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Ymateb gan: ColegauCymru

Response from: CollegesWales

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### **Senedd Children Young People and Education Committee Inquiry - Routes into post-16 education and training.**

ColegauCymru is an education charity which promotes the public benefit of further education (FE) in Wales. We believe that all learners have the right to world-class education, delivered in a safe, diverse and inclusive setting and within a sector which supports the wider community, employers and the economy. We convene the FE Principals' Forum, which represents the interests of FE providers. We undertake research and policy development and provide practical support to the FE community. Working closely with Welsh Government, their agencies, and other stakeholders, we help shape policies affecting the FE sector, their learners and staff.

FE and apprenticeships are fundamental to Wales' economic recovery and to the fairer, greener, stronger society we all want to build. There is no route map to a better Wales that doesn't rely on a thriving, resilient and successful FE and Work-based Learning sector. Colleges recognise the long-standing support that the Welsh Government has given to the FE sector, however more action is still needed from the Welsh Government and from Medr to create the right environment for colleges to deliver for learners. Our key asks in this response are:

- 1) **The Welsh Government must develop a strategy for Vocational Education and Training.** We would like the Welsh Government to develop a national Strategy for Vocational Education and Training. There is a lack of overall strategic intent and purpose in post-16 policy and a new strategy, aligned to a clear understanding of the requirements of the economy, would ensure the delivery of vocational and technical education that can support growth and offer equitable opportunities for individuals. This ask reiterates the recommendations made both by the Welsh Government's Vocational Qualifications Review and ColegauCymru's Taith funded research into the Finnish VET system.
- 2) **Collaboration between schools and colleges must be improved to benefit learners.** Part of the solution to ensuring learners make the right choices for their futures is to ensure that they understand their options at any early stage in their education journey. This is why the recommendations in both the Transitions to Employment report by Dr Hefin David MS and in the Welsh Government's Review of Vocational Qualifications to improve school / college collaboration, and to give colleges greater access to school pupils, are essential. There has not been enough urgency given to addressing the recommendations from both reports and these should be priorities for the Welsh Government, Medr and the pre and post-16 sectors.
- 3) **Longer term funding arrangements are critical for delivering better mental health and wellbeing support.** Demand for FE, and in particular vocational provision, is rising. The education and social impact of the pandemic is still evident through poor levels of attendance in schools, significant mental health challenges facing many learners, and evidence of wider behavioural challenges of learners entering college. Recent analysis

by ColegauCymru shows that enrolment in the 16-18 age group for 2024/25 has increased by 8.27% since 2023/24. Enrolment figures have particularly increased for those learners coming in at lower levels and learners who require support to remain in education. With the increase in mental health referrals, and the implementation of ALNET, it is more important than ever that funding is protected through multi-year longer term funding for the sector. Longer term planning for mental health and wellbeing is also needed to address pressure on provision.

- 4) **Transport barriers must be removed.** An ongoing concern across the college sector is the cost of transport. According to the Welsh Government’s own data, 41% of 16 to 24 years olds identified transport as being the number one barrier to getting a new course, training or a job. Funding arrangements for learners vary widely across Wales. In some cases, parents cover the costs, while in others, it’s the colleges or Local Authorities that pay or subsidise travel. Colleges across Wales have faced an increase of more than £3.2million in learner travel costs over the last year.

### Question 1 - Quality of information given to learners about the full range of post-16 options

Improving independent advice and guidance for learners is absolutely critical. As set out in the Welsh Government’s Review of Vocational Qualifications<sup>1</sup>, the Learning and Skills Measure (2009) recognises that advice given to learners should be unbiased and should be in the best interests of the individual. In 2022, Estyn<sup>2</sup> found that options to continue learning at 16 vary considerably depending on where learners live in Wales, what language they wish to learn in, and what their education attainment was at age 16. The report also found that the national, regional and local structures to bring coherence and to support improvements are not working well enough. Estyn’s research<sup>3</sup> shows that the majority of schools with their own sixth form provide learners with detailed information about courses available in the sixth form but relatively little, if any information, on other options at all levels or apprenticeship opportunities available through alternative local providers. ColegauCymru urges the Welsh Government to implement the recommendation from the Review of Vocation Qualifications in Wales, “that all learners receive equitable and impartial advice on, and access to the opportunities available to them in post-compulsory education and training, and consider how best to support this aim specifically for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities”<sup>4</sup>.

In ColegauCymru’s Taith funded research into the Finnish VET system<sup>5</sup>, it is clear that the issue of ‘attractive’ pathways can be complex. Often individual learner choices are constrained by their environments and knowledge of working life, so guidance plays a key role in this. There is a clear role for Careers Wales in this activity—at least with ‘gateway’ learners preparing for their next stage. Currently, funding models drive competition between different types of providers. This has created barriers to colleges being able to access learners in some schools to set out

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<sup>1</sup> [A review of vocational qualifications in Wales](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2022-10/A%20review%20of%20the%20current%2016-19%20curriculum%20in%20Wales.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [A review of vocational qualifications in Wales](#)

<sup>4</sup> [A review of vocational qualifications in Wales](#) (recommendation 15)

<sup>5</sup> [Strategies for Moving Freely - The Finnish Approach to Vocational Education and Training.pdf](#)

the options available to them and means there is variation across Wales, and even within local authority areas, on the quality and amount of advice given to pupils.

Also, if there is a lack of relationships between a school and college this means that it is difficult to gather data on learner transition. Sharing transition data across all phases of education is critical for successful learner movement between educational settings. This is currently a weakness in the systems of support, meaning colleges spend significant time chasing data and students arrive without the data needed to support them.

The new curriculum states that schools must include careers and work-related experiences, and all learners have a right to high-quality independent advice and guidance, particularly at key transition points in education and life. There must be an appropriate range of entry and exit points that can be accessed by learners at different stages of their lives, including for upskilling and retraining.

A national VET strategy for Wales would provide a framework for routes and pathways through our FE system. ColegauCymru's Taith funded research into the Finnish VET system<sup>6</sup> in 2024 recommended: "The Welsh Government should develop a Vocational Education and Training Strategy. A key learning point from this project has been the cohesiveness of the Finnish VET system coupled with an agility for 'moving freely'. This has been achieved by a clear strategic approach to VET that is long-term, is based on a clear analysis of its operating environment, and links with other parts of government". Evidence from successful systems around the world demonstrates the need for Wales to have more non-university pathways to higher level qualifications and skills acquisition. Access to independent advice and guidance is key to making this work.

With the establishment of Medr, it is critical that the viability of small school sixth forms is considered. Central to Medr's mission of establishing high-quality learning and transition pathways should be a commitment to reviewing the sustainability and offer between 16-19, in particular the viability of small school sixth forms and the breadth of choice learners are able to access. In too many parts of Wales this has been left in the 'too difficult' box, but this short-termism has ultimately been to the detriment of learners. For example, in 2021/2022, 42% of sixth form classes had 5 learners or less (across Wales). There is now sufficient evidence from different parts of Wales that this issue can be addressed, and Medr should expect local authorities to show leadership where change is needed. At a time of acute pressure on public funds, it is failing learners if we don't address parts of the system that cannot offer the choice and educational experience that they should rightly expect. Greater local collaboration to ensure learners have choice and access to high quality provision is needed to underpin reform for the future.

## **Question 2 - How effective careers support is at compulsory school age**

Estyn's Report into Impartial Careers Advice and Guidance to Young People aged 14-16 years provided by Careers Wales<sup>7</sup> states that, where relationships with schools are good, Careers Wales provides clear advice, often challenging risky or unrealistic ideas through sensitive questioning. Most of the young people eligible for a guidance session respond well to their

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<sup>6</sup> [Strategies for Moving Freely - The Finnish Approach to Vocational Education and Training.pdf](#)

<sup>7</sup> <https://estyn.gov.wales/improvement-resources/impartial-careers-advice-and-guidance-to-young-people-aged-14-16-years-provided-by-careers-wales-advisers/>

adviser and consider questions around their initial ideas and plans and are willing to work towards the action plan they create with support.

However, despite the work of Careers Wales in engaging with schools it is clear that too many young people do not have access to the information and guidance they need to make informed choices about their future, including the opportunities in vocational education and training.

Improving opportunities for collaboration between colleges and schools, particularly in supporting the transition into post-16 and in offering vocational programmes at study between 14-16, will significantly help learners, parents and carers make informed choices.

School absenteeism, particularly among young people aged 14-16, has increased post pandemic. Some schools are reporting rates as high as 42.6%. Overall, attendance fell by 6.3 percentage points from 2018 to 2023.<sup>8</sup> 14-16 Pathways and schemes, for example the Junior Apprenticeship programme and school / college partnerships, provide vocational education opportunities to learners aged 14 to 16 who have been identified by schools as being at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). There are different delivery models for the 14-16 provision in FE colleges, but five out of the 12 FE Colleges have accessed 'junior apprenticeship' funding.

Cardiff and Vale College's Junior Apprenticeships programme has seen high success rates with an average of 86-88% of learners achieving vocational qualifications and GCSEs, and the majority have progressed on to FE or employment.<sup>9</sup> An independent study has also found that the Junior Apprenticeship Programme at Cardiff and the Vale College will save the economy £750,000 per person in preventative spend over the course of a 40-year working life and 60-year adult life, in addition to providing numerous additional benefits to learners.<sup>10</sup> Estyn's Review of the Junior Apprenticeship Programme in Wales<sup>11</sup> found that earlier pathways for 14-19 improved levels of engagement and attendance, high success rates in vocational qualifications offered and strong progression rates into further education and training.

A range of provision for 14-16 learners exists. Coleg Sir Gâr and Coleg Ceredigion have approximately 900 learners from Schools across Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion who study with them for between 2 and 4 hrs a week. The delivery model is prescribed by the College and the school. For example, some schools send their pupils to the College (they are bused into the College and back to attend class), or College Staff go into Schools to deliver the vocational qualification - in Llanelli there is a vocational centre on one of the school sites (the College services the construction centre). They also have a Youth Access provision. This is where some pupils from across a range of schools join a full vocational programme for 2 or 3 days a week. The other days they are in school picking up the statutory requirements of pre-16 education. Coleg Cambria is also delivering a similar model.

However, programmes at Colleges with the large numbers of learners are consistently oversubscribed, and learners in many areas of Wales do not have similar opportunities because there are no collaborative local arrangements in place within their areas to support the delivery of 14-16 programmes. Schools should work collaboratively with colleges and local authorities

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<sup>8</sup> Estyn

<sup>9</sup> Cardiff and Vale Annual Self-Assessment Reports

<sup>10</sup> August 2023 by Dr Steve Garner - Reducing inequalities in educational outcomes at CAVC.

<sup>11</sup> <https://estyn.gov.wales/improvement-resources/a-review-of-the-junior-apprenticeship-programme-in-wales/>

to evaluate opportunities for developing or extending 14-16 programmes in order to broaden their curriculum offer in the best interests of learners. Local Authorities should also work collaboratively to evaluate the potential for introducing or extending junior apprenticeship provision to enhance suitable learning opportunities for Year 10 and 11 pupils struggling to engage with existing mainstream provision in schools. We recognise this will require additional funding to both support any capital and ongoing costs but the value to local authorities will come in the form of better outcomes for learners and improvements in attainment and attendance.

### **Question 3 - Changes in routes post-18**

Further data and more detailed analysis over the longer term would be needed to make a definitive statement about whether learners are changing their choices post-18. However, there has been an impact from the cost of living crisis and the changing labour market that means both young people and adults are considering different choices as they enter higher education. There is scope to consider how we can create more non-university pathways to higher skills. This should not be at the expense of traditional pathways to university and it is crucial that Wales has a successful and financially sustainable university sector. However, there is scope to further develop the role of FE institutions in delivering access to higher education for local communities, either as a direct provider, offering progression and lifelong learning routes at Levels 4 and 5 to enable upskilling and reskilling, and in delivering degree apprenticeships.

### **Question 4 - Welsh-medium provision**

ColegauCymru is supportive of the Welsh Government's aspiration for one million Welsh speakers and increased learning through the medium of Welsh is welcome. However, there needs to be full consideration of the workforce challenge in meeting the ambition to create more bilingual pathways in post-16. Significant investment in education, and specifically teacher recruitment and development, is required. This includes not only recruiting new Welsh speaking staff but also upskilling existing staff. We have seen the success of these initiatives across the FE sector. For example, Coleg Gwent, supported by Coleg Cymraeg Cendlaethol, has increased bilingual learners on key areas such as childcare and health care from 7% to 52% over the last five years.

We would welcome a greater breadth of qualifications being made available through the medium of Welsh, assuming funding is available to support the workforce to deliver them. There is a need to develop a coherent and connected system of qualifications that are flexible and valued by learners and employers alike. This would mean having the workforce in place with sufficient Welsh language skills to deliver and assess these qualifications. Awarding organisations with sector expertise and sufficient Welsh language capacity will need to develop qualifications and to provide the necessary external quality assurance.

If we are to meet the one million Welsh speakers by 2050 target, it is essential that a whole education system approach is taken. The FE sector, with its well-established links to employers, is critical to the success of Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 targets and, therefore, consideration must be given to ensuring robust transition arrangements for the new

cohort of learners as a result of the changes to compulsory school education being brought forward by the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill.

### Question 5 - Equity of access

The FE sector in Wales generally supports a higher percentage of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to Higher Education (HE) and school Sixth forms, through various learning pathways such as vocational lower level provision, Adult Community Learning and apprenticeships. The most recent figures show that of the 98,175 learners (both full-time and part-time) enrolled at FE institutions from August 2021 to July 2022, 13% were from the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods in Wales. This is compared to 8% of the 23,375 Sixth form students registered at schools in Wales. Enabling people from all backgrounds the opportunity to have the best educational opportunities offered to them provides an excellent basis for furthering social mobility in Wales. Participating in adult learning has a significant impact on social mobility – helping people gain better employment opportunities, leading to higher wages and therefore a better standard of living.

Learners from more deprived areas require a higher level of financial support. There is support available to college learners via the Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) which is critical for colleges to flexibly use to meet the support needs of their learners. However, some colleges have already exhausted their FCF pots this year, such is the acute pressure on their budgets. In 2023/2024, over 8% (3,666) of full-time FE learners aged 16-18 utilised Financial Contingency Funding for free meal vouchers, with a further 748 learners in the 19+ age bracket, bringing the total number of learners who relied on the FCF in order to eat during the college day to almost 10% (4,414). Colleges have noted that it is not only those learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds struggling with the cost of living, but now those middle earners are also facing financial hardship. As with the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), ColegauCymru suggests that eligibility for receiving support from the FCF is also reviewed in order to support all learners who are facing financial difficulty.

An ongoing concern across the FE sector is the cost of transport. According to the Welsh Government's own data, 41% of 16 to 24 years olds identified transport as being the number one barrier to getting a new course, training or a job<sup>12</sup>. Funding arrangements for learners vary widely. In some cases, parents cover the costs; while in others, it's the colleges or Local Authorities that pay or subsidise. For example, Coleg Cambria does not receive any contribution to their Learner Travel Bill from Flintshire or Wrexham but do receive a contribution from Denbighshire. However the Coleg has been informed that this is under review, and their transport bill for 23/24 was £2,665,456. Colleges across Wales have faced an increase of more than £3.2million in learner travel costs over the last year. We recognise that Local Authorities are facing intense budget pressures, and this year Rhondda Cynon Taf has withdrawn funding for some transport from September 2025; and from September 2026, Merthyr Tydfil will no longer fund over-16s outside of the council area to travel to college. Learners who study at Coleg y Cymoedd's Nantgarw campus have said the change will have a big impact on future students' ability to attend college<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> [Young Person's Guarantee National Conversation: update for participants | GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Councils in Wales face 'unsustainable' budget gaps, warns WLGA - BBC News](#)

There is also concern that the Welcome Ticket Scheme which allowed refugees to access free public transport has ended<sup>14</sup>. The impact varies across Wales and between colleges, partly because of differences in local demographics, and partly because of the wide range of learner transport arrangements in different local authority areas. For some colleges, the impact is acute and is already affecting some of the most vulnerable learners. This includes some learners having to leave college earlier to be able to pick up their children from school because they are on foot, or not continuing with their studies at all. Cardiff and Vale College - A College of Sanctuary has approximately 1200 refugees and asylum seekers and has said that travel cards have had a huge impact on attendance with these groups. The College provides them to all learners that need them, however their travel bill is already an additional £550K more than last year – £1.5 Million in total on transport costs.

The implementation of Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) is already transforming the learner experience in FE. However, sustaining and building on this progress will require ongoing support from Welsh Government and LAs. FEIs need enhanced funding, and long-term financial commitment to support the additional resources required for ALN provision. Colleges have significantly increased staffing levels to meet their new ALN duties. However, this has been achieved with limited additional short-term funding and no certainty of long-term financial support. Addressing the resourcing challenges of the duties in the post-16 sector must be addressed for both the short and longer term. Alongside the need to better resource support for additional learning needs, there are other challenges to be addressed: information sharing; consistency in provision; specialist provision; and building stronger collaboration.

ColegauCymru and its members recognise the significant role that they have in achieving a more equal Wales, and the sector is helping to reach the ambitious target of an anti-racist Wales by 2030. All FE colleges in Wales have anti-racism and equalities plans in place, supported by appropriate equality, diversity and inclusion internal structures, teams and leads. College staff have participated in a range of training and leadership programmes supported by Welsh Government, and we would urge this support to continue. Staff in the FE sector would like to emphasise how valuable this funding has been, enabling links to be made with practitioners and leaders from across all phases of education. Given the momentum that this has created, we would be grateful for further support in enabling the continuation of this engagement.

Shifting the focus towards disability, supported internships in Wales are delivered through Pathway programmes and involve a partnership between employers, FEIs and young people. This provision is expensive to offer as it requires high levels of staffing with people who are well-trained. Therefore recent funding reductions make it difficult for colleges to sustain. Raising the profile of supported apprenticeships with groups of disabled learners is also key, as apprenticeship providers find it difficult to attract applicants for employers. Bridgend College has partnered with Project SEARCH and Hft to provide a supported internship programme at phs Group. The programme has allowed learners to; agree realistic individual outcomes and targets for their programme of learning; engage in meaningful work at the employer's premises; work to develop and improve their employability skills; have the opportunity to practise and improve their independence skills; and gain experience at work for their CV. While there has been support from the Welsh Government in this area, Wales needs to be better at

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<sup>14</sup> [Welcome Ticket: Refugees will no longer get free bus travel - BBC News](#)

acknowledging the challenge and the need to improve outcomes for disabled people through consistent funding, better data collection and raising the profile of Supported Internships.

Last year, the Welsh Government invested £4million into the FE sector for better mental health, this funding is used to support learners and staff across a range of projects. Mental health referrals for young people are increasing. FE Colleges have gathered the following data on wellbeing and safeguarding referrals. This illustrates a significant percentage increase, year on year, since the beginning of the Pandemic:

<b>Total</b>	<b>8,456</b>	<b>10,409</b>	<b>15,990</b>	<b>22,438</b>
<b>Percentage increase on prev. year</b>		<b>23%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>40%</b>

With the increase in referrals, it is more important than ever that funding is protected through multi-year longer term funding for the sector. Longer term planning for mental health and wellbeing is also needed to address pressure on provision. As part of the wider work being undertaken on mental health, FE Colleges in Wales fully recognise the impact of keeping active on wellbeing. Active wellbeing can provide a preventative solution to wellbeing and mental health related referrals. As part of this, FE colleges are delivering an Active Wellbeing Project via a combination of funding from Sport Wales, college resources and use of Welsh Government project funding for mental health in FE. The project reached over 5000 FE learners in 23/24. There is good evidence that a wide range of engagement and delivery models are being used successfully; For example, referrals for individual learners or groups identified as needing specific support related to behaviour, wellbeing or other potential risks. However the key challenge is the increase in referrals places further pressure on resources in college wellbeing teams alongside other responsibilities.

For a number of colleges it is the case that support staff providing pastoral care and mental health support are funded by UK Government funding pots. We welcome the extension of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for one year as a transitional arrangement but are concerned that this will be at a reduced level for a further year with £900 million of funding. This reduction will severely impact the FE sector's ability to deliver current projects that are having a positive impact on learners, for example developing pastoral care initiatives and resilience coaches, as well as the future of the staff delivering these projects. Specialist pastoral roles are critical to the success of learners with complex needs, both for their success at college and to develop the skills they need to function in society and work. However, the sector is losing skilled staff because of low pay and uncertainty for pastoral staff helping to address behaviour and attendance issues. At Coleg Cambria for example, the college was successful in a bid to deliver a Supportive Steps Project which was approved by Flintshire Local Authority. The Supportive Steps project focuses on supporting learners at most risk of becoming NEET, by addressing barriers to attendance with team colleagues receiving referrals from Progress Coaches, triggered by a learner having five non-attendance marks, so that targeted interventions can be put in place. However funding for this project ended in December 2024 and the Coleg do not know if they will receive any further support to continue to deliver the project.

A skilled workforce is essential to ensure a thriving Welsh economy, and adult learning and upskilling are a key part of the rebuilding the Welsh economy. Lifelong learning can provide a

sense of wellbeing and purpose, helping to address social issues such as loneliness and isolation. These benefits in turn provide communities with the tools to thrive. Skills help people into work, and to improve at work, which allows us all to keep up with a changing world and our rapidly transforming workplaces.

However, participation in lifelong learning has fallen over the last decade in Wales with large inequalities in access to learning by age, socioeconomic group, and prior educational attainment. Findings show that there is a growing trend of working-age adults in Wales being under-qualified and lacking essential skills. Almost half of adults from the lowest socioeconomic groups have not received any training since they left full-time education. In Wales the proportion with a level 4 qualification and above is 4% below the UK average.<sup>15</sup> There are inequalities regarding disability (15.2% of disabled people have no qualifications, compared to 4.9% of non-disabled people) and geographical distribution of delivery. The Committee should consider and recognise the important contribution of adult community learning (ACL) to offering adults flexible routes to return to and continue their studies and to gain skills and qualifications. Sustained investment to build capacity in the ACL sector needs to be central to any post-16 strategy. This must include routes to raising levels of basic skills and to supporting those communities with the highest levels of people without recognised qualifications.

### **Question 6 - Post-16 destination data**

Pupil Destination Data for 2023 and previous years, shows a high proportion of learners dropping out of A Levels after year 12. In 2023, 10,698 learners progressed into year 12, however only 7,813 then returned to complete Year 13.<sup>16</sup> This data suggests that there is a lack of objective advice for school pupils on their post-16 options. This lack of advice may have led to many learners dropping out of sixth form to commence studies within FE later during the year. This data shows the importance of all learners being able to access a range of impartial post 16 careers advice.

Currently, we do not have a clear assessment of the national occupational and skills that Wales needs for the future. We need to chart enrolments onto qualifications, learner destinations, and if learners have remained in Wales. Without such correlation it is difficult to determine whether we have a relevant and effective range of vocational qualifications to meet our future needs. Colegau Cymru's Taith funded research into the Finnish VET system recommends that the Welsh Government should develop National Skills Anticipation Planning. In Finland, VET is planned and delivered based on reliable, contemporary data, collected in a systematic and coordinated way, and that should be the aspiration in Wales. The current system does not work, with significant regional variation in approaches in Wales that results in data that providers often regard as unreliable. This unreliability leads to duplication at the institutional level and is therefore a waste of scarce resources. The size of Wales merits a national approach with regional and sectoral input.

The Welsh Government, working with Medr, should expedite work identifying not only enrolment trends of learners, but destinations of learners, to understand if learners progress into an industry related to their vocational qualification. These trends should be mapped

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<sup>15</sup> <https://wcpp.org.uk/publication/supporting-the-welsh-lifelong-learning-system/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://careerswales.gov.wales/education-and-teaching-professionals/pupil-destinations/pupil-destinations-2023>

against the labour market demands to determine whether Wales is succeeding in filling its occupation and skills gaps to meet future aspirations.

### **Question 7 - Welsh Government's role**

Colleges recognise the long-standing support that the Welsh Government has given to the FE sector. Over the last two decades the FE sector has undergone significant structural change and reorganisation to help us deliver on the priorities of the Welsh Government and of local communities. The sector is therefore well placed to be able to respond to the changing skills landscape and to support growth in the Welsh economy. However, more action is still needed from the Welsh Government and Medr to create the right environment for colleges to deliver for learners. There is a lack of overall strategic intent and purpose in post-16 policy, and a new strategy, aligned to a clear understanding of the requirements of the economy, would ensure the delivery of vocational and technical education that can support growth and offer equitable opportunities for individuals.

Alongside this, both the Welsh Government and Medr must work together to improve the transition to post-16 education and training, and specifically to deliver a new 14-19 Learning and Transition Pathway. Successive reports have identified weaknesses in the transition to post-compulsory education. A cross-party consensus to support change at a national and local level is needed. If we are to genuinely put learners at the heart of the system then the government must give the leadership needed to ensure learners have access to the support they need and the opportunity to make real choices about their futures.

Part of the solution to ensuring learners make the right choices for their futures is to ensure that they understand their options at any early stage in their education journey. This is why the recommendations in both the Transitions to Employment report by Dr Hefin David MS and in the Welsh Government's Review of Vocational Qualifications to improve school and college collaboration and to give colleges greater access to school pupils are essential. There has not been enough urgency given to addressing the recommendations from both reports and these should be priorities for the Welsh Government and the pre and post-16 sectors.

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