

Ms Buffy Williams MS
Children, Young People, and Education Committee Chair
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

24 November 2025

Dear Ms Williams MS,

As you know from evidence given to the Committee previously and by your own visits to colleges in your constituency and elsewhere in Wales, the further education sector experienced a significant increase in participation over the 2024/25 academic year. This was driven in part by a rise in demand for specific areas of vocational education and training, but also by higher numbers of young people coming in at lower qualification levels.

At your evidence session on the 19 November James Owen, the Medr CEO, highlighted the financial pressures on colleges in the current academic year as a result of another year of sustained increases in participation. We wanted to write to the Committee to endorse the comments made by Medr at the session and to detail some of the specific challenges facing the sector.

Colleges have had another strong year of recruitment with high numbers of young people enrolling in September. At the point of the enrolment freeze date in November, full-time learner numbers were 43,400, which is around 4,400 more than originally budgeted for by the Welsh Government and by Medr. Some provision was made this year to support increased growth, but even allowing for this, the sector is delivering around £15m - £20m of unfunded delivery.

This is of course a positive story about the resilience and success of the Welsh further education sector and of learners making positive choices about their post-16 education journey. The challenge now is to ensure that these additional learners complete their courses and progress to the next stage of their education or into work.

Specifically, it is both the number of additional learners and the support needs associated with their demographic and educational profile that is contributing to the financial pressure. As in the 2024/25 academic year, the profile of the additional learners is that they have the fewest qualifications and are coming in at lower levels of study, with significant literacy and numeracy support requirements which has placed additional strain on college resources. Added to this, to attain a Level 3 qualification many of the learners will need to study in college for three years. They are often young people from the poorest households and need additional financial support to be able to afford the cost of travel and other associated costs of studying. They are the learners most in need and the learners we all have a duty to support.

Our analysis of the Welsh Government's 2026/27 budget is that these pressures will be even more challenging for colleges next year. Additional in-year funding and extra resource for 2026/27 is absolutely essential if we are going to be able to support our learners to complete their qualifications.

We want to state clearly to the Committee just how important this moment is for so many young people throughout Wales. Colleges are already having to make incredibly difficult decisions about who they are able to financially support and how they are able to resource the extra learning support many of our young people need. Additional financial support for the sector will make a real difference to the lives and the futures of these young people.

This is why ColegauCymru is calling for:

- Emergency, in-year funding for this academic year to help colleges provide the additional financial and pastoral support they need for learners to stay in college and to complete their courses.
- A revision to the Welsh Government's 2026/27 Draft Budget to reflect the expected demand and costs of learner recruitment and retention in the next academic year.

We would be happy to arrange a visit for yourself or for any Committee Members to meet learners and staff at any college in Wales so you can see for yourself, both the challenges facing the sector, but also the opportunity we have to support learners at this crucial stage in their education.

Best wishes,



David Hagedyk
Chief Executive