

Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)-10-11 Paper 1

**Inquiry into the implementation of the Learning and Skills Measure
2009**

**Evidence from the Welsh Local Government Association and the
Association of Directors of Education**



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People Committee**

**Inquiry into the Learning and Skills
(Wales) Measure 2009**

November 2011



INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities, the three fire and rescue authorities, and four police authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
3. The WLGA and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) welcome the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into the Implementation of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009. ADEW and the WLGA supported the implementation of the Measure as a means of providing a collaborative approach to provision and enhanced curriculum opportunities for learners aged 14-19.
4. The Committee has posed a number of questions about the implementation of the Learning and Skills Measure which this response addresses. Further detail regarding any of the points below can be provided when the WLGA and ADEW appears before the Committee on the 23rd November 2011.

What effect has the implementation of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 had to date on young people aged 14-19 years? Do young people have a wider choice of academic and vocational courses as a result of the Measure?

5. As the Measure was only implemented in 2009 it is still too early to comment on the long term impact of the changes. However in the short term it is clear that an increased number of young people are able to access a wider spectrum of courses and learning options which provide them with enhanced skill sets for both academic and vocational routes. There is also evidence in some areas that there has been an increased level of attainment for 14 year olds.
6. The anecdotal evidence from local authorities is that the offer of a wider range of courses has had a positive impact on learners, particularly via the Welsh Baccalaureate. There is a wider choice of vocational options, and the access to these courses has improved. Although there has been an improvement in access there is

some way to go towards achieving parity of esteem, particularly in the employment sector, between vocational learning and academic qualifications. In addition there is a concern about the sustainability of this approach to the provision of vocational courses as they are often more costly than academic routes. This is of particular concern given the recent announcement by the Welsh Government that they will be reducing the 14-19 grant by 19% over the next two years.

7. The Measure has also had a positive impact on the wider support for learners. The use of learning coaches has ensured that fewer young people have become disengaged and for others has offered a 'guiding hand' which may not have been available previously.
8. There has been an increase in the number of courses available in both academic and vocational subjects in Welsh and the all schools are meeting the requirements of the Measure. This has been made possible in many areas by increased collaboration between schools, Further Education Institutions (FEIs) and local authorities. There are also examples of innovative use of ICT, particularly in areas where geographic distance makes collaborative approaches more challenging.

Has the implementation of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 had any effect on the numbers of young people choosing to stay on in education or training after the end of compulsory education at age 16?

9. Most areas of Wales have seen a decrease in the number of young people that are not in education, employment or training (NEET), although this is not the case in all local authority areas. On a Wales-wide basis the statistics show that since 2009, when the Measure was implemented, there has been a reduction of 1,700 16-18 year olds who could be categorised as NEET. The number of young people NEET peaked in 2008 when 15,000 16-18 year olds were not in education, training or employment, this figure is now 12,700. Figures are also showing that the number of 15 year olds leaving education with no qualifications is reducing, however attainment at 17 has remained steady for a number of years.
10. It is difficult to draw conclusions from these statistics at this early stage and monitoring trends over the next few years will give a clearer picture. It is also important to ensure that the quality of post-16 provision remains high and that there are opportunities for young people when they leave education and training. Whilst the number of NEET 16-18 year olds is decreasing there is a marked increase in the number of 19-24 year olds who are not in employment, education or training. There

are now 58,000 NEETs between 19 and 24, rising from 36,600 in 2004. Clearly the current economic situation is a significant factor in these figures.

What practical problems are being addressed in order to implement the Measure?

11. There have been a number of practical issues that have been encountered during implementation of the Measure. Many issues were raised at the consultation stage of the Measure, prior to implementation, and included concerns over transport, particularly in rural areas; meeting the required number of courses; and partnership and collaborative working. Local authorities and 14 – 19 networks have worked hard to ensure that these challenges have been overcome in order to enable young people to take full advantage of the extended curriculum offered.
12. There are a number of issues that particularly, although not exclusively, impact on rural areas. In order to meet the curriculum demands it has been necessary in some cases for young people, and/or staff, to travel between institutions. Local authorities have overcome this challenge by using central coordination of transport including sharing funding.
13. Accessibility issues have also been overcome by the innovative use of ICT. This type of remote learning has worked well in some areas, however, for some of the vocational courses this is not a practical option. A good example of where ICT is working well is in north Wales where they have developed an online Welsh language resource. This approach has worked well to avoid duplication and is now being shared with other regions who require Welsh language support.
14. Despite these challenges the target of providing 30 options, including 5 vocational courses, seems to have been met in all areas. The establishment of partnerships has been key to enabling effective delivery. Partnerships between schools, and with FEIs, has meant that duplication of courses has been avoided and regional networks have provided strategic direction and support.

Is the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 being implemented consistently across all local authorities?

15. There is widespread support for the 14-19 curriculum and local authorities are meeting the requirement to provide the 30 options. There are inevitably variations in provision according to the needs of the local area. The 14-19 representatives meet at a regional

and national level to share good practice which promotes consistency in approaches. Methods of delivery do vary according to a number of factors, including rurality, pupil numbers, diversity etc. Taking a bespoke approach is a strength of 14-19 delivery and has resulted in some excellent and innovative programmes, which were highlighted in the recent 14-19 evaluation report.

Are vulnerable learners, particularly those with additional learning needs, able to benefit from the provisions in the Measure?

16. During the consultation stage of the Measure there was a concern that pupils who would be unable to access level 2 provision would be disadvantaged within the new framework. The focus on achieving level 2 has meant that there has been a redirection of resource away from those pupils who would be more suited to level 1.
17. There are however, good examples of where specialist support is available for more vulnerable learners. Trinity Fields School in Caerphilly works in partnership with the local FEI to support an independent learning programme. Young people who are NEET or in danger of becoming NEET can also access support from Learning Coaches and also via more informal learning environments, such as youth work.

Is learning support being delivered effectively?

18. Support is available to all pupils within the 14-19 framework, although not all learners require support. Many learners only require intermittent support at particular junctures, which is provided alongside work with those who need a greater level of ongoing support. There are now substantial numbers of learning coaches who have been trained across Wales to fulfil this role.

What effect is the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 having on further education colleges?

19. Local authority engagement with FEIs has been very positive. All local 14-19 networks have full involvement of colleges and the experience of building effective partnerships has been beneficial to effective delivery of the 14-19 curriculum.

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