



Inquiry into the implementation of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure by the NAW's Children and Young People Committee: ColegauCymru evidence

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Introduction

- 1 ColegauCymru represents the 18 further education (FE) FE colleges and two FE institutions in Wales¹.
- 2 FE colleges in Wales offer 80% of all post-16 qualifications (outside of higher education) and in 2009/10 provided learning experiences for 184,730 individuals. Around two-thirds of 16-18 full-time learners study at college. There has been an increase in the number of 14-16 year olds taking courses in colleges.
- 3 ColegauCymru is pleased to respond to the inquiry into the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure² by the Committee for Children and Young People.
- 4 It may be argued that it is too early to comment on the full impact of the Measure. It is not until 2012 that all young people aged 14 and 16 will be entitled to choose from at least 30 options at level 2, inclusive of five vocational options.

Background

- 5 ColegauCymru³ gave broad support to the draft Measure in 2009. It considered that the Measure would provide young people with more choice, help raise the profile of vocational subjects, and accelerate partnership arrangements between schools and FE colleges. A key success factor was the importance placed on the giving of independent advice and guidance to 14-16 year olds.
- 6 The introduction of the Measure took place in the context of the continuing development of 14-19 learning networks, funded by the Welsh Government (WG).
- 7 The 2011 Estyn Annual Report pointed out that there had been a big increase over two years in the number of courses available for 14-16 year olds including new vocational courses but there was too much variation in the ability of different areas to meet the requirements of the Measure.

The effect the Measure has had on 14-19 year olds

- 8 Motivation, increased choice, improved status of vocational courses and improved advice and guidance are the key benefits for 14-19 years olds.
- 9 Several colleges report positive feedback from schools concerning general improvements in motivation and attention back in school as a result of experiencing vocational provision in another setting. Typical examples include greater motivation to succeed in subjects like mathematics as a result of greater

¹ In this paper the term 'FE college' or 'College' is used to cover the 18 FE colleges and the two FE institutions

² In this paper the 'Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure' is called 'the Measure'

³ ColegauCymru was known as 'fforwm' prior to November 2009.

appreciation of applied uses of the subject material in vocational subjects e.g. Construction/Engineering.

- 10 A college in north Wales reports a very positive impact on the vocational choice for learners – eight routes are offered, seven of which are bilingual, with excellent progression from 14-16 onto full time vocational courses and a 91% success rate.
- 11 In general terms, colleges report that the Measure – combined with targeted 14-19 funding - has provided the impetus for closer school/college collaboration and this has benefited many young people.
- 12 The Measure appears to have worked best in areas where there were already positive relationships between colleges and local schools. The nature of partnerships at local level is crucial to its success. The Measure appears to work particularly well in the more tertiary areas (i.e. where there are few sixth forms attached to individual schools). In these cases, 11-16 and 11-18 schools are working closely with their local college to develop 14-16 programmes covering vocational and academic subjects that benefit learners. In other areas where there is competition for learners at the age of 16, schools are more reluctant to engage fully with their local colleges.

Effect on numbers staying on in education/training post-16

- 13 ColegauCymru notes the Careers Wales data set out in Estyn's evidence to the Committee showing an increase in staying on rates for 16 year olds from 77.2% in 2007 (before the Measure), to 82.8% in 2010. Colleges also report an increase in numbers attending college at 14-16 and 16+. The trend was already upwards before the Measure was introduced and therefore it is difficult to judge whether the increase is a direct result of the Measure. 14-16 year old pupils are registered by schools. There is no robust national data on college participation by this cohort.
- 14 There is some risk that a concentration on level 2 programmes could act to the disadvantage of those seeking a level 1 qualification.

Choice of courses for 14-19 year olds

- 15 Learner choice has undoubtedly been increased by the introduction of the Measure. In most cases this has been beneficial. Many more students now have the opportunity to study courses in areas such as public services, agriculture, construction, and engineering.

Welsh-medium provision

- 16 The Measure, combined with the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy and ColegauCymru's National Bilingualism Strategy in FE, is helping to provide conditions for increased Welsh-medium and bilingual provision.
- 17 There is a long way to go, but good progress is being made, as is borne out by a number of the other submissions the Committee has already received.
- 18 In most cases, it is the Welsh-medium and dual stream schools that have partnered colleges to offer vocational provision through the medium of Welsh, but there is also an encouraging development underway with English-medium schools partnering a college to expand Welsh-medium opportunities.
- 19 Other helpful developments in increasing Welsh-medium options include the expansion of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification and the development of Welsh-medium vocational/customer service qualifications. The increased flexibility in the delivery of the Welsh Language Sabbatical programme is enabling increasing numbers of FE college tutors to become more confident in teaching through the medium of Welsh.
- 20 Transformation developments, including college mergers and collaborations with higher education institutions have provided opportunities in some areas to develop new Welsh-medium provision and expand existing provision to more learners.
- 21 Some colleges do however find it difficult to recruit Welsh speaking teachers in FE to deliver vocational education and training through the medium of Welsh. In addition, small groups can sometimes be unviable/incur higher costs where a Welsh-medium school is geographically quite distant from other Welsh-medium schools, making it impractical in such cases to cluster on the basis of language.

Issues surrounding choice

- 22 In some cases, questions have been raised about how appropriate the choices are, e.g. where options offered may have been driven more by points value/GCSE equivalence than local/regional need.
- 23 Where there is a continued lack of comprehensive impartial advice and guidance, the extension of choice may be confusing to pupils/parents/schools. It appears that some consider the vocational route to be an easier/softer option, with some pupils being advised to take a level 2 qualification when a level 1 might have been more appropriate.
- 24 The drive to achieve level 2 qualifications pre-16 has given many learners, parents and schools the expectation that they will automatically progress to level 3 qualifications post-16. In practice however, the course or nature of the level 2 studies do not necessarily provide pupils with the breadth of skills necessary to progress to level 3 immediately. In addition, some are under the false

impression that taking a course in hairdressing or engineering at age 14 qualifies pupils to work in those sectors if they leave school at 16.

- 25 Most learning coaches are employed within a specific learning setting and consequently their ability/willingness to provide full and impartial advice on all the options available may be restricted.
- 26 In some cases schools have developed their own vocational provision, without recourse to college facilities or specialist tutors. It has also resulted in some duplication of pre-existing college provision. The number of pupils attending colleges on school link partnerships is declining in some areas.
- 27 Funding pressures may encourage schools to limit vocational choice in the higher cost areas whilst at the same time school based vocational provision in lower cost subjects is being expanded. Typical examples include reduced engineering and construction provision with corresponding increases in public services, IT, sport, and travel and tourism.
- 28 ColegauCymru has welcomed the Welsh Government's Review of Qualifications which is examining the number, type and quality of academic and vocational courses available to young people. ColegauCymru strongly supports the development of a clear vocational progression route for students. This would enable young people taking vocational subjects to progress through various levels of learning up to and including higher education in a way that mirrors the routes available to those taking academic subjects. There is still some way to go before vocational subjects have a similar status to that of academic subjects.

Summary

- 29 In many cases it appears that young people have a wider choice of academic and vocational subjects than hitherto, through the medium of both English and Welsh. However, the pattern seems to vary. There is some evidence that schools are increasingly seeking to deliver vocational subjects in-house, without specialist facilities, equipment and vocational tutors, leading to unhelpful duplication and potentially lower quality.

Practical problems that have been addressed

- 30 Collaboration: The introduction of the Measure has acted as a catalyst for increased collaboration. Much of this collaboration has been across sector e.g. school/college, school/work based learning provider as well as within the school sector itself. Where vocational provision has been within the school or through school/school collaboration in the best cases colleges/work based learning providers have been consulted/informed and progression issues have been planned/discussed.
- 31 Good practice examples reported by one college of practical problems that have been overcome:

- joint timetabling now in place across the whole age range 14-19
 - website developed in order that pupil data is shared rather than inputted twice
 - clear protocol document in place to underpin the partnership including pricing methodology
 - joint staff development
 - joint Moodle space to support 14-19 collaborative learning
 - joint teaching on one route.
- 32 Transport: In the most effective cases colleges have encouraged schools to align timetables so that pupils can access existing transport to college – this has reduced costs and environmental impact.

Issues that need to be addressed

Financial sustainability of collaborative vocational provision

- 33 Colleges recognise that schools do not receive any subject weighted funding for the higher cost vocational subjects (e.g. Engineering, Construction, Agriculture) and report that many schools and/or networks frequently question the need for lower group sizes (e.g. due to health & safety issues in practical workshops) and/or higher hourly charges for teaching delivery costs (e.g. due to technician support requirements, high cost of consumables etc). At present the shortfall between base funding for schools and the higher vocational costs is in effect met through 14-19 Network funds via Annual Network Development Plans (ANDPs).
- 34 As targeted 14-19 funding reduces, schools are cutting back on these options. For example, a long standing peripatetic delivery of a construction qualification by a college to a school has been withdrawn this year because the school cannot afford to pay the college and is using an underutilised teacher to deliver.
- 35 The WG is reviewing the National Planning and Funding System (NPFS). This is an opportunity to build-in sustainable funding of vocational provision at 14-19.

Geographical flexibility across counties

- 36 Whilst there is some cross-county collaboration on Welsh-medium provision, there is scope for cross county collaboration on English-medium provision in order to better manage the costs of transport and provision. The current structural arrangements of 14-19 networks in some cases means that pupils have to travel many miles within a county to access vocational choices which may in fact be available considerably closer to their school/home but within a neighbouring county.
- 37 As Transformation continues apace, colleges are increasingly merging across local authority boundaries. Responsibilities of partners in delivering the Measure within a partnership/network across different local authority areas will need to be clarified. It is a responsibility of each local authority to achieve the Measure for

14-16 year olds, whereas it is the responsibility of Welsh Ministers to ensure the Measure is achieved for 16-18 year olds.

- 38 Transformation provides opportunities to simplify the logistics of bussing students around a number of providers in a day.

Independent Advice and Guidance

- 39 The Measure has made disappointingly little impact in ensuring impartial advice for pupils at age 14 and 16. Reasons might include:
- ❖ Lack of understanding of vocational progression routes
 - ❖ Competition for 16-19 learners between colleges and school sixth forms for learner numbers/funding.
- 40 This can prove costly as students either drop out of courses for which they are not suited or enrol at college at 17 or 18 on the same course they could have taken at the age of 16.

Rolling out best practice

- 41 In some cases there are good protocols in place covering a range of issues. Some of the issues that can be addressed through such protocols include: clarifying responsibilities over disciplinary issues, establishing how colleges can best liaise with parents, ensuring safeguarding policies are in place covering schools and colleges, ensuring rigorous initial assessment of pupils so that programmes can be planned which suit their needs.

Targets and data

- 42 The Measure concentrates on level 2 programmes and has effectively reduced the number of places on alternative curriculum programmes (level 1 or below) for school pupils. There is a risk that this group of pupils could be disadvantaged.
- 43 There needs to be a common approach to measuring student success.
- 44 ColegauCymru has welcomed the recommendation in the Thomas Review⁴ that a single database be established bringing together the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) and the Lifelong Long Wales Record (LLWR) for all post-16 education by January 2013. Having a common database will help cooperation post 16 between schools and colleges.
- 45 All schools are now issuing a Unique Learner Number (ULN) to each 14 year old pupil. Over time, this will mean every learner enrolling at college will have a ULN – which provides a Personal Learner Record (PLR) of each pupil's achievements. This provides the beginning of a lifelong learning record for each individual – a very positive development. The potential uses of the ULN needs to be maximised, e.g. to provide impartial advice to learners during transition from one provider/sector to another.

⁴ *The Structure of Education Services in Wales* (March 2011). Report of the Independent Task and Finish Group chaired by Vivian Thomas.

Workforce flexibility

- 46 The Wolf Report on Vocational Education in England recommended that lecturers' qualifications should prepare and enable them to teach in schools. This was accepted by the Secretary of State for Education and has already been implemented.
- 47 In Wales, new Professional Standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector in Wales were agreed by the WG in 2008. However, these Standards have still not been transposed into a qualifications framework. It means that FE tutors know what standards are expected of them, but there aren't appropriate qualifications, agreed by the WG, that they can study in order to equip them with the skills to reach those standards in a consistent and efficient way.
- 48 The qualification for full time teaching staff in FE is out of date. It urgently needs to be revised to incorporate identified policy developments e.g. Welsh-medium and bilingual teaching, and the specific teaching skills that are needed to equip FE teachers to teach 14-16 year olds. For example, schools' Learning Support Assistants do not usually accompany pupils on college-based activities. College staff are making progress in gaining essential skills qualifications with the aim that every teacher becomes a numeracy/literacy teacher. However, one college reports that progress is modest given the size of the workforce. Essential skills need to be included in a revised teaching qualification for FE staff.
- 49 There is no agreed qualification for part-time teaching staff in FE in Wales.
- 50 The WG asked the sector skills council LLUK for advice on a teachers' qualifications framework encompassing both full and part-time FE teachers in 2008, but the sector is still waiting for the WG to publish a final framework.

Conclusions

- 51 Colleges have welcomed the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure as an opportunity to encourage partnerships between educational institutions, provide a wider range of options for young people in Welsh and English and raise the profile of and access to high quality vocational subjects.
- 52 Where the Measure is working best, there is evidence that colleges and schools are cooperating to enhance the range of options available to pupils; that uptake has increased; the number of vocational subjects has increased; and advice and guidance is impartial.
- 53 At its worst, schools have undermined the Measure by offering inappropriate and poor quality vocational courses and duplicating existing college courses, and the advice given to young people has been led by more by the needs of the institution than the needs of the individual.

- 54 With 14-19 network funding being reduced, the new post-16 planning and funding system that is currently under development provides an opportunity to mainstream the implementation of the Measure.
- 55 The full impact of the Measure cannot be assessed until its provisions are fully operational in 2012. It will be important to review the progress of the Measure regularly to see how it has affected the success rates of learners and widened choice. Such assessment will be significant as funding for 14-19 partnerships reduces.

Individual colleges' examples of the Measure's impact

Positive general reports

"The implementation of the Measure has certainly created wider opportunity for learners in the local area. Relationships were strong between the schools, the county council and the college pre-2009, but the Measure provided an added incentive for co-operation to create opportunities for learners".

A college has partnered over 20 schools locally and has joint governance arrangements across four county regional areas, including Welsh-medium. Over 1,000 pupils access the college weekly. A specific vocational centre has recently been established.

Provision has been established at third party venues to deliver Agriculture, Hair and Beauty, Countryside Management and Public Services. Pupils from schools have been mixed to create viable groups. Welsh medium schools have worked closely with the college to establish 14-19 vocational provision in Welsh. Learners have participated annually in learner voice surveys and internal inspection processes across the county.

A tertiary college reports the strong positive influence of the Measure and the local learning network on the working relationships between individual institutions. There is effective collaboration and partnership between the local authority, the college, and other local organisations. The college is closely involved in the Regional Learning Partnership which now has the responsibility for delivering the Measure. There are greater choice, flexibility and progression opportunities for learners aged 14-19, especially in terms of access to vocational qualifications.

The appointment of a full-time 14-19 partnership manager by the college has been of considerable help to the schools and the college. The college also reports high levels of achievement at Key Stage 4 in relation to five GCSE threshold scores in the local network area. The high success rates achieved by pupils on collaborative courses and the positive value added scores of these pupils have benefitted from partnership arrangements.

A tertiary college reports that a vocational curriculum existed before the Measure but has since been refined. Level 2 courses have increased with an emphasis on the achievement of qualifications. Before the Measure, 14-19 Networks were able to choose a vocational curriculum that met the needs of schools and young people aged 14 to 16. In the majority of cases school pupils attending vocational programmes at college were described as disaffected or lower achievers. The curriculum was mainly delivered at level 1 and the primary purpose was engagement: often referred to as an alternative curriculum.

The Measure introduced a statutory minimum number of vocational and academic choices and simultaneously raised the bar to level 2. Initially the college did not see a significant change in the prior attainment level of pupils entering these programmes. This created, in many cases, a mismatch between ability and level of study. The college attempted to address this by improving initial assessment and support. It has also developed teachers to cope with more differentiation and

delivery of different level qualifications within the same class. This has had some success. Teachers are also gaining essential skills qualifications to support learners. However, the level 2 curriculum places heavy demands on many of the learners and staff because there has not been a proportionate shift in the ability of pupils' entry levels to these vocational programmes. There is a risk that the pressure to attain level 2 qualifications might devalue the qualifications rather than raise the skills of learners.

The Measure has effectively reduced the number of places on alternative curriculum programmes (level 1 or below) for school pupils. There is now a growing demand from this group of learners for more provision although there is a lack of funding available for the learners. There is a risk of the policy creating more people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). The college has taken steps to develop the 16 to 19 curriculum in partnership with schools and the local authority. It offers college learners the opportunity to study 'A' levels in a local school as well as encouraging traffic the other way. There has been very limited success in this age range so far. College learners do not seem to favour the idea of returning to school even on a part-time basis. The college continues to deliver CACHE to pupils aged 16 to 19 in the local Welsh medium school which benefits a small number of learners there. The 14 to 19 Learning Pathways curriculum has a very significant and positive impact on the large numbers of 14 to 16 year old pupils that attend college (around 750 in 2010/11).

The college has collected evidence through surveys, focus groups and research projects clearly showing that vocational study in a college environment is a very positive experience for pupils. Their progression to further study at college is high and those who progress generally do well. College teachers are generally positive about teaching this age range and find it rewarding when they continue their study aged 16.

A tertiary college reports that vocational opportunities were already in place for 14-16 year olds with school link programmes being offered across a wide range of subjects. After the Measure, these are being developed and expanded.

A college reports a steady increase in the number of students accessing collaborative provision over recent years. At key stage 4, the college works with 10 of the 13 county secondary schools via two separate geographically centred local curricula. In 2010/11, 339 school pupils accessed school link provision. Year 10 intake increased by 17% on 2009 numbers. The 2011 intake has decreased but the three-year trend is upwards.

During the last three years the breadth of provision at key stage 4 has increased from three subjects areas to six in response to student demand. A package of qualifications is offered for each subject generally including qualifications at levels 1 and 2. Subjects offered include: Motor Vehicle, Construction, Hair and Beauty, Business, Agriculture, Catering.

A high proportion of school link participants return to college as full time learners (66% in 2010, 61% in 2011). For those who successfully complete the school link programme the percentage of returners is higher (73% and 62% respectively). The college has seen an increase in those who want to access provision at Key Stage 5 as part of their A Level programme. Numbers have increased by 85% from the pilot

programme (66 to 122). Students have timetabled access to 19 groups offering 15 separate A level equivalent subjects. These include a range of Subsidiary Diplomas and professional qualifications such as AAT (Accounting). These are also offered through two separate geographically distinct consortia. In addition to this, a small number of college students are currently accessing A level subjects as part of their level 3 college offer.

Neutral/negative reports

A college reports that the Measure has had little impact on local arrangements.

A college operates as a key partner in the Learning Partnership board and invests considerable resource in ensuring that the Measure is achieved. Renewed effort from the college and increased dialogue with local 6th forms (several joint planning meetings took place in 2010/11) resulted in a restricted timetable for the college to accommodate no more than seven sixth form pupils accessing subjects. In effect the college's duty to collaborate has negatively impacted on the timetable of around 3,000 full time learners.

Welsh-medium developments

A college where there are not many Welsh speakers reports good progress in Welsh-medium partnerships. It has been able to increase its delivery of vocational courses (Motor Vehicle, Construction, Hairdressing, Health and Social Care) in partnership with a local school. In addition, individual modules are delivered in Welsh in a further 12 curriculum areas. In all of those areas students can also have tutorial support in Welsh if they so want and submit assignments in Welsh. This year, the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification, in which Welsh is being delivered, has been made mandatory at the college. The Welsh customer service qualification, Yr Iaith ar Waith, plus other Welsh electives, are offered at the college.

A college reports the increased flexibility in the delivery of the Welsh Sabbatical is helping to improve Welsh-medium teaching capacity. A recent merger with another college has also helped enhance Welsh-medium and bilingual teaching capacity.

The modest number of Welsh learners from one local secondary school makes it difficult for the school and college to make up viable groups and provide the same choice. Consequently some Welsh-medium groups have a higher cost per pupil. Attempts have been made to cluster together Welsh schools but this has delivered no advantages for the one Welsh school in the area as its cluster is mainly in a different county.

Student Numbers – staying on

A college reports a jump of 14-16 year old learners from 267 (2008/09) to 684 (2011/12).

In a tertiary college, 73% of pupils who studied L2 on collaborative provision linked to the college in 2010/11 have enrolled on to KS5 qualifications in 2011 (not including WBL). The total of pupils enrolled against year 11 cohort figures from 14-16 schools

has increased 6% from 2009/10 to 2011/12 since the implementation of the Measure.

A college reports that while it is very hard to quantify direct relationships between staying on rates and the implementation of the Measure, the NEET population in the county at the age of 16 and 17 has reduced significantly since 2009.