

PCET (Post Compulsory Education and Training) Briefing

The present system

In 2015/16 there were 224,410 FE students in Wales spanning the entire availability of FE at multiple placements. Lifelong learning, part-time learning and work-based learning are also essential to social mobility and national prosperity

Colleges are major providers of general education provision in Wales, helping to produce some of the best learner outcomes. Colleges are the predominant providers of funded vocational and technical education in Wales, providing about 85% of the total provision.

“The various sectors (further education, higher education, work-based learning and adult community education) and providers are regulated and funded in different ways by different bodies and the result can be unhelpful competition between education and training providers, duplication or gaps in provision and confusion for learners. New types of providers have entered the system in recent years and a significant number of HE courses are now taught in FE institutions. Boundaries between higher education and further education, which once were clear, are now breaking down.”

Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education.

PCET offers vital opportunities for people of all backgrounds and levels of ability to participate and succeed in learning. This includes FE, WBL and ACL offering a ‘second chance’ to young people and adults who may not have done well at school, or to those who need to develop new skills in order to enter and maintain employment. This provision is wide-ranging, including everything from entry level provision for school leavers, to literacy and numeracy courses for adults and access to higher level qualifications and skills. For some of these learners, developing confidence and motivation are at least as important as gaining formal qualifications.

Colegau Cymru has long called for a strategy to address post-compulsory education in Wales, where FEIs and 6th forms are treated as equals. Failure to do so would undermine the effectiveness of genuine post compulsory planning, provision, monitoring and evaluation. We cannot continue with a system where, for instance, learners studying identical A Levels in FE are treated differently to those studying in sixth forms. We believe a forward thinking strategic plan is essential for Skills and the Post-16 sector working in partnership with colleges and learners.

Hazelkorn recommendations

Following the Hazelkorn report recommendations, Welsh Government are proposing to create a new Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales. Colegau Cymru supports a reform which puts the learner at the centre of post compulsory education and training and shows parity of esteem whatever the provider or educational route taken by the learner. Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education said in her statement “It is intended that the new body would be given responsibility for planning, funding, contracting, ensuring quality, financial monitoring, audit and performance, and be the lead funder of research. In

line with Professor Hazelkorn’s recommendations, the current functions of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales would be transferred to the new authority, which would operate at arm’s length from the Welsh Government”

Following this statement to the Hazelkorn review, ColegauCymru believes a more developed vision is needed for post-compulsory education in Wales, and agrees that the current system needs review. There must be parity and consistency between institutions offering the same qualifications – for example, between school sixth forms and Further Education institutions, or higher level qualifications being delivered in FEIs. Any approach which claims to be post-compulsory has to include learners in all settings. A genuine post-compulsory system will allow for more effective across-the-board planning, funding and monitoring, with a positive impact on skills levels, skills needs and the economy of Wales. ColegauCymru and its members are committed to this vision for bringing about a renewed commitment to plan correctly and successfully execute a post-16 education system that will achieve improved results for all.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance and continuous improvement is fundamentally important to delivering the best outcomes for learners across the whole sector. Estyn is responsible for the inspection of PCET in FE and related settings and for inspecting the quality of initial teacher education and training in higher education. Under the new commission, 6th form quality and standards will need to be inspected in the same way. Sixth forms are a significant and vital part of the PCET landscape. Each year nearly half of 16 year olds who continue in full-time education do so in school sixth forms.

Tertiary Education & Research Commission for Wales Consultation

Following on from her speech in April, where she expressed her vision for 6th form provision to be added to the remit of the new authority for post-16 education and training, the Cabinet Secretary published the next steps to the Public Good and Prosperous Wales consultation. This consultation paper proposes that the Commission should be made responsible for the funding of school sixth forms and have oversight of their quality assurance.

FE member colleges and institutions

