

The impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on children and young people

CYPE Committee Consultation response

May 2020

Background

ACT is Wales' largest training provider, and last year trained approximately 6,400 learners last year across its Traineeship and Apprenticeship programmes, with 96% of learners rating our course as excellent/good.

Since its establishment in 1988, ACT's mission has been to make a positive difference to people's lives by providing outstanding learning opportunities. We value our strong relationship with the Welsh Government, as its leading provider of training and Apprenticeships, delivering dynamic training packages designed to meet the needs of young people and employers across 30 different industry sectors.

Named in the prestigious Sunday Times Top 100 List of Best Companies to Work For, we have gained Investors in People Gold Award since 2010 and that in 2017 we were placed 7th best IIP Gold company in the world. We were also named the BITC Responsible Large Employer of 2018.

We have established 8 centres across South Wales employing almost 400 people, to deliver engaging learning programmes for young people, who are disengaged from pre-16 education.

The centres are include Aberdare, Cardiff, Barry, Bridgend, , Caerphilly and Ebbw Vale.

ACT is passionate about ensuring all young people are equipped to become successful adults with a wide range of skills and abilities. Far too many young people engage with ACT at age 16 with deficient literacy and numeracy skills and are unprepared to successfully transition from school into the 'real world'.

We strongly believe that early intervention is needed to ensure all young people; especially those disengaged with education, are able to enter the world of work with the best possible chance of success. We're also passionate about reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

ACT developed a specific, targeted Schools Programme in 2012 as an attempt to redress these fundamental issues. In March 2018, ACT Schools became a registered Independent Schools with the capacity to educate 150 learners. The school is registered to admit students with special educational needs specific to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Since establishing our academies provision we have been able offer an alternative key stage 4 education to young people across South Wales who have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion, who are school phobic or are classed as vulnerable. Since September 2016 we have been providing Key Stage 3 provision, expanding our targeted age range to 11-16.

We offer a true alternative to mainstream learning, which is designed to engage young people and help them overcome their barriers to participation, preparing them for adulthood and the world of work. Our dynamic alternative curriculum and range of support packages truly encourages, motivates and nurtures young people to realise what they can achieve.

Our learners are guaranteed:

- A bespoke programme that suits their needs Access to our experienced pastoral team
- Daily support with behaviour and personal barriers
- Regular progress and target setting

- All the support they need to ensure successful transition to post-16 destinations

Consultation response

Our comments are a reflection of our work in supporting vulnerable young people in our school, and in delivering traineeships and apprenticeships.

Wellbeing

Our concerns for our younger learners are around the delayed impact this will have on them longer term and in turn, on our provision. We would like to see Welsh Government give early consideration to the support needs of young people in the medium and longer term, and how organisations like ACT are able to step in and increase the wellbeing services that we already provide.

We already deal with challenging young people, many who have already been affected by adverse childhood experiences and this experience, added to previous negative experiences, will significantly exacerbate behavioral issues, resulting in a significant increase in pastoral and well-being needs.

We have a comprehensive wellbeing service for our learners that we have developed as we have identified it as a priority, but funding for well being initiatives such as mental health support packages announced for schools, period poverty initiatives are targeted at schools and FE colleges, and we are unable to access these schemes or funds to access the support for our learners. Many of our learners are the most vulnerable young people in society.

- We would like clarity on the long term plan to address the wellbeing needs of young people.
- We would also want to ensure that any initiatives, funding, policies or guidance recognize the unique position many WBL providers are in. We are excluded from accessing many public health interventions at the moment even though we deal with the most vulnerable young people in society and are in a unique position to support these young people who desperately need it.

ACT has been operating a food bank for vulnerable learners and their families, with support from food share. We are currently supporting over 60 families a week across south Wales.

Engagement with Apprentices

Overall, our apprenticeship learners are continuing to engage very well, progress and engagement is extremely high and the apprenticeship delivery is producing good outcomes and demand is high.

Engagement with Traineeships

Engagement with traineeship learners has generally been strong, although there has been an increase in issues surrounding safeguarding. Many of our traineeships are suffering from mental health problems, homelessness and general deprivation, we are housing a food bank in our main learning centre for our learners to access.

- Consideration needs to be given to our role as one central agency that is in contact with the most vulnerable young people in society, and whether we could increase our role in offering support to them at this difficult time.

Engagement with School learners

Engagement of our school learners is low, trying to engage learners in alternative education via e-learning is challenging and complex. Our focus has been on supporting the safety and wellbeing of learners.

- We would welcome advice, support or guidance on this, and how we can try and achieve better engagement with our school learners.

E-learning guidance

Guidelines on e-learning from each of our age groups would be good. We provide education to young people from the age of 14. There is ambiguity around the use of video calls, but our younger learners benefit the most from actual face to face interaction.

- We would welcome guidelines on e-learning for specific age groups

Support for Independent Schools

Our School -ACT Schools is classed as an independent school. We capture a cohort of the most vulnerable learners in our society, yet we always fall through the cracks in relation to resources available and funding. For example we are unable to access all of the resources on Hwb, only the content that is publicly available.. Unfortunately, as an Independent Registered School we are unable to have log in access to Hwb, despite the fact that we support some of the most vulnerable young people in Wales – all of whom came from maintained settings.

- Consideration is needed for all types of Schools when developing guidance, policies and resources.
- The Welsh Government guidance published on Friday 15th of May ‘The decision framework for the next phase of education and childcare: considerations, planning and challenges’ does not reference the type of provision we provide as we are classified as an ‘independent school’ despite the fact that we support some of the most vulnerable young people in Wales, all of whom come from maintained settings. We would urge the Welsh Government to consider our role, and the services we provide for the most vulnerable, and would seek clarity on what guidance does apply to us.
- The publication today (18th May) of the IFS study on learning at home and attitudes towards education are highly relevant to our learners and our work, despite being an England only survey. It highlighted that children of wealthier families are spending more time studying during lockdown compared to their poorer peers, and less than a third of parents in the poorest families said they would send their children back to school given the choice, compared to 55% of the most affluent parents. In light of this we are currently drafting a plan to establish an outreach team to go out and visit the learners at home as much as possible (following social distancing guidelines) as we are expecting huge issues with re-engagement we are mindful therefore of the need to prioritise this work now. We would welcome support or guidance in how best to overcome the issues with re-engagement from Welsh Government.