

National Assembly for Wales

Enterprise and Business Committee

November 2014

Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work

Evidence from: Welsh Government

The Committee has requested an update on recent changes to pre and post 16 education provision to understand more fully how these changes will better prepare young people for the world of work.

1. The National Literacy and Numeracy Framework

The National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) was introduced as a statutory curriculum requirement in September 2013 and aims to bring precision into the teaching and learning in key literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. It currently covers Reception to Year 9.

From September 2015, the LNF will be extended to cover 3-4 years and 14-16 year olds (on a non-statutory basis). It is fully inclusive and designed for all learners of all abilities. It was designed and developed in collaboration with practitioners and LA representatives, and was subject to full consultation. This included stakeholder sessions, between April and October 2012. It was made available in January 2013 and was broadly welcomed and continues to be supported by the sector.

Since September 2014 there has also been a requirement for schools to assess using the LNF. The Framework gives teachers the tool to track all pupils' progress with precision.

In supporting the implementation of the LNF, we have developed an interactive version of the LNF online, complete with exemplifications for each expectation statement. There is also a range of training, guidance and exemplification materials for teachers and schools – also designed and developed in collaboration with practitioners (some from school practitioner panel schools).

The National Support Programme (NSP) has been put in place to provide hands on support to all schools in Wales, including special schools to help understand the requirements of the LNF and to implement the LNF.

The NSP works with 1600 schools across Wales - primary, secondary, special and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and has produced 330 resources and materials to support schools to implement the LNF. Some 92 schools have received direct funding to develop best practice material to share with the wider school system in Wales. Although early days, early indications are schools are working very hard to embed the LNF into their teaching and learning.

Implementing the LNF is the responsibility of the whole school. All teachers should be teachers of literacy and numeracy. They should actively embrace opportunities to embed these crucial skills in teaching across the curriculum.

2. New/revised qualifications including changes to GCSEs and the Welsh Baccalaureate

The Review of Qualifications took a comprehensive look at qualifications for 14-19 year olds in Wales and made 42 recommendations for improving the qualifications system in Wales. The Review was prompted by concerns that the qualifications system in Wales was overly complicated and that improvements were needed to ensure that the qualifications on offer are relevant in terms of the progression opportunities they offer young people and valuable in terms of the broader educational benefits they extend to learners.

GCSEs: GCSEs remain as the main Level 1 and Level 2 general qualifications at 14 to 19 in Wales. New GCSEs in English Language and Welsh Language were accredited in October for first teaching from September 2015 and will provide a greater focus on literacy and the functional skills that learners need in their everyday lives, preparing them for the world of work or further study. Two new maths GCSEs were also accredited in October for first teaching from September 2015; one will focus on the maths needed for everyday life and the world of work and the other will focus on the mathematics needed for progression to scientific, technical or further mathematical study. Having two maths GCSEs reflects the importance of the subject for progression and employment; it is expected that most young people in Wales will take both new mathematics GCSEs.

These new GCSEs reflect and support the improvements that will result from the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework. Learners who have not achieved at least a grade C in GCSE English or Welsh Language and Mathematics-Numeracy by 16 will be expected to continue to work towards these GCSEs or other appropriate qualifications.

AS/A Levels: The Review found strong support for both the A level brand and product and concluded that A levels are fit for purpose and require little change. Several AS and A level qualifications are being revised for 2015 and we are developing these in step with changes in England.

A levels in Wales and England will be the same in size, scope and level of demand, and will share the same content as far as possible. AS qualifications will remain as a coupled part of A level qualifications in Wales; stakeholders, including universities, have been clear that they value and support this approach.

Welsh Baccalaureate: A new Welsh Baccalaureate was accredited in October for first teaching from September 2015. In line with the Review's recommendations the Welsh Baccalaureate has been revised and made more rigorous and will focus on developing the skills valued worldwide by employers and higher education. These skills include: literacy, numeracy, digital literacy, planning, organisation, innovation, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and personal effectiveness. These skills

are developed and assessed through three Challenges and a substantial individual project, based on independent research.

Vocational qualifications: All vocational qualifications in Wales are being classified as either IVETs or CVETs (initial or continuing vocational education and training), according to European conventions. Since September, only IVETs have been available to learners up to the age of 16, so younger learners have access to qualifications appropriate for their age, providing a broad introduction to a sector and allowing for progression. Those over 16 can take IVETs or CVETs, which focus more on competence in specific roles. To support the on-going development and improvement of the vocational qualifications systems in Wales, the Welsh Government is introducing a number of sector specific stakeholder panels (involving employers, employer representative bodies and teaching and training institutions) to take a strategic view of vocational qualifications within each sector.

3. Greater accountability through schools categorisation

We know that using performance data to drive school improvement has made positive strides for many schools and learners. Since secondary school Banding was introduced we have seen schools in Band 4 and 5 make real progress year-on-year. Band 5 schools in 2012 have seen the overall percentage of pupils achieving the Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh First Language and Mathematics increase from 35.0 per cent in 2012 to 45.0 per cent in 2013. Similarly Band 4 schools in 2012 have gone from 45.8 per cent to 49.5 per cent in 2013.

To build on the improvements achieved by Banding and to include primary schools, we have announced a new National School Categorisation System which will cover both primary and secondary schools. The new system will assess schools on the following intelligence:

- a range of performance measures provided by the Welsh Government
- robust self-evaluation from schools on their ability to improve in relation to leadership, learning and teaching
- corroboration of the school's self-evaluation by education consortia Challenge Advisers.

The outcome of the performance data and self-evaluation will generate a Categorisation for each school, which will trigger a bespoke programme of support, challenge and intervention. The Categorisation will be determined by consortia, discussed with the school and moderated by a quality assurance and standardisation group to ensure consistency within and across consortia.

The primary purpose of the National School Categorisation System remains just as it was with Banding. It is to identify schools that are most in need of support, to ensure that, in partnership with local authorities and consortia, we direct our support and resources most effectively to secure the improvements necessary in our school system.

This is not about labelling, naming or shaming, or creating crude league tables. It is about putting schools into a position that enables them to identify what are the

factors that contribute to their progress and achievement, or what are the areas to focus on to achieve further development.

4. Local curricula and closer arrangements between schools and colleges

Collaborative working between colleges and local authorities forms a fundamental part of discussions linked to the post-16 planning cycle. These partnerships provide opportunities for learners to access course provision which would sometimes be unavailable at their home school.

Young people have been given opportunities to follow high quality vocational courses at colleges, such as Engineering and Manufacturing, which are being offered at FE colleges, through collaboration with schools.

Collaboration has enabled learning providers to deliver courses in priority subjects, such as Modern Foreign Languages, where low uptake would normally make such courses unsustainable.

For example, the 14-19 Network in Wrexham has offered a two year GCSE Spanish Twilight collaborative course at Coleg Cambria in response to falling number of learners taking a Modern Foreign Language at KS4 and post 16. This course was offered to all learners in Wrexham as part of the local curriculum offer and was oversubscribed.

In September 2013, the independent 14-19 Learning Pathways Task and Finish Group recommended that local curriculum points, which were introduced to safeguard level 1 course provision in order to meet the needs of a range of learners, were no longer needed as learning providers are now routinely delivering such courses, due to increased collaborative working arrangements.

In 2014-15 the Welsh Government allocated £10.0m of 14-19 Learning Pathways grant to education consortia to take forward the 14-19 Learning Pathways policy and develop local curricula which includes the delivery of collaborative course provision including the cost of transport.

Following a recommendation from the 14-19 Learning Pathways Task and Finish Group the Local Curriculum Offer at Key Stage 4 from 2014 has now been reduced from 30 to 25 choices. The number of vocational choices has been reduced from 5 to 3.

The post 16 Local Curriculum Offer remains at 30 choices including a minimum of 5 vocational courses.

All schools and FE colleges in Wales are either meeting or exceeding the revised local curricula offer requirements of the 14-19 Learning Pathways policy. This is evidence that learners are continuing to be offered a wide curriculum offer which the 14-19 Learning Pathways Task and Finish Group concluded had benefitted learners.

5. Mergers between colleges and universities

The Webb Review 2007 (the Transformation Policy) signalled an intention to improve learning opportunities for all communities in Wales. Evidence suggested that the existing arrangements for post-16 learning delivery were unlikely to support the learning transformation that Wales required to allow seamless progression into employment and HE.

In 2011 the Programme for Government manifesto committed to improve Further and Higher Education (FE/ HE) outcomes in Wales by “*working to encourage mergers of colleges to provide increased learning opportunities and enable closer collaboration between FE and HE providers*” and to “*create a smaller number of stronger universities*”.

The Welsh Government set out to secure a workforce sufficiently skilled to access emerging high level employment opportunities. The aim was to reduce unnecessary duplication of provision through increased collaboration, and to widen the options available to learners by ensuring that resources could be better focussed on learner outcomes, progression, quality and access, and less on supporting duplication, back office functions and administration. In some instances relocation of provision was necessary to answer issues of inappropriate location or poor alignment between staff expertise and student demand.

To meet the challenge and maximise the benefit to learners, policy direction in Wales has been to transform post-compulsory learning through a managed process of HE rationalisation, college mergers and 6th form integration, while at the same time retaining local accountability.

The number of college mergers completed to date means that the policy initiative has delivered a reduction in the number of FEIs, down from 20 in 2009 to 12 by 2014¹, a year ahead of target. By today HE provision in Wales is delivered via 9 higher education institutions, a reduction of 4 as a result of HE mergers which have taken place since 2009. HE provision can also be accessed at a number of further education colleges.

In addition there have been 3 FE/ HE mergers; Merthyr College forms part of the University of South Wales, while both Coleg Sir Gâr and Coleg Ceredigion have become subsidiary bodies of the University of Wales Trinity St David. The concept of ‘dual sector’ bodies is recognised as a model that has the potential to be applied elsewhere in Wales to encourage progression.

As a result of the moves to establish stronger FE/HE links, some merged institutions now serve as regional hubs for learning, developing specialist provision in ‘Centres

¹ The data includes Merthyr Tydfil College, (which in May 2006 merged with the University of Glamorgan) but excludes the 3 designated institutions: WEA Cymru, YMCA, and St David's Sixth Form College. This is in line with the analysis in the Report of the Independent Task and Finish Group on the Structure of Education Services in Wales (2011). From 2013/14, the data also includes Coleg Ceredigion and Coleg Sir Gâr, following their merger with University of Wales Trinity St David. The data for this indicator are sourced from departmental management information and have not been published as official statistics.

of Excellence', and by developing close collaborative partnerships with the involvement of FE, HE, WBL providers and employers, are progressing parity of esteem between vocational and academic learning.

Merged institutions have tended to report on initial short term achievements, which, in the main, have indicated financial efficiencies and savings amounting to between 5 and 10% of overall turnover. This will eventually impact on the primary aim of merger i.e. to realise and redirect benefits to quality of provision, access, learner outcomes, and progression.

Larger institutions have created commercial arms to their portfolio of operations and many earn substantial amounts of income in this way, using the income to sustain and develop the other learner and business services of their college.

Whilst the post compulsory sector has generally responded well to the Transformation Policy, some institutions have not engaged in merger arrangements, and a few appear to be proposing limited interaction with other providers. Smaller colleges tend to be constrained by their inability to secure the larger financial capital investment needed to answer fast changing vocational requirements.

6. Employability of undergraduates and postgraduates from Welsh higher education

In June 2012 the Agreement on Skills and Employability for Wales was launched, committing HEFCW and the three other partners (NUS Wales, CBI Wales and HEW) to actions to improve the job related skills of graduates in Wales. There has been a focus on work placement and work experience; employer approved courses; and embedding employability skills across all higher education curricula

HEIs in Wales have prepared Skills and Employability Action Plans, which demonstrate a wide range of activity from employability awards to new work experience schemes. HEFCW has provided one-off funding for initiatives to enhance innovation and sustainability. There are employment and employability measures in HEFCW's fee plan arrangements with institutions which will ensure that both are high on the agenda for HEFCW and HEIs in Wales.

It is clear that the changes to the student funding regime introduced from 2012/13 have also encouraged HEIs to focus on employability, as employment statistics are now published by course, and employment prospects feature large in students' decisions as to where to apply to study.

Full-time graduates: Of the 2012-13 cohort of first degree graduates, some 92.4 per cent had obtained employment, or had entered further study 6 months after graduation from full-time courses. This is above the UK average of 92.1 per cent, and above both the England and Northern Ireland figures.

Some 58 per cent of first degree graduates from Welsh universities gained employment within Wales. The comparable figures of gaining employment in the country of study are: England 98 per cent; Scotland 83 per cent and Northern Ireland

91 per cent. Salaries in Wales and Northern Ireland were lower than in England and Scotland.

In addition to the normal Welsh HEIs, the Open University has some 8000 part-time students in Wales, over 70 per cent of which are in employment whilst they study. Over 800 students are sponsored by their employing companies.

7. Latest GCSE and A level results

One of the main measures of performance in education in Wales is the Level 2 inclusive threshold. This represents 5 GCSEs or equivalent at grade A*-C in English or Welsh First Language and Mathematics.

This year's provisional exam results show progress is being made on attainment. In 2013/14, the provisional numbers of 15 year olds achieving the Level 2 inclusive hit an all-time high of 55.1 per cent. This is 2.3 percentage points higher than 2012/13 – the highest year-on-year increase since records began for this measure in 2006/07. Performance in this threshold is now 11.0 percentage points higher than that year.

In terms of A levels, 17 year olds continue to perform well in A Level and equivalent qualifications, with 97.1 per cent of those entering a volume equivalent to 2 A Levels achieving the Level 3 threshold. This is 0.6 percentage points higher than in 2012/13.

These provisional results indicate the new momentum in the school sector in Wales and reflect the positive changes in our direction of travel. There are improvements in the percentage of pupils achieving A-C in the individual subjects of English/Welsh First Language, Mathematics and Science.

The Department for Education (DfE) in England published provisional Key Stage 4 results on 23 October. In 2011 Wales was 8.9 percentage points below England for Level 2 inclusive. Wales' performance has been improving over recent years and has been closing the gap with England. In 2014 the provisional data shows that there is now only a 0.9 percentage point gap between England and Wales.

However it should be noted that England has made significant changes to its policies for school performance measures which are reflected in their data this year. Despite publishing data based on the previous year's methodology (to facilitate a more like-for-like comparison) there are limitations to this data – they have not been able to take into account any changes in behaviours and decisions made by schools based on policy announcements made by the DfE. Comparisons between Wales and England data for 2014 must therefore be treated with caution.