

Developments in remote and blended learning practice

The work of further education, work based learning and adult learning in the community providers during the COVID-19 pandemic

March 2021



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Introduction

This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education in November 2020. It provides an overview of how further education colleges, work-based learning providers and adult learning in the community partnerships have developed their practice to deliver teaching, training and learning, either as remote or blended learning, from March 2020 to January 2021. The report captures the strengths and on-going challenges that providers and learners face, and it shares cameos of emerging practice.

The intended audience for this report is the Welsh Government and the further education, work-based learning, adult learning in the community sectors and local authorities. It draws on the evidence base set out in appendix 1, and includes interviews, observations and focus groups with learners, tutors, teachers and assessors, all of which inspectors carried out remotely. Inspectors engaged remotely in professional discussions with teachers¹ about the sessions they observed, where requested by staff.

The report is part of a series of publications by Estyn to share learning and support the education system's continued response and recovery from COVID-19. In July 2020, Estyn published cameos of emerging practice from the sectors of further education, work-based learning and adult learning in the community on our website (Estyn, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). In December 2020, we published a report alongside our Annual Report 2019-2020 on the sector response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Estyn, 2020a), giving an update of our engagement with the post-16 sector and including further cameos of emerging practice from engagement calls to providers and partnerships during the autumn term 2020.

This report features further cameos of interesting practice from further education colleges, work-based learning providers and adult learning in the community partnerships. These are not case studies as we are unable to fully evaluate the impact of the work because of the restrictions on our activities due to COVID-19. The cameos are included to exemplify points raised in the report and give a flavour of the work that has taken place across Wales.

The report also refers to helpful additional publications to support effective remote and blended learning approaches.

¹ Our glossary provides an explanation that we refer to 'teachers' in the report as a generic term to describe all those who deliver and support learners' progress in learning across the three post-16 sectors.

Background

In the foreword to his Annual Report 2019 - 2020, Meilyr Rowlands HMCI, (Estyn 2020e, p.4) stated that, 'the last months of 2019 - 2020 academic year brought challenges to Welsh education the like of which we have not seen in generations. The challenges were many, complex and unexpected. The COVID-19 pandemic changed people's lives, had a huge impact on our economies and caused major disruption to education systems worldwide and in Wales.' The Chief Inspector's foreword and the report offer an initial account of how education and training providers across all phases and sectors coped with the initial lockdown period and how they strived to support learners through remote and blended learning opportunities.

This has been a period of unprecedented change and a timeline of significant events in the period March 2020 – January 2021 can be found in Appendix 2. On 20 May 2020, the Welsh Government (2020b) published its overarching COVID-19 Resilience Plan for the Post-16 Sector. On 10 June, it published additional guidance to support providers in addressing key issues in re-starting face-to-face learning in the further education, work-based learning sectors and adult learning in the community sectors. The Welsh Government consulted widely with learning providers and partners and, on 31 July 2020, it published an overarching framework and vision for post-16 learning delivery from September 2020 (2020f). This plan envisaged a return to face-to-face learning for all learners with providers developing blended learning courses to help to protect learners' and staff's health by reducing the number of learners at any one campus or venue at any one time.

With the emergence of a new, more easily transmissible form of the COVID-19 virus in the autumn 2020, the Welsh Government initiated a further period of lockdown from 19 December 2020. This required providers in the post-16 sector to return to providing courses remotely. On 5 February 2021, the Minister announced the prioritised return to onsite face-to-face learning of those learners in the further education and work-based learning sectors who are studying qualifications which demonstrate occupational or professional competence (such as those studying how to install electrical and gas appliances). The Welsh Government envisages that other post-16 learners will return to learning on a phased basis.

In its document, Strategic framework for learning delivery from September 2020 (July 2020), the Welsh Government (2020f) envisaged three stages through which providers would move from initial impact of the lockdown to the return to normal delivery of education. These three phases are:

- **the rescue stage (March – June 2020)** in which the Welsh Government would make sure providers have security of funding with which to ensure that immediate arrangements for the continuity of learning were in place
- **the review stage (May – September 2020)** when government and providers would plan for potential changes to provision, funding and learning delivery from the autumn 2020 and beyond

- **the renew stage (September 2020 – March 2021)** where providers would put into place revised arrangements for the academic year 2020 – 2021 and evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on post-16 education.

To support the post-16 sectors, the Welsh Government set up a series of task groups drawing members from further education, work-based learning and adult learning in the community as well as other key organisations. During the recovery and renew stages, the task groups produced guidance to support the further education, work-based learning and adult learning in the community sectors with the development of blended learning.²

Between November to December 2020, the Welsh Government (2021) also conducted a [survey of post-16 learners](#) about their experiences, attitudes to learning and wellbeing to help them understand the learners' perspective and to plan for the next stage of recovery. In practice, the further periods of lockdown have made it difficult for post-16 sectors to continue with teaching and learning through blended learning and they have had to return to teaching and learning remotely.

Moreover, the logistics of returning to partial onsite and partial learning at home, and eventually to full return to onsite learning, in a COVID-19 secure manner poses many problems for all sectors. At the time of publication, the Welsh Government is working with post-16 stakeholders to plan the phased return to onsite learning and develop strategies to help learners in the post-16 sectors recover their learning and ensure that learners do not get left behind. Both the Welsh Government and stakeholders are mindful that there then needs to be a period of reflection on the period since March 2020 to review lessons learned and to put contingency plans in place for any future outbreak of COVID-19 or other virus.

Concepts underpinning online teaching and learning

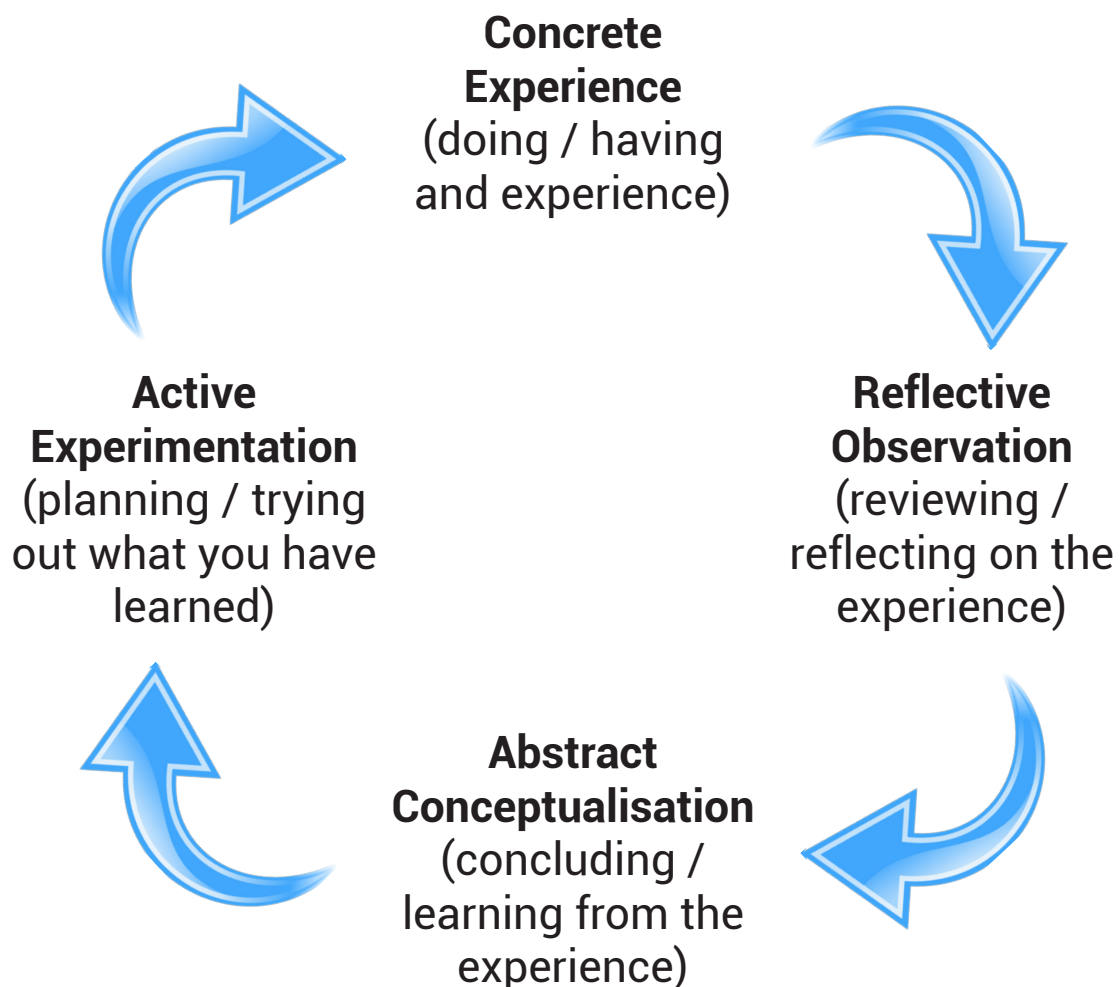
There is a good deal of writing and research about the different concepts underpinning online teaching and learning, including remote and blended learning. However, the main challenge, as with all teaching and learning, is to design the learning in such a way that learners can actively engage with the subject matter and the teacher to be able to develop the learner's knowledge, understanding and skills through independent learning and interaction with peers. To achieve this, it is important that the teacher designs teaching and learning to take advantage of the technology, but does not allow the technology to dictate the way in which the teacher engages the learner. Darlene Christopher (2015, p.4) expresses this idea when she writes:

'In the course of virtual class training (and face-to-face classroom training for that matter), the magic is not found in the sophistication of the technology but in how well the physical and virtual tools are used to create and facilitate a learning event. The same technology that is behind highly interactive, engaging, and interesting virtual learning experiences is also what creates ineffective and boring training solutions that invite criticism.

² These guides are referenced in appendix 3.

You can suffer a 'death by Powerpoint' experience virtually or in person. The only differentiator between a successful or unsuccessful training event is good design executed by a skilled facilitator. It is all about creating the ideal mix of appropriate technology, excellent design, and engaging facilitation.'

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory builds on that of Kurt Lewin and underpins the design of many online courses, as well as much of face-to-face teaching and learning. The theory proposes that to learn effectively, learners need to work through four stages: concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualisation and active experimenting. Learning starts with what learners are already familiar: this can be previous learning or experiences gained through reading relevant texts or viewing videos, for example. In the second stage, the learner makes observations about the experience and collects data. In the third stage, the learner forms conclusions based on meanings derived from observations and, in the fourth stage, the learner experiments using their conclusions derived from the three previous stages.



As part of a series of documents related to the overarching COVID-19 resilience plan, in its Blended learning and teaching: a short guide (July 2020) the Welsh Government (2020d, p.1) adopt Jisc's definition of blended learning as,

'Blended learning provides a combination of face-to-face learning and dynamic digital activities that facilitate any time/any place learning.'

(<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/creating-blended-learning-content>)

The Welsh Government acknowledges that, 'There is a huge difference between moving classroom content online and a planned blended learning programme which effectively integrates face-to-face learning and remote activities. Working in this way requires specific skills for both learners and staff. We recognise that this is an on-going process and that it will take time to establish high standards of blended learning across the whole sector.'

In gathering information and evidence for this report, we found that many providers have interpreted and applied the terminology associated with remote and blended learning in a variety of ways within and across organisations and partnerships. What one provider might refer to as 'hybrid learning' might not necessarily refer to the identical way of delivery in a different organisation. Therefore, for the purposes of this report, we have provided a glossary of terminology that we use in this publication.

Main findings

- 1 The pandemic has caused a paradigm shift in teaching and learning in the post-16 sectors. Providers and their staff across all post-16 sectors have focused their priorities on learners and their wellbeing.
- 2 While there have been improvements in the quality of teaching and learning through remote and blended learning since the start of the pandemic, the quality of teaching and learning online remains variable overall.
- 3 Providers and their staff across all sectors have shown great commitment to developing their skills in remote and blended teaching and assessment.
- 4 Those providers who had begun to introduce an element of remote or blended teaching and learning into their curriculum offer prior to lockdown in March 2020 were in a stronger position to bring other provision online quickly.
- 5 The introduction of remote and blended learning has caused a shift in how providers and staff quality assure online courses and share practice. The greater use of technology enables opportunities for greater reflection on an individual basis and sharing of innovative practice to staff across the provider.
- 6 Adult learning in the community partnerships were disadvantaged in bringing adult learning online because in most cases they do not have centralised IT learning support teams, virtual learning environments and access to shared online resources to support planning and delivery to learners, particularly to those learners who are disadvantaged.
- 7 It has been more difficult to move some courses and programmes into remote learning than other courses or programmes. This has been particularly the case for learners in the further education and work-based learning sectors undertaking apprenticeships and technical courses, as they need to practise with specialist equipment and in specialist facilities, as well as take supervised assessments to demonstrate occupational or professional competence.
- 8 Where staff work in teams to develop remote and blended teaching and learning courses, they are able to share responsibilities, teaching methodology, ideas and resources. This leads in the main to online courses with greater coherence and a good balance of purposeful synchronous and asynchronous activities that promote learning.
- 9 Providers have noted unexpected benefits to taking courses online. For example, the greater flexibility attracts a wider range of learners, as they are able to access learning more easily.
- 10 In the further education and adult learning in the community sectors, providers have adjusted their curriculum offer quickly and appropriately to meet the needs of learners who have lost employment and need to reskill to access the job market.

- 11 Despite their efforts to develop remote and blended learning and assessment methods, providers consider that in too many cases awarding organisations were not agile enough in adapting their requirements. This has left too many learners waiting to complete their qualifications and receive their awards in the academic year 2020-2021. In many cases, this has demoralised learners, and left them unable to make progress in the jobs they are in or unable to apply for jobs related to their qualifications.

Recommendations

Further education colleges, work-based learning providers and adult learning in the community partnerships should:

- R1 Quality assure remote and blended learning provision to ensure that all courses or programmes meet a minimum quality standard so as to reduce the variability in provision
- R2 Ensure that leaders and teachers have access to professional learning that supports the development of how to design effective remote and blended teaching and learning, as well as further develop teachers' pedagogical and assessment skills
- R3 Share emerging and innovative remote and blended learning practice within and across post-16 sectors in Wales and beyond

The Welsh Government should:

- R4 Continue to support the sector with guidance to enable providers to develop quality remote and blended approaches, particularly in supporting the return to direct teaching and training and the assessment of practical vocational and technical skills
- R5 Commission professional learning for the post-16 sector, which is free to providers and helps them to develop specific expertise in remote and blended learning design, teaching, training and learning for their sector to reduce variability of quality in provision
- R6 Enable adult learning in the community partnerships and learners to access a national centralised digital platform to provide remote and blended learning more easily
- R7 Encourage and support providers to share emerging practice in remote and blended learning within and across post-16 sectors in Wales

1 Policy and planning for online learning

- 12 The arrival of the pandemic in March 2020 and the subsequent lockdown to protect people's health caused a paradigm shift in teaching and learning in the post-16 sectors. What is of most importance to many learners who we spoke to, is that they continue their courses or programmes. In doing so, not only can they complete and gain qualifications and improve their employment opportunities, but also they gain a focus that provides stability and purpose in uncertain times.
- 13 In the 'rescue' phase, providers focused initially on safeguarding learners online and on supporting learners to remain engaged with learning. This activity revealed a digital divide, with a significant number of learners without access to the necessary equipment through which they could access their teachers and continue learning remotely. In many cases, teachers also identified a need for emotional support and strategies for learners to maintain their own wellbeing and mental health.
- 14 Due to the situation, much of senior leaders' and teachers' time in the rescue phase was spent responding to learners' immediate needs, such as ensuring that learners had the appropriate equipment to access learning and signposting them to organisations that could provide social, financial and wellbeing support. Estyn's report on [learner mental health and emotional wellbeing](#) (Estyn, 2021) discusses these latter issues.
- 15 In March 2020, only a few providers had undertaken prior planning to include remote or blended learning as a regular option in their curriculum offer or work-based learning programme during 2019-2020. This put those few providers in a better position to respond more quickly and coherently to the developing situation. In most cases during the 'rescue' stage, providers focused on operational planning and the day-to-day challenges of developing an online presence. Many further education colleges started to deliver learning online by the end of April 2020. They were able to do this mainly because they have centralised IT departments and access to additional resources through Hwb, the Welsh Government's professional learning, networking, collaboration and resource sharing portal.
- 16 In cases where work-based learning providers had a centralised IT system, they too were able to provide remote and blended learning in a relatively short time. Where work-based learning providers had developed online processes for electronic portfolios, this helped learners to submit work to be assessed, for example essential skills assessments in literacy and numeracy. In many cases, providers focused initially on developing the theoretical and essential skills elements of the work-based learning programme online. Providers found addressing training and the assessment of practical elements in the work place or training centre more difficult during lockdown when learners could not go to their work places.

Cameo: Delivering work-based learning remotely and through blended learning within the Educ8 Group

The Educ8 Group, incorporating ISA training, had already begun to consider developing remote and blended teaching and learning content prior to the pandemic. As a result, in 2018, they appointed a digital curriculum manager to oversee the development of blended learning programmes and trainer/coaches (TCs) had already begun a training programme to develop their digital skills and their use of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and E-portfolio. This enabled the training company, staff and apprentices to move to new ways of learning and working quickly when the pandemic started. The Educ8 Group responded to individual industry needs by adding content, digital tools and new interactive methods to their established platforms. Apprentices developed their vocational knowledge and skills through using a variety of resources, such as videos, recorded masterclasses, webinars and one-to-one online sessions. The company already offered a fully online and remote learning package, which it adapted to blended learning as settings began to re-open to onsite visits in September 2020.

The company gave employers access to the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) Moodle platform, so that they could keep up-to-date with apprentices' theoretical learning. The employers reported that this worked especially well in the hair and beauty sector, where apprentices took the opportunity to develop their theoretical knowledge to a higher level while waiting for the opportunity to complete their final assessment, and through using the VLE Moodle platform themselves, the employers could see what the apprentices were learning. To help furloughed hairdressing apprentices, when government regulations allowed them to do so, the Educ8 Group hired space in two external salons to help apprentices make up time with their practical skills in a safe environment.

The provider reports that apprentices have engaged well with remote and blended learning. The reduction in travel time for TCs has allowed them to conduct more sessions online and work with more apprentices more often. This has resulted in shorter, more well-focused and frequent sessions allowing apprentices to make steady progress. The provider judges that apprentices are developing greater independent learning and self-evaluation skills. The provider supports the apprentices to explore higher and more challenging levels of study, which they discuss with their TC. Apprentices studying hairdressing also take part in peer teaching sessions, where they demonstrate different skills and techniques, for example in hair colouring.

In parallel with increased online learning opportunities for apprentices, the company has developed an online professional learning package for staff.

The Educ8 Group reviews the delivery models every three months to update content. To ensure that it can continue to operate the programme it offers online, the company has invested in appointing a digital learning apprentice to support ongoing development and a digital developer to develop advanced digital teaching methods.

In these ways, the Educ8 group is working towards meeting the challenges in

delivering and assessing vocational learning in health and social care, childcare and hairdressing when the outbreak of COVID-19 stopped apprentices continuing with learning in their work settings.

- 17 Although all adult learning in the community partnerships have links with local authorities and further education colleges, these partners focused their attention necessarily on the challenges for full-time learners and statutory (pre-16) learners. Many adult learning in the community providers found it more difficult to move to online education as rapidly as other post-16 sectors due to the lack of access to a national centralised and shared IT system through which to connect with learners and access tools and resources, such as those provided for schools on Hwb. Providers often found learners' lack of equipment or data allowance and their technological skills were also barriers to engaging them in online learning. Nonetheless, staff in partnerships found a range of ways, including delivering paper-based materials, to maintain learner engagement and ensure continued learning. Cardiff and the Vale adult learning partnership developed a scheme whereby companies and people with spare equipment could donate laptops and electronic tablets to the partnership for refurbishment. The partnership then distributed the equipment to those learners without equipment to help them to continue to engage with learning without the need to return the equipment at some stage in the future.
- 18 The rescue stage was characterised by great variability in both the provision and the quality of learning experiences because providers did not have time to plan in detail, but had to respond as quickly as possible to the needs of their learners and utilise whichever technological staff skills and digital tools were available to them to take learning online. During the summer of 2020, most providers across the three sectors were able to move successfully from the 'rescue' and 'recovery' stages into the 'renew' stage. Providers reviewed their remote and blended learning practices and started to plan how to deliver remote and blended learning activity more effectively in the academic year 2020-2021, the 'renew' stage. Providers realised that the digital capability and confidence of staff at the time of the lockdown was variable. After the rescue period providers took the opportunity to focus professional learning on the next step of how to adapt courses and provide a more coherent remote or blended learning package (Welsh Government, 2020i).
- 19 From March to July 2020, policy and planning focused mainly on operational issues, such as re-organising timetables and the physical learning environment to cope with the return of learners to safe and COVID-19 secure face-to-face learning. From the late summer 2020 onwards, senior leaders also began to develop policy to address additional support for teachers' wellbeing, to develop further teachers' understanding of digital standards and teaching methods, and their technological skills to deliver quality teaching remotely and through blended learning. As a part of this work, many providers we contacted began to develop useful policies about the delivery of online learning to ensure appropriate digital standards, equal access and opportunity for learners and to set parameters to teachers' working hours and workloads. Providers worked with staff and learners to develop policy in the form of codes of practice about expectations of learners and learner entitlement and behaviours during online sessions.

- 20 Overall, the work to develop policies in respect of remote and online learning has helped to bring about a shared understanding within individual providers and to reduce to some extent the wide variation seen in practice in the early stages of the pandemic. Providers across the three sectors continue to keep policies about remote and blended learning under regular review to ensure they reflect the most current circumstances. They refine them as they develop greater knowledge and understanding about what works best for learners and staff in their own contexts.
- 21 With rates of COVID-19 infections declining and in line with the Welsh Government's planned phased return, vocational learners who need to attend onsite learning in order to complete practical learning and assessments, including apprentices and those studying for qualifications in occupational or professional competence, returned to socially distanced onsite learning from 22 February 2021.

2 Teaching and learning using online methods

- 22 Prior to lockdown in March 2020, most post-16 teachers had little experience of teaching online courses or programmes. In the initial weeks of the 'rescue' stage, most teachers experimented with different ways of presenting their courses or programmes online. In many cases, for example in further education and work-based learning sectors, teachers had to adapt their teaching to the digital platform adopted by their own organisation, such as Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom. In the adult learning in the community sector, where there were only limited centralised digital platforms, teachers had often to find software that would accommodate the teaching strategies that they wanted to use online. They also had to take into consideration whether their choice of software was accessible to their learners, many of whom are from disadvantaged and hard-to-reach backgrounds without access to their own computer, laptop or electronic tablet, or with limited access to data on mobile telephones.
- 23 To overcome some of these initial problems, teachers provided learners with work that they could complete on their own (asynchronously) before joining online sessions. This enabled teachers to work interactively with learners during the online sessions. In this early stage in many cases across all sectors, ease of access to information technology drove the teaching and learning practice, rather than the teaching and learning driving the choice of IT package which best complemented the teaching methodology. This often resulted in disjointed provision and it did not provide for engaging teaching and learning experiences overall.
- 24 In the recovery stage, teachers became more familiar and gained greater confidence in using different types of IT packages. Through their experience, they were better able to evaluate the IT packages they were using, as well as learners' progress. Teachers began to review and refine schemes of work and to adapt them to a more considered form of blended learning for the start of the new academic year in September 2020, the 'renew' phase.
- 25 Overall, the most effective examples of courses adapted for remote and blended learning approaches that inspectors have seen so far are generally courses at level 3 or above in subject areas that suit BTEC or A levels in particular. Teachers said that they found it easier to adapt courses that did not have a high level of practical components to them. This was because learners could carry out independent study, such as reading and research work, prior to joining online sessions where they could discuss the outcomes of their work or the teacher could make a presentation or consolidate learning on a topic. However, delivering many work-based learning courses through remote or blended learning methods proved more difficult.
- 26 Work-based learning providers could deliver Essential Skills Wales qualifications online, especially if they used the online programmes prepared by The Open University in conjunction with Welsh colleges. However, the time apprentices had available to practise or receive direct training to develop the skills needed for their occupational programmes and qualifications was severely curtailed by the lack of

access to workplaces and specialist training facilities during periods of lockdown or other restrictions.

- 27 A few adult learning in the community providers have developed practical courses taught through blended learning methods. These courses, such as cookery, art, yoga and languages, are aimed at adult learners wanting to develop their personal interest skills in these areas and are courses that need only limited additional specialist equipment.
- 28 While there have been improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in terms of pedagogy and the adaption of courses and programmes to remote and blended learning approaches, there remain significant challenges for work-based learning providers to provide the practical components of qualifications through these means.
- 29 As a result, the provision and quality of teaching and learning online across the further education, work-based learning and adult learning in the community sectors remains variable overall.
- 30 In the most effective examples, teachers work as teams to plan and to deliver blended learning courses or programmes which are coherent and which allow learners to make good progress in their learning. They ensure that:
 - All teachers on the team have a clear overview and understanding of the work.
 - Each teacher is clear as to the role of the sessions they will deliver on the course in relation to other sessions taught by other teachers.
 - They plan for contingencies at the outset, for example, how to adapt the course to remote learning in the case of lockdown or who will cover sessions if a team member is unable to do so.
 - They plan for the longer term so that they can ensure learners experience wide range of teaching activities, informal and formal assessment opportunities and personal support, as they would were they to attend class at a college, a work placement or a community venue.
 - They ensure that there is a suitable balance of time between learners working asynchronously and independently, and synchronously, either online or face-to-face onsite, as part of a whole group or smaller group of learners.
 - They plan appropriate tasks for asynchronous work, such as preparation for a future session or consolidation of work, such as producing an assignment for assessment to show their progress in learning.
 - They set assignments that learners can present in a variety of ways using technology to show the range of their skills they are developing in their learning.
 - They ensure that learners have access to paper-based and/or digital resources that support them in those tasks.
 - They use online and/or face-to-face sessions to introduce new concepts and knowledge, give practical demonstrations and review learners' presentations.
 - They ensure learners have the opportunity to interact with each other in online and face-to-face discussions so that learners do not feel isolated, but gain confidence in articulating their ideas to others.
 - They take good account of learners' levels of concentration and home circumstances when working synchronously and they adapt the timing of online face-to-face sessions accordingly.

Cameo: Adapting a Cardiff and the Vale adult learning in the community course for remote and blended learning delivery

A good example of this approach is an Entry 3 course for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) delivered by a Cardiff and the Vale College in conjunction with Cardiff and the Vale adult learning in the community partnership. The team delivering the course came together to re-design the schemes of work and teaching plans to work effectively as a blended learning course. In their planning, they took into consideration how they might easily change to working remotely if in lockdown. The teachers divided the group of learners into 'bubbles', smaller groups of maximum five people, in order to be COVID-19 secure when learners are onsite. To deliver the course as blended learning, they reviewed the course and made adjustments to decide when to teach language skills discretely or as mixed skills. The team arranged to introduce new material to learners online as a whole group. Teachers each take responsibility for delivering the different elements of the course. Learners have an additional opportunity to work in their 'bubbles' with a teacher onsite or online, dependent upon restrictions, to practise listening, reading and speaking. Teachers take good account of learners' social, financial and cultural circumstances in what they ask learners to do online. For example, learners may live with their families in accommodation that has limited personal space and therefore they wish to join the class with videos turned off.

In one particular class, the teacher built on work introduced in the previous session by another colleague, providing the opportunity for learners to practise using new vocabulary and syntax through reading a document shared on screen and sharing their own ideas in English about the subject of the text. As the language used in the session is not the learners' first language, the teacher was careful to make full use of the facilities on the chosen IT platform to retain the learners' attention. For example, the teacher presented the text by reading it aloud so the learners can hear the correct pronunciation and intonation and by asking open questions. The teacher used coloured markers to help learners to keep track of the place in the text. The teacher asked questions to find out how well the learners understood the text and to elicit their opinions, thereby helping them to recall and extend their language use.

- 31 In less effective examples, teachers remain less confident about using technology and in methods of teaching online. In these cases, teachers do not take an overview of the whole course or programme or adapt the sequencing of activities and materials to meet better the mode of delivery. Instead they focus on organising their teaching and learning around the applications of the commercial product, rather than putting the learner as the focus of their preparation and re-designing the learning to present it in a way that requires learners' active engagement. Learners report that they become bored and lose focus when synchronous sessions only include presentation of materials that do not require them to engage and discuss the ideas and content. Additionally, where teachers deliver courses or programmes remotely or through blended learning in a more disjointed way, learners find it difficult to evaluate their own progress in learning or to be enthusiastic about attending online sessions.

- 32 In a minority of cases when circumstances permit face-to-face learning, providers use 'hybrid learning' methods to deliver courses. Providers sometimes use the term 'hybrid learning' interchangeably with blended learning. However, many providers also use the term to refer specifically to teaching learners face-to-face onsite and face-to-face online at the same time (offering livestreaming for remote participants). Many teachers and learners hold mixed views about the efficiency and efficacy of this method. In many cases, hybrid learning has grown to be a part of the blended learning delivery due to number of individual learners not being able to attend face-to-face sessions onsite for limited periods when they have needed to self-isolate but they do not want to miss out on their education. Where providers have employed this mode of delivery without careful consideration, many teachers find it stressful to teach in this way because they have to divide their attention between those in the classroom and those working from home online. They find the greatest distraction is that often the online learners suffer connectivity problems. This has the effect of slowing the pace of the session and it often means that the teacher and learners do not cover as much of the work as planned. It also means that learners in the face-to-face group feel frustrated, as they are not able to have as much of the teacher's attention due to the teacher sorting out technical issues with learners online, or recapping sections of the lesson which the remote learner has missed due to connection issues.
- 33 Where senior leaders and middle leaders have approved hybrid learning as a considered strategy, they have chosen the most suitable courses for this form of delivery and they have provided appropriate resources and training. Such courses are usually AS and A levels or BTEC level 3 equivalents because the learners generally already have the concentration and study skills to adapt to this model. In these cases, colleagues may team-teach so that there is always one person available to support the learners in the classroom. Alternatively, a support assistant with good IT skills works alongside the teacher to help resolve technical issues without detracting from the teacher's time.

Cameo: Delivering purposeful hybrid learning in St David's College

This cameo relates to arrangements for AS and A level learners studying a range of subjects where most lessons are suitable for delivery within a standard classroom or environment. Learners are of relatively high prior attainment at GCSE, meeting the college's entry requirements of six GCSE grades at A*-C for A level study, or five GCSEs grades at A*-C for vocational level 3 courses.

During the 2020 spring term, senior leaders at St David's College reviewed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 on teaching and learning. A small group of senior leaders with teaching responsibilities and teachers trialled and refined ways of using technology to provide effective remote learning and to help achieve socially distanced face-to-face learning through hybrid learning. The college has the longer term aim of using video technology to support staff professional learning. Senior leaders arranged with staff agreement to install two cameras and a remote microphone in each of the college's 63 classrooms. In addition, each classroom was equipped with a document visualiser to capture photographs of documents or provide live video of handwriting and drawing.

To enable face-to-face learning to continue safely when allowed to do so during the pandemic, the college divided each teaching group in two. During periods where learners were allowed onsite, one half of each teaching group physically attended lessons during the first two-and-a-half days a week, while the other half of the group joined the lessons remotely from home using a live link to the classroom. Teachers reversed the arrangements for the second half of the week. During periods when attending the college premises was prohibited for all but vulnerable learners, lessons continued to be delivered by teachers from empty classrooms or from their homes. In addition to these arrangements, each learner undertakes 50 minutes of asynchronous independent learning a week for each of their subjects. For these, teachers provide learners with specific online resources and tasks; for example, teachers may provide a video of themselves explaining a new concept and set learners related questions to answer to reinforce the learning.

The nature of the learners, having relatively high prior academic achievement at GCSE and strong study skills, together with the way that the college staff had already started to develop their skills in remote teaching and learning, meant that senior leaders and college staff felt comfortable with introducing hybrid learning to meet the challenging circumstances.

- 34 In moving to remote or blended learning, many of the teachers we contacted noted that a few learners, who found it difficult to attend onsite sessions regularly in the past, attend more regularly online. In many cases, this is because they do not have to commit to travel times, they can use the additional time for study and they gain more family and social time. However, in a few cases, younger learners have not found it easy to attend sessions in lockdown starting at nine o'clock in the morning for a range of reasons. The consequence has been learners arriving late to sessions or absenting themselves. To combat this, in one further education college senior leaders have given teachers permission to be more flexible during lockdown and to negotiate a mutually agreeable time for the start of sessions with learners that fits in

better with learners' lives, and with their own lives and family responsibilities. For one such group, teachers agreed with learners that the session starts at 13:00 and continue with breaks at suitable intervals until 17:00. Teachers send a reminder to learners an hour before the start of the session. They have found that, by doing this, learners attend more frequently, arrive more punctually and engage more fully with the work.

- 35 The pandemic has led to reduced working hours or redundancies for many employed individuals, particularly in sectors such as retail, hospitality and catering. There is now a growth in adults looking for a change of direction in their lives and needing to develop new skills. As a result, post-16 providers have put on new courses to meet these needs. For example, Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales has developed a course to help people gain skills to apply for a job with the civil service. This is leading in a few areas to the development of more coherent and better quality remote and blended learning courses or programmes because teachers plan the courses carefully for online modes of delivery from the outset.

Cameo: Using opportunities afforded by remote and blended learning in Groundworks

This cameo focuses on an Agored level 1 award: Introduction to Health and Social Care (adults and children and young people), Early Years and Childcare offered by Groundworks, an independent charity, as part of the Wrexham and Flintshire adult learning partnership. This award is new to the adult learning in the community partnership provision. The course comprises of four units. Learners progress onto formal regulated courses (for example, Level 2 Food Safety in Catering) upon successful completion. Learners are drawn from the Wrexham area and they come from a wide ranges of backgrounds and experiences.

Trainers have designed an innovative course for online delivery in which they undertake one-hour online sessions with learners, two or three sessions in a day, twice a week. Learners attend online synchronous sessions with a trainer to compete individual and group exercises. Following synchronous sessions, learners carry out independent work set out in their paper-based workbooks asynchronously. The provider has set up one-to-one support for learners as needed. Once learners complete workbooks and return them, if trainers require further supporting evidence, they organise one-to-one question and answer sessions.

The provider has developed a code of conduct for online learning, which all learners receive before to the start of the course. Trainers discuss the code of conduct with learners in the online introductory session. The provider has developed a remote learning policy and procedures. All trainers are aware of what to do if learners break the code of conduct frequently. Trainers report that the short one-hour sessions are effective in allowing learners to engage with the course and manage other factors in their lives, such as childcare and other responsibilities. The provider has found that once learners overcome the hurdle of joining sessions online, they stay with the provider and attend sessions on a regular basis. Where learners are not able to join the online sessions, for example through poor IT connection issues, the provider allows time for catch up sessions,

so learners felt confident they can achieve and are not disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control. Learners have told the provider that they prefer remote and blended learning, as they lack the confidence to attend unfamiliar buildings and are concerned about potentially contracting COVID-19.

Tutors give feedback to learners through email and in individual online sessions. Trainers monitor learners' progress through their contributions to online sessions and the work they submit. Bearing learners' circumstances in mind, the provider allows a degree of flexibility. In the last year, all learners achieved their qualifications within the required timescale. Of the 14 referrals to the course, 10 completed their course and nine progressed to higher level learning and qualifications with other providers. The adult learning in the community development officer has regular contact with trainers and learners by email and telephone. When there were face-to-face classes, the development officer visits at the start of the course. The provider monitors attendance and success rates, and discusses concerns with the adult learning in the community partnership development officer. This enables learners to benefit from support from a wider network of specialists with specific issues, if required. Trainers include the referral staff in key communications with learners. The opportunity to learn online and the network of support are helping learners to continue achieve their qualifications in the difficult times caused by the pandemic.

3 Remote and blended learning provision for vulnerable learners and those with additional learning needs, including those with low levels of literacy and language

- 36 Staff across the post-16 sectors have shown very strong commitment to ensuring that their learners have been able to keep learning through the pandemic. A significant challenge for post-16 providers has been to provide suitable remote and blended learning courses for vulnerable learners, those with additional learning needs, learners with low levels of literacy and English Speakers of Other Languages with low levels of language and literacy.
- 37 In most cases, providers reported that they identified vulnerable learners and those with learning needs requiring additional support quickly. Teachers have worked with support departments within their organisations and, where necessary, with external organisations to find appropriate IT equipment and software to allow learners to continue their learning remotely. Examples include software that reads materials aloud, voice recognition software to transcribe learners' work, packages that magnify writing for those with visual impairment to be able to read text for themselves and equipment that allows the learner to use the keyboard so that they can research and draft their own work. Many vulnerable learners and those with additional learning needs require greater one-to-one time and paper-based resources to help them make progress. In many cases, teachers were able to enlist help from the provider's support department. Where this was not possible, they provided extra one-to-one support themselves, through onsite face-to-face sessions where circumstances would allow, or through one-to-one sessions online or on the telephone.
- 38 Many providers have found learners with low levels of English or Welsh language and literacy have been the hardest learners for whom to provide remote and blended learning. In these cases, learners' language skills may not allow them to understand written materials fully. They may need support from a teacher to help them understand and interpret the materials. Some learners who have arrived as refugees in Wales may not have high levels of literacy in their first languages and, even though providers have had materials translated into their first languages, learners do not necessarily understand what is required of them unless there is someone who can read the information to them.
- 39 Providers have been anxious about losing contact with these learners and are working on the ways in which they can provide courses for them so that they stay engaged and make good progress. This has included telephoning learners to have a simple conversation with them at regular intervals or providing simplified paper-based materials for learners that focus on key language they may need during the pandemic and with which other members of their family, such as older children, can help them. In a few cases, where teachers have been able to work with learners with low levels of language and literacy, this has sometimes been a family affair with others of the family joining in remotely.

4 Assessment of learners' work online

- 40 As providers across the three post-16 sectors have developed remote and blended learning courses, they have also started to develop ways in which to assess learners' work and gauge their progress online. These methods include undertaking essential skills and diagnostic tests online, remote one-to-one discussions with their teachers, electronic submission of written work, sitting assessments online (for example, multiple choice tests), submission of a video providing an oral presentation supported by a bullet presentation of work completed, self-assessment, and online peer assessment. Where learners have submitted written work into an electronic folder, teachers provide annotated feedback.

Cameo: Grwp Llandrillo Menai – assessing and providing feedback on further education learners' work remotely

This cameo focuses on a small group of eight A level Physics learners who are normally based at Grwp Llandrillo Menai's Dolgellau campus. The college serves a population that consists of a strong proportion of Welsh speakers. Teachers provide lessons remotely through Google Classrooms. All of the learners within this group have elected to undertake their assessments in English. To help learners evaluate the standard of their work and the rate at which they are progressing, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai has explored different ways of providing A level learners with clear, frequent feedback on their work and ways of helping them monitor their progress. These methods also help the college to collate additional evidence that they anticipate may be useful as part of the process in determining A level grades for the 2020-2021 academic year.

To provide learners with a holistic view of their progress, in September 2020 the college strengthened its use of formal monitoring points twice each half-term. Learners submit a substantial piece of assessed work, the grades for which teachers collate centrally via the electronic mark book within the college's 'eDRAC' system. When learners access the system, they can see their progress over time and access links to personalised feedback videos about their assessments.

Teachers use personalised feedback videos to help learners reflect on and improve their work. Each feedback video is approximately five minutes long. The learner can see their written work and the teacher's annotations. The teacher provides a verbal commentary on the strengths, errors and misconceptions in the work. The ability for learners to access and replay parts of the feedback helps learners to engage with the teachers' suggestions of how to improve their work. Teachers strengthen this process by providing individual follow-up tasks for the learner that focus on a particular area the learner needs to develop.

Learners report that these methods have improved their understanding of their progress since courses have moved online. This is because the focus points are more frequent. For a few learners who have found it difficult to make enough progress in the past, this has proved to be an effective tool to boost motivation to

keep-up with their studies. Learners report feeling anxious about the uncertainty about attaining their grades during the next year and whether they will be any disadvantage in teacher assessed grades. The college's formal, regular and transparent arrangements for monitoring progress helpfully provide learners with consistency and a degree of clarity of expectations, for assessments during these uncertain times.

- 41 Due to the circumstances generated by the pandemic, there were learners who have not had the opportunity to complete enough assessed work during the 2019-2020 academic year to submit to the awarding organisation for award. Providers have worked to find innovative ways to assess the work that were acceptable to the awarding organisations. A few providers created e-portfolios into which the learners could place examples of their work for assessment. The portfolios allowed learners to submit work in a variety of formats, for example written work, videos in which they present their work or demonstrate a particular skill, and animations to show how they have constructed an item. Providers considered that in too many cases the awarding organisations were not agile or flexible enough to agree a way forward or to provide guidance as how to satisfy the awarding organisations' criteria in the circumstances. This has left too many learners waiting to complete their qualifications and receive their awards in the academic year 2020-2021. In many cases, this has demoralised learners, and left them unable to make progress in the jobs they are in or unable to apply for jobs related to their qualifications.
- 42 In a few cases, for example for a level 3 and level 4 counselling course, the awarding organisation agreed to the provider's proposal to adapt the external assessment from the original assessment proposed so that the focus was on the work that learners had covered prior to lockdown in March 2020. Learners submitted their assessments into an encrypted folder on the provider's website. This allowed teachers and the external assessor to carry out the standardisation exercise completely online and for the examination board to award learners their qualifications promptly.

5 Quality assurance of online teaching and learning

- 43 In developing ways of teaching and learning online, providers have started to explore ways of evaluating and assuring the quality of teaching, learning and learners' experiences online. Where blended learning takes place, senior leaders and middle leaders undertake activities that help them to understand both the online and face-to-face aspects of the experience. This includes observing face-to-face and online sessions, scrutinising learners' work, 'listening to learners' sessions and holding professional dialogues with teachers.
- 44 As teaching online is a new experience for many teachers, a few providers have agreed observation systems with teachers whereby the teacher records their online session, which they play back and analyse for themselves afterwards. The observer also watches the recording. This frees the teacher from their immediate reactions to the session and they are able to consider the session with new eyes. They may do this at the same time as the teacher or separately. The teacher and the observer then agree a mutually convenient time to discuss their observations and evaluations of the session. If possible, the observer will have completed speaking to learners and scrutinising their work prior to the online meeting with the teacher. The observer documents the professional conversation and shares it with the teacher so that the teacher can add their comments. Where the observer and teacher agree that there are innovative and effective aspects of practice, the observer places the recorded session into an electronic file in the provider's online professional development area. In this way, staff can share their practice with each other.
- 45 To ensure equality of experience, most providers work with staff to develop codes of practice in respect of observing online. In many cases, providers adapt or create new observation forms to take account of the medium of teaching and learning.
- 46 The developing use of technology to support quality assurance is helping teachers and providers to analyse and share key aspects of teaching and learning. In due course, these changes should lead to improvements in teachers' personal practice and that of the provider.

Cameo: Developing quality assurance for online teaching and learning through reflective practice in St David's College

This cameo focuses on the college's introduction in December 2020 of 'lesson reflections' arrangements for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning. As well as enabling remote teaching and learning during the pandemic, the new teaching and learning arrangements accelerated the college's existing drive to use video technology to aid quality assurance through enabling teachers to review and evaluate aspects of their teaching and learning. As part of the new arrangements, from February 2021 teaching staff can choose from four methods of evaluating their teaching, learning and student experience:

- a traditional lesson observation with an assigned observer physically present

in the classroom

- a remote observation where the observer joins the lesson using a video conferencing application in the same way as learners who are joining from home
- a self-evaluation that draws on a week of lessons and three video clips that demonstrate the college's teaching and learning principles
- a self-evaluation of a particular lesson with a focus on the teaching and learning, drawing on examples of learners' work and the resources used

Teachers use helpful reflective templates for self-evaluations. Each of the four options is supported by professional dialogue between the teacher and a senior or middle leader, during which they agree on improvement actions as well as any effective practice that can be shared with others via the college's electronic 'learning observatory'.

The aim of these evaluation arrangements is to maintain a focus on continuous improvement and to share effective practice, irrespective of whether teaching is delivered remotely or face-to-face. Using these methods, the college reports that staff have significant ownership of the process, which supports their wellbeing.

6 Professional learning for teaching online

- 47 Most teachers report that they did not have personal experience of either teaching or learning online before the lockdown in March 2020. Most report they lacked the knowledge and confidence to use the medium.
- 48 In the 'rescue' phase, many tutors attended online training provided by commercial companies who focused training on the features of their products, such as how to share materials online, use collaborative writing tools and put learners into breakout rooms. This form of training was the most immediate available, and while this training was useful in learning how to use the technology, it did not provide teachers with the more in-depth knowledge about remote and blended teaching design and methods.
- 49 Many teachers who wanted to develop a greater understanding of teaching and learning online attended webinars run for example by Jisc, which provided a more comprehensive overview of key issues about teaching online. Teachers also took up relevant courses offered free on platforms such as OpenLearn and FutureLearn. These provided a more in-depth consideration of course design and pedagogy for online learning. Many teachers who undertook online courses over this period report that the experience of being an online learner themselves gave them a useful perspective in helping them to review their own teaching practices.
- 50 By the 'recovery' stage, providers with centralised IT departments, such as further education colleges, had put in place systems and professional development areas online for their staff to use. In a few cases, they had created 'digital champions', that is members of staff with good IT expertise who could support members of staff who were less confident digitally on a one-to-one basis with specific problems. Teachers noted that they welcomed these developments as they could share practice, experiences and resources across departments, as well as improve their general understanding of issues such as digital standards or safeguarding. Teachers report that moving professional learning online has had the benefits of allowing staff to join webinars live or at a convenient time for them. In joining live, they can discuss pedagogical issues that are of interest to them with colleagues within or external to their organisation, or they can use or revisit recorded materials to engage at their own pace or refresh their knowledge.
- 51 In general, the work-based learning sector has found that it is more difficult to take apprenticeship programmes online due to the large practical components of the programme and assessments related to qualifications that demonstrate occupational or professional expertise. To support the sector, Jisc, funded by the Welsh Government, developed a pilot digital pedagogy course for a small number of work-based learning staff to help them to develop sector-specific online teaching and assessment skills. Each lead contract holder for work-based learning provision was invited to send a representative to the course. The course was designed as a 'train the trainer' programme with the aim of participants sharing their knowledge with others. Participants report they found the course of great value and that they have

shared their professional development with other staff in their organisations and companies. The same digital pedagogy course is also being trialled with adult learning in the community partnerships.

- 52 Additionally, in a few cases, work-based learning providers have worked across companies to share experiences and to develop appropriate professional learning resources for their staff. Many adult learning in the community partnerships had systems in place to share professional learning as they had been doing this at face-to-face events prior to the lockdown in March 2020. In many cases, the partnerships have taken the professional learning online and teachers are able to access different partners' professional learning events and recorded materials. Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales, which works with all adult learning partnerships across Wales, has developed a useful central professional learning area that their own teachers and those of their partners can access. This facility has the potential to help adult learning in the community partnerships across Wales develop shared understanding about online teaching, learning and assessment methods as well as further develop quality standards.

Cameo: Professional learning in Cambrian Training Company (CTC)

Cambrian Training Company (CTC) is an independent private sector work-based learning provider. It identified that many learners, particularly those who have practical jobs, have been reluctant to adopt digital ways of working in the past. However, the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have seen learners from across the full range of industry sectors and levels of study adapt quickly to remote and blended learning methods of interacting and working. CTC staff members have been trialling teaching models that take advantage of this new ability to bring learners together in a digital environment to enhance learning and support wellbeing.

CTC staff have been exploring the use of group sessions to support aspects of learning that are common across different programmes and in different sectors; for example to teach about health and safety requirements and legislation. In one such session, CTC staff deliver an introduction to the implications of legislation for the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH). Learners in different locations, and working in different sectors, are able to join the session, which two CTC representatives deliver remotely. Staff use multimedia, collaborative resources and interactive quizzes to help reinforce learning while maintaining the momentum of the session. The provider plans to incorporate a range of similar online sessions as part of its provision for the government funded 'Kick Start' programme to support young people into employment.

In addition, CTC is taking advantage of individuals' often newly developed ability and willingness to engage with remote working, to help its staff members develop their Welsh language skills. As part of weekly 'sgwrs dros baned' remote sessions, fluent Welsh speakers and those who are learning the language come together to support each other and practise their Welsh language skills. Having established these sessions among a group of 10 staff members, the provider is in the process of expanding these to include learners from across Wales. The pandemic-related impetus to develop the skills and capacity to use online methods of working has

allowed CTC to take advantage of the flexibility and benefits that this technology provides. The provider believes that learning that traditionally would take place independently, or on a one-to one basis with a training officer, can now involve multiple learners and tutors/training officers in a convenient way. No longer constrained by the need to travel, providers can make the most of individual staff members' specialist knowledge and skills to help learners with particular aspects of their studies. This can be realised through one-to-one mentoring, or alternatively on a teaching group basis, with learners working in different sectors coming together for single sessions. Due to the widespread adoption of technology, training officers and tutors can jointly deliver sessions and integrate a range of resources to enhance teaching, learning and assessment.

Cameo: Professional learning in The College Merthyr Tydfil

This cameo focuses on professional learning sessions that have a common broad format: they are hosted online, last for 30 minutes and consist of a 10 minute demonstration of a technique, a five minute description of the planning, rationale and evolution of the aspect, and they culminate in a 15 minute discussion based on questions from the participants. In some cases, the provider makes recordings of these sessions for later viewing by those unable to attend the live event.

Feedback from teachers suggests that the various sessions provided a menu of quick-fire opportunities to learn about useful techniques and strategies to aid their overall teaching, but specifically to plan and deliver remote and blended learning sessions more effectively. Professional learning leaders encourage teachers to include the new techniques in their teaching to maximise the impact on learning. Teaching staff have responded enthusiastically to this short online format describing it as 'an incredibly useful way of sharing information and effective practice while providing real solutions to some of the issues we are currently facing'.

Examples of useful aspects of remote and blended learning practice identified and shared using these arrangements include the use of new technology to track learners' work and the quick identification of gaps in learners' knowledge. For example, a session focused on effective questioning strategies for online settings, which focus on using the 'chat' function as a means of assessing learner understanding and increasing levels of active engagement. Leaders identified a good approach of a teacher using separate dedicated device to achieve different functions during lessons. The teacher used a computer to provide learners connecting remotely with a live audio and video feed of the teacher. A separate touchscreen tablet computer with stylus was used by the teacher to view learners' work in real-time; the teacher used this to monitor learners' progress and to annotate their work, providing them with synchronous written feedback. The teacher used a smartphone to monitor and respond to the 'chat' among learners connecting remotely. While the teacher could carry out the same using a single device, the separate allocation helps teachers avoid pauses that can disrupt momentum of the session and provides alternative methods of communication should one device fail.

7 Support for staff and leaders

- 53 From the outset of the lockdown in March 2020, providers have put in place both formal and informal systems to support their staff. During the lockdown phases, they have carried out these meetings online; in the phases when providers could open venues, staff have had the opportunity to meet with colleagues and line managers on a one-to-one basis taking account of COVID-19-secure practices.
- 54 To ensure that teachers were not isolated, particularly in the early days of the pandemic, senior leaders set up 'pyramid' communication systems whereby line managers have scheduled formal sessions with staff on a weekly or two weekly basis to discuss both work and the member of staff's wellbeing. In the initial 'rescue' phase, many staff told line managers of their concerns for the more disadvantaged and hard-to-reach learners within their groups, many of whom did not have good coping strategies and for whom their teacher was their only point of regular contact. Most staff said that they felt overwhelmed by the enormity of the workload of transferring their teaching online, while at the same time ensuring that their learners continued to engage, make progress and achieve their qualifications along with the threat of catching COVID-19 and dealing with issues in their own lives, such as home schooling, caring for other relatives. These issues proved very stressful to staff. The Welsh Government acknowledged these issues and it provided funding of £2 million to further education, as well as subsequent funding to work-based learning providers and adult learning in the community partnerships to support mental health and wellbeing. As a result, many providers set up for their staff access to counselling sessions and provided links to online wellbeing classes, such as mindfulness, yoga and Pilates as well as stressing the benefits of exercise and healthy eating. To combat the isolation that many staff felt, providers also in many cases set up informal meetings, such as 'coffee and chat' groups where staff could meet with colleagues and socialise as they would in a staffroom.
- 55 The onset of the pandemic in March 2020 has placed senior leaders across further education, work-based learning and adult learning in the community under considerable pressure. In the rescue phase, they had to instigate emergency procedures as fast as possible to secure wellbeing of staff and learners and to secure remote learning, while in the rescue and renew phase, they had to instigate measures to make sites COVID-19 secure for full scale onsite delivery from September 2020. From 19 December 2020, they have needed to re-instate measures for remote learning in the spring term 2021 as Wales returned to full lockdown. With the Minister's announcement on 5 February 2021 of a phased return to vocational learning in the post-16 sector from 22 February, senior leaders need to make further adjustments for a phased re-entry of learners to onsite learning. Particular challenges facing senior leaders in colleges and work-based learning include finalising and implementing arrangements to return to secure operations across multiple sites in several geographical areas that include a wide range of facilities.

- 56 Throughout the difficulties caused by these circumstances, senior leaders have appreciated opportunities to meet with counterparts from across their own and other post-16 sectors to share issues and ideas. They have also appreciated the dialogue with Estyn through online meetings with link inspectors and separate meetings with Welsh Government officials to make them aware of, and help resolve, the immediate issues surrounding delivery of teaching and learning. Senior leaders report that they have also formed their own support groups to share work issues, resolve problems and to 'just have a chat' when they have needed to do so to maintain their own mental health and wellbeing, as well as take advantage themselves of the range of courses on offer aimed at wellbeing.

8 Learning for the future and next steps

- 57 This section considers some of the positive outcomes further education, work-based learning and adult learning in the community sectors have identified from the necessity to take teaching and learning online. It also considers some of the questions the post-16 sector may need to address as it moves to returning to onsite education and coping with living with COVID-19.
- 58 Most providers with whom we spoke while researching experiences of moving to remote and blended learning felt there are aspects of online learning on which they can improve and which they might include in their curriculum and practice in the future. They identified a key priority to address in future is ensuring that all learners and staff have access to hardware and software through which to learn and research online should providers continue to include an element of remote or blended learning to enhance their curriculum offer. Providers have begun to include questions for applicants to courses about the types of computers, electronic tablets and mobile phones they have so that providers have an audit from the outset the digital status of learners. They envisage that they may need to put a loan scheme or financial support scheme in place so that learners who are digitally disadvantaged have a means through which to access online learning. This allows them to plan more effectively to support online teaching and learning.
- 59 Providers tell us they have also begun to include codes of conduct, including matters relating to safeguarding, in their teacher and learner handbooks and in staff training and induction sessions with learners. This enables everyone involved in online learning to have a clear understanding of expectations from the outset about such things as teacher workload and learner standards of behaviour online.
- 60 Providers have also found that the provision of remote or blended learning courses has been more attractive to certain of their learners than attending onsite sessions. These learners are those who, for example, are on a limited budget and for whom the travel distances to get to campuses or venues where sessions are taught is expensive, or adults who are learning part-time and who have found it easier to integrate their learning with other commitments, such as work, family life, caring for elderly relatives. Online provision in winter also means that learners do not have to go out in inclement weather and they can use the time productively in relation to their learning. While providers see the need to ensure certain vocational programmes take place in work-based settings, they also recognise from the pandemic experience that the theoretical and essential skills elements of the programmes are deliverable online.
- 61 Additionally, many providers who spoke to us recognised learners from further afield than the providers' immediate geographical areas were able to join courses which had previously been difficult to access or unavailable to them. In further education and work-based learning, learners and staff from different campuses and work-based sites were able to study together rather than in separate geographical groups. In adult learning in the community, partnerships realised that they could work together

in future to offer learners across Wales, and UK and worldwide, access to courses they may not have easily had access to prior to the pandemic. This has the potential to reduce unnecessary duplication while providing for a greater range of learners.

- 62 The arrival of the pandemic caused providers across the post-16 sector to move very quickly to online learning. As already noted, this meant initially that providers focused on finding appropriate hardware and software through which to deliver courses. This necessitated adapting courses and programmes learners were already studying to online delivery. Most providers to whom we have spoken recognise that there have been difficulties with this in terms of coherence and quality and that some courses and programmes are by their nature much more difficult to transfer to online provision and assessment, for example, vocational programmes. This has led to the realisation that in providing future online learning there is a need to address the learning design, including online assessment that is acceptable to awarding bodies, of such courses and programmes so that they are fit for purpose. Providers acknowledge that, to achieve this, they will need to work collaboratively with other providers in their sectors.
- 63 The urgent move to online learning has also led to a few examples of positive changes in quality assurance of courses and programmes and to professional learning. New procedures, such as recording sessions, allow the teacher to review and reflect on their own teaching prior to holding a professional discussion with their line manager. Additionally, providers, with their staff's agreement, are able to create an online repository of effective practice to which staff can refer as and when they need, and which leads to a shared understanding of effective practice.
- 64 The questions that follow are not an exhaustive list, but we offer them as prompts for discussion about the ways forward with remote and blended learning in the post-16 sector. They are:
- What is the place of remote and blending learning in education in our sectors in the future?
 - What has worked well in remote and blended learning, and why?
 - What has not worked well in remote and blended learning, and why? Is there anything we can do to improve?
 - If we are to keep aspects of remote and blended learning in our curriculum and programme plans, what key issues do we need to take into consideration?
 - Are we able to think outside the box and find ways in which we can confidently deal with practical aspects of vocational learning online?
 - What are the benefits and disadvantages of using remote and blended learning in our curriculum and programme plans?
 - How do we quality assure teaching and learning online effectively?
 - How do we measure learner engagement and the impact of remote and blended learning on learning and the development of skills?
 - What are the financial implications of keeping aspects of remote and blended learning in our curriculum and programmes?
 - What do we need to put in place to ensure that our vulnerable, disadvantaged and hard-to-reach learners can take advantage of remote and blended learning when necessary or as a choice?

- What are the implications for our institution or partnership in terms of developing our IT systems to cope with providing reliable connections for staff and learners to be able to operate remote and blended learning successfully?
- What are the implications for learners of retaining aspects of remote and blended learning?
- What are the implications for the staff in retaining aspects of remote and blended learning?
- What types of professional learning do staff need to engage in so that they are confident in designing, teaching and assessing quality remote and blended learning to produce courses and programmes that have coherence?
- Can we do this on our own, or do we need to collaborate more effectively with other providers in the post-16 sector and other sectors, such as pre-16 and higher education sectors, to provide a well-focused offer of online provision in Wales?
- What are the implications of our institution or partnership offering remote and blended learning courses on other providers in Wales?

Appendix 1: Evidence base

To gather evidence for this report, during the review phase (May 2020 – September 2020), inspectors undertook a series of engagement calls to speak to senior leaders in further education, work-based learning and adult learning in the community partnerships across Wales. These remote meetings focussed on how providers were working to maintain learners' engagement, to continue with learning and to support staff in the 'rescue' and 'renew' phases, as defined by the Welsh Government.

Inspectors followed up initial engagement calls with a second remote meeting in the period September – October 2020 to find out more about the successes and challenges of developing remote and blended learning within the different sectors. In December 2020, based on this work, Estyn (2020a) published a report alongside the Annual Report (2020e). [Engagement work: Post-16 sector update – autumn 2020 | Estyn \(gov.wales\)](#)

In the period November 2020 to January 2021, inspectors contacted a sample of four providers from each of the sectors across Wales to find out greater depth about the successes and challenges of introducing remote and blended learning, as well as changing practice. To do this, inspectors piloted:

- online meetings with senior and middle leaders
- online meetings with teachers leading courses and programmes which providers judged to be working well
- remote observations of teaching and learning online
- remote 'listening to learners' sessions

Inspectors also invited teachers, tutors, trainers and assessors from the post-16 sector across Wales through the Estyn's social media outlets to register and take part in four online forums to discuss remote and blended learning. Estyn allocated staff/individuals to four forum groups ensuring a balance of geographical spread, sectors and learning areas in each group.

Inspectors wish to express their thanks to all the staff and learners who took part in pilot online meetings, observations and forums to provide insight into their experiences of remote and blended learning in unprecedented times.

Appendix 2: Timeline of significant events from March 2020 – February 2021

You can find a more extensive timeline about the Welsh Government's response to COVID-19 here:

<https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/coronavirus-timeline-welsh-and-uk-governments-response/>

March 2020

- Inspections were suspended.
- National lockdown started.
- Minister for Education announced the suspension of the summer examination series.
- Furlough scheme was introduced.

April 2020

- Minister for Education confirmed that the 2020 Wales results day for AS and A level students, and for GCSE students, would be as originally scheduled.

May 2020

- Minister for Education set out an approach for thinking about how and when schools and other education providers would reopen called 'the decision framework for the next phase of education and childcare: considerations, planning and challenges' (Welsh Government, 2020k).
- Welsh Government (2020b) published its COVID-19 Resilience Plan for the post-16 sectors, including further and higher education, apprenticeships, employability and adult learning. This strategy set out three phases of Rescue, Review and Renew from March 2020 to March 2021.

June 2020

- Minister for Education and the Minister for Health launched the 'Young Person's Mental Health Toolkit' (Welsh Government, 2020m).
- Welsh Government (2020g) published guidance to support a safe return to face-to-face further education and work-based learning.
- Further education colleges and work-based learning providers began to reopen for face-to-face learning from 15 June for priority groups of learners who needed to return to college or training centres to carry out practical assessments to complete their qualifications, and those learners who needed extra support and guidance to stay in education.
- Qualifications Wales (2020a) published its aims that underpinned the way that GCSE and A level grades would be calculated in summer 2020, together with the requirements for the appeals process.

July 2020

- Welsh Government announced additional funding of £23 million to support learners in further education colleges and sixth forms. For learners in sixth form, vocational courses or at further education colleges, funding would allow an increase in teaching support and provide digital equipment as well as supporting a variety of other approaches for learners in Wales.
- Welsh Government published updated guidance to support further education (2020f) and work-based providers (2020l) as they continued to prepare for the autumn term and beyond. This included guidance for safe operation in post-16 learning from September 2020 (Welsh Government, 2020h) and a strategic framework for learning delivery (2020e).
- Welsh Government (2020a) published blended learning guidance for further education institutions, work-based learning and adult learning in the community
- Estyn published brief insights into how further education (2020c), work-based learning (2020d) and adult learning in the community providers (2020b) had worked to support their learners and community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

August 2020

- Wales' Minister for Education guaranteed a learner's final A level grade would not be lower than their AS grade. After public outcry following the publication of A-level results, the Minister for Education confirmed that A level, AS, GCSE, Skills Challenge Certificate and Welsh Baccalaureate grades would now be awarded on the basis of Centre Assessment Grades.
- GCSE results and revised A level results were released, based on teachers' assessments in line with the rest of the UK. At A level, results also increased, particularly those achieving A-A*. This rose substantially to 41.3% compared with the originally published result of 29.9% and a figure of 27% in 2019 (Qualifications Wales, 2020b)
- Welsh Government announced further funding to support a range of services, including £3.6 million for further education colleges, for additional cleaning costs to ensure that learners and staff are able to work in a safe environment during the pandemic.
- Welsh Government (2020f) released updated guidance to support the safe operation in post-16 learning from September 2020 and advice for teachers and lecturers (Welsh Government, 2020c) and for learners studying AS, A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate in school sixth forms and further education colleges.
- Following advice from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Welsh Government amended guidance to require settings and local authorities to undertake risk assessments to determine if face coverings should be recommended for their staff and young people in communal areas, including school and college transport.
- Minister for Education announced an independent review of the arrangements for awarding grades for the 2020 summer exam series for general qualifications to be chaired by Louise Casella, director of The Open University in Wales.

September 2020

- Additional funding was provided to further education colleges to support the use of face coverings.

October 2020

- OECD (2020) education review was published.

November 2020

- Post-16 learners remained at home for the week after half-term as part of the national 'firebreak'.
- The Minister for Education announced that there would be no end of year exams for learners taking GCSEs, AS levels or A levels in 2021. In place of exams, the Welsh Government intends to work with schools and colleges to take forward teacher managed assessments, including assessments that will be externally set and marked but delivered within a classroom environment under teacher supervision.
- Strategic vision for post compulsory education and training published. <https://gov.wales/post-compulsory-education-and-training-strategic-vision>

December 2020

- Minister for Education decided that all secondary schools and colleges in Wales would move to online learning for the last week of term.
- Estyn published its annual report (2020e) and a separate update report on post-16 providers' response to COVID-19 (2020a).
- Wales went into lockdown with all post-16 learning continuing online, except for the most vulnerable learners and those needing to attend for examinations.

January 2021

- Independent Review of the Arrangements to Award General Qualifications in Summer 2020 published (Casella, 2020) (<https://gov.wales/independent-review-summer-2020-arrangements-award-grades-and-considerations-summer-2021-final>).
- Detail provided about how the Centre-determined Grade model will work for schools and colleges assessing students for GCSEs, A levels and AS levels.

February 2021

- Welsh Government announced extra funding of £26.5 million to support learners on vocational learning programmes and remove barriers that may prevent completion of their qualifications this academic year. An extra £2.5 million will also support Welsh colleges and private training providers provide additional mental health support in recognition of the increased mental wellness issues as a result of the pandemic.
- Minister for Education announced £1m of extra funding for further education colleges to support learners with additional learning needs to remove barriers to learning due to COVID-19.
- Learners in further education colleges and work-based learning providers returned on site to complete assessments to demonstrate occupational or professional competence from 22 February.

Appendix 3 – Useful resources or reports on remote and blended learning

British Educational Research Association (2020): [Collection](#) of open research focusing on various aspects of online learning and teaching

Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) [Coronavirus and Me](#)

Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) [Getting online: barriers and successes for the provision of online learning during the January 2021 Tier 4 lockdown](#)

Children's Commissioner for Wales (2021) [Coronavirus and Me - Results of our January 2021 survey - Children's Commissioner for Wales](#)

Department for Education (2020) [Remote education good practice](#)

Education Endowment Foundation (2020) [Remote Learning: Rapid Evidence Assessment](#)

Education Policy Institute (2021) [Education re-opening and catch support across the UK](#)

Education Scotland (2020) [What Scotland Learned – 100 stories of lockdown](#)

Education Scotland (2020) [What Scotland Learned – building back better](#)

ETI (2020) [Post-Primary Remote and blended learning: curricular challenges and approaches](#)

Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020) [Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children's experiences during home learning](#)

Lyakhova, S. (2020) [Remote Teaching and Covid-19 Approaches to School Education](#)

National Literacy Trust (2020) [Literature review on the impact of COVID-19 on families, and implications for the home learning environment](#)

OECD (2020) [Education responses to COVID-19: Embracing digital learning and online collaboration](#)

OECD (2020) [Learning remotely when schools close: How well are students and schools prepared? Insights from PISA](#)

OECD (2020) [Teaching in Focus #2: How prepared are teachers and schools to face the changes to learning caused by the coronavirus pandemic?](#)

OECD (2020) [The impact of COVID-19 on education: insights from education at a glance 2020](#)

Ofsted (2020) [*What's working well in remote education*](#)

Ofsted (2021) [*Remote education research*](#)

QAA (2020) [*Building a Taxonomy for Digital Learning*](#)

Regional School Improvement Consortia, Estyn and Welsh Government (2020) [*Developing approaches to support distance learning*](#)

Regional School Improvement Consortia, Estyn, CSC, EAS, ERW and GwE (2020) [*Developing integrated approaches to support blended learning for the phased opening of schools*](#)

Regional School Improvement Consortia, Estyn, CSC, EAS, ERW and GwE (2020) [*Models of Blended Learning*](#)

Scottish Government (2020) [*National overview of practice in remote learning*](#)

Sutton Trust (2020) [*Learning in Lockdown*](#)

UNESCO (2020) [*Thinking about Pedagogy in an Unfolding Pandemic: An Independent Report on Approaches to Distance Learning During COVID-19 School Closures*](#)

Wales Centre for Public Policy (2021) [*The education response to Coronavirus: Implications for schools in Wales*](#)

Welsh Government (2020) [*Covid-19 Resilience Plan for the post-16 sector: Guidance for Blended Learning*](#)

Welsh Government (2020) [*Basic principles in designing blended learning July 2020*](#)

Welsh Government (2020) [*Blended teaching and learning; a short guide July 2020*](#)

Welsh Government (2020) [*Blended teaching and learning practical tips for teaching practitioners December 2020*](#)

What works Clearinghouse (2021) [*WWC Rapid Evidence Review of Distance Learning Programs Report*](#)

Online resources

FutureLearn

Resource	Authors	Study Time	Level
Blended Learning Essential for Vocational Education and Training	University of Leeds co-created with UCL Institute of Education	3 courses 10 weeks	Intermediate

The Online Educator: People and Pedagogy	The Open University	4 weeks 4 hours per week	
A Digital Edge: Essentials for the Online Learner	Dublin City University	4 weeks 4 hours per week	
How to create great content online	University of Leeds Institute of Coding	2 weeks 3 hours per week	
Blended Learning Essentials@ Getting Started	University of Leeds UCL Institute of Education	5 weeks 4 hours per week	
Blended Learning Essentials: Embedding Your Practice	University of Leeds UCL Institute of Education	3 weeks 4 hours per week	
Making Blended Education Work	University of Edinburgh European Union	5 weeks 2 hours per week	
Micro-credentials (This course incurs a fee)			
Online Teaching: Creating courses for Adult Learning	The Open University endorsed by Association for Learning Technology	1 course 12 weeks	Postgraduate

Jisc (www.jisc.ac.uk) provides a useful range of advice, guidance and training for staff in relation to online technologies and their use across the United Kingdom. Welsh Government annual grant funding to Jisc enables post-16 learning providers in Wales to access a range of services, support and training directly from Jisc.

OpenLearn

Resources	Study Hours	Level
Am I ready to be a distance learner?	3	Introductory
Building confidence in using online forums	8	Introductory
The digital scholar	24	Intermediate
Digital Skills: succeeding in a digital world	24	Introductory
Getting started with online learning	6	Introductory
Introduction to cyber security: staying safe online	24	Introductory
An introduction to Open Educational Resources (OER)	6	Advanced
Open Education	40	Advanced
Take your teaching online	24	Intermediate
Teachers sharing resources online	10	Intermediate
Themes and topics for working in virtual project teams	4	Advanced
Online teaching: evaluating and improving courses	12	Postgraduate

Glossary

Inspectors found that providers across the post-16 sector attribute words and phrases associated with online learning with different meanings in different contexts. For the sake of clarity, the words and phrases listed in this glossary refer to the definition of the words and phrases Estyn has used in the context of this report.

Asynchronously	Learning that is undertaken offline
Blended learning	Delivery that takes place using a blend of remote and onsite face-to-face teaching and learning at different times
Face-to-face	Teaching and learning that takes place at a provider's venue
Hybrid	Delivery that takes place using a blend of remote and onsite face-to delivery simultaneously
Learning design	A term referring to not only the structuring of knowledge and concepts to be delivered through the course, but also the match of activities to synchronous and asynchronous teaching activities to support effective learning
Online	All teaching and learning activity delivered and undertaken using information and communication technology
Onsite	Teaching and learning that takes place at a provider's venue and learner attend in person.
Remote	Teaching and learning that takes place wholly at distance using information and communication technology.
Synchronously	Teaching and learning that takes place when learners are present remotely and/or face-to-face
Teacher	The different sectors in post-16 use a range of different words, such as teacher, tutor, trainer, in relation to those who deliver teaching and learning. In this report, we use 'teacher' generically to describe all those who deliver and support learners' learning and progress.
Virtual	All teaching and learning activity delivered and undertaken using information and communication technology

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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