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## Post-16 partnerships

Shared planning and provision between schools, and between schools and colleges

January 2021

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## Introduction

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This report is written in response to a request for advice in the Minister for Education's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2019-2020. It reports on strategic planning and partnership working for the education of 16 to 19-year-olds in school sixth forms and further education colleges. It provides an overview of the way that mainstream school sixth forms work with each other and with further education colleges, to support learners to study the post-16 courses that best meet their needs and abilities. This scope of this work does not include partnerships between special schools and mainstream schools and colleges.

This report aims to contribute to the development of a shared understanding of partnerships at post-16, and to support the Welsh Government, regional consortia, local authorities and providers themselves in their work to improve post-16 provision. It is the latest in a series of Estyn thematic reviews on 16-19 provision in school sixth forms and further education colleges, intended to help inform improvement work and planned reforms to post-compulsory education. Previous reports have focused on A levels (Estyn, 2018), A level Welsh language (Estyn, 2020a), and Business and social studies at A level (Estyn, 2020b).

The intended audience for this report is the Welsh Government, school headteachers, college chief executives and principals, teachers in secondary schools and colleges, local authority officers and regional consortia officers. The report draws on evidence from visits to 17 secondary schools and five colleges.

Nearly all the thematic activity undertaken as part of this review was conducted prior to the disruption to education caused by the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. As a result, unless specifically stated, this report does not refer to changes made by providers since March 2020 in response to the pandemic.

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## Background

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### Effective partnerships

Effective partnerships between schools<sup>1</sup> and further or higher education institutions can be defined in terms of seven key characteristics (Essex, 2001). A partnership should:

- have a clearly defined purpose and direction
- be endorsed by leaders

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'school' is used throughout this report to refer exclusively to a publicly funded provider of mainstream secondary education that encompasses key stage 4 provision. This includes secondary and all-age schools. It does not refer to independent schools or special schools.

- involve trust
- adopt open communication
- involve mutual respect
- provide tangible benefits
- have mechanisms to assess progress.

The development of incentives by external policymakers to encourage collaboration rather than competition is noted as an effective catalyst for improved partnership working (Boswell, 2000). Factors impeding collaboration have previously been identified as initial resistance, communication difficulties, lack of funding and resource, and unclear leadership responsibilities (Nunley *et al.*, 2000).

Shared provision partnerships can benefit learners directly by broadening the range of courses available to them. Providers are able to improve the viability of otherwise small teaching groups by sharing their provision and resources. Where partnership work encompasses professional learning activities, teachers and middle leaders are able to learn from, and support, the work of their peers at partner providers. Senior leaders can benefit from valuable contributions into quality improvement processes by colleagues from partner providers. This, together with the ability to draw on subject teaching expertise at partner providers, can help to improve the quality of teaching that learners experience. In addition, sound relationships between different providers often facilitate the smooth transition of learners if they leave one provider to enrol at another.

Research suggests that the degree of collaboration between providers is, in general, affected by policy drivers and levers, local context, and institutional positioning and cultures (Higham and Yeomans, 2010). These encompass several factors including the degree of overlap in provision between providers, the geographical nature of the local areas, perceptions of the quality of provision and the quality of care, as well as local and national politics.

### The local curriculum

Several legislative drivers have been used to support and encourage collaboration between providers of education for 16 to 19-year-olds in Wales.<sup>2</sup> The Learning and Skills Act 2000 (Great Britain, 2000) led to the establishment of local curricula for learners aged 16 to 19 within each local authority. It specified that a local curriculum should be comprised of courses of study within five learning domains:

- mathematics, science and technology
- business, administration and law
- services for people
- arts, media, culture and languages
- humanities, social sciences and preparation for life and work

The act stipulated the promotion of access to courses taught through the medium of Welsh as part of each local curriculum. It required local authorities, maintained

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<sup>2</sup> Different pieces of legislation and guidance refer to different but overlapping age ranges; typically 16-18, 14-19 or 16-19 year-old learners.

schools and further education (FE) colleges to assist in planning the local curriculum and placed a duty on these parties to collaborate in joint working.

The Learning Pathways 14-19 guidance (National Assembly for Wales 2004, 2006) outlined how local 14-19 Networks should be established to involve learning providers and strategic organisations within each local authority. These networks were tasked with securing continuity, coherence and progression across a wide range of vocational and academic study programmes to meet the needs of 14 to 19-year-old learners. This required co-operation and collaboration between all learning providers and supporting organisations operating within each local area. The *'Learning Country: Vision into Action'* publication (Welsh Government, 2006) outlined the Welsh Government's commitment to transform the provision for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales. As part of this, the Learning Pathways 14-19 initiative aimed to encourage more young people to achieve their potential to be equipped better for the world of work, and to be better informed, more active citizens. The aim was to increase the proportion of 16-year-olds gaining worthwhile qualifications and progressing to further learning in education or training, as well as widening the choice of courses and improving equality of opportunity. Schools, FE colleges and training providers were to work together to provide the learning pathways through a local 14-19 network. To form the pathways, the partners in each local 14-19 network were expected to set out the full range of courses available to learners in the area via an options menu. These menus were to be innovative and collaborative, giving learners opportunities to study across the domains of learning with increased choice, particularly of practical, applied and vocational courses, as well as avoiding unhelpful duplication of provision.

The Learning and Skills Measure (Wales) 2009, reinforced the formal duty on local authorities, headteachers, college principals and the governing bodies in schools and colleges to assist Welsh Ministers in planning the local 16-18 curriculum offer in a co-operative and collaborative way. In April 2014, the Welsh Government issued statutory guidance on how the Learning and Skills Measure 2009 should be implemented (Welsh Government, 2014b). It explained how local curricula for 16 to 18-year-olds should be designed through joint planning with suitable consideration of both vocational and academic routes. Regional consortia, local authorities, secondary schools and further education institutions have due regard to this statutory guidance. However, this policy has not been updated since the Further and Higher Education Act 2014 effectively removed the duty to collaborate from FE colleges (National Assembly for Wales, 2014).

### Planning and funding

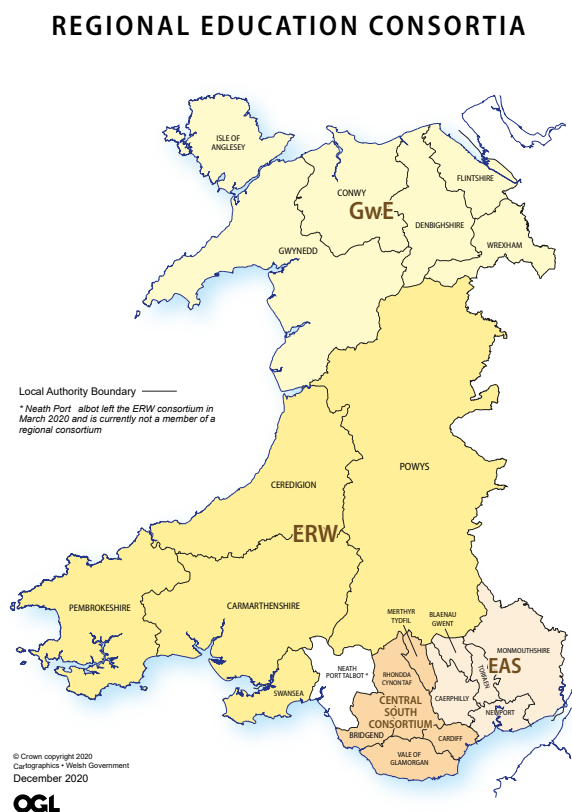
The post-16 planning and funding framework (Welsh Government, 2013a), revised in September 2014, involves the Welsh Government providing FE colleges and local authorities with annual planning guidance. This guidance is based upon strategic ministerial priorities and includes information on past and projected patterns of delivery for different programmes of learning across local authorities and FE colleges. Using this information, colleges and local authorities plan and implement any changes to the curriculum on offer, as well as to any broader aspects of provision. The latest letters confirming the four ministerial priorities were published in December 2016 for the 2017-2018 academic year (Welsh Government, 2016a, 2016b). FE colleges and local authorities are funded directly by the Welsh

Government for the learning programmes they provide to 16-19 year old learners. Local authorities use their allocations to fund individual school sixth forms. Whereas the Welsh Government uses a common methodology to determine local authority sixth form and FE sector funding, the funding arrangements for school sixth forms by the local authorities vary across Wales (Estyn, 2018).

## Oversight

With the exception of independent schools, across Wales, secondary and all-age schools are maintained by local authorities. Four regional school improvement consortia were introduced by the National Model for Regional Working 2013 (Welsh Government, 2013b), with each operating across a number of local authorities. The regional consortia lead on school improvement work on behalf of the local authorities in their areas. One local authority in Wales is not currently part of a consortium and provides its own school improvement service. The national model specifies that one of the consortia's delivery functions is to have a strategic overview of the regional 14-19 offer. It also states that they are obliged to ensure meaningful engagement with other key stakeholders including post-16 providers, such as colleges. Each regional consortium has a designated officer or challenge adviser for post-16 education. FE colleges were removed from local authority control following the introduction of the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 (Great Britain, 1992). As such they are independent of local authorities and the regional consortia.

**Figure 1: The four regional school improvement consortia<sup>3</sup>**



<sup>3</sup> The Four regional consortia are Gwasanaeth Effeithiolrwydd (GwE), Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith (ERW), Education Achievement Service (EAS) and Central South Consortium (CSC). In March 2020 Neath Port Talbot local authority left the ERW regional consortium. Map provided by Welsh Government.

Three Regional Skills Partnerships (RSP) across Wales help identify the skills needs of the local and national employment markets to help FE colleges shape the provision they offer. Each is a voluntary, non-statutory partnership made up of employers, education and training providers and other key stakeholders. The RSPs make recommendations to the Welsh Government about FE college and apprenticeship provision including the number of graduates needed to meet regional economic needs. The three partnerships were established between 2007 and 2014, and each has evolved independently, shaped by their own regions and, more recently, their respective City Deals and Growth Deals (House of Commons, 2019).

**Figure 2: The three regional skills partnerships<sup>4</sup>**



(Welsh Government 2020h)

Funding methodologies, performance measures, inspection practices and regional oversight arrangements can influence the provision offered by schools and colleges, as well as the advice and guidance they give to prospective learners. Until recently, the performance of learners in school sixth forms and FE colleges was measured differently, even if learners at the two different types of provider were undertaking the same courses. In 2018, the Welsh Government introduced new post-16 performance measures to address this inconsistency. These quantify the achievements of learners in school sixth forms and colleges in the same way.<sup>5</sup>

In 2016, the Welsh Government commissioned review of post-compulsory education recommended that a single regulatory, oversight and co-ordinating authority be

<sup>4</sup> North Wales Regional Skills Partnership (NWRSP); South East Wales Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership (CCRSP); South West and Mid Wales Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP)

<sup>5</sup> The Welsh Government has temporarily suspended its education performance measures because of the disruption to normal teaching caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Welsh Government, 2020d).



established (Hazelkorn, 2016). The purpose of such an authority would be to realise an overarching vision of a post-compulsory education and training system for Wales based upon stronger links between education policy, providers and provision, and social and economic goals. As a result, the Welsh Government has recently conducted a public consultation on the proposed Tertiary Education and Research Bill (Welsh Government, 2020i). This draft bill proposes the establishment of a Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER), which will regulate the work of nearly all government-funded providers of education and training for learners beyond 16 years of age. The Commission is expected to enable a strategic and collaborative view of education and training for 16 to 19-year-olds across the mixed economy of post-16 provision. Subject to legislation it will have extensive funding, planning and regulatory powers, enabling it to improve quality, efficiency and efficacy across the post-compulsory education and training (PCET) sector (Welsh Government, 2020f).

### Post-16 provision

The arrangements for the provision of education for 16 to 19-year-olds across Wales involve regional joint-planning to varying degrees. In 2006, Estyn's thematic review categorised collaboration between schools and colleges. At the time of publication in 2006, Estyn's thematic review found that 64% of school sixth forms across Wales were operating under a 'competition/isolation' approach, and 32% were part of a 'co-operation' approach, with only 4% taking part in fuller 'co-ordination and collaboration' with colleges (Estyn, 2006). No providers were part of a 'confederation'.

The thematic review concluded that there was little collaboration between school sixth forms and colleges. Where collaboration did take place, it was to widen the choice of courses on offer, to help schools maintain their sixth forms and to satisfy government initiatives. It found that improving quality and raising standards were not key drivers for schools and colleges to collaborate. The thematic review found a general lack of clear assessment of the benefits of collaboration for learners. It concluded that re-organising and consolidating the learning provision, especially in urban and more compact geographical areas, was a better way of improving efficiency compared to learners travelling between providers for different lessons.

For the purposes of this survey work, we have updated the categories of shared provision partnerships. The five categories are independence, co-operation, collaboration, consortium and confederation. The features of each of these partnership arrangements are described in Appendix 2.

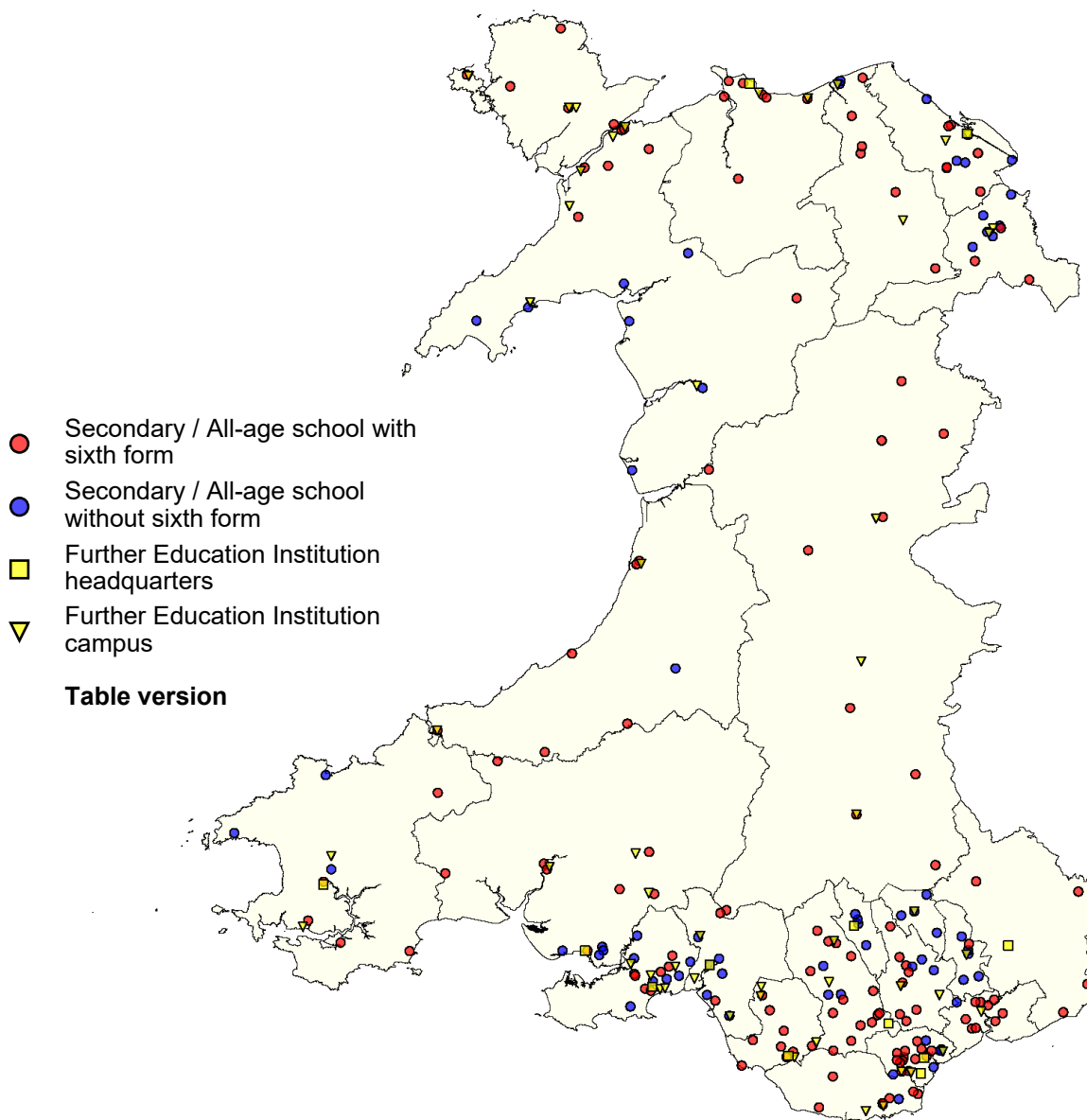
Consolidated tertiary provision<sup>6</sup> involves learners completing their GCSEs at secondary schools that do not have their own sixth forms, before enrolling at a local college or neighbouring school sixth form for their post-16 education. Today, such arrangements are long established in areas such as the west of Gwynedd, Neath Port Talbot and parts of Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham. This model has also recently been adopted in parts of Pembrokeshire and Torfaen.

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<sup>6</sup> Secondary schools do not have their own separate sixth forms. Learners from these schools progress to a nearby college or school with sixth form.

One or more of these models can operate within the same area. For example, the consolidated tertiary model can coexist alongside larger schools who maintain their own largely independent/isolated sixth forms.

**Figure 3: Locations of schools without sixth forms, schools with sixth forms, and colleges**



(Welsh Government, 2020a)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Information for FE was gathered from providers' websites.

Around two-thirds of secondary schools in Wales have a sixth form offering A levels and, in most cases, vocational courses as part of their level 3 study options (Welsh Government, 2020a). Level 3 vocational provision delivered by schools often takes the form of a number of one A level equivalent subsidiary diplomas. These courses tend to form part of hybrid programmes of study consisting of one or more A level subjects alongside one or more subsidiary diplomas.

FE colleges typically provide a broad offering of courses across a wide range of levels, from Entry level to level 3 and beyond. The proportion of each college's offering that caters for 16-19 year old 'sixth form' learners varies significantly between colleges depending on local factors. Today, most FE colleges in Wales offer a full complement of A level courses as well as level 3 vocational courses. Around 30% of publicly funded A level delivery in Wales is undertaken in colleges (Welsh Government, 2020c, 2020e).

The Welsh Government's post-16 transformation agenda in 2008 led to mergers between the 24 FE colleges/institutions over time. This has culminated in the 13 further education institutions (FEIs) that exist in Wales today. Two of these are FE colleges that are wholly-owned subsidiaries of higher education institutions. Three of the 13 FEIs across Wales are comprised, in part, of dedicated sixth form centres that were distinct sixth form colleges prior to merger. These continue to provide tertiary education for learners leaving 11-16 secondary schools in their localities. There is a single stand-alone sixth form college remaining in Wales, located in Cardiff, which is classed as a Catholic further education college. A national provider of adult learning in the community is classed as the 13<sup>th</sup> FE institution; this provider will not fall into the scope of this report as it caters largely for older learners following part-time courses.

Schools and colleges in Wales are expected to work with each other to facilitate the transition of learners. According to the Welsh Government's guidance on '*Effective post-16 transitions and data sharing*' (2019) they should work together to provide advice and guidance to learners on educational pathways and career aims. They should also share information about individual learners, including their achievements, wellbeing, behaviour, attendance and qualification outcomes when they transition from one provider to another.

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## Main findings

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### Strategic planning and leadership

- 1 The majority of colleges and local authorities communicate well with each other. They share their plans and work together appropriately to evaluate the impacts of these plans on schools and colleges in the area. In a minority of cases, local authorities and regional consortia on the one hand, and colleges on the other, do not engage with each other sufficiently well. In too many cases, school and college leaders' planning does not consider the wider community of local schools and colleges, and the broader cohort of learners, well enough.
- 2 A majority of senior leaders in schools with sixth forms report that the relationship with their local colleges is generally not as strong as with other schools. Senior leaders within colleges also acknowledge that this is an issue between colleges and a minority of schools across Wales. They report a sense of competition and lack of transparency and trust between the two sectors. In a few cases, similar tensions exist between schools.
- 3 In a few cases, differing planning, funding and oversight regimes impede productive partnerships between providers. Such administrative boundaries arise between schools in different local authorities, as well as between the school and college sectors. As a result, a few providers that are well placed to work together do not collaborate due to the differing regimes under which they operate.
- 4 Providers and local authorities do not use the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 to guide their strategic planning at post-16 sufficiently well. A minority of school leaders are not confident that the offer available to their learners meets the requirements of the measure. Local and national government processes for ensuring that providers meet the requirements have become less effective over recent years. As a result, compliance with the measure is monitored inconsistently across Wales and, currently, it is unclear how many learners have access to a sufficiently broad curriculum offer at post-16.
- 5 Over recent years, several local authorities have carried out worthwhile reviews of local sixth form provision that result in useful strategic recommendations for improvements. In a few cases, schools, colleges and local authorities do not work together to respond to these recommendations well enough. This allows weak or inefficient aspects of post-16 provision to persist.
- 6 Many providers work effectively with each other to share post-16 provision where learners from different providers come together to form merged teaching groups. This helps to secure a greater choice of courses for sixth form learners and to reduce operational costs. In a few cases, senior leaders draw on subject specialists from partner providers to help improve the quality of teaching. For example, providers exchange responsibility for the delivery of specific courses in order to improve the learning experience. A few providers invite subject specialists from other schools or colleges to help support and improve their subject departments.

- 7 A majority of leaders have a sound understanding of the performance of courses delivered to their learners by other providers. They access each other's evaluations of lessons and records of learners' progress over time, and also gather learners' views about their lessons. The overall effectiveness of improvement processes for shared provision is inconsistent across Wales and, in a minority of cases, leaders do not have robust quality assurance arrangements in place.
- 8 The majority of designated Welsh-medium schools share post-16 provision through small partnerships that are led by the providers themselves. In many cases, neighbouring schools maintain strong working relationships. To overcome the long distances between them, a few providers share provision using video links between each other's lessons. Many subject teachers who deliver sixth form lessons through the medium of Welsh collaborate well to develop and share teaching and learning resources written in Welsh. However, colleges and Welsh-medium schools generally find it difficult to collaborate to help learners pursue elements of vocational courses through the medium of Welsh.

### Partnership working

- 9 Across Wales, a third of secondary phase schools are part of consolidated arrangements, having no sixth form at the schools themselves. Eight per cent have their own sixth form and do not share any provision with other schools or colleges. The remaining 59% of schools have sixth forms and report that they are part of post-16 partnerships of some kind.<sup>8</sup> Two of the 12 further education colleges in Wales, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Bridgend College, play significant roles in post-16 partnership networks together with local schools. Bridgend College also works with neighbouring Pencoed Comprehensive School to jointly operate a sixth form centre.
- 10 As part of their annual post-16 data submissions, schools that make use of shared provision should submit information about the provider of each course that their learners undertake. Overall, schools across Wales under-report the extent of this shared provision. This limits the Welsh Government's ability to monitor the extent of such provision and the outcomes achieved by the groups of learners taking part.
- 11 Most school sixth forms that share provision, transport learners between them to attend lessons; a very few schools use remote learning arrangements instead.<sup>9</sup> In both cases, shared provision arrangements are often informal and lack written agreements that set out roles and responsibilities clearly.
- 12 Many schools present learners with a broad choice of sixth form study options. However, in 2018-2019, 25% of schools had learners studying across a more limited range of 25 sixth form courses or fewer (Welsh Government, 2020e). Most learners attending school sixth forms report that they were able to choose the subjects that they wanted to study, but a few did not have access to less popular subjects that were of interest to them, for example politics or economics.

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<sup>8</sup> Survey conducted via regional consortia in October 2020; see figure 4.

<sup>9</sup> Since the time of writing, providers have increased their use of remote learning arrangements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 13 Senior leaders in schools, local authorities and regional consortia ensure that the majority of school sixth form teachers and middle leaders undertake professional learning activities alongside their peers from other schools. Between colleges, most networking activity involves senior leaders, who meet their peers from across Wales regularly. However, only a few providers work together to support professional learning between schools and colleges, even where they have staff undertaking similar roles. In a majority of cases, colleges, regional consortia and local authorities do not communicate, or work together well enough, to develop these opportunities.

### Supporting learner transition to post-16 education

- 14 Many schools provide learners with suitable information about the options available to them once they complete Year 11. In a few schools, learners benefit from a comprehensive range of activities to help them learn about, and decide between, their post-16 options at all local providers. This includes opportunities to meet representatives from other local post-16 providers, including work-based learning providers as well as schools and colleges.
- 15 Many learners value the advice and guidance they receive whilst at school. A minority feel that advice from schools does not address alternative pathways to A level study sufficiently, and that staff members often focus on encouraging learners to progress to the school's own sixth form. Learners feel that post-16 providers, including schools and colleges, do not share enough information about the quality of their provision and the outcomes achieved by their learners.
- 16 Many school sixth forms and colleges see the number of learner enrolments as a high priority. Leaders of small sixth forms often feel under financial pressure to ensure that Year 11 learners progress to their sixth form. In a minority of cases, this leads senior and middle leaders to limit the promotion of alternatives. In a few cases, school leaders do not invite other providers to discuss their post-16 provision with Year 11 learners in a comprehensive way.
- 17 The majority of providers do not share information on individual learners to support their transition when they transfer to another school or college. Few providers follow the Welsh Government's guidance on '*Effective post-16 transitions and data sharing*' (Welsh Government, 2019) successfully.
- 18 Most schools that do not have their own sixth form, provide learners with impartial information about the full range of progression options available to them. Learners benefit from regular interaction with local post-16 providers, both schools and colleges, to learn about the courses on offer and to discuss their aspirations. In a minority of cases, these schools ensure that learners also interact with providers of work-based learning provision. Many have effective transition arrangements that are supported by helpful dialogue between school staff members who know individual learners well and representatives of the post-16 providers.

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## Recommendations

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### **Schools and colleges should:**

- R1 Ensure strong partnership working to develop collaborative provision with other providers where this helps to improve quality or expand choice
- R2 Ensure that post-16 provision delivered in partnership with other providers is underpinned by written agreements of responsibilities, and is included fully within improvement planning processes
- R3 Ensure that advice and guidance to learners is impartial, focused on learners' needs, and informed by the provision, standards and support available at all local post-16 education and training providers
- R4 Share information to support the transition of learners to other providers in line with Welsh Government guidance
- R5 Submit accurate information about the programmes learners undertake, including the provider of each learning activity, as part of their annual data submissions to the Welsh Government

### **Local authorities and regional consortia should:**

- R6 Ensure that strategic planning involves the wider community of local schools and colleges
- R7 Work together with colleges on joint professional learning activities where appropriate
- R8 Work with colleges to ensure that a suitable range of post-16 provision is available locally through the medium of Welsh

### **The Welsh Government should:**

- R9 Review and consolidate legislation, policy and guidance for 16-19 provision to ensure consistency and clarity of expectations in a way that builds on the developments of Curriculum for Wales
- R10 Apply a consistent approach to the oversight and quality monitoring of post-16 provision, including planning and funding considerations
- R11 Provide prospective learners and their parents with clear information about learner progress and outcomes for school sixth forms and further education colleges in Wales
- R12 Ensure that any future Commission for Tertiary Education and Research addresses the findings and recommendations of this thematic review



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## Strategic planning and leadership

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### Local curriculum planning

- 19 The Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 stipulates that a local curriculum offer for 16 to 19-year-old learners should contain a minimum of 30 recognised level 3 courses, with level 2 alternatives being suitable for a few vocational disciplines (National Assembly for Wales, 2009). The offer should include a minimum of five general courses (including A levels) and five vocational courses. The vocational courses should span a minimum of three domains, one of which being mathematics, science and technology. However, senior leaders' interpretation of these requirements on an individual provider level is inconsistent and a minority are unclear as to whether the offer available to their learners meets these requirements. Compliance with these requirements is monitored inconsistently and, currently, no clear information is available on the proportion of learners in each area of Wales that has access to such a broad curriculum offer at post-16.
- 20 Many schools and colleges work well with each other and their local authorities to amalgamate post-16 provision. This has helped them broaden the range of subjects on offer, and respond to the demographic decline in the number of 16 to 19-year-old learners in Wales over the last 10 years (StatsWales, 2020). The two main strategies employed are the sharing of sixth form provision between schools and colleges or the consolidation of sixth form provision to one provider. One-third of secondary schools do not have sixth forms,<sup>10</sup> and in these cases learners progress to consolidated sixth form provision at other providers. Around 59% of schools report that they share post-16 provision. This means that learners from different providers come together to form merged subject teaching groups. However, the degree to which local authorities, colleges and schools plan post-16 provision strategically in consultation with each other remains too inconsistent across Wales. Despite the legislation and guidance introduced since 2004 to encourage joint strategic planning on a local level, few providers work with others locally to optimise the local curriculum as a whole. A minority of schools that share provision do so largely in response to increasing financial pressures resulting from falling learner enrolments and changes to funding arrangements.
- 21 The majority of local authorities meet frequently with college leaders, in these cases both parties share their plans and work with each other to help shape local provision in a collaborative way. However, in a few cases, senior leaders of local authorities and colleges do not engage with each other sufficiently well. Similarly, the degree to which regional consortia and colleges take advantage of opportunities to involve each other in relevant activities varies significantly between regions and providers.
- 22 Recently, several local authorities have carried out reviews of sixth form provision in their areas. Such reviews focus on projected demand, demographics, logistics, cost-effectiveness and impact on providers and local communities. They include

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<sup>10</sup> Survey conducted via regional consortia in October 2020; see figure 4.



consultations with key stakeholders and members of the wider community. In many cases, subsequent developments secure worthwhile, tangible improvements for learners such as a greater choice of courses. In a few cases, the findings and recommendations of such reviews have not been used to secure improvements.

- 23 A few local authorities have implemented reorganisation involving partial consolidation of sixth form provision over recent years. Typically, this involves reducing the number of schools that have their own sixth forms and identifying or establishing a small number of centres where sixth form teaching will be hosted. Across Wales, 33% of secondary and all-age schools act as partner schools to such post-16 centres.<sup>11</sup> Recent examples include partial consolidation of provision within Pembrokeshire, and consolidation of all English medium post-16 provision within the Torfaen local authority. In successful examples, arrangements have been put in place to limit the perceived negative impacts on the schools that lose their sixth forms. For example, school leaders and governors play an important and continuing role in helping to shape and quality assure the post-16 provision in the new centre to which their learners progress.

#### **Case study 1: School involvement in oversight at Campus 6, Pembrokeshire**

Following a formal consultation process, two school sixth forms in the north of Pembrokeshire at Ysgol Bro Gwaun and Ysgol Dewi Sant (now Ysgol Penrhyn Dewi) were closed with provision being consolidated at the newly built Campus 6 building at Pembrokeshire College. Members of both school communities were anxious at the prospect of losing their school sixth forms. At an early stage in the process, the local authority, together with college and school senior leaders, identified an opportunity to support the new centre. They recognised that a forum through which both schools and their governing bodies retained the ability to monitor the progress and achievements of their former pupils would be advantageous to all parties.

They formed the A level Committee to provide a multi-stakeholder governance group to support and challenge the work of Campus 6. Membership of the group includes senior leaders and governors from both of the associated schools as well senior and middle leaders from the college. The group is chaired by the Director of Education of Pembrokeshire County Council, who is also a member of the college's corporation board.

Initially set up as a shadow committee during the final year of sixth form delivery at the two schools in 2017-2018, the committee is now firmly established and scrutinises the college's entire A level provision. The committee meets termly and has a wide remit encompassing: learner progress and outcomes; curriculum offer and delivery; transition including advice and guidance; learner destinations; staffing and safeguarding.

The work of the committee has helped strengthen the relationship between the three providers involved, resulting in transparent and open dialogue that benefits the centre and its learners. Both schools maintain strong links with

<sup>11</sup> Survey conducted via regional consortia in October 2020; see figure 4.

learners after they transition to Campus 6.

*“The pupils and their parents/carers greatly appreciate the strong links that have developed between the school and Pembrokeshire College. The carefully planned collaborative transition process begins in Year 9 around option choice time and continues through to GCSE results day. The governing body appreciate the regular progress updates from college staff regarding their former pupils and they are very appreciative of the destination information they receive.”* Headteacher, Ysgol Penrhyn Dewi

*“I found the transition between school and college very smooth. The school and college worked together by organising transition events in order to help all students. These events were very effective. When I left, the school said that we were all welcome back anytime in the future to visit.”* Former pupil at Ysgol Bro Gwaun and recent A level student and student governor at Pembrokeshire College.

- 24 As an alternative to consolidation of sixth form provision, the majority of schools have established shared provision arrangements at post-16. In these cases, school sixth forms, and in a minority of cases the local college, come together to agree on a suite of courses that they can offer to each other’s learners. Such arrangements can be driven by local authorities or the schools and colleges themselves.

Linc Conwy is an established partnership involving eight school sixth forms and the local college. The Linc partnership provides sixth form learners with a choice of 21 level 3 courses, six of which are available bilingually or through the medium of Welsh. Together with their school’s own provision, this ensures that learners have a wide range of study options. The local authority plays a lead role in co-ordinating and overseeing the shared provision as part of a leadership group involving senior leaders from each provider. The Linc operates under its own distinct brand as a partnership, with a clear focus on the different courses on offer, rather than on the individual providers. It produces a prospectus of all of its courses and hosts a dedicated annual Linc Conwy open day at a nearby events centre that is chosen to be independent of all providers.

Linc Conwy lessons take place at various schools and the college every Wednesday during the school term. Providers design their timetables of internally delivered courses to ensure compatibility with the Linc Conwy provision. The local authority manages and finances the transport for learners to move between lessons at different providers. The Linc partnership enables learners to mix with peers from across the county, who have similar interests and aspirations.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, between March and November 2020 the partnership adopted remote learning arrangements in whole, or in part, in order to reduce the risk of infection to learners.

## Leadership and management of shared provision partnerships

- 25 Leadership groups responsible for partnerships comprise of senior leaders from each provider, and often a local authority representative. They consider strategic issues as well operational matters. For example, they consider a given provider's proposal to introduce a new course to their offer, including the potential benefits for learners and any negative impacts on other providers. The majority of leaders scrutinise the quality of partnership provision and the standards that learners achieve in a suitable way, and in a few partnerships this is thorough and effective. In a minority of cases, for provision delivered externally, leaders do not have a sufficiently clear view of the standards of learners' work or the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- 26 A minority of providers that share provision with other schools or colleges have written agreements in place that specify roles and responsibilities clearly. But a majority rely too heavily on mutual verbal understanding and goodwill. In a minority of cases, working relationships between providers are overly reliant on informal agreements and interpersonal relationships between senior leaders. Such arrangements are vulnerable to disruption if future changes in staffing or circumstances lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations or disagreements.
- 27 A majority of partnerships for shared provision are managed largely under the leadership of the providers themselves. In a minority of partnerships, local authority representatives co-ordinate leadership groups. Where local authority co-ordinators play an active role, most are effective in encouraging the development of productive working relationships between providers. Over the last five years, the extent to which local authorities have specific officers who undertake 14-19 or 16-19 co-ordinator roles has decreased. This has, in part, led to inconsistent management and oversight of partnership provision across Wales.
- 28 Local authorities play a central organisational and oversight role for shared provision across a minority of areas including Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy and Bridgend. Such partnerships tend to be large, involving several schools and a college. Many of these partnerships are well organised with written agreements outlining the responsibilities and expectations of partners, including clear deadlines and an agreed calendar of activities. Typically, the providers involved agree on a common day per week, or alternatively two separate half-days per week, during which learners can travel between them and access their courses.
- 29 The exact role of the local authority in partnerships varies across Wales. Generally, they co-ordinate leadership meetings, and to differing degrees, manage improvement processes. Operationally, they co-ordinate the timetabling of partnership courses, organise billing for provision and co-ordinate transport for learners to move between providers. A very few local authorities arrange and fund additional transport arrangements for partnership lessons.
- 30 A minority of schools are part of provider-led partnership arrangements. Here, schools take the lead in driving the partnership work that often involves two to four schools only. The smaller size of these partnerships facilitates responsive organisation to meet the needs of each provider and their learners. For example, such partnerships can make timetable adjustments to accommodate the subject

choices of a relatively small number of learners. However, many such partnerships across Wales are managed without suitably detailed written agreements that address roles and responsibilities, financial reimbursement or quality assurance arrangements sufficiently well. They risk relying too much on mutual understanding and good will between senior leaders representing the providers involved.

The 'Trisgol' partnership involves the three school sixth forms in the north of Powys. These schools have harmonised timetables with planned travel time for learners to move between their sixth form lessons at the different schools. The local authority supports this partnership by arranging and funding the transport for learners. The partnership has also recently begun to make use of the Welsh Government sponsored e-sgol project to enable distance learning via video link between the different schools.

- 31 In a few cases, policy, protocol and system differences form a barrier to productive partnership working between providers. For example, administrative differences between local authorities, as well as political factors, present significant barriers to establishing and maintaining partnerships that span the boundary between two neighbouring local authorities. Similarly, a college and school that are well placed to work together may not do so due to the different administrative, funding and oversight arrangements within which they operate.
- 32 A majority of senior leaders in schools with sixth forms report that the relationship with their local colleges is generally not as strong as with other schools. Senior leaders within colleges also acknowledge that this is an issue between colleges and a minority of schools across Wales. They report a sense of competition and lack of transparency and trust between the two sectors. In a few cases, similar tensions exist between schools.
- 33 One-third of schools do not have sixth forms and so feed into consolidated post-16 provision. The colleges and 11-16 schools visited as part of this work reported strong working relationships between these schools and nearby post-16 providers. The lack of competition results in communication that helps secure impartial advice, guidance and transition arrangements for learners progressing into post-16 education. In these cases, transition arrangements are comprehensive and taster activities are embedded throughout key stage 4.
- 34 Such consolidated post-16 arrangements have become increasingly common. They are long established in the west of Gwynedd, Neath Port Talbot, Wrexham, and parts of Cardiff and Swansea. Within the last ten years they have been introduced in parts of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Flintshire, Merthyr Tydfil, Pembrokeshire and Torfaen.

## Funding

- 35 The ways that local authorities allocate funding to their schools, within the parameters of the School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010 (Great Britain, 2010), vary across Wales. In some cases, the allocation of school sixth form funding by local authorities is dependent on the number of learners and the volume of their study programmes. In other cases, funding relies only on the number of learners enrolled in the sixth form. In a very few cases, funding is allocated according to the

number of subjects offered by the school, and is not dependent on the number of learners enrolled or how many courses they study. This funding mechanism is used where local authorities identify a need to maintain the choice of subjects available locally despite there being few learners, such as in sparsely populated areas.

- 36 In a few cases, the way that school sixth form funding is allocated leads to tension between schools, or between schools and their local authorities. For example, this can result from funding methodologies that are based on predicted learner enrolments that can incentivise consistent over-estimation by a very few schools.
- 37 Where sixth forms cater for a small number of learners, they often are not financially self-sustaining without support from the wider school's resources. In these cases, the costs of staffing lessons are high compared to the income that the schools receive for their small cohort of learners.
- 38 Colleges receive their funding directly from the Welsh Government according to their annual grant awards. If significantly more learners than anticipated join a college in any given year, college leaders are able to apply for top-up funding. The relatively high number of learners recruited by individual colleges means that overall, income for 16-19 year old learners meets the costs of maintaining provision. There are a few exceptions, where specialist provision on generally small campuses is, in effect, subsidised by income for other courses. Nearly all colleges secure income in addition to direct public funding, for example by providing training to businesses on a commercial basis, and from tuition fees for any higher education provision that they deliver. The amount of such additional income varies significantly between the colleges across Wales.
- 39 In a minority of cases, costing arrangements for shared provision are formalised and clear. A very few partnerships weight the rates of reimbursement depending on the specific subject in question. They take into account the associated costs of delivering individual subjects including, for example, practical activities and the costs of consumables. A majority of providers that are part of partnerships for shared provision do not financially reimburse each other for delivery. This means that providers who receive significantly more learners into their lessons than they send to join the lessons of other providers, in effect, subsidise the partnership.
- 40 In a very few instances, providers secure small amounts of additional funding by leasing their facilities to other providers. For example, Ysgol Emrys Ap Iwan leases space to the local college to run community-based courses and Coleg y Cymoedd leases teaching spaces to local special schools.

### Quality improvement

- 41 Where provision is shared, a majority of leaders have a sound understanding of the relative performance of courses delivered by other providers. This awareness is helped by local authorities that share aspects of performance outcomes from a range of measures, such as value added scores<sup>13</sup>, between all of their school sixth forms. In a few cases, colleges are also involved in local or regional arrangements to share

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<sup>13</sup> Measures that compare learners' qualification outcomes at level 3 to their prior attainment at GCSE, to gauge the progress that they make

post-16 performance outcomes between providers. A minority of senior leaders have a well-informed and detailed picture of the quality of provision delivered by partnership providers based on a useful range of evidence. For example, these leaders access each other's evaluations of lessons and records of learners' progress over time, and also gather learners' views about their lessons. A very few providers directly observe and evaluate teaching, learning and assessment at partner providers as part of their improvement practices.

- 42 Most teachers who work with learners from other providers share these learners' working grades three or four times a year with the learners' own schools or colleges, as well as with the learners themselves and their parents. They also provide written progress reports to parents at least once a year. Most providers share attendance data for relevant learners and communicate any incidents of unexplained absences promptly. The majority of providers communicate effectively with pastoral leaders at learners' own schools or colleges when individuals make insufficient progress and are at risk of underachieving. In these cases, this allows pastoral leaders to provide valuable support for such learners.
- 43 The effectiveness of improvement processes for shared provision is inconsistent across Wales. In a minority of cases, leaders do not have formal quality assurance arrangements in place. These providers do not share relevant evaluations of provision with partner providers who have learners attending their lessons. In a minority of cases where learners travel for their lessons, senior and middle leaders do not evaluate the standard of learner work in lessons and books sufficiently well. In a few cases, the lack of written agreements between providers engaging in such partnership arrangements means that it is unclear where responsibility for this lies.
- 44 Many leaders report that learners' qualification outcomes for partnership courses are generally in-line with the school's own results, but are aware of a few exceptions where performance is weaker. In nearly all cases, improvement actions are the sole responsibility of the provider that hosts the lessons, and these actions are conducted according to their internal processes. In a very few instances, providers collaborate to exchange responsibility for the delivery of specific courses to address identified underperformance.
- 45 In a minority of cases, schools' improvement planning processes for sixth form provision as a whole are less well developed than those for key stages 3 and 4. A few senior leaders do not evaluate systematically learners' progress and qualification outcomes for shared provision to the same degree as those achieved by learners who attend only the providers' own provision.
- 46 A few partnerships evaluate shared provision in a systematic and transparent way that is accessible to all providers involved. This enables school and college leaders to make informed decisions when planning their curriculum offer, and helps them to give learners suitable advice and guidance about the courses available via other providers. Larger schemes for shared provision often have a local authority co-ordinator. The co-ordinators play a key role in oversight and help review and report on the quality of provision as well as learners' progress in an effective and systematic way.



The Gwynedd and Anglesey Post-16 Education Consortium involves six school sixth forms in the north of Gwynedd, Anglesey's five school sixth forms, and also provision at three of Grŵp Llandrillo Menai's campuses. A local authority representative has management responsibility for the consortium's work across both local authorities. They co-ordinate effectively improvement processes that include a learner level progress review every half-term, and an annual learner results analysis. They ensure that outcomes of such activities are shared with all member providers across the two partnership clusters within the consortium.

The consortium's quality subgroup includes senior leaders from each provider. A second group for strategic leadership is comprised of the schools' headteachers together with the chief executive from the college and the consortium manager. From an operational and strategic perspective respectively, both groups scrutinise the outcomes of self-evaluation to identify and take forward relevant improvement actions.

The consortium's self-assessment activities provide a useful evaluative overview for each of the courses delivered as part of shared provision across all of the providers involved. The information includes qualitative descriptions of strengths and weaknesses as well as measures of completion, retention and value added grade attainment. Host providers are responsible for assessing their own provision. In addition, as part of the wider self-evaluation process, senior and middle leaders from the different providers observe lessons delivered by each other's teachers. The consortium has a formal complaints process to enable providers to raise any concerns about the provision delivered at other schools or by the college.

### Strategic planning to support Welsh-medium provision

- 47 The majority of designated Welsh-medium school sixth forms have learners accessing courses at other schools, broadening the choice of subjects available through the medium of Welsh. This has helped schools maintain Welsh-medium delivery for courses that attract small numbers of learners. For example, the schools merge their teaching groups for A levels in further mathematics, music and computing. They also expand their provision by introducing subjects that are relatively new to 16-year-old learners such as psychology and sociology. Most learners undertaking these courses value the opportunity to study through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.
- 48 Post-16 partnerships among designated Welsh-medium schools tend to be led and managed by the providers themselves. The majority of these schools work together, often in pairs or as a partnership of three, to share provision. Examples include the Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr and Ysgol Bryn Tawe partnership in Swansea. The three Welsh-medium schools in Cardiff, Ysgol Gyfun Plasmawr, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf and Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Edern have also formed such a partnership. The degree of partnership working between other designated Welsh-medium schools in less densely populated areas is often limited by the time needed for learners to travel between them. A few take advantage of the e-sgol project to provide distance learning via video link to each other's lessons.

Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr and Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bryn Tawe in Swansea deliver their sixth form provision via a cohesive partnership between the two schools. This partnership has a distinct identity with a common prospectus and open evenings where prospective sixth form learners and their parents are informed about provision available at both schools. The majority of sixth form learners at the schools elect to study at least one subject delivered by the partner school. Senior leaders have put in place written agreements that address a suitable range of working arrangements and expectations. This agreement defines the partnership and helps to ensure consistency when senior personnel change.

- 49 In many cases, neighbouring designated Welsh-medium schools maintain strong working relationships. Despite often being separated by significant distances, these schools work together effectively to develop their staff and/or share provision. However, such relationships are not often reinforced by written agreements that set out roles and responsibilities clearly. In general, Welsh and English-medium providers do not take sufficient advantage of opportunities to work with each other locally, for example for the professional development of staff members.
- 50 Many subject teachers who deliver sixth form lessons through the medium of Welsh collaborate well to develop and share teaching and learning resources written in Welsh. This has been driven by, and contributed to, the relatively close-knit communities of teachers who deliver subject lessons in Welsh, both in bilingual schools as well as designated Welsh-medium schools. Such collaboration is often ad-hoc, taking place between individual teachers working together to address the relatively small range of published Welsh-medium post-16 teaching resources. As a result, while being worthwhile, such collaboration is often informal and can be inconsistent.
- 51 Estyn's thematic review of local authorities' Welsh in education strategic plans (WESPs) concluded that most indicated appropriately how they proposed to increase the proportion of post-16 learners studying subjects through the medium of Welsh in schools (Estyn, 2016). Although FEIs are outside the scope of local authorities' WESPs, there were a few examples of shared provision arrangements enabling learners to access Welsh-medium provision at other school sixth forms or colleges.
- 52 In a minority of cases, planning at the local level does not consider Welsh-medium post-16 provision carefully enough. Opportunities to introduce or promote Welsh-medium post-16 teaching and assessment are not taken consistently by local authorities, schools and colleges. In a few cases, leaders within designated Welsh-medium schools do not feel well-supported by their local authorities. Overall, colleges and Welsh-medium schools do not work together effectively in order to expand the range of Welsh-medium or bilingual provision available to their post-16 learners. They do not take sufficient advantage of opportunities to collaborate on provision that enables learners to pursue elements of vocational studies at post-16 through the medium of Welsh.
- 53 Because vocational courses are often unavailable in Welsh locally, many senior leaders in Welsh-medium schools feel a duty to offer their learners the opportunity to continue with their education through the medium of Welsh at the school's sixth form.



This can cause a dilemma when providing guidance to learners about vocational post-16 provision that is often available only in English, for example at a nearby college. This can lead to a few learners enrolling onto A level courses at Welsh-medium school sixth forms that are not suited to them.

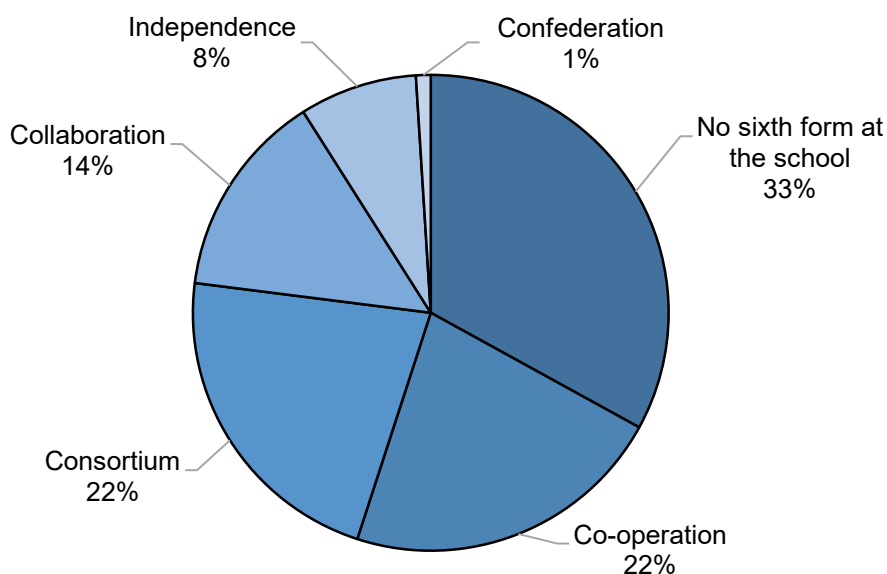
- 54 A few leaders of Welsh-medium schools feel that the introduction or expansion of Welsh-medium A level provision at nearby colleges will reduce the viability of their own sixth forms. They believe that collaborative local curriculum planning should emphasise the development of provision that is not already available in Welsh locally. This would increase the range of provision available while avoiding competition. In many cases, this would involve colleges focusing on increasing the proportion of vocational provision that is available through the medium of Welsh, rather than duplicating A level provision if it is available nearby.
- 55 Learners cite transport as a key factor in choosing a post-16 provider. In a few cases, learners fluent in Welsh report that they would consider an English-medium post-16 provider over their preferred Welsh-medium provider because of issues around transport reliability and costs.
- 56 In a few instances, local authorities do not work with Welsh-medium schools effectively enough to gauge the impact of any changes to sixth form learners' access to school buses on their engagement with Welsh-medium education. Leaders of Welsh-medium schools with sixth forms report that changes to school transport arrangements are at risk of disproportionately disadvantaging Welsh-speaking sixth form learners. Designated Welsh-medium schools often cater for learners from a broad geographical area whereas English-medium education is often available nearer to learners' homes. In key stages 3 and 4, school buses cater well for learners attending these Welsh-medium schools. However, a very few Welsh-speaking sixth-form learners find themselves with significant challenges in commuting to school.

## Partnership working

### Partnership types

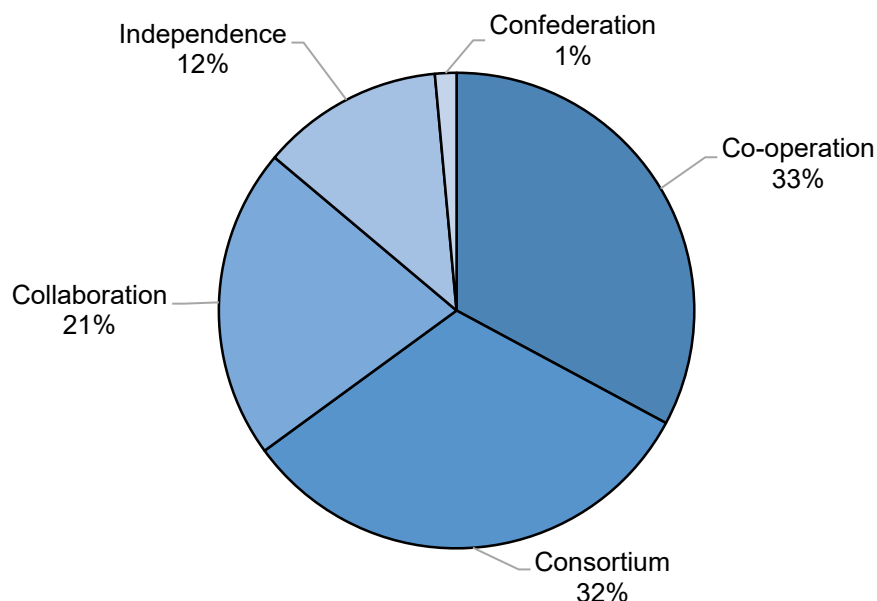
- 57 To establish a full picture of sixth-form partnerships across Wales, we asked the four regional consortia to coordinate an exercise to classify each school sixth form according to one of five defined partnership categories (see appendix 2). The results of this exercise indicate that a majority of schools are part of a shared post-16 provision partnership of some kind. A very few schools, 1%, operate in effect as a single joint entity via a post-16 confederation, 22% are part of a close consortium, 14% collaborate and 22% co-operate with other providers. Only 8% of schools report that their sixth forms operate independently with no sharing of post-16 provision. The remaining 33% of secondary phase schools do not have a sixth form at the school and so feed into consolidated sixth forms elsewhere.

**Figure 4: Schools in Wales according to post-16 partnership type – all secondary phase schools including schools with no sixth form**



- 58 By discounting schools that do not have their own sixth forms, these survey results show that 88% of school sixth forms are part of a partnership of some kind, with the remaining 12% operating independently of other providers (figure 5). However, schools' annual post-16 data submissions to the Welsh Government for 2018-2019 suggest that only around 60% of sixth forms had learners who undertook learning activities delivered by a different provider. This involved 9% of learners and only 2% of all sixth form learning activities (Welsh Government, 2020e). The survey of figures 4 and 5 was conducted in October 2020, and the latest available post-16 annual data relates to 2018-2019. Despite this, it remains likely that schools' recording of this specific information in their annual post-16 data submissions is not accurate across all regions.

**Figure 5: Schools in Wales according to post-16 partnership type – schools with sixth forms only**



- 59 As part of their annual post-16 data submissions, schools should indicate any activities that learners undertake with other providers. However, the findings of our October 2020 survey suggest that annual post-16 data submissions by schools are likely to under-report the extent of shared provision across Wales. This lack of accurate recording of the provider of each learning activity limits the Welsh Government’s ability to gauge the popularity of such arrangements and the outcomes achieved by learners who are taught in this way. Such information could prove useful in informing post-16 strategy on a national, regional and local level.
- 60 Only a few colleges in Wales are part of significant post-16 shared provision arrangements with other providers. For example, Bridgend College works with Pencoed Comprehensive School to offer post-16 provision in the form of Penybont Sixth Form College. The college also makes provision available to learners from other school sixth forms through the local authority’s post-16 partnership arrangements. Grŵp Llandrillo Menai is a member of similar local authority led partnerships across Anglesey, Gwynedd and Conwy.

### Shared post-16 provision

- 61 For younger pupils, many colleges in Wales provide vocational key stage 4 courses to pupils from nearby schools. The lessons for these pupils, who are between 14 and 16 years of age, typically take place on one designated afternoon a week. Such arrangements have become common since The Education (Local Curriculum for Pupils in Key Stage 4) (Wales) Regulations 2009 stipulated that a minimum of five vocational courses should be included within each local curriculum for 14 to 16-year-olds. The amendment in 2014 reduced this requirement to three vocational courses (Welsh Government, 2014a). The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill currently before the Senedd, if enacted, will involve the partial repeal of these regulations, effectively removing this requirement (Welsh Government, 2020b).

- 62 Most 16 to 19-year-old learners attending school sixth forms report that they are able to choose the subjects that they wanted to study. A few did not have access to less popular subjects that are of interest to them, for example courses in politics and economics.
- 63 The majority of school sixth forms that use partnership arrangements to broaden their offer, sensibly combine groups in subjects where the number of enrolled learners is low. Learners report that, if timetables are not suitably co-ordinated or travel arrangements are not sufficiently reliable, they are less likely to recommend the affected courses to friends. This can reduce further the popularity of these courses.
- 64 A minority of schools have ensured that their lesson and break times are synchronised in order to support shared sixth form provision. To allow for differing timetables, many partnerships designate one day, or alternatively one morning and one separate afternoon, per week for learners to travel to other providers for lessons. In many cases, courses delivered in partnership involve fewer lessons that are longer in duration than usual; this helps to minimise the time spent travelling to and from other centres. In a very few cases, teachers, rather than learners, travel between providers to deliver lessons.
- 65 Many schools in Wales present learners with a broad choice of sixth form study options. Including any provision delivered in partnership, 75% of school sixth forms had learners studying across a range of more than 25 different subjects in 2018-2019. However, 9% had learners studying across a range of 20 courses or fewer. In these cases, more courses may have been on offer, but not chosen by any learners for that year. Most school sixth forms offer at least one level 3 vocational course. The highest number of vocational enrolments at school sixth forms across Wales are for courses in sports, health & social care, applied science, business and public services (Welsh Government, 2020e).
- 66 A few providers work together to deliver lessons to each other's learners via distance learning models incorporating a significant proportion of teaching via video link.

### **Case study 2: e-sgol – a technology enabled remote learning initiative**

The e-sgol project is a Welsh Government supported initiative to expand opportunities for 14 to 19-year-old learners to study courses that are otherwise not readily available to them. It is based on the existing e-sgoil scheme in Scotland. Both projects aim to improve access to courses for learners in more rural areas and to improve access to lessons delivered through the medium of Gaelic or Welsh. The project in Wales is currently run in clusters and involves lessons delivered in both Welsh and English.

In 2018, a group of schools in Ceredigion became the first to pilot the e-sgol project and used it to deliver A level lessons in further mathematics and drama, as well as GCSE music. More recently, secondary school sixth forms in the north of Powys have formed a cluster offering nine A level subjects in total. For example, Ysgol Llanfyllin learners can choose from A levels in French, politics, religious education and Welsh second language

via the e-sgol project.

Most lessons take place via a live video link between the teacher and learners who sit in suitably equipped classrooms at their schools. Learners have access to lesson resources, can view their teacher's writing live, and can take part in conversations with their teacher and each other. Learners take lesson notes and complete their work electronically, either by handwriting using a touchscreen or by typing. This gives the teacher instant access to each learner's work. Learners who are unable to attend school can join their lessons from home. The software applications used are commonly found in the workplace and are made available free of charge to all learners and teachers in Wales by the Welsh Government. Learners travel to meet their e-sgol teachers face-to-face regularly to discuss their learning and review progress. Depending on the schools involved and the distance between them, this takes place every fortnight, every month, or every half-term.

Financial arrangements vary between e-sgol clusters; schools in the north Powys cluster currently do not financially reimburse each other irrespective of their teaching commitments or the number of their learners taking part in the lessons. Quality assurance and improvement measures for provision delivered via e-sgol are determined by the schools involved. Overall, these draw on a suitable range of evidence including learners' views, observations of teaching and learning, tracking of learner progress and evaluations of qualification outcomes.

- 67 A very few schools use specialist third sector organisations or private companies to deliver provision. For example, Mudiad Meithrin provide level 2 and level 3 childcare qualifications, and other private organisations provide teaching for sports courses. Additionally, the Wales Institute of Mathematical and Computational Sciences offers A level further mathematics in a few schools via a distance learning programme.

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd is the only designated Welsh-medium secondary school serving the Bridgend local authority. Despite the modest size of the sixth form, with fewer than 100 learners in total across the two year groups, the school works creatively to broaden its offer of courses. It engages with a number of partners to ensure that their sixth form learners have access to courses that meet their needs, interests and aspirations. The school works in direct partnership with Ysgol Llanhari in the neighbouring Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority to achieve a broad and sustainable curriculum offer. Learners travel between the two schools to engage in a number of lessons as part of merged teaching groups. In addition, sixth form learners at Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd can study childcare courses delivered by Mudiad Meithrin, or A level further mathematics via distance learning by the Further Mathematics Support Programme Wales. They can also access specialist A level courses such as criminology, law and dance through the medium of English, via twilight classes at Bridgend College.

## Professional learning

- 68 Many providers in Wales ensure that staff members are able to take valuable professional learning opportunities to develop alongside their peers who undertake similar roles at different schools or colleges. For example, subject networks established by regional consortia or local authorities provide teachers from a range of schools with an opportunity to work together in subject specialist groups. This helps them form cohesive networks, supporting each other and sharing the work of developing resources. Over recent years, post-16 aspects have increasingly been included within the work of such networks. In addition, the four regional consortia in Wales host a dedicated professional learning programme for sixth form leaders. This programme has been standardised and spans regional consortia boundaries. Middle leaders of relevant provision in colleges such as Pembrokeshire College and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai have also been part of the programme. Training events and meetings provide these middle leaders with valuable opportunities to discuss, compare and collaborate in their work across administrative and sector boundaries.
- 69 Staff members at colleges work with peers in similar roles at other colleges as part of ColegauCymru facilitated groups. For example, the principal's forum and the curriculum and quality group involve representatives from colleges across Wales. However, the joint working groups involving middle leaders responsible for similar curriculum or vocational areas across the different colleges were discontinued in 2016-2017. This has led to a reduction in collaboration opportunities between such middle leaders at different colleges. In a few cases, colleges work together on professional development activities as part of distinct Welsh Government funded projects. For example, the five colleges in the south east of Wales have recently begun to undertake joint lesson observations and professional development activities as part of a Welsh Government funded project.
- 70 Opportunities for schools and colleges to work together locally are not identified and exploited consistently across Wales. In a majority of cases, regional consortia, local authorities, colleges and schools do not communicate or work together well enough to support this. In a few subject networks, teachers from colleges join and play a full part in development activities alongside their peers from schools. However, the involvement of college-based teachers in such networks is underdeveloped across the regions. This can be due to either the lack of an invitation from the host regional consortium or local authority, or a lack of positive engagement from a college following such an invitation.

ERW's post-16 professional enquiry project has involved teaching staff members from school sixth forms and Pembrokeshire College working collaboratively on projects aimed at developing specific aspects of practice. In addition, as part of a separate initiative to help subject departments develop, the ERW regional consortium arranged for subject teachers to work in pairs across local authority boundaries. As part of this exercise, a specialist teacher of English from Pembrokeshire College supported a peer from a school in Swansea. Both participants benefited from learning about each other's work, sharing their experiences and developing their practice.

- 71 A few providers regularly invite neighbouring schools and colleges to attend their training events. Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Coleg y Cymoedd invite staff from other schools and colleges to attend masterclasses alongside their teachers. A few providers also work directly with each other on professional development for teaching, learning and assessment. For example, Ysgol Morgan Llwyd and Ysgol y Creuddyn staff work together as part of a teacher development programme.
- 72 The Welsh Government backed Seren Network of regional hubs aims to support the brightest students to achieve their full academic potential and progress to leading universities. Seren activities provide valuable opportunities for more able and talented learners to interact with their peers from different schools and colleges. The lead roles of co-ordinating the numerous Seren regional hubs across Wales are held by individuals from a range of different organisations including local authorities, colleges, schools and universities. Overall, Seren activities are well established and valued by school and college leaders, as well as the learners who take part. In general, Seren networks require little collaboration between providers. Activities are often delivered by individual subject experts from universities or industry in dedicated sessions that take place after school or college hours. In a few cases, due to the relationships built through the Seren networks, teachers from different providers support each other with aspects of their work. For example, teachers develop each other's ability to prepare A level learners for entry examinations and interviews at highly selective universities.



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## Supporting learner transition to post-16 education

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### Advice and guidance for learners

- 73 Most schools provide learners with a suitable range of activities to help them learn about the progression options available to them once they complete Year 11. These include progression themed assemblies and lessons as well as options evenings for learners and parents. In a majority of schools, senior leaders invite each Year 11 learner to a helpful individual progression meeting.
- 74 In a majority of cases, schools ensure that Year 11 learners are well informed about any sixth form courses available at the school through shared provision arrangements. In a minority of cases, subjects delivered by partner schools or colleges are not represented well enough during careers/options events, and learners do not meet or interact with teachers of shared provision before lessons commence. In a few cases, learners applying for courses delivered in partnership with other providers take part in specific meetings to discuss expectations, timetabling and logistics. In a very few cases, learners receive advice and guidance about shared provision from dedicated partnership open events.
- 75 All colleges and many schools have appropriate and clearly communicated entry requirements for the sixth form and/or for each post-16 course that they offer. Generally, providers appropriately and sensitively compromise these in extenuating circumstances. For example, they may show flexibility if a learner's GCSE results have been affected by personal difficulties. In a very few cases, providers enrol learners onto challenging A level or level 3 vocational courses, when they have not demonstrated enough skill and ability in their Year 11 studies. The challenging nature of such courses often leads to these learners withdrawing or failing. In these cases, middle leaders feel that these learners are not yet independent enough to leave at the end of Year 11 to engage with more suitable courses at other providers. This reflects a lack of trust in other providers to support and develop these learners.
- 76 A minority of local authorities have introduced useful common application systems for learners applying for post-16 courses. Each learner benefits from only having to complete a single online application form that is accessible to schools and colleges selected by the learner. A very few partnerships have additional application requirements for learners who wish to access shared provision. For example, learners are asked to write a letter of application and provide a resumé of their achievements to be shared with partner providers.
- 77 In a few schools, learners benefit from a comprehensive range of activities to help them learn about, and decide between, their post-16 options at all local providers. This includes opportunities to meet representatives from local post-16 providers other than their own school, including work-based learning providers as well as schools and colleges. In the best examples, advice to learners is well informed, impartial and engaging. In a majority of schools, learners are given helpful opportunities to speak with former Year 11 learners who have recently progressed to different destinations, and learn about their experiences.



Monmouth Comprehensive School's integrated curriculum pastoral programme spans the school age range from Year 7 up to and including the sixth form. Advice and guidance for learners is embedded throughout each key stage. As part of the integrated curriculum, learners develop a strong understanding of work-related education, working with employers and voluntary organisations to facilitate this. They undertake worthwhile work experience, learn about apprenticeship options at post-16, and attend a comprehensive careers fair. In addition, learners benefit from external visits to other post-16 providers including neighbouring colleges.

- 78 Many learners value the advice and guidance they receive about their progression options. However, a minority feel that the advice they receive from their teachers does not address the alternative pathways to A level study sufficiently. They report that staff members' advice is often focused on encouraging learners to progress to the school's own sixth form. Many learners believe that they do not know enough about the quality of the options available to them and the outcomes achieved by learners who recently completed those courses.
- 79 Many senior and middle leaders across school sixth forms and colleges place a high priority on enrolling as many learners as possible. Senior leaders in schools with small sixth forms feel under particular pressure to secure enrolments. In a minority of cases, this can lead to limited promotion of alternative options to Year 11 learners. In too many cases, the advice and guidance given to learners by schools and colleges does not consider sufficiently whether alternative providers in the area are better placed to meet the needs of any given learner.
- 80 College leaders feel that working relationships with the majority of schools are strong and effective, particularly where schools do not have sixth forms. However, college leaders report that a minority of schools will only invite college representatives to speak with learners about college provision that does not directly compete with the school's own sixth form. Some schools allow college representatives to address entire year cohorts, while others give colleges access to only a selected group of learners. A few schools do not invite providers who they perceive to be competing with them to speak with learners in any way. College leaders feel that the advice and guidance a minority of schools provide to learners lacks objectivity and steers learners towards their own sixth forms. A few school senior leaders feel that nearby colleges are overly assertive in their marketing and wider efforts to attract learners.
- 81 Careers Wales undertake a valuable role in raising awareness of alternative post-16 pathways to A level study. When given the time and the opportunity, they explain the structure and format of full-time vocational courses and work-based learning programmes to learners. They also share useful details of local careers fairs, open events and apprenticeship opportunities. Careers Wales representatives interact with learners via text or email, and most also visit schools for one-to-one meetings and sessions with specific groups of learners on a weekly basis. In a few schools, Careers Wales representatives find it difficult to secure sufficient access to, or time with, learners.
- 82 In general, post-16 providers and learners themselves report that secondary schools without sixth forms offer learners a broad range of impartial advice and guidance.

Learners benefit from interaction with nearly all nearby providers and take part in a wide range of taster sessions and transition events from Year 9 onwards.

- 83 Where schools have their own sixth forms, most learners completing Year 11 choose to progress to the sixth form at their own school or enrol at the nearest college. A few choose to enrol at a different school's sixth form. Overall, learners base their decision to join a post-16 provider on four main factors: the courses available, the ease of travel, their relationships with their current teachers, and the choices of their friends. A minority take into account broader parental or community perceptions of the performance of past learners and the quality of teaching at different providers.
- 84 A few learners use objective evaluations of the performance of different providers, such as inspection reports, to inform their choices. A few learners report taking account of post-16 performance data shared with them by the providers. However, only providers themselves can give prospective learners and their parents access to course level performance information. As a result, providers can choose what measures, if any, to share.
- 85 As members of the public, parents and prospective learners can access information about overall learner outcomes at individual school sixth forms via the Welsh Government's 'My Local School' website. The website presents the percentage of learners achieving the level 3 threshold of two A level or equivalent at A\*-E. Due to the threshold of achieving two E grades at A level being low, most school sixth forms achieve 95% or better for this measure. As a result, this information is limited in its usefulness to prospective learners and their parents. The second measure is the average points score, which depends both on the volume of qualifications and the grades achieved by learners. It gives a broad indication of the strength of performance of individual school sixth forms. Neither of these measures take into account the prior attainment of learners or the proportion of learners who withdraw from their studies before being entered for examinations.
- 86 The measures available made it difficult to gauge the strength of outcomes for pupils at schools and colleges. To address this, in 2018 the Welsh Government introduced a comprehensive suite of post-16 performance measures that are consistent across both sixth forms and colleges.<sup>14</sup> These provide detailed information across a wide range of outcome measures. However, no elements of these new consistent measures are currently available publicly, and very few providers across Wales share them with prospective learners or their parents.
- 87 Many senior and middle leaders believe that performance information can be useful for prospective post-16 learners when presented appropriately. Many providers share relevant information with learners and parents about the overall qualification outcomes of recent cohorts. A minority of providers share useful course level results during options events, or through their prospectuses or course information materials. However, a majority of providers do not provide learners with helpful performance

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<sup>14</sup> Due to the disruption caused to teaching and assessment by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Welsh Government have announced that they will not use 2019-2020 qualification outcomes to publish performance measures or use them as part of normal accountability arrangements for schools and colleges. They have also outlined the expected effects on publication of performance data for subsequent years (Welsh Government, 2020d).

information about the courses they offer, including via shared provision. In too many cases, providers are overly selective and share information that does not reflect fully the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the provider. Very few schools or colleges share their Welsh Government post-16 performance information with prospective learners or the wider public.

### Learner information sharing

- 88 Protocols for sharing learner information when learners in Year 11 or below transfer between schools are well established. The Education (Pupil Information) (Wales) Regulations 2004 (Great Britain, 2004) set out the requirements for common transfer files to be used to share specific information about learners when they transfer between schools. The nature and format of the necessary information are defined helpfully and understood widely by schools. The regulations also set out the requirements for a school leaver's report to be made available to any learners above compulsory school age, such as those in the sixth form, who propose to leave the school.
- 89 At post-16, most providers work well together to ensure that schools and colleges enrolling learners with special educational needs understand the ability, support and care needs of these learners. Many are collaborating to develop standardised systems for recording and sharing information about these learners, including individual development plans, in response to the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. In a few cases, colleges that need to liaise with a very high number of different providers to obtain information about these learners find this process to be logistically challenging. This impedes the quality of communication and transition planning between the college and the schools.
- 90 In a minority of cases, partnerships for shared provision at post-16 have suitable arrangements in place for sharing learner information between relevant providers. A few partnerships have effective centralised electronic systems and written agreements specifying the information they will share with specific reference to post-16 learners. These set out clearly the extent of relevant learner information to be shared between signatories.

Gwynedd and Anglesey local authorities have established effective systems to help schools share learner information with the local college, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. The college places lists of the names of applicants onto its secure site for each school to access privately. Each school then uses a function of their information management systems, developed by the local authorities, to conveniently compile relevant information about their pupils who have applied to the college. The information includes any additional learning needs, medical needs and behavioural and attendance information. School staff can append comments to each learner's record, before uploading this information to the college's secure site at the beginning of June each year.

- 91 The majority of providers do not share learner information effectively to support transition or transfer to post-16. In too many cases, providers do not communicate well enough to support the progression of these older learners, including those

completing Year 11. Few providers are aware of the Welsh Government's guidance on *'Effective post-16 transitions and data sharing'* (Welsh Government, 2019) or the associated requirements. In a minority of cases, this results in providers beginning to teach learners who transfer from other schools or colleges while knowing little about them.

- 92 A minority of leaders are wary of sharing information about learners, citing anxiety about potential infringements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Among staff, there is a lack of clarity as to what can be shared and what consent needs to be obtained. Generally, schools ask parents to sign consent for sharing of their child's information with relevant partners when their child enrolls at the school, usually in Year 7. Similarly, colleges ask learners to sign consent for information sharing on enrolment.
- 93 A majority of senior and middle leaders are unclear as to how any local authority level data sharing protocols apply to sixth form learners or those who have recently completed Year 11, particularly if those learners move to providers who are outside of the local authority's control. In many cases, a school or college enrolling any post-16 learner mid-year, who had previously been at a different school or college, relies solely on the learner for their information. In a minority of cases, providers will contact the learner's previous school or college to request information.
- 94 Where schools do not have sixth forms, information sharing to support learners' transition to college or a different sixth form works well. For most of these schools, transition activities involve several opportunities for interaction between representatives of the post-16 providers, the learners themselves, and the school staff who know the learners well. This helps to ensure that the school sixth form or college is able to obtain helpful information and build a useful picture of each learner's needs. In a few cases, a lack of clear systematic arrangements can lead to ineffective communication, particularly if learners progress to providers that are not closely linked to the school, for example in a different region of Wales.

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## Appendix 1: Evidence base

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The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:

- visits to 17 secondary schools and five further education colleges
- interviews with local authority and regional consortia officers
- interviews with Careers Wales representatives
- a review of relevant literature including Welsh Government policies and updates, research papers, evaluations of government programmes
- a survey conducted by Estyn via regional consortia in October 2020 to categorise sixth form partnership working arrangements across Wales
- analysis of data from the following sources:
  - The Welsh Government's All Wales Core Data Sets (AWCDS) for sixth forms
  - The Welsh Government's Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) data
  - Wales Examinations Database (WED)
  - The Welsh Government's Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC)
  - The Welsh Government's Post-16 data collection
  - The Welsh Government's StatsWales statistical repository

Schools and colleges were selected following an analysis of data, consideration of inspection findings and feedback from HMI. The sample is as diverse as possible, based on a proportionate number of English-medium and Welsh-medium schools, geographical location and socio economic factors.

The visits involved:

- interviews with senior and middle leaders
- meetings with learners to discuss their experiences and to gather their views on the quality of provision and the advice and guidance they receive
- scrutiny of school or college documents and websites
- remote meetings and interviews for four out of the five colleges

Estyn would like to thank the following schools and colleges that supported this thematic review:

- Bedwas High School, Caerphilly
- Bishop Hedley Catholic High, Merthyr Tydfil
- Bishop of Llandaff, Church in Wales High School, Cardiff
- Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Chepstow School, Monmouthshire
- Coleg Gwent
- Coleg y Cymoedd
- Gower College Swansea
- Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
- Llanfyllin High School, Powys
- Monmouth Comprehensive School, Monmouthshire

- Pembrokeshire College
- Pentrehafod School, Swansea
- Stanwell School, The Vale of Glamorgan
- St Teilo's Church in Wales High School, Cardiff
- Ysgol Calon Cymru, Powys
- Ysgol Emrys Ap Iwan, Conwy
- Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr, Swansea
- Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd, Bridgend
- Ysgol Maes y Gwendraeth, Carmarthenshire
- Ysgol Morgan Llwyd, Wrexham
- Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn, Gwynedd

## Appendix 2: Models of shared provision partnerships

Estyn’s thematic review of 2006 focussed specifically on partnerships between schools and colleges and defined these in terms of four categories (Estyn, 2006). Within this report, we also include post-16 partnerships between schools and other schools, as well as with colleges, and classify them according to the following five revised categories:

	<b>1) Independence</b>	<b>2) Co-operation</b>	<b>3) Collaboration</b>	<b>4) Consortium</b>	<b>5) Confederation</b>
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providers plan and operate their sixth form/post-16 provision separately from each other.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When planning provision, neighbouring sixth form/post-16 providers identify where they can improve the range and viability of provision by catering for each other's learners in a few subjects. This process may be co-ordinated by, or report to, the local authority.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each provider works with one or more collaborating sixth form/post-16 providers to plan rationalised provision to improve the choice and viability of courses available and avoid inefficient duplication of provision. This process may be co-ordinated by, or report to, the local authority.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A consortium leadership group jointly plans the sixth form /post-16 provision across all providers. The local authority may play a central role in co-ordinating the work of the group.</li> <li>Learner demand, labour market information, value for money and quality of provision all influence the planning process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sixth form/post-16 provision planning is centralised and holistic.</li> </ul>
Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If they are in reasonably close proximity, providers often compete to attract post-16 learners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reciprocal arrangements mean that a few learners undertake a small number of sixth form/post-16 subjects delivered by another provider.</li> <li>Providers may have partially harmonised timetables to facilitate reciprocal post-16 shared provision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each provider's sixth form/post-16 learners undertake a range of courses delivered by other providers as part of the school or college's timetable.</li> <li>Providers have harmonised timetables to facilitate reciprocal post-16 shared provision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners at each provider can access a comprehensive suite of designated provision across the consortium.</li> <li>Logistics are standardised across the consortium, including timetabling and transportation arrangements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With the exception of a very few courses, all learners have the same access to provision across the confederation.</li> <li>Provision may, or may not, be centralised to a single site.</li> <li>A provider within the confederation may or may not be directly involved in delivery of provision.</li> </ul>
Information, advice and guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key stage 4 learners are strongly encouraged to progress to the sixth form at their existing school (subject to entry requirements).</li> <li>The provider helps learners who do not meet the sixth form/post-16 provision's entry requirements, or where suitable courses are unavailable, to progress to a different provider for their sixth form/post-16 education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key stage 4 learners are provided with information and advice about the range of options available to them via other co-operating providers.</li> <li>Learners may be able to speak to relevant teachers from co-operating providers before making their sixth-form/post-16 choices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key stage 4 learners are provided with information and advice about the range of options available to them via other collaborating providers.</li> <li>Providers arrange for key stage 4 learners to speak with representatives from other collaborating providers, for example during open/options events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key stage 4 learners receive information and advice about the range of options available via the consortium.</li> <li>Providers arrange for key stage 4 learners to speak with representatives from other consortium providers, for example during open/options events. There may be a dedicated open event to promote the consortium's provision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key stage 4 learners receive information and advice about the range of options available via the confederation. Guidance materials and events are standardised.</li> </ul>



## Post-16 partnerships

Contractual arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The provider does not generally rely on other providers for any of their sixth form/post-16 provision. They may have contracted external or commercial providers to teach specific courses, for example A level Further Mathematics or specific childcare courses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-operating providers understand the role that they play, yet they may not have a formal written agreement specifying expectations and responsibilities across all relevant aspects of their work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A written agreement specifies the operational responsibilities of each collaborating provider.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are formal arrangements for example, contracts, memoranda of understanding and/or service level agreements that refer to quality, reporting responsibilities and financial arrangements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policies and processes span the confederation. For example, performance management arrangements are consistent across the confederation's sixth form/post-16 provision.</li> <li>Staff members may be employed directly by the confederation.</li> </ul>
Quality Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sixth form/post-16 providers do not share self-evaluation findings or improvement plans with each other.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where they share provision, providers communicate relevant learner attendance data and share learner assessment outcomes, particularly in preparation for reports to parents.</li> <li>Quality improvement processes remain largely separate with little sharing of self-evaluation findings or improvement plans between providers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providers have systems in place for regular sharing of learner attendance, behaviour and progress tracking information. They also share relevant learner's improvement targets.</li> <li>Providers communicate main self-evaluation findings and improvement plans with each other.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learner attendance, behaviour, progress tracking and target-setting information is accessible to all relevant stakeholders across the consortium.</li> <li>The consortium's leadership group evaluates the quality of the consortium's shared provision. Improvement planning takes into account the consortium's sixth form/post-16 provision as a whole as well as individual provider's courses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learner attendance, behaviour, progress tracking and target-setting information are accessible to all relevant staff members.</li> <li>Quality improvement systems and processes are confederation wide with centralised oversight.</li> </ul>
Oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally, there is little communication between sixth form/post-16 providers. They have no input into each other's provision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior or middle leaders from co-operating providers meet regularly to discuss operational matters.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior or middle leaders of the different providers meet regularly to address operational matters and monitor quality improvement processes. The local authority may be part of such meetings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A formal leadership group oversees and directs the designated shared provision across all providers. This group is likely to include local authority representation.</li> <li>There may be a hierarchy of leadership groups that address operational matters and quality improvement processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The provider may be branded as a single entity, for example a sixth form centre or college, but separate providers contribute towards operation, management or governance.</li> <li>There is an overarching governance group.</li> <li>The local authority is part of any group with responsibility for strategic planning and oversight.</li> <li>Some senior and middle leaders have a confederation wide remit.</li> </ul>

In October 2020, Estyn requested that the four regional consortia work with local authorities to classify each school sixth form in Wales according to these partnership categories. The results of this survey are shown in figures 4 and 5.

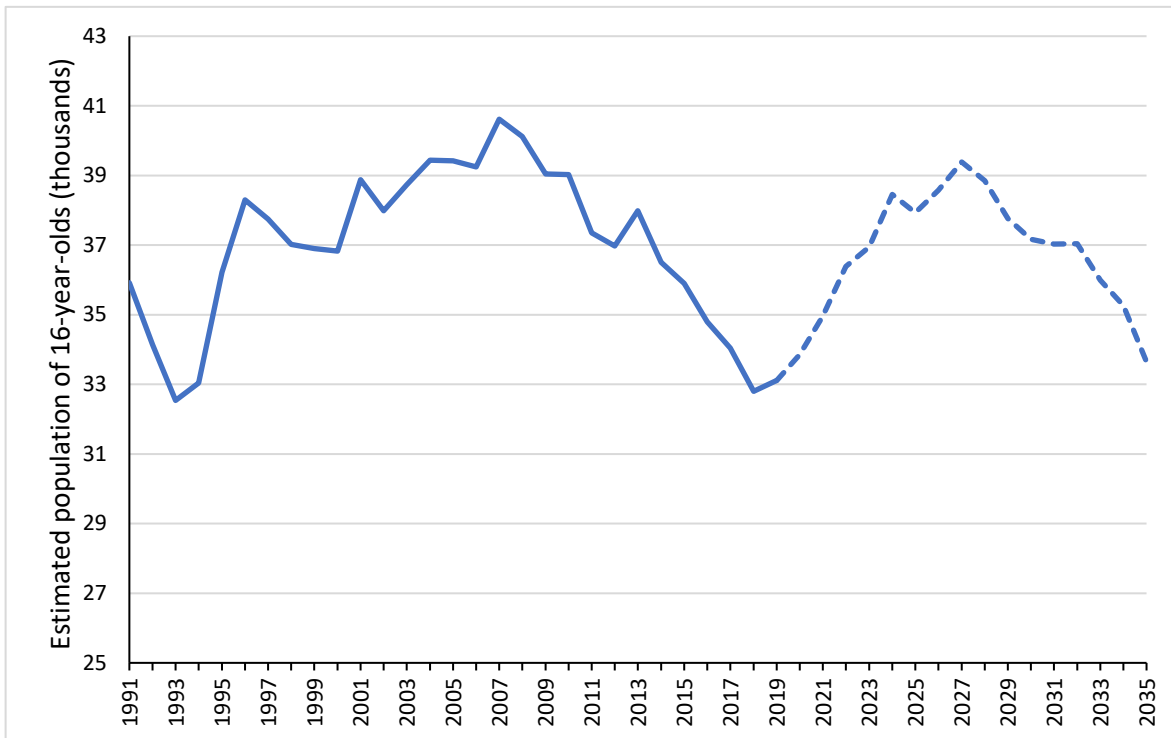


## Appendix 3: Supporting information

### Trends in post-16 provision

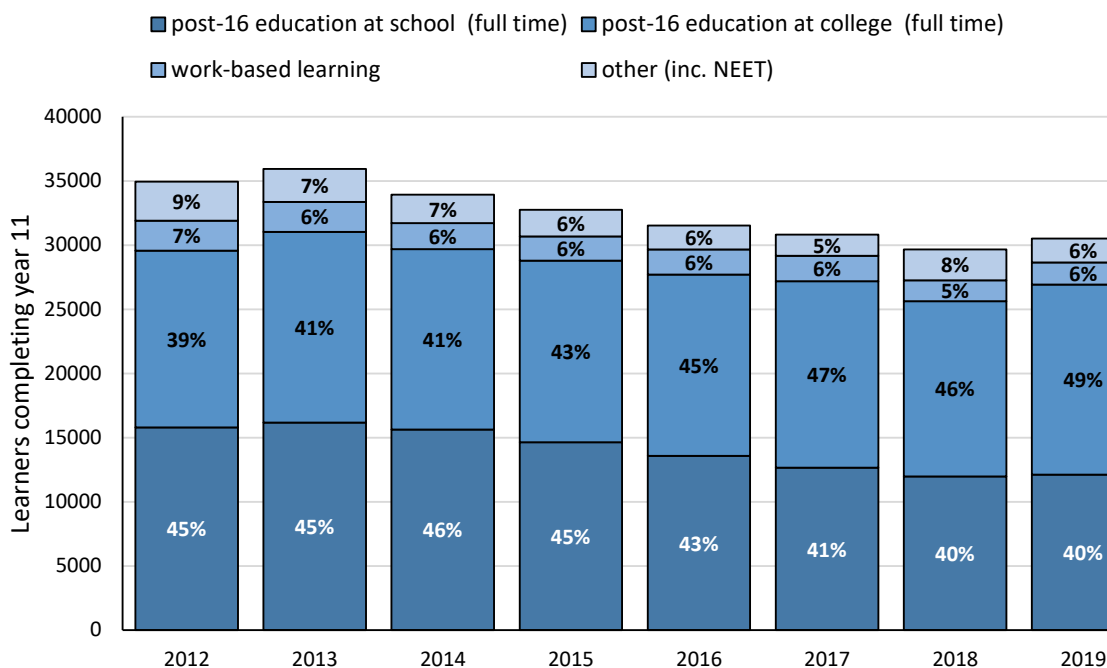
The number of 16-year-olds in Wales increased by 25% between 1993 and 2007; from around 32,500 in 1993 to reach a peak of around 40,600 in 2007. Since 2007, the number has declined steadily and in 2018 had reverted to broadly the same level as in 1993. There followed a slight increase for 2019 which is part of projected upward trend until 2027.

**Figure 6: Number of 16-year-old learners in Wales**



(StatsWales, 2020)

**Figure 7: Destinations of 16-year-old learners**

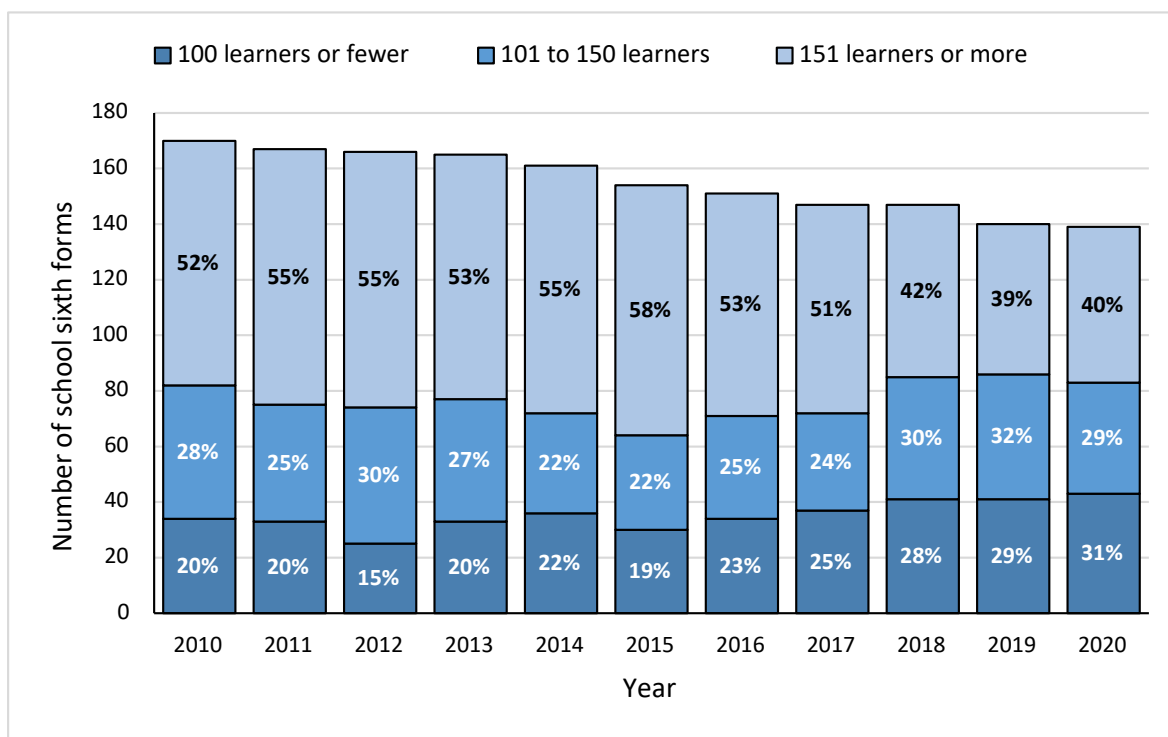


(Careers Wales, 2020)

In 2019, 49% of learners completing Year 11 progressed to study full time at an FE college, with 40% progressing to a school sixth form, 6% progressing to work-based learning and 2% known not to be in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Between 2012 and 2019, the number of learners progressing to college increased slightly to 14,800. Over the same period, the number of learners attending school sixth forms decreased from 15,800 to 12,100; a fall of 23%.

In 2019-2020, 68% of secondary and all-age schools in Wales included a sixth form. A minority of these school sixth forms are small, in 2019-2020, 31% had a total of 100 learners or fewer across both year groups, with 60% having 150 learners or fewer (Welsh Government, 2020g). Many school sixth forms have small subject cohorts. In 2018-2019, 70% of second year A level subject cohorts in schools across Wales were of 10 learners or fewer, with 41% being of five or fewer. Corresponding AS level course enrolments are higher, with 73% being 15 learners or fewer, 55% being 10 learners or fewer, and 29% being of five learners or fewer (Welsh Government, 2020e). It is these very small subject groups that schools prioritise for inclusion in shared provision arrangements. In a very few instances, providers alternatively combine their own AS and second year A level teaching groups for subjects where the number of learners is low. For example, specific lessons involving learners working independently, with regular one-to-one support from the teacher, can be conducted in this way.

**Figure 8: School sixth forms by size**



(Welsh Government, 2020g)

The majority of learners in school sixth forms study AS/A levels alongside the Welsh Baccalaureate. In 2018-2019, 59% had study programmes of this type, and a further 9% studied AS/A levels alone. Five per cent undertook the Welsh Baccalaureate alongside level 3 vocational qualifications and a further 1% undertook vocational level 3 qualifications alone. Twenty-three per cent studied a combination of vocational and A level qualifications.

Colleges cater for approximately 30% of A level learners across Wales. In 2018-2019, 32% of second year A level subject cohorts in colleges across Wales were of 10 learners or fewer, with 16% being of five or fewer. Corresponding AS level course enrolments are higher, with 33% being 15 learners or fewer, 21% being 10 learners or fewer, and 11% being of five learners or fewer (Welsh Government, 2020c). Some colleges manage and accommodate A level provision as a single entity, hosting lessons at one or more designated A level centres. Others integrate their A level provision alongside related vocational provision across separate learning areas. Such learning areas also provide a wide range of vocational provision for 16-19 year old learners, ranging from entry level to level 3.

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## Glossary

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<b>A level</b>	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level qualification (level 3)
<b>AS level</b>	General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary Level qualification (level 3)
<b>College</b>	One of the 12 further education institutions in Wales predominantly providing education to 16 to 19-year-old learners
<b>Consolidated provision</b>	Secondary schools do not have their own individual sixth forms. Learners from these schools progress to a nearby college or school sixth form.
<b>Consortia</b>	Regional school improvement consortia working to lead, orchestrate and co-ordinate improvements in the performance of schools and education of young people
<b>GCSE</b>	General Certificate of Secondary Education qualification (level 2)
<b>NEET</b>	Not in Education, Employment or Training
<b>Post-16</b>	For the purposes of this report, post-16 refers to the phase of education involving learners between 16 and 19 years of age. It encompasses school sixth form and college learners, but excludes those in higher education such as at university.
<b>Shared provision</b>	Courses where providers combine teaching groups from different sixth forms or colleges
<b>Sixth form</b>	The phase involving school Years 12 and 13 where learners between 16 and 19 years of age typically study level 3 qualifications such as AS and A levels or equivalent vocational qualifications
<b>Value-added</b>	Measures used to gauge the degree of progress learners make from their starting points, based on prior attainment. They quantify grade attainment for level 3 qualifications, such as A levels, by taking into account learners' prior attainment at level 2 (predominantly GCSE).

## 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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