

FURTHER SUCCESS:

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
THE NEXT WELSH GOVERNMENT IN
POST-16 EDUCATION AND LIFELONG
LEARNING FOR WALES



THE VOICE OF **FURTHER EDUCATION** IN WALES.



The elections to the Welsh Parliament in May 2021 offer an ideal opportunity to refocus and refine the unique role and contribution of Further Education to the varied and dynamic communities of Wales. As established and independent public service organisations, Wales' Further Education Institutions (FEIs) are community assets providing an essential public service alongside the NHS and local government. Despite their essential role, particularly as Wales continues to adjust to the challenges of the COVID19 pandemic, and their well-documented contribution to economic and social wellbeing, the contribution of FEIs to Wales is often overlooked. Informed by the development and findings of a separate independent research exercise led by a team of researchers from Sydney, Manchester and Cardiff, this policy document sets out to address this oversight.

The document sets out how achievable and targeted interventions could transform provision of learning from the age of sixteen onwards, placing citizens at the heart of social and economic policy. Some of these proposed interventions may require legislation but wherever possible change should be undertaken by amending existing legislation.

All the interventions will require a genuine and meaningful reorientation of existing thinking and the challenging of long-established biases. Stable funding systems which allow at least medium-term planning underpin much of the action needed. However, a great deal will also rely on the future Welsh Government to adapt its own working practices, genuinely tackle issues of disjointed, silo-ed approaches to education, skills and society, and structure the civil service in a way that addresses this to better deliver for Wales. Responsibilities for Further Education, skills and apprenticeships need to be the remit of a specific minister who understands the relationship between these areas and education, economy and society more broadly.

The actions are grouped within five themes.

Each theme can be seen as an individual policy area but together they outline a cohesive policy platform for the next Welsh Government and an agenda for Further Education for the Senedd.

Iestyn Davies

Chief Executive, Colegau Cymru

THEME 1

Expanding citizens' entitlement and engagement with education

The next Welsh Government should:

- Change the statutory basis of education to allow for funded entitlement to access a first Level 3 qualification in Welsh or English up to and including all those to age 25, in the first instance, with a commitment to extending this entitlement to all adults. As part of this, raise the age of compulsory engagement with education or training to 18, including the necessary access to independent advice and guidance for all learners.
- Build on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill and the consequential impact on 14-19 learning pathways to provide a legal basis for learners aged 14-16 to progress to vocational and technical pathways provided independently via Further Education Institutions, and the necessary funding to support these learners. The delivery of vocational general education qualifications should be reserved for schools and colleges with the specific designation as centres for initial technical and vocational learning.
- Introduce a 'digital entitlement' for all learners – a future Welsh Government should commit to providing digital devices for all learners and using all means available to improve access to high-speed internet across all parts of Wales. As part of this, the provision of appropriate spaces for learners to study must also be taken into consideration.
- Commit to and deliver a three-year budget for Further Education to enable more effective planning.



THEME 2

A coherent and connected system that includes flexible and valued qualifications

The next Welsh Government should:

- In conjunction with the sector, employers, and key stakeholders, develop a coherent post-16 vision and a system that addresses the issue of unnecessary competition, enables proportionate and effective regulation, and works in the best interests of all learners and staff, using a ministerial review or other method as a basis.
- Use existing powers to develop a means to deliver and regulate Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications, whether by establishing a Technical Accreditation Council for Wales or mandating and regulating partnership and cooperation between FE and Higher Education Institutions and employers.
- Carry out a review of Qualifications Wales and its responsibilities with a view to making appropriate changes to its legal basis, functions and capacity (that would allow it to host the Technical Accreditation Council if necessary).
- Provide access to student finance for Level 4 and Level 5 programmes alongside the development of flexible, means tested/income based personal learning accounts for adults (post-25).
- Introduce a more flexible system of learning and qualifications that is not based on variations of 35 week/1 or 2 year programmes, predominantly delivered in traditional 'office hours'. This could include new types of qualifications such as professional regulation and ongoing updated professional training, as well as qualifications which are not tied to one specific level (and could include appropriate elements of Levels 2 - 4).
- Make it easier for smaller units of learning, rather than full qualifications, to be recognised, portable, and for learners to be able to build these over time; making enhanced use of effective Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes.





THEME 3

Entitlement to wellbeing for learners and staff

The next Welsh Government should:

- Support the sector through the consolidation of the existing Mental Health Wellbeing budget within the FE funding allocation, to consistently apply a 'whole college approach' to mental health and apply existing best practice.
- Improve the quality and provision of physical activity in support of active wellbeing, to enhance the emotional and physical resilience of the college community through consistent long-term funding.
- Ensure that all mental health policy and strategy is coherent across all educational settings including work-based learning and takes full account of the Further Education sector. This should include extension of the schools-based counselling service into FE settings for the equivalent age group to which it applies in school settings.
- Support ongoing flexibility in delivery and learning – for example, elements of home-learning and home-working – for learners and staff in any future policy development.

THEME 4

Better skills and business engagement

The next Welsh Government should:

- Ensure that companies' skills planning and business support are more consistently linked and coordinated in both physical and virtual environments, with FEIs operating as locations or hubs for business support and services such as Business Wales.
- Improve the skills element of the Business Wales service by building closer links with FE offering flexible accredited training for SME business owners and their staff.
- Establish a Centre for Vocational Education and Training to enhance dual professionalism, strengthen collaboration between business and FEIs and support the practical application of innovation. The Centre would also provide access to new technology, particularly by SMEs, and strengthen supply chains between SMEs and anchor companies.
- Reassess the impact of Regional Skills Partnerships, the Apprenticeship Advisory Board and the Wales Employment and Skills Board and whether these functions could be streamlined or undertaken more effectively, potentially within or by other organisations. Subject to this assessment, in future, such bodies must have a clear remit and transparent, effective governance procedures to enable independent and evidence-based planning advice for schools, colleges, and universities as well as the development of apprenticeships.





THEME 5

FE workforce fit for the future

The next Welsh Government should:

- Build on the approach to professional learning taken by the new Curriculum for Wales, and support further professionalisation of the FE workforce.
- Legislate for professional standards and minimum requirements of qualification for FE teachers and for the oversight of the Post-16 Workforce Development Framework through amending the existing legislation for the establishment of the Education Workforce Council.
- Explore how an appropriate Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and dual professional model could be applied to FE.
- Extend Education Workforce Council (EWC) responsibilities for regulation of the PGCE and CertED qualifications to cover the post-16 sector in an appropriate way.
- Consider how the dual professional system can be enhanced, learning from best international practice and implement funded CPD systems to enable this, informed by the work of the proposed Centre for Vocational Education and Training.



These Policy Priorities are presented by ColegauCymru, the voice of further education in Wales.

ColegauCymru is the voice of the Further Education sector. We are an education charity which promotes the public benefit of further education in Wales. We believe that all learners have the right to world-class education, delivered in a safe, diverse and inclusive setting and within a sector which supports the wider community, employers and the economy.

As we navigate uncertain times, ColegauCymru will continue to be a positive force for change, seeking to work constructively with the next Welsh Government to deliver the priorities we have identified. We believe that these will help to create a Wales that is better for citizens, values learning and supports a responsible economy.

The future is not yet decided. ColegauCymru looks forward to playing our part in building a better Wales.



Phone

02920 522 500

Email

hello@collegeswales.ac.uk

CollegesWales

Unit 7 Cae Gwyrdd
Greenmeadow Springs
Tongwynlais Cardiff, CF15 7AB

Website

www.colleges.wales