

Skills for a Prosperous Nation

A manifesto for the 2016 Assembly election

Our members



Foreword



The next Welsh Government will face a series of significant challenges. The challenges in the area of further education and skills can only be met by working in partnership with the colleges and training providers of Wales.

In the last decade further education colleges have adapted through a series of mergers, reducing their number by half. We now have larger colleges with the critical mass to be genuine anchors for skills provision in Wales' regional economies, working in close partnership with work-based training providers.

However, the financial settlement the sector has received has been challenging. As a consequence, and to meet the challenges of a world class skills provision, the next government must deliver fair funding for further education.

Despite cuts, the sector has embraced change and stands ready to lead the way in defining a bold new role for post-16 education and training. It can only do this if the values we place on skills, and on vocational and academic results, are matched by commitments, not just in words, but in actions too, by the next government of Wales.

Colleges have led an intense period of radical organisational change. Wales now needs a change in approach to 16-19 education and training in order to underpin the development of a high skill and high wage economy. Colleges mean business and are determined to be at the forefront of Wales' future economic revival. Colleges are close to employers of all shapes and sizes, from SMEs through to large companies such as Airbus, GE, EE and BA as well as social enterprises and the public sector.

Colleges have a thirst to be a key catalyst for change. Working with our social partners we can deliver a sustainable Wales. Together we can help tackle complex social challenges such as the care needs of an ageing population. We can help realise the ambition of a truly bilingual Wales where citizens, whatever their background, can participate in a diverse community of communities where equality of opportunity becomes synonymous with what it means to live in the Wales we want.

This manifesto is as much about how colleges want to change themselves as it is about how government policies have to change. It contains four key policy areas and detailed yet realistic interventions that can bring about an economically prosperous nation that plays to its strengths and values individuals.

The document sets out how the next government and the sector can deliver the ambition of world-class post-16 education and skills for Wales. It is our manifesto for a prosperous nation. On behalf of our members and with our minds placed firmly on the learners, communities and businesses that will benefit from it, I commend it to you.

Judith Evans
Chair, ColegauCymru

Our recommendations to the next Government

These are our four recommendations to the next Government that will help transformed colleges lead a transformed Wales.

1

Drive productivity by raising an employer-led supply of skills

The next Welsh Government should:

- Ring-fence the revenue from the proposed Apprenticeship Levy from 2017 for post-16 skills provision up to Level 5
- Channel investment from the Levy into quality-assured skills provision subject to proper inspection, accreditation and accountability mechanisms
- Invest in part-time further education for the over 25s, enabling individuals to retrain and reskill for new jobs and careers
- Grow the number of traineeships and apprenticeships in Wales, keeping pace with the rest of the UK, whilst ensuring quality and relevance.

2

Improve opportunities of 16 –19 year old learners by providing a full range of options, academic and vocational, across Wales

The next Welsh Government should:

- Undertake an urgent review to identify the settings that deliver a full range of high quality academic and vocational choice to 16-19 year olds, and, using the report's outcomes, reconfigure education and training swiftly, working with local authorities, colleges and schools
- Ensure that learners in Welsh-medium and English-medium sectors receive the same range and choice of learning opportunities
- Ensure that 16-19 year olds are funded on the same basis wherever they study
- Ensure that the performance of all providers of 16-19 education is measured and published in the same way so that young people, parents and carers can make informed choices.

3

Secure higher level vocational education that meets Wales' economic needs

The next Welsh Government should:

- Implement the outcome of the Diamond Review, ensuring the costs of residential full-time higher education provision does not continue to squeeze out other post-16 skills provision
- Expand and improve the range of Higher Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships by permitting the direct funding of Foundation Degrees via existing government work-based learning contracts
- Establish a Technical Accreditation Council - together with the UK and the other devolved governments - in order to ensure that learners have the right range of qualification routes to higher level skills.

4

Meet the needs of learners in all their diversity

The next Welsh Government should:

- Ensure that colleges have the capacity to expand Welsh medium and bilingual provision, with planned progression routes through from school through to university
- Focus funding that is provided for Welsh medium provision in order to allow colleges to deliver more fit for purpose Welsh and bilingual provision that answer the needs of the economy and society
- Work with users and providers to establish an affordable and integrated public transport system to help get students to their place of learning
- Step up work with social groups, employers, parents and schools to reinforce a parity of esteem in the perception of vocational and academic study.

Introduction: Help transformed colleges lead a transformed Wales

We need the next Welsh Government to join us in transforming Wales into a leading edge, highly skilled economy.

Globalisation means relentless change for companies, employees and education providers.

Having transformed the shape of the further education sector, a second phase of transformation should focus on what colleges do - and how they do it. It will require policy changes from government in key areas and a new approach from employers.

Success rates in post-16 education in Wales have soared from 50% in 2000 to 86% in 2013/14.¹ Wales' colleges have a good profile in inspection outcomes by Her Majesty's inspectorate, Estyn. The learner experience in further education is highly positive: 85% of post-16 learners rated their experience of post-16 education in Wales as 'good' or 'very good' in a 2015 national independent survey.²

But change is needed to ensure that we address the skills shortages and mismatches identified by successive UKCES Employers Skills Surveys in Wales and to develop the rounded individuals needed by business.

We need employers to make a greater contribution to skills through co-payment and support in delivering more work placements and apprenticeships.

We need the next Government to address a number of structural issues and support an expansion in traineeships and apprenticeships, and invest in fairer funding for 16-19 year old learners as well as older learners, including establishing a new, more sustainable approach to higher education tuition fees.

Colleges are committed meeting employer needs for current and future demand for skills.

When adequately resourced they will:

- Provide a refreshed skills-based offer geared more closely to the requirements of employers and better suited to our evolving economic social needs
- Prepare 16-19 year olds for 21st century careers and the demands of the workplace
- Value equality, bilingualism and social inclusion education, serving the needs of people of all ages and with diverse needs
- Ensure an equality of esteem between academic and vocational pathways, ensuring progression into jobs and higher education.

Drive productivity by raising the supply of skills



Colleges need to be enabled and supported to be more responsive to employers' complex and changing needs. There is no time to waste: other parts of the UK are already taking a lead in developing a knowledge economy based on skills and innovation.

Wales has the opportunity with a range of large initiatives – the planned Tidal Lagoons in Swansea and Conwy, an M4 Relief Road, rail electrification and Circuit for Wales – to lead the way in delivering the skills for projects that will deliver growth and improved connectivity.

The Bevan Foundation recently set out the stark productivity challenge we face, noting that "our low GVA primarily reflects long-standing ... low skills".³ We need to strengthen Wales' foundational economy where so much of our labour force is based.⁴

Colleges will need to be more fleet of foot to respond to new employer needs. There will be less classroom-style learning in vocational areas and more work-relevant experience. The curriculum will need to be more rapidly refreshed.

The proposed National Apprenticeship Levy will need to be used to invest in skills that will deliver growth and that respond nimbly to employer demand. This move could be truly transformational if handled well; a missed opportunity if it is not.

Colleges should:

- Provide a refreshed skills-based offer geared more closely to the requirements of employers and better suited to our evolving economic social needs.

The next Welsh Government should:

- Ring-fence the revenue from the proposed Apprenticeship Levy from 2017 for post-16 skills provision up to Level 5
- Channel investment from the Levy into quality-assured skills provision subject to proper inspection, accreditation and accountability mechanisms
- Invest in part-time further education for the over 25s, enabling individuals to retrain and reskill for new jobs and careers
- Grow the number of traineeships and apprenticeships in Wales, keeping pace with the rest of the UK, whilst ensuring quality and relevance.

2

Improve opportunities of 16 – 19 year old learners by providing a full range of options, academic and vocational, across Wales

Wales needs a new approach to 16 – 19 education and training that will provide a bridge between school and the world of work and university; an approach that will underpin the development of a high skill and high wage economy.

Wales' young people deserve the opportunity to choose the options that best suit their abilities and aspirations, including a wide range of high quality A level programmes, apprenticeships and vocational courses.

The policy and funding environment needs to be designed around the needs of learners and their future potential careers, rather than the needs of providers.

Two thirds of Wales' 16-19 year olds attend college. Colleges are both academic powerhouses and pivotal vocational centres, and provide high quality pastoral support and independent advice for their learners.⁵ The Oxford Ambassador's Report (2014) found real strengths across colleges in supporting learners with high academic ability, including those with ambitions to go to the most prestigious universities.

Few school environments can offer such a range and too often they are not able to offer their learners independent advice. Estyn's forthcoming review of learner support shows that many schools are not aiding student progression to 16-19 education in the most appropriate way.⁶

We need a system that:

- Supports all students to make informed choices
- Enrols students on a path that suits their needs and goals, in class sizes that are big enough to provide a challenging educational environment and value for money

- Has a curriculum of sufficient breadth and depth to deliver academic qualifications and high level skills suitable for Wales in a global economy
- Allows schools to focus on improving attainment at age 16 in GCSE.

Colleges should:

- Work with Welsh Government, local authorities, schools and business to design and deliver a 16-19 education and training system that is fit for purpose
- Share their academic expertise and strong pastoral support systems to raise standards across Wales.

The next Welsh Government should:

- Undertake an urgent review to identify the settings that deliver a full range of high quality academic and vocational choice to 16-19 year olds, and, using the report's outcomes, reconfigure education and training swiftly, working with local authorities, colleges and schools
- Ensure that learners in Welsh-medium and English-medium sectors receive the same range and choice of learning opportunities
- Ensure that 16-19 year olds are funded on the same basis wherever they study
- Ensure that the performance of all providers of 16-19 education is measured and published in the same way so that young people, parents and carers can make informed choices.

Secure higher level vocational education to meet Wales' economic needs



Wales' higher level skills system is broken, with opaque and inflexible funding routes. Policy changes could help colleges expand higher level skills provision.

In a period of austerity, the amount of government funding for full-time residential undergraduate education has expanded, whilst investment in part-time adult skills at further and higher education levels in colleges and universities have been cut. This is a direct but unintended consequence of the untargeted and unsustainable tuition fees policy.

The OECD⁷ and other organisations have highlighted big deficiencies specifically in vocational and technical higher skills provision in the UK and beyond. A report by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development⁸ highlighted the weaknesses of our current default assumption that there is only one route to higher level skills – the full-time, residential degree. Resolving these issues is a pressing matter.

Though progress has been made in establishing Higher Apprenticeships in Wales, we are behind other parts of the UK in delivering work-relevant higher-level skills programmes. Scotland successfully delivers a high proportion of level 4 and 5 skills in colleges and England is delivering a broader range of Higher Apprenticeships than Wales. Degree Apprenticeships, which lead to a full Bachelor's degree, are becoming a reality across the border, but have not yet got off the ground here in Wales (other than Airbus' self-funded programme).

Colleges should:

- Ensure that their institutions have the capability to deliver level 4 and 5 qualifications and frameworks at a bigger scale
- Partner with universities to ensure learners can progress to levels 6 skills and beyond
- Consider applying for Foundation Degree Awarding powers following successful college QAA Higher Education Reviews in 2016
- Learn from European and global best practice on involving employers in the design and delivery of higher level skills programmes.

The next Welsh Government should:

- Implement the outcome of the Diamond Review, ensuring the costs of residential full-time higher education provision does not continue to squeeze out other post-16 skills provision
- Expand and improve the range of Higher Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships by permitting the direct funding of Foundation Degrees via existing government work-based learning contracts
- Establish a Technical Accreditation Council - together with the UK and the other devolved governments - in order to ensure that learners have the right range of qualification routes to higher level skills.

4

Meet the needs of learners in all their diversity

In order to enable further education to continue to be a centre for social inclusion and equality, changes are needed to learners' transportation, the esteem for vocational learning, and the funding and structure of Welsh-medium education.

Colleges work hard to tackle poverty and address inequality through being open to a diverse range of learners.

Learners who have found their niche at college include vocationally and academically gifted learners, learners with additional needs, learners whose first language is not Welsh or English, young adults and old alike, and part- and full-timers.

Where learners have struggled to achieve in school, colleges have very often helped them turn their lives around and given them the confidence to succeed.

Wales' future is as a fully bilingual nation. To achieve this we need to maintain our focus on developing our people with the linguistic skills for the workplace and for life in society. Our bilingual future depends on students having the Welsh language skills to enter the workplace confident in using their Welsh, socially and professionally.

Colleges should:

- Institute a sense of place that naturally includes Welsh culture and language for all learners and staff
- Develop more flexible learning options including bilingual e-learning and blended learning with the school and university sector
- Actively offer Welsh-medium and bilingual learning opportunities and seek to work with other learning providers to share and develop capacity.

The next Welsh Government should:

- Ensure that colleges have the capacity to expand Welsh medium and bilingual provision, with planned progression routes through from school through to university
- Focus funding that is provided for Welsh medium provision in order to allow colleges to deliver more fit for purpose Welsh and bilingual provision that answer the needs of the economy and society
- Work with users and providers to establish an affordable and integrated public transport system to help get students to their place of learning
- Step up work with social groups, employers, parents and schools to reinforce a parity of esteem in the perception of vocational and academic study.

Who we are



Colegau Cymru

Colegau Cymru / Colleges Wales is the body that represents all 14 further education (FE) colleges and institutions in Wales.

It is constituted as a charity. Its board of directors comprise the chief officers / principals of its members. Its mission is to raise the profile of further education with key decision-makers to improve opportunities for learners in Wales.

Wales' colleges

Nine of the incorporated colleges are general further education colleges or part-tertiary colleges (where the sixth form provision of an area is undertaken by the college). They are: Coleg Gwent, Cardiff & Vale College, Coleg y Cymoedd, Bridgend College, NPTC Group, Gower College Swansea, Pembrokeshire College, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, and Coleg Cambria.

One college, St David's Catholic College, is a faith-based sixth form college.

Three colleges (Coleg Sir Gâr, Coleg Ceredigion, the College Merthyr Tydfil) are limited companies and wholly owned subsidiaries of university groups. The WEA YMCA Community College Cymru is a third sector institution that works in communities. It has no campuses.

As non-profit institutions serving households, colleges belong to their communities and are not owned by local authorities or by government.


- Bridgend College
- Cardiff and Vale College
- Coleg Cambria
- Coleg Ceredigion
- Coleg Gwent
- Coleg Sir Gâr
- Coleg y Cymoedd
- Gower College Swansea
- Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
- NPTC Group
- Pembrokeshire College
- St David's Catholic College
- The College Merthyr Tydfil
- WEA YMCA CC Cymru

Endnotes

1. Colleges are measured on successful completion rates (that is, how many learners who started a course attained their qualifications or learning goals. It is calculated as: completion rate multiplied by attainment). Latest figures published by the Welsh Government on 31 Mar 2015 show the completion rate was 86% in 2013/14. *SDR 51/2015 Learner Outcome measures for FE, WBL & ACL 2013/14*.
2. *Learner Voice Survey Wales 2015*. Available from: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/post-16-learner-voice-wales-survey/?lang=en>
3. *The Shape of Wales to Come*, The Bevan Foundation (Sept 2015).
4. Justin Bentham et al, 'Manifesto for the Foundational Economy', CRESC Working Paper 131 (2013).
5. Whilst further education colleges are measured on successful completion rates, schools are measured on the attainment rate only of those learners who were entered for an examination. That means that those who leave the course early or who are not entered into an exam are not included in schools' performance measures.
6. Estyn's Thematic Review of Learner Support to be published in December 2015.
7. *Skills beyond School – Synthesis Report*, OECD, (2014). Available from: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/Skills-Beyond-School-Synthesis-Report.pdf>
8. The CIPD findings: "suggest that there may be more cost-effective (for both government and individuals) ways of preparing many of our young people for entry into the labour market. Policy-makers need to scrutinise the range of courses offered by the HE sector and seriously consider the ... returns to them. We ... conclude that, in many cases, public funds could more usefully be deployed elsewhere in the education and training system. Our findings suggest that ... a large HE sector will not necessarily lead to the attainment of the knowledge economy so beloved by successive UK governments. See *Over-qualification and skills mismatch in the graduate labour market*, Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, (Aug 2015), p.29.

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