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LEARNER VOICE WALES SURVEY
Sixth-forms pilot

Executive Summary

1.   Introduction to the pilot

1.1   The Learner Voice Wales survey forms part of the 'Responsiveness' element of the Welsh Government's Quality and Effectiveness Framework and was introduced by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2013 to understand and respond to the views of learners in the Further Education (FE), work-based learning (WBL), adult community learning (ACL) and Welsh for adults (WfA) sectors across Wales. The survey findings also:

- Inform Estyn[1] inspections of post-16 learning providers;

- Help providers to understand aspects of their delivery that may need improvement; and

- Allow providers to compare satisfaction with their provision against a national benchmark.

1.2   In order to meet these aims for all post-16 learners across Wales, DfES commissioned Ipsos MORI to explore the logistics of how the survey could be delivered in a school setting, to sixth-form learners. This report details how the pilot was conducted and concludes with suggestions for the future implementation of the survey in schools with sixth-form learners.

2.   Methodology

2.1   The questionnaire that is usually distributed to learners in the FE sector was adapted for use in a sixth-form setting and then cognitively tested with sixth-form learners. Two schools volunteered to take part in the testing in December 2014, one of which was a Welsh-medium school. Some revisions were made following the testing and the course-level loop was extended from

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[1] Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, responsible for inspecting quality and standards in education and training in Wales

three to five subjects.

2.2 Ten schools in South Wales were then invited to take part in the pilot survey. The survey was made available to sixth-form learners in these schools to answer online between 2nd -27th March 2015, in English and in Welsh. A paper version was made available for the schools to download from a secure webpage but it was not used.

2.3 Completed surveys were received from 816 sixth-form learners, which represented a participation rate of 43 per cent of the total sixth-form population in the eight schools that took part. Responses in Welsh made up one per cent of the completed surveys, as in the main Learner Voice Wales survey[2]. The average length was 11 minutes and 10 seconds and a higher proportion of surveys were completed on a mobile device than in the main Learner Voice Wales survey.

2.4 While feedback about the questionnaire was positive from both learners and the schools, participation rates were lower than in the main survey. This would need to be addressed if the survey is rolled out across Wales, to ensure that the findings are representative. The highest participation rates were from the school where an Academic Registrar, rather than teacher, took charge of engaging the learners. They achieved a high participation rate by booking each tutor group into the IT suite during 'study periods' (time when there is no other lessons scheduled and which the students use for completing homework or coursework) to complete the survey and otherwise telling the learners to complete it at home.

2.5 Overall, the fieldwork period went very well: no queries or complaints were made by the schools and they did not encounter any technical difficulties in using the online survey. More detail on the methodology is given in Chapter 3 and the questionnaire used in the pilot can be seen in Annex A.

3.   Matching to learner datasets

3.1 Ahead of fieldwork taking place for the main survey the Welsh Government provides an extract from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR). This is so learners can be matched -as they take part in the survey - to the courses they are recorded as studying. As described in more detail in Chapter 4, the Welsh Government has different data requirements for schools and so there is no comparable dataset for sixth-form students in Wales. As live matching could therefore not take place, a course-level loop was built from the courses that were known to be available for sixth-form learners in Wales to study. To determine the effectiveness of the loop, the participating schools were asked for a dataset of their learners' details so that retrospective matching could be undertaken.

3.2 Three of the eight schools that participated in the survey submitted a dataset. These showed that the loop captured 96 per cent of courses that were being studied by the learners that responded to the survey (and which were successfully retrospectively matched). A decision should be made before the

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[2] It should be borne in mind that the survey was administered in schools in South Wales only, with one Welsh-medium school included in the pilot.

future roll out of the survey as to whether the loop is accurate enough or if live matching (as for the main survey) is preferable.

3.3   Data on the learner profile of each school is needed, even if the built course-level loop is deemed accurate without needing to retrospectively match survey responses, in order to weight the data. Without weighting, the findings cannot be considered to be representative or comparable. As such, schools will need to ensure that the fields are filled in consistently because, while the level of completeness of the fields in the three datasets that were received was high, they were not filled in a consistent manner. The research agency would also need to receive them with sufficient time for any cleaning to be completed.

4.   Reporting the findings

4.1   Chapter 5 has more on each of the three individualised reports that were made available for the schools to download from an online portal. In brief, these were:

4.2   A PowerPoint report of 27 slides comprised of composite scores for the main 'themes' in the survey (for example, 'Information and Advice') by first and second tier Sector Subject Areas, response to each question (for example, the per cent saying 'very good' through to 'very poor' for Q1) and benchmarks (consisting of the average 'very good' response across the eight schools);

4.3   An Excel report, which broke down answers to all of the questions by key learner demographics (gender, school year and qualification type) and first and second tier Sector Subject Areas;

4.4   An Excel sheet of the verbatim answers given by their learners to the two open-ended questions in the survey (Q10 and Q11): these ask learners to comment on the best thing about their provider and suggestions for improvement.

4.5   Feedback from the schools indicated that the PowerPoint report was most easily and readily used: indeed some had already shown it to colleagues and other stakeholders.

4.6   An overview of the findings is also provided in Chapter 5, including a discussion of composite scores, overall satisfaction and a comparison of verbatim responses given in the pilot to those received from FE students in the 2013/14 survey.

4.7   Composite scores summarise the views of learners across a battery of questions relating to the same theme. These findings can be used by the schools to determine broad areas for improvement. In the pilot, 'Teaching and Training', which is calculated from responses to the battery of questions forming Q6 and which are asked for each course being studied (in the course-level loop), was the theme with the highest proportion of 'very good' responses (62 per cent) across the eight schools.

4.8   In terms of overall satisfaction, 57 per cent of sixth-form learners said that their experience was 'very good' or 'good'. In terms of satisfaction with courses, 77 per cent of sixth-form learners in the pilot said they were as expected or better

4.9   Analysis was undertaken to compare the verbatim responses given by sixth-form and Further Education learners to the two open-ended questions in the survey. It is important to note that only very broad comparisons between these two learner groups can be drawn, given that response to the sixth-form survey was not representative and relies on far fewer responses than for the main survey.

4.10   For both sectors, the 'best thing' about their provider related to aspects of learning. Within 'learning', FE learners commented on having enjoyable courses, gaining or learning new skills, liking the assignments or practical work components, and having small class sizes. While sixth-form learners also mentioned having enjoyable courses, they tended to focus more on having study periods in which to work or revise and the freedom to study at their own pace.

4.11   In terms of areas for improvement, the verbatim responses from both FE and sixth-form learners suggested that 'teaching and learning' was of the highest priority. In particular, sixth-formers wanted more help and support from teachers and requested changes to the Welsh Baccalaureate.

5.   School feedback and rolling out the survey

5.1   The participating schools were asked to provide feedback on the pilot, in order to inform suggestions for change ahead of the survey being rolled out across all sixth-forms in Wales. Five of the schools provided responses in writing and these are summarised in Chapter 6. Briefly, schools reported that:

- their sixth-form learners were happy to take part in the survey;

- the Survey Guidance was useful for reminders about how the survey needed to be conducted; and

- the PowerPoint report was the most visually appealing and had already been used to feedback to students, staff and governors.

5.2   The final chapter of this report presents a summary of the key challenges of the pilot and suggestions for change should the Learner Voice Wales survey be rolled out to all sixth-form learners in Wales. It is split between recommendations for survey processes, methodology and reporting. Mainly it will be important to:

- improve school engagement with the survey, perhaps by asking an intermediary that is familiar with schools in a particular region to communicate on an ad-hoc basis with them;

- achieve a representative response and obtain learner datasets needed for matching and weighting; and

- discuss further what level of granularity is useful to the schools in terms of providing findings by first and second tier Sector Subject Areas and courses.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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