
The impact of the Learning and Skills Measure on vulnerable learners

April 2018

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Contents	Page
Introduction	1
Background	1
Main findings	3
Recommendations	5
Learner outcomes	6
Learner provision	12
Curriculum planning	12
Learner support	15
Personal support	15
Learning coaches	16
Impartial careers advice and guidance	16
Leadership and management	17
Schools and colleges	17
Local authorities and regional consortia	17
Appendix 1: Evidence base	19
Glossary	20
References	22

Introduction

This report is published in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit to Estyn for 2016-2017. The report provides evidence relating to recommendation 8 of the Children, Young People and Education Committee review of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure (National Assembly for Wales, 2009) in 2012. Recommendation 8 states that:

'The Welsh Government should evaluate the impact of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure on vulnerable learners, including learners in mainstream schools with additional learning needs and vulnerable learners in further education.' (National Assembly for Wales, 2012, p. 41)

For the purpose of this remit, the term 'vulnerable learners' means learners with special educational needs (SEN), learners eligible for free schools meals (eFSM), looked after children (LAC), and learners educated other than at school (EOTAS) including in pupil referral units (PRUs).

The report summarises evidence collected from inspections and thematic surveys over the last three years. Interviews with all four regional consortia and with four local authorities also contributed to the evidence base. For further information, see the appendix.

Background

The Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009¹ (National Assembly for Wales, 2009) aims to ensure that learners in Wales have access to a broad and balanced curriculum and to learning support services that will help them overcome barriers to their learning. The standards under the Measure were introduced in phases to ensure that it was fully implemented by September 2012.

Secondary schools and further education colleges have a statutory duty under the Measure to widen choice and provide learner support services for young people aged 14 to 19. The Measure made an individual learning pathway framework statutory through the 14-19 Learning Pathway Policy. This framework consists of six key elements arranged under the two distinct aspects of learner provision and learner support.

Learner provision consists of three elements which are:

- individual learning pathway – to meet the needs of each individual, including formal, non-formal and informal strands

¹ Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009: Learner Support Services and Learning Pathway Document Guidance

- wider choice and flexibility of courses – leading to qualifications from a local curriculum
- wider learning from the learning core – including skills, knowledge, attitudes values and experiences that all 14 to 19-year-olds will need whatever their pathway

Learner support consists of three elements, which are:

- access to learning coach
- access to personal support
- impartial careers advice and guidance

All learners in maintained secondary and special schools and in further education colleges, including those with additional learning needs, have the same entitlement to the individual learning pathway framework. However, there is a lack of clarity within the Measure as to the entitlement of learners in EOTAS provision, including in pupil referral units (PRUs), to the learning pathway framework. Learners in EOTAS provision are disapplied from the national curriculum.

In 2012, three years after the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 (National Assembly for Wales, 2009) was first introduced but before it was fully implemented, the Children, Young People and Education Committee carried out a review of the Measure (National Assembly for Wales, 2012). The review found that evidence indicated that the 14-19 Learning Pathway Policy, together with the Measure, had made a positive difference to the choice of subjects available to learners and to the level of support they received.

Main findings

- 1 Nearly all schools plan a curriculum that meets the requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 (National Assembly for Wales, 2009). However, the curriculum in secondary schools is more limited than it was two years ago. This is a result of many schools reducing the number of option subjects to allow for extra curriculum time for the new GCSE mathematics qualification and a more extensive skills challenge certificate (as part of the Welsh Baccalaureate), and to increase the emphasis on GCSE English/Welsh, mathematics and science due to changes to performance measures. In a few schools, the choice of vocational courses has also been reduced and this impacts on the appropriateness of the curriculum available for many vulnerable learners.
- 2 Although vulnerable learners have equal access to the curriculum, schools enter vulnerable learners on average for fewer qualifications than their peers. Learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and learners with special educational needs (SEN) are entered for two fewer GCSEs on average than learners who have no SEN or are not eFSM.
- 3 Since the introduction of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure, standards achieved by vulnerable learners at key stage 4 in schools and in further education colleges have generally improved. There has been an improvement in the proportion of vulnerable learners who achieve key qualification performance indicators. However, in 2017 the proportion of eFSM learners and SEN learners achieving the level 2 threshold declined. The decline is not as marked in the level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and mathematics. The decline in level 2 threshold may be due to the change to performance measures where key skills qualifications no longer count as part of the level 2 threshold. The gap in achievement between vulnerable learners and their peers in schools and further education colleges has not narrowed significantly for these key indicators and remains too wide.
- 4 In nearly all colleges, leaders plan the curriculum well and offer a broad range of academic and vocational courses at levels that provide learners with flexibility and choice. However, the number of level 1 courses offered by colleges is reducing. This is due to an increased emphasis on delivering level 3 qualifications. This impacts on a few vulnerable learners who rely on level 1 courses for progression to further learning at level 2 and above. A few colleges are redirecting entry level and level 1 learners towards work-based learning provision to minimise this impact.
- 5 A few schools, where the curriculum is not able to meet the needs of individual vulnerable learners, collaborate well with further education colleges and other providers to create bespoke learning pathways and widen the subject choice available to learners. However, in general, schools do not promote the full range of available technical or vocational courses at further education colleges or other providers to all learners.

- 6 Personal support in schools and further education colleges is generally of a high quality and learners benefit from a wide range of intervention strategies that help them achieve successful outcomes. In general, learners are more engaged with their learning and their attendance rates have improved, although the attendance of vulnerable learners remains too low overall. Where additional support is less effective, this is often due to poor tracking and identification systems rather than to the quality of the support. In schools and further education colleges, the support provided by learning coaches is generally effective for learners with SEN and those from other vulnerable groups. However, there has been a steady decline in the availability of learning support provided by learning coaches due to funding reductions.
- 7 The effectiveness of careers advice and guidance varies too much between schools. In around half of schools, individual careers interviews by Careers Wales are only provided for learners with additional learning needs or for those identified as being at risk of not being engaged in education, employment or training. Only a minority of schools provide learners with an extensive range of advice, including, for example, information regarding apprenticeships. Often, this is because teachers do not know enough about this pathway. For a few learners, this has an adverse effect on their ability to select options that meet their future aspirations.
- 8 The majority of schools and all colleges evaluate performance data and monitor individual learners' progress. For example, colleges use the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) to identify learners from deprived areas and to measure their progress against their peers
- 9 Local authorities commission regional consortia to provide support and challenge to schools through the work of the challenge advisers. For example, challenge advisers monitor how schools use grants such as the pupil development grant and the education improvement grant. Recently, regional consortia have appointed officers with responsibility for improving outcomes for eFSM learners. However, regional consortia's processes for monitoring and tracking the progress of specific groups of vulnerable learners and reporting the findings to the local authority is less well established. Overall, the role of the regional consortia in supporting schools and local authorities with regard to vulnerable learners is variable and there is no established common or consistent practice.
- 10 Most local authorities track the progress of LAC learners centrally and have secure processes to monitor their progress through LAC co-ordinators or achievement leaders. However, the tracking of a few LAC learners who are placed out of county is less effective.

Recommendations

Schools, further education colleges, regional consortia and local authorities should raise the attainment of vulnerable learners so that it is more in line with their peers by:

- R1 Tracking and monitoring the achievements of vulnerable learners more closely, and analysing data on groups of vulnerable learners better
- R2 Improving their attendance and ensuring that they have access to targeted support
- R3 Evaluating the curriculum to consider the extent to which it meets the needs of vulnerable learners and offers them opportunities to gain appropriate qualifications

Learner outcomes

- 11 Since the introduction of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure, standards achieved by vulnerable learners at key stage 4 in schools and in further education colleges have generally improved. There has been an improvement in the proportion of vulnerable learners who achieve key qualification performance indicators. However, in 2017 the proportion of eFSM learners and SEN learners achieving the level 2 threshold in schools declined. This may be due to the change to performance measures where key skills qualifications no longer count as part of the level 2 threshold. Before 2017, key skills qualifications could contribute up to 90% of the level 2 threshold. Learners could attain the level 2 threshold by obtaining six key skills qualifications and just one other qualification at level 2.
- 12 Learners in schools and further education colleges who face the greatest barriers to learning have benefited from the introduction of the learning pathways framework. In general, they are more engaged and their attendance rates have improved. In secondary schools, since 2013, the attendance of eFSM learners has improved more quickly than the attendance of other peers. However, currently around 37% of eFSM learners in key stage 4 have less than 90% attendance (14% for other learners) and only 37% attend for better than 95% of the time (62% for other learners). This is a concern because there is a close relationship between attendance and attainment.

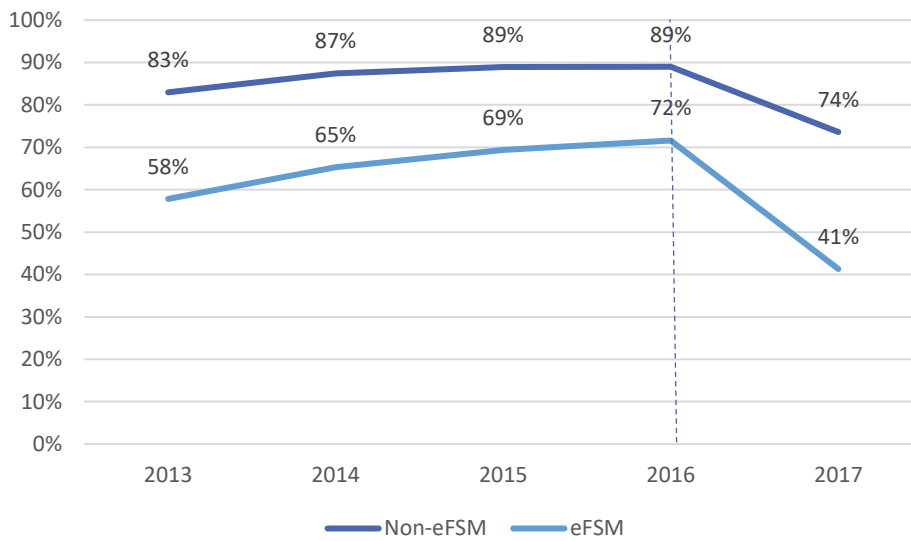
Figure 1: Percentage of key stage 4 learners with attendance below 90% and above 95% for non-FSM and eFSM learners, 2013-2017

	Below 90% Attendance		Above 95% Attendance	
	Non-eFSM	eFSM	Non-eFSM	eFSM
2013	21%	48%	53%	28%
2014	17%	43%	58%	33%
2015	16%	41%	60%	34%
2016	14%	38%	62%	36%
2017	14%	37%	62%	37%

Sources: Welsh Government (2017b & 2017c)

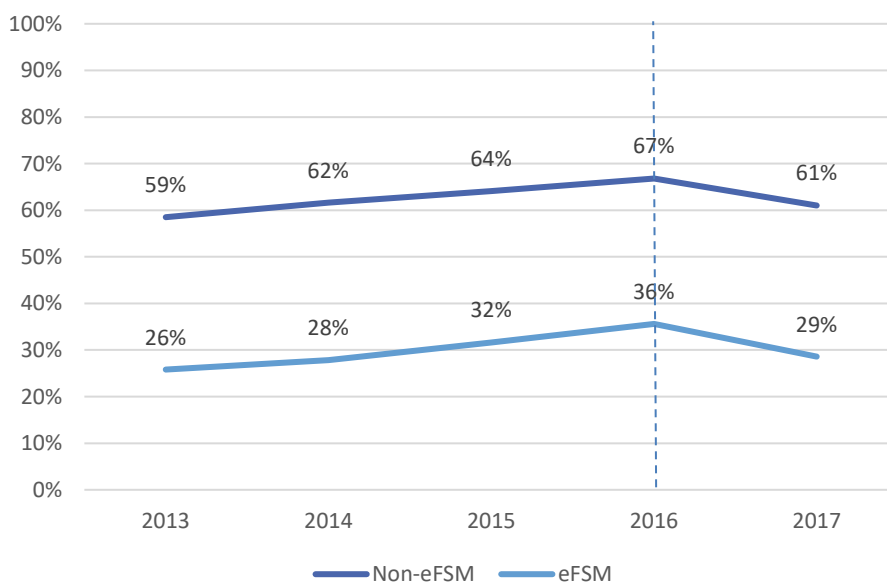
- 13 In schools judged as excellent or good for their current performance, vulnerable learners benefit from the support provided by the school. Standards achieved by this group of learners is consistently in line with, or higher than, the family or national average achievement for eFSM learners.

Figure 2: Percentage of key stage 4 learners achieving level 2 threshold by FSM, 2013-2017²



Source: Welsh Government (2017d)

Figure 3: Percentage of key stage 4 learners achieving level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics by FSM, 2013-2017



Source: Welsh Government (2017d)

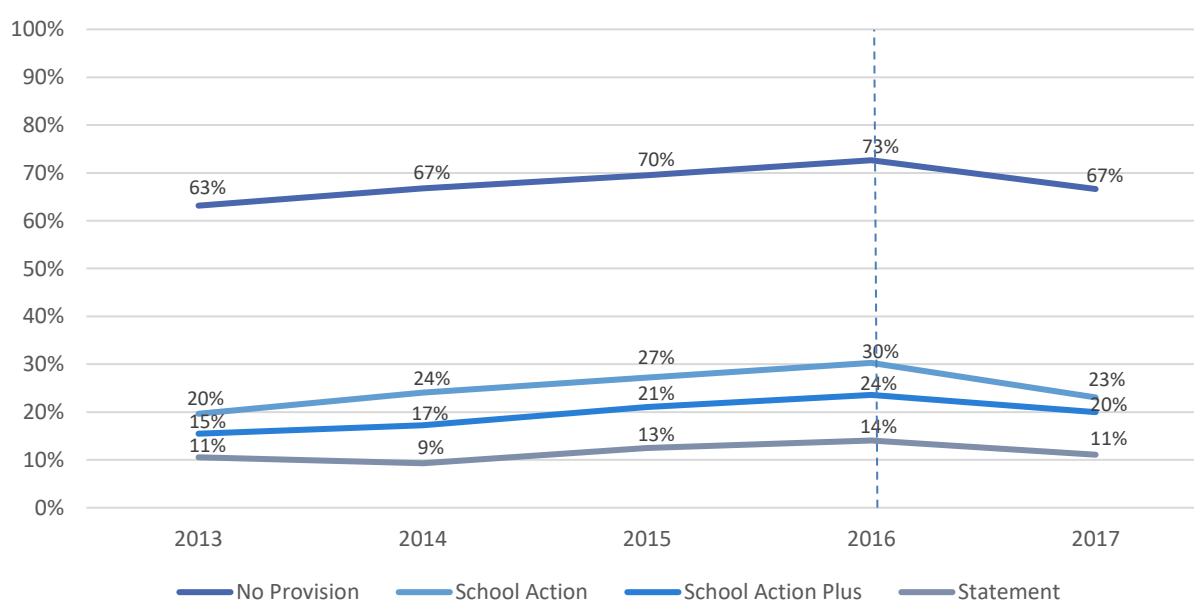
- 14 The trend in figure 2 shows that between 2013 and 2016 there has been a steady increase in the achievements of all learners. This increase is higher for learners who are eFSM, with data showing a 13.8 percentage points improvement in the level 2 threshold across the three years. The level 2 threshold including English or Welsh

² Several key changes have been made to the key stage 4 performance measures for 2016-2017, which impacts on comparisons with previous years.

first language and mathematics has also improved, with an increase of 9.8 percentage points. In 2017, performance in the level 2 threshold declined by over 30 percentage points for eFSM learners. In 2017, the proportion of eFSM learners achieving the level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and mathematics fell by eight percentage points. This decline in performance for eFSM learners in the level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and mathematics is not as notable as that for the level 2 threshold. It reflects schools' increased focus on improving English/Welsh and mathematics through providing additional curriculum time and targeted intervention work at key stage 4.

- 15 The gap between the achievements of eFSM learners and the achievements of their peers narrowed between 2013 and 2016. The greatest improvement had been in the level 2 threshold, where the gap had narrowed from 27.1 percentage points to 17.4 percentage points. However, in 2017, the gap widened to 32.3 percentage points due to the decline in the performance of eFSM learners. The gap in the achievement of the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics shows a similar pattern, with smaller improvements from 2013 to 2016 and, in 2017, a similar 32.4 percentage points' difference between the number of eFSM learners achieving this level in comparison to those learners who are non-eFSM. The gap between eFSM learners and their peers remains too wide.

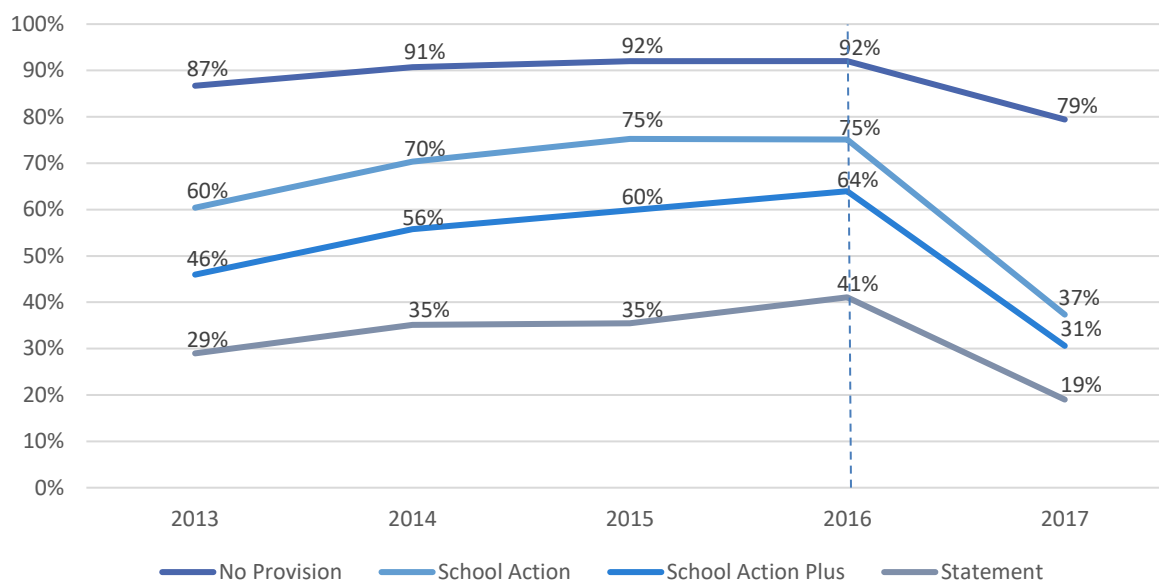
Figure 4: Key stage 4 outcomes for level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics for learners by special educational need provision³



Sources: Welsh Government (2017c), Welsh Government (2017e)

³ Several key changes have been made to the key stage 4 performance measures for 2016-2017, which impacts on comparisons with previous years.

Figure 5: Key stage 4 outcomes for level 2 threshold for learners by special educational need provision⁴



Sources: Welsh Government (2017c), Welsh Government (2017e)

- 16 Figure 5 shows that, between 2013 and 2017, there has been a small improvement in the proportion of learners with SEN achieving level 2 including English/Welsh and mathematics. However, there is a notable decline in the proportion of SEN learners achieving the level 2 threshold in 2017, compared with 2013 for all SEN provision (Figure 4).

Figure 6: Key stage 4 outcomes for learners educated other than at school (not including those in pupil referral units), 2016-2017

	Level 1 threshold	Level 2 threshold	Level 2 threshold including English, Welsh first language and mathematics
2016	37%	7%	1%
2017	21%	3%	2%

Sources: Welsh Government (2017c), Welsh Government (2017f)

- 17 Figure 6 data shows that, in 2017, while the proportion of EOTAS learners achieving the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics improved slightly, the proportion achieving the level 1 or level 2 threshold declined by 16 percentage points and four percentage points respectively compared with 2016 figures. The collection of learner outcomes for EOTAS learners is new and there is only one year's comparison of data. EOTAS learners do not achieve as well as their peers in schools. Although many have useful opportunities to study vocational courses, and this motivates them to do well, too few achieve to their full potential.

⁴ Several key changes have been made to the key stage 4 performance measures for 2016-2017, which impacts on comparisons with previous years.

- 18 LAC learners also achieve notably fewer qualifications than their peers at key stage 4. In 2017, while 69% achieved the level 1 threshold and 21% the level 2 threshold, only 12% achieved the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics (Welsh Government, 2018). For the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics, this represents a decline back to the performance achieved in 2013. At all key stages of education, LAC learners do not achieve as well as their peers and almost a third leave care with no qualifications. This is in part due to their special educational needs, the lack of stability in placements, and to the changes to their educational setting.

Figure 7: Key stage 4 outcomes for LAC learners 2013-2017

	Level 1 threshold	Level 2 threshold	Level 2 threshold including English, Welsh first language and mathematics
2013	12%
2014	17%
2015	18%
2016	23%
2017	69%	21%	12%

.. denotes that data is not available

Source: Welsh Government (2018)

- 19 Further education colleges use the Welsh index of multiple deprivation (WIMD) to identify and measure the progress and achievements of learners from areas of deprivation. Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) data for further education colleges shows that, while the rate at which learners from deprived areas successfully complete their courses has improved over the last five years, it is still consistently below the all Wales average, and below the success rates of learners from the least deprived areas. Furthermore, despite the improvement, the gap between the success rates of learners from the most deprived areas and the all Wales average, and learners from the least deprived areas, has widened over this same period.

Figure 8: Success rates¹ for learner in further education colleges against the WIMD deciles success, 2013-2017

WIMD decile	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
10% most deprived	83.6%	83.7%	84.3%	83.7%	85.9%
10-20% most deprived	83.8%	84.7%	84.9%	84.6%	85.8%
20-30% most deprived	83.6%	84.9%	84.9%	84.7%	85.7%
30-40% most deprived	83.8%	86.0%	84.6%	85.4%	86.1%
40-50% most deprived	84.0%	85.8%	85.7%	86.0%	86.3%
40-50% least deprived	84.1%	86.1%	85.9%	86.3%	86.6%
30-40% least deprived	84.6%	86.4%	86.5%	86.3%	86.5%
20-30% least deprived	85.7%	87.0%	86.5%	87.3%	87.6%
10-20% least deprived	86.3%	88.4%	86.5%	88.1%	87.3%
10% least deprived	84.9%	87.5%	88.1%	88.5%	88.1%
All Wales	84%	84%	86%	86%	86%

¹ (The number of learning activities attained and completed divided by the number of learning activities terminated)

Source: Welsh Government (2017b)

- 20 The proportion of young people remaining in education and training after Year 11 has shown a steady improvement since the introduction of learning pathways framework. The number of Year 11 school leavers who are known to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) has fallen from 4.2% in 2012 to 2.0% in 2016 (Welsh Government, 2017g). How much of this improvement is due to the introduction of the learning pathways framework is unclear. Other initiatives, such as the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (Welsh Government, 2013) at a national level, and behaviour, support and attendance initiatives introduced by schools, have all contributed to this reduction in the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training.

Learner provision

Curriculum planning

- 21 Overall, schools plan curricula that meet the requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure (National Assembly for Wales, 2009). They offer a wide enough choice of subjects and monitor learner achievement and progress. Learners who are eFSM and LAC have as equal access to the curriculum as their peers. Recently, the range of options offered to key stage 4 learners has narrowed due to the increase in lesson time devoted to the core subjects of English/Welsh and mathematics. In addition, schools find it difficult to provide option subjects where fewer than eight learners select a particular subject and this tends to impact disproportionately on vocational courses.
- 22 The choice of vocational courses in a few schools is limited including at level 1. In addition, the options for level 1 courses in colleges are reducing as level 2 and 3 courses become the benchmark. Where there are level 1 courses, these tend to be generic, such as construction skills courses, rather than for specific trades, for example plumbing or electrical installation. For vulnerable learners, who often rely on level 1 courses to help them to progress in their learning, this reduces the options and choices available to them. A few colleges are redirecting entry level and level 1 learners to alternative work-based learning provision, such as engagement or traineeship programmes to minimise such impact.
- 23 A few schools, where the curriculum is not able to meet the needs of individual vulnerable learners, often collaborate well with further education colleges and other providers to create bespoke learning pathways and offer broader choice of learning options that meet the requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure (National Assembly for Wales, 2009). However, collaboration between schools and colleges remains variable across Wales. In general, 11-18 schools place too much emphasis on promoting the continuation of learners' education into their sixth form rather than exploring fully the range of available options such as academic, technical or vocational courses at further education colleges or other providers.
- 24 Further education colleges are suitably located in many areas across Wales, and a minority offer schools a range of options for 14 to 16-year-olds, particularly vocational courses. However, places for these learners are more limited than places for 16 to 19-year-olds, due to demand for spaces in workshops and salons. Despite the options being available, a few vulnerable learners are reluctant to travel from their usual educational setting and this further restricts the choices available to them. In addition, schools face challenges with the cost of travel to college sites and with making arrangements that allow for travel as well as lesson time.
- 25 In schools, the most effective learning pathways for more vulnerable learners are often those where there is collaboration between the school additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCO), parents, the learner, and professional agencies such as health officials and Careers Wales. This allows learners to make informed decisions based on a broad range of advice that includes careers, education, personal, health and social considerations.

- 26 In nearly all colleges, leaders plan the curriculum well and offer a broad range of academic and vocational courses at levels that provide learners with flexibility and choice. They monitor learner progress efficiently, and swiftly identify and support those who are in danger of dropping out of courses.
- 27 Since the introduction of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure (National Assembly for Wales, 2009) the proportion of learners aged 14 to 16 who access provision in further education colleges has steadily reduced. This is probably because many schools have invested in facilities and in staff to deliver more vocational courses on the school site.⁵
- 28 Most secondary schools and all colleges plan intervention and support sessions to make sure that the impact on learners accessing their usual curriculum is minimised. Most withdraw learners from non-core subject lessons and vary the times of the withdrawal to minimise disruption to learning. Nearly all secondary schools make appropriate provision for learners with SEN. They adapt the curriculum for these learners well through the annual review process.
- 29 Despite having equal access to curriculum choices, schools enter vulnerable learners, on average, for fewer qualifications than their peers. Overall, learners who are eFSM and those who are identified with SEN are entered for two fewer GCSEs than learners who have no SEN and are not eFSM (Welsh Government 2017c, 2017f). For a few learners this may be an appropriate decision, allowing them to achieve where they are most likely to do well and to concentrate on subjects where they are more skilled or confident. However, for these learners, the wider choice of subjects offered through the measure has not necessarily resulted in better outcomes and achievements.
- 30 Vulnerable learners are more likely to be entered by schools for Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications than their peers (Welsh Government 2017c, 2017f). This is often an appropriate choice that matches their interests and future ambitions. However, the use of BTEC reduced in 2015-2016 for all groups with a corresponding rise in entries for GCSEs. This reduction indicates that the choice of courses offered is often influenced by how they contribute to performance indicators for the provider rather than being necessarily the best choice for individual learners.
- 31 Where learners are struggling to cope in mainstream schools, and the support provided has not been successful, local authorities withdraw these learners from the school. Many are appropriately placed in PRUs. A few of these learners make good progress in the more supportive PRU environment with tailored provision planned to meet their specific needs. Although PRUs do not have to provide a full curriculum, most offer a basic curriculum that includes English, mathematics, personal and social education (PSE) and information and communication technology (ICT). However, the national curriculum is disapplied for PRUs and this may result in learners not receiving their entitlement to a wider choice of subjects under the Learning and Skills

(Wales) Measure.

- 32 Although many learners in PRUs take vocational options at key stage 4, the range of subjects they have to choose from is often limited and varies greatly between PRUs. Where learners are dual registered in a PRU and a mainstream school, many of the PRUs liaise well with the school to allow the learner to continue with their learning pathways. In these cases, the school provides the learner with appropriate reading material and exercises to help them keep up with the work while they are at the PRU. However, in a few schools, work and resources from the school are slow in reaching learners in PRUs. As a result, many of these learners do not fulfil their potential or gain the qualifications they are capable of achieving.
- 33 Most LAC learners have the same opportunities as their peers with regard to access to a wide curriculum and support provision to help them achieve to their potential. However, positive learning outcomes for these learners are dependent on having stability in educational placements. When foster placements change, these children may be moved outside the catchment area of their current school and their learning pathways are often disrupted. They often require additional emotional support and the time needed for this narrows the course options available to them. In a few local authorities, there is insufficient account taken of the educational needs of the young person, as foster placements take priority.

Learner support

Personal support

- 34 Nearly all schools provide support to help learners overcome personal, social, emotional and physical situations that may present barriers to their learning or prevent them from realising their potential. Personal support helps learners find ways to overcome the barriers to becoming independent learners.
- 35 In nearly all secondary schools, the provision for personal support for vulnerable learners is the strongest aspect of learner support. Many schools have effective systems to deliver personal support. Staff work well with other agencies to help learners overcome barriers presented by home circumstances or by physical or mental health challenges.
- 36 Many schools use assessment and tracking systems to identify learners in need of additional support. When learners are not achieving as well as they could or are falling behind in their work, they provide support through a variety of ways, including from classroom assistants and the school learning support department. Where additional support is less effective, this is generally due to poor tracking and identification systems rather than to the quality of the support provided.
- 37 Further education colleges use a wide range of assessments and other information on prospective learners to identify vulnerable learners at an early stage. Support staff use an extensive variety of intervention strategies including in-class support, out-of-class support, and one-to-one and group support to make sure that all learners have the best opportunities to succeed.
- 38 Nearly all learners with SEN receive well-planned support as they progress from school to further education college. Colleges work well in partnership with schools, agencies and Careers Wales to collate information that allows them to offer learners suitable academic or vocational choices.
- 39 Personal support for learners educated in EOTAS provision, including PRUs, is generally of a high quality. Learners benefit from appropriate nurturing relationships with staff who have a secure understanding of their needs. Learners develop skills in understanding their barriers to education and learn how to manage their emotions and behaviour. As a result, they develop their ability to learn.
- 40 Support for LAC learners is generally strong in many schools and particularly strong in special schools. Most special schools have staff who are well-trained in topics such as attachment, aspects of child development, emotional health and coaching. A very few special schools have delivered training for all staff on bereavement, trauma and loss, but staff in most special schools do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of these specific aspects of support.

Learning coaches

- 41 Learning coaches have been a feature of nearly all secondary schools and further education colleges since the requirements of the Measure. The role of the learning coach is to guide, support, coach and mentor learners so that they can make better informed decisions, identify learning goals and become independent learners. Coaching should take account of the needs of the individual young person and provision should be tailored to their needs.
- 42 In many schools and colleges, the learning coaching provided by designated learning coaches is generally effective for learners with SEN and those from other vulnerable groups. Over time, they help learners to improve their attendance, behaviour and performance. Where learning coaches have a learner support role, learners from vulnerable groups achieve well.
- 43 However, over recent years the availability of learning coaches has reduced due to the reduction in available funding. Schools have generally compensated for this by tracking vulnerable learners carefully and by focusing more on meeting their needs better through general learning support.

Impartial careers advice and guidance

- 44 Recent inspections and thematic reports (Estyn, 2013; Estyn, 2014; Estyn, 2015a; Estyn 2015b; Estyn, 2016a; Estyn, 2016b; Estyn 2017b) show that the quality and impact of careers advice and guidance are variable between schools. In around half of schools, individual careers interviews by Careers Wales are now only provided for learners with additional learning needs or those identified as being at risk of not being engaged in education, employment or training. Only a minority of schools provide learners with an extensive range of advice, including for example information regarding apprenticeships. Often, this is because teachers do not know enough about this pathway. In a few schools, careers advice and guidance on subject choices and options for future study are not co-ordinated well enough for vulnerable learners at key stage 4. For a few learners, this has an adverse effect on their ability to select subject options that meet their future aspirations.
- 45 Many colleges receive valuable support from Careers Wales advisers to help their most vulnerable learners select appropriate and relevant courses. In addition, a minority of colleges also employ dedicated careers guidance specialists. However, Estyn's report into the progress and destinations of college learners in independent living skills provision (Estyn, 2017a) shows that planning for the future of these learners after they leave college, does not start early enough. Early planning for these vulnerable learners concentrates too much on the next step of education rather than on a longer-term destination. This means that advice along the learners' educational journeys is not always accurate enough for them to focus on the particular skills they will need or the best courses and subjects for them to study.
- 46 Careers Wales provide ongoing support, advice and guidance for learners in EOTAS provision, including PRUs. However, Careers Wales have little influence on the curriculum and learning pathways for these learners. As a result, the impact of the advice and guidance they provide is limited, and learners often choose from a narrow range of available options rather than following an appropriate and planned learning and progression pathway.

Leadership and management

Schools and colleges

- 47 A minority of schools co-ordinate learner support services well through a whole-school approach. These schools target learning coaching and personal support to the learners that most need them and can demonstrate the impact through an analysis of learner outcomes. Staff at these schools are well trained, and make effective use of external partners and collaborative arrangements to support the provision.
- 48 However, the effectiveness of the strategic direction for learning support varies between schools. In a few schools, the different elements of learner support services are not well co-ordinated and do not work together effectively. Although many schools have tracking systems to monitor the progress of learners and those who need additional support, a minority of schools do not evaluate the effectiveness of learner support services and interventions. In particular, careers advice and guidance are not co-ordinated or tracked well enough. There is a lack of a planned approach to advising learners on subject choices and options for future study at Year 9 and Year 11. In addition, too few schools use the pupil development grant (PDG) to support more able learners to achieve their full potential.
- 49 In nearly all colleges, senior managers monitor the performance of learning support staff well. They have well-established management information systems that track learners' attendance, progress and performance. College senior managers quality assure tutorials where teachers meet with individual learners to discuss their performance and progress. Teachers use data well to agree improvement targets with learners and record them on individual learning plans that are reviewed at regular intervals. They use tutorials to help learners develop their career planning skills to inform their future beyond the college.
- 50 Nearly all colleges have robust policies and procedures for staff to intervene promptly if patterns emerge that indicate individuals need support. All colleges monitor the performance of vulnerable groups, such as minority ethnic learners and LAC learners, well. Most have good systems in place to ensure that targeted support for these groups is effective.

Local authorities and regional consortia

- 51 Although monitoring and tracking the progress and achievements of vulnerable learners is an established part of the work of schools and colleges, the overall statutory responsibility for these learners rests with the local authority. The role of the regional consortia in supporting schools and local authorities with regard to these learners varies and there is no common or consistent practice.
- 52 Most local authorities commission the consortia to provide support and challenge to schools through the work of the challenge advisers. Part of this role is to question the provision for vulnerable learners alongside that of their peers. Challenge

advisers monitor how well schools use grants such as the pupil development grant (PDG) and the education improvement grant (EIG). Recently, regional consortia have appointed officers with responsibility for improving outcomes for eFSM learners. However, processes for monitoring and tracking the progress of specific groups of vulnerable learners and reporting the findings to the local authority are less well established.

- 53 Whole-school data at key stage 4 is monitored between the local authority and regional consortium. For vulnerable learners, the Welsh Government captures and analyses attainment data for learners with SEN, including by SEN stage, effectively.
- 54 Most local authorities track the progress of LAC learners centrally and have secure processes to monitor their progress through LAC co-ordinators or achievement leaders. The tracking of a few learners who are placed out of county is less secure.
- 55 EOTAS provision for learners aged 14-19 years features in key local authority strategic plans such as the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (Welsh Government, 2013). These plans do not always lead well enough to effective policy to improve practices across all the organisations providing EOTAS. Generally, the plans focus on improving aspects only of EOTAS, such as PRUs, exclusions, attendance and the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- 56 Local authorities are currently adapting many of their practices for 14 -19 provision following the changes to funding. There is a reduction in the number of posts of 14-19 officers and in a few local authorities' responsibilities of this role have been distributed between other officers. It is too early to judge the impact of these changes.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

The report is a digest of evidence collected from inspections, local authority link visits and thematic surveys over the last three years.

Estyn (2013) *Working together to tackle the impact of poverty on educational achievement*. Cardiff: Estyn.

Estyn (2014) *Learner support services for pupils aged 14-16*. Cardiff: Estyn

Estyn (2015a) *Learner support services in further education colleges for learners aged 16-19*. Cardiff: Estyn

Estyn (2015b) *Education other than at school: a good practice survey*. Cardiff: Estyn

Estyn (2016a) *Education other than at school*. Cardiff: Estyn

Estyn (2016b) *Raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after – a best practice report*. Cardiff: Estyn

Estyn (2017a) *Learner Progress and destinations in independent living skills learning areas in further education*. Cardiff: Estyn

Estyn (2017b) *Careers – The implementation and the careers and world of work framework in secondary schools* Cardiff: Estyn

Estyn (2018) *Supporting more able and talented pupils: How best to challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils: key stages 2 to 4*. Cardiff: Estyn

The following regional consortia contributed to the consultation for this report:

ERW Consortium
EAS Consortium
North Wales consortium
Central South consortium

The following local authorities contributed to the consultation for this report:

Isle of Anglesey local authority
Merthyr Tydfil local authority
Caerphilly local authority
Cardiff local authority

Glossary

ALNCO	Additional learning needs co-ordinator
eFSM	Eligible for free schools meals
EIG	Education improvement grant. Established in April 2015, it provides financial assistance to schools, local authorities and regional education consortia to improve educational outcomes for all learners.
EOTAS	Educated other than at school
FE	Further education
GCSE	General certificate of education
LAC	Looked after children
Learning Pathway	The learning experience of each individual 14 to 19-year-old. It consists of a Learning Core and the choice of options from which the learner selects, with informed support and guidance.
LLWR	Lifelong learning Wales record
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
PDG	Pupil development grant. These grants provide financial support to help tackle the effects of poverty on attainment.
PRU	Pupil referral unit
SEN	Special educational needs
WIMD	Welsh index of multiple deprivation

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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