Scoping study into the use of further education destination data

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Research

Scoping study into the use of further education destination data

Audience   Further education providers and policy makers.

Overview   This document details the findings of a scoping study commissioned by the Welsh Government (WG) into the collection and use of further education (FE) destinations data in Wales. Destinations data is the term used to describe the data providing the end destination of young people who have progressed through Wales' various educational and vocational provisions. The study was conducted by Old Bell3 Ltd.

Action   None – for information only.
required

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Additional   This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's
copies   website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

DBIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills of the UK Government
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
DELNI	Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland
DfE	Department for Education of the UK Government
DfES	Department for Education and Skills of the Welsh Government
DLHE	Destinations of Learners from Higher Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESF	European Social Fund
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
ILR	Individual Learner Record
LLWR	Lifelong Learning Wales Record
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NEETs	Young people not in education, employment or training
NPFS	National Planning and Funding System
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual Schools Census
QEF	The Quality and Effectiveness Framework
SAS	Self Assessment Statement
SFA	Skills Funding Agency, a UK Government Agency
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SFR	Statistical First Release
SSC	Sector Skills Council
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UKCES	United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills
ULN	Unique Learner Number
WBL	Work Based Learning

WESB	Wales Employment and Skills Board
WPLS	Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study
YPLA	Young People's Learning Agency

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.   Old Bell 3 Ltd, in association with Dateb, was commissioned by the Welsh Government to carry out a scoping study into current and potential approaches to the compilation and use of Further Education (FE) destinations data. The work was undertaken between February and June 2012.

2.   The purpose of the study was to:
   o   provide an insight into what uses stakeholders could potentially make of FE destinations data;
   o   understand the use currently being made of FE destinations data;
   o   assess the strengths and weaknesses of FE destinations data currently being gathered in Wales;
   o   draw lessons for Wales from practices elsewhere;
   o   consider how developments in data sharing might aid the better use of FE destinations data;
   o   present options for the future use of FE destinations data in Wales.

3.   The study was based on:
   o   a review of relevant policy documents from Europe and other parts of the United Kingdom as well as discussions with stakeholders from England, Scotland and Northern Ireland;
   o   a review of Welsh Government policies, guidance and data collection systems;
   o   discussions with representatives of the Welsh Government, Local Authorities, 14-19 Partnerships, FE institutions, Careers Wales and various other stakeholder organisations.

   FINDINGS

4.   Recent skills related policy documents in Wales, as well as our discussions with stakeholders, point to four challenges which destinations data can potentially help to address:

1. The need to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of learning provision;
2. The need to equip learners to make informed choices;
3. The need to improve learning provider performance;
4. The need to inform stakeholders about the behaviours and needs of young people not in education, employment or training, the so called NEETs.

5. In terms of **ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of learning provision**, destinations data were seen as a potential mechanism for assessing:
   o whether provision prepares learners for progression into further and higher level learning;
   o whether vocational provision in particular prepares learners for work and, more specifically, in fields related to the learning undertaken;
   o the longer term labour market effects of particular learning routes in terms of the sustainability of employment and earnings.

6. It was thought that destinations data, alongside other intelligence, could be used to inform the planning and design of learning programmes and possibly, to influence the allocation of resources. However, because of the numerous external factors affecting young people's choices, there was little appetite for using destinations data as the basis of outcome related funding.

7. Destinations data were seen as a potential means of **equipping individuals to make informed choices** in terms of the curriculum by revealing the likely consequences, in terms of access to further learning or work, of pursuing particular learning programmes. Indeed, discussions are currently underway about the possible creation of an education portal for Wales to host information, including destinations data, about particular learning programmes.

8. It was thought less likely that destinations data would serve a useful purpose in enabling learners to choose between providers. Indeed, it was notable that

providers currently make little use of destinations data to promote themselves to potential learners.

9. Learner destinations data were seen as one metric, amongst others, that could and should be used to paint a more rounded picture of **providers' performance**. It was thought that destinations data could be used to benchmark provision, to identify areas for development and to highlight good practice, both within and across institutions.

10. Whilst contributors were mixed in their views as to whether destinations data should be put into the public domain via 'learner outcome reports', some believed that such information could usefully inform political debate about the structure of education provision at a local level.

11. Reference was made to the need to **keep in touch with young people at risk of falling into the NEETs category** and some contributors spoke of the potential benefits of using destinations data to track these young people over a number of years to ensure that they receive the support they need to secure and maintain employment.

12. Data about the destinations of young people in school sixth forms are currently gathered by Careers Wales and stored on its Cognisoft IO system. The bulk of destinations are established by linking cohort data already held by Careers Wales to the September Pupil Level Annual Schools' Census, enrolment information received from FE colleges and Work Based Learning providers and data about the take-up of higher education places received from UCAS. Careers Wales works with partner organisations and uses a range of methods (e.g. texting and telephoning) to established the destinations of the small proportion of young people not tracked down through data-linking.

13. It was thought that the destinations data compiled by Careers Wales are reasonably reliable and are of a consistent quality across Wales. However, the destinations data gathered generally only capture leavers' immediate destinations and do not provide any sense of their longer term progression.

14. Data about the destinations of young people leaving FE colleges are captured by FE colleges and recorded on the Welsh Government's LLWR system, via institutions' own front-end management information systems. FE colleges also make some use of data-linking to identify learners progressing into further study within the same institution or, using UCAS data, those progressing into higher education. On the whole, however, FE colleges rely on tutors to supply information about learners' intended (rather than actual) destinations and it is notable that over recent years, the destinations of some 40 per cent of leavers have been recorded as 'not known'. Whilst practices vary from one FE institution to another, with some investing considerably more in establishing what leavers go on to do than others, in general, destinations data compiled by FE colleges are not thought to be particularly reliable.

15. To some extent, the limited investment FE colleges have made in establishing the destinations of leavers reflects the fact that the Welsh Government has hitherto made little use of such data for performance management purposes. This is changing, however, and the Welsh Government has indicated that it is contemplating publishing destinations data as part of its annual 'national comparators'. As a precursor to this, FE colleges have been asked to check destinations reports derived from information returned to the Welsh Government via LLWR.

16. Alongside this, the Welsh Government is working with the Department for Work and Pensions to undertake a data matching exercise which will combine benefits, employment and earnings data with learner data from LLWR. The combined dataset should allow analysis of the labour market performance of former learners both by course/learning programme and by FE institution and it is hoped that it will be available by June or July 2012. This data matching exercise is confined to learners leaving FE colleges and there are no plans at present to undertake any similar data matching exercise for those leaving school sixth forms.

17.   Until fairly recently, only limited use has been made of destinations data in other parts of the UK and, as in Wales, the quality of destinations data in respect of leavers from FE colleges is widely acknowledged to be variable. Indeed, in Scotland, no central databases of learners in either school or FE settings exist, albeit that plans are in place to create a 'data hub' to capture information currently held by a number of disparate organisations.

18.   However, and most particularly in England, increasing use has been made of 'course labelling' and 'institutional scorecards', both as a means of managing FE colleges' performance and as a means of empowering individuals to choose learning programmes and providers. Destinations data are among the metrics used in compiling FE Choices, a web-site launched in January 2012 to provide comparative data on learning providers, though not learning programmes. The data published on FE Choices were gathered through a data-linking exercise undertaken in parallel with a telephone survey of a very large scale stratified sample of leavers. It is notable that in the wake of a restructuring of UK government departments, FE Choices is unlikely to contain information about the destinations of 16-18 year olds going forward.

19.   The approach taken to establishing the destinations of young people leaving schools in England (and, going forward, also 16 – 18 year old learners in FE colleges) relies on data-matching, using National Pupil Database records, Individualised Learner Records (for those entering FE and WBL) and Higher Education Funding Council for England (as opposed to UCAS) enrolment data at a census point 12 months after leaving. This is again intended to be used to provide public information about providers' performance to guide learner choice, and is not expected to provide information about the outcomes of different learning programmes. Whilst this approach allows a focus upon learning which is sustained for at least two terms after leaving, reliance on Funding Council data means that it is subject to long time delays. At present, the system does not record young people progressing directly into employment or falling into the NEETs category, though plans are afoot to use Local Authorities' National Client Caseloading Information database, which draws on careers advisors' contacts, to provide this information.

20.   Separately from these approaches, work has also been done in England to match Individual Learning Records with the Work and Pensions' Longitudinal Study Dataset. The exercise undertaken yielded an 80% match rate and independent evaluations of the potential utility of the information generated were highly encouraging.

OPTIONS GOING FORWARD

21.   This report concludes by setting out five options that the Welsh Government might consider in relation to the future collection and use of FE destinations data in Wales. Each option is considered in terms of the utility it is likely to offer in relation to the four challenges referred to in paragraph four above using a number of what might be described as destinations data related performance indicators.

22.   The advantages and disadvantages of each of the options presented are also discussed, along with an estimate of the timescales within which each might be expected to yield reliable data and the resource implications of adopting each option.

23.   The options presented focus on data relating to the destinations of leavers from FE colleges as opposed to those leaving school sixth forms. Given that fairly reliable data are already captured about the destinations of leavers from school sixth forms, there seems little merit in changing the systems already in place, at least in the short to medium term. This many, however, need to be revisited in light of wider developments relating to organisational structures and the potential merger of PLASC and LLWR.

24.   The five options presented are:
1.   Remove the requirement for FE providers to gather destinations data and do nothing further;
2. Continue with current arrangements, whereby FE providers undertake some internal data-matching within LLWR as well as data-matching with

UCAS datasets, and continue to rely on a mixture of tutor 'guesswork' and leaver tracking;

3. Continue with current arrangements, whereby FE providers undertake some internal data-matching within LLWR as well as data-matching with UCAS datasets, but become more prescriptive with FE colleges in terms of:

   o Requiring them to gather information about learners' actual rather than intended destinations;

   o Requiring them to use statistically robust approaches to gathering data;

   o Requiring them to achieve specific response rates.

4. Centralise data gathering arrangements within the Welsh Government. This would involve the Welsh Government matching LLWR data across all providers as well as data-matching with LLWR with UCAS datasets. The Welsh Government could then commission an external survey of leavers.

5. Centralise data matching arrangements within the Welsh Government. This would involve the Welsh Government matching LLWR data across all providers as well as data-matching LLWR with UCAS datasets in order to identify the proportion of leavers progressing into further learning. The Welsh Government could then turn to the work being done by the DWP to match its WLPS dataset to the LLWR dataset. The data generated could be used to indicate where problems might lie (e.g. learning programmes which do not seem to lead leavers into employment) and further, more focused, research undertaken to pin-point the precise nature of any underlying weaknesses.

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Old Bell 3 Ltd, in association with Dateb, was commissioned by the Welsh Government to carry out a scoping study into current and potential approaches to the compilation and use of Further Education (FE) destinations data. The work was undertaken between February and June 2012.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1.2   The objectives of the study were to:
- o 'provide an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of current FE destinations data in Wales;
- o review how FE destinations data are used elsewhere and identify key challenges or lessons relevant to developing this intelligence in Wales;
- o engage with colleges and work based learning providers to understand the issues for them in collecting data;
- o engage with policy leads across the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to access the range of uses of FE destinations data and the implications this has for the type, volume and frequency of data collection;
- o engage with Knowledge and Analytical Services, Welsh Government leads in relation to Official Statistics requirements regarding [the] publication of data, to meet the needs of the wide range of statistical users;
- o assess the potential impact of forthcoming advances in Government data sharing on the ability of government to generate outcome data. Provide advice on the likely timeframes associated with these developments in their relation to the provision of FE destinations data;
- o identify and elaborate upon a range of options for FE destinations data in Wales and their utility in relation to different end-users. This options appraisal should include a broad assessment of the cost implications

(and VFM) of different approaches and the technical complexity of other challenges associated with each'.

METHOD

1.3   The study encompassed nine main elements of work:
- o a review of documents relating to the availability and use of data on destinations of learners in Europe, other parts of the United Kingdom (UK) and Wales;
- o a review of guidance and other documents relating to collection and use of FE destinations data in Wales;
- o interviews with stakeholders within the Welsh Government;
- o interviews with the representatives of key partner organisations;
- o face to face discussions with representatives of five FE colleges;
- o face to face discussions with representatives of four 14-19 Networks;
- o two focus group discussions with careers advisers, teachers and FE college staff;
- o telephone interviews with representatives of relevant government departments and agencies in other parts of the UK;
- o discussing our emerging findings with the project steering group, before finalising this report.

1.4   A list of those who kindly contributed to our study is given at Appendix 1.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

1.5   The remainder of this report is presented in five parts as follows:
- o Potential uses of FE destinations data (chapter 2);
- o Data collection and management practices currently employed in Wales (chapter 3);
- o Data collection and management practices elsewhere (chapter 4);
- o Potential options going forward (chapter 5).

2 POTENTIAL USES OF FE DESTINATIONS DATA

BACKGROUND

2.1 Before considering what data are currently collected, the quality of the data and how they are used, it is important to reflect on the potential ways in which FE destinations data might be used to inform policy and practice and to steer the FE learning system. Indeed, in considering whether and how to invest in improving FE destinations data, it is essential to clarify the relative importance of these potential uses as 'policy drivers' in the Welsh context.

2.2 Learner outcomes, including learner destinations, have been on the Welsh Government's agenda for a number of years. In its 2008 Skills and Employment Strategy and Action Plan, the Welsh Government heralded its intention to 'publish new measures and comparator data for learner outcomes' and undertook to 'take advice from the new Wales Employment and Skills Board on a new generation of targets to reflect our longer-term ambitions', including 'indicators of success such as: employer and learner satisfaction with the services they receive; learners' progression into their desired pathway of further learning or employment; and providers' attainment of quality benchmarks'.

2.3 The Quality and Effectiveness Framework (QEF) for post-16 learning in Wales later identified 'learner destinations' as one of five 'learner outcome' related 'core indicators' within the QEF, the others being 'attainment', 'completion', overall success' and 'apprenticeship framework success'. The document also pointed to the need to collect better information on learner destinations. More recently, an Independent Task and Finish Group on the Structure of Education Services in Wales argued that 'greater transparency and responsibility around educational outcomes is a vital reform objective within Wales' and pointed to the need for easier access to education related 'performance information', to enable stakeholders, including parents and young people, 'to make robust and reliable judgments'.

2.4   The Skills and Employment Strategy and Action Plan essentially invited the Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB) to advise the Welsh Government on performance indicators as long ago as 2008. It was not until the publication of Skills for Jobs in 2011, however, that WESB issues a clear message to Welsh Government that 'the skills agenda requires better LMI and information about the outcomes of learning programmes to ensure funded provision that is relevant, effective and efficient'. The document goes on to say that the National Planning and Funding System (NPFS) is 'planning light', not least because of a shortage of meaningful LMI, and that better LMI is 'essential to the development of an "intelligent market" for learning'. WESB is clear that the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 'must … urgently address the provision of better information to the public on which courses and qualifications offer best value to learners and on the performance of all providers (e.g. through published balanced score cards that include quality, outcome and student destination data)'.

2.5   The market driven philosophy which underpins WESB's recommendation probably owes more to UKCES' emphasis on using outcomes data as a means of empowering prospective learners to make rational choices about investing in learning than it does to explicit Welsh Government policy. WESB's message does, nevertheless, chime with the general thrust of Welsh Government policy.

2.6   The literature essentially highlights three broad challenges which destinations data can potentially help to address:
1. The need to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of provision;
2. The need to equip learners to make informed choices;
3. The need to improve learning provider performance.

2.7   These challenges largely chime with the themes identified by the stakeholders to whom we spoke and are discussed in more detail below. A fourth theme which arose during our discussions with stakeholders was the

need to use destinations data to support the so called 'NEETs agenda'[1]. It is, of course, possible that the prevalence of NEETs as an issue during our discussion with stakeholders may owe something to the fact that other work is currently underway to explore potential approaches to tracking NEETs going forward.

ENSURING THE RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PROVISION

2.8   A question which underpinned discussions about the potential use of destinations data relates to the purpose of publicly funded post-16 education. Whilst stakeholders accepted that there is inherent value in all education 'in an art for art's sake sense', it was generally thought that post 16 learning should be geared towards equipping people for successful entry to the labour market, whether directly from sixth forms or FE colleges or indirectly via higher education. On this basis, FE destinations data were seen as a mechanism for assessing the extent to which post-16 provision produces 'employable and progressable' learners.

2.9   Contributors were particularly interested in using destinations data to learn more about the labour market relevance of vocational provision. It was thought that destinations data could be used in conjunction with other information to create a better understanding of the degree to which pursuing particular learning programmes leads to leavers finding employment in fields related to the learning undertaken. Contributors were keen to make better use of data to test the validity of received wisdom, for example that a high proportion of FE provision is not well attuned to labour market needs or, more specifically, that few people pursuing hairdressing courses secure jobs as hairdressers. There was also an appetite for looking beyond the immediate labour market effects of pursuing particular learning routes to understand how acquiring certain skills and/or qualifications impacts upon the sustainability of employment and upon earnings.

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[1] This relates to policies designed to prevent young people from becoming 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' - NEET

2.10   Whilst there was also interest in the longer term labour market destinations of learners pursuing more academic post-16 provision – primarily A levels - the general consensus was that the focus here should be upon understanding the extent to which such provision allows learners to progress into higher education. It was a moot point as to whether the eventual labour market outcomes of those progressing into higher education can reliably and usefully be linked back to specific A level choices.

2.11   One contributor suggested that 'scores' might be attached to particular courses to indicate the proportion of learners pursuing them progressing into related higher education courses or jobs. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the South West Wales Regional Learning Partnership is currently doing the inverse in that it is reviewing whether the region's higher education institutions offer appropriate progression opportunities for those leaving the region's FE institutions.

2.12   Contributors generally saw potential in using destinations data, alongside other intelligence, to inform the planning and design of learning programmes. Indeed, some argued that the current system, which places emphasis on the achievement of qualifications, is flawed because 'qualifications should be seen as a means to an end' and 'the litmus test' of vocational learning programmes' relevance and effectiveness 'has to be whether employers are willing to take [leavers] on' at the end of those learning programmes. Some contributors, recognising that funding is a key driver of behaviour within the FE system, even thought that destinations data might inform the allocation of funding across learning programmes, arguing that 'the real prize would be to be able to say, "actually, should we be investing less in x and more in y?" so that people don't come out with qualifications that aren't relevant'. Having said this however, the general consensus was that learner destinations should not form the basis of outcome related funding because:

    o   the data are not sufficiently reliable (the reliability of destinations data is discussed further in subsequent sections of this paper);

- o destinations data do not take account of learners' starting points and do not, therefore, measure the 'distance travelled' by individual learners as a result of learning undertaken;

- o positive outcomes in terms of employment are contingent upon a number of external factors, not least economic and labour market conditions;

- o it could give rise to perverse incentives that might encourage unscrupulous practice or disadvantage weaker learners;

- o it would introduce unnecessary bureaucracy.

2.13   Clearly these are issues that will need to be considered as part of the Welsh Government's Post-16 Planning and Funding Review[2], which will itself be influenced by the recommendations of the on-going review of 14-19 qualifications in Wales[3].

INFORMING LEARNER CHOICES

2.14   Destinations data were seen as one element of a suite of indicators that could help to inform learners, as well as those who influence them, of the likely consequences of pursuing particular learning programmes as opposed to others. In essence, there was an underlying assumption, not necessarily founded on firm evidence, that well informed learners make rational choices and, thus, pursue those learning programmes that offer the greatest likelihood of yielding good job outcomes or of providing access to particular further or higher education pathways.

2.15   Some contributors even believed that destinations data could help to 'inform demand … equip learners to make [rational] choices' in such a way that it brings about appropriate, labour market responsive supply side changes.

2.16   Whilst subscribing to the idea of using destinations data to equip prospective and existing learners with the knowledge required to make

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[2] Which is scheduled to take place between November 2011 and March 2014
[3] Being undertaken between September 2011 and March 2013

informed choices, most contributors were clear that this related to choices between alternative learning programmes rather than between learning providers. It was argued that for vocational routes in particular, learners' choice of provider is fairly limited in practice – 'if you live in Bridgend, you're hardly going to do a course in Deeside'- and even in the case of general education, it was argued that 'the majority of people aren't sophisticated' in selecting post-16 learning providers, with one contributor commenting that 'people put more effort into choosing car insurance or utilities suppliers' than they do to selecting post-16 learning providers. This was contrasted with pre-16 education where 'the higher social classes' especially 'tend to be more selective'.

2.17   At present, FE colleges are not required to establish the destinations of part time learners. A number of contributors to our study thought that going forward there would be merit in providers collecting part time learners' destinations, quite simply because part time learning is likely to become more important as people are increasingly obliged to change career direction and part time learners are more likely to be paying for courses themselves and will, therefore, be keen to know the likelihood of particular courses leading to positive employment and/or earnings related outcomes. However, it was argued that the sheer number of learners involved in part time learning and the diversity of provision, from leisure related 'evening classes for a couple of hours a week to work related short courses', means that 'the effort of trying to collect [destinations data] would far outweigh the meaning that you'd get out of [the data] in the end'. As one contributor commented 'don't go there … it's a huge can of worms'.

2.18   However, the learning providers who contributed to our study attached relatively little importance to destinations data as a potential tool for promoting themselves or even particular learning programmes. Whilst they were obviously not blind to the possibility of using destinations data at an aggregate level for promotional purposes, it was rarely done, beyond 'publicising good news stories' about 'star' learners.

2.19   In this context, it is notable that discussions are currently underway about the possible creation of an education portal for Wales to host information (including destinations data) about particular learning programmes, quite possibly at an individual provider level. This arguably builds upon work already done to publish school banding information as a means of establishing 'priorities for differentiated support' and of identifying schools 'from which the sector can learn'[4].

THE MANAGEMENT OF LEARNING PROVISION AND LEARNING PROVIDERS

2.20   It was widely thought that destinations data could and should be used as one metric amongst others to paint a more rounded picture of providers' performance 'as part of a balanced scorecard type approach'. Indeed, there was a degree of consensus that destinations data could be used alongside other metrics to 'band' providers, in much the same way as schools were now being banded by the Welsh Government. This banding was not seen as something punitive, but rather as part of a 'supportive' approach that would 'help identify good practice and weaknesses' and encourage on-going improvement. Indeed, one of the FE colleges which we visited had already started to benchmark its destinations data against those of neighbouring colleges and was keen to see this done on a Wales-wide basis.

2.21   Some contributors were keen to see destinations data included within 'learner outcome reports'[5] and, thus, put into the public domain, not least because it was thought that this might encourage providers to 'weed out courses that don't lead to jobs'. Others advised caution in this respect, however, arguing that destinations data provide a rather 'blunt and simplistic' indicator of providers' effectiveness and, thus, need to be caveated and contextualised if published. One contributor also argued that

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[4] Welsh Government (2011) The model for banding secondary schools: *Paper for information for stakeholders*
[5] http://www.learningobservatory.com/loreports/

publishing performance data leads providers to play 'data games … we've seen it with attainment data'. It was argued that marked improvements in this respect were partly attributable to 'genuine improvement', partly down to 'improvements in data management' and partly to do with providers' rather loose interpretation of criteria. In this context, however, it is notable that DfES has recently published a set of data management principles to help ensure more consistency in how FE institutions record learner attainment, in response to concerns expressed by the sector.

2.22   Balanced information about individual providers' performance, embracing destinations data alongside other metrics, was seen by a handful of contributors as 'an instrument for local democracy'. It was argued that balanced information could be used to inform political debate, for example around the structure of school sixth forms, and to dispel emotive myths which often surround such subjects.

2.23   At an institutional level, it was thought that reliable destinations data could help schools and colleges to review curricula and determine whether courses are preparing learners to progress into either further learning or into employment. As one contributor put it, destinations data should allow providers to 'challenge' themselves as to 'whether they are delivering what's needed as opposed to what they're geared up to deliver'. Again, contributors saw merit in benchmarking course or programme level information across institutions in order to identify good practice and 'drive sustainable improvement' across the learning system.

SUPPORTING THE NEETs AGENDA

2.24   A recurrent theme during our discussions with stakeholders was the need to make use of destinations data to better support the NEETs agenda. It was thought that local authority or even electoral ward level destinations data might help local authorities and 14-19 networks to target resources upon those areas which experience the highest level of NEETs.

2.25   Several contributors referred to the need to keep track of young people at risk of falling into the NEETs category in order to provide them with the additional support needed to prevent them becoming NEET. This does, of course, require intelligence about young people still in education, rather than after the point of leaving and some areas do have local programmes targeted at achieving this.

2.26   Indeed, a handful of contributors spoke of the potential benefits of tracking young people over a number of years, not only to ensure that they receive the support they need to secure and maintain employment, but also to 'see the wage effects [of different learning experiences] over time'.

DESTINATIONS DATA AND OTHER DATASETS

2.27   As already indicated, there is an appetite for using destinations data alongside other kinds of information to help present a rounded view of the relevance and effects of learning provision, whether in terms of courses or programme areas or in terms of overall provider performance.

2.28   The ability to combine datasets will be enhanced by the introduction of Unique Learner Numbers (ULNs)[6] to all learners aged 14 and over. ULNs will enable individuals' learning journeys and achievements to be tracked as they leave learning programmes or progress from one learning provider to another, thus making it possible to gauge the effects of learning over time.

2.29   Other datasets which it was thought destinations data might complement were:
   o qualifications data;
   o learner satisfaction data;
   o UCAS data;
   o 'student loans' data;

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[6] Issued by the UK wide Learner Record Service

- data about individuals' earnings derived from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC);
- data about welfare benefits received by learners from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP);
- school/college catchment area labour market statistics from Job Centre Plus.

2.30   Information about the **qualifications achieved** by learners is held on awarding bodies' systems and, in the case of schools, this information is merged with pupil level data via the Welsh Examinations Database[7]. There is no such data merging arrangement in place for the qualifications achieved by learners registered with FE colleges[8], primarily because FE colleges deal with a far wider range of awarding bodies than do schools. As a result, FE colleges are obliged to enter information about qualifications achieved by learners onto their own management information systems and thence onto LLWR. This difference means that information about the qualifications achieved by learners in FE colleges is not available as swiftly as that in respect of school pupils and, arguably, neither is it as reliable. This clearly presents problems in drawing comparisons between the two sectors.

2.31   **Learner satisfaction** data are gathered by individual FE colleges, though there are differences between institutions in terms of the coverage, methods employed and response rates, which mean that the datasets held do not provide consistent and comparable information across Wales. The Welsh Government also proposes to undertake a learner satisfaction survey in early 2013, along similar lines to the Learner Voice Surveys run in previous years, but dovetailed where appropriate, with colleges' own surveys. The Welsh Government hopes to achieve a 50% response rate, which should allow the analysis of data by course/programme areas as well as by institution. However, the survey will be administered to individuals in

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[7] This process is managed by Amor Group, which has been retained by the Welsh Government. Amor provide a similar service to the Scottish Government

[8] Although work is underway to extend the scope of the Welsh Examinations Database to embrace learners in FE colleges

learning which probably means that it will fail to capture the views of early leavers.

2.32 **UCAS** makes available data, at a learner level, about the offers made by higher education institutions to individuals, individuals' acceptance of those offers and the take up of the places accepted. These data can be bought by the institutions at which learners applying for higher education places are registered (i.e. schools and colleges) as well as by organisations such as the Welsh Government.

2.33 The Student Loans Company publishes aggregate data relating to the numbers and values of **loans, grants and allowances** awarded and paid to full-time undergraduate students domiciled or studying in Wales.

2.34 The **Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study** (WPLS) dataset essentially combines benefits data from the DWP and earnings data from HMRC. As discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4, this dataset is capable of being combined with other datasets e.g. the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR).

3. DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES CURRENTLY EMPLOYED IN WALES

LEAVERS FROM SCHOOLS

3.1 The Welsh Government contracts Careers Wales to gather information about the destinations of young people leaving school at Year 11 as well as from school sixth forms (Year 12 and Year 13/14), using categories specified by the Welsh Government (these are given at Appendix 2), but also exploring the nature, location and duration of any learning being undertaken by those not remaining at school. Data sharing agreements between Careers Wales and schools/local authorities allow the transfer of data about individual pupils from Year 7 onwards, thus enabling Careers Wales to build up a picture of each young person's education and guidance journey whilst at school[9]. Whilst Careers Wales is not contracted to gather information about the destinations of leavers from Further Education, data sharing agreements with individual colleges allow the transfer of information to Careers Wales about individuals enrolling onto Further Education courses each year[10].

3.2 Careers Wales use seven methods to gather destinations data about post-16 school leavers:
   o the electronic transfer from schools/local authorities of post-16 learning activity data derived from the September Pupil Level Annual Schools' Census (PLASC). This dataset essentially provides details of individuals returning to school in subsequent academic years and allows Careers Wales to match information received to details already held on its own Cognisoft IO web-based client information management system;
   o using information about individuals enrolling onto courses at FE colleges. Data sharing protocols established allow each college to provide Careers Wales with a list of new recruits and this is matched to information about

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[9] Though a refocusing on Careers Wales' activities in the wake of funding cuts mean that it is not clear that the new merged organisation will continue to hold data for Year 7 and 8 pupils

[10] Although outside the scope of this study, it is worth noting that similar data sharing agreements are in place with WBL providers, albeit that they are also required to inform Careers Wales of any young people leaving WBL provision early

the previous years' school cohorts already held on Careers Wales' Cognisoft IO system;

- o updating Cognisoft IO records with enrolment data received from Work Based Learning providers under the terms of data sharing agreements;

- o attending schools on 'A level results days' to glean young people's intentions;

- o updating records with information received from schools (drawing upon UCAS data) about the offer and take-up of places at Higher Education institutions by leavers from Year 13/14;

- o through direct involvement with school leavers 'who walk into our offices' for advice or help;

- o contacting young people whose destinations have not been established using the methods discussed above, using a range of approaches such as 'ringing them up in the evenings', using 'text if we've got their [mobile] phone number', 'door knocking' and 'working with partners' (e.g. schools and youth service teams where information sharing agreements exist) to track young people down.

3.3 Careers Wales succeeds in ascertaining the destinations of 97 per cent or more of leavers. Much of this is done through data matching, with for example, over 93 per cent of Year 12 leavers[11] and almost 82 per cent Year 13 leavers[12] in 2011 continuing in full time education or progressing into Work Based Learning. The proportion of 'not-knowns' recorded was as low as 1.3 per cent of Year 12 leavers and 2.8 per cent of Year 13 leavers and it was thought that the current process of merging of Careers Wales' six client information management systems into one may enable the proportion of not-knowns to be eroded further, as young people's movements across different parts of Wales becomes detectable. Whilst data received from schools and colleges allows Careers Wales to establish the destinations of the majority of leavers, its success in tracking down the 4 per cent or so of Year 12 leavers and 10 per cent of Year 13 leavers who do not progress into further learning,

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[11] http://destinations.careerswales.com/year12.html
[12] http://destinations.careerswales.com/year13.html

WBL or employment owes much to working with partners to keep in touch with or track down young people at risk of falling into the NEETs category.

3.4   It was thought that the destinations data compiled by Careers Wales are reasonably reliable and are of a consistent quality across Wales. Indeed, it was argued that the data held on Careers Wales' client management system are generally more reliable than school census based data held by the Welsh Government because Careers Wales updates its records as it comes into contact with young people. Furthermore, because Careers Wales maintains fairly close contact with pupils in school sixth forms, the data in relation to their destinations tends to be more up to date than do data relating to learners in FE settings. It is notable, however, that Careers Wales' Cognisoft IO system does not provide any mechanism for referring back to the individual learner's record on PLASC. Discussions were underway to see if the data sets could be linked, with the obstacles not being practical or technical, but rather legal and ethical around data protection.

3.5   However, Careers Wales' destinations data are only published once a year, generally reflecting the immediate destinations of school leavers, and not tracking their longer term progression. Contributors tended to see this as a weakness in that it provides 'only a snapshot' at 'that point in time' Another weakness identified is that Careers Wales' destinations data do not necessarily take account of young people schooled at home or 'looked after' young people.

3.6   Careers Wales' Cognisoft IO system allows destinations data to be analysed by various geographic areas, from school level upwards, as well as by various learner characteristic e.g. gender, those carrying a statement of additional learning needs, those who receive free school meals etc. The system does not, however, provide a mechanism for feeding destinations data back into individual learners' records on PLASC.

LEAVERS FROM FURTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

3.7   The systems employed by FE institutions to gather destinations data vary, but broadly involve recording individual leavers' destinations on management information systems (such as EBS and QL) which provide an interface with the Welsh Government's LLWR. Whilst the management information systems used by institutions are capable of recording more finely grained destinations data than those asked for by the Welsh Government, most stick to the categories set out by the Welsh Government in the LLWR manual[13] (these are given at Appendix 2), despite some contributors commenting that they are subject to 'huge ambiguity' and that they 'are not sufficiently detailed' to provide institutions with meaningful management information.

3.8   The colleges which contributed to our study employ one or more of three main methods for the collection of information about learners' destinations:
   o   the first, and most widely applied method, relies on course tutors to supply information about learners' destinations. Tutors generally do this as 'part of the end of year clear up' for completers, or at the time of withdrawal for those leaving courses early. For the most part, the data are gathered between June and September and usually relate to leavers' intended rather than actual destinations;
   o   the second method involves identifying individuals returning to the same institutions to pursue further programmes of learning, usually in the next academic year. This is normally done in the autumn, following completion of the enrolment process;
   o   the third method, employed by some institutions, involves colleges updating their records with data bought from UCAS about offers made to leavers by HEIs and the acceptance and take-up of those offers. This information is received towards the middle of the autumn.

3.9   The use of these different methods for compiling destinations data essentially means that two different categories of data are gathered. The first method

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[13] Lifelong learning Wales Record user support manual for learning providers 2012/13, Version 1.0, p. 127

provides information on leavers' <u>intended</u> destinations, whereas the second and third provide information on leavers' <u>actual</u> destinations.

3.10   Even setting aside this definitional distinction, the use of different methods for compiling destinations data means that some strands of the information gleaned are more reliable than others. Data relating to learners progressing into Higher Education or into further learning at the same institution tend to be fairly reliable because they are based on firm evidence of the next steps taken by individuals. In essence, there is a clear audit trail to support the information recorded. The information provided by course tutors is less reliable for the following reasons:

- o   Whilst there is an expectation that tutors will base the information they gather on direct discussion with individual learners, this does not always happen and some of the data derived in this way are based on assumptions and anecdote;

- o   even where tutors succeed in accurately recording learners' intentions at the time of completion/withdrawal, these are not necessarily a good guide to actual destinations, as 'many students really don't know what they're going to do after they leave', or personal circumstances or other factors means that some learners do not go on to do what they had genuinely intended to do. Furthermore, one contributor commented that college tutors tend not be 'close enough to the students' to know how strong the relationship between intentions and destinations is in practice.

3.11   These differences are likely to give rise to variations in the coverage and reliability of data across different learning programmes and indeed, across institutions, depending upon the balance of academic and vocational provision delivered and depending upon the data collection approach of individual institutions.

3.12   Questions about the coverage and reliability of the data are compounded by the destinations of some 40 per cent of leavers being recorded as 'not known' over a number of years. This was attributed by stakeholders to young people being 'difficult to track down', particularly at key change points in their lives. It

was also thought that the high incidence of 'not knowns' owed something to a general perception that nothing is done with the destinations data entered on LLWR, thus rendering the investment of resources in tracking learners down rather pointless. One FE representative was candid that 'the collection of destinations data is not prioritised here … [but] if DfES published performance indicators on it and Estyn used it in their inspections, the college would sort it [the quality and coverage of destinations information] out immediately'.

3.13　Despite this, however, most of the institutions contributing to our study had sought to reduce the proportion of leavers whose destination was not known. The approaches taken included:

o　senior managers issuing clear directives that the 'not known' field should be used as little as possible. Contributors from one institution were candid that whilst this had led to a reduction in the incidence of 'not knowns' recorded, there had been a growth in the proportion of learners recorded as progressing into 'other' destinations;

o　the use of non-teaching staff (student services staff or evening receptionists) to telephone those leavers whose destinations were recorded as 'not known'. Whilst one institution had found this practice quite effective, another had discontinued it because it was thought that the effort needed to gather the information 'was disproportionate' to the benefit derived from having more complete and accurate destinations data;

o　Commissioning an external agency to undertake a telephone survey of early leavers as well as those who had applied for places at the college, but not taken them up. Indeed, some FE colleges had asked Careers Wales whether it would be prepared to follow up their leavers, but none had been prepared to make available the resources required to do so.

3.14　To some extent, these efforts reflected an expectation that destinations data are likely to feature more prominently in the Welsh Government's quality assessment processes going forward. Indeed, the Welsh Government is contemplating publishing destinations data as part of its annual 'national comparators' and may also include the data within individual institutions' 'learner outcome reports'. As a precursor to this, and as part of the process of

reconciling LLWR data for 2010/11, FE institutions have been issued with destinations reports (derived from the information returned to the Welsh Government via LLWR) and asked them to check and improve the quality of their destinations data.

3.15   Attempts to improve the quality of destinations data have also been driven by institutions' desire to better understand the reasons why some learners leave courses early, in order to improve retention and completion rates. Some were also keen to use destinations data, as part of their curriculum planning activities, to help ensure the relevance of course curricula to learners' ambitions.

3.16   Broadly speaking, however, contributors to our study agreed that the destinations data gathered by FE institutions are 'notoriously frisky' and too lacking in credibility to be used with confidence, with one individual commenting that 'you wouldn't stake your reputation' on the information produced. The exceptions to this are data about individuals progressing into further learning at the same institutions and information received from UCAS about leavers progressing into Higher Education.

OTHERS

3.17   There was no evidence that any other organisations gathered destinations data other than in a piecemeal fashion, generally related to tracking NEETs. For example, local authority youth teams each hold information about their 'clients', but this is obviously confined to a relatively small proportion of young people. The one exception to this was Agored[14], an awarding body, which gathers data about the destinations of individuals pursuing its Access to Higher Education courses.

THE COST OF GATHERING DESTINATIONS DATA

3.18   There was a general consensus that gathering destinations data (beyond those which can be determined from sources such as September PLASC

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[14] Formerly the Open College Network in Wales

censuses, FE enrolment information, WBL starters' data and UCAS) is an expensive proposition. However, contributors were not able to provide any idea of the costs involved because:

- o it involves the input of staff from Careers Wales (e.g. Learning Coaches) and other organisations (e.g. Local Authority youth teams), whose main focus is not gathering data per se, but working with young people at risk of falling into the NEETs category. Arguably, the marginal cost of gathering destinations data is minimal, but it is difficult to disaggregate from other costs;

- o it is done as part of wider work to monitor learner progress, attainment and completion within FE institutions. This, again, makes it difficult to disaggregate the cost of gathering destinations data in particular from wider learning monitoring processes;

- o where FE colleges sought to track down leavers whose destinations were 'unknown', they used existing staff to do so alongside other duties. The FE colleges which contributed to this study found it difficult to estimate the proportion of administrative staff's time dedicated to, and thus, the cost of gathering destinations data in this way.

3.19 Where FE colleges had used external agencies to undertake surveys of early leavers, contributors said that the costs had been almost prohibitive, to the extent that such practices were not used as a matter of course. One contributor commented, however, that the cost of undertaking surveys was minor compared to the long term cost to the economy of continuing to deliver a curriculum without knowing whether and to what extent it was equipping people to take part in the labour market.

NEW APPROACHES BEING EXPLORED

3.20 The Welsh Government is currently working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to undertake a data matching exercise between the DWP's Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) dataset and the Welsh Government's LLWR dataset. This builds upon work already done in England (as discussed in chapter 4) to combine benefits data from the DWP,

employment and earnings data from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and learner data, in this case, from LLWR. The intention is to match (as far as is possible) the details of full time learners who have left FE colleges in Wales since 2002[15] in order to provide an insight into the labour market effects of different learning experiences. It is hoped to update the combined dataset regularly once processes have been fully established.

3.21 It is hoped that the combined dataset will be available by June or July 2012, though some contributors had doubts that the work would be completed within this timescale. Once available the combined dataset will allow analysis of the labour market performance of former learners both by course/learning programme and by FE institution. Whilst the precise nature of the analyses to be undertaken has yet to be decided, it is probably worth noting that because the DWP is actually undertaking the matching process (because it has to retain control of its own and HMRC's datasets), there will be limitations to what can be achieved e.g. it will not be possible to compare learners' outcomes against a control group of similar individuals who did not undertake any learning. Furthermore, it is not altogether clear whether it will be possible (legally or ethically) to use data about the destinations of leavers from particular courses at particular institutions for public information purposes.

3.22 This data matching exercise is confined to learners leaving FE colleges and there are no plans at present to undertake any similar data matching exercise for those leaving school sixth forms.

3.23 On a related point, it is notable that little progress has been made on taking forward the recommendation made by the Independent Task and Finish Group on the Structure of Education in Wales[16] that DfES, 'in partnership with schools, FE and other providers should create a new, straightforward and single database for all post-16 education that combines the data fields of the Pupil Level Annual Census and the Lifelong Learning Wales Record'. Contributors were sceptical that a merged system would be in place by the

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[15] And are 19 years of age or over at the time of matching
[16] The Thomas Review

'January 2013' deadline set by the Task and Finish Group although they saw the benefit of having a single system in place.

THE USE CURRENTLY MADE OF FE DESTINATIONS DATA

3.24 Hitherto, the Welsh Government's use of FE destinations data has been very limited, not least because 'qualifications are the main measure' of schools' and colleges' success and 'destinations aren't really discussed that much'. However, as discussed earlier, some believed there to be a case for using FE destinations data, among other metrics, as an instrument for encouraging the on-going improvement of the supply of learning or even as part of a revised funding formula.

3.25 The situation in relation to school sixth forms and FE institutions is in contrast to WBL, where destinations data are used by the Welsh Government to evaluate providers' performance. Information about learners progressing into positive destinations from WBL, Traineeship and Steps to Employment programmes is published in learner outcomes reports, and forms a core consideration of the Self Assessment Reports (SARs) which providers are required to prepare each year. The SAR process requires WBL providers to set out how they propose to increase the proportion of learners progressing into positive destinations targets for positive progressions form part of providers' contracts with the Welsh Government. Indeed, it is notable in this context that the Welsh Government has recently issued detailed guidance on the evidence required to support information recorded about WBL leavers' destinations. The evidence requirements in this respect are designed to provide a clear audit trail and are substantially more burdensome than anything asked in respect of leavers from schools or FE institutions.

3.26 Three factors make the focus upon leaners' destinations more meaningful in the context of WBL:
   o the Traineeship and Steps to Employment programmes are designed specifically to prepare people for the labour market, whereas the intention

of other post-16 learning programmes may be to move participants into further learning as an interim step towards work;

- o WBL programmes are part funded by the European Social Fund and this means that evidence requirements are considerably more stringent than those imposed by the Welsh Government in respect of school or general FE programmes;

- o WBL providers are funded by means of annual contracts and it is, therefore, more practical to hold them to particular conditions than it is schools or colleges, which receive formula driven block grants.

3.27 Interestingly, even though the Welsh Government makes some use of destinations data as the basis of 'downstream' dialogue (primarily with WBL providers), the data have generally not been used to inform 'upstream' dialogue with policy makers, for example in terms of the planning and funding of provision. Hitherto, policy makers' interest in destinations data appears to have been 'reactive', driven by the need to respond to Ministerial questions rather than to proactively inform policy making.

3.28 Contributors outside the Welsh Government were under the impression that destinations data have influenced Welsh Government policies relating to NEETs, though the focus here was primarily upon leavers from statutory education rather than those leaving post 16 learning. There was some evidence that local authorities and 14-19 networks are beginning to make use of destinations data to inform the NEETS agenda at a more local level, in part because 'they have to report on NEETs'. One contributor commented that 'Directors of Education [are] being challenged increasingly by the Minister … to demonstrate successful outcomes and a range of provision for young people … this data is being taken seriously … if our NEETs figure goes up tomorrow, I'll be challenged by my Director of Education'. However, another contributor argued that the potential for destinations data to inform policy at the coal face is hindered by the existence of 'far too many partnerships trying to do … [their] own thing in relation to a keeping in touch strategies'.

3.29   In this context, a number of contributors said that destinations data suggest a decline in the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds falling into the NEETs category since the advent of the 14-19 agenda. Possibly allied to this, a small number of contributors spoke of an increase in the proportion of 16 year olds progressing into school sixth forms to pursue both A level and vocational courses. It was said that patterns are beginning to emerge of learners progressing into full time, college based Further Education a year later than they probably would have in the past, giving rise to questions from some quarters about the appropriateness of the advice being given to young people. It was also thought that these patterns many indicate a delay in young people falling into the NEETs category i.e. that they are becoming NEET at 18 or 19 rather than at 16 or 17. However, post-16 destinations data, unlike year 11 destinations figures, are not sufficiently robust to allow definitive conclusions to be drawn, not least because their starting point is not a single dataset (i.e. PLASC via Careers Wales' Cognisoft IO system), but rather rely on information from different sources (i.e. Careers Wales, FE institutions, WBL providers etc). Indeed, the reliability of NEETs estimates in relation to 19 year olds compiled by StatsWales was brought into question by a number of contributors[17].

3.30   There was also some suggestion that local authorities, 14-19 Networks and other local networks (e.g. ACL Partnerships, Children & Young People's Partnerships, Health & Social Care Partnerships) are beginning to use, or at least consider destinations data, alongside other information, to shape learning provision, though again, this owed much to the need to address the NEETs challenge. For example, one local authority has shifted the emphasis of its Adult Continuing Education portfolio away from more traditional arts courses towards vocational provision suitable for younger people. In another area, destinations data, alongside attainment data, had led one FE institution to change the emphasis of some of its level 1 and level 2 full time vocational courses in order to take account of vocational learning already undertaken by those progressing onto full time courses. Mention was also made of using

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[17] This may be attributable to Stats Wales' estimates relating to all leavers (aged 16, 17 and 18) whose destinations are unknown whereas Careers Wales produces destinations data for each age group

destinations data to support applications for ESF monies to support projects designed to tackle NEETs problems, including projects targeted at young people aged 19 and above.

3.31   In this context, it is notable that destinations data seem to add most value when combined with other information e.g. attainment data, intelligence about vocational routes pursued by learners, information about the types of jobs into which learners progress and labour market information.

3.32   On the whole, however, FE institutions seemed to make only limited, or where it did happen, fairly unsystematic, use of the destinations data they gather, primarily because the data are not sufficiently robust. The one exception to this was where a College had used destinations data, among other metrics, to inform course and departmental level self-assessment exercises and to benchmark performance across campuses and across schools within the college. This institution had also worked with neighbouring FE institutions to benchmark performance against a handful of headline destinations-related indicators, which essentially involved aggregating data across the categories used by LLWR. This process had revealed that the institutions involved each defined 'leavers' differently, suggesting that there may be weaknesses to destinations data beyond those already discussed.

3.33   Interestingly, contributors from the Welsh Government speculated that one use to which FE colleges put destinations data was to market certain courses. This did not seem to be widespread practice among the FE institutions that contributed to our study, albeit that some do refer to progression into Higher Education statistics in promoting A level courses. Nevertheless, we heard of one FE college that does produce an annual student destination booklet, but this really did seem to be an exception[18].

3.34   Careers Wales advisers make some use of schools' post-16 destinations data, generally by building the information into presentations given to pupils in Year

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[18] http://www.bridgend.ac.uk/assets/Student-Destinations/On-Route-Destinations-2010.pdf

12. This was done 'in order to show [young people] that not everyone goes to university … to give them a bit of a reality check' where needed. Whilst school destinations data are publicly available via CareersWales.com, it was not thought that young people or their parents generally refer to them.

3.35   A key factor preventing the use of destinations data by schools and careers advisers is their lack of granularity. The headline statistics, whilst vaguely interesting, do not really tell readers much. As one careers adviser argued, 'I need to be able to show them that ten people [from a particular school] went to do sports science at university last year … when there's only two or three jobs as PE teachers or sports coaches to be had around here … they sometimes need a bit of a reality check'.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

3.36   Notwithstanding the fundamental weaknesses of the destinations data collected, our study revealed some examples of good and potentially useful practice, both in terms of data collection and use.

3.37   Examples of potentially valuable practices in gathering destinations data include:
   o   one FE college charges full-time students an enrolment fee of £15 which is reimbursed upon leavers' completion of a questionnaire which asks, inter alia, about what their destinations. Whilst this approach was thought to have yielded a reasonably good response rate, it was said to be administratively burdensome;
   o   another college uses text messaging in an attempt to establish leavers' destinations. This had produced mixed results, with young people's tendency to change mobile phone numbers proving a hindrance in many cases;
   o   one organisation had considered using Facebook to follow-up leavers' destinations, but had not done so, partly 'for ethical reasons' and partly because 'Facebook is a social medium' and was not, therefore considered an appropriate place to discuss destinations with young people;

- one FE college forwards information about early leavers to Careers Wales on a monthly basis as part of a local 'keeping in touch' project;
- Careers Wales works with a range of organisations e.g. schools, colleges, youth teams, Communities First teams and ESF projects to track down and 'keep in touch' with young people at risk of becoming NEETs;
- one FE college was said to take active measures to 'keep in touch with potential NEETs over the summer' in order to increase the likelihood that particular young people progress into FE in the following September.

3.38 By and large, contributors struggled to identify examples of good practice in the use of destinations data. However, examples put forward were:

- one FE college publishes information about the destinations of full time learners leaving a range of courses, by department, in its 'On Route' publication[19];
- the use, as already discussed, by one college of destinations data to inform departmental self-assessment exercises and to benchmark performance across campuses and schools;
- another college provides each of its feeder schools with individualised information about the courses pursued by ex-pupils at the college and, where relevant, the HE courses they went on to study. This information sharing was designed to strengthen the relationship between the FE college and its feeder schools.

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[19] http://www.bridgend.ac.uk/assets/Student-Destinations/On-Route-Destinations-2010.pdf

4. DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ELSEWHERE

INTRODUCTION

4.1   In this chapter we briefly set out the findings of a review of literature relating to the availability and use FE destinations data elsewhere, as well as from discussions with stakeholders from other administrations within the United Kingdom. The chapter is presented in four parts as follows:

- o The use of destinations data outside the UK;
- o Policy and practice relating to the use of destinations data in England;
- o Policy and practice relating to the use of destinations data in Scotland;
- o Policy and practice relating to the use of destinations data in Northern Ireland.

4.2   The different policy contexts which form the background to the approaches taken in other parts of the United Kingdom are discussed at Annex 4.

THE USE OF DESTINATIONS DATA OUTSIDE THE UK

4.3   A very brief review of the websites of the OECD, European Union and more particularly, CEDEFOP suggests that there is little information available about the use of destinations data for post-secondary learners.

4.4   While there is an extensive literature relating to 'learning outcomes' which is seen by CEDEFOP to have become a subject of increasing focus across all developed countries in recent years, this relates not to the outcomes of learning in terms of progression to employment or further learning but to the pedagogical outcomes in terms of the acquisition of knowledge and skills as opposed to formal qualifications.

4.5   Thus, learning outcomes are defined by CEDEFOP as 'statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after completion of learning'[20].

4.6   Similarly an OECD work strand on comparing outcomes of University education across member countries is focusing not on the destinations of graduates but on using standardised tests on graduates across member-states, much along the lines of PISA.

4.7   CEDEFOP notes that, more generally, while the outcomes of learning are 'the ultimate or eventual effects of undertaking education … for example increased earnings, employment, contribution to productivity, improved health, and other non-monetary outcomes'[21], such outcomes 'are difficult to both define and measure. It is also problematic to define a causal relationship reflecting data availability'.

4.8   It is thus, perhaps not surprising that CEDEFOP, Eurostat nor the OECD appear to publish any comparative data on the outcomes associated with specific periods of learning. Rather the data that is available tends to concentrate on evidence of returns to learning in the shape of the earnings or employment rate premia associated with different levels of qualification. Such data are sourced largely from population based surveys such as the Labour Force Survey and thus, do not allow for any examination of, or comparison between, the outcomes of particular courses of study[22].

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[20] The Shift to Learning Outcomes: Policies and Practices in Europe, CEDEFOP Reference Series 72
[21] CEDEFOP website
[22] See e.g. OECD, Education at a Glance, 2011, a very comprehensive collection of international data on education and training

THE USE OF DESTINATIONS DATA IN ENGLAND

4.9   In England, there are a number of developments underway in respect of collecting and making available for public use data relating to destinations of FE learners, though this has to some extent been complicated by changes to the structure of Government, with responsibility for adult learners in FE now resting with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), while 16 – 18 year olds, whether in school sixth forms or FE institutions are within the remit of the Department for Education (DfE).

4.10   FEIs have been required for some years to collect data on the destinations of leavers from their courses and to log data on the Individual Learner Record (ILR)[23], the key data collection instrument related to learners in learning funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA)[24] and the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA)[25] – formerly the Learning and Skills Council. However, this is widely acknowledged to have been of variable quality:

> 'The ILR contains data on participation and achievement in FE. Information is contained within a Statistical First Release published by the Data Service. It also contains destination data, but most observers agree that this data is not very robust, as many providers experience difficulties in contacting learners to gather destination data following a learning episode'[26].

4.11   As this observation from GHK's report on 'Improving Individual Choice in Career Direction and Learning' suggests, the limitations of the data have meant that they have not featured in the Statistical First Releases (SFR) on outcomes of post-16 education, which have focused largely on

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[23] Parallels might be drawn between ILR and elements of LLWR in Wales
[24] Which is an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
[25] The YPLA has now been subsumed within the Education Funding Agency, an arm's length body sponsored by the Department for Education
[26] Improving Individual Choice in Career Direction and Learning, GHK for UKCES, December 2010

success rates. Where the SFRs have included data on the relationship between qualifications and economic activity rate, these have been drawn from the Labour Force Survey[27].

4.12   Indeed, until very recently it appears as if FE-related data has been very much the poor relation in terms of publicly available data. Thus, the compendium of Statistics on Education and Training for the UK published on-line by the Department for Education in 2011 contains details on pupils' destinations at age 16 (gathered from administrative data from schools) and graduate destinations but nothing on destinations for learners leaving FE colleges (or indeed, school leavers at age 18).

4.13   In this context, it is worth noting the well-established systems put in place (UK wide) by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to gather destinations data from graduates of UK HE courses (including those delivered by FEIs) through the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) Survey. Data are collected by individual HEIs but on the basis of very tight guidance and standard questionnaires produced by HESA and with very demanding requirements in terms of response rates: HEIs are required to achieve an 80% response rate in relation to UK domiciled students who studied full-time, 70% for UK domiciled students who studied part-time and 50% for graduates domiciled in other EU states. DLHE potentially yields a vast amount of data at the level of individual institutions and courses, though as the GHK report, such data have not so far been freely available[28].

4.14   However, while comparable data related to the far larger number of FE leavers has not previously been available, considerable strides have been made in response to the Government's agenda in the last 12 months. Under the aegis of the Data Service (a body established and funded by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills as a single

[27] Statistical First Release, January 2012 Post-16 Education & Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held
[28] UKCES, 2010 p. 26

point of contact for all data to do with FE, which serves both the SFA and the YPLA/EFA and which manages all data collection in FE, notably the ILR[29]), fairly comprehensive data on FE leavers' destinations were collected and published as part of FE Choices (originally known as the Framework for Excellence or FfE) which was launched in January 2012. The 'prime purpose' of FE Choices as explained in the SFR of January 2012 is:

> 'to provide clear, comparable information to learners and employers so they can make informed choices about post-16 education and training. FE Choices enables users to search and compare provider ratings for four performance indicators: Success Rates; Learner Destinations (including Employment Rate and Learning Rate); Learner Satisfaction; and Employer Satisfaction.'[30]

4.15   Data on these four performance indicators have been published on the FE Choices website and users are now able to search for individual institutions and to compare individual institutions with similar institutions i.e. 'General FE and Tertiary Colleges; Sixth Form Colleges; Specialist Colleges (to include Art & Design/ Land-based /Special Designated Institutions); Other Public Funded Institutions; Private Sector Public Funded Institutions) and against all learning providers'.[31]

4.16   An example of the data provided with regard to leavers' destinations from Ludlow College is shown below:

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[29] See www.dataservice.org.uk
[30] SFR, p.20
[31] See http://fechoices.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/

Description	Learners
Number of young people and adults who finished their course in 2008/09	462
Number of young people and adults whose destination in 2009/10 was found	232
Projected number of destinations where finishing the course had no impact but the learner's destination may have had benefits for the individual and their family	32
Number of learners used to work out the score (this is the total number of learners who finished their course minus those learners where the learning had no impact)	430
Projected number of destinations where finishing the 2008/09 course had a positive impact	362
Estimated percentage of learners with a positive destination	**84%**

4.17 Positive destinations are defined as:

   o   'Progressed to learning with a higher level of highest learning aim

   o   Remained in employment or self-employment with improved job security or enhanced careers prospects

   o   Entered employment/self-employment in 2009/10 having been in learning prior to 2008/9 where the 2008/9 learning had a positive impact

   o   Entered employment/self employment or training in 2009/10 having previously been outside the labour market'[32].

4.18 Each learning providers' data are broken down 'by gender, level and age' and there is an intention to break down qualification results (though not destinations outcomes) more finely. However, the data are not particularly timely: although the website (as above) refers to leavers who finished their courses in 2008/9, a note on the Data Service website referring to the data published in January 2012 says that:

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[32] Ibid.

'The data for this indicator has not been updated since last year - an update for 2009/10 destinations will be available in Spring 2012'[33].

4.19   Moreover, data are not made available at the level of individual courses, and nor is there any intention of doing so in the future. FE Choices is very much seen as a mechanism for facilitating choice of provider and not choice of course/learning programme. The main argument against including information about the employment and earnings prospects attaching to particular learning programmes and/or career paths on FE Choices is that such intelligence is already available at an aggregate national level through the new National Careers Service web-site[34].

4.20   The data published on FE Choices were gathered through a data linking exercise undertaken in parallel with a telephone survey of a very large scale stratified sample of leavers, commissioned and managed by the SFA. These two elements were undertaken in parallel because of the long timescales intrinsic to the release of HEFCE data[35] and to the submission of FE data. The data linking element involved the use of the ILR to identify individuals progressing/continuing in further education and HEFCE data to identify those progressing into higher education. The survey of learners aged 19 years and over, which was undertaken centrally at a cost of roughly £1million, was stratified to ensure that 15% of learners from each provider were contacted and that there was a bias towards individuals who were not expected to be traced through data linking.

4.21   As already noted, the purpose of collecting and disseminating this data is principally to enable learners (and employers, where relevant) to 'vote with their feet' in terms of choosing which providers to use. Since the

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[33] Ibid.

[34] http://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx

[35] HEFCE data on enrolments are only made available once a year, in the autumn following enrolment, and relate to individuals who have enrolled and not withdrawn during the first two terms of the year. This means destinations data using this source cannot be published until at least 18 months after leavers have left FE.

Government is reforming FE funding to 'follow the learner', this, it is expected, will also lead to financial rewards for the most successful providers:

> 'The aim of the FfE [FE Choices] is to provide information that can be used by individuals to inform their choice of training institution. This information includes: learner and qualification success rates and learner destinations. The information source is user-focused and is available by institution. It is a good example of a national source explicitly developed to inform and empower individuals.'[36]

4.22   In practice, however, usage of the FE Choices website has so far been very low.

4.23   The current approach to gathering destinations data for FE Choices is unlikely to be taken forward after this year. Following a 'gentleman's agreement' between DfE and DBIS, in future information on destinations of 16 – 18 year old leavers from FE courses will be published by DfE, using methods of collection reliant only on data linking/matching (see below). DBIS has yet to decide how to collect destinations data for FE Choices for adult learners but questions have been raised as to whether the data from the telephone survey yields sufficient utility to warrant the expense of gathering it. Alternative approaches are currently being investigated by DBIS, notably the use of data-matching: requiring providers themselves to gather more data on leavers' destinations has been ruled out as being inconsistent with the Government's wish to reduce bureaucratic constraints on providers.

4.24   In this context, however, it is worth noting that surveying leavers does offer advantages: the survey undertaken to inform FE Choices allowed the Skills Funding Agency to explore issues which would not be apparent from data matching, such as whether those progressing to further learning were also working, the degree to which respondents believed the

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[36] UKCES 2010, p.26

courses undertaken had contributed to their finding work, progressing at work or led to any wage gain. Having said this, however, the use made of the dataset generated by the 2010 survey has been fairly limited thus far.

4.25   DfE's approach to gathering destinations data (for both year 11 and year 13 leavers) entails matching National Pupil Database records with ILR data (covering FE and WBL) and with HEFCE enrolment data at a census point 12 months after leaving, but also focusing on learning which was sustained for at least two full terms after leaving. The use of HEFCE data means that there will be quite long delays in publishing information (data to be published shortly as experimental statistics will relate to leavers who finished FE provision in summer 2010). Moreover, in this first year, data matching will only enable individuals progressing to further learning to be identified: those entering employment will be shown as having unknown destinations – along with NEETs. This is seen as relatively unproblematic in that the main policy focus of DfE is on the extent to which schools and colleges succeed in equipping learners to progress to higher education (with a particular interest in the proportion of students progressing to Russell Group universities, which may in due course be published separately). The intention is to publish data at the level of the individual school/FEI and at local authority level: data will not be segmented by course or subject area. Again, this is expected to inform and drive learner and parent choice between institutions.

4.26   It is envisaged that from 2013, National Pupil Database records could also be matched with the National Client Caseloading Information database, which is maintained by Local Authorities[37] and is based on careers advisors contacts, in order to identify young people progressing into employment. However, the quality of this data is thought to be variable. DfE have so far not considered data matching with DWP/HMRC data, because no data sharing agreement is in place, and because data can only be made available from these sources for individuals once they have reached the age of 19.

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[37] It was formerly the responsibility of Connexions

4.27 A budget of some £225,000 is believed to have been set aside for the data-matching process and it is envisaged that the data will appear on the Schools Performance website[38] from 2013.

4.28 Separately, and to some extent independently of this work, a separate strand of work has been underway to research the destinations of FE leavers (and also leavers from DBIS funded workbased learning) using data matching between the Individual Learning Record and 'The Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study Dataset [which] is a long established dataset which comprises DWP benefit data and earnings and employment data from HMRC:

   o P45 employment data, an administrative dataset collated by HMRC from income tax records from 1998/99

   o P14 earnings data, a further HMRC administrative dataset sourced from tax processing from 2003/04

   o National Benefits Database (NBD) covering benefit records from 1999

   o DWP Master Index benefit database from 1999.

   o Labour Market System (LMS) referrals administrative data'[39]

4.29 This research was made possible as a result of the 2008 Education Act (which allowed the data to be shared) and is based on DWP 'finding' individuals whose ILRs have been provided in the WPLS and providing the DWP and HMRC data on these individuals on an anonymised basis. Impressively, more than 80% of the individuals whose ILRs have been supplied have been found in either the DWP or HMRC records. As already noted, however, that there is no data-sharing arrangement in place between the DfE and DWP, which prevents a similar data-matching exercise being undertaken in respect of those leaving school sixth forms. A further legal difficulty in this respect is that individuals can only be tracked in the system once they have reached the age of 19. This

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[38] http://www.education.gov.uk/performancetables/
[39] Further Education and Benefit Claims - Emerging Findings from the Data Matching Project, DWP and BIS (undated), p.4

process enables researchers to investigate the employment and benefits history of learners and to examine the impact of different completed learning episodes on earnings, on the intensity of employment (i.e. how much of the working year is spent in employment) and on the length of time spent on benefits. The analysis segments the data in terms of learning aims (level and nature of qualification) and broad subject area to reach conclusions of the impact of different types of provision after controlling for changes in the macro-economy.

4.30   In terms of the potential for further research, an experimental analysis of the merged data set by the Institute of Fiscal Studies concludes:

'The data sets we have used provide a unique insight into the characteristics of learners in the FE, Apprenticeships and TTG [Train to Gain] funding streams. We have been able to show how earnings, employment levels and benefit receipt differ by subject area and level, and to provide some limited information at an institutional level. The ability to undertake this analysis, at this level of detail is entirely new. It flows from the existence of the new data set but also requires careful thinking about how to analyse it appropriately....'[40].

4.31   The report notes that the potential of the data could better be exploited with greater clarity within the ILR as to whether courses followed were academic or vocational and better information on which FE learners progressed to HE, since data e.g. on earnings of those completing Level 3 qualifications is thought to be strongly affected by the inclusion of A level students going on to HEIs and hence not taking up paid employment. To some extent this latter issue might be capable of resolution by combining the matching with HEFCE data used by the Data Service with this exercise.

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[40] BIS Research Paper No. 48: Reporting and Employment and Earnings Using Experimental Matched Data, Institute for Fiscal Studies FS for BIS, June 2011, p.241

4.32 The report also notes issues over the timeliness and frequency of the data analysis, noting:

> 'In terms of reporting, it is possible to report this data on a periodic basis, in order to get timely feedback on the impact of training on labour market outcomes. In principle, data on employment and benefit rates could be reported at a high frequency, e.g. monthly. There is an obvious trade-off, however, between the timeliness of the data and the burden of extracting and analysing it at frequent intervals. There may also be pitfalls in analysing the data too frequently. In particular, flows of completion will be uneven throughout the year, so that in some reporting periods the number of learners to be analysed will be much smaller than in others. They may also have different characteristics to learners completing at different times of year (e.g. full-year learners might be different to those completing shorter courses). There may be patterns within the year linked to seasonal employment or economic inactivity. These factors may impact on quality of results, therefore careful consideration needs to be given to the frequency of reporting, though annual reporting will resolve most issues'.[41]

4.33 Finally, since data are not available for individuals who have not undertaken learning, it is not as yet possible to construct a control group to fully explore the counter-factual. Despite this, work has been undertaken by London Economics for BIS, using the same data matching approach to compare the long-term outcomes of those completing different forms of learning provision with early leavers on the same provision.[42] This work was based on examining the learning, employment and benefits records of some 6.9 million learners (controlled for personal characteristics and local level socioeconomic factors) and concluded that:

> 'there are strong positive effects of qualification attainment on both the long term earnings and employment outcomes of those

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[41] Ibid., p,247
[42] BIS Research Paper no. 47: The Long Term Effect of Vocational Qualifications on Labour Market Outcomes London Economics for BIS, June 2011

completing learning aims relative to non-completers. In addition, the analysis clearly illustrates that individuals attaining additional qualifications are significantly less likely to be benefit dependent. Although there is some variation on the extent of the gains depending on the level of learning aim or the specific qualification, in general the results are unambiguous: education and skills acquisition result in improved labour market outcomes that persist for many years post attainment.'[43]

4.34   In terms of the potential of the data as a basis for research, the London Economics team shared the enthusiasm of the IFS:

'The opportunity to combine and analyse these three data sets in unison creates an information resource that allows for analysis that is far more useful and enlightening than that which might be undertaken on the individual data sets in isolation. We believe that this merged data could become a very important resource for policy makers and researchers alike and we would hope that resources are made available to ensure that this data continues to be updated and upgraded over time.'[44]

4.35   While, given the extensive coverage of these data, the potential clearly exists to drill down to the level of individual institutions and indeed, individual courses, such uses have not yet been explored. It is already evident, however, that this approach might offer an alternative (albeit one with possibly even longer lead-times) to the methods currently being used for FE Choices.

THE USE OF DESTINATIONS DATA IN SCOTLAND

4.36   As with England prior to very recent times, it would appear that information on the destinations of FE learners has been something of a

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[43] Ibid., p.70
[44] Ibid

Cinderella. Indeed, data on pupil and learner enrolment, progression and outcomes is not held centrally (there is no equivalent of PLASC and LLWR) with Local Authorities retaining responsibility for managing schools related data and individual FEIs managing learner data. . However, plans are afoot to develop a data-hub to track the progression of young people aged 16-19, though the key driver for this flows from Opportunities for All, the Scottish Government's commitment to provide a place in education and training for all 16-19 year olds[45]. In essence, the motivation behind the development of the data-hub owes more to the NEETs agenda and combating youth unemployment than it does to informing learner choice.

4.37 It is envisaged that the data-hub eventually will bring together:
- o data currently held on Skills Development Scotland (SDS), which is responsible for the Careers Service in Scotland, on its Customer Support System;
- o data also held by SDS on the National Training Programmes database, which records details of young people following apprenticeships;
- o data from school pupil records which are held by each local authority: there are data sharing agreements in place with all 32 local authorities which enables SDS to access data relating to pupils' leaving dates and known destinations as well as some data flags of social need (e.g. free school meals);
- o data about FE learners held by individual institutions: data sharing agreements are in place with some, but not all of Scotland's colleges, which are currently undergoing a very major reorganisation;
- o 'live data' from Job Centre Plus on 16-19 year olds in receipt of benefits[46];

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[45] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2012/04/opportunities-for-all1042012
[46] There is no proposal as yet to link data with the WPLS. This is partly because until the data hub is operational Scotland does not have any equivalent of LLWR or PLASC which can be transferred to DWP for matching, partly because the data sharing agreements are not in place and partly because, as already noted, DWP can only work on individuals who are already aged 19 or over, whereas the policy driver for the data hub is tracking in real time the engagement of 16 – 18 year olds with learning and employment.

o data from Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) – as opposed to HESA or UCAS – on young people taking up places at higher education institutions.

4.38 In the meantime, however, data in respect of learners in FE are collated by individual colleges and reported to SFC and the Scottish Government on an aggregate basis. Guidance to Scottish Colleges issued by the SFC in December 2010 sets out the requirement for colleges to collect and return data on the 'Post Course Success Ratio' (PSCR) for each course, with data to be collected in November 2011 in order to ensure that information captures what has happened to learners after the summer break. Colleges are required to record destinations according to four categories – in employment, progressing to more advanced study, of other known destination, of other unknown destination, with the PSCR being formed as the ratio between the first two combined and the first three combined.[47]

4.39 In terms of method, the Guidance is far less prescriptive than that issued by HESA for the DLHE (which is also implemented in Scotland) and says that:
o 'data collection methods should be auditable (hence tutor knowledge alone is not appropriate);
o colleges should adopt the data collection method most suitable for their circumstances and should consider using combined methods(e.g. postal and telephone survey) where appropriate;
o colleges should regularly review the effectiveness of their data collection procedures'.[48]

4.40 Although these data are collected, it is much less clear they are being used. Interestingly, the SFC's publication of College Performance Indicators contains no reference to destinations, with the section on

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[47] Guidance notes – PERFORMANCE INDICATORS. Guidance notes for completion of Performance Indicators data: Academic year 2010-11 December 2010 (Scottish Funding Council)
[48] Ibid., p. 3

'outcomes' dealing only with success rates in terms of qualifications[49]: neither does an admittedly broad-brush statistical overview published by Scotland's Colleges, the Scottish FEIs representative body.[50]

4.41   Scottish stakeholders interviewed for this study generally confirmed that data on destinations of FE leavers was not collected or analysed centrally and was believed to be patchy and inconsistent. A debate was said to be underway about whether to place clearer requirements on Colleges to collect destinations data in the context of the requirement for the new FEIs emerging from the current reorganisation to commit to 'outcome agreements' as the basis for future funding. This debate was seen to be fairly finely balanced, with, on the one hand, a recognition that destinations data was critical to getting a clear understanding of the value being added by provision and, on the other, a view that with funding cuts and budgetary pressures, now was perhaps not the time to place additional burdens on the newly-merged institutions.

4.42   The position with regard to the collection and dissemination of data about FE destinations stands in sharp contrast to the practice with regard to the monitoring of destinations of school leavers – which in Scotland is undertaken not of destinations at age 16 but of destinations of leavers after they leave the school system, which in the vast majority of cases is at 17 (28%) or 18 (51%).[51] SDS records the known destinations of school leavers on its Customer Support System and supplements this information by using careers advisors to survey leavers in two waves, the first in September and the second six months later, in March.

4.43   The resulting data are published in a Statistical Release by the Scottish Government, broken down by demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity) and by local authority area. Positive destinations are categorised as onward progression to HE and FE, employment and

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[49] College Performance Indicators, 2010-11 Scottish Funding Council
[50] Scotland's Colleges: Key Facts 2010 (Scotland's Colleges)
[51] Scottish Publications Notice: Destinations of Leavers from Scottish Schools, 2009/10

voluntary work, and for those going on to further study or to employment, data are presented by broad occupational or subject area, also segmented by demographics.

4.44   However, and inevitably given the broad-based generic nature of Scottish school education, this does not relate to the prior subject(s) or courses studied.

4.45   Importantly, destinations outcomes are also available at a school level and are published online at the Scottish Schools on Line website.[52] An example is shown below:

Destinations of pupils

The table below shows the destinations of pupils leaving school in 2010/11 for the school, the local authority and all of Scotland.

Leaver destination and percentages

	Blairgowrie High School	Perth and Kinross	Scotland
Higher education	29%	37%	36%
Further education	25%	26%	27%
Training	7%	5%	6%
Employment	29%	23%	20%
Unemployed, seeking employment	10%	8%	10%
Unemployed, not seeking employment	0%	1%	1%
Not known	0%	0%	0%

THE USE OF DESTINATIONS DATA IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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[52] http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishschoolsonline/

4.46 Information about the intended destinations of leavers from full time FE provision in Northern Ireland is gathered by means of surveys administered by colleges at the point at which learners leave provision. Leavers are asked what their plans are for six months down the line in terms of employment, further education etc. A publication from 2002, 'Further Education Means Business' provided data from such a leavers survey (broken down by demographic characteristics, by institution, by the type of qualification and by broad subject area), while noting that:

> 'the record keeping by the colleges of these statistics is erratic; some colleges keep a close track of their final year students while others do not'.[53]

4.47 Data on destinations are not collected centrally and the DELNI website in the section on FE performance statistics simply says:

> 'Content will be added when data becomes available in 2011'[54]

4.48 By contrast, data are collected and published on school leaver destinations. As with Scotland, this records destinations for all leavers, regardless of age with data being segmented in a number of ways, including by religion, type of school, gender and ethnicity. However, in contrast to Scotland, data are collected by the schools, not centrally.[55]

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[53] Further Education Means Business: Underlying Evidence, Department of Education and Learning, 2002 Tables 21 and 22
[54] www.delni.gov.uk
[55] Statistical Press Release: Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers, 2009/10

5. POTENTIAL OPTIONS GOING FORWARD

INTRODUCTION

5.1   In this chapter, we discuss a number of options for the future collection and use of FE destinations data in Wales. In presenting these options, we take account of current arrangements as well as lessons provided by practices employed in other parts of the UK. Crucially, we consider the utility which each option presented is likely to offer in relation to the four areas that the literature and our discussions with contributors suggested the better and fuller use of FE destinations data can potentially contribute:

- o   ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of provision;
- 4.   equipping learners to make informed choices;
- 5.   improving learning provider performance;
- 6.   supporting the NEETs agenda.

5.2   In order to consider the likely utility of different options in a consistent fashion, we use a number of what might be described as destinations data related performance indicators. These essentially draw on the kinds of issues which contributors to our study believed that destinations data could usefully help to illuminate and are presented in the following table.

Destinations Related Performance Indicators by Issue Addressed

	Ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of provision	Equipping learners to make informed choices	Improving learning provider performance	Supporting the NEETs agenda
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning	✓	✓	✓	
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning in related disciplines	✓	✓		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning		✓	✓	
% learners leaving particular learning programmes progressing into employment	✓	✓	✓	
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields	✓	✓		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment		✓	✓	
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes	✓	✓		
employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes	✓	✓		
% learners not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence			✓	✓

5.3   The options presented must, of course, be viewed against the backcloth of a number of key on-going developments, most notably:

- o   The Welsh Government's Post-16 Planning and Funding Review, with a fairly broad consensus that destinations data could help to inform the appropriate allocation of resources between learning programmes;
- o   The new structure, governance arrangements and remit of Careers Wales;
- o   The on-going restructuring of FE colleges which will bring about, amongst other things, greater consistency in the way data are gathered, managed and used;
- o   Work being done, albeit at a relatively early stage, to merge the PLASC and LLWR databases into a single repository of learner records, as recommended by the Task and Finish Group on the Structure of Education in Wales;
- o   The introduction of Unique Learner Numbers for all post-14 learners in Wales in 2012, which should ease the process of identifying and tracking individual learners in future years;
- o   The creation of an education portal for Wales.

5.4   As discussed in chapter 3, there are essentially three repositories of data about post-16 learners in Wales – PLASC, LLWR and Careers Wales' Cognisoft IO system. Both PLASC and Careers Wales' system essentially contain data about all young people in statutory education, as well as data relating to young people who remain in school sixth forms (Years 12 and 13). Careers Wales' system also captures data about young people who progress into FE, though reliance on the semi-automated matching of enrolment data received from FE colleges to existing learner records means that these data may not be entirely complete. LLWR contains data on all learners registered with FE colleges in Wales, including but not confined to, those whose details are also held on Careers Wales' system.

5.5   Data on learners' destinations upon leaving school are not recorded on PLASC, but fairly reliable data about school leavers' destinations are captured by Careers Wales. Given that the destinations of over 90% of year 12 leavers and around 80% of year 13 leavers are established through data linking, that the proportion of learners whose destinations are not known is less than 3% in both cases and that establishing the destinations of other leavers generally sits alongside Careers Wales' advisory activities, there seems little point in making changes to the system currently in place, at least in the short term. This may need to be revisited once the future remit of Careers Wales is clarified or in light of wider developments relating to the merger of the PLASC and LLWR systems.

5.6   Data about the destinations of leavers from FE colleges are stored on LLWR, but overall, the data are not particularly reliable. The options set out below, therefore, focus upon potential approaches to gathering data relating to leavers from FE colleges. More specifically, they relate to the capture of data about leavers from full time FE provision on the basis that data on part time learners' destinations are considerably less likely to provide meaningful information and would be significantly more complex to collect.

OPTION 1

Remove the requirement for FE providers to gather destinations data and do nothing further.

Likely Utility in Relation to Specific Requirements

Ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of provision:

Indicators [56]	Likely Utility		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning			■
% leavers from particular programmes progressing into higher level learning in related disciplines			■
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment			■
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields			■
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■
Employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■

Equipping learners to make informed choices:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning			■
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning in related fields			■
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning			■
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment			■
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields			■
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment			■
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■
Employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■

Improving learning provider performance:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning			■
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning			■
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment			■
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment			■
% leavers not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence			■

Supporting the NEETs agenda:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	M	L
% leavers not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence			■

Advantages
- *Would lessen the administrative burden on FEIs, but only to a limited extent in most cases, because capturing data about learners' intended destinations from tutors generally forms part of the wider year-end tidy-up process*
- *Would allow the removal of field LP42 from LLWR*

Disadvantages
- *Would not provide any destinations data*
- *Could mislead colleges into believing that the Welsh Government is not too concerned about learners' destinations*

Timescales for the Provision of Reliable Data	Resource Implications
N/A	N/A

OPTION 2

Continue with current arrangements, whereby FE providers undertake some internal data-matching within LLWR as well as data-matching with UCAS datasets, and continue to rely on a mixture of tutor 'guesswork' and leaver tracking.

Likely Utility in Relation to Specific Requirements

Ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of provision:

Indicators	Likely Utility		
	H	**M**	**L**
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning		■	
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning in related fields		■	
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment			■
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields			■
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■
Employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■

Equipping learners to make informed choices:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	**M**	**L**
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning		■	
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning in related fields		■	
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning		■	
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment			■
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields			■
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment			■
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■
Employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■

Improving learning provider performance:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	**M**	**L**
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning		■	
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning		■	
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment			■
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment			■
% leavers not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence			■

Supporting the NEETs agenda:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	**M**	**L**
% leavers not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence			■

Advantages
- *FE colleges already have the systems in place to do this*

Disadvantages
- *Would perpetuate the situation whereby FE colleges produce information of limited value*

Timescales for the Provision of Reliable Data[57]			Resource Implications[58]		
L	M	S	H	M	L
		■			■

OPTION 3

Continue with current arrangements, whereby FE providers undertake

some internal data-matching within LLWR as well as data-matching with UCAS datasets, but become more prescriptive with FE colleges in terms of:

- o *Requiring them to gather information about learners' actual rather than intended destinations;*
- o *Requiring them to use statistically robust approaches to gathering data;*
- o *Requiring them to achieve specific response rates.*

This option largely reflects what is done by HESA in respect of leavers from higher education courses at present.

Likely Utility in Relation to Specific Requirements

Ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of provision:

Indicators	Likely Utility		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning	■		
% leavers from particular programmes progressing into higher level learning in related disciplines	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields	■		
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes		■	
Employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■

Equipping learners to make informed choices:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning in related fields	■		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields	■		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment	■		
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes		■	
Employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■

Improving learning provider performance:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning	■		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment	■		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment	■		
% leavers not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence	■		

Supporting the NEETs agenda:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	M	L
% leavers not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence	■		

Advantages
- *Likely to yield reliable destinations data which could be used for published performance indicators*
- *Would make it clear to FE colleges that the Welsh Government takes the destinations of learners seriously*
- *Could lead providers to abandon provision that does not lead to favourable destination outcomes*

Disadvantages
- *Likely to be highly resource intensive, probably more so than the work done by HEIs to establish leavers' destinations, not least because of the sheer numbers of learners in the FE system and the very diverse characteristics both of learners and the learning undertaken*
- *Likely to meet with strong opposition from some, if not all, FE institutions, particularly if full and additional funding is not provided to cover the costs*
- *The cost burden could only be justified if clear plans were in place for the use of the data e.g. links to the funding system*

Timescales for the Provision of Reliable Data				Resource Implications		
L	M	S		H	M	L
	█████			█████		

OPTION 4

Centralise data gathering arrangements within the Welsh Government. This would involve the Welsh Government matching LLWR data across all providers as well as data-matching with LLWR with UCAS datasets. The Welsh Government could then commission an external survey of leavers.

This option is in keeping with what was done by the Skills Funding Agency on behalf of the Department for Business Innovation and Skills in England in order to compile the FE Choices datasets.

Likely Utility in Relation to Specific Requirements

Ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of provision:

Indicators	Likely Utility		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning	■		
% leavers from particular programmes progressing into higher level learning in related disciplines	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields	■		
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes		■	
Employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■

Equipping learners to make informed choices:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning in related fields	■		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment	■		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields	■		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment	■		
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes		■	
Employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes			■

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Improving learning provider performance:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	**M**	**L**
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment	🟥		
% leavers not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence	🟥		

Supporting the NEETs agenda:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	**M**	**L**
% leavers not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence	🟥		

Advantages
- *Would make it clear to FE colleges that the Welsh Government takes the destinations of learners seriously, which could lead providers to abandon provision that does not lead to favourable destination outcomes*
- *Welsh Government would have a greater degree of control over the quality of the data gathered*
- *It would introduce a greater level of consistency of approach across Wales*
- *It would be possible to explore a wider range of issues than learners' immediate destinations upon leaving e.g. their earnings levels*
- *FE colleges would welcome the lessening of their administrative burden*

Disadvantages
- *Some data may not be capable of being published at all spatial levels*
- *Commissioning and managing the process would mean a great deal of additional work for Welsh Government staff and may not be manageable within existing resources*
- *The work itself would be costly*
- *The data produced by the survey undertaken in England was thought to have been of limited use*
- *FE colleges' experience suggest that it is difficult to track leavers down*

Timescales for the Provision of Reliable Data			Resource Implications		
L	M	S	H	M	L
	🟥		🟥		

OPTION 5

Centralise data matching arrangements within the Welsh Government. This would involve the Welsh Government matching LLWR data across all providers as well as data-matching LLWR with UCAS datasets in order to identify the proportion of leavers progressing into further learning.

The Welsh Government could then turn to the work being done by the DWP to match its WLPS dataset to the LLWR dataset. The data generated could be used to indicate where problems might lie (e.g. learning programmes which do not seem to lead leavers into employment) and further, more focused, research undertaken to pin-point the precise nature of any underlying weaknesses.

Likely Utility in Relation to Specific Requirements

Ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of provision:

Indicators	Likely Utility		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning	🟥		
% leavers from particular programmes progressing into higher level learning in related disciplines	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields			🟥
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes	🟥		
Employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes	🟥		

Equipping learners to make informed choices:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning in related fields	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment in related fields			🟥
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment	🟥		
Earnings ranges of individuals leaving particular learning programmes	🟥		
Employment stability of individuals leaving particular learning programmes	🟥		

Improving learning provider performance:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	M	L
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into higher level learning	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into higher level learning	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning programmes progressing into employment	🟥		
% leavers from particular learning providers progressing into employment	🟥		
% leavers not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence	🟥		

Supporting the NEETs agenda:

Indicators	Likelihood		
	H	M	L
% leavers not progressing into further education, training or employment by areas of residence	🟥		

Advantages
- *Retrospective data can be used and the effects of learning undertaken over the past few years can be considered, thus providing some intelligence fairly swiftly*
- *Would allow the Welsh Government to identify the returns on investment of different learning programmes*
- *Would introduce a greater level of consistency of approach across Wales*
- *Would reduce the administrative burden on FE institutions*

Disadvantages
- *The data would not allow users to discern whether learners progressing into employment did so in jobs related to the learning undertaken*
- *Would incur a cost (though less cost-intensive than Option 4)*
- *It is not clear that the data will provide the level of 'granularity' required, particularly at a local level*
- *The level at which findings can be published remains unclear*

Timescales for the Provision of Reliable Data				Resource Implications		
L	M	S		H	M	L
🟥	🟥			🟥	🟥	

5.7 On balance, the analysis above suggests that there are no 'quick fixes' to this issue. In deciding between the options, it will be essential for Ministers and officials first to determine which of the various potential uses of better destinations data are most important to them – and in particular whether the focus is on managing provider performance (whether directly or indirectly via learner choice) or on ensuring the labour market relevance of the curriculum.

5.8 If the former is the key policy driver – and particularly if there is a desire to link funding to outcomes, including learner destinations – then there is undoubtedly a need to significantly improve upon the current collection of data, with options 3 and 4 needing serious consideration, despite the relatively high cost and administrative burden. If, however, the key policy driver is to ensure and improve the relevance of provision to the labour market, option 5 is probably central (potentially combined with option 1), since this is likely to yield in the medium term a richer – and potentially

longitudinal - source of data on the extent to which specific courses of study (albeit aggregated across providers) lead to progression and successful labour market outcomes.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS STUDY[59]

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John Pugsley	Welsh Government
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APPENDIX 2: CAREERS WALES DESTINATIONS CATEGORIES

(For leavers from school sixth forms)

1. Continuing in full time education

2. Continuing in part time education (less than 16 hours a week)

3. Work based training (WBL) – non employed status

4. Work based training (WBL) – employed status

5. Employed – other

6. Known not to be in education training or employment (NEET)

7. No response to survey

8. Left the area

APPENDIX 3: LLWR DESTINATIONS CATEGORIES

(For leavers from further education colleges)

00   Continuing existing programme of learning with same provider or another provider;

08   Continuing current employment (not self-employed);

07   Entering new employment/changing employment (excluding Pre-Employment Training);

13   Voluntary work;

14   Entering employment with a Pre-Employment Training (PET) employer;

18   Self-employed (including setting up own business);

15   Progressed to learning with a higher level learning aim (other than higher education) at the same provider or another provider;

16   Further learning at the same level or lower level, at the same provider or another provider;

19   Progressed to higher education (QCF Level 4 or equivalent, or higher), at the same provider or another provider;

09   Seeking work/unemployed;

20   Other (Long term sickness, pregnancy, death, custodial sentence, or the learner has moved out of Wales);

98   Not applicable (part-time learner);

99   Not known.

APPENDIX 4: POLICY BACKGROUND TO THE USE OF FE DESTINATIONS DATA IN OTHER PARTS OF THE UNITED KINDGOM

England

Since the election of the coalition Government in May 2010, Government policy on education (and indeed public services more generally) has focused strongly on reducing bureaucratic controls on providers of services, increasing the use of quasi-market mechanisms and empowering the users of services to choose between providers on the basis of access to much more extensive information about the performance of individual providers.

In this context, both the Government and the UK Commission on Employment and Skills (UKCES) have placed an increased emphasis on access to outcomes data relating to post-16 provision of education and training. Thus, the UKCES website notes that its current strand of work on empowering customers:

> 'takes forward the proposal made in Towards Ambition 2020: Skills, jobs, growth to "Increase trust in, and authority to, learning providers, through the use of outcome-based public course labelling and institutional scorecards, which empower customers and communities to drive provider responsiveness, quality and continuous improvement"'.

In particular, UKCES notes that 'Toward Ambition 2020' places an emphasis on ensuring information on the outcomes of learning programmes are freely available with such outcomes including:

> 'learner success rates, destination, wage gain, quality and satisfaction of learners and employers'.

The UKCES website goes on to emphasise that, in accordance with the emphasis on the Government on empowering providers, work on these issues is being led within the learning sector:

'The National Improvement Partnership Board is a sector led group that has agreed to oversee work this year to explore the concept of course labelling and institutional scorecards in more detail. The UK Commission is an observer on the board and will use this role to work in partnership with the sector to develop this issue further'.

This same focus on 'course labelling' and publishing evidence about learning outcomes, including destinations, at a granular level, is very clear in the Government's recent policy statement on Post-16 Education and Training, 'New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System'[60]. The opening statement – under the heading 'Learners are at the heart of the FE and Skills System' - states:

'Their success and where they go next is our most important consideration … Our future students and their employers will need to be well informed and make good choices about their training. This strategy sets out how we will ensure that they and their employers are empowered to shape the FE and skills system[61].

The document stresses that this empowering of students should be seen as an alternative to 'top-down bureaucratic controls':

'in the place of Government -based quality assurance systems we will empower students by providing better access to quality information'[62].

'By empowering students to make informed choices through better access to information on quality, we create competition and the incentives for providers to be responsive to students and employers. If we get this right, we can minimise the Government-led quality systems, which divert providers from concentrating on the needs of students and employers… The information students and employers say they need to make informed choices is in most cases already available but it is not accessible enough.[63]

In particular, the document emphasis the need to make information available in one place on the internet and to make more high quality information

available at more 'granular levels (i.e. about subject or course as well as institution or sector subject)'.[64]

While it is not clear that this is referring specifically to destinations of learners, as well as other outcomes (such as success rates), this clearly maps out an agenda in which making information available is central to Government policy.

Scotland

Policy on all aspects of FE provision is currently subject to a period of consultation and development. A major consultation document on all post-16 education - Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education[65] - was published in September 2011 with a closing date for responses of 23 December.

The document stresses – as reflected in the title – the need to make learning more responsive to the needs of learners, particularly in terms of their employment prospects. However, it says relatively little about the use of information and, while arguing that a simpler funding system is necessary, does not suggest an approach directly linked to learner choice as favoured by the UK Government, suggesting rather the retention of a more Government-directed approach:

> 'Given our wish to shift towards regionalisation of college provision, SFC [Scottish Funding Council] funding for colleges should in future be based on the needs of a region, taking into account the demographics and economy of the region in question. The SFC should also separately consider if there is specialist provision that should be funded nationally. Regional funding of college provision should be bolstered by new requirements to make sure the needs of individual localities and communities within the region are properly taken into account. There should be a simple, visible and public connection between the funding allocated and the outcomes that should be delivered.'[66]

In terms of outcomes performance measures, the document is non-prescriptive – one of the consultation questions asks 'What measures should form the basis of our performance management framework for colleges and training providers in order to improve outcomes for all learners?' – and refers to learner destinations only obliquely:

> 'We will develop a more robust and coherent approach to performance management of our institutions and providers by setting them clear outcomes that must be achieved for their funding and rigorously holding them to account for their performance. For colleges and training providers this framework will be based on a set of core indicators which:
>
> o   reflect the Government's priorities for post-16 learning – specifically jobs and growth, life chances, and sustainability;
>
> o   are measurable;
>
> o   are easily understood and transparent;
>
> o   can be used to support external scrutiny;
>
> o   as far as possible can be collected without imposing unnecessary additional bureaucracy on providers.'[67]

At the same time considerable emphasis is placed on this last issue of reducing bureaucracy in connection with collecting data:

> 'At present, colleges and universities are subjected to a range of input measures and a smaller number of output measures. But there is insufficient focus on outcomes. In addition, much of the data we collect is merely descriptive and is not used for effective performance analysis of our system. This must change: the burdens of the statistical and data collection exercises that much of the existing arrangements represent is a bureaucratic overhead to little end, which we can no longer afford and to which our providers should not be subjected'[68]

The tenor of this consultation document which appears rather different to that of the UK Government is perhaps more striking given that the document is in part a response to an Independent Review of Post-16 Education and

Vocational Training in Scotland commissioned by the Scottish Government and chaired by Willie Roe, which was published in August 2011[69].

On the question of empowering learners through better information on outcomes, this report supported a very similar approach to that advocated by UKCES (which as we have seen mirrors the UK Government's position). It referred to the UKCES publication 'Towards Ambition 2020 : skills, jobs, growth for Scotland' and explicitly endorsed that document's recommendations for requiring 'all publicly funded learning programmes (full and part time) to provide public quality labelling on key outcomes, including learner success rates, destinations, wage gain, quality and satisfaction levels of both employers and individuals'.[70]

It suggested that one of 12 key principles driving reform must be to create a system which 'is performance driven with a clear focus on outcomes and impacts'[71] and stated right at the start that:

> 'Lack of transparency is an issue that affects the system at many levels and is impeding the achievement of peak performance. Employers and the wider community should have more influence over what colleges and other providers offer; there should be a system of quality labelling for all publicly-supported programmes; and this review calls for a new system to enable the performance of all learning providers to be publicly compared in a balanced way.'[72]

Finally, amongst its 46 recommendations, two refer specifically to taking forward a new approach to using information, including on destinations, to drive performance and learner choice (the first broadly restating a UKCES recommendation to the Scottish Government):

> '**Recommendation 9:** Publicly funded learning and training organisations (whether offering full time or part-time programmes) to provide online quality labelling on key outcomes, including learner success rates, destinations, wage gain, quality and satisfaction levels of both employers and individuals.

Recommendation 10: The Scottish Government, through its funding agencies, should create a new and public institutional performance framework for learning and training providers – a balanced scorecard based on their profile of aggregate outcomes / destinations customer satisfaction levels and quality, balanced against evidence of the economic, social and labour market characteristics of their catchment areas.'[73]

The Roe Committee's advice has thus put these issues into the Scottish political discourse, though, from the Consultation document, it is less clear that the Scottish Government shares the enthusiasm for this approach.

Northern Ireland

Information on the intentions of using FE destinations data in Northern Ireland appears from a brief web-based survey much more scant.

The Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI) published an updated Skills Strategy in 2011 - Success through Skills – Transforming Futures: The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011. This contains no reference (even implicit) to data on the destinations of FE leavers, though it does suggest that a new FE Strategy is in development, following the major structural upheaval with the merger of the Province's 16 FEIs into six new Institutions.[74]