



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Covid-19 Resilience Plan for the post-16 sector

Strategic framework for learning delivery  
from September 2020

31 July 2020



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Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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# Contents

Introduction.....	3
The learning experience from September 2020 .....	4
Enabling principles .....	6
1. Safe operation.....	7
2. Wellbeing and mental health .....	9
3. Curriculum and assessment.....	11
4. Learner and staff involvement.....	13
5. Equality .....	14
6. Professional learning.....	15
7. Welsh medium and bilingual learning.....	16
8. Economic recovery.....	17
9. Financial resilience.....	19

# Introduction

On 20 May we published our overarching [Covid-19 Resilience Plan](#) for the post-16 sector (including further education, work-based and adult learning), setting out how the Welsh Government will work with its stakeholders to meet the changing needs of Welsh learners, communities and employers during and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. It outlines three phases of work:



On 10 June we published [guidance](#) on recommencing face-to-face learning in further education and work-based learning settings during summer 2020. Part of the “Rescue” phase, the guidance focused on learners who needed to complete vocational assessments, and those who needed additional support to remain in learning.

Over the last few months we have worked closely with learning providers and partners to develop a plan for post-16 learning delivery from September 2020. Over this period, Covid-19 restrictions have gradually been eased as the infection rate drops, and sectors of the economy have re-opened for business. However, there is still considerable uncertainty about how the situation will evolve, the possibility of future spikes in infections and a subsequent re-introduction of restrictions.

Providers have consistently told us that:

- the safety and wellbeing of learners and staff must continue to be the first priority in decision-making;
- they need time to plan their curriculum, staff, learning environments and communications ready for the autumn;
- it is much easier to revert from a planned “blended learning” model to face-to-face delivery, rather than the other way around; and
- despite the challenges of delivering remote learning during lockdown, there are many positive outcomes and opportunities, and the Welsh Government should work with practitioners, leaders, learners and learner representatives to ensure that these are built into future delivery.

This document, co-constructed with the sector, sets out an overall framework and vision for the post-16 learning experience from September 2020. It aims to build on experiences of recent months through endorsing a “blended learning” delivery model, whereby most learners will continue to do at least some of their learning remotely as well as attending their college or learning centre. We are not prescribing the balance of remote and face-to-face learning activities, recognising that this will differ for individual learners, courses and settings. Providers will have flexibility to plan and deliver learning in ways that meet local needs and comply with public health advice.

# The learning experience from September 2020

We expect post-16 providers to offer a high quality learning experience to all learners from September 2020 onwards. We anticipate that this will involve a return to face-to-face learning for most learners, with blended learning used, where appropriate, to enhance the learning experience and assist with safe operation. In some cases, streamlining and refocusing of curriculum will be agreed in order to help with safe delivery, as outlined in Section 3 below.

Learning providers should determine the mix of face-to-face and remote learning, based on their knowledge of learners' needs and abilities; their ability to access digital learning and support; and the practicalities of delivering different courses and qualifications. Providers need to ensure that they have a clear vision of what a high quality blended learning experience looks like, and this document provides an overall framework of principles to help guide this.

## Requirements for specific groups of learners

Some learners are likely to need more time in their college or centre than others, and providers should use initial assessment, their knowledge of returning learners' needs, and identification of risk factors to determine this. For some learners, remote learning may not be appropriate or may need to be minimised; many post-16 learners will be able to study independently for part of the time but will still need support, direction and feedback to ensure that their time is used productively. Others may not be able to learn remotely at all because of factors around their skills, equipment, home environment, learning difficulties, motivation or the type of programme they are studying. These factors, and therefore learners' individual needs, may change over time.

Learning providers should:

- (i) Ensure that learners studying **Independent Living Skills** programmes in FE return to an agreed programme of face-to-face learning from September, where it is possible to do so safely, in order to reflect the challenges around remote delivery for this cohort and their parents/carers;
- (ii) Plan for learners on **Entry level programmes, Traineeships, and vulnerable learners** to have a suitably high proportion of face-to-face learning, so that they can benefit from the support, social interaction, and motivation that will help them to remain engaged in learning, with online content to enhance and enrich their experiences;
- (iii) Ensure that **learners in the workplace**, such as apprentices, are afforded the same level of protection as "centre-based" learners, but recognise that it is the employer who is ultimately responsible for apprentices health, safety and wellbeing; and
- (iv) Determine the appropriate balance of face-to-face and remote learning for all other learners and programmes, to ensure safe working practices and high quality learning experiences.

## Blended learning

Staff across the post-16 sector have worked exceptionally hard to move learning provision online, to support learners' wellbeing and maintain safeguarding standards. We have surveyed the sector to understand their approaches and the challenges faced by staff and learners, and have set up a working group to identify effective practice and the further support needed by the sector.

The immediate shift to online learning has identified valuable lessons which can inform future teaching and learning models. There is a huge difference between moving classroom content online, and a planned blended learning programme which effectively integrates face-to-face and

remote activities. Working in this way requires specific skills for learners and staff, and a refocusing of professional learning.

The post-16 sector in Wales is very well placed to embrace the lessons and opportunities of blended learning. In June 2019 we published our [Digital 2030](#) strategic framework for post-16 learning, co-constructed with the sector and Jisc. This is used to determine national priorities and actions, as well as shaping individual providers' strategies. Of course, when the framework was published, few anticipated how crucial digital learning would become in such a short time. Those providers who had already enthusiastically embraced the Digital 2030 concept were well placed to respond to the challenges of the pandemic, and will be ahead of the curve when it comes to establishing a longer-term blended learning model. Nonetheless, we recognise that it will take time to establish high standards of blended learning across the whole sector.

### **Blended learning definition**

*Blended learning provides a combination of face-to-face learning and dynamic digital activities and content that facilitate any time/any place learning.*

<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/creating-blended-learning-content>

### **Characteristics of effective blended learning**

- Learning is planned to take account of the different modes of delivery to create coherent programmes with clear aims, objectives and assessment points.
- Learners are encouraged and supported to develop independent study and research skills, information literacy, motivation and resilience.
- Learners are provided with direction so that they know what to do and how to get help if they need it.
- Digital and face-to-face components are carefully planned to be integrated and complementary, and each enhances and enriches the other.
- Face-to-face time is prioritised for the delivery of practical activities that cannot be undertaken online, for peer collaboration, and to provide “scaffolding” for remote learning, including formative assessment, feedback, redirection and guidance.
- Staff and learners understand what is expected of them, including how many hours of face-to-face, remote and independent learning are required, and any flexibilities around attendance and when they learn.
- Learning is differentiated to meet individual needs, including bilingual resources, additional support where needed and “stretch and challenge” activities.
- Digital inequalities and the barriers for vulnerable learners are considered in the planning and delivery of learning.
- Activities are designed to help learners and staff manage “screen fatigue”, including short, focused sessions, time for regular breaks and flexible timetabling.
- Learners understand when and how to submit work and are given prompt, constructive feedback on it.
- Learners have opportunities to work together and support one another, including through the medium of Welsh.
- Learner engagement is monitored and there is a clear understanding of what good engagement looks like.

We have published separate [guidance](#) on designing and delivering blended learning.

# Enabling principles

This document focuses on our vision for learning delivery from September 2020, and so we have placed the teaching and learning experience at its centre. We have defined a number of enabling principles to support this, which include expectations around learner and staff support, as well as practical arrangements to help ensure the resilience of our provider network.

The next section expands on these principles, which are summarised below.



Evaluation and research will be an ongoing focus of the Renew phase of the Post-16 Resilience Plan. An analytical plan is being prepared, setting out the research and statistical work required to address any gaps in the available data and to monitor and evaluate the impacts of Covid-19 on the sector. We will assess and review the delivery of the plan and adapt our approach as the situation evolves. We will ensure that we include the learner and practitioner voice in research, and explore how we can use co-production to ensure that learners and practitioners are involved in evaluating how learning is being delivered. Thematic work by Estyn will help us to understand approaches to blended learning and support for wellbeing.



## 1. **Safe operation:** The health, safety and wellbeing of learners and staff will be the key priority in decision-making at national and institutional levels

As part of their planning for 2020/21, learning providers should revisit and update the risk assessments they undertook for the return of priority learners from June 2020. This will help to ensure the safe return of learners and staff, including those who have not attended for face-to-face learning since lockdown was initiated.

Learning providers must ensure all staff and learners are advised of, and continue to follow, the system of controls set out below.

### *Prevention:*

1. Minimise contact between individuals wherever possible.
2. Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have Covid-19 symptoms, or who have someone in their household or extended household who does, do not attend their college or training centre.
3. Clean hands thoroughly, more often than usual.
4. Ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach.
5. Continue enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and bleach.
6. Where necessary, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

### *Response to any infection:*

7. Comply with the Welsh Government's [Test Trace Protect strategy](#).
8. Contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice.

We have published separate on how learning providers must ensure safe operation. It will continue to be updated in line with the latest scientific advice.

## **Preparing for future restrictions**

Learning providers need to be prepared for possible future restrictions to face-to-face delivery if Covid-19 infection rates increase, which could include periods of lockdown and/or local restrictions leading to the closure of colleges, training centres and employers.

To help ensure that learning can proceed without disadvantaging learners, providers should ensure that:

- They regularly review what is working well and what needs to improve in relation to remote learning, and use this to inform planning for future restrictions;
- Learners and staff know what is happening and what is expected of them;
- Individual learning plans are in place and up to date for all learners;
- Learners have the ICT equipment and software they need to be able to learn online, wherever possible;
- ICT services are available and accessible to those teaching and learning remotely;
- Arrangements are in place to support remote learning for those who cannot learn online;

- Contact details are up to date for all learners and staff;
- The provider knows who its vulnerable learners are (including those at risk of dropping out), and has arrangements in place for tracking and monitoring;
- Arrangements are in place for safeguarding and wellbeing support, and learners and staff know how to access the support they need;
- Course materials and resources are available online through accessible platforms, with appropriate consideration for the needs of Welsh medium learners;
- Arrangements are in place for submission of work, marking and feedback;
- All online learning platforms are up to date, secure and resilient, with recovery planning should be finalised and ready if required;
- The content of learning platforms is compliant with accessibility standards, be inclusive and accessible on a range of devices and screen sizes;
- Learners are given a framework of support to develop study skills, independent learning, motivation and resilience, to help them cope with changes; and
- There are communication strategies in place for learners, staff, parents/carers, and employers.



## 2. Wellbeing and mental health: Providers will ensure that the mental health needs of learners and staff are identified and supported, with clear communication of the support available

A body of research is already beginning to emerge, showing how the pandemic has affected (and continues to affect) the wellbeing of young people and adults.

A [survey](#) carried out by Young Minds at the beginning of the lockdown period found that, for young people with a history of mental health needs, the pandemic had intensified problems such as anxiety, difficulty sleeping, panic attacks or urges to self-harm. The closure of educational settings created uncertainty in the short term, and around educational and employment outcomes in the future. Young people were concerned about the closures for several reasons, including:

- Disruption of routines and activities that they used as coping mechanisms
- Potential loss of contact with friends
- Concerns about how their grades would be assessed, or about the impact on their university or career prospects
- Less contact with counsellors or other trusted adults, including teachers, with some respondents anxious about telephone counselling because of a lack of privacy at home
- Concerns about home learning, both for practical reasons and because of stress related to the pandemic
- Loss of formal or informal pastoral support
- Loss of their 'safe' place away from difficult or dangerous home environments

A literature review of the *Impact of Mass Disruption on children's mental health and wellbeing* is due to be completed this summer, and will provide more evidence on the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people to inform policy development.

We have set up a working group with post-16 stakeholders, which will help to share good practice and develop strategies and guidance to enable the sector to support learners affected by the pandemic. During 2020-21, we are funding further education-led projects on mental health, including some specific activities around Covid-19 support and transition; we will work with networks across the post-16 sector to disseminate and learn from these.

Meanwhile, we expect learning providers to:

- Use initial assessment to ensure risk factors in relation to wellbeing are identified;
- Ensure that wellbeing support is available to learners and staff, including referrals to counselling services where required, face-to-face, online or by telephone;
- Where possible, signpost Welsh speaking learners to support through the medium of Welsh;
- Ensure that the available support is promoted to learners and staff and that they are aware of "early warning signs" and what to do if they need help;
- Be aware that remote learning may make it more difficult for staff to know when learners are struggling to keep up, to manage their time and to cope with anxieties, and use regular "check-ins" to help with this;
- Consider the anxieties that may be experienced by parents in supporting their children during remote learning, and communicate with them about the best ways to do so as well as about changes to how learning is taking place;

- Help staff and learners to use technology to manage their time and anxieties effectively (for example, by managing notifications to minimise interruptions, and taking regular screen breaks);
- Recognise that staff will experience anxieties and pressures related to Covid-19, and ensure that they can access the support they need; and
- Follow the Welsh Government's non-statutory [guidance on Keeping children and young people safe](#), which is designed to assist practitioners working with young people up to the age of 18 to access information and advice on identifying abuse, supporting disclosure and reporting.

### 3. Curriculum and assessment: Curriculum and assessment requirements will be reviewed and updated where possible, to help ensure an agile response to learner and employer needs

We are working with the sector and stakeholders to look, where possible, at simplifying curriculum requirements to help ensure that providers can keep learners and staff safe. There are constraints on how much we can do, because of the need to maintain parity for our learners with those undertaking equivalent qualifications elsewhere in the UK, and the need to meet levels of competence for vocational learners and apprentices. The current position is set out in the table below.

Curriculum
<p><b>Vocational programmes in FE</b></p> <p>Most vocational qualifications taken by learners in Wales are also available in other UK nations, so Qualifications Wales works closely with Ofqual and other regulators to ensure a consistent approach to assessment. Ofqual has published a <a href="#">paper</a> outlining key principles that awarding bodies are likely to be asked to follow when considering how qualifications and assessments may need to be adapted in 2020/21. Any changes that are made will seek to maximise the manageability of assessments and ensure that learners are not disadvantaged compared to their peers taking general qualifications, while maintaining the validity of vocational qualifications.</p> <p>We have worked with ColegauCymru's Curriculum and Quality Group to agree arrangements for streamlining vocational programmes for 2020/21, enabling colleges to focus on the delivery of main qualifications. This will allow colleges to be flexible and learner-focused in responding to awarding body adaptations, and to allow for seamless transition should further restrictions be imposed, by allowing for blended learning from the outset.</p>
<p><b>A levels</b></p> <p>Ofqual has <a href="#">consulted</a> on proposed changes to the assessment of some A level and GCSE subjects in 2020/21, in order to reduce pressures on teachers' time and accommodate potential ongoing public health restrictions. There may also be further changes to the exam timetable in 2021, to extend teaching and learning time.</p> <p>Because A level learners will be competing with their peers from England and elsewhere for university places and jobs, there is little scope for the design of A levels in Wales to deviate from that in England. Therefore, we are currently not anticipating significant changes. The WJEC has recently surveyed teachers on the adaptations that might be required to successfully deliver A level qualifications from 2020/21 academic year. Further guidance on future assessment, adaptations and the exam timetable for A levels delivered across FE and schools will be issued in due course.</p> <p>We have set up a working group with representation from the FE sector and sixth form schools along with Estyn, Qualifications Wales, WJEC, Regional Consortia and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, to develop a shared vision for the delivery of A level provision across sectors in 2020/21. This group is preparing initial supplementary guidance for teachers, learners and parents for publication in August. This will be updated to reflect any changes to A level assessment during the academic year.</p>
<p><b>Apprenticeships</b></p> <p>As apprenticeship frameworks are set out in legislation, completion of the full framework of qualifications will continue to be a requirement. However, providers will have flexibility to use blended learning models for delivery. Where apprentices need to undertake learning and assessments that could not be completed during lockdown, but would have exhausted their programme funding value in 2019/20, we will award additional funding per remaining learning activity (up to a maximum value of three months' funding) to ensure that the provider is financially able to support them.</p>

### **Personal Learning Accounts (PLAs)**

The PLA pilot was launched in September 2019 in two colleges, to support employed people to gain higher level skills and qualifications in the construction, engineering, digital, financial services and health sectors. Ministers have agreed to merge this pilot with the FE Skills Development Fund, to provide support across Wales for employed people earning under the median income, furloughed workers and individuals who have been negatively impacted by Covid-19 to gain higher level skills in priority sectors so they can access a wider range of job opportunities. During the first year of delivery, the programme will be responsive to employers' upskilling requirements, in direct response to Covid-19. The programme will be delivered flexibly, including online and blended learning.

### **Monitoring arrangements**

#### **FE planning and monitoring**

We have relaxed planning requirements for 2020/21, allowing for colleges' curriculum plans, in the main, to reflect the previous year's plans. We will also take a "light touch" approach to monitoring of delivery, and will analyse the impact of Covid-19 on colleges' curriculum planning across sectors. We expect colleges to be responsive to both national priorities set by Welsh Ministers and priorities that emerge from Regional Skills Partnerships reports.

#### **Performance measures**

For 2020/21:

- We will not be producing two-year achievement measures for General Education programmes, reflecting the continuing impact on the A2 cohort whose learning and qualifications were disrupted during their AS year in 2019/20.
- We will not be producing value added measures.
- We will work with the sector to consider what performance data would be useful and meaningful at provider level, including FE vocational qualifications, work-based learning and adult learning. We anticipate producing some data for one-year qualifications delivered in 2020/21, for learner progression and completion, but the format and status of this is open to discussion.
- We will use national data to help us understand the impact of Covid-19 on learners' outcomes and progression.

#### **Inspection**

Estyn took the decision to suspend inspection activity on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020. They have extended their suspension of inspection activity into the autumn term for post-16 providers. They will continue to make engagement phonecalls or, when safe to do so, visits to providers. This will allow them to share insights into how providers are adapting their approaches.

Estyn will also undertake thematic reviews across providers in relation to:

- approaches to blended learning; and
- support for learners' wellbeing.

The latest information about Estyn's work in relation to COVID-19 can be found on their website - <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/about-us/faqs-covid-19-and-inspection>

#### 4. **Learner and staff involvement:** Learners and staff will be involved in decision-making about the easing of Covid-19 restrictions and about how learning and support are delivered

Covid-19 has affected individuals in many different ways, impacting on their family lives, work, physical and mental wellbeing, and expectations for the future. Many learners and staff in the post-16 sector will be looking forward to returning to their college or provider in September, and continuing uncertainties mean that it is more important than ever that they can influence decisions about their learning and their work.

We expect providers to adapt and develop their mechanisms for involving learners and staff in decision-making, to inform change management on an ongoing basis. The growth of digital learning offers new opportunities to include a wider range of learners (not just those who are full-time or campus-based) in decision-making, but consideration is also needed for those who are unable to access online learning. For younger learners and those with additional learning needs (ALN), arrangements should be in place to communicate and seek views from parents/carers, recognising that they may be anxious about their child's return to learning and will want reassurance that the risks are being managed. Effective communication can also help to manage expectations about how learning will take place.

Providers should:

- Maintain and strengthen existing structures, including student unions, course representatives, learner governors and other systems, to ensure that learners are involved in decision-making about what and how they learn;
- Use surveys and other engagement mechanisms to understand the experiences of learners and staff, including how Covid-19 changes have affected them, how well they engage with blended learning approaches, and how their linguistic needs can be met;
- Take every opportunity to ensure that the views of learners from under-represented, protected and disadvantaged groups are heard, understood and responded to;
- Ensure that informal opportunities are available for learners to raise questions and concerns;
- Communicate early and comprehensively to learners, parents/carers and staff when changes are being made, why, and how it will affect them;
- Explore opportunities to work with learners as “change agents” who can co-produce strategies, practical solutions and learning resources; and
- Involve learners and staff in evaluating the impact of changes to how learning and support are delivered.

## 5. Equality: Planning and delivery of learning will reflect the needs of disadvantaged and protected groups, with appropriate adjustments made to secure equality of access and experience

Evidence shows that while the impact of Covid-19 has affected the whole of our society, individuals from protected and disadvantaged groups are likely to experience the impacts most severely. For example:

- A [review](#) by an expert advisory group considered why people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities were more likely to be adversely affected by Covid-19. This found that disproportionate infection and death rates for BAME communities were linked to income and employment insecurity and cultural issues around the suitability of health and social services for these groups.
- [Analysis by the Bevan Foundation](#) highlights the challenges of providing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes during lockdown, and the vital social and emotional role this provision provides in learners' lives.
- Welsh national disability organisations have raised [concerns](#) about the impact on disabled people with pre-existing medical conditions who are likely to face harm, not just through Covid-19 itself but through general pressures on the health and social care system.
- Mencap has [reported](#) that people with learning disabilities already face extreme levels of social isolation and loneliness and are seven times more likely to feel lonely than the general population due to closures of day services, loss of routine, difficulties staying in touch with family and keeping active.
- Carers Trust Wales and the All Wales Forum for Parents and Carers have fed back advice to the Welsh Government relating to the concerns and pressures facing many young carers around returning to education. These include concerns around transmitting the virus to the people they care for, managing competing priorities, coping with isolation, and guilt around responsibilities for their siblings.
- Opportunities for the perpetration of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence have [increased](#) during lockdown, with victims often isolated from their families and unable to access educational and other "safe spaces".

We will continue to research the impacts of Covid-19 on different groups, including specific consideration of post-16 learners. We have carried out an integrated impact assessment on our Covid-19 Resilience Plan, which will be published shortly. This will be continually under review to address any additional risks that arise from reopening the sector to face-to-face learning.

In their planning for delivery from September 2020, learning providers should consider impacts on different groups of learners and staff. They will need to consider how the provision of technology for remote learning; learning support; transport arrangements; and provision of financial and practical support may need to be adjusted to meet the needs of different groups.

In particular, some learners from disadvantaged groups may find it particularly difficult to learn remotely, due to issues around their living environment, access to technology and/or caring responsibilities. We expect learning providers to plan to address any barriers to engagement, for example through providing equipment, ensuring that these learners benefit from face-to-face attendance, and additional support to help them continue and progress in their learning.

## 6. Professional learning: Practitioners will have access to appropriate professional learning to help develop and enhance their skills to deliver and support learning in the context of Covid-19 adjustments

Jisc's 2019 [Insights survey](#) of post-16 practitioners in Wales illustrates the scale of the challenge the sector faced when lockdown started, just a few months later:

*Feedback suggests that teaching practitioners consider the use of digital technologies in their teaching to be an optional extra component within their job role, although they are aware of the importance of learning digital skills for students' future careers. This tension, together with a lack of reward and recognition for staff who do put time and effort into utilising the transactional and transformational potential of digital technologies, creates important blockers to embedding technology-enabled teaching and learning into widespread practice.*

At the start of lockdown, many practitioners already had well-developed digital skills and were able to enthusiastically embrace delivery of online learning. Others, as the Insights survey shows, were less equipped to do so. Longer-term changes to learning delivery will go far beyond the immediate migration of teaching to online platforms, and this poses significant challenges for professional learning.

We recognise that learning providers are already investing in professional learning to help their staff prepare for the autumn and beyond. Our support for the sector includes:

- Jisc's extensive training and support offer, including support through [account managers](#); the [digital capability framework](#); and [Covid-19 guides, resources and online training](#);
- The £5m Professional Development Fund for colleges, which for 2020/21 includes digital learning as a key focus for institutional and collaborative projects;
- The new [digital standards](#) for post-16 providers;
- Digital pedagogy in work-based learning via a forthcoming Welsh Government-funded Jisc project; and
- The continued development of Hwb resources, and the roll-out of accounts to post-16 staff.

Providers should:

- Use the [professional standards for further education and work-based learning](#) to guide their planning and delivery of professional learning;
- Support practitioners to design and deliver engaging blended learning activities;
- Consider how workloads can be managed and streamlined so that practitioners can focus on teaching and learning, including opportunities to review administrative requirements;
- Use the new digital standards, co-constructed by the sector and Jisc, to evaluate practitioners' digital skills and prioritise further training;
- Recognise that staff will be managing learners' anxieties and practical issues about re-engagement in learning, and are likely to need support to do this effectively;
- Beyond formal training, give staff opportunities to collaborate to share digital teaching ideas and resources through networks and events, within and beyond their own organisation;
- Follow up training with practice, encouragement and hands-on support;
- Develop a culture of recognition and reward for digital development; and
- Provide training and guidance for practitioners on staying safe and behaving appropriately in digital environments, with reference to EWC's [good practice guides](#).



## 7. Welsh medium and bilingual learning: Learners will be offered appropriate opportunities to progress their Welsh language skills, including learning, assessment and informal use of Welsh

We remain committed to the [Cymraeg 2050](#) target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050, and expect learning providers to continue to plan to meet the needs of Welsh speaking learners and support the use of the Welsh language. Providers should make every effort to provide materials and access to assessment through the medium of Welsh, and to encourage their uptake. Blended learning offers opportunities for collaborative and innovative approaches, through shared resources, teaching activities and platforms.

Learning providers should recognise that some of the learners who are progressing into the post-16 sector are coming from Welsh medium schools; those who are from non-Welsh speaking families will have lost opportunities to use and develop their language skills over the lockdown period. Studying through the medium of Welsh or bilingually, or even having informal opportunities to use Welsh, will help these learners to re-engage with the language as they start post-compulsory learning. Anything that providers can do to support this will help.

Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol supports Welsh-medium learning in the post-16 and higher education sectors. Its resource portal, [Porth](#), contains learning and staff development resources for a wide range of subjects and levels, which learning providers can use to support and enhance their delivery of Welsh medium and bilingual learning. The Coleg also plays a key role in disseminating good practice and supporting innovative and creative projects.

Providers should:

- Ensure that they actively plan bilingual and Welsh-medium delivery and assessment into their blended curriculum;
- Explore creative opportunities for informal use of Welsh, including online communities, social media and resources to help supplement more limited face-to-face conversations;
- Ensure that practitioners include the Welsh language when developing resources in priority subject areas; and
- Identify opportunities for creative delivery, such as increased collaboration and opportunities for greater “critical mass” of Welsh speaking staff and learners on online platforms.

## 8. **Economic recovery:** The planning of post-16 learning provision will reflect the economic impacts of Covid-19, including the needs of unemployed individuals and work to lay the foundation for future labour market changes

*Prosperity for All, the Economic Action Plan (EAP)*, is built on the twin foundations of reducing inequality and spreading wealth and wellbeing across Wales. The regional approach articulated in the EAP has been vital in shaping and delivering our immediate response to Covid-19, and will become even more central as we move to the next phase of recovery.

The employment and skills response to Covid-19 must be informed by a clear understanding of its effect on the labour market, using data and information from a range of sources and stakeholders. We asked Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) to provide regular labour market intelligence reports, drawing on information gathered from their employer networks to show how employers in key sectors are responding to Covid-19.

The early reports have highlighted that:

- Many employers are focusing on short term survival, with a high degree of uncertainty making it difficult to think about the implications of the crisis for their skills needs.
- Impacts of Covid-19 were identified across a wide range of sectors, but with particularly intense effects on tourism, hospitality, aerospace and automotive manufacturing.
- While furloughing has softened the blows, the prospects of further job losses remain, with workers in lower skilled occupations thought to be at particular risk.
- Health and social care has seen relatively high levels of recruitment; however, the need to recruit large numbers of new workers while coping with Covid-19 presents challenges.
- The uncertainty faced by many employers means there is ambiguity about the future prospects for employer training and engagement with work-based learning, especially in the sectors worst affected by the crisis.
- While many firms remain committed to providing training opportunities, there is a risk that investment may be scaled back if economic conditions do not improve.
- The reports have highlighted a number of issues to be considered as part of the refresh of the National Occupational Standards Strategy, particularly the importance of transferable skills to support moves between sectors and occupations.

Discussions are underway with the sector to develop a more flexible, responsive mechanism for delivery into key sectors to meet employer need and the choices of individual learners. Aligning work-based learning delivery to regional needs will be reviewed prior to the end of the year once the full impact on apprenticeships is clearer.

Welsh Ministers have announced a **Covid Commitment** to “offer advice and support to people 16+ to find work, pursue self-employment or find a place in education or training, with hiring incentives for employers to recruit individuals most affected by Covid-19.” This focuses on:

- i. Support for young people to mitigate the anticipated rise in youth unemployment and those not in education, employment or training.
- ii. Focus on tackling inequalities and supporting the long-term unemployed in communities that are most vulnerable.
- iii. Creation of new jobs and new enterprises, including the provision of employer incentives to stimulate hiring.

- iv. Increasing the amount of education and training for jobs in expanding occupations and sectors through upskilling and reskilling.
- v. Remedial work for learners who have been detrimentally affected by the lockdown through limitations on access to vocational training facilities.

Work is already underway to deliver on these priorities and Welsh Government has developed a series of initiatives to support young people and adults whose employment prospects are affected by Covid-19, which include:

- Working Wales support for individuals, which is delivered online and through its new job bulletin, as well as a pilot video calling service;
- [Online learning for furloughed workers](#), hosted by Working Wales, which supports individuals to update their skills, maintain mental health and think about future careers options;
- [Redundancy support](#) including the established ReAct scheme;
- Traineeship Summer Schools, delivered online by our provider network; and
- Realignment of other schemes, such as the Community Employability Programme and Wales Union Learning Fund, to ensure safe delivery and to meet the needs of employees who have been furloughed or made redundant.

Providers should:

- Support people into work as quickly as possible, by delivering employability and skills support to help people join the job market or restart employment following redundancy;
- Reskill and upskill unemployed individuals and existing employees across Wales to sustain employment or find employment in new sectors or access higher pay;
- Ensure continuity of learning and progression for learners, particularly young people, and those detrimentally affected by the lockdown due to limitations on access to vocational training facilities – through catch up support;
- Optimise employer relationships and recruitment incentives to stimulate recruitment, job creation, work placement and work experience opportunities;
- Draw on regional labour market information and respond to emerging regional needs and priorities, and develop a more flexible, responsive system that supports key sectors, meets employer need and the choices of individual learners; and
- Work with Working Wales and Business Wales to ensure they are aware of current provision and that referral mechanisms are in place to respond to marketing campaigns.

## 9. **Financial resilience:** The financial resilience of the post-16 sectors will be reviewed and supported, to ensure the safe and effective delivery of learning whilst maintaining financial security for 2021 onwards

During the early stages of the lockdown period in spring 2020, we put measures in place to secure continuity of funding for providers, so that they could focus on responding to learners' needs during the pandemic. Over the last few months we have worked with the sector to identify how funding should be adjusted to support delivery in 2020/21, and areas where additional support is needed.

For the **FE sector**, Ministers have agreed a funding package including:

- £5m to support the additional costs of bringing vocational learners back into a socially distanced college environment to ensure licence to practice qualifications are completed.
- £15.288m to recognise "catch-up" costs of all full time 16-19 learners beginning A-level or vocational provision at either a sixth form or FE college.
- £460,000 to support additional costs of allowing Independent Living Skills learners to return to college in September, to complete a final term of delivery in preparation for leaving the college environment.
- A maximum of £17.962m to support the additional costs of bringing vocational learners back for practical face-to-face learning in accordance with Welsh Government guidance for safe operation.

For the **work-based learning sector**:

- Given the re-opening of training centres and the increase in the number of apprentices being able to return to work, funding for both the Apprenticeship programme and the Traineeship programme will be based on actual data from 1 August 2020. Officials will monitor the take up of apprenticeships by each provider to ensure that funding can be realigned to meet demand within priority areas.
- Where apprentices need to undertake learning and assessments that could not be completed during lockdown, but would have exhausted their programme funding value in 2019/20, we will award up to an additional three months' funding per learner to ensure that the provider is financially able to support all learners in this position.
- We recognise that this period of economic instability is likely to result in significant numbers of apprentices being made redundant. We also recognise that the demand for apprenticeships is likely to decline. In response to this, Ministers have agreed a funding package of £16.4m to:
  - Deliver wage incentives to stimulate the recruitment of apprentices aged 16-24 and enable redundant apprentices to continue learning with a new employer; and
  - Support sector led shared apprenticeships to facilitate continued learning of existing apprentices with shared responsibility.

For **local authority adult learning**, we have allocated £100,000 for professional learning and mental health initiatives to help build capacity in the sector to support learners and staff.

An additional £3.2m has been allocated to help tackle digital exclusion in post-16 learning. This will be used to purchase ICT equipment and improve connectivity to help support blended learning.

