Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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16 to 18 local curricula guidance

We want your views on the draft 16 to 18 local curricula guidance.

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Overview

The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 transfers legal duties on the formation of 16 to 18 local curricula in Wales from Welsh Ministers to the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (Medr). It is intended that these duties will transfer as of April 2026. This consultation is seeking your views on the '16 to 18 local curricula guidance' that will serve as statutory guidance from Welsh Government to Medr in respect of these duties.

1. Introduction

The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 (the TER Act) established Medr (the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research) as a new body, responsible for post-16 education in Wales. The establishment of Medr brings a range of strategic, practical and learner-centred benefits, with there now being a single body responsible for post-compulsory education.

The transition into post-16 education is of significant importance for learners. At 16, they have the opportunity to specialise in courses that are reflective of their interests and ambitions, and which allow them to progress on their chosen pathways. There is no mandatory post-16 curriculum in Wales; there are, however, local curricula for 16- to 18-year-old learners. Through the TER Act, Medr will be responsible for forming local curriculum offers for each local authority area, and local authorities, maintained secondary schools with sixth forms ('schools') and further education institutions ('FEIs') must assist Medr in this duty. It is intended that this duty for Medr will transfer as of April 2026.

Local curriculum offers are the courses that are made available for learners to study in the local area, either directly through the learner's school or FEI, or through collaborative arrangements with other local schools or FEIs. Responding to learner choice is a key element in ensuring that 16 to 18 local curricula are reflective of the needs of students and that local offers are suitably

broad in nature. Given the importance of learners having a broad choice of courses at the point where they specialise in their education, local authorities, schools and FEIs must take all reasonable steps to maximise the number of courses available.

On 1 April 2025 the Cabinet Secretary for Education published a **written statement on 14 to 19 Learner Pathways** (https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-14-19-learner-pathways), which outlined a commitment to refresh the guidance on local curricula for 16 to 18 year old students. In addition to emphasising the importance of students having access to a wide range of courses of study (both academic and vocational), this written statement committed to explore how the wider post-16 learning experience can be enhanced, supporting our priority of increasing participation in further and higher education, and ensuring that the strengths of Curriculum for Wales continue to benefit learners as they move onto more specialised post-16 pathways.

Welsh Government has subsequently developed the 16 to 18 local curricula guidance ('this guidance'), engaging with a broad range of stakeholders throughout the process, including Medr, local authorities, Qualifications Wales, Estyn, Colegau Cymru, Coleg Cymraeg, Universities Wales, Cydag, NUS, and school and FEI leaders.

2. Why are we publishing 16 to 18 local curricula guidance

This guidance outlines the regulatory duties on the formation of 16 to 18 local curricula that will transfer from Welsh Ministers to Medr under the TER Act and sets out Welsh Government's wider policy expectations as Medr undertakes these duties.

Once finalised, Welsh Government expects Medr to use this guidance when working with local authorities, schools and FEIs during academic year 2026 to 2027, with respect to local curricula that will be available and delivered from September 2027.

3. Key features of the 16 to 18 local curricula guidance

Section 1: vision for 16 to 18 learning

The first section of the guidance sets out Welsh Government's vision for 16 to 18 learning, which the policy on 16 to 18 local curricula should support. While the Curriculum for Wales does not extend to post-16 education in Wales, the four purposes continue to underpin our vision that 16 to 18 learning should:

- make learners' transitions smoother, both:
  - Following end of compulsory schooling at 16.
  - When progressing to tertiary education, training or employment at age 18 or 19 - with learners enabled to access their chosen next steps with confidence.
- be centred around the learner and their needs
- support increased rates of participation, in 16 to 18 education and in higher education and apprenticeships
- embed parity of esteem between general and vocational qualifications and pathways
- plan for and provide increased opportunities and encourage demand for participation in learning Welsh and learning through the medium of Welsh
- give learners the skills they need to be able to adapt throughout their lives in an ever-changing economy and society

Section 2: respective duties

This section highlights the statutory duties and role for Medr in the formation of local curricula, as set out in legislation.

We have also highlighted the respective duties of local authorities, schools and FEIs so that users of the guidance can see all duties in one place and understand how these relate to each other.

To make the guidance more useful, this section also highlights relevant duties from other legislation, where it is relevant to formation of local curricula - in particular around Welsh Language. (This also applies to Section 3.)

Section 3: formation and monitoring of local curricula

We want all 16 to 18 learners to have as broad a curriculum offer as possible made available to them and for every young person, regardless of their background, ability, or ambition, to follow a meaningful pathway into higher education, training, or employment. This section outlines Welsh Government's expectations for Medr on the formation and monitoring of local curricula, in support of these objectives.

This section includes several areas that will be important points of consideration as local curricula are formed, including:

- Welsh language: The Welsh language will form an important part of 16 to 18 local curricula planning. Medr must promote the Welsh language and learners must, wherever possible, be able to continue their studies through the medium of Welsh as they enter post-16 education. This guidance seeks to ensure that Welsh language options are made available to learners, without limiting the broader offer of courses that are made available through local curricula.
- 14 to 16 qualifications reform: As new, national 14 to 16 qualifications are being introduced to support the aims and purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, it is important that the 16 to 18 local curricula made available to learners allow for meaningful progression in subjects they have enjoyed and succeeded in at school.
- Inclusive offer: Whilst we expect 16 to 18 local curricula to predominantly include level 3 qualifications, it is important that that every young person has a meaningful pathway into further or higher education, training, or employment. Learners therefore need access to an appropriate range of courses below level 3 to help support them to continue to participate in further education and to make progress at the pace that is right for them.
- Additional learning needs (ALN): Medr has a strategic duty to

promote equality of opportunity and encourage participation in tertiary education for all eligible learners. Consideration here is given to ensuring that additional learning needs are reflected through the formation of 16 to 18 local curricula.
- Role of learner voice and demand-led curricula: This section highlights the importance of a learner-centred approach to 16 to 18 local curricula design, including that learner demand is adequately considered in the courses included in local curricula.
- Economy and labour market: In addition to learner demand, 16 to 18 local curricula should also be informed by labour market intelligence and aligned with local, regional and national priorities.

Collaboration and partnership, both locally and further afield, will be essential in enabling our vision for 16 to 18 local curricula. Schools and FEIs will need to work together to maximise the number of courses available to learners and Medr will play a key role in facilitating and encouraging collaboration, linked to Medr's strategic duties. It will be for Medr to develop their own guidance for local authorities, schools and FEIs, outlining how these bodies will support Medr in the formation of 16 to 18 local curriculum offers. This guidance also provides advice to Medr to monitor local curricula to help provide equality of opportunity for learners across Wales. In doing so, we want them to ensure that curriculum requirements are being met, and surface and investigate problems where they arise, working with curriculum planners to facilitate collaborative solutions.

Section 4: 16 to 18 programme funding and design

In the absence of a national curriculum post-16 in Wales, the learning 16-to-18-year-olds experience is predominantly shaped by the design of the programmes they follow and the qualifications they choose. This section therefore provides guidance for Medr on Welsh Government policy expectations that should be taken into account in their design of 16 to 18 programmes of learning, which underpin local curricula. This section is also intended to be used by schools and FEIs in planning their individual 16 to 18 curriculum offers.

The statutory guidance for schools on 14 to 16 learning under the Curriculum for

Wales introduced the 14 to 16 learner entitlement. The entitlement articulates the four components of 14 to 16 learning that Welsh Government considers to be most important for learners in years 10 and 11. This guidance seeks to build upon these four components within 16 to 18 local curricula, demonstrating the continuities that exist between pre- and post-16 learning, while emphasising the greater choice and flexibility for 16 to 18 learners. As learners progress onto more specialised programmes of learning post-16, we want their learning to include:

- reflections on learning and progress and planning for next steps
- development of skills in literacy and numeracy
- main qualifications
- wider learning and experiences

Importance of careers education and support for post-18 planning

As learners progress through their post-16 education and continue planning for their next steps, it is important that learners have dedicated time and advice to consider the full range of options available to them at the end of their 16 to 18 education and that they are subsequently supported to reach the destination to which they aspire. We therefore want 16 to 18 local curricula and programmes to be designed so that schools and FEIs continue to support learners with their planning, and collaborate with partners, including Careers Wales, to ensure learners are aware of the options available to them.

GCSE ‘resit’ policy

Large numbers of learners in 16 to 18 educations undertake resits of GCSEs in English, Cymraeg and Mathematics where they have not achieved a level 2 (C grade) pass in school. While achieving a level 2 pass is important for many learners’ future progression into higher education and employment and has a significant positive impact on adult lives, too few of those learners resitting these GCSEs go on to achieve level 2 by 19. There is a risk that learners undertaking resits without success can have a negative impact on their well-being, self-esteem and ongoing participation in education.

This guidance therefore clarifies Welsh Government's expectations on English, Cymraeg and Mathematics qualifications for 16 to 18 learners who do not have a level 2 pass. We want all these learners to be supported to both develop their literacy and numeracy skills and given the opportunity to obtain a level 2 qualification which demonstrates their attainment in these skills. The decision whether to put a learner forward for GCSE resits should be made between the school or FEI and the learner, taking into account the learner's prior attainment in these qualifications and their aspirations and likely pathways for further education or employment at 18. The guidance is clear that for some learners, working towards a Level 2 Essential Skills Wales qualification in Application of Number and (or) Communication Skills will be the most appropriate route.

Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales (AdvSBW) and wider skills

This guidance highlights the benefits of the AdvSBW and outlines our policy on its use as part of 16 to 18 programmes. The AdvSBW continues to support and assess learners' development of the integral skills of Curriculum for Wales, which we know are important for success in higher education and to employers. The guidance therefore expects the AdvSBW to be available and offered to all learners aged 16 to 18 on a 2-year, level 3 course. We want all eligible learners to be encouraged to undertake the AdvSBW, although schools and FEIs should take into account the individual needs and circumstances of learners, as they would for any qualification.

Given the importance of all 16 to 18 learners continuing to develop their wider skills, including those on vocational courses below level 3, the guidance proposes that new, made-for-Wales Skills Suite and Personal Project qualifications are potentially used to support these learners.

4. Consultation questions

Question 1

To what extent do you agree that the guidance for Medr on local curricula for 16

to 18 learners (‘16 to 18 local curricula guidance’) clearly sets out Medr’s role in the formation of local curricula?

Question 2

To what extent do you agree that the 16 to 18 local curricula guidance will support the vision for 16 to 18 learning set out within it?

Question 3

To what extent do you agree that the 16 to 18 local curricula guidance helps you understand the factors and priorities that Medr should take into account when working with local authorities, schools and further education institutions (FEIs) to form local curricula?

Question 4

To what extent do you agree that the expectations of Medr and other organisations within the 16 to 18 local curricula guidance will lead to the formation of local curricula that provide learners with a broad choice of qualifications, which will enable them to progress onto their chosen next steps in education or employment?

Question 5

To what extent do you agree with the proposed policy within the 16 to 18 local curricula guidance on the use of English, Mathematics and Cymraeg GCSEs and of Essential Skills Wales qualifications within post-16 programmes?

Question 6

To what extent do you agree with the proposed policy within the 16 to 18 local

curricula guidance on the use of skills qualifications within post-16 programmes, including the Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales and Skills Suite qualifications?

Question 7

We would like to know your views on the effects that the policy outlined in the 16 to 18 local curricula guidance will have on the school and FEI workforce, including any impact it might have on workloads.

Question 8

We would like to know your views on the effects that the policy outlined in the 16 to 18 local curricula guidance will have on the diverse needs of individual learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who share protected characteristics (as set out under the Equality Act 2010).

Question 9

What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the 16 to 18 local curricula guidance on the Welsh language? We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English.

Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?
Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?

Question 10

In your opinion, could the 16 to 18 local curricula guidance be formulated or changed so as to:

- have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language

and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or
- mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?

Please use the consultation response form to respond to the above questions.

UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)

The Welsh Government will be data controller for Welsh Government consultations and for any personal data you provide as part of your response to the consultation.

Welsh Ministers have statutory powers they will rely on to process this personal data which will enable them to make informed decisions about how they exercise their public functions. The lawful basis for processing information in this data collection exercise is our public task, that is, exercising our official authority to undertake the core role and functions of the Welsh Government. (Art 6(1)(e)).

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about or planning future consultations. In the case of joint consultations this may also include other public authorities. Where the Welsh Government undertakes further analysis of consultation responses then this work may be commissioned to be carried out by an accredited third party (for example, a research organisation or a consultancy company). Any such work will only be undertaken under contract. Welsh Government's standard terms and conditions for such contracts set out strict requirements for the processing and safekeeping of personal data.

In order to show that the consultation was carried out properly, the Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then redact

them before publishing.

You should also be aware of our responsibilities under Freedom of Information legislation and that the Welsh Government may be under a legal obligation to disclose some information.

If your details are published as part of the consultation response, then these published reports will be retained indefinitely. Any of your data held otherwise by Welsh Government will be kept for no more than three years.

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Under the data protection legislation, you have the right:

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- to require us to rectify inaccuracies in that data
- to (in certain circumstances) object to or restrict processing
- for (in certain circumstances) your data to be ‘erased’
- to (in certain circumstances) data portability
- to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) who is our independent regulator for data protection

For further details about the information the Welsh Government holds and its use, or if you want to exercise your rights under the UK GDPR, please see contact details below:

Data Protection Officer:

Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Email address: **dataprotectionofficer@gov.wales** (mailto:dataprotectionofficer@gov.wales).

The contact details for the Information Commissioner's Office are:

Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Website: **ICO website** (https://ico.org.uk/).

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