

I want to be something:
better opportunities for
young people.

MAY 2018

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Acknowledgements

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The Bevan Foundation is Wales' most innovative and influential think tank. We develop lasting solutions to Wales' most challenging problems.

Our vision is for Wales to be a nation where everyone has a decent standard of living, a healthy and fulfilled life, and a voice in the decisions that affect them.

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Executive Summary

In August 2017, one in three year 11 pupils in Wales left school without five GCSEs at grades A*-C – a benchmark moment with life-changing consequences. Their achievements do not necessarily reflect their ability – illness, emotional difficulties or lack of awareness of the importance of these examinations can all affect results. The risk of not obtaining five A*-C GCSEs is highest for pupils eligible for Free School Meals or on the Special Educational Needs register.

The opportunities that are available for these young people typically include:

- **Further Education:** GCSE re-sits in some subjects, entry level, Level 1 and Level 2 courses, and military preparation college.
- **Work-based learning:** Engagement and Level 1 traineeships, foundation, and Level 3 apprenticeships.
- **Employment:** Jobs Growth Wales and other local employment opportunities.
- **NEET support:** Local projects aimed at young people Not in Education, Employment or Training.

Through interviews with young people and stakeholders we identified significant issues that can further affect the pathways young people follow.

Experiences and behaviours

Young people experienced barriers to participation, such as lack of awareness of opportunities, mental ill-health and inexperience, that hindered either their access to or completion of opportunities.

Limited choice of opportunities

Although there were a number of opportunities for young people their range was limited, with fewer subjects available for study at lower levels than at Level 3. Some areas did not offer a choice of traineeships or apprenticeships.

Variable quality

The quality of some provision was questionable, with some young people feeling that courses or traineeships did not equip them with the skills to progress.

Weak outcomes and progression

A number of young people were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) after completing their course, and a minority 'bounced' from one type of provision to the next. Apprenticeships were often in sectors with few progression opportunities.

Financial issues

College enrolment or administration fees, course costs and travel costs were significant outlays for young people from low-income families. The Educational Maintenance Allowances and traineeship allowance are less than the JSA rate.

An inclusive approach to post-16

We want an approach to post-16 provision that offers opportunities for every young person in Wales, regardless of their background and circumstances. This inclusive approach should allow young people to make their own informed choices and choose from a variety of different good-quality options that will allow them to achieve their full potential.

Four major changes are needed to achieve this vision:

- **Youth Advice Pledge:** A step-change in careers advice is needed to give young people the tools and ability to make informed choices, involving readily-available, good-quality, impartial and effective careers information, advice and guidance (IAG). The Welsh Government should pledge that all young people receive appropriate support, which should be achieved by:
 - legislating for provision of careers IAG and including effective provision as a measure of school performance;
 - starting careers IAG from year 7; and
 - increasing participation in real work experience in years 10 and 11.
- **Youth Prospects:** Young people should be offered clearer progression pathways from entry-level and Level 1 into Level 3 opportunities, and they should be offered a wider choice of subjects including STEM subjects. We recommend:
 - increasing the number and range of opportunities below Level 3;
 - widening the range of vocational areas offered by post-16 providers;
 - clarifying the pathways into Level 3 learning and into occupations; and
 - guaranteed GCSE resits in a wide range of subjects.
- **Better access:** The barriers to post-16 provision must be reduced to ensure that all young people in Wales can fulfil their potential. We recommend:
 - reducing the cost of participation in post-16 further education and work-based learning;
 - ensuring parity in financial support for different forms of provision, which should at least match the JSA rate;
 - dropping the age restrictions for traineeships; and
 - introducing a pre-engagement programme.
- **Better monitoring:** There also needs to be effective monitoring of the progression and destinations of young people aged 16 to 25 to ensure that they progress into higher-level learning or sustainable employment. We recommend that:
 - schools monitor the destinations of their Key Stage 4 pupils;
 - post-16 destinations data is collected beyond 12-weeks; and
 - destination data is collected on those over 18-years old.

1. Introduction

The opportunities available for Wales' young people are hugely important. Young people are Wales' future workers contributing to the economy, they are the parents of our future generations and they are our future leaders - this is why each young person needs to have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Last year 10,355 young people in Wales left school without five A*-C GCSEs. A further 3,891 left without achieving an A*-C in Maths and English or Welsh language. Often, not obtaining these GCSEs is not a reflection of a young person's ability or potential but can be the result of factors such as poverty, poor health and caring responsibilities as well as an inadequate education.

The risk of having low attainment at GCSE level differs depending on family income, learning needs, ethnic background, geographic location, absenteeism rate, place of learning and whether they were looked-after children.

Many opportunities are closed to young people who do not achieve five A*-C GCSEs, with no access to the pathways taken by other young people into AS and A levels, Level 3 courses or apprenticeships and limited access to employment opportunities.

We wanted to find out more about the range of opportunities that are available for young people in Wales who leave school without five 'good' GCSEs and their prospects¹. Therefore, this report focuses on the opportunities available after leaving school, rather than on reducing the number of young people leaving school without five GCSEs – a whole different issue.

Young people with no or few GCSEs at A*-C are more likely to end up not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and are more likely to spend six and twelve months or more NEET, which can have a serious impact on their future prospects. At the end of 2016, one in nine 16-18-year olds and one in five 19-24-year olds – some 57,400 young people across Wales - were NEET.

To help reduce the number of NEET young people in Wales the Welsh Government launched the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework – Implementation Plan (IP)² in October 2013. The IP sets out the Welsh Government's commitment to increase the engagement and progression of young people in Wales and to support young people to maximise their potential in education, employment, and training.

The IP also sets out the Youth Guarantee which is "the offer, acceptance and commencement of a suitable place in education or training"³, where a place in education or training includes either a place in school or college (part or full-time), an apprenticeship, a traineeship, a place on a re-engagement programme, volunteering, or a Level 2 training programme during employment⁴. This offer needs to be suitable for the needs of young people including their level of education, method of delivery, location and in a sector that engages young people and aims to support them into sustainable employment.

Since we conducted our research, the Welsh Government has launched its new Employability Plan including the Working Wales programme which has three strands. Youth engagement aimed at 16-17-year olds further from the labour market, Youth Training aimed at 16-17 year olds closer to the labour market and adults, expanding the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework to adults up to 25 years old⁵.

Although we welcome the Employability Plan and the Working Wales programme, there is still more that needs to be done to ensure that young people who leave school without five 'good' GCSEs have the same opportunities as those who do.

1.1 What we did

The Bevan Foundation has explored the opportunities that exist for young people who leave school without five GCSEs in Wales, beginning in June 2017. We began by reviewing relevant literature and analysing Welsh Government statistics on the existing post-16 opportunities and policies covering post-16 education, training, and employment. This included a systematic review of the lower-level courses on offer at colleges and work-based learning and employment opportunities available across Wales. We then interviewed stakeholders including those from Further Education, work-based learning providers, careers advisers and local youth services.

Most importantly, we interviewed over 30 young people who did not have five 'good' GCSEs and who were either in college, work-based learning or NEET. We selected Port Talbot as the location for interviews because in 2016, Neath Port Talbot had the highest proportion of NEET year 11 school leavers in Wales, at 3.6 per cent⁶, and one of the highest unemployment rates in Wales of 5.9 per cent⁷. Although the findings from these interviews are specific to Port Talbot, they nevertheless provide a valuable insight into the issues that young people who leave school without five GCSEs face across Wales.

In order to develop some practical solutions, we held two workshops - one in Port Talbot with 18 stakeholders including local post-16 providers and the local authority, and another in Cardiff with 20 different stakeholders from across Wales. These solutions and our findings were then tested in a workshop with young people who left school without five GCSEs elsewhere in Wales (in Llanelli).

The rest of this report sets out our findings and our recommended solutions. It begins by looking at the proportions of young people leaving school without five 'good' GCSEs. It then highlights the opportunities that are open to them and explores some associated issues. The final section sets out a more inclusive approach to post-16 education and training for young people, which provides opportunities for every young person in Wales, regardless of ability and background. This inclusive approach should allow young people to make their own informed choices about their futures and ensure access to a variety of good-quality opportunities that will allow them to meet their full potential.

1.2 Acknowledgements

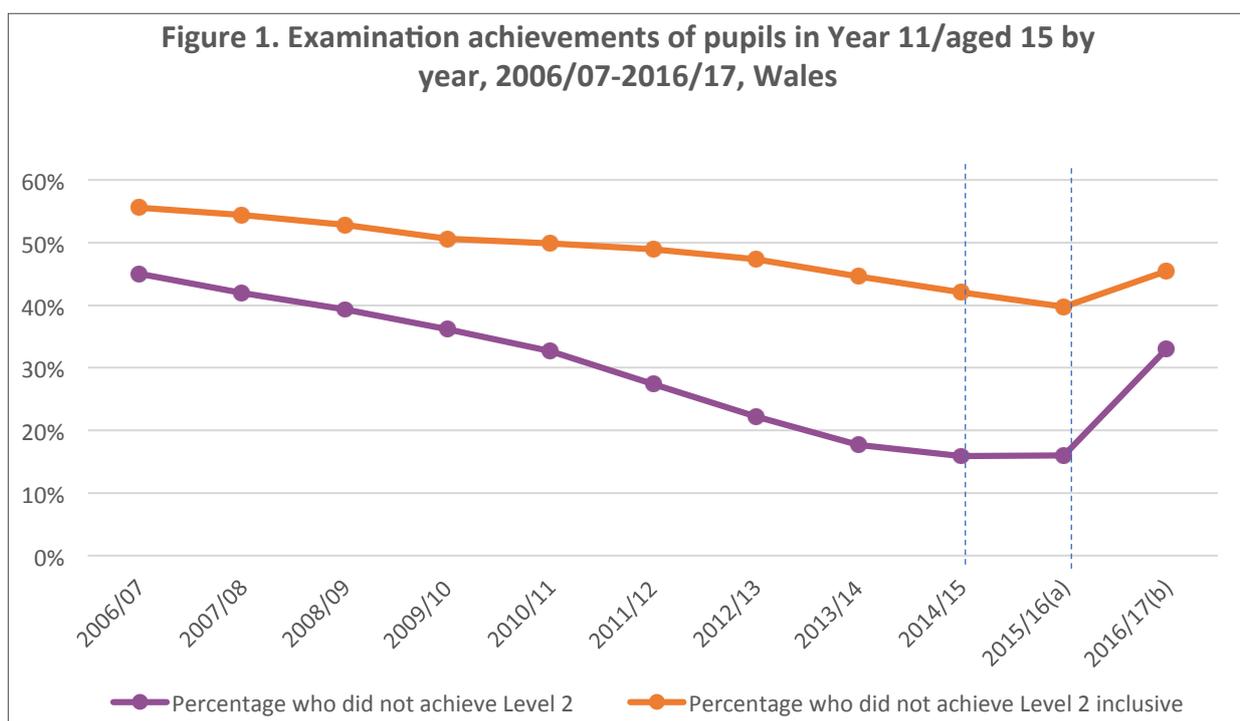
We would like to thank the Garfield Weston Foundation, Community Union and all of the individuals and organisations who donated to our crowd-funding campaign in December 2016, who have between them funded this important project. We would also like to thank all of the young people and stakeholders who were an integral part of this project, with a special thank you to Neath Port Talbot Youth Service, People Plus, NPTC Group and the Prince's Trust.

The Bevan Foundation has taken care to be as accurate as possible with the information in this response and is responsible for any errors or omissions.

2. Young people without five GCSEs

The number of young people in Wales leaving school without five GCSEs at grades A*-C has decreased over the last ten years apart from a blip in 2016/17. In 2006/07, four in nine pupils did not achieve qualifications at Level 2ⁱ, compared with one in six in 2015/16. Five in nine pupils did not achieve a Level 2 inclusiveⁱⁱ in 2006/07, compared to two in five in 2015/16.

The increase in the number of young people leaving school without five A*-C GCSEs in 2016/17 has been attributed to the changes made to the curriculum and examinations in the academic year^{(b)8}. Nevertheless, one in three pupils in that year did not achieve qualifications at Level 2, some 10,355 year 11 pupils, and four in nine did not achieve them at Level 2 inclusive - 14,246 year 11 pupils.



Source: StatsWales, Examination achievements of pupils in Year 11/aged 15 by year, 2006/07-2016/17 [accessed via <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Examinations-and-Assessments/Key-Stage-4/examinationachievementsofpupilsaged15-by-year>]

The risk of leaving school without five 'good' GCSEs is higher for some young people than others. Their attainment depends on where they live, their gender, family income, ethnic background, learning needs, absenteeism rate, place of learning and whether they were looked-after children.

ⁱ Level 2 is the equivalent of five GCSEs A*-C grade.

ⁱⁱ Level 2 inclusive is the equivalent of five GCSEs A*-C grade, including A*-C in English or Welsh 1st language and Maths.

^(a) From 2015/16, cohort based on pupils in Year 11. Up to 2014/15, cohort based on pupils aged 15 at the start of the academic year. There is also a maximum of two GCSE equivalence value applied to any individual non-GCSE qualification.

^(b) From 2016/17, only the new specifications for GCSE English Language, GCSE Welsh Language and GCSE Mathematics/Mathematics-Numeracy will count towards the literacy and Maths elements of the Level 2 Inclusive threshold measure. The legacy GCSE Mathematics specification will not count towards the Maths element of the Level 2 Inclusive measure. Literature qualifications do not count towards the literacy element of the Level 2 inclusive.

2.1 Regional and Local Authority Area

At a regional level, one in three year 11 pupils did not achieve qualifications at Level 2 in the academic year 2016/17 in South East Wales, compared to two in seven in South West and Mid Wales. Similarly, just over half of year 11 pupils from South East Wales did not achieve a Level 2 inclusive, while in the South West and Mid Wales this was only the case for three in seven.

By local authority area, there was a 19.7 percentage point difference between the best performing local authority for Level 2 attainment (Ceredigion) and the worst performing (Merthyr Tydfil). In respect of Level 2 inclusive, there was a 25.9 percentage point difference between Monmouthshire, the best performing, and Blaenau Gwent, the worst performing local authority.

Table 1: Examination achievements of pupils in Year 11 by local authority, 2016/17

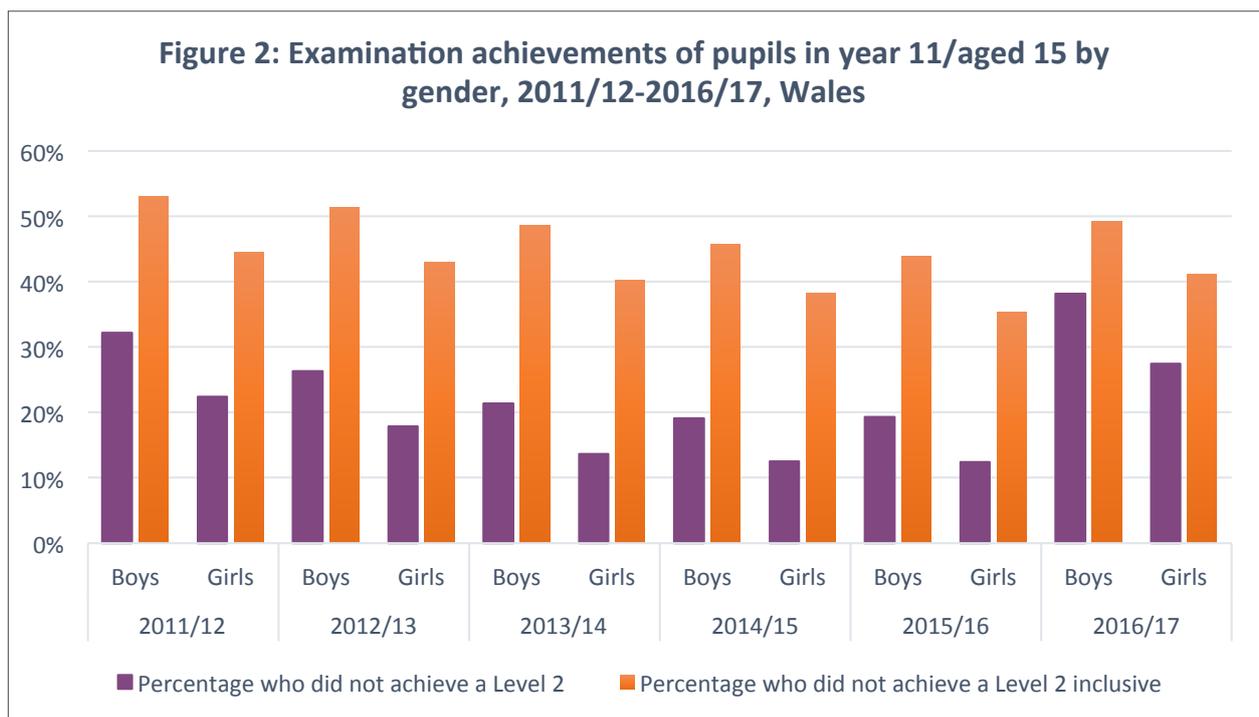
Local Authority	Percentage who did not achieve Level 2	Percentage who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive
North Wales	34.7	46.4
Isle of Anglesey	35.5	49.5
Gwynedd	30.0	41.9
Conwy	33.2	46.2
Denbighshire	36.4	50.0
Flintshire	34.2	43.0
Wrexham	39.6	50.7
South West and Mid Wales	29.6	42.7
Powys	25.7	37.8
Ceredigion	21.5	37.6
Pembrokeshire	34.0	44.7
Carmarthenshire	27.4	42.8
Swansea	30.3	42.2
Neath Port Talbot	34.8	48.6
Central South Wales	32.4	45.5
Bridgend	32.1	47.0
Vale of Glamorgan	26.2	39.6
Rhondda Cynon Taf	36.8	50.2
Merthyr Tydfil	41.2	57.6
Cardiff	30.1	41.5
South East Wales	36.3	47.1
Caerphilly	40.1	50.1
Blaenau Gwent	40.8	58.9
Torfaen	38.4	48.8
Monmouthshire	22.7	33.0
Newport	34.7	44.5

Source: StatsWales, Examination achievements of pupils in Year 11/aged 15 by year, 2006/07-2016/17 [accessed via <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Examinations-and-Assessments/Key-Stage-4/examinationachievementsofpupilsaged15-by-year>]

2.2 Gender

The gradual decline in the proportion of pupils not achieving Level 2 or Level 2 inclusive has taken place for both genders until 2016/17 (Figure 2). There is a greater risk of not achieving Level 2 and Level 2 inclusive among boys, with a 10.7 percentage point difference between Level 2 attainment rates for boys and girls in 2016/17, and an 8.6 percentage point difference between Level 2 inclusive attainment rates.

Source: StatsWales, Examination achievements of pupils in Year 11/aged 15 by gender [assessed via <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Examinations-and-Assessments/Key-Stage-4/examinationachievementsofpupilsaged15-by-gender>]

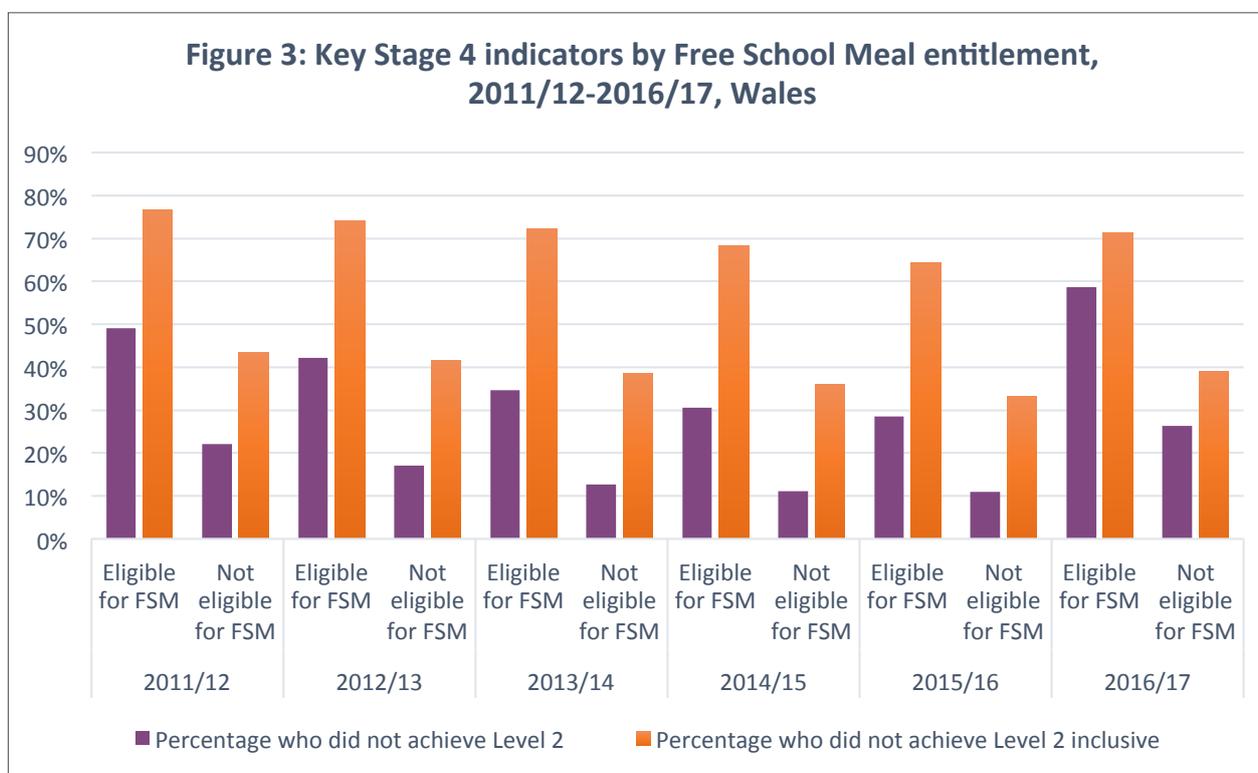


2.3 Free School Meals eligibility

The risk of leaving school without achieving a Level 2 or Level 2 inclusive is much greater for pupils who are eligible for FSM (eFSM) than those who are not eligible (Figure 3).

The gap in attainment between those who are eFSM and those who are not has been gradually narrowing over the years, with improvement at a slightly faster rate than for all pupils until 2016/17. In 2015/16 the gap between the two for Level 2 was 17.4 percentage points, and 31.2 percentage points for Level 2 inclusive. However, in 2016/17 there was a 32.2 percentage point difference between those who were eFSM and those who were not for Level 2, and a 32.4 percentage point difference for Level 2 inclusive.

In 2016/17, five in every seven pupils eFSM did not achieve a Level 2 inclusive, with three in five not achieving a Level 2, compared to two in five and one in four pupils who were not eFSM respectively.



Source: StatsWales, Key Stage 4 key indicators by Free School Meal entitlement [accessed via <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Examinations-and-Assessments/Key-Stage-4/ks4keyindicators-by-freeschoolmealentitlement-gender>]

2.4. Ethnic background

There is considerable variation in the Level 2 and Level 2 inclusive attainment rates when pupils' ethnic background is considered. In 2015-2017, over half of pupils from Gypsy or Gypsy Roma backgrounds and a quarter of pupils from any other White, White and Black Caribbean and any other Black backgrounds did not achieve Level 2 qualifications. In contrast this was the case for only 6.2 per cent of pupils from a Chinese or Chinese British background and 6.8 per cent of pupils from an Indian background.

Similarly, seven in every nine pupils from Gypsy or Gypsy Roma backgrounds and half of pupils from any other Black background, White and Black Caribbean and any other White background did not achieve a Level 2 inclusive. On the other hand, one in every five pupils from Indian and Chinese or Chinese British backgrounds did not achieve a Level 2 inclusive.

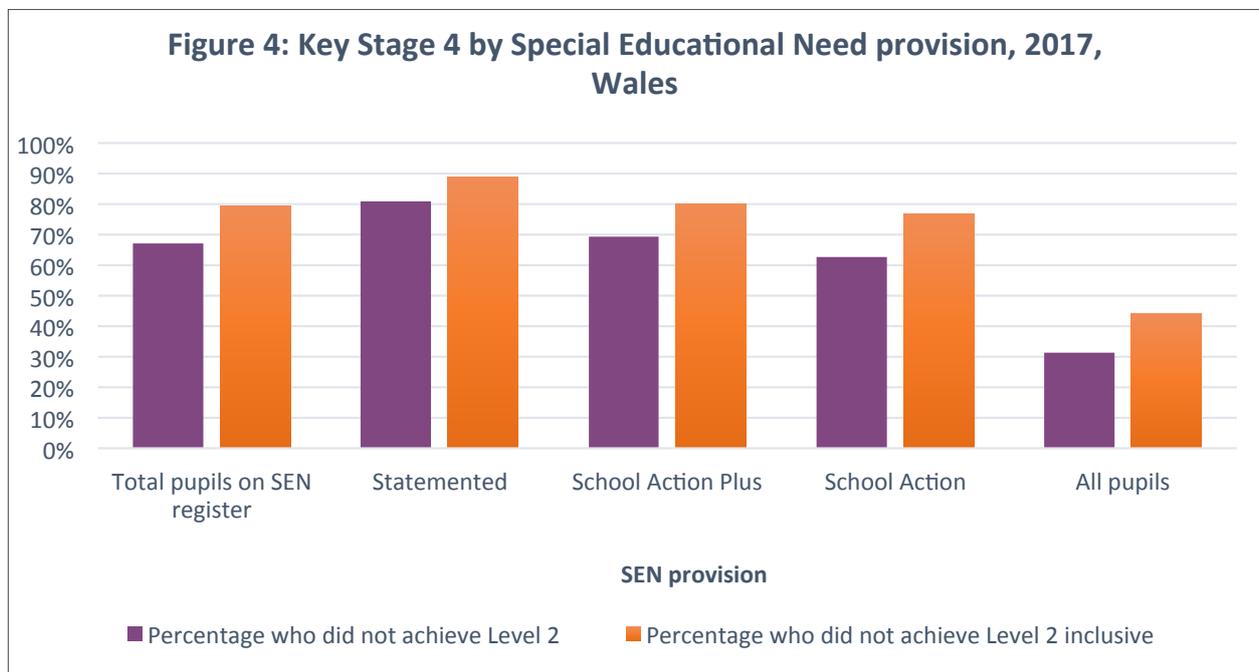
Table 2: Key Stage 4 by ethnic background, 2015-2017 (aggregated), Wales

Ethnic background	Percentage who did not achieve Level 2	Percentage who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive
White	19.8	41.3
White - British	19.6	41.1
Traveller	*	*
Gypsy/Gypsy Roma	50.6	78.5
Any other White background	26.1	47.0
Mixed	19.4	39.2
White and Black Caribbean	25.4	50.2
White and Black African	18.4	42.0
White and Asian	12.7	27.9
Any other Mixed Background	19.5	37.4
Asian or Asian British	13.5	33.3
Indian	6.8	19.0
Pakistani	19.3	40.3
Bangladeshi	11.4	34.8
Any other Asian Background	13.2	27.6
Black or Black British	19.9	42.2
Caribbean	*	*
African	18.8	40.2
Any other Black background	25.0	52.3
Chinese or Chinese British	6.2	19.2
Any other ethnic group	17.7	37.8
Unknown	18.5	36.5
All pupils	19.6	41.0

Source: Welsh Government (2018), Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 8: Key Stage 4 by ethnic background, 2015-2017 (aggregated), [accessed via <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2018/180130-academic-achievement-pupil-characteristics-2017-en.ods>]

2.5. Special Educational Needs

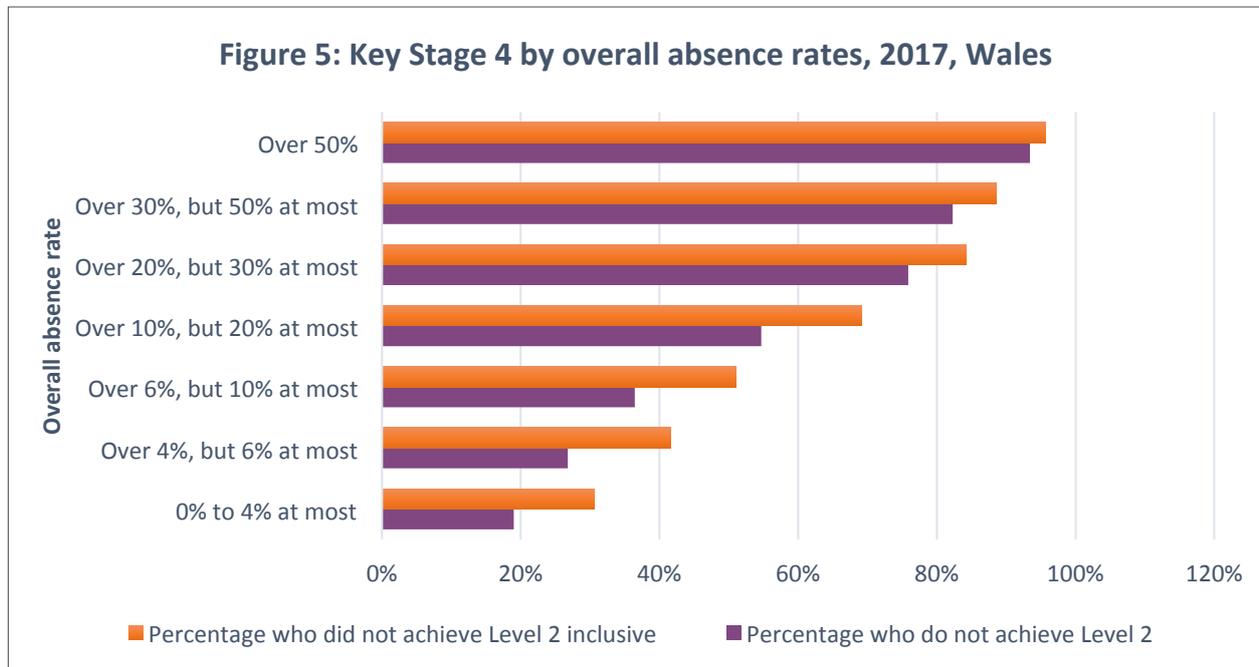
Pupils on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register had a much greater risk of not achieving a Level 2 and Level 2 inclusive. Overall, two thirds of pupils on the SEN register did not achieve a Level 2 in 2017, with four in every five pupils on the SEN register not achieving a Level 2 inclusive (Figure 4).



Source: Welsh Government (2018), Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 16: Key Stage 4 by Special Educational Need provision, 2017 [accessed via <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2018/180130-academic-achievement-pupil-characteristics-2017-en.ods>]

2.6 Absenteeism

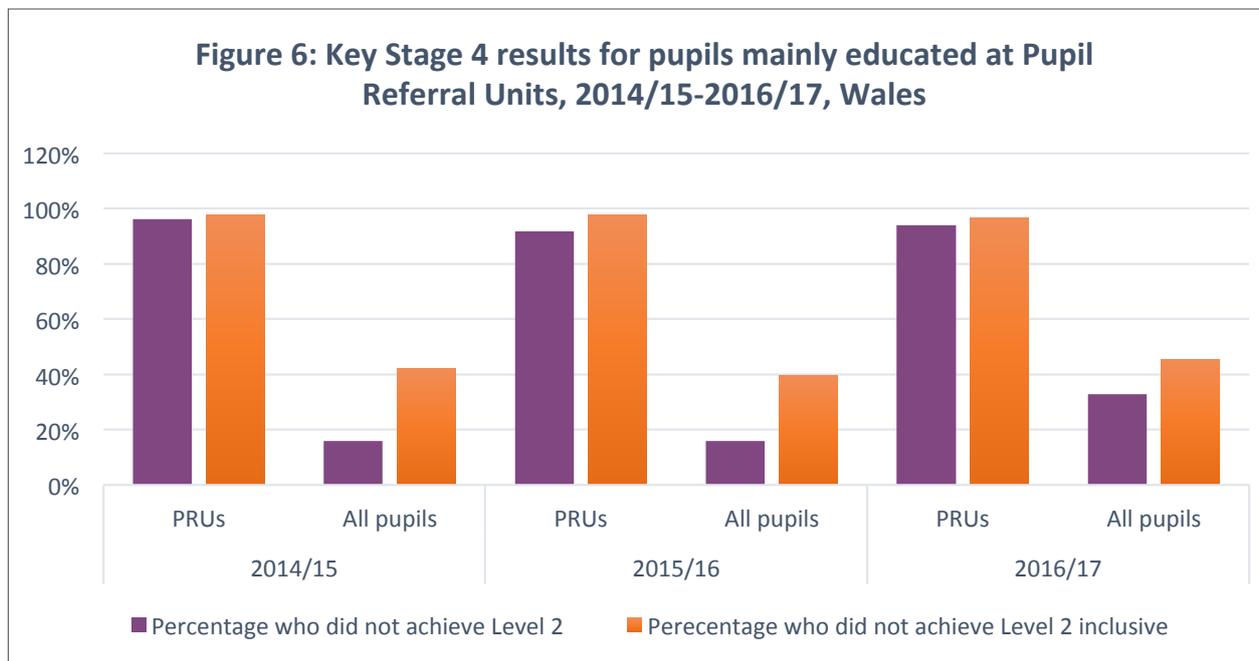
There is a strong link between pupils' absenteeism rates and the likelihood of them achieving Level 2 and Level 2 inclusive qualifications. In 2017, over nine in ten pupils with an absenteeism rate of over 50 per cent did not achieve a Level 2 and Level 2 inclusive, compared to one in five with an absenteeism rate of between 0 and 4 per cent not achieving at Level 2 and one in three not achieving at Level 2 inclusive.



Source: Welsh Government (2018), Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 24: Key Stage 4 by overall absence rates, 2017 [accessed via <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2018/180130-academic-achievement-pupil-characteristics-2017-en.ods>]

2.7 Pupil referral units

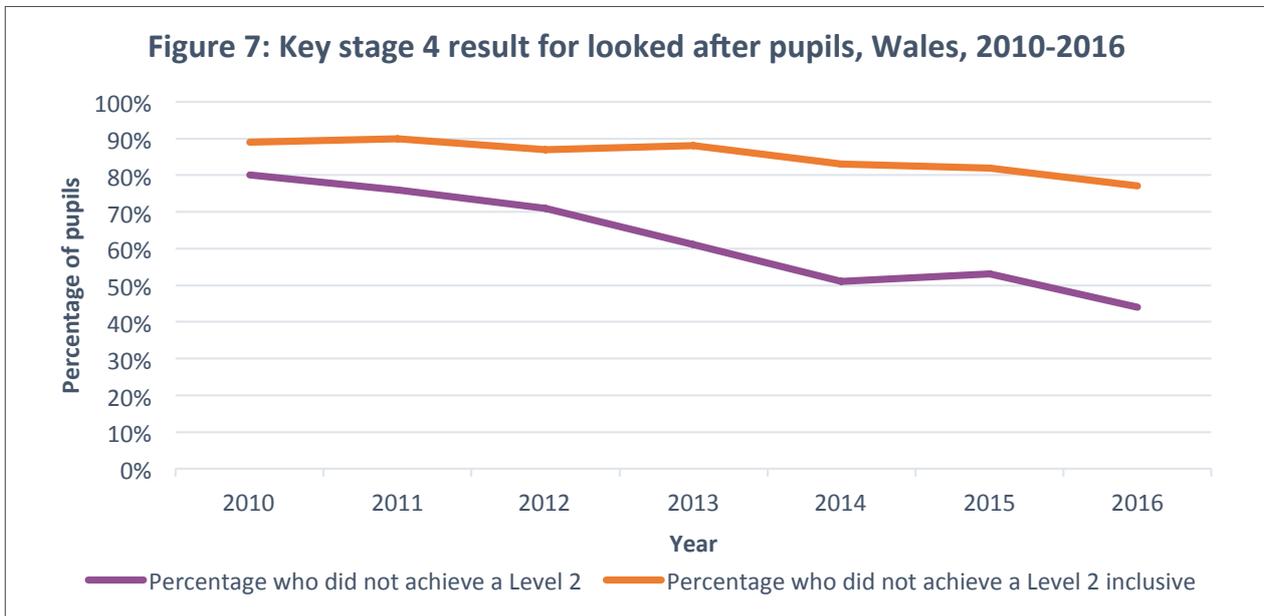
The group of pupils most at risk of not achieving a Level 2 or Level 2 inclusive are those who are educated primarily at Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) – 246 pupils in 2016/17. Approximately 6 per cent of pupils achieved a Level 2, with 3 per cent achieving a Level 2 inclusive in 2016/17.



Source: Welsh Government, Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 29: Key Stage 4 results for pupils in Year 11 or aged 15 at the start of the academic year whose main education is at a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), 2014/15-2016/17 [accessed via <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2018/180130-academic-achievement-pupil-characteristics-2017-en.ods>]

2.8 Looked-after children

The proportion of looked-after children not achieving at Level 2 or Level 2 inclusive has decreased between 2010 and 2016. Still, in 2016 four in nine pupils did not achieve at Level 2 and seven in nine did not achieve at Level 2 inclusive.



Source: StatsWales, Educational attainment of children in need by measure and year, 2010-2016 [accessed via: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-in-Need/educationalattainmentofchildreninneed-by-measure-year>]

2.9 Gaps in data

The Welsh Government collects data on the destinations of Key Stage 4 pupils through the Careers Wales annual survey of school leavers that represents a snapshot of pupil destinations. However, this data does not differentiate between full-time education at sixth form or at an FE college and does not break down further education into course level. Secondary schools also do not collect data on the destinations and progression of their Key Stage 4 pupils.

The Welsh Government are currently linking education data from different provisions including schools, work-based learning, Further Education and Higher Education to show the educational destinations of Key Stage 4 and post-16 learners. However, the only data currently available is from the academic year 2014/15 showing a high-level overview of the destinations of learners⁹. Although it may be possible to generate bespoke data on the destinations of pupils who left school without 5 GCSEs in the future, presently there is no data collected on the destinations and progression of young people who leave school without 5 A*-C GCSEs.

FE institutions and work-based learning providers collect progression and destinations data of their learners 12 weeks after the end of the course or programme. However, there is no data on the destinations of learners after 12 weeks and the longer-term influence of the qualifications gained, or the sustainability of the pathways provided through college and work-based learning is not known.

Careers Wales is responsible for collecting data on young people between 16 and 18 to assess whether they are in post-16 provision, in employment, at risk of becoming NEET or are NEET. However, they do not collect data on young people aged over 18.

2.10 Conclusion

Despite the improvements in achievement at year 11, a substantial number of young people in Wales leave school without one of the most important benchmarks in the UK – five GCSEs at A* to C. Not achieving five ‘good’ GCSEs is often not a reliable indicator of a young person’s ability or potential and can reflect a young person’s background and circumstances.

The risk of not achieving five ‘good’ GCSEs is even greater for some groups of young people, including those from low income families and living in more deprived areas, some ethnic groups, young people with Special Educational Needs, those educated in Pupil Referral Units and looked-after young people. For some of these groups of young people, leaving school without five ‘good’ GCSEs is the norm rather than the exception.

There is also a hole in the data that tracks the progression and destinations of young people, with no specific data available on those who leave school without five GCSEs, on those over 18-years old or on the long-term destinations of young people, making it more difficult to track outcomes and assess the effectiveness of provision.

3. Opportunities Available After Leaving School

Leaving school without five A*-C GCSEs seriously limits the opportunities that are available for young people. A wide range of learning opportunities are closed, with access to study for AS and A levels, Level 3 college courses and apprenticeships and many job opportunities being dependent on having five A*-Cs. Young people without the qualifications needed therefore follow different pathways, taking them into largely vocational learning and then into mostly low-skilled and low-paid employment.

This section looks at the options that are available to young people without five A*-C GCSEs, looking in turn at the main types of provision. The information in this section is derived from a systematic review of lower-level courses on offer at colleges across Wales, including GCSE re-sits, and the different work-based learning programmes and employment opportunities available. Examples of the provisions given are taken directly from college websites.

3.1 Further Education

Further Education (FE) colleges offer a variety of different qualifications, covering learning at different levels and in vocational and some non-vocational subjects. Like schools, some offer AS/A levels, as well as courses at entry level, Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. Some also offer traineeships and apprenticeships.

The FE options that are available to young people without five A*-C GCSEs are displayed in Figure 8.

GCSE re-sits:

Most colleges offer young people the opportunity to study Maths and English GCSEs, with some offering other, largely semi-vocational, subjects including health and social care, IT, catering, art and design and media studies, at GCSE. Some colleges offer a pre-GCSE programme to equip young people with the skills they need to move onto GCSE level courses and full-time GCSE programmes¹⁰, although most GCSE opportunities sit alongside other courses.

Entry requirements vary, with some colleges asking for four A*-D GCSEs, including English and Maths¹¹ while others ask for successful evidence of Level 1 study.

Pre-GCSE programme:

WJEC Entry Level Certificates in English and Maths along with Essential Skills. There will also be a choice of qualifications in two or more of the following areas: Catering; Art; Media Studies, English and Maths. - **Coleg Ceredigion**

Figure 8: Further Education opportunities



Entry Level Qualifications:

There are three levels of entry-level qualification: level 1, level 2, and level 3. Some entry-level courses are subject-specific, for example early years education, motor vehicle, engineering, and hair and beauty¹². Others aim to supply learners with basic skills and confidence, for example, vocational access, work skills, introduction to college, personal progress, and skills for independence¹³. Entry-level courses at some colleges, especially entry-level 1 or level 2 courses, are aimed specifically at young people with SEN such as 'steps to entry' and 'introduction to college LPE'¹⁴.

There are typically no entry requirements to study entry-level 1 and level 2 courses, although some colleges require previous study at GCSE level or completion of an entry-level 2 to progress to an entry level 3 course¹⁵. The successful completion of an entry-level qualification can give young people the opportunity to progress onto the next entry-level courses or to Level 1 vocational courses.

Vocational access (entry level 3):

Learners will further develop Essential Skills Wales and an appropriate Vocational Qualification. The course offers learners an introduction to college and opportunities to sample various vocational areas, from which learners will be able to make an informed decision on further progression routes. These courses also give learners an opportunity to improve their Numeracy, Literacy and IT skills. – **Cardiff and Vale College.**

Level 1 vocational courses:

Level 1 vocational courses comprise of a range of qualifications including BTEC diplomas, awards, and certifications and NVQs. The majority of Level 1 courses include numeracy, literacy and employability skills alongside specific vocational subjects such as introduction to professional cookery, business administration, caring for children, customer service, hair and beauty, sport and active leisure, work skills, arts and media, construction and engineering. Some Level 1 courses allow learners to try two different vocational subjects in one course, for example, foundation awards¹⁶.

Entry requirements for Level 1 vocational courses vary depending on course and institution. Some courses and colleges ask for GCSE grades of between G to E¹⁷, while others require three GCSEs at D-E grade, or 2 GCSEs at D grade or above including Maths, English, Welsh or Science, or two GCSEs A* - G grade¹⁸.

The successful completion of a Level 1 course will give young people the opportunity to progress onto Level 2 courses in a similar subject, or a Level 2 apprenticeship.

Carpentry and Joinery (level 1):

This course is designed to develop the skills and knowledge of people enabling them to work in the industry in their chosen craft. It has been specifically developed for delivery in a training environment using simulated conditions and the tests are based on the learner showing what they can do as an individual. As part of the programme learners will also complete Essential Skills. – **Coleg Sir Gâr.**

Level 2 vocational courses:

Level 2 vocational courses are the equivalent to four or five A*-C GCSEs. They typically cover similar subjects to Level 1 courses e.g. cookery, business administration, child care, customer service, hair and beauty, sport and active leisure, arts and media, construction, and engineering.

Entry requirements again vary by course and institution. Some courses require four GCSEs grades D-G, or at grade D or above, others require four GCSEs with two at grade C or above and two at grade D or above, while others require two A*-C GCSEs including Maths or English or Welsh. Courses that require a specific skillset such as bricklaying or plumbing often require a Level 1 qualification in the same subject area¹⁹.

Completing a Level 2 course will give young people the chance to progress onto a Level 3 course in a similar subject, including AS/A levels if Maths and English GCSE resits were taken and passed alongside the Level 2 course.

Childcare and Education (level 2):

This course is aimed at learners who are thinking about a career working with young children in a variety of childcare settings. The course will prepare you to work in a supervised capacity with children and their families. Work experience forms an integral part of the course allowing you to put the skills you have learnt in the classroom into practice. – **Pembrokeshire College.**

Military preparation college:

Military Preparation College (MPC)ⁱⁱⁱ offers courses to young people aged 16-23 years old to help prepare them for a career in the Armed Forces and public services. In Wales, the college offers a part time Engagement programme and a Level 1 BTEC which includes essential skills from entry level 1 to level 2 and functional skills (Maths and English) from entry level 1 to level 2 which can be used to support progress towards GCSE. There are no specific entry requirements for young people who wish to enrol into MPC, however MPCs are only available in Bangor, Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport, Swansea, and Wrexham²¹.

Military Preparation College:

At the college, students follow a weekly routine of activities and curriculum. This includes vocational and skills training, physical training, military training days and assessments.

ⁱⁱⁱ Through the Military Preparation College for Training.

3.2 Work Based Learning

Work-based learning (WBL) provides young people with the opportunity to learn specific skills while they gain work experience. These programmes are delivered by a network of training providers that include FE colleges. The main work-based routes available for young people without five A*-C GCSEs are displayed in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9: Work-based learning route



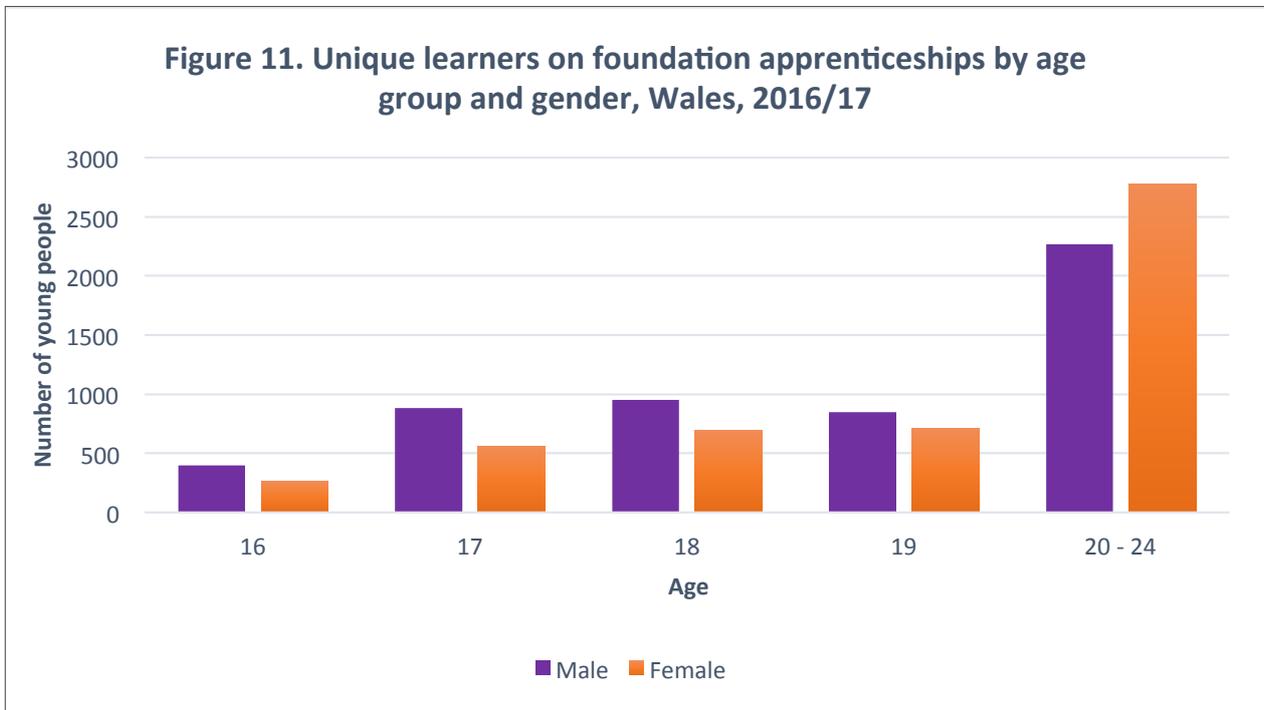
Traineeships:

Traineeships are a learning programme for young people aged 16 to 18 years old, that is only accessible via a referral from Careers Wales. The programme is developed by training providers and employers and includes in-house training by the training provider including Maths, English, Essential Skills, Health and Safety and on the job training through a work placement.

By design a traineeship is more flexible than most FE courses or apprenticeships and it does not last a specific length of time – the duration is variable for different learners. There are two main types of traineeships offered to young people without five GCSEs in Wales, Engagement traineeships and Level 1 traineeships.

- **Engagement traineeships:** are the lowest level traineeship available and are aimed at young people who are unsure what they want to do or those who need some extra support before going onto a Level 1 traineeship. Alongside in-house learning, learners have the opportunity to choose their work placement in sectors including retail, business administration, motor vehicle, hair dressing, construction and child care. However, an engagement traineeship does not offer a specific qualification. At the end of an engagement traineeship, trainees can go onto a Level 1 traineeship, a Foundation Apprenticeship, Level 1 FE course or try to find employment.
- **Level 1 traineeships:** are for learners who know what career path they would like to take and are ready to train at this level. A Level 1 traineeship also includes a work placement with an employer and training towards a Level 1 NVQ qualification in their chosen sector. Trainees work between 30 and 40 hours a week and once a Level 1 traineeship has been completed successfully a trainee can progress onto a Foundation Apprenticeship, Level 2 FE course or employment, sometimes with the existing employer.

In 2016/17, nine per cent of the 16-year-old cohort (3,305) in Wales were on traineeships. The number of young people on traineeships decreases as young people get older with only three per cent of the 18-year-old cohort on traineeships. At each age, slightly more trainees were male rather than female, and more so for the 16-year-old cohort with 1,830 males and 1,475 females.

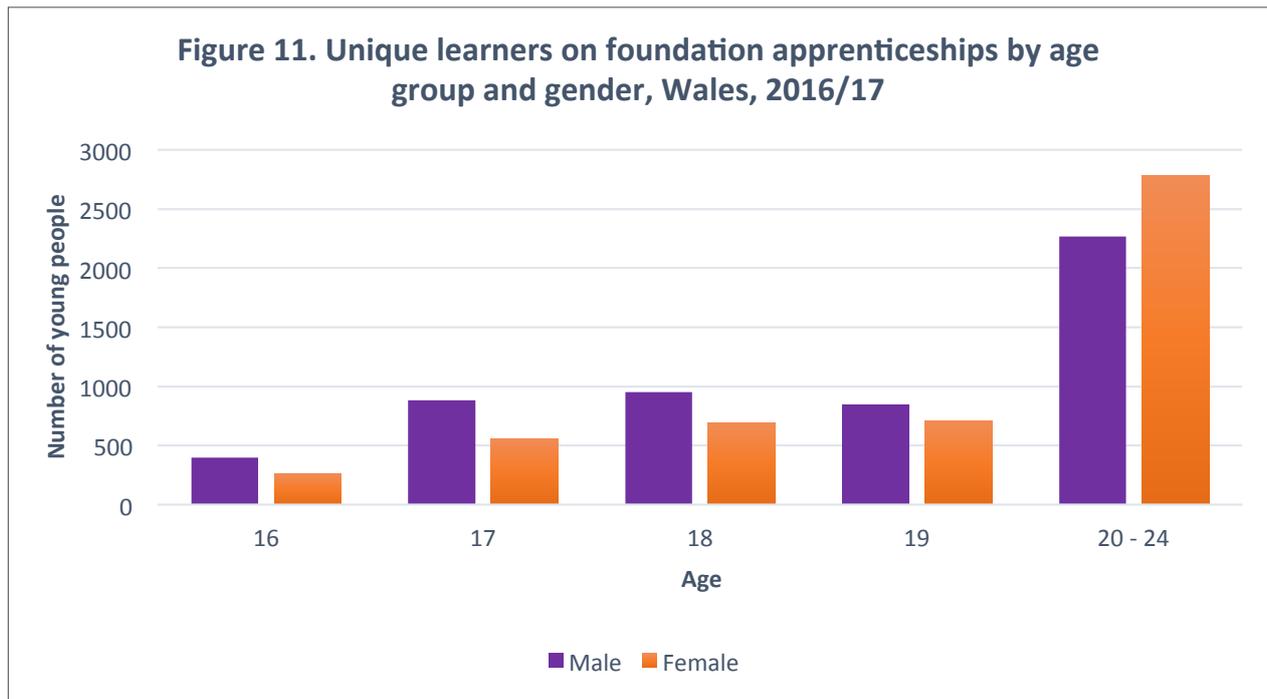


Source: StatsWales, Unique learners in work-based learning provision by age group, gender and programme type, 2016/17 [accessed via: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Work-Based-Learning/uniquelearnersworkbasedlearning-by-age-gender-programmetype>]

Apprenticeships:

Apprenticeships give young people the opportunity to earn a wage^{iv} while they complete a vocational qualification and essential skills through a training provider²³. There are two types of Apprenticeships available for young people without five A*- C GCSEs:

- **Foundation Apprenticeship:** offers a Level 2 qualification, the equivalent to five A-C GCSEs or a Level 2 NVQ. There are no entry qualifications for a foundation apprenticeship and apprenticeships exist in a variety of professions including engineering, vehicle mechanic, electrician, welder, nursery nurse, and hairdressing.

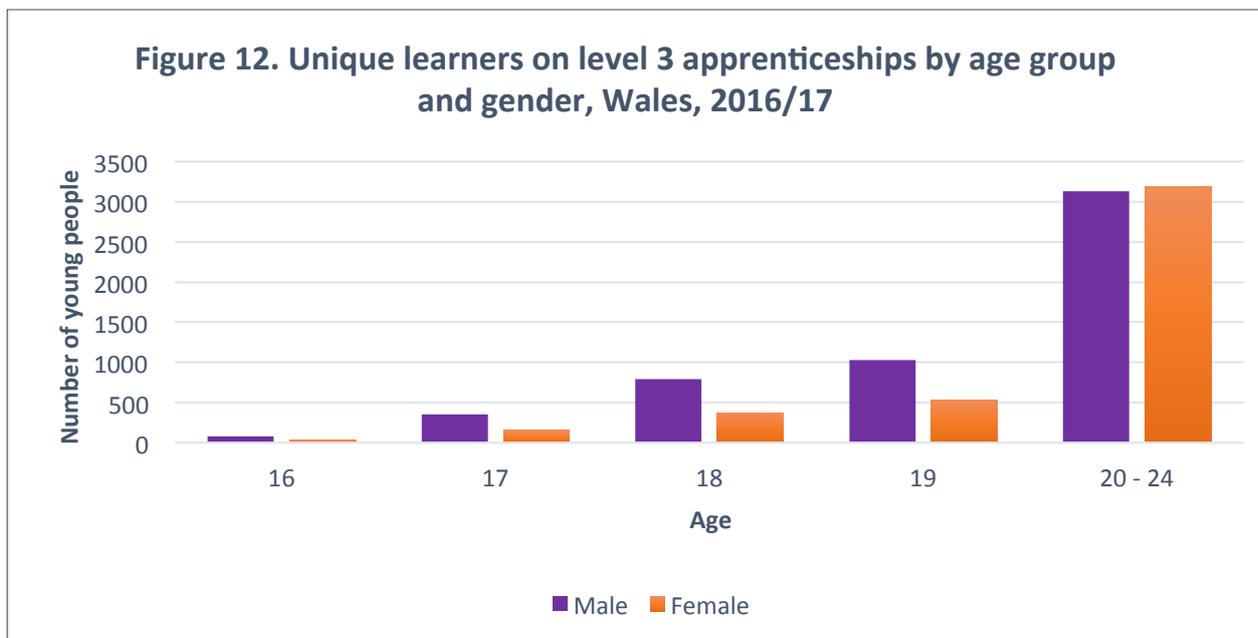


Source: StatsWales, Unique learners in work-based learning provision by age group, gender and programme type, 2016/17 [accessed via: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Work-Based-Learning/uniquelearnersworkbasedlearning-by-age-gender-programmetype>]

In 2016/17, 10,365 young people aged 16-24 were on a foundation apprenticeship, however only six per cent of them were 16-year-olds (665) compared to 14 per cent and 16 per cent of 17 and 18-year-olds respectively. Additionally, males aged 16-19-years-old were more likely to be on a foundation apprenticeship than females, however females aged 20-24-years-old more likely to be on a foundation apprenticeship than males.

- **Level 3 Apprenticeship:** offers a Level 3 qualification, the equivalent of two A level passes or an NVQ Level 3. Entry requirements for a Level 3 Apprenticeship usually consist of some GCSEs grades C and above or equivalent, depending on the profession and employer. Apprenticeships exist within many professions similar to foundation apprenticeships including engineering, hairdressing, environmental, business administration, IT, nail technician and hotel assistant. Some apprenticeships are only offered to those aged 18-years-old and above and these usually ask for a higher number of A*-C GCSEs.

^{iv} Apprenticeships wage for those under 19 or 19 years old and in their first year of an apprenticeship is £3.70 per hour.



Source: StatsWales, Unique learners in work-based learning provision by age group, gender and programme type, 2016/17 [accessed via: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Work-Based-Learning/uniquelearnersworkbasedlearning-by-age-gender-programmetype>]

In 2016/17, 9,675 young people aged 16-24-years-old were on a Level 3 apprenticeship, and only 1 per cent and 5 per cent of these were 16 and 17-years-old, compared to 12 per cent of 18-year-olds, 16 per cent of 19-year-olds and 65 per cent of 20-24-year-olds. Males aged 16 to 19-years-old are more likely to be on a Level 3 apprenticeship than females, with slightly more females aged 20-24-years-old on Level 3 apprenticeships than males.

3.3 Employment

According to Careers Wales, in 2016, only 2 per cent of 16-year olds went into employment after completing their GCSEs in year 11, 2.6 per cent of them were males and 1.4 per cent were females. The main job opportunities available for young people, including those who leave school without five A*-C GCSEs are through Jobs Growth Wales.

Jobs Growth Wales:

Jobs Growth Wales (JGW) is a six-month paid job opportunity for young people aged 16 to 24 years old that pays at least the National Minimum Wage^v, with few jobs paying more. The aim of Jobs Growth Wales is to provide young people with paid work experience by working between 25-40 hours a week. To be eligible to apply for a Jobs Growth Wales vacancy young people must be between 16 and 24 years old, be unemployed, have not previously completed a Jobs Growth Wales vacancy, and not be in full-time education (16 hours or more) or on a traineeship²⁶. Jobs Growth Wales is partially funded by £25 million European funding to create 8,955 new job opportunities for 16 to 24-year olds for three years starting in 2016²⁷.

Opportunities through Jobs Growth Wales are offered in a range of occupations including administration assistant, production and assembly worker, salon assistant, trainee sales officer, junior chef, kitchen assistant, cleaning technician, trainee fitness instructor, computer repair technician, stock controller, trainee social media manager and much more. Many of these jobs do not require any entry qualifications and some offer sustainable employment for the right candidate.

^v National Minimum Wage which is £4.20 per hour for those under 18 years old, £5.90 for 18-20- year olds, £7.38 for 21-24-year olds, and £7.83 for those aged 25-years and over.

Other job opportunities:

Other opportunities are largely dependent on the local labour market. Young people under 18-years-old are not eligible to claim Job Seekers Allowance and therefore cannot access support from the Job Centre, but can seek support from their local youth service, Careers Wales and other statutory and third sector organisations. Those over 18 can get support from their local Job Centre Plus via the Employability Skills programme and general support from their job coach.

Job opportunities other than Jobs Growth Wales vacancies advertised on the Careers Wales website were scarce. Those that were advertised included care assistant, office assistant, order fulfilment operative and assembler and packer positions. The majority of these jobs offered the National Minimum Wage and had no minimum entry requirements, although the higher paid positions required at least five A*-C GCSEs or a Level 2 qualification.

Additional Support:

There are numerous programmes across Wales, some funded by the Welsh Government and the European Social Fund (ESF), that work with young people and provide additional support to help young people into education, training or employment. These programmes include ESF funded programmes Inspire2Work, Ad Trac and Cam Nesa and Prince's Trust programmes which aim to provide mentoring, basic and personal skills, and confidence and self-esteem to young people facing significant challenges²⁸. These programmes are only offered in certain areas of Wales and are not available in others meaning that access to this type of provision often depends on where a young person lives.

3.4 Conclusion

Overall, our analysis has shown that there are many different types of opportunities available for young people, from FE courses to traineeships to Jobs Growth Wales vacancies. However, although the provider and the method of delivery may vary, the occupations, sectors and qualification levels on offer are essentially the same.

The effect is to offer young people a confusing and arguably spurious choice. For example, a young person can train in hairdressing or construction through a course at an FE college, participating in a traineeship or securing an apprenticeship, but his or her choice of vocational areas is much more limited.

In addition, the majority of opportunities on offer are for entry into occupations that are largely low-skilled and low-paid, with often limited progression. There are very few opportunities for young people without five 'good' GCSEs to enter and progress in subjects leading to higher skilled occupations including sectors such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), or in the social sciences, finance, legal or languages. Therefore, the pathways open to young people who do not have five GCSEs is directed towards a vocational, low-skilled and low-paid future.

4. Current Provision

The statistics and college prospectuses only tell part of the story. The voice of young people themselves is often not heard, and we wanted to find out more about their experiences of learning, work and being NEET. To do this we interviewed over 30 young people and also held discussions with a wide range of post-16 providers and stakeholders. In doing so we identified several key issues with the current opportunities that are available for young people who leave school without five 'good' GCSEs.

Alongside a narrow choice of occupations and sectors to choose from (highlighted in the section above) young people's experiences of the different types of provision are an additional factor in the decisions and actions taken by young people, further influencing the pathways they have followed.

The issues fall into three broad areas: first, the experiences and behaviours of young people themselves; second, the adequacy of current provision and third, practical barriers to participation. False names are given to ensure anonymity of those interviewed.

4.1 Young people's experiences and behaviours

Our research found young people often had experiences which acted as barriers to accessing opportunities or completing their learning. These experiences included a lack of information resulting in a lack of awareness of the post-16 opportunities available, mental health issues including low confidence and self-esteem, the lack of work experience they have and their age.

Information, Advice and Guidance

Young people themselves as well as stakeholders of all kinds were unanimous that young people who leave school without five A*-C GCSEs in Wales have insufficient careers information, advice and guidance. The result is that many of them leave school without knowing the full range of opportunities that are available for them.

Many of the young people interviewed said they did not receive impartial advice and felt that the information they got was very one sided, often favouring study for AS/A-levels or higher-level FE college routes. They felt that options such as work-based learning, lower-level FE courses and employment were neglected – work-based learning was referred to as the “poor relation”. As a result, many young people left school unaware of their options or how to find out more.

“I only knew about college. I didn't know about PeoplePlus, or Rathbone or anything, I only knew about college.” – **Emma, aged 16.**

“Apprenticeships are ramping up because it's a more recognisable brand, but then when you get into things like traineeships, you could ask 100 young people in a year 11 what they knew about traineeships, probably 99 would say not very much, despite us trying.” – **Stakeholder.**

“I knew for a fact that I would never get C or above in Maths and English and you needed five GCSEs and I only did two. But then I found out further down the line in college that some people don't even need GCSEs to do it. I would have just gone to health and social care, if I could have, if I had the right information about it.”
– **Bethan, aged 16.**

The lack of information around certain opportunities, especially work-based learning, has determined the paths that some young people have taken since leaving school. Some of those we interviewed emphasised that having more information before they left school would have changed the direction they had taken.

“If I had had more information and that, I would have been in hairdressing for a year.”
– **Jamie, aged 17.**

“It would have helped me get more of a view of what kind of path I wanted to take and stuck to it properly. Instead of just figuring it out through and through. It would have helped me figure out the choice I really wanted to do and keep my mind focused.” – **Ryan, aged 18.**

Mental health

Our research found that some young people experienced a lack of confidence and anxiety which was a serious barrier to them accessing most of the post-16 opportunities available to them. This is worse for those who have been outside of the learning environment for some time.

"...with college, I didn't really want to go to college because I'm one of those types of people that doesn't like being in a place with loads of people and I like it a bit quiet".

– **Nathan, aged 17.**

"I was going to [go to college], but I haven't got the confidence to go to college because I haven't been to school for so long." – **Holly, aged 18.**

These issues were brought up by numerous stakeholders, with some stating that mental health issues among young people was at a crisis point due to limited resources.

"...at the moment...a lot of young people that we've got have major anxiety issues, mental health issues...School is a good kind of structured approach for the them and there's support for them...When that support stops, when that structure and that routine stops, what we find is that young people retreat into their bedrooms ... and don't leave...So we are having to work with them...we are working a partnership and trying to work with the voluntary sector to have a befriending service to go in and get those young people out of their rooms." – **Stakeholder.**

Qualifications and experience

Although the focus on this project was on young people without five 'good' GCSEs, we found that nevertheless some held qualifications that excluded them from some opportunities. For example, young people who have completed a Level 2 qualification in a specific vocational subject at school are sometimes unable to participate in a Level 1 or Level 2 traineeship in the same subject.

"If they had a Level 2 in school, they couldn't go on then to have a Level 2 placement [traineeship] in the same discipline...A vocational progression route that has been identified in school as being the best for these young people, which is great and we support that. But that progression route that they took up in school hinders their chances post-16 because funding post-16 was for Level 2 qualifications so if they already have a Level 2 qualification then they wouldn't re-fund that person so they couldn't access Level 2 vocational courses post-16." – **Stakeholder.**

Many of the young people interviewed, especially those who were NEET, maintained that their lack of GCSEs and in particular their lack of work experience were the main reasons for not being able to find employment.

"It's just like experience more than anything. With jobs see like now, I've gone to interviews and the interview's gone really well and then they turn me away because of my experience." – **Abby, aged 20.**

"...there's not much opportunity for people that's got hardly no GCSEs, they're all looking for higher grades, A* people and stuff like that. And you know, there's nothing that we can actually do." – **Sarah, aged 19.**

Additionally, some stakeholders have noted that young people without five GCSEs in Wales are competing for opportunities, especially apprenticeships, not only with those who have five GCSEs, but also those with A levels and degrees.

"The difficulty is the market they are in, a poorly qualified 17-year-old versus a graduate with work experience going for the same apprenticeship which is the market, that's exactly what's happening. I've seen the figures, the amount of Level 2 apprenticeship entrants who have a degree I think it's like a third or something, it's really high... But as an employer, unless you're really socially minded, you've got that option of 5 GCSEs 17-year-old or degree educated...its sometimes a no brainer really. So, the opportunities are there but they are just in a tough market." – **Stakeholder.**

Some young people felt like "failures" because they were unsuccessful getting work or placements.

"It does my head in, I just wish I had GCSEs, I wish I had just done them in school, then everything would be easy now wouldn't it? I'd probably have a job if I had done them." – **Cerys, aged 18.**

Age

Traineeships in Wales are only available for young people aged between 16-18-years-old. In contrast, the majority of young people who are NEET are aged over 18.

“For when you’re older, about 18, the opportunities that you could do as a young person they just don’t suit you anymore... There needs to be more things for 18-year olds to do.” – **Adam, aged 18.**

Young people aged 16 and 17 also claimed that employers were not hiring them due to their young age.

“There’s no jobs for like 16-year olds is there. A lot of jobs now are like 18 or over and minimum wage is like £4, so it’s not good anyway.” – **Claire, aged 16.**

Some stakeholders pointed out that 16 and 17-year olds have historically been pushed out of some Job Growth Wales opportunities in favour of those who are older, with more qualifications and experience.

“There were graduates who were not interested in the graduate roles, they just wanted a job and were going into the jobs we thought the 16-18-year olds would do well in. I think it was 1 in 10 successful applicants were 16-18 in the first couple of years of Jobs Growth Wales, the rest were 18 plus. So, the 16-17-year olds always get squeezed out because of their age, their experience, their qualifications, that’s a challenge.” – **Stakeholder.**

4.2 The range and quality of provision

Young people and stakeholders alike had strong views on the adequacy of current provision, based on issues about the range and choice of provision, the quality of the experience, and progression and outcomes.

Choice

We found young people in Port Talbot and elsewhere to have relatively limited choices. There are typically fewer subjects on offer at a lower level in FE colleges compared to those at a higher level, resulting in less choice and fewer progression opportunities. There is also considerable variation in availability between colleges and campuses, so the choice of lower-level courses can depend very much on where a young person lives.

“I tried doing photography, but I couldn’t do it because I didn’t do my GCSEs. Careers told me I can’t do it because I haven’t got GCSEs.” – **Amy, aged 16.**

“I’ve applied for the animal college, my career adviser did it for me. She said that if I didn’t like it here that I could still go there, but I don’t know if I want to go over there [Bridgend College]...if they did an animal course in Neath I probably would have gone.” – **Hannah, aged 17.**

Opportunities to sit or resit GCSEs also depend on where a student lives, with some young people having access to a broad range of GCSE resits or a pre-GCSE programme while others, especially if they did not sit their GCSEs or got above a D grade, have no options to sit or resit GCSE subjects full-time.

“Oh yeah, I definitely would [sit GCSEs], but I can’t just go and sit my GCSEs, I have to go and learn about it.” – **Tom, aged 18.**

“I think that would be a really good idea to have a centre that run classes for certain GCSEs because people don’t have to like worry about money if they wanted to resit their GCSEs or like worry about anything because it would all be there for them, so they can just try again.” – **Lowri, aged 17.**

There is no limit on the number of traineeships available, but in practice young people do experience limitations because there may only be one traineeship provider locally, which has only a few options available due to the tendering process. In contrast in other areas there were several different training providers, resulting in them competing for learners.

“Where provision isn’t enough it tends to be where it’s not appealing for the providers to be, so recently in Welshpool, for example, you’ve gone down to one provider with a very limited group of vocations. So, for the young people in North Powys, North Monmouthshire, there’s barely an offer. For most of them it’s about 20 miles travel to get there so it really depends.” – **Stakeholder.**

Additionally, both foundation and Level 3 apprenticeships are said to be scarce in Wales, with opportunities only existing in a few sectors. Stakeholders and young people both acknowledged the lack of apprenticeships both in Port Talbot and Wales as a whole.

“No, ... I don't think they [apprenticeships] are available. I think the way it would go, it would be engagement training, then it would be Level 1, then whilst you're with a training provider hopefully the employer would keep you on and be able to move on to do a Level 2.” – **Stakeholder**

“Well apprenticeships I've been looking at but there's nothing for me that I'm wanting to do. There's nothing. So, I'm just waiting now to try and get as much experience to put onto my CV” – **Alice, aged 20.**

Other stakeholders asserted that the main problem is the lack of awareness of apprenticeship opportunities, both amongst young people and employers. Some regarded information on apprenticeships for employers as 'non-existent', with employers receiving the wrong information.

“There is a lack of opportunities for apprenticeships in Port Talbot. The process for employers is non-existent, where is it advertised? They need a visual tool, document, framework, flow chart, something that explains how it works for employers. At the moment all they have is an 0800 number to call and that's it.” – **Stakeholder.**

Similarly, employment opportunities in Port Talbot were very limited, with many young people applying for jobs in Neath, Swansea and Cardiff, with little success.

“If you want a full-time job it's probably Swansea or Cardiff you've got to travel for it. You'll have to look outside of Port Talbot for a full-time job, you'll have to.” – **Ashley, aged 19.**

“I put myself there, in [charity shop], volunteering. I go every day, I have a Friday off. I do everything that you would do in a shop, paperwork, stocktake, everything... I love it. I don't want to leave there but I need a more permanent thing. I've been looking in Port Talbot, but I have been looking Cardiff way as well.” – **Natasha, aged 21.**

Quality of provision

The majority of young people interviewed who are currently at college had positive experiences of their courses and the college environment, with most claiming that the courses were providing them with the skills they needed, and they received the support they wanted.

However, our research found that young people who had dropped out of college or were NEET had different experiences. Some young people claimed that lower-level courses, especially the entry-level and Level 1 courses, were not giving them the skills they wanted or needed to progress further, with some feeling that tutors “treated them like children”.

“They put me on a gateway course...like a life skills course, I don’t want to do a life skill course, I want like a job, stuff like that, something that’s going to help me. Not like learning how to write my name on a page... I went there and then I just stopped going, I can’t sit there.” – **Danielle, aged 18.**

“I went to college to do [a Level 1 course] but I didn’t like it there...There were toys everywhere. When I first walked in there were just toys everywhere and the tutor was telling me that if I liked to fuss or fidget then I could play with toys. I was like, I don’t want to play with toys, I’m 16.” – **Mia, aged 16.**

The impact of negative experiences meant that some young people said that Level 1 did not prepare them enough to progress onto Level 2. Some referred to some Level 2 courses as too “theory based” for them, particularly if they are not very academic, with some highlighting a lack of support for those with SEN.

“I thought it [sports course] would be more activities and that rather than writing, but it’s more writing than the activity itself.” – **Elinor, aged 19.**

“I got into BS vocational sampling, the year after vocational preparation, and the year after IT Gateway but I couldn’t do it because I had no support, understanding is terrible. That’s why I left college and moved down here. I never had one to one support, I asked for support and I sat there and did nothing.” – **Ben, aged 18.**

In a similar vein, many young people interviewed who had experienced traineeships found that they helped them gain work experience and new skills including numeracy and literacy skills, increased their self-esteem and confidence. They said they had received the support and help that they needed.

However, some young people had mixed experiences with different training providers, for example, providers telling them to find their own placements, putting them in unsuitable placements, or not providing the placements that they wanted. Some had experiences of staying with a training provider for a long period of time and not getting a suitable or any work placement and no vocational qualifications, regarding the experience as a “waste of time”.

These experiences caused a minority to drop out of their traineeship and to be unwilling to consider another with a different provider. Importantly, we found that the majority of NEET young people we interviewed had participated in engagement traineeships but had never completed them.

“Well, [training provider] told me that I had to find my own placements, so I had been trying to contact people and I just got nowhere. That’s when I dropped out of there because they did nothing for me. I was with them for about three months and they didn’t do anything for me. So, I left there, and I came here then to see if this place could help me. I was with [training provider] for so long I was expecting it to be exactly like [training provider], what they did to me, so I wasn’t too fond of coming to another place... But it’s actually better than [training provider]. – **Leah, aged 17.**”

There are also inconsistencies among the hours spent on work placement by Level 1 learners, with some working closer to 30 hours a week and others 40 hours a week but both receiving the same allowance of £50 a week. Additionally, some stakeholders have experienced cases of young people being kept on traineeships and in centre for longer than is necessary.

“In the past an issue was training providers were keeping young people in house for too long, even when they were work ready, ready to go out to a work placement. They were keeping them in too long, and that was frustrating for some young people, not moving them on into the work place.” – **Stakeholder.**”

As with traineeships, the majority of apprenticeships offered are in specific vocational and often low-paid occupations. It was recognised by stakeholders that there is a need to have apprenticeships in a wider range of sectors across Wales, to allow young people to have jobs and careers in higher-paid sectors, as well as the lower-paid sectors.

“I would like to see a lot more apprenticeships offered by businesses and I think that’s the way to really help to get our young people accredited, into work, and enable them to have in work progression...We need to encourage employers to take on a lot more apprenticeships and get our young people in. And it’s something we need to work on, to make sure that we have enough on the framework to offer to people.” – **Stakeholder.**”

Similarly, the employment opportunities available for young people with few qualifications are largely in low-paid jobs and occupations offering very little progression, including retail, customer service or warehouse jobs, with young people working unsocial and variable hours. The majority of Jobs Growth Wales opportunities advertised on the Careers Wales website offer the National Minimum Wage, with a limited number offering between £7.00 and £9.00 an hour.

“I worked in a fruit and veg shop, stacking shelves and till work. The person that owned the shop she got a different job and basically didn’t tell me, so I turned up and she wasn’t there. Everything was gone, the shop was closed, she basically moved and didn’t tell me. And I was meant to be getting paid that day as well and she didn’t pay me or anything, she just up and left.” – **Chloe, aged 16.**

“I worked in Amazon, stayed there for what, 4 months, and then they just let me off, about 3 or 4 days before Christmas.” – **Liam, aged 20.**

Other young people can only find temporary jobs in the local area, that are often only available at certain times of the year, for example, Christmas.

“I had a job, two jobs actually, one in a factory which was temporary and one in a restaurant but that was also temporary. So, I can only get temporary jobs because they just don’t take you for longer.” – **Sophie, aged 21.**

Outcomes and progression

Although the majority of young people in Wales who complete the different post-16 provisions progress onto higher-level learning or employment, some young people are not moving on, for example from a Level 1 to a Level 2 course and are ending up unemployed.

In 2016/17, two in nine learners ended up unemployed four weeks after completing their traineeship programme³⁰. Additionally, although Jobs Growth Wales opportunities have the expectation of a permanent role, one in eight young people who completed a private sector Jobs Growth Wales placement and one in five who completed a third sector Jobs Growth Wales placement between 2012 and 2015 ended up unemployed³¹.

Not being able to find work or access other post-16 provision has resulted in some young people without five A*-C GCSEs becoming NEET and claiming Job Seekers Allowance or Employment Support Allowance, sometimes for a lengthy period of time. At the end of 2016, 10.4 per cent of 16-18-year olds in Wales were NEET, some 11,000 young people, with a further 18.5 per cent of 19-24-year olds being NEET, another 46,400 young people across Wales.³²

"I've been looking for work for years. It's ridiculous, like I don't want to be on the dole, I genuinely don't, I know you probably hear loads of people say it, I don't. I'm up and out every day working for free." – **Vicky, aged 20.**

Long periods out of the labour market can have a serious impact on future prospects. The Youth Job Index (2017) found that, proportionately, young people with either no or low Level 2 qualifications are more likely to become NEET, to be NEET for 6 months or more and, importantly, are more likely to spend 12 months or more NEET. Spending six months or more NEET can have a long-term wage-scarring effect on young people, and the longer a young person is NEET the less chance they have of finding employment, particularly higher-paid employment.³³

Our research found that the paths taken by some young people after compulsory education are not linear. Many young people, especially those who were NEET, had experienced some if not all of the post-16 opportunities available, an experience sometimes known as "fractured transitions."³⁴

We found that young people were trying and exploring different options before choosing what is best for them, or in some cases not choosing anything at all. Some young people were as confused about their future at 19 as they were when they left school at 16. These 'fractured transitions' are leaving some young people in Wales NEET, or continuously bouncing from one type of provision to the next without progressing onto higher-level learning or sustainable employment.

“I’ve done an engagement traineeship in retail with Rathbone, a Level 1 painting and decorating course at college, went to sixth form first to do work skills and travel and tourism, now I’m doing this.” – **Alex, aged 18.**

Many of the young people interviewed, whether in college, in work-based learning or NEET have tried different college courses, traineeships or apprenticeships and for various reasons, some highlighted above, have dropped out without completing their course or placement and without gaining any qualifications. The act of dropping out of a provision can in turn set young people back even further and increase their likelihood of becoming NEET.

This has been highlighted by the Fabian Society who claim that the number of young people dropping out of post-16 provision has contributed to the increase in the number of NEET 17-year-olds³⁵. The Fabian Society also claim that the number of young people leaving post-16 provision without the skills and qualifications they need to transition to employment or further learning has contributed to the increase in the number of NEET young people 18 and over³⁶. Additionally, Impetus³⁷ found that in England most pupils who do not achieve A*-C GCSEs, especially in Maths and English at 16 do not catch up by the time they are 19. This data is unavailable in Wales; however, our findings suggest a similar picture as most of the young people interviewed who were over 18, especially those who were NEET, had not achieved a Level 2 or Level 2 inclusive since leaving school, with only some achieving a Level 1 qualification.

There is a real gap for young people who are unable to find suitable provision. For example, one young person aged 22 has spent four years doing four different entry level and Level 1 courses in college, has completed a traineeship and work experience through the Job Centre, but has been NEET for over two years.

The gap is leaving some young people behind, with the majority of young people interviewed stating that they want to move onto higher level courses, apprenticeships or sustainable higher paid employment, but do not have the skills and qualifications they need to do so.

“I’m not going to have a career, though am I? It’s just going to be a job. If I had GCSEs I could go and learn a career, travel and tourism, science or something like that, but now I’ve got nothing. The training courses, that’s all it helps you do is go out and get a job. But I don’t want to be like a shop person for the rest of my life, I want to be something. I don’t want to work in Lidl’s or something for the rest of my life.” – **Catrine, aged 19.**

4.3. Financial Implications

We identified some major financial issues that affected young people's participation, both in terms of relatively high costs of participation in some learning and also marked differences in the financial rewards associated with some options.

Costs

The cost of going to college can be a major barrier for young people. Costs can include an admin fee of up to £50³⁸, course costs sometimes of around £100, and the costs of a bus pass. These fees and charges are leaving young people, especially those from low-income families or who are supporting themselves, struggling to access college courses.

"I went to [a pay day lender] to get a £300 loan and I got to pay £600 back. I pay it weekly. I don't live with my mum or my dad... Even though I work two jobs as well, with college, I still had to get a loan." – **Emily, aged 18.**

In addition, there are day-to-day costs of participating such as the purchase of text books and course materials, stationery and lunches.

Some colleges have funds to assist students on low incomes, but we found that these were not well-publicised and were typically based on learners paying up-front and then being reimbursed.

Incomes

There are numerous different regimes to help learners financially, but none provide enough to cover the full cost of living and only apprenticeships are more attractive financially than unemployment.

For students in full-time college or school courses, the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) offers £30 a week for those aged 16 to 18-years-old³⁹. The number of EMA applications has declined by 10 percent since 2008/09 to 25,635 applications, 94 per cent of which (24,025) were approved. The majority of applications (81 per cent) were from students with a household income at or below the threshold of £20,817^{vi} and 19 per cent were from applicants with a household income of £23,077 or less^{vii}. The majority of approved applications were from students studying in further education colleges (17,060) rather than in secondary school or other learning centres.⁴⁰

For learners aged 19 and over, the Welsh Government Learning Grant FE (WGLG FE) offers means-tested support of up to £1,500 (full-time) and £750 (part-time) to those on low incomes⁴¹ - approximately £38.50 per week in college for full-time learners^{viii}. The WGLG FE has only a quarter the number of recipients as the EMA, with 6,200 applications in 2016/17, down 12 per cent on the previous academic year. The number of successful applications was 5,395, the majority being from full-time students. Three-quarters of full-time recipients had residual incomes of £6,120 or less.

Some schemes run by third sector organisations provide additional support, such as the Prince's Trust's development grant.

Our interviews with young people showed that although some knew about the different types of financial support available, others were unaware that Welsh Government or other financial support existed for further education.

"I didn't know about that! I'm also a twin, so my parents would have had to pay for two of us. I didn't know you could get help." – **Michelle, aged 18.**

Separate schemes operate for participants in traineeships and apprenticeships. Participants on engagement traineeships can receive an allowance of £30 a week, while participants on Level 1 traineeships receive £50 a week. Apprentices under 19 years old and those aged 19 or over in their first year receive a minimum wage of £3.70 per hour^{ix 42} - equivalent to £136.90 a week for 37 hours.

The low allowances are a significant barrier to young people who want to access these opportunities, especially those who do not rely on their family for financial support.

^{vi} Independent students or only child in household.

^{vii} With siblings aged 16 or under in the household or one or more siblings aged 20 or under in full-time education or training and eligible for child benefit in the household.

^{viii} £1,500 by 39 full-time weeks in college ($£1,500/39=£38.50$)

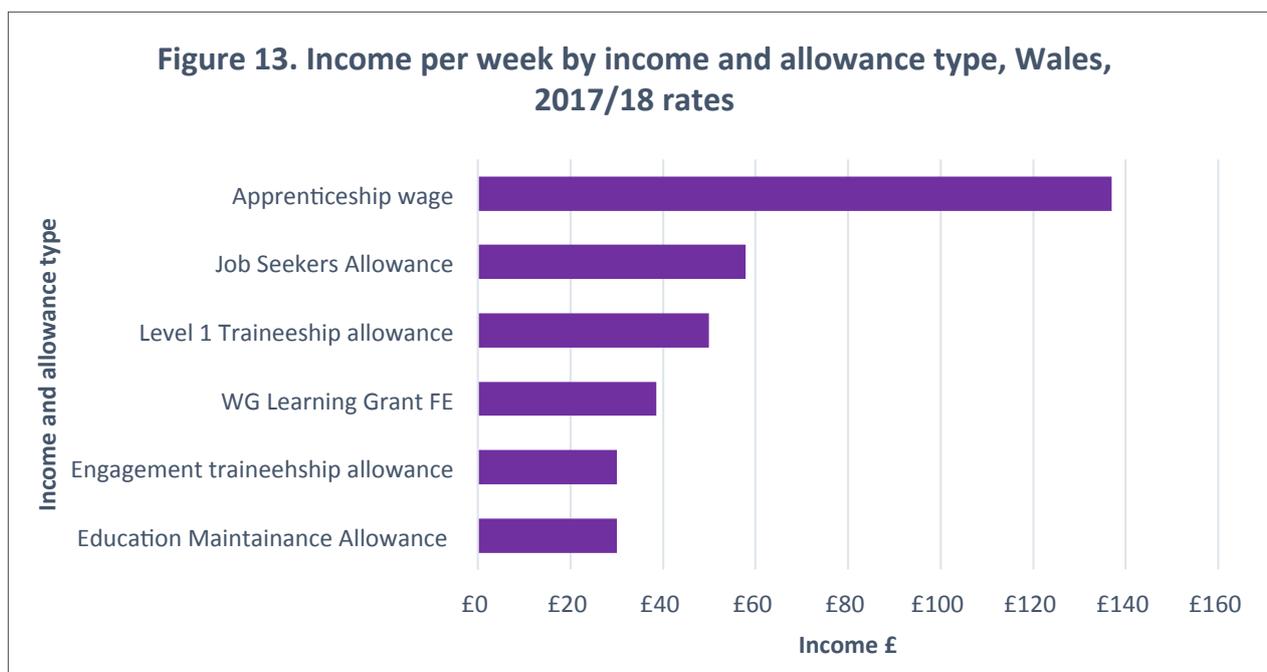
^{ix} The national minimum wage is £5.90 for 19-20- year olds, £7.38 for 21-24-year olds, and £7.83 for those aged 25-years and over.

“Because I live on my own an apprenticeship won’t be worth me doing because of the money. The wage is about £3 something, it’s stupid, it’s like slavery. I think it’s a joke.”
– **Georgie, aged 19.**

“The barrier to doing apprenticeships for young people is largely the pay, it’s too low. They want a job that pays money, a decent wage, rather than the apprenticeships wage.” – **Stakeholder.**

Young people aged 18-24 can receive up to £57.90⁴³ a week when claiming Job Seekers Allowance. This is higher – significantly so – than either the financial support for participation in FE or in traineeships. Some stakeholders told us that young people are dropping out of college and traineeships once they turn 18-years-old because JSA is paid at a higher rate, as displayed in figure 13 below.

“Young people can earn more on Job Seekers than they do in EMA, so we’ve had some drop out of college as soon as they turn 18, especially if they are from poorer families”. – **Stakeholder.**



Transport and Travel

Travel and transport can be a major barrier to some young people, especially those who live in the more rural areas, with the majority of opportunities offered in urban areas and college courses scattered across different campuses. The idea of traveling outside of their local area also stopped some young people from going to college or onto a traineeship, a barrier which was also emphasised by some stakeholders.

“So, then I went to my careers and she put me on this course. Because I said I liked to do stuff with animals she said for me to go up to Bridgend College, but I didn’t want to travel all the way up there either, so I just came here.” – **Laura, aged 16.**

“...we struggle to get young people from Port Talbot to come to Neath to attend provision and vice versa, I mean they’re 5 miles apart! It’s breaking down those kinds of embedded social preconceptions for want of a better phrase.” - **Stakeholder.**

Additionally, the cost and availability of local transport could be barriers, which in some instances affected young people’s studies and even resulted in some losing their jobs.

“I worked in Swansea...but I couldn’t get there. Sometimes I’d have a lift off one of the boys, when they weren’t working on that day I couldn’t get there so I had to ring in and say I was sick. Because I had no transport over they would put it as sick which would take my pay down.” – **Luke, aged 20.**

“The bus comes in at about 5 or 10 minutes past eight. Two buses come in and they’re either full of college students who got on before me or school students...Once the bus is full they no longer stop for people and they drive past you. If I don’t catch the college bus I’m almost guaranteed to be late for college...So I’ve already missed the first period of the lesson and I’m just in time for the second. It’s now really starting to affect my attendance on the course.” – **David, aged 18.**

4.4 Conclusion

Although there is a plethora of different courses, programmes and schemes on offer to Wales' young people, they do not necessarily meet the needs and circumstances of a substantial number nor are they enabling a successful transition into work or further study. A minority bounce around different programmes before becoming long-term NEET, with negative consequences for the rest of their lives.

At the centre of the problem is the lack of independent information, advice and guidance for young people who are not pursuing an academic path. The absence of support, both at school and afterwards, results in young people making poorly-informed decisions about their options. The sense of failure can affect young people's well-being.

There are also significant issues in the provision of post-16 opportunities. The number of vocational areas covered is relatively narrow, but there are numerous pathways into them offered by different types of training provider. We identified some concerns about the support offered to some learners, and about progression from lower-level to higher-level qualifications and from learning into employment. These are essentially problems of system design and monitoring rather than problems associated with particular providers.

The final factors are financial, with young people facing costs to participation that are high in relation to the very modest allowances they can receive, all of which – with the exception of apprenticeships – are lower than Job Seekers' Allowance at age 18.

5. An inclusive approach to post-16

We want a post-16 approach that includes and provides opportunities for every young person in Wales, regardless of ability, background, race, gender, and geographic location. This inclusive approach should allow young people to make their own informed choices and choose from a variety of different good quality options that will allow them to meet their full potential and follow the pathway that is more suitable for them.

This section sets out some practical solutions to help make post-16 education and training more inclusive of young people who leave school without 5 'good' GCSEs. These solutions were generated through two workshops with post-16 providers and stakeholders from different areas of Wales and were tested with a group of young people in Llanelli.

5.1 Youth Advice Pledge

Young people should have a statutory entitlement to receive independent careers information, advice and guidance. In 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government published *Careers and the world of work: a framework for 11 to 19-year-olds in Wales*. This statutory framework was intended to ensure that young people "... are ready to take their place in a rapidly changing world of work within the global economy."⁴⁴ The framework is meant to be delivered by schools while also including a wide variety of partners including Careers Wales, employers, entrepreneurs, advisers, parents, trainers and community groups.

Estyn's report *Careers: The implementation of the careers and world of work framework in secondary schools* highlighted that although most schools provided pupils with general information on post-16 options, the majority noted that reductions in services provided by Careers Wales due to funding cuts and insufficient responses to these changes have caused them to substantially decrease the careers support available to many pupils.⁴⁵ Approximately half of schools in Estyn's survey only provided careers interviews to those with additional learning needs or those identified as being at risk of being NEET, with only a few schools offering careers interviews to all pupils.

Our proposed Youth Advice Pledge would ensure that independent and expert careers advice and guidance would be available for all pupils, irrespective of ability or risk of becoming NEET, to give all young people the ability to make informed decisions about their future. Careers advice can be more inclusive by:

- Making legislation that requires schools to supply adequate impartial careers information, advice and guidance to young people that is incorporated into school KPIs and monitored by Estyn as part of the school inspections. Currently, Estyn's Common Inspection Framework does not include careers information, advice and guidance offered at secondary schools. This would make careers information, advice and guidance a legal requirement that all secondary schools in Wales would need to meet and maintain in order to pass Estyn inspections^x.
- Starting impartial careers information, advice and guidance from year 7 that follows and adapts to the needs of pupils through each school year. The *Careers and the world of work* framework is aimed at 11 to 19-year-olds, however in reality careers information, advice and guidance is not provided to pupils from year 7 onwards. To improve careers information, advice and guidance in schools and embed it into the school culture, it should start earlier and become a 'normal' part of the school environment.

^x Although this would increase careers information, advice and guidance for pupils at school, those with higher absenteeism may not necessarily benefit from this measure. Therefore, careers advice for those under 16 outside of the school environment would also need to be increased and improved.

- Careers information, advice and guidance should be a collaborative approach that includes Careers Wales, local and national employers, work-based learning providers, FE colleges, and entrepreneurial representatives. To ensure that careers information is impartial it needs to include and involve all of the post-16 providers in the local area to allow young people to make informed decisions about the best paths for them.
- School staff including teachers and teaching assistants should have training on the different post-16 options that is included as part of their professional development. Careers information can change quite frequently with local opportunities changing each year. To ensure that the information given to young people is relevant, there should be regular professional updating for those providing careers information.
- Effective careers information, advice and guidance should include parents and guardians alongside pupils and post-16 providers, as they are key influencers of children and young people's decisions. Including parents and guardians in careers information, advice and guidance supports young people when it comes to making informed decisions about their future.
- Careers information, advice and guidance should include both face-to-face interaction paired with good quality websites and apps that can be used on smart phones and tablets. Face-to-face information, advice and guidance provides the initial information and support, and can also challenge misconceptions and raise ambitions. Internet-based tools provide pupils with detailed information on the different opportunities available locally. These applications should provide information that is tailored to each young person by requesting post codes, subjects taken, grades or prospective grades, and aspirations. It is important that websites and applications are impartial and not commercially-driven.
- Increase 'real' work experience for young people in year 10 and 11 as part of careers information, advice and guidance that offers a positive outcome, for example, giving young people a real project to work on. Estyn found that the number of pupils who participate in work experience placements in Key Stage 4 has dropped substantially over the past five years, with schools claiming that it has a negative impact on pupil's progress and understanding of their career options.⁴⁶ Offering work experience should be part of business Corporate Social Responsibility for pupils in the local community.

5.2 Youth Prospects

Young people should have clearer progression routes into a wider range of vocational areas. At present subjects and sectors offered to young people without five GCSEs are limited in scope, with few opportunities for learning which could lead to high-skilled and higher-paid occupations. In addition, the range of provision can be confusing with young people faced with several options to enter the same vocational area.

Having less than five A*-C GCSEs does not necessarily mean that a young person does not have the potential to progress to higher-level learning and it is vital that they have the opportunity to do so. Better prospects for young people could be achieved by:

- Increasing opportunities for young people to sit or re-sit a wide variety of GCSEs not only in FE colleges but also within work-based and community learning, with the cost of studying GCSEs part-time subsidised for young people aged 16 to 25.
- Increasing FE provision at lower levels, especially at entry level and Level 1, with clear progression routes into Level 3 learning. This is the main route into Level 3 opportunities for young people who did not get five 'good' GCSEs at school.
- Broadening the range of subjects offered at lower levels so that young people can access a wider range of occupations. This should include STEM subjects in FE colleges and work-based learning opportunities in higher-skilled sectors and occupations.
- Offering training opportunities, including FE, traineeships and apprenticeships, that reflect local growth sectors and opportunities. This needs to be done at local rather than regional level and requires close liaison between training providers and local employers.
- Providing more opportunities for young people to do shared apprenticeships, similar to the Shared Apprenticeship Programme in Blaenau Gwent, that is offered at a foundation level and is inclusive of those without five GCSEs. Shared apprenticeships could increase employer buy-in by sharing the cost and risks of having an apprentice between several companies and organisations while meeting the Welsh Government apprenticeships framework.
- Simplifying the pathways into different occupations and providing information for young people on the entry routes, including the benefits and disadvantages of specific options. This will provide young people with the information they need to make the best decision about which route to take into the career path they want.
- Streamlining the complex system for applying for work-based learning contracts to allow training providers to offer a range of post-16 opportunities in different areas of Wales. Some training providers including FE colleges informed us that they cannot access funding for certain types of post-16 provision, largely

traineeships and apprenticeships, and therefore cannot offer the full range of options.

- Increasing the number of local jobs for young people by making it mandatory that employers who get public funding invest in the local community by hiring local people who are NEET, offering good quality work experience and delivering careers talks at schools, colleges and work-based learning.

5.3 Better access

Every young person should have the same opportunity to achieve their full potential. Whether a young person is from a low-income family, has Special Educational Needs or has mental health issues should not affect the opportunities they have, nor determine the pathways that they take. Some of the experiences young people have had and the behaviours they have adopted hinder their progression and limit the opportunities available.

Changing the experiences of young people and reducing the barriers they face would greatly improve access and prospects. It is worth noting that these proposals were the most popular of our recommendations amongst young people themselves.

We recommend:

- Reducing the cost of post-16 provision for those from low income families or who are supporting themselves. This should include removing enrolment or administration fees for college courses and offering a grant to cover course costs to learners on low incomes.
- Mitigating travel costs by providing concessionary passes for public transport, including bus passes for young people aged 16 to 25 years old.^{xi}
- Ensuring parity between the EMA, the WGLG and traineeship allowances. The rate for those aged 18 or over should match the Job Seekers Allowance rate (currently £57.90 per week).⁴⁸ Financial support should be advertised effectively to ensure that young people take up help available to them. The apprenticeships wage or additional learning support should be increased in line with the recent increase in support for students in Higher Education.
- Dropping age restrictions on participation in traineeships to include young people who were NEET aged up to 25 years old^{xii} and removing age restrictions for EMA and for local authority transport to college would widen the opportunities available for young people over 18.
- Introducing more activities and programmes to aid the transition from school to post-16 provision for young people with confidence and anxiety issues to allow them to adjust to the college and work environment. For example, a pre-engagement programme that would help young people get back into a routine and give them some basic social skills and confidence, similar to programmes run by the Prince's Trust.^{xiii}
- Improving information for learners about what a course or work-based learning programme entails and what they should expect. This could help decrease the numbers of young people dropping out of post-16 provisions by ensuring that young people know which courses and programmes are right for them.

^{xi} The Employability Plan states that "We will explore the potential for extending the age of discounted bus travel up to 24 year olds".

^{xii} This is due to be implemented within the Working Wales programme.

^{xiii} Similarly, this has been identified within the Youth Engagement strand of the Working Wales programme, however this provision needs to reach young people in the hardest to reach places, including those with mental health conditions.

5.4 Better monitoring

The ability to effectively monitor the achievements, progress and destinations of young people makes it easier to ensure that young people do not fall through the cracks in the system. Currently limited data on the progress and destinations of young people who leave school after their GCSEs is collected by Careers Wales, with additional educational data linking by the Welsh Government and limited data collected on learners from FE colleges and work-based learning providers. Recommended improvements include:

- Secondary schools should monitor the progression and destinations of their Key Stage 4 pupils after they have left school. Alongside this, schools should monitor the soft, life skills that their pupils have and need in order to have a positive transition. This could be done by utilising the Wales Essential Skills Toolkit (WEST) to assess whether young people are leaving school with the skills needed for a positive transition.
- Destinations data collected post-16 by FE colleges and work-based learning providers should be improved and be extended to collect information beyond 12 weeks to give better indication of the longer-term impact of the skills and qualifications gained through college courses and work-based learning provisions. The sustainability of progression pathways would then be known.
- Data that is currently collected by schools, post-16 providers and other organisations such as Careers Wales should be regarded as a single data set so that comparable duplication is avoided. This would enable more effective analysis to understand young people's circumstances and the barriers they face.
- Data needs to be collected on young people up to the age of 25 and not only those aged 16 to 18. This would allow the destinations and progression of all young people to be monitored, reducing the risk of young people falling through the cracks in the system.
- Data should be collected on the destinations and progression of young people who leave school without five A*-C GCSEs in Wales, as currently no data is collected for this specific group. The educational data linkage by the Welsh Government showing the destinations of previous cohorts of Key Stage 4 pupils and post-16 learners could be used to provide destinations and progression data on those who left school without 5 GCSEs in previous academic years.

5.5 Conclusion

Every year, thousands of young people, for a variety of reasons, do not achieve the five A*-C GCSEs. As a result, they are unable to access AS / A levels, Level 3 courses and many apprenticeships and must instead look to lower-level FE, work-based learning and employment.

To make post-16 education, training and employment more inclusive, we recommend a Youth Advice Pledge to deliver a step-change in information, advice and guidance for young people to make informed decisions about their future. Over and over again we found young people who had not been able to do so, and who as a result felt that they had missed out.

The Youth Advice Pledge needs to be coupled with Youth Prospects, so that young people have a range of opportunities including subjects currently not on offer to them, such as STEM subjects. It should also include clear progression pathways so that young people with few qualifications can eventually access Level 3 qualifications if they wish.

There needs to be urgent changes to improve the experiences of young people and reduce the barriers to access and completion. Some of these barriers are put in place by the post-16 sector itself and should be removed to ensure that the system is genuinely inclusive. There should also be parity between the financial rewards for different types of learning, and all should at least match the rate of Job Seekers' Allowance at age 18.

Lastly, effective monitoring of the progress and destinations of young people aged 16 to 25, especially those who do not have five GCSEs, would allow stakeholders more opportunity to intervene before young people fall through the gaps in the system and become, and stay, NEET for a substantial period of time.

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