

POST COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM

Young Persons Consultation Report

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1. About Dynamix, and the consultation

Dynamix is a Welsh social enterprise that provides education, gives people a say and has built up an excellent reputation in this field through its 29 year history. Dynamix specialises in giving people a voice using participative activities to engage inclusively.

Dynamix makes use of consultative, participative activities to ensure participants feel able to give their opinions. A range of techniques are used to cater to every person's individual preferences for giving their opinions, be that physically, visually, verbally, or in the written form. This results in participants feeling comfortable and confident enough to participate fully in the experience using facilitated consultation, to feel included and to know that their thoughts and opinions count and are counted.

It is also important to note that information is gathered in a non-standardised way and so statistical analysis is not appropriate. Instead, it delivers a rich, qualitative narrative, useful insights and valuable information, and a positive experience for those taking part.

Dynamix draws on a range of activities that have been tried and tested over many years.

Dynamix methodologies are underpinned by our values of engagement through participation and enjoyment, respect, inclusion, co-operation and empowerment along with the cooperative values & principles. Dynamix is also a strong advocate of the 12 Welsh National Principles of Public Engagement and the 7 National Standards of Children and Young People's Participation.

The Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) department in Welsh Government (WG) wish to streamline processes and ways young people can get informed about opportunities in Higher Education (HE), further education (FE), training and apprenticeships. Following the Hazelkorn Review "Towards 2030 – A framework for building world class Post Compulsory Education System for Wales", it was noted that it is critical to hear from learners and suggestion was made by NUS that the learner voice needs to be stronger in the consultation. Consulting the young people (YP) who will be affected by these changes is vital to ensuring a smooth and informative transition.

Dynamix were contracted by Welsh Government to involve learners in this consultation through a series of workshops across Wales from 4th September over 8 weeks. The final group consultation took place on 23rd October 2017.

2. Summary of key issues

Transport was highlighted as an issue for a high number of learners that we spoke to. Changes to where they go to learn may increase the pressure on learners and their financial situation to be able to travel to different venues. Provision of subsidised transport to coincide with timetable hours would help to ease this pressure. Reliable, cheap, and accessible transport would enable participation.

Consistent and skilled face to face support is more valued by the young people than that provided online. Structured support provided throughout the length of their studies would be of great benefit, allowing individuals to be supported and encouraged as well as picking up on any concerns before they become significant problems.

Accessible information (in a range of formats), about both the courses and the infrastructure of the services is needed for both young people and their families. This should be provided both prior to PCET and during it, allowing for young people to be as informed as possible.

Financial concerns are high for all learners'. Any changes as a result of these proposals will need to ensure that the finances of learners are not impacted. Some of the young people we spoke to identified that changes in circumstances can leave them without any money and as a result would prevent them from attending college or University. Apprenticeships and vocational courses were not viewed as being financially viable due to the low pay attached to these schemes.

Self-esteem and confidence was mentioned by a high proportion of the learners as a barrier to entering PCET. Any changes to their education should happen with this in mind. Including self-esteem and confidence building sessions into the process could ease the pressure on students and minimise disruption. Developing the self-esteem and resilience of young people to help them to see PCET as a right and viable option is needed.

Changes to course choices or college closures is not considered by most learners as a risk. They have confidence in the institutions and don't think anything will change. Therefore, any changes that could affect any learner would need to be communicated clearly so that they were aware of any potential disruption. There was assumption that it would be the responsibility of the institution to resolve any such issues.

Welsh Language was viewed as important and as such should be protected by the new Commission. Promotion of the benefits of learning Welsh would be advantageous as many young people disliked the compulsory element and felt that they should be given a choice as to whether they studied it or not.

Sixth Form students had often chosen to access this type of Further Education as they appreciated the familiarity and consistency that came with studying at their former school. As a result, they were slightly uneasy about the new Commission having a significant role in how their education is managed and run. This was slightly different to groups not connected to 6th forms (colleges, apprenticeships etc.) as they felt 6th forms should be more consistent with other PCET providers.

3. Scope of the consultation

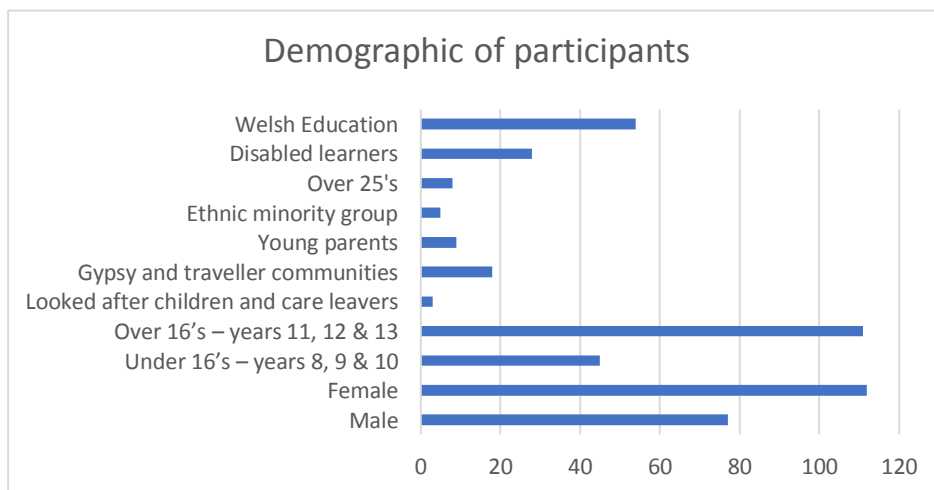
Dynamix spoke to a wide range of learners from across Wales. Contact was made with over 25 schools/colleges across Wales as well as over 10 protected characteristic groups to arrange consultations. Due to timescales for the consultation, as well as busy schedules within schools and groups, Dynamix delivered the consultations with those learners that were available within the 8 week timescale.

The tables below show a breakdown of those included in the consultation.

Region	No. of groups
South East Wales	1
South and West Wales	8
North Wales	3
Mid Wales	1
TOTAL	13

Of these groups seven identified as protected characteristic groups including a Gypsy and traveller group, Additional Learning needs groups, Ethnic minority groups and young parents.

Demographic	Number of young people consulted
Under 16's – years 8, 9 & 10	45
Over 16's – years 11, 12 & 13	97
Looked after children and care leavers	3
Gypsy and traveller communities	18
Young parents	9
Disabled learners	28
Ethnic minority group members	5
Welsh Education	54
Male	77
Female	112
TOTAL number of learners consulted with	199



4. Methodology

We addressed the following questions and themes. Due to the complex nature of the current consultation and language used, the questions were interpreted and adapted to be clear for learners by removing any jargon to enable them to provide input into these areas. The selection of questions below were seen as the most appropriate for learners to engage with. A toolkit explaining the details of the methods we used to engage learners in this consultation will be provided separately to the PCET Department as part of this contract.

➤ **Theme: Protecting, supporting and managing learners**

Question asked in PCET Consultation	Methodology and question addressed with learner groups	Comments
<i>Protecting the interests of learners in the PCET sector</i>		
8	Do you agree that the arrangements to protect learners studying at PCET providers in Wales need to be strengthened?	These questions were alien to young people, the concerns of college closure, or a course changing or ending during study, was not an issue for young people as they did not see the likelihood of this happening – they felt secure within the education establishment they had chosen. Their concerns for dropping out lay in a variety of other reasons.
9	If yes, what arrangements should be put in place to support learners no longer able to continue on their course at their chosen provider because of the closure of the course, the closure of a campus or because of provider failure?	
<p><u>Understanding PCET and the reforms</u></p> <p>Before we could start to address the questions around PCET reform it was necessary to explain the reforms in a simple and jargon free manner with learners. This was achieved through a simple presentation and by putting PCET in the hot seat so that learners could ask questions about the sector and the proposed reform.</p> <p>We used an activity to look at barriers to entering PCET and solutions to</p>		

10	Should providers offering higher education courses that are designated for statutory student support in Wales be required to produce student protection plans within their Outcome Agreements?	those barriers.	
<i>Supporting learners who wish to transfer between courses or providers</i>			
11	What support should be provided to learners wishing to change courses or provider?	<p>Following discussion around barriers and solutions we were able to discuss with learners the types of support they would need should they want to change courses or providers.</p> <p>Discussion was had about whose responsibility it was to facilitate changes – this was voted on by the groups.</p>	<p>Young people are unaware of the potential for changing courses or provider and are unclear who to speak to and where to gather information from.</p> <p>The groups were not aware of the new Commission and its responsibilities, therefore it was difficult for them to answer if the Commission should take a role in arrangements.</p>
12	What role, if any, should the new Commission have in ensuring arrangements are in place to facilitate student transfer arrangements and to promote awareness of these arrangements amongst learners?		

➤ Theme: Widening Access and participation

Question asked in PCET Consultation		Methodology and question addressed with learner groups	Comments
<i>Widening access and participation in the PCET sector</i>			
21	What actions, if any, should be undertaken to encourage greater participation in the PCET sector, particularly by individuals from disadvantaged and under- represented groups?	<p><u>Exploring pathways in education</u></p> <p>We explored learning pathways with the groups to establish a picture of why, how, where and when they learned?</p>	This was sometimes difficult for groups to answer if they had not had experience of PCET. However, by exploring their own learning pathways and drawing on experiences they had heard about from friends and family they were able to identify issues that might affect them.
22	How could we ensure greater retention on and successful completion of PCET courses by these groups?	This enabled a discussion and identification of the biggest reasons for staying in PCET and their top tips for staying in PCET.	
<i>Widening access and participation in the PCET sector</i>			
24	Should further and higher education institutions be placed under a duty to publish and provide to the Commission, data on the application, acceptance and progression rates of students, broken down by gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background?	This was discussed in terms of fairness and information relating to this question was taken from barriers to PCET. If these things are seen as a barrier for learners then this data should be provided to ensure discrimination does not take place.	This was especially important for those from protected characteristic groups.

➤ Theme: Sixth form

Question asked in PCET Consultation		Methodology and question addressed with learner groups	Comments
25	Do you think that the Commission should have responsibility for the planning, funding and monitoring of school sixth forms? If yes, please give reasons?	In order to understand how the learners felt about sixth form we asked them to describe the differences that they saw between sixth form and other institutions. The groups then voted on whether they thought sixth form should be included.	For some young people who want to stay in school, 6 th form is a place of continuity and safety for them. This is especially so if they suffer from anxiety or stress relating to changes in their life such as going to a new place of study. Outsourcing this responsibility would potentially mean that the 6 th form would change and maybe become more like a college – by looking at these differences the young people were able to identify different elements that worked for them.
26	Do you think that the Commission should have any other role in relation to school sixth forms, for example provider registration, quality assurance and enhancement, and governance? If yes, please give reasons?	To consider the Commissions role we used a voting system that allowed the young people to vote; Yes, No, Maybe	The young people were not really concerned about the overarching role of the Commission, they want to continue with their education as they have planned with minimum disruption or change. When we asked these questions the groups struggled with answering as they are so far removed from the reality of what this actually means. Those who are not in PCET do not have a concept of the differences between college and 6 th forms as they have not been to either. Those in 6 th form or college struggled with answering this question as they had already decided on one or the other.

27	Do you think it might be preferable to establish the Commission without including sixth forms within its remit, but with the option of doing so at a later date?		Young people in 6 th form were in a better position to answer this question.
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➤ **Theme: Transitional Arrangements**

Question asked in PCET Consultation	Methodology and question addressed with learner groups	Comments
<i>Transitional arrangements – Preparing the road to implementation</i>		
31	Protecting the interests of learners and minimising disruption for providers will inform plans for the transitional period. Are there any other matters which should be taken into account?	<p><u>Impact of new models</u> We looked at what PCET looks like now and what it could look like in the future following the reforms.</p> <p>The learners discussed their hopes and fears, wishes and worries about PCET, their continued education and their aspirations for the future.</p> <p>The groups also voted on whether they would prefer a quick change or slowly overtime.</p>
32	To help inform our assessment of the possible impact of these proposals can you foresee any particular impact on those with protected characteristics (within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010) and how they might be particularly affected by these proposals? What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?	

➤ Theme: Welsh Language

Question asked in PCET Consultation		Methodology and question addressed with learner groups	Comments
33	<p>We would like to know your views on the effects that the establishment of the <i>Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales</i> would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:</p> <p>i) opportunities for people to use Welsh and ii) on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.</p> <p>What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?</p>	<p>Learners discussed how important Welsh language options were to them in their education and voted on it.</p>	<p>The results in this section depend considerably on the group – those in Welsh language education are very passionate about the Welsh language. However, many of those not in Welsh language education also showed support for the development of the opportunities to use and learn Welsh. Whereas others felt it added an extra burden – especially for those who are not first language English speakers or have additional learning needs.</p>
34	<p>Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy could be formulated or changed so as to have</p> <p>i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.</p>		

3. Results by theme

I. Protecting, supporting and managing learners

Understanding PCET and the reforms

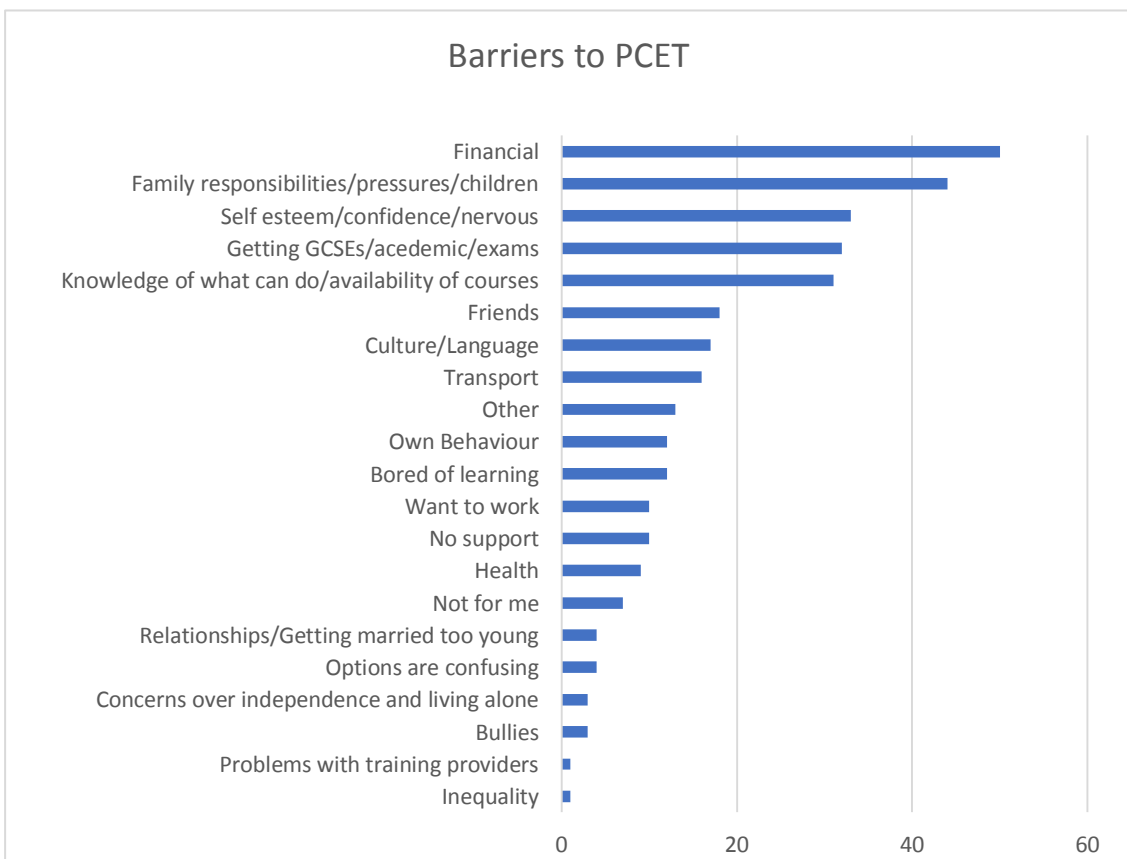
Before we could start to address the questions around PCET reform it was necessary to explain the reforms in a simple and jargon free manner with learners. This was achieved through a simple presentation and by putting PCET in the hot seat so that learners could ask questions about the sector and the proposed reform.

Barriers to PCET and solutions to these barriers

To gather opinions on what support learners need it was necessary to understand the barriers to entering PCET for learners. To do this we used a method called ‘Bricks in the wall’. The individual learners involved in this consultation identified over 400 barriers to them going into PCET.



The results were collated by theme. As can be seen from the table the biggest barrier for young people is financial. This encompasses concerns over paying for fees, transport, childcare and being able to support themselves.



Once we had discussed the barriers faced to entering PCET we discussed possible solutions to these barriers to introduce the idea of overcoming barriers and thinking about doing things in a different way.

Many of the solutions were focused on individuals doing things themselves to overcome the barriers such as encouraging others to try harder, to save their own money, to look for new ways of doing things, ask others for help or to research their options better. Very few of the solutions identified specific organisations to provide support. Those that were mentioned included the care system, Open University, UCAS and support from teachers.

Following these discussions, the following question was asked in order to address questions 8, 9 and 10 from the original consultation;

Question; 'If your course closes down what support do you need to continue studying?'

A significant number of young people did not understand the reason why they were being asked this question as they had not had any experience of this happening and had not considered that this could happen.

Students from many groups talked about the detailed plans they had already made for their future education;

'I want to go to 6th form and then university but first do well in GCSE's. I want to work as a life guard for the RNLI'

'I want to succeed in GCSE's by only getting A's and A, I will stay in 6th form studying History, French and English literature then go to a good university like Bristol and study English lit and French, then do a conversion course in human rights and become a human rights lawyer'*

Learners were not expecting courses to close, change or be disrupted. Those who want to continue in further education do not even begin to entertain the thought that the course will be changed or stopped.

However, those who did foresee potential issues arising with their course were often those who had already struggled within the education system and were possibly slightly more aware of problems that can arise;

'Some training providers go under or change their name which means it's confusing to know what to do' (Care Leavers group)

Many see further education, as the only way they will achieve their planned career. Being given more information about the wide variety of options available would help relieve some of this pressure;

My worry is *'That I won't get into university which means I won't achieve the career I want, I won't achieve a good job and won't succeed in life'*

(Over 16 years old college group)

It was clear that students from some schools had much higher concerns about not achieving academically;

'Pressures, people wanting a definite plan and family wanting best grades' (Barrier to PCET)

'That I can't reach the expectations that are rising all the time' (Worries about my education)
'That I won't be able to deal with the strain of studying and school, that I'll start going down the wrong road and self-destruct' (Worries about my education)

(All quotes from one group)

Other groups also had concerns regarding not achieving in other ways including;

I worry *'That my parents are not proud of me, I don't have enough money for Uni yet, I'm always compared with people who are better than me' (Worries)*

This leads to many having high expectations to achieve high grades as well as high expectations of the further education choices that they make. They do not think that these institutions will let them down and as such have little idea about how they could be helped if they did.

Concerns were raised by a number of learners about whether they will enjoy further education and if it will live up to their expectations or that they may choose the wrong course due to a lack of information about what is available;

'I worry that I won't be happy in uni' (Worries about PCET)

'I may not like the course' (Worries about PCET)

'Being unsure of what course to pick' (Barriers to staying in PCET)

'Your course doesn't lead to a job' (Barriers to staying in PCET)

As can be seen from the chart above students are fully aware of the cost and subsequent debts that will be part of their future and as such expect Further Education establishments to be of high quality, meeting the high level of work they will have to put into the course.

'I worry that student fees will rise despite recent news articles' (Wishes and Worries)

'That if I go to uni I'll be in debt for the rest of my life' (Wishes and Worries)

Young care leavers have significant money concerns, that in turn has a real impact on whether or not they are able to access and stick with PCET;

'EMA is not enough – especially when you're in care, otherwise your living on a muffin a day in college (£1)'

'Too expensive, £4-£5 a day for food plus transport and everything else'

'The money situation was why I quit'

(Top reasons for dropping out of PCET - Care Leavers Focus Group)

Many young people from disadvantaged groups in Wales don't have the same desire to go to university. This could be due to lack of opportunity, geographical limitations, and financial constraints.

*'Not enough money, no friends going, family problems, too far away'
'parents stop me from going to college/work because they want me to stay close to home'*

(Barriers to PCET)

Young people have a significant potential for financial loss if courses are changed or cancelled. Many have overcome numerous hurdles to be able to attend PCET, these include cultural barriers, travel, anxiety and lack of self-confidence. Protecting learners at PCET would mean that young people would approach further education with increased confidence and security in knowing they would be protected if something happened to their course.

This question proved to be a difficult one to answer, this could be seen as being because young people did not consider this an aspect of PCET they needed to be involved in and was instead a responsibility that belonged to the providers themselves. Young people therefore did not have a sense of what arrangements should be put in place to protect them.

However, 65% of those asked felt that it was the responsibility of the course provider to sort out issues and 33% felt it was their own responsibility. Comments made included;

'It's their fault'

'It should be between you and the college'

'They took you on so they can sort you out'

Much was talked about in terms of having support for students while they were studying, if students had somebody they could get advice and information from then it would mean they knew how to solve any issues that they were concerned about. Communication is paramount to ensure that any problems that occur during a course are rectified as soon as possible. For some groups of young people, the concern regarding lack of support is felt more as they may have had significant support throughout their education up until that point. Support identified included;

'Better communication between all relevant parties'

'Bursaries for supporting students should be improved'

'Lack of support'

'Confusion – courses/everything'

'Better support from job centre – ongoing support after training course finishes – more training for adults and grants to pay for them' (Wishes for PCET)

'Post 18 what do we do? I'm in care so that means once you turn 18 there's less support'
(Wishes for PCET)

'Extra support – or know how to get it – it's there for people and is made known to them. There should be regular check ins with tutors and more guidance'
(Top tips for staying in PCET)

One group felt that service providers should do their best to provide alternative avenues for study if their course was cancelled or changed. If this wasn't possible some suggested offering free online or distant learning alternatives so that young people didn't miss out.

They felt that if changes were made to locations for any reason that service providers should cover costs of transport to that location (possibly with subsidies from Welsh Government).

They felt there should be advice available to anyone who has gone through this change and guidance on which steps to take after the course has been cancelled or changed. Support could be offered by a designated worker or guidance could be given online by a reputable and trustworthy source.

Students felt that different providers should link up with support from the Welsh Government so that learner's education is disrupted as little as possible.

II. Widening Access and participation

Barriers and solutions to PCET

As discussed above, part of each session looked at barriers to PCET and possible solutions to overcoming these barriers. The aim of this was to identify the actions that young people view as ways of encouraging greater participation.

In this section we break down the results by groups to demonstrate the actions identified by the young people. From this it is possible to see what is needed to encourage greater participation in the PCET sector by individuals from protected characteristic groups.

➤ Looked After Children and care leavers

It was identified by this group that there was a need to improve apprenticeship opportunities. This group of young people prioritised choices that will make them money in the near future as they often can't rely on families to support them or house them while they study. Many of their barriers were focused on cost and the price of living.

They felt it would be useful for service providers to follow the same guidelines as each other and have similar rules and procedures so not to confuse anyone searching for the best options. It was also suggested that more information should be available to them, ideally in one place, either at a central website or an info hub somewhere central.

Transport was also seen as a barrier as many of the young people relied on public transport to get them places and were often late for college or placement because of buses being full or running late. They suggested putting on more buses and offering free transport to people, especially those on low incomes.

None of the care leavers talked about university – their priorities are earning money to cover their costs of living.

TOP TIPS identified to help care leavers stay in PCET identified by this group are;

- 1) *Make it worthwhile.*
- 2) *Sort out the cash situation.*
- 3) *Make the courses more relevant.*
- 4) *More job opportunities and apprenticeship for under 18s specifically.*
- 5) *Make under 16's education more relevant for people who are more interested in going out to work.*
- 6) *More information about hands on jobs, this way you can make your decisions and prioritise.*
- 7) *Help and advice on C. V's etc. some support currently, but not enough.*
- 8) *Governments need to put incentives out there for multinational companies to employ under 18's and offer apprenticeships.*
- 9) *Education could be more inclusive- less disparity between mainstream education and extra support education.*

➤ **Gypsy and traveller communities**

Cultural differences play a big part for some young people from the gypsy and traveller community to attend PCET.

'Culture – Not so much importance held on education (especially for young women)'

'In some cultures, girls have to get married very soon, 17-18 years old'

'Not much understanding in my life and in my country before'

'Family won't want you to leave them.'

Many young people want to continue on with PCET but feel that parental pressure to stay at home, get married and not valuing education for women poses a significant barrier. However, they talked about being open and honest with their families to help them understand the importance of PCET while still respecting traditions but also valuing education;

'Try to persuade and convince them by telling how successful further education is and how it can help you succeed in life.'

'We have to respect each other, doesn't matter about the background'.

'Don't give traditions up, but negotiate with parents, have a nice chat'.

Having PCET that is available locally for some young people will mean the difference between attending FE or moving straight into the work.

If young people struggle academically in school, or receive negative feedback from teachers, this impacts their own self-worth and self-esteem, meaning they are less likely to follow a path that includes PCET. Lack of confidence in their own academic abilities is a significant barrier. The opinions of others on their ability to succeed, or not, has a massive influence on how they feel they will do. Barriers identified by this group included;

'People telling you you're not good enough'

'Teachers telling you you're English is not good'

'Not being bright enough, exams are too hard'

Many young people that we talked to have great aspirations for the future including;

'To have a good education, hopefully in Paris'

'I would like to go to 6th form. I want to be something big in the future'

'I want to be a barber'

'I wish I could get through 6th form and Uni OK. I wish after I finish uni to become a nurse or designer, model'

'I wish I could become a police woman'

'Go to 6th form and go to uni, good future, pretty houses'

As they did not have experiences of being in PCET this group put together a list of the **top things that stop young people from gypsy and traveller communities going into PCET**;

- 1) *People not being nice / other students.*
- 2) *Not understanding/ too hard.*
- 3) *Want a career instead, chances come up.*
- 4) *Mum and Dad.*
- 5) *It's boring.*
- 6) *Waking up is an effort.*
- 7) *I feel like an adult and am treated as a kid at college/school.*
- 8) *My mates are snobby/ full of themselves.*

- 9) *Fighting.*
- 10) *Strict teachers.*
- 11) *Peer pressure.*
- 12) *Trouble every day.*
- 13) *Struggles with teachers.*
- 14) *Finances for keeping up with latest fashion stuff clothes phone etc.*

➤ **Young parents**

The main barriers for young parents entering PCET were finances, lack of information, having young children, confidence and transport. Some of the members in this group had been in college when they became pregnant and were asked to leave their vocational courses for health and safety reasons. Their main priority was to provide for their children and as such stated that they would struggle to go into PCET as they would not get enough money to cover childcare costs and studying.

'Because we are under 25 I couldn't claim working tax credit. There are only a certain amount of benefits you can claim if you are studying. What's the point, I'd be doing it all for nothing'

Vocational courses or apprenticeships were not considered to be an option as they did not provide enough financial support for a family either;

'Apprenticeships only pay £3.40 ph in the 1st year – can't afford it. I was working full time and only bringing in £800 per month. Council tax is £65 a month and you have to pay £75 upfront per month for a bus fare to college. I just can't afford it.'

Not knowing what was available and availability of courses locally were also raised as issues for young parents to be able to manage childcare arrangements. The group agreed that they would want to go back to PCET and gain qualifications, or a trade, but didn't want to miss their child's development in the early years. At the heart of the consultation was the fact that they are parents, and their main concern was the welfare of their children, and answered the questions putting the needs of their family first.

TOP TIPS identified for young parents go into PCET identified by this group are;

- 1) *Go back to learning when you're ready.*
- 2) *More help with finances.*
- 3) *Remove age restrictions for financial support.*
- 4) *More friendly staff.*
- 5) *Colleges needs to be more flexible for people with children – especially if the children are unwell etc.*
- 6) *Vocational courses need to cover the costs of living.*
- 7) *Support with childcare for studying outside of college hours – difficult to study at home.*

➤ **Disabled learners**

Many young people with additional needs talk about their own behaviour as a barrier to PCET; feeling *'frustrated', 'angry', 'wound up', 'cross'* and *'not being able to cope'*. Confidence, anxiety and not being engaged at school were also raised as barriers for many learners with additional needs.

Another barrier is living in the wrong area to be able to access courses. If they have extra needs they may well not have the confidence or ability to travel alone on public transport – reliance on parents means they may not be able to get to college at all especially if grants towards transport are not available.

A lack of awareness of other options available is clear; *'not enough choices'* is mentioned as a barrier. It may well be that young people in this college do not have sufficient information about what PCET is available. It is important to question whether these young people are expected to achieve. If they have anger or behaviour issues, they may be getting the message that they won't be able to complete any PCET. A possible lack of belief that these young people can achieve their employment dreams, this is shown not only through their own concern that they may fail their GCSE's but also their reference to other people's opinions of whether they can succeed or not.

'Teachers lack understanding of the student'

'Not getting the right education'

(Barriers to PCET)

The transition to PCET is quite intimidating. They want to feel safe in college with support provided, feel rewarded for positive behaviour and *'make it less scary'*. Continuation of financial, transport and practical 1-2-1 support, that they get during secondary school, may not continue after they leave. They want to know that despite all these concerns, college will be worth it. For some young people the practical every day is so enormous that they are unable to see far enough ahead and to plan for FE. Physical, mental, and emotional health have an exacerbated effect on some young people e.g. to be able to go for a walk is a current main aspiration for one young man after an operation on his spine.

TOP THINGS that stop learners with additional learning needs and/or disabilities going into PCET;

1. *Stress.*
2. *Transport problems; Cost & availability, Struggle to take public transport alone.*
3. *Lack of support.*
4. *Confusion – courses/everything.*
5. *Family.*
6. *The work is too difficult – not what you think it is.*
7. *Money.*
8. *Not fitting in – moving away from your circle of friends.*
9. *Changing your mind.*
10. *Attendance and money.*
11. *Lack of job opportunities.*

12. *Not meeting their needs get angry and wound up. They are annoying get stressed and cannot cope.*
13. *Mental health issues.*
14. *It's too much like school.*
15. *They behave badly-bully someone.*

TOP TIPS for staying in PCET for learners with disabilities;

1. *1-2-1 support.*
2. *More choices.*
3. *Help with planning ahead.*
4. *Stay in a group.*
5. *Look to the future to get a better job.*
6. *Qualifications.*
7. *Friends (Make friends).*
8. *Build people's confidence.*
9. *Help them feel safe in college.*
10. *Help people to control their moods.*
11. *No punishments - all rewards.*
12. *Make it less scary and show it's worth it.*

➤ **Ethnic minority group members**

Financial difficulties, not having enough information and getting the right grades are common place barriers to entering PCET.

For this group discrimination was raised as an issue, with young people agreeing that equal opportunities should be provided for all and there should be procedures in place to ensure that equality checks take place. Culture was also identified as an issue, a solution to this was identified as;

'Persuade them by showing them benefits of higher education e.g. better qualification means better jobs'

This group identified that they want to go to university and succeed in a good career, they understand that they have to do well in their exams in order for this to happen. However, they also questioned whether university is the correct path for their career choice and whether jobs would be available after finishing their degree.

'Being advised on all the opportunities outside of school. Or given extra support in and outside of school'

'Would I have the same response, opportunity and chances if I chose something other than university?'

They also voiced concerns about university especially the financial aspect and debts, and how difficult the work might be.

Some young people felt that they have jobs to go into in the family business.

TOP THINGS that stop learners from ethnic minority going into PCET;

1. *Money motivated.*
2. *Find a permanent job.*
3. *Lack of interest in their course.*
4. *'It's not for me'.*
5. *Workload.*
6. *Not doing well.*
7. *Stress.*
8. *Help out in a family business.*
9. *Confidence.*
10. *Easier to concentrate in school than college (and vice-versa).*
11. *Grades drop.*
12. *Don't know what they want to learn.*

TOP REASONS for staying in PCET;

1. *Guaranteed progression opportunities/routes for after. Not just university and apprenticeships.*
2. *University tasters from early on.*
3. *Variety of courses on offer.*
4. *Prepare young people before 16 – aspirations and confidence etc.*
5. *Extra support – or know how to get it – it's there for people and is made known to them. There should be regular check ins with tutors and more guidance.*
6. *Decent, supportive, and inspiring teachers.*
7. *Higher EMA (more money).*

➤ Welsh Education

These groups raised concerns over the change from Welsh medium education to an English based one at university, or not having a course delivered in Welsh and the concern that they would lose their ability to speak Welsh if they had such a focus on English.

Students in these groups had high aspirations, both in their expected achievements academically and with their future education and careers. Many know the types of career they would like to go into and what they need to do to achieve this. The idea that university is the key to many of these careers far outweighs any mention of vocational courses, to the point where one young person mentions having to take an apprenticeship as a negative outcome.

Top Tips for staying in PCET for Welsh language students;

1. *Join Welsh speaking groups at University.*
2. *Stay on at sixth form so can continue education in Welsh.*
3. *The government needs to make sure that every school has the same choices for GCSE.*
4. *Organise your time and prioritise.*

5. *Scrap tuition fees / student loans with too much interest.
Student loans should be interest free.*
6. *Create more colleges and universities offering all types of courses.*

➤ **Over 16's – years 11, 12 & 13**

We spoke to a further four groups across Wales within this age group.

Some felt as if the pressure of education could be too much and mentioned that the work for 'A' level was noticeably harder than GCSE's which could leave some students feeling like they "weren't good enough".

Issues surrounding transport costs and times were mentioned, with some students feeling that public buses weren't always timetabled well and that they may not fit in with their college classes. Also, it would be difficult to afford transport if their parents were over the threshold for EMA.

Some members in this age group felt that there should be more support for students who are struggling with any issues surrounding PCET. One school had a designated worker who offered them support and guidance in terms of PCET (along with anything else) and the learners felt it was a real help when they were going through issues with their studies.

There was also a call for clear and trustworthy information to be available for anyone struggling to make decisions regarding PCET. They said that all staff working in education should have at least a basic knowledge of the education system, different options available to students and different educational pathways. They said that it may also be worth having reliable information available to parents who may never have been to college or university and may have anxieties about funding their child's studies.

TOP TIPS for staying in PCET

1. *Channels for discussion where you can go for support with anything (connected to PCET or not).*
2. *In house support staff are really useful.*
3. *More info about University/College from a verified source – someone you can trust that doesn't rely on myths/rumours (which often comes from past students).*
4. *Have info on which path is right for you – from a verified source.*
5. *All people who are in the education system should be more knowledgeable about routes to further/higher education. What agencies to contact etc.*
6. *Tree style system where information is passed down – everyone on the tree should be up skilled including parents (who may not know much about University etc.).*
7. *Trustworthy information about saving money with regards to cost implications of education. People like Martin Lewis on YouTube.*
8. *Better support outside of lessons. One to one support if necessary.*
9. *Wide range of courses.*
10. *Nicer environment.*
11. *Better organisation/better teachers/ better delivery.*
12. *Make the courses more fun. More interesting + Fun lessons – Participative.*

13. Better support systems (family, money, college).
14. Better facilities.
15. Less assignments.

➤ **Under 16's – aged 11 – 13. Welsh Education.**

The main group of learners we spoke to under 16 years old were in Welsh medium education. The main barriers for this group were also identified as money, transport, family and friends. Solutions suggested to overcome some of these financial issues included;

'Try to save up once you know that you want to go to university; Look for students' loans and once you get a good job you can start paying them back; Maybe the government could reduce the price, this would encourage more people to go to university; Free education; Universities could lend more money to students.'

This group's perceived barriers were very similar to those students over 16 and outside of compulsory education. Their top tips for staying in PCET are based on what they have heard from others about being in PCET and based on what they identify as their own educational needs.

TOP TIPS for staying in PCET

1. Students should look for support - There should be more support for students.
2. There should be more opportunities for different course like dance, performance etc.
3. If your struggling to make friends in college/uni join societies, clubs, sports teams etc.
4. There should be more free/cheap buses available.
5. Put more money in to education or offer free education without the need to go into debt.
6. More time to sleep, either try to get to bed early or Colleges and 6th form could start later.
7. It should be made easier for people without money to access education.
8. Look for support from your family when things are getting tough.
9. There should be more scholarships to take some of the strain off students.

➤ **Adult learners**

For this group cost was a real issue. Not only the costs of the courses themselves but often having to prioritise work commitments first, or placing more importance on opportunities to make money over that of training. Many adult learners have other commitments such as family, mortgage and bills and as such education and training opportunities are often seen as unachievable.

Because of similar factors this group saw the value in work based learning, with opportunities to make money on the job.

There was call for cheaper, or free education, for all, regardless of age, and that opportunities should be made available and provision should be put in place for anyone to train regardless of age.

Issues were brought up around the benefit system and some people mentioned that if you decided to retrain your benefits could be stopped or suspended which made some people less likely to take on further education. There was call for some lenience with this and a request that government/job centres see the value in improving job prospects through education.



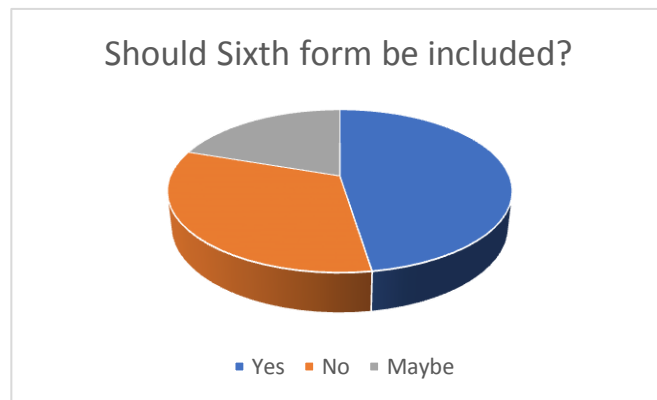
Issues surrounding confidence and experience were brought up, it was felt that providing clear easy to understand information along with supportive organisations and workers would make it more likely for people with confidence issues to access training.

III. Sixth form

Differences and including Sixth Form in the reforms

In order to understand how learners felt about sixth form we asked them to describe the differences that they felt between sixth form and other institutions. The groups then voted on whether they thought sixth form should be included.

Yes - 48%
No - 33%
Maybe - 20%



➤ Yes comments

- *'They should both be seen as equal, at the moment 6th form doesn't always see themselves as equal'*
- *'More money would be put into it if it was all under the same umbrella/organisation'*
- *'Keep it simple with everybody included'*
- *'Treated like more of a student (older) at college, more like a child at 6th form'*

➤ No Comments

- *'Might not get the attention they need'*
- *'It's already simple and working as it is'*
- *'It's good that the 6th form is more linked with the school and is more independent'*
- *'If they were both similar and had to follow the same rules and regulations you may as well go to college'*
- *'6th form will always try to encourage you more'*

➤ Maybe comments

- *'Don't care too much'*
- *'Doesn't really make a difference'*
- *'They can both be the same'*

In discussions, young people thought that if sixth form was included in the reforms then they may have more money invested. This links with their views on insufficient money being invested in the colleges they have experienced. Young people want to feel valued within their education; many suffer from stress and anxiety and feel under pressure to do well. The high cost of university placements mean that young people have high expectations of their education provider, but this is also relevant at 6th form and college level.

Many young people see sixth form as an extension of school with the same rules and regulations applied to them as they would have in lower years. They recognised that the continuity of staying on at sixth form may be beneficial in terms of teachers knowing you and understanding what support is needed, but it was also mentioned that young people felt that they needed a new start in some cases.

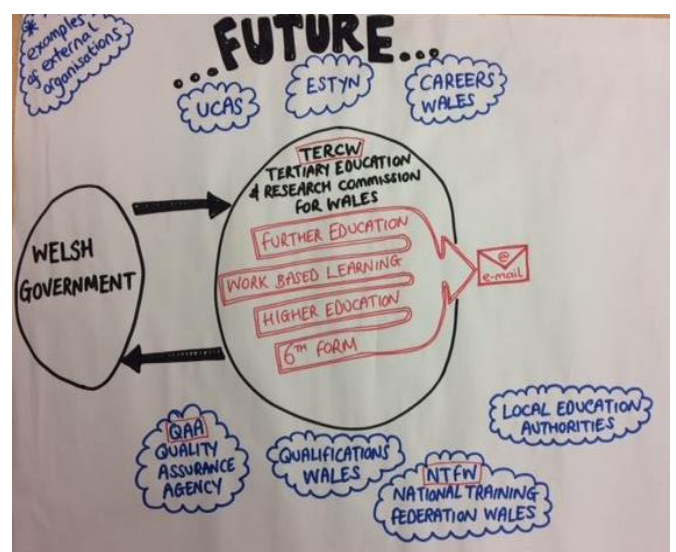
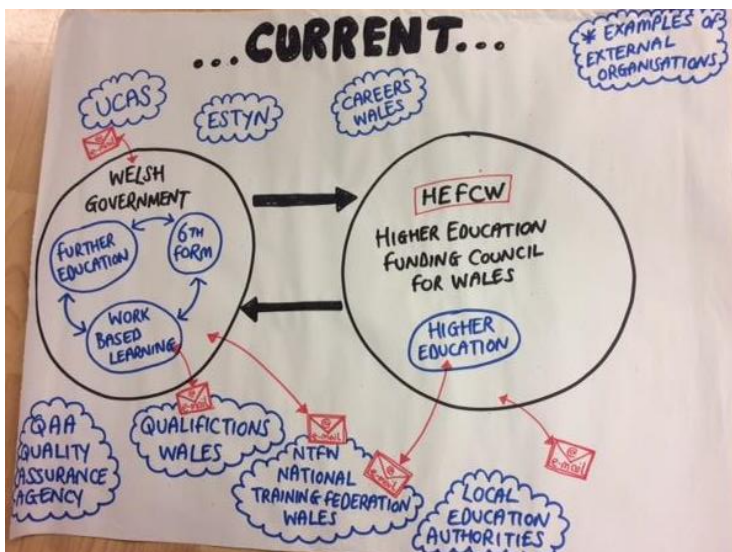
They felt that there would be new experiences and friends in college, and although the day would be longer there would be a more relaxed atmosphere, a lack of regulation uniform and more freedom to explore who they were becoming as they got older.

Young people see sixth form as an important and valid part of further education all be it within a school format with many of the school rules. There is safety for many young people in continuing in this format because it is something that they know and understand; many young people may not be ready for the extra pressures of a different college or FE establishment. It was felt that if the Commission were to be responsible for planning and monitoring of sixth forms they may lose this continuity which many young people appreciate.

IV. Transitional Arrangements

Impact of new models

We looked at what PCET looks like now and what it could look like in the future following the reforms.



The learners discussed their hopes and fears, wishes and worries about PCET, their continued education and their aspirations for the future.

➤ **Looked after children and care leavers**

For those who were leaving care their hopes were based on getting work;

'A job that I can live on and progress in'

'I want to be a foster carer but I don't know how I can do it!!'

'I want any job where I can get paid'

One of the group members discussed how they wanted to go into social care but didn't like college and was unsure of other options. The barriers identified by this group to accessing PCET was primarily financial as such it would be important to ensure that any changes made sure that financial support was not disrupted. Being clear on any potential impacts on financial support for learners would be necessary.

➤ **Gypsy and traveller communities**

This group of young people identified that relationships with their peers and teachers at school are an important factor for staying in PCET. They demonstrated concerns over their English language being good enough for education and that people won't believe in their academic ability. Their aspirations include;

'I want to be successful and go to school and get good qualifications'

'I would like to go to 6th form. I want to be something big in the future'

The worries they identified included their language skills, money and acceptance;

'I'm worrying that I won't have a bright future. They won't accept me in 6th form and uni. Leaving, going far from home'

In order to protect the interests of these learners it is important to try to minimise disruption to the relationships they have established and to be clear about any changes that will happen to ensure they are informed and prepared for such changes.

➤ **Young parents**

Changes to where young parents go to learn could have an impact on their childcare arrangements. This could be minimised by having onsite childcare arrangements or ensuring that transport links between college sites is subsidised or free and at times that suit the learners. In consideration of their future with PCET this group identified that they would like to return to learning when their children were in school, therefore consideration of childcare facilities and ensuring flexibility for

learners with children would be paramount. Due to their family responsibilities, any changes to PCET would have to ensure that it did not affect their finances;

'Make sure that we're not left without money if there are changes'.

➤ **Disabled learners**

Some of the concerns highlighted by this group for the future of their education included not having 1-1 support, finances, their health, carer responsibilities, failing lessons/exams, not knowing about the opportunities after school. These worries could be minimised through clear communication of the support available before young people finish school, to be clear about the PCET options and that academic study is not the only option and to have flexibility and understanding of the responsibilities of young carers.

➤ **Ethnic minority group members**

Discrimination for selection onto courses was raised as a concern for this group. They suggested that a blind selection process should be used and that continued checks for equality should be in place. This group also suggested that young people should be prepared before they reach 16 by looking at their aspirations and helping to build confidence.

➤ **Welsh Education learners**

Provision of opportunities to study in Welsh is a high priority for this group and as a result great value is placed on the sixth form provision at their Welsh medium school. Many of the concern highlighted by this group were about the availability of their choices in Welsh and that they succeeded with their chosen path.

➤ **Other Groups**

Transport has been highlighted as an issue for a high number of learners that we spoke to. Changes to where they go to learn may increase the pressure on learners and their financial situation to be able to travel to different venues. Provision of subsidised transport to coincide with timetable hours would help to ease this pressure.

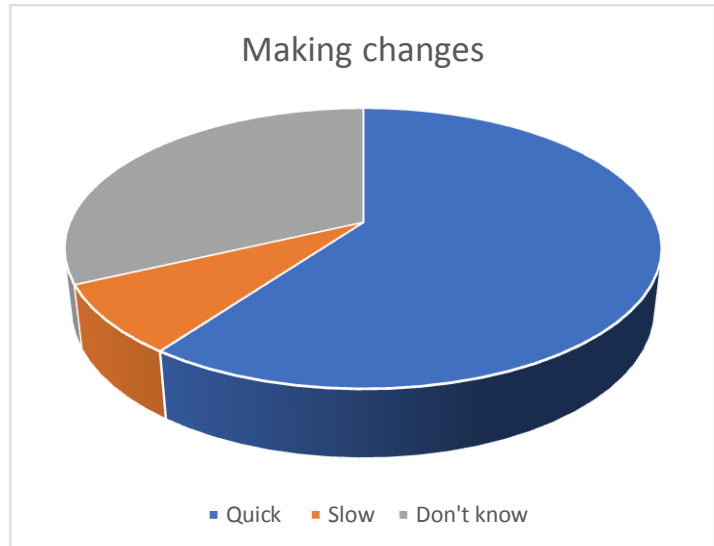
Financial concerns are high for all learners'. Any changes as a result of these proposals will need to ensure that the finances of learners are not impacted. Some of the young people we spoke to identified that changes in circumstances can leave them without any money and as a result would prevent them from attending college or University.

Self-esteem and confidence was mentioned by a high proportion of the learners that we spoke to as a barrier to entering PCET. Any changes to their education should happen with this in mind and including self-esteem and confidence building sessions into the process could ease the pressure on students and minimise disruption.

Changes to course choices or college closures is not considered by most learners as a risk. They have confidence in the institutions and don't think anything will change. Therefore, any changes that could affect any learner would need to be communicated clearly so that they were aware of any potential disruption.

Of those asked 60% would prefer any changes to happen quickly, 8% would prefer a slow change and 32% didn't know or choose not to answer.

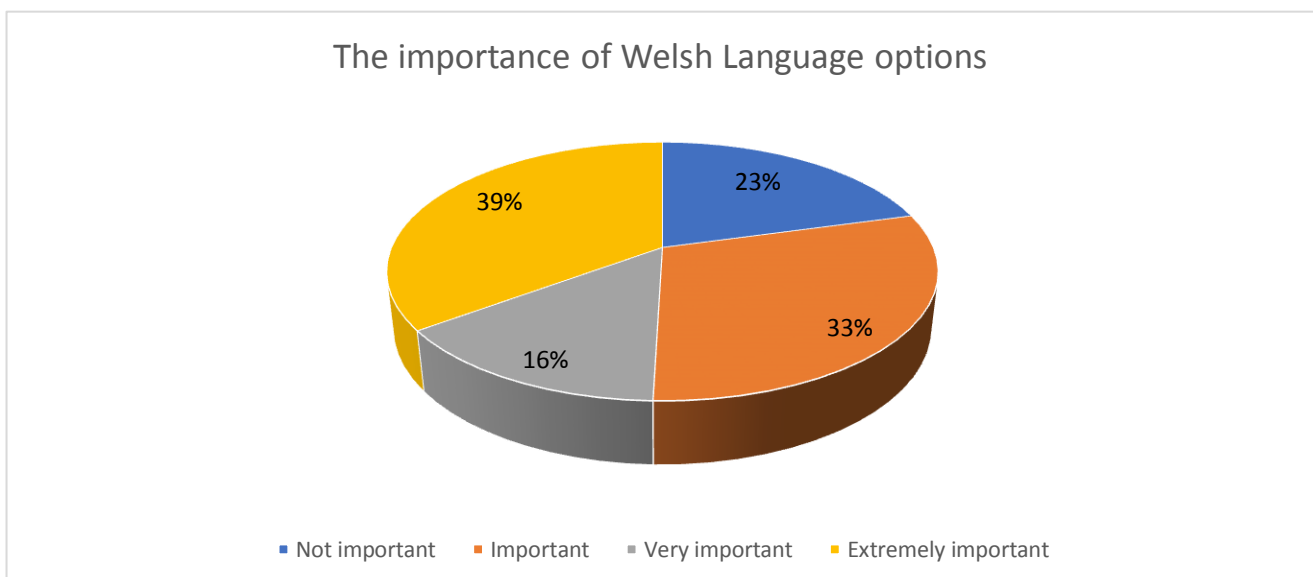
A quick turnaround is preferred by many of the young people, they like the fact that it will be over more quickly and as a result you would be able to adjust to the new change more quickly



V. *Welsh Language*

The importance of Welsh language options

Learners discussed how important Welsh language options were to them in their education.



➤ **Gypsy and traveller communities**

Learning or speaking Welsh, is not seen as a priority for those from the gypsy and traveller community that we spoke to.

Some young people do not understand the rationale for learning Welsh, they see other languages as being more beneficial and question how it will be used in later life. Some comments made included;

'We've learned so many languages already'

'Why do we have to learn Welsh'

'If everyone understands English why learn Welsh?'

'How will you use it in later life'

➤ **Young parents**

This group had mixed opinions of the importance of the Welsh language based on where they would use it. Parents with children in Welsh language education felt it was important for them to learn Welsh to support their children's education;

'Any language is a plus'.

'There should be improved opportunities for parents who want to learn Welsh, like local in the community with childcare provided.'

'My son is going to a Welsh school and I need to learn it for him'

'I want to be able to help with Welsh homework'

➤ **Disabled learners**

Young people with additional needs also do not see the relevance of Welsh language. In one group, just under 60% of young people felt that it was of no importance to them to learn Welsh. They commented that it was hard to learn and they struggled with it, despite obvious enthusiasm from their teachers about the importance. It could be said that these young people struggle with basic academic education and having to learn in Welsh would be too much.

➤ **Ethnic minority group members**

This group felt that they should have the choice so it should be a right to learn in Welsh. All of members felt that it was very important that there be Welsh language options in PCET.

➤ **Welsh Education**

Learners in Welsh school saw Welsh language are very much a priority. The change from Welsh medium education to an English based one at university, or not having a course run in Welsh was a repeated worry for these groups. Some of the worries highlighted by this group included;

'Lose the Welsh language if you go to college'

'Don't do the course I want in Welsh'

'Language – the university is English (schooling is in Welsh)'

'The Welsh language dies '

'That I've taken Science in Welsh, what universities do science in Welsh?! There's not enough Welsh courses in university'

'Maybe Oxford will be less favourable of Welsh people, only 7 Welsh people go to Oxford/Cambridge'

In discussion on protection of the Welsh language and opportunities in PCET for using and learning Welsh, learners demonstrated a great passion for saving the Welsh language, and utilizing the growing opportunities in Wales for bi-lingual Welsh speakers. Yet, they also recognised that there are limitations in learning subjects like maths and science through the medium of Welsh.

Many young people mention they want to study in Welsh and how proud they are to be a Welsh speaker. They want to encourage others to speak the language also.

'Over 2 million people speak welsh by 2050'(Wishes)

'That there will be better universities in Wales, because I have to go to Oxford if I want a good course, but I want to study in Welsh' (Wishes)

The group showed great passion for further developing the opportunities for the Welsh language but recognise that it should be a choice, comments made included;

'There are far more English school and more people are learning English it should be made more equal'

'It's important to prioritise Welsh language, the language is dying out'

'You should be able to speak Welsh but shouldn't be forced to learn the language'

'Welsh government now has to make everything dual language, private sector organisations should do the same thing if they're working in wales'.

'There should be more Welsh schools, maybe even as many as English schools'

➤ **Over 16's – years 11, 12 & 13**

One group at an English medium college felt that the Welsh language should be protected by the reform and should be encouraged in PCET institutions;

'Shouldn't be forced but given the opportunity to learn Welsh'

'Welsh lessons should be continued all the way through college'

'Should be on top of specific learning'

'Might be difficult for people who learn Welsh to fit everything in'

'Learning Welsh can help with future careers'

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

I. Protecting, supporting and managing learners

Learners need to be aware of the structures that are in place at the moment, how these may change and how this could impact on their education and their futures. The future aspirations of many of the learners we spoke to included being successful in their education. An open, honest and transparent process is needed for learners to prepare for any changes. Learners see it as the responsibility of the education providers to protect them and ensure that their educational plans are not disrupted by unforeseen changes through these reforms. This is especially important for those who have additional learning needs, disabilities, or are overcoming cultural barriers to education. Trust and confidence in their education, and their education providers, is of the utmost importance and as such learners need to be aware of any proposed changes in advance and need to be informed at all stages of the changes.

II. Widening Access and participation

We have seen from all groups throughout this consultation that finances, transport and academic achievements are common barriers to entering PCET. Loans and employment, are seen as solutions to financial barriers for many. However, for those with additional responsibilities, or without any support from family, they would prefer to be doing work based learning to support themselves while learning. Yet, the current arrangements for work based learning does not allow young people to be able to support themselves while undertaking these courses. It is recommended that work based learning provides a minimum wage or living wage to enable those with additional responsibilities, learning needs, disabilities or from deprived areas to be able to improve their prospects while financially supporting themselves.

Other issues highlighted by those with additional learning needs was in regard to support available. To minimise disruptions and maintain continuity for these learners, their support needs should be considered, and clear communication while they are in compulsory education about what support will be available in PCET for these learners would remove some of the fears and barriers they face.

Many of the issues raised with protected characteristic groups was about challenging cultural traditions which do not see the value in education. Clear messages to families about the benefits of PCET alongside positive messages for learners in their ability to achieve, would be useful for the learners in these groups to be able to confidently move into PCET and achieve their aspirations.

III. Sixth form

There was a split in opinion in whether sixth form should be included in the reforms. Those that were in favour of including it wanted to see that both sixth form and colleges were treated the same and hoped that the funding of these institutions would be levelled out if they were both included in these reforms.

IV. Transitional Arrangements

Transitional arrangements were seen as something that should be done quickly but with openness, honesty and transparency for learners. This would ensure that learners are prepared for the changes when they happen. For many making sure that financial arrangements are not impacted is also very important.

V. Welsh Language

Welsh language is seen as something that should be protected and developed further for a lot of learners. However, for those with additional needs or those who are not first language English speakers learning Welsh is not seen as a priority. Those in Welsh medium education worry that they will not be able to continue their education in Welsh and this causes them concerns for their future education. Investment into PCET through the medium of Welsh is important for those who are first language Welsh speakers.

Overall

As we can see from the above, openness, honesty and transparency will help learners to prepare for any changes they face as a result of the proposed reforms. Many of the learners we spoke to were unaware of the reforms or even the department that oversees PCET in Wales. Part of our recommendations would be that the language used is simplified so learners are informed and can meaningfully participate in the shape of the sector which has such an impact on their future education. The learners we spoke to were pleased to be involved in the consultation and are keen to see how their participation has an impact on the reforms.