

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) i egwyddorion cyffredinol y [Bil Addysg Drydyddol ac Ymchwil \(Cymru\)](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into the general principles of the [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Bill](#)

TER 26

Ymateb gan: Sefydliad Dysgu a Gwaith

Response from: Learning and Work Institute

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Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Committee consultation on the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill. We know the Committee has already received written and oral evidence from across the post-compulsory sector and as we will broadly share many of these points, we have therefore focused our response on a few specific points. These include specific points in relation to the legislation and also where we believe particular attention will need to be given by the Commission at the implementation phase.

### **About Learning and Work Institute Cymru**

Learning and Work Institute Cymru is an independent research and development charity specialising in lifelong learning, skills and employment. Our work includes advising and supporting the Welsh Government and the wider adult learning and skills sector. We are part of the Welsh Government's PCET Strategy and Implementation Group.

### **General approach to the Bill**

As an organisation we have consistently supported the principle of the legislation as an important part of building a more coherent post-compulsory sector where learners have clear entry points and progression pathways.

We strongly believe key challenges facing Wales and the Commission can only be met by sustained focus and investment in lifelong learning. Whether it is the impact of demographic change and an ageing society, technological advancements that are reshaping the world of work, or the need for personal and collective action to meet the climate and nature emergency, lifelong learning has an important role to play.

We also recognise that there have been specific improvements made to the legislation as a result of previous engagement with the sector. However, we believe there are specific areas where greater clarity is required on the detail of the subsequent regulations and where particular attention will need to be given by both the Commission and the Welsh Government at the implementation stage.

## **Duty to promote lifelong learning**

One area of improvement is the inclusion of a new duty for the Commission to promote lifelong learning. It will help ensure the Commission has regard for learners of all ages and recognises the challenge of providing access throughout our lives to appropriate education and training.

In considering how to implement this duty effectively the Commission will need to target resources at those groups and individuals with the greatest need. For more than twenty years Learning and Work Institute has produced a Participation Survey<sup>1</sup>, which tracks and explores the levels of participation in learning and the barriers and motivations of learners. The survey consistently highlights a pattern of inequality in access to learning. Specifically, the survey highlights that those who left school the earliest have the fewest qualifications, and those who are furthest from the labour market are less likely to learn as adults. In contrast, those with the highest existing levels of qualifications are most likely to be participating. **In meeting the duty to promote lifelong learning it will be important for the Commission to understand the pattern of participation and to ensure resources are targeted at those with the greatest need.**

There are specific areas where particular focus should be given:

- **Accessible entry points into learning:** the Commission will need to appropriately balance investment across the post-compulsory sector to ensure learning is accessible. This must mean appropriate opportunities within communities, outreach and engagement to reach under-represented groups, independent advice and guidance, and a responsibility on all parts of the PCET system to widen participation to under-represented groups.
- **Recognition and investment in adult community learning:** underpinning the need for accessible entry points in the system should be a clear recognition by the Commission of the role of adult community learning. For many adults, access to community-based learning will be their first step along a wider lifelong learning journey. This first step however is often the hardest

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<sup>1</sup> <https://learningandwork.org.uk/what-we-do/lifelong-learning/adult-participation-in-learning-survey/>

and being able to access learning that is flexible, close to home, and that offers both informal and formal learning opportunities to learn is incredibly important. Arguably this is the one part of the system which has faced the most significant resource challenge over the last decade. For it to play a role in a coherent post-compulsory sector it will require investment in capacity building, professionalising the workforce, and in expanding provision. We would also ask the Committee to seek assurances from the Welsh Government that the adult community sector will have a clear voice in the new Commission and mechanisms will exist to ensure a more balanced approach to funding.

- **Defining a broader purpose for adult learning:** current policy and resourcing means that the focus of adult learning within the PCET system is narrowly defined and doesn't fully meet demand from learners. A broader purpose for adult learning should be set out by the Commission so that provision can meet the need for learning to support skills for work, civic and democratic engagement, and community cohesion and renewal. Specifically, this definition should include flexibility for providers to meet demand for learning to support health and wellbeing. The Committee should consider how to ensure the new Commission establishes collaborative links with public health bodies to create opportunities for learning that is preventative of ill-health and that supports individuals to manage health conditions, as well as creating clear links to local social prescribing pathways between primary care and learning providers.
- **A strong voice for adult learners:** within the system the voice of students / learners will be crucial for effective planning and accountability. In particular the voices of adults and part-time learners across the PCET system need to be amplified within the structures of the Commission itself and at local / institutional level.

### **Provision of proper facilities for 'relevant' further education and training for 'eligible' adults**

There is an important area where greater clarity is still required if we are to fully understand the intended impact of the legislation. The proposed change in the legislation to require the Commission to secure 'proper facilities' for relevant further

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education and training for eligible adults is a welcome step forward but there is a risk that the definitions of both 'relevant' and 'eligible' will be narrowly drawn.

The impact of narrowly drawn regulations could be limits on the courses and purposes that would be defined as relevant and limits on individuals who would be eligible to access provision and support. Specifically, we are concerned that the eligibility criteria could be drawn narrowly, at least initially, to exclude mid-career and older learners and to focus first on younger cohorts (for example, 19-25). Placing such a priority on younger learners at the exclusion of older adult cohorts would risk undermining the strategic duty to promote lifelong learning and to meet the challenge of an ageing society and workforce. The Welsh Government should avoid a trade-off between cohorts and instead support balanced investment across the sector and the age profile of learners.

Without sight of these regulations it will be difficult to assess the impact the Commission will have on widening participation and providing access to retraining and upskilling support for adults. Although we expect there to be engagement with the sector prior to the publication of the regulations we would ask the Committee to seek assurances from the Welsh Government that this is meaningful and timely.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit our evidence to the Committee.