



Recovery from COVID-19

Across all sectors, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be felt throughout the academic year 2021-22. As the year progressed and providers returned to a more 'normal' way of operating, the full impact of the previous year and a half on learners, staff and the general work of providers became more apparent.

Positive aspects

- Most learners have welcomed the return to face-to-face provision and generally engage better than they did online, though many providers are retaining elements of remote learning.
- Many of the 'issues' affected by the pandemic, such as the decline in learners' skills, have gradually improved since the return to more 'normal' education.
- Providers across sectors have placed a strong emphasis on supporting well-being, which has resulted in increased and more wide-ranging provision.
- Leaders across all sectors have demonstrated agility and creative thinking in responding to the pandemic and have worked purposefully to re-establish experiences affected by restrictions, such as extra-curricular activities.
- Due to improved and more extensive communication over the pandemic, providers in general have a better understanding of the families and communities they serve.
- Many providers gradually returned to self-evaluation and quality assurance activities as the year progressed, resulting in a better understanding of the impact of their work.

Issues and concerns

- Cases of COVID-19 among learners and staff caused continued disruption to teaching and learning throughout the year.
- Overall, learners' skills have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. This is especially the case for numeracy and literacy skills, particularly oracy skills. The social and personal skills of a minority of learners have also been affected, especially the youngest children and those who have struggled to settle back in to more 'normal' educational routines.
- Learners' use of spoken Welsh generally declined as a result of the pandemic.
- Restrictions have had a negative impact on learning involving practical elements, including work placements, practical assessments for vocational qualifications and subjects such as music, design and technology and physical education.
- Overall, the progress providers are making towards implementation of the Curriculum for Wales is too variable.
- Across all sectors, there has been a notable increase in demand for well-being and mental health support.
- Attendance, in schools in particular, continues to be below pre-pandemic levels and persistent absence issues have increased.
- There have been significant challenges related to staffing, particularly in terms of managing COVID-related absences, sourcing supply staff and recruiting new staff.
- A few providers across all sectors have been slow to resume self-evaluation activities, resulting in an incomplete understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement.