

# Further education

## Provider Data

12

There are 12 colleges providing further education courses in Wales. Many have multiple sites across a wide geographical area, spanning several local authority areas.

## Learner Data

47,090

No. of full-time learners in further education institutions in 2023-2024

61,555

No. of part-time learners in further education institutions in 2023-2024

45,275

No. of full-time learners in further education institutions in 2022-2023

60,510

No. of part-time learners in further education institutions in 2022-2023

45,250

No. of full-time learners in further education institutions in 2021-2022

54,680

No. of part-time learners in further education institutions in 2021-2022

Source: Sta/Medr/06/2025: Further education, work-based learning and community learning, August 2023 to July 2024

## Follow-up Data

There are currently no further education colleges in follow-up.

## Inspection activity

No. of core inspections: 2

## Case studies

No. of case studies: 1

## Engagement visits

No. of link inspector engagement visits: 9

## Summary

Overall, teachers planned and delivered well-structured learning sessions that helped engage and motivate learners to develop and apply their knowledge, understanding and skills across vocational and general education programmes. Colleges provided safe, welcoming and inclusive environments, where many learners were well supported and felt a strong sense of belonging. Leaders provided clear strategic direction and worked well with internal and external stakeholders to meet local and regional needs and establish professional learning communities.

## Teaching and learning

In both colleges we inspected this year, most learners made secure progress in developing the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to support their learning and progress. Most learners were motivated, and many applied their learning confidently in both vocational and academic contexts, often using subject-specific terminology accurately. They took pride in their work and benefited from positive, respectful relationships with staff and their peers. Many learners developed their literacy and numeracy skills appropriately as part of their learning programmes.

Read how Coleg y Cymoedd learners with particularly strong sporting ability benefit from the college's flagship Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) [here](#).

Teaching was generally purposeful and well planned. Most teachers used a suitable range of approaches to engage learners and support their progress. In one college, most teachers used questioning well to check learners' understanding and extend thinking. In another, many sessions were engaging and well-structured. Teachers fostered calm, inclusive learning environments. In a few sessions, there was an over-reliance on teacher-led approaches and weak questioning limited learner independence. Teachers do not always challenge learners enough to reach their full potential or set ambitious enough expectations for learners' progress and achievement. Across both colleges, teachers' verbal feedback on learner work was often a strength, although written or recorded feedback was more variable.

### Consistent strong teaching at The College Merthyr Tydfil

The college has a well-defined teaching and learning strategy based on a research-informed, reflective and collaborative teaching model. This model is firmly embedded across the college. Most teachers implement this strategy consistently, ensuring that lessons are effectively planned, engaging, and well-paced. Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies to support learners in progressively building on prior knowledge. As a result, learners demonstrate strong engagement and make sound progress in developing their skills and understanding.

Both colleges were beginning to explore the use of emerging digital tools, such as virtual reality and generative artificial intelligence (AI), to enhance learning. Welsh language development was promoted in both institutions, with many teachers using Welsh terminology in their teaching. However, learners made limited use of Welsh in their work.

## Digital platforms supporting connection at Coleg y Cymoedd

Nearly all teachers across the college use digital platforms particularly effectively to manage and plan learning, share resources, track learners' progress, and communicate with their learners. They consistently use digital platforms to share key information with other teaching and support staff across all campuses around issues such as learners' behaviour, attendance and well-being. This coherent, cross-college approach helps the college to provide timely interventions and support for learners where necessary. Nearly all learners use these platforms confidently to manage and submit their work and communicate with their tutors, demonstrating and developing strong digital skills.

In one college, outcomes for A level learners were broadly in line with those of their peers elsewhere, while vocational outcomes were variable. At another, most learners achieved appropriate outcomes, but persistent absence was a barrier to progress for a few learners. Attendance was too low in a few areas in both colleges and, where this was the case, this had a negative impact on learner progress and outcomes.

During our link inspector engagement visits to colleges, we reviewed progress in implementation of their anti-racist Wales action plans. We found that colleges were at varied stages in embedding anti-racist content into their curricula. Common approaches included the adaptation of tutorial programmes, use of available metaverse tools and efforts to decolonise subject-specific content.

## Well-being, care, support and guidance

Learners at both colleges inspected this year benefited from inclusive and supportive learning environments. They felt safe and valued, and nearly all felt that staff listen to their views.

Read the spotlight on creating space for safeguarding conversations at Coleg y Cymoedd [here](#).

Strong pastoral and well-being support helped learners to develop confidence, resilience and a strong sense of community and belonging. At one college, well-being support was particularly proactive for learners from low-income backgrounds and those at risk of disengagement. Overall, variable understanding of additional learning needs (ALN) among staff limited the consistency of learner support. As a result, colleges did not always identify and review the progress of learners with ALN well enough.

Dedicated well-being centres provided convenient access to personalised emotional, study and financial-related support for learners, including access to quiet spaces, social groups and specialist support such as counselling and health support.

Read about The College Merthyr Tydfil's well-being support offer, including its work with disadvantaged learners, [here](#).

Effective transition support arrangements were evident in both colleges inspected this year. Learners received useful guidance on enrolment, course selection and future progression. Strong collaboration with schools, local authorities and employers underpinned these arrangements. Tutorial programmes

and guest speaker sessions in both colleges covered important areas such as mental health, personal and online safety, anti-racism and healthy relationships.

Both colleges offered enrichment and leadership opportunities that supported learners' personal and social development. Many learners participated in a variety of community-based initiatives, competitions and wider learning activities that helped foster a strong sense of community and belonging.

Read about the innovative and aspirational academy programme for engineering and construction learners at [\*\*The College Merthyr Tydfil\*\*](#).

In both colleges, learners showed positive attitudes to their learning and were respectful in their interactions with others. Where learners attended well and engaged regularly, they were well prepared for progression to further learning or employment. However, persistent low attendance in a few curriculum areas was an area of concern.

We also undertook link inspector engagement visits to all 12 FE colleges during the autumn and early spring terms in 2024-2025. In our engagement with learners during these visits, learners were generally very positive about their early experiences of college life. We identified continued encouraging progress in implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET). However during our link visits, colleges often expressed concern over the heavy administrative burden of individual development plans and inconsistencies between schools and local authorities in terms of information sharing and documentation. College leaders also frequently expressed concern over variability of initial advice and guidance between, and within, local authority areas with regard to post-16 options.

We also visited a range of seven FE colleges as part of a thematic review of learner behaviour within further education colleges across Wales. The report considered how colleges were promoting positive behaviours and managing negative behaviours, alongside the support and guidance available to learners and staff. Find out more report about the thematic review [here](#).

## **Leading and improving**

Principals and senior leaders at both colleges have set a clear vision and strategic direction and ensured the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum offer that has responded well to the needs of learners across local and regional communities. In one college inspected this year, leaders worked effectively with external partners and were prioritising the ethical and purposeful use of digital technology, including AI. At another, the senior leadership team had fostered a strong culture of transparency, trust and collaboration.

Middle leaders in both colleges received effective support from senior leaders and regular meetings and digital communications helped keep staff well informed. Both institutions promoted professional learning and reflective practice well. Leaders provided strong support for collaborative working and the establishment of professional learning communities. Colleges provided useful opportunities for staff to feed into college policy and decision-making processes, including those affecting staff well-being and workload. Both colleges actively promoted Welsh language and bilingualism and have appointed specialist staff to support staff and learners.

The professional learning development at The College Merthyr Tydfil empowers teachers to reflect on

their teaching practice to explore areas they have identified as needing improving or challenges that they need to overcome. The results of this work are clearly demonstrated in many sessions through varied learning activities promoting greater learner engagement and developed questioning techniques that probe and challenge, deepening learning. Read the full effective practice case study [here](#).

Read how the aspiring leadership programme at Coleg y Cymoedd has successfully nurtured talent development across the college through a strong focus on homegrown leadership [here](#).

Self-evaluation processes were generally well embedded and effective, particularly at the departmental level, and leaders made appropriate use of a wide range of evidence. These included teaching and learning observations, learning and campus walks, perception surveys and discussion forums in addition to learner outcome performance data and benchmarks where these were available. However, evaluation activities did not always make sufficient use of vocational outcomes or attendance data to inform strategic planning. Learner attendance and punctuality data was not captured and used well enough to drive improvement. In addition, self-evaluation and improvement planning processes did not focus strongly enough on monitoring and improving higher grade attainment on both general and vocational programmes.

Governance was a strength in both colleges. Governors provided effective support, scrutiny and challenge to senior leaders. Staff morale was generally high, and staff felt well supported and proud to work at their institutions. Colleges provided useful opportunities for staff to feed into college policy and decision-making processes, including those affecting staff well-being and workload.

Overall, both colleges demonstrated a clear commitment to continuous improvement, to supporting learner well-being, and to developing high-quality learning environments. Both colleges had invested heavily to provide high quality facilities and learning resources to support delivery of their strategic priorities.

During our link inspector engagement visits to FE colleges this year, we discussed a range of issues with college leaders in relation to leading and improving. It was clear that the financial position facing the sector had become more challenging this year and transport costs along with local changes to eligibility were a particular concern. College leaders also raised concerns over continued external delays in the publication of timely, validated post-16 consistent measures data for individual colleges and for the sector as a whole. This impacted negatively on colleges' self-evaluation and improvement processes and also impacted negatively on our ability to evaluate learner attainment during FE college inspections this year.

During our link inspector engagement visits to colleges, we reviewed progress in implementation of their anti-racist Wales action plans. Across colleges, there was strong strategic commitment to anti-racism, evidenced by action plans, designated roles and participation in national partnerships. Most colleges had incorporated anti-racism efforts into wider equality, diversity and inclusion strategies.

Professional development was seen as central to advancing anti-racist practice. Many provided whole-college training, often delivered in collaboration with external partnerships. Colleges had also placed significant emphasis on making recruitment processes more inclusive and improving ethnic diversity across staff and governance. Colleges were increasingly seeking learner feedback and creating more inclusive environments through events, learner forums and structural changes.

A recurrent theme across colleges was the difficulties in quantifying impact of actions within anti-racist action plans. While activities were plentiful, measurable changes in learner outcomes, culture or attitudes were less well-defined. Although colleges were still navigating how to measure impact, a useful overall foundation for cultural and institutional change had been established.

A minority of colleges also shared updates on changes at senior leadership level in their colleges, arising primarily from a substantial recent increase in retirements among senior postholders across the sector. Continued strong collaboration between colleges was also evident, although collaboration with schools and local authorities in relation to planning the local curriculum was still variable.

## Overview of recommendations from inspections

There were two providers inspected in the FE sector.

Both had a recommendation related to **teaching and learning**, one to improve learners' use of Welsh and the other to provide challenge to learners to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills.

Both had a recommendation related to **well-being, care, support and guidance**, referring to ALN support: either strengthening arrangements for identification and support, or ensuring staff know of learners' ALN and provide support.

Both had a recommendation relating to **leading and improving**, to improve approaches in dealing with learner attendance.