

fforwm submission to House of Commons' Welsh Affairs Committee Cross Border Services: further education

Introduction

1. fforwm welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence in respect of the cross border services in further education to the Welsh Affairs Committee.
2. fforwm, the equivalent body in Wales to the Association of Colleges in England, is the national organisation representing the 23 further education (FE) colleges and two FE institutions in Wales¹. It is an educational charity and a company limited by guarantee. fforwm's Board comprises college principals and chairs of corporations, appointed by member colleges. fforwm provides a range of services to its members including networks, conferences, research, consultancy and the sharing of good practice. It also works closely with a wide range of partners in post-16 education and training. Through fforwm, colleges are represented on various committees, working parties and other groups influencing and shaping policy in post-16 education and life-long learning. It works closely with the Welsh Assembly Government in developing and implementing policy.

Data

3. Data from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (llwr) on learners travelling from England to Wales is attached as an **Annex**.
4. The data shows that of the 24 colleges/institutions (St David's Catholic College is not included), all but two have learners stating an English postcode or stating their domicile as English. Not surprisingly, those colleges close to the border with England record the greatest number of learners from England. These colleges are: Coleg Gwent in South East Wales; Coleg Llysfasi and the Welsh College of Horticulture in North East Wales (both specialist land-based colleges), Deeside College and Yale College, all in North East Wales. Coleg Harlech/WEA North is one of the smallest providers in Wales but has a relatively high number of learners from England as a result of its specialist adult provision.
5. Around 6,000 learners stated their domicile as English. This compares with a total of 271,000 learners in total in Wales. Thus the number of English students is approximately 2.2% of the student cohort.

¹ In this response the term further education institution (FEI) and FE colleges are used to describe all of fforwm's members.

6. There is no evidence about which parts of England learners come from. It is assumed that most would come from areas close to the border with Wales, i.e. Gloucestershire, Hereford and Worcester, Shropshire, Cheshire, and probably Merseyside.

Context

7. Education is a devolved responsibility. Education policy affecting further education in Wales differs considerably from that in England.
 - In Wales, a significant report on the mission and purpose of FE chaired by Sir Adrian Webb,² published in December 2007, sets out a future direction for FE colleges. Its main recommendations cover the reconfiguration of FE colleges and other providers offering education and training post-16; new funding arrangements for 14-19 education; and a new direction in employer engagement.
 - The WAG's draft Skills and Employment Strategy³ sets out the WAG's response to the Leitch Review on Skills and serves as its initial response to Sir Adrian Webb's report.⁴ Both these reports set a distinctive policy direction which builds on the approach set out in WAG's *The Learning Country*.⁵
 - Proposals for a Learning and Skills Measure, which sets out the importance of young people having a minimum number of vocational and academic options at the ages of 14 and 16.⁶
8. A number of other factors include:
 - WAG policy is focused on cooperation and the development of partnerships between providers rather than competition
 - FE colleges in Wales are funded less generously than colleges in England⁷

² *Promise and Performance: The Report of the Independent Review of the Mission and Purpose of Further Education in Wales in the Context of The Learning Country: Vision into Action*, chaired by Sir Adrian Webb, December 2008.

³ *Skills That Work for Wales: A Skills and Employment Strategy*. Consultation document no. 047/2008, Welsh Assembly Government.

⁴ HM Treasury (December 2006) *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills Final Report of the Leitch Review of Skills*.

⁵ *The Learning Country: Vision into Action*. DCELLS, Welsh Assembly Government, 2006

⁶ *Proposals for a Learning and Skills Measure (Wales) Measure 2008*, Welsh Assembly Government, January 2008.

⁷ Funding on post-16 learning per head of the population in Wales is around 5.45% compared with 5.85% England. *ibid.*, p102.

- Capital investment in Wales falls well behind that of any other UK country⁸
 - However, lecturers in Wales have achieved pay parity with schoolteachers and WAG has invested heavily in ensuring this takes place
 - There is a single Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) in Wales covering education of all ages. In England, there are now two departments (Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills).
 - In Wales there is no central funding agency equivalent to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The functions of ELWa, the equivalent body to the LSC, were transferred to WAG in April 2006.
 - There is no intention in Wales to transfer funding for 16-19 provision to local education authorities (LEAs). The funding of 16-19 provision will remain with WAG.
 - In England, there has been considerable increased investment in learners post-16. This funding has been directed towards improving facilities and equipment whereas in Wales the funding has gone on increasing the pay of lecturers. Thus learners in Wales attending colleges in England will have the benefit of improved facilities.
 - There are a number of specific initiatives in Wales such as the development of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification; the Welsh Assembly Grant system for learners attending FE or higher education; recognition of the Welsh language and the importance of Welsh-medium or bilingual education. In England there has been Train to Gain, the development of Centres for Excellence and Skills Academies and policies such as the presumption that a high performing school seeking to open a sixth form will have its application accepted.
9. There are a number of similarities. Both the administrations in Wales and in England have seen the raising of standards as central and there is evidence that standards in FE colleges, as measured by inspections (Estyn in Wales, Ofsted in England), have risen considerably over the past few years.

⁸ Post-16 capital expenditure per head of the population in Wales is around £4.20 compared with £9.95 in England, £16.50 in Northern Ireland and £14 in Scotland. *ibid.*, p102.

Arrangements currently in place to co-ordinate cross-border provision

10. There is little evidence of any systematic coordination of cross-border provision. As one principal close to the border with England pointed out:

'I am not aware of arrangements to co-ordinate cross border FE. Free trade exists.'

11. This lack of coordination may not be a bad thing. Another principal reported:

'We are not conscious of the "border" for the vast majority of the time, and in an education context the current arrangements seem to be working well in that they are flexible enough to ensure that individual learners and employers get the learning they want.'

12. Another principal stated increasing cross-border coordination might be useful but only if there was no additional bureaucracy:

'It would make sense for continued dialogue between FE centres in these areas but it would not be appropriate to require formalised joint planning systems with a swathe of additional bureaucracy to manage and monitor its effect.'

13. There is some evidence of coordination. For example, a Memorandum of Understanding regarding cross border issues between WAG and the West Midlands Local Authorities was agreed in 2007. However the existence of the MoU is not well known and as yet there is little evidence of the impact of this MoU.

Why learners from England attend courses in colleges in Wales

14. Learners attend colleges in Wales because of the specific courses offered, because transport may be more convenient and because campuses may be nearer than centres in England rather than as a result of any systematic policy. They may also attend employment related courses because their workplace is in Wales.

15. One principal reported that:

'Because of the specialist nature and quality of provision, we have always recruited significant numbers of students from across north and mid Wales and north west England.'

One college reported having a relatively high number of learners from England, owing to the college's major and relatively high involvement in work-based learning (WBL) and other employer-linked learning in NE Wales, and the wider sub-region of Merseyside and Cheshire. The college is an active member of a multi-agency regional group called the Mersey-Dee Alliance. In addition, there are high employment levels in Deeside and Flintshire, and as this borders with England, many of the workforce reside in England. So to meet these employers' needs the college trains staff who live outside Wales.

16. Another specialist college has had an overall increase in part-time learners from England in the current year. They show that learners from England have increased from 818 (57 full-time (FT) and 711 part-time (PT)) in 2005/06 to 1213 (106 FT and 1107 PT) in 2007/08. In terms of headcount, learners from England as a proportion of totals learners have increased from 17.1% in 2005/06 to 18.5% in 2007/08.

17. The principal sees this recruitment of learners from England as important for the college:

'It is essential this flow of students should continue so the quantum of learners can be retained despite the demographic downturn in 16 year olds... In future, the college focus will be on more upskilling of the existing workforce which will involve older learners.'

18. In another college, most learners from England are adults accessing community provision provided in border towns such as Presteigne and Knighton.

19. In Powys, the Welsh county with the longest border with England, there is a flow of learners both ways. Many Powys residents access their health, retail, leisure and education services from Oswestry, Shrewsbury and Hereford for example. These are their local centres of any size. The college refers learners from the area to these other centres for specialist provision (e.g. plumbing) that is not readily accessible locally. In the past, the college had a significant number of WBL trainees in outdoor education from outdoor centres in the Wye Valley area. In recent years, the way WBL is funded has prevented the college from supporting English learners in this way.

Specialist residential provision

20. In respect of specialist residential provision, which is provided by one college located in north west Wales, bursary funding levels are less than those in England and do not cover costs. The college has to draw on

Financial Contingency Funds (FCF) and hardship funds to keep this provision going.

21. Within Wales, bursary funds provide some support for learners. FCF or hardship funds are utilised to support learners where appropriate.
22. The college's specialist long residential courses provide for English domiciled students to receive intensive residential Access provision as a preparation for residential HE level at university, as opposed to day Access courses at FE or HE level, that are not available at the English residential colleges.
23. There is no coordination over the funding allocated to learners. Historically, from the beginning of the establishment of the residential college network, the reciprocal arrangements have worked as they allow Welsh domiciled students to make use of the English residential colleges facilities and apply for funding from England. The bursary marketing material specifically mentions the cross border potential e.g. the Ruskin bursary booklet names Coleg Harlech as one of the group of residential colleges on the first page.

Transport

24. Transport arrangements vary between colleges. A principal of a specialist land-based college reports that:

'We bus most of the full-time students in from England using our own fleet of buses. The part-time students normally find their own ways into the college to access their training. We transport a significant number of our students to the college from a wide geographical location across North Wales. Significant numbers of our full-time students and some part-time students access the transport where appropriate. We link up to the LEA routes where ever possible picking up often where the buses terminate.'

25. Another principal reported that home-to-college transport is a major source of difficulty on account of the geography of the area although the local authority has maintained their post-16 discretionary transport policy to date.
26. The boundary for the Central Wales area within the Wales Spatial Plan includes a number of English towns. Clearly, it would make sense for continued dialogue between FE providers in these areas but it would not be appropriate to require formalised joint planning systems with a swathe of additional bureaucracy to manage and monitor its effect.

Other issues

27. Under the Education (Fees and Awards) Regulations, a learner who has been ordinarily resident in Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man who moves to England or Wales specifically for the purpose of attending a course is regarded as being ordinarily resident in the place from which s/he moved. Such a learner would normally be eligible for funding for a programme of learning. However, learners not domiciled in Wales but attending Welsh colleges are not currently eligible to receive financial support such as financial contingency funds or a Coleg Harlech bursary, nor are they able to receive the education deprivation uplift. There are also some differences in calculating 'sparsity' weightings⁹.
28. WAG has a reciprocal arrangement with the LSC for colleges and providers in England close to the borders with Wales. However, guidance issued to colleges in Wales by ELWa (and in England by the LSC) states that:

*'it is not expected that colleges and providers in Wales will recruit entire groups of learners from outside their local area'*¹⁰
29. Under the FE and Training Act 2007, FE colleges in England - but not in Wales - have the power to validate their own foundation degrees, subject to approval by the Privy Council which will need to be reassured about quality procedures and sufficient numbers of learners. The WAG's Deputy Minister for Skills has indicated that WAG intends to seek equivalent powers for colleges in Wales. If this power is not extended to colleges in Wales, it could lead to English border colleges putting on their own foundation degree courses which could be targeted at learners in Wales – a one-sided affair. It would benefit learners if colleges in Wales, once awarded foundation degree making powers, worked with colleges in England on an equal basis in developing foundation degrees. This would help avoid duplication and boost demand as learners would be drawn from both sides of the border.

⁹ *National Planning and Funding System (NPFS). A Guide*. ELWa, Jan 2006. "In Wales, calculations show an average sparsity of 13.23 learners per square kilometre. For an electoral division to be classified as sparse, both the division and the unitary authority must have a learner population density of less than 13.23 learners per sq km. For England, as appropriate learner information is not available, a 'sparse' ward is defined as a ward whose population density falls below the Welsh national average, provided that population density for the local authority containing that ward also falls below this level." para 7.51.

¹⁰ *NPFS* *ibid.*, para 8.48.

Recommendations

30. This response has covered some aspects of cross border services in further education. They have applied to Wales and England only and have not referred to learners attending colleges in Wales from other UK countries. It is assumed that numbers from Scotland and Northern Ireland are very small. There are a number of recommendations that fforwm would like the Committee to consider.
31. Regular data should be collected and published on the number of learners from other UK countries attending colleges in Wales and those from Wales attending other UK countries.
32. The current arrangements seem to be working satisfactorily in that learners choose to attend provision that suits their needs. There is a risk that establishing formal cross-border coordination might lead to bureaucratic obstacles or planning systems which might make provision more difficult.
33. However, it would be useful for relevant regulatory and funding bodies in Wales and England to liaise on cross-border matters and encourage liaison between providers where there is clear benefit for learners. This will be particularly important when local authorities in England take over from the LSC responsibility for funding 16-19 learners.
34. Wherever possible, learners from Wales attending courses in England should not be disadvantaged as compared with English domiciled learners. The same principle should apply to English domiciled learners attending colleges in Wales.
35. Encouragement from WAG and from the DCSF and DIUS to colleges to enrol learners from both sides of the border might be helpful.
36. It might be useful for meetings to be organised of colleges in Wales which have a significant number of learners from England (say, over 100) with those colleges in England with equivalent numbers of learners from Wales to share issues and any problems. The same principle might apply to sixth forms in schools.
37. The major policy differences in Wales and England over the funding and management of 16-19 learners and of adult learners, particularly those taking employment related courses, and the disparities in levels of recurrent and capital funding between the two countries should not prevent cooperation.

ANNEX

Number of learners domiciled in England and enrolled at Welsh FE institutions in academic year 2005/06

FEI	Learners stating an English postcode*	Learners stating their domicile as English**		
		All	18 & under	19 & over
Barry College	45	*	0	*
Bridgend College	15	0	0	0
Coleg Ceredigion	50	45	*	45
Coleg Glan Hafren	95	15	5	10
Coleg Gwent	950	355	10	345
Coleg Harlech/WEA (North)	225	225	5	220
Coleg Llandrillo	290	10	*	5
Coleg Llysfasi	165	150	10	145
Coleg Meirion Dwyfor	20	5	*	5
Coleg Menai	90	55	*	50
Coleg Morgannwg	50	*	0	*
Coleg Powys	270	185	15	170
Coleg Sir Gar	70	*	*	*
Deeside College	2420	2650	215	2435
Gorseinon College	*	0	0	0
Merthyr Tydfil College	*	0	0	0
Neath Port Talbot College	25	20	*	15
Pembrokeshire College	40	20	*	20
Swansea College	45	15	*	15
WEA South	10	*	0	*
Welsh College of Horticulture	1050	645	100	540
Yale College	1565	1875	420	1455
YMCA	10	0	0	0
Ystrad Mynach College	35	0	0	0
Total		6285	795	5485
Unique Learner Total	7540	5955	760	5195

Data source Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), 12th March 2007

Notes

- Counts greater than 0 and less than 5 are asterisked out for data sensitivity.
 - All other counts are rounded to nearest 5 and there may be slight discrepancies between the sums of constituent items and the independently rounded totals.
- * On a unique learner basis any pre-filters learning programmes with English postcode before reducing to learner level.
- **On a provider -defined basis and Learners domiciled in England: reported before commencing learning programme as their country of domicile for their latest learning programme