

Review of Sixth Form Provision in Powys

Stage 1 Report

V2 (September 2019)

1. Policy Context

The Corporate Improvement Plan Vision 2025 includes the following commitments as part of the Learning and Skills Priority:

'We will develop a highly skilled workforce, where skills match the needs of the local economy, by:

- *Taking action to develop a new county-wide sixth form delivery model with an attractive and broad ranging academic and vocational curriculum by 2020*
- *Forging stronger and more accessible further and higher education provision in partnership with providers'*

And also:

'We will implement our new School Organisation Policy and Delivery Plan to develop a more efficient schools network, with a greater focus on working in partnership with schools and the communities they serve. The Delivery Plan will focus on improving secondary and post-16 provision, primary provision and Welsh-medium/bilingual provision'.

The School Organisation Delivery Plan includes the following commitment:

- *To develop a sustainable model for post-16 education*

2. Scope of the review

Stage 1 of this review focuses on post-16 provision in Powys' mainstream schools – it does not take into account the wider post-16 network which includes NPTC Group of Colleges and other providers.

The authority is currently carrying out an ALN Transformation Programme to ensure that it can meet the needs of all learners, and recognises both the complexity and diversity of need in post-16 provision for learners with additional learning needs. As a result, a specific work stream within the ALN Transformation Programme is currently considering post-16 for learners with ALN and the findings will be presented in a separate report. Any future developments that arise from this will be taken forward in parallel with the review of mainstream post-16 provision.

The stages of the review are as follows:

Stage 1	Case for Change and initial recommendations	September 2019
Stage 2	Engagement and development of the business case	October 2019
Stage 3	Development of the business case and further engagement if needed	Spring 2020
Stage 4	Final recommendation	June 2020

3. Our ambition for post-16 provision in Powys – Key Principles

At the heart of this review is the ambition to develop a skilled and well-educated workforce by providing outstanding 16-18 education with a breadth of opportunities. These young people will provide the skilled adults employers are seeking and will underpin the growth of employment opportunities, the economy and wealth in the local economy.

Generally, sixth form provision in Powys is held in high-regard by schools and their communities, and there are a number of positive aspects to the current system:

- Tradition of positive collaboration between all providers
- Forward looking sector – a lot of innovation goes on in sixth forms
- Accessibility - local access to sixth form provision
- Excellent pastoral care – caring environments
- Sixth formers are able to be role models for younger pupils
- Teachers have the opportunity to teach specialist subjects at A level

A number of reviews and discussions about the sustainability of Powys' sixth forms have taken place over the years, and many arguments have been put forward about the additional value that a sixth form gives a school. Most of Powys' learners leave sixth forms and enter into higher education, and progress successfully along that pathway.

However, the sixth form system in Powys is facing significant challenges and these have been increasing over a number of years, to the point where there is a growing acceptance that the current sixth form system is possibly unsustainable in its current form – both financially and educationally. The contributing factors are simple but inter-linked: falling learner numbers leading to decrease in funding leading to constraints on curriculum choice.

In discussion with Powys' secondary headteachers as part of this review, it was agreed that,, in order to provide the best for the young people in Powys, there should be a post-16 system that is based on the following key principles:

- A curriculum responsive to learners' and employers' needs
- High quality teaching and learning experiences
- Choice – flexible and inclusive
- Sustainability in the longer term
- The ability to minimise learner travel
- Inclusivity including language
- Access to a broad range of subjects, including facilitating subjects

4. The Case for Change

4.1 Description of the current situation

Powys has twelve mainstream schools providing secondary education, with sixth forms delivered from eleven sites to around a thousand learners. The authority's three special schools also have sixth forms. The schools provide learning programmes that generally include AS/A levels, the Welsh Baccalaureate and some BTEC subjects as well. Welsh-medium subjects are available at four sixth forms.

In order to be able to provide the broadest offer of subjects, the authority operates a collaborative post-16 partnership between schools – the North Powys Post-16 Partnership and the South Powys Post-16 Partnership. The local further education provider, NPTC Group of Colleges, are part of these partnerships and offer a range of vocational subjects at their two campuses in Newtown and Brecon.

The success of the partnership approach is testament to the positive collaboration between schools, the authority and the college. Both partnerships have a shared timetable and learners are able to choose from a range of subjects that are delivered across the partnership and they can travel to other schools or the college to study subjects. The authority provides transport for learners to travel between schools/college. Over the last year, the authority has introduced subjects that are taught through digital learning, which enable learners to access subjects through technology, rather than having to travel.

In terms of educational standards, although improvements were evident on the previous year's results, standards remain as adequate. The number of WJEC A-levels taken in Powys schools has decreased from 1,111 in 2017 to 1,045 in 2018 which represents a fall of approximately 6%. The number of A-level candidates in Powys has fallen from 624 to 519 between 2013 and 2018.

In 2017-18, more than 20% of A-level candidates achieved the highest grades A*-A, however, this remains significantly below the Wales average of 26.3%. More than 75% of students achieved grades A*-C and this is close to the Wales average of 76.3%. Almost all students that took a WJEC A-level obtained grades A*-E (97.2%). This overall pass rate is similar to that for Wales of 97.4%.

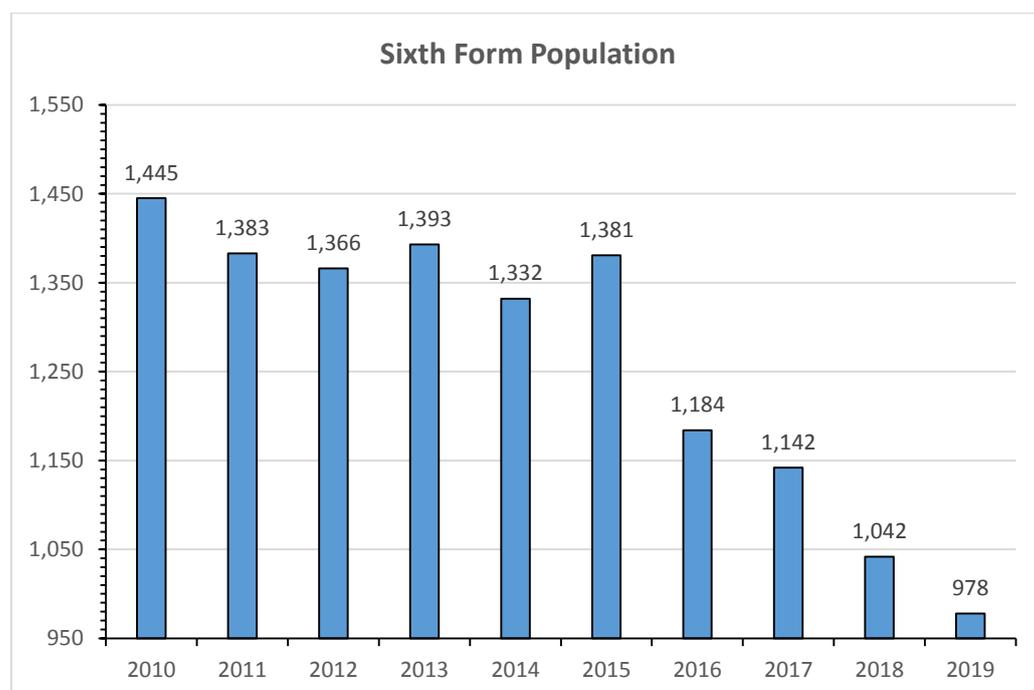
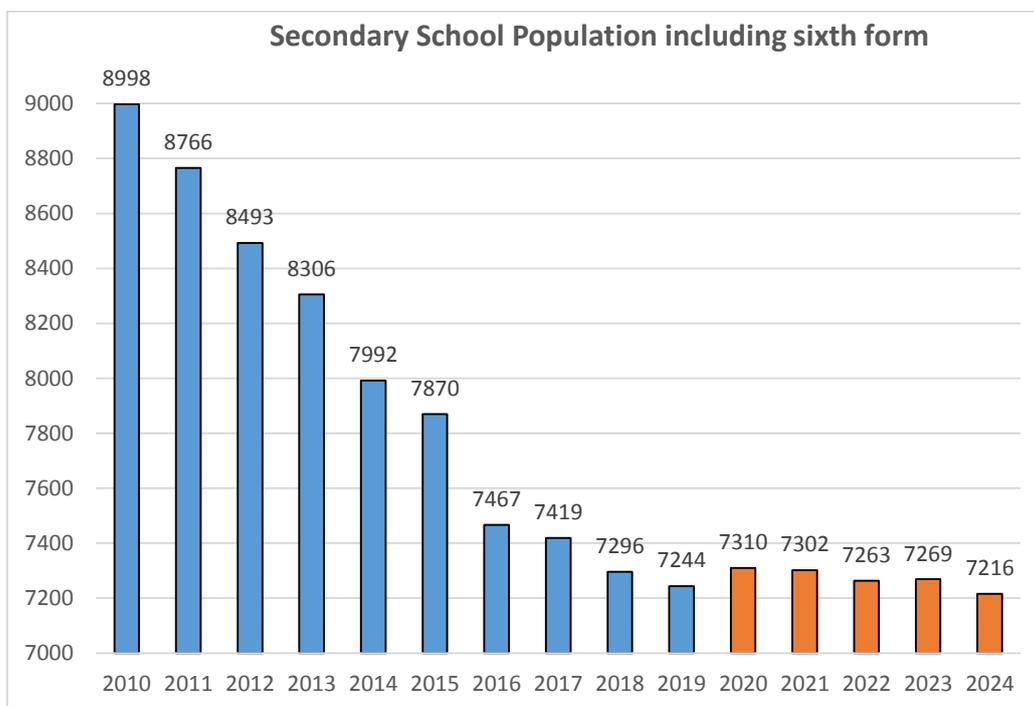
The average wider point score at key stage 5 was 734 in 2017-2018. This is a decrease from 804.0 over the last two years. Powys' average wider point score is now lower than the national average of 740. Factors that contribute to this reduction are the falling number of students taking A level courses, the availability of A level courses across multiple sites in both North and South Powys & the increased number of students accessing A Level provision out of county, approximately 200 in 2017-18.

4.2 Key Challenges

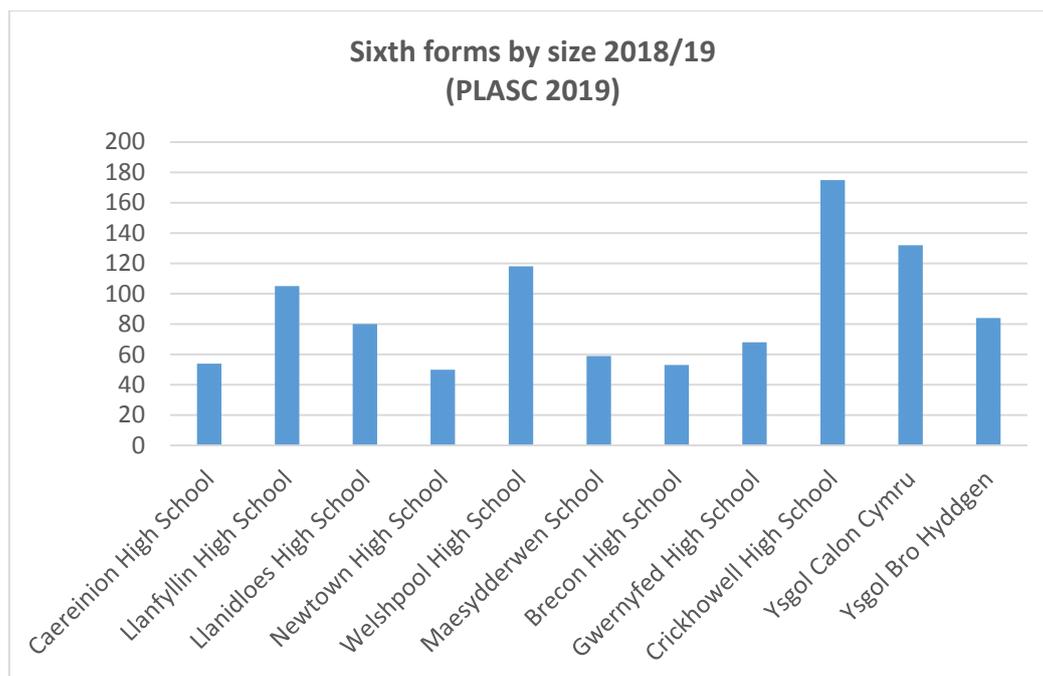
4.2.1 Decreasing learner numbers

This review is set in the context of recent demographic changes in Powys which has seen a significant education in secondary school pupil numbers over the last ten years, a trend that is also reflected in the sixth form population as well. There are some exceptions, most notably Crickhowell High School, where the school has seen an increase in the number of pupils on roll and in the sixth form, generally all schools have seen a decline.

The following charts show the impact of falling pupil numbers over the last ten years¹:



¹ PLASC figures and local authority projections.



The following table shows the sixth form population changes over the last ten years at each school²:

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Caereinion High School	84	98	107	95	88	83	66	71	61	54
Llanfyllin High School	197	193	173	176	186	200	147	160	144	105
Llanidloes High School	126	123	117	116	104	97	75	59	60	80
Newtown High School	155	142	148	139	97	108	100	89	65	50
Welshpool High School	185	177	155	168	170	192	163	148	128	118
Maesydderwen School	85	77	64	59	69	57	60	60	80	59
Brecon High School	125	119	127	114	96	89	83	71	57	53
Gwernyfed High School	85	75	70	87	83	82	79	60	57	68
Crickhowell High School	130	132	158	188	188	185	169	188	180	175
Ysgol Calon Cymru	218	198	197	188	178	223	178	174	133	132
Ysgol Bro Hyddgen	55	49	50	63	73	65	64	62	77	84
Powys Totals	1445	1383	1366	1393	1332	1381	1184	1142	1042	978
Powys Average	120	115	114	116	111	115	99	95	87	82

² PLASC data

Retention rates from Year 11 in Powys schools to Year 12 in Powys sixth forms have also reduced over the last few years.

The retention rate from Year 11 in Powys schools to Powys sixth forms in September 2018 was 42.4%³. The retention rate in September 2012 was 47.2%. This indicates a drop of 4.8% over the last 6 years.

Whilst the overall retention rate across Powys has decreased, there are significant variations in retention rates between schools. The following table provides a breakdown of the retention rate per high school in September 2017⁴:

School Name	Retention rate (%)	
	Yr11-12	Yr12-13
Caereinion	32.9%	80%
Llanfyllin	51.2%	93.7%
Llanidloes	37.8%	95.7%
Newtown	16.6%	81.8%
Welshpool	44.5%	89.5%
Maesydderwen	48.9%	91.7%
Brecon	37.6%	90.3%
Gwernyfed	43.2%	93.3%
Crickhowell	67.5%	83.8%
Ysgol Calon Cymru	33.1%	81.3%
Ysgol Bro Hyddgen	71.4%	89.3%

Throughout Wales, there has been a reduction in the retention rate into Year 12, however the reduction in Powys is among the highest of all local authorities. In 2017, Powys saw the third highest reduction in retention rate into Year 12 from the 22 local authorities⁵.

The reduction in the retention rate into Year 12 is partly due to an increase in the number of pupils travelling to providers outside Powys to study AS/A level provision, especially to Shrewsbury Sixth Form College and Herefordshire Sixth Form College.

The following table provides an indication of the number of Powys pupils that were attending a number of out of county providers during 2018/19⁶:

Provider	No. of Powys learners attending
Shrewsbury Sixth Form College	251
Hereford Arts College	23

³ Careers Wales destination data

⁴ Careers Wales destination data

⁵ Careers Wales destination data

⁶ Information received from the providers

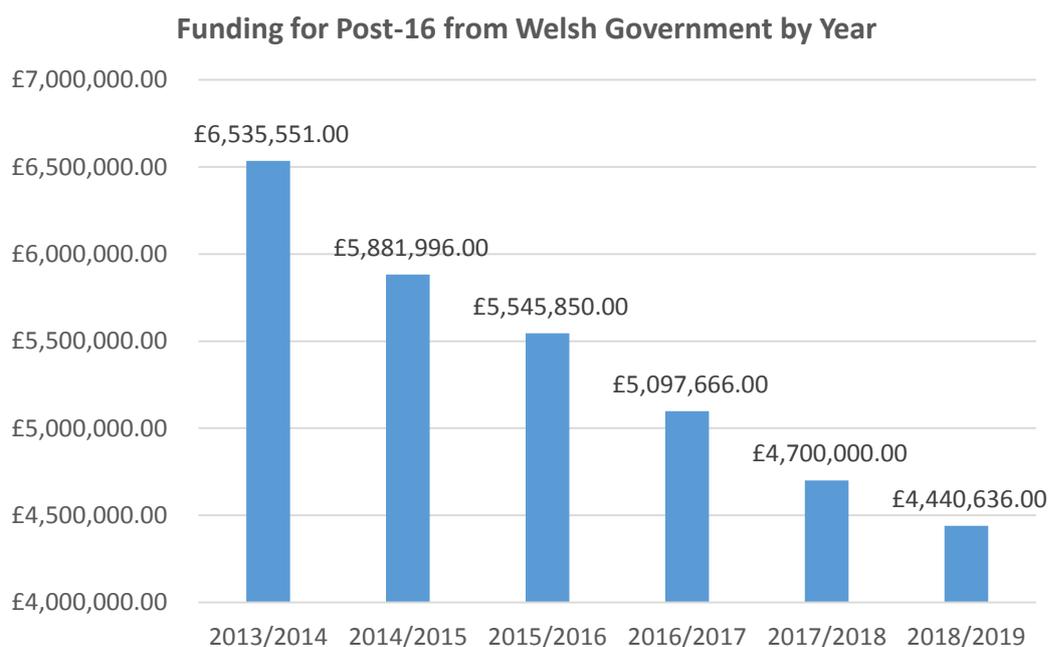
Cardiff and Vale College	16
The Marches School, Oswestry	11
Reaseheath College	46
Hereford and Ludlow	8
Coleg Cambria – Llysfasi	47
Hereford Sixth Form College	No information received
North Shropshire College	No information received
Coleg Ceredigion	No information received
Total	402
Estimated Total	450

There are many reasons why learners choose to access provision outside of Powys. The authority carried out a survey of learners views about post-16 provision this year. Although the sample was small, those that attend out-of-county providers were asked for their reasons for choosing to do so which include the following:

- There was nothing that would have encouraged me to stay;
- The course was not available in Powys;
- Higher standards than in Powys schools;
- I dislike intra-day travel.

4.2.2 Financial challenges

Sixth forms in Wales are funded via an annual grant from the Welsh Government to local authorities. As this grant is based on learner numbers, Powys has seen a year-on-year reduction due to its declining learner population, which in turn leads to a decrease in the number of subjects that can be offered. The following table shows the level of funding received by the authority over the last five years:



The authority distributes the grant to schools via a formula where funding is provided to each school to deliver a specific number of courses. This formula has been in place since 2012 and enables the Post-16 Partnerships to operate within the available funds. Schools are funded £12,950 per course and an extra overall top-up based on pupil numbers.

The following table outlines the total funding that will be provided to each school to support Post-16 provision during the 2019-20 financial year, and also indicates the number of courses funded per school:

School	Funding provided	Courses funded (Year 12)
Brecon High School	£ 282,790.00	10
Builth Wells High School	£ 341,220.00	12
Gwernyfed High School	£ 282,010.00	10
Ysgol Maesydderwen	£ 342,780.00	12
Crickhowell High School	£ 639,610.00	22
Ysgol Uwchradd Caereinion	£ 334,980.00	12
Llanfyllin High School	£ 602,010.00	21
Llanidloes High School	£ 282,400.00	10
Ysgol Bro Hyddgen	£ 340,050.00	12
Newtown High School	£ 284,740.00	10
Welshpool High School	£ 567,920.00	20
Llandrindod High School	£ 280,840.00	10
Total	£4,581,350.00	161

During 2019/20, the authority received a Post-16 grant of **£4,440,636.00** from the Welsh Government. This is distributed to schools via the post-16 funding formula. However, the grant received is less than the total funding allocated to schools by the formula as indicated above. During 2019/20, the authority has provided £140,714 additional funding to high schools in addition to the grant received from Welsh Government.

The number of funded courses across Powys has decreased over the years from 191 in 2012/13 to 161 in 2018/19. However, in order to provide a more attractive curriculum offer to learners, schools have been delivering more post-16 courses than they have been funded for. It is likely that this has been funded by the school's delegated budget, which has therefore impacted on the funding available for pre-16 provision at the school. This suggests that pre-16 funding is being used to subsidise post-16 provision.

The following table shows the number of post-16 courses delivered by each school in 2018/19 compared with the number of post-16 courses the school was funded for:

School	No. of Courses Funded For 2018/19	No. of Courses Delivered in 2018/2019	Variance
Brecon High School	11	12	1
Crickhowell High School	23	27	4

Gwernyfed High School	10.5	13	2.5
Llanfyllin High School	22	29	7
Llanidloes High School	10.5	19	8.5
Newtown High School	14.5	20	5.5
Welshpool High School	22	22	0
Ysgol Bro Hyddgen	12	27	15
Ysgol Calon Cymru	26	27	1
Ysgol Maesydderwen	10.5	17	6.5
Ysgol Uwchradd Caereinion	11.5	15	3.5
Total	173.5	228	54.5

This shows that in 2018/19, 54.5 additional post-16 courses were provided across Powys. Based on the figure of £12,950 per course which is provided in the funding formula, it is estimated that this costs £705,000 across Powys.

The increase in the number of Powys pupils accessing provision out of Powys is also having a financial impact on the funding available to support post-16 provision, as the grant received from Welsh Government is based on pupil numbers. Based on approximately 450 Powys learners attending out of county providers, it is estimated that Powys is losing out on approximately £1.5m of funding.

Another contributing factor has been the changes to the Welsh Government 14-19 Grant. For a number of years in Powys this grant provided a source of funds to pay for the transport costs incurred when learners travel to study subjects offered in collaboration between schools and/or the college. The 14-19 grant has now been merged into the Education Improvement Grant ('EIG') and has reduced significantly from the original grant. The inter-school transport was historically funded from the 14 – 19 grant, but has now transferred into the core transport budget – the expenditure is approximately £240k per year.

4.2.3 Sustainability of the curriculum offer

The decreasing learner numbers and subsequent decrease in funding has an impact on the curriculum that can be offered across Powys. Through the Learning and Skills Measure (Wales) 2014, Welsh Government regulates the number of subject choices that should be made available to learners aged 16-18 in mainstream secondary schools and further education colleges in Wales. Currently the legislative requirement is that every learner aged between 16 and 18 should have an offer of 30 'level 3' subjects (A/AS level and equivalents such as BTECs), including 5 vocational subjects.

In order to meet this statutory requirement, the authority has been operating a North and South Powys Post-16 Partnership for a number of years, where schools collaborate to provide a joint timetable. Learners can choose to study a subject at more than once school, and the authority funds the inter-school transport – the cost of this in 2017/18 was £240k, which is in addition to the authority's home-to-school transport budget. The authority does not fund

learners to travel to out-of-county providers unless the subject they are studying is not available within Powys. Most learners travelling to Shrewsbury Sixth Form College and Hereford Sixth Form College fund their own transport.

Whilst the authority meets the requirement of the Measure through collaboration, difficult decisions have had to be made over the years as funding has decreased – schools have worked very hard to maintain a core provision, but a number of minority subjects are no longer being provided. Another constraining factor for learners is that they may not be able to choose their preferred combination of subjects due to timetabling clashes. Larger providers such as sixth form colleges are not only able to offer more subjects, learners are not as constrained in choosing their combination of subjects – this is an attractive factor for some learners.

The authority's view is that the optimum size of a sixth form should be 180 learners across both year groups with an average class size of 12. This is based on the need to deliver the statutory requirements of the Learning and Skills Measure where sixth forms are able to deliver 25 subjects to meet the Measure without a need for inter-school collaboration with 5 vocational subjects delivered by other providers.

Each learner, over a two year period, studies an average of 3.5 subjects (4 AS in Year 12, 3 A Levels in Year 13):

- On an average class size of 12, the size of a sixth form (Years 12 & 13) would be 180
- On an average class size of 15, the size of a sixth form (Years 12 & 13) would be 220.

Across Wales, the average class size in the post-16 schools sector is around 11 or 12 with, in some centres, a significant number of classes well below this. By contrast, larger sixth-form centres and colleges will see average class sizes of 18 or more. When set against the Welsh Government funding mechanisms, it can be seen that smaller institutions cannot afford to offer a broad range of subjects without experiencing financial difficulties.

The average sixth form class size in Powys is 9. The proportion of small teaching groups increases as the size of a sixth form decreases. This is not a cost-effective delivery model but schools manage the situation in a variety of ways, such as combining year groups for certain modules, or, in dual-stream schools, combining the streams and teaching bilingually.

The following table shows the number of learners studying specific subjects this year across the county and the number of sixth forms that are delivering the subject.

Subject	Y12	Y13	Number of sixth forms delivering subject
Art and Design	59	40	9
Biology	138	103	10
Business Studies	74	54	6
Chemistry	85	72	10
Computer Science	9	6	2

Cymraeg Mamiaith	8	10	2
Cymraeg Ail Iaith	1	2	1
Design and Technology	37	25	8
Daearyddiaeth	14	17	2
Drama and Theatre Studies	28	32	7
English Literature and Language	96	87	10
French, German and Spanish	16	24	5
Geography	87	70	10
Hanes	4	7	2
Health and Social Care	55	46	7
History	104	91	10
ICT	49	54	6
Law	31	12	2
Maths and Further Maths	162	109	10
Media Studies	39	31	6
Music	11	16	6
Music Technology	3	7	2
PE and Sport	89	41	7
Photography	16	9	4
Physics	81	53	9
Politics	6	7	1
PSE	167	106	3
Psychology	83	49	5
Religious Education	55	23	3
Sociology	19	5	1
WBQ	529	518	All

4.2.4 Sustainability of Welsh-medium curriculum offer

There are six dual-stream secondary schools, although only four of these schools offer Welsh-medium subjects in the sixth form – Ysgol Bro Hyddgen, Caereinion High School, Llanfyllin High School and Ysgol Calon Cymru. The current situation for Welsh-medium provision does not meet the authority’s key priority as outlined in its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan of providing equality of provision. Learners who wish to access Welsh-medium provision are limited to a very narrow curriculum choice.

In 2018, there were 145 Welsh-medium A/AS exam entries – to put this into context, there were 3850 English- medium exam entries.

Ysgol Bro Hyddgen has an established partnership with Ysgol Gyfun Penweddig in Aberystwyth where sixth form subjects are shared between the two schools and learners travel between the sites. This has enabled Ysgol Bro Hyddgen to provide more subjects through the medium of Welsh, and the school has recently seen its sixth form numbers increase.

4.2.5 Impact on standards and outcomes

It is not clear if the challenges outlined above have an impact on standards and outcomes in sixth forms, and outcomes vary on a school by school basis. However, on a county wide basis, as stated in section 4.1, there is a need to improve standards at key stage 5.

In this context, it should be noted that larger schools/sixth forms will have larger departmental teams and thereby greater experience to draw upon than in smaller sixth forms and this is a factor that needs to be taken into account in relation to size of provision and standards of performance. Smaller settings may only have one or two staff to draw upon compared to the greater pool of expertise in larger settings. The impact of staff illness or loss of staff is another factor to consider with regard to the size and resilience of a sixth form.

4.3 The views of learners

In order to understand how learners view post-16 provision in Powys, the authority carried out a survey earlier this year. Young people between the ages of 11 and 19 (inclusive) were invited to complete a survey on their attitudes towards education and work once they finish compulsory education. The survey ran online between March 6th 2019 and April 7th, 2019 and 753 responses were received.

From the responses received, it is clear that the majority of pupils in years 7 – 11 in Powys schools expect to join a sixth form following the end of their compulsory education. Following this, pupils said that they intend to continue their education in England, with the third highest group stating their intention to join NPTC for their studies.

There are a number of interesting viewpoints that can be found in the learner survey, which is attached at Appendix A. However, there are no clear conclusions that can be drawn at this stage.

4.4 Summary of the Case for Change

The evidence outlined in this section suggests that the sixth form system in Powys is now at a point where it is unviable in its current form, and unless it is reformed there is a strong case to say that the system is not meeting the key principles that underpin this review:

- Curriculum responsive to learners' and employers' needs
- High quality teaching and learning experiences
- Choice – flexible and inclusive
- Sustainable beyond 2017/18
- Minimise learner travel
- Inclusivity including language
- Access to a broad range of subjects, including facilitating subjects

The demographic and financial pressures on the system contribute to the pressure on secondary school budgets in the county, increasing the likelihood of schools moving towards a deficit budget position and also increasing the risk that resources for Years 7 to 11 are being used to prop up sixth-form expenditure – cross-phase subsidisation.

Nine of the authority's eleven sixth form sites now have fewer than a 100 learners (across two year groups) and, in some cases, are also delivering through the medium of Welsh and English. The authority's view is that a viable sixth form should have 180 learners in order to provide the appropriate choice without the need for inter-school travel.

The average sixth form class size in Powys is 9. The proportion of small teaching groups increases as the size of a sixth form decreases. This is not a cost-effective delivery model but schools manage the situation in a variety of ways, such as combining year groups for certain modules, or, in dual-stream schools, combining the streams and teaching bilingually.

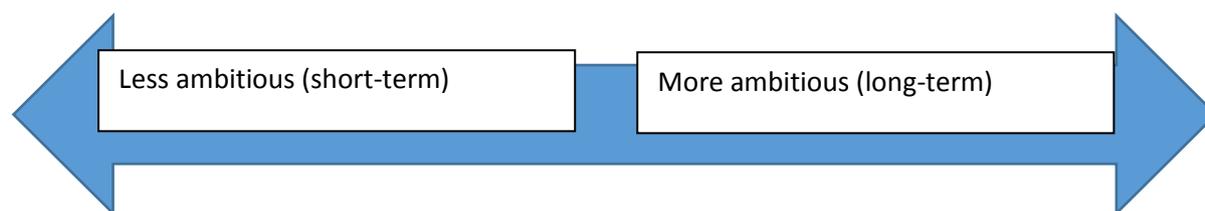
The fact that an estimated 500 post-16 learners are choosing to travel out-of-county for their studies is a strong indication that the current system is not attractive enough for them to stay. The financial impact of this exodus has a knock-on effect on the finances available to sustain the curriculum within Powys.

There is the continued requirement to meet the legislative requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 and the authority could choose to continue with the current collaborative model. This will still require inter-school transport to be funded from the Home-to-School transport budget, and costs are expected to increase.

There is clearly a need to improve Welsh-medium curriculum offer, but this is linked to the need to improve linguistic progression throughout all key stages in Powys.

5. Potential Solutions

In considering ways to improve the sustainability of sixth form provision in Powys, potential solutions range along the continuum from the less ambitious (short-term) to the more ambitious (long-term)



5.1 Short-term solutions

There are a number of actions that can be taken immediately. These include:

- Developing a new brand for post-16 in Powys and launch a new marketing campaign
- Developing digital learning opportunities to broaden choice whilst minimising the need for travel
- Relaunching the 14 – 19 Network to improve strategic planning

- Revising the post-16 funding formula to provide a fairer and more equitable distribution of funding

5.1.1 Developing a new brand for post-16 in Powys and launch a new marketing campaign

Sitting alongside a re-launched 14 – 19 Network, the authority is in the process of establishing a new brand for Powys sixth forms – ‘Dyfodol Powys/ Future Powys’.

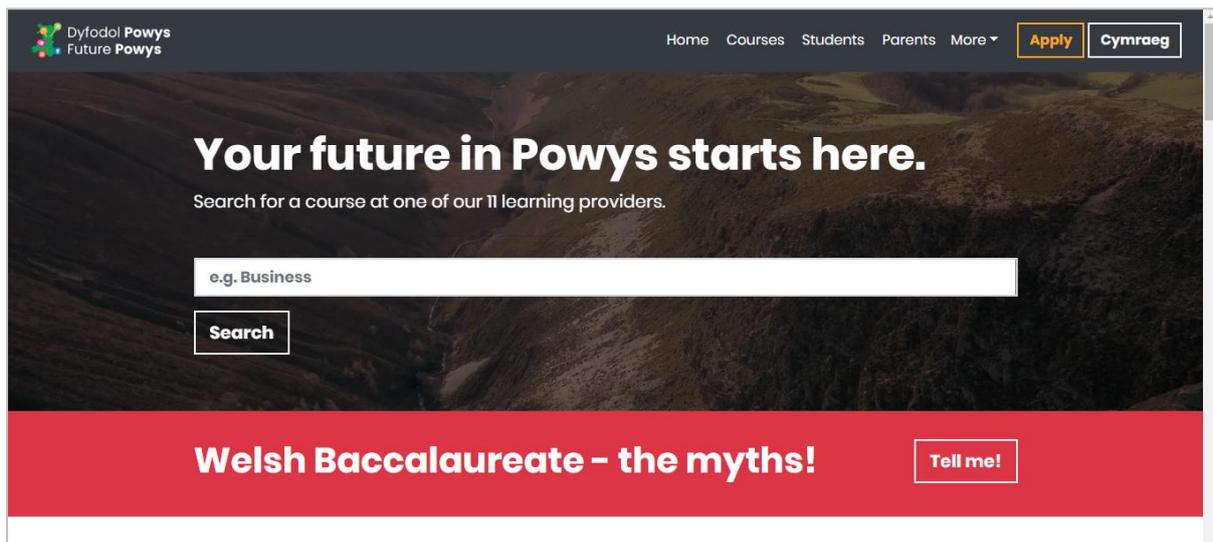


This would mean that all sixth forms in Powys sit within this single brand which will be a consistent feature of promotional campaigns:

- Authority to provide consistent marketing materials to all providers.
- Authority to provide a bilingual digital platform (e.g. website, apps) for course searching, online application and information for learners.
- Providers no longer need to individual sixth form marketing materials.

The digital platform would provide information on:

- Course search, provider information, events and applications.
- All courses across whole of Powys in one place, with each regional provider views.
- Mobile and web compatible for maximum reach.



The screenshot shows the website for Dyfodol Powys Future Powys. The navigation bar includes 'Home', 'Courses', 'Students', 'Parents', and 'More', along with 'Apply' and 'Cymraeg' buttons. The main content area is titled 'Students' and includes the subtext 'Discover more about support, opportunities and financial support for potential learners.' Below this are three columns:

- Financial Support:** You could be entitled to Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) if you study in one of our learning providers. [More info](#)
- Learning Support:** Powys has an outstanding track record at providing high quality support and guidance to Post-16 learners. [More info](#)
- Opportunities:** Our learning providers offer lots of opportunities beyond your studies including a great enrichment programme and sporting opportunities. [More info](#)

Learners would be able to apply directly online which would mean easier planning for learners and for providers.

The authority is planning to launch the brand in readiness for September 2019 open evenings. The launch for September 2019 is being funded out of the EIG 14-19 grant. It is expected that a small 'marketing budget' will be included in the revised post-16 funding formula.

5.1.2 Developing digital learning opportunities

The authority is currently piloting a new digital learning initiative. E-sgol is a Welsh Government-funded initiative that is being piloted as a partnership between Ceredigion and Powys, with implementation from September 2019. The delivery is based on a teacher teaching a course to groups of learners across all Powys schools.

The authority is also currently piloting the delivery of two AS courses virtually via Tute Teach, a company specialising in delivering A/AS courses via technology. Courses are taught by qualified teachers from the company's base in Wrexham there is no need for any additional hardware as the course is delivered via computer/laptop/ipad. Tute Teach offer courses through the medium of English and Welsh. Following an evaluation of the first pilot year, the authority's intention is to buy more courses from Tute Teach by using some of the uplift funding. This may have an impact on the overall funding available to schools.

The development of digital learning in Powys sixth forms is clearly an opportunity to expand choice, especially in relation to Welsh-medium education, and to deliver in a more cost-effective way whilst reducing the need to travel between schools. However, the quality of the provision must be monitored very closely over the next two years to ensure it delivers the best outcomes for learners.

Digital learning must also be seen as part of a blended offer and is complementary to the traditional teaching taking place.

5.1.3 Relaunching the Powys 14 – 19 Network

In recent years, the Powys 14- 19 Network was responsible for the strategic planning of 14 – 19 provision in the county. The Network included a range of providers, including schools, NPTC, training providers as well as partner agencies such as Careers Wales. As this was a Welsh Government initiative with grant funding attached, the Network operated effectively. However, without the grant funding available, the Network has not been as effective and there hasn't been a joined-up strategic approach to 14 – 19 planning and delivery.

The authority is currently in the process of re-establishing the Network with a refreshed focus which will improve the ability to strategically plan for both post-16 and 14 – 16 provision.

5.1.4 Revising the post-16 funding formula

The current formula for allocating the post-16 grant has been in use for several years and does not accurately reflect the amount which schools actually spend per course. The authority is currently revising the formula and this will be discussed at the Formula Review Group – if approved by Cabinet, it is expected that this formula will be in place for September 2020 intake. The outcome of this will be a fairer and more equitable funding formula which better reflects the actual costs of teaching an AS/A level.

5.2 Long term solutions

Whilst it may be possible that the short-term solutions outlined above can help improve the sustainability of the system in the short-term, the evidence suggests that a more ambitious solution is required.

The current structure of eleven sixth forms delivering to around a thousand pupils doesn't enable the creation of a critical mass in more than one of these sixth forms. This doesn't enable the system to be able to provide the breadth of provision that young people are entitled to have, without the necessity of additional inter-school travel or the use of technology.

The advantages and disadvantages of structural change are explored below:

Advantages

- Creates a critical mass of pupils at post-16, enabling more subjects to be delivered from one location and minimising the requirement for additional inter-school travel and transport.
- Would deal effectively with issues such as class size, financial effectiveness and cross-phase subsidisation
- Produces effective economies of scale
- Curriculum breadth is retained and minority subjects become more viable
- More efficient class sizes providing better value for money
- A greater equality of offer to learners

- Teaching staff would specialise in post-16 delivery, potentially producing higher standards of performance
- Creates an opportunity to invest in tailored facilities for 16-18 education
- Potentially more attractive to learners, reducing the number of learners choosing out of county providers
- Critical mass of Welsh-medium learners improves curriculum choice.

Disadvantages

- Loss of sixth forms would be unpopular with local communities
- Negative social and economic impact on those school communities that lose sixth forms
- Transition phase to new structure may de-stabilise the secondary school system – parents and staff affected by uncertainty and change
- Potentially capital investment required to ensure that there are sufficient facilities
- Increase in travel arrangements and potentially higher discretionary post-16 transport costs for the Council, although the cost may be offset by greater efficiency of delivery costs due to larger teaching groups
- Learners living further away from provision may find it more difficult to access after-school activities, with a reliance on public transport
- Dependent on the location of provision, there may be additional travelling required for some learners in the county – their nearest alternative provision may be out-of-county
- Increased surplus places in schools
- Opposition from stakeholders
- Difficult to retain and/or attract new teachers to Powys' secondary schools due to instability.

6. Recommendations

- a) That the short term solutions outlined in section 5.1 are fully supported and implemented with immediate effect
- b) That the authority proceeds to Stage 2 of the review – to develop a detailed business case that considers the cost-benefit implication and impact of structural change as outlined in section 5.2 above.