

Collaboration between schools with sixth forms and Further Education Colleges to deliver flexible high quality provision that expands choice and achieves value for money



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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- ▲ LEAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
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Introduction

- 1 Estyn published a report on 'Post-16 provision in schools-factors that influence the capacity of school sixth forms to meet the needs and aspirations of learners' (Estyn 2005) that included references to collaboration between school sixth forms and further education (FE) colleges. That report:
 - described some of the difficulties and challenges associated with collaboration;
 - showed that, despite these challenges, schools and FE colleges in some areas were beginning to work more collaboratively; and
 - outlined some features of that collaboration.
- 2 This report continues our work on collaboration by concentrating on the collaboration that takes place between school sixth forms and FE colleges. We do not include other types of collaboration, for example initiatives between schools and colleges for 14-year-old to 16-year-old learners, between schools and other schools, or between schools and work-based learning providers.
- 3 This report explores why and how school sixth forms and FE colleges are collaborating and what factors either promote or inhibit this work. The report also evaluates the effectiveness of the different types of collaboration in Wales.
- 4 The Welsh Assembly Government's paving document, 'The Learning Country' (Welsh Assembly Government 2001), wants a Wales where:
 - learning is an everyday part of working and non-working life; and
 - the needs of learners come first.
- 5 In particular, the Welsh Assembly Government wishes to:
 - transform provision for 14-19 year olds; and
 - remove barriers and promote greater access to learning.
- 6 To take this work further, the Welsh Assembly Government published 'Learning Pathways 14-19 Guidance'(National Assembly for Wales, Circular 37/2004). This seeks to:
 - enhance and extend the learning experiences of all young people;
 - raise expectations; and
 - work towards the target of 95% of young people to be ready for high-skilled employment or higher education by 2015.

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- 7 In addition ELWa¹ is undertaking work in the 16 to 19 sector through the:
- Common Investment Fund that supports a number of projects to achieve greater collaboration between providers of education and training for 16 to 19-year-olds; and
 - Geographic Pathfinder projects that review the current provision in six parts of Wales and suggest ways of improving it.
- 8 This report explores how collaboration between school sixth forms and FE colleges can help to remove barriers and promote greater access to learning, while at the same time leading to an improvement in the achievements of young people.
- 9 In producing this report, Estyn inspectors:
- researched the literature available on collaboration between school sixth forms and FE colleges;
 - interviewed officers in ELWa;
 - visited 20 schools and 17 FE colleges to interview key staff and learners;
 - reviewed inspection evidence about the standards and quality of school sixth forms and FE colleges; and
 - analysed information on learners' performance.

¹ This is the joint brand name for the National Council for Education and Training for Wales and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

Main findings

- 10 School sixth forms and colleges mainly collaborate in order to:
 - increase the choice of courses and subjects available to learners;
 - respond to either Welsh Assembly Government priorities or ELWa initiatives;
 - help schools maintain their sixth forms; and
 - meet learners' aspirations more effectively.
- 11 Overall, improving the quality of provision and raising the standards that learners achieve are not the main or most important reasons for undertaking collaborative activities. The Common Investment Fund has resulted in new collaborative arrangements, but there is uncertainty about whether they are sustainable once the funding ceases.
- 12 Where there is little or no collaboration between school sixth forms and colleges, the main reasons are:
 - the difficulties of organising transport, both in terms of cost and time;
 - competition for learners, and lack of trust, between schools and colleges;
 - the preference of many schools who wish to maintain their sixth forms in order to retain numbers and staffing levels;
 - difficulties associated with timetabling teaching sessions;
 - the implications of collaboration for the autonomy of individual schools and colleges; and
 - the absence of a strategic body to plan provision across a geographical area.
- 13 Schools, rather than colleges, gain most from collaboration. Collaboration enables schools to retain more learners in their sixth form than would otherwise have been the case.
- 14 Overall, there is little collaboration between school sixth forms and colleges in Wales. Only about 36% of the schools with sixth forms in Wales collaborate with colleges. This mainly involves the provision of a small number of Advanced (A) level courses for about 5% of the learners in sixth forms. There is very little collaborative activity for Welsh-medium education or for vocational options.
- 15 Although it is outside the scope of this report, there is increasing collaboration between schools and colleges at key stage 4 and between school sixth forms.

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- 16 Developments at key stage 4 are helping learners to make more informed choices about their education and training at 16.
- 17 Collaboration between school sixth forms and colleges may lead to better value for money by eliminating some uneconomic teaching groups. However, the benefits are sometimes counter-balanced by the need for learners to travel further. Collaborative arrangements also involve additional time and costs for planning, co-ordination, management and administration.
- 18 Re-organising the learning provision in an area, especially in urban and more compact geographical areas, is a better way of improving efficiency. In more rural areas, there would also be benefit in re-organising sixth form provision by bringing sixth forms together. The exceptions to this might include providers of exceptionally high quality or providers of Welsh-medium education in English-medium areas.
- 19 If collaboration is to take place between school sixth forms and colleges, there must be a clear assessment of the benefits for learners, not only in terms of increasing the choice available to them, but also in helping to improve the quality of provision and the standards that learners achieve.
- 20 About half of the existing collaborative arrangements are working well, but few have formalised arrangements, well-developed strategic plans and effective co-ordination. Very few have appropriate procedures for assuring the quality of the arrangements. Learners do at least as well as they might expect in many of the more well-established partnerships. However, in a significant minority of them, learners do not achieve predicted results in examinations.
- 21 In both collaborative and non-collaborative arrangements, most learners are generally satisfied with their courses and with the support and guidance they receive. About two-thirds of learners feel that they were given useful information to help them choose their course, but others felt that they had received inadequate information. A small number felt that they were given biased advice.
- 22 The most important factors that encourage collaboration between school sixth forms and colleges in Wales are:
 - the influence of Welsh Assembly Government or ELWa policies;
 - the positive relationships between schools and colleges;
 - a shared perception in schools and colleges that there is a need to widen curriculum choice;
 - the location of the schools and colleges in a compact geographical area; and
 - the anticipation by school staff of the effects of the new planning and funding system for post-16 learners.
- 23 Existing funding mechanisms do not help schools and colleges to collaborate. The different funding streams for pre-16 and post-16 provision and the fact that 14-19 Local Area Networks do not control core funding are obstacles to more collaboration.

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- 24 Schools do not do enough to make sure that learners receive unbiased advice when choosing their courses at 16 years of age. Also, schools do not provide learners with experiences of the type of courses and forms of teaching and learning that would be available to them in a college.

Recommendations

The **Welsh Assembly Government** should:

- R1 create planning bodies that can make strategic decisions about the nature of provision in an area;
- R2 ensure that there is greater compatibility between the funding mechanisms for pre-16 and post-16 provision;
- R3 provide sustainable funding for partnerships and collaborative activities that support the planning and implementation of the 14-19 Learning Pathways; and
- R4 encourage LEAs to work with all partners to review the nature of provision in their area.

LEAs should:

- R5 work with all partners to review the nature of provision in their area and provide clear, cost effective and workable plans through the 14-19 Local Area Networks that ensure wider choice, better quality and higher standards in accordance with the model of the 14-19 Learning Pathways initiative.

Schools and colleges should:

- R6 work together for the benefit of learners in their area by helping to rationalise and co-ordinate provision;
- R7 explore how collaborative activities can increase the range of general vocational and occupational courses on offer; and
- R8 ensure that collaborative arrangements:
 - spell out a clear and agreed strategic vision in partnership agreements;
 - feed into the 14-19 Local Area Networks development plans and local options menu;
 - focus on raising standards to the benefit of learners;
 - include a full and proper evaluation of the achievements of learners, including the value added and the quality of teaching and learning; and
 - are co-ordinated efficiently and economically.

Schools should:

- R9 ensure that learners receive full, fair and unbiased information and advice about the options available to them at 16 years of age.

Why are school sixth forms and FE institutions in Wales collaborating?

Why do schools and colleges collaborate?

- 25 The main reason why schools and colleges collaborate is to **increase the choice of courses and subjects** available to learners. Providers aim to broaden the curriculum by offering a wider range of A level subjects than would normally be available and, in a few cases, some vocational options as well. Very few schools and colleges collaborate in order to provide learners with the opportunity to mix vocational and general courses.
- 26 Schools and colleges have started to consider some form of collaboration in response either to **Welsh Assembly Government priorities** or to **ELWa initiatives**. Many providers cite the availability of the Common Investment Fund from ELWa or the grant from the Welsh Assembly Government as important reasons that they have started to collaborate. The extra funding has helped to set up a number of collaborative arrangements. However, there is uncertainty about whether these arrangements can continue once the funding ceases.
- 27 Many schools want to collaborate in order to **maintain their sixth forms**. These schools see collaboration as a way of continuing to offer A level subjects, such as music, that do not attract large numbers and introducing subjects, for example law, psychology and sociology, that the schools cannot provide alone. They believe that this enables them to retain learners who would otherwise have gone to other providers.
- 28 A few schools have started to pursue collaborative activities in order to provide courses that **meet learners' needs and aspirations better**. School staff feel that this will lead to an increase in the proportion of learners who stay on in full-time education and training and therefore help improve participation, retention and completion rates.
- 29 Overall, improving the **quality of provision and outcomes** is not the main or most important reason for undertaking collaborative activities. There has been little or no consideration of whether collaboration will lead to an improvement in quality and standards.
- 30 Schools and colleges in Wales do not individually have a perspective on provision across a geographical area. They do not see the reduction of unhelpful competition by combining small classes and making better use of specialist resources as a priority. This is because they plan their provision mostly in isolation from their neighbours. The result is that they tend to perpetuate existing provision, even where this leads to unnecessary duplication and inefficiency and when a lack of collaboration with others limits learner choices.

Why do schools and colleges decide not to collaborate?

- 31 The main reason that there is little or no collaboration in some areas is that there is a **lack of trust** between schools and colleges. This lack of trust becomes a barrier that stops schools and colleges coming together to establish collaborative arrangements. In these instances, there is often a history of competition for learners and both sets of providers are keen to enrol as many learners as is possible. In some cases, schools and colleges see each other as having different cultures and this contributes to this lack of trust. There is a perception that schools are overly protective of sixth formers and wish to 'spoon-feed' learners through their courses, whereas colleges are perceived to be unduly expansionist and predatory. In a number of cases, schools' poor experience of the college's previous provision for 14 to 16-year-olds has damaged their trust in it.
- 32 An equally important reason why schools and colleges do not collaborate is the difficulties created by **transport**. This is especially, but not exclusively, the case in larger geographical areas that have a small and dispersed population. However, it is also the case where transport networks are inadequate or where transport does not run as punctually and reliably as it should.
- 33 Difficulties with **timetabling**, other than where provision is through 'twilight' sessions that take place after normal teaching hours, are seen as another important reason for not collaborating. School sixth form timetables have to accommodate other age groups in the school and this inhibits its ability to provide the longer teaching periods needed to undertake collaborative activities.
- 34 A number of schools have set up their **own vocational courses** and do not feel that it is necessary to collaborate with the college. In some instances this provision is in direct competition with the local college. Occasionally, these vocational courses are taught by staff who are not specialists in the subject and in rooms that do not have adequate facilities and equipment. In a similar way, some general further education colleges **provide A level courses** that attract small numbers of learners, in direct competition with neighbouring schools.
- 35 In a number of cases, schools and colleges take advantage of their status as **autonomous organisations**. They use their autonomy to make decisions to the advantage of their own institutions and they do not see the need to develop collaborative arrangements.
- 36 A few schools see the call for more collaboration as a threat to remove their sixth form. These schools fear that more collaboration will be the start of an irreversible process that will eventually lead to the removal of their sixth forms.

How are school sixth forms and FE institutions collaborating in Wales today?

What are the different types of collaboration between schools and colleges?

37 The following table describes the different ways that schools and colleges might collaborate. The column on the right-hand side titled 'proportion of provision across Wales' classifies all the 170 schools in Wales that have sixth forms.

Different types of collaboration

Type	Characteristics	Proportion of provision across Wales
Competition or isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools and colleges work in isolation from each other. There is often competition for post-16 learners. Learners often do not receive fair and balanced information and guidance on all post-16 options. Schools do not allow colleges to provide full information to school leavers. Generally, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding between individual institutions. Schools' and colleges' perceptions are often based on stereotypes and hearsay. 	64% (109 schools)
Co-operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is some linkage through formal or informal networks. There is co-operative exchange of information and mapping of the courses available. Both sides realise that they need to do more for post-16 learners in the area and to make post-16 delivery more efficient and effective. Colleges have access to open evenings in schools to provide information to school leavers. There is some small scale working with each other, for example school-based learners take some subjects at the college, after school hours or through video-conferencing. Results stay with schools. 	32% (54 schools)
Co-ordination and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools provide information, advice and guidance to pre-16 learners about the full range of available options. Some learners attend courses at the college during the school day. Colleges and schools share some staff to deliver courses on each other's premises. The provision of units or courses of study is rationalized across providers in order to avoid unnecessary duplication, improve viability and secure better value for money. Teachers in schools and colleges contribute to reports on learners. Teachers contribute to self-evaluation activities and processes across the institutions. The school-college partnership arrangements identify clearly-defined management roles. Results go to the institution that delivers the teaching. Schools and colleges have common timetable arrangements. 	4% (7 schools)

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Type	Characteristics	Proportion of provision across Wales
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are memoranda of understanding or service level agreements between providers. 	
Confederation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single organisation oversees and directs work across all sectors. • There are shared or pooled budgets. • There are clear legal arrangements including for example, contracts, memorandum of understanding and/or service level agreements and single governing body. • Provision of units or courses of study is rationalized across providers in order to avoid unnecessary duplication, to improve viability and to secure better value for money. • Providers manage ideas and decisions equally and share responsibilities. • The confederation rather than the individual institution reports examination results. 	None

38 The table describes the general characteristics for each type of collaboration. A school or college within a particular category may not display all the characteristics and they may be present in varying degrees. However, we have placed schools and colleges into a category that they fit best.

39 It is important to note that the classification is an aid to describing the different types of collaboration that take place between schools and colleges in Wales and it is not a developmental continuum that shows how collaboration might progress from 'competition or isolation' to 'confederation'. Also, tertiary provision or sixth form centres are outside these categories, because the classification is concerned only with the types of collaboration that exist between separate schools and colleges.

How much collaboration is taking place between schools and colleges?

40 Although just over a third of schools with sixth forms are engaged in collaborative activities, they only involve about 5% of the total number of sixth form learners.

41 Many of the areas in the 'competition or isolation' group are rural areas where poor transport links and isolation make collaboration difficult. However, the group also contains some urban areas and compact rural areas, where distances between providers are not great enough to prevent more collaboration. Most of the examples of 'co-operation' and 'co-ordination and collaboration' are in more compact geographical areas.

42 Collaborative activity in the 'co-operation' group concerns the provision of a limited number of A level subjects for small numbers of learners. This is usually the case with courses that are not related to subjects taught in key stage 4, such as psychology, sociology, law and media studies, and that schools themselves find difficult to provide. The provision also includes other subjects such as music and some modern foreign languages that usually attract small numbers. These arrangements allow providers to pool resources to provide viable teaching groups for these subjects. About half of the arrangements in this group are relatively new. The most common form of provision is made through the delivery of twilight sessions. In

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a few of the arrangements, college staff travel to the school to teach the sessions. There is very little collaborative activity that enables learners to pursue vocational options.

- 43 A few of the arrangements in the 'co-ordination and collaboration' group provide a wider range of A and AS level subjects and encourage more learners to remain in education. Even so, many of the subjects tend to be those that usually attract fewer learners than the more popular subjects. In this category, the provision takes place during the school day.
- 44 Overall, there is very little collaboration in Welsh-medium education. Most of the Welsh-medium schools do not collaborate because colleges cannot provide teaching and learning in Welsh. In some arrangements, learners from Welsh-medium schools take courses that are taught through the medium of English.

What is the impact of the collaboration activities?

- 45 In Wales as a whole, there is little collaborative activity between school sixth forms and colleges. This is in contrast with an increasing amount of collaboration between schools and colleges for learners in the 14 to 16 age range and between school sixth forms.
- 46 Overall, schools, rather than colleges, benefit most from collaboration as it enables schools to retain learners who would otherwise have left. This then contributes to the continuation of sixth forms and, as a result, it helps preserve the schools' staffing complements.
- 47 Collaboration between school sixth forms and colleges may lead to some cost efficiencies by eliminating uneconomic teaching groups. However, the cost benefits are not clear-cut because the collaborative arrangements can require learners to travel further. There are also additional costs of time, energy and money associated with the planning, co-ordination, management and administration of such arrangements. As the arrangements only involve a few subjects and a relatively small number of learners, the costs of the arrangements often outweigh any benefits. In the future, it will be a challenge to ensure that the aim of increasing choice and quality through collaboration will not conflict with the aim to rationalising provision in order to increase cost-effectiveness. Where collaboration only involves marginal or 'extra' subjects and only small number of subjects and learners, it offers limited value for money.
- 48 Although it is outside the scope of this report, there is increasing collaboration at key stage 4 in order to provide more vocational options. This is a key development in helping learners to make better choices at 16. Many learners feel that they made a wrong decision at 16, but once they have started on a course in either a school sixth form or college, they find it difficult to change. Therefore, increasing the provision of vocational options for 14 to 16-year-old learners, often through collaboration, is likely to be a critical factor in helping learners to make better choices at 16. Where this provision at key stage 4 involves collaboration between schools and colleges, it provides learners with:

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- a better experience of vocational or occupational work through working with qualified staff in specialist facilities; and
- a greater awareness of the range of options and progression routes available after 16.

- 49 Collaborative activities for the 14 to 16 age range and the developing work of the 14-19 Local Area Networks is starting to improve the trust between schools and colleges. When combined with the impact of the National Planning and Funding System, this may lead to more collaboration, but there is a long way to go. It is likely that these developments will have an impact on improving choice in the provision in an area rather than lead to any more collaborative activities for 16 to 19-year-old learners.
- 50 More efficiency can be gained by re-organising the learning provision in an area. This involves rationalising sixth form and FE provision, especially in the more urban areas of Wales and where sixth forms are small. These efficiencies would lead to a better range of choices for learners and a more cost-effective system. It would also help resolve some of the issues of transport, governance, funding and timetabling that inevitably occur in any collaborative activity. Sixth forms that are big enough to retain economic teaching groups and can ensure that learners achieve good standards should be allowed to continue. However, they should:
- provide learners in the 14 to 16 age range with a substantial experience of vocational and occupational options, including an experience of the teaching and learning styles and facilities available in college or in work-based learning;
 - give learners unbiased and impartial advice about which courses to choose at 14 and 16;
 - allow the college full and open access to any arrangements that contribute to learners' decisions about which courses to pursue at 14 and 16; and
 - ensure that learners are offered a complete package of options at the age of 14 and 16 that treats each of the options fairly and consistently.
- 51 In more rural areas, there is often limited scope for reorganising sixth forms. In these areas, there is usually a tacit understanding that schools generally concentrate on A level courses and colleges concentrate on vocational or occupational courses. However, the arrangement does not enable learners to take a mixture of general and vocational options. In some of these areas, this informal arrangement is breaking down as more and more schools start to increase their vocational provision in an attempt to retain sixth-form numbers.
- 52 In a number of rural areas where there are small sixth forms, the provision is often restricted to a narrow range of A level subjects and teaching groups are small. Unless the provision in these schools is of high quality or it ensures progression in Welsh-medium education in English-medium areas, there should be some rationalisation of the provision in that area. Many schools in these areas claim that if the sixth form provision were to be removed, learners would not be prepared to travel

to other providers and would 'drop out' of the system. Although this is true for a small number of learners, many already show a willingness to travel to colleges and, occasionally, to other larger sixth forms in order to pursue their studies. Overall, providers are not doing enough to explore imaginative and innovative ways to increase learners' choice in more rural areas through activities such as:

- using new technologies including distance learning, video-conferencing and 'virtual learning environments'²;
- placing learners in other institutions for blocks of time;
- supporting learners to travel to other institutions; and
- providing mobile college workshops that move between school sites.

53 The main aim of collaboration between school sixth forms and colleges is to increase the choices available to learners through a more cohesive and co-ordinated provision in a specific area. However, collaboration should be seen as a means to achieving greater choice rather than an end in itself. If collaboration is to take place, there must be a clear assessment of the benefits to learners, not only in terms of increasing the choice available to them, but also in helping to achieve the highest standards of achievement. It is clear that across Wales, there is no single model of provision that can apply to all circumstances. In some areas, 'co-operation' might be the most effective way to increase learner's choice, while in others a reorganisation and rationalisation of the current provision may be necessary in order to achieve the most effective and efficient arrangement.

54 In any reconfiguration of provision in an area, it is very important to take into account the quality of provision being offered by the different providers. Estyn inspection report grades offer an indicator of the relative quality of what is offered by different providers. Reports on individual providers are available at www.estyn.gov.uk

How well do existing collaborative arrangements work?

55 Only four out of the 17 collaborations in the 'co-operation' and 'co-ordination and collaboration' categories have formalised their arrangements through partnership agreements, memoranda of understanding or service level agreements. Also, only a similar number have well-developed strategic plans. Six of the arrangements have appointed co-ordinators. Overall, about half the arrangements in these two categories are working well. The features of effective organisation include:

- well-established strategic and operational arrangements;
- an effective co-ordinator in post;
- a programme of regular meetings, with agendas and minutes, that are concerned with strategic matters and issues of quality; and

² Virtual learning environments are systems that use computers and the internet to support a range of learning situations from conventional classrooms to off-line and on-line learning.

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- a willingness on the part of all partners to work together.

56 However, in the other arrangements, there are some important shortcomings:

- there is a lack of strategic planning;
- meetings are restricted to operational matters; and
- the arrangements are too informal and lack a clear focus and purpose.

57 Very few have appropriate procedures for assuring the quality of the arrangements. Schools and colleges monitor attendance and behaviour effectively and act appropriately on matters for concern. However, the arrangements for assuring quality usually involve providers following their own systems and there is no agreed or common approach. There are no clearly defined and agreed policies and systems for self-evaluation. Managers usually discuss issues of quality in general terms and in an informal way. Although many collaborative arrangements review the outcomes in terms of examination results, few of them consider how much value has been added. Where schools and colleges collaborate, they do not do enough analysis and evaluating of:

- the views of learners;
- the quality of teaching and learning taking place in classrooms;
- the views of other stakeholders such as parents and carers;
- information on how many learners remain on the courses, how many progress afterwards to suitable courses and the outcomes that learners achieve;
- value for money; and
- the effect of action taken to address under-performance.

58 Collaborative arrangements may lead to greater choice, but there is little evidence that they improve standards of achievement. Current initiatives involve small numbers of learners. Generally they achieve results that are at least appropriate to the learners' ability. However, a small number of them do not do well enough.

59 The overriding factor that determines the quality of the outcomes is how well the arrangement is led and managed. It is clear that collaborative activities may lead to an increase in choice for the learner, but they do not necessarily lead to an improvement in standards.

What are learners' views about their experiences in schools and colleges?

60 We talked to a number of learners in schools and colleges in all categories in the table. Most of the learners are generally satisfied with the choices they made. These learners feel that their school or college supports and guides them well, and that the quality of teaching is generally good and often very good. About two-thirds

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feel that they were given useful information about the courses they chose, but others felt that they had received inadequate information. A small number of those in the latter group felt that they had received biased advice and that schools were unreasonably or uncritically encouraging them to stay on into the sixth form.

- 61 Where learners were involved in collaborative arrangements, they:
- valued the opportunity to take new or additional courses;
 - enjoyed the different styles of teaching and learning in a different institution; and
 - felt that they were receiving a good preparation for higher education.
- 62 Even so, many of these learners were critical of the difficulties created by having to travel between sites and of the timetabling their lessons.

What factors promote and inhibit collaboration?

- 63 In the United Kingdom, there have been a number of pieces of research into the factors that promote or inhibit collaboration between schools and colleges. This report evaluates which are the most important factors in Wales.

What factors encouraged the development of the current arrangement?

- 64 The most important factor to drive collaboration in Wales is the influence of **Welsh Assembly Government and ELWa policies and funding**. The development of Learning Pathways 14-19 and 14-19 Local Area Networks is encouraging schools and colleges to set up collaborative arrangements, mainly to address 'Key Element 2-Wider Choice and Flexibility' of Learning Pathways. A key influence in this development is the use of the Common Investment Fund and Welsh Assembly Government grants in many of the current and developing collaborative arrangements. This has provided the means by which schools and colleges can collaborate, often enabling the partners to overcome particular obstacles such as paying for transport between sites. Although this is stimulating more collaboration, its effect is limited to the relatively small numbers of schools and colleges that collaborate at the 16 to 19 age range and to a small number of A level subjects. In addition, it is unlikely that providers will be able to sustain these arrangements once the funding has ceased.
- 65 The second most important factor that encourages collaboration is the **quality of relationships** between schools and colleges. Where the relationship is good, schools and colleges trust each other, they understand and appreciate the issues each of them face, and are willing to work together.
- 66 Schools and colleges are more likely to collaborate where they see a need to **broaden the curriculum** by increasing the range of choices available to learners. In many instances, providers want to increase the range of vocational options, but in practice collaboration usually only involves the provision of new A level subjects or those subjects that attract few numbers.
- 67 A key factor that helps to promote collaborative arrangements is the **location of the schools and colleges** in a compact geographical area. There are still difficulties with transport in these more urban areas. However, the difficulties are more easily overcome because in urban areas learners have better access to public transport.
- 68 A factor in some arrangements is the school's anticipation of the effects of the **common funding system** for post-16 learners. Schools perceive that this system may threaten some of the courses they currently provide and see collaboration with colleges as one way of continuing to provide these courses or even to provide new ones. Therefore, schools see collaboration as a way of keeping learners in their sixth form.
- 69 An effective **Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCET)** or **14-19 Local Area Network** is proving to be an important factor, in a small number of cases, in helping to set up collaborative arrangements. However, CCETs overall have had a

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limited effect in promoting collaboration, while most 14-19 Local Area Networks have not yet had time to be implemented.

What factors inhibited the development of the current arrangement?

- 70 **Transport**, both in terms of costs and time taken, is the most important factor that inhibits collaboration. This is especially the case in the more rural areas, but it is also perceived to be a key inhibiting factor in some urban areas as well. The use of information and communications technology (ICT), for example in providing video-conferencing and distance learning, is often seen as a way of helping to overcome the problems of transport, especially in more rural areas. However, ICT has largely been an insignificant factor in helping to increase collaboration.
- 71 Almost as important a factor as transport is the **competition** for learners that results from funding based on the number of learners. Schools in particular see the maintenance of a sixth form as vitally important to their overall long-term future. They feel that the loss of some sixth formers will inevitably lead to a loss of staff. Schools fear that this may lead to an irreversible decline in the sixth form, which may in turn affect the 11 to 16 part of the school as well, as parents look to send their children to schools with more successful sixth forms. Schools consider a sixth form as important in helping to recruit better quality staff who would want to teach a sixth form and who would attract parents to select the school. Many schools feel that they would not be able to maintain standards if their sixth form were to close. However, schools without sixth forms in Wales do not achieve any worse results than those with sixth forms and many achieve significantly better. In some instances, the removal of a sixth form can enable schools to direct more resources and energy towards key stages 3 and 4, especially where performance in these key stages is not as good as it should be or where there are challenging factors that affect performance.
- 72 In many cases, schools wish to keep their sixth forms in order to retain numbers rather than to address the **needs of learners**. Many learners benefit from A level courses in school sixth forms and most sixth forms achieve good or very good standards. However, school sixth forms as a whole only cater for about half of 16 to 19-year-olds in Wales and there is a significant number of learners in sixth forms who are not on the courses that are best for them.
- 73 A factor that militates against more collaboration is the **autonomy** of individual schools and colleges. Many schools and colleges do not feel the need to collaborate and are able to continue in much the same way as they have always done. Even those schools and colleges that wish to collaborate more are often inhibited by the unwillingness of others in their area.
- 74 An important factor is the absence of a **strategic body** that has the power and resources to establish the most effective and efficient learning provision for a specific area. Although CCETs and 14-19 Local Area Networks bring schools and colleges together, these co-ordinating bodies are only able to be influential if all providers are willing to collaborate or where there are specific funds, such as the Common Investment Fund, to pay for such activities. In a similar way, the Geographic Pathfinders will suggest options to improve the learning network in an area but are

Collaboration between schools with sixth forms and Further Education Colleges to deliver flexible high quality provision that expands choice and achieves value for money

unable to ensure that providers implement these options. There is no strategic body to provide leadership and direction, where learners have a limited choice of courses because schools and colleges are unwilling to collaborate with each other. LEAs cannot play this role as schools are largely autonomous and colleges are outside their influence.

75 The 14-19 Learning Area Networks have a responsibility to plan provision that maximises choice for learners and offers value for money by minimising unnecessary duplication. However, existing **funding mechanisms** do not help them to do this, because:

- the funding streams for pre-16 and post-16 have different requirements that increase the burden of bureaucracy and have the potential for double funding;
- the 14-19 Local Area Networks do not control core funding, but have to bid individually for specific grants from the Welsh Assembly Government or ELWa; and
- no one is in a position to guarantee the implementation of plans that include providers, such as FE colleges and work-based learning providers, that are outside the jurisdiction of LEAs.

76 There are other factors that inhibit the development of collaborative arrangements in Wales, but they are not as important as those listed above. These factors are:

- timetabling difficulties;
- lack of trust between schools and colleges;
- staff concerns about anticipated job losses as a result of more collaboration;
- different term times between schools and colleges;
- learners' lack of awareness of the full range of option available at post-16; and
- a lack of impartial and unbiased advice for learners when they make their option choices at 14 and 16³.

Conclusion

77 The introduction of the 14-19 Learning Pathways initiative and its associated funding streams have helped to make providers more proactive in their arrangements for making the curriculum more responsive to the needs of learners. These arrangements include collaboration between schools and colleges. However, progress is still relatively slow and there are many constraints that continue to inhibit the momentum of change.

³ The introduction of learning coaches as part of the 14-19 Learning Pathways initiative should help to address this shortcoming.