



# Estyn

*Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

# The impact of deprivation on learners' attainment in further education and work-based learning

July 2011



INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE | Gold

**The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:**

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities;
- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ independent specialist colleges;
- ▲ adult community learning;
- ▲ local authority education services for children and young people;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies; and
- ▲ offender learning.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk)

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)

**© Crown Copyright 2011: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document/publication specified.**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Main findings</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>How learners from deprived areas perform in Wales</b>	<b>7</b>
Poverty and unemployment in Wales	7
How do we support learners financially?	8
How many learners are there in colleges and training providers?	9
How many learners receive financial help?	10
How well do learners achieve?	11
Inspection evidence about 'how well learners are cared for, guided and supported'	12
What did learners tell us?	12
What did providers tell us?	13
<b>Appendix</b>	
<b>Glossary</b>	
<b>The remit author and survey team</b>	

## Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this survey is to provide the Welsh Government with advice on the performance of learners from deprived areas in colleges of further education and work-based learning providers, as requested in the annual Ministerial remit letter to Estyn.
- 2 In undertaking this survey, inspectors followed a similar methodology to previous surveys on the performance of schools and other educational establishments. Inspectors carried out a review of previous Estyn remits and reviewed current literature. Inspectors analysed data from DCELLS<sup>1</sup> and recent Estyn reports on the following:
  - completion, attainment and success rates;
  - trends in enrolments;
  - rates of attendance;
  - quality of teaching;
  - the attitude and behaviour of learners; and
  - the quality of support and guidance.
- 3 Inspectors visited seven colleges providing further education and work-based learning programmes and four independent work-based learning providers. They interviewed managers at these providers and met with groups of learners on Skill Build programmes and learners on further education programmes who are in receipt of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). Before these visits, Estyn issued a questionnaire to all colleges and work-based learning providers in order to collect their views on the performance of learners from deprived areas.
- 4 Inspectors reviewed Welsh Government statistical bulletins and information available to learners on relevant Assembly and provider web sites.
- 5 For the purposes of this remit, areas of deprivation are identified using the Welsh Government's official measure of deprivation for small areas in Wales. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) was developed in 2008 for the Welsh Assembly Government by its Statistical Directorate and the Local Government Data Unit (Wales).

---

<sup>1</sup> The Welsh Government's Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, recently renamed the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

## Background

There are significant areas of deprivation in Wales. Learners from these areas face multiple barriers when they leave school and enter further education or work-based learning. These problems are not only concerned with not having enough money, but also refer to lack of resources and opportunities. Previous Estyn remit reports show clearly that there is a strong link between poverty and low educational attainment in schools. Pupils from poorer families are more likely to attain lower levels than other pupils.

### How do we identify areas of deprivation?

- 6 The WIMD states that deprivation is a wider concept than poverty. It states that poverty means not having enough money or other essentials to get by. Deprivation on the other hand refers to problems caused by a general lack of resources and opportunities and not just money. Multiple deprivation, as used in the WIMD, cannot be measured directly: it is not some special sort of deprivation. It is a mixture of separate kinds of deprivation, each of which can be measured to some extent. However, they cannot be added together to make an overall index because they may interact and have more impact if found in certain combinations.
- 7 The WIMD constructed in 2008 is made up of eight kinds of deprivation:
  - income;
  - housing;
  - employment;
  - access to services;
  - health;
  - environment;
  - education; and
  - community safety.
- 8 England and Wales have been divided into Super Output Areas (SOA). Each SOA has roughly the same population. There are three levels of SOA: Lower, Middle and Upper layers. There are 1,896 Lower Layer Super Output Areas in Wales, each with a population of around 1,500 people. Deprivation scores have been worked out for these areas, the higher the score an indicator of greater deprivation. An area is allocated a higher deprivation score than another if the proportion of people living there classed as deprived is found to be higher. It is not the area itself that is classed as deprived; the deprivation score is affected instead by the circumstances and lifestyles of the people living there. The Welsh Government points out that not everyone living in a deprived area is deprived, and not all deprived people live in deprived areas.

- 9 Workforce skills vary across Wales. More than a fifth of people in Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil and a fifth of people in Caerphilly have no qualifications. In comparison, only 8% of people in Ceredigion, The Vale of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire have no qualifications. (Welsh Assembly Government Statistical Directorate 2009 - Highest Qualification held by working age adults in Wales).
- 10 The percentage of people of working age with no qualifications across Wales in 2009 are shown below:
- over 18% of working age people with no qualifications in Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Caerphilly;
  - between 16% and 17.9% of working age people with no qualifications in Swansea, Torfaen and Neath Port Talbot;
  - between 13% and 15.9% of working age people with no qualifications in Gwynedd, Newport, Carmarthenshire and Bridgend;
  - between 11% and 12.9% of working age people with no qualifications in Pembrokeshire, Powys, Conwy, Denbighshire, Isle of Anglesey, Cardiff and Wrexham; and
  - less than 11% of working age people with no qualifications in Ceredigion, Monmouthshire, Flintshire and The Vale of Glamorgan.

(Welsh Assembly Government Statistical Directorate 2009)

- 11 In relation to education, skills and training, the Welsh Government considers the following indicators when calculating the WIMD:
- key stage 2 average points scores;
  - key stage 3 average points scores;
  - key stage 4 average points scores;
  - primary and secondary school absence rates;
  - the proportion of people aged 18 to 19 not entering higher education; and
  - the proportion of adults aged 25 to 59/65 with no qualifications.
- 12 The WIMD shows that there are 190 Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOA) in the most deprived ten per cent of areas in Wales. Cardiff (22%), Rhondda Cynon Taf (13%), Swansea (11%) and Newport (9%) contained the highest percentage of the SOAs in the most deprived ten per cent of areas in Wales in terms of education deprivation. The five most deprived LSOAs in Wales are:
- Rhyl West 2, Denbighshire;
  - Queensway 1, Wrexham;
  - Rhyl West 1, Denbighshire;
  - Butetown 2, Cardiff; and
  - Rhyl South West 2, Denbighshire.
- 13 There is often a wide variation between the highest and lowest index deprivation score within local authority areas. In Denbighshire, for example, the range is from the highest at 81.7 to the lowest at 4.0. In Monmouthshire, the range is much smaller from the highest at 32.8 to the lowest at 2.6.

- 14 The information from the WIMD is used to plan and allocate funding across Wales. This includes the Communities First Programme and the Flying Start Programme. The education domain of the WIMD is used to provide deprivation uplift for funding allocations within the National Planning and Funding System (NPFS). This uplift is designed to cover the additional costs of widening provision and delivering provision to those from educationally deprived backgrounds. The funding model applies the uplift to provision undertaken by learners residing in areas that are ranked in the top three deciles of the educational domain of the WIMD.

## Main findings

- 15 Almost all work-based learning providers and further education colleges provide programmes for learners from deprived areas to continue their education or training. Estyn inspection reports indicate clearly that, once learners start on these programmes, they have access to good or very good care, guidance and support. However, providers do not analyse their learner data well enough to know whether they attract a good enough proportion of learners from deprived areas. Providers do not analyse data on learners' completion and attainment rates well enough to demonstrate that the care, guidance and support they provide makes an impact on performance. Only a small number of providers compare the achievements of learners from deprived areas, or the achievements of learners in receipt of financial support, with the performance of other learners.
- 16 The number of full-time learners following programmes at further education colleges has increased steadily from 2004 to 2010. Over the same period, the number of learners on work-based learning programmes has fallen. However, completion and attainment rates for learners on further education programmes have improved modestly at all levels over the same period. For work-based learning programmes, success rates for all levels have improved significantly, particularly on Skill Build programmes.
- 17 It is clear from talking to learners that the financial support they receive is a major factor in helping them to complete their studies. The level of financial support is not enough to make a major difference to personal circumstances, but does give learners some independence and helps to relieve hardship. Although learners do not consider the financial benefits when considering their educational or training choices, the majority of learners interviewed feel that they would not be able to continue on their programmes without the financial help they receive.
- 18 Providers invest considerable resources to provide care, guidance and support to their learners. They have effective screening systems to identify learners who need support in order to make progress. All providers insist that they provide the same levels of care, guidance and support to all learners who need them, regardless of whether they are from deprived areas or not. However, providers do not do enough to identify the support needs of learners from deprived areas before they apply for their programmes. Providers do not do enough to help learners with support and guidance to enable them to apply for the programmes that they provide.
- 19 It is clear that the number of learners participating in further education and training after leaving school has increased and that the introduction of financial assistance has enabled more learners to continue with their education and training. It is also clear that the withdrawal of financial support for poor attendance or unsatisfactory progress motivates learners to attend regularly and to complete their work on time.



## Recommendations

Providers should:

- R1 provide support and guidance to learners from deprived areas before they apply for programmes, to make sure that they are aware of the support and financial assistance available to them and that they enrol on the right programmes;
- R2 track the performance and progress of learners from deprived areas and compare these with those of learners from other areas;
- R3 evaluate the effectiveness of support for learners from deprived areas to identify its impact on attainment;
- R4 work more closely with schools and other providers to identify learners from deprived areas and their support needs to make sure that they are aware of the personal and financial support available for them when they are considering their career options;
- R5 provide learners with easier on-line access to information on their attendance, punctuality and performance; and
- R6 make sure that the performance of learners from deprived areas is reported annually within the providers' self-assessment reports.

The Welsh Government should:

- R7 continue to support learners from deprived areas financially to enable them to complete their education or training;
- R8 investigate ways of reducing the cost of EMA scheme administration; and
- R9 develop national benchmarks and targets for improvement in the attainment of learners from deprived areas.

## How learners from deprived areas perform in Wales

### Poverty and unemployment in Wales

- 20 The Office for National Statistics (December 2010) reported a slowdown in the annual growth in Gross Value Added (GVA) per head of population in the UK. GVA is a measure of economic activity valued in basic prices, which means it includes taxes on production, but excludes taxes on products. Regional GVA estimates are at current prices, and therefore they do not allow for changes in prices over time (inflation). The regional GVA figures are available for 12 regions of the UK. The highest GVA per head in 2008 was for Inner London, with £60,686. West Wales and the Valleys had the lowest, with £12,860. The UK average GVA per head in 2008 was £20,541.
- 21 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported in 2009 that the young adult (16 to 24) unemployment rate in Wales in 2008 was 16%, with around half of all unemployed people in Wales under the age of 25. At its lowest point in 2004, the young adult unemployment rate in Wales stood at 12% compared with an all working-age rate of 4.5%. In 2008, the young adult unemployment rate was 16% compared with the all working-age rate of 6%. During that year this unemployment rate equated to about one in 10 of all young adults in Wales. The report suggests that the most significant aspect of the current recession is the high level of unemployment among young adults. It reports that, if this situation persists, there may be a risk of a new generation lacking the experience, qualifications and self-belief to provide for themselves and their families. Yet many of the parents of 2010's children will come from this very generation. (Monitoring poverty and social exclusion in Wales: Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2009.)
- 22 The Welsh Assembly Government's Child Strategy for Wales 2010 has a clear vision of "a Wales where no child or young person is disadvantaged by poverty". It highlights the fact that children and young people growing up in poverty may:
- have more health problems;
  - not do as well at school;
  - have fewer skills;
  - expect less out of life;
  - not get a job, or have a job that pays less and end up depending on benefits; and
  - have fewer opportunities and be disadvantaged all their life.
- 23 The Welsh Assembly Government's Child Strategy for Wales has 13 broad aims to achieve the vision that no child or young person is disadvantaged by poverty by 2010. Two of these aims relate to the need to:
- help young people take advantage of employment opportunities by focussing on training and making new jobs available for young people aged 18 to 25; and
  - help young people make full use of education and training by boosting education, training and skills for young people at risk of being not in education, employment or training, and encouraging the growth of community-focused schools, as they can help keep children, young people and parents involved with learning.

- 24 The latest progress against the Welsh Assembly Government's Child Poverty Strategy released in April 2010 shows that the percentage of pupils leaving full-time education with no approved qualification fell from a baseline figure of 2.2% in 2005 to 0.9% in 2009. However, the baseline figure of 16 to 18 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) of 12% from 2002-2003 remained at around the same level up to 2008. The lowest percentage was in Powys (3.0%) and the highest in Cardiff (10.6%), Newport (10.4%) and Torfaen (10.1%). (Statistics Wales, January 2010.)
- 25 Similarly, the percentage of children living in relative low income households fell slightly from 35% in the three year period from 1998-1999 to 2000-2001 to 32% in the three year period from 2005-2006 to 2007-2008. The percentage of children living in workless households increased slightly from 16.9% in 2006 to 18% in 2008. (Statistics for Wales, April 2010.)

### **How do we support learners financially in colleges and training providers?**

- 26 There are a number of funding systems available to support learners on further education and work-based learning programmes. For learners on further education programmes, these are:
- the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA);
  - the Assembly Learning Grant (ALG); and
  - the Financial Contingency Fund (FCF).
- 27 Learners on work-based learning Skill Build programmes receive the standard weekly training allowance.
- 28 The EMA was introduced as an incentive for 16-year-old learners in further education in 2004-2005. It was extended to include 17-year-old learners in 2005-2006 and to 18-year-olds in 2006-2007. Learners must be studying for at least 12 guided hours at a recognised educational institution in Wales. The principal component of the EMA is the weekly allowance of £10, £20 or £30 paid fortnightly to learners subject to satisfactory attendance. Learners may qualify for additional bonus payments of £100 if they meet agreed learning objectives. The entitlement per week is based on the household income in the tax year prior to the learner's application. The guidance is shown below for the academic year 2010-2011:
- £30 per week for household income £0-£21,885;
  - £20 per week for household income between £21,886-£26,840;
  - £10 per week for household income between £26,841-£32,400; and
  - £0 for household income above £32,400.
- 29 The Assembly Learning Grant (ALG) was introduced in 2002-2003 to encourage people aged 19 and over living in Wales to continue with their education at a provider in Wales or elsewhere in the UK. Learners can receive up to £1,500 if they are in full-time education or up to £750 if they are in part-time education. Learners must study on a course supported through DCELLS funding and which involves at least 275 taught hours in each academic year.

- 30 The grant per year is calculated on the residual income and cumulative contact hours per year as shown below, between 275 and 499 contact hours for the academic year 2010-2011:
- £750 for residual income £0 - £5,895;
  - £450 for residual income £5,896 - £11,790;
  - £300 for residual income £11,791 - £17,700; and
  - £0 for residual income at £17,701 or over.
- 31 For 500 or more contact hours, the grant increases as follows:
- £1,500 for residual income £0-£5,895;
  - £750 for residual income £5,896-£11,790;
  - £450 for residual income £11,791-£17,700; and
  - £0 for residual income at £17,701 or over.
- 32 Learners on Skill Build programmes are entitled to a weekly training allowance of £50, and training will last for at least 13 weeks. The training allowance is not linked to parental or household income. Learners will also receive help to cover some of their costs in travelling to the training centre and to work placements.

<b>How many learners are there in colleges and training providers?</b>
--

- 33 The number of full-time learners in further education institutions increased from 41,405 in 2004-2005 to 44,185 in 2009-2010, an increase of around 7%. For the same period, the number of part-time learners decreased from 186,930 to 125,725.
- 34 The number of learners following programmes at each level was as follows:
- 4,885 at pre-entry level;
  - 68,930 at entry level;
  - 204,035 at level 1;
  - 266,345 at level 2;
  - 153,215 at level 3;
  - 12,895 at level 4, 5 or HE; and
  - 51,810 not known or not required.
- 35 For work-based learning, including learners pursuing work-based learning and Pathways to Apprenticeships programmes at further education colleges, the number of learners fell from a high of 58,620 in 2004-2005 to 57,605 in 2009-2010. In 2009-2010, the numbers of learners starting on work-based learning programmes consisted of the following starts:
- 6,880 on Modern Apprenticeship;
  - 9,540 on Foundation Modern Apprenticeship;
  - 1,050 on Modern Skills Diploma;
  - 9,530 on Skill Build Youth;
  - 4,770 on Skill Build Adult;

- 80 on pre-apprenticeship learning; and
- 1,430 on other work-based learning programmes.

(Statistics for Wales, November 2010)

### How many learners receive financial help?

#### The Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

- 36 In 2006-2007, 30,370 learners claimed the EMA at all centres, including further education colleges and schools. This had increased to 36,190 by 2009-2010. There was an increase of 9% in the total number of applications from the previous year (2008-2009). The majority of claimants were in the first year of their programme (54% in 2009-2010), an increase of 10% over the previous year, and the least number in their third year (9.9% in 2009-2010). Of these learners in 2009-2010, 47% were males and 53% were female. Of the 36,190 approved applications for the EMA, 34,390 applicants (95%) received at least one payment.
- 37 The number of learners receiving the EMA at further education colleges in 2009-2010 was 21,290, around 59% of all recipients. The largest proportion of recipients at all learning centres were aged 16 (almost 46%) with fewer aged 17 (39%) and 18+ (15%).
- 38 The majority of recipients at further education colleges received the full £30 award (85%) with fewer receiving the lower awards of £20 (8%) and £10 (6%).
- 39 Bonus payments of £100 are paid to learners who are eligible for an EMA and make good progress against the objectives set out in their learning agreements in January and July of each academic year, with an additional bonus payment in September for those who have returned to learning for a second or subsequent year. These bonus payments are authorised by the learning centres and their purpose is to reward learning progression and provide additional incentives to learners to continue their education to the best of their ability. Retention bonuses were paid to 14,500 learners continuing their studies from 2008-2009, an increase of 14% compared to the previous year. In 2009-2010, learners at further education colleges received bonus payments as follows:
- September 2009 – 9,210 learners (4,310 males and 4,910 females);
  - January 2010 – 16,600 learners (7,880 males and 8,720 females); and
  - July 2010 – 14,590 learners (6,860 males and 7,720 females).
- 40 According to the learners interviewed, bonus payments are not as important to their participation in learning as the weekly allowance. However, they did agree that the bonus payments were an additional incentive to work hard and to continue with their training or education.

#### The Assembly Learning Grant (ALG)

- 41 In 2009-2010, the total paid out to learners in further education for ALGs was £7m compared to £5.8m in the previous year. The number of learners applying for the

ALG in 2009-2010 was 8,170, an increase of 22% on the number in 2008-2009, and an increase of 33% on the number in 2006-2007. Eighty per cent of applicants were successful. Eighty-five per cent of successful applications were from full-time learners. There were 560 successful applications from part-time learners.

- 42 Eighty-two per cent of successful full-time applications were from learners with a residual income of £5,895 or less, and these were awarded the full grant of £1,500.
- 43 The majority of successful applicants in 2009-2010 were aged 22-49 years (3,140) and studying full-time programmes. There were 1,220 full-time learners aged 19 years, 640 aged 20 years and 460 aged 21 years. The highest numbers of full-time learners with successful applications for the ALG were in Cardiff (670) and Rhondda Cynon Taf (620), with the lowest in Monmouthshire (80) and Anglesey (90).

### **The Financial Contingency Fund (FCF)**

- 44 There were 20,845 applications for financial assistance from the FCF from learners in further education institutions in 2009-2010, a decrease of 2% compared with the situation in 2008-2009. Of these applications, 19,390 were successful. In total, 25,405 individual awards were funded, totalling £7.0m, an 8% increase from the the previous year. Fifty-seven per cent of awards were to learners of between 16 and 18 years of age.

### **How well do learners achieve?**

- 45 Estyn inspection evidence for further education colleges for the last cycle of inspection (2004-2010) shows that the standards achieved by learners were good or very good in almost all colleges inspected. In 19 of the colleges we inspected, standards achieved by learners were awarded a grade 1 or 2. In work-based learning, standards achieved by learners over the last cycle were judged to be good or very good in almost 60% of the providers we inspected.
- 46 In work-based learning, we inspected 29 providers who delivered Skill Build programmes over the six year cycle. In 19 of these providers standards achieved by learners were judged to be good or very good, and in eight standards were judged to be satisfactory.
- 47 Analysis of data on completion and attainment for further education long courses shows an increase in completion rates for long courses from 85% to 88% between 2007-2008 and 2009-2010. For the same period, there was a corresponding increase in attainment from 75% to 89%. This led to an increase in success rates from 64% to 78% over the same period. The data for Level 1 programmes shows that completion rates improved from 85% to 89%, attainment rates from 79% to 90% and success rates from 67% to 71%. The corresponding figures for Level 2 programmes show completion rates improved from 84% to 87%, attainment rates improving from 74% to 89% and success rates improving from 63% to 78%. For Level 3 programmes, completion rates improved from 84% to 87%, attainment rates from 76% to 88% and success rates from 64% to 76%.

For work-based learning, success rates for all programmes improved from 70% in 2007-2008 to 82% in 2009-2010. Over the same period, success rates for Skill Build

programmes improved from 63% to 78%.

### **Inspection evidence about 'how well learners are cared for, guided and supported'**

- 48 Estyn inspection evidence for further education colleges shows that the quality of care, guidance and support throughout the last inspection cycle (2004-2010) was good or very good in most of the providers we inspected. Twenty of the 23 colleges we inspected were awarded a grade 1 or 2 for the standards of care, guidance and support. Similarly, in work-based learning, standards of care, guidance and support were good or very good (grade 1 or 2) in almost two-thirds of the providers we inspected.
- 49 In the Chief Inspector's Annual report for 2008-2009, Estyn reported that all colleges had good arrangements for informing learners about the range of courses available. They all took care to make sure that learners chose courses that matched their needs and abilities well. Most colleges had timely and effective methods for diagnosing and meeting the needs of learners who needed help with literacy and numeracy. Learners received regular, formal tutorial support in most of the colleges inspected.
- 50 In work-based learning, most of the providers inspected supported learners well to achieve their qualifications. They made sure that they identified and met the support needs of learners. Many providers continue to have good links with external agencies who offer additional support for learners, for example in relation to careers advice, homelessness, and drug and alcohol issues.

### **What did learners tell us?**

- 51 In further education colleges, learners we met spoke very highly of their courses and the level of support they received from their teachers, course tutors and support staff. Almost all were in receipt of the full £30 allowance per week and almost all had received one or two bonus payments.
- 52 All learners agreed that the EMA had encouraged them to attend regularly and to work hard on their courses. Many learners commented that the EMA made them more independent and encouraged them to take more responsibility for their own learning. They said that colleges were good at keeping them informed of their attendance and progress on their courses. Many colleges provided easy access to this information on their Moodle sites. However, they agreed that the EMA had not been a major factor when they were looking for a suitable college or course. They all agreed that the reputation of the provider, the right course and the qualifications available were more important.
- 53 All learners commented that the EMA was not large enough to make a real difference to their financial position. However, it gave them some independence and helped them to contribute to their college costs. Many also had part-time jobs. Many learners stated that they would like to continue their studies, even if the EMA were to be withdrawn, but stated that this would place an intolerable strain on their finances. All learners had clear career paths, with most wishing to progress to higher education

or to employment with further training. All learners agreed that they would travel some distance to college provided that they delivered the courses they required and that the teaching and training were of a high standard. Many learners, particularly in rural areas, travelled for over an hour on the bus to get to college.

- 54 Learners used the EMA wisely to cover essential personal expenses. These included food, the purchase of equipment and clothing needed for their courses, transport to and from college and contributing to college trips and educational visits.
- 55 Learners were well aware of the need to attend regularly and to make progress on their courses in order to receive the EMA. A small minority had had their payments stopped due to non-attendance. However, all agreed that the strict application of the rules by the college was appropriate and necessary.
- 56 On Skill Build programmes, the learners we met were in receipt of training allowances. They spoke very highly of the Skill Build programme and the progress they were making. Many saw this as a fresh start and an opportunity to gain qualifications and to improve their basic and essential skills. They all agreed that the training allowance had not been the main reason for their entry into work-based learning. Many of the learners had not enjoyed their time at school and saw work-based learning as an opportunity to re-start their learning. They agreed that the reputation of the provider, the right training programme and location of the provider's premises were major factors in deciding where to train. Learners liked the independence they gained through having their own bank accounts and control over their training allowance. However, the amount of money involved was not enough to make a big difference to their lives. A few of the learners interviewed saw the training allowance as a contribution to their learning and they liked the similarity between being in work-based learning and being in employment. They liked being treated as they would be in the workplace.
- 57 Most of the learners we met used the training allowance appropriately. They used it for food, the purchase of tools and equipment needed for their training, and personal protective clothing and uniform required for the workplace. Transport costs were not a major issue for the learners as they were all able to reclaim their expenses above the weekly £5 allowance. However, many learners used a substantial part of their training allowance to pay these costs initially as they were not normally reimbursed until the following week. Many learners had additional financial help from their providers when they had difficulty paying for specialist clothing or equipment, or had difficulty with transport costs or buying appropriate clothing for interviews or work placements.
- 58 Learners understood the conditions regarding training, attendance and motivation well. They agreed that strict application of the rules on attendance and punctuality were necessary and they felt that the provider applied these fairly and consistently.

#### **What did providers tell us?**

- 59 In colleges and work-based learning providers, managers knew the areas of deprivation that they serve well. They used learners' post code information to classify learners according to the 10 deciles of deprivation from the WIMD.



Managers used this information to calculate the percentage of their learners who resided in areas of deprivation. However, providers did not routinely use this information in their quality systems to analyse the performance of learners from these areas, and nor did they compare their performance with that of learners from other areas.

- 60 Managers understood that learners from deprived areas need additional support and guidance, including financial support, in order to succeed on their programmes. However, managers insisted that they provide the same level of care, guidance and support to all learners regardless of where they live. All providers stated that they had robust procedures to screen all new learners at entry to determine their literacy, numeracy and financial support needs, including transport and childcare needs where appropriate.
- 61 Providers did not routinely monitor the level or take-up of support for learners from deprived areas or compare the level of support, or its effectiveness, with support for learners from other areas. As a result, providers were unable to show that the care, guidance and support that they provided for learners from deprived areas led to improvements in their completion or attainment rates.
- 62 Managers at colleges and work-based learning providers stated that the EMA and training allowance certainly helped with attendance and punctuality. One college reported attendance levels for learners in receipt of the EMA to be over 95% in 2009-2010 when authorised absences were considered. Providers had developed robust systems to monitor and record learners' attendance. In many cases, they used electronic registers, and learners had access to their attendance records on the provider's Moodle system. In some cases, providers used a paper-based system where learners were required to 'sign in' at every session. In these cases, the time and effort required to monitor learners' attendance and to authorise payments were considerable. All providers applied appropriate expectations for all learners in receipt of financial support. Providers applied these consistently and did not authorise payments when learners failed to comply with the requirements. However, providers used their discretion well in cases where the withdrawal of financial support would have had a detrimental effect on the learner and progress on the programme. Providers worked closely with the learner and outside agencies to help them to overcome any barriers to learning in the short term and may continue to authorise payments in cases of real hardship, such as homelessness, health issues or personal difficulties.
- 63 Providers reported that one of the main challenges they faced when dealing with learners from deprived areas was the need to raise their aspirations and to make them aware of career opportunities available to them. Managers reported that many learners in deprived areas were influenced by a culture of non-participation in education and training. They often had low confidence and self-belief and lacked the desire to progress to higher levels of training after completing their compulsory education. They also stated that there was a need to provide higher levels of support to learners from deprived areas at a time when the available funding was decreasing.

## Appendix

### Case study 1

This 19-year-old learner was in care for most of her childhood, and despite difficult times left school with 10 GCSEs. The learner became independent at 16 years old, being responsible for looking after herself and running her own home. However, this was a challenging and often difficult time. Thus, it was not until two years after leaving school that she felt able to engage fully with further education, and she joined her local college in 2009 to study AS levels.

Due to the protocol that had been developed between the local County Borough Council's Looked-after Children and Care Leavers team, the college was able to target this student to ensure that financial concerns would not be a barrier to learning. Support was provided to ensure that an application for the Education Maintenance Allowance was completed in her first year, and an application for Assembly Learning Grant in her second year when she became 19. The college also arranged for the student to have a bus pass and free meals through the Financial Contingency Fund provided by the Welsh Government. The college's Designated Person for Looked-after Children and Care Leavers provided pastoral support and acted as an advocate in college, and linked in with her social worker, lecturers and personal tutor. A learning coach was also arranged for the student to provide additional academic support. Being an independent young person, the student initially found returning to full time education a challenge. However, during the first year she attended the Reaching Wider Summer University Scheme, which developed her aspiration to study criminology at university. The student has returned for her second year at college with more focus and improved attendance, and has submitted her university application for 2011 entry.

### Case study 2

This 16-year-old learner had spent the majority of his life in care. His attendance at school was poor and consequently he did not achieve well. Moreover, some time was also spent in a pupil referral unit. Due to the protocol that had been developed between the local County Borough Council's Looked-After Children and Care Leavers team, the college was able to target this learner to ensure that he had a bus pass, free meals and access to support from the Learner Support Fund for any other necessary items for college. In addition, help and support was provided with the Education Maintenance Allowance application. The college's Designated Person for Looked-after Children and Care Leavers linked in with the learner's social worker, and the learner was made aware of the support available, and that the Designated Person was his advocate at college for any issues he might have. Despite non-engagement at school, this student's attendance at college was excellent. The feedback also suggested that the Education Maintenance Allowance payments were acting as an incentive for this student, as it was the first time that he had had a bank account, and the first time he had had money that he could call his own.

### **Case study 3**

Over the past few years, the college has been assisting three siblings who claimed the Education Maintenance Allowance, Assembly Learning Grant and Financial Contingency Fund. The learners all lived with their mother, who is a single parent and speaks little English. Due to their family situation, the learners were all expected to help out financially. Although they all had part-time jobs, the financial support which they received helped lessen the burden by allowing them to work fewer hours and to concentrate on their studies whilst being able to contribute to the family. Without this financial support, it would not have been possible for the learners to attend college.

### **Case study 4**

A learner who left school at 16 with no qualifications attended a work-based learning provider on a work experience programme. He gained an interest in IT and returned to complete his NVQ Level 1 qualification in IT. He gained further work experience through his placement with a well-known IT retailer. He moved to another provider to gain his NVQ Level 2 qualifications. Financial and personal support for the learner enabled him to gain appropriate qualifications and experience in installing computer software, repairing hardware and maintaining computer networks. It gave the learner the confidence to apply for full-time employment and a career in the IT industry.

### **Case study 5**

A learner from a travelling community left formal education at the age of 10, but received home tuition on-site. At 16, he decided to return to education and enrolled on a Skill Build programme with a work-based learning provider. He made excellent progress with his literacy and numeracy and gained qualifications at entry levels 1, 2 and 3. He is now working on the NVQ Level 1 in Sport and Recreation and continuing to develop his numeracy and literacy skills. He is an excellent role model to other learners. His hard work, determination and positive attitude have impressed his teachers. He was the provider's Skill Build learner of the year.

### **Case study 6**

A mature learner who is accessing an Assembly Learning Grant grant to fund his studies has applied to Oxbridge to study next academic year. He left his secondary school after completing his GCSE exams as there was no expectation for learners to progress, the school being situated in a socially deprived area. He enlisted with the Army. Having spent many years in the Army, he decided to enrol at the college last year to get the necessary qualifications to study zoology. He obtained three A grades at AS level last year and his tutors have predicted 3 A\* grades at A2 level this year.

## Glossary

**Skill Build** This is a Welsh Assembly Government funded initiative for unemployed 16 and 17 year old school leavers. Learners are referred to a training provider by Careers Wales. Learners receive a training allowance of £50 per week.

**WIMD** The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

## The remit author and survey team

Huw Collins	HMI
Christine Hooper	HMI