

Medr statistics

Quality and Methodology: Further education, work-based learning and community learning

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Summary: Quality and production information on the production of statistics for the Further education, work-based learning and community learning report and tables.

Theme: Further education, apprenticeships, community learning

Source: Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR)

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Removal and restoration of local authority community learning statistics

A local authority provider made us aware on the 25th February 2025 of substantial errors in their data submitted to the Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR) for 2023/24, prior to the final freeze of data in December 2024.

Due to the potential scale of the issue, the publication of this report was postponed in order to remove the Local Authority Community Learning statistics, pending further investigations into the scale of the issue and any similar issues in the data submitted by other local authority providers.

Local Authority Community Learning statistics for all years before 2023/24 are likely to be overcounted. As a result, figures from 2023/24 that include Local Authority Community Learning data are not comparable to previous years.

The local authority had been submitting learning to the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) which should not have been included. The correct data for the 2023/24 academic year has been manually identified by the local authority, and we have removed the incorrect data from our statistics. The investigation revealed that these data quality issues also existed in previous years, these have not been corrected.

The effect of the change reduces the number of learning activities delivered by the local authority provider from 4,915 to 620. The provider has consistently submitted activities in the thousands since at least 2012/13. The change reduces the overall number of learners in further education, local authority community learning and work-based learning from 168,065 learners to 166,385.

We investigated whether the issue raised may affect other local authorities. The number of learning activities delivered by each provider was compared to funding levels, and local authorities with anomalous patterns were approached. No issues were found.

Local Authority Community Learning is funded by the Community Learning Grant. Historically the grant has been a relatively small source of funding. Unlike other types of learning, the LLWR data collection is not used for allocating or validating the learning delivered by this grant. As a result, there is more potential for data quality issues that would not affect further education or work-based learning.

Moving forward, with the start of the next funding period, Medr will be transitioning to using the Lifelong Learning Wales Record to report and monitor against the delivery of the Community Learning Grant. This should lead to improvements in the data quality. We will be working with providers to ensure the data is recorded correctly on LLWR by providing further guidance and support.

We intend to use data collected in winter 2025 to further assess the quality of local authority community learning data.

Context

General

This statistical release summarises data on learner numbers in publicly funded further education, work-based learning and community learning.

Prior to 2017/18 the figures were not restricted to fundable learning at those providers. From 1 August 2017, information relating to learning activities not publicly funded is no longer collected. This has affected the number of part-time learners in further education in the years since.

The release contains information on Further Education (FE) institutions (referred to as colleges), Work-based Learning (WBL) providers and local authority community learning but excluding Higher Education (HE) institutions, the Learn Welsh sector and school sixth forms.

Policy context

This release and other outputs from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) data underlying it play a role in supporting decision making processes in relation to:

- Post-16 [Planning and Funding Framework](#). Programmes rather than qualifications are at the core of the funding framework with each programme having a defined purpose and outcome against which it will be monitored.
- The draft [Medr Strategic plan 2025 to 2030](#) sets out our proposed response to the Welsh Government's [statement of strategic priorities for tertiary education and research and innovation](#), issued on 28 February 2024. It also takes account of the legislative requirements placed on us in the [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Act 2022](#), as well as other legislation that places duties on public bodies in Wales.
- The commitment to the delivery of apprenticeships is set out in the [Programme for Government](#), which contains a commitment to create 100,000 new all-age apprenticeships.

Data source

Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)

The [Lifelong Learning Wales Record](#) is the data collection system employed by the Welsh Government to enable FE, WBL and local authority community learning providers to submit on-line individualised data on learners, their learning programmes, activities and awards.

Welsh Government systems load the data on to a database to facilitate analysis. The database is then transferred to Medr for processing and analysing. Further information on LLWR including user support manuals can be found on the [Welsh Government's website](#).

The data used in these statistics is extracted from the LLWR on the Thursday of the third full week of December.

The primary purpose of the LLWR is to provide FE/WBL/local authority community learning data to facilitate the planning and funding of learning delivery. The LLWR data are also a basis for monitoring of performance and outcomes, informing strategy and development and the provision of statistics on FE/WBL/local authority community learning in Wales.

Definitions and methods

Learner numbers, learning programmes and learning activities

The Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) has datasets based on learners, their learning programmes and their constituent learning activities (as well as awards which are not included in this release).

Tables referring to unique learners and figures referring to learners in the report are based on counts of individual learners using a methodology which counts a learner present at more than one provider only once.

Tables referring to provider learners and exceptions noted in the report are based on counts of individual learners which counts a learner at each provider they have studied at in a year.

Learning programmes are a set of activities that a learner studies at a provider for a specific purpose. An example of a learning programme is “3 A levels and a Welsh Baccalaureate”. A learner will be counted for each programme they took in an academic year. This includes programmes that were started in an earlier academic year, and programmes where the learner dropped out within the first 8 weeks.

In the figures included within the report, and the accompanying spreadsheet, full-time further education programmes are only counted once per learner per provider.

Learning activities are a specific qualification or other learning aim a learner undertakes as part of a programme. A learning programme will have one or more activities.

Time period

December 1st counts are based on a snapshot of the week of 1st December during the academic year. All-year counts are based on all learners enrolled during the academic year.

Work-based Learning

Work-based learning programmes in this release now consist mainly of apprenticeships.

- Starts and leavers denote the cumulative number of new starts and leavers of learning programmes during the academic year.
- Counts of leavers exclude those who have transferred to another learning programme at the same provider. They are also restricted to those leavers who are identifiable from the standard database population used for this release. All figures (except the target starts measure) include early leavers.
- In progress figures are expressed as learning programme counts as the number of distinct learners at any time during the full year and also as learner counts on 1 December and 31 July in the academic year.

We additionally include a measure of starts specifically related to the target to create 100,000 all-age apprenticeships. This measure discounts starts that are recorded as

early leavers (less than 8 weeks) and those that are recorded as transferred to another apprenticeship.

Quarterly statistics on apprenticeship learning programmes started will continue to be updated to reflect progress towards the new target according to the pre-announced timetable.

Degree apprenticeships are not included in these statistics, with the exception of the cumulative total towards the target measure. In 2022/23, there were 305 degree apprenticeship starts that contributed to the measure. Figures for 2023/24 are not yet available.

Provision type

The provision type is determined at the learning programme level. This statistical release is not a funding report and definitions can differ from those used for funding purposes.

- For the purpose of this statistical release, **Further Education (FE)** provision is defined as that submitted to the LLWR by an FE provider excluding:
 - learning programmes categorised below as WBL; and
 - learning delivered by a Local Authority via a subcontracted arrangement with an FE provider.
- junior apprenticeship programmes (with learners additionally being recorded through school enrolment figures).

Data for all higher education (HE) learners in Further Education institutions are now recorded through HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) data rather than LLWR. Historically, franchised Higher Education has been collected through HESA (and therefore not part of this release) and from 2016/17 all new HEFCW funded learners are also recorded through HESA.

Community learning is a broad definition that can encompass, for instance, provision at FE institution outreach centres and Adult Basic Education. The report only identifies local authority community learning provision and refers to this as community learning. The StatsWales tables distinguish between local authority community learning, and all community learning.

Students on courses with Adult Learning Wales are included in the report.

WBL provision is included whether at an FE college, at a WBL subsidiary of an FE institution or at another training provider.

Where a provider is part of a WBL consortium, the assignment to 'WBL at FEIs' or to 'WBL at Other training providers' has been made according to the status of the consortium member (which may differ from the status of the lead provider of the consortium).

Local authority community learning provision is defined as that submitted to the LLWR:

- by a Local Authority directly ('maintained' or 'contracted-out' provision); or

- by an FE provider but where the learning is delivered by a Local Authority through a partnership, franchise or subcontracted arrangement ('contracted-in' provision).

The local authority community learning figures **exclude** 'assisted' provision, i.e. courses controlled and managed by another organisation but which the local authority supports either financially or by providing premises or other facilities free of charge or at subsidised rates.

WBL programmes are submitted to the LLWR by contracted WBL providers (including some FE institutions) and mainly consist of the following programmes:

- Apprenticeship (Level 3);
- Foundation Apprenticeships (Level 2);
- Higher Apprenticeship (Level 4 plus);
- Traineeships (up to and including 2021/22).

The traineeships programme ended in March 2022 and was replaced by Jobs Growth Wales+, statistics for which are reported separately in the quarterly [Jobs Growth Wales+](#) reports published by the Welsh Government. This affects the comparability of combined statistics for the work-based learning sector as a whole.

Age

Ages are as at 31 August at the start of the academic year.

Free School Meals

Learners are eligible for free school meals if their families are in receipt of certain benefits/support payments, or are on universal credit. Learners are only recorded as eligible if they have applied for free school meals to their local authority.

A learner is defined in this report as “ever eligible for Free School meals” if they were eligible for free school meals at any point during secondary school in Wales. If they were not eligible in any year of secondary school in Wales they are described as ‘never eligible for Free School meals’. Learners who could not be matched to a secondary school record in Wales are categorised as unknown.

Gender

The all persons total includes a small number of learners who do not associate themselves with a binary gender identity of Male or Female.

Subjects

Apprenticeship subject information is based on Sector Framework information, whilst that for individual learning activities and further education programmes is based on the Sector Subject Area (SSA) definition.

Rounding

Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and there may be apparent slight discrepancies between the sum of the constituent items and the total. Percentages are rounded to the nearest digit.

Percentages are also calculated using the unrounded figures; therefore, it may not be possible to recreate the percentages quoted throughout this release from the information included in the tables.

A [c] represents a number greater than 0 and less than 5, or a percentage with a denominator less than 23 or a numerator less than 5.

A [k] refers to a percentage that rounds to 0 but is not 0.

A [z] stands for “not applicable”.

Key Quality Information

Relevance

The statistics are used both within Medr, the Welsh Government and outside to monitor educational trends and as a baseline for further analysis of the underlying data. Some of the key users are:

- Officials and Board members in Medr
- Cabinet Secretaries, Ministers and officials in the Welsh Government;
- Members of the Senedd and researchers in the Senedd Cymru.
- other government departments;
- Further Education Institutions, Work-Based Learning providers and local authorities;
- Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Training in Wales;
- Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol;
- students, researchers, and academics;
- individual citizens, private companies, and the media.

These statistics are used in a variety of ways. Some examples of these are:

- general background and research;
- inclusion in reports and briefings;
- advice to Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers;
- informing and evaluating the education policy-making process in Wales.

Accuracy

Statisticians within Medr review the data and query any anomalies with the LLWR data management team and, where relevant, with learning providers before tables are published.

The LLWR data underlying this release are intended to be final, for non-funding purposes.

The annual timescale for the production of data balances timeliness against the need for accurate data quality. Final statistics on a given academic year are drawn from a database based on the LLWR as at December following the end of the academic year.

Timeliness and punctuality

We additionally publish provisional quarterly information on apprenticeship starts to provide more timely data in this area of interest.

Accessibility and clarity

This statistical release is pre-announced and then published on the [Medr.cymru](https://medr.cymru) website. It is accompanied by more detailed tables on StatsWales, a free to use service that allows visitors to view, manipulate, create and download data.

An accompanying spreadsheet adhering to accessibility guidelines provides additional data.

The report follows best practice for reporting and data visualisation to assist accessibility, including using accessible colours and providing written descriptions along with charts.

Comparability and coherence

Apprenticeship learning programmes

From September 2022, all construction apprenticeships start at level 3 instead of level 2. Of the programmes started in 2022/23, 93% were started by males. This has caused a large fall in the number of level 2 apprenticeship starts and an increase in level 3 apprenticeships in this sector compared with previous figures for males.

New work-based learning contract arrangements came into effect on 1 August 2021. This resulted in the transfer of around 4,800 existing apprentices to new providers with new programme records created on the Lifelong Learning Wales Record. New programme records resulting from a transfer are usually included in the statistics on apprenticeship starts with the exception of the target measure. For 2021/22, however, we excluded the records as so many learners were transferred that the statistics would have presented a misleading picture of apprenticeship starts in that quarter had they been left in.

Traineeships and Jobs Growth Wales+

This release included traineeships in figures for work-based learning up to and including the 2021/22 academic year. The traineeships programme ended in March 2022 and was replaced by Jobs Growth Wales+.

Statistics for Jobs Growth Wales+ are reported separately in the quarterly [Jobs Growth Wales+](#) reports published by the Welsh Government, on a financial year basis. Any 2022/23 statistics for work-based learning provision as a whole are therefore not comparable to previous years. Furthermore, there will be some impact on figures for 2021/22 as the traineeships programme ended part way through that academic year.

Since their introduction in 2011/12, traineeships accounted for between 10% and 20% of all in learning WBL programmes.

This issue will also have a smaller impact on any statistics presented for all three sectors (further education, local authority community learning and work based learning) combined, for example overall counts of unique learners.

Data for previous years

The following changes were made to the data collection for 2017/18.

Unfunded learning:

From 1 August 2017, information relating to learning activities not publicly funded is no longer collected through the LLWR; whilst the change is at individual activity level it will have an impact on the overall number of learners recorded. Because funding is recorded

at activity rather than learner level, it is difficult to give a firm assessment of impact, as the change may also affect the way providers code their data.

Learn Welsh sector:

From 1 August 2017, information relating to Learn Welsh/Welsh for Adults provision in Further Education institutions is no longer collected through the LLWR. The [National Centre for Learning Welsh](#) has been responsible for providing leadership to the Welsh for Adults programme and co-ordinating provision across Wales on behalf of Welsh Government from 2015.

These two changes mean that, particularly for part-time further education and community learning, it is not possible to draw any conclusions around trends in the number of learners compared with the years prior to 2017/18. The decrease seen may be fully accounted for by the changes to the data collection. For completeness the following charts show the time series – but indicate the break in the series and that figures for 2017/18 are not comparable with earlier years.

Resit codes

From 2017/18 there was a change to recording of GCSE resits, through separate part-time programmes alongside other programmes of learning. In 2018/19 approximately 14,600 such programmes were recorded by around 11,800 unique learners.

In-learning population

In-learning counts for all years in the current release (and in the other bulletins using LLWR data listed at the end of this release) are on an adjusted population basis.

The in-learning population is adjusted by excluding unclosed activities with an expected end date more than two years earlier than the start of the given academic year. Having excluded these activities, the population is then determined from the remaining activities by means of the actual start and end dates (in conjunction with the learning programme end date, where available separately for WBL programmes).

The adjusted population was introduced in order to produce a more accurate reflection of 'live' activity after identifying an increasing number of unclosed activities since the inception of the LLWR.

Mode of learning

Prior to 2014/15, Mode of learning was derived using guided contact hours sourced from the LLWR field LA19. Non-WBL learning programmes were classified for statistical purposes as full-time if they contained at least 450 guided contact hours per year and other non-WBL learning programmes were designated as part-time. Owing to a change in LLWR data collection, this is no longer possible on the same basis. Instead, from 2014/15 onwards, the mode is determined directly from a marker in the new Learning Programme Code LLWR field (LP74).

The LLWR field LA19 used in derivation of the former mode of learning was not collected after the end of 2013/14 and the new field LP74 was not collected before the start of 2014/15. This lack of a period of overlap means that a direct comparison cannot be

made. However, the trend from the one mode to the other appears smooth. In the context of FE and community learning data, the new mode appears to have very similar characteristics to the old.

Statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

All of our statistics are produced and published in accordance with a number of statements and protocols to enhance trustworthiness, quality and value. These are set out in Medr's [Statement of Compliance](#) with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

These official statistics demonstrate the standards expected around trustworthiness, quality and value in the following ways.

Trustworthiness

These statistics have been published according to Medr's [Statement of Compliance](#) and [pre-release access to official statistics policy](#).

Quality

The data is sourced from the Lifelong Learning Record Wales which is submitted by learning providers. This data is also used to determine funding for learning providers and is subject to audit.

When the data is submitted it must meet certain validation rules. When the statistics are being produced quality checks are undertaken by the statisticians.

Value

These statistics are produced to provide an insight in the learning being delivered in Wales. They are used for monitoring and evaluating the adult learning, further education, and work-based learning sectors.

Change in accredited statistics status

These statistics were previously published by the Welsh Government as National Statistics (now known as Accredited Official Statistics). As the statistics are now published by a new organisation, the Accredited Official Statistics status has been temporarily removed.

Medr has continued the systems and processes for producing the statistics from Welsh Government, and the statisticians producing the statistics include statisticians who produced further education, work-based learning and community learning statistics at Welsh Government.

The OSR will assess the processes in place at Medr as an official statistics producer. The OSR will assess whether the statistics meet the requirements for Accredited Official Statistics.

Further details

This release is available at: www.medr.cymru

StatsWales

Additional tables supplying greater detail, including analysis by programme and qualification type, subject, age, disability status and ethnicity, are available via the Welsh Government's online dissemination service StatsWales.

Other statistical outputs using the LLWR data underlying this release

- [‘Learner outcome measures for apprenticeships and adult community learning’](#) - Statistics on learner outcomes for apprenticeships and adult community learning.
- [‘Consistent performance measures for post-16 learning \(achievement\)’](#) – Statistics on the achievement of learners in FE institutions (derived from LLWR data) and school sixth forms (derived from school data sources)
- [‘Consistent performance measures for post-16 learning \(learner destinations\)’](#) – Statistics on the destinations of post-16 learners in the year following their post-16 learning programme.
- [Apprenticeship learning programme started.](#)
- [‘Outcomes for learners in post-16 education affected by the coronavirus \(Covid-19\) pandemic’](#) – reports on the learning outcomes for learners who were on vocational programmes, general education programmes (including A Levels), apprenticeships or community learning courses.

UK nations

Examples of similar outputs from other UK nations can be found at:

England - [Further education and skills: statistical first release - gov.uk](#)

Northern Ireland - [Further Education Enrolments - Department for Employment and Learning](#)

Scotland - [Scottish Lifelong learning Statistics: statistical first release](#)

However, owing to differences in methodology and data collection, caution should be exercised in making direct comparisons with the figures contained in this release.

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