

Learner Engagement Code

Sector briefing: school sixth forms



Introduction

Under Section 129 of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 (TERA), Medr has a statutory responsibility to publish a Learner Engagement Code about the involvement of learners in their provider's decision-making. This includes opportunities for learners to:

- participate in the making of relevant decisions by their provider;
- have their voices effectively represented in provider decision-making; and
- give their views on the education they are receiving and matters of concern or interest to them.

Medr [consulted](#) on the draft Learner Engagement Code in autumn 2025, and published [the final Code](#) in April 2026. The Code applies to all providers in the tertiary education sector in Wales: further and higher education institutions, apprenticeship providers, adult community learning providers, and **schools with sixth forms**. Under Section 101 of TERA, the governing body of a maintained school with a sixth form **must** comply with the requirements of the Code.

During our consultation and wider discussions with the tertiary sector, providers asked us to ensure that the Code is tailored to the very different types of organisation and diverse learners in different parts of the sector. We have developed this briefing as part of a suite of reference materials to contextualise the Code to each part of the tertiary sector, and to provide practical information on how we expect the Code to be implemented and evidenced. It should be read alongside the Code itself, which sets out the specific requirements that all providers must meet and the evidence they must provide to Medr to demonstrate compliance.

We will keep this briefing under review to reflect feedback from learners and providers, and to add further resources and examples as they are developed.

Who is this briefing for?

- Headteachers of schools with sixth forms, heads of sixth form and school governors
- Local authority staff responsible for supporting school improvement and school governance
- Sixth form pupils, including those in representative roles through school councils and/or associate pupil governors

Sector context: Sixth forms

The governing body of every maintained school in Wales, except maintained nursery and infant schools, is required to establish a school council. The membership of school councils spans every year group, and there is no requirement or expectation for schools to establish a separate council for sixth form pupils to meet the requirements of Medr's Learner Engagement Code. Instead, schools should consider how they can use their existing representation structures to ensure that sixth form pupils are appropriately

engaged in decision-making; and consider whether they need additional structures or processes to engage with these pupils.

The Welsh Government has published statutory [guidance](#) for governing bodies on establishing and operating school councils. Medr's Learner Engagement Code introduces an additional statutory requirement for schools to work with their sixth form pupils to develop, publish and keep under review a formal commitment to learner engagement. Medr will work with schools to help ensure that our requirements are clearly understood, and that compliance with the Code can complement and enhance what schools are already doing to engage with pupils.

Whilst there is no regulatory requirement on local authorities to comply with the Learner Engagement Code for school sixth forms, Medr will work with local authority teams to coordinate engagement and communication with schools and their governors to support and ensure schools compliance.

Requirements of the Code

Requirements for 2026 - 2027

- Schools with sixth forms **must** publish a commitment to embed and support impactful learner engagement in decision-making before the end of the academic year
- This **must** align with the principles of The Code
- Evidence required via the Annual Assurance Return (Autumn 2027)

Requirements from 2027 - 2028

- Schools with sixth forms **must** annually review the commitment
- Schools with sixth forms **must** provide evidence of impact of learner engagement
- Evidence required via the Annual Assurance Return (from Autumn 2028)

Governance

- The governing body (or equivalent) **must** confirm compliance annually
- Assurance required via the Annual Assurance Return (from Autumn 2027)

Learners

- Learners **must** be engaged in the development and review of the commitment
- The commitment **must** be promoted in accessible ways to learners

The commitment **must** include:

- How learner engagement in decision-making is embedded and supported
- How the learner representative body co-developed (reviewed) the commitment
- How learners have been engaged in development (and review)
- How the views of diverse learners are taken into account

- Which learners are covered (some schools may wish to extend their commitments beyond years 12 and 13, Medr will only monitor sixth form engagement)

Wherever a learner representative body (e.g. school council, sixth form council) exists the school **must** work in partnership with them to:

- co-produce the commitment
- annually review the commitment
- promote it in accessible ways to learners through provider and learner representative body channels

The learner representative body **must** sign the commitment to provide confirmation of the above requirements in relation to partnership working.

The learner engagement commitment

The Learner Engagement Code requires providers to work with their learners to develop and publish a commitment to embedding and supporting impactful learner engagement in decision-making in line with the principles of the Code.

The commitment is intended to be a clear and honest reflection of current learner engagement in decision-making, rather than an aspirational statement of intent, and should be used as a continuous improvement tool to recognise strengths, identify areas for development, and address gaps.

Schools **must** work with sixth form pupils and sixth form members of their school councils to develop their learner engagement commitment, monitor its impact and undertake an annual review. They may choose to work with their wider school council and Year 11 pupils who are intending to progress into the sixth form, to ensure a range of views and experiences informs the commitment.

A school may choose to develop an overall learner engagement commitment covering all year groups. While such a commitment may be whole-school in scope, Medr's monitoring of compliance with the Code will focus exclusively on sixth form learners. Evidence submitted **must** demonstrate how sixth form learners have been engaged in decision-making and how this engagement has impacted the sixth form experience and the quality of sixth form provision.

Some schools may have an existing published document, such as a charter, that sets out pupils' rights to be involved in decisions that affect them. This can be used as the school's learner engagement commitment, as long as it meets the requirements set out in the Learner Engagement Code.

Medr is not prescriptive about the structure or format of the commitment and advises that this should take the most appropriate form for each school and its pupils, this may include a more streamlined or visual demonstration of learner engagement with links to more formal written documents where necessary to meet the requirements of the Code.

Schools can engage with sixth form pupils effectively by:

- Ensuring that they have appropriate mechanisms to engage Year 12 and Year 13 pupils in decisions that specifically affect these cohorts, where the whole-school nature of the school council doesn't allow for sufficiently in-depth consideration
- Providing support and training for pupils who have representative roles, including school council members and associate pupil governors
- Including pupils in working groups or committees set up to develop policies, plan activities or deliver projects that will impact on the learning experience
- Creating opportunities for pupils to raise their own ideas for initiatives, policies or projects to explore, rather than simply consulting them on topics determined by the school's leadership
- Supporting and encouraging pupil-led committees and projects
- Ensuring that pupils can record, evaluate and apply their skills developed through representative roles in their CVs and university applications
- Considering informal as well as formal routes for engagement, such as learning walks or focus groups to explore specific issues
- Considering how sixth form pupils could support the wider operation of the school council, for example through taking the lead on council co-ordination or mentoring younger members
- Working with pupils to build their confidence in a rights-based approach to decision making, helping them understand future opportunities for democratic participation and representation (such as those available through students' unions, for pupils who progress to university)

Examples of "relevant decisions" for sixth form pupils could include:

- The school's sixth form curriculum offer and timetabling
- Sixth form pupil dress codes
- Opportunities for enrichment, extracurricular activities and social activities such as community outreach and voluntary work
- Decisions on the availability, facilities and decoration of common spaces
- School policies on the use of technology such as artificial intelligence, specialist software or smartphones
- Reviewing the effectiveness of advice and guidance for pupils' next steps, including support for university applications
- Work experience opportunities

Useful links and resources

Statutory guidance:

- [Guidance for governing bodies on the establishment and operation of school councils](#), updated 2025
- [Rights of Children and Young Persons \(Wales\) Measure](#), 2011

- [The School Councils \(Wales\) Regulations](#), 2005

Good practice guidance and information:

- [The Right Way: A Children's Human Rights Approach to Education in Wales](#), 2022
- [AMPLIFY: How to maximise young people's voices through your secondary school council](#), 2021

Medr has commissioned Children in Wales to deliver a project, working with schools and sixth form pupils to develop training materials for staff, governors and pupils to embed the Learner Engagement Code. Schools should make use of the Medr-funded resources from this project, available from September 2026, to embed and support impactful learner engagement in decision-making.

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