Medr

Y Comisiwn Addysg Drydyddol ac Ymchwil
Commission for Tertiary Education and Research

Learner Voice Survey Pilot: Technical Report Executive Summary

Produced by IFF Research

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg | This document is also available in Welsh

www.medr.cymru

Noddir gan **Lywodraeth Cymru**
Sponsored by **Welsh Government**

Contents

1 Glossary 3
2 Executive Summary.....6

1 Glossary

Term	Definition
ACL (Adult Community Learning)	Learning delivered for adults, often part-time, to support personal, community, social or employment-related development.
Apprenticeship	A paid job with training. Apprentices gain experience, learn new skills and gain a nationally recognised qualification while earning a wage. This is completed through an apprenticeship framework, which sets out the programme of learning and qualifications from level 2 up to degree level.
Base Size	The number of survey respondents included in a particular analysis or subgroup.
Census Approach	A survey approach designed to invite all eligible learners within the target population rather than selecting a sample.
Cognitive Testing	A qualitative research method in which participants complete survey questions while explaining how they interpret and answer them, helping identify issues with wording, routing or comprehension.
Confidence Interval	A measure of statistical precision showing the range within which the true population result is likely to fall.
Easy Read	An accessible format that uses simplified text and supportive imagery to help people with additional learning needs, low literacy or where English or Welsh is a second language.
FE (Further Education)	Post-compulsory education and training that takes place after secondary school and outside of higher education.
Headline Findings Report	A separate report presenting key findings from the survey, distinct from the technical report.
Live Dashboard	A dashboard updated during fieldwork that allows providers to monitor survey participation and response rates in real time.
Live-Match / Live-Matching	The process whereby learner details entered during survey completion are immediately matched to LLWR records so that demographic and course

	information can be imported automatically.
LLWR (Lifelong Learning Wales Record)	The administrative database containing learner, learning programme and learning activity records used for matching, weighting and analysis in the survey.
Main Qualification	For full-time FE learners, a learning activity identified within LLWR as a principal qualification within a learner's programme of study.
Mainstage Survey	The full national rollout of the Learner Voice Survey following the pilot phase.
Match Rate	The proportion of survey responses successfully linked to learner records in the LLWR.
Pre-Code	A fixed answer option included within a survey question, rather than a response created through later coding of open-ended answers.
Provider	An organisation delivering FE, apprenticeship or ACL provision and participating in the survey.
Response Rate	The proportion of eligible learners who complete the survey.
Retrospective Matching	A process undertaken after fieldwork that links survey responses to updated LLWR records using learner details supplied in the survey.
RIM Weighting	A method used to make survey results more representative by adjusting responses so that the survey sample matches the known characteristics of the wider population.
Safeguarding Concern	Information indicating a potential risk of harm to a learner or another person that may require escalation through established safeguarding procedures.
Significance Testing	A statistical technique used to determine whether differences between survey results are likely to reflect real differences in the population rather than occurring by chance.
Statistically Significant	Findings that are proven to not have occurred by chance as a result of significance testing. All significant results are at the 95% confidence level.
Subcontractor	An organisation delivering learning provision on behalf of a lead provider.
Survey Weight	The value assigned to a survey response during weighting to improve

	how representative the final dataset is of the target population.
Verbatim Comment	An anonymised open-text response provided by a learner in their own words.
Weighting	The statistical process of adjusting survey data so the profile of respondents better reflects the wider learner population.
Welsh Medium / Welsh Language Provision	Opportunities for learners to study, train or receive support through the medium of Welsh.

2 Executive Summary

2.1 Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research in Wales, has commissioned the Learner Voice Survey to provide a national evidence base on learners' experiences in the tertiary education sector in Wales. Ahead of the first phase of the national survey in 2027, a pilot of the survey was carried out by IFF Research in Spring 2026. The pilot sought to test the operational delivery of the survey; assess whether the survey works effectively for different learner groups and provision types; test data linkage and weighting processes; and evaluate and refine reporting outputs.

2.2 The pilot survey covered learners on further education (FE), apprenticeship, and adult community learning (ACL) provision. A separate pilot of maintained sixth forms will take place after the first phase of the national survey.

2.3 This technical report focuses on the pilot processes and learnings to inform further development and refinements to the survey ahead of the national rollout, which is referred to in this report as the "mainstage" survey. The pilot survey results are published separately in the supporting Headline Findings report.

Sampling

2.4 All learners taking FE, apprenticeship, or ACL courses with one of the eight pilot providers at the time of fieldwork (16 April to 15 May 2026) were eligible to take part in the pilot survey. The survey was disseminated as an open link by each of the eight providers. At the start of the survey, learners were asked to enter their Learner ID (LN02) so they could be live-matched to learner record data from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR). For those who matched, it was possible to draw in their course details from the LLWR, so that a specific module of course questions could be asked (for up to four courses). In addition, those who live-matched did not need to be asked several demographic questions.

2.5 The March 2026 freeze of the Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR) was used for the pilot as this was the most up-to-date extract available prior to fieldwork launching. Overall, live-match rates were high for the pilot (84%) which helped improve the survey experience for most participants.

2.6 Because the LLWR extract used for live-matching pre-dated fieldwork, changes in learner enrolment occurred between the point of sampling and fieldwork. This meant that learner records not added to the LLWR by the freeze date, and learners who enrolled after the freeze date, could not be matched live. This caused some frustration from learners who entered a valid learner ID that did not correctly match, and some confusion over eligibility. On the other hand, there were learners in the population file (which informed target response numbers) who were no longer at the provision by the time fieldwork started. This caused difficulties for providers when monitoring response rates, as the total number of learners shown from available LLWR data did not always match their records. For the mainstage survey, guidance to providers should make more explicit that live response-rate

monitoring will not fully reflect the final eligible population, and that new learners will be matched retrospectively and are still eligible. The possibility of drawing an LLWR extract closer to the start of fieldwork could also be explored, which would reduce the number of learners affected by this issue; however, there would still be some learners excluded due to the need to ensure sufficient time to process this sample and load it into the online script.

2.7 The pilot also highlighted the need for clearer arrangements for subcontracted provision. The pilot LLWR extracts only included courses where pilot providers were lead contractors; however, in practice, providers shared the survey with their full learner cohorts, including learners for whom they were delivering provision as a subcontractor, such as some apprenticeship provision delivered by FE colleges. These learners were not part of the in-scope LLWR extract and therefore could not be weighted to a population target. For the mainstage survey, lead providers and subcontractors will need clear instructions on who should distribute survey links and which links should be used, to ensure learners are contacted only once using the lead provider's survey link.

2.8 During sample processing, rules were applied to the LLWR records to decide which course or courses should be covered in the survey, up to a maximum of four per learner. This worked well for most learners; however, it was unclear how multiple, concurrent learning programmes for ACL and part-time FE learners should be prioritised due to the way data is captured in the LLWR, which led to some courses being selected at random. Future waves should explore additional variables for identifying a learner's main qualification. A small number of full-time FE learners were taking more than four courses at the same level (resulting in 4 being selected randomly). The option to increase the number of courses per learner will be reviewed ahead of mainstage, however IFF highlight that repeating question loops for more than four courses per learner is likely to increase survey fatigue and potentially survey drop-out.

Questionnaire design

2.9 The questionnaire topic areas were agreed with Medr and informed by input from stakeholders, providers and learners. The standard survey was then subject to iterative review by Medr policy colleagues before cognitive testing[1] with 44 learners across FE, apprenticeships and ACL.

2.10 The easy read version of the questionnaire was developed by Easy Read UK, a specialist organisation for production of easy read documentation, who translated the standard questionnaire into simplified wording with supporting images to improve accessibility. Due to limitations of the project timetable, cognitive testing of the easy read survey took place both before and during the pilot fieldwork period rather than completing before launch. Further cognitive testing of both the

[1] Cognitive testing is a qualitative questionnaire testing method in which participants complete survey questions while explaining how they understand the wording, response options and instructions, so researchers can identify and address potential comprehension or routing issues before launch.

standard and easy read questionnaires is required and scheduled to take place ahead of the launch of the mainstage survey.

2.11 Overall, the survey results indicate that the questionnaire worked well. Learners engaged meaningfully with the survey, with sufficient variability in responses to suggest they were providing considered answers. There were low levels of 'don't know' responses across most questions.

2.12 The key lessons for the mainstage survey are therefore focused on targeted refinement rather than substantive redesign, particularly as the survey already runs at the target length of 10 minutes. Suggested improvements include the addition of a "No improvements needed" code at the open-ended question asking what, if anything, the learner would improve about their provider (alongside the existing "don't know" pre-code). Questions on Welsh language provision require further review and testing, as they were substantially changed prior to launch without further testing and attracted higher levels of neutral, 'don't know' or 'not applicable' responses in both the standard and easy read surveys. Throughout the survey, questions need to be further assessed to ensure they are applicable to those who do not physically attend their learning at provider sites (or are yet to do so at the time of the survey). The easy read survey should be shortened and reviewed to improve suitability of images, particularly removing thumbs-up/thumbs-down graphics, which can be considered offensive in some cultures.

2.13 To reduce drop-out at the start of the survey, the landing page, which asks learners which language they wish to complete the survey in, could provide additional prompts to encourage learners to begin the survey. Further instructions are needed where learners are asked to enter their ID number, including reassurance about anonymity and clearer guidance for cases where valid learner IDs cannot be immediately verified.

Survey set-up and dissemination process

2.14 The pilot providers were supported by a briefing webinar and comprehensive suite of supporting materials, including survey links and QR codes, a survey website, email templates, posters, briefing packs, and a tutor and learner guidance video. Materials were made available in both English and Welsh and were designed to support providers in promoting the survey and maximising participation. Dedicated provider liaison contacts at IFF Research offered ongoing support throughout fieldwork, with most providers reporting timely and effective assistance. Feedback on the materials was generally positive, particularly regarding the PowerPoint briefing packs and guidance provided.

2.15 A key learning from the pilot was the importance of timely receipt of survey materials. Several providers reported receiving materials too close to the survey launch date, limiting their ability to brief staff and prepare communications. Future waves should provide materials earlier to allow adequate preparation time.

2.16 Providers used a range of dissemination methods, including email invitations and completion in a classroom setting. In-class promotion led to the best response rates and was particularly valuable for learners who benefited from additional support to understand and complete the survey. While email was the most common distribution method, a small number of providers also shared survey links through digital learning platforms such as Moodle.

2.17 QR codes were widely used, providing quick access to the survey. Providers reported that QR codes were particularly useful to display in classroom settings.

2.18 Learners reported a few issues with accessing or completing the survey. The most common challenge concerned locating and entering LN02 learner identification numbers and improved guidance and communications around this will be made available for future waves.

2.19 Accessibility was supported through Easy Read survey versions, paper questionnaires, and a variety of dissemination methods, enabling providers to reach a wide range of learner groups. A small number of providers reported that some of their learners were excluded due to language barriers. Up to three additional language versions will be made available for future waves.

2.20 A small number of safeguarding concerns were raised through open-text survey responses during pilot fieldwork. These cases were managed in accordance with established safeguarding procedures and the survey privacy notice, with concerns escalated where appropriate. To minimise the use of the survey as a route for reporting safeguarding issues in future waves, further instruction directing learners to appropriate safeguarding reporting routes outside the survey will be introduced.

2.21 Providers were given access to a live dashboard to monitor survey participation and completion rates throughout fieldwork, both overall and by subcontractor. The dashboard enabled providers to track progress throughout fieldwork and target additional communications where required.

2.22 A small number of live dashboard access issues were reported (individuals did not have required permissions to view the site) but access was granted quickly. Adopting an open-access model to allow a single dashboard link to be shared with subcontractors and relevant staff would help to streamline the process. Alternatively, improved communication is needed to ensure that all individuals who would need access are identified ahead of fieldwork launch.

2.23 Providers found the live dashboard easy to navigate and valued the ability to monitor response rates in real time. Providers suggested that adding course-level response data would be beneficial to further target reminders.

2.24 Overall, the pilot demonstrated that the survey infrastructure, support arrangements, and dissemination materials were effective and well received by providers with no significant changes to approach required.

Data processing and data quality

2.25 The pilot achieved a response rate of 16% overall (compared to a target of 50%), with considerable variation by providers. Response levels were particularly low among part-time learners and apprentices. This low response led to some tables and subgroup results being suppressed due to low base sizes. Low response also has an impact on survey weighting, leading to larger weights being required for individual responses (and therefore more data distortion). To mitigate the impact on weighting, more granular age groupings were banded into broader categories, though this limited the granularity of analysis possible. Low response rates also meant that for two FE providers, part-time learner data could not be included in weighting strategy as the base did not reach a suitable level for representation of this group.

2.26 For the mainstage survey, providers will need clearer guidance on why response rates matter for analysis and reporting, with particular emphasis on reaching learners with lower contact time through planned classroom or tutor-led activity.

2.27 Live LLWR data linking was a key aspect of survey design. As outlined in paragraph 2.4, this enabled learners to skip demographic questions and answer course-specific questions via live-matching. During data processing, retrospective matching was also used to support survey weighting processes. Live-matching to LLWR data was generally effective and retrospective matching improved the overall match rate further from 84% to 90%. However, final match rates varied substantially by provider, due to learners not providing usable learner IDs or personal details. The pilot showed that more emphasis needs to be placed on completing the learner ID and personal details fields. Expanding the range of fields for matching could also be explored in future, for example using phone number.

Reporting outputs

2.28 The pilot tested three reporting outputs: an online results dashboard, a findings slide pack and detailed data tables. Overall, provider feedback suggests that all three should be retained for the mainstage survey because they met different needs: the dashboard supported interactive exploration, the slide pack provided an accessible summary for sharing internally, and the data tables enabled more detailed analysis. The main priority is therefore not to replace any single output, but to make the package easier to access, interpret and use.

2.29 Future reporting should therefore prioritise clearer communications on how to access and use the dashboard and plain-language guidance on interpreting data tables and findings, including base sizes and significance testing.

2.30 Providers typically valued more granular data, wanting to use the data to identify course, curriculum area or department-level issues. The online results portal can be used to investigate data by a range of subgroups including campus, sub-provider, course-type and learner demographics. Further refinement of this tool should investigate whether further (or different) analysis groups would be

beneficial. Development may also consider improved print or print-to-PDF functionality.

2.31 There was also appetite from providers for receiving anonymised verbatim comments, or summaries of common open-text themes, where this can be done without compromising anonymity or safeguarding requirements.

Next steps

2.32 This report sets out a number of recommendations on provider engagement, response rates, survey design, sampling, data analysis and reporting. These will be discussed and agreed with Medr before the mainstage launch. Minor amendments to the survey script are anticipated, and all learning from the pilot will directly inform the next phase of the survey.

2.33 Outstanding risks remain, particularly around low provider engagement, low response rates and insufficient response from subgroups, in particular part-time learners. These risks will continue to be reviewed throughout preparation for the mainstage survey.

2.34 The next phase of the Learner Voice Survey rollout will survey all FE, ACL and apprenticeship learners in Wales. This fieldwork is expected to run between late January and March 2027.

2.35 Preparation is also underway to pilot the survey with maintained school sixth forms in 2027/28.

Medr

Y Comisiwn Addysg Drydyddol ac Ymchwil
Commission for Tertiary Education and Research

www.medr.cymru

2 Cwr y Ddinas
Stryd Tyndall
Caerdydd
CF10 4BZ

2 Capital Quarter
Tyndall Street
Cardiff
CF10 4BZ

Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Sponsored by
Welsh Government