

MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Consultation On Proposals to Reorganise Post-16 Education and Training in Merthyr Tydfil

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Background

Post-16 education in Merthyr Tydfil is provided at four 11-18 secondary schools and at Merthyr Tydfil College, now part of the University of Glamorgan. Some young people aged 16 to 19, presently around 0.3%, undertake work-based training whilst others, around 10%, are employed. Over 8% of young people aged 16 to 19 in Merthyr Tydfil are not in education, employment or training, compared to around 5% nationally.

The level of participation of young people in Merthyr Tydfil in post-16 education and training has been below the all-Wales figure. This could be due, in part, to limited curriculum opportunities, particularly in relation to vocational courses and work based training. The Welsh Assembly Government intends to achieve equality of opportunity and experience for all learners aged 14-19 across Wales. There is a duty on Head Teachers, Governing Bodies, Local Authorities and further education institutions to co-operate in securing a learner's minimum entitlement, so that learners are given a broad range of options to choose from, both vocational and academic. It is also intended to strengthen the notion that academic and vocational learning should have equal status.

The Welsh Assembly Government has set a target that, by 2015, 95% of young people by the age of 25 should be ready for high skilled employment and/or further or higher education.

Some 646 pupils presently attend school sixth forms in Merthyr Tydfil. In line with an overall reduction in pupil numbers, the number of pupils in sixth forms is predicted to fall to around 550 students by 2021. In the period from 2004 to 2009 the number of 14-19 year old learners attending the college has grown by 20%.

Key issues for consideration

The main purpose of this document is to aid consideration about the future of post-16 education and training in Merthyr Tydfil. The key considerations underpinning educational developments should be that:

- the learners' needs are central to the process; and
- standards should continuously be improved and raised.

“The interests of learners should override all others and inequalities in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, groups and individuals must be narrowed in the interests of all.” (*School Organisation Proposals: Welsh Assembly Government Circular No: 021/2009, paragraph 1.16*)

An Outline Business Case has been submitted to the Welsh Assembly Government seeking approval for 'in principle' funding to support proposals aimed at widening the range of learning and training options available to young people in Merthyr Tydfil and enhancing their life chances.

It is considered that the desirable transformation in learning and training can be achieved through a new and ambitious learning facility to be known as the Merthyr Learning Quarter (MLQ) located on the site of the present Merthyr Tydfil College. Plans for the MLQ are structured to maximise the advantage that can be taken of the relationship of the University of Glamorgan and University Wales, Newport and the new Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI). This would enable learners from across the Heads of the Valleys region wishing to progress to higher education to access learning pathways in Merthyr Tydfil, Ebbw Vale, Pontypridd, Newport, Cardiff and beyond.

It is envisaged that the proposed MLQ will open in 2013. Pupils presently attending Years 7 and 8 in secondary schools in the County Borough will be the first cohort to be affected directly by the proposal, which is to alter the upper age limit of secondary schools in the County Borough so that the schools cease to make sixth form provision.

The case for change is based on key investment objectives, which are to:

- raise the overall standards of success and achievement in Merthyr Tydfil;
- increase participation and staying-on rates in post-16 education and training;
- improve the breadth and depth of curriculum to make it more responsive to the needs of all learners and employers;
- increase progression to Further and Higher Education or to employment;
- provide a cost effective and efficient model for delivery; and
- respond appropriately to the Welsh Assembly Government's proposals for transforming education and training provision in Wales to make it fit for the 21st Century.

"The publication of *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales*, as one of the policy strands within the Skills that Work for Wales strategy, challenged all providers of post-compulsory education and training to set aside traditional, narrow, institutional arrangements, to plan provision collectively and direct more of the funding available to teaching and learning and learner support." (*Transformation: Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, November 2009*)

Much has already been done by schools and the college and by other learning and training providers to lift overall learner success rates, to improve engagement and to make good use of the available resources. Notwithstanding the gains, there are issues still to be addressed if continuous improvement is to be achieved. Key issues for consideration are as follows:

a) Standards of attainment

In Key Stage 1 (5 to 7-year-olds), Key Stage 2 (7 to 11-year-olds) and Key Stage 3 (11 to 14-year-olds), the attainment of pupils in Merthyr Tydfil schools in national curriculum assessments is below the average for Wales. However, in the past three years, pupil performance has been at or better than expected levels given the incidence of social disadvantage as indicated by the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

The following tables compare the percentage of pupils in Merthyr Tydfil achieving the Core Subject Indicator in National Curriculum teacher assessments in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 in the last three years with that in pupils in Wales.

Key Stage 1	2007	2008	2009
Merthyr Tydfil	77.0%	75.0%	77.3%
Wales	80.1%	80.7%	81.1%
Rank	17	21	21

Key Stage 2	2007	2008	2009
Merthyr Tydfil	69.2%	70.7%	77.3%
Wales	74.1%	75.5%	77.0%
Rank	22	21	21

Key Stage 3	2007	2008	2009
Merthyr Tydfil	48.6%	52.1%	54.8%
Wales	56.7%	59.6%	61.3%
Rank	21	20	21

The performance of Merthyr Tydfil schools at Key Stage 4 (15 to 16-year-olds) is below the all-Wales average. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE declined over the period 2006-2008, but improved in 2009. The percentage gaining the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics is also considerably below the Welsh average as is performance in the Key Stage 4 Core Subject Indicator. However, the average wider points score in Merthyr Tydfil rose by over 33 points from 2006 to 2008, compared to a rise of just less than 21 points nationally. Further, the percentage of pupils leaving school without a recognised qualification has declined sharply since 2006 at a significantly greater rate than across Wales. In Merthyr Tydfil the decline was three percentage points compared with less than one point nationally. This makes Merthyr Tydfil one of the nine highest performing authorities for this indicator.

Percentage of pupils who gained five or more GCSEs grade A*-C or vocational equivalent	2006	2007	2008	2009
Merthyr Tydfil	43.3%	40.9%	40.2%	41.2%
Wales	53.8%	54.2%	55.8%	57%
Rank	22	22	22	22

Percentage of pupils who achieved the level 2 threshold including a GCSE pass in English or Welsh first language and mathematics	2006	2007	2008	2009
Merthyr Tydfil	n/a	n/a	33.7%	34.7%
Wales	n/a	n/a	45.6%	47.2%
Rank	n/a	n/a	21	21

As in other key stages, due to the continued dedicated professionalism of school staff and the efforts of the students themselves, performance at Key Stage 5 shows improvement, but remains below the Welsh average.

Percentage of 17 year old pupils entering a volume equivalent to 2 A levels who achieved the Level 3 threshold	2008	2009
Merthyr Tydfil	90.8%	91.9%
Wales	94.2%	96%
Rank	22	22

“Many sixth forms offer their learners an education of high quality and promote students’ moral, social and cultural development well. Sixth forms are most successful in offering academic (i.e. non vocational) courses at level 3 (predominantly A level courses) and in preparing students for higher education. In effect, they cater well for those pupils who gain five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A*-C. School sixth forms do not cater as well for about half the post-16 learners in Wales, namely those who do not achieve 5 or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C. Where sixth forms offer vocational courses, the range is narrow. The courses tend to be in only a small number of vocational areas.” (*Post-16 Provision in Schools: Factors that influence the capacity of school sixth forms to meet the needs and aspirations of learners, Estyn, 2005.*)

b) The size of sixth forms

Sixth form numbers in Merthyr Tydfil are predicted to fall owing to the fall in primary school numbers already experienced, but now stabilising. Generally, the larger the sixth form or post-16 year groups, the broader the range of subject choices which can be offered. Relatively low sixth form pupil numbers may result in a disproportionate impact on the school budget with, potentially, pupils in the 11-16 age range having reduced opportunities owing to the financial burden of maintaining small sixth forms.

“The size of the sixth form is crucial in considering its efficiency and viability. The Audit Commission has historically considered that sixth forms need 150 learners to be viable and efficient Clearly, where sixth forms are small, diseconomies of scale will occur. There may also be inefficiencies. It is not unusual to see small classes in some school sixth forms, when there is a thriving class following the same course at a nearby larger sixth form or in a local FE college.” (*Post-16 Provision in Schools: Factors that influence the capacity of school sixth forms to meet the needs and aspirations of learners, Estyn, 2005.*)

“The current delivery of education and training provision is inefficient in terms of the upkeep of excess school buildings, unnecessary 16-19 duplication of provision between schools and between schools and colleges, restricted choice for many learners, too many small post-16 classes in schools and in some cases surplus places 11-16. This leads to valuable education and training funds being directed towards additional staff costs and infrastructure investment when they would be better directed at the learner and the learner experience. In addition, Estyn reports that small class sizes found in many school sixth forms lead to limited student interaction which diminishes the effectiveness of learning.” (*Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales: Delivering Skills that Work for Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, 2008*)

In 2007, Estyn inspectors reported that, in Merthyr Tydfil, just under half of AS level classes and about four-fifths of A level classes had fewer than 10 learners. The average size for school sixth forms in Merthyr Tydfil is the sixth lowest in Wales.

“If post-16 learners in an area all attended a single institution, rather than several different schools and colleges, group sizes would rise. In the largest sixth forms, for example, managers normally allow class sizes to rise to about 20 before they split a class in two.” (*Post-16 Provision in Schools: Factors that influence the capacity of school sixth forms to meet the needs and aspirations of learners, Estyn, 2005.*)

Existing and Predicted Post-16 Students at each Secondary School in Merthyr Tydfil to 2020

School	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Afon Taf High	157	127	127	149	151	142	131	146	140	118	112	107	110	114	112
Bishop Hedley High	90	103	107	112	110	108	129	127	117	108	103	99	97	109	105
Cyfarthfa High	247	235	269	256	282	280	276	268	248	257	274	271	252	247	252
Penydre High	142	132	111	129	124	106	95	91	85	86	90	82	77	80	85
Total	636	597	614	646	667	636	631	632	590	569	579	559	536	550	554

“Schools in particular see the maintenance of a sixth form as vitally important to their overall long-term future. They feel that the loss of some sixth formers will inevitably lead to a loss of staff. Schools fear that this may lead to an irreversible decline in the sixth form, which may in turn affect the 11-16 part of the school as well, as parents look to send their children to schools with more successful sixth forms. Schools consider a sixth form as important in helping to recruit better quality staff who want to teach a sixth form and who would attract parents to select the school. Many schools feel that they would not be able to maintain standards if their sixth form were to close. However, schools without sixth forms in Wales do not achieve any worse results than those with sixth forms and many achieve significantly better. In some instances, the removal of a sixth form can enable schools to direct more resources and energy towards key stages 3 and 4, especially where performance in these key stages is not as good as it should be or where there are challenging factors that affect performance. (*Collaboration between schools with sixth forms and Further Education*)

c) Curriculum provision

The Welsh Assembly Government is taking forward proposals for a local curriculum in every local authority in Wales. Under these proposals, post-16 students are entitled to access a minimum of 30 learner choices, five of which should be vocational courses. Provision for learners is required to cover five 'domains' or areas of study covering: (i) mathematics, science and technology; (ii) business administration and the law; (iii) health, public services and care; (iv) creative arts, media, culture and languages; and (v) humanities, social sciences and preparation for life/work.

Working in cooperation, the four secondary schools in Merthyr Tydfil and Merthyr Tydfil College, have agreed a local curriculum that provides post-16 learners with a choice of 33 programmes offered at Level 3 as AS/A level courses or vocational equivalent. None of the secondary schools is able to provide the full range of subjects so young people who opt to study courses not available in their own school will need to travel to another school or schools at set times each week to pursue the courses there. The schools have agreed a common timetable to facilitate this travel without detriment to students' study time. Transport is being arranged through the local authority, but will be paid for by the schools. The first students affected by the new arrangements make their subject choices in February 2010 and commence study of their options in September 2010.

The **subjects on offer through the partnership arrangements between the four secondary schools for delivering the local curriculum in Merthyr Tydfil for 2010-2011**, in each of the five domains, are as follows,:

ACADEMIC LEVEL 3 – AS/A2	VOCATIONAL – BTEC National Cert/Dip and equivalent
Mathematics, Science and Technology	
Mathematics Further Mathematics Physics Chemistry Biology Design & Technology* Computer Studies Applied Science ICT	Engineering* ICT
Business Administration and the Law	
Business Studies Law	Business and Administration

Health, Public Services and Care	
Health and Social Care PE	Sports Studies* Outdoor Education
Creative Arts, Media, Culture and Languages	
Art Music Drama English Media Welsh French Textiles	Art and Design*
Humanities, Social sciences and Preparation for Life/Work	
History Religious Education/ Religious Studies Geography Sociology Psychology Economics	

The need to address the structure and delivery of post-16 education and training was highlighted as a result of the commissioning by ELWa, now the Department for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning, of the Geographic Pathfinder Project in 2005. Options for the delivery of learning were researched and appraised against key criteria. A preferred way forward was identified to rationalise provision in Merthyr Tydfil by bringing all post-16 learning together in a proposed tertiary development.

It is intended that the proposed tertiary development will provide brand new, first-class specialist facilities for young people to study a wide range of subjects at AS/A2 and vocational provision catering for all needs, abilities and aspirations. The new campus will greatly enhance the learning process and promises to increase engagement and staying-on rates post-16. A greater number and choice of subjects and courses will be on offer than is the case presently, even allowing for the cooperative arrangements between schools. The projected MLQ curriculum offer is for 62 programmes at Level 3 as AS/A level courses or vocational equivalent and, for young people wishing to continue their studies to improve or add to their qualifications at Level 2, a further 45 programmes at Level 2, GCSE equivalents. The level 2 curriculum offer is designed to provide progression pathways into Level 3 and is predominantly applied courses, which largely replicate the Level 3 offer. Seven GCSE courses are offered. These include Welsh and French which may be offered as part of the Welsh Baccalaureate, English and mathematics that students may need to re-sit and a few other courses that students may wish to follow as being complementary to other programmes that they are following at Level 2 or Level 3.

The subjects that it is envisaged to offer through the proposed MLQ (tertiary development) in each of the five domains, are as follows:

MLQ Offer at Level 3

ACADEMIC LEVEL 3 – AS/A2	VOCATIONAL – BTEC National Cert/Dip and equivalent *A range of specialist routes / programmes are offered within this pathway	VOCATIONAL – NVQ 3 Work-based learning
Mathematics, Science and Technology		
Mathematics Further Mathematics Physics Chemistry Biology Technology Computer Studies Applied Science	Applied Science* (Forensics, Dental Technology, Medical Science) Design Technology* Engineering* Construction and the Built Environment ICT IT Practitioner*	Vehicle Maintenance and Repair Construction – carpentry, plumbing and building work Construction - plastering, painting and decorating Electrical Installation
Business Administration and the Law		
Business Studies Law	E-Business Business and Administration Law and Legal Work	Business & Administration
Health, Public Services and Care		
Health and Social Care PE Sports Science	Health and Social Care* Public Services Travel and Tourism Hospitality and Catering Sports Studies* Outdoor Education	Hair and Beauty Care Teaching Assistant Play Work Retail Customer Care Catering
Creative Arts, Media, Culture and Languages		
Art Music Drama Drama & Theatre Studies English Welsh French Textiles	Art and Design* Media Performing Arts* Production Arts/Technical Theatre* Music Technology Fashion	

Humanities, Social sciences and Preparation for Life/Work		
History Religious Education/Religious Studies Geography Sociology Psychology Economics Politics & Government	Work Skills	

MLQ Offer at Level 2

ACADEMIC LEVEL 2 - GCSE	VOCATIONAL – BTEC First Cert / Dip and equivalent	VOCATIONAL – NVQ 2
Mathematics, Science and Technology		
Mathematics Further Mathematics Statistics	Adult Numeracy Applied Science Engineering* Construction Built Environment* IT Practitioner	Engineering Vehicle Maintenance & repair Brickwork Welding Carpentry & Joinery Painting & Decorating Plastering Electrical Installation
Business, Administration and Law		
	Retail Business & Administration Law & Legal Work	Retail Customer Service Business & Administration
Health, Public Service and Care		
	Health and Social Care* Public Services Hospitality & Catering Travel & Tourism Sport/Outdoor Education*	Care Hair & Beauty Teaching Assistant Play Worker Retail Customer Services Catering
Creative Arts, media, culture and languages		
English Welsh French	Practical Media Art & Design* Performing Arts* Production Arts* Music Technology	

Humanities, social sciences and preparation for life		
Sociology Psychology	Work skills	

Where appropriate, combinations of Level 2 courses or Level 3 courses or Level 2 and Level 3 courses in combination will be completed alongside work in key skills, such as communications, working with others, problem solving and improving one's own learning. In addition, plans are being progressed to increase provision for learning through the medium of Welsh, for example through networking across local authority boundaries, and to provide a faith dimension for young people who require it, for example through links with faith schools.

The opportunity will be taken in the formative period up to the opening of the proposed MLQ to work closely with school head teachers, governors and teachers to establish best practice in catering for young people who would previously have entered sixth forms, and to build on this with the objective of providing for all learners excellent pastoral care, effective guidance and support systems inside and outside the classroom and with access to high quality teachers, learning coaches and welfare support systems. The governance and organisation of the proposed MLQ will need to reflect this important strategic objective. Due regard will also need to be given to the findings of a community impact assessment and a separate Welsh language impact assessment, being undertaken as part of the consultation process.

The incorporation of a number of academic subjects into the proposed MLQ not currently provided by Merthyr Tydfil College will provide the opportunity for some current school teachers to participate. This is highly desirable to provide established expertise, create continuity and assist the important ethos and pastoral care aspects of the learning environment. In the formative period up to the opening of the proposed MLQ, it will be a primary task of the MLQ leadership to establish the teaching organisation, including the opportunities for existing staff based on both the legal position (TUPE) and selection based on expertise, having regard also to the future needs of the on-going 11-16 schools and possibly including some opportunity for participation across both the school and the proposed MLQ.

The proposed MLQ will provide sustainable links with and into Higher Education and the world of work. Higher level programmes will be developed, building on the strengths of existing provision and identifying the kind of skills needed in the community. There will be engagement with employers in the development and delivery of learning and training, and close account will be taken of the unique environment and heritage of Merthyr Tydfil. Where appropriate, learning programmes will link to the natural environment of the valleys and the surrounding area and reflect its social and economic history. The engagement of employers in the development and delivery of learning and training programmes will be given high profile.

Summary of benefits

Key benefits of the proposed MLQ include:

- an increase in the number of young people aged 16+ continuing to study and to progress into high skilled employment and/or further or higher education;
- further improvements in the overall standard of attainment by young people, to the benefit of their life chances;
- a greater choice of subjects offered to students and more opportunities to combine academic courses with vocational courses;
- increased engagement with employers in the development and delivery of education and training;
- a reduction in the number of young people aged 16+ not in education, employment or training;
- eliminating the need for students to travel between different schools and providers in order to access their preferred subject options;
- an increase in the knowledge base and skills level of the community in general, making Merthyr Tydfil more attractive for employers to invest in and boosting economic regeneration;
- reducing inequalities in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, groups and individuals, and improving social justice;
- removing inefficiencies in the use of resources and directing more of the funding available to teaching, learning and learner support;
- new purpose-built accommodation providing state-of-the-art facilities, including the latest equipment and technology;
- extending links with associated community services and facilities, such as health care, leisure and the arts;
- all needs in terms of premises and facilities fully met, including issues relating to access by disabled young people, environmental performance and sustainability.

We have the opportunity to re-shape post-16 education and training in Merthyr Tydfil by working together to provide world-class facilities associated with a strategic approach to lifelong learning that raises the aspirations of all our young people and the community in general and which contributes significantly to the regeneration of Merthyr Tydfil as an attractive and vibrant place in which to live, work and study.

Although world class facilities will make a significant contribution to achieving our ambitions for our young people, it will also require a commitment to change and to placing the interests of the wider community before those of individual services, agencies and institutions.

“The interests of learners should override all others and inequalities in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, groups and individuals must be narrowed in the interests of all.” (*School Organisation Proposals: Welsh Assembly Government Circular No: 021/2009, paragraph 1.16*)

The next stages in the process

Following completion of the statutory consultation process, the Local Authority will consider all views expressed and decide whether to bring forward specific proposals. A report for Council will be prepared, summarising the issues raised and making such further recommendations as are appropriate.

Following statutory public consultation, and subject to the views of Council, a proposal to alter the upper age limit of secondary schools in the County Borough so that the schools cease to make sixth form provision will require the publication of a statutory proposal, which would give all interested parties a two month period to comment on, or object to, the proposal(s).

Statutory proposals to reorganise school provision come to Welsh Ministers for determination where such proposals attract objections or where the Welsh Ministers call in the proposals under paragraph 8(1) (a) of Schedule 6 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. In all cases the Welsh Ministers make the decision on the basis of advice from officials. Each case is judged on its merits.

The Welsh Ministers may:

- approve the proposals;
- approve the proposals with modification;
- reject the proposals; or
- give a conditional approval, which becomes a final decision once action to meet the condition has been taken to their satisfaction.

Views and comments

The consultation period starts on the 1st February 2010 and ends on 1st April 2010. Your views and comments on the proposal to alter the upper age limit of secondary schools in the County Borough so that the schools cease to make sixth form provision are invited. A consultation form on which to record your views is appended and should be returned to the email address given below or if you prefer to the postal address indicated **no later than 1st April 2010.**

For further information, please contact:

**The Director of Integrated Children's Services
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Ty Keir Hardie
Riverside Court
Avenue De Clichy
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 8XD**

Telephone: 01685 724614

Email: mlq@merthyr.gov.uk

MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Consultation Timetable

Consultation on Proposals To Reorganise Post-16 Education And Training In Merthyr Tydfil

1 February 2010	Commence statutory consultation on a proposal to alter the upper age limit of the four secondary schools in the County Borough so that the schools cease to make sixth form provision.
1 February 2010	Publication of consultation document and response form: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council website• Facebook• Documents distributed electronically and hard copy• Special Email address mlq@merthyr.gov.uk live
8 February – 18 March 2010	Consultation meetings.
1 st April 2010	Closing date of statutory consultation.
	The following dates/timetable are provisional and should only be used as a guide.
28 April 2010	Report to Council (and University of Glamorgan) on outcomes of statutory consultation and making such further recommendations as are appropriate.
29 April 2010	In the event that Council and the University agree to progress the proposals, statutory proposals sent to press.
6 May 2010	Subject to foregoing, commencement of statutory proposal period.
6 July 2010	Subject to foregoing, closure of statutory proposals period.
6 July-6 August 2010	Subject to foregoing and the receipt of any objections, prepare responses to objections and submit to the Welsh Assembly Government.
November - December 2010	Expected date when Welsh Ministers decide on the proposals

Please select the following link to view the consultation questionnaire:

[Consultation Questionnaire](#)