



Senedd Public Accounts Committee Consultation:

Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

26 November 2020

ColegauCymru
Uned 7 Cae Gwyrdd
Greenmeadow Springs
Tongwynlais, Caerdydd CF15 7AB
Ff: 029 2052 2500
E: helo@colegaucymru.ac.uk
W: www.colegaucymru.ac.uk

CollegesWales
Unit 7 Cae Gwyrdd
Greenmeadow Springs
Tongwynlais, Cardiff CF15 7AB
T: 029 2052 2500
E: hello@collegeswales.ac.uk
W: www.collegeswales.ac.uk

Introduction

ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Senedd Public Accounts Committee's consultation on Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

ColegauCymru is a post-compulsory education charity; we promote the public benefit of post compulsory education and learning. We also convene the further education (FE) Principals' Forum, which represents Further Education colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales. ColegauCymru also undertakes research, policy development and provides practical support to FE colleges in Wales, including on work-based learning (WBL) which is a key part of FE college activity.

1. Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications

1.1 ColegauCymru is aware of the Act and has a good grounding in its implications. We also promote the Act to our members and stakeholders.

1.2 In September 2016, ColegauCymru published a report on the practical and policy implications of the Well-being of Future Generations Act on the FE sector in Wales¹. The report was created as a guide for the FE sector on responsive methods to the requirements of the Act, with reflections on existing activity to date. It highlights that even though Further Education Institutions (FEIs) do not fall under the remit of the Act, they do work closely with a number of the public bodies upon whom the Act places a well-being duty. Subsequently, many FEIs have implemented strategies which work towards the seven well-being goals, including well-being strategies to promote healthy and active lifestyles.

1.3 From a Further Education perspective, it is unclear how well the Act has filtered down through the Welsh Government to the wider public. FEIs promote a healthy and active lifestyle within college well-being programmes with a range of enrichment and curriculum activity for learners. However more widely, the Act does not seem to be highlighted by businesses and any work they do towards the well-being goals is not emphasised.

1.4 Organisations who are not legally bound to comply with the Act but have updated their strategies to align with the well-being goals could help raise the visibility of the Act by receiving an optional badge or charter mark. This will highlight that even organisations not bound by the Act are taking guidance from it, and it is having a positive effect on their work and activity. The Act could have positive effects for many businesses and organisations, however it is almost invisible.

¹ <https://www.colleges.wales/image/publications/reports/The%20implications%20of%20the%20Well-being%20of%20Future%20Generations%20Act/Final%20Report%20CC%20160909.pdf>

1.5 Colleges are also engaged with the “Healthy colleges and universities framework” promoted by Public Health Wales. Within the framework there are six health topics that should be covered across four aspects of college and university life. These topics are attuned with the principles of the FGA and call on colleges to incorporate health and sustainability into their mission, vision and strategic plans, and lead and drive change in society by modelling, testing and transferring innovative approaches. Colleges have been influenced by the framework and the FGA and have successfully managed to incorporate the well-being duty into their curriculum. An example of this is Coleg Cambria’s “Active Cambria Strategy” which offers free fitness, wellness and health activities and advice days to everyone at Coleg Cambria.

1.6 ColegauCymru works closely with Sport Wales, a public body which falls under the Future Generations Act and supports the delivery of Welsh Government’s strategic priorities through the new Sport Wales strategy released in 2019. This helps facilitate ongoing awareness of the Act and its aims.

1.7 In January 2020, ColegauCymru launched a new Active Wellbeing Strategy for the FE sector in Wales, closely linked to the goals of the FGA and Sport Wales’ strategic aims. Active Wellbeing takes a person-centred approach for college communities with the vision of Active Colleges – Active Lives – Active Wales. The strategy aims to make the connection between activity and well-being encouraging individuals and organisations to have a better understanding of the long-term impact.

2. Resources available to public bodies to implement the Act and how effectively they have been deployed

2.1 Neither ColegauCymru nor Further Education Institutions are subject to the Act and therefore we are unable to offer much further information directly on this question.

2.2 However, ColegauCymru’s 2016 report on the FGA suggested that a more regional approach to the Public Service Boards would help resource meaningful engagement. According to the report, nearly three quarters of the colleges have had interactions with their PSB, however others have not, citing the issue of resources when attempting to engage with multiple PSBs.

3. Support provided to public bodies by the Future Generations Commissioner

3.1 Again, neither ColegauCymru nor Further Education Institutions are subject to the Act and therefore we are unable to offer much further information directly on this question.

3.2 Nevertheless, we have found the Commissioner and her staff willing to engage with ColegauCymru and the FE sector on conferences and other events.

4. The leadership role of the Welsh Government

4.1 The leadership role of the Welsh Government on the Act has been variable. In relation to one of the key reports concerning Further Education and post-compulsory education more broadly - the Hazelkorn Review – Towards 2030, “the WFG Act was conspicuous by its absence ... despite a real synergy with the main messages drawn from stakeholder consultation around “the need for a step change”, and tellingly the “overall absence of strategic capacity and joined-up thinking at and between government and institutions”.²

4.2 More recent Welsh Government policy thinking has taken greater account of the FGA. Recent reports from the Welsh Government, such as the Review of Adult Community Learning in Wales³, Post 16 Professional Learning Scoping Study (2019)⁴, and Digital 2030 (2019)⁵ link closely to key goals set out in the FGA. However, when it comes to schools the Act appears to be more integral to policy than it does at the post-16 level. For example, Education in Wales: Our national mission, Action plan 2017–21⁶ was implemented in accordance with the FGA five principles of working, and seeks to support all seven well-being goals.

4.3 In terms of compulsory education, work remains to be done to ensure that the FGA is as embedded as necessary in the Welsh Government’s Curriculum for Wales. Professor Calvin Jones’ 2019 report, ‘Education Fit for the Future in Wales’, states that without teacher reskilling and training “Wales’ schoolchildren – or at least those taught in the less effective schools – are unlikely to be well equipped for the challenges of the future economy and society”⁷ and even with the FGA providing a core framework, “the new curriculum will fail to prepare pupils for the current (Welsh) world of work, let alone a future one”. He also suggests that Welsh Government may need to ensure that the bodies it funds are clear about where they fit in with the Act, and that HE and FE institutions build a bespoke ‘continuum of learning’ across all ages, firmly based in the legal framework of the FGA Act.

4.4 Stronger leadership and a more consistent approach to the FGA is necessary and should be reflected across policy initiatives and guidance from the Welsh Government. This includes thinking more creatively about how to support the goal of “A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language”. While there are some fairly standard questions

² <https://www.colleges.wales/image/publications/reports/The%20implications%20of%20the%20Well-being%20of%20Future%20Generations%20Act/Final%20Report%20CC%20160909.pdf>, page 9

³ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/a-review-of-adult-community-learning-in-wales.pdf>

⁴ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-12/post-16-professional-learning-scoping-study-final-report.pdf>

⁵ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/digital-2030-a-strategic-framework-for-post-16-digital-learning-in-wales.pdf>

⁶ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/education-in-wales-our-national-mission.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2019-10-16-Fit-for-the-Future-Education-in-Wales-1-1.pdf> page 10

about the impact of policy initiatives on the Welsh language, these often appear to show a tick-box mentality, rather than suggesting or encouraging ways to promote Welsh language use.

5. Any other barriers to successful implementation of the Act

5.1 Under the seven well-being goals there are 46 indicators of progress, each one aligned to one or more of the goals. The indicators are set by Welsh Ministers, and since the implementation of the Act there has been very little change to the indicators.⁸⁹ Considering the huge challenges the country has faced over the last eight months due to the pandemic, it would be timely to review the current indicators and assess whether they are still the most useful ones, and likewise, whether there is any scope for reduction and simplification.

5.2 Only five of the 46 indicators are linked to education, with two of the five (Percentage of adults with qualifications at the different levels of the National Qualifications Framework, and percentage of people in education, employment or training, measured for different age groups) linked to further education.

5.3 ColegauCymru would like to see an overhaul of the indicators, with greater focus on education and skills. As previously stated, the pandemic has had a life-changing effect on learners wherever they may be in the education system, and a greater number of adults will need to upskill and retrain. Indicators may need to be amended to reflect the post-pandemic education landscape.

5.4 There are also currently no consequences for public bodies who do not align themselves with the Act. In order to give the Act more significance and for public bodies to take the goals of the Act seriously, it may be necessary to consider what consequences there are for not observing the asks within the Act. For example, in May 2019, there was an attempt to use the FGA to challenge a school closure, which was unsuccessful. The case was dismissed by High Court judge Mrs Justice Lambert who said *"I do not find it arguable that the 2015 act does more than prescribe a high-level target duty which is deliberately vague, general and aspirational"*. Following the case, members of both Plaid Cymru and the Conservative Party shared their disappointment, and suggested that the Act needed to be amended¹⁰. A barrister acting on behalf of school campaigners said of the Act *"The guidance that has been issued on it is full of fantastic-sounding phrases but in reality individuals are not going to be able to use it"*. There is a lack of awareness and understanding from the public which makes the Act almost invisible and difficult to use.

5.5 The Auditor General's report 'So, what's different?' (May 2020) highlights that short term funding is still a barrier to success as first identified by public bodies in 2017.

⁸ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/national-indicators-for-wales.pdf>, 2016 indicators

⁹ <https://gov.wales/well-being-wales-national-indicators>, 2019 indicators

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-48272470>

Legislative complexity was also noted as a barrier in 2017 and remains a practical challenge today¹¹.

5.6 The Covid19 pandemic has had a negative impact on many projects and activities. We must ensure that decisions taken to address the effects of Covid19 continue to take account of the FGA and that it is not set aside in favour of short-term thinking. Investing in education and skills at all levels will be an important aspect of dealing with the challenges facing Wales and such action is in keeping with the Act.

5.7 Barriers to measuring and understanding well-being can hinder successful implementation. New research is currently being developed by ColegauCymru around Eudemonic Wellbeing (a type of psychological wellbeing) and is linked to delivery of our Active Wellbeing project. The aim of this research is to identify new qualitative insights into measuring well-being outcomes more effectively and meaningfully, in particular an individual's understanding of the long-term benefits of activity.

6. How to ensure that the Act is implemented successfully in the future

6.1 Many of the actions to implement the act more successfully in the future require addressing the barriers identified in response to the previous question. This includes an overhaul of the indicators post-pandemic, within the next 12-18 months. ColegauCymru also suggests that more acknowledgement be given to the education and skills agenda.

6.2 A charter mark could highlight the organisations (like FEIs) who do not fall under the remit of the Act, but who are making a conscious effort to meet the well-being goals through the five ways of working.

6.3 The UK's exit from the EU could potentially present opportunities for the FGA. For example, a replacement scheme for Erasmus+, should a domestic version be necessary, could incorporate the well-being goals of the FGA. Currently learners gain valuable experience via Erasmus+ mobilities developing new skills and expanding their horizons.

6.4 The current Future Generations report is over 800 pages long, and provides an assessment of the improvements public bodies should make in relation to their well-being objectives.¹² Such an important report should be more user friendly, and 800 pages worth of information could be considered daunting for some, despite efforts to break it down into more manageable sections. Considering current circumstances, it may be an idea to produce the next report, or at least certain aspects of it, sooner, to take into account the impact of Covid19. Waiting another five years could mean missing out on celebrating achievements, or important changes in the ways of working in the public sector.

¹¹ <https://www.audit.wales/system/files/publications/Well-being-of-Future-Generations-report-eng.pdf>, page 15

¹² <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FGC-Report-English.pdf>

7. Conclusion

7.1 While the Future Generations Act may be known and understood within the public sector, and those bodies currently within its remit, there is much more that can be done to raise awareness and make its benefits known, including to the private sector and the public more broadly. A charter mark could be considered.

7.2 The Welsh Government needs to demonstrate stronger leadership and a more consistent approach to the FGA across all policy and guidance, in particular concerning the “Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language” goal.

7.3 Following the Covid19 pandemic, a review of the number and content of indicators should be undertaken, with a view to strengthening those concerning education but minimising the overall number if possible.

7.4 While encouragement to take the Act into consideration is the preferable path, the introduction of appropriate consequences for not paying due regard or failing to seriously consider the Act should be explored. (The weaknesses of the Act were demonstrated in the failure of the May 2019 legal challenge on school closure.)

7.5 The need to address the challenges Wales faces as a result of the pandemic should not be used as a reason to weaken the emphasis on future generations or the needs to live more sustainably and fairly.


Policy Officer, ColegauCymru


Director of Policy and Public Affairs, ColegauCymru