Analysis of the effects of funding cuts to part-time learners in Further Education in Wales (2014-2017)

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Marks, Aimee; Punton, Rachael; Davis, Rhian; Brodie, Ellie and Nickson, Sofi.

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government`

For further information please contact:

Dr Jo Coates

Social Research and Information

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Email: RhYF.IRP@gov.wales

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
Further Education (FE)	Further Education includes any study after secondary education that is not part of higher education (i.e. not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree).
Further Education Institutions (FEIs)	Organisations that offer FE study to learners.
Post-16	Learners who are over the age of 16
Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)	A dataset that is submitted for all learners undertaking FE, work-based learning or adult community learning which is fully or partially funded by the Welsh Government. During the time period covered by the analysis, this also included all learners in FE that are not funded by the Welsh Government such as those funded through ESF; full cost recovery, employers, courses delivered for the Prison Service and international students.
Gender	In the LLWR data and within this report, a learner's gender is that identified by the individual and not the learning provider. A learner can choose to record a different gender and providers will update their records accordingly. Therefore, gender does not also represent sex in this instance.
LGBT+	LGBT+ is an umbrella term used to represent individuals who identify as any one (or more) sexual or romantic orientations. This includes gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans individuals. The plus refers to all other minority orientations, such as (but not limited to) pansexual, intersex, asexual and queer. In the present research, the majority of sources refer primarily to LG, and rarely distinguishes other identities.

Ethnic minority communities	Ethnic minority communities is an umbrella phrase that includes people from a diverse range of ethnicities. In the present research, the majority of research could refer to any minority ethnicity (or ethnicities). Where research examines a specific ethnicity the report will talk only about that ethnicity.
Disabled people or people with impairments	According to the social model of disability, these refers to people who face barriers in society owing to a specific impairment or impairments they have. For instance, including but not limited to dyslexia, inflammatory bowel disease and generalised anxiety disorder. Where society is not accessible, each impairment can be faced with a unique set of barriers.
Learning Disabilities and Difficulties (LDD)	Learning Disabilities and Difficulties that are reported in the quantitative section are based on students' own assessment of their health and are those that impact on their ability to learn and/or use facilities of a kind generally supplied by the learning provider
Local Authority of domicile	The Local Authority of domicile is a reported field of the LLWR and is the Local Authority where the learner lives. This may not always be the same as the Local Authority of the FEIs that the learner attends
Unique learner	A learner that is identified using their unique learner identifier assigned to them by the Welsh Government. This ensures that a learner is only counted once in the data.
Adult Community Learning (ACL) Networks	An unofficial network that allows for ACL resources to be pooled and coordinating delivery in order to sustain provision at a time of reduced funding for the sector, address any issues of duplication of provision and provide clear progression routes for learners.

Estyn	The education and training inspectorate for Wales. Estyn aims to improve the quality of education and training and outcomes for all learners in Wales.

1.   Introduction

1.1   The Internal Research Programme (Knowledge and Analytical Services, Welsh Government) has been asked by the Further Education and Apprenticeships Team (Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, Welsh Government) to undertake an evaluation of the effects of reductions in funding to the further education (FE) sector on learners and the provision of FE.

1.2   Prosperity for All: The National Strategy, the Welsh Government's vision for delivering on the cross-cutting agenda of Taking Wales Forward[1]recognises that education provides opportunities to improve the life chances of low-income learners and those with additional barriers and sets out its aspiration to build ambition and encourage learning for life. The further education sector is a diverse sector delivering a broad range of qualifications and training for learners who are older than 16 (post-16) through the implementation of Qualified for Life, the Skills Implementation Plan and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. Collectively, these frameworks outline the Welsh Government's long-term vision for education of 3-19 year olds, developing a highly skilled nation and supporting young people not in education, training or employment to fulfil their potential. To accommodate this diversity, the FE sector is encouraged to collaborate with schools, local authorities, employers and Regional Skills Partnerships to deliver on the ambitions set out in Prosperity for All.

1.3   The Further and Higher Education (Governance and Information) (Wales) Act 2014 established the current status and increased the autonomy of FE colleges in Wales. The Act placed duties on the Welsh Government to ensure a proper education and facilities for learners aged 16-19 years and reasonable provision for learners aged 19 years and older. The Welsh Government has cut revenue grant funding for the sector by £22 million between 2011/12 and 2016/17, a reduction of seven percent in monetary terms and 13 percent in real terms. Although funding for full-time provision has risen by three percent in real terms, funding for part-time provision has seen a reduction of 71 percent in real terms over the same period. During this time, the Welsh Government also made significant reforms to the funding

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[1] Taking Wales Forward – Programme for Government 2016-2021

framework for post-16 education in 2014/15. As a result, funding for part-time FE was reduced by 37.5 percent in monetary terms in 2014/15 and the remaining funding was cut again by a further 50 percent in monetary terms in 2015/16 (Welsh Audit Office, 2017). FE colleges receive a fixed annual funding allocation from the Welsh Government, which they draw down according to the value of the learning provision they offer. Mergers of FE colleges were intended to ensure the financial resilience of the sector and quality of provision, however there is limited understanding of the impact of the funding reductions on learners to date.

1.4   The Wales Audit Office published a detailed review of the financial management arrangements of all fourteen FE colleges across Wales. The review examined whether the Welsh Government is effective in its oversight of the sector to ensure that despite financial constraints, colleges have sufficient financial resources to deliver on the Government's expectations. The report recommended that the Welsh Government review the impact of cuts on learners and equalities.

Aims

1.5   The central aim of this study was to understand how cuts to FE grant funding, and subsequent decisions made by colleges to implement these cuts, have impacted FE learners and equality of access to FE among diverse groups of learners.

1.6   The research objectives were as follows;

a. To identify trends in the data which indicate potential impacts of FE cuts on specific groups of post-16 learners in Wales;

b. To understand the wider rationale and approaches taken by FE institutions when implementing cuts to FE provision within Wales;

and

c. To explore the views and perceptions of learners on the scope, accessibility and quality of FE provision.

1.7   This report will start with the research methodology then the literature review. Then it will discuss the findings in relation to FE cuts, including the processes that were involved in implementing the funding cuts, the perceived effects of the cuts on FE learners across learner characteristics and changes in activity in FEIs at the time

the cuts were made. These findings will focus primarily on quantitative data, with some supplementary qualitative findings from interviews.

1.8 The original literature search and qualitative data collection was conducted in 2018, prior to the wider environmental and economic changes resulting from Covid-19. The quantitative data in this report covers academic years up until 2017/18, which means it also does not reflect changes since that period. This means both the quantitative and qualitative data will not account for any changes or impacts that might have been driven by Covid-19. This means any interaction between the FE sector cuts and Covid-19 will not be measured, however, the literature review will touch on theoretical impacts that Covid-19 will affect in this sector, and where (if any) inequalities result, from the cuts might be exaggerated by Covid-19.

2.   Methodology

Literature Review

2.1   In order to understand the impact of cuts to FE, a rapid evidence assessment of relevant literature was conducted (HM Treasury, 2020). This was the most appropriate form of review in the timescale and because of the initial scoping nature of the research.

2.2   The Library and Analytical Services in Knowledge and Analytical Services in Welsh Government conducted an initial literature search in 2018. To identify relevant literature, major databases were searched using keywords such as "Further Education", "budget", and "austerity" along with terms such as "evaluation" and "review". Filters were used to narrow results to publications written in English, relating to Wales, the UK or Europe and those published between 2011 and 2018. Full details of all data sources, key words and search filters are provided in Annex A

2.3   There were two main aims for the search:

- Understanding socio-economic benefits of FE, for which there were 29 reports returned

- Understanding the impacts of funding cuts, for which there were 27 reports returned.

2.4   Documents included academic, governmental and third sector documents, from which an initial rapid literature review was produced. These documents were not assessed for quality systematically; instead, the researcher used their own judgement on robustness and relevance of the literature. After the researcher assessed the literature this was narrowed down to a total of 27 publications that were deemed useful for inclusion. A further five publications were excluded from the literature review at this point for a variety of reasons, including the publication:

- not being relevant after a full read

- being requested but not obtainable

- being superseded by another document.

2.5   After a pause to the project, in 2020, a Knowledge and Analytical researcher re-reviewed the literature review produced in 2018. A researcher then performed a light-touch search, which used the same search terms to assess whether there were key updates in research and relevant policy changes for both of the two search aims.

2.6   In 2020, an additional search was then performed to expand focus on known societal inequalities, such as the protected characteristics (UK Government., 2010) and people from a lower socio-economic or working-class backgrounds. The second-stage search was restricted to Google Scholar, and only sought key words in the report titles and abstracts or report summaries; the time range used was 2011-2020 (see annex A for full search approach). Twenty-three further reports were identified as relevant for the present review. One additional report was found through the references of one of these reports, which was also included.

Quantitative: analytical approach

2.7   The funding cuts were implemented across the FE sector in Wales. Other nations in the UK did not have comparable education systems but were also subject to a series of cuts. This meant it was not feasible to undertake a comparative outcome evaluation as there was no appropriate comparison group. Therefore, to assess whether the funding cuts implemented across the FE sector in Wales resulted in changes for part-time students, existing data was analysed. This allowed observations to be made about changes over time and identify the specific groups that were affected by the cuts.

2.8   The analysis uses the academic years 2013/14 as a baseline (prior to the introduction of the cuts), 2014/15 and 2015/16 to reflect the years the cuts were made and 2016/17 to identify whether the effects of the cuts were felt after they were made. Further years following the FE cuts were not included as part of this analysis as the more time that passed following the years that the cuts were implemented, the higher the likelihood that yearly trends would be affected by factors unrelated to cuts to part-time FE. As it can be difficult to disentangle the factors that can influence changes to the number of students in FE, it was decided not to analyse the years 2017/18 and 2018/19.

2.9   The analysis was undertaken using Microsoft Excel to create time series line graphs from the raw data tables to represent how the numbers of students in full-time and part-time FE changed over time. The percentage change in the number of part-time learners between 2013/14 and 2016/17 was also calculated for individuals with particular protected characteristics. This provided an indication of the percentage that the number of learners in a particular group had increased or decreased by in 2016/17 in relation to the number of part-time learners in that group in 2013/14, prior to the funding cuts. This helped to determine which groups may have been more greatly affected by funding cuts to part-time FE. The time series graphs were quality assured by comparing them to the tables used to create them, this assessed whether any errors were made in selecting the correct data to make the graphs. The percentage change of part-time students between 2013/14 and 2016/17 was calculated by working out whether the number of part-time learners with a particular protected characteristic in 2016/17 increased or decreased by a percentage of the original number in 2013/14. A code was applied to the data on the number of FE students to calculate this which was spot-checked for errors. The bottom row of the tables showing the number of part-time learners by protected characteristic and percentage change between 2013/14 and 2016/17 included the total number part-time learners in each year and the total percentage change of all part-time learners. This bottom row should be the same for each table (tables 5.1-5.4) so any figures that differed would also draw attention to any mistakes that occurred in coding the percentage change. The findings and conclusions are reported in light of both the changes to the number of part-time and full-time learners in FE and percentage change of part-time learners between 2013/14 and 2016/17.

2.10   The analysis of existing data drew on secondary data available through the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)[2]. The LLWR is a record of data that must be submitted for all learners undertaking FE, work-based learning or adult community learning which is fully or partially funded by the Welsh Government and, for the data analysed in the time period relevant for this research, all learners in FE that are not

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[2] The Lifelong Learning Wales Record

funded by the Welsh Government.[3] The LLWR contains Learner, Learning Programme, Learning Activity and Award datasets. The learning provider with a contract or funding agreement with Welsh Government are responsible for returning the full LLWR dataset by submitting XML files to the Welsh Gov via the LLWR Data Collection Application. The LLWR is a continuous data collection system so providers can upload data as frequently as they wish. The Welsh Government take monthly freezes of the 'live' database for funding, monitoring, performance and other analytical purposes. Prior to 2016/17, Knowledge and Analytical Services in Welsh Government used the month 7 freeze (February) for the annual statistical publications. From 2016/17 onwards, the month 5 freeze (December) is the data freeze used in the annual publication of National Statistics relating to the FE, work-based learning and adult community learning sectors[4].

2.11   Initially, the aim was to use the Learner Programme data within the LLWR that was published and available through Welsh Government's StatsWales website to determine the number of learners in full-time and part-time education. However, the data available on the StatsWales website[5] did not provide all of the data required to indicate potential effects of FE cuts on specific groups of post-16 learners in Wales. Learner datasets providing data broken down by mode of study (part-time or full-time) and split by age, ethnicity, gender, disability status and Local Authority (LA) of domicile for FE only were reported as part of the LLWR but were not published on the StatsWales website and were provided to the researchers by the post-16 education statistics team, in KAS, Welsh Government. This was descriptive statistics only, crosstabs were produced in SAS using the final LLWR data freeze used for National Statistics relating to each academic year. These datasets include learners from FEIs in FE only and excluded learners in adult community learning, work-based learning and higher education (HE) provision. The underlying datasets will have gone through rigorous quality assurance as part of the process of

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[3] These included those funded through ESF; full cost recovery; employers; courses delivered for the Prison Service and international students – Lifelong Learning Wales Record user support manual for learning providers 2014/15 page 27
[4] Further education, work-based learning and adult learning statistical releases
[5] Lifelong Learning Wales Record

producing the National Statistics. All ad-hoc analysis provided by the team is independently checked by a second team member.

Unique Learners

2.12   In the unpublished learner LLWR datasets provided, students were counted on a 'unique learner' basis by using their unique learner identifier (ULI) from the underlying data. A ULI is assigned to learners by Welsh Government in order to allow the tracking of learners over time. This ensured that each learner was only counted once avoiding any element of multiple counting if the student was enrolled in two or more learning providers in one academic year. Full-time and part-time learners were determined using the learning programme code, in some instances, learners undertake multiple learning programmes within the same academic year. If this is the case then assigning learning programme codes prioritises work-based learning courses first followed by full-time and then part-time learning programmes. For instance, if one learner had undertaken one full-time FE course and two part-time FE course then they would be considered a full-time learner in FE provision for the purposes of reporting. In line with disclosure controls, all figures reported as part of the secondary quantitative data analysis were rounded to the nearest multiple of five.

Definitions and exclusions to categories including any changes

2.13   Prior to 2014/15 full-time learners were defined as those with at least 450 funded contact hours across all learning programmes in the academic year, therefore it is important to note that full-time and part-time learners were determined differently in the baseline year (2013/14) compared to the following years. A learner's age is calculated at the beginning of the academic year (reported age on 31st August) and remains the same throughout the academic year. A learner's gender is that identified by the individual and not the learning provider. A learner can chose to record a different gender and providers will update their records accordingly. Therefore, gender does not also represent sex. Learning disabilities and difficulties (LDD) types only relate to learners with an LDD that impacts on their ability to learn and/or use facilities of a kind generally supplied by the learning provider, and were

based on the learner's own assessment of their health[6]. The LA of an individual learner refers to the LA in which they live (Local Authority of domicile) rather than where they study; this is due to issues surrounding FEIs potentially offering FE across multiple locations as well as the potential to miss provision such as distance learning.

Data from Further Education Institutions

2.14   Trends relating to the number of full time equivalent staff in FEIs and the number of individuals in FEIs by qualification and sector are also presented within this report. This data on staff numbers were collected from the institutions by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) via the Finance Record whilst the number of learners in FEIs by qualification and sector was obtained from the published LLWR data. Both datasets were published on the StatsWales website. This data relates to the number in FE institutions, which does not necessarily mean FE provision as FEIs also house HE provision and work-based learning. However, the majority of learners in FEIs are receiving FE. These datasets also did not provide a breakdown of mode of study (part-time or full-time). Initially, there was the intention to compare full-time equivalent (FTE) staff numbers in FEIs with full-time staff numbers, however full-time staff data is not collected from FEIs by Welsh Government. As a result, only data for FTE staff has been analysed to try to assess the changes to staff numbers at the time of the funding cuts.

Interviews: data collection, sampling and qualitative approach

2.15   Supplementary interviews and focus groups were undertaken with a range of FE staff and students in Wales. These took place in colleges across Wales, with staff and students interviewed in six FEIs in west Wales, north Wales and south east Wales. The purpose of these was to develop an understanding of the factors influencing the decisions colleges made to apply the cuts, the process by which colleges implemented the cuts and the extent to which colleges were able to consider and prioritise local need. They assessed this through gathering narratives

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[6] See page 75 – fields 21 – 36 are the disability and difficulty types included within LDD status of the LLWR user support manual

from curriculum managers, directors and principals in the colleges about the processes individual colleges undertook when implementing cuts.

2.16   The format of the data collection differed between FE institution staff and part-time learners. Semi-structured interviews with staff were conducted over the phone with one or two key staff members from a FE institution by one researcher from KAS (these consisted of either a manager of student support services, director of finance or a principal). The interviews lasted between thirty minutes to an hour. Data were collected with learners in the form of face-to-face semi-structured focus groups at their FE institution. The focus groups had between 8 to 12 participants from diverse backgrounds (see sampling section for more information). Focus groups were facilitated by two researchers from KAS. The length of focus groups ranged from 45 minutes to 120 minutes. Interviews were more appropriate with staff given that some of the content was sensitive in nature and one-to-one encouraged disclosure. Focus groups occurred with students in part to encourage interactions between students, and in part as with younger people, the presence of others can help to alleviate nerves or discomfort.

2.17   Sampling and recruitment of participants differed depending on if the participant were a learner or a member of staff. Sites were sampled on the basis of:

- the blend of rural and urban populations being served by college adult learning provision;

- the proportion of adult learning provision delivered in the community to ensure we had a choice of locations for focus groups that enabled access for particular groups in communities that didn't have easy access to transport and/or resources to travel, including disabled participants, working parents, the retired, unemployed participants (e.g. the focus group in Wrexham was held in a local library where the college provided language classes and ICT access courses);

- diversity with regard to Welsh language use and learner characteristics (ethnic group, age, gender, disability/learning needs).

2.18   Staff were recruited through an email that detailed the rationale for the research, the interviewer details and available interview day and time slots. Participants were offered the choice of having their interview in the medium of Welsh or English, all the interviews and focus groups were undertaken in English, except one focus group which was conducted in Welsh. Learners were recruited through workshops that KAS organised in collaboration with staff at the FE institutions. Staff were approached for their support in organising the focus groups as part of the email sent to recruit them for their interview. Focus groups were arranged with the support of Student Support Services. Focus groups generally took place following a course/adult learning session that had been delivered, and those students were provided with information about the study, consent forms and asked if they would volunteer their time.

2.19   Separate topic guides were developed by KAS researchers, with input from Welsh Government policy officials for the interviews and focus groups. They remained constant over the course of the interviewing (see Annex B and C).

2.20   Each interview/focus group were audio-recorded, and then fully transcribed. Two researchers independently reviewed the transcripts. These were then coded in MAXQDA using the broad topics identified through the quantitative analysis as thematic areas. Analysis was conducted iteratively, moving back and forth from the quantitative analysis to interview evidence to develop a full picture of each theme. Where the views expressed in interviews did overlapped with findings from the analysis, this this was drawn out in the analysis to highlight areas of consensus, although it is worth noting as discussed below that the limited scope of the interviews meant that this was not possible in every area. Where the views did not overlap with the quantitative analysis, these themes were presented separately. Any gaps in the evidence base were noted and indications of what further research could be undertaken to fill any gaps were given.

2.21   Initially, there was a target of six focus groups and 12 interviews for this research. However, a recognised limitation is that a smaller number of interviews and focus groups were finally undertaken than originally planned. The final number of conducted interviews was seven and final number of undertaken focus groups

three. Therefore, the analysis can give an indication of the approaches undertaken but is not able to draw out conclusions on any understanding of the prevalence of these approaches across Wales.

Ethical and logistical considerations

2.22   At the planning stage of the research, thorough consideration was given to any ethical issues presented by the topic or the methodology to participants. These were in line with the GSR ethical principles.

2.23   Given the challenges around recruitment for research with part-time students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds, it was important to reduce the burden on them as much as possible. To mitigate the impact of burden on the students, the focus groups were held at the students FE institutions and provided an incentive in the form of a £20 "LovetoShop" voucher for students who attended. In West Wales there were not enough students in a regional concentration to convene a focus group with sufficient numbers following the cuts. The plan was to arrange interviews instead of focus groups to ensure coverage/inclusion of students from that area, however, the research was paused at this time, so views from these learners are not included in the research.

3. Literature review

Background

3.1 This section of the report aims to summarise key literature on the FE sector and the impacts funding reduction has had. In order to achieve this, it shall focus on: the value of FE; observed effects of funding reductions including impacts on different groups; and methods of mitigating the effects of funding reductions.

Further education

3.2 Although historically the remit of FE stretched to a role in improving social inclusion and independent living skills, as well as gaining qualifications, over recent years it has narrowed towards a focus on improving employability and skills (McMurray, 2017). In Prosperity for All*,* this is said to provide opportunities for individuals to build and fulfil their ambitions as well as linking the contribution of these individuals to the needs of people and businesses (Welsh Government, 2017).

3.3 Despite a mention in Prosperity for All, there is no unified strategy for FE in Wales, and because priorities change year on year with Minister's remit letters (Auditor General for Wales, 2017), it may be more useful to conceive FE in terms of what it delivers as opposed to its purpose. In terms of driving employability and skills, FE can be thought of as delivering:

- options for learning

- a gateway to accessing higher education

- preparation for learners to achieve qualifications

- assistance for those where English is not their first language (Learning & Work Institute, 2017).

3.4 To deliver this, FE colleges provide a vocational curriculum alongside the academic (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012). This vocational offer fulfils a need for job-related training in local communities, which universities and other institutions often do not, thereby fulfilling the Prosperity for All commitment to link individual skills to the needs of businesses (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012; Welsh Government, 2017). Some consider

this to mean that FE colleges are uniquely placed to serve the economic development of both the learner and the community in which they reside (ibid).

3.5   Despite some evidence of unique value, especially to the community, FE colleges are not always seen as equivalent in status to sixth form colleges (Department for Education, 2017). In part this may be due to the 'high social premium which parents and young people place on the A-level to university pathway' (Department for Education, 2017, p. 2). However, even when they are not viewed as equal in this respect, FE colleges still offer opportunities for students excluded from higher education and are crucial in re-tooling displaced workers (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012).

Further education in Wales

3.6   As of the 2016-2017 financial year, there were 14 FE institutes in Wales (Champion, 2018), and as of the 2016/17 academic year, FEIs were providing 149,000 FE learning programmes, the majority of which were part-time (Statistics for Wales, 2018). Of the learners, 29.1 percent were aged under 19, and 47.6 percent under 25, demonstrating a young age profile (ibid), and that two-thirds of 16-19 year old learners in Wales were attending FE colleges (Welsh Government, 2016).

3.7   FE funding is not a protected area of government expenditure in Wales, therefore falling allocations result in funding reductions (Welsh Government, 2016). Between 2013 and 2017, Welsh Government has reduced funding to the FE sector by seven percent in cash terms, which equates to 13 percent in real terms (Auditor General for Wales, 2017). As will be discussed later in this report, colleges have turned to alternative funding sources in some instances, however over the past five years income from tuition fees, other grants and training contracts with public sector bodies have also fallen (ibid). In all, alternate sources of income have been unable to replace government funds, and since 2011/12 college income has fallen by 11 percent (ibid).

3.8   Funding reductions have been especially severe on part-time provision, which received a 71 percent reduction, and less so on the full-time, which increased funding over this period by three percent (ibid). The other area that has been largely

impacted by cuts is for learners over 19, due to government priorities protecting allocations for 16-18 year olds (Champion, 2018).

3.9   Rising pension and national insurance contributions as well as contractual entitlements to staff have meant that the FE sector has inevitably passed some of the impact of funding reductions on to learners (Auditor General for Wales, 2017). Given that we are aware that most learners study part time and are over 19, and that those are two groups of provisions which received the most severe funding reductions, it stands to reason that a majority of FE college students in Wales could have been impacted by the reductions in FE funding implemented since 2011/12. In part, this is why the Auditor General for Wales recommended the current report, so that Welsh Government can understand the impact of funding reductions on learners and equality, which can be used to inform future decisions on policy and funding (Auditor General for Wales, 2017).

The value of further education

3.10   In order to understand the impacts these reductions may have had, context will be provided in terms of the value FE provides to learners and to society. This will also take into account factors beyond qualifications gained, as evidence suggests that understanding FE requires assessing whether it helps citizens achieve their desired outcomes (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012). Given that the majority of learners (including both those who achieve qualifications and do not) state their primary driver for engaging in FE to be economic, for example improving job prospects, promotion opportunities or job security (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2013), this domain shall be the first to be considered.

Economic outcomes

3.11   Given that students cite their main motivations as economic, it is concerning that there should be such scant evidence exploring economic outcomes for FE students in Wales. This may be in part due to reforms focussing funding on outcomes (Smith & O'Leary, 2013), meaning that the priority has become measuring objective qualifications as opposed to the subjective experience of students or the difficult-to-quantify economic impacts. Because of this the present understanding of FE, which cites that quality and outcome indicators in Welsh FE colleges have been

maintained over the period of funding reductions, may not be telling the whole story (Auditor General for Wales, 2017).

3.12   Because of the academic context of education, researchers have noticed a preoccupation with measuring knowledge exchange through qualifications gained as opposed to the economic contribution of skills gained from FE (Hermannsson, et al., 2017). Despite the issues with the economic evidence, there is still a small body of literature that suggests positive economic outcomes from FE although not specifically in the Welsh context.

3.13   In England, achieving FE was found to demonstrate statistically significant earning premiums when comparing people who enrolled on courses but did not complete them, to those who did complete (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2014). One might expect the difference between those who completed and those who did not to decrease over time, given that non-learners may improve their skills through learning by doing, and learned skills might deteriorate; however, evidence suggests a seven-year post-qualification period of impact (ibid).

3.14   This increase in earning premiums is not experienced by all: despite overall premiums being higher for the group who completed FE, closer analysis demonstrated that actually only 22 percent saw a wage increase (the number being marginally higher for men than women), with 11 percent actually showing a decrease (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2013). This decrease was supposed by the authors to be in part due to some taking up full-time study, however, confirming this was out of the scope of the study (ibid). Despite this supposition, there is some evidence that there are indeed no positive outcomes for all who partake in FE, with Wolf (2011, cited in (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012)) stating that in England between a quarter and a third of 16-19 year olds are on FE courses that are not expected to lead to higher education and have 'little to no labour market value'[7].

3.15   For the overall level of earning premiums, there appears to be variance by gender, with women experiencing smaller premiums than men (ibid), which is thought to be

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[7] However, there was no definition of a "good job" provided in this paper.

in part due to women participating in subjects or frameworks that are less lucrative (National Union of Students, 2012). Men also express perceptions of better job security; increased responsibilities at work and expectations of improved future pay at a higher rate than women, although regardless of gender these are higher for those who achieve FE than non-achievers (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2013).

3.16   One might see this as strong evidence for outcomes of FE given the use of a counterfactual condition. However, there are issues with attribution also explored in literature. For one, there is a question of whether the economic impacts achievers experience are a result of their completion of FE, or alternatively, whether their achievement simply signals a higher level of innate ability (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2014). For the learner, this question is irrelevant as they reap the improved outcomes even if FE is simply a mechanism of pairing employers with suitable employees (ibid). However, the mechanism through which the economic benefits of FE are realised and measured remains unclear.

3.17   A second way in which the economic outcomes of FE are less than straightforward is when looking beyond the individual, focusing on the wider economic outcomes for society. For instance, increased productivity, productivity spill over and increased profits for employers are not captured by asking FE completers about changes to their wages (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2014). This challenges the assumption when calculating these wider economic outcomes that economic impacts on the employer equal those on the individual, as estimates that only focus on the individual are too low (ibid). In Scotland, researchers looked at the macroeconomic impact of one FE cohort, and somewhat confirmed this prediction by using economic modelling in order to demonstrate impacts on endogenous investment, employment and competitiveness (Hermannsson, et al., 2017). The authors here suggest economic measures of FE impact, which ignore wider economic contributions of skills, are probably underestimating the reach FE impact has on society on a collective level.

Wider perceived outcomes

3.18   Although the majority of those asked about their motivations for partaking in FE cited economic reasons (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2013), other positive outcomes of FE have also been observed both to individuals and to society as a whole.

The role of FE in fostering improvements in wellbeing, physical and mental health

3.19   Looking first to wellbeing impacts on individuals, it appears that completing FE leads to self-reported gains in confidence and self-esteem, and also higher levels of wellbeing, life satisfaction and feelings of worthwhileness (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2013; Gloster, et al., 2015). Although gold standard measures of these domains are self-reported given their subjective nature, assessing gains through self-report lacks a baseline and relies on individuals accurately recalling and assessing their previous levels as well as present levels. This means that the claim of FE leading to wellbeing gains must be caveated, given that we cannot be sure any actual gains have occurred. Similarly, the data compares completers to non-completers in these domains, however, it is possible that non-completion reduces levels of wellbeing as opposed to completion improving them, meaning that again we cannot be sure of the causality. In all, the effects of FE on the domain of wellbeing do vary by measure, level of learning and learner characteristics; however, they appear robust on the whole (ibid). There is also some evidence that continued engagement in learning (in some areas FE specifically) can also cause improvements in physical and mental health, thereby benefiting society in terms of health care cost savings, and even reduced levels of crime (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012; McMurray, 2017).

The role of FE for in developing self-efficacy and agency for different groups

3.20   Beyond wellbeing, a social impact of FE might be increased perceived self-efficacy in developing social networks, and helping people feel included (Learning & Work Institute, 2017). Looking to a specific population, people with learning disabilities have noted a similar effect of FE, seeing it as a method of developing life skills, improving independent travel, a way to meet new friends and to overall increase their social inclusion (McMurray, 2017). Effects also stretch to the families of FE

learners, for example, literature notes that those who complete FE feel more able to help their children with schoolwork than those who do not complete (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2013). There is even some evidence of an indirect effect on improving early years development of children (Gloster, et al., 2015). Some qualitative research into women's experiences and perceptions around adult education in England revealed that for individuals who have barriers that result from their intersectional identities (or multiple challenges in life) such as dyslexia, and low family income perceive access to FE as transformational for their sense of agency and key to enabling them to change their lives. Specifically, participants feel less restricted by their circumstances or identities than before their engagement in FE (Duckworth & Smith, 2018). These positive effects are demonstrated by individual studies rather than representing a consensus among the literature, which show that FE improves self-efficacy for a number of groups. A systematic literature review would be required to draw any conclusions about a consensus in the literature.

Protected Characteristics wider outcomes and barriers to FE

3.21   Official statistics and monitoring information are often limited in the information they can detail on minority groups. The following section draws on a combination of descriptive figures that might highlight differences in such groups, and qualitative research to help offer depth and potential explanations to the descriptive figures based on lived experiences of those groups.

The role of FE for people from lower socio-economic class

3.22   Despite positive social impact on the immediate circle of relatives, FE has been proposed at a societal level to maintain inequalities as opposed to reduce them (Bukodi, 2016). It has been found to demonstrate the greatest impact on those who are from managerial or professional families yet do not currently work at that level, as they have a higher probability of returning to their class of origin than others moving into that class as a result of FE (ibid). However, Duckworth and Smith, (2018) found a theme that came out of interviews with female students in FE in England was "motherhood" as a motivator for engaging in FE, which participants perceived as opportunities to break their children out of the poverty cycle they had previously felt trapped in themselves. Research on lived experiences or perceptions

changes do not necessarily translate into robust outcomes of FE without comparator groups.

3.23   For 16 – 18 year olds in 2018/19, nearly double the number of students who had received free school meals when they were 15 attended a college compared to the number who stayed in school and academy sixth-forms (Association of Colleges, 2020). Qualitative research adds depth to this finding: in Scotland revealed that while the younger working class participants generally disliked the school environment, they valued the environment of FE College; both in terms of flexibility (such as part-time study) and feeling more valued compared to their experiences at school (McPearson, 2020). This could imply that FE colleges have a larger role in supporting people in working class background to remain in education.

3.24   Research found that for young people without financial support from a family, their rationale for studying FE part-time was linked to financial constraints, whether that was lower family income or spreading costs of education out, part-time study was perceived as more accessible than full-time FE education (Callanan & Morrell, 2013). This suggests that FE part-time options may help to bridge the inequalities class gap (although this could imply that the gap could widen if cuts focus on part-time courses). Further research should investigate the validity of the perceived impacts on FE learners from working-class backgrounds, by examining trends over time for people from working-class backgrounds to see if there are changes to the number of working-class people enrolled over the period of the cuts.

The role of FE for people who are LGBT+

3.25   In Wales, 2.4 percent of the total population define as LGBT+ according to the ONS annual population survey (Office for National Statistics, 2018), however, sexual identity data will likely be an underestimate of the LGBT+ population. The Government Equalities Office undertook a systematic review, which critically assesses the robustness and strength of evidence to highlight differences between LGBT+ groups and heterosexual counterparts (National Institute of Economic and Social Research, 2016). In the education section, there was only one piece of research that distinctively focused on FE, and that only focused on apprenticeships.

3.26   For young people undertaking FE, robust statistics on sexual identity are non-existent. However, NHS Digital's representative study on Children and Young People's mental health in England examined self-reported sexual identity for the age group 14 – 19 year olds. NHS digital found one in ten young people identified as LGBT+. Whilst this is not fully comparable to the age group likely to undertake FE straight from school, it might provide a more accurate indicator than the APS adult data, for young people in FE.

3.27   Future research should first be conducted on the prevalence of LGBT+ people who undertake FE in Wales, alongside other equality data that is routinely collected and reported on. Qualitative research is needed to investigate whether there are any benefits for the LGBT+ population who attend FE, as this is not clear from the literature. Existing research in schools/universities indicates LGBT+ children face higher levels of discrimination compared to their heterosexual class mates, so future research should expand this to examine whether there are differences in experiences between schools and FE such as comparative prevalence of discrimination. The results may be able to inform how FEIs improve practices to reduce barriers for these groups and understand what, if any benefits that are for these learners.

3.28   Research can often group identities (for example Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and LGBT+) together; this can be problematic as this can mask differences within these groups. This can lead to overlooking the additional barriers (or outcomes) non-white and non-straight people can face such as double discrimination. Future research should aim to account for homogeneity, rather than grouping all minorities together in turn assuming similarities.

The role of FE for people with different ethnicities, religions and cultures

3.29   Evidence shows that those from ethnic minority communities are over represented in FE compared with school sixth forms, and that this decreases their likelihood of going onto study at HE level (Tackey et al, 2011), as those attending FE are overall less likely to do so. Learners in FE from ethnic minority communities under-achieve due to several inhibitors to attainment related to ethnicity. Frumkin and Koutsoubou (2012) in their study of South Asian females and black male adult learners, found

that students from ethnic minority communities, or those from a minority religion, were more likely to feel isolated in the academic setting. In trialling approaches to counteract this, it was found that teaching staff who were aware of cultural issues that can arise in the academic setting were more likely to facilitate feelings of inclusion. Role models for learners from ethnic minority communities were also found to be important in increasing inclusion.

3.30   At the societal level, FE is thought to be effective in bridging differences between ethnic groups and ages (Learning & Work Institute, 2017). Unity among different religions, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds has found to be contingent on a few factors: such as FEIs recruiting diverse students, lecturers/teachers ability to encourage integration and dissonances students hold around community cohesion (Holden, 2013).

3.31   As previously mentioned, experiences of FE education, and the impact of various inhibitors and enablers to academic success vary widely across different minority groups, and there is little research that accounts for these nuances in the literature. This research is valuable in outlining the impact of cuts to part-time provision for ethnic minority communities, but what is also needed are regular published data on the long-term impact of funding cuts to these learners, in order to understand whether certain ethnic minority groups continue to be disproportionately affected and to address these disparities. This will be particularly important in the Covid 19 recovery period.

The role of FE for mature students

3.32   BIS research into college students in England revealed that in 2011/12, 21 percent of students studying a qualification equivalent to A-levels were age 25 or over (Smith, et al., 2015). This indicates that mature students make up over a fifth of students studying FE who may return to education after a break or as part of a career change. Lived experiences of mature students of FE revealed that they found FE to be a very positive experience, which provided them with a valuable qualification and a possibility of progressing to HE (Dunne, 2019). The Adult Education Survey on adult learning in England covered incentives to learning for adults. "Learning something new" was a common motivator to undertake future

learning (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Key barriers identified by respondents were training "takes too long" and it being "too expensive". The survey covered all forms of learning including informal and degree qualifications among England adult learners, but the barriers and incentives may be indicative of parallels for adults undertaking FE.

3.33   It is difficult to examine age in isolation from other characteristics, as often there are intersections between age and other characteristics that can relate to completing further education not straight after school. Research states that mature students are more likely to be from lower socio-economic status backgrounds, have caring responsibilities, be disabled, and be from ethnic minority communities (Million Plus, 2018). Further, there are differences in protected characteristics between age groups. For adults in FE colleges nearly a third identify as ethnic minority communities, compared to a quarter of 16 to 18 year olds and female students aged 16 – 18 make up 46 percent of the population in FE colleges, compared to 54 percent of adults (Association of Colleges, 2020). This could indicate that FE provides an opportunity for ethnic minority communities and females to access education later in life. However, it should be noted that the Association of Colleges report refers to England only and does not provide clear descriptions on the metadata for the students included in this data so it is unclear if the data is specific to studying at FE level in colleges or to FE colleges (including HE study).

3.34   Further research in the Welsh context may want to explore the experiences of mature part-time learners and the ways in which they balance other areas of the life with study, as well as the barriers experienced to accessing and completing FE.

The role of FE for people with disabilities

3.35   To understand the value FE may have for disabled people, it is important to examine the wider trends in education for disabled people. For instance, ONS analysis using the Annual Population Survey, found that disabled people who were "limited a lot" by their disability were more likely to have no qualifications than non-disabled people (10.7 percent compared with six percent) (Office for National Statistics, 2019). This may indicate that there is a level of exclusion amongst disabled people in the education sector as a whole.

3.36   As a proxy indicator for further education, for people whose highest qualification is A
        level or equivalent there tends to be minimal disparities between those with a
        disability and those who are non-disabled (ONS), however, this in itself does not
        provide any evidence for whether FE is useful in mitigating this disparity found
        elsewhere in other "highest" qualifications. Office for National Statistics, 2019
        analysis revealed that certain types of disabilities an individual has have higher
        proportions of people with no qualifications. For instance, disabled people with
        learning difficulties had the highest percentage of no qualifications and the lowest
        proportion with a degree. Qualitative research provides insight into a handful of lived
        experiences of FE students with learning difficulties, which highlighted that they
        perceived the FE environment better supported them, which they contrasted to
        experiences in mainstream schools (Duckworth & Smith, 2018). The statistics and
        research taken together these findings could suggest that FE may have an
        important role to play in reducing the education gap for disabled people, in particular
        those with learning difficulties. However, the conclusions are limited as they are
        largely theoretical potential benefits, as the research does not robustly examine the
        role of FE in mitigating the education gap for disabled people.

3.37   Further research in the Welsh context may want to explore the experiences of
        disabled part-time learners and the ways in which their health and studies intersect,
        as well as the barriers experienced to accessing and completing FE. This may
        inform effective forms of support that could be provided to these students by FEIs to
        reduce societal/environmental barriers, minimise attrition rates and improve
        individual outcomes for disabled learners as a whole.

3.38   In England, funding reductions are thought to disproportionately impact certain
        types of learner. Their use of outcomes-based funding has led to a reluctance to
        take on students who may not gain qualifications, for example those with learning
        difficulties or disabilities (Smith & O'Leary, 2013), thereby disadvantaging these
        groups in the realm of FE. In Wales, funding reductions have included the protection
        of a discrete provision for learners with moderate or profound learning difficulties
        (Welsh Government, 2016). However, wider cuts to the system may still effect this
        group more than others (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012; Pennacchia, et al., 2018).

3.39   In Scotland, an increase in the proportion of students declaring their disability status has been celebrated, as it means that FE colleges can better plan for courses and support these learners (McMurray, 2017). Despite in a practical sense being a success, this does mean that there is no robust time series in order to understand whether, and in what manner, the proportion of learners with disabilities might have changed as a result of funding reductions. The data which is available implies that there is an increase in the proportion of learners with dyslexia, mental health difficulties and multiple disabilities, but a large fall in those with physical disabilities (such as wheelchair users) and unseen disabilities (such as blindness or deafness) attending FE colleges (ibid). As noted, this data is caveated by the lack of robust comparison from before funding reductions were implemented; however, the direction in which policy has been moving in Scotland suggests there is a reduction in disabled people attending FE colleges.

3.40   The main policy move is that full-time programmes have been pushed for disabled people, which may mean this group loses out on opportunities to progress from lower level part-time courses to higher level, and also lose out on career advice [Scottish Consortium for Learning Disabilities, as cited in (McMurray, 2017)]. The Welsh Government has adopted the Social Model of Disability that argues that exclusion could be owing to a unique set of barriers that prevent the individual with a disability from accessing education. For example, a relevant institutional barrier could be the lack of flexible and part time opportunities to study (Welsh Government, 2019). This idea of barriers for disabled people is echoed in a literature review that pulls together research on FE for people with autism; the authors conclude that whilst people with autism are intellectually capable in FE, there are often barriers for them such as accessing FE or coping with life in colleges (Chown & Bevan, 2011). There is a need for further research to be undertaken that examines whether the reduction to FE funding that has largely translated into reducing part-time options, adversely effects students with disabilities, particularly those whose disabilities are either particularly limiting, physical or who have learning difficulties.

The role of FE for those with caring responsibilities

3.41   FE learners with caring responsibilities are more likely to undertake part-time study in their capacity as parents or guardians, or as young carers of parents or other family members. The prioritisation of funding full-time courses over part-time has a disproportionately negative effect on access to FE for those with caring responsibilities, which often leads to this group being less likely to take up FE courses and additional costs required to support them elsewhere (McMurray, 2017). A study of young carers aged between 14 and 25 found that they were much more at risk of mental and emotional difficulties as a result of their responsibilities and more likely to perform poorly in school and college (Becker and Sempik, 2018). This indicates that this group are more negatively affected by funding decisions around FE, and require more support if undertaking FE to improve attainment.

3.42   Studies of mature students in HE with parental responsibility has found that, despite encountering personal and financial difficulties as a result of their dual roles of caring and studying, they were able to develop coping strategies with appropriate support (Hinsliff-Smith et al, 2012; Moreau and Kerner, 2013). Dunne (2019), in an exploration of adult learners in FE, highlights the need for support from staff, peers and family in negotiating the difficulties of returning to HE whilst balancing family commitments. In successfully supporting these students, they can achieve a balance between studying and caring which overall can enrich their lives.

3.43   Further research in the Welsh context may want to explore the extent of caring responsibilities amongst part-time learners and the ways in which these demands are balanced, as well as the difficulties experienced. This may inform effective forms of support that could be provided to these students by FEIs to manage their commitments, minimise attrition rates and improve individual outcomes.

Effects of funding reductions

3.44   As noted in the section on FE in Wales, in recent years there have been considerable reductions in funding to the sector. Although the present piece of research has been commissioned due to a dearth of Welsh evidence, there are findings from around Britain that record the impact of funding reductions on learners, colleges and staff, which are to be explored presently. As the UK and

Scottish governments have approached FE funding reductions in much the same manner as Welsh Government has (Auditor General for Wales, 2017), there are reasons to expect some levels of generalisability between the findings.

Changes to course delivery and the impacts on different learner groups

3.45   Even when not actively targeting certain groups of students, the decision to direct funding reductions at peripheral services in order to maintain educational provision can lead to barriers for learners. An example of this is the removal of nursery provision preventing some learners from attending class, or provision of a class only at the college eliminating opportunities for those who feel more comfortable attending classes in a community setting (ibid), which may disproportionately impact lower income adults, and especially women (Auditor General for Wales, 2017).

3.46   It is not always true that people prefer participating in FE in the community, for example in Scotland IT courses in FE colleges were replaced by a community provision in libraries, however some retired people did not see this as convenient and therefore did not take up the new offer (McMurray, 2017). Despite being economically inactive, retired people are still an important part of society. By removing the type of provision that retired people prefer to access to increase their IT skills it is possible that digital exclusion of older generations may be exacerbated, thereby reducing their opportunities to participate in society (ibid). On top of this, as the financial sector is moving online, digital exclusion of this group may also lead to financial exclusion in the long run (Lot Income Tax Reform Group, 2012, as cited in (McMurray, 2017)).

3.47   As part-time provisions have been cut, there has also been a fall in part-time learner numbers in Wales by almost half (Auditor General for Wales, 2017). This is thought to affect women to a greater degree than men (ibid), and the risk is that these individuals are unable to participate in full-time courses due to work or caring responsibilities (McMurray, 2017). A reduction in part-time provisions means these individuals miss out on FE, thereby missing out on the opportunity of improving their employability or to progress to further study, and therefore their social exclusion is not reduced (ibid).

3.48   Even looking at the relatively better funded full-time courses, decisions to provide specific courses only at certain campuses in order to save money have had detrimental impacts on learners (ibid). In rural Wales especially, large travel time between campuses alone can be a significant disincentive to learning (ibid), and this greater travel time is also linked to increased financial costs which can in turn lead to a reduction in engagement with FE and an increase in drop-out rates (Belgutay, 2016, as cited in (McMurray, 2017)). Sparsity uplifts have been provided by the Welsh Government to the most sparsely populated and deprived areas of Wales to cover the higher costs of providing services in rural areas. This funding is proportionate to the size of the FEI. Colleges had reported that the funding model to address this issue had been effective, but some colleges had reported that the sparsity uplift did not fully meet their additional costs for providing services in a rural area (Auditor General for Wales, 2017).

3.49   Despite noting the impacts on specific groups, some outcomes are purported to be on all FE learners, for example, a sector-level preoccupation with accreditation is thought to lead to a lack of preparation for employment (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012). When looking at the global effects on the learning provision, funding reductions appear to have led to:

- increased class sizes

- reduced number of courses available

- reduced number of hours per course

- reduced career guidance

- reduced tutorial support time (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012; Smith & O'Leary, 2013).

3.50   As FE is largely made up of women and BME learners when funding reductions impact all there are worries that these groups will be the most affected even if specific barriers to their learning are not put in place (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012).

The impact on colleges and staff

3.51   Funding cuts to institutions can impact the overall sustainability of colleges' financial health. For instance, an analysis in England on the impact of FE cuts revealed that the financial health of FEIs has deteriorated, with more colleges with in-year deficits (increasing from seven percent in 2010/11 to 36 percent in 2016/17 (Domínguez-Reig & Robinson, 2019). This was echoed by the National Audit Office that found nearly half of colleges in England in 2020 required government intervention for financial health reasons (National Audit Office, 2020). The WCPP used Welsh Government figures to examine numbers of FEIs, they found the number of FEIs fell by four percent, with the reduction largely driven by falling numbers in part-time learning (James & Unwin, 2016).

3.52   Austerity policies can lead to funding concentrated on keeping courses running (Smith & O'Leary, 2013) and for FE colleges, this can lead to a reduction on spending on extra-curricular activities such as sports (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012). Diverting funding in this manner cannot absorb all required efficiencies; therefore increasing the use of technology and changes to staffing are also required (Department for Education, 2017). Staffing changes can include recruitment to new posts, which become necessary with reform, as well as re-training and reallocation of staff (ibid). For some colleges internal restructuring means eliminating departments while expanding others to meet changing needs (ibid). Even retaining and recruiting staff in key areas can be difficult, with pay constraints acting as a barrier, especially in areas with skills shortage such as maths, information technology and engineering (Association of Colleges, 2014).

3.53   Inevitably, funding reductions mean some job losses do occur (ibid), with a 16.9 percent fall in full-time equivalent staff numbers in Wales between 2012/13 and 2015/16 (Auditor General for Wales, 2017). A report commissioned by the Sixth Form Colleges Association, found that since the funding decline in England, there have been reductions in teaching workforce in sixth form colleges. This has resulted in a 28 percent increase in the average learner-to-teaching staff ratio across the sector (London Economics, 2014). Generally part-time staff are the first to lose

employment, and as part-time staff are predominantly female, this group is thought to be disproportionately affected by funding reductions (Smith & O'Leary, 2013).

3.54   When FE colleges are deciding what areas to implement funding reductions in, they must in part defer to government policy on the matter. Funding in Wales is protected for those aged 16-18 (Champion, 2018), with those over 19 facing the biggest cuts. As evening and part-time courses provide the required flexibility for older adults with caring or health requirements, they are often areas which colleges choose to cut because government has prioritised the needs of those in early adulthood (Bevington, 2016). This has also been because funding allocations have also been reduced to a greater degree for the part-time provision as compared to the full-time (Welsh Government, 2016).

3.55   Some colleges have merged in an effort to reap the benefits of economies of scale, and although the Auditor General for Wales notes that despite no formal evaluation there are reasons to believe in resilience as a result of mergers, Payne [2008, as cited in (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012)] found no such evidence (Auditor General for Wales, 2017). Some even purport that funding issues are exacerbated in larger colleges given that their size makes them less responsive to change (Hill, et al., 2016). Colleges need to be responsive given that student numbers change yearly (Macpherson & Wane, 2016) meaning that budgets are volatile and difficult to rely on or predict (Hill, et al., 2016). Because of the insecurity of funding, human resourcing is often flexible with contracts that can be terminated as necessary, and it also means innovation, financial planning and investment are difficult (Hill, et al., 2016; Auditor General for Wales, 2017).

Contextual changes that may lead to increases in number of learners

3.56   The economic context surrounding the reductions to funding has recently evolved, as a result of Covid-19. Regarding interactions between funding reductions and Covid-19, the literature can only offer theoretical assumptions on potential longer-term impacts on FE. The Institute of Fiscal Studies produced a literature review and analysis on education spending in England; they theorised that despite additional incentives, training and apprenticeship opportunities for young people are likely to reduce owing to the economic challenges (Britton, et al., 2020). Historically, when

youth unemployment is low, there is a higher demand for FE (Clark, 2011). An analysis revealed that younger people were more likely to be employed in a 'shutdown sector' as a result of Covid-19, in particular for females aged 16-24 (Welsh Government, 2020). This implies that the numbers of students enrolling in FE in Wales may increase over the next few years, which may lead to a mismatch between demand for FE and available funds.

Mitigating the impact of funding reductions

Alternate funding sources

3.57   Although there have inevitably been changes to the field of FE from reductions in funding, in order to mitigate the impact, colleges have been innovative in sourcing other methods of income (Association of Colleges, 2014).

3.58   Some have chosen to offer degree level provision with lower fees in order to attract higher education learners and therefore gain funds with which to provide FE (Jephcote & Latiner, 2012). Others have turned to recruiting international students who pay fees, or gaining income from recruiting high needs students (Association of Colleges, 2014). Alternatively, educational contracts such as providing back to work programmes or major training contracts (for example with defence or prisons and probation) can be sources of revenue (Association of Colleges, 2014; Auditor General for Wales, 2017). In Wales, however, despite a moderate increase in income from work-based learning, lower public sector budgets and falling part-time provision has meant that income from tuition fees, other grants and training contracts with public sector bodies have decreased significantly (Auditor General for Wales, 2017)

3.59   Since 1992, FE colleges in Wales have been able to generate their own income through commercial activities, which was made easier in 2014 when colleges no longer had to ask for permission from ministers (Welsh Government, 2016). In Wales, several colleges have taken advantage of this and established business development teams in order to develop new streams of commercial income (Auditor General for Wales, 2017). These include turning to non-educational provisions such as farming, catering or providing accommodation, however, given the lack of long-term financial security, commercial ventures are limited in that investment and

significant borrowing is difficult (Auditor General for Wales, 2017; Association of Colleges, 2014). To counteract this, some have been able to sell surplus property or borrow money in order to raise capital; however, the lack of long-term financial security is still prohibitive (Auditor General for Wales, 2017). In Wales, commercial ventures of FE colleges have been observed to be most successful in cities or areas with large employers who have specialist training needs (Auditor General for Wales, 2017).

3.60   One alternative funding source that may be uncertain in the future is the European Social Fund (ESF). Colleges have turned to this as a considerable source of income as government funding reductions have come to pass, however, given ESF is EU funded, this will end at the point of EU exit (Auditor General for Wales, 2017). Replacement funding is possible, however the scope and amount of this is unknown at present, therefore colleges might experience further funding reductions in the future if this source of income is lost (ibid).

Funding methods

3.61   Colleges appear appreciative of flexible frameworks in funding given that they view themselves to be best aware of how to meet the needs of their students (Macpherson & Wane, 2016). More prominently there is a desire for greater stability or awareness of future budgets in order to aid long term planning, innovation and investment (Hill, et al., 2016; Auditor General for Wales, 2017). Given the position of FE colleges, local knowledge of the community is important, although may be deprioritised in the current climate in light of the view of colleges as independent financial institutions (Smith & O'Leary, 2013).

Summary

3.62   FE colleges are uniquely placed to serve both learners and the communities in which they sit, and provide both social and economic benefits to each. There appear to be perceived benefits of FE for minority and/or disadvantaged groups, including but not limited to disabled people, people from working-class backgrounds and ethnic minority communities. The perceived benefits for other minority groups (such as LGBT+) have not been explored in the literature. In the context of FE, with

the reduction of PT courses, the barriers to accessing FT education has not been fully explored for these groups.

3.63   Reductions in funding have inevitably led to impacts on the type of students who are able to access provisions, the structure of colleges and the learning experience. Colleges have turned to innovative funding methods in order to try and mitigate the impact of funding reductions, however there remains a desire for longer term forecasts of funding in order to aid innovation, investment and planning.

3.64   Given that a substantial proportion of the evidence cited in this review is not from Wales, and despite the fact that there ought to be some generalisability from other areas of Britain, it would appear that the present report will fill a crucial evidence gap for Welsh Government. Other evidence that is lacking include the future impacts on FE colleges if funding reductions continue, which is important to consider given the nature of the economy at present and how this may be further exaggerated for minority and/or disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, conflicting evidence on the value of college mergers might warrant continued investigation, especially in a structured or formal manner.

4. Findings: Processes involved in implementing cuts

4.1 This chapter outlines the key findings relating to the processes undertaken to implement the cuts drawn out from the qualitative analysis.

Decision-making processes: internal and external to further education institutions

4.2 There is some evidence from the qualitative fieldwork as to the approach colleges took to implement funding cuts both internally and externally. However, there was little discussion amongst interview participants about the barriers to implementing cuts in their colleges.

4.3 For decision-making processes internal to the FE institutions, several staff members reported how colleges used the management or executive structures within colleges and staff intelligence to make decisions on cuts:

> 'We met as a senior management team, at the college led by the CEO and principal. We all had to take, go away and look where we could save money based on the, I think it was a three million reduction we had' *FE Curriculum Manager*

> 'it's gathering intelligence from staff who are directly working with the industries really' *FE Curriculum Manager*

4.4 There was some discussion around how colleges used evidence to inform their decision-making processes. Where this was highlighted it included considering course attainment levels, student retention and enrolment figures. In some instances participants stated that they did not have the resources or time to fully consider the available evidence during the implementation process due to the pressures they were under. In these instances the depth of experience and knowledge held by staff was seen as a key resource. One curriculum manager described the challenges of being able to use an evidence based approach, stating that:

> 'Um, well, we didn't. I can tell you that but truth is, you know, the focus when we had the announcement on the funding was all about how we were going to manage this, how we were going to manage the cuts and that's where the effort

went really. As you can imagine, it was a really quite intense and difficult time and we didn't look at perhaps assessments I'm afraid' *FE Curriculum Manager*

4.5   For decision-making processes external to the FE institutions, participants highlighted the use of regional learning partnerships and collaboration with other colleges to inform their decision-making. Colleges were able to draw on their existing networks to share best practice and learning from implementing cuts. This was seen as a particular strength with one participant stating that:

> 'The sector is a small number of colleges, we work really well together, probably far stronger together than universities do or schools do I believe. We share best practice' *FE College Chief Executive*

4.6   It was seen as important to have a cohesive approach to implementing the cuts. The close working relationship between colleges was highlighted by participants as a method of colleges attempting to ensure regions were impacted in a more equal way.

4.7   Participants also cited the involvement of unions (especially if they were making staffing changes), Estyn, and adult community learning networks during decision making around the cuts. Linked to this, some participants discussed how they engaged with employers in their area to understand how their curriculum should look. They also highlighted that this was not limited to funding cuts but was part of their general activity around curriculum design and development.

4.8   Some participants also discussed the role of the Welsh Government in implementing cuts. There was some discussion of being limited by the rules and level of support put in place by the Welsh Government. One staff member, for example, discussed how certain courses were protected within funding reductions by Welsh Government and so this to a certain extent dictated choices around what to prioritise when making cuts.

> 'With regards to your basic skills, obviously Welsh Government protected that within the funding reductions… we as a college, we've obviously followed suit and we've made sure that our basic skills provision was protected' *FE College Interim Principal*

4.9   Some colleges however did note that they had tried to adapt to be less reliant on funding from Welsh Government so that they had more autonomy in decision making and could use their internal structures. This involved looking to diversify funding sources and relying more on internal leadership to support decision making:

> 'So what colleges have generally done is they have tended to have as a key performance indicator a reduction in reliance on Welsh Government funding. So we've all brought in a reduction in our recurrent grants… We may look for new income sources, maybe EU finding. We may look at international income. We may look to work with employers and increase our commercial income, so all the time we are trying to see straight away whether we can offset that income as much as we can' *FE College Chief Executive*

> 'The support we get internally is very much from out governors. They'll question us in detail in terms of the decisions that we are making. Welsh government don't really play a role in that at all.' *FE College Principal*

4.10   Other participants however felt that there was an open dialogue between the organisations which helped in making difficult decisions. They discussed having a strong relationship with and feeling involved in consultations on decision-making, with a positive relationship described:

> 'In difficult periods like this, the communication and thought from Welsh Government is pretty good actually from the funding team. We've got a really strong relationship with them and whenever they're changing things and having to make difficult decisions, they do consult with us very well I think and we're quite a closed knit community in FE in Wales and I think the officials need to have a bit of credit for that' *FE Curriculum Manager*

Approaches to implementing cuts based on learner impacts

4.11   There was some commonality amongst participants in how they had approached implementing cuts from a student impact perspective. These included:

- Protecting services delivered to directly support students (as part of organisations wider commitments):

'We were lucky from a student services point of view because the college executive made a decision from the beginning that they were going to protect services to learners or anything that was learner facing, and directly working with students was protected by and large so it didn't have a massive impact on us at the time. It's been more of an indirect impact as a result of the other changes and cuts that were made' *FE Student Support Manager*

- Considered the accessibility of alternative provision if they were to remove their own provision. Some participants described taking this consideration further, adapting their models of delivery to provide more online or remote learning.

   'I think technology is taking the cuts out of the picture, the advantages of technology and the way that people learn has obviously made us have different strategies on how we deliver some of the courses' *FE Curriculum Manager*

4.12   All interview participants highlighted that there was a greater impact on part-time learners as opposed to full time learners due to a focus in delivering specific courses and the curriculum. Staff discussed this prioritisation away from part-time provision, stating that:

   'We prioritised our reductions, of the impact of the reductions, on our part-time recruitment, because our full time curriculum was important to us and we strategically wanted to protect that moving forward' *FE Curriculum Manager*

Approaches to implementing cuts based on staff impacts

4.13   Several interviewees discussed how they sought to understand the staffing impacts of implementing the cuts, including reviewing terms and conditions, compensation or voluntary redundancy schemes, and changes to responsibilities other than teaching. Staff discussed how these schemes such as voluntary redundancy allowed them to implement cuts while attempting to minimise impact on staff:

   'We developed this contract reduction scheme and what we did was, we offered staff up to 26 weeks compensation to reduce their contract rather

than leave the organisation. Without that scheme we wouldn't have got to where we needed to get to and we would have ended up in a compulsory redundancy situation' *FE College Interim Principal*

4.14   A common approach amongst participants was to make changes to staff remission[8] in order to provide more teaching time to reduce the impact of the funding cuts.

'There were other efficiencies that we put in place as well, you know, we changed the way that we handled remission for teaching staff and by that, I mean, you know, if they're timetabled on contract for 24 hours of delivery per week in the past prior to that many of them would have had an element of remission related to specific duties. It could be quality assurance duties or internal verification or whatever and we stripped that out as well so that had the effect of teachers teaching more and us having to employ less part-time to backfill that activity' *FE Curriculum Manager*

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[8] This involved reducing the amount of time staff spend on additional non-teaching activities to allow them to complete more teaching hours.

5. Findings: perceived effects of the cuts on Further Education learners across learner characteristics

5.1 The next section focuses on understanding the impact of the cuts on FE learners. The following areas are discussed: learners in full or part time study; by age; ethnicity; gender; disability; and local authority in which the learner lives.

Distribution of unique learners in full-time and part-time study

5.2 The LLWR data shows the number of unique learners who were in FE in the academic years 2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 and how they are distributed between full-time and part-time study. Generally, the number of learners enrolled in part-time study was greater than those in full-time study.

Figure 5.1 – The number of learners for academic years 2011/12 to 2016/17 by mode of study

The number of part-time learners faced larger decreases over time than full-time learners
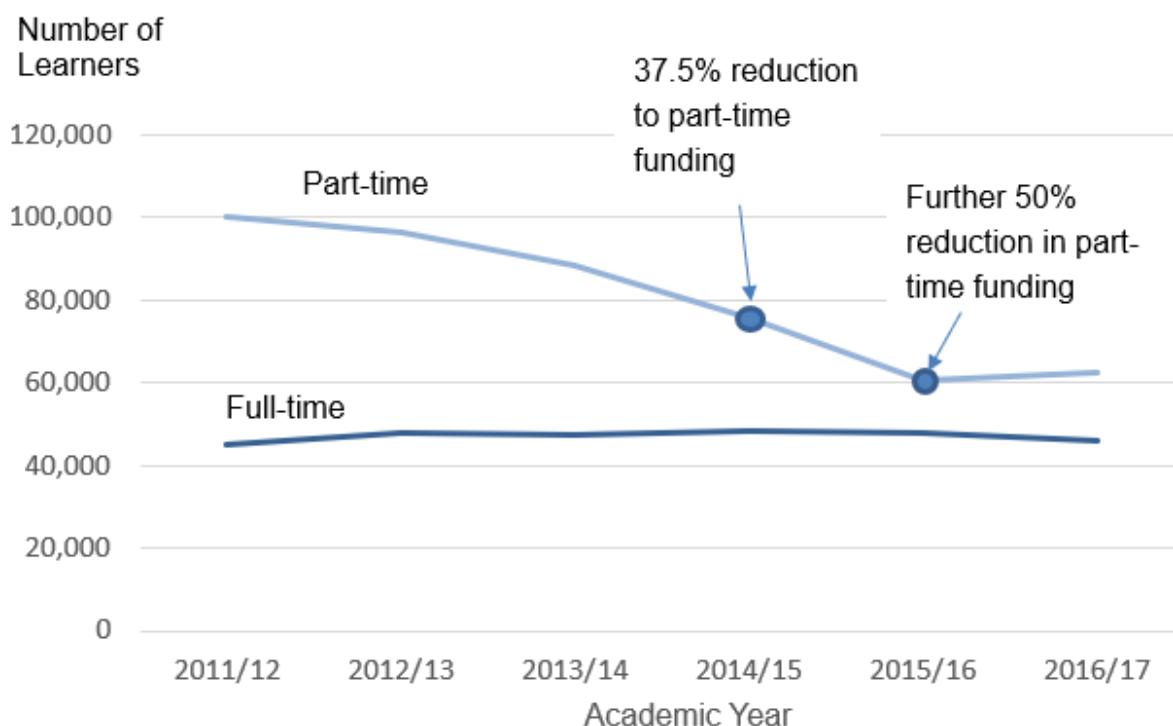
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.3   The number of part-time FE learners steadily decreased between 2011/12 and 2015/16 (see table 5.1). The greatest year-on-year decreases over this period were seen in 2015/16 (down 20 percent) and 2014/15 (down 14 percent), coinciding with the reductions to part-time funding. This is a continuation of a longer-term trend of decreasing volumes of part-time learning. Whilst data on a unique learner basis was only made available back to 2011/12 for this report, data on the number of part-time learning programmes undertaken in FE indicates that numbers have been steadily decreasing since 2005/06 (StatsWales). Most of the subsequent analysis presented in this report focuses on the change in the number of learners between 2013/14 and 2016/17. The number of full-time learners showed marginal year-on-year increases between 2011/12 and 2014/15 and year-on-year decreases between 2014/15 and 2016/17.

5.4   Interview participants highlighted this perceived impact on part-time learners. A common theme was the fact the strategic importance of full-time courses and that colleges felt they had to protect provision of the full-time curriculum.

> 'We didn't try to cut curriculum, I mean obviously curriculum was cut, we never would have been able to sustain it with the cuts but I think it was to minimise the effect on one targeted audience I would say, which was part-time and invariably part-time adult' *Curriculum Manager*

5.5   The focus on part-time funding cuts also meant that those colleges with considerable part-time provision perceived there to be more impacts:

> 'Those campuses with significant part-time provision were those parts of the group that bore more of the, more of the reduction' *FE Curriculum Manager.* The level of cuts to part-time provision varied across colleges. Some participants stressed that they did not stop providing part-time FE altogether and that despite the fifty percent cut in funding for part-time learning they did not necessarily make the same level of cuts on provision: 'I think we had a fifty percent cut in our funding for part-time but we didn't cut fifty percent of the provision' *FE Curriculum Manager*
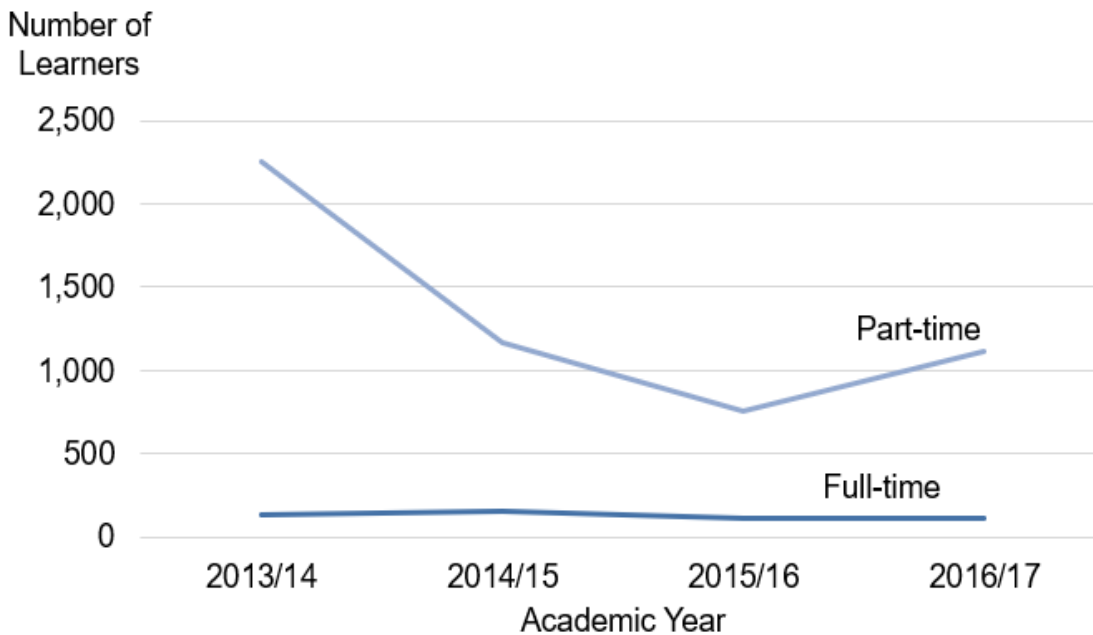
5.6   In other cases there was a greater reduction with one participant describing how:

> 'We just stopped doing it pretty much overnight really'.

Learners by age or age group

Figure 5.2 – The number of learners aged under 16 by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

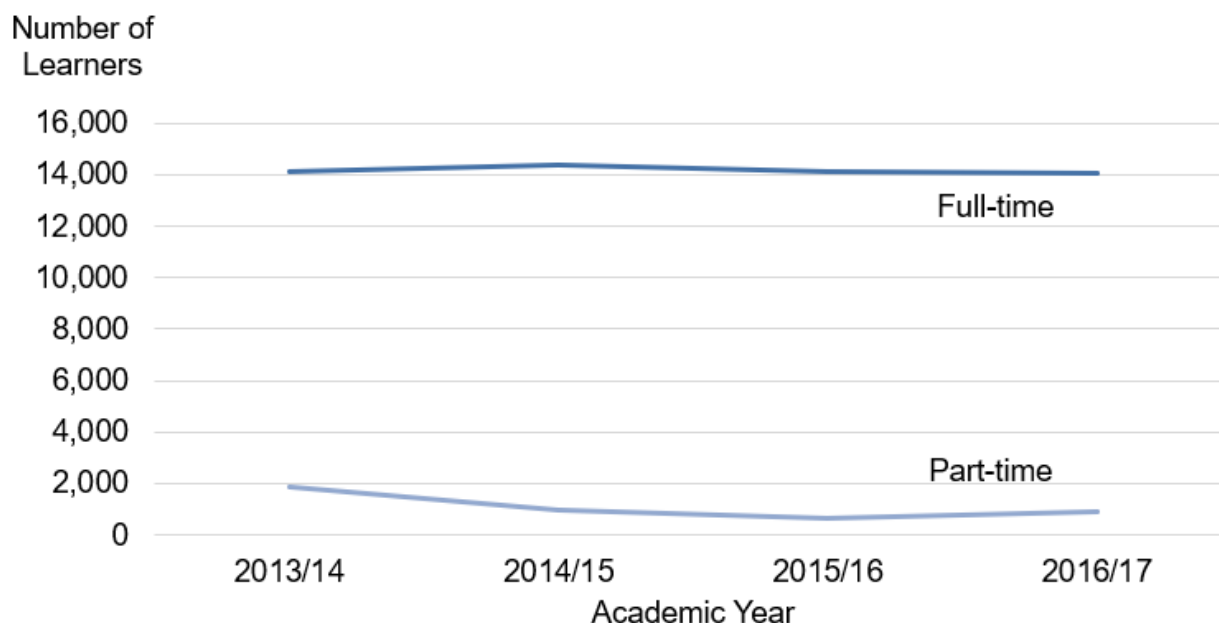Number of learners aged under 16 in full-time or part-time FE

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.7   The majority of learners aged under 16 were enrolled in part-time provision. As the numbers of full-time learners aged under 16 were small, there was little variation between 2013/14 and 2016/17 with a slight increase between 2013/14 and 2014/15, followed by a larger decrease in 2015/16 and little change in 2016/17 (see Figure 5.2). Part-time learners showed the decrease familiar to all age groups between 2013/14 and 2015/16, although the decrease was sharper between 2013/14 and 2014/15. Numbers began to rise again in 2016/17.

Figure 5.3 - The number of learners aged 16 by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

There was a greater decrease in the number of learners aged 16 in part-time FE than learners in full-time FE.
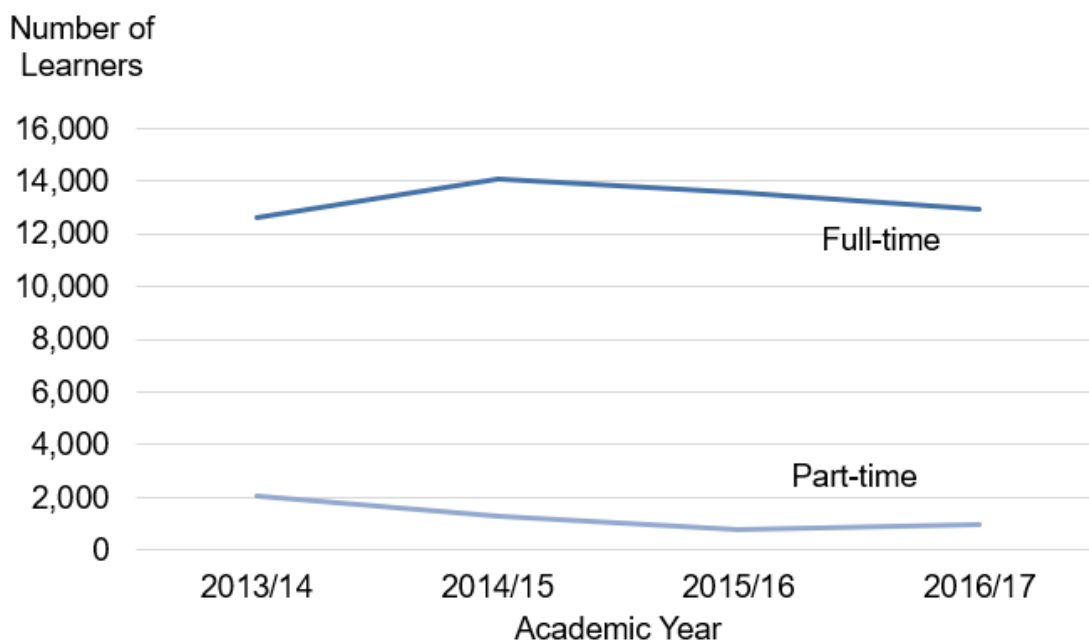

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.8   There were a far greater number of learners aged 16 in full-time study than part-time study. In 2014/15, the number of 16-year-old full-time learners increased from 2013/14 (see figure 5.3) whilst part-time learners fell. Similar decreases in 16-year-old learners were seen in both full-time and part-time learners in 2015/16 but in 2016/17, full-time learners continued to decrease marginally whilst part-time learners increased. The number of full-time learners aged 16 overall remains stable, between 14,000 and 14,500, whilst the changes in the number of part-time learners varies by a greater degree despite the overall numbers of part-time learners aged 16 being much lower.

Figure 5.4 – The number of learners aged 17 by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of learners aged 17 in part-time FE reduced over time and remained below baseline levels
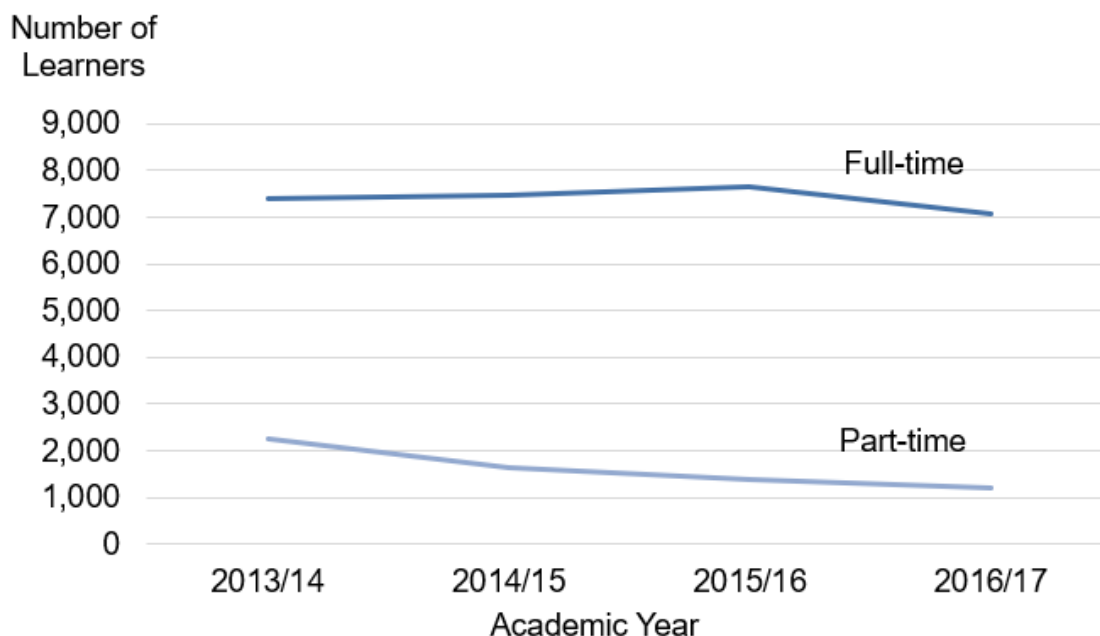

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.9   The majority of learners aged 17 were in full-time study. The number of 17-year-old full-time learner increased in 2014/15 but then went on to decrease in 2015/16 and 2016/17 (see Figure 5.4). Part-time learners fell in 2014/15 and 2015/16 and increased by a small amount in 2016/17.

Figure 5.5 – The number of learners aged 18 by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

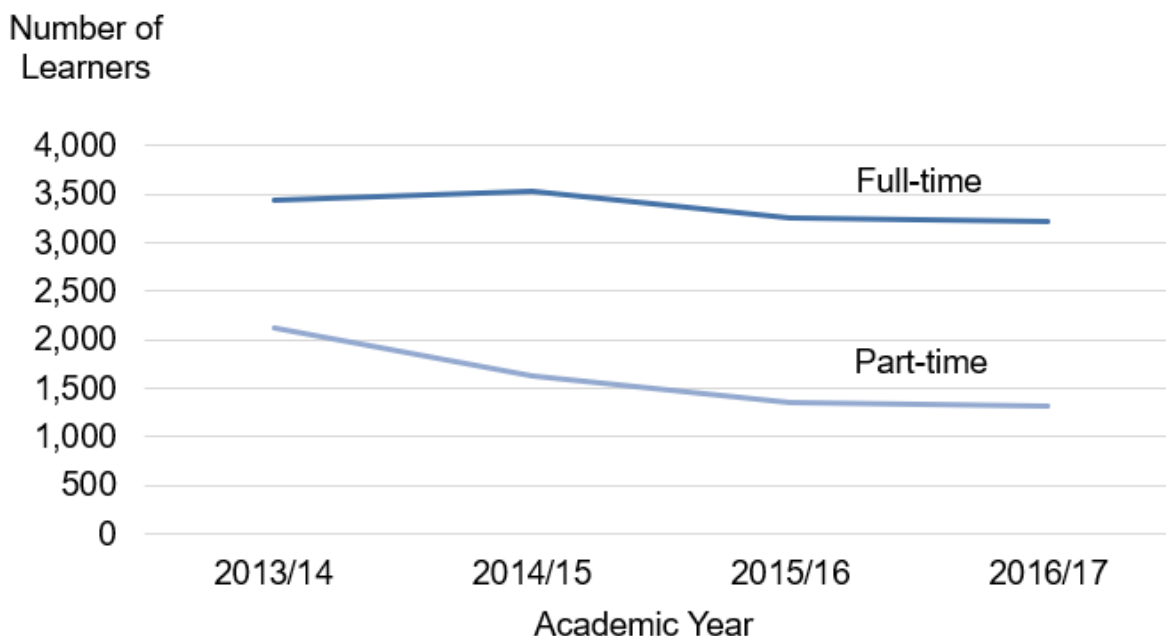The number of part-time learners aged 18 steadily decreased over time

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.10   As with students aged 16 and 17, the majority of 18-year-old learners were in full-time education, although the gap between the number of learners in full-time and part-time study was smaller. A small steady increase in full-time learners aged 18 was seen between 2013/14 and 2015/16 which dropped in 2016/17 (see Figure 5.5). Between 2013/14 and 2016/17 part-time learners steadily decreased, with the largest fall in numbers seen between 2013/14 and 2014/15.

Figure 5.6 – The number of learners aged 19 by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

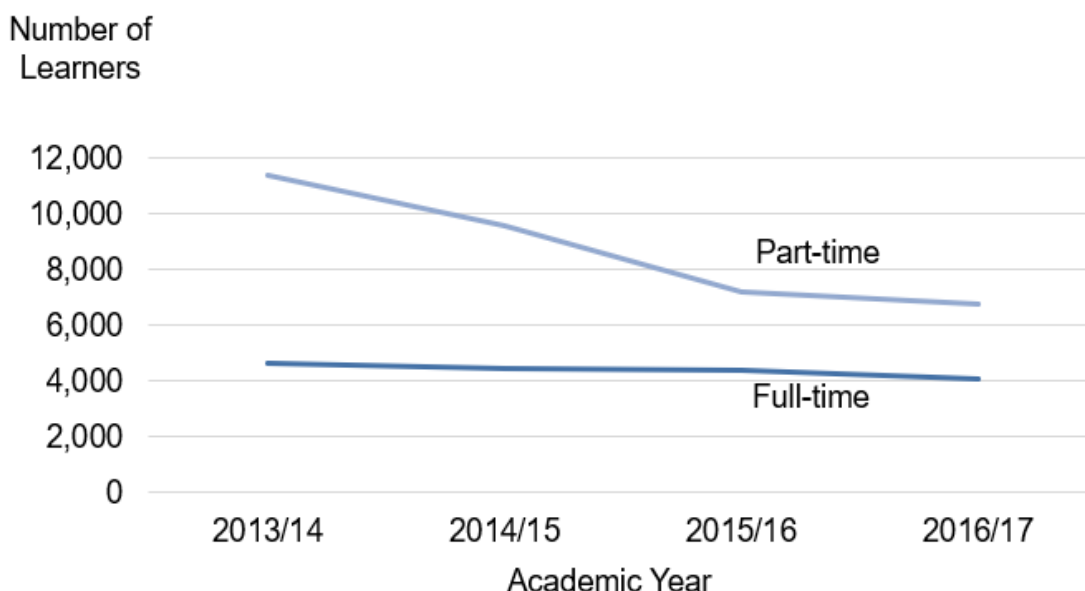The number of part-time learners aged 19 steadily decreased over time

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.11   The number of full-time learners aged 19 is greater than the number of part-time learners, however the difference between the number of part-time learners and full-time learners is less marked in this age group compared to younger age groups. The number of full-time students aged 19 increased marginally between 2013/14 and 2014/15 which was followed by a decrease in numbers the following year which then remained fairly stable between 2015/16 and 2016/17 (see Figure 5.6). Whereas, part-time learners showed a steady decrease between 2013/14 and 2015/16 whilst remaining relatively stable between 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Figure 5.7 – The number of learners aged 20-24 by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners aged 20-24 reduced considerably between 2013/14 and 2014/15
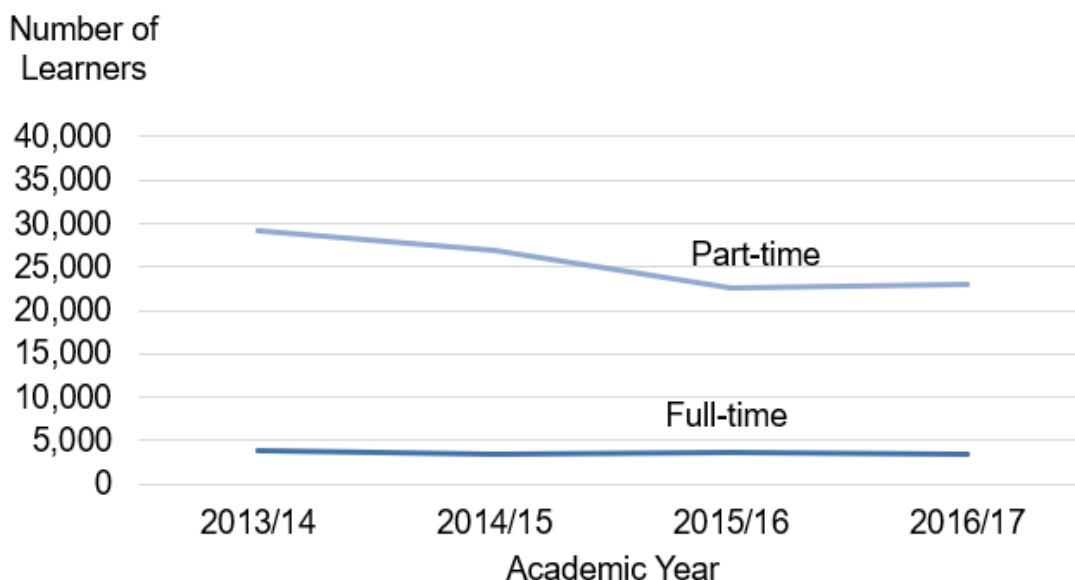

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.12   In contrast with trends relating to the number of learners aged below 20, there are considerably more part-time learners aged 20-24 than full-time learners. Figure 5.7 presents a small and steady decrease in the number of full-time learners aged 20-24 between 2013/14 and 2016/17, with the greatest reduction happening between 2015/16 and 2016/17. The number of part-time learners also showed a steady decrease over time, however the fall in the number of part-time students was far greater than full-time, with a reduction of around 4,000 students in part-time provision between 2013/14 and 2015/16.

Figure 5.8 – The number of learners aged 25-39 by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of learners aged 25-39 in part-time education decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.13   The majority of students aged between 25 and 39 were enrolled in part-time study. The number of full-time learners aged 25-39 varied marginally between 2013/14 and 2014/15 but remained between 3400 and 3900 students (see Figure 5.8). Full-time learners fell between 2013/14 and 2014/15 rose in 2015/16 and fell again in 2016/17. Whereas, part-time learners fell by a large proportion between 2013/14 and 2015/16 and the decline was sharpest between 2014/15 and 2015/16. Numbers increased slightly in 2016/17. The trends seen in part-time learner numbers aged 25-39 are similar to that of part-time learners aged 20-24, especially between 2013/14 and 2015/16.

Figure 5.9 – The number of learners aged 40-49 by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners aged 40-49 fell between 2013/14 and 2015/16

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.14   The number of part-time learners aged 40-49 far outweighs the number of full-time learners of that age. Overall, the number of full-time students remained stable between 2013/14 and 2016/17 although small increases and decreases were present (see Figure 5.9). As with part-time learners aged 20-24 and 25-39, the number of part-time learners aged 40-49 steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2014/15, with a sharper decrease seen between 2014/15 and 2015/16. Figure 5.9 also shows a small increase in numbers in 2016/17, but numbers remained stable.

Figure 5.10 – The number of learners aged 50-59 by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

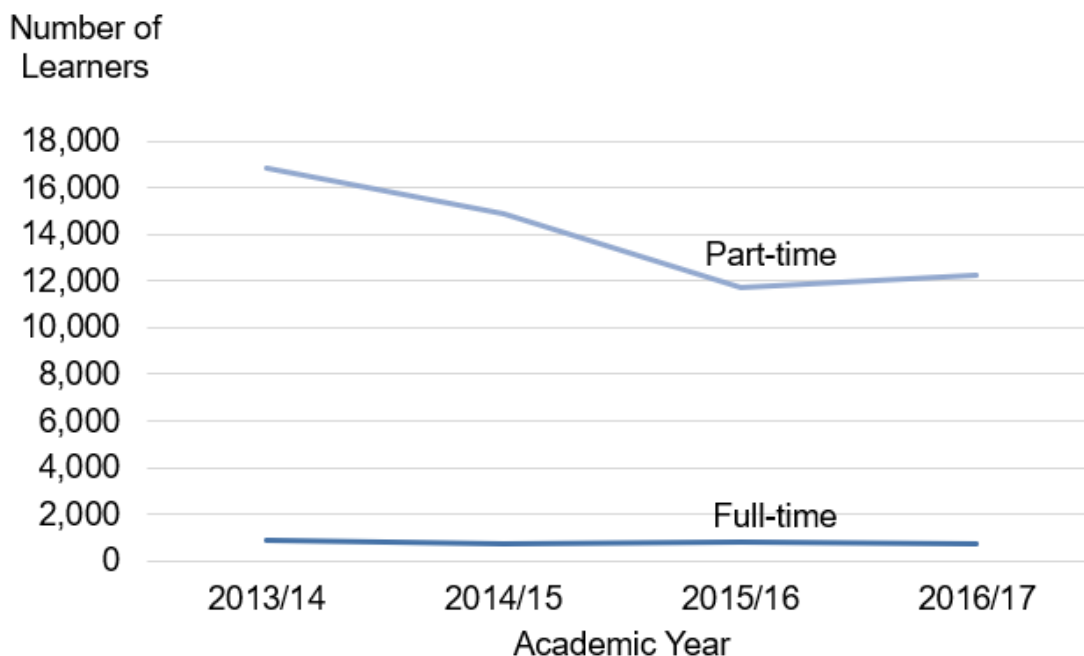The number of learners aged 50-59 in part-time FE decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.15   Again, the majority of learners aged 50-59 were enrolled part-time, with a small number of full-time learners. Overall, full-time learner numbers remained stable but fell between 2013/14 and 2014/15 and increasing again following that (see Figure 5.10). Part-time learners aged 50-59 steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16, following a similar pattern to part-time learners aged 20-24, 25-39 and 40-49. In 2016/17, part-time learners started to increase again.

Figure 5.11 – The number of learners aged 60-64 by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

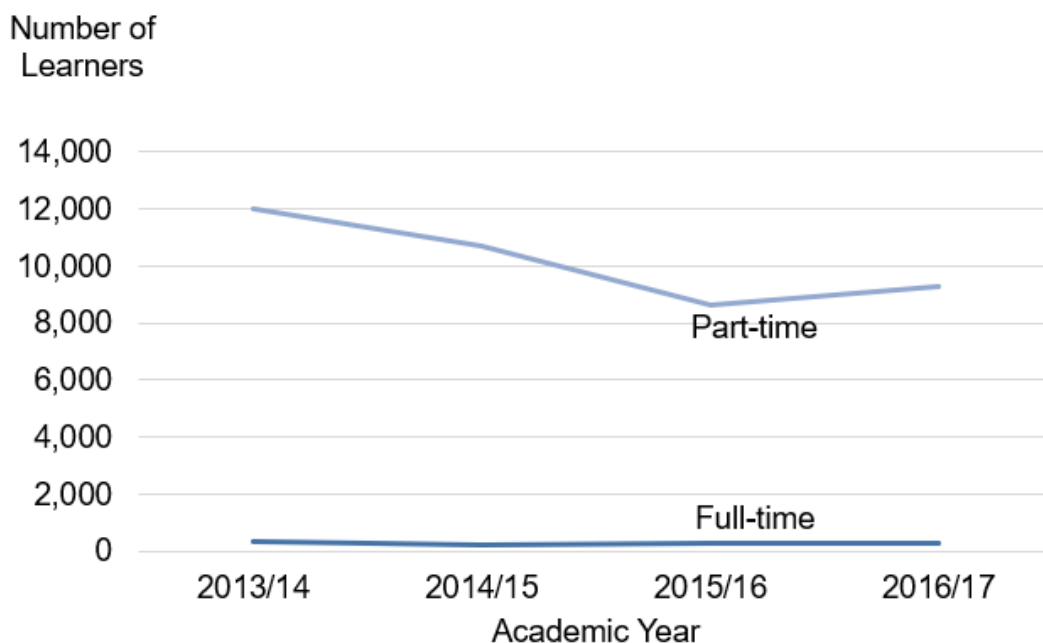The number of part-time learners aged 60-64 decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.16   There were very few full-time learners aged 60-64, almost all learners aged 60-64 were in part-time provision. Full-time learner numbers varied but only by a small amount, showing a decrease between 2013/14 and 2014/15 and an increase between 2014/15 and 2016/17 (see Figure 5.11). Part-time learners aged 60-64 decreased between 2013/14 and 2014/15 and went on to decrease further in 2015/16; however, numbers began to rise again in 2016/17.

Figure 5.12 – The number of learners aged 65+ by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

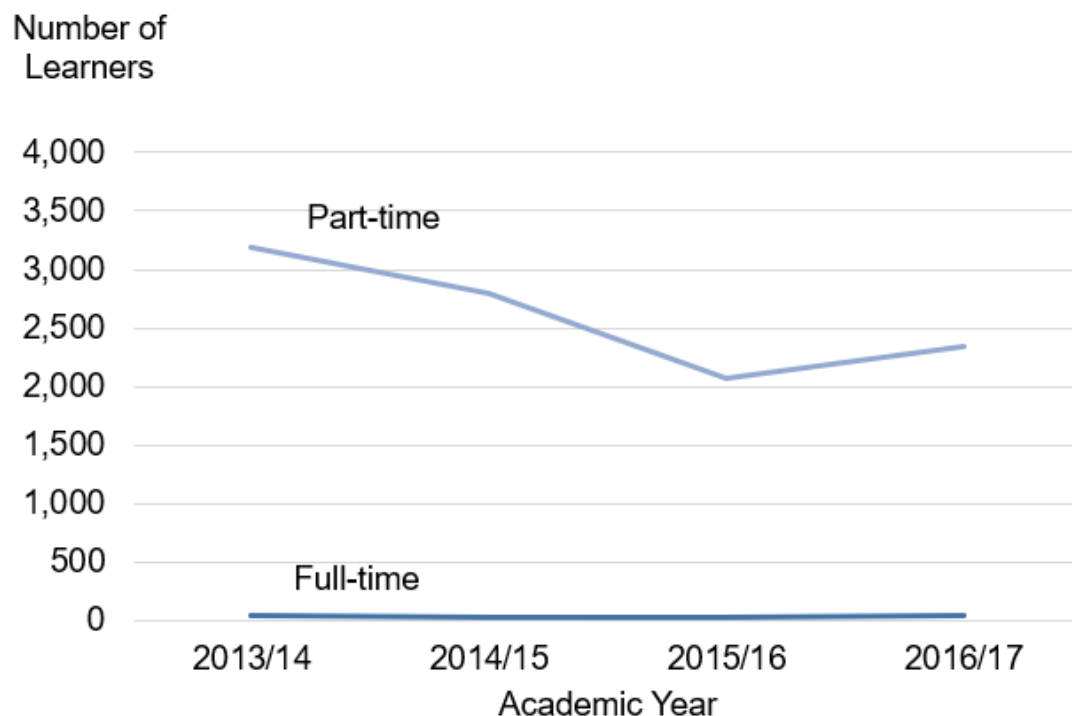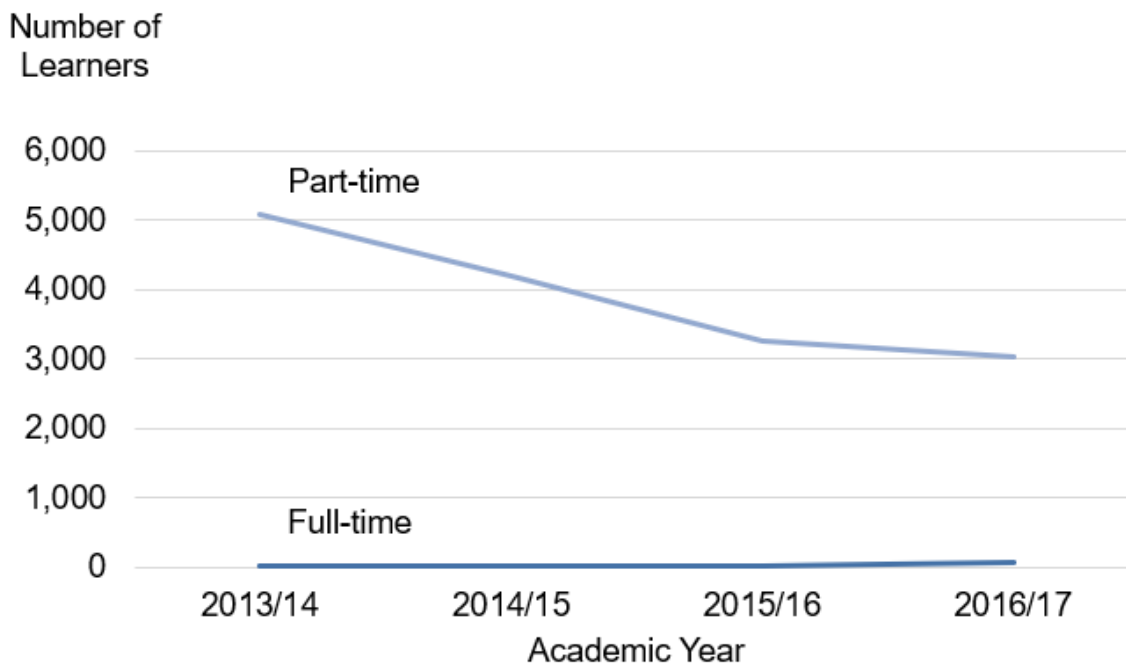The number of learners aged 65 in part-time FE fell between 2013/14 and 2015/16

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.17   As with learners aged 60-64, there are very few full-time learners aged 65 and over. The number of full-time learners was relatively stable over 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16 but saw a small increase in numbers in 2016/17 (see Figure 5.12). Part-time learners steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16, and fell by a smaller margin in 2016/17.

Table 5.1 – The number of learners in part-time Further Education and percentage change between 2013/14 and 2016/17, by age

Age   Academic Year

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	% change between 13/14 and 16/17
Under 16	2,255	1,170	755	1,120	-50%
16	1,850	950	635	925	-50%
17	2,035	1,280	785	950	-53%
18	2,270	1,625	1,370	1,205	-47%
19	2,130	1,630	1,345	1,315	-38%
20-24	11,375	9,565	7,205	6,780	-40%
25-39	29,200	26,875	22,630	23,045	-21%
40-49	16,855	14,905	11,705	12,225	-27%
50-59	12,035	10,705	8,660	9,290	-23%
60-64	3,185	2,795	2,070	2,335	-27%
65+	5,080	4,190	3,260	3,035	-40%
Not Specified	270	130	80	45	-84%
Total	88,545	75,825	60,500	62,265	-30%

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.18   Between 2013/14 and 2016/17, it appears that part-time learners in younger age groups, those aged under 25, decreased by the greatest proportion (see table 5.1). For instance, the number of learners aged under 16, 16, 17 or 18 fell by around a half, with part-time learners aged 17 decreasing by the largest proportion, with numbers reducing by 53 percent between 2013/14 and 2016/17. Part-time learners aged between 19 and 24 also decreased by around 40 percent between 2013/14 and 2016/17. This, compared to a less marked proportional decrease seen in the number of learners aged between 25 and 64.

5.19   However, it is important to note there are considerably less part-time learners aged 19 and under than part-time learners aged between 20 and 64. Those aged between 25 and 39 have the greatest number of learners in part-time FE of all the age groups but show the smallest proportional decrease. It is important to highlight,

that despite a small proportional decrease between 2013/14 and 2016/17 compared to other age groups, the number of part-time learners aged 25-39 decreased by the largest amount in this time It is likely that the greater proportional decrease in the number of part-time learners in younger age groups compared to middle-aged and older age groups is due to the smaller volume of young part-time learners whilst the number of middle-aged and older part-time learners is larger overall.

5.20   Although the number of FE learners in part-time provision aged 24 and under decreased by a larger proportion, this does not necessarily mean these groups were more negatively affected by the cuts, it appears to have affected learners of all age groups. Middle-aged and older learners appear to rely on part-time provision more than younger learners, as shown by greater number of part-time learners and greater numerical decreases in their numbers.

Learners by ethnicity

Figure 5.13 – The number of learners who identified their ethnicity as Asian, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners who identified as Asian steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2016/17
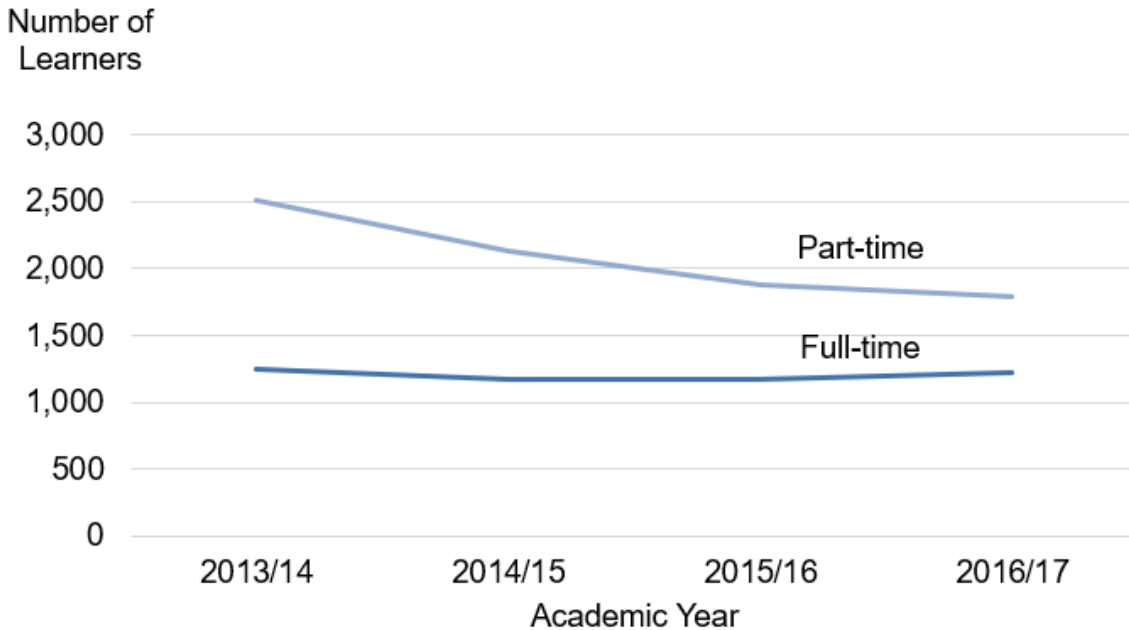
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.21   Overall, the number of full-time learners who identified their ethnicity as Asian remained fairly stable between 2013/14 and 2016/17. Figure 5.13 shows only a very small reduction in numbers between 2013/14 and 2014/15, remaining very similar into 2015/16 and then a very small increase in 2016/17, where the number returned to 2013/14 levels. Whereas, part-time learners of Asian ethnicity decreased steadily between 2013/14 and 2016/17.

Figure 5.14 – The number of learners who identified their ethnicity as Black, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

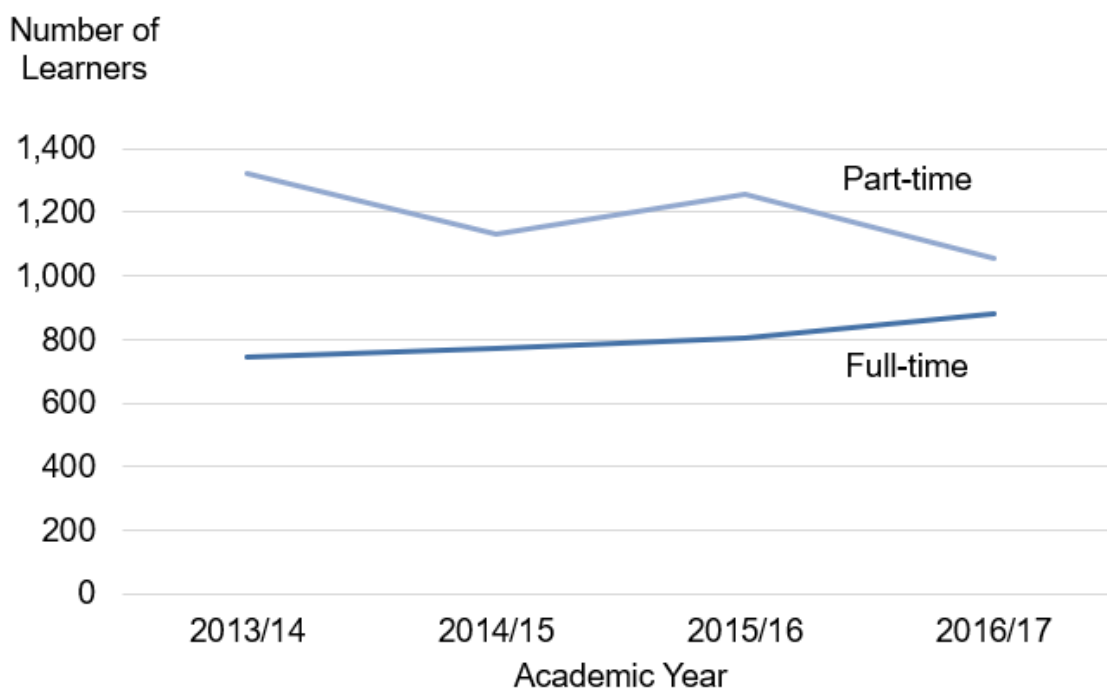The number of part-time learners who identified as Black varied between 2013/14 and 2014/15

Source: The Lifelong Learners Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.22   Full-time learner numbers of Black ethnicity stayed broadly similar between 2013/14 and 2016/17, showing a very small increase in numbers – this increase was the greatest between 2015/16 and 2016/17 (see figure 5.14). The number of part-time learners varied slightly over this time, cycling between 1000 and 1400 students. Figure 5.14 shows part-time numbers decreasing between 2013/14 and 2014/15, rising in 2015/16 and falling again in 2016/17.

Figure 5.15 – The number of learners who identified their ethnicity as Mixed, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners who identify as Mixed ethnicity decreased by the greatest amount between 2014/15 and 2015/16
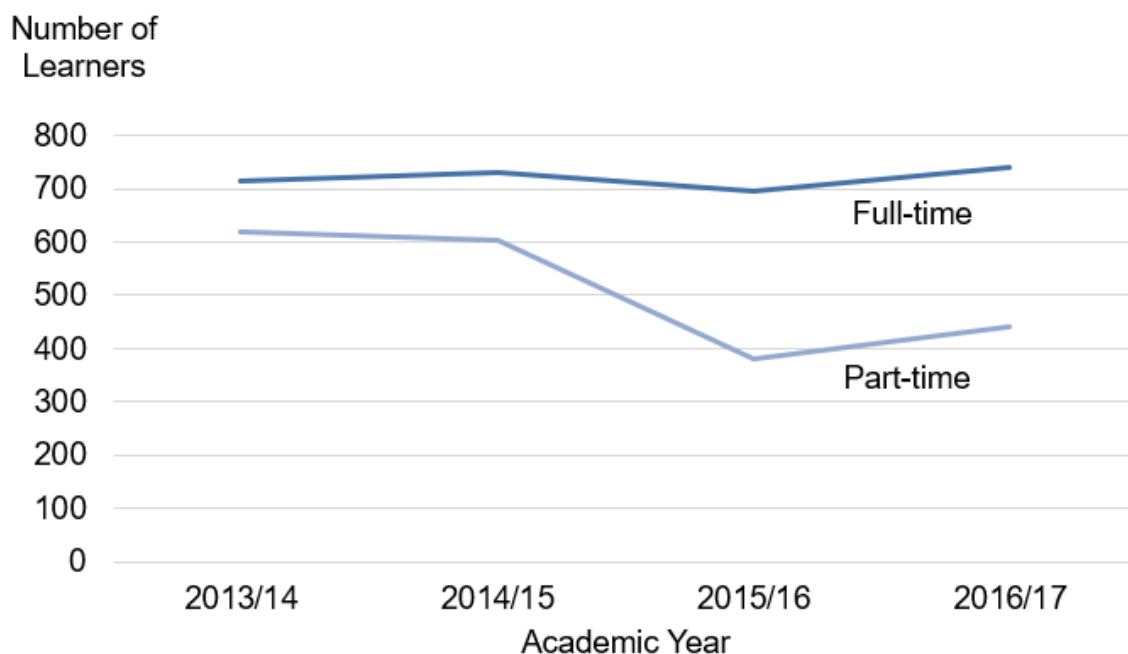
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.23 Figure 5.15 shows that the number of full-time learners of Mixed ethnicity fluctuated very little between 2013/14 and 2016/17, remaining within 650 and 750 people. There was little change in the number of part-time learners between 2013/14 and 2014/15 but numbers went on to fall by almost a third in 2015/16 and began to increase by a small amount in 2016/17.

Figure 5.16 – The number of learners who identified their ethnicity as Other, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

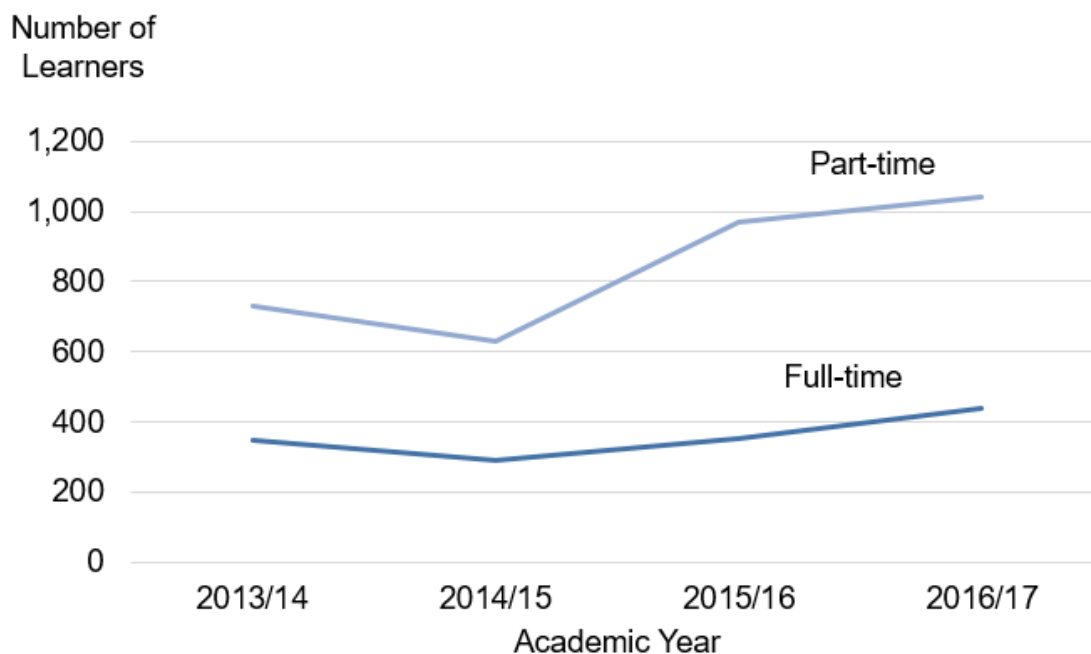The number of part-time learners who identify their ethnicity as Other increased between 2014/15 and 2016/17

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.24   The number of full-time learners who indicated being of 'Other ethnicity' varied only slightly, showing a very small decrease between 2013/14 and 2014/15 whereas between 2014/15 and 2016/17 numbers started to steadily increase by a small amount (see figure 5.16). The fluctuations in the number of part-time learners was larger than that of full-time learners. There was a small reduction in numbers in 2014/15 followed by a sharp increase in 2015/16 which begins to taper off in 2016/17.

Figure 5.17 – The number of learners who refused to provide an ethnicity or who have an unknown ethnicity, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

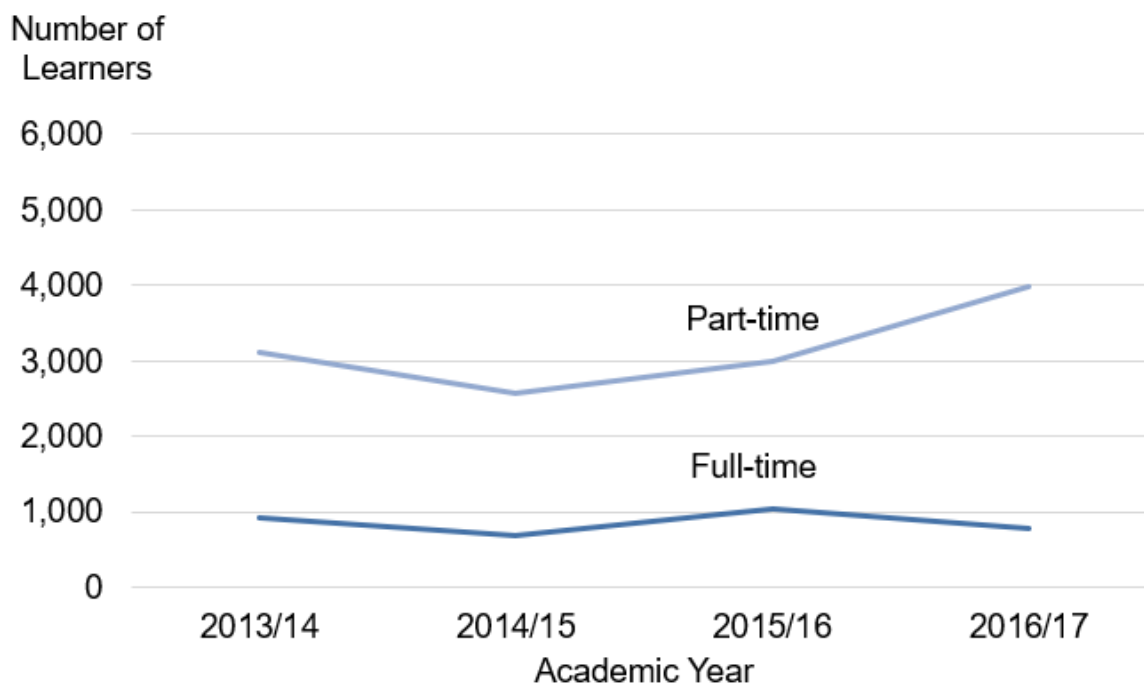The number of part-time learners who refused to provide their ethnicity or have unknown ethnicity increases between 2014/15 and 2016/17

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.25   The number of full-time learners whose ethnicity was unknown cycled between 700 and just over 1000, decreasing between 2013/14 and 2014/15, increasing in 2015/16 and decreasing agan in 2016/17 (see figure 5.17). Part-time learners, however, varied by a larger amount between 2013/14 and 2016/17. Numbers decreased between 2013/14 and 2014/15 but then increased by a similar amount in 2015/16 and increased even more sharply in 2016/17.

Figure 5.18 – The number of learners who identified their ethnicity as White, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners who identified as White decreased substantially between 2013/14 and 2015/16
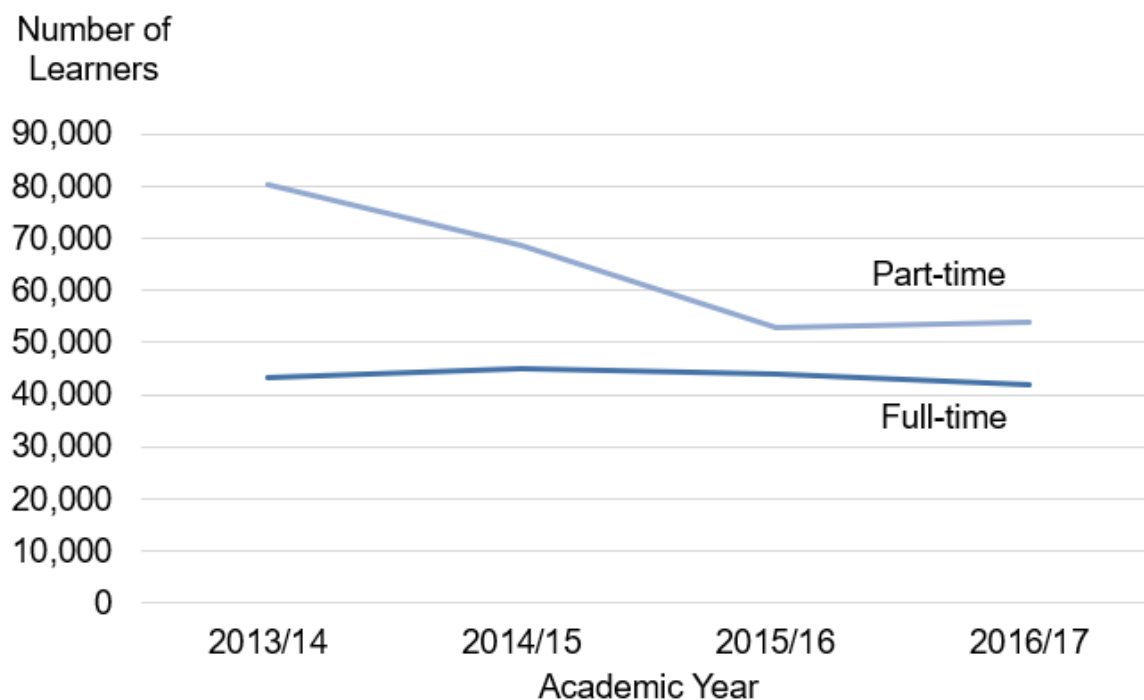
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.26   There are a far greater number of learners in FE generally that are of White ethnicity compared to other ethnicities and for that reason, the variation in the number of White students in both full-time and part-time is very large compared with other ethnicity groups. Full-time learner numbers saw a sharp rise between 2013/14 and 2014/15 which then went on to fall in 2015/16 and decrease even further by a larger amount in 2016/17 (see figure 5.18). Whereas, part-time learners saw a large decrease in numbers between 2013/14 and 2015/16 which then goes on to increase in 2016/17.

Table 5.2 - The number of learners in part-time Further Education and percentage change between 2013/14 and 2016/17, by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Academic Year				
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	% change between 2013/14 and 2016/17
Asian	2,505	2,130	1,875	1,785	-29%
Black	1,320	1,130	1,255	1,055	-20%
Mixed	620	605	380	440	-30%
Other	730	630	970	1,040	+43%
Unknown/refused	3,115	2,565	2,995	3,980	+28%
White	80,255	68,760	53,025	53,965	-33%
Total	88,545	75,825	60,500	62,265	-30%

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.27   Table 5.2 shows that the proportion of part-time learners who identify their ethnicity as Asian, Black, Mixed ethnicity or White decreased between 2013/14 and 2016/17. The largest proportional decrease in part-time learners was seen in those who identified as White: the number of part-time learners who identified as White decreased by a third between 2013/14 and 2016/17. Meanwhile, part-time learners who identified as Asian or Mixed ethnicity fell by 29 and 30 percent respectively. Over the same period, the number of part-time learners who identified as Asian, Mixed ethnicity and White decreased in both 2014/15 and again in 2015/16 when the cuts to part-time funding occurred. This suggests that Asian, Mixed and White learners may have been disproportionately affected by the FE cuts in both years they occurred. Although, it should be noted that part-time learners generally saw a

decrease between 2013/14 and 2016/17, particularly in the years that the cuts to part-time FE funding were made, as White learners make up between 85 and 90 percent of part-time learners it is not unexpected that the number of part-time learners of White ethnicity saw a great decrease.

5.28   Overall, the number of part-time learners who identified as Black were much more variable between 2013/14 and 2016/17 which is partially captured by a proportional decrease as seen in table 5.2. The reduction in the number of part-time learners who identify as Black seen in 2014/15 but not in 2015/16 suggests that these learners were affected to some extent by the cuts to part-time provision but not to the same extent as part-time learners whose numbers decreased in both 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Learners by gender

Figure 5.19 – The number of female learners, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time female learners decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16
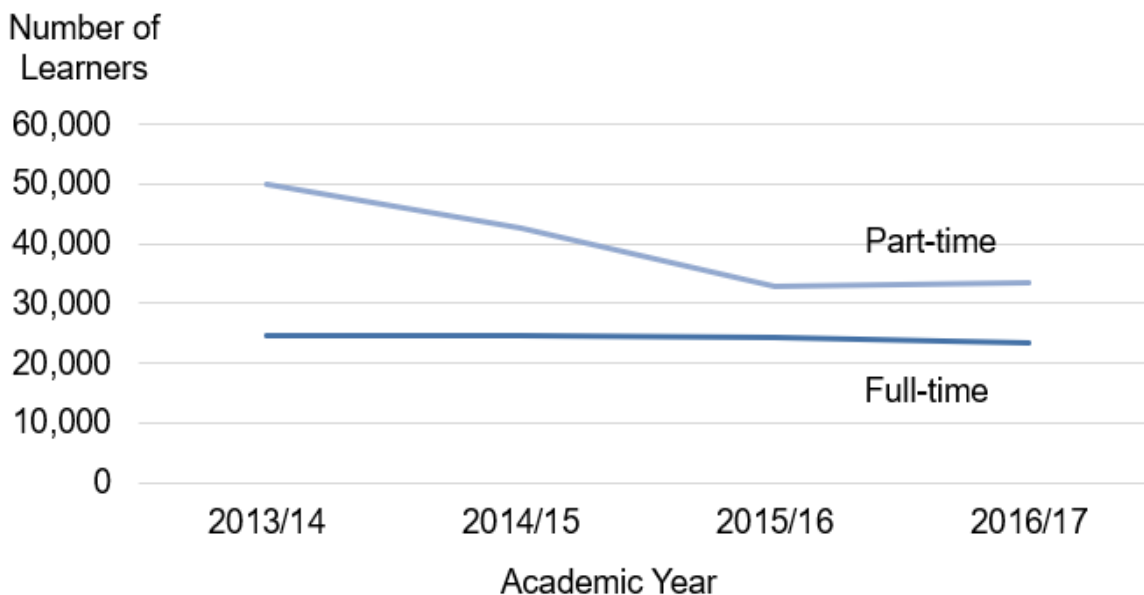
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.29   There are more part-time female learners than full-time. The number of female learners in full-time study remains similar between 2013/14 and 2016/17, only

showing a very small increase in 2014/15 and decrease in 2015/16 (see figure 5.19). Full-time female learners drop in 2016/17. There were large reductions in the number of part-time female learners in 2014/15 and 2015/16, ending in a small increase in 2016/17.

Figure 5.20 – The number of male learners, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of male learners in part-time FE fell between 2013/14 and 2015/16
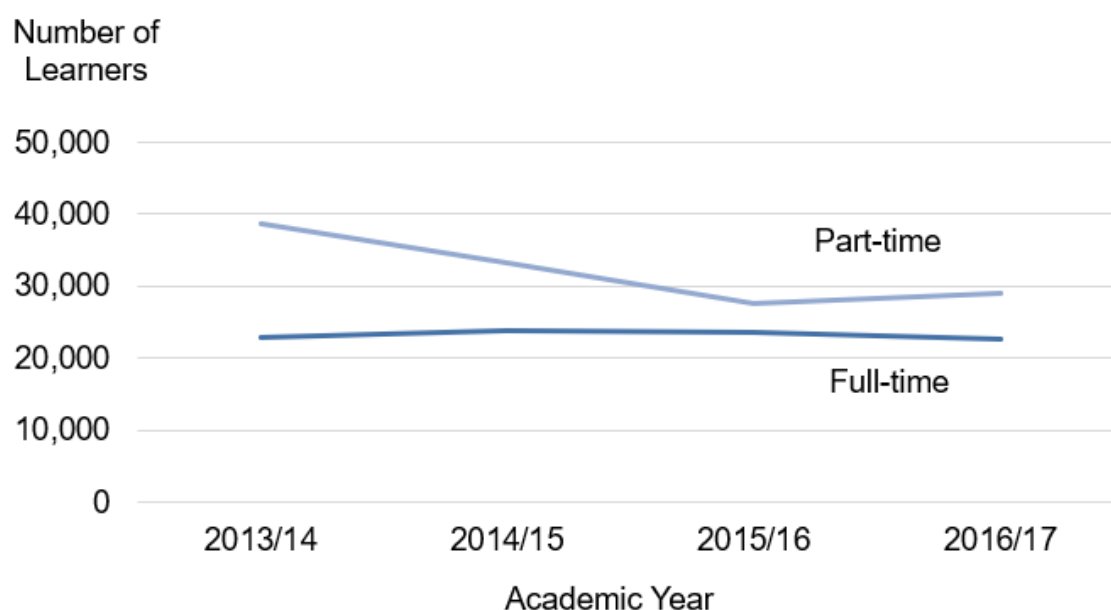
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.30   The number of full-time male learners varied more greatly between 2013/14 and 2016/17 compared to females. Male full-time learners increased between 2013/14 and 2014/15, decreased marginally in 2015/16 and decreasing again in 2015/16 (see figure 5.20). Part-time male learners also decreased in 2014/15 and 2015/16, increasing again in 2016/17.

Table 5.3 - The number of learners in part-time Further Education and percentage change between 2013/14 and 2016/17, by gender

Gender   Academic Year

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	% change between 2013/14 and 2016/17
Female	49,845	42,590	32,980	33,320	-33%
Male	38,700	33,230	27,520	28,945	-25%
Total	88,545	75,825	60,500	62,265	-30%

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.31   The number of part-time learners fell considerably between 2013/14 and 2016/17 with the number of female part-time learners falling by a third between 2013/14 and 2016/17 and the number of male part-time learners falling by a quarter over the same period (see table 5.3). This suggests that both groups were affected by the funding cuts to part-time provision. Females showed the greater reduction in numbers and proportional decrease over this time and also make up a greater proportion of part-time learners generally so appear to rely more greatly on part-time provision. Therefore, female learners may have been affected by the cuts to part-time provision to a greater extent than males

Self-reported learning difficulties and disability status

Figure 5.21 – The number of learners who have learning disabilities or difficulties, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners with learning disabilities and difficulties (LDD) decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16 with the greatest reduction occurring between 2014/15 and 2015/16
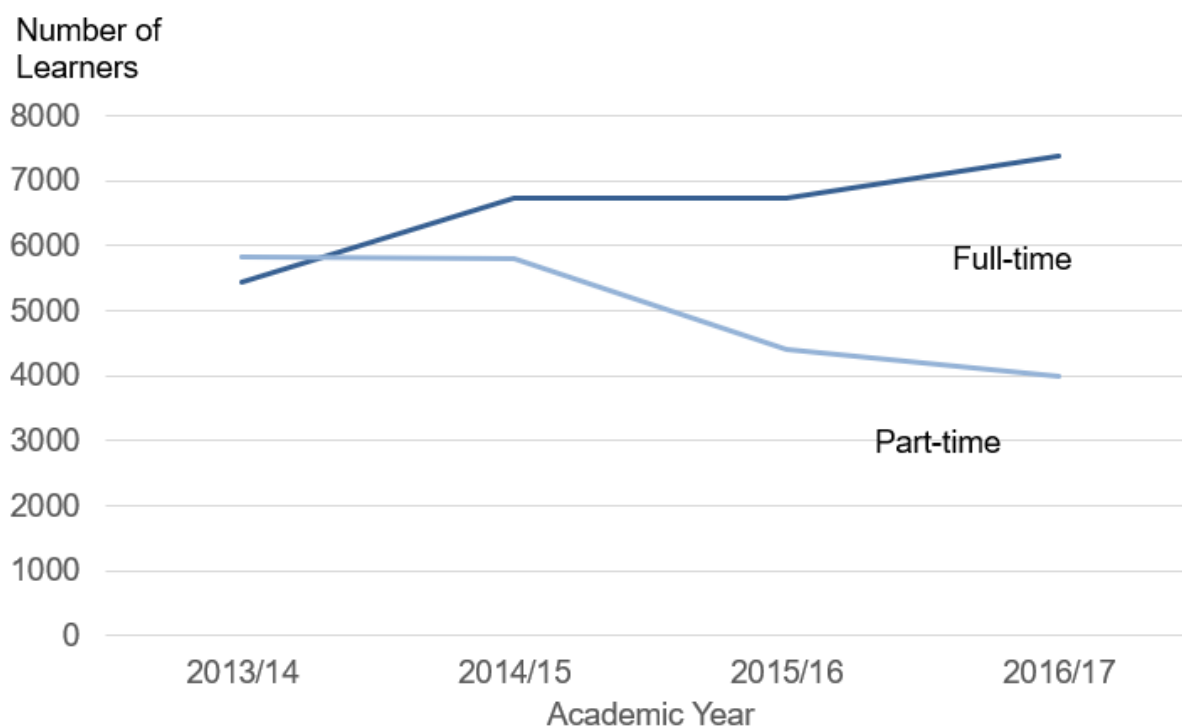
Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.32   In 2013/14, there were marginally more part-time learners than full-time learners with a self-reported LDD, which changed from 2014/15 onwards so there were a greater number of full-time than part-time learners with a self-reported LDD (see figure 5.21). Full-time learners with a self-reported LDD increased between 2013/14 and 2016/17, with the greatest increase seen in 2014/15. Meanwhile, the number of part-time learners decreased between 2013/14 and 2016/17. Part-time learners fell by a small amount in 2014/15 but went on to fall most sharply in 2015/16 and decreased again in 2016/17.

Figure 5.22 – The number of learners who do not have learning disabilities or difficulties, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

Part-time learners who do not have learning disabilities or difficulties fell considerably between 2013/14 and 2015/16, rising again in 2016/17
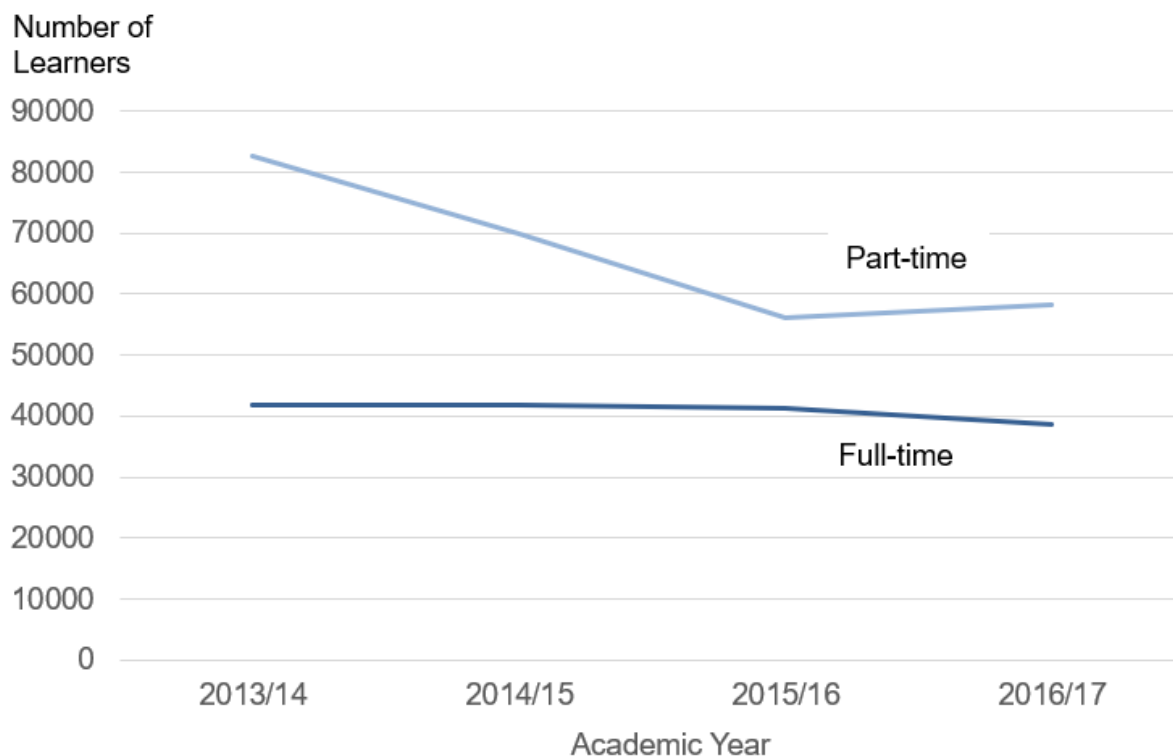
Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.33   There are a greater number of part-time than full-time learners without a self-reported LDD, however between 2013/14 and 2015/16 the gap between the two groups lessens (see figure 5.22). The number of full-time learners without a self-reported LDD decreased between 2013/14 and 2016/17. Part-time learners fell considerably between 2013/14 and 2015/16 and went on to increase in 2016/17

Table 5.4 – The number of learners in part-time Further Education and percentage change between 2013/14 and 2016/17, by disability status

LDD Status	Academic Year				
	2013/14	**2014/15**	**2015/16**	**2016/17**	**% change between 2013/14 and 2016/17**
LDD	5,840	5,815	4,395	4,000	-31%
No LDD	82,705	70,010	56,105	58,265	-30%
Total	88,545	75,825	60,500	62,265	-30%

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

5.34   Both part-time learners with and without a self-reported LDD fell by close to a third between 2013/14 and 2016/17 (see table 5.4). Part-time learners with and without a self-reported LDD fell in 2014/15 and 2015/16, the years that cuts to part-time FE provision was made. This suggests, that learners with an LDD were not more negatively affected by the cuts to part-time provision compared to learners without an LDD. The number of part-time learners without a self-reported LDD make up a greater proportion of part-time learners than those with an LDD and show a greater reduction in numbers between 2013/14 and 2016/17 which reflect the volume of part-time learners in this group.

Mental health and socio-economic deprivation

5.35   Interviews highlighted effects of cuts on further groups not covered in the data above. Participants discussed how they perceived the provision of mental health support to have been impacted. Throughout interviews participants alluded to the fact that this was occurring parallel to wider cuts to mental health provision nationally outside of FE.

5.36   This, combined with the perceived impacts of the cuts on staff and student wellbeing, led to increased demand on student support services. Participants discussed only being able to provide a basic level of support but not having the resources to increase or improve provision to meet this increasing demand. Even in

areas where mental health provision was protected by colleges during cuts, increases in mental health issues meant staff and students couldn't be supported by just maintaining existing support levels and demand was not being met sufficiently.

> 'A lot of our time is still kind of firefighting and having to be reactive because of the kind of volume of need, only though for more sorts of issues with students and ideally again, in a better resourced world we would be able to put things in place and build things into their timetable and curriculum' *FE Student Support Manager*

> 'Although we didn't see any cuts, what we haven't been able to do is increase the resources for support. While demand is increasing now like every college and anyone working with young people, year on year there's a much bigger increase on all sorts of wellbeing services you know' *FE Student Support Manager*

Student support services reported having had to start prioritising what they considered the most serious cases and having less time to deal with lower level cases. One participant stated that they were unsure if they would be able to meet demand in three or four years' time.

> 'I think, we are concerned in three or four years' time, we will struggle to cope with the current levels of support that we are staffing within the college' *FE Curriculum Manager*

Attempts to help minimise the perceived impacts of these pressures included working on increasing students resilience to allow them to deal with issues themselves, although it was recognised that within the budgets available capacity to do this effectively was limited.

5.37   In interviews, it was recognised that cuts had the potential to impact learners who come from lower income households as they would be less likely to afford the course fees. Some felt that student support should be means tested or focused on areas of higher socio-economic deprivation to attempt to make what was still available more impactful.

'If [support] was means tested so that it wasn't open to everyone, that perhaps might mean we could target different provisions for that hard to reach group and we'd like to see the strategic skills fund continue with its incentive to deliver in sparse locations and areas of deprivation' *FE Curriculum Manager*

5.38   There were some examples of colleges trying to improve provision for those in more deprived areas. In Swansea, for example, one participant described a process of identifying specific courses in place in these areas and looking to bring in other money from local social services to protect them.

'We do recognise that in some areas of Swansea, socially deprived areas where we have specific courses in place we will generally look to protect them as much as we can. The courses probably aren't making money, they are probably small class sizes, but we will generally look to protect them. Or look to see whether we can bring other money working with local social services, communities first, to see whether there is any other support in place for courses that we think are making a big difference' *FE Principal*

Learners by local authority of domicile

5.39   Overall, the number of learners in full-time FE remained fairly stable across all LAs between 2013/14 and 2016/17 compared to the number of part-time learners (see Annex F).

5.40   Some LAs saw the greatest decrease in the numbers of part-time learners between 2013/14 and 2014/15 with smaller changes in the years following that. The greatest fall in the number of part-time learners between 2013/14 and 2014/15 happened in Caerphilly (see figure F.3). The number of part-time learners in Merthyr Tydfil (see figure F.12), Conwy (see figure F.7) and Isle of Anglesey (see figure F.11) also reduced more in 2014/15 compared to the following years.

5.41   Although small decreases in the number of part-time learners occurred in Bridgend (see figure F.2), Carmarthenshire (see figure F.5), Ceredigion (see figure F.6), Swansea (see figure 6.19) and Vale of Glamorgan (see figure F.20) in 2014/15, their numbers fell more greatly in 2015/16. Part-time learners in Wrexham (see

figure F.22) also decreased sharply in 2015/16 but this was preceded by a small increase in numbers in 2014/15.

5.42   There was also a sizeable steady decrease in the number of part-time learners between 2013/14 and 2015/16 in Cardiff (see figure F.4), Denbighshire (see figure F.8), Gwynedd (see figure F.10), Pembrokeshire (see figure F.16) and Rhondda Cynon Taff (see figure F.18). As a result, this could suggest that learners in these LAs were more greatly impacted by the cuts to funding.

5.43   Interview participants highlighted that in some cases provision was reduced in community campuses. In these cases rather than stop providing learning opportunities they attempted to mitigate potential impacts by providing more blended learning focusing more heavily on online teaching. For example a Curriculum Manager from one college explained a shift to distance learning in more rural community campuses:

> 'It's more difficult to get people to travel to work and college and things so we might have focused a little bit more on distance learning, online learning, blended learning where you don't need a member of staff there, to pay a member of staff for classroom time.' *FE Curriculum Manager*

5.44   The success of these initiatives was not available for analysis although it does highlight the awareness of colleges of accessibility and barriers to education.

6. Findings: Changes in activity in Further Education Institutions at the time the cuts were made

Analysis of full-time equivalent staff numbers

Figure 6.1 – The number of Full-Time education staff in Further Education Institutions for the academic years 2013/14 to 2016/17

The number of full-time equivalent staff in Further Education Institutions steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16
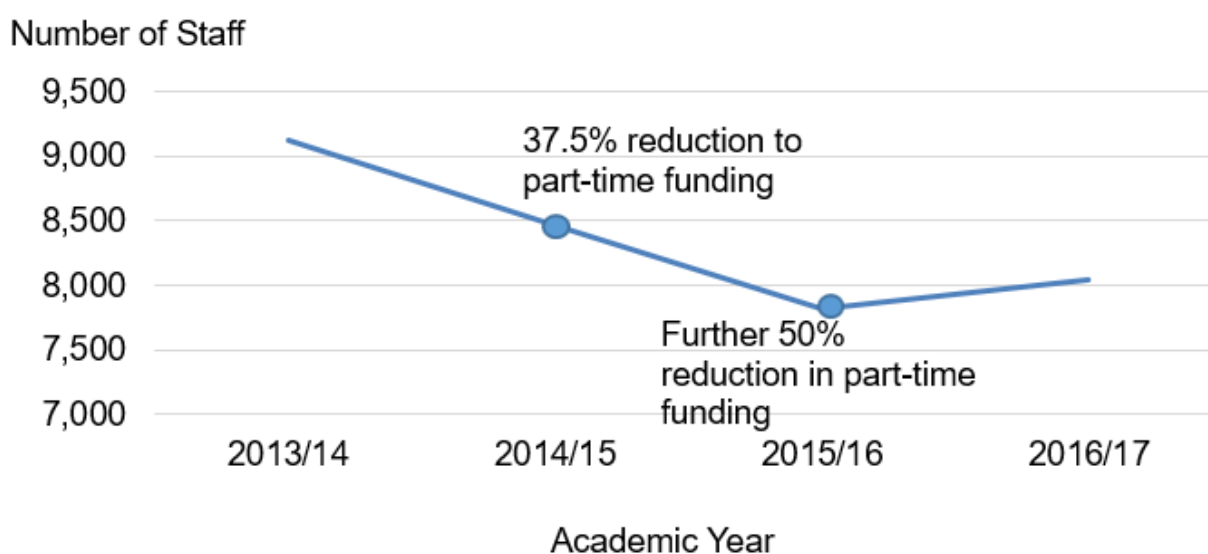
Source: Further Education Institutions' Finance Records, Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

6.1   The number of FTE staff decreased steadily between 2013/14 and 2015/16, with numbers starting to rise again in 2016/17 (see figure 6.1). This fall in FTE staff coincides with the years that cuts to part-time provision were made, therefore these cuts may have contributed to a reduction in staff numbers.

6.2   Information provided through interviews supports this, with the majority of participants discussing the need for reductions in staffing budgets. Colleges took steps to attempt to minimise the potential impact of this. These primarily included offering redundancy schemes, which they aimed to make voluntary where they could.

'We had to offer voluntary redundancy to a number of experienced staff at the time because we couldn't stay in the same levels of staffing and hours of delivery with the cuts in funding' *FE Interim Principal*

6.3   While avoiding colleges having to force people out of roles participants did comment that this led to them losing more experienced staff members. In one college they took the approach of offering a contract reductions scheme to avoid having to enforce redundancies. This involved offering staff up to 26 weeks compensation to reduce their contract rather than leave the organisation. This was discussed as being a key way of retaining staff whilst also reducing staffing budgets in the long term.

'We developed this contract reduction scheme and what we did was, we offered staff up to 26 weeks compensation to reduce their contract rather than leave the organisation. Without that scheme we wouldn't have got to where we needed to and we would have ended up in a compulsory redundancy situation' *FE Principal*

6.4   These reductions in staffing numbers and hours worked led to increased pressure on remaining staff, with participants discussing how they ended up absorbing the roles of those who were made redundant.

'Obviously we tried to do as much as we could with voluntary redundancy but with voluntary redundancy you can't replace that person's job that's been made redundant. So some of those roles were then being absorbed by other people so their workloads were increasing. So say you had somebody doing job B and somebody else doing job A, well now job B has just had voluntary redundancy but the person still doing job A now still has to do job B as well for no extra pay' *FE Curriculum Manager*

6.5   This led to increased workloads and pressure and colleges discussed how staff felt they were expected to provide the same services and results without the same support being available to them.

Analysis of qualification and sector area

Table 6.1 – The number of learning activities in FEIs by credit level

Credit levels				Academic year
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Pre-entry level	1,085	1,195	430	1,765
Entry level	61,045	46,125	45,385	45,475
NQF Level 1 or equiv	141,900	97,320	76,000	67,050
NQF Level 2 or equiv	188,095	144,175	112,365	102,935
NQF Level 3 or equiv	143,465	139,455	116,530	95,720
HE level/NQF Level 4 or above	11,030	8,810	11,530	6,360
Mixed levels	60	.	.	.
Not known/not applicable	44,315	53,705	46,510	57,555
Total	**590,990**	**490,790**	**408,755**	**376,865**

All Sector Subject Areas

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

6.6   Overall, the number of learning activities in FEIs reduced considerably between 2013/14 and 2016/17, with the biggest decrease seen between 2013/14 and 2014/15 (see table 6.1). It is important to emphasise that these figures are published on StatsWales and cover learning activities in FEIs provided through FE as well as work-based learning, adult community learning and HE provision so this general reduction in learning activities was not only as a result of cuts to part-time FE provision. Additionally, these figures are not split into qualifications within part-time and full-time provision. Therefore, these figures give an indication of the number of learning activities by credit level that may have been affected by the cuts to part-time FE, but findings cannot be used to conclude which qualification levels and therefore the types of learners that may have been affected by the funding cuts.

6.7   NQF Levels 1, 2 and 3 showed the greatest decreases in number of activities at these levels, which continuously decreased from 2013/14 to 2016/17. The number

of pre-entry level and entry-level activities decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16 but rose again and stayed the same respectively in 2016/17. HE level activities also decreased in 2014/15, then returned to baseline levels in 2015/16 (similar to 2013/14) and then showed a large decrease in 2016/17. It is difficult to conclude whether qualifications offered at FE level disproportionately decreased as multiple course types were included in this figure and reductions were seen in many of the qualification levels.

Table 6.2 – The number of learning activities in FEIs by sector subject

Sector Subject			Academic year	
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Health, Public Services and Care	53,070	43,400	38,135	39,430
Science and Mathematics	18,985	17,745	18,635	20,605
Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	8,060	6,200	5,165	5,560
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	27,245	21,870	18,970	19,560
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	19,120	16,765	14,810	15,060
Information and Communication Technology	33,885	22,390	15,395	15,945
Retail and Commercial Enterprise	34,620	25,685	21,680	21,515
Leisure, Travel and Tourism	10,690	7,015	6,530	5,400
Arts, Media and Publishing	32,510	21,970	16,965	14,705
History, Philosophy and Theology	8,485	7,340	6,810	4,965
Social Sciences	3,985	3,880	3,875	5,245
Languages, Literature and Culture	39,000	23,425	19,475	25,000
Education and Training	13,580	8,215	9,070	5,160
Preparation for Life and Work	255,880	232,850	190,570	156,205
Business, Administration and Law	31,675	27,715	21,830	21,545
Not Known	205	4,315	850	965

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

6.8   Table 6.2 shows the number of learning activities that took place in FEIs between 2013/14 and 2016/17 broken down by subject type. Overall, the learning activities of all sector subjects decreased between 2013/14 and 2014/15. This reduction in activities continued in 2015/16 for all subjects except 'Science and Mathematics' and 'Education and Training'. In 2016/17 the number of learning activities within each subject was a lot more varied with some subjects showing an increase and some a decrease in the number of learning activities. It is worth highlighting that these numbers represent FE overall and are not broken down by part-time or full-time learning activities, therefore any changes to part-time learning activities may be masked by any changes to the number of full-time activities. It is also important to note that this data relates to activity in FEIs covering more than FE which should also be taken into account when interpreting the data.

6.9   All interview participants dealt with funding cuts by rationalising their part-time provision, particularly post-19 provision. Interview participants, when discussing how they had approached the cuts in their college, identified the protection given by themselves or Welsh Government to basic skills. This included literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

> 'Literacy and numeracy development, digital literacy development, those types of areas where they link to employment, we try to keep as much of that going as we could. Whereas some of the other softer, sort of community based type programmes were probably the ones that went' *FE Curriculum Manager*

6.10   Many interview participants also discussed that courses which were seen to have a direct link to employment opportunities were prioritised over others. This often resulted in cuts to part-time courses and adult learning according to participants:

> 'they [part-time courses] would have been deemed as sort of, leisure type courses. Yeah, probably the ones that which were going to be looked at by external stakeholders and at the time their expectations were that part-time provision be linked to employment and skills and I think that it has remained that way' *FE Curriculum Manager*

'We very much tried to align the curriculum to make sure that we were delivering the things that they would need for the regional skills requirement, so protecting things like engineering, construction, STEM, all those kind of things. A lot of community delivery that was happening in the college went because it wasn't necessarily related to jobs' *FE Principal*

7. Conclusions

7.1 Between 2011/12 and 2016/17 the Welsh Government cut revenue grant funding to the FE sector by £22 million, a reduction of 7 percent in monetary terms and 13 percent in real terms. Although funding for full time provision has risen by 3 percent in real terms, funding for part-time provision has seen a reduction of 71 percent over the same period. During this time, the Welsh Government also made significant reforms to the funding framework for post-16 education in 2014/15. As a result, funding for part-time FE was reduced by 37.5 percent in 2014/15 and the remaining funding was cut again by a further 50 percent in 2015/16. This research sought to understand how cuts to FE grant funding, and subsequent decisions made by colleges to implement these cuts, have impacted on FE learners and equality of access to FE among diverse groups of learners.

7.2 The specific aims were:

- To identify trends in the data which indicate potential impacts of FE cuts on specific groups of post-16 learners in Wales;

- To understand the wider rationale and approaches taken by FE institutions when implementing cuts to FE provision within Wales;

- To explore the views and perceptions of learners on the scope, accessibility and quality of FE provision.

7.3 Whilst the qualitative data collected has limitations due to the fact that fieldwork was halted midway through the project, it does highlight the different considerations of colleges during the process of implementing the cuts. While there were pockets of using an evidence-based approach to implementing cuts this was limited, with pressures on timings and resources meaning colleges had to make quick decisions about what to cut. This suggests that colleges were given little preparation time and advance notice from Welsh Government and explains why they focused instead of using staff experience and knowledge to guide them on where to make the cuts. There were, however, areas of good practice identified with collaborative working between colleges and regional learning practices. Knowledge and best practice was shared between groups and this was seen as a particular strength by participants.

7.4   FE colleges were also aware of the impacts the cuts would have on students and used this to inform their decision making. Efforts were made by some colleges to protect student services and provision was adapted for remote and online learning. Colleges are therefore able to be flexible in the ways that they provide services for students and this can lead to increased resilience when facing challenges such as those given with the funding cuts.

7.5   Some of the processes involved in implementing cuts were limited by external structures. Certain courses which were protected by Welsh Government limited decisions and to an extent dictated choices around where cuts could be made. Colleges responded to this limitation in some cases, with attempts to diversify funding structures. Predominantly this was done by exploring access to European Union (EU) funding. Whilst this was a successful way of responding flexibly to the cuts to maintain provision in key areas it is worth noting that the impact of leaving the EU and access to these European funding structures might limit this in the future.

7.6   The quantitative data provides evidence of the impact on learner numbers (by a variety of characteristics) during the cuts. Data available on the number of learners in FE by mode of study went back to academic year 2011/12. Overall, there was a large reduction in the number of part-time learners in FE between 2011/12 and 2016/17. The largest reduction in the number of part-time learners occurred in 2014/15 and 2015/16, coinciding with the years that cuts to part-time FE provision were made. . This is a continuation of a longer-term trend of decreasing volumes of part-time learning. At the same time, much smaller changes in numbers were seen in full-time students in FE. This suggests that the cuts to part-time FE may have contributed to the decrease in the number of part-time learners.

Effects of cuts on learners

Age

7.7   The literature review showed that a large proportion of FE is undertaken by learners who are 19 or older, this implies that mature students may be adversely affected by the cuts/changes to FE. Mature learners have highlighted the value of FE for them. Mature students often face barriers from other intersection identities, such as from

lower socio-economic class, have caring responsibilities and be from ethnic minority communities. This could imply that any reduction to options that are dominated by adults may consequentially have knock on impacts across a range of other disadvantaged/minority groups.

7.8   The quantitative analysis revealed the change in the number of part-time learners within all age groups showed similar trends. Each age group showed a decrease in numbers between 2013/14 and 2014/15, followed by a further fall in 2015/16. The number of learners in most age groups started to increase in 2016/17. As all age groups showed similar trends this could suggest that the part-time cuts didn't negatively affect one group more than another.

7.9   Younger age groups, especially part-time learners under the age of 25 decreased by a greater percentage between 2013/14 and 2016/17 than middle aged and older part-time learners. These figures, may be in part due to the smaller volume of part-time learners aged under 25 than over 25 and so larger proportional decreases are found despite smaller numerical decreases. Learners between 25 and 39 showed the greatest reduction in the number of part-time learners over the years analysed and the years that the cuts were made. As the majority of learners in middle-aged and older age groups are in part-time FE this does indicate that this age group may have been more greatly affected by the cuts to part-time provision. In comparison, the majority of younger learners are in full-time provision so this age group were less likely to be disproportionately affected by the cuts to part-time FE.

Ethnicity

7.10   The literature review revealed that ethnic minority communities are over-represented in FE compared to school sixth forms, which decreases the chances of going onto HE. This may indicate that sixth forms could learn lessons from FEI about attracting/retaining diverse learners. Ethnic minority communities or people from a minority religion face barriers to educational attainment, for instance, perceptions of isolation. Several factors are important for increasing unity among different cultures, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds such as staff ability to encourage integration. This might indicate that any impacts from the cuts for these learners may be mediated by other services or efforts made by the individual FEIs

to reduce the barriers faced by learners ethnicity/religions/cultures to accessing education and feeling integrated.

7.11   The quantitative analysis showed that the number of part-time learners of all ethnicities decreased between 2013/14 and 2014/15 whereas the number of full-time learners varied between ethnic groups over the same period. The number of Asian, Mixed ethnicity and White part-time learners continued to decrease even more sharply in 2015/16 whilst other groups increased. The greatest percentage decrease in the number of part-time learners between 2013/14 and 2016/17 was also seen in Asian, Mixed ethnicity and White ethnic groups. The number of part-time learners who identified as Black varied between 2013/14 and 2016/17 but did fall in 2014/15, which could be as a result of the cuts that occurred in that year. Overall, the trends suggest that Asian, Mixed and White learners may have been disproportionately affected by the FE cuts that occurred in both 2014/15 and 2015/16 and part-time learners of Black ethnicity may have been affected by the cuts occurring in 2014/15. It is important to note that the number of all part-time learners fell between 2013/14 and 2016/17 and between 85 and 90 percent of part-time learners between were of White ethnicity. Therefore, a great reduction in part-time learners who report being of White ethnicity was expected.

7.12   These findings suggest that funding cuts to part-time provision do not affect different ethnicities in the same way. This analysis shows the importance of understanding the experiences of specific Black and Minority Ethnic groups and the different factors that influence their educational experience. In the future, it would be useful to determine how the experiences of different Black and Minority Ethnic groups vary, and do further in-depth analyses into the factors that influence the patterns of FE take up amongst different Black and Minority Ethnic groups in different areas of Wales.

Gender

7.13   The literature review showed that women are likely to earn less than men following FE, it is postulated that this is owing to the subjects chosen to study by women. However subjects by gender was not examined in the context of FE.

7.14   The quantitative analysis showed that both males and females generally followed similar trends with a large number of reductions for both the academic years where cuts were introduced. Female part-time learners decreased by a third and male part-time learners decreased by a quarter between 2013/14 and 2016/17. The data from the LLWR show that the number of female learners in part time FE is greater than the number of males. Therefore when policy colleagues deliberate any changes to part-time FE in the future, further consideration should be given to the effects this could have on female learners as they represent a greater proportion of part-time learners, and may rely more greatly on part-time provision.

Disability and mental health

7.15   The literature review revealed that disability that limited people "a lot" were more likely than non-disabled people to have no qualifications. This indicates there is an inequality gap generally for disabled people accessing education. There are also differences between the highest qualifications held and type of impairment. For instance, learning difficulties had the highest level of no qualifications. Learners with learning difficulties perceived the FE environment to support them better than the support they had received in mainstream schools. This could indicate that schools do not support disabled people as well as FEI, which could suggest the key role FEI have in mediating the education inequality gap for disabled learners. However, the literature is predominantly from disabled people's perceptions, rather than a critical examination of the support services offered by colleges compared to schools.

7.16   The quantitative analysis showed that the number of part-time learners with a self-reported LDD decreased between 2013/14 and 2016/17, with the largest reduction in numbers occurring between 2014/15 and 2015/16. The number of part-time learners without an LDD also reduced considerable between 2013/14 and 2015/16 – the majority of part-time learners were in this group. Between 2013/14 and 2016/17 the number of both part-time learners with and without an LDD fell by close to a third. This suggests that learners with an LDD were not more negatively affected by the cuts to part-time FE provision then those without an LDD. Part-time learners without an LDD fell more consistently in 2014/15 and 2015/16 but this is likely to reflect the fact that the majority of part-time learners did not have an LDD.

Between 2013/14 and 2016/17, the number of full-time learners with an LDD increased, this could suggest that more limited part-time provision options may have led some learners with an LDD to enrol on full-time FE courses, although this cannot be concluded with certainty.

7.17   Qualitative analysis highlighted that cuts had a disproportionate effect on those experiencing mental health and wellbeing issues. Some colleges prioritised trying to maintain student support services while others had to cut provision due to the cuts. In both these situations there were reductions in the quality of support that was available to staff and students. Even in areas where service was protected there was not enough resource to increase provision while demand was increasing. This led to limited services having to work reactively and focus on the most serious cases. There were limited budgets to help less serious cases and work on building staff and student resilience and wellbeing practices. This highlights how FE cuts can have wider impacts on the health of staff and students and these impacts might be particularly pronounced in those facing mental health and wellbeing issues. Although not captured in this research this could have impacts more broadly across communities and increase demand for external support services which are already facing high levels of pressure.

7.18   *Location and socio-economic deprivation* The literature is mixed on whether FE has a positive social impact for working-class people. The qualitative literature indicates that perceptions are that FE can play a role in supporting individuals and their immediate relatives and can be perceived as an opportunity to break their family from the poverty cycle. However, some have argued that FE maintains societal inequalities, with life rarely changing for those in the working-class as a whole. There are higher proportion of learners from a working-class background in colleges compared to schools, this may indicate that colleges have been seen as more appealing by learners from working-class backgrounds irrespective of their success in reducing inequalities overall. Concerning FE part-time learning, this was perceived as more accessible for working-class learners who perceived themselves to face barriers to education. This could suggest the importance of part-time learning for working-class people, which could imply the education inequality gap could increase further with fewer part-time options for study.

7.19   Overall, the quantitative analysis revealed the number of learners in full-time FE remained stable across all LAs between 2013/14 and 2016/17 compared to the number of part-time learners. Cardiff, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Pembrokeshire and Rhondda Cynon Taff showed consistent reductions in the number of part-time learners who live there over the years that the cuts took place. As a result, this could suggest that learners in these LAs were greatest affected by the cuts to funding. Therefore, it doesn't appear that a particular region of Wales (e.g. north, south east etc) was more negatively affected by cuts to part-time FE. However, it is important to highlight that learners may study in different LAs to the one in which they live, this means a reduction in learners in an LA does not necessarily mean there are fewer learners enrolled in FE that takes place in that LA.

7.20   Qualitative findings indicated that the FE cuts had the potential to impact learners who come from lower income households as they would be less likely to afford course fees. The cuts meant that student support grants were under pressure and there were arguments that student support should be means tested or focused on areas of higher socio-economic deprivation to attempt to make what was still available more impactful. Some examples were highlighted where colleges recognised these issues in access to support and tried to improve provision in more deprived areas. Some brought in more funding from local services to support and make available particular courses that they think are making a positive difference in more deprived area. This challenge does however highlight the difficulties for colleges when they are limited by external funding structures and lack the ability to make changes to how financial support is allocated.

LGBT+

7.21   The literature review revealed there is limited research and no official or robust statistics in the whole of the UK on LGBT+ people in FE. Wider LGBT+ literature and statistics suggests mental health is often poorer for LGBT+ people than heterosexual people, which may affect all areas of their life, including education. Research has examined the challenges specific to LGBT+ people in the other levels of education (e.g. schools) which reveals LGBT+ people face higher levels of discrimination than heterosexual counterparts do. This may indicate there is an

association between mental health prevalence and discrimination for young LGBT+ people. FEIs should reflect on how this might interact with any impacts from funding cuts, for instance, college mental health support services/staff training on barriers LGBT+ learners face could be reduced (or prevented from being established), which would otherwise assist LGBT+ learners.

7.22 There was no monitoring information available to undertake analysis over time on LGBT+ learners in Wales. This could indicate understanding the FE take up of LGBT+ learners has not been prioritised to the same extent as other protected characteristics by FEIs and in government strategies. Given the limited evidence base for this group, this is something that should be reconsidered.

7.23 The literature review suggested that there has been a fall in employment for staff, for instance part-time staff are most likely to lose jobs first. This suggests staff who are most likely to be in part-time employment would be most likely impacted, for example, women.

7.24 The quantitative analysis showed that the number of FTE staff decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16, in line with the years that the part-time funding cuts were implemented. Unfortunately, data is not available to compare FTE staff numbers with full-time staff numbers to determine if all staff numbers were affected or if FTE staff numbers were disproportionately affected by funding cuts.

7.25 Qualitative analysis highlighted perceived impacts of the cuts on staff. Across all colleges there were impacts on staffing budgets as a result of cuts. To minimise impacts on staff voluntary redundancies were offered where possible, although one impact of this was the loss of experienced staff members which had potential impacts on service quality. There were examples of trying to avoid redundancy schemes with one college offering a contract reduction scheme with 26 weeks compensation to avoid losing staff. Both of these approaches led to increased pressure on remaining staff with them having to absorb the roles of those made redundant or working less. This could lead to reductions in the quality of teaching provision due to increased pressure on staff and less support being made available to students. Increased pressures on staff also have potential implications for staff wellbeing due to stress and reduced wellbeing support as a result of cuts.

Colleges, mode of study and subjects

7.26   The literature review revealed that there are other challenges for FE around the
colleges themselves and decisions they have to make. For instance part-time
courses have reduced, and the number of FEIs has reduced since the cuts. This
suggests the cuts have had impact on availability of part-time courses. It is possible
that this could impact those who are most likely to attend part-time and flexible
learning for example, mature learners with caring or health requirements. This could
lead to the increase of the inequalities gap for minority/underrepresented groups in
the education system. Reductions in funding for extra-curricular activities could
have the greatest impact on learners who do not have the opportunity to access
hobbies elsewhere or who face financial barriers, such as those from lower
socioeconomic classes.

7.27   The quantitative data shows that the number of learning activities in FEIs decreased
between 2013/14 and 2016/17 with the largest reduction happening in 2014/15.
This may not be solely as a result of cuts to part-time FE as these figures are not
split into part-time or full-time provision and include learning activities provided
through work-based learning, adult community learning and HE provision.

7.28   The number of learning activities at NQF Levels 1, 2 and 3 showed the greatest
decrease between 2013/14 and 2016/17. However, as these figures include
learning activities beyond FE only, it is difficult to conclude whether cuts to part-time
FE may have contributed to these findings.

7.29   All subjects appeared to reduce their activity at the same time as the funding cuts.
The LLWR data on the number of learning activities in FEIs by subject type is for FE
overall and not broken down by part-time or full-time courses. Grouping part-time
and full-time numbers together could mask the effects that the reduction to part-time
provision had on the number of learning activities – specifically part-time – that was
undertaken in particular subjects which could explain why no particular courses
seemed to be more or less affected. It is also important to note that this data relates
to activity in FEIs covering more than FE which should also be taken into account
when interpreting the data.

7.30   Qualitative analysis supported the finding that availability of part-time courses was impacted. Both FE colleges and Welsh Government had protections on subjects which provide skills for employment including, for example, courses related to literacy and numeracy as well as engineering and construction. This resulted in cuts to part-time courses and adult learning opportunities which were seen as offering 'softer' skills and did not have the same level of protections in place when cuts were being implemented.

Wider contextual changes

7.31   Alternative funding sources are considered by colleges as a way to generate additional income such as selling property and attracting reduced fee HE courses. However, as a large source of funding has come from the European Social Fund, the availability of alternative funding will be uncertain following Britain leaving the EU following the end of the transition period. Given the context of Covid-19, the literature indicates more people may enrol in education as unemployment rates will be high, job opportunities will be lower. Younger people and females have been most effected by shutdown sectors during Covid-19 so this could imply that women and young people may be most likely to enrol following Covid-19. This could imply there might be a mismatch between college funding and the number of learners in FE.

8. Recommendations

Data collection

8.1 *Recommendation 1* – Welsh Government should engage with UK Governments that collect Official Statistics on Further Education to seek opportunities to produce more granular breakdowns for minority groups. This would allow for trend monitoring that is often masked by grouping different identities together (for example, ethnic minority communities, LGBT+, disabled). Policy and KAS should work together to identify where potential sample boosts for minority groups into the design of existing surveys to improve data quality would be useful. A more granular breakdown of characteristics is available in some areas of the LLWR already, this could look to be published where numbers permit.

8.2 *Recommendation 2* – Some key gaps in data availability were identified as useful to address to obtain a fuller picture of the impacts of funding reductions on specific protected groups. They are as follows;

(a) LGBT+ - Welsh Government should collect LGBT+ monitoring information alongside other diversity characteristics in FE monitoring to allow trends, and impacts to be examined over time for this group. This should include the impact of cuts to peripheral services for LGBT+ groups, such as onsite mental health services.

(b) Socio-economic class – Policy, KAS researchers and statisticians should explore the possibilities for measuring of socio-economic class, including suitably robust proxy measures. This will allow for monitoring the class inequality gap more accurately for assessments of future increases/decreases in FE funding. For example, receipt of free school meals or profession of the highest earner when the learner was at a certain age.

(c) Ethnic minority communities - Welsh Government should, in cooperation with Office for National Statistics and other partners, work to create appropriate data infrastructure and data sharing agreements to allow robust monitoring of the impact of cuts on learners from ethnic minority communities. Additional comparisons, such as the numbers of ethnic minority learners attending FEIs versus school-based sixth forms would be useful in understanding the wider context of opportunities for ethnic

minority communities, as those attending FEIs are less likely to progress to higher education. This would enable more accurate analysis of the ways in which existing inequalities are further compounded by cuts to FEIs.

8.3   Further recommendations around additional research beyond data collection and infrastructure are detailed below and are grouped according to the protected characteristics concerned. There are also recommendations in relation to funding and access in FE.

Gender

8.4   *Recommendation 3* - Welsh Government should undertake an audit of subjects studied in FE mapped against financial outcomes, controlling for subject variation, could reveal if earning differences in FE are related to subject choices. This could potentially expand the evidence base around the gendered nature of subject choices and the resulting impact on earning potential.

Disability

8.5   *Recommendation 4*: In order to better understand the particular ways disabled learners may be impacted by funding cuts, Welsh Government should explore the experiences of disabled part-time learners in Wales examining the interaction between their health and education, as well as the barriers experienced in accessing and completing FE. A particular focus should be on those whose impairments are either particularly limiting, physical or who have learning difficulties.

LGBT+

8.6   *Recommendation 5* – Welsh Government should commission in-depth qualitative research to investigate whether there are any issues in terms of access and participation for the LGBT+ population who attend FE and the effect FE cuts might have had on these groups.

Ethnicities, religions and cultures

8.7   *Recommendation 6* – FEIs should ensure the presence of ethnic minority communities' role models and cover cultural and integration issues in staff training in their institution to facilitate feelings of inclusion for ethnic minority communities/religious people in FE.

8.8   *Recommendation 7* – Welsh Government should commission in-depth research to investigate the breakdown in enrolment in part-time versus full-time courses for those from ethnic minority communities to understand whether the cuts to part-time courses have disproportionately affected particular ethnic minority groups and the potential reasoning behind this. This work could follow completion of recommendation 1 that would provide the granular breakdown to make this possible.

Mature learners

Recommendation 8 – Policy and KAS colleagues should either synthesise existing available data or commission a survey on mature learners in Wales that allows for breakdowns by formal study, including FE and the mode of study (part-time and full-time). The survey should seek to explore motivations and barriers that are specific to mature learners undertaking study.

Funding

8.9   *Recommendation 9* – Signposting to alternative pathways for funding should be explored for supporting FEI given the cuts and removal of ESF in Wales to ensure inequalities are not maintained or widened for the minority groups that would not otherwise access education with changes to the flexibility of studying.

8.10   *Recommendation 10*: Many people can possess multiple protected characteristics, and how these interact can also influence a person's experience. The effect of multiple protected characteristics and socio-economic status and how they intersect to affect individual learners and their experiences in FE should be further explored with qualitative data. This issue could not be explored with the quantitative data as the small numbers of students involved could potentially be identified if published. Future research could explore these issues through qualitative interviews with students to understand how multiple protected characteristics and socio-economic status impact individuals' access and attainment at FE level.

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10.   Annexes

Annex A - Sources and search terms

Initial Search in 2018

Keywords

1."Further Education" AND (Evaluation OR Review)

2. "Further Education" AND (Fund* OR Budget* AND spend*) AND (cut* OR reduc*)

3. "Further Education" AND (Austerity OR Recession)

4. post-16 AND college* AND (Fund* OR Budget*) AND (cut* OR reduc*)

5. post-16 AND college* AND (Austerity OR Recession)

6. "further education" AND (impact OR benefit* OR advantage* OR value OR socio-economic OR "social mobility" OR inequalit* OR equali* OR barrier*)

ERIC / Education Collection Subject Headings

"Further Education" (freetext) AND (Educational Finance OR Financial Reform OR Funding OR Budgets OR Economic Crisis OR Economic Factors OR Employment Potential OR Budget Deficits OR Cost Benefit Analysis OR Benefit Cost Analysis OR Socioeconomic Status OR Socioeconomic Background) OR Socio-Economic Aspects; Socio-Economics Economic Impact OR Recessions

British Education Index

"Further Education" (freetext) AND (Grants (Money) OR Educational Finance OR Funding OR Austerity (Economics))

Databases: Soutron; Ingenta: ERIC; Education Collection; EconLit; British Education Index; ASSIA

Websites: Welsh Interest: Wales Centre for Public Policy; Public Policy Institute for Wales (pre 2017); Learning Wales; Qualifications Wales; Bevan Foundation;

UK: Department for Education; Department for Business & Innovation; UK Parliament Research Briefings; Scottish Government; Scottish Parliament; Department of Education (NI); Department of Education and Skills (Republic of Ireland); Ofsted; Estyn; Campbell Collaboration; EPPI Centre; Association of Colleges; British Education Research

Association; Demos; Education Development Trust; Education Policy Institute; Institute of Education; IPPR; Learning & Work Institute; Nesta; NFER; Education and Skills Funding Agency; Skills Funding Agency (pre 2017); Scottish Funding Council; Equality & Human Rights Commisison; Social Mobility Commission; National Audit Office; Audit Scotland Taylor & Francis Online;

Europe: Cedefop; RAND; OECD

Protected characteristics and disadvantaged groups search in 2020

Keywords

1. "Further Education" AND (ethnic OR race OR culture OR religion)
2. "Further Education College" AND (part-time AND ethnic)
3. "UK Further Education" AND (ethnic)
4. "Further Education" AND (disability OR impairment)
5. "Further Education" AND (age OR mature student)
6. "Further Education" AND (working class OR socio-economic OR low income OR low earn)
7. "Further Education" AND (sexual identity OR gay OR lesbian OR bisexual)
8. "Further Education" AND (carer OR caring responsibilities OR XXXX)
9. "Further Education" AND (part-time OR part-time study OR flexible study)

Annex B – Interview Schedule – Managers of Student Support Services / Directors of Finance / Principals / Colleges Wales

<u>**Introductions**</u>

- Introduce self – from Welsh Government Internal Research Programme, doing some work with policy team responsible for post 16 further education to understand the effects of the reductions to post-16 education funding in Wales. Stakeholders will be aware that the Wales Audit Office recently undertook an audit of FE colleges and the funding landscape in Wales and recommended that Welsh Government undertake research to understand the impact of budget reductions on learning provision and learners.

- We're looking to interview Directors of Finance and Student Services Managers across a sample of FE colleges to understand how the budget reductions have been implemented in different areas. The research will also comprise focus groups with post 16 part-time learners enrolled at different FE colleges to explore their views about access, choice and quality of learning provision.

- Information gathered from individuals participating in the research will remain anonymous, where possible. Individuals will not be named in the report but organisations may be identifiable. Is the participant happy to give consent to participate with this informed understanding?

- Would you be happy for information you share in this interview to be used as anonymous quotations in the published research report?

- Would you like to take part, and if so, what is your preferred language?

- If Welsh is preferred, take details for Welsh researcher to ring back.

Role and support provided by Collegiau Cymru/Colleges Wales[9]

a. Tell me about the role of Collegiau Cymru / Colleges Wales.

PROMPT: the nature of relationship between Colleges Wales and Welsh Government and FE colleges; the nature of consultation with respect to the implementation of reductions to FE funding and the support provided to sector providers by the body.

The implementation of reductions to FE funding

a. Tell me about the extent to which you have been involved in the approach to implementing the funding reductions to the FE budget?

PROMPT: the nature and scope of consultation; understanding of the rationale for the approach; the process of implementation and key stakeholders.

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[9] This section was only asked of Colleges Wales. All other sections were asked in all interviews with staff.

b. To what extent have you been able to draw on support and intelligence to facilitate the process?

PROMPT: the nature and availability of support / data; current understanding of supply and demand factors for student support services; perceived future trends and gaps in provision.

c. What barriers and enablers have you encountered to implementing the reductions to FE funding?

PROMPT: culture change; operational restructuring; capacity or capabilities regarding strategy, operational delivery and/or workforce planning; partnership working; relationships with students.

Considerations of equality and diversity to the implementation process

a. Are you aware of the key considerations that informed the implementation of the funding reductions?

PROMPT: the distribution of budget reductions; the timing/ phasing of the budget reductions; the availability of provision; the demographic profile of learners; the demographic profile of the region/ local geography; alternative delivery models.

b. To what extent were considerations of equality, diversity and inclusion take into account in the implementation process?

PROMPT: equality of access and opportunity for learners of diverse backgrounds; the availability, scope and quality of provision/ choice for learners; capacity and capability of teaching provision; availability and accessibility of student support services for learners with additional learning needs; provision through the medium of Welsh.

Perceived effects of reductions to FE funding

a. How would you describe the impact of the reductions that have been made?

PROMPT: changes to the role/remit of student support services; capacity and capabilities of the team; quality and timeliness of support; student numbers / profiles/ needs; student outcomes /destinations; effects on the workforce.

b. What changes have you made as a consequence of the reductions to the FE budget?

PROMPT: changes to provision; changes to workforce; changes to learner numbers and/or profiles; different strategic partnerships or delivery models; different funding models. Explore positive and negative effects.

c. What needs to be in place to support students in the FE sector in future?

PROMPT: explore role / remit of student support services; nature of support to be provided; resources; policy.

Conclude interview

- Thank participant for their time;
- Explore whether they have any further questions about the research or comments to make;
- Set out next steps – timeline for publication and process of dissemination of findings.

Annex C - Focus group topic guide

Introduction

- Thank for participating.
- Introduce moderators & observer.
    - We are the internal research programme, which is an in-house research team working across all policy areas in WG.
- Housekeeping (where toilets are, refreshments etc.)
- Phones on silent.
- Introduce aims:
    - Welsh Gov is the devolved government for wales.
    - One of the areas of responsibility WG has is education including further education.
    - Over the last few years there have been changes in the support WG provides to further education.
    - We want your help to understand what impact these changes have had on those who are in further education for example on courses, teaching quality and more.
    - As you are the experts, we hope you can provide some of the information we need.
- Introduce GSR:
    - We work under government social research principles.
    - This means our work will be impartial even though we are part of government.
    - The work we produce will be published on the welsh government website at some point next year if you are interested in reading it.
- Introduce focus group:
    - We will introduce topics.
    - We may ask obvious questions as don't want to assume.
    - No right/wrong so respect others' opinions.
    - Don't talk over each other.
    - If asked to move on it's not because you aren't important but because we haven't much time.
    - Please keep what is said confidential- do not bring it up outside of this room.
    - We want to record so can listen properly, will transcribe within the team & transcript will only be available to small team, all=confidential & recording will be deleted.
- Any questions?

Warm up

- Go round (starting at moderator's left), say name & a little bit about you such as what you study at college, why you chose to do that course etc.
- *Ensure names=clear and order is rigid for transcriber's benefit*

Enrollment

- Discussing perceptions of enrollment
- Did you consider taking a different route instead of going to college?
    - Do you know what other options there might have been?
    - Why did you decide to go to a college instead of taking a different route?
- How much choice did you feel you had when deciding which college to go to?
    - Why?
- When you were deciding what college to go to, what was important to you?
    - Did you think about where your friends were going?
    - Did you think about what subjects were on offer?
    - Did you think about the location?
    - Did you think about the reputation of the college?
    - Did you think about your plans for future employment?
    - What was the main reason you chose to go to the college you are at?
- How easy or difficult was it for you to enroll in college?
    - Why?
    - Was there anything that was difficult for everyone?
    - Was there anything that was difficult for you personally?
- Is there anything specific which makes it difficult to attend college?
    - What is it and why?
    - How affordable or unaffordable do you find going to college?
    - Is there anything which might make it easier for you to attend college?
- Is there anything which makes attending college easier than it might otherwise be?
    - E.g. Busses / EMA etc.
    - Are you aware of any additional funding you might be able to access?
-

Subjects

- Discussing perceptions of subject choice
- Do you think your college offers enough subject choice or not?
    - If yes, why do you think that?
    - If no, what makes you think there is not enough choice?
    - If no, what might you have wanted them to offer?
- Were you able to sign up to the subjects you wanted to take?
    - If no, why not?
    - If not, what impact do you think this might have had?
- Why did you choose the subjects you chose?
    - Did you think about long term plans?
    - Did you choose things you enjoy?
    - Did you choose things you are good at?
    - Were there any rules about which subjects you could take together? For example did you have to pick out of subject blocks?

- Did your preferred language change which subjects you chose?
- Do you have any plans for the future or not?
    - Do the subjects that you are taking fit with those long term plans?
    - If no, did you have these plans when you chose the subjects?
    - Would you have preferred to take subjects which helped you with your long term plans?
    - What stopped you from taking these subjects?
    - To what extent have your experiences in further education influenced your long term plans?
    - Do you think that you would have chosen differently if you chose again now?

Quality

- Discussing perceptions of quality of provision
- How satisfied or unsatisfied are you with the teaching you receive?
    - Is it what you expected?
    - Why/why not?
    - What are you comparing it to?
    - Do you think you will achieve grades which you need?
    - Does the teaching quality vary by subject? What are the better ones?
    - What might make the teaching better for you personally?
- Have you experienced any workplace-based learning while at college? How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with this?
    - Is it what you expected?
    - Why/why not?
    - What are you comparing it to?
- What support (if any) does your college offer you if you were not happy with the quality of teaching?
    - Who might you speak to about it?
    - What services do they offer?
    - Why do you think the quality of teaching is as it is?
- Did you want to access any subjects or learning in Welsh?
    - If yes, were you able to?
    - If no, do you know if your college offers anything through the medium of Welsh?
    - Does your college provide anything else in Welsh?
    - How do you feel about the fact that your college does / does not provide learning in Welsh?
    - Do you know if your college offers anything in any other languages for people who's first language isn't Welsh or English?

Services

- Discussing other services on offer at the FE college
- What sort of facilities does your college have?
    - Do you have student services?
    - Do you have a sports area?
    - Have you received any advice on career guidance or what your next steps could be?
    - Do any of you use these facilities?
- How did you find out about the facilities on offer?
    - Were you told about it formally? Do you remember receiving any documents about it?
    - Was it word of mouth?
    - Is it just known by everyone?
- Have you ever accessed any of the student support services?
    - If you wanted to access them, would you be able to?
    - Do you know how you might access them?
- If you were in need of help not to do with your college work (like if something was happening at home), is there a service at your college which could help you? You do not have to tell me the details about why you went there.
    - Has anyone ever used this service?
    - How helpful or unhelpful was it?
    - To what extent did the help you were provided with influence your decisions or actions that followed?
    - How did you find out about it?
    - Does anyone who hasn't used it think they would use it?
    - Do you know whether this is available in Welsh?
    - If you prefer to speak Welsh, do you think that the language provision makes it more or less likely that you would use student services?

Wrap-Up

- Based on your college experience so far, do you think you are at the right college for you?
    - Why / why not?
    - If no, what would make it the right college?
- Any further thoughts or questions?
- Ask co-moderator if anything to add/check?
- This group has been really important as we will use what you have told us to feedback to the team responsible for further education policy.
    - We don't know what they will do with the information we provide them, but we do know there is a commitment to consider how to support the FE sector
    - The findings from today could be used to inform that commitment.
- Reminder of confidentiality

- Please leave all documents behind and if there is an incentive please remember to take it with
- Thanks and goodbye

Annex D – Unique learners in further education broken down by age, ethnicity, gender, disability and Local Authority of domicile

Table E.1 – Unique learners in further education broken down by age group

Age Group				Academic Year
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Under 16	2,395	1,325	865	1,225
16	15,945	15,330	14,780	14,985
17	14,635	15,355	14,340	13,920
18	9,655	9,100	9,030	8,265
19	5,570	5,165	4,600	4,540
20-24	16,005	14,035	11,575	10,855
25-39	33,035	30,355	26,330	26,545
40-49	17,740	15,605	12,515	12,925
50-59	12,345	10,945	8,935	9,570
60-64	3,230	2,820	2,100	2,380
65+	5,100	4,210	3,280	3,100
Not Specified	270	130	80	45
Total	135,930	124,375	108,425	108,350

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Table E.2 – Unique learners in further education broken down by ethnicity

Ethnicity				Academic Year
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Asian	3,750	3,300	3,045	3,000
Black	2,065	1,900	2,060	1,935
Mixed	1,335	1,335	1,075	1,180
Other	1,075	920	1,315	1,480
Unknown	4,035	3,255	4,030	4,755
White	123,665	113,665	96,900	96,000
Total	135,930	124,375	108,425	108,350

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Table E.3 - Unique learners in further education by gender

Gender				Academic Year
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Female	74,450	67,265	57,415	56,740
Male	61,480	57,110	51,010	51,600
Not Known	0	0	0	10
Total	135,930	124,375	108,425	108,350

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Table E.4– The number of unique learners in Further Education broken down by self-reported disability status

Disability	Academic Year			
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Learning difficulties and difficulties	11,285	12,550	11,140	11,370
Not Applicable	124,640	111,825	97,285	96,980
Total	135,930	124,375	108,425	108,350

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Table E.5 – The number of unique learners in Further Education broken down by Local Authority of domicile

Local Authority	Academic Year			
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Blaenau Gwent	3,290	2,870	3,070	3,000
Bridgend	5,985	5,890	4,670	4,810
Caerphilly	8,695	6,890	6,670	6,645
Cardiff	12,925	11,030	9,965	10,010
Carmarthenshire	7,055	7,050	5,385	4,925
Ceredigion	2,500	2,220	1,575	1,470
Conwy	6,875	5,880	5,310	5,110
Denbighshire	5,425	4,990	4,300	4,820
Flintshire	6,595	6,440	5,590	6,620
Gwynedd	7,200	6,365	5,180	5,325
Isle of Anglesey	3,675	3,075	2,785	2,850
Merthyr Tydfil	3,580	2,955	2,750	2,530

Monmouthshire	2,105	1,970	1,810	1,965
Neath Port Talbot	6,660	6,880	6,425	5,480
Newport	5,380	5,240	4,985	5,015
Not known	985	370	190	130
Outside UK	540	115	25	*
Pembrokeshire	5,380	4,705	3,700	3,020
Powys	4,080	3,615	3,355	3,165
Rhondda Cynon Taf	8,915	8,060	7,225	6,815
Swansea	11,615	11,670	10,075	9,710
The Vale of Glamorgan	4,160	3,820	2,885	3,325
Torfaen	3,565	3,230	3,015	2,905
Unknown	2,520	2,435	1,945	2,430
Wrexham	6,215	6,605	5,550	6,275
Total	135,930	124,375	108,425	108,350

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Annex F – Learners in Further Education broken down by mode of study and Local Authority
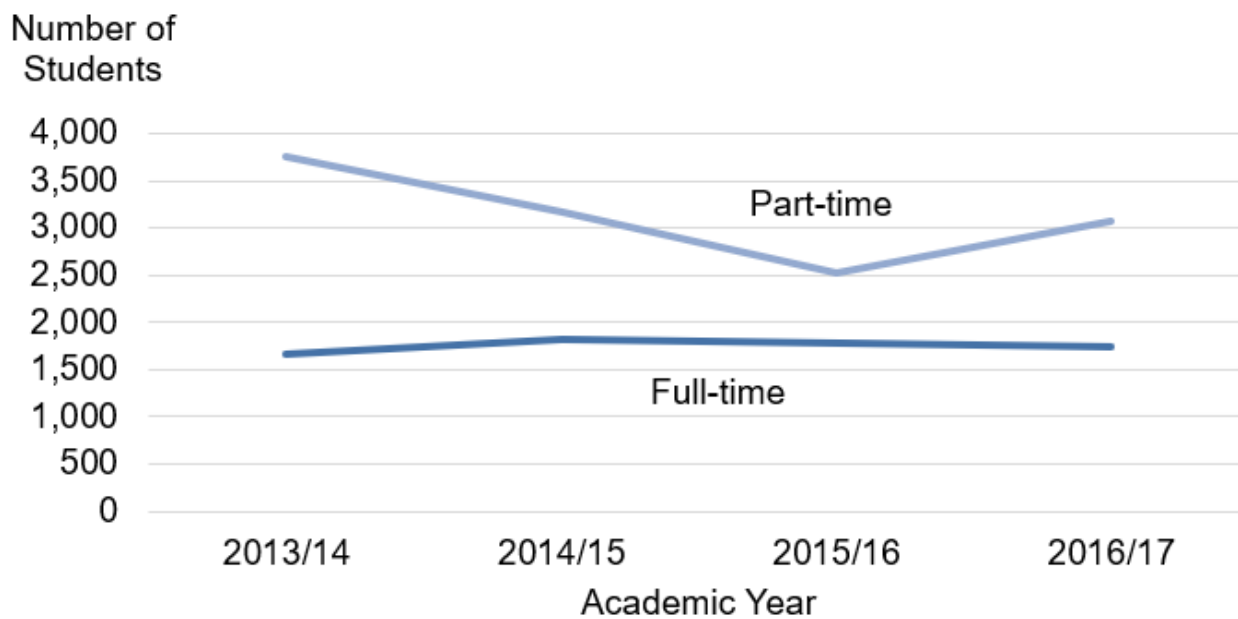
Figure F.1 - Number of learners in Blaenau Gwent, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Blaenau Gwent decreased the most in 2014/15 but remained fairly stable in 2015/16 and 2016/17
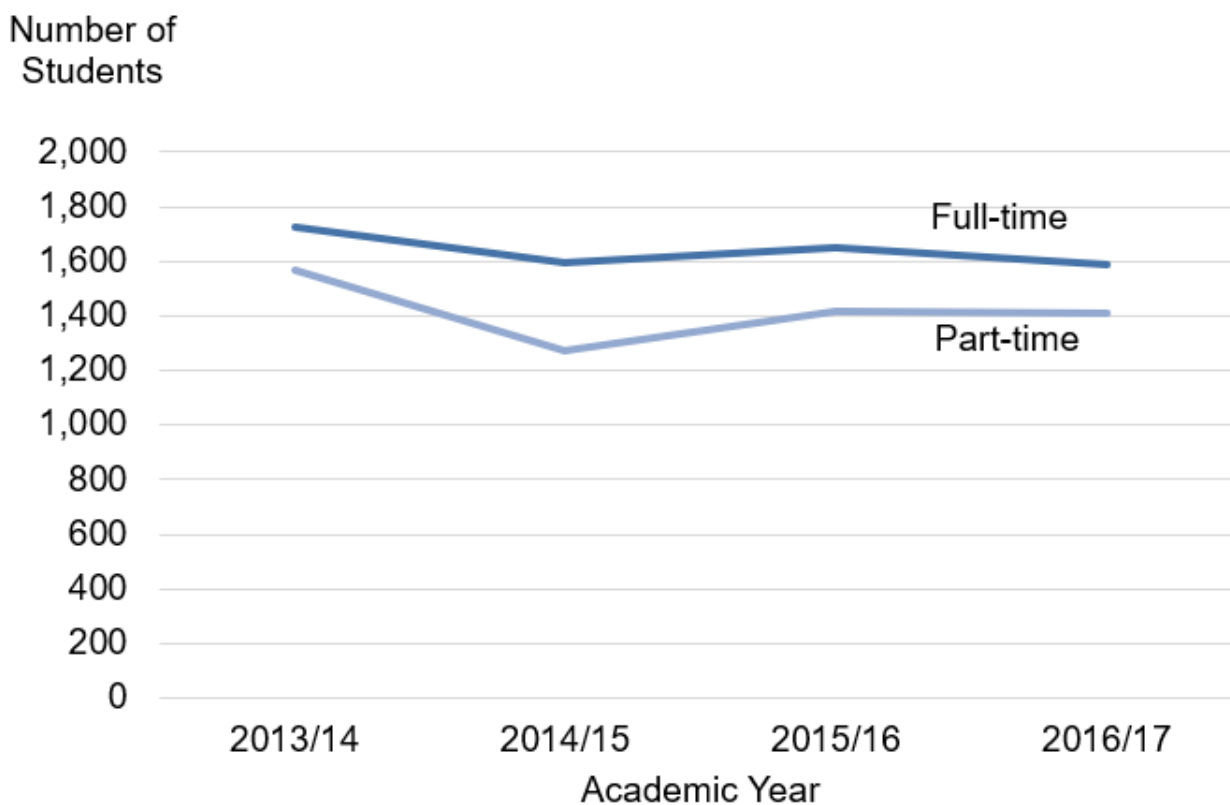
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.2 - Number of learners in Bridgend, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Bridgend decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16, decreasing the most between 2014/15 and 2015/16
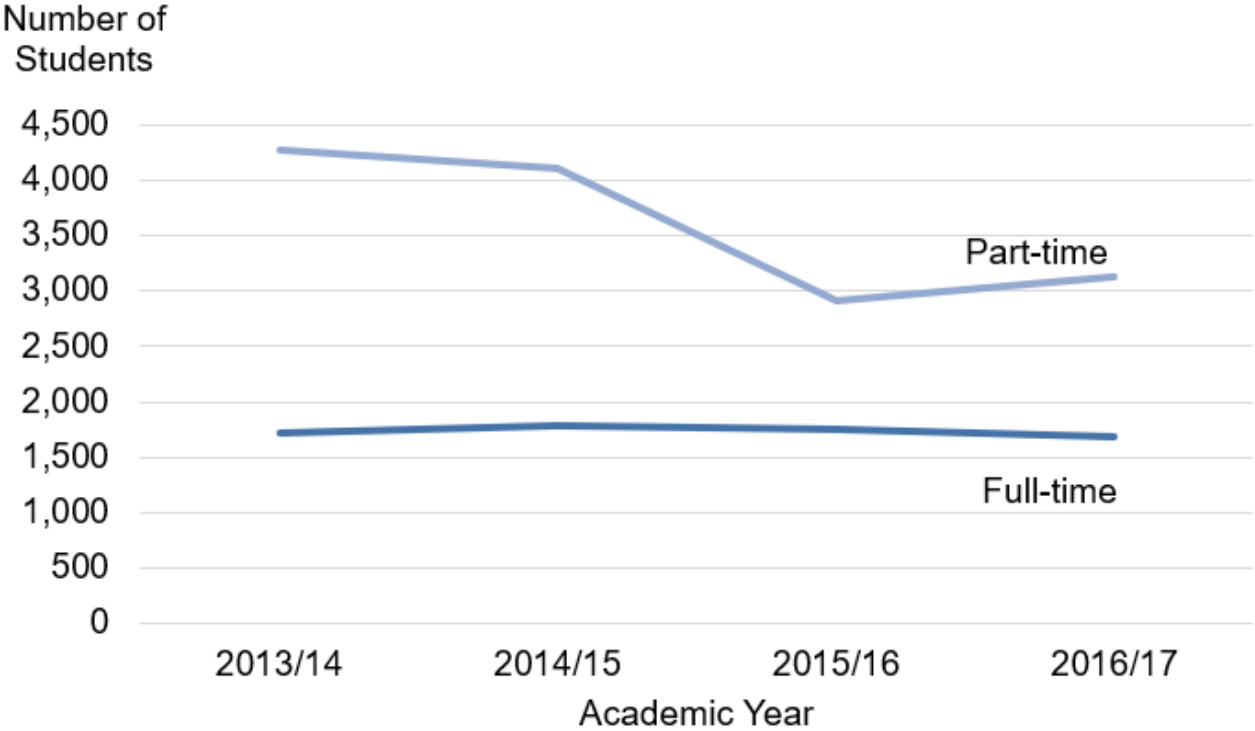
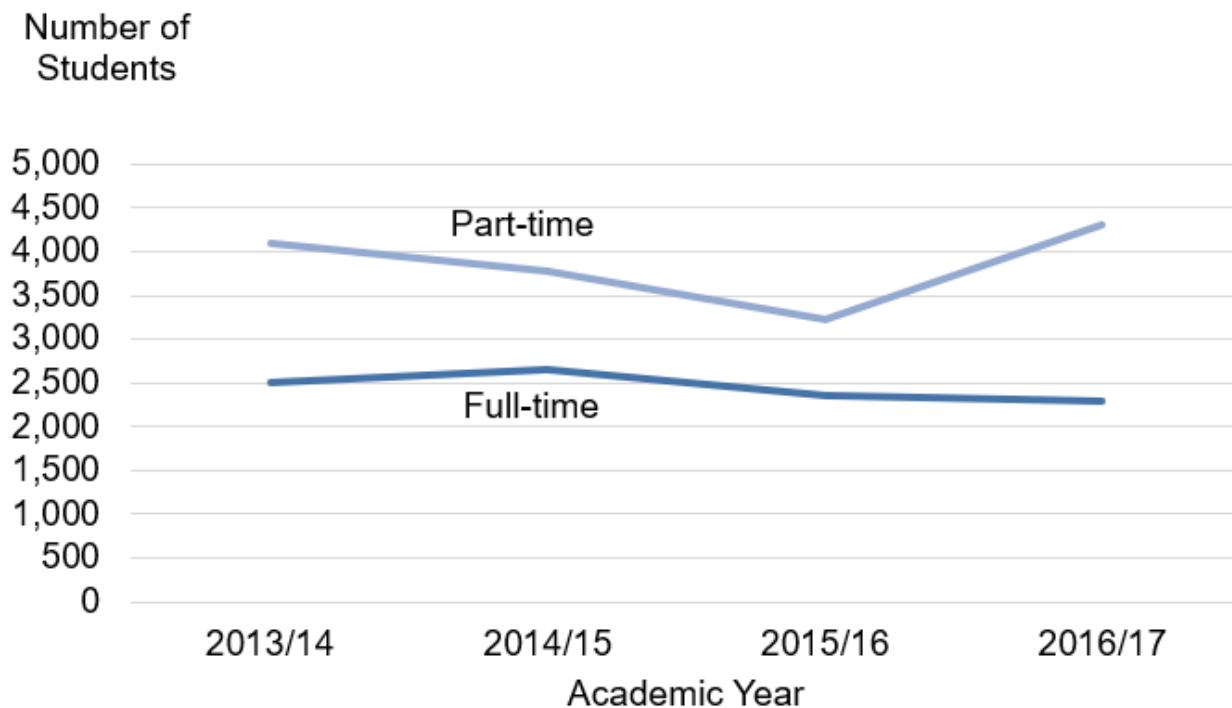Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.3 - Number of learners in Caerphilly, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17
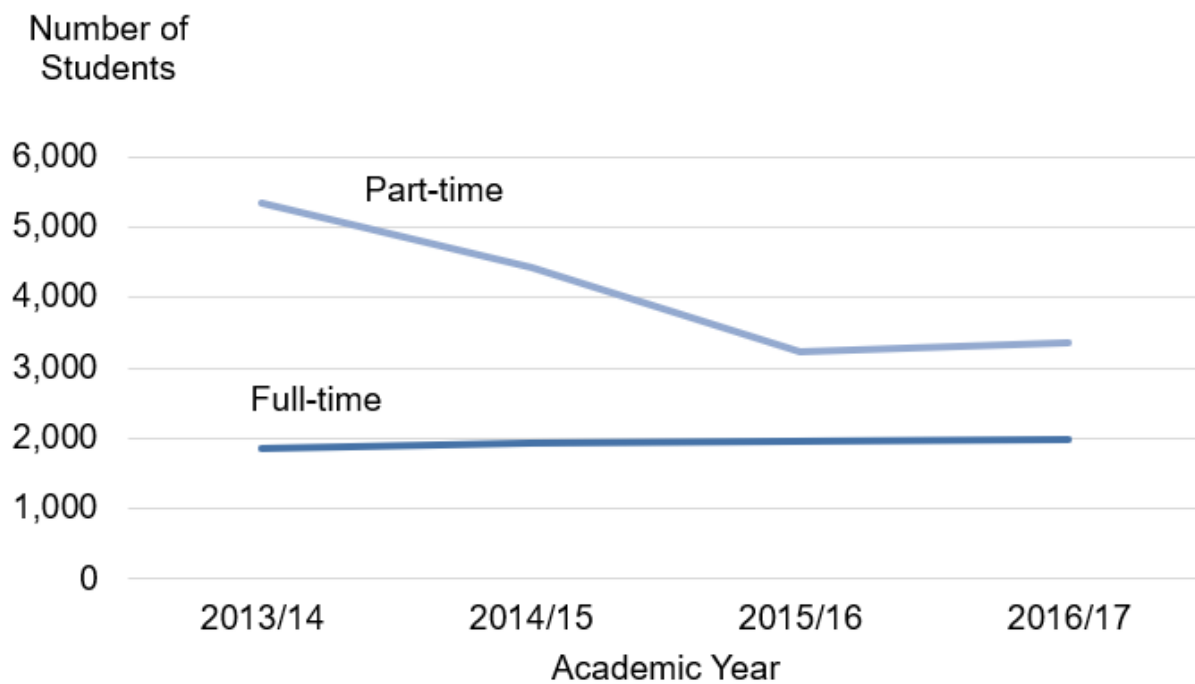
The number of part-time students in Caerphilly decreased by the greatest amount in 2014/15.
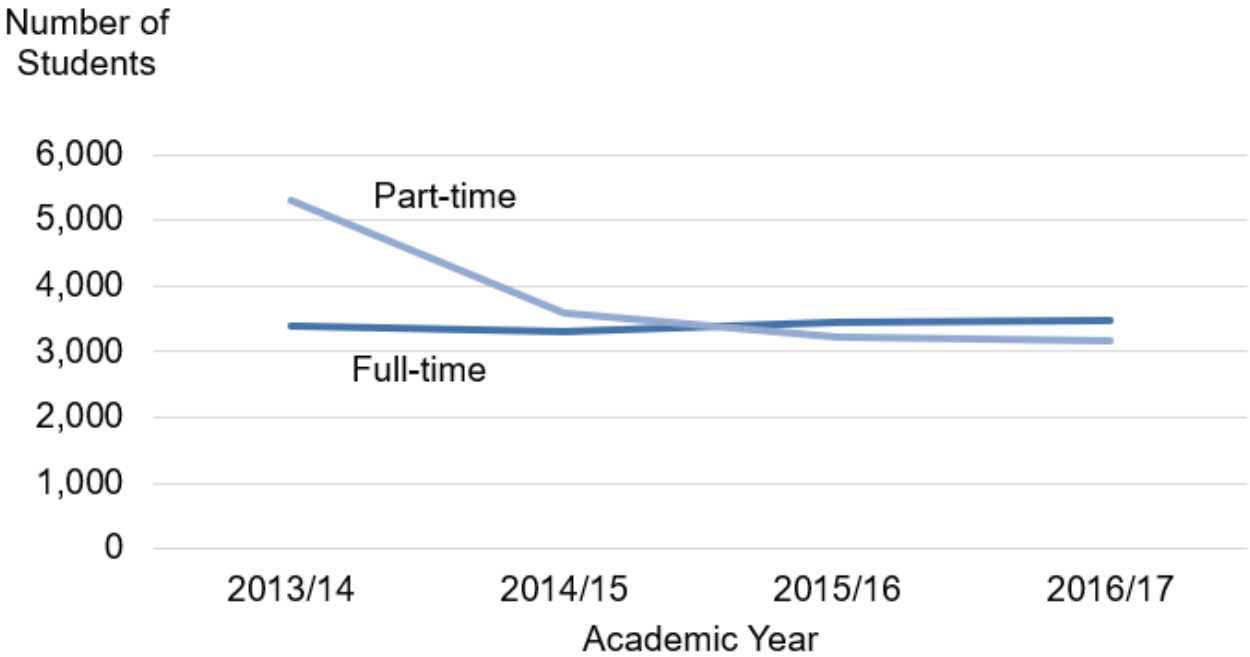
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

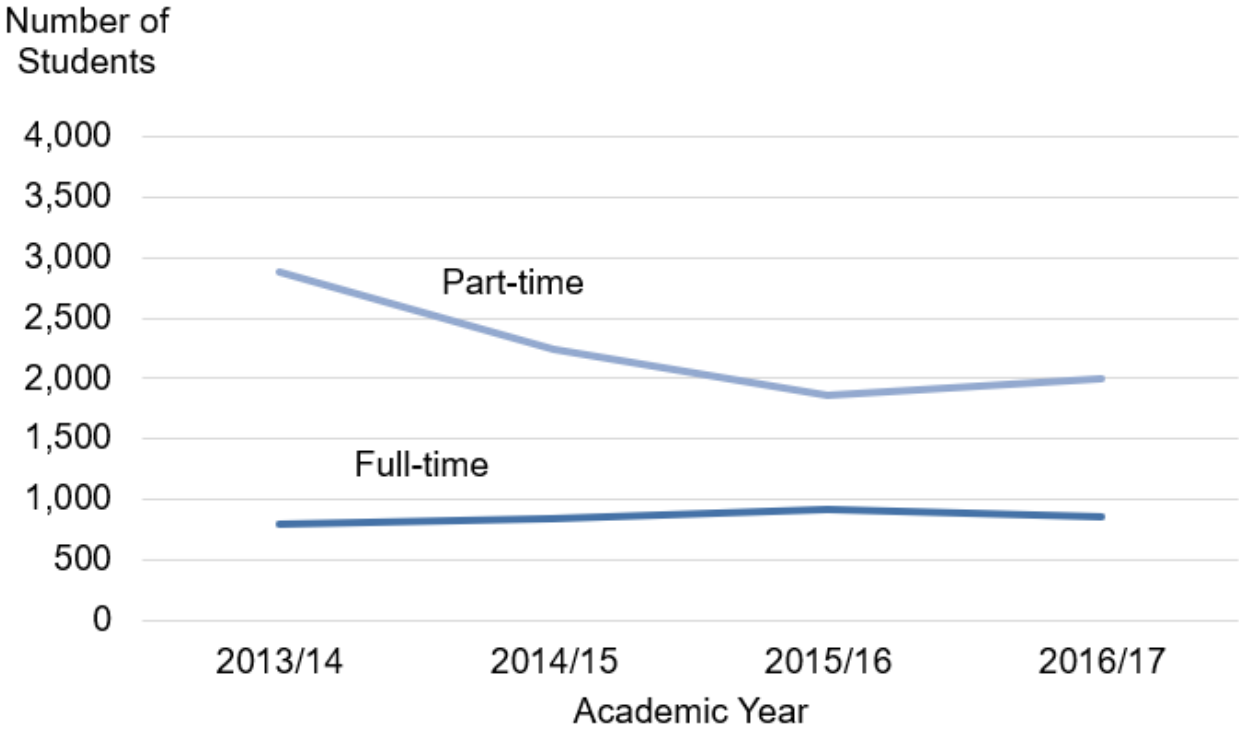**Figure F.4** - Number of learners in Cardiff, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Cardiff decreased steadily between 2013/14 and 2015/16
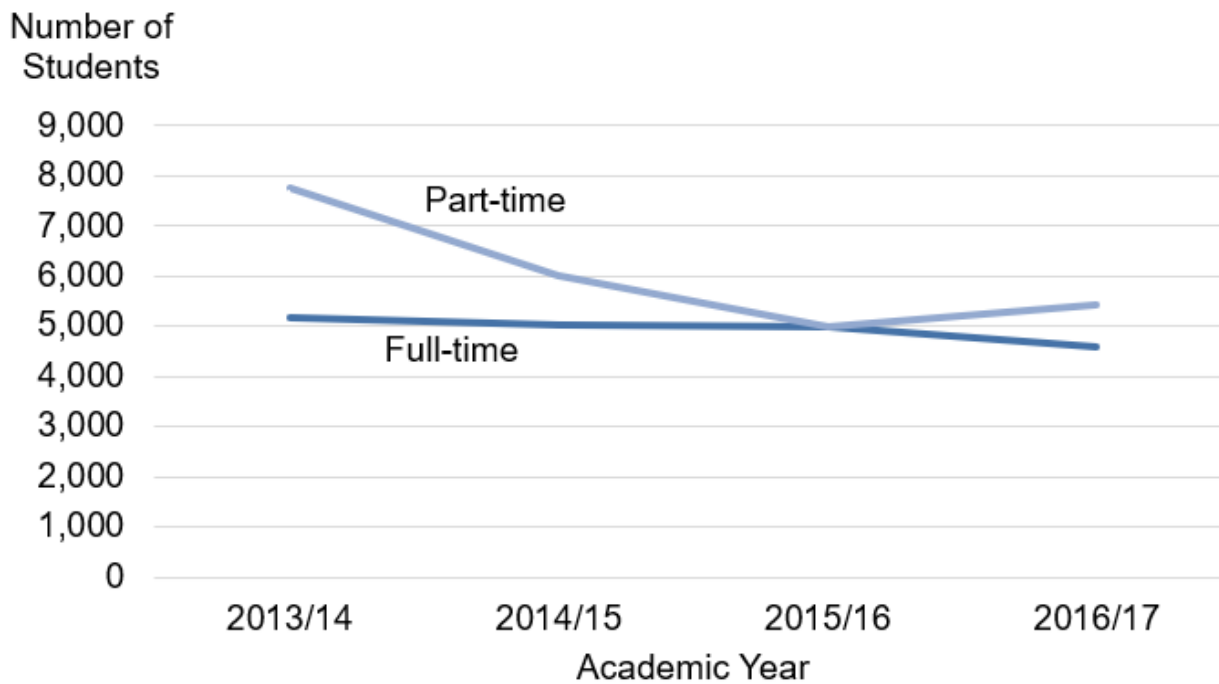
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.5 - Number of learners in Carmarthenshire, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Carmarthenshire decreased by the greatest amount between 2014/15 and 2015/16
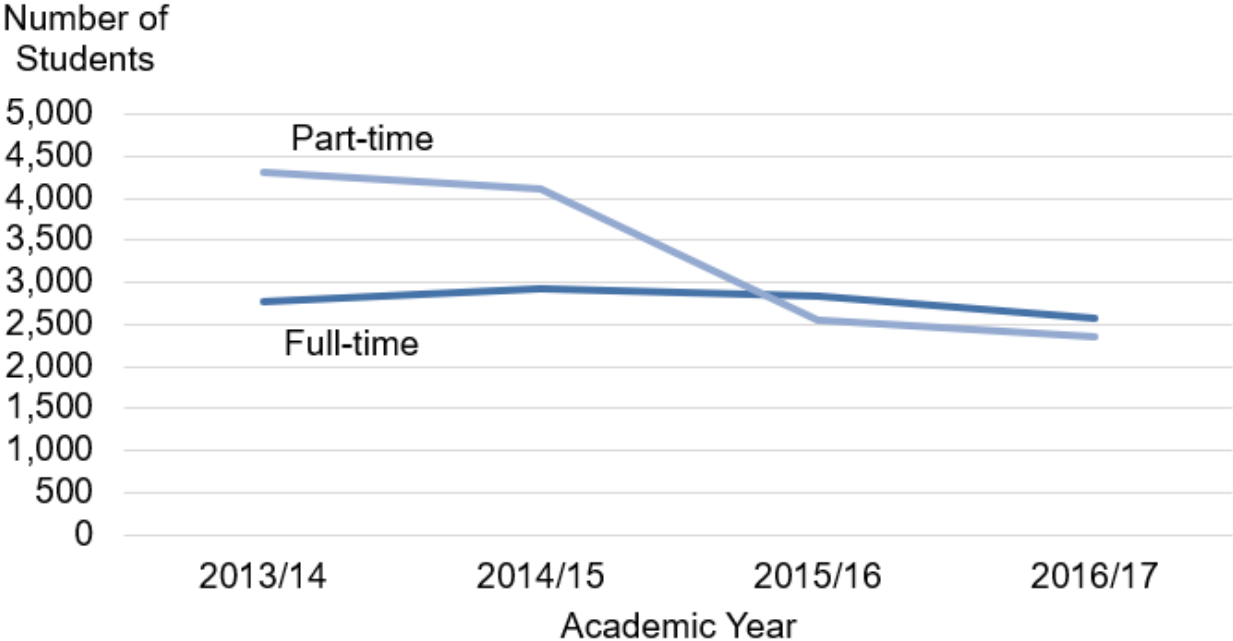
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.6 - Number of learners in Ceredigion, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

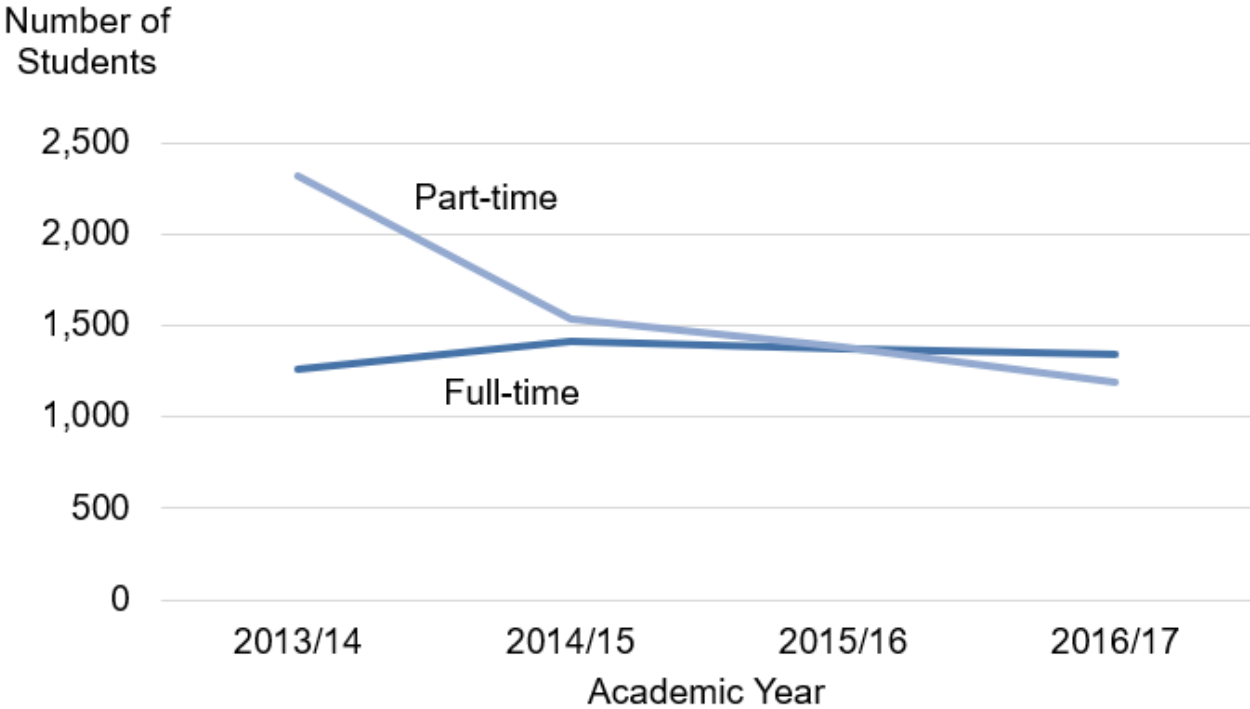The number of part-time learners decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16 with the sharpest decrease between 2014/15 and 2015/16.
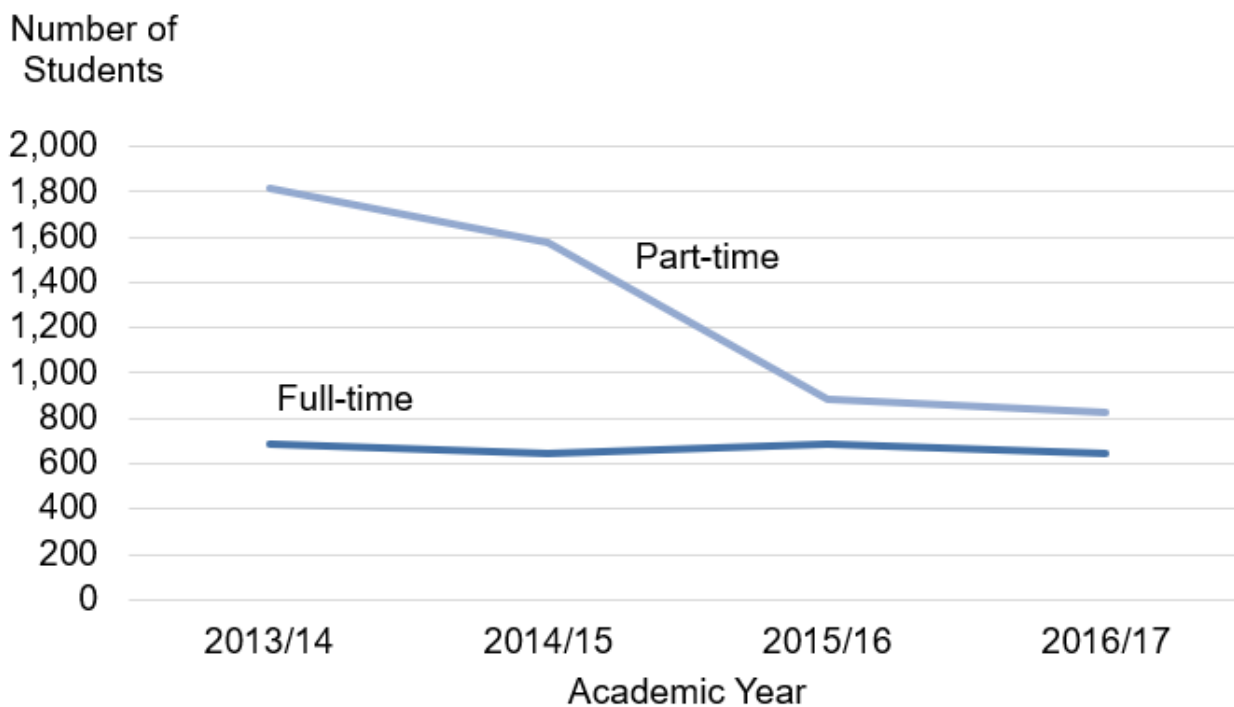
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

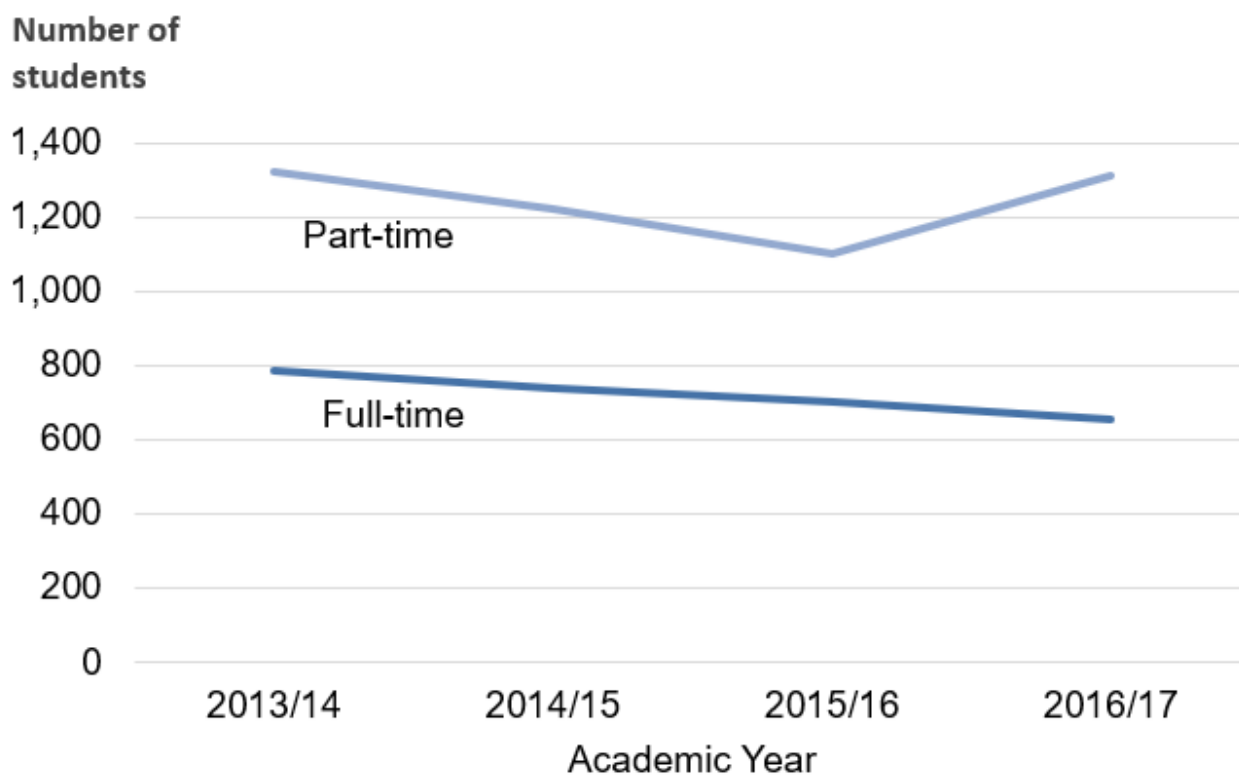**Figure F.7** - Number of learners in Conwy, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Conwy steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2016/17 with the sharpest decrease between 2013/14 and 2014/15
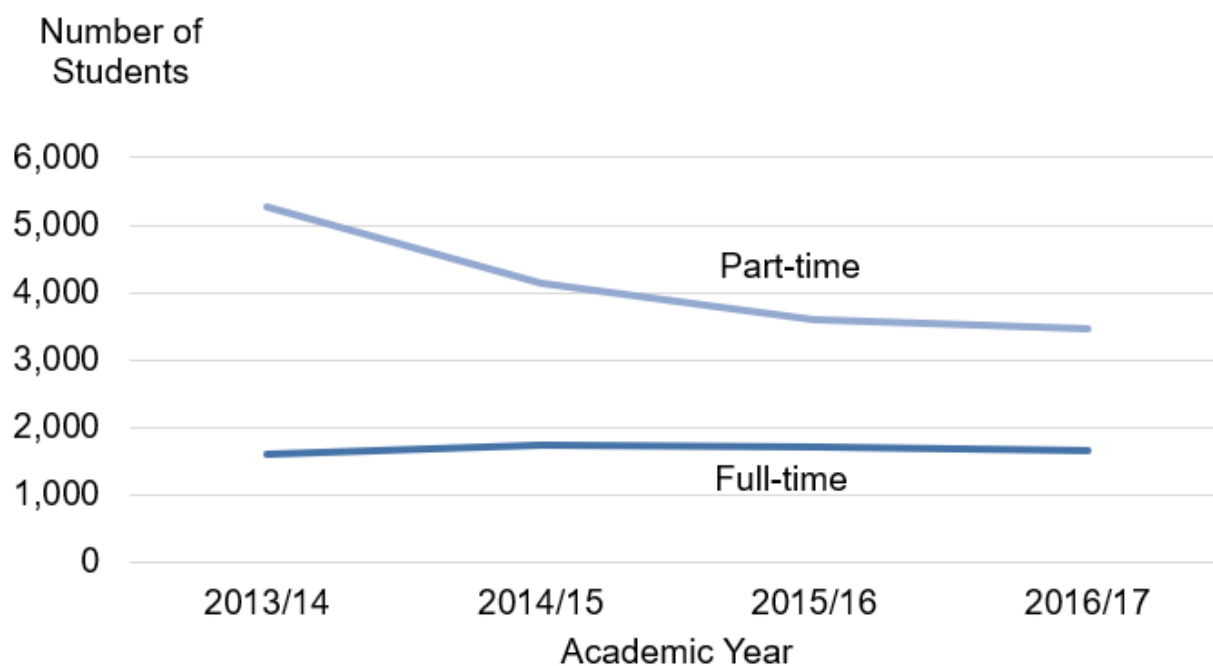
Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.8 - Number of learners in Denbighshire, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

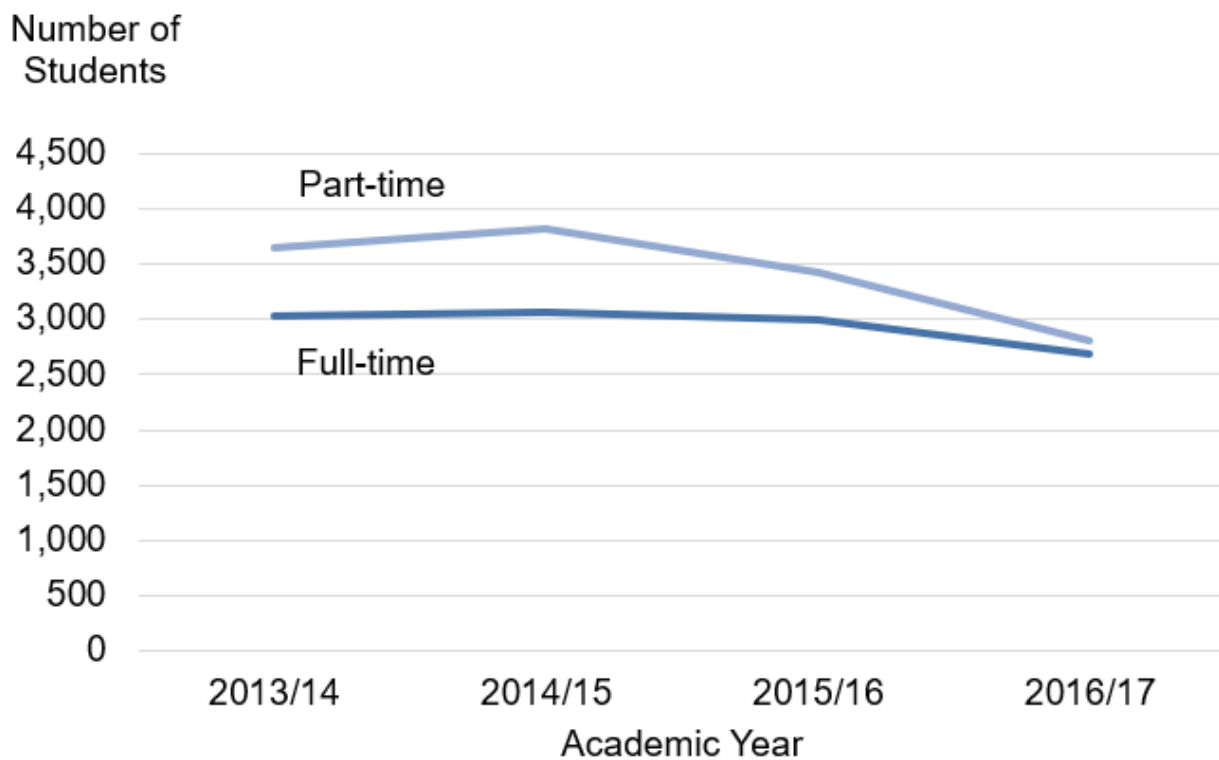**Figure F.9** - Number of learners in Flintshire, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Flintshire decreases by a small amount between 2013/14 and 2015/16 but increased in 2016/17

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.10 - Number of learners in Gwynedd, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners has steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.11 - Number of learners in Isle of Anglesey, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

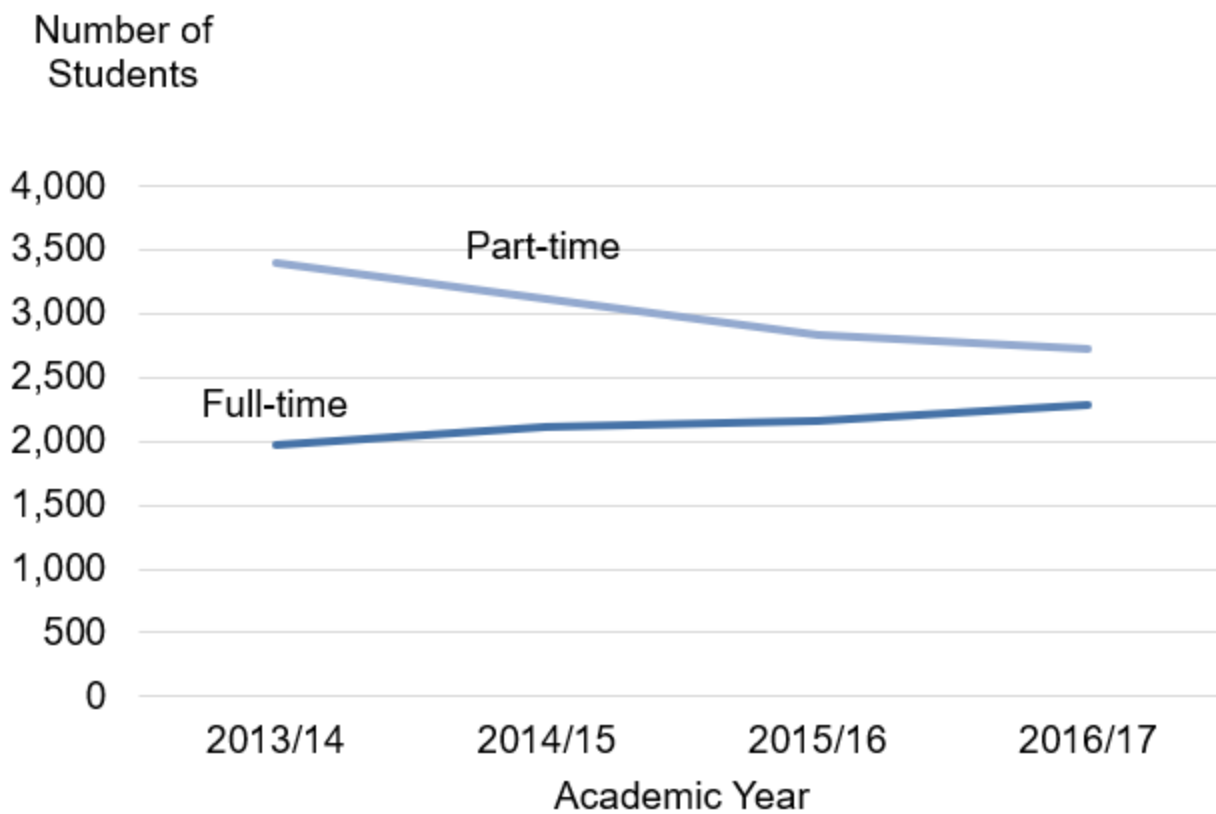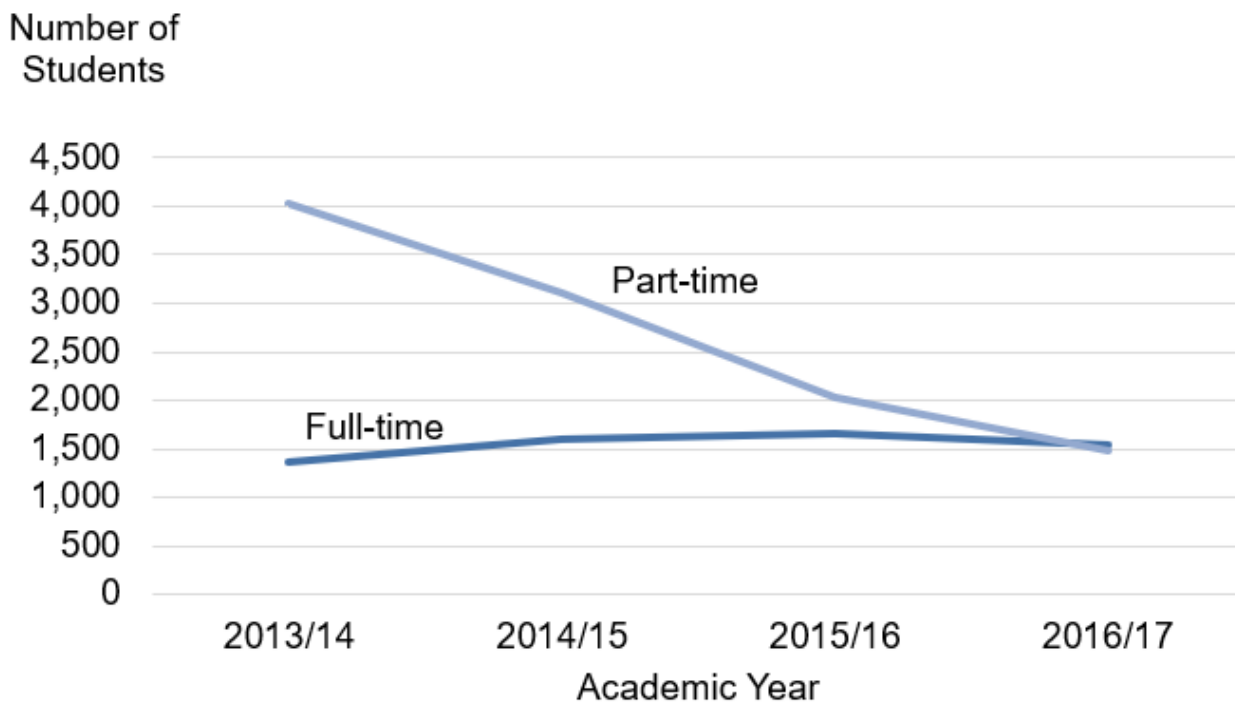The number of part-time learners in the Isle of Anglesey steadily decreased between

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.12 - Number of learners in Merthyr Tydfil, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Merthyr Tydfil decreased by the largest amount between 2013/14 and 2014/15

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.13 - Number of learners in Monmouthshire, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17
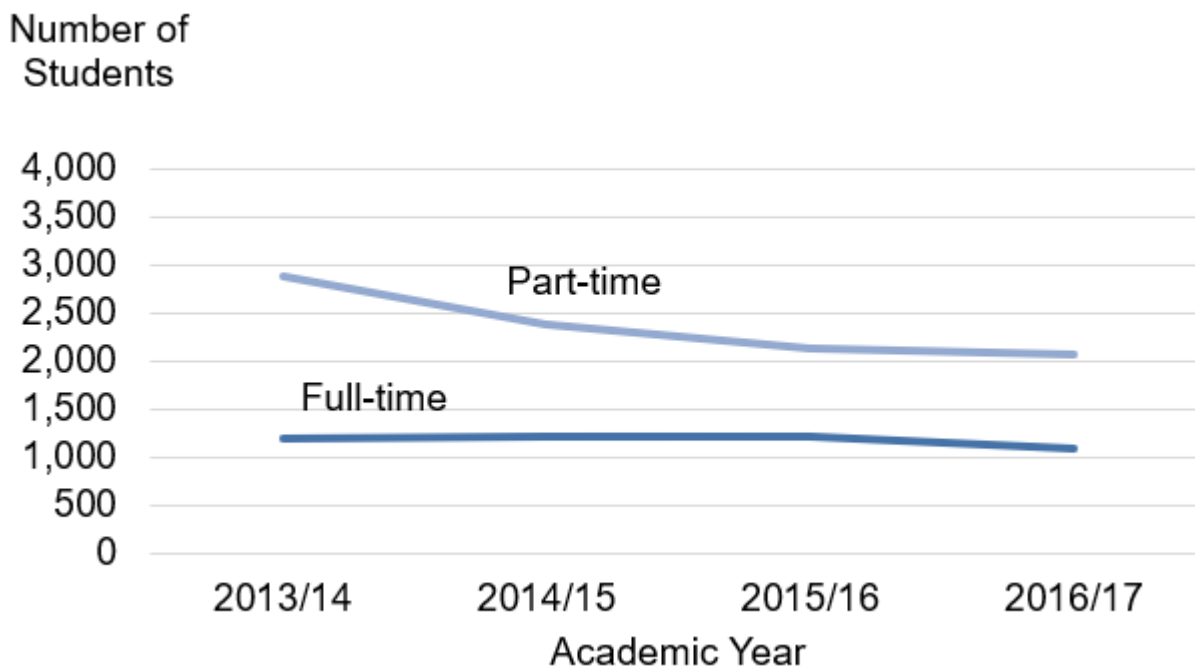
The number of part-time learners in Monmouthshire has decreased by a small amount between 2013/14 and 2015/16 and increased in 2016/17.

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.14 - Number of learners in Neath Port Talbot, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Neath Port Talbot steadily decreased between 2014/15 and 2016/17

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.15 - Number of learners in Newport, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17
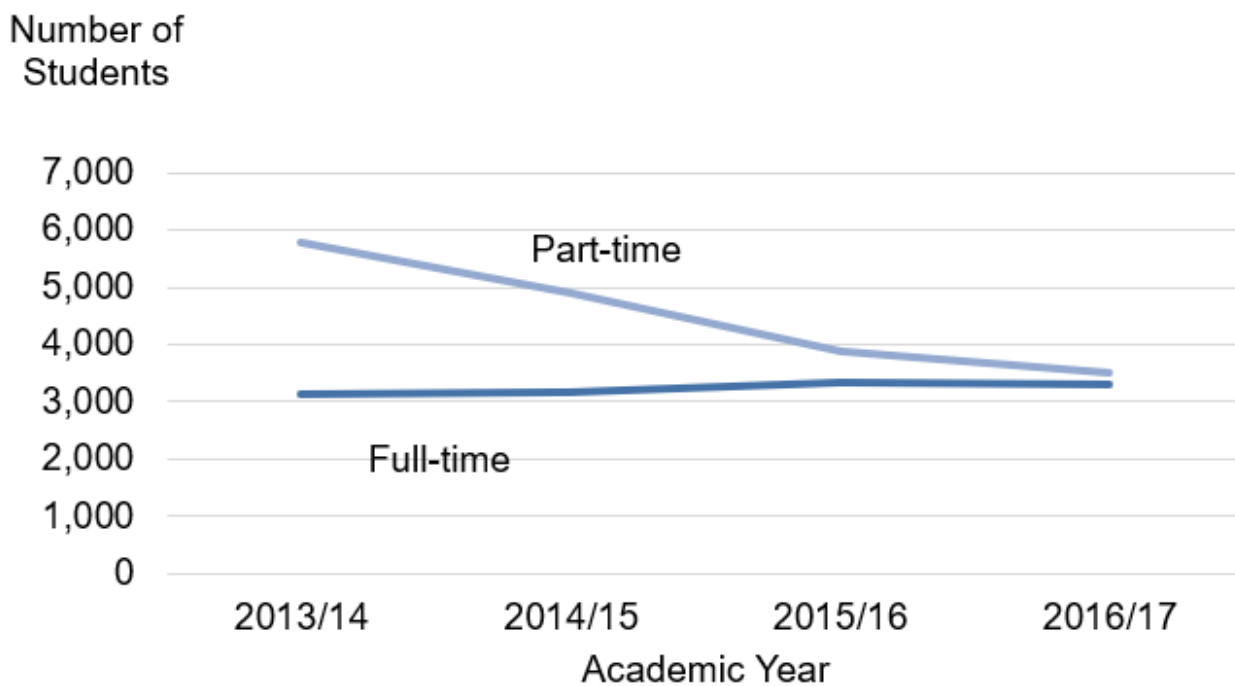
The number of part-time learners in Newport steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2016/17

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.16 - Number of learners in Pembrokeshire, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Pembrokeshire has steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16

Number of
Students

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.17 - Number of learners in Powys, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Powys steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2016/17

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.18 - Number of learners in Rhondda Cynon Taff, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17
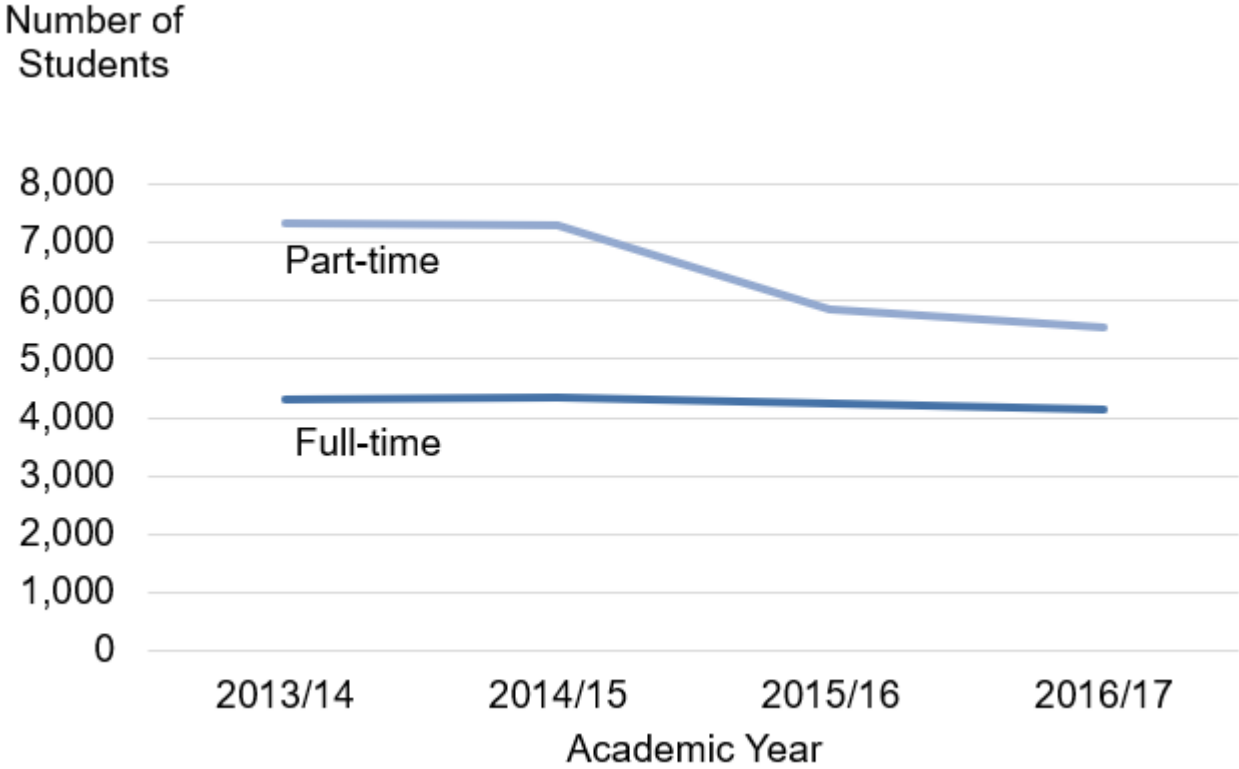
The number of learners in Rhondda Cynon Taf steadily decreased by a large amount between 2013/14 and 2015/16

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.19 - Number of learners in Swansea, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17
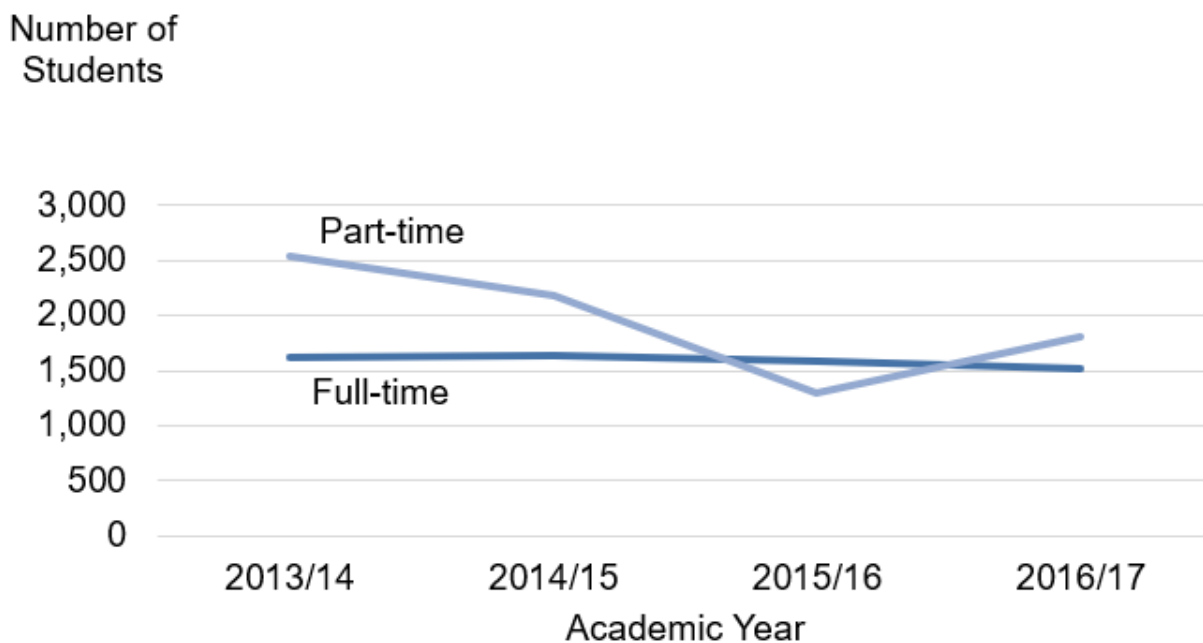
The number of part-time learners in Swansea decreased sharply between 2014/15 and 2015/16

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.20 - Number of learners in The Vale of Glamorgan, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17
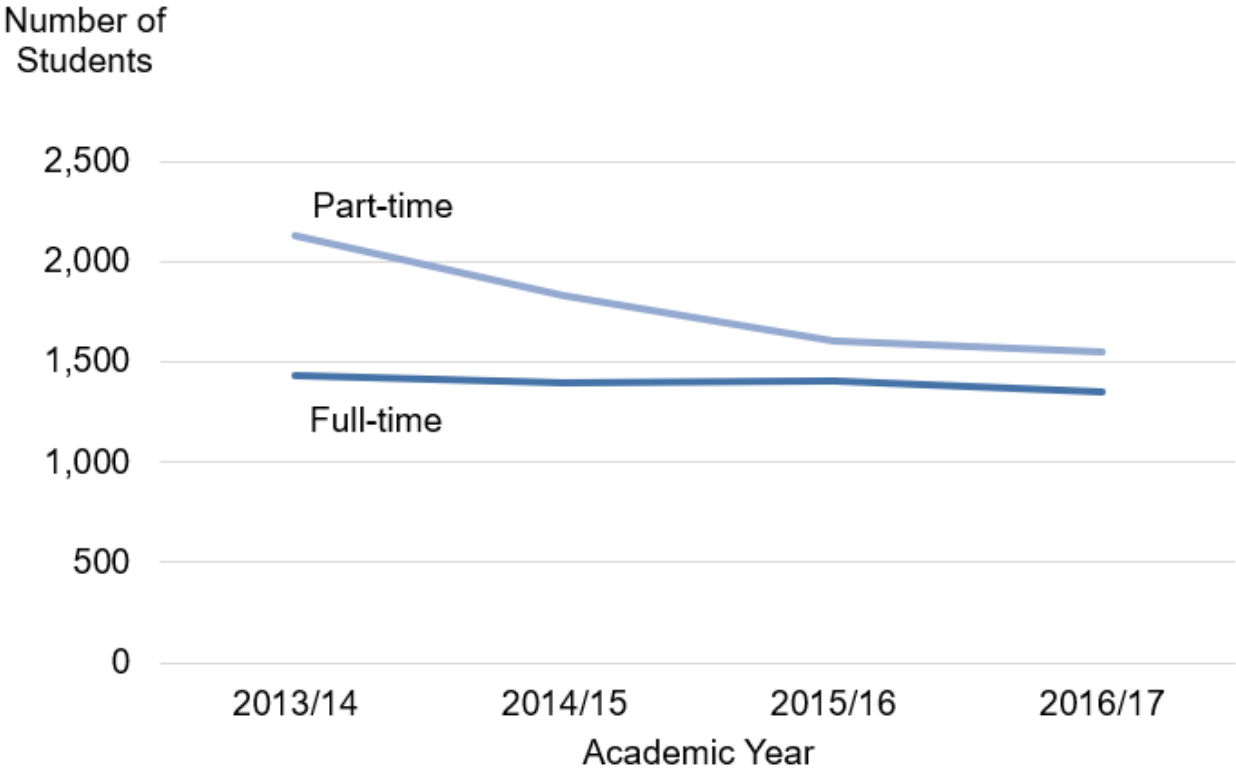
The number of part-time learners in The Vale Glamorgan decreased by the greatest amount between 2014/15 and 2015/16

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.21 - Number of learners in Torfaen, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17
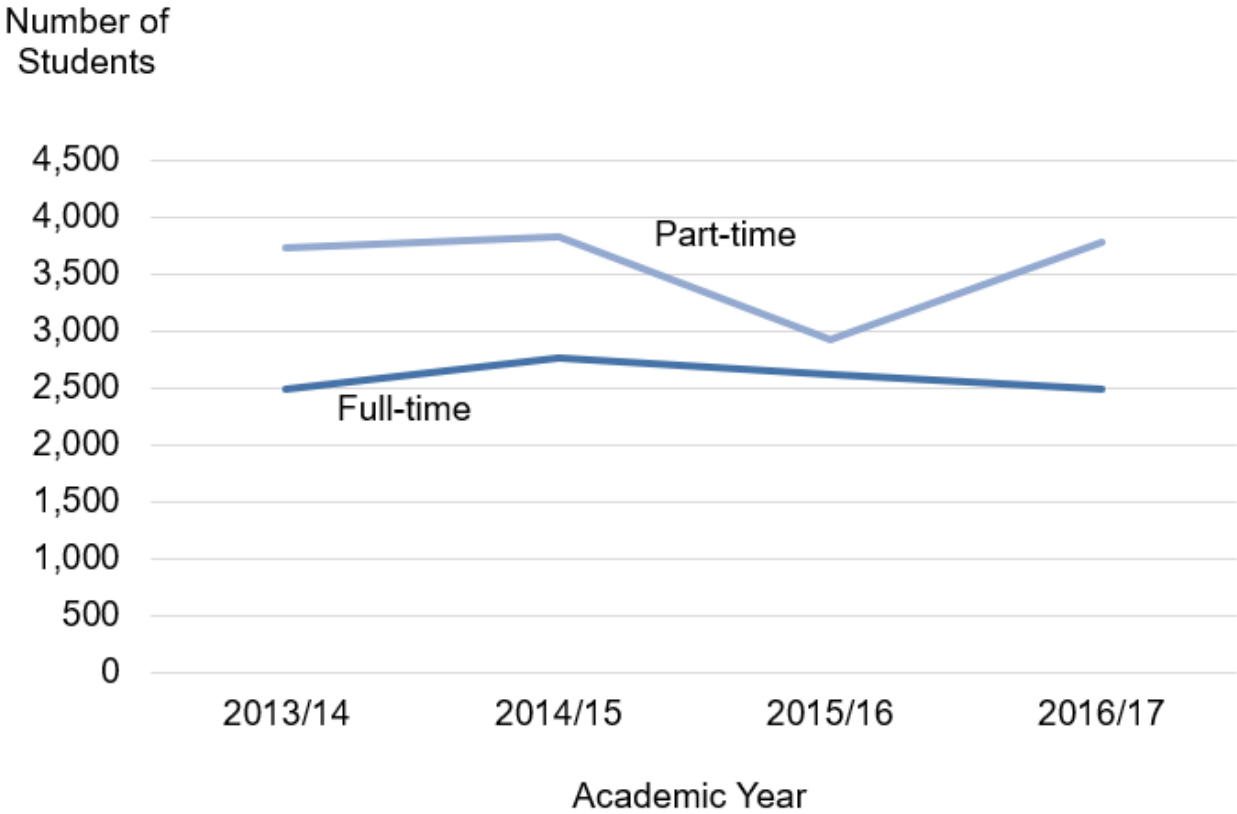
The number of part-time learners steadily decreased between 2013/14 and 2015/16

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government

Figure F.22 - Number of learners in Wrexham, by mode of study, academic years 2013/14 through to 2016/17

The number of part-time learners in Wrexham decreased by the greatest amount between 2014/15 and 2015/16

Number of
Students

Source: The Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government