

Consultation Response Pro-forma

The Proposals

Proposal 1: Removal of the sixth forms of Hawthorn High, Pontypridd High and Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive, with post 16 students attending an alternative school or college that offers the choice of courses they require.

Do you agree with proposal 1? **No**

Please let us know the reasons for your choice

1. This proposal will curtail choice for post 16 students in the greater Pontypridd area. The consultation assumes that approximately two thirds (c.200 of c.300) pupils attending the three 6th Forms proposed for closure will transfer to Bryncelynnog, expanding the Bryncelynnog 6th Form to 428 pupils by 2025, from its current base of 147. Though the projections do not include Coleg y Cymoedd, the inference is that just 60-100 of the pupils who would have attended one of the three closing 6th Forms will choose to attend CyC. There is no evidence to support these assumptions. Indeed, elsewhere in the document it is stated, quite plausibly, that the small decline we have seen in 6th Form numbers is a direct effect of the creation of the College.

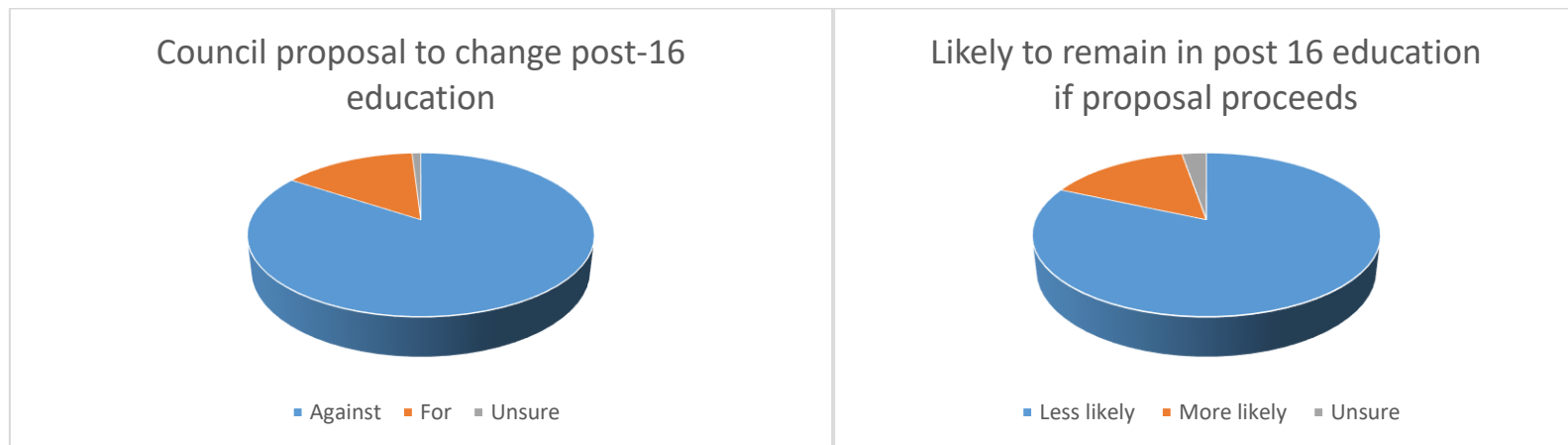
A far more realistic assumption is that the majority of students living between Cilfynydd and Taffs Well will, when presented with a choice between Bryncelynnog Comprehensive 6th Form and Coleg y Cymoedd, choose to attend the College. Geography and traditional patterns of travel and community connection will drive this pattern. People tend to travel up and down our valleys for work and education, rather than across valleys and there is no evidence to suggest that this pattern would change for these proposals.

In order to test public opinion about these proposals, I conducted a survey with affected schools in the catchment area and received responses from 542 families from the following schools:

- Pontypridd High
- Cardinal Newman
- Hawthorn High
- Hawthorn primary

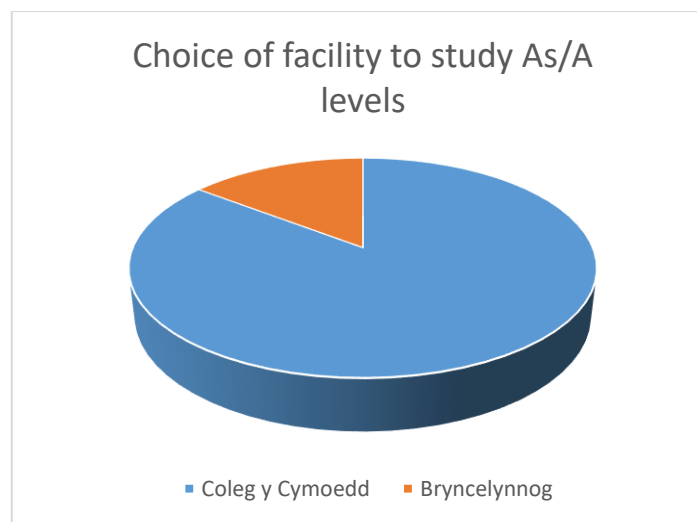
- Cefn primary
- Trehopcyn primary
- Trerobert primary
- Coed y Lan primary
- Parc Lewis primary
- Coedpenmaen primary
- Maesycoed primary
- Trallwn infants

Overwhelmingly, 84% of parents opposed the Council’s proposals as the best way to improve post-16 education in the Pontypridd area, with only 15% supportive of the proposals. Furthermore, 82% of parents clearly stated their children were less likely to remain in education after the age of 16 if the Council’s proposals were implemented. Only 16% thought their children were more likely to remain in post-16 education.



I also asked parents that if the changes were implemented, would your child be more likely to attend Coleg y Cymoedd or Bryncelynnog Comprehensive school to study for their As/A levels.

85% of parents answered that their child would be more likely to attend Coleg y Cymoedd compared with 15% who would choose to attend Bryncelynnog Comprehensive school.



The findings comprehensively support the conclusion that pupils will see their only 'real' choice as attending the college. It is therefore, essentially a false choice that is offered in these proposals, as the majority will attend the college.

There are several important issues that stem from this reduced choice:

a. Lesser pastoral care and structured learning for less mature or more vulnerable pupils, or for some with Learning Difficulties. Coleg y Cymoedd is an excellent FE college. It is, however, a very different learning environment to school, with a far greater, historic emphasis on vocational study and on student-led learning, with lesser structure in the learning day or week and greater churn in the teaching staff, with lesser continuity for students. There is less one-on-one management and knowledge of individual pupils, a function of the numbers of students and the culture of treating students more as adults and autonomous learners. For some, more mature or able students, this cultural change may prove stimulating and wholly positive. For others, however, who require greater nurturing, support or encouragement, it may prove a significant impediment to their achieving their full potential. That is why a true choice of options for students, with continuity pre-and post- 16 for those that require additional support, in an environment closer to their community, will remain a necessary condition for success for some students. In other words, the college will not be suitable for all at age 16, and Bryncelynnog, though an excellent school itself, may not be a realistic or viable alternative for those pupils who would fare better in a school 6th Form environment.

b. Lack of evidence that academic achievement will be improved by a concentration of pupils either at Coleg y Cymoedd or Bryncelynnog. The consultation document gives an impression that Bryncelynnog is significantly outperforming the other three schools in terms of performance at A Level. However, over a five year period all four schools have, in fact, performed similarly, with changes in cohorts delivering better results in Bryncelynnog in one year, Hawthorn in another, Ponty High in a third, Cardinal Newman in a fourth.

In 2015, for example, Bryncelynnog achieved just 34.7% success rate at grades A-C, whereas Cardinal Newman, Pontypridd High and Hawthorn achieved 73.4%, 68.3% and 59.6% respectively. A year later, in 2016, Bryncelynnog had boosted its performance to 67.2% while PHS, CN and HHS scored 64.7%, 68% and 61.9% respectively. These fluctuating patterns of similar performance are repeated across the period, and provide no strong evidence that any one school is 'out-performing' the others, nor that concentration of pupils in BCC would improve performance overall.

It is not ordinarily possible for parents to draw comparison between the academic performance of A Level students at Coleg y Cymoedd and that at our sixth forms, as the CyC data is not published. However, that data has been provided to me by the Welsh Assembly Government and it does not support the conclusion that performance would be enhanced by the transference of pupils to the college.

For comparison, in 2015, 61% of students at CyC achieved A-Levels grade A-C, out-performing the cohort at Bryncelynnog that year, on a par with Hawthorn, but a lesser percentage of success than at Ponty High or Cardinal Newman.

In 2016, 59% of students at CyC achieved A Levels grade A-C, performing less well than at any of our 6th Forms.

For completeness and transparency, please see the table below listing all Coleg y Cymoedd results across all A Level Subjects from 2013-2017.

Psychology	55	9	54	89	20	0	40	95	35	*	53	85	45	7	45	84
Religious Studies	25	17	58	92	15	0	54	100	*	*	*	*	10	*	67	92
Sociology	45	6	55	94	35	0	61	100	35	*	63	100	30	14	82	100
Spanish	0	0	0	0	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0	0	0	0
Statistics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*	*	*	*
Welsh second language	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
All	405	11	59	93	350	7	61	96	355	10	65	95	425	11	67	97

(a) Data not shown for cohorts of less than 10, or individual cells for less than 3 pupils.

Number of A levels sat rounded to the nearest 5.

Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)

It is also worth noting that the breadth and nature of the A Level Subjects being undertaken at the College versus the 6th Forms may have some significant bearing on any analysis of their relative performance. The history and tradition of CyC is as a centre of excellence for vocational learning, not as a 6th Form with its traditional emphasis on academic learning and progression to Higher Education.

This accounts for the fact that many traditional A Level subjects have NEVER been taught at Coleg y Cymoedd. For example, since the creation of the College, NO pupils have undertaken A Levels in English Literature, Further Mathematics, French, German, Spanish, Welsh, Music, DT, Government and Politics, Philosophy or Statistics..

The most popular A Levels at the College over the period are Psychology, Sociology, Art and Design, Media studies, Mathematics, History and Law. Of course these subject choices and mix would change if the College were effectively the post-16 choice for many across Pontypridd, but it does highlight a significant dearth of experience or expertise in the teaching of many academic subjects at Coleg y Cymoedd

c. Travel arrangements. It is a longstanding objective of the Welsh Government and RCTCBC to increase the physical activity of our children, including through the encouragement of walking to school along safe school routes. For the overwhelming majority of pupils transferring from one of the existing 6th Forms to either CyC or BCC, there will be no safe route and significantly increased

distances to travel. The consultation acknowledges that fact and so proposes home to school bus transport for almost all of the pupils. This is at odds with the important objective of increasing physical activity. It is also environmentally detrimental. Questions also have to be asked about the sustainability of this guarantee of transport, in light of recent, later retracted, proposals to cut school transport routes due to budgetary restrictions.

d. Faith school provision. This would be the second time in five years that the 6th Form at Cardinal Newman has undergone significant change, including its abortive partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd, widely perceived by parents and pupils not to have worked, for a variety of reasons. These new proposals will see many pupils seeking a Catholic 6th Form education forced to travel out of county, to Cardiff. There is significant concern among parents and pupils at the school about the impact this will have on both the individuals concerned and on the long-term viability of the school, if denuded of its 6th Form.

Proposal 2: Create a new, 3 – 16 ‘all through’ school for Hawthorn

Do you agree with proposal 2? **No**

Please let us know the reasons for your choice:

For the reasons listed in my response to Proposal 1, I believe retention of a 6th Form for Pontypridd is essential. I accept the arguments being made about size and the relative performance of the existing 6th Forms, and the logic of greater concentration on one or more sites. The logical site for an expanded 6th Form for the greater Pontypridd area is at Hawthorn, although that too would present some challenges in respect of traffic management and other important issues raised by parents.

There is nothing to stop the Council proposing a 3-19 school on the Hawthorn site. The proximity of Hawthorn Primary means that such a school already exists in spatial terms, though the management, governance, resourcing etc are currently all separate, of course.

Nor is there significant evidence from elsewhere in Wales, or the rest of the UK that 3-16 schools increase academic performance. Indeed some recent studies have illustrated the traditional benefits of having older, post-16 student role-models on site alongside younger pupils. I accept many of the arguments made in the document about the theoretical benefits in management and financial terms of the merger, but do not believe they are sufficient to any educational concerns.

Parents, as surveyed above, and in local public meetings have expressed other concerns, which the council must address. These include:

- That a 3 – 16 ‘all through school’ can be difficult to manage and younger pupils may be exposed to older pupils’ behaviour, i.e, swearing and smoking.
- That there could be an increase of anti-social behaviour due to the size of the school, which also raises the question about children who have difficulty settling into a new environment – a smaller school, with pupils from an appropriate age range can manage the transition into school easier, which then has a more positive outcome on their educational journey.

Proposal 3: Create a new, 3 – 16 ‘all through’ school for Pontypridd

Do you agree with proposal 3? No

Please let us know the reasons for your choice:

For the reasons listed in my response to Proposal 1, I believe retention of a 6th Form for Pontypridd is essential. However, I accept the arguments being made about size and the relative performance of the existing 6th Forms, and the logic of greater concentration on one or more sites. Pontypridd High School provides an excellent, nurturing education and environment for its pupils. It’s location, however, significantly outside Pontypridd, in the Cynon Valley Constituency, and wedged between an industrial estate and the A470 has never been ideal. If the Council considers it financially and educationally unsustainable to retain all three existing 6th Forms, then a compromise proposal might be to concentrate the three 6th Forms at Hawthorn.

Alternative ideas that the Council should consider are either:

- a. The construction of a new 6th Form Centre of Excellence elsewhere in Pontypridd, with shared governance between the three local schools, and oversight by our Local Authority.
- b. Full amalgamation of Pontypridd High and Hawthorn High Schools on a shared site, with a 6th Form shared between all three schools.

Proposal 4: Close YGG Pont Sion Norton and relocate its pupils to a new Welsh Medium Primary School, to be constructed on the current site of Heol-Y-Celyn Primary School (which will close as part of Proposal 2). Welsh Medium pupils attending Heol y Celyn will also transfer to the new school.

Do you agree with proposal 4? **Yes**

Please let us know the reasons for your choice

YGG Pont Sion Norton is another excellent local school, but its site, access and location are far from perfect, as described accurately in the Consultation Document. Welsh language pupils will benefit significantly from the construction of a new school, especially in the improved provision for outdoor learning and play.

Proposal 5: Amendment of the catchment areas of Hawthorn High and Pontypridd High Schools and the 6th form catchment area of Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School, as outlined in this document.

Do you agree with proposal 5? **Yes, in respect of Pontypridd High. No, in respect of Hawthorn and Bryncellynog**

Please let us know the reasons for your choice

The changes to the catchment for Pontypridd High are sensible and largely supported by parents. The current catchments are anomalous consequences of previous decisions to relocate Secondary provision in Pontypridd from Glyntaff and Coed-y-Lan to the current sites at Hawthorn and Pontypridd High (Cilfynydd) respectively. Natural connections between areas and communities would be better reflected by the proposed changes. This is especially true for Coedpenmaen Primary. The case for Maes-y-Coed is more finely balanced, as reflected in the relatively even split of pupils transitioning from the school to Hawthorn and Ponty High.

However, the same cannot be said of the proposal to change the catchments for Hawthorn and Bryncelynnog through the change to Gwauncelyn Primary School.

Gwauncelyn is located in Tonteg, at one end of a 'natural' community that includes Church Village, Llantwit Fadre, Tynant and Beddau, all locations that have traditionally fed Bryncelynnog Comprehensive. Tonteg is geographically and culturally part of that community and wholly separate from the community of Hawthorn and Rhydyfelin. Geographically, they are several miles apart, with Power Station Hill, the River Taff, Treforest Industrial Estate and the exceptionally busy Upper Boat Roundabout separating them. There is clearly no safe route to school between Tonteg and Hawthorn but, more importantly, there is no shared community. Such a shift would involve moving pupils wholly outside their community of friends, neighbours, clubs and associations – only to ask them all to move back at age 16.

This is a decision clearly designed to accommodate anticipated growth of the communities along the Church Village by-pass corridor, and the consequent increase in pupil numbers at Bryncelynnog, but it cannot be right to ask parents and pupils in the community of Tonteg to sever their traditional, natural connection to Bryncelynnog in anticipation of other local population changes. Far better to plan additional, future primary school provision for those growth areas in conjunction with investment and expansion of Bryncelynnog as necessary.

6. Please state any alternative views or points which you would like to be taken into account (attach additional sheets if necessary):

Rhondda Cynon Taff Council has an excellent and enviable record of investment in, and support of local education with some outstanding performance and results as a consequence. I consistently hear praise from local parents at the quality of local education and the commitment of our teachers and local authority to maintaining and improving performance.

The recent capital investments across our county have also been exceptional – in effect the greatest investment we have seen since the Victorian era, with new schools across all areas. The proposals in this consultation also involve significant and welcome further investment. Bryncelynnog and Hawthorn schools, in particular, are in clear and pressing need of investment in the fabric of

their buildings. We also have too many surplus places at Primary level, and too many failing buildings in need of constant and expensive repair. These proposals would be beneficial in addressing these financial issues.

However, these changes must, first and foremost, be about achieving improvements in educational standards, increasing educational engagement post-16, while creating a footprint for our local services which matches likely population growth and development into this century. And I am not convinced that these proposals are the best means of achieving any of those goals.

The consultation document suggests that pupils will have a choice in the greater Pontypridd area between attending Coleg y Cymoedd or Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School. I believe, in line with the more than 500 parents and pupils I have consulted, that the majority of pupils under these circumstances will attend Coleg y Cymoedd, thereby effectively denying meaningful educational choice to residents in Pontypridd. That cannot be right.

Nor is it right, in my view, for our Local Authority, with its proud tradition of overseeing excellent local education, to divest itself of responsibility for the provision of post-16 education for the hundreds of pupils whom this consultation anticipates will attend CyC in future, as CyC has no meaningful accountability to our Local Authority, only to the Welsh Government.

In conclusion, I do not support the proposals to change 6th Forms outlined in the consultation document, nor those to the catchment areas for Hawthorn and Bryncelynnog. I think it is imperative that the Council does invest in Bryncelynnog and Hawthorn as the fabric and suitability of the buildings on both sites is poor, and unequal to the excellence and commitment of pupils and staff at both schools.

I believe the Council should undertake a further study of the options for reform in greater Pontypridd, including an analysis of the possibility of Secondary School Mergers, as has been undertaken in Aberdare, for example. Or in the merger of 6th Forms at a site in Pontypridd to achieve the financial and educational excellence, sustainability and local accountability sought by the Council and supported by parents and pupils.

None of these alternative options should consider any changes, other than the required additional investment, to the excellent 6th Form provisions at Bryncelynnog Comprehensive.

In summary of the 542 submissions from parents and pupils that I received, here are some of their comments and concerns. For completeness and transparency, I will provide all of the survey data to the Council.

Parents are concerned about:

- Diminished parental and pupil choice
- Sense that these changes are driven largely by financial considerations
- Loss of high calibre teachers
- Lack of consistency and continuity of support for pupils
- Large impersonal class sizes
- Loss of teaching posts and other job losses
- Loss of community schools
- Affordability and sustainability of school transport
- Lack of affiliation between Pontypridd High and Bryncellynog
- Traffic congestion at schools during peak times
- University town of Pontypridd should have a 6th form
- Significant difference between a secondary school and a college
- Reduced diversity in subjects
- Reduced aspirations for pupils
- No Catholic 6th Form for Pontypridd
- Lesser accountability to parents for performance at Coleg y Cymoedd
- Less pastoral care – especially for pupils with learning difficulties.

7. Please indicate who you are (e.g. parent of a pupil at named school, governor at named school etc.)

Constituency Member of Parliament

8. Name **Owen Smith MP**

9. Please provide contact details if you wish to be notified of publication of the consultation report

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Please forward completed questionnaires to the above address no later than Thursday, 31st January 2019

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