

This is the first in a monthly series. Every month, something is said about young people which is true. A think tank publishes a report, a minister makes a speech or a statistic dominates the headlines. This series aims to mind the gap and ask what it really means for the young people where we work: Wrexham, Flintshire, and Cheshire West and Chester.

On two Thursdays this August, school halls across Wrexham, Flintshire and Cheshire West and Chester filled with young people, their families and teachers who had been nervously awaiting the big day almost as much as the young people themselves.

Across Wales, [29.6% of A level grades were A* or A and the pass rate rose to 97.7%](#), with entries up on last year. Entries for the Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales rose [by 10.4%](#). A week later, [Wales maintained its GCSE pass rate](#).



Closer to home, Coleg Cambria had a successful summer, with [a record 68 honours at Skills Competition Wales](#) and national Vocational Celebration Day held at its Bersham Road campus in Wrexham. [Schools across Flintshire celebrated](#), and over the border [more than 2,300 students in Cheshire West and Chester](#) collected their results, with Cheshire College South & West recording a third consecutive year of increased high grades.

Those mornings were described nationally too. [The Sutton Trust](#) showed the gap between London and the North East widening to 9.6 percentage points, up from 3.9 before the pandemic. [Impetus](#) traced the connection between what happens in school and what happens at 24.

[The Learning and Work Institute](#) read the labour market figures and [Senedd Research](#) the Welsh ones, while [Careers Wales](#) spent the week reminding families that results day is a starting point rather than a finish line. Anna Brychan told learners in Cardiff that their results do not define their future, and Cefin Campbell congratulated students heading to university, to apprenticeships, to employment, or still making up their minds. He treated all four as equally worth congratulating, which is not always how these things are said. Advocacy of that quality makes the case for young people far better than any one organisation could manage alone, and we are glad of it.

A week after the second of those mornings, the Office for National Statistics published [their quarterly figures of those young people not in education, employment or training](#). The headline figure fell by around 30,000, to 981,000, taking it back below a million after it [passed that mark in May for the first time since 2013](#). That is welcome news, but it still underlines the enormous scale and challenge facing young people today. In the past 5 years, this figure has increased by 31.2%. The next update, due in November, will help us assess whether this is indeed a turning point or merely a blip in a concerning, rising trend.

What determines who appears in that November figure is rarely an A level. More often it is a pass in GCSE English or Maths, and this year [the resit figures fell again](#), something the Sutton Trust's Carl Cullinane called "very concerning" and tied directly to this crisis. [Research from Impetus has helped in understanding which factors can lead to economic inactivity](#). Of 326,000 pupils suspended at least once last year, those on free school meals were four times more likely to be among them, and suspended pupils twice as likely to be out of work or study by 24.



For the first time, a Year 11 student in England did not have to make the trip to school at all. [The new Education Record app](#) put GCSE grades on a phone. The Department for Education [expects it to save schools up to £30m a year](#), and nobody should have to hunt through a drawer for a certificate before a job interview.

However, it has made missing the formative experience of collecting results at school easier. And the young person most likely to miss it is the one who already suspects the news is bad, the one who most needs a supportive teacher standing nearby. The young person most at danger of falling through the gaps.



The ONS number covers the UK, while Wales publishes separately and on its own timetable, [putting 17% of 16 to 24 year olds outside education, employment and training](#) against 13.5% across the UK. Nor is the support the same on each side of the border. The [£4,500 apprenticeship bursary](#) and [£287m for post-16 places, technical pathways from 14](#), the [£416.8m Youth Matters Fund](#), and the results app itself, all apply in England only.

A school leaver in Wrexham and one in Ellesmere Port shared a results week yet now face rather different offers and opportunities. Wales' new Plaid Cymru led government has just passed its first 100 days in power, and has a great opportunity to decide how subsequent Barnett consequential can be effectively made use of in terms of youth and education provision.

[Around 100 Year 11 leavers spent seven weeks this summer at Coleg Cambria](#), the kind of programme that exists because young people will always need support as they progress through their life journey, and grades are not a life plan. WeMindTheGap exist to offer similar support. We put young people into paid jobs, offer coaching or mentoring, have no cliff edge of support and provide a caring community in which young people can find both themselves and belonging. Our suite of programmes run all year round, to support whenever and wherever young people find themselves on their own journey.



Many of the young people counted in November will have sat no exams this summer at all. But some will be the ones who opened an envelope this August, or looked at a phone alone. Whichever it was, what happens to them between now and then will not be decided in London or Cardiff. It will be decided by whether anyone was still paying attention in September.

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