

The new *WG Economic Plan* is to be welcomed in respect of making the economy work for people on low incomes. The plan sets out new ways to define and achieve growth (inclusive growth, support for foundation sectors, sustainability and job progression), and to maximise the potential of public spending to encourage local growth and introduce an *Economic Contract* to obtain economic and social value.

Up skilling and Training

Implementation will need to be underpinned by a thorough understanding of the different ways in which socio-economic disadvantage can limit aspiration and access to basic skills and/or adult learning. Learning opportunities will need to be flexible, attentive to diversity, properly resourced and provided 'close to home'.

While the intention to introduce equivalent maintenance support across full-time and part-time undergraduate and post-graduate study will assist adults with career entry into professions, the resource offer to support adult learners outside of Higher Education settings is less clear.

Progression from low-skilled work

The *Economic Plan* will need more detail on how job progression from low skilled work will be achieved. Job ladder and job

progression models are generally under-developed for 'entry level' and low graded jobs.

The *Women Adding Value to the Economy* (WAVE) programme found that little consideration had been given to progression for workers in the lowest grades (for example in health, local government and education from Grade 1 to supervisory level at Grade 3). Grade 3 is often the top of the grade scale for the majority of women's jobs in the public sector in cleaning, catering and clerical work.

Career pathways exist in most semi-professional and professional occupations (although there are silos within these, with women, disabled people and people from ethnic minorities more likely to be in career dead-ends and on insecure contracts), but progression into these roles from lower grades needs further consideration (for example from clerical work into higher administrative grades, from health care assistant to nursing, from porter to plumber).

New job progression models will need to facilitate vertical movement within the same occupation or horizontal movement into occupations with defined career ladders. Careers advice will need to include information on transferring skills and knowledge between occupations and sectors, as well as up-skilling, opportunities/funding sources.

WAVE employers began by introducing or revamping performance development reviews (PDRs) for workers in the lowest grades, with an emphasis on development discussions; information on

work-based learning and job shadowing development opportunities, and the availability of full time and/or permanent contracts 'close to home'.

They also equipped line managers with an understanding of how welfare transfer regulations can work to dissuade, particularly 'second earners' in a household, from taking on additional hours of paid work or moving into higher graded higher paid jobs.

Only the employer can progress employees through their grade hierarchy. To realise the *Economic Plan* goals, there must be a concerted effort to establish collaborative networks between employers, job and career advisors, training providers, and trades unions to examine and recommend how to create horizontal and vertical job ladders in different occupational areas.