

Welsh Government Update to the Enterprise and Business Committee on responses provided to the Enterprise and Learning Committee's recommendations in the report: Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

Tackling youth unemployment in Wales remains one of my top priorities. I welcome the opportunity to provide an update on the implementation of measures outlined in the Welsh Government response in December 2010 to the Enterprise and Learning Scrutiny Committee's Report and the opportunity to discuss what we are doing to tackle youth unemployment in Wales.

I am pleased to announce the creation of the Youth Engagement and Employment Division within the Department for Education and Skills. This Division will bring together key policy areas in support of young people aged 11-25.

There continues to be an increase in youth unemployment in Wales with more than a fifth of young people aged 18-24 out of work. We have implemented some key initiatives in support of youth employment over the past 12 months:

- The Jobs Growth Wales programme commenced on the 2nd April and will create 4,000 jobs a year, over the next three years, for unemployed young people aged 16-24 providing them with a job opportunity for a six month period paid at national minimum wage for a minimum of 25 hours per week. The programme will cater for young people that are job ready but have had difficulty securing employment. The outcome of the programme is to support young people to enter sustained employment including where appropriate an Apprenticeship opportunity.
- We are continuing to extend our Young Recruits initiative, which offers a wage subsidy to employers taking on a 16-24 year old apprentice. During 2011–2012, we increased the number of Young recruit places to 1,800 from the original target of 1,000. Numbers for 2012 -2013 have been increased further to 2,000 places. We will seek to link apprenticeship opportunity as progression outcomes to individuals supported through the Jobs Growth Wales programme subject to sufficient budget capacity.
- We are making a further 2000 places available this year on our Pathways to Apprenticeship programme which will be offered across 10 industry sectors. The programme was introduced to provide young people without an Apprenticeship place a full-time intensive training programme to acquire the knowledge and skills required for an apprenticeship framework and which has been developed closely with the relevant Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to meet employer needs.
- As part of the Programme of Government, we implemented in August 2011 two new employability programmes: Traineeships for 16-18 year olds and Steps-to-Employment for adults aged 18 +. These programmes will support young people to gain confidence, motivation, improve their skills and gain work experience to enable them to enter sustained employment.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to provide an update on the implementation of measures supporting youth engagement and employment in response to the October 2010 Report's recommendations as set out below.

Recommendation 1. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government continue to ensure, by working with the UK Government where appropriate, that headline and local data relating to young people not in education, training or employment are as comprehensive, robust and up-to-date as possible.

Recommendation 3. Given that young disabled people are twice as likely to be not in education, employment or training as non-disabled people, we recommend that Welsh Assembly Government statistical publications should routinely analyse data in relation to disability and young people that are not in education, employment or training.

Update to recommendations 1 and 3

Headline data on young people not in education, training or employment are published through a series of statistical publications by the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services department. Our annual headline measure is published in a Statistical First Release in July of each year. In 2009, we introduced a new quarterly statistical output summarising the latest data from a variety of sources concerning young people not in education, training or employment. This contained more timely, but less statistically robust, quarterly data to provide an indication of the latest trends. The latest published information is for the year ending September 2011 which was published in April 2012.

Given that the source of this information generally uses survey data, when looking at sub groups of the population, such as disabled young people, the data becomes less robust and subject to a greater degree of sampling error. However in response to this recommendation and other user feedback, Knowledge and Analytical Services published a Statistical Article "*Further Analysis of data related to Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)*" in March 2012. This Article provided a more detailed analysis of the characteristics of young people that are NEET including data related to disability. It also highlighted some of the issues around the quality of the data.

Recommendation 2. We further recommend that headline and local data on young people not in education, employment or training are regularly impressed on all those agencies that have a role in addressing the issue to ensure proactive and reactive measures are prioritised.

Recommendation 4. We recommend that as part of the review of Careers Wales, the Minister should seek to strengthen its performance in managing a national register of young people not in education, employment or training that is both consistent and comprehensive, and also in maintaining a database that can match job vacancies with unemployed young people. We further recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government keep a monitoring role on performance in this area.

Update for recommendations 2 and 4

The Welsh Government issued guidance in 2002 (Extending Entitlement: support for young people in Wales) under section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act, 2000. Annex 12 of that Guidance, “Keeping in touch” sets out the Welsh Government’s expectations of local authorities in establishing and leading multi-agency arrangements to keep in touch with young people who are disengaged or disaffected from learning, who are or at risk of becoming NEET. Local authorities and their partners are required to provide support for these young people to assist them to re-engage in learning employment and/or active citizenship. In carrying out this role there has been an expectation that local authorities and their partners would share and make best use of the data available to them (Annex 11 of the Guidance refers to Data Sharing).

In practise, local authorities’ response to this requirement has been varied both in degrees of enthusiasm and success. Data sharing difficulties between agencies have sometimes been cited. I am currently working with my officials to identify the most effective ways of strengthening the requirement on local authorities/regional educational consortia to undertake this role proactively.

I am also looking at the potential for Wales-wide data sharing / tracking systems, linked to existing school and further education college information arrangements. Further details of the work which is currently being undertaken to identify predictive indicators for young people at risk of disengaging are provided in the update to recommendation 5.

We are currently drafting new guidance on Youth Support Services which will require agencies and local authorities to take a more targeted and co-ordinated approach to supporting those young people who are, or at risk of becoming NEET.

Recommendation 5. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government evaluate local authority and regional approaches to addressing the issue of young people not in education, employment or training in order to develop a best practice model and guidance for delivering and monitoring effective services.

Recommendation 6. We recommend that one of the outcomes of the Minister’s review of his Department’s support for young people not in education, employment or training should be the development of clear, multi-agency guidelines to ensure practitioners adopt an early, consistent and holistic approach to identifying those at risk of disengaging or becoming not in education, employment or training, and that appropriate intervention is provided at an early stage.

Update to recommendations 5 and 6

I have previously shared with the Committee my view that “stemming the flow” of young people who find themselves NEET at age 16 is not only one of the most effective ways of reducing numbers in the longer term but also one of the greatest challenges for Welsh Government in terms of our policy approaches, and for schools and local authorities in terms of delivery.

As part of the Keeping in Touch research project, a literature review is being undertaken by Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS) to identify systems which are effective in identifying, at an early age, young people at risk of disengaging from employment, education and training. Literature from the United States suggests that it is possible to identify young people at risk of disengaging with up to 85% accuracy using school-based attainment, attendance and behaviour indicators.

The Families First initiative aims to develop a seamless support service for families alongside other programmes such as Flying Start, Communities First and the Integrated Families Support Service. Families First Plans were received by the Welsh Government in October 2011 from all local authorities

Recommendation 7. We recommend that the Welsh Government should review how effectively local authorities are implementing existing statutory requirements to support the education of care leavers up to the age of 25. The review should include evidence from care leavers who are within the further and higher education systems and those who are not in employment, education or training.

Update

The Department for Health, Social Services and Children will shortly be consulting on the development of a new scheme for young people to support their transition from care to independent living beyond their 18th birthday. As part of that consultation the Welsh Government will also seek to raise the age at which young people can reconnect to care up to age 25 and also enable provision of a personal adviser for those young people.

The Welsh Government is currently working with the BIG Lottery Fund, as part of Dormant Accounts Scheme for Wales, to agree a specification for a Youth Engagement Programme to enable vulnerable groups of young people aged 16/17 who are NEET to receive paid work placement opportunities for 25 weeks. Round 1 of this programme will target care leavers and young people in the youth justice system and will enable them to move closer to employment and / or will raise their aspirations and expectations to gain further education or training to move into permanent paid employment.

The Welsh Government has provided targeted annual funding of £1 million per year for the last 6 years to raise the educational attainment of looked after children. The funding for 2012-13 is included as part of the School Effectiveness Grant. The guidance for operating the grant sets out that we expect each Consortium to plan how they are preparing for the education of looked after children. From this academic year we have made available a £2,000 bursary for every care leaver who goes into higher education.

Widening access to vulnerable learners is critical to our vision of Further Education (FE) provision in Wales. We are encouraging collaborative practice between FE providers and Leaving Care teams. This is leading to improved understanding of the needs and circumstances of our most vulnerable learners and more flexible arrangements are being put in place for care leavers to gain qualifications and thus improved life chances.

We have participated in establishing UK standards for care leavers in FE provision and are actively encouraging all FE providers to aspire and achieve these standards

Recommendation 8. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should consider how best to extend and fund the good practice of programmes run by third sector organisations across the whole of Wales, in conjunction with and to complement the programmes of local and school authorities.

Recommendation 12. As part of our recommended evaluation of local authority and regional approaches to addressing the issue of young people not in education, employment or training, we recommend that Welsh Ministers should identify at local level a lead agency for young people not in education, employment or training. This agency should coordinate partnerships, identify responsibilities, manage the journey for young people from one stage to the next, and monitor performance.

Update to recommendations 8 and 12

The Review of activities designed to help young people not in education, employment or training will be led by the Youth Engagement and Employment Division. The aim of the Review will be to identify how resources can be aligned with those interventions which deliver the greatest impact. There is some initial mapping at a local authority level which has been commissioned as part of the overall 14-19 Review. The Review will also incorporate work to provide clarity of roles, tracking systems and information sharing protocols.

For many young people who are not engaged by school based learning, community based non-formal and informal learning support, including youth work, can prove to be a valuable tool in helping them to develop self confidence, self-esteem and ultimately to re-engage in formal learning, employment, training or active citizenship.

Under Youth Support Services Guidance 2002, local authorities are required to work with a broad range of statutory and voluntary sector partners to plan and secure delivery of a mixed menu of community based provision to meet the needs of all young people.

This should include local arrangements to support activity by organisations such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, Urdd Gobaith Cymru and Prince's Trust who are able to provide specialist support for young people to overcome the barriers to learning and are often in a position to secure additional external funding from sources not available to local authorities/schools.

In practise, provision is varied, and frequently schools are either unaware of what the third sector has to offer, do not understand what it can do to help their students, and do not avail themselves fully of it.

I believe the third sector has a great deal to offer young people in this area, and is generally a very cost-effective provider. I am proactively looking at ways of encouraging schools and community based learning providers to work more closely together to meet the needs of all young people, and in particular those who are at risk of becoming NEET. In the case of older young people and those who are already NEET third sector organisations such as the Prince's Trust, Fairbridge De Cymru, and Llamau, to name but three, have a great deal to offer by way of support and I have asked for advice from my officials on ways it can be utilised more effectively.

The Guidance is currently under review; the revised version will clarify my expectations of the much greater extent to which schools and community based third sector providers will work collaboratively in future.

Recommendation 9. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government work with partners in both the public and third sectors to involve employers at an early stage in working with learners, learning coaches and others so that there is a more joined-up approach to helping young people progress into securing employment or apprenticeship opportunities, and particularly in providing work-based learning opportunities for young people who have additional learning needs.

Update

The Pathway to Work concept referred to in our response is being built on through a range of initiatives such as Job Growth Wales (referred to above). In addition a pilot Intermediate Labour Market project has been provided through the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) who are working with organisations who can support and develop young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET) from Community First areas. The contracted organisations provide 26 weeks of paid work at national minimum wage with the aim of progressing these young people into sustained employment or further learning at a higher level.

Options are currently being developed for putting in place multi-agency arrangements at regional consortium level for identifying young people aged 11-25 who are in need of additional or intensive support. These options will require further consideration across the Welsh Government, by myself and other relevant Ministers, and will also need to be discussed with external stakeholders. They will involve an identified lead agency- most probably the regional consortium - working collaboratively with a range of partners to identify the most appropriate service/s to meet the need of individual young people and ensuring that each young person receives whatever support they need to engage with and progress through a structured and coherent programme of learning towards an end goal of being employed, “job-ready” or engaged productively and routinely in active citizenship. There may be potential for an enhanced role for the local statutory and voluntary sector Youth Services who have the experience, infrastructure and expertise to deliver informal and non formal learning in providing personal support.

This system, which we are provisionally referring to as “brokerage arrangements” will reinforce and build on existing Keeping in Touch processes to support young people and will involve both schools and community-based partners.

Recommendation 10. We recommend that because the issue of young people not in education, employment or training cuts across a range of Welsh Assembly Government Departments and policies, there should be one Minister who will lead on the coordination of strategy and action plans, monitor implementation, and be accountable at a national level.

Update

Further to our response provided previously the Welsh Government has now established a Youth Engagement and Employment Division within the Department for Education and Skills which will lead on driving policy and activity which supports young people into education, employment or training in Wales. It will ensure coherence in the overall departmental approach to youth engagement and employment and will be developing and building on cross-working with other key policy areas across the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 11. We recommend that Welsh Ministers should review and update the existing strategy for young people not in education, employment or training so that it covers the 16 to 25 age group, and that they should introduce a new national target for reducing the proportion of 16 to 25 year-olds not in education, employment or training, ensuring that all relevant Government Departments be responsible for its delivery.

Update

The published 2011-2015 Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan provided a broader set of actions supporting young people aged 11-25 than the 2009 strategy supporting young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Youth Engagement and Employment Division will be leading on establishing a revised Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan, in light of the Programme for Government and the need to further reduce the numbers of young people who are, or who are at risk of becoming NEET.

Recommendation 13. We recommend that Ministers should review the adequacy of the existing constitutional arrangement for the Department for Work and Pensions and JobCentre Plus in a devolved context and work with their UK counterparts on making the necessary changes to ensure the arrangement is more effective in future.

Recommendation 14. We recommend that Welsh Ministers work with UK colleagues to ensure that personal advisers and outreach workers form a central, rather than marginal, element of JobCentre Plus activity in order to improve the effectiveness of its engagement programmes.

Recommendation 15. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government work with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that in the eventuality of larger numbers of young unemployed people applying for assistance under the future Work Programme, those in Wales who are most disadvantaged do not lose out, and that those in greatest need can be fast-tracked for more intensive support.

Update

The Welsh Government and the Department of Work and Pensions have set out a shared ambition for better planning and integration of employment, skills and other programmes to reduce the number of people who are unemployed or not economically active, to raise the earnings of people who are in work and to improve services for employers. The core principles of how this will be taken forward are set out in the 'Labour Market Framework for Wales'.

To make progress towards this, the Joint Employment Delivery Board for Wales has agreed a Joint Operational Plan which sets out high level objectives and operational actions to assist the planning and delivery of policy and services in Wales, with the aim

of achieving far greater alignment, simplification, efficiency, and integration of employment, skills and other programmes.

Recommendation 16. We recommend that in order to engender a culture of collaboration rather than competition the Welsh Assembly Government should work with local, regional and national agencies to coordinate the delivery of European Union and non-EU funded projects for young people not in education, employment or training.

Update

The Welsh Government places a high value on the importance of genuine partnership and we will be working with stakeholders across Wales to ensure that the new European programmes address the main challenges and opportunities facing Wales and are delivered successfully. A key challenge will be the effective use of European funding to complement Welsh Government policies in health, education, training and infrastructure provision to remove barriers for young people entering education, training and employment.

Strategic Frameworks were introduced in the 2007-2013 round of European programmes to meet the commitment to adopt a more strategic approach to the use of funds and one which ensures much closer alignment with Welsh Government policy. The current Frameworks set out the types of interventions that will best deliver the priorities and are intended to:

- strengthen strategic alignment between EU and Welsh Government policies;
- provide a co-ordinated approach allowing for better use of resources maximising the potential of ESF directly linking to improved outcomes for young people;
- assist in reducing the overall volume of projects;
- help to shape and balance programme delivery.

Recommendation 17. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should review how the acquisition of “soft skills” for young people not in education, employment or training, and those at risk of becoming so, could be given greater recognition within education, employment and training settings.

Update

“Demonstrating Success” is a rigorous, made-in-Wales, academically tested, method of measuring outcomes of non-formal learning for young people.

The Demonstrating Success model recognises the importance of Social and Emotional Dispositions and Skills in enabling young people to gain advancement and achievement of more formal recognition such as qualifications and accreditation. Many interventions supported by the Welsh Government aim to provide young people with a range of skills which can contribute to their educational success and wider wellbeing. There is increasing evidence to show that employers value these skills in young people alongside formal qualifications.

Demonstrating Success is about capturing evidence of progress in those skills and has been well received by stakeholders. The framework is largely flexible and can be

adapted for use with short or longer term interventions. There is potential to use Demonstrating Success more widely in future to measure distance travelled/progression by a young person, particularly in conjunction with the brokerage arrangements described in the update response to recommendation 9 above.

Recommendation 18. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should ensure that engagement or outreach coaches are available to intervene at any stage in a young person's life to give direct support on a range of family, finance, education, employment or health related issues

Update

There have been significant developments within the learning coach element of 14-19 Learning Pathways. The learning coach role in maintained Secondary Schools and Colleges has been clarified, through statutory guidance, as a function, which can be provided by an individual or by a team and can be delivered to individuals or groups, depending on the needs of each learner. The learning coach role has also been extended to the new Traineeships programme and forms part of the contractual arrangements with providers. The focus of learning coaching is on supporting the learner to develop: their learning skills, motivation and engagement; to make the best use of and to develop their learning styles; to cope with transition at key points of change during the 14-19 phase; and to plan their individual learning pathway which takes account of their skills, attributes and experience in all aspects of their lives.

Learning Coaching can make a real difference to learners to ensure that they are supported to help develop the skills they need to overcome any barriers to their learning. Those delivering the learning coaching function should signpost the learners to any personal support services where they are experiencing barriers to achieving their true potential or remaining engaged in learning. This includes support from qualified and experienced youth workers who are able to provide a short, medium or long term mentoring role in response to the young persons needs in order to overcome the barriers to learning.

The Welsh Government has determined that there should be a minimum ratio for the learning coach function of 1:80, learning coaches to young people. Latest data shows that all schools and colleges are on target to achieve this by September 2012. The Welsh Government continues to provide funding for the training of learning coaches through the 14-19 grant monies which are allocated to the regional networks. The unit based Learning Coaching Programme is available for all awarding organisations to form a Level 4 qualification if required.

In 2011-12 the Welsh Government has supported a learning coach pilot project to extend the successful learning coach support to 10-13 year olds. The pilots were delivered in four local authority areas; Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Anglesey and Gwynedd. The aim of the pilots was to investigate the relative costs and benefits of rolling out the Learning Coaching across the 10-13 age range. An evaluation of the pilots will be carried out this summer.

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