

Committee Clerk
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF991NA

By email to: petition@wales.gsi.gov.uk

26 August 2010

Dear Ms Chapman

Petition's Committee Inquiry: Work-Based Learning for vulnerable young people

You invited Estyn to contribute to the above inquiry. For your information can I refer you to my letter to the chair of the committee dated 7 June 2010 when I replied to the oral evidence originally given to the committee from which this inquiry arose. For ease of reference a number of points that I make in that letter I repeat here.

I hope that you have found my contribution to the inquiry useful but if you should require any further advice please do contact Bernard O'Reilly the lead inspector for work-based learning.

Yours sincerely



Ann Keane

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Training and Education in Wales

The quality of training programmes and placements

From our inspection work and knowledge of the sector the evidence shows that the majority of providers deliver at least satisfactory, if not good, quality Work-Based Learning (WBL) in Wales. Many providers also provide good support for learners in helping them overcome any difficulties they might have in undertaking and completing their learning. This includes young people with multiple needs. (See Para 204 of the WBL section of my recent annual report which can be found on the Estyn website: www.estyn.gov.uk)

Nevertheless, we do still see some unsatisfactory provision in a minority of providers. In a few providers learners are on the wrong course with little account taken of prior learning and achievement. This is usually because of funding issues and course availability. A few learners leave their training with few or no qualifications, make little progression from NVQ level 1 or take too long to achieve their qualifications.

In our experience many disadvantaged learners initially join the Skillbuild programme. Skillbuild is a DCELLS-funded training programme the purpose of which is to help people who are not able to access mainstream education to develop a range of skills that will help them to access higher levels of training in the first instance and, where this is not possible to develop skills to become 'work ready'. During our inspection of Skillbuild we have seen a number of examples of good individualized support by providers. This includes good liaison with both voluntary and public sector organizations to help with some of the personal difficulties that learners are faced with. In the majority of providers learners are able to access work placements that take account of any individual issues that a learner might have. Where a learner needs extra support and training before they can enter the Skillbuild programme then they are put on a pre-Skillbuild course.

Personal support for vulnerable young learners

In the majority of providers we have seen some good examples of one-to-one support and also effective overall support for all learners, including those with particular issues or difficulties. These providers identify learners' specific needs during the induction programme and prepare an individual learning plan which in many instances includes measuring the improvement in a learner's 'soft skills' such as time-keeping and behavior. Provider staff often 'go the extra mile' in their support for the learner.

Progression for vulnerable young learners in WBL

Depending on the funding received by providers (DCELLS can advise further on this), learner progression and the learner's time with the provider on Skillbuild can potentially cease at the completion of a learner's agreed individual learning plan. This might or might not include learning to NVQ level 1. However, some of the better providers who are DCELLS funded to deliver NVQ2 and NVQ 3 do succeed in progressing Skillbuild learners through to level 2 and 3 or employment. One provider, whose rate of progression from Skillbuild to NVQ levels 2 and 3 was over 80%, received a grade 1 for its Skillbuild provision (Gorseinon College) during the past 12 months. More detail is available in our inspection reports at: www.estyn.gov.uk

There is an issue with the young person's guarantee programme, introduced in January this year. This programme guarantees all 18-24 olds an opportunity to receive training and work experience but this is starting to put pressure on the limited number of work placements available in Wales. The Department for Work and Pensions funds this programme and providers delivering it are now joining the Skillbuild providers in trying to secure placements effectively from the same pool of employers.