



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

Title: Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan 2011 – 2015

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By: Leighton Andrews, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

The Welsh Assembly Government published its Action Plan for '*Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Wales*' in April 2009.

Since its publication, the economic environment has changed dramatically. Although much good work has been done to deliver the action plan, we have, over the past year, taken a much broader view than concentrating specifically on young people once they reach 16 years old. We have looked holistically at the issues young people face and considered the journey of children and young people (from birth to 24 years old) who may become disengaged from learning and who are subsequently at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training- 'NEET' - in the future.

Evidence has shown that support in the earliest years of a child's life is the most effective way of improving life chances, breaking the cycles that can exist for some of our most disadvantaged and vulnerable children, and providing a chance to grow, succeed and achieve. Each child or young person's experience will be unique. For many of these young people disengagement from education, employment and training may be as a result of experiencing multiple barriers and problems throughout the course of their young lives. On the other hand, there will be those who unexpectedly and surprisingly become NEET perhaps owing to a single life event, for example bereavement in the family.

At 16, a young person who wishes to engage in learning or enter the labour market faces a different set of issues and barriers. As we know, the recession

can have an adverse affect on opportunities for these young people (16-24 years old) and can often result in cycles of inactivity and the absence of sustained episodes of working. We therefore need to provide young people with opportunities to gain suitable skills to progress into sustainable employment.

Work is continuing to support children and young people to remain engaged. Preventative measures include the publication of the National Literacy Plan, which I announced last year, the Child Poverty Strategy and existing programmes such as Flying Start and the Foundation Phase. To support young people from 16 years old, we put in place a funding package of over forty nine million pounds, which I announced at the Welsh Assembly Government's first Economic Summit of 2010. This will fund more training and education places. This included extra funding for Further Education, the continuation of the Pathways to Apprenticeships and the Young Recruits Programme and additional funds to keep Skill Build and ReAct working in Wales. As a result, we now have more young people staying in learning or training than ever before which shows that the measures are working. We are also keeping Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) in Wales, unlike in England, to prevent young people from disengaging.

In addition, last year, Welsh Ministers signed a Labour Market Framework with the Department for Work and Pensions and established a Joint Employment Delivery Board to work at an operational level. It is important that we have a clear customer journey in Wales where our training and provision complements but does not duplicate or divert mainstream provision offered by DWP. We also need to ensure properly funded offers of support for young people here are at least equivalent to those offered in England and that we have innovative responses to the particular needs of our labour market.

Reflecting the high priority given to this agenda, last year I commissioned two groups to investigate the issue of youth engagement and employment in Wales. These were an external task and finish group, chaired by Martin Mansfield of Wales TUC which looked specifically at what more we should do to counter the effects of the recession on young people, and an internal operational group of officials which reported to me on what triggers children and young people to disengage from learning in the first place. Our Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB) also published a report, as part of the Board's Second Annual Report '*Moving Forward; Foundations for Growth*', which looked holistically at youth unemployment.

All three reports made a wide range of recommendations which has led to the development of the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan.

The Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan outlines the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to preventing children and young people from disengaging from learning and supporting them with entry to the labour market. Of course, the overall aim of the plan is the reduction of the number of young people who are, or at risk of becoming, not in education,

employment or training in Wales. A new Unit has been established within the Welsh Assembly Government to drive this agenda forward.

We have already achieved a great deal. There is some excellent practice across Wales which has had a significant impact but this is a hugely challenging agenda which cuts across many of the Assembly Government portfolios. Despite a challenging settlement from the UK Government, we will prioritise skills training, honour our commitment to Pathways to Apprenticeships, and, continue to focus on our youth engagement and employment agenda.

We will need to be creative, innovative and inspirational in order to develop and deliver the support needed to enable young people to move towards and progress into sustainable employment. Over the next 4 years our aim is that the Youth Engagement and Employment Action achieves this and succeeds in reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training in Wales.