

Evidence from the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

Petitions Committee Inquiry - Work Based Learning Provision (WBL) for Vulnerable Young People

Background

Work Based Learning Provision

- 1 Under sections 31 and 32 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, the Welsh Ministers have a duty to secure the provision of either proper or reasonable facilities for education (other than higher education) and training for post-16 learners in Wales.
- 2 A strong and credible Work Based Learning (WBL) system is at the heart of the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for education and training in Wales and WBL is an important component in strengthening the contribution of education and training in economic development, making learning a part of working day life, and looking at the interests both of learners and employers.
- 3 The WBL programmes operating in Wales aim to:
 - Provide a broad range of competence-based skills and knowledge to enhance employability and career progression;
 - Enable participants not in employment to acquire skills and work experience as part of a wider drive to raise economic activity rates and help people out of inactivity and poverty; and
 - Help provide employers with a workforce that has the skills to compete in the "knowledge-based" economy.
- 4 The Welsh Assembly Government WBL programmes encompass two 'flagship' programmes i.e. Skill Build and Apprenticeships.

Skill Build

- 5 The Welsh Assembly Government currently funds an **all-age** preparatory and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) skills training programme for both younger people (16-18) and adults (18+) entitled Skill Build. The programme aims to provide learners with the key personal and employability skills and qualifications to enable them to effectively enter the labour market and retain sustainable employment.
- 6 The programme encompasses:
 - The identification of learning barriers that prevent the learner immediately participating in vocational learning at level 1, 2 or 3;
 - The identification and addressing of a Basic Skills need;

- Learning opportunities which provide learners with the breadth and flexibility of skills they need to enable them to better participate in the workforce and society at large; and
- Occupational learning to vocational level 1 or 2 or 3

Apprenticeships

- 7 Apprenticeships are employment based learning programmes for employed learners. Apprenticeships provide an opportunity for both young people and adults to progress quickly within their chosen occupation, equipping them with transferable skills as well as the ability to carry out a specific skill or trade. They provide a bridge between full-time learning and employment. Investment in the high-quality skills training via apprenticeships offers benefits to individuals, employers and the economy.
- 8 An apprenticeship is not a qualification in itself but a framework designed by the relevant Sector Skills Council or standard setting body containing a number of different qualifications, all of which must be passed in order to complete the framework. The frameworks are designed to equip learners with transferable skills relevant to the wider industry, as well as the specific skills associated with each framework. There are around 190 different apprenticeship frameworks across 80 industry sectors.
- 9 There are three levels of Apprenticeship available through WBL for those aged 16 and over:
 - 1 – Foundation Apprenticeships:** Foundation Apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications such as an NVQ Level 2, Key Skills and, in some cases, a relevant knowledge-based qualification.
 - 2 – Apprenticeships:** Apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications such as NVQ Level 3, Key Skills and, in most cases, a relevant knowledge based certificate.
 - 3 - Higher Apprenticeships:** Higher Apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications such as NVQ Level 4 and, in some cases, a knowledge-based qualification such as a Foundation degree.

10 Terms of Reference for Evidence

Availability and Quality of WBL of Training Programmes

- 10.1 Availability of training vacancies may vary depending on the route in which a learner is interested and where they live. A Careers Wales Adviser can provide information about jobs and training opportunities available in the learner's local area.

- 10.2 During 2009/2010 and based on Provider profiles, the Skill Build programme supported approximately 10,500 16-18 year old learners and up to 6,000 18 plus adult learners. This constitutes a total investment of circa £35.6 million for Youth (including allowances) and £9.4m for Adult.
- 10.3 The total Work based Learning contract value for 2010/11 has been maintained at the levels offered in 2009/10, i.e. circa £127,000,000.
- 10.4 At the 6th April 2009 Economic Summit - a package of at least £20,000,000 was announced to help people gain new skills. Of this, the Assembly Government made available £6 million to increase capacity within the established Skill Build programme in order to respond to rising demands as a result of increasing unemployment, and the need for certain individuals to refocus their skills and aspirations.

Quality

- 10.5 Under the Estyn framework which operated until August 2010, grade 4s or 5s are below acceptable standards. Skill Build as a programme is inspected under the "Foundation for Work" sector subject area. All providers currently have grade 3 (satisfactory) or above. From September 2010 Estyn will no longer award grades to individual sector subject areas, but will come to an overall judgement on each provider's standards and capacity to improve.
- 10.6 Estyn, when inspecting the Skill Build programme, focuses primarily on learners' progress, achievements and success in attaining qualifications. The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) focuses on positive progression as the primary measure for the programme, rather than qualifications delivered - although learning activity success is factored into our measure of quality as a secondary output.
- 10.7 In terms of the most recent (2008/09) performance data for the Skill Build Programme, the majority of Skill Build providers are achieving scores above the Quality and Effectiveness Framework (QEF) threshold for "Good". This is reflected in the 2008/09 national average for positive progressions of 71%, considerably higher than the benchmark for the adult Skill Build programme which for the same period was 45%.
- 10.8 Of the 48 providers contracted to deliver Skill Build Youth in 2008/09:
- 56% were categorised as "Excellent" in their delivery of the Youth programme.

- 25% were categorised as "Good" in the delivery of the Youth programme (a total of 81% of the providers performing in the two highest categories).
 - 15% were "Adequate" in their delivery of the Youth programme.
 - 4% (or two providers) were "Unsatisfactory" in their delivery of the Youth programme.
- 10.9 It is worth noting that those providers categorised as "Unsatisfactory" are offering very small volumes of Skill Build provision and the data is therefore not considered to be robust as it is subject to the variations linked to small numbers skewing performance.
- 10.10 All of the providers with "Adequate" or "Unsatisfactory" performance categorisations are required to demonstrate to DCELLS that they are addressing the issues and driving forward performance to achieve a categorisation of "Good". They are all subject to follow up as part of the QEF process.

Progression for the vulnerable young person

- 10.11 'Positive progressions' from the Skill Build programme are counted as progression to further learning or employment, and are calculated based on Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) data submitted by providers. From 2010/11 we are strengthening our requirements and making the definition of 'positive progressions' more specific; learners will have to progress to employment or to learning at a higher level. The duration of further learning or employment is also being more closely specified.
- 10.12 A minimum performance target for progressions is being set for the first time in WBL contracts from August 2011, and DCELLS is currently establishing performance thresholds for the next few years which will be issued to providers in September. This will include challenging targets for the achievement of an 'excellent' performance rating.

Youth Employment and Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and Future Jobs Fund (FJF)

- 10.13 In April 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government published its NEETs Plan – *'Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Wales'* - to support and help reduce the number of young people who are NEET.
- 10.14 The NEETs Plan, which primarily focuses on 16-18 year olds in Wales, provides a number of strategic and practical actions to support and help re-engage young people back into education, employment and training and prevent disengagement. It

outlines the need to improve systems to ensure young people remain engaged and their progress is monitored. Enhanced advice and guidance for young people is also highlighted with the aim to provide the appropriate support and provision tailored to individual need. It sets out the need to work locally to make sure the right systems, the right provision and the right support are available in order for the Welsh Assembly Government to deliver an integrated seamless service to re-engage this disadvantaged group of young people and where possible reduce duplication.

- 10.15 More recently there have been three reports looking at the broad issue of youth unemployment in Wales. The first is the Wales Employment and Skills Board report on youth unemployment which has been published as part of the Board's Second Annual Report 'Moving Forward; Foundations for Growth. The second is the report of an internal Operational Review Group on the issue of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). The third is a report of the *Youth Unemployment Task and Finish Group* chaired by Martin Mansfield of Wales TUC.
- 10.16 Each of the reports has had a slightly different focus and remit but a significant number of their recommendations are interlinked. Based on the reports' recommendations, a programme of work to tackle youth engagement and employment in Wales was submitted to Cabinet in September and will be taken forward over the coming months. Furthermore there are proposals to develop a new voluntary work experience programme and a new intermediate labour market programme – both intended to engage, or re-engage, vulnerable young people into appropriate activity.
- 10.17 The Future Jobs Fund was announced in the Budget 2009 and was a fund of around £1 billion to support the creation of jobs for long term unemployed young people and others who face significant disadvantage in the labour market. The fund, run by DWP, aimed to create 170,000 temporary jobs until 2011. The Fund contributes up to £6,500 per job and as a minimum, the jobs must benefit the local community; provide at least 25 hours per week of employment; pay at least at the national minimum wage; and last at least 6 months.
- 10.18 The UK Government now intends to implement a single Work Programme to help unemployed customers back to work. No further bids will be approved and the Fund will close to new bids immediately. There will be no extension of the Future Jobs Fund in to 2011/12.
- 10.19 All existing commitments will be honoured and, to date, more than 28 Future Jobs Fund projects have been approved for

Wales with the potential to create more than 10,000 jobs and attract around £60m funding to Wales.

- 10.20 The Future Jobs Fund is part of the wider Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) which offers all long-term unemployed young people full-time training, a real job or work experience. The UK Government has announced that the Young Person's Guarantee will not now be extended into 2011-12 as planned by the previous administration. This extension of the Young Person's Guarantee into 2011-12 was announced in Budget 2010. The Welsh Assembly Government provides the training elements of the YPG through Skill Build.
- 10.21 The YPG will continue to run as programmed across the UK until March 2011.

Financial Support

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

- 10.22 The EMA Wales scheme was fully rolled out in 2006/07 for 16 – 18 year olds within Further Education. It is a weekly allowance, linked to satisfactory attendance, paid fortnightly to eligible learners attending learning centres in Wales. The awards are £10, £20 or £30 per week depending on household income and periodic bonuses of £100 may be paid if learning objectives are met or for returning for the second year of a course.
- 10.23 The original aim of EMA was to address the link between low income and low participation by providing a financial incentive to young people from low-income households to remain in full-time education beyond compulsory education.
- 10.24 DCELLS are currently investigating the potential and feasibility of introducing the EMA (Wales) Scheme into Work Based Learning for young unemployed people from 2012.

Learning Allowances

- 10.25 Currently, youth learners with guarantee/extended guarantee status on Skill Build programmes must be paid an allowance of a minimum of £50.00 per week. Employer contributions must be maximised to support these costs. Learners on Traineeships (L1) will continue to be in receipt of this allowance at least until 2012 (see EMA above).
- 10.26 For Adult learners, learning allowances are paid by Jobcentre Plus to non-employed learners who wish to receive them. The allowance is made up of:

- An amount equivalent to the Jobseeker's Allowance and/or Income Support which a learner would have received whilst unemployed; and
- a learning premium paid to those undertaking learning.

Travel and Accommodation Funding

- 10.27 Learners on Work Based Learning programmes that are not employed may be eligible to receive a contribution towards travel costs in excess of £5 per week. Learners may claim towards necessary reasonable travelling expenses incurred in connection with travel to and from their place of learning.
- 10.28 In addition, learners that are not employed may be eligible to receive a contribution towards accommodation costs, where the accommodation is essential for the learner to access learning.

Childcare Funding

- 10.29 Childcare support is available for learners on Work Based Learning programmes who are not employed and who are lone parents. Learners may be eligible to receive a contribution towards the costs of registered or accredited childcare, up to a maximum of £29.75 per day or £148.75 per week for the first child and £51 per day or £255 per week for two or more children.
- 10.30 Current levels of investment for Childcare, Travel and Accommodation are as shown below:

2008/09

Travel & Accommodation: £857,817.50

Childcare: £144,813.68

2009/10

Travel & Accommodation: £765,239.57 (to date)

Childcare: £311,143.63 (to date)

Learner Support and the Benefits system

- 10.31 Although this falls within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) remit, officials within DCELLS have looked into the issue of benefit support and entitlements for vulnerable young people and have been provided the following information.
- 10.32 Young people who are homeless, or living independently, are entitled to £51.85 benefits, plus housing allowance. For a young person referred to Further Education provision, they will continue to receive their benefits allowance, plus the £30 EMA which totals £81.85.

- 10.33 Those learners who have been endorsed by Careers Wales and referred to Skill Build as the appropriate training route will be entitled to a Training Allowance of £50, paid by the Welsh Assembly Government. This allowance is not passported against any benefits to which they may be entitled. They can however claim the differential of £1.85, which will total £51.85.
- 10.34 Colleagues at DWP state that EMA was introduced to offer a financial incentive to young people to remain in education and training. It was agreed to disregard it for benefit purposes as it was specifically not for subsistence. DWP cannot disregard monies that are issued for the same purpose as a benefit payment, i.e. for subsistence purposes (as is the case for the Skill Build Training Allowance).

Personal Support and support for care-leavers

- 10.35 There is substantial support available to young people who are living independently or are homeless for them to make informed choices:
- the Children Act 2004, and its associated statutory guidance documents, places a duty on local authorities and a range of partners to co-operate and improve the well-being of children in each local authority area;
 - the Welsh Assembly Government published Stronger Partnership for Better Outcomes and Shared Planning for Better Outcomes outlines the areas of focus we would expect these local authority Partnerships to focus on, including Education and Learning Opportunities and A Safe Home and Community; and
 - the objectives of the Core Aim of Education and Learning Opportunities are that all children and young people should engage in full-time education; have any barriers to learning identified early and removed; reach their full potential; continue in purposeful formal and informal education training or employment to age 19; and achieve social and economic well being.
- 10.36 Support for young people living independently or who are homeless is underpinned by Children and Young People's Partnerships (CYPP). These operate in each local authority area and bring together the various agencies and organisations with responsibility for meeting the needs of those children who are 'most in need'. CYPP plans should set out how agencies and partners will work together to support those young people who are most in need.

- 10.37 For young people aged 18 years plus, including those young people who are homeless, Jobcentre Plus facilitates access to a range of DWP and Welsh Assembly Government programmes and services. This could, for example, include an offer of training or employment through DWP or the Welsh Assembly Government's programmes, or referral to Careers Wales for in-depth career information, advice and guidance. In addition, Jobcentre Plus works with a range of partner organisations, including those in the Third Sector, at a national and local level, to help ensure that young people are sign-posted to services that can help them address specific barriers to moving into training or employment.
- 10.38 Furthermore, the Assembly Government's 'Ten Year Homelessness Plan' includes an action to improve access to training for all homeless people including 16-18 year olds. This plan is being taken forward through a working group focussing on cross-sector working, understanding, partnership and engagement for all service users. The aim is to encourage communication and liaison between agencies in the homelessness sector and the employment, skills and learning sectors to ensure that development opportunities for service users are optimised.
- 10.39 The Assembly Government Housing Directorate has also used one year funding from the resource accenting exercise to fund a project creating housing services which develop opportunities for young excluded people through learning skills and work. As a part of this activity, the Assembly Government has commissioned an evaluation exercise to review the impact of this project.
- 10.40 The UK Coalition Government announced a series of welfare reforms as part of the Coalition Agreement published on 20th May 2010. One of the key elements of the Coalition Agreement is the introduction of a new single Work Programme and associated measures to support people back into work. Although all of these announced measures are currently being developed, early indication of the shape they will take has been provided through discussion with DWP officials
- 10.41 In summary, DCELLS is working closely with other Assembly Government Departments to ensure that the health and well-being of young people isolated from their families is intrinsically linked to the development of new learning opportunities.

Vulnerable Young People formerly in Care

- 10.42 In terms of addressing the needs of young people formerly in the care of a local authority and who have chosen to live

independently, a personal adviser is assigned to the individual, and agrees a pathway plan to enable young people to make informed choices about their future.

- 10.43 The personal adviser is nominated and the pathway plan is agreed before the young person is 16 years old and leaves compulsory education. Planning is centred on the young person who is actively encouraged to put forward his/her views, aspirations and intentions.
- 10.44 The pathway plan is based on an assessment of need and is subject to regular reviews. The entitlement of contact with the personal adviser will be extended to the age of 25 (from 21 currently) following the commencement of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 in Autumn 2010.
- 10.45 Personal Advisers work with a range of partners, including Careers Wales, so that young people in care can receive impartial advice and guidance on the full range of post-16 opportunities available to them. This can include entry into the Youth Gateway programme delivered by Careers Wales which is designed to assist young people in overcoming barriers to entry into further learning or employment.

Effectiveness of agency collaboration/partnership working in Wales

- 10.46 In order to offer learning provision where it is required, to address capacity issues and to address the need to have viable numbers, it is part of the Assembly Government's Transformation agenda to encourage providers across all types of post 16 learning to adopt a consortia or partnership type approach and this includes a partnership approach within Work Based Learning.
- 10.47 From the outset, the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) fully embraced the Transformation Policy and has been quick to respond positively to ensure that the WBL sector makes an equal contribution to improving learning opportunities for the 14-19 cohort. The Assembly Government has provided a grant to the NTfW to investigate the support that the WBL sector can provide to secure a full learning portfolio to support the implementation of local and regional transformation.
- 10.48 The procurement for the new contracts for WBL from August 2011 requires WBL Providers to be full and active members of local planning networks.