

Regional Skills Partnerships

October 2019



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Regional Skills Partnerships

October 2019



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016. Its remit can be found at: www.assembly.wales/SeneddEIS

Committee Chair:



Russell George AM
Welsh Conservatives
Montgomeryshire

Current Committee membership:



Mohammad Asghar AM
Welsh Conservatives
South Wales East



Hefin David AM
Welsh Labour
Caerphilly



Vikki Howells AM
Welsh Labour
Cynon Valley



Bethan Sayed AM
Plaid Cymru
South Wales West



Joyce Watson AM
Welsh Labour
Mid and West Wales

The following Members were also members of the Committee during this inquiry.



Mark Reckless AM
Brexit Party
South Wales East



David J Rowlands AM
Brexit Party
South Wales East



Jack Sargeant AM
Welsh Labour
Alyn and Deeside

Contents

Chair's foreword	5
Recommendations	6
1. Background to the inquiry	9
Terms of reference	10
Evidence gathering	11
2. Background to the Regional Skills Partnerships	12
Policy context.....	14
How Regional Skills Partnerships policy has evolved	15
3. Low-skill traps and skills shortages	18
Low skill traps and the tension in Welsh Government policy	20
The skills picture in Wales.....	22
Future skills picture and the need for skills provision to keep up with change	24
4. Breaking low-skill traps and aligning skill supply with demand	26
Ways of aligning skills supply with skills demand	27
International examples	29
Stimulating higher skills demand amongst employers	30
5. The role of RSPs in low-skill traps and reducing skills shortages	33
Role, governance and scope of the partnerships.....	33
Partnership remit and the position of the higher education sector	36
Employer engagement and data analysis by the partnerships	40
Recommendations of the partnerships.....	44
6. The Committee's recommendations	49
Annex: Oral evidence	52

Chair's foreword

Despite increasing average qualification levels and examples of high-profile change and innovation, we heard that parts of the economy in Wales continue to experience “low-skills traps” where employers don’t need or value higher level skills; this in turn inhibits innovation and doesn’t create the incentives needed for employers to invest in a highly-skilled workforce. The result is vicious cycle associated with poor economic and personal outcomes.

Whilst the Committee initially set out to investigate how well regional skills partnerships identify and reflect employer demand for skills, we quickly learned that the existence of low-skills traps means work must be done to stimulate employer demand for higher level skills at the same time as tackling the issues around supply.

Our recommendations are designed to give the partnerships a clear, strategic mission that has a strong focus on identifying and breaking low-skill traps. This means a stronger role in demand-side interventions and stimulating employer demand for higher-level skills. In line with this, and to underline their new roles, we recommend that the partnerships are renamed Regional Skills Advisory Boards.

As well, we recommend making better use of the assets the public purse already funds to improve data analysis and employer engagement – getting the basics right. It is important to say that the Committee recognises the excellent work partnership staff have already done here in the face of clear resource challenges – now it is time to build on this. Welsh Government should work with the higher education sector to unlock the vast research capability of our universities for the new Boards. At the same time we must make better use of the apprenticeship provider network – an enormously valuable asset for working more closely with SMEs and developing relationships.

Finally, we are pleased to see that the Welsh Government’s review of digital innovation, Wales 4.0, shares our view that the partnerships should be reformed and have a stronger role in stimulating demand for higher-level skills. If learners are to prosper in the workforce, it won’t be enough for the skills system in Wales to simply keep up with changes, it must anticipate change and indeed go further and help shape it.

Russell George AM
Chair, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Welsh Government should instigate a thorough reform of Regional Skills Partnerships by adopting the package of actions set out below, and revisit their resourcing where required. This package includes rebranding the partnerships as Regional Skills Advisory Boards to make their role in the wider skills system clear, and a new focus on demand-side interventions. The package also puts in place a clear strategic outlook and remit for the Boards, whilst improving employer engagement and data gathering and analysis.....Page 49

Action 1: Rebrand Regional Skills Partnerships as Regional Skills Advisory Boards (RSABs) to make their role and remit clear to stakeholders. Following from this, the RSABs should have the clear role of advising Welsh Government and stakeholders on at least: (a) current and future regional skills demand and shortages/mismatching; (b) how to tackle skills shortages/mismatches, (c) evaluating their own advice and plans and (d) on any response to shocks to the regional economy and skills system such as a large employer laying off significant numbers of staff.....Page 49

Action 2: In addition to the above, the RSABs should have the role of identifying, understanding and clearly presenting to stakeholders the sectors, regions, and places that are experiencing low-skill traps. They should advise on addressing the traps, including stimulating future employer demand for higher level skills.
.....Page 49

Action 3: Welsh Government should **agree and publish a timetable for the full implementation of the recommendations made within the Graystone review** to ensure governance of the RSABs is strengthened, particularly the recommendation for a National Assurance Framework. Welsh Government should also go further and work with the RSABs to diversify their Boards and achieve a gender balance, doing so through the National Assurance Frameworks.Page 49

Action 4: In line with both the Graystone and SQW review recommendations, the RSABs should become more strategically focussed, publishing improved 3 year regional skills and employment reports. These reports should present intelligence and in-depth analysis at a genuinely strategic level that considers industry skills pipelines, pinchpoints etc to guide and assist the entire range of education providers and other stakeholders, who can then set out their proposals for responding. The plans should include the matters in Actions 1 & 2 above.
.....Page 49

Action 5: Through the National Assurance Frameworks, Welsh Government should work with RSABs to set out quantitative and qualitative measures by which the impact of the Boards can be measured and communicated to stakeholders. If RSABs are to enjoy the confidence of industry the RSABs must be able to unequivocally evidence that the time and effort of employers to engage with them has been worthwhile and impactful. Page 50

Action 6: One RSAB should be designated to represent and act as a single-point-of-contact for large national bodies with national skills needs such as the construction industry and Transport for Wales. This RSAB should be appropriately resourced and their regional skills and employment reports should specifically address the aggregated national skills needs of such bodies..... Page 50

Action 7: As a priority, **the data gathering and analysis capability in each RSAB must be substantially strengthened.** To achieve maximum value for money, and in line with Welsh Government’s focus on their civic mission, this should be done by drawing on **the publicly funded world-leading research expertise present in Welsh universities.** Welsh Government should therefore work with HEFCW and Welsh universities to establish formal partnerships between universities and each RSAB to undertake research and data analysis on their behalf and offer research methodology consultancy..... Page 50

Action 8: As a priority, **the Welsh language data gathering and analysis capability in each RSAB must be substantially improved.** Welsh Government should consider how it can facilitate a model that allows the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Coleg Cenedlaethol Cymraeg to use their existing expertise and research to help the partnership’s mainstream Welsh language considerations and inform their 3 yearly reports..... Page 50

Action 9: As a priority, employer engagement, particularly with SMEs, must be better resourced and substantially improved. Again, in so doing Welsh Government should aspire to utilise an existing and valuable asset in the form of our extensive network of publicly funded apprenticeship providers and sub-contractors. These providers, by default, have far closer links with SMEs than RSABs can aspire to have – such relationships are a valuable asset. Welsh Government should explore using its funding agreements to place reasonable terms on the private providers (and their 90+ sub-contractors) to engage with both their employer networks and the RSABs to harness their considerable knowledge of market demand..... Page 50

Action 10: In-line with a more strategic outlook, Welsh Government should no longer request RSABs to make operational recommendations on learner numbers at further education institutions (FEIs), even at the current sector-subject level. Instead, Welsh Government should require FEIs to “have demonstrable regard to” the more strategic and intelligence based 3 year RSAB reports when negotiating their final delivery plans, empowering and incentivising them to respond to the issues identified in those reports..... Page 50

Recommendation 2. Welsh Government should work closely with industry representative bodies and Qualifications Wales and publish an action plan to ensure the wider skills infrastructure is rebuilt and based on organisations and structures which are suitable for the timely level of scrutiny and deep expertise required. Regional Skills Advisory Boards, the Wales Apprenticeship Advisory Board and the Wales Employment and Skills Board are not a substitute for close and timely sector level scrutiny and approval of qualifications and content.
..... Page 51

1. Background to the inquiry

With influence over almost £400 million of skills provision, and able to make recommendations that can impact on the choices of tens of thousands of prospective learners, Regional Skills Partnerships have become increasingly important to Welsh Government education and economic policy. With such an important remit, the Committee was keen to understand how well they are working.

- 1.** In October 2018, in view of their increasing influence and their key role in regional economic development, the Committee agreed to conduct an inquiry into Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs or “the partnerships”).
- 2.** The main purpose of the inquiry was to explore how well the partnerships were working in practice and to make clear and constructive recommendations on improving their work and effectiveness. The issues the partnerships face and the constraints on their work presented a challenging inquiry.
- 3.** During the inquiry Welsh Government announced a second review into the partnerships, conducted by a company called SQW¹. This review was published in May 2019 and utilised some of the evidence taken by the Committee in this inquiry.
- 4.** The Committee broadly agrees with the recommendations in both the previous 2018 Graystone review² of partnership governance and the 2019 SQW review. This report builds on them and continues the work of developing the partnerships.

¹

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/sites/skillsgateway/files/documents/SQW%20Report%20on%20Regional%20Skills%20Partnerships.pdf>

² <https://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s80869/CYPE5-33-18%20Paper%20to%20note%201.pdf>

Terms of reference

5. The Committee agreed to look at the following:

- Understand how effectively the Regional Skills Partnerships are reflecting current and future skills demand, particularly the needs of the foundational economy and skills provision through the medium of Welsh including:
 - Exploring the reliability and validity of the evidence used by RSPs to draw their conclusions
 - Exploring the effectiveness of their engagement activity and the demand and supply side inputs that shape their conclusions
 - Exploring how their City and Growth Deal roles influence their work;
- Understand if the Regional Skills Partnerships are adequately resourced to fulfil their growing role
- Understand how the work of Regional Skills Partnerships is being used by Welsh Government to shape skills provision “on the ground” including:
 - Exploring the level of operational detail being set out by Welsh Government in relation to further education institution activity.
- Understand in general what is working well, not working well and if there are any unintended consequences from how current Regional Skills Partnership policy is operating including
 - Exploring delivery against the objectives of the RSPs and their impact;
 - Exploring the particular focus Welsh Government places on RSPs as a source of regional skills requirements
- Consider both improvements to the current way of working and any views stakeholders might offer on potential alternative models for aligning skills provision with the needs of the Welsh economy.

Evidence gathering

6. The Committee held a written consultation between 24 January and 4 March 2019. It received 29 responses³ from a wide range of stakeholders including the three partnerships, education providers and representative bodies.

7. The Committee held oral evidence sessions⁴ between 21 March and 15 May 2019 comprising eight different panels and evidence from the Minister for Economy and Transport and Minister for Education.

³ www.senedd.assembly.wales/mgConsultationDisplay.aspx?id=339

⁴ www.senedd.assembly.wales/ieIssueDetails.aspx?Id=24100

2. Background to the Regional Skills Partnerships

Each partnership is a voluntary, non-statutory board made up of employers, education providers and others. The boards make recommendations to Welsh Government on full-time college and apprenticeship courses and learner numbers. Each of the partnerships was created at a different time between 2007 to 2014, and each have evolved independently, shaped by their own regions and more lately, their respective City and Growth Deals.

8. There are currently three Regional Skills Partnerships as follows:

- The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership (NWRSP): which is technically a “workstream” of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB)⁵;
- The South West and Mid Wales Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP): which is linked to the Swansea Bay City Deal and is providing support to the proposed Growing Mid Wales Partnership⁶;
- The Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership (CCRSP): which was formerly known as “LSkIP” and is linked to the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal. The CCRSP is legally separate from the City Deal’s own Employment and Skills Board, but in practice the Board membership is the same for both structures.⁷

9. The partnerships have a role to play within Welsh Government’s recently strengthened regional economic development model. They are intended to tackle skills shortages by influencing skills provision within their regions based on labour market intelligence and employer-led insight.

⁵ <https://northwaleseab.co.uk/jobs-and-skills/regional-skills-partnership>

⁶ www.rlp.org.uk/?doing_wp_cron=1568638904.1833291053771972656250

⁷ www.cardiffcapitalregion.wales/sector/skills-partnership/

- 10.** Each partnership consists of a non-statutory and entirely voluntary board which is supported by a small paid service of 2-3 staff.
- 11.** Each partnership undertakes work for its own respective City and Growth Deal as needed, but all receive funding (approximately £160K each a year) from Welsh Government to carry out a consistent set of tasks on its behalf. These tasks are set out in their contract letters.
- 12.** Board membership is a matter for each Board but includes representatives from relevant economic sectors, education providers and several other organisations such as the third-sector, Welsh Government, industry representative bodies and so forth.
- 13.** As the partnerships are non-statutory, Welsh Government funding is paid to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) who in turn issue contracts and funding to an accountable body on behalf of each partnership. It is from this funding that the partnerships maintain their paid-service staff. For North Wales the accountable body is Gwynedd Council; for South-West and Mid Wales it is Carmarthenshire Council; and for South East Wales it remains the WLGA itself at the time of writing.
- 14.** The partnerships are tasked by Welsh Government to produce two key pieces of work: a 3-year Regional Employment and Skills Plan (RESP) with Annual Reports on progress, and filling in a Regional Planning and Funding spreadsheet by July each year. The Planning spreadsheets contain detailed recommendations for full-time further education student numbers and apprenticeship programme priorities.
- 15.** Welsh Government use the completed templates to help them meet the demand for apprenticeships and when negotiating the final delivery plans each further education college must submit to Welsh Government to unlock their funding allocation. These final delivery plans include what programmes and how many students per programme the college aims to deliver in the coming academic year and must take into account the recommendations included in the Regional Planning and Funding spreadsheets unless the colleges can justify any deviation from them.
- 16.** Once the final delivery plans have been agreed with Welsh Government, under new rules from 2019-20 colleges will be expected to recruit learners in accordance with it, with any under-shooting or over-shooting being subject to

potential financial clawback. Welsh Government have explained that in practice the spreadsheets impact on 10-15 per cent of all delivery by the colleges.⁸

Policy context

17. In its paper to the Committee Welsh Government explained that its 2014 Policy Statement on Skills⁹ “signalled a move to regional working, with a policy shift away from a sector-based approach”.

18. Prosperity for All¹⁰ signalled a general move toward a regional model of economic development in which the Regional Skills Partnerships would play a role, with the strategy explaining that:

“[we will] reform our economic development and skills provision to work on a regional basis, building on the three employer-led Regional Skills Partnerships.”

19. The subsequent Economic Action Plan¹¹ further set out the central role that the partnerships are to play in Welsh Government strategy, with it describing “a model for regional working that placed the role of RSPs as being an integral part of the delivery model” for economic development.

20. At the same time as Welsh Government has been evolving its regional economic strategy, two City Deals (Cardiff Capital Region and Swansea Bay) and a Growth Deal (North Wales) have been announced with discussion on-going as to a further Growth Deal for Mid-Wales. Each of the skills partnerships has a relationship of some kind with their respective Deal.

21. The evidence the Committee received on how the development of the City and Growth Deals has had an impact on the work of the partnership’s centred around the need for clear accountability between the work required by the Deals and the work required by the Welsh Government contracts.

22. However, David Jones of Coleg Cambria told the Committee that he had concerns that the local authority dominated City and Growth Deals was risking a return to councils having substantial control over colleges once again. He said:

⁸ Para 185, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019

⁹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/policy-statement-on-skills.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://gweddill.gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>

¹¹ <https://gweddill.gov.wales/docs/det/publications/171213-economic-action-plan-en.pdf>

“I have to say, as colleges, this might seem a little parochial, but up until 1993 we were part of the local authority set-up in Wales [...] But since then we’ve had a level of independence, [...] and our concern is that—with all this checking of all that we do in our colleges through an RSP, and then the RSPs are increasingly, in the north at least, being responsible to the ambition board, which is led by the six local authorities—it almost feels like going back to 1993 through the back door. I’m sure there isn’t a plan there, but that is a genuine concern for us.”¹²

23. The Committee did not receive any evidence which argued for the abandonment of the partnerships. Instead there was a strong view that some sort of regional skills co-ordinating body was necessary and useful.

How Regional Skills Partnerships policy has evolved

24. Each partnership was established entirely separately and at different times in 2007, 2013 and 2014. Created via grass-roots organisation rather than by Welsh Government, they have since continued to evolve in line with the context of their regions and City/Growth Deals.

25. The 2014 Skills Implementation Plan¹³ provided the original basis for consistent Welsh Government involvement in the work of the then disparate Regional Skills Partnerships, stating that:

“We are tasking the regional partnerships with the following four key roles:

- To produce and analyse LMI [Labour Market Intelligence] aligned to economic intelligence to inform the skills requirements in the regions and inform our future priorities for funding linked to our co-investment policy.
- To provide a mechanism to review regional skills provision and advise the Welsh Government on future prioritisation of skills funding in line with regional employment and skills needs.
- To act as a strategic body effectively representing regional interests to inform a demand-led and sustainable skills system, ensuring that

¹² Para 243, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

¹³ <https://gweddiill.gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/140714-skills-implementation-plan-en.pdf>

this is informed by strong industry engagement and takes into account the level of skills utilisation in the region’

- To act collectively and strategically to maximise future available funds acknowledging the likely reduction in public funds over the coming years.”

26. Prosperity for All re-iterated the importance of the partnerships whilst the Economic Action Plan went on to set out the reformed regional basis for economic development and strengthening the role of the partnerships within it. The plan also linked the partnerships with the proposed creation of the Post Compulsory Education and Training strategic funding body (once known as TERCW, but now as CTER and expected to be established by 2023).

27. The Employability Plan Update Report 2018¹⁴ stated that the RSPs would now be asked to provide a more strategic 3 year RESP rather than the annual version they had to produce at the time, but did not widen the remit of the partnerships from full-time further education and the apprenticeship programme. The plan explained that:

“We recognise the crucial role that RSPs play in setting strategic regional priorities, working closely with employers and stakeholders. They are a key partner in implementing the regional approach to economic development set out in our Economic Action Plan.”

28. In 2017 Welsh Government commissioned an independent review into the governance of the RSPs – the Graystone review – reflecting their growing influence over significant levels of skills provision. The review made several recommendations to improve governance, improve accountability, make the decisions of the Boards more transparent and set a consistent set of expectations via a National Assurance Framework. It also recommended:

“that RSPs should remain voluntary partnerships and not adopt legal structures and that Welsh Government should review the resources of RSPs given their increased role.”

29. It is not clear to the Committee what progress has been made toward implementing all these recommendations.

¹⁴ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-09/employability-plan-progress-report-2018.pdf>

30. The Graystone review was followed in May 2019 by a second review conducted by SQW. This review focussed on the insight and intelligence produced by the partnerships and how they work with their relevant Growth and City Deals. The report made recommendations intended to strengthen regional intelligence and insight including a more strategic focus by the partnerships, improved employer engagement, utilising a wider range of evidence and continuing to make detailed operational recommendations on further education learner numbers.

3. Low-skill traps and skills shortages

Low-skills traps see parts of an economy stalled by a cycle of low employer demand for higher-skills and a low-skill workforce that consequently has little incentive to upskill. Both low-skills traps and skills shortages are associated with negative economic and personal outcomes, including low pay and low productivity.

31. Welsh Government's Economic Action Plan¹⁵ states that Wales faces a "productivity gap". This gap must be closed to achieve its aim of "prosperity for all". However, there are parts of the Welsh economy that are working in ways that are exacerbating this gap.

32. In academic terms, parts of the Welsh economy are experiencing a "low skill equilibrium". These are often simply termed low-skill traps – traps because they involve a vicious cycle of limited demand for highly-skilled workers, which leads to a low-skilled workforce, which in-turn places limits on innovation and growth, which in-turn perpetuates the limited demand for highly-skilled workers – and so the cycle continues. This trap is illustrated on the next page.

33. The Minister for Economy and Transport told the Committee that he "broadly agreed" that parts of the Welsh economy were experiencing a low-skills equilibrium, or trap (the term trap is used throughout the rest of this report). He went on to say that:

"Over the past 20 years, [we have] wrestled with the problem of underemployment and low skills [...] there are still too few businesses investing in the skills of their workforce"¹⁶

34. At the same time, like other parts of the United Kingdom, the Welsh economy experiences a number of inefficiencies or skills mismatches in the workforce that are also associated with poor personal and economic outcomes: skills shortages when trying to recruit into vacancies, skills gaps in current workforces, and the under-utilisation of skills.

¹⁵ <https://gweddill.gov.wales/docs/det/publications/171213-economic-action-plan-en.pdf>

¹⁶ Para 9, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019



Source: Future of Skills and Lifelong Learning, Government Office for Science

35. As set out in a 2017 report from the Government Office of Science¹⁷, a mismatch between skills and skills needs can lead to:

- Skills shortages (where vacancies are hard to fill due to a shortage of skilled candidates)
- Skills gaps (where employees are not deemed to be fully proficient in their role)
- Skills under-utilisation / skills surplus (where employees are over-qualified for the role they are in / where employer demand is for predominately low-skilled workers).

36. The most recent Employer Skills Survey from 2017¹⁸ shows that Welsh employers reported an increase in vacancies that are hard to fill because of skills

¹⁷

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727776/Foresight-future-of-skills-lifelong-learning_V8.pdf

¹⁸

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746494/ESS_2017_Wales_Slide_Pack_v04.00.pdf

shortages in 2017 (27% of vacancies); whilst skills gaps in existing workforces remained broadly the same (4.7% of all staff had a skills gap) and the under-utilisation of staff increased to 9.5%.

37. The Future of Skills and Lifelong Learning¹⁹ report commissioned by the UK Government argues that skills mismatches such as those above are “high [in the UK] compared with many countries”, yet the Employer Skills Survey shows Wales performing more poorly than the UK average.

38. Regional Skills Partnerships are intended by Welsh Government to play a key role in tackling these issues. As it explained to the Committee in its written evidence:

“The ambition was clear. RSPs [have] a key role to help break the cycle of low-skill, low-wage and low-productivity by identifying skills gaps and skills shortages in each region by [...] drawing upon the intelligence of employers and stakeholders.”²⁰

Low skill traps and the tension in Welsh Government policy

39. The idea of a low-skill equilibrium, or trap, emerged in the 1980s when researchers began to explore the connection between persistently low wages, low skills and low value-added output.

40. There is no standard definition of a low-skills equilibrium or trap, but the concept is based upon:

“the theory that some economies with deficient levels of skills and output suffer from a mutual causality between low skills acquisition by the workforce and low skill utilisation by firms.”²¹

41. As an example of an identified low-skill trap, Welsh Government, in its Transforming Skills in the Welsh Food and Drink Industry plan states that:

“Commitment to training is low by Welsh [food and drink] businesses – there is a low skills equilibrium whereby companies don’t see the value

¹⁹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727776/Foresight-future-of-skills-lifelong-learning_V8.pdf

²⁰ Written evidence EIS(5)-13-19(p4)

²¹ https://www.neroinstitute.net/download/pdf/a_low_skills_equilibrium_in_northern_ireland.pdf

in training and therefore don't train – and therefore don't see a value in training.”²²

42. Low-skill traps can exist because some sectors and industries simply do not require highly-skilled or highly-qualified workers to provide their services or manufacture so-called “low specification” goods: they can be and are profitable with a low-skilled workforce. However, this can then constrain the employers capacity to expand or innovate, dragging down productivity.²³

43. Low-skill traps present a fundamental problem to the concept of the Regional Skills Partnerships. If all they do is faithfully reflect industry demand for skills in sectors that have no requirement for higher-level skills, they risk simply reinforcing low-skill traps and perpetuating the poor personal and economic outcomes policy is meant to overcome. This can create a tension between actual skills demand from industry and the skill levels associated with high quality jobs and pay.

44. A key aim of Welsh Government policy is to “drive up the average skills level”²⁴ in Wales. As such it has been gradually restricting access to Level 2 Foundation Apprenticeships in Wales, focussing on standard and Higher Apprenticeships. Within further education, Andrew Clark, Deputy Director, Further Education and Apprenticeships told the Committee that:

“What we're trying to do is to nudge gently towards level 3 and above, whereas perhaps 10 years ago we would have settled for a level 2 outcome. And the reason that we're nudging gently towards level 3 and above is because all the research tells us that an individual's life chances are better if they achieve level 3 or above.”²⁵

45. The Committee heard from the partnerships how the tensions between some skills demand and Welsh Government policy of driving up average

²²

https://businesswales.gov.wales/foodanddrink/sites/foodanddrink/files/180209%20F%26D%20Industry%20Skills%20A4%20ENG_1.pdf

²³

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727776/Foresight-future-of-skills-lifelong-learning_V8.pdf

²⁴ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/aligning-the-apprenticeship-model-to-the-needs-of-the-welsh-economy.pdf>

²⁵ Para 37, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019

qualification levels are playing out on the ground. Sian Lloyd Roberts of the North Wales partnership explained that:

“The steer we get is from Welsh Government. They’re pushing higher level skills and qualifications [...] They’re pushing us towards that way [...] there have been some tensions there [...] and what happens in terms of health and social care, in particular for us, because we have as a region identified level 2 apprenticeships in health and social care, but because Welsh Government’s non-priority directive says that we’re not allowed to, [...] FE and work-based learning can’t then respond to what we’re saying is a regional priority.”²⁶

46. The Committee feels that the key point here for Welsh Government and policy makers is that it is not enough to raise qualification levels in the population, this simply creates an unhelpful tension between demand and supply and could alienate employers who do not see their needs being met.

47. The increase in qualification levels must be accompanied by stimulating the demand from industry for a highly-skilled workforce or there is the risk of increasing skill under-utilisation.

48. The Committee feels strongly that the evidence shows that intervention in a low-skill trap must therefore address both the supply of skills and the demand for high level skills: a supply-side push alone is unlikely to be enough in itself.

Conclusion 1. The Committee agrees with the Minister that parts of the economy in Wales are in a vicious cycle of low-skills, low-wage and low-productivity – in other words, they are in a low-skills trap. This means that the scope of the challenge goes beyond just making recommendations in-line with industry demand and extends to demand-side interventions to stimulate higher level skills demand from employers. Not doing this whilst increasing the average qualification levels of the population risks replacing low-skill traps with just as inefficient skills surpluses.

The skills picture in Wales

49. The skills and qualification picture in Wales has changed dramatically since devolution. Qualification levels in the working age population of Wales have been

²⁶ Para 66, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

increasing over time and are projected to continue increasing.²⁷ According to Welsh Government official statistics:

- Overall in 2001, 21% of the working age population had no qualifications, whilst 22.1% held a qualification at Level 4 and above.
- By 2018 this had changed to 7.9% holding no qualifications and 38% holding a qualification at Level 4 and above.²⁸

50. Regarding occupations, and the level of skill required to undertake them, there has been less significant change but the direction has been

- toward higher skilled occupations; and
- a significant increase in the qualification levels of those in the lowest skilled occupations.²⁹

51. The table below shows the distribution of workers amongst the least and most skilled occupations according to Office of National Statistics (ONS) classifications.³⁰

Percentage of employed people in Wales by ONS occupation					
Jan-Dec 2004			Jan-Dec 2018		
Least Skilled	Level 1	12%	Least Skilled	Level 1	11%
	Level 2	39%		Level 2	35%
Most Skilled	Level 3	27%	Most Skilled	Level 3	29%
	Level 4	21%		Level 4	25%

52. Significantly, qualification levels in Wales are rising fastest in the lower skilled occupations.

53. The proportion of the workforce in ONS classified elementary occupations holding a Level 4 qualification and above has increased by 69% between 2011 and 2018, and by 41% for ONS classified sales and customer service occupations.³¹

²⁷ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/aligning-the-apprenticeship-model-to-the-needs-of-the-welsh-economy.pdf>

²⁸ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-04/levels-of-highest-qualification-held-by-working-age-adults-2018-731.pdf>

²⁹ Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Lifelong-Learning/Qualification-Levels/highestqualificationlevelsofworkingageadultsinemployment-by-occupation-qualification>

Future skills picture and the need for skills provision to keep up with change

54. This picture will continue to change in Wales and in the UK in a number of ways.

55. The 2014 Working Futures³² publication which has been used by the partnerships in writing their skills plans predicts:

- Some sectors to grow and increase their proportion of GVA (such as IT and construction) and other sectors to shrink / reduce their proportion of GVA (manufacturing and primary utilities for example);
- Growth in the number of people employed in professional, managerial and associate professional occupations (i.e. the more highly skilled occupations according to ONS classification), and a decline in occupations such as machine operatives and administration; and
- Over half the UK employed population will hold a qualification at Level 4 and above, an increase of over 5 million people.

56. At the same time there has been much published and written on the impact of developments such as AI, automation and digital technologies on the economy with automation in particular being highlighted by bodies such as Universities Wales and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR).³³

57. At the time of writing the Welsh Government's review of digital innovation (the Brown review)³⁴ has not published its full report. However the interim report, whilst rejecting technological determinism and arguing that technology is not fate, explains that technology will change jobs more often than completely replace existing ones:

“The ‘robots’ will take jobs, make jobs, but mostly change jobs.”

58. The Committee feels that this poses a particular challenge for the skills system in Wales since such change may not mean exotic new programmes or exciting vocational qualifications, but rather the need for the far more ordinary

³²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/513801/Working_Futures_final_evidence_report.pdf

³³ www.ippr.org/

³⁴ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/review-of-digital-innovation-interim-report-april-2019.pdf>

task of constantly and rapidly updating and refreshing existing qualifications to ensure they remain relevant as jobs change; and as importantly developing new modes of delivery to support lifelong learning as people change careers.

59. Consequently, the Committee was concerned to receive evidence that the infrastructure in place to ensure programmes are well-designed, refreshed and scrutinised closely by the sector expertise needed to ensure their relevance to industry has been “eroded”.

60. Joshua Miles of the FSB told the Committee that:

“We used to have a UK-wide advisory infrastructure that would look at things like sector skills councils and would say, ‘These are the sectoral issues, this is how qualifications should look to respond to that.’ That doesn’t exist anymore. Welsh Government’s trying to plug that gap with RSPs, with the WAAB—the Wales apprenticeship advisory board, with WESB—the Wales employment and skills board, and with the PCET reforms. But if we’re going to do it properly on a Wales level, we’re going to have to resource it properly and we’re going to have to make sure that there’s a good level of employer engagement.”³⁵

61. Whilst this matter is outside the strict scope of this inquiry, the Committee feels that it is not possible to simply consider the number of places made available for particular skills programmes without being assured that the programmes themselves are of a good quality and keeping up to date with changing jobs. The Committee may wish to explore this matter in more depth in a future inquiry.

Conclusion 2. Learners entering the labour market must have completed courses that are of high quality with content that meets the latest needs of industry. The skills system in Wales must be flexible enough to identify and implement change and that must mean having sector expertise at its core so that new qualifications can be written, refreshed and consolidated as fast as possible to ensure they enjoy the confidence of learners and industry.

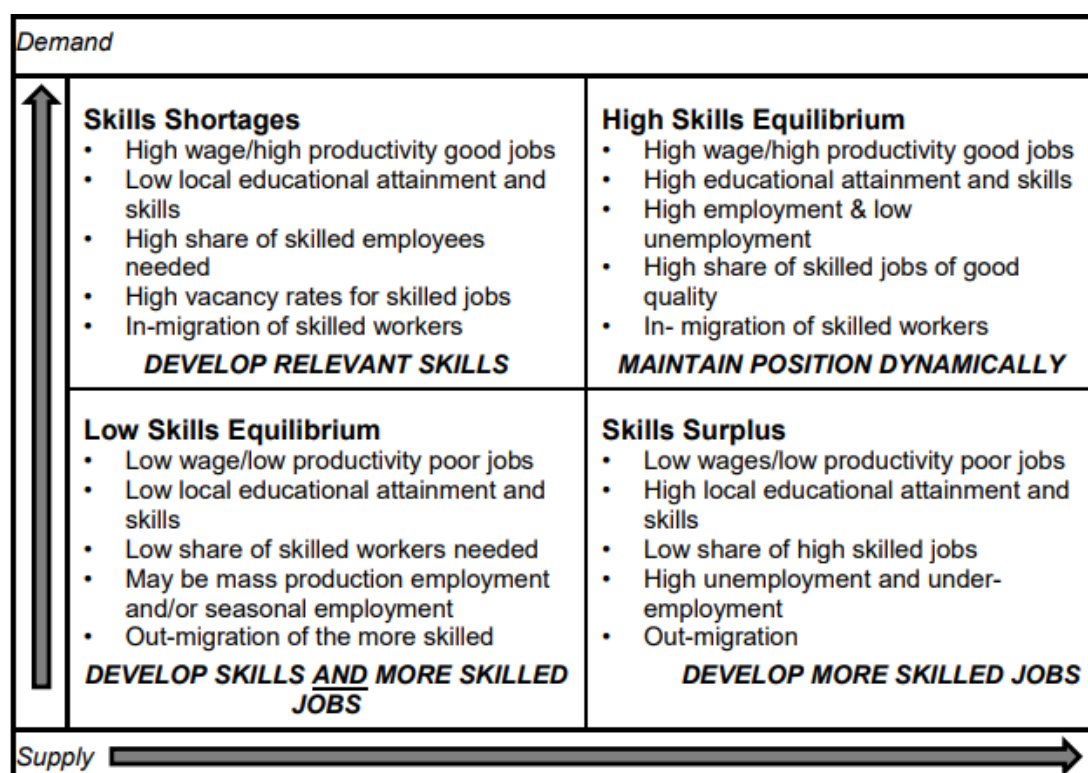
³⁵ Para 273, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 9 May 2019

4. Breaking low-skill traps and aligning skill supply with demand

The best economic and personal outcomes are associated with both a strong demand from employers for highly skilled employees, and a highly skilled labour market. In the Committee's view, the challenges for Wales are not just in increasing the average qualification level of the population, but also in stimulating employer demand for those higher-level skills.

62. The Committee believes that instead of a low-skill equilibrium, the aspiration should be to bring about high-skill equilibriums. This is where there is a supply of highly skilled workers along with strong demand from employers for those high-level skills – a virtuous rather than a vicious cycle.

63. As can be seen below, high-skill equilibriums are associated with the positive personal and economic outcomes Welsh Government policy is meant to bring about.



Source: *Low skill traps in sectors and geographies: underlying factors and means of escape*, Anne Green, Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick

64. At present there is little information within the public domain as to which parts of Wales or which sectors are caught in a low-skill trap – this can only make them more difficult to tackle. The first step in breaking the traps is to understand where they can be found.

Conclusion 3. There is a need to understand what sectors, places and regions are experiencing low-skill traps so that they can be tackled by stimulating employer demand for higher level skills. It is clear to the Committee that this requires leadership and co-ordination across many different bodies and across Welsh Government. Regional Skills Partnerships are an obvious body to undertake this.

Ways of aligning skills supply with skills demand

65. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there are three main methods³⁶ by which skills can be aligned with industry demand:

- Learner preference: this is where providers adjust their curriculums to match the demand of learners. Since 2012 when funding began to follow the student, this has been the model operated by the higher education sector.
- Central planning of provision: this is where a central or regional body gathers data and labour market intelligence to forecast industry skills demand so that skills provision can be planned accordingly. This is the basis of the Regional Skills Partnership model.
- Market determination: this where learners are free to choose their programmes but the programmes on offer are determined by employer demand. Apprenticeship programmes, including the Welsh one, are by their nature the primary example of this model – learners are free to select apprenticeship programmes but can by definition only pick apprenticeships where employers are willing to offer one.

66. Each has disbenefits:

- The learner choice model is arguably not the most efficient means of meeting the needs of industry even with strong efforts to guide learners toward priority areas. There has been significant criticism of the learner

³⁶ www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/43898253.pdf

preference model of higher education in the UK. For example the ONS³⁷ has argued that many graduates are over-educated for their current role, whilst the UK Industrial Strategy argues there is a shortage of students willing to undertake STEM courses.³⁸ The recent review of Post-18 provision in England, the Augar review states that:

“Generous and undirected funding has led to an over-supply of some courses at great cost to the taxpayer and a corresponding undersupply of graduates in strategically important sectors.”³⁹

- The central planning model is, argues an OECD paper⁴⁰ “fraught with information problems. Forecasting (by location and by occupational sectors) of the exact number of skills needed in a given labour market is often unreliable”. The Committee has taken considerable amounts of evidence from stakeholders during this inquiry that reflect exactly those concerns, which the Committee shares.
- The market determination model may seem at first glance to be the most attractive, automatically combining learner preference with industry needs. However without carefully design, apprenticeships can reflect the parochial needs of individual businesses rather than the needs of the regional and national economy or the longer term needs of the learner. This is a criticism reflected in an IPPR report⁴¹ regarding the apprenticeship system in England.

67. Alongside the tension between Welsh Government’s aim of driving up qualification levels and industry demand in some sectors (discussed above), learner choice represents the other fundamental tension.

68. Beverly Owen of Cardiff Capital Region partnership remarked that:

“I think that balance between learner choice and industry need is one of the biggest challenges that we’ve got, not just for the RSPs, but for

³⁷ www.ons.gov.uk/news/news/oneinthreegraduatesovereducatedfortheircurrentrole

³⁸

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf#page=97

³⁹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805127/Review_of_post_18_education_and_funding.pdf

⁴⁰ www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/43898253.pdf

⁴¹ www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/Englands_apprenticeships_Aug%202016.pdf

skills in Wales in totality. It's certainly something that the south-east Wales RSP and the Cardiff capital region, even at a cabinet level, are conscious of and are dealing with, but it's not going to be a quick win."⁴²

69. Jane Lewis, of Mid Wales and South West partnership told the Committee that:

"One of the questions, is around how we can influence some of the career choices that are made in schools. And we don't have a remit to have that input at the moment, and I think that would be really important for us."⁴³

70. The Minister for Education stated that:

"I think we recognise that there is a tension between [learner choice and industry demand] and our job is to ensure that we are giving, as I said, best information and advice, and students are very, very clear about the economic opportunities and the job opportunities by pursuing this course. [...] we are doing a disservice if an individual studies a course for which there is not a demand in the economy for those particular skills."⁴⁴

Conclusion 4. Careers advice is fundamental to the well-being and prosperity of learners and the Committee has looked into this matter in past inquiries. Whilst the Committee agrees with the argument that careers advice can help nudge learners into prosperous sectors where there are skills shortages, careers guidance must be impartial and aimed at benefitting the learner, not employers. There is potential for a conflict of interest should partnership boards with their industry membership become too involved in offering direct careers advice to young people. The partnerships should focus on the employer-side of the skills landscape, leaving careers advice and guidance for young people to schools, Careers Wales and other appropriate agencies.

International examples

71. Several EU states have established mechanisms to attempt to understand skills demand and match supply to that demand.

⁴² Para 143, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁴³ Para 140, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁴⁴ Para 33, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019

- Germany⁴⁵ operates its Fachkräftenradar (or skilled workforce bottleneck monitor) to provide information on which occupational groups are already affected by skill shortages and where bottlenecks are likely to occur. The results are broken down by province. The goal is to enable employers and providers to react to future skills mismatches.
- Portugal⁴⁶ operates Critérios para abertura de vagas nos ciclos de estudos de formação inicial no ensino superior público (or Criteria for definition of number of vacancies in public higher education) specifically intended to address skills mismatch by taking into consideration employer demand when calculating university places on different courses.
- Sweden⁴⁷ has established Regionala kompetensplattformar or regional skills platforms which are similar in concept to Regional Skills Partnerships. The platforms are intended “to improve the national co-ordination of skills supply and to strengthen local and regional cooperation between public institutions and agencies in charge of skills supply”.

Stimulating higher skills demand amongst employers

72. It is not enough to simply align the supply of skills to industry demand if industry demand reflects a preference for lower-skills. There must also be action to help stimulate employer demand for highly-skilled workers where there is a low-skills trap and in a more general sense as Wales’ qualification levels continue to rise.

73. The means of stimulating skills demands amongst employers, particularly in an economy dominated by SMEs, did not form part of the scope of this inquiry. Nonetheless, impressed by the need for progress in this area the Committee took evidence from the Minister for Economy and Transport on what action Welsh Government was taking. The Minister explained that:

“There are a number of things that we’re doing [...] In order to stimulate demand, we’re also investing heavily in infrastructure and facilities that can ensure that demand is intensified. I could point to a number of

⁴⁵ www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/matching-skills/all-instruments/skilled-workforce-bottleneck-monitor

⁴⁶ www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/matching-skills/all-instruments/criteria-definition-number-vacancies-public-higher-education

⁴⁷ www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/matching-skills/all-instruments/regional-skills-platforms

centres of excellence across Wales, right across the country. For example, the development of the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre in Broughton. There's a construction centre of excellence as well, not far from here in Swansea. They are creating the environment. They're the infrastructure components that will drive demand. But also the economic action plan places very strong focus on increasing the number of businesses that are headquartered here."⁴⁸

74. The Committee notes other Welsh Government action in this area including skills development being included as one of its 5 Calls to Action, and it having a role in both the Economic Contract and Economic Futures Fund assessment criteria.

75. The Committee is aware of other thought-provoking work on stimulating demand, with organisations like the Institute for Public Policy (IPPR) being interested in how Wales can increase demand and utilisation from employers of increased skill levels. Emerging ideas in this area include:

- creating tests of employer demand and new obligations on employers to progress workers if learning outcomes are achieved in return for public funding.
- reviewing the tax and funding levers within the hands of the Welsh Government, to consider how taxes and tax allowances, alongside public funding, can be used to encourage greater numbers of employers in Wales to co-invest in skills.
- new forms of provision that lower the barrier to entry to the skills system for all employers, but in particular SMEs, micro-businesses and self-employed workers/owners. A more modular, bite-sized option within the skills system could allow greater engagement from a broader range of employers and offer new “open” learning routes, more tailored to employers and learners/workers.

Conclusion 5. How to stimulate demand for higher level skills is beyond the scope of this inquiry but is of fundamental importance to the aim of breaking low-skill traps. It is vital to ensuring that the more qualified workforce Wales is developing is not under-utilised and under-employed with all the poor personal and economic outcomes skills surpluses are linked to. The Committee may wish

⁴⁸ Para 18, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019

to pursue this in a future inquiry and consider some of the interesting work being done in this area.

5. The role of RSPs in low-skill traps and reducing skills shortages

The partnerships, as forums that bring together skills providers and employers, have enormous potential to help break low-skill traps and reduce skills shortages. But the Committee heard that whilst improvements are being made, they are not yet reaching their full potential. We heard that their role remains unclear, their remit artificially constrained, their recommendations too operational and detailed. Most importantly, we also heard that despite their best efforts, their employer engagement is under-resourced and unbalanced, and their data analysis capability under-developed.

Role, governance and scope of the partnerships

76. There has already been much good work done on the role, governance and scope of the partnerships by Dr John Graystone in his March 2018 review and by SQW in their May 2019 review. This inquiry builds on those substantial body of recommendations in these areas.

77. The Committee heard that there was widespread support for the principle of the partnerships and for regional skills planning, but equally it heard evidence that the role of the partnerships and where they fit into the wider economic development picture remained unclear to many stakeholders. David Jones of Coleg Cambria told the Committee that:

“There’s a strong message coming through from us that we fully support improved regional planning to make sure we use public money [...] What we are saying, I think, is that [...] there needs to be a review to ensure there is clarity about what it’s trying to achieve, the data it uses, and the scope of what RSPs are looking at.”⁴⁹

78. The Committee heard from Ania Rolewska of the Welsh Language Commissioner’s Office that:

⁴⁹ Para 362, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

“There are two concerns: one is that the status of the partnerships is ambiguous—it’s very difficult to find out what the depth of their work is at times. And it’s difficult to know what their remit is.”⁵⁰

79. More widely, the Committee took evidence from stakeholders which suggested some believed the partnerships had a wider role and remit than they actually in reality have from Welsh Government. This adds to the Committee’s sense that there remains a lack of clarity amongst wider stakeholders as to what the partnerships do and what they are for. On the other hand, the Committee got no sense that the partnerships have a clear role in stimulating employer demand for higher level skills.

80. Regarding the place of the partnerships within the wider regional and national economic development structures in Wales, Joshua Miles of the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) argued that:

“We need a much tighter alignment of what regional economic development looks like. We have quite a lot of scattered things going on at the moment. The governance is not quite tied down, and it would be nice to pull those things together a bit firmer so that we know who’s doing what, where and why.”⁵¹

81. Ken Skates, Minister for Economy and Transport explained that:

“I’d accept that the picture needs clarifying and that’s our firm intention. Regional economic development is ongoing and the structures that are being designed are still being considered, and we’re still putting in place new structures as well, for example the regional teams that will work for the chief regional officer.”⁵²

82. Throughout the inquiry stakeholders continued to raise concerns regarding partnership governance and consistency despite the recommendations made by Dr John Graystone. The Committee is concerned that any lack of consistency amongst partnerships particularly impacts their work with those national bodies that need to work with all three partnerships. Jeff Protheroe of the National Training Federation Wales (NTfW) told the Committee that:

⁵⁰ Para 193, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 4 April 2019

⁵¹ Para 238, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 9 May 2019

⁵² Para 65, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 9 May 2019

“Each of the RSPs is at a different stage of development and governance at the moment, which is not necessarily helpful, given where we are at the moment.”⁵³

83. Whilst Guy Lacey of Coleg Gwent commented that:

“I would suggest that, if you look at the governance structures currently across the three partnerships, they’re all completely different. The representation level is completely different.”⁵⁴

84. The Committee also heard that the governance and effectiveness of the partnerships could be improved by a more gender balanced and inclusive approach to membership. Cerys Furlong of Chwarae Teg explained that:

“There’s masses of evidence about how diversity and gender balance leads to better decision making. Getting a broader spectrum of opinions, priorities and experience necessarily results in different outcomes.”⁵⁵

85. The Minister for Economy and Transport set out Welsh Government’s own view that

“I think we need to go further than gender; we need to look at issues around disability, we need to look at other minority groups within our communities and how they are faring in terms of their ability to acquire skills and then whether those skills, then, are adequately and properly rewarded in the workplace.”⁵⁶

86. The role of the partnerships in relation to the Welsh language was considered by the Committee. Whilst Welsh Government explained that the partnerships have a role supporting the Cymraeg 2015 strategy, the Welsh Language Commissioner’s Office raised concerns about how the partnerships engage with Welsh language matters. Lowri Williams of the Welsh Language Commissioner’s Office told the Committee that “you have to mainstream the Welsh language into the work of the partnerships”⁵⁷; whilst Dafydd Trystan of Coleg Cenedlaethol Cymraeg explained that:

⁵³ Para 24, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 4 April 2019

⁵⁴ Para 366, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁵⁵ Para 273, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 4 April 2019

⁵⁶ Para 87, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019

⁵⁷ Para 191, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 4 April 2019

“Co-ordinating and making things consistent is another need. There’s a good survey being done by one of the partnerships in co-ordination with employers, but the same pattern isn’t being followed by everyone. So, we don’t know what the skill needs are, even as they’re currently defined by employers in the north and in mid Wales. So, we can’t compare.”⁵⁸

Conclusion 6. The role of the partnerships remains unclear. When taking evidence it was obvious to the Committee that there is confusion over their purpose, tasks and remit, and real questions over how they integrate with wider regional and local bodies such as the Chief Regional Officers, City and Growth Deals, and Public Service Boards. Their role in relation to other key policy areas, such as inclusion and Cymraeg 2050, is also unclear resulting in seemingly ad-hoc drift rather than a more strategic approach.

Conclusion 7. There remain opportunities regarding the governance of the partnerships, improving the inclusivity of their Boards and the consistency of their operation. Inconsistency across partnerships is an obstacle to providers and employers who operate at a national level. If industry and providers are to be expected to fully engage with the partnerships there must be clear doorways into them for national and intra-regional employers, transparent decision-making, consistency of operation, and clear evidence that the time and energy organisations spend working with the partnerships results in impact and success.

Conclusion 8. Working to create more inclusive and diverse partnership boards would offer opportunities to consider long-standing problems in a new light and develop new and innovative approaches to tackling them. Partnerships also have a role to play in the Welsh Government’s Cymraeg 2050 strategy but it is a role that does not yet appear to have been mainstreamed, fully formalised or structured.

Partnership remit and the position of the higher education sector

87. The remit of the Partnerships is currently limited to full time further education provision and apprenticeships. The Committee heard evidence that this represents an artificial barrier which is at odds with the overall Welsh Government aim of moving to an integrated post-16 education and skills system.

⁵⁸⁵⁸ Para 189, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 4 April 2019

88. Mark Jones of Gower College explained that:

“The issue with the regional demand and supply plan that we do at the moment, [it it’s] just focused on further education and work-based learning, and it needs to really pull in school sixth-forms, it needs to pull in A-levels, it needs to pull in some areas of HE [Higher Education] as well.”⁵⁹

89. Jane Lewis of the South West and Mid Wales partnership also argued that the remit of the partnerships should be wider:

“I agree with [including] the schools, but I also agree with influencing HE. The resources are really important, but it’s actually having a clear vision of what is expected of us from Welsh Government.”⁶⁰

90. Joshua Miles of the FSB told the Committee that:

“At the moment, by focusing just on FE [Further Education], we’re looking at just one mode of delivery there. One of the recommendations might be RSPs saying, ‘Do you know what? We’d be better delivering this through work-based learning’, or ‘We might be better delivering certain things through degree apprenticeships’, for example. So, we really need to see that different method of delivery being thrown into the mix as well, as opposed to just a conversation about FE here, work-based learning here, and HE not even being on the radar, if that makes sense.”⁶¹

91. The Committee heard evidence that regional skills policy should take into consideration the circumstances of the higher education sector in Wales which are driven by three main factors:

- Particularly since 2012 when funding began to follow individual students and central grants to universities reduced, universities in Wales have become “market led”, operating in an international, UK-wide and Wales-wide student market in competition with institutions overseas and in the UK. Universities Wales told the Committee that in two significant instances (medicine and teacher training) universities already deliver centrally planned provision.

⁵⁹ Para 203, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁶⁰ Para 181, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁶¹ Para 261, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 9 May 2019

- All Welsh universities have significant residential estates and attract large numbers of students from outside Wales and outside their home regions in Wales, many of whom return there after graduation. This means that large proportions of Welsh university students do not enter their university's regional labour market.
- Welsh universities are autonomous corporations, independent from Government and also registered charities. Whilst Welsh Government negotiates a so-called final delivery plan with colleges each year that sets out their proposals for what programmes to offer and the volume of students/learning to be taught, there is no such mechanism for universities who are free to set their own academic character, award their own degrees, decide the content of those awards and decide who to admit to them.

92. Professor Julie Lydon of the University of South Wales told the Committee that:

“The word ‘planning’ is the word that I shiver at very slightly, because we’re market led. So, how far do you plan markets? [...] I would object very strongly to [RSPs becoming involved in planning the curriculum] that for lots of reasons, not only institutional autonomy. The reality is that, actually, for most higher education provision, we’re not only serving the region. We cut across regions, we cut across nations, we obviously cut across globally. If we weren’t able to do that, it would be a lot poorer experience for our learners, and ultimately for the organisations.”⁶²

93. The above means that Welsh Government cannot influence the curriculum at universities, or negotiate the number of learners it will fund on particular courses in the same way it can with further education colleges. The exception to this are Degree Apprenticeship’s which are directly funded by HEFCW central grants and where funding has been restricted to a handful of “priority” subjects.

94. The Committee heard evidence from College Principals regarding the position of higher education. Guy Lacey of Coleg Gwent explained:

“I think that part of the dimension there is: do we want our universities in Wales to be solely operating in a global market, or do we want our universities in Wales to be supporting the development of the Welsh

⁶² Para 99, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 4 April 2019

economy? And I just think there's a place in this debate between RSPs and higher education about meeting regional need as well as meeting global need. Otherwise, we have universities that simply attract young people from elsewhere to come and live in Wales for three years, graduate and move away.”⁶³

95. David Jones of Coleg Cambria also explained that:

“We can't just let universities crack on and do their own thing—because ultimately there's public money going into universities; that's where it's coming from at the end of the day—and then just focus on some sort of regional economy-driven planning just on FE and work-based learning. It's flawed if you do it that way.”⁶⁴

96. Despite these views on the position of university provision, the Committee heard from university representatives that they engage with the partnerships and are also engaged in a number of other ways with employers and the wider skills system.

97. The Committee heard that there was support from some stakeholders for the remit of the Regional Skills Partnerships to extend to universities and encompass the whole range of post-16 education.

98. When asked about this the Minister for Education explained that:

“I think there's a role there. I think, once we've got confidence that this process is working and, potentially, with post-compulsory education and training reforms, we could look then to see what influence it could have on other parts of our curriculum and our learning continuum. But I think it's early days at the moment.”⁶⁵

Conclusion 9. The Committee has carefully considered the evidence regarding the role and position of the higher education sector in the skills system in Wales, including the ways in which higher education already contribute to the skills landscape in Wales, institutional autonomy, academic freedom and the need for universities to attract students from across the UK and overseas. Where there is no direct Welsh Government funding (via HEFCW) it is clear universities must make their own decisions regarding their own awards and admissions decisions. However, the Committee welcomed the evidence from the sector on the ways it

⁶³ Para 230, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁶⁴ Para 234, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁶⁵ Para 126, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019

feels it can make further contributions, particularly regarding research and analysis.

Conclusion 10. As Wales moves toward an integrated and cohesive post-16 education and skills system, it makes no sense that the remit of the partnerships continue to be artificially restricted to full-time further education provision and the apprenticeship programme. This artificial division will become much starker with the establishment of the proposed Commission for Tertiary Education and Research from 2023. The remit of the partnerships must include consideration, challenge and advice on the full range of skills provision.

Employer engagement and data analysis by the partnerships

99. The inquiry focussed on how the partnerships gather and analyse data, and how well they engage with employers to understand their skills demands. The Committee understands that success and capability in these areas is a factor of the level of resourcing the partnerships have received, a level which almost all stakeholders thought inadequate.

100. Reliable and valid data is fundamental to making effective recommendations and keeping the confidence of employers. Any difficulties in this area can undermine the work and role of the partnerships.

101. The Committee took evidence from stakeholders that contained considerable concerns around data and employer engagement. Concerns acknowledged, but not fully shared by the regional skills partnerships.

102. Sasha Davies of the North Wales partnership told the Committee that:

“we recognise that there needs to be improvement in terms of engagement. I think we’ve been very honest. I wouldn’t say that it’s necessarily a rosy picture that we’ve been painting from a north Wales basis. But, with actually quite limited resources, I think we do a pretty good job, but there’s always room for improvement.”⁶⁶

103. Jane Lewis of the South West and Mid Wales partnership in turn stated that:

“We’ve all got weaknesses, but one of our strengths has always been the employer engagement that we have got, from the SME level all the way

⁶⁶ Para 71, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

through to the national companies. That has enabled us to work closer.”⁶⁷

104. The Committee heard from the partnerships that data gathering and analysis has been improving and becoming more cohesive and consistent across the partnerships with common labour market intelligence being provided by Welsh Government and an increasing use of a piece of software by EMSI, which is intended to provide robust labour market intelligence and forecasts.

105. However, a number of stakeholders did not share the view that employer engagement can be considered a strength across all partnerships. In particular the Committee heard concerns regarding the capacity of the partnerships to engage with SMEs which make up the vast majority of enterprises in Wales, with some stakeholders arguing that larger employers had a disproportionate influence over the findings of the partnerships.

106. Joshua Miles of the FSB told the Committee that:

“Large employers—Tata, Airbus, those kinds of organisations—have the capacity to send an individual to an RSP to sit on a committee meeting and to articulate what they need. They quite often have direct links to the colleges. They have sufficient numbers where they can pitch in for funding from Welsh Government as well, additional funding, and from the college for that kind of support. [...] Where it starts to fall down is engagement with SMEs. It’s a much harder thing to do, and we’d be the first to say that; it’s not easy to talk to 250,000 businesses in Wales and get their perspective, but it’s the kind of thing we need to do if we’re going to get the economy of Wales right.”⁶⁸

107. Evidence from further education institutions echoed this. Guy Lacey of Coleg Gwent told the Committee that:

“I think employer engagement is notoriously difficult. In a nation where we are overwhelmingly an economy of small and medium-sized enterprises, it’s very difficult to have that dialogue.”⁶⁹

108. Regarding SMEs within the foundational economy, both Mary Wimbury of Care Forum Wales and Richard Clifford of UK Hospitality raised very similar points. Both the care and hospitality industry are key pillars of the Welsh economy and

⁶⁷ Para 72, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁶⁸ Para 239, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 9 May 2019

⁶⁹ Para 259, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

vital for the wellbeing of Wales however they are also both largely made up largely of SMEs.

109. Mary Wimbury told the committee:

“Our experience is that the regional skills partnerships know that they need to engage with health and social care as a totality, but too often that means just talking to statutory organisations about what their services and needs are, what they’re commissioning, rather than directly to employers within the sector.”⁷⁰

110. The Committee took a particular interest in how data gathering and analysis can be improved and how the partnerships can ensure they effectively engage with SMEs and employers within the foundational economy. On employer engagement, Jeff Protheroe of NTfW articulated that fundamentally:

“It is really about trying to reduce any barriers between the employers and the providers. [...] there are already discussions going on between providers and employers to identify their needs; that’s happening within that apprenticeship systems as well.”⁷¹

111. He went to say:

“More can be done. [...] But that ultimately comes down to resources on the ground.”

112. Joshua Miles of the FSB explained some of the considerable difficulties that the partnerships face and the scale of the challenge:

“there’s no best picture of how to do this—I can think of a couple of examples. The Valleys taskforce, for example, had quite a lot of employer engagement events that were, by and large, SMEs—40, 50 people in a room in different areas of the Valleys. You know, it’s that kind of stuff, I think. It’s not the silver bullet—there’s no model we can take off the shelf that’ll solve this problem. It’s always going to be hard work, it’s always going to be granular, but it’s got to be much more proactive and much more outwardly facing, I think.”⁷²

113. Universities Wales told the Committee that there is already considerable research and data analysis expertise within the universities in Wales and that this

⁷⁰ Para 17, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 March 2019

⁷¹ Para 49, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 4 April 2019

⁷² Para 246, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 9 May 2019

could be made available to the partnerships to help improve their capacity in this area. Julie Lydon of Universities Wales and the University of South Wales explained that:

“There is a resource within the universities. Clearly, they are employed by the university, but, as academics, they are working with that evidence base and with that information base, and we would like to see more of that used. [there is] expertise in universities they could draw upon.”⁷³

114. The Committee took evidence from the Welsh Language Commissioner’s Office on weaknesses regarding data on the Welsh language within the skills system. Ania Rolewska from the Commissioner’s office explained that:

“[The partnerships] are ready to listen, but the question is whether they have the capacity at present to deliver, to improve data collection methods and these problems in terms of the reliability, continuity and comprehensiveness of the data that they gather. And we have concerns in that regard, with regard to the Welsh language in particular, because, initially, perhaps the data isn’t always reliable.”⁷⁴

115. The Committee also heard evidence from the partnerships that there are gaps in their ability to gather data on very specialist skills. Sian Lloyd Roberts of the North Wales partnership explained that:

“As an RSP, we are able to identify the broader action of where the skills demand is. But more specialist skills—probably, it’s down to the industry themselves; they are not entirely sure all the time what they require as specialist skills as well.”⁷⁵

116. The Minister for Economy and Transport told the Committee that:

“I think we need to recognise that RSPs, whilst the resource has been quite considerable—£0.5 million—it’s probably not been enough to ensure that thorough engagement takes place with businesses of all types and sizes. Equally, though, there’s a role for more representative groups to ensure that they engage with the RSPs and contribute towards the work that is undertaken by them, but I would accept,

⁷³ Para 112, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 4 April 2019

⁷⁴ Para 184, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 4 April 2019

⁷⁵ Para 61, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

moving forward, we need to ensure that employer engagement is more thorough.”⁷⁶

117. In its evidence paper to the inquiry Welsh Government also explained that it was minded to review the level of resourcing provided to the partnerships to help ensure they are able to improve employer engagement and data analysis. The Committee supports such a review.

Conclusion 11. Data gathering and analysis is absolutely fundamental to the work of the partnerships and in developing intelligence that is actionable by providers and employers. This data needs to consistently and reliably cover the Welsh language, the foundational economy and inclusion. The Committee was concerned to have heard consistent and significant concerns from stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of this activity, both in general and in relation to the specific matters above, although it recognises that the partnerships are being asked to do much with relatively little. It is extremely important that the partnerships have access to reliable and timely data, including from representative employer engagement, and it is just as important to have the capability to analyse it usefully.

Recommendations of the partnerships

118. Through Regional Planning and Funding spreadsheets, the partnerships make recommendations to Welsh Government regarding which areas of full-time further education and apprenticeship provision should be increased and decreased. Welsh Government then use these spreadsheets to help negotiate the curriculums of further education institutions, and inform the contractual arrangements with apprenticeship providers. Until this year these recommendations were made at the level of individual learners on individual programmes. From this year onwards the partnerships will instead make recommendations at a higher level, recommending increases and decreases within subject sectors.

119. The further education sector told the Committee that this methodology did not recognise:

- how colleges set their budgets and manage their teaching staff;
- that the colleges have a wider social mission;

⁷⁶ Para 105, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019

- the challenges faced by learners who have had poor experiences at school;
- the issues of both recovering essential skills and gaining transferable skills; and
- the opportunities for new modes and methods of delivery, or new programme content.

120. David Jones of Coleg Cambria told the Committee that:

“I don’t think the RSPs are equipped to, to be honest, to advise on that [make detailed recommendations on course levels]. They haven’t the people on there or the know-how, and I don’t think that’s something they’re particularly pursuing. I think the challenge with RSPs is that they spend most years developing a plan, getting it signed off and then, once it’s signed off, developing another plan.”⁷⁷

121. Guy Lacey of Coleg Gwent explained that he believed the methodology was in-fact “ineffective”. He went on to say:

“I think the exercise is fundamentally flawed, because it is an in-year exercise. It’s all about, ‘Do we need 16 hairdressers next year?’ And I think that micromanagement of provision is, ultimately, a fool’s errand. That’s not a criticism of the RSP; I think that’s a criticism of the inherent activity of trying to plan, at a regional level, down to the micro level of an individual course, a level 2 hairdressing course where, this year, colleges in the region had 30 students. Next year there should be 28. [...] Frankly, that’s not the level of planning that we usefully work at.”⁷⁸

122. David Jones of Coleg Cambria, on the matter of the wider social mission of further education colleges, told the Committee that:

“it’s a bit daft really if we get an RSP plan saying, ‘Sorry, north Wales, you only need 16 hairdressers this year’, because, at the end of the day, if 30 people want to do hairdressing, we’re going to give them a place. Why? Because they’re young people and, alongside doing that course, they’re going to develop essential skills, digital skills and so on, and it would be totally inequitable to say, ‘Sorry, we’ve only got 16 places in north Wales for hairdressing’, when, in schools and the university sector, there are no

⁷⁷ Para 330, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁷⁸ Para 316, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

quotas whatsoever on the type of courses and how many are put on them. So, it really needs a good look at.”⁷⁹

123. This need to take into account matters beyond just employer skills demand was echoed by Guy Lacey of Coleg Gwent

“I think that the dimension of the conversation that we’ve not touched on so far is about our social responsibility to the communities we serve. So, our curriculum planning and our curriculum offer isn’t ever going to be just purely employer-led, because a large part of the dialogue has to be with our other community stakeholders about whether or not what we are doing is meeting their needs.”⁸⁰

124. He went on to say regarding transferrable skills:

“The single most frequently conversation I have with employers isn’t about vocational skills, it’s about employability skills. It’s about: is a young person or a young adult, because it’s not just about 16 to 19-year-olds—? The population of colleges is significantly more diverse than that. The most routine conversation I have is about being ready for work—‘Do they understand the obligations of work? Do they have a level of literacy and numeracy that is going to be suitable for my workplace?’ That’s the most frequent conversation.”⁸¹

125. Mark Jones of Gower College on the issue of essential skills told the Committee that:

“What [learners want] is something that they can engage in at the age of 16 that maybe they haven’t—something that they’re going to enjoy. [...] You slide in the maths and the English right underneath it and, in two years’ time, they blossom and maybe at that stage, with really good, strong careers advice, they go on to do the jobs that we need them to do. But, at 16 years of age, they haven’t got a clue what they want to do, and the advice isn’t strong.”⁸²

126. He went on to explain, regarding the operation of colleges and the management of staff:

⁷⁹ Para 217, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁸⁰ Para 257, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁸¹ Para 263, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁸² Para 218, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

“It’s not easy, say, for example, to reduce hairdressing and just move those lecturers into engineering. Maybe it’s doable over time, but it’s not possible in six months.”⁸³

127. On the challenges faced by some learners, David Jones explained that:

“This ambition about getting more and more people into the level 3, the A-level equivalent or the national diploma level in Wales, I fully support that, but, you know, sometimes, in most cases, you can’t just put them on level 3? If they haven’t had a good experience at school or at college, you’ve got to do the steps.”⁸⁴

128. Whilst Sian Lloyd Roberts of the North Wales partnership told the Committee that:

“The feedback we’re getting back from FE quite regularly is that you can’t actually get somebody in on level 3 straight away from school. In some instances, you have to have that progression, and we really do understand that and we recognise that.”⁸⁵

129. Guy Lacey told the Committee that improving skills provision:

“...might not be about developing new qualifications. It might be about developing new approaches to delivering those qualifications.”⁸⁶

130. Welsh Government told the Committee that it was in fact in the process of strengthening this arrangement. Andrew Clarke of Welsh Government explained that:

“For 2019-20, the one that’s coming, we’re going to add some teeth to that and then we’re going to say that, ‘We’re agreeing a plan with you that’s aligned to the RSP outcomes. If you don’t stick to it and don’t talk to us during the year to explain what the problem is, then we will reclaim money from you and redistribute it to those that do’. And that will put a much harder edge on the whole of the process.”⁸⁷

131. Kirsty Williams, the Minister for Education told the Committee that:

⁸³ Para 278, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁸⁴ Para 267, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁸⁵ Para 66, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁸⁶ Para 257, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 March 2019

⁸⁷ Para 128, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019

“We are developing a closer monitoring system to see whether that data and the plans from the RSPs are actually influencing delivery in FE. It’s not an easy thing to do, because you can’t turn things on and off. Sometimes it’s going to take a little bit of time to bed in.”⁸⁸

132. The Minister went on to explain that Welsh Government had learned from the previous version of the methodology that saw recommendations made down to individual learner level, but that it intended to continue asking partnerships for recommendations, albeit at the so-called subject sector level, of which there are 14 groups of subjects.

“We’re making changes accordingly, in the light of that experience—that very, very granular approach that was taken, it was clearly not appropriate and moving to the situation we have now, which is, as you said, those 14 areas and the various levels within those 14 areas gives us a better shot at getting that alignment.”⁸⁹

Conclusion 12. Setting out detailed recommendations at the operational level, with partnerships subject to additional artificial restrictions on the recommendations they can make is a blunt tool that does not fully recognise the expertise and experience of providers. It also exacerbates tensions with the wider social mission of providers that they are best placed themselves to resolve. Whilst the Committee believes providers must of course still have regard to regional skills demand, it believes that those closest to learners and to developing and delivering skills provision are the best placed to translate that evidenced demand into viable curriculum delivery plans utilising their considerable expertise and their own local employer knowledge.

⁸⁸ Para 124, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019

⁸⁹ Para 173, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 May 2019

6. The Committee's recommendations

Recommendation 1. Welsh Government should instigate a thorough reform of Regional Skills Partnerships by adopting the package of actions set out below, and revisit their resourcing where required. This package includes rebranding the partnerships as Regional Skills Advisory Boards to make their role in the wider skills system clear, and a new focus on demand-side interventions. The package also puts in place a clear strategic outlook and remit for the Boards, whilst improving employer engagement and data gathering and analysis.

Action 1: Rebrand Regional Skills Partnerships as Regional Skills Advisory Boards (RSABs) to make their role and remit clear to stakeholders. Following from this, the RSABs should have the clear role of advising Welsh Government and stakeholders on at least: (a) current and future regional skills demand and shortages/mismatching; (b) how to tackle skills shortages/mismatches, (c) evaluating their own advice and plans and (d) on any response to shocks to the regional economy and skills system such as a large employer laying off significant numbers of staff.

Action 2: In addition to the above, the RSABs should have the role of identifying, understanding and clearly presenting to stakeholders the sectors, regions, and places that are experiencing low-skill traps. They should advise on addressing the traps, including stimulating future employer demand for higher level skills.

Action 3: Welsh Government should **agree and publish a timetable for the full implementation of the recommendations made within the Graystone review** to ensure governance of the RSABs is strengthened, particularly the recommendation for a National Assurance Framework. Welsh Government should also go further and work with the RSABs to diversify their Boards and achieve a gender balance, doing so through the National Assurance Frameworks.

Action 4: In line with both the Graystone and SQW review recommendations, the RSABs should become more strategically focussed, publishing improved 3 year regional skills and employment reports. These reports should present intelligence and in-depth analysis at a genuinely strategic level that considers industry skills pipelines, pinchpoints etc to guide and assist the entire range of education providers and other stakeholders, who can then set out their proposals for responding. The plans should include the matters in Actions 1 & 2 above.

Action 5: Through the National Assurance Frameworks, Welsh Government should work with RSABs to set out quantitative and qualitative measures by which the impact of the Boards can be measured and communicated to stakeholders. If RSABs are to enjoy the confidence of industry the RSABs must be able to unequivocally evidence that the time and effort of employers to engage with them has been worthwhile and impactful.

Action 6: One RSAB should be designated to represent and act as a single-point-of-contact for large national bodies with national skills needs such as the construction industry and Transport for Wales. This RSAB should be appropriately resourced and their regional skills and employment reports should specifically address the aggregated national skills needs of such bodies.

Action 7: As a priority, **the data gathering and analysis capability in each RSAB must be substantially strengthened.** To achieve maximum value for money, and in line with Welsh Government's focus on their civic mission, this should be done by drawing on **the publicly funded world-leading research expertise present in Welsh universities.** Welsh Government should therefore work with HEFCW and Welsh universities to establish formal partnerships between universities and each RSAB to undertake research and data analysis on their behalf and offer research methodology consultancy.

Action 8: As a priority, **the Welsh language data gathering and analysis capability in each RSAB must be substantially improved.** Welsh Government should consider how it can facilitate a model that allows the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Coleg Cenedlaethol Cymraeg to use their existing expertise and research to help the partnership's mainstream Welsh language considerations and inform their 3 yearly reports.

Action 9: As a priority, employer engagement, particularly with SMEs, must be better resourced and substantially improved. Again, in so doing Welsh Government should aspire to utilise an existing and valuable asset in the form of our extensive network of publicly funded apprenticeship providers and sub-contractors. These providers, by default, have far closer links with SMEs than RSABs can aspire to have – such relationships are a valuable asset. Welsh Government should explore using its funding agreements to place reasonable terms on the private providers (and their 90+ sub-contractors) to engage with both their employer networks and the RSABs to harness their considerable knowledge of market demand.

Action 10: In-line with a more strategic outlook, Welsh Government should no longer request RSABs to make operational recommendations on learner

numbers at further education institutions (FEIs), even at the current sector-subject level. Instead, Welsh Government should require FEIs to “have demonstrable regard to” the more strategic and intelligence based 3 year RSAB reports when negotiating their final delivery plans, empowering and incentivising them to respond to the issues identified in those reports.

Recommendation 2. Welsh Government should work closely with industry representative bodies and Qualifications Wales and publish an action plan to ensure the wider skills infrastructure is rebuilt and based on organisations and structures which are suitable for the timely level of scrutiny and deep expertise required. Regional Skills Advisory Boards, the Wales Apprenticeship Advisory Board and the Wales Employment and Skills Board are not a substitute for close and timely sector level scrutiny and approval of qualifications and content.

Annex: Oral evidence

Date	Name and organisation
21 March 2019	Jane Lewis, South West and Mid Wales Regional Learning and Skills Partnership Sasha Davies, North Wales Regional Skills Partnership Sian Lloyd Roberts, North Wales Regional Skills Partnership Beverly Owen, Newport City Council Richard Crook, Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership Mark Jones, Gower College Swansea Dr Rachel Bowen, Colegau Cymru David Jones, Coleg Cambria Guy Lacey, Coleg Gwent
27 March 2019	Mary Wimbury, Care Forum Wales Richard Clifford, UK Hospitality
4 April 2019	Jeff Protheroe, National Training Federation Wales Professor Julie Lydon, Universities Wales Keiron Rees, Universities Wales Anna Rolewska, Welsh Language Commissioner Lowri Williams, Welsh Language Commissioner Dr Dafydd Trystan, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol Cerys Furlong, Chwarae Teg David Hagendyk, Learning and Work Institute
9 May 2019	Joshua Miles, Federation of Small Businesses
15 May 2019	Ken Skates AM, Minister for Economy and Transport Kirsty Williams AM, Minister for Education Andrew Clark, Welsh Government Huw Morris, Welsh Government Rachel Garside-Jones, Welsh Government