

## ACT and Learn About's response to the Petition Committee looking into work based learning provision for vulnerable young people

The petition submitted by Action for Children which called for:

**"We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Assembly Government to:**

- **provide more work based learning provision that better meets the needs of more vulnerable young people, that really moves them on and ensures they achieve at least NVQ2 level qualifications.**
- **We would particularly like to see more provision for homeless young people seeking training who are not in the care of a local authority"**

Response:

The current work based learning programme for unemployed young people that caters primarily for vulnerable young people i.e. Skill Build, is very flexible and accessible where it is delivered properly i.e. responding to the needs of the young person.

The programme is accessed via a process where Careers Wales independently identifies the specific needs of the young person and the resulting 'endorsement', together with learning and skills support plan (section140) if applicable. ACT has close inter agency links(e.g. YOS team, Youth Gateway, Support workers, leaving care workers, NEETS learning coaches etc.) which have resulted in sharing of essential information between parties to ensure the learner is provided with the best support possible. This information may include:

- Statement of special needs;
- emotional and mental health disclosures;
- offending behaviour;
- disclosures around physical and mental abuse;

- drug and alcohol issues;
- aggressive behaviour/violence;
- home circumstances (which includes homelessness).

This information is used as the basis of an Individual Learning Plan' (ILP) that is reviewed every month by the training provider to record progress and set milestone targets. In the first few weeks of the programme learners are monitored closely so that staff can assess their well being and engagement into the programme. Careers Wales also independently monitor that the ILP reflects the content of their endorsement and that the training and support needs as recorded in the monthly reviews is being adhered to. Careers Wales Advisors also interview the young person to verify the training is being delivered to a satisfactory standard in line with the needs of every young person.

Where training is at its best there is extensive support by professional staff that have been well trained and experienced in the needs of vulnerable young people. At ACT/Learn About this includes: Additional Learning Support Workers, Learning Coaches, weekly access to a fully trained counsellor across all centres, four trained Child Protection/Safeguarding Officers in addition to a high level of in house training for all staff including non delivery staff. Whilst learners are in training any support need that is identified at any point in their training is addressed either in house or referred to an appropriate agency.

The 14-19 strategy in Wales will eventually improve the current Skill Build programme as from August 2011 it will be replaced by 'Traineeships' that are intended to be included as one of the local 14-19 Options available for 16 to 19 year olds that are not in statutory education. Inclusion in 14-19 Learning Pathway Options will mean that young people accessing a Traineeship will also be able to access the same levels of support that is now given to school and further education students' i.e.

- access to a Learning Coach;

- specialist support from local agencies for personal issues;
- independent careers advice and guidance.

Although these additional support services are available to some young people already involved in the Skill Build programme it is not embedded due to the fact that work based learning providers were not integrated into 14-19 partnerships until quite recently which has led to a lag in allowing them to get involved. In more enlightened 14-19 partnerships that are based on local authority boundaries this is more advanced and these elements are better developed.

14-19 planning at a local authority level dove-tails into the same locality's Children and Young People's Plan. This approach should ensure that gaps in services, including education and training, are joined up, seamless and fit-for-purpose. However, the lag in including WBL-Skill Build in this planning has not been helpful in ensuring that particularly vulnerable young people such as those in or leaving the care system are made aware of or supported to access the programme.

It is essential that agencies who feed into the Careers Wales referral system are fully aware of the services Skill Build training providers offer and that providers are equipped with the skills to offer the necessary support to learners. Agencies occasionally come to ACT directly but we then need to refer them back to Careers for an endorsement. It is concerning from a training provider's perspective where these young people go as referral of young people in the care system or for those that have left it must come via Careers Wales. Despite WBL-Skill Build providers knowing about the large numbers of young people in care that achieve few or no qualifications they do not appear to be referred in any significant numbers to WBL-Skill Build post-16.

Although we have limited data available on the actual numbers the general view is that the actual volume varies between areas and can appear very low in percentage terms. However, as already stated, vulnerable young people make

up the majority of young people involved in Skill Build i.e. at least 90% of all learners with ACT and Learn About would be categorised as vulnerable due to their personal backgrounds and a range of other disadvantages.

The 'Youth Guarantee' ensures that if a young person, vulnerable or otherwise, wants to access work based learning (WBL) they must be able to within 8 weeks. This should prevent any vulnerable young person being in a position where they are not able to access training in WBL-Skill Build. ACT and Learn About adhere to the Youth Guarantee and wherever possible provide immediate entry especially where a young person has been identified by Careers Wales as having a particular need where immediate access would be beneficial.

Barriers to learning that require 'Additional Learning Support' is available from the Welsh Assembly via DCELLS. This can include one-to-one support for young people requiring this support as well as a range of other interventions that are over and above the core funding for learners. This is a considerable benefit to those young people with the greatest needs but even though this funding has been available and ACT has been accessing this for several years the take up from providers was slow and it has only recently been made more easily accessible. Previously it had been so difficult and bureaucratic to access over a prolonged period of time that most providers gave up trying to access it.

Additional Learning Support (ALS) is now easier to access for vulnerable young people but this is mostly where the young person was 'statemented' while in school. As many young people have slipped through education without a statement, sometimes parents are discouraged by schools not to have their child statemented, these young people are disadvantaged again when they access Skill Build. This is a problem that should be investigated and remedied. Accessing ALS is via Careers Wales and without a statement they will either not support the application or it is turned down by DCELLS. However, ACT will always offer discrete provision for those who need it regardless of accessing the ALS funding.

ACT and Learn About have specifically targeted provision at young people living independently through working closely with Llamau Housing in Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend (where Llamau were provided with their own training suite in ACT's Bridgend Centre and in Risca (Learn About have referrals from Llamau's 'safe house').

Learn About also operated a training facility based in the Compass project Newport. The Compass project was set up for homeless young people and adults by Seren (part of the Solas Group). Learn About through working in the Compass project engaged numerous young people in Solas hostels and other young people living with foster parents. The joint project was operational for approximately 4 years but had to end when the focus of the Compass changed to work exclusively with Solas clients and it became un-economic for Learn About to continue.

### **NVQ Level 2 provision**

The Skill Build provision is however largely limited in its scope of being able to offer NVQ Level 2 qualifications. Currently WAG-DCELLS has provided some flexibility to allow young people to follow NVQs at Level 2 but this has been a very recent flexibility due to the recession and increasing numbers of young people not in employment, education or training. From August 2011 this flexibility will be largely removed. The reason for having limited NVQ 2 provision available is that the WAG-DCELLS policy is that this level of provision should only be available to young people if there is a job. Hence NVQ Level 2 is available via the Foundation Modern Apprenticeship programme and only for those young people in employment.

## Terms of reference - ACT & Learn About's response

- **The availability and quality of training programmes, and work based placements, particularly suitable placements for vulnerable young people**

As stated above, where provision is delivered in the spirit of the current Skill Build programme the availability and quality of provision is not an issue. Where it is not there will be problems. However, Careers Wales in their 'gatekeeper' role should be ensuring that poor and inadequate provision is communicated to the Welsh Assembly-DCELLS for investigation and resolution.

Work placements are an integral part of the programme and their suitability should be ensured by well trained staff and adherence to robust policies in relation to working with vulnerable young people. Within ACT and Learn About we have a Director specifically responsible for the protection of young people and adults. Safeguarding vulnerable people, young and adults, is paramount whether in ACT and Learn About centres or with employers for work experience.

Clearly we are unable to comment on all Skill Build providers but we would hope that all similar organisations to ourselves are as vigilant and professional in their work with vulnerable young people. If not Careers Wales should be reporting this to WAG-DCELLS to investigate.

- **Progression for the vulnerable young person building on skills and qualifications gained in the previous placement**

Progression is the main outcome for the Skill Build programme. Young people cannot repeat skills development that they have already secured elsewhere as the funding of the programme prevents this. This should not be a problem unless the young person started a qualification but did not finish it. If they are unable to provide evidence for prior learning and achievement there is no option but to

have to provide the evidence again. This is not a provider issue but a requirement for any recognised and valued qualification.

- **Financial support for independently financed young people including training allowances, Education Maintenance Allowances, benefits, and funding for travel costs**

All young people receive an allowance of £50 per week. This does not have any impact upon their housing benefits or other support they may receive. In addition young people receive their travel costs that exceed £5 per week. Education Maintenance Allowances are not available in WBL-Skill Build. However, from August 2011 WAG-DCELLS are introducing a Training Maintenance Allowance (TMA). For the most vulnerable that will access the Engagement strand of the new Traineeship programme the TMA will be reduced to £30 per week from the current £50 per week while they remain on this programme.

Although WAG-DCELLS were repeatedly told of the negative impact this reduction in the training allowance will have on the most vulnerable young people, in addition to it being a major de-motivating factor, by both the Skill Build network and Careers Wales it is being introduced regardless.

- **Personal support for vulnerable young people including differences in levels of support for care-leave**

As stated above.

Most Skill Build providers have developed their own support networks for young people as well as recruiting or developing their staff to ensure they have the

expertise. Inclusion of Traineeships in 14-19 Options Menus and support mechanisms should enhance the programme from August 2011.

It is however a shame that this had not been made policy by WAG-DCELLS in conjunction with the 14-19 team and the department responsible for CYPP within WAG from the beginning of these strategies.

- **The effectiveness of agency collaboration/partnership working in issues in Wales;**

Agency collaboration is patchy as WBL-Skill Build has not been mainstreamed by 14-19 partnerships and CYPPs in their planning. Relationships with agencies and training providers vary between geographical areas. Hopefully this will start to improve from August 2011. However, it would be fair to state that there is a development need for professionals working with vulnerable young people, including those leaving special schools with special needs, about the opportunities that are available via the current Skill Build programme and its successor from August 2011, Traineeships.

Other bodies working with vulnerable young people as well as CYPPs and 14-19 partnerships need to be increasing their awareness and 'making the connections' with mainstream funded programmes like Skill Build as a key provision to support their clients. There has been a tendency in Wales to develop new short-term programmes via EU funding that duplicate what is available through Skill Build. If more had been done to make these connections and to use EU programme funding to enhance the Skill Build programme where gaps existed or where there was a lack of provision there would be a better mainstreamed opportunities for vulnerable young people and less duplication of provision.