

Welsh Assembly Government Response to the Enterprise and Learning Committee's recommendations in the report: Young People not in Education, Employment or Training

Tackling youth unemployment in Wales remains one of my top priorities. I welcome the Enterprise and Learning Scrutiny Committee's Report and the opportunity to discuss what we are doing to tackle youth unemployment in Wales.

The recommendations contained in this report fit closely with our current policy direction, so I am pleased to be able to accept the majority of them. Some require further consideration given the current economic climate, but I support the intent of the proposed actions and believe that steps should be taken to achieve the intended outcome.

Therefore I am pleased to announce the publication of the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan, which can be found on the Welsh Assembly Government Website [insert link] following the Plenary debate on 12th January 2011. The plan outlines the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to supporting and preventing children and young people from disengaging from learning and supporting them with entry to the labour market.

To inform the policy direction and the Action Plan, three pieces of work reported on the issue of youth engagement and employment in Wales. These were;

- an external task and finish group, chaired by Martin Mansfield of Wales TUC which looked specifically at what more we should do to counter the effects of the recession on young people.
- an internal operational group of officials which reported to me on what triggers children and young people to disengage from learning in the first place.
- the Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB) which looked holistically at youth unemployment.

This is a hugely challenging agenda, especially in these economic times. The recession has led to an increase in unemployment in Wales and we know that young people are disproportionately disadvantaged when competing with older jobseekers. However, despite a challenging settlement from the UK Government, we will prioritise skills training, honour our commitment to Pathways to Apprenticeships, and, continue to focus on youth engagement and employment initiatives.

We have already achieved much over the past few years:

- We now have more young people staying in learning or training than ever before which shows that the measures we have put in place to counter the recession and the funding package of over forty nine million pounds which was announced at the Welsh Assembly Government's first economic summit of 2010 have worked.

- Evidence has shown us time and time again that support in the earliest years of children's lives is the most effective way of improving life chances, breaking the negative cycles that exist for some of our most disadvantaged children and young people. Work is continuing to support these children, such as the National Literacy Plan, which I announced last year, the Child Poverty Strategy and existing programmes such as Flying Start and the Foundation Phase. Underpinning all of these programmes is our School Effectiveness Framework.
- Our 14-19 Learning Pathways policy aims to increase educational attainment by increasing the number of young people who remain fully engaged in learning and the number of learners who progress to post-16 Learning. It aims to achieve this by offering young people at Key Stage 4 and post-16 access to a wide range of courses from which to choose together with Learner Support which will help them overcome any barriers to their engagement in learning and in attaining their potential. By 2015 our aim is that 95% of young people by the age of 25 will be ready for high skilled employment or higher education.
- In 2009-2010 we introduced a range of measures to ensure that apprenticeship opportunities for young people were maintained during the economic downturn. The measures included the Young Recruits programme and Pathways to Apprenticeships initiatives. Pathways to Apprenticeships and Young Recruits will continue this year and will offer opportunities to an additional 3,000 young people.
- We are also making changes to our Skill Build Programme, which is our main employability programme for people who are 16 plus. It will be replaced on the 1st August 2011 by the Traineeship Programme for those aged 16-18, and Steps to Employment for those 18+ who are not in education or employment. The Traineeship aims to provide young people with a completely individual approach to learning that fully suits their needs, offering flexibility and a broader range of opportunities.

I thank the committee for its support in tackling this agenda and have set out my response to the Report's individual recommendations below. This report, and the evidence presented during its preparation, will provide crucial information to assist us in the delivery of the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan.

Recommendation 1. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government continue to ensure, by working with the UK Government where appropriate, that headline and local data relating to young people not in education, training or employment are as comprehensive, robust and up-to-date as possible.

Response - Accept

The Welsh Assembly Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation, which aligns with the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan.

The Welsh Assembly Government Statistics Team are currently consulting users on the full programme of Education and Lifelong Learning Statistics, to gain feedback upon

what they currently produce, what could be improved and if there are any gaps to help them understand the relative priorities that users attach to particular analyses. Over the past year they have addressed issues around the timeliness of data through the inclusion of provisional annual results (bringing the publication timetable forward one year) and the development of the quarterly bulletin containing less robust but more up-to-date data.

Recommendation 2. We further recommend that headline and local data on young people not in education, employment or training are regularly impressed on all those agencies that have a role in addressing the issue to ensure proactive and reactive measures are prioritised.

Response – Accept in principle

The Welsh Assembly Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation, which aligns with the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan. Working in partnership with local authorities and other key stakeholders we will look at options to improve data and data sharing between organisations for young people who are not in education, employment or training in Wales.

We are also working with the Efficiency and Innovation Board's work stream on New Models of Service Delivery. One of actions being developed, based on the success of the Swansea Project to tackle the issue of young people who are not in education, employment or training, is supporting the Swansea Local Service Board to:

- a. set out, in an accessible format, the characteristics of their approach to reducing the proportion of young people NEET. It is hoped that this may assist other organisations reduce the proportion of young people NEET; and
- b. develop an approach to appraise and evaluate the financial benefits of their approach to reducing the proportion of young people NEET. In so doing, the work stream would be looking to encourage the development of an approach that is of national relevance.

Recommendation 3. Given that young disabled people are twice as likely to be not in education, employment or training as non-disabled people, we recommend that Welsh Assembly Government statistical publications should routinely analyse data in relation to disability and young people that are not in education, employment or training.

Response – accept in principle

The Welsh Assembly Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation, which aligns with the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan.

The Statistical Bulletins related to young people who are not in education, training or employment use data from the Annual Population Survey. The small sample size is a potential problem but the Welsh Assembly Government statisticians will investigate the robustness and suitability for publication of analysis of young people who are NEET in relation to disability.

Recommendation 4. We recommend that as part of the review of Careers Wales, the Minister should seek to strengthen its performance in managing a national register of young people not in education, employment or training that is both consistent and comprehensive, and also in maintaining a database that can match job vacancies with unemployed young people. We further recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government keep a monitoring role on performance in this area.

Response - accept in principle.

The Future Ambitions: Developing careers services in Wales' Report was published on 16th November 2010. Careers Wales' existing database might usefully form the cornerstone of a more comprehensive 'tracking and data management resource for NEET young people linking in the 'keeping in touch' developments. A similar recommendation was included in The Future Ambitions: Developing careers services in Wales' Report and will be considered upon the unification of Careers Wales as part of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system developments. However, development of the recommendation will be fully dependent on the structure, budgets and relative priorities for Careers Wales in the future.

With regard to matching young people to job vacancies - we have worked in partnership with JobCentre Plus and Careers Wales to establish three pilots to test whether a personalised, individual-to-vacancy matching approach backed up by post-employment training and mentoring, could get more unemployed young people into vacancies and then sustain that employment. The three Vacancy Matching Service pilots have commenced for a period of 6 months. The pilots will report on a monthly basis to the Welsh Assembly Government. A full evaluation of each pilot will take place with recommendations on options to roll this service out across Wales from the autumn of 2011.

Recommendation 5. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government evaluate local authority and regional approaches to addressing the issue of young people not in education, employment or training in order to develop a best practice model and guidance for delivering and monitoring effective services.

Response - accept

There are many good practices across Wales where hard outcomes, user and provider feedback and anecdotal evidence suggest that we are making a positive impact for young people. We know that a number of local authorities have in recent years managed to reduce the proportion of young people in their areas who are NEET. We must not reinvent the wheel – we need to learn from projects we know work and share that knowledge and expertise across Wales.

We propose building on these positive initiatives by taking a more active approach with individual local authorities and 'NEET' hotspot areas. This will include working with authorities to improve systems for identifying and referring young people at risk of becoming NEET based on the evidence we know about risk factors; the coordination of subsequent interventions including looking at the wider family context and the actions needed to support the family; and the central role of schools to identify and refer for

additional support and also in the development of an appropriate and flexible curriculum.

Recommendation 6. We recommend that one of the outcomes of the Minister’s review of his Department’s support for young people not in education, employment or training should be the development of clear, multi-agency guidelines to ensure practitioners adopt an early, consistent and holistic approach to identifying those at risk of disengaging or becoming not in education, employment or training, and that appropriate intervention is provided at an early stage.

Response - accept

We can not wait to address young people’s issues when they reach 16. International evidence shows that support in the earliest years of children’s lives is the most effective way of improving life chances, breaking the cycles that can exist for some of our most disadvantaged children and providing a chance to grow, succeed and achieve. In order to help those families that need our help most, they must be able to access a seamless, integrated and comprehensive programme of support that strengthens the family unit, supports children and young people to achieve better outcomes and helps build communities. We have to look at the issue comprehensively and identify how to address it from the earliest years, recognising all the while that there can be a variety of reasons why people fall out of education, employment or training.

The importance of effective partnerships, both at national and local level, and appropriate interventions at each stage forms the key to achieve this.

In addition, part of the Welsh Assembly Government’s commitment to support families and tackle child poverty the Families First Pioneers, which was announced by the Deputy Minister for Children on 20th July fully supports the direction of this recommendation, which also aligns with the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan.

Recommendation 7. We recommend that the Welsh Government should review how effectively local authorities are implementing existing statutory requirements to support the education of care leavers up to the age of 25. The review should include evidence from care leavers who are within the further and higher education systems and those who are not in employment, education or training.

Response – Accept in principle

The Welsh Assembly Government agrees that supporting the education of care leavers is vitally important and making sure local authorities implement their duties is an important part of that. We would also emphasise the importance of further and higher education institutions by acknowledging the existence of good collaborative practices between local authorities and further/ higher educational institutions to support young people who were in care.

There are also good opportunities already in place for engagement with care leavers themselves but we will continue to seek their opinions on their needs, what works, what does not and the best approach to adopt to improve their life chances. Our aim is to use

our resources to continue to place a high profile on the needs of care leavers and to share existing good practice such as Denbighshire's use of local authority councillors to link with individual care leavers and provide a face for that mystical 'corporate parent' term.

Existing best practice in local authorities is also shared for example, in the Care Leavers Forum enabled by the Welsh Assembly Government. The Forum meets regularly to discuss service provision for care leavers and is solution focused. Topics for discussion include housing, education, financial support and providing practical help on independent living skills. We have used the evidence provided through these forums to inform our decisions such as having a strategic priority to provide financial assistance to care leavers in the form of a Transition from Care grant, which was recently announced. We are currently consulting on draft regulations that will impose a duty on local authorities to provide a bursary of £2,000 to care leavers who choose to pursue a course in higher education.

For care leavers in education, employment or training the Welsh Assembly Government is working with UK partners to establish minimum standards of available support in colleges and universities. The recognition of high strategic priority and supportive mechanisms is provided by a UK Quality Mark, awarded by the Frank Buttle Trust. All Higher Education Institutions in Wales, Coleg Sir Gâr in Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot College and Coleg Glan Hafren in Cardiff have achieved this so far. Coleg Menai is working towards their submission of evidence to achieve the same.

Support staff in FEIs and HEIs are networking with local authority personnel - designated staff in schools, LAC education coordinators and leaving care teams to establish good communication, high quality service links with education, training and work based providers. A good example is where Coleg Glan Hafren in Cardiff have worked with the Cardiff LAC team to offer a course designed specifically around the needs of care leavers and those not in education, training or employment. The course boosts basic skills and has appropriate flexibility on course length and access. The Reaching Wider Partnerships, associated with Higher Education, continue to provide taster days and are engaging with Looked After Children in schools from the age of 12 to encourage high aspirations and provide open access to engage or re-engage with education, employment and training.

For all care leavers, we have commenced the section of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 that extends the entitlement of a personal adviser to the age of 25. The Welsh Assembly Government continues: to work proactively with local authorities and with large public companies such as BT to provide apprenticeships; to support the work of the Children's Commissioner's Office as they work towards a web based self help booklet on entitlements for care leavers; and we continue to engage with Fostering Network as they strive to continue their contact with the young people formerly in their care.

Recommendation 8. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should consider how best to extend and fund the good practice of programmes run by third sector organisations across the whole of Wales, in conjunction with and to complement the programmes of local and school authorities.

Response - accept

A review is currently underway to map the provision available to young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, NEET in Wales. In the most part, services currently exist to support young people at every point on their journey and during transition points. However, they are often provided by different schemes and organisations which do not always link effectively.

The outcome of the review will ensure stronger collaboration and the sharing of good practices between organisations, including the voluntary sector, with a view to the removal of duplication and enabling the most effective use of funding including the streamlining of processes.

In addition, we will work with the Big Lottery and voluntary sector to fully utilise the dormant accounts money to fund innovative projects to support young people who are NEET in Wales – to help prevent disengagement and encourage re-engagement back into education, employment or training.

Recommendation 9. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government work with partners in both the public and third sectors to involve employers at an early stage in working with learners, learning coaches and others so that there is a more joined-up approach to helping young people progress into securing employment or apprenticeship opportunities, and particularly in providing work-based learning opportunities for young people who have additional learning needs.

Response - accept

I am fully committed to ensuring that all young people are equipped with the skills they need to secure satisfying careers and working with key organisations and employers is key to achieving this.

We need to ensure young people have opportunities to gain suitable skills to progress into sustainable employment. That is why we will pilot a new 'Pathway to Work' for 16 and 17 year olds. This will not be a new programme but the creation of a single, flexible and coherent route-way for young people who do not have positive or sustained engagement with one of the main post-16 options. It will offer young people more choice and better progression into employment. For example, new elements would include:

- A new voluntary work experience programme to target 16-17 years olds who are NEET (the hardest to reach) who may lack the skills or confidence to start a training course or to gain employment;
- An Intermediate Labour Market opportunity (along the lines of Future Jobs Fund for 16 and 17 year olds) for young people who 'just want a job', not a training opportunity. The young person would be employed for a 6 month period, via existing services provided by WCVA, working closely with the Communities First Partnerships; and
- a graduation element which would mark the young person's achievement and progression to the next step along the Pathway.

A strong relationship with employers is essential to the success of Pathway to Work. We are currently seeking opportunities to work with employers from both the public and private sectors to ensure our approach is joined up and employers are engaged at an early stage. The National Training Federation Wales (NTfW) Conference in November 2010 offered the opportunity to start this engagement process with providers who work with employers across Wales. We also held a Public Services Summit which presented the opportunity to run a workshop on sharing good practice around the youth engagement and employment agenda. In addition, we will hold an event in March 2011 which will engage employers as well as individuals and their teachers and trainers to improve the nature and quality of work experience and work placements across Wales.

Recommendation 10. We recommend that because the issue of young people not in education, employment or training cuts across a range of Welsh Assembly Government Departments and policies, there should be one Minister who will lead on the coordination of strategy and action plans, monitor implementation, and be accountable at a national level.

Response - accept

The Children, Education and Lifelong Learning Minister is the lead Minister for young people who are not in education, employment or training.

The Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan brings together one programme of work to strategically drive forward youth engagement and employment in Wales. In order to manage this effectively a new Unit has been established to drive policy and lead activity that supports young people into education, training and employment opportunities in Wales. It will ensure coherence in the overall departmental approach to youth engagement and employment.

Recommendation 11. We recommend that Welsh Ministers should review and update the existing strategy for young people not in education, employment or training so that it covers the 16 to 25 age group, and that they should introduce a new national target for reducing the proportion of 16 to 25 year-olds not in education, employment or training, ensuring that all relevant Government Departments be responsible for its delivery.

Response – accept in principle

The Welsh Assembly Government published its Action Plan for young people not in education, employment or training in April last year. However, since then, the economic environment has changed dramatically. The Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan is the revised Action Plan for young people who are not in education, employment or training. As stated earlier, the new Action Plan has a much broader view than 16 – 18 year olds, concentrating on preventing young people from disengaging, looking at key transition points in a young person's life and engaging young adults, up to 25 years of age.

I am currently considering the most effective way of managing and monitoring the reduction of young people who are not in education, employment or training and I intend to make a statement about this in the New Year.

Recommendation 12. As part of our recommended evaluation of local authority and regional approaches to addressing the issue of young people not in education, employment or training, we recommend that Welsh Ministers should identify at local level a lead agency for young people not in education, employment or training. This agency should coordinate partnerships, identify responsibilities, manage the journey for young people from one stage to the next, and monitor performance.

Response - accept

The Welsh Assembly Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation, which aligns with the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan.

The importance of effective partnerships, both at national and local level, has been highlighted very strongly throughout this process. A multi-agency approach with stronger collaborative working to ensure young people do not fall through the net, particularly at transition points, is one of the key areas the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan will address. Clarity of roles, robust tracking systems and information sharing and monitoring of performance all form a key part of this. The Children and Young People's Partnerships are one of the vehicles for co-ordinating local delivery against the Welsh Assembly Government policy, and its success will be evidenced over time by improved outcomes for young people in Wales.

Recommendation 13. We recommend that Ministers should review the adequacy of the existing constitutional arrangement for the Department for Work and Pensions and JobCentre Plus in a devolved context and work with their UK counterparts on making the necessary changes to ensure the arrangement is more effective in future.

Recommendation 14. We recommend that Welsh Ministers work with UK colleagues to ensure that personal advisers and outreach workers form a central, rather than marginal, element of JobCentre Plus activity in order to improve the effectiveness of its engagement programmes.

Recommendation 15. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government work with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that in the eventuality of larger numbers of young unemployed people applying for assistance under the future Work Programme, those in Wales who are most disadvantaged do not lose out, and that those in greatest need can be fast-tracked for more intensive support.

Response to recommendations 13-15 - accept

Last year, Welsh Ministers signed a Labour Market Framework with the Department for Work and Pensions and established a Joint Employment Delivery Board to work at an operational level.

Our work with DWP continues and the need for flexibility over the delivery of the new DWP programmes in Wales is key to effective delivery in Wales.

We must have a clear customer journey in Wales where our training and provision complements but does not duplicate or divert mainstream provision offered by DWP. We also need to ensure properly funded offers of support for young people here are at least equivalent to those offered in England and the need for innovative responses to the particular needs of our labour market.

I have commissioned the Joint Employment Delivery Board to consider this work further.

Recommendation 16. We recommend that in order to engender a culture of collaboration rather than competition the Welsh Assembly Government should work with local, regional and national agencies to coordinate the delivery of European Union and non-EU funded projects for young people not in education, employment or training.

Response – accept

A recommendation of the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan was to undertake a review of the funding and provision available to support young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, NEET in Wales. This is underway and initial evidence has suggested that the issue is not a lack of provision, but the support available is provided by different schemes and organisations which do not always link effectively. The outcome of the review will ensure stronger collaboration and the sharing of good practices between organisations, including the voluntary sector, with a view to the removal of duplication and enabling the most effective use of funding including the streamlining of processes. Alongside this, WEFO will also review relevant projects within ESF Priority 1 and 2 to ensure they are in line with the policy outcomes of the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan.

The new DWP Work Programme will also impact on how ESF is delivered in Wales. WEFO is considering the implications and will be working with project sponsors over the coming months to ensure that activity funded through ESF continues to demonstrate added value in light of the new Work Programme.

Recommendation 17. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should review how the acquisition of “soft skills” for young people not in education, employment or training, and those at risk of becoming so, could be given greater recognition within education, employment and training settings.

Response – accept

The new ‘Pathway to Work’ for those aged 16 and 17 years will support this recommendation by offering young people more choice and better progression into employment. The graduation element would mark the young person’s achievement and progression to the next step along the Pathway, this includes soft skills achievement.

In addition, the successor programme to Skill Build, our main employability programme for those not in employment will be replaced next year by the Traineeship Programme for those aged 16-18, and Steps to Employment for those 18+. The Traineeship aims to provide young people with a completely individual approach to learning that fully suits their needs, offering flexibility and a wider range of opportunities.

In addition, the JISC Regional Support Centre (RSC) was commissioned to develop a web-based tool, which providers can use to track and measure learners' progress and distance travelled. The tool enables learners to assess themselves against a series of statements at the start date, the mid-point and the end of their learning. The tutor also

undertakes the same assessment at the same points in learning. The outcomes of this will result in a distance travelled score for that learner.

Recommendation 18. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should ensure that engagement or outreach coaches are available to intervene at any stage in a young person's life to give direct support on a range of family, finance, education, employment or health related issues

Response – accept in principle

It is important to remember that each child and young person's experience will be unique and we need to ensure a personalised approach is adopted through the child's life. It is vital that we ensure these young people are equipped with the skills and support they need to secure a satisfying career in the future. Therefore, a multi-agency approach with stronger collaborative working to ensure young people do not fall through the net, particularly at transition points, is one of the areas the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan will address.

The Learning Coach role is a core part of 14-19 Learning Pathways. The aim is to support young people to develop skills to learn and to overcome any barriers to learning. The Action Plan recommends that the Learning Coach model be extended to 10-14 year olds, to provide Young people with increased and improved learner support. This may result in the learner feeling more confident, able and motivated to engage, leading to an improvement in attendance and achievement and reducing the chances of the young person becoming disengaged and at risk of becoming NEET.

The Assembly Government will undertake a learning coach pilot for children between the ages of 11-13 to investigate the relative costs and benefits of rolling out across Wales. The pilot will run during 2011/12. Assembly Government officials are working with stakeholders to develop a delivery mechanism for the pilot focusing primarily on transition between primary and secondary education i.e. years 6 and 7.

Finally, one of the key changes between the current work based learning programme specification and the programme specification that will succeed it from August 2011 is that Learning Providers will be required to provide Learning Coach support and guidance as a contractual obligation, in line with 14-19 Learning Pathways, for all youth programme levels. There will be four strands of learner support. These are:

- Learning Coach Support - access to a named learning coach either within the provider organisation or through a third party, who will provide the learner with advice on how to maximise their own ability and learning skills.
- Access to Personal Support- access to the personal support available through Learner Support Services, if required by the learner as part of their 14 – 19 Learning Pathway.
- Careers Information, Advice and Guidance - the right to specialist and impartial careers information, advice and guidance provided by professional advisers from Careers Wales.

- Careers and World of Work Framework- The right to Careers and World of Work Framework programmes as prescribed by the Welsh Ministers.