**WRITTEN STATEMENT**

**BY**

**THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**



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| **TITLE**  | **Employabilty Support in Wales**  |
| **DATE**  | **30 January 2020** |
| **BY** | **Ken Skates, Minister for Economy and Transport** |

I am extremely proud of what the Welsh Government has done through the course of devolution to support more people into good quality work. Since 1999, well over a quarter of a million more people are in work in Wales; the proportion of working age people with no qualifications has more than halved and those with higher education level skills has gone from just over one in five to more than one in three.

Just recently, we celebrated the best ever set of labour market figures with unemployment at record low levels – a testament to the work we have done over many years through our apprenticeship programme and our wider employability and skills programmes.

Building on this solid foundation has been a vital part of the work which I have been engaged with in recent times – particularly supporting those furthest away from the labour market to acquire the right skills, to get into good quality employment and to progress whilst in employment. Our new approach must build on the benefits provided by our programmes that operate across all parts of Wales and are particularly successful in serving our most vulnerable communities.

I will continue to strive to ensure that skills and employability solutions promote equality of opportunity and fairer work and as we move forward, our approach will also support improved growth and inclusiveness throughout Wales, focusing more on reducing income inequalities and labour market changes because of automation and digitalisation.

This continued prioritisation of jobs and growth means we need to focus on developments above the individual programme or project level. We need a revised system that is better aligned to the post Brexit jobs and career needs of individuals and the skills and employment needs of employers in Wales. This system needs to ensure that services and programmes not currently devolved to Wales operate seamlessly with our approach providing the right support to individuals at the right time and place.

We all have a responsibility to continue to equip young people and adults with the skills, work preparation, and all round support they need to obtain and remain in employment.

An important part of that has been to re-shape our approach to employability support – to make it simpler to access, and more tailored to the needs of individuals. Gone are the days of fitting people into programmes – through our new employability approach we want to fit programmes around the needs of people. Moving that work forward has taken time and a lot of careful work with stakeholders and partners to develop our approach. I am grateful to everyone who has worked with us to make the employability and skills landscape in Wales such a success to date.

An individualised approach to resolving all barriers to employment continues to be our main goal and a continued focus on the availability of local services in order to address the many different barriers people face when trying to enter employment. Therefore, I intend to develop a more robust evidence base around employment barriers linked to our regional footprints in order to identify gaps in services and better link our planning arrangements to wider employability outcomes.

As part of my ongoing commitment to providing an individualised approach to employability, I launched the new ‘Working Wales’ service on the 1st May 2019.  The new national service, delivered by Careers Wales is making it easier for people to access professional advice and guidance, tailored to them. The service provides bespoke needs based assessment and referral to appropriate support to get a job. It hides the complexity of the skills landscape, so that the young people and adults purely get a great simple service.

As members know, our employability and skills support is delivered through a wide network of high quality providers including local authorities, further education institutions, employers and the third sector. The planned new Job Support Wales Programme aimed to amalgamate the five Welsh Government Employability initiatives into a single tailored offer, with delivery planned from April this year.

Following technical issues with a recent procurement exercise, including particular issues around the moderation process leading to final tender scores, we have had to revise our approach and the Job Support Wales Programme will now not go ahead as originally planned. Our existing programmes will all remain in operation until alternatives can be put in place.  Officials will take this opportunity to review what provision best meets the needs of this cohort, as well as considering the implications for ESF funding (or similar) from April 2021.

Our existing programmes will see no drop in service and all our existing initiatives - including ReAct, Job Growth Wales, Access, Traineeships and the Employability Skills Programme - will remain open to people as normal.

Good quality employment provides the most sustainable route out of poverty and I am proud of the progress we have made, but we need to continue to improve and develop our approach to respond to the challenges of the future.  I call on all our partners to work with us to create better outcomes for individuals.

I will continue to keep members informed of our work and intend to make a statement on progress during March 2020.