# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Working Wales and Employability across Wales** |
| **DATE** | **1 November 2019** |
| **BY** | **Ken Skates, Minister for Economy and Transport** |

Earlier this year, I launched the new Working Wales service. A multi layered approach to providing advice and guidance on careers and jobs to the people of Wales.

I took the opportunity to root this new approach into careers and work in Wales, at the heart of government’s focus on social justice and our desire to make sure that everyone, regardless of their background, has the information they need to progress in life.

It has been in operation for 6 months now and already it is an astounding success. Providing services on the high street, within communities across Wales, Further Education Institutions and prisons though a wide range of interactions including web chats, Skype, e-mail, texts and, of course, through the traditional one to one interviews. The service has even reached international status by helping an individual in Dubai, prepare to relocate back to Wales.

I have to thank Careers Wales who have been at the forefront of this new approach. In a short space of time their advisors have helped 15,008 adults and 3,608 young people access the service which has resulted in 8,872 adults and 2,407 young people being referred to Welsh Government funded programmes. A £9 million annual government investment in Working Wales has allowed a network of advisers and coordinators to provide a first class service to support the people of Wales. In doing so we are delivering a real and lasting change in high-quality careers and enterprise strategies, influenced by strong relationships with employers.

Having taken action in this area, we mustn’t lose sight of our primary aim and purpose, which is for careers advice and guidance to ultimately lead to meaningful, sustainable employment. Working Wales is not there as a standalone service in its own right – it’s the engine room of our plans to drive improvements in the labour market and social justice, particularly in light of Brexit.

The ambition of our Employability Plan is to support people across Wales into work today, whilst also preparing the workforce for the immediate and long-term challenges of the future through stretching ten-year targets.

In an increasingly globalised labour market, we cannot conduct the debate about careers and skills in a vacuum; we have to consider it also in the context of the dramatic changes in demography and in the global economy of which we are a part and changes occurring within the Welsh labour market today.

Jobcentre Plus play a crucial new role in helping people back into work and are based across a regional footprint with 1,466 full time roles in operation (this equates to around 2,858 people working out of 59 job centres).

In order to maximum our possible engagement at regional level we are establishing three new Regional Response Groups. They will serve as an emergency response to Brexit employment problems and will attempt to provide reassurance and stability within the immediate jobs market. This will help minimise uncertainty within the Welsh economy and maintain confidence in Welsh Government’s approach to employability matters. They will be deploy existing programmes and services to create a stimulus to boost demand, support jobs and reduce the risk of a slowdown in each region.

The Regional Response Groups are short term in nature and provide a rapid response and immediate action within their location. In time the work of the City and Growth Deals, Regional Economic Frameworks, Regional Skills Partnership Plans and planning for post-EU Regional investment will operate in this part of the market.

Large scale redundancies will still be dealt with via a triage system but we cannot use this methodology to deal with all redundancy cases and blind spots within the economy such as those linked to the use of agency workers, zero hour contracts, graduate unemployment and NEET levels. We intend to build on the experience of the Ford Taskforce and use that as a modus operandi for the new Regional Employability Groups.

The three advisory groups will provide an oversight of labour market activities focusing on:

* *Unemployment levels & numbers of people likely to report as Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) and Redundancy notifications.*

I am excited to have oversight of all of these areas and the chance to bring a greater coherence to them. [With around 64,000 people currently unemployed in Wales](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/timeseries/ycmz/lms), the right response is to ask how we can raise our game, working with the UK Government who has responsibility for employment, to help our citizens to compete in today’s labour market.

I am also committed to doing that by working with service providers and their partners to nurture and support a strong and vibrant employability landscape that recognises the strength that a mixed economy of third, private and public sector suppliers offers to deliver better outcomes for people using employment support services.

I know my officials have already started the process of establishing meetings to mobilise our support. We share responsibility with UK Government and delivery partners to make the labour market work more effectively for the people of Wales.