

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a
Sgiliau
Partneriaeth Sgiliau Rhanbarthol
EIS(5) RSP08
Ymateb gan Cadeirydd Clwstwr Sector
Adeiladu, RLSP de-orllewin a
Chanolbarth Cymru

National Assembly for Wales
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee
Regional Skills Partnerships
Evidence from Construction Sector
Cluster Chair, South West and Mid
Wales RLSP

Is the data and evidence being used by the Regional Skills Partnerships timely, valid and reliable? Have there been any issues?

Data received from various sources have been questioned by the Construction Sector group as it did not conform to what was felt to be happening in reality.

Through the close working relationship forged with the regional BACH (British Association of Construction Heads) representatives more manageable data was gathered. Whilst this information may not have been 100% correct it did allow for better consultation within the cluster group as the information was presented in a more relevant form than that generated from the provider data bases.

Using this collaboration between the provider group and the construction group, which would not have been facilitated had it not been for the RSP, clear debates have been forthcoming on the issues affecting both employers and providers alike leading to a more strategic approach to possible changes required.

How well do the partnerships engage with and take into account the views of those who do not sit on the partnership boards, and how well do they account for the views of the skills providers themselves?

All employers that attend the cluster group meeting do so on a voluntary basis and realise the potential that the RSP initiative has through the engagement and there is a feeling that the voice of the indigenous contractor may begin to be listened to. For each one volunteer employer there are many others who may not be able to attend due to the size of their business and the views expressed must be considered as those of the silent majority.

The Construction sector group benefits from industry wide engagement through three training groups, Dyfed Training group representing Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion, CCTAL representing Carmarthenshire and the Swansea Bay Group representing Neath Port Talbot and City and County of Swansea. These training groups meet on regular basis to discuss issues relevant to training needs within

the industry and represent in excess of 100 regional SME's. The construction sector in the region is heavy reliant upon SME sector to support and deliver sustainable training for the industry.

In addition, the cluster group also benefits from the input of CYFLE Building Skills Ltd the largest shared apprentice provider in the UK who currently employ 120 construction apprentices in the region and has a network of 200+ contractors who engage with the scheme. From this engagement the SME voice is heard on the training needs of the industry which are then fed through to the RSP board through the chair.

In addition to the training groups other sectors such as construction professionals and services contractors are invited to the cluster group meetings in order to ascertain the full breadth of requirements for the industry at large.

From this SME engagement it is felt that issues around training needs for the industry have been disproportionately influenced by Tier 1 contractors who do not employ trades people direct and offer little or no apprenticeship opportunities into the region. Whilst they may have targets to meet on project by project basis the requirements for the industry are long lasting and need the engagement of the regional SME's on a long-term basis rather than one off opportunity offered by major contractor.

Using this engagement skills gaps have been identified and actions taken on a regional basis for the benefit of all rather than reliance on one organisation self-interest.

How do the key City and Growth Deal roles of the RLSPs influence their Welsh Government remit?

The RLP influence on City and Growth deals will be crucial. These initiatives cannot be seen as simple stand-alone projects but need to be tied in to the long terms need of the industry locally.

There is a clear danger that construction projects delivered under the City and Growth deals will plough their own furrows on training outcomes under be-spoke community benefits targets which bear no resemblance to the need of the industry both in the short, medium and long term.

The SME led construction cluster group feel that whilst they carry the major burden of the delivery of training and apprenticeships on an annual basis their voices have not been heard by both local and Welsh Government. It is felt that the setting up of the RLP is a major step forward and allows for the collaborative

assessment of need between employers and providers to the benefit of learners and the industry.

Are the Regional Skills Partnerships able to actually reflect current and future skills demands within their regions? What about very specialised skills for which there may be low volumes of demand?

The Construction sector cluster group identified early in the RLP engagement that one of the issues greatly affecting the efficiency of the education provision was the 'commerciality' that exists between providers in and around Wales.

By working collaboratively with the intelligence gathering on need linked with possible low volume required then specialist provision can be identified. The sector would then look to the RSP that this specialism is built upon within one deliverer and not allowed to be diluted through commercial opportunities that some may see from such an initiative.

Currently there is no perceived gateway to hinder this type of approach and it is seen that the RSP would be the ideal management structure to ensure that this does not happen.

Do the Regional Skills Partnerships have sufficient knowledge and understanding of:

- a. The foundational economy and the needs of those employed within it and

The foundational economy is important to the South West and Mid Wales region with a whole range of different skill sets required to support the various industries.

One of the key issues surrounding many discussions at cluster and other groups meeting is the key role that industry has in supporting other organisations within the regional economy. What threatens this engagement and ability to support is the access to construction projects which through Welsh Government policy seems to be migrating to one delivery organisation for all public sector contracts thus forcing many local regional companies away from the work place.

It has to be seen that mutual support and delivery is essential in order to support foundational economy and to build upon community wealth. Keeping the £ locally, keeps it in the region, keeps it in Wales. Current policy seems intent on ensuring the £ migrates out of Wales.

b. The demand for skills provision through the medium of Welsh

Many of the SME's engaged within the cluster group are long established Welsh grown and continue to be based in Wales and their support of the Welsh language is high on the agenda.

This is promoted within the provider group and with individuals employed to ensure that the Welsh language is used effectively in the workplace.

Are the Regional Skills Partnerships adequately resourced to fulfil their growing role?

The current small management team utilised to support the RSP is under pressure.

As the cluster groups get more engaged there is an expectation that further data on provision and need is produced. A clear example of this is the identification across all groups on the role of schools particularly the 14 - 16 age group has in feeding learners into HE system and also the role of the FE sector in the training agenda.

It is essential that data representing these areas is gathered and analysed to inform the needs of the industry.

Of particular interest has been the 14 - 16-year group with young people leaving school without basic requirements of numeracy and literacy and not being ready for the workplace. This would seem to be an issue across all sectors and would indicate a system failure that requires the whole community to engage in order re-dress these fundamental issues. Again, it is seen the RSP is the ideal vehicle to facilitate this with the proper support rather than setting up another initiative to deal with the issue.

Is there an appropriate balance between the work of the RSPs and wider views on skills demand?

Through the RSP engagement with the cluster group and others it is getting at first hand the needs and requirements of the industry from the 'grass roots' rather than third or fourth hand from commissioned reports prepared by external consultants.

A clear indication of this is that the industry would like to see more dexterous skills being introduced into the school curriculum accepting the fact that not all learners are going to be capable of achieving the highest qualifications but can

still be a valued part of the community. Many learners are discarded early in the process as they may not be a positive contribution to performance indicators thus resulting in many not achieving literacy and numeracy standards and not prepared for the work place. It is considered that insufficient bias is given to developing dextrous skills in favour on academic achievement which is clearly not producing the right people for the work place.

Through the RSP the cluster sees an opportunity to address this with a structured approach involving both employers and providers as the issues cannot be resolved in isolation.

Is the level of operational detail set out by Welsh Government for skills provision in higher/further education and work-based learning providers appropriate?

The cluster group has some frustrations with the current organisational set up. The group is seeking a clear pathway for learners entering the industry and attempting to explain to parents and others of the differing organisations and providers highest the complexity of the current system.

The process should be set up for the benefit of the learner but currently seems to be organised to benefit the institutions engaged in the provision of training.

It would be beneficial if the role of the RSP was extend to include the whole learning pathway of 14- 19 in order to effectively scrutinise and influence the provision of training within the region.

If there are any, how are tensions between learner demand/learner progression reconciled with Regional Skills Partnerships conclusions and the Welsh Government preference for funding higher level skills?

Through the engagement with the professional group within the cluster it is evident that they tend to access young people via the A' level/ degree routes rather than the WBL route. There is frustration here as they have seen reduction in work experience take up and have lost many people after training to opportunities outside of the area with little assistance from FE/HE sector to assist.

Whilst all would sign up to encouraging learners to attain their greatest potential this cannot be done at the expense of under valuing or ignoring the level 1-3 programmes which are essential to the construction industry. There is a high percentage of school leavers who do so without achieving grades A-C who need

to be factored into the higher-level skills agenda.

Have the Regional Skills Partnerships and Welsh Government been able to stimulate changes in skills provision on the ground to reflect demand?

The Construction sector has seen the benefit of engagement through the RSP. It has positively supported the regional construction agenda under a difficult backdrop of competition and buy in from various competing providers which the sector has already highlighted.

Probably the biggest step taken, whilst relatively small in scale, has been the bringing together of the provider group, at BACH level, and employer group in order to identify the industry needs and issues. Whilst all are in agreement as to what is required all are aware of the magnitude of the task in order to achieve and the hurdles that may be presented along the journey.

THE RSP are key in ensuring that this continues over the coming years.

What, in general, is working well and what evidence of success and impact is there?

The major benefit that the RSP has brought to the regional construction sector is its instances and willingness to engage with local indigenous SME's who have previously been ignored by other initiatives. The region is not blessed with major national contractors but does have many significant employers in the construction with long trading histories. These are the lifeblood of the industry in South West and Mid Wales.

This may well be a different approach to that being taken within other RSP regions but Welsh Government have to accept that 99% of companies within Wales are SME's all of whom have a major part to play in supporting the foundational economy and generating community wealth for their localities, region and Wales.

There has been a tendency that WG policy has been influenced by national and international construction companies at the expense of the indigenous provision evidenced by the publication of the recent notice for the Mutual Investment Model which will ensure a drop in regional GDP and remove opportunities for local contractors to trade with the subsequent reduction in training opportunities for learners. Evidence shows that from these management type contracts less 30% is spent within the locality with many sub-contractors travelling to sites from great distances due to existing agreements being in place.

Gathering these views as an industry has been a major success as they are not seen as an individual company complaining for its own benefit. These views expressed in this response are on behalf of both the construction and local communities. Training and skills development is reliant on the SME within Wales and the RSP has given them a voice to influence this agenda.

It is essential that the WG fully supports the initiative of the RLP as, over time, it will see the benefit of proper employer engagement within the region.

The impact on this success can only be measured by the continuing development and support given to the RSP.

Are there any aspects of the policy that are not working well, have there been any unintended consequences, and what improvements can be made?

The frustration of the industry largely lays with the disconnect between various provision within the 14 + agenda.

It is difficult to engage with schools as this is largely down to the willingness of individuals within the establishments to allow access to pupils to sell the industry and if access is allowed it is generally to those that are considered non-achievers.

The construction industry is a wide school with requirements for trades people to professional architects and engineers and can offer a career to all. The curriculum is not set up to encourage employer engagement and this must be addressed. The cluster and provider group are currently investigating ways to co-ordinate this aspect for the region which will be fed back to the RSP for support.

In order to demonstrate the support for the RSP they must be allowed to manage and administer grants for specially identified projects which could be trialled on a regional basis before sharing as best practice with other regions within Wales. The current system of having to deal with provider consortia is cumbersome and ineffective.

Submitted by South West and Mid Wales Construction Sector Cluster Group chair, on behalf of:

- *Cyfle Chair*
- *Dyfed Training Group Chair*
- *Swansea Bay Construction Support Group Chair*

- *Carmarthenshire Construction Training Association Limited Chair*
- *ECA Regional Manager*