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Sgiliau
Partneriaeth Sgiliau Rhanbarthol
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Ymateb gan Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod
Dewi Sant

National Assembly for Wales
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee
Regional Skills Partnerships
Evidence from University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

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

The RLSP utilises multiple data sources, some of which have been of concern to members in respect of data accessed being out of date. Data from Welsh Government is invariably between one and two years out of date and is also provided late in the development period of the annual employment and skills plan. Of benefit has been the support of FE colleges providing data directly to the RLSP on FE and WBL provision. This has caused a minor issue on correlation with WG data, mainly on location of provision where providers span different geographical regions. Many colleges utilise EMSI data and it would be of benefit if all RLSPs could access such data also. WG should fund the purchase of EMSI data for RLSPs.

Data from schools (Academic and Vocational provision offered in schools) remains an issue for the RLSP, the supply of which should be a priority for WG to resolve in order to build a complete regional picture. Priority over the last three years has been on FE and WBL, there is inadequate data made available identifying progression into higher education in the region. This needs to be resolved in order for employer representatives of the RLSP to appreciate progression pathways into Higher Education.

The data provided by employers to the RLSP is current, valid and reliable providing an accurate picture of immediate requirements. The RLSP strives hard to increase the numbers of regional employers contributing data.

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

Engagement with those who do not sit on the partnership continues to evolve and improve. Over the last two years the RLSP has been transformed into an employer led and focussed partnership with the development of 8 employment

sector cluster groups. The Chair of each cluster group represents the group on the main board of the RLSP. Each cluster group is in a different state of development, a number benefit from significant membership (Construction and Engineering Manufacturing) whilst others are less well developed (Food and Farming). The role of Cluster Group Chairs are critical and provide a conduit for the employer voice to the RLSP Board. All Chairs are challenged to increase cluster group membership and attendance at group meetings.

The RLSP officer team have developed different strategies to encourage engagement and ensure surveys are distributed to a significant number of employers in the region. Return rates of surveys remain a disappointment however. For the development of the 2019 plan an additional strategy developed is the use of provider (college/University) employer engagement teams to circulate and encourage return of surveys. The RLSP team attend a significant number of business events, fora meetings etc. in order to gather data.

The views of the skills providers in the region are well accounted for due to the creation of the 9th Cluster Group - the Provider Group. This group comprises representation of every college and University in the region, a number of WBL providers, schools in the region, NTFW, Careers Wales and Job Centre Plus. The Chair of the provider group sits on the main board along with a FE, HE and WBL representative. It should be noted also that as of 2019 a Provider Group representative is in attendance at all employer cluster group meetings.

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

The role of the RLSP in respect of supporting the City Deal is clearly defined and documented and influences the production of the annual plan. The function of the RLSP is much broader than the city deal however. It fulfils its function in respect of producing the annual plan for the entire region, not only the city deal region. The skills requirements of the city deal are managed via a specific city deal project - The Skills & Talent Initiative has an assigned dedicated team of provider representatives which form a sub group of the Provider Group. This initiative will ensure a coordinated approach to identify the needs and provide training solutions for all ten city deal projects. If a further growth deal emerges in the region the RLSP is well-placed to support in a similar manner.

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?

As a result of intelligence gathered the RLSP accurately reflects current skills demand. Future demand is however difficult to predict beyond current forecasting ability. Influencing factors such as the emergence of city deal projects, Brexit, outward migration etc. all contribute to challenge accurate skills forecasting. Skills demands are identified through a mix of sources - labour market intelligence data from accredited sources and employer voice.

Mechanisms are in place to enable the identification of low volume specialised skills and the provider group are challenged to provide appropriate solutions. Such demand is identified to WG and funding streams identified. A recent example has been the use of SDF funding to support such demand.

The City Deal Skills & Talent Initiative is structured to identify specialist demand, quantify existing provision, provide a gap analysis and subsequently develop solutions along with the identification of funding sources.

Do the Regional Skills partnerships have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the foundational economy and the needs of those employed within it; and the demand for skills provision through the medium of Welsh?

Foundational economy- the RLSP's understanding of the foundational economy is excellent with very good key member representation. Knowledge of needs is reliant upon two factors - generic LMI data available to inform and representation from employers/practitioners from the sector. Data is adequate whilst representation is limited in a number of contributing employment sectors. To react to local need it is essential to increase representation from employers in the sector. Welsh Medium demand-dependent entirely on survey responses, not a high priority in most sectors. Identified in hospitality and care sector primarily.

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

The funding resource for the RLSP to meet its primary function of developing the annual plan is adequate, although consideration needs to be given to inflation proofing and more importantly longevity. Annual funding with notification late in

the cycle is wholly inappropriate. It is recommended that a three year funding cycle be sought from WG. One year funding has led to issues of retaining key RLSP Officer personnel.

In the event of city and growth deal activity being confirmed, additional resources would be required to satisfy the additional demand. The RLSP team are challenged to maintain momentum during the development phase of city and growth deals.

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

Skills demand identification and the provision of solutions remains the primary role of the RLSP's. Having the development of an Annual Employment and Skills Plan as the main purpose of the RLSP ensures the focus on need is maintained. Having transformed the RLSP to be employer led and focussed ensures the employer voice in the region is clearly heard and will, in the long term, influence future provision afforded in the region. For this to happen, all providers in the region, WBL, FE and HE must respond to identified, evidenced demand and offer appropriate provision.

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 level of detail set out for FE and WBL is appropriate and increasingly reflects regional demand. In some instances providers are called upon to react to minor changes at a course or programme level which invariably undermines efficiency in delivery. A better solution could be provided if, in each sector, (WBL and FE) regional demand only was directed by the RLSP and the providers collaborated to provide a regional, efficient solution. The WBL and FE partnership in the SW region is mature enough to facilitate this. The provision afforded by the HE sector in the region is primarily based on historical and individual institution design and is yet to be influenced by RLSP activity.

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

Tensions exist as pupils leaving school with generic level 2 qualifications invariably need additional support and provision at level 1 and 2 in specific vocational skill

areas. The drive, rightly so, to increase qualification and skills levels at level 4/5 will provide a challenge for funding when actual demand continues to exist for level 1 and 2 provision. The FE sector has a social responsibility in enabling young people, not in possession of any qualifications when leaving school to acquire level 1 and 2 skills-based qualifications even though they may not progress in such a skill area.

Learner demand in the region is also not reflective of actual career progression opportunities. Much provision continues to be available which may be deemed fashionable but does not provide progression to sustainable employment. It is critical that the RLSP are part of a WG drive to identify regional career progression opportunities to develop provision to meet demand at all levels, WBL/FE and HE and to ensure the retention of skills and talent in the region.

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

In a limited number of instances, notably in WBL and some FE provision. As the partnership matures and accuracy of demand improves the RLSP is well placed to provide the intelligence required to influence change. The change in skills provision is required at all levels and across all sectors- WBL/FE and HE. Clear progression pathways are sought to meet the needs of regional employment, productivity improvement and skills retention.

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

Trust and confidence in the partnership has developed well with excellent dialogue between employers and providers. Employers are well briefed on funding methodologies and providers are obtaining improved demand data. Employer engagement in a number of sectors is excellent and leading employers are taking ownership of the skills agenda in the region. This has led to the employer voice influencing apprenticeship and FE provision on a local basis.

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

Activity of the RLSP has targeted the WBL and FE sector only. To provide a true regional solution there needs to be greater influence on schools based provision (notably post-16 provision - both academic and vocational) and HE provision in the

region. One such unintended consequence is the influence of post-16 provision in the FE sector in the region with no such equivalent influence on post-16 provision in the schools. The RLSP should influence all level, career progression pathways in the region.

Improvement sought- funding for EMSI data, rolling three year RLSP funding, approval of specific projects for city and growth deal skills projects managed by the RLSP and the development of regional progression pathways for employment.