

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a
Sgiliau
Partneriaeth Sgiliau Rhanbarthol
EIS(5) RSP26
Ymateb gan Partneriaeth Sgiliau
Prifddinas-Ranbarth Caerdydd

National Assembly for Wales
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee
Regional Skills Partnerships

Evidence from Cardiff Capital Region
Skills Partnership

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

The data used by the Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) is gathered from a number of sources:

Welsh Government data – this is the data source that the RSP’s are encouraged to use as baseline data however the data can be 18 months out of date and it is not received by the RSP’s until at least May which only allows the RSP’s 2 months to use the data to support the writing of the main report that is submitted in July. This data is also out of date because the information that the providers have is far more time sensitive.

We believe the RSPs should all have access to the same baseline as the FE Colleges use (EMSI data) which would ensure that the recommendations across the regions are comparable and based on an accepted data source.

Data sets should not be used in isolation from their wider policy or operational context.

Over the lifetime of the Skills Partnership in South East Wales there has been an improvement in the approach taken to the use of data sets to inform the partners work. However there is a feeling that the board could benefit from specialist inputs and advice from data specialists (e.g those running the Msc Data Science Graduate Programme) to better understand the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of data sets.

The data sets around FE and HE in particular could be seen against these bodies wider regional , national and international remit with a clearer understanding of how such institutions are funded and the existing requirements on them via ministerial remit letters and fee and access plans.

In addition the data provided for full time learners (level 1 to Level 3) does not capture progression to other provision or employment. An example of this is where it appears that there are high numbers of FE students studying level 1 qualifications and a much lower level studying Level 2 or on an Apprenticeship programme, to make an informed decision on increases and decreases in FT and

Apprenticeship provision requires more in depth analysis to the data than has previously been provided.

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?

The Employment and Skills Board is driven by the Private sector with an Industry chair driving the Board and supported by the chairs of the 6 priority sector industry cluster groups, representatives for the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, Enterprise Zone Boards, CBI, FSB, South Wales Chamber of Commerce, Further education, Higher education, National Training Federation for Wales

The remit for the RSP from Welsh Government has been to focus and concentrate on priority sectors and those that will deliver the biggest impact to GVA and high value careers and the RSP board is reflective of this.

Board members generally understand their role as representative of the sectors and bodies that put them there. However some organisations may have clearer mechanisms and transparency than others as to how they feedback, consult and feed in – on behalf of sectors / bodies.

The Employment and Skills Board has for some time identified a dedicated employer engagement work-stream within its work programme. It utilises business representatives and sector champions to lead engagement activity, with a particular emphasis on priority sectors. Sector champions connect with industry representatives from across the wider business landscape and from within their sectors to engage employers in the work of the Regional Skills Partnership.

However we also recognise that because someone comes from a sector doesn't necessarily mean they are representative of that sector. Members should be able to demonstrate how they engage and feedback to their wider sector groups. Some progress is being made on this but all board members need to be able to articulate how and when they engage with their wider reference groups.

We acknowledge that those representing membership bodies is an area which we believe can be improved and this year we are working closely together to put in place effective engagement plans when trying to capture the same or similar information. The purpose of the cluster groups is to gather specific information from each of the cluster groups on what the areas of concern are on training and skills development in their sector. The group representatives are encouraged to share information about the work of the Cluster group and to get other businesses

to join or to work with the RLSP by completing the on line skills and training survey.

The RSP officers also attend a number of business events across the region to inform business groups who have not previously engaged about the work of the RSP's and to gain information from these companies on the skills issues.

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

The Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership and Employment and Skills Board are integrated within regional structures as a part of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD). The Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership is managed by the CCRCD Programme Management Office and its Employment and Skills Board is formally recognised as one of four Regional Partnership Boards which are supported by the CCRCD and which act in an advisory capacity to the Cardiff Capital Region Cabinet. The Regional Skills Partnership and Employment and Skills Board support the delivery of a shared Cardiff Capital Region employment and skills agenda for the City Deal and Welsh Government.

The Cardiff Capital Region employment and skills function is delivered by a small team, not yet fully staffed, within the Cardiff Capital Region Programme Management Office. The work programme accommodates both the Welsh Government requirements of RSPs, as identified by contract requirements plus delivery of the City Deal five-year business plan. This includes support for regional partnership boards such as the Employment and Skills Board, Regional Skills Partnership activities, development of skills delivery and investment proposals, such as the 'Skills for the Future' programme and the consideration of employment and skills aspects of other investment proposals submitted to the City Deal Wider Investment Fund.

It is fair to say that the ongoing development of key strategic priorities of the City Deal is continually evolving so the integration of the work/role of the RSP in assisting this is 'fluid' at present.

The work of the RSP to meet the WG contract is very clear and concise on what is expected and by when.

The clear definition of roles/responsibilities of both is the current key focus so the RSP board has clear guidance on its role in relation to works associated with City Deal and the Cardiff Capital Region

To ensure widespread clarity and transparency around the role of the RSP the Employment and Skills Board, City Deal and Welsh Government has committed to ongoing dialogue and communication.

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?

We can identify the broader direction and the primary issues that each of the sectors are raising but the very specialist skills in the longer term will be more difficult because the industry itself does not recognise some of these needs. Working with the Universities and colleges there is some clear evidence of the type of training needed and some of the more specialist sector bodies have all identified skills gaps that are not all full time provision skills but more niche specialist skills required in that specific sector.

There is also a consistent message from the more technically demanding clusters for bespoke, shorter and more-focused training provision as well as in-situ vocational training versus the year-long+ training usually provided by FE and HE.

We continue to be mindful of the growing impact of automation across the economy whilst current intelligence from employers suggests the overwhelming skill requirement across our priority sectors is that of digital technology and ensuring that learning programmes keep up with these advances. Whilst the Compound Semi-Conductor Cluster has identified a need for educational programmes to support skills development in CSC technologies.

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 human foundational economy (health, social care and education) is a priority sector for the Cardiff Capital Region with a whole range of different skill sets required to support the various industries. These needs are identified within the skills surveys distributed by the Skills Partnership and are considered within the cluster group

The HFE group (made up of members from employers, training providers, FE/HE ensures there is a wide spectrum of skills, experience and knowledge) has identified continued growth in demand for Level 2 Health and Social Care

Apprenticeships as the sector continues to grow. The qualification is mandated by the sector. This has been highlighted by the HFE Group as a key challenge and the need to build capacity within the workforce to ensure sufficient qualified staff are in place to deliver the new standards from September 2018. We also recognise that part of this labour demand will be met by part-time study and graduates from higher education with nurses, doctors and other medical professionals being trained at universities.

The foundational economy sector has identified a clear need for level four pathways to support progression for higher-level teaching assistants and consideration is also being given to whether there is demand for an 'access to teaching' pathway to broaden entry into the sector. It is important to note that gaps exist at Level 4 for both pre- and post-16 learning and development professionals; this will require further exploration. A need has also been identified for Level 4 programmes to support the Ambulance Service, Healthcare Science and Healthcare Therapy.

The RSP recognises that there are significant changes to the human foundational economy sector in terms of technology, with a focus on e-learning and moving towards 'born digital' and paper free environments. This presents challenges for the digital infrastructure, including access to appropriate computer hardware to support new software but also staff development and work practices, which are continually evolving to meet these new challenges, such as agile working policies. There are challenges for employees and learners, who may not be digitally competent, this is particularly relevant in some sectors such as health which has an aging workforce.

Further changes are anticipated due to Brexit, with some of the sectors finding future challenges difficult to predict due to the uncertainty of a post Brexit Britain. Staff replacement could become a challenge, alongside a need to train and upskill the workforce at all levels.

The RSP has previously made recommendation due to size of the sector in SE Wales that it should be split into 2 categories (public and private sector) which was declined by WG. The RSP does not have a remit to look at the public sector element of the HFE despite its large employment numbers

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

The RLSP has worked with the Welsh Language Commissioners office to ensure the questions we ask and the data we collect reflects the advice given. We work with industry to understand their needs for skills through the medium of Welsh and how much Welsh is used within their business. A specific question is

contained within the RSP survey and there is discussion at all sector cluster groups on how important the Welsh language is in their businesses.

Our 2018 Annual report stated that in the human foundational economy, policies to support the Welsh Language are seeing an increase in demand for services delivered through the medium of Welsh, in the education, health and social care sectors.

As part of the Regional Skills Partnership's Business Skills Survey 2018, 51% of survey respondents stated that the Welsh language is either 'very important' or 'somewhat important' to their business, although there were significant variations across sectors

This is an area that the RSP could improve on.

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

No there is considerable input in time from Board members who act in a voluntary and representative role. Their supporting organisations and employers in effect provide hidden levels of resource and expertise to the region. In some areas it may be important to consider where specialist advice or expertise is required which is not on a board's membership profile and consider ways that this could be resourced or secured.

The need for stronger secondary evidence and data is growing to strengthen the RSP ability to produce evidence based plans and it is therefore necessary to have timely secondary data that can complement the primary data gathered by the RLSP and additional funding is required in order to achieve this.

Understanding the skills requirements of current employers in the region has the potential to be at the cost of a) potential to attract new inward investors who may be competition to current business in the region and b) ignore the fact that as well as upskilling in the region providers also have a duty to prepare trainees/ students/ learners for a global market place where employment destinations may not sit neatly within a regional boundary..

The RSP works in a cyclical process, three annual Employment and Skills Plans have been completed and the process and timelines are planned around consultation, supporting activity and drafting and completing the plan. The contract from Welsh Government has clear outcomes and an associated payment schedule, however the majority of the work to fulfil the contract takes place in the first quarter and this combined with the issue of an annual funding agreement is

of concern because there is no continuity of contract available for the staff working within the RSP. We recommend a longer term view of funding allocation for both people and resources with a minimum of a three year agreement be considered.

These specific reporting demands of Welsh Government on an set of recommendations risks an operational focus on production of such annual recommendations on scale of provision where more resource and focus is required around long term strategic work that will make a difference in the region.

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

The work of the RSP's is done in a two pronged approach. Whilst employer engagement is undertaken to capture primary level intelligence this is then complimented by secondary data sources. We take account of wider views on skills demands via a number of Welsh Government approved reports such as; Employer Skills Survey and the Employer Perspective Survey. These provide intelligence at a regional level on a number of issues and skills challenges facing businesses. The surveys utilised by the RSP's to gather local level intelligence are based on the questions asked within these studies therefore it is possible to make comparisons where necessary. We also look at cross-border skills issues as this can affect the movement of labour and one of the major issues for Wales as a whole. This involves sharing intelligence between the three RSPs and being aware of skills issues within the English border counties.

The Regional Skills Partnerships offer a co-ordinated approach to the development and delivery of skills provision across Wales. There is currently no better or alternative method or vehicle to ensure that the employer voice is heard by Welsh Government. The focus placed on the Regional Skills Partnership by Welsh Government Departments is welcomed by industry as the Regional Skills Partnerships become recognised by Industry as a credible vehicle for change.

The Greystone review emphasised the transparency of the Regional Skills Partnerships and the cohesiveness and closer working between the three. This is something that each partnership is committed to and approaches have already been amended to ensure that there is greater parity between approaches for the next planning years. e.g. same skills survey being utilised by the three so the same information will be used to make recommendations.

Across all stakeholders within the RSP, employers and providers, there are consistent and frequent calls for authority to influence pre-16 learning. Too much of FE provision is spent bringing students to an acceptable level of numeracy and literacy. Moreover, attitudes towards certain sectors, careers, jobs and an individual's path to success has been influenced by teachers (and parents) along an unnecessarily narrow route (i.e. GCSE - A levels - university) or precluding industries and learning that could offer an individual their best opportunities for success. The drive for an improvement in basic skills is one of the most clear messages from the RSP in recent times and these need to be tackled at a much earlier age. So too does the need to demonstrate all possible routes to meaningful work and success in adult life beyond the purely academic routes.

The RSP is aware of other Skills groups and believes that better shared learning across these groups would enhance the recommendations presented. An example would be the Compound semiconductor sector – this is identified by the RSP as a priority sector so is developing a new sector group (led by IQE) and we are also aware that WG have set up a CSC working group and that also there is a Catapult Centre for this sector. Why is there a need for 3 groups on the same sector that don't share best practice and knowledge?

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

There is a risk that the Welsh Government steer to make annual recommendations in relation to provision lack a long term strategic focus and that in particular for FE the requirement for RSP's to make recommendations in a budget neutral way blurs the role between genuine recommendations for increased demand, skills gaps and skills shortages (which are different) and potentially inappropriate recommendations for decreases in provision that neither take account of the FE sectors wider responsibilities around their local communities and the reality that Universities benefit to the region is only partly served by a local/ regional focus.

It is desirable that career pathways and ladders are signposted up and through professions. Current focus appears to be on particular provision in the middle to lower levels.

The level of detail set out by Welsh Government risks a more operational, functional approach to matching budgets to provision rather than a strategic long term view of how skills provision can be leveraged up in those areas where there

are gaps or demand and which parts of the population can access skills and training in emerging and developing sectors.

There are limitations to what an RSP can do with the remit placed by Welsh Government to only focus on Full time FE provision and WBL provision. It would be more beneficial to look at the entirety of the learning landscape to include Higher Education and schools level provision. i.e. the whole 14-19 picture. This would be welcomed by both providers and the RSPs. In addition, it would make operational sense to view post-16 policy as education and not economy. Failing this there needs to be a closer alignment between the two policy areas as they are so deeply connected. This would also align to the PCET reforms.

There needs to be a greater commitment provided by Welsh Government to ensure that the level of operational detail provided meets the needs of both providers and the RSPs.

It is also vitally important that WG provides the RSP with detailed feedback on its recommendations and the impacts they have had on provision and outcome (positive and negative). This will deliver credibility to the employers engaged to show that they are being listened too. To date no feedback has been given by WG on the recommendations provided to allow a 360 degrees review to be undertaken.

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?

There is a risk that the RSP recommendations are seen by some in Welsh Government as the only source of advice in relation to the nature and scope of provision in a region. Whilst progression to employment and upskilling are critical considerations for all education and skills providers, not all provision for all categories of learners can usefully be planned through this starting point or lens.

It would be useful to see analysis of any recommendations in regional skills work that related to :

- Those with specific or additional learning needs.

- Engaging / reengaging hard to reach or disenfranchised adult and younger learners in education, training and employment

- The promotion of education, training and employment opportunities for BME communities underrepresented in the workforce.

Welsh in the workplace.

Higher level skills and applied research requirements of the Economy at L6. L7 and post Doctorate.

Vocational training/pathways in schools

Due to the inappropriate focus producing a major piece of work each year focussing on FE numbers (up and down) there is a tendency for other areas and level of provision to become marginalised.

Whilst the Welsh Government's vision to increase the number of people achieving levels 4,5 and 6 qualifications is something that we all aspire to achieve in real terms to increase the GVA of the region this conflicts with the needs identified by Industry and Colleges is that the demand is for the levels 1,2 and 3. A recent example of this is the continued growth in demand for Level 2 Health and Social Care Apprenticeships as the sector continues to grow. The qualification is mandated by the sector.

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

Anecdotal feedback from providers and employers is that changes can be seen particularly in the apprenticeship provision. However we need the data from Welsh Government at an earlier stage in order to demonstrate to the Industry partners that their contribution and involvement in the Employment and Skills Plan is making a difference and the provision within FE and apprenticeship is changing to meet their needs. The RSPs are at a critical point in the life cycle and feedback on the original recommendations made to Welsh Government through the Planning and Funding Template are due in 2019, this baseline information will provide a factual response and will ensure that RSPs can provide evidence back to industry and stakeholders, therefore demonstrating the credibility of the RSPs.

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

Working with Industry has raised the profile of the work of the Regional Skills Partnership and the opportunities for them to engage and influence the changes that can be made to the provision of skills training. The industry voice through the skills survey and through the Cluster groups has enabled the training providers to

work together to make the necessary recommendations to change the provision of training.

Increasing the number and range of apprenticeships – data from stats wales shows that there has been an increase in the number of apprenticeships recruited in the region and alignment to regional priorities is improving

Delivering employment and skills support for industry, infrastructure and other investments to enable growth – working with Transport for Wales to assess and respond to employment and skills demands in support of the Metro investment and wider Wales and Borders franchise.

In addition links between the RSP in South East Wales and higher education are beginning to tackle issues around increasing graduate uptake by SME's through the Skills for the Future Proposal.

It cannot be understated the importance of WG providing feedback in September 2019 as employers (to ensure they remain committed to making a difference) need confidence that their voices are being listened too and that RSP are just a 'tick box' exercise to demonstrate engagement with industry. Employers are used to working in a faster timescale than that of WG (e.g. recommendations made in 2017 take until Sept 2019 to get any evidenced feedback) to achieve positive impact and outcomes.

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 current remit of the RSP is post 16 FE and apprenticeship training however there is a need to widen this remit and have the ability to influence all post 16 training including A level and HE. The A level provision is particularly important when schools and FE play a role in delivering these qualifications.

The Regional Skills Partnership would value an opportunity to have an impact on the curriculum design within Higher Education and what is offered in the region to meet the needs of employers and to support the development of the higher level skills in region.

The narrow focus on degree apprenticeships being limited to two sectors, with only 350 places across Wales should be a greater concern for boards. Higher Education risks being seen by some sectors as not interested in this type of provision where the reality is that funding is limited and driven by a policy where

funds between HE and FE are seen as in competition. This is not helpful to an honest scrutiny of the needs of the economy.

The RSP would welcome the improvement of destination data for better learner outcomes. Quality data in higher education is able to demonstrate learner outcomes and the impact and value of skills investment; this needs to be extended across further education and work-based learning. Longer term measures could identify pathways to employment, relevance of learning and movement within and across different occupations to measure learner outcomes over time.

Understanding an individual learner's outcomes (of any age) is key to recognising the impact and value of skills investment. Collection of relevant data is a priority, with the take-up and completion of courses and qualifications offering two valuable measures to understand the direction of travel for learners across the skills and training landscape.

A key challenge is working collectively to also measure detailed longer-term (12+ months) outcomes. This needs to go beyond looking at whether, at 6 months, an individual is in continuing education or employment and consider pathways, type of employment, the relevance and transferability of the training/qualification achieved, numbers leaving their specialisation or returning to it and numbers leaving or returning after specified time periods.

Expanding the collection of quality destination data, such as that collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for higher education, across further education, work Based learning (including apprenticeships), third sector interventions and European Union

Funded initiatives will aid planning and funding decisions, develop understanding of skills gaps and shortages, identify success/best-practice and allow for a 360 review of skills investment, delivery and outcomes.