

Atebion Polisi Policy Solutions

A series of Policy Solution seminars brought to you by
ColegauCymru / CollegesWales, Learning and Work Institute
and the National Training Federation for Wales



Why we came together

Our Policy Solutions seminars aimed to bring fresh thinking and new ideas to key challenges in public policy and to start a dialogue and generate discussions with our members and supporters, with Assembly Members, their staff and officials. However, we also wanted to be provocative and constructive, and forge new relationships through discussions and debate within the learning, skills and employment sectors and beyond.

Collaboration between three different organisations, an independent policy and research organisation, a charity and limited company and a membership organisation required a shared vision for influencing change. All three parties are dedicated to lifelong learning, accessibility, all age employability and high quality post-16 education, training and skills. All of these elements are key in creating a sustainable skilled workforce supporting economic growth in Wales.

What we created

Our Policy Solutions seminars focussed on issues where learning, skills and employment can help achieve economic growth, better educational outcomes, higher employment, improvements in productivity, better health and well-being, social inclusion, tolerance and cohesion, and community and citizen engagement. Our overall aim has been to generate interest and debate in how public policy can be improved and how policy can be implemented to help deliver a more inclusive, fairer and successful society.

We identified five key issues and hosted five policy solutions seminars throughout the summer of 2016 to stimulate, challenge and provide space for innovative thinking and new solutions. The events were held under 'Chatham House rules' to encourage freedom of speech and honest contributions. As such, ideas and suggestions included in this paper are not attributed to individuals or organisations, but reflect the diverse and vibrant discussions that took place.

Our audience were Assembly Members from all parties, their staff and our wider stakeholders who are working in this space or would be affected by policy decisions. We encouraged participants to adopt a fresh mind-set about the real value of post-16 education, training and skills in creating a truly proficient workforce for Wales.

The five key issues identified were:

1. Skilling Adults into Work
2. The Role of Post-16 Education in Tackling Poverty
3. The Value of Skills to the Economy
4. Welsh Language Skills for Work
5. Delivering World Class Apprenticeships in Wales

The events were held in various locations: Tŷ Hywel, the Oriel and at the National Eisteddfod.

Our Policy Solutions Seminars

1. Skilling Adults into Work

Sponsor: Simon Thomas AM

Guest Speaker: Mark Isherwood, Chief Executive WEA YMCA CC Wales

Host: Cerys Furlong, Learning and Work Institute

Date: 18 May 2016, Tŷ Hywel

i) The Challenge

- We believe that access to skills and learning is vital for people to stay healthy, productive and happy in both work and retirement. However, in recent years investment in skills and adult education in Wales has been heavily focused on young adults, 16-24 year olds, while the numbers of adults engaged in learning has fallen significantly - as has public investment.

- We also know that work is not the only solution out of poverty. Evidence from Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows it is in-work poverty that is keeping poverty rates high in Wales. So getting people into a job, any job, especially a short term one is not a sustainable solution to tackling poverty or improving economic growth and productivity.
- We do too little research or data gathering on skills levels of adults in Wales, and rely too much on anecdotal evidence or experience of what we think works. The Bevan Foundation predicts that by 2020, 1 in 12 adults in Wales will have no qualifications, but we must better gather and evidence the landscape so we can plan for the future.
- We have skills gaps - we want a 'high skilled economy' but according to the Wales Employment and Skills Board "Wales is under skilled by comparison with OECD competitor nations and most parts of the UK".
- Figures show that the population of Wales is 3 million, there are 2 million adults, 90k unemployed, 200k with no qualifications, 700k living in poverty.
- Too few adults have the basic skills they need to participate fully in everyday life, particularly when it comes to literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

ii) Responding to the Challenge

- It is time for a radical rethink about education in Wales. If we do not change our approach then we will not be able to supply the highly skilled workforce Wales needs, and far too many adults will still have poor basic skills that mean they are not able to participate fully in life.
- To really enable adults to access skills that will set them on the path back to work, we need resilient individuals who are ready and able to take advantage of the opportunities Government is able to offer them. Such programmes, post-Communities First, cannot be separate from mainstream education, and progression needs to be seamless so that trust is built and maintained with individuals.

iii) Priorities for Action

- Welsh Government needs to be mature and proactive in discussions with DWP and UK Government to ensure that opportunities to align Welsh interventions with UK wide programmes are maximised for the benefits of individuals - particularly to ensure seamless transfer and progression through programmes and into work.
- An ongoing commitment to the Regional Skills Partnerships to allow them to do a better job, devolve budget and responsibility to enable regions to decide what is required and allow them to deliver on it.
- Deliver a balanced approach to post-compulsory education across FE and HE by getting on with implementing the changes put forward by the Hazelkorn and Diamond Reviews as a package. Welsh Government should establish an advisory group on implementation of Hazelkorn and Diamond, engaging key organisations across the sectors to scope out practicalities, supporting DfES to deliver (recognising that Welsh Government does not have the required capacity to do this alone).

2. The Role of Post-16 Education in Tackling Poverty

Sponsor: Lee Waters AM

Guest Speaker: Victoria Winckler, Chief Executive, The Bevan Foundation

Host: Cerys Furlong, Learning and Work Institute

Date: 14 June 2016, Tŷ Hywel

i) The Challenge

- Wales' economy grows at a slower rate than the UK average and we cannot rely on overall improvements in economic growth to lift large numbers of people out of poverty in Wales.
- Since the vote to leave the EU, the value of sterling has fallen which is likely to lead to a fall

in living standards, and an increase in unemployment. Those on the lowest incomes are most likely to suffer. At the same time it is likely that business will be less confident in investing, including in their staff.

- Child poverty forecast is set to increase, up to 50% by 2020, as children from low income families are less likely to do well.
- Changes to the benefits system by UK Government are likely to result in the poorest people in Wales becoming even worse off.
- We know that qualifications affect individuals' risk of poverty and that those on low incomes are less likely to have qualifications. However, we also know that while levels of qualifications have risen in Wales, there have not been significant improvements in income levels. This is likely to be in part due to the number of older people retiring who had no, or few formal qualifications.
- People who are not working are three times more likely to have no qualifications as people who are in work, however we know that in work poverty is a real problem in Wales.
- 1 in 3 children on free school meals will achieve the core subject indicator, but this is not enough for them to secure high paying jobs in their future careers.
- Poverty is a cycle that is difficult to break, with family history often determining children's success.

ii) Responding to the Challenge

- The new programme for Government makes no explicit reference to policies or strategies to alleviate poverty. While reduced public funding means it is unlikely that there will be large scale programmes to replace Communities First, there must be clear political commitment and priority given to all public funding contributing towards tackling poverty,
- Approaches to tackling poverty have remained broadly the same over many years. We must recognise that the time has come to consider that different approaches work in different parts of Wales. We do know that strong local communities that work to engage individuals can be very effective at progressing them into further learning in the community, perhaps onto college or work, where community initiatives work closely with education, employment and skills providers.
- We know that those furthest from education or employment are most receptive to learning in the community.

iii) Priorities for Action

- Despite constraints on funding, we must find ways to invest in accessible education and training opportunities for adults in the community – Welsh Government, post-16 education, training and skills sector and DWP must work together to drive this agenda.
- Funding methodologies should provide support for educators to engage with the harder to reach communities through widening access projects and opportunities.
- Provide a support mechanism that allows access to education – investigate how the 30 hours free childcare access can support parents to re-engage with education and training.
- Ensure aligned policies that support progression routes and clear career paths to motivate ambition in the people who have missed out on opportunities.

3. The Value of Skills to the Economy

Sponsor: Llŷr Gruffydd AM

Guest Speaker: Professor Dylan Jones-Evans, UWE Bristol

Host: Iestyn Davies, ColegauCymru / CollegesWales

Date: 7 July 2016, Oriel, Senedd

i) The Challenge

- To create aligned policies that support the role of education, training and skills and employer engagement that raise proficiency and support future economic growth in Wales.

- To continue to provide fit for purpose education and training across all levels and sectors to support the changing needs of the employer in Wales.
- Lack of innovative support, entrepreneurial spirit and leadership and management skills are hampering the growth potential of small businesses in Wales.
- SMEs in Wales are less likely to engage in training. This has been evidenced by recent research from ColegauCymru / CollegesWales, FSB Wales and University of South Wales (USW) into training activity in the Hospitality, Retail and Tourism sector, and the low level engagement of SME and micro businesses in these areas.
- Education and training has to be relative to real life situations.
- According to a CBI / Pearson survey in 2015 underlining the skills challenge facing the UK (310 companies, which together employ over one million people)¹:
 - a) 2 in 3 businesses (68%) expect their need for staff with higher level skills to grow in the years ahead, but more than half of those surveyed (55%) fear that they will not be able to access enough workers with the required skills.
 - b) Demand for highly skilled workers is particularly strong in sectors critical to the rebalancing of the economy – engineering, science and hi-tech (74%), construction (73%) and manufacturing (69%).
- 75% of organisations believe staff should be undertaking professional qualifications but will not pay for them. Upskilling activity of existing employers remains low. How do we demonstrate the benefit to employers of engaging with their local education and training providers?
- Cannot underestimate the importance of soft skills and the role of educators in this space in making learners skilled, able and work ready.

ii) Responding to the Challenge

- Government, post-16 education, training and skills and industry must work together to deliver the solution to the expectation of business needs – all policies need to be aligned and linked. The three Regional Skills Partnerships are an opportunity for closer alignment and cross sector collaboration for moving the skills agenda forward.
- Skills and qualifications need to be complementing each other and used together.
- Shatter the barrier between formal education and applied training.

iii) Priorities for Action

- Align policies between Welsh Government, local authorities, education, training and skills and business that break the barriers to accessing efficient skills delivery. The three Regional Skills Partnerships are critical catalysts in this space.
- Provide a refreshed skills-based post-14 offer, ensuring equality of esteem between academic and vocational pathways, and preparing young people for the demands of the workplace.
- Support activity with a strategic vision and commit to a post-14 skills plan for Wales.
- Ensure that a wide range of qualifications are offered but drive for higher level skills programmes (Master Craftsperson, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships) and establish a Technical Accreditation Council with the UK.
- Invest in part-time further education enabling individuals to retrain and reskill to find new jobs and careers.
- Promote and support innovation and entrepreneurship, look to create centres to support Vocational Education Training (VET) (further and higher education). The Basque model develops innovative projects in the areas of technology, teachers' training, ICT and management.
- Further invest in support for manufacturing and utilise the space in education, training and skills facilities to support business and encourage new business to test prototypes and materials, optimise manufacturing processes and even test the market for the new product with a trial run (similar to the model of the three existing Food Technology Centres in Wales). This will require investment in capital to support the development.

¹ <http://www.cbi.org.uk/news/skills-emergency-could-starve-growth-cbi-pearson-survey>

4. Welsh Language Skills for Work

Guest Speaker: Meri Huws, Welsh Language Commissioner

Host: Iestyn Davies, ColegauCymru / CollegesWales

Date: 4 August 2016, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol Stand, National Eisteddfod

i) The Challenge

- How to match the supply of Welsh speakers to demand in Wales and support the Welsh Government goal of attaining one million speakers by 2050.
- The role of post-16 education, training and skills in achieving this is critical to success.
- Bilingual workers are in demand in the public sector and workplace in Wales.
- Post-16 Welsh/bilingual education, training and skills provision remains inconsistent across Wales, there are pockets of excellence, however it remains a postcode lottery in terms of linguistic provision of post-16 vocational (and some academic) opportunities in Wales.
- Changing perception of the value of Welsh language linguistic vocational progression post-16.

ii) Responding to the Challenge

- Bring the post-16 education, training and skills sector together to collaborate on providing linguistic vocational opportunities in response to the increase in demand from employers for bilingual skills of varying levels and ability in the workplace.
- Qualifications Wales has a key role in ensuring access to Welsh and bilingual qualifications in Welsh Government (focus on Welsh Government key priority areas for bilingual development that match employer needs).
- Welsh Government must support and facilitate the production of timely bilingual resources to aid bilingual teaching.
- The Welsh language post-16 education, training and skills support service Sgiliaith must be evolved and grown to further support the needs/demand for bilingual teaching staff.
- The Sector needs investment to feed the appetite for change. Cross sector collaboration across the whole education system will support development and avoid unnecessary duplication of services.
- All regulatory bodies must recognise that the Welsh language post-16 education, training and skills landscape is changing and reconsider methods of review and support for the sector.

iii) Priorities for Action

- Comprehensive strategy and skills plan needed for post-16 education, training and skills, schools and universities that looks at linguistic progression as well as vocational and or academia choice. This strategy must look at the role of schools, colleges, work based learning, apprenticeships and lifelong learning in recognition of their responsibility in building a confident Welsh workforce.
- An opportunity for Careers Wales to further promote the Welsh language as an employability skill. Invest in a pan Wales LMI review of what linguistic skills and levels are needed in the next 3, 5 and 10 years.
- Utilise the Dysgu Cymraeg centres (Welsh for Adults) to support delivery in post-16 education, training and skills. Enabling people to progress into Welsh or onto further learning from Welsh to support integration with the rest of the sector.
- Invest in Welsh language development across vocational education which is the sector that trains and retains Welsh speakers locally.
- Qualifications Wales to lead on supporting post-16 education, training and skills sector in providing qualifications, resources and assessment that are fit for purpose in a bilingual Wales.

5. Delivering World Class Apprenticeships

Sponsor: Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James AM

Guest Speaker: Paul Byard, National Director – Wales, EEF The Manufacturers' Organisation

Host: Sarah John, National Training Federation for Wales

Date: 13 September 2016, Tŷ Hywel

i) The Challenge

- Although a very achievable, and welcomed, challenge the Welsh Government's commitment to "deliver a minimum 100,000 high quality all-age apprenticeships in Wales over the term of this assembly" needs a 'whole systems approach' to ensure it is met, and that high quality apprenticeships are delivered.
- The ever-increasing divergence of apprenticeship policy across the UK, including the advent of 'employer ownership' in England which has brought about the Apprenticeship Levy and Apprenticeship Standards (aka Trailblazers) can create confusion amongst employers, learners and providers about what an Apprenticeship is, and who it is for.
- In 2015, only 1.5% (488) of all school leavers at age 16 (Year 11) went directly on to an apprenticeship. This figure reduces to 1.9% (163) of the cohort leaving school at age 19 (Year 13). Despite the almost universal rhetoric around the need to achieve parity of esteem between vocational and academic, there is still considerable work to do.
- Employers (and employment opportunities) are central to an effective apprenticeship programme. The economy will need to grow, to give businesses confidence to invest, if we are to have a truly 'World Class Apprenticeship Programme' in Wales.

ii) Responding to the challenge

- Current apprenticeship delivery is of a high quality across Wales, whether its delivered by independent training providers or by FE Colleges. The challenge to increase both the volume of delivery, and increase delivery of apprenticeships at higher levels is embraced by all providers, who will continue to deliver high quality to learners and employers.
- The all age apprenticeship in Wales is a welcomed opportunity to support employer needs. However, we need to be clear that this is influenced by Welsh Government priorities.
- All of the partners involved in the development and delivery of the apprenticeship programme across Wales need to be mindful of the issues of cross-border working for employers and individuals, and that 'transferability and portability' should be central to everything that is done.
- With the advent of Welsh Government's Apprenticeship Policy, apprenticeship providers will need to develop their offer to ensure that it meets the needs of business and regional economies (informed by the Regional Skills Partnerships) and those individuals looking to enter the job market.
- The sector embraces this target and welcomes further support to bring forward creative solutions.

iii) Priorities for Action

- With only 30% of apprentices being aged 16-19, Welsh Government, Careers Wales and providers will need to use all the levers at their disposal to ensure young people (and their parents) are informed about the benefits of undertaking an apprenticeship. We must ensure that there is appropriate access to impartial advice and guidance for all young people, enabling them to make the best decision for them, and not driven by provider interest (whether that be school, college or training provider).
- Welsh Government, employer representatives and providers will need to mobilise the employer network in Wales to ensure that their default recruitment processes are aligned to the apprenticeship programme. This means maximising opportunities to promote positive case studies of individuals and employers who have benefitted from apprenticeships. Existing campaigns and events including the Apprenticeship Awards, VQ Day, Adult Learners' Week provide opportunity to do this, but there should also be better alignment with other Welsh Government supported PR & Marketing campaigns.

- Welsh Government will need to work with all employers (including the public services) who are paying the Apprenticeship Levy to develop an 'Apprenticeship First' approach to recruitment, training and development for their workforce.
- In order to increase the volume of higher level apprenticeships, there should be development of clear 'Apprenticeship Pathways' for learners of all ages, including the development of Degree Apprenticeships, and linkages to Professional Recognition.

Conclusion

This series has identified that clarity is needed on the role and purpose of further education in Wales, and to allow provision to young people and adults through a thoughtful analysis of what is required, rather than through a narrow interpretation of current funding methodology. Too frequently we think about education and training as separate from other important challenges in Wales - health and wellbeing, poverty, community regeneration, culture, language and civic engagement. In actual fact, giving people the skills they need to be resilient and confident participants in their families, communities and our economy is of benefit to all these areas.

The events have certainly recognised consensus in the need for prioritisation and a shared commitment to all age employability and long term sustainability. People and skills are at the heart of our economic prosperity. We need innovative delivery models to ensure the best outcomes for learners and Wales. With a good education and the right skills, everyone has the best chance to get a job and get on in their career.

Unemployment levels are low, however, economic inactivity in Wales remains high. Wales must seize new opportunities to grow. However work does not always pay, and we must ensure employees are supported to progress to higher paid high skilled jobs. We also need to increase the productivity of our workforce.

We need a trained and diverse workforce, supported by successful business engagement and the right policy environment. We need to think more holistically about how we fund education across the life course, agree what the priorities for action are and work proactively with other Government departments to ensure that individuals value education and training, invest in it themselves as well as engaging in Government-supported programmes.

Welsh Government needs to be bold in setting and communicating its vision and strategy for education, skills & employment in Wales, and be prepared to accept that some previous approaches have not worked. Whilst the desire to reduce the proliferation of new policies is understandable, given the pace of change in the external environment, it seems necessary (and prudent) to regularly revisit and re-state skills & employability policy to maintain momentum and ensure all parties - state, individual, providers and employers - are fully aware of what is required.

The three partners ColegauCymru / CollegesWales, Learning and Work Institute and the National Training Federation for Wales would like to extend their thanks to all who supported the events, from Assembly Members and Guest Speakers to attendees.

