

Enterprise and Learning Committee

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Rathbone Cymru

Whether Welsh Government strategies are effectively delivering outcomes for young people not in education, employment or training;

Rathbone Cymru believes that Welsh Assembly Government Strategy does provide a potentially effective foundation for delivering support for young people not in education employment or training.

However there are a number of obstacles that prevent this from becoming fully effective in reality. This includes -

A need to define and recognise the differing levels of NEET and reasons that people become NEET. Much resource is made available to the 'NEET Community' but distinction should be made between activities that help differing levels of the NEET community - as results are easier to obtain with a young person who is an occasional school truant rather than someone who is long term dis-engaged.

A bias of funding towards the delivery of accredited qualifications. With many NEET young people the first need to be addressed in delivering outcomes is that of building relationships with the young people. This is often time and resource intensive and measures of success are based around softer outcomes. In order to reach the NEET co-hort that are furthest from engagement, appropriate standardised measurement of soft-skill development and associated output recognition needs to be established.

Additionally funding needs to be structured to focus on positive progression to greater levels of engagement, with buy in from referring agencies such as Careers Wales. This should go to some part in preventing the current revolving door syndrome that we witness within the training marketplace whereby young people move from provider to provider with no 'upward' progression.

Many Welsh Assembly Initiatives seek to promote collaborative working, and the development of local curriculums and frameworks based around 14-19 learning partnerships. This should be welcomed, but effective frameworks need to ensure the co-ordination of learning / development frameworks that avoid duplication of provision, whilst ensuring that a diversity of providers are sustained. Learning / development frameworks need to incorporate a breadth of providers to recognise the need for individual choice. It is proper that 14-19 Pathways and Children and Young People's Partnerships co-ordinate this - but there needs to be appropriate and active representation from a wider consortia than just the schools and colleges; to include the voluntary sector, support organisations and non formal learning providers. The level that this happens across the 22 local authorities in Wales varies significantly - and the risk is that in some areas where provision is dominated by the statutory sectors that some young people who view statutory provision with suspicion become further detached.

There is rightly significant onus on collaborative working from providers, but at times it feels that whilst providers are being encouraged to work collaboratively; the need for collective and informed working needs to extend into the commissioning process. Some recent experiences in areas such as the Reach the Heights project and the developing New Day project show a lack of collaborative working. Equally whilst it is proper that the responsibility for NEET rests with one government department, there is the need for cross departmental working as NEET is an area which has resonance for Health, Justice, Community Regeneration, Economy and Equality.

We have already recognised the number of programmes that exist to support the NEET co-hort and these are in the main bound by statutory funding. Rightly this has to be supported by a large amount of evidence to ensure that resources are allocated effectively - however this often means that young people are constantly faced with diagnostics and assessments on starting with new providers. This is one of the most off-putting things that can be presented to a young person and a movement to a Common Assessment Framework should be considered.

How and to what effect the Welsh Government is engaging with the Department for Work and Pensions and Job Centre Plus in Wales to ensure a coherent policy response to address the circumstances of young people not in education, employment or training;

Our experience in this area is limited, but experiences do show a degree of variability. Of particular note is the disparity that exists between England and Wales in respect of the programme complementarity. An example of this is the eligibility of transfer between Skillbuild and FND.

Equally the rollout of certain DWP initiatives has at time had negative effects on the flows of people engaging with certain Welsh specific programmes (perhaps ESF funded). For instance a number of young people have been more attracted to Future Jobs Fund rather than engaging with training - which in many cases has created short term rather than sustainable benefit for the young people concerned, and reduced flows to programmes which offer training.

Along the same lines a number of DWP programmes, such as Future Jobs Fund do seem to operate in isolation, and these should perhaps receive a greater level of development to ensure that they are embedded into a learning framework - for instance the provision of 'exit-support' for Future Jobs Fund may have stopped a number of these young people becoming NEET and enabled a positive outcome to be sustained.

Within JCP our experiences show that support for programmes exists, although there are issues faced in engaging a young person on a short term (3 or 4 week) programme without creating a negative impact on benefits claims; particularly if this programme is not on an approved list with JCP. Equally like many large organisations support for NEET based programmes from JCP is as good as the links that

exist with staff teams at a local level.

We view that the voluntary sector could have a greater role to play in supporting and establishing Local Employer Partnerships.

To what extent the Welsh Government's economic development and employment strategy (for example, upcoming Economic Renewal Programme) is addressing issues affecting young people aged 16-24 not in education, employment or training (and for those over 18 specifically);

This is not something that we are directly familiar with; but key to any economic development and employment strategy will be the need to ensure that there are a broad range of sustainable jobs. Equally at times of high unemployment such as the present it is important to ensure that these are accessible to the NEET community in terms of both employer perceptions, and the skill / experience levels that are being required by employers.

What specific action the Welsh Government is taking with regard to, or addressing the needs of, those young people at highest risk of becoming NEETs and specific 'at-risk' groups (including Gypsy Travellers, refugees and asylum-seeking young people, young offenders, young carers, Looked After Children, care leavers and certain ethnic minority groups);

There are a range of programmes that exist but these are not as well formalised, as well known or as accessible as they should be. Equally a number of these seem to work in isolation and are failing to develop links into some areas of mainstream provision.

We know that there are a large range of factors that contribute to a young person becoming NEET and programmes focused at specific 'at-risk' groups need to ensure that they have the flexibility to address a broad range of factors.

Whilst recognising the importance of support for specific groups it has also to be noted that within the education system activities need to include support for those who are not engaging with a school campus and are facing long-term disengagement from school. Too often when linking with mainstream education partners we become aware of plans to support young people having issues with school which are based on the school estate - and whilst valid do not support those furthest from engagement.

The status of arrangements/negotiations for current/future European Structural funding for NEETs policy delivery in Wales;

Firstly Wales should be congratulated for the lead that it took within Europe in reducing eligibility age for Priority 1 to 11.

Rathbone Cymru fully supports the drive by WEFO to have fewer, larger projects than in previous commissioning rounds; as this does ensure more appropriate resource allocation; so long as this is effectively implemented.

Experiences with both Reach the Heights and Prevent have however shown that this is not a process which is inclusive to voluntary sector partners, and has been beset with delays that has meant that there has been a void in provision in many areas. Initiatives such as the Engagement Gateway have succeed in distributing money, many of the projects that they fund lack sustainability beyond 24 months, and we would question the efficiency of the distribution structure with overheads occurred nationally and locally by the distributor and at a project level by the deliverer.

Equally ESF funding is very hard output related, thus as illustrated in point 1, does not take account for assessing distance travelled and other soft outcomes.

The effectiveness of agency collaboration/partnership working in addressing NEETs issues in Wales and whether there is duplication of effort in this area;

Agency collaboration and effectiveness is essential to success. There needs to be a central organisation formally tasked and accountable for measuring and keeping in touch with the NEET co-hort, and this needs to use agreed national criteria and KPIs. Work to monitor and manage the NEET co-hort in any area needs to be pro-active and targeted measures need to be in place to ensure that the status of all young people is known, not just those who register with the accountable organisation as NEET.

Organisation and Collaborative working needs to ensure that there is fair and adequate representation of all parties, and that the young person - their needs and aspirations - are placed central to any development. Partnership working needs to ensure a variety of engagement and learning methods, environments and organisations.

To be effective full data sharing and a common assessment framework needs to be in place.

There is a risk of duplication where partnerships are formed for statutory reasons i.e. 14-19 partnerships and then others for funding reasons e.g. ESF consortia

The implications of the current Welsh Government Review of Careers Services in Wales on implementation of NEETs policies.

A review of the Careers Service is welcome. This response has already identified the need for an organisation to take responsibility for managing the NEET register. However this needs to be undertaken in a uniform way across Wales. Our present experiences inform us that the completeness of the register and activities undertaken to inform the register differ greatly between the various Careers' companies.

In the same vein as Job Centre Plus; dealings with Careers are often stand or fall by the strength of the local relationship.

Key to success would be consistency which may achieved through the establishment of a single Careers Company.