

Enterprise and Learning Committee

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Inquiry into Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training in Wales (10th June 2010)

Fairbridge De Cymru - An Introduction

Fairbridge De Cymru welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry into Young People Not In Education, Employment or Training in Wales.

Fairbridge De Cymru is a national charity that supports marginalised young people to take the first steps towards re-engaging with society. Every year we succeed in winning the trust and commitment of young people that many other organisations find difficult to engage with. Our philosophy is simple, we believe that many young people become disengaged and disaffected not because they are 'bad', but because they lack the personal and social skills and confidence that allows most people to cope with and get on in daily life.

We know that these young people can turn their lives around and cope independently if they are merely given the right opportunity to develop their skills and the support and encouragement to achieve them.

Fairbridge De Cymru is a first step provider that prides itself on its ability to develop the personal, social and independent life skills necessary for these young people to reengage in mainstream educational and recreational activities. Through a programme of challenging activities coupled with intensive one to one support we practice a holistic system of learning by stealth to develop the social and personal skills required for these young people to live independent and fulfilling lives.

Fairbridge works closely with young people to help them identify the barriers to accessing education, employment and training. Young people then work in partnership with Fairbridge to identify their own personal learning needs and develop their personal and social skills in order to equip them to overcome the marginalisation they face. In order to achieve this Fairbridge recognises that it requires a holistic approach to every young person as everyone's learning needs are individual. The success of our work in partnership with young people is well documented and the demand for our work continues across Wales.

We identify within a young person, the needs and deficits that act as barriers to entering mainstream educational and recreational environments. This then tailors their involvement with Fairbridge and the personalised support programme they enter into. Our holistic nature ensures that in whatever activity a young person takes part in they are always working to address their needs and overcome these barriers so that when a young person is ready to move on from Fairbridge they do so ready to fully reengage with further education, employment and training programmes and get the most from their lives. Our success is well documented and the demand for our work continues to grow across Wales.

The young people we work with represent some of the most marginalised, deprived and disadvantaged in Wales who come to us with multiple presenting needs including substance misuse, exclusion from school, mental health issues, long-term unemployment and homelessness. In 2008/09 83% of the young people we engaged with us did so with three or more of these presenting needs. Despite these challenges Fairbridge works successfully with these young people and last year 72% of young people went on to achieve at least one positive outcome, such as returning to the classroom, starting a college course or attaining a qualification.

Fairbridge De Cymru specialising in giving young people the skills they need to live independent lives and access education, employment or training opportunities. We do this through a combined programme of activities which are fun, challenging and engaging coupled with intensive one-to-one support and coaching. Our experience has shown that structured, fun and adventurous activities work well in engaging and developing young people's personal, social and interactional skills. What makes the Fairbridge programme different to other 'fun and challenging' activities is that each programme is delivered in a format that is developmental rather than diversionary.

Every activity is designed and delivered so that it becomes a vehicle for developing one or more key skills that will develop young peoples' ability to cope with, get on in and importantly, enjoy daily life.

Response to Inquiry Issue 1: Do WAG Strategies effectively deliver outcomes for NEETs?

1. We are aware of a number effective programmes and well meaning initiatives that have made some positive impression on the NEETs problem. However, in our view the programmes and initiatives are numerous, overlapping and somewhat uncoordinated. There is a strategic view in WAG which is well articulated at Ministerial and senior official level but too few resources to ensure programmes and initiatives are linked and tailored to contribute to the strategy.

2. For Fairbridge being NEET is only part of the problem, it needs to be holistically solved by addressing the overall needs of the communities that NEET young people live in. In our opinion it can only be actively addressed by linking in with Child Poverty strategy, Health and Well Being, overall education policies, Youth Work strategy for Wales, benefit system, transport etc. In some regards being NEET and living in worklessness households is entrenched in certain communities in Wales. Engaging with NEETs is only part of the solution - the environment that they live in and in some regards the aspirations of their local communities also needs to be part of the overall plan.

3. At the heart of this must be effective, timely and joined up funding opportunities that benefit organisations working with NEETs. For

example, when opportunities to bid for funding are announced all providers, public, private and third sector, work independently and in competition with each other to submit bids.

4. It needs to be understood that a real NEET solution is not cheap or quick. It needs investment, long term funding and the realisation that hard outcomes are often not the best way to judge success.

Response to Inquiry Issue 2: Does WAG engagement with DWP and JCP ensure a coherent policy response to NEETs?

1. Fairbridge has areas of experience when relating to this question.

2. Overall we feel that Future Jobs Fund is a good example of a sound initiative that could have contributed to sustainable employment if approached on a broader and more strategic front. For example it was recognised within WAG that a pre Future Jobs Fund programme would greatly enhance the chance of success for young people on the Future Jobs Fund. However, funding could not be made available to support that approach.

3. Also, JCP frontline staff are under considerable pressure and they have many, many training opportunities to consider when deciding on the best way forward for a young person. We are not convinced that the referral process is as good as it could be and young people are missing opportunities to be dealt with by the appropriate agency (including voluntary and state provision).

4. Our experience as an organisation that has an agreement with JCP is that the policies, opportunities and benefits of that referral are often understood at managerial level but due to high staff turnover at the coal face - this detail is often missed or not understood. Thus young people are shoe horned into the wrong type of provision.

Question 3: To what extent is WAG economic development and employment strategy addressing NEETs?

1. We are not able to comment on this as we are unsighted on much of the renewal programme.

2. We feel that there must be a greater understanding of the requirements to develop "soft skills" within NEETs that enable young people to successfully move on within the employment spectrum. From Fairbridge experience all too often we see young people sent to Training providers who are not ready to engage at that level of learning. This results in them dropping out and either being lost in the system or sent around the system again to face continual feelings of failure.

3. We feel that this is in some regards attributed to the drive for hard outcome based funding - organisations become short term and target driven rather than really addressing the entrenched needs of young people who are NEET.

Response to Inquiry Issue 4: What specific action is WAG taking for young people at high risk of becoming NEET and specific at risk groups?

1. We aware of a range of programmes exist but, as in response to the first issue, they are not as well coordinated as they could be.

2. Once again we feel that the entrenched issues that cause young people to become NEET needs to be developed rather than reactionary funding.

3. The danger of allocating funding to certain groups is that it is short term and reactionary - once the target is achieved (% drop in NEET young people) then the funding is moved somewhere else and the problem reasserts itself (the cause is not addressed only a short term outcome).

Response to Inquiry Issue 5: The status of ESF for NEETs policy delivery?

1. ESF funding is a great resource to Wales and can mitigate present funding concerns. However Fairbridge has the following concerns/issues regards ESF:

2. It can be time consuming and paperwork heavy process

3. Is it correctly allocated against areas (Cardiff and Newport) have some of the highest NEET levels but lack associated funding regards Convergence areas

4. Organisation rely on ESF for large amounts of their funding - what is the post 2012 strategy to replace this funding?

Response to Inquiry Issue 6: The effectiveness of collaboration/partnership working in addressing NEETs?

1. This is an area that needs significant improvement as outlined, but also the needs of smaller more specialised delivery partners need to be heard as then danger exists that larger organisations become the Prime delivery partner and "squeeze" those smaller agencies that they are in partnership in.

Response to Inquiry Issue 7: The implications of WAG Review of Careers services on NEETs policies?

1. We know little about this except that Careers Wales will become a single entity rather than 6 separate ones.

2. The issues we face in working with Careers Wales mirror those outlined in the response to the second issue.

Fairbridge De Cymru - Final Thoughts on how the NEET issue can be addressed within Wales!

1. Different organisations (statutory services/other providers/training providers) all working in competition and in isolation from one another. An overall culture of competition rather than partnership working that uses young people as sales opportunities that are fought over between agencies rather than their needs being placed at the centre of the process.
2. Not enough engagement with young people themselves who are NEETs - too many experts discussing what to do with them rather than engaging with the young people themselves.
3. Constant re-inventing of the wheel regards priority groups - no real audit of services or agreeing how the services fit together to form a pathway for learning and engagement for NEETs (correct mapping exercise) with multiple entry points and also progression but also regression routes between providers.
4. Funding - broken down across departments - I feel that funding should be centralised and funnelled to necessary organisations.
5. Outcome based environment - engagement with NEETs is over qualitative improvements in that young person's life chances, it's about changes in attitude, small steps and personal development not a tick in a box. By driving front line organisations into hard outcome and target focused they become the servants of the funding provider rather than focusing on the real aims - that of the young people.
6. Priority for us is putting the young person at the centre of the process.
7. It has been well documented that early and preventive engagement will save the tax payer in the long run 100fold - however as this approach will take 10 to 15 years to come through it will require a change in government thinking to develop a real long term approach.