



19 May 2010

Dear Sian

Re: Enterprise & Learning Committee's Inquiry into Young People not in education, employment or training

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for examining this important issue. Addressing the factors that can contribute to a young person becoming NEET will be vital in Wales' economic recovery in the coming years, but will also help to address the interrelated issues of social justice, mental health, substance abuse and the broader skills gap in Wales which I am sure that the Committee is familiar with.

ConstructionSkills Wales is the Welsh arm of the national Sector Skills Council for the construction sector. As a Sector Skills Council we are predominantly concerned with the provision of good quality training and apprenticeships, company development, sector specific skills training and the spread of best industry and workplace practice within our specific sector.

ConstructionSkills Wales would like to take this opportunity to raise a number of issues with the Committee. The term 'NEET' is too narrow and has significant negative overtones. ConstructionSkills Wales will be using the term as an adjective rather than a noun in this response. The term does not take into account regional, individual and urban and rural differences. This has knock-on effects when it comes to collecting and presenting data for Wales and this can have a corresponding effect on the drafting of policy. ConstructionSkills Wales believes that the following issues need to be addressed in terms of the definition of those young people who are NEET and in terms of data collection:

- **Rural issues** – The Committee, and in its policy work the Welsh Assembly Government, should consider the work that many farming families, including young men and women, do on a regular basis; both in the built environment sector and the land-management sector (maintaining such traditional and sustainable skills such as dry-stone walling, reed bed management, thatching and soil maintenance). These young people may not attend specific training courses or recognised education institutions but are far from unskilled and are making economic contributions not only to their families but to their regions as well.
- **Social issues** – In drafting future policies, the Welsh Assembly Government should note that there is a need to recognise a number of social issues, including young female Muslims who may not be encouraged to work or be employed by family members. However, they may provide a number of vital services to friends and families, for example childcare, tutoring or physical care to elderly relatives. Furthermore, the interaction with young carers who have fallen out of 'formal' education systems will also have to be handled delicately.

- **Individual issues** – It will be increasingly important to recognise that not all young people are suited to formal learning environments. Whilst it is important to offer high quality learning routes offering a unique combination of paid employment or work-experience, it is equally important to ensure that young people who are not suited to or prefer practical rather than classroom-based learning have the opportunities to learn and upskill themselves.

We firmly believe that some of the problems raised by employing such a narrow definition could be tackled by working more closely with SSCs operating in the sector, and specifically ConstructionSkills Wales. Given ConstructionSkills Wales' history as an Industry Training Board, we have a significant amount of experience in working in 'non-traditional' working and learning environments in the built environment sector.

Young people who are NEET remain young people first, and this is a highly diverse group which would necessitate that a range of learning avenues are provided and made available. Clearly when one takes into account the three issues outlined above (and these are not exclusive) it is evident that a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate. When the Welsh Assembly Government begins work to address the social issues outlined above there will be a need to work with appropriate partners in the voluntary and health sectors. When working with the black and ethnic minority populations in Wales there also needs to be an understanding of the cultural situation as well as the economic situation. ConstructionSkills Wales has been carrying forward a number of workstreams to begin addressing the lack of women and people from black and ethnic minority in the construction sector in Wales, and if the Committee would like to discuss these projects further please contact me at the details included below.

ConstructionSkills Wales firmly believes that apprenticeships and other work-based learning solutions can add a different dimension to making employment and education relevant to young people who are NEET. For many young people who are currently in education and for those who are NEET, even further education institutions are too much like 'traditional' education environments and whilst apprenticeships and work-based learning solutions are a form of formal education they are often deliverable in different ways. In order to deliver more appropriate and different learning environments, the Welsh Assembly Government should prepare to provide increased funding for Modern Apprenticeships and Foundation Modern Apprenticeships. These new and innovative types of learning solutions are one-part of a wider package of solutions to tackling the NEET agenda in Wales.

Another partial solution to the NEET agenda in Wales would be to examine in detail the ways in which procurement procedures and systems are used. In addition to ensuring best value for money on particular projects, ConstructionSkills Wales firmly believes that a more developed and intelligent approach to using procurement procedures (especially those in the public sector) can bring about sustainable / lower carbon solutions as well as job creation; tackling disenchantment with formal education and increasing uptake of apprenticeship places. Whilst ConstructionSkills Wales believes that this approach is not a 'magic bullet', we believe that including commitments in procurement exercises is a clear way forward in beginning to address the NEET agenda in Wales.

ConstructionSkills Wales firmly believes that a joined-up approach **across Welsh Assembly Government departments** is essential in addressing this issue. We recognise the work that the Welsh Assembly Government has done to date, but we would strongly recommend that the issue is addressed by a team from across a number of Welsh Assembly Government departments as young people who are NEET often bring with them a series of contributing factors including; criminal and social justice issues, mental health and health-related issues, a lack of formal education, special

educational needs and sometimes a history of substance misuse. ConstructionSkills Wales has been broadening its approach to making the built environment sector more open in terms of the demographics of people involved in learning and working in the sector and this is an approach that we would hope the Welsh Assembly Government would adopt.

In summary, tackling the NEET agenda in Wales is not and should not wholly rest with one particular department or policy team. There should be one organisation or body (not necessarily a newly created body) which would be able to coordinate a range of education and employment options for young people who are NEET. ConstructionSkills Wales believes that given the current environment, Careers Wales would be best suited to take on this role. Careers Wales would also have to take into account those wider issues outlined above and work closely with partner organisations from local authorities and the voluntary sector to ensure that young people do not slip through the gaps in any provision.

If you would like to discuss further any of the issues raised in this letter, I would be happy to meet with you or your Committee team on this matter and discuss the ways in which ConstructionSkills can be helpful during this inquiry. Alternatively you can contact my colleague Dave Hoare at dave.hoare@grayling.com.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Wyn Prichard', with a horizontal line underneath.

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