

Enterprise and Learning Committee

EL(3) 17-08 (p2) : 12 June 2008

Inquiry into the economic contribution of Higher Education in Wales

Response from SkillsActive:

1. SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure and Learning, covering the sub-sectors of sport and recreation, health and fitness, the outdoors, playwork and camping and caravanning.
2. SkillsActive believes that Sector Skills Agreements (SSA) provide the basis for a shared agenda between a Sector Skills Council, its employers and the Higher Education Network in Wales. Indeed SSCs can be the main route to ensure that the views of employers can be expressed in a clear and co-ordinated way to support the strategic development of HE in Wales.
3. SkillsActive concluded it's SSA in Wales at the end of 2006 and subsequently agreed a partnership agreement with HEFCW which is attached below as the basis for an on-going relationship between the Sector and Welsh HEIs. Work is underway in implementing this agreement and there is an emerging partnership with individual institutions.

General Comments:

4. **Vocational Skills:** SSCs are primarily concerned with ensuring that their sectors have the skilled and qualified workforce that they need to succeed - in terms of business growth, productivity or public service performance. A key focus for partnership with HE is to ensure the supply of graduates with these appropriate skills.
5. The transition from education to employment is not always easy. As a Sector we would encourage increased vocational content in HE programmes, based on the Sector's National Occupational Standards. The development of Foundation Degrees is seen as a way of delivering a vocational focus and as a sector we would support their development in Wales. These can be delivered flexibly, allowing study alongside employment and are particularly attractive for those seeking access to HE later in their career, supporting their development into managerial positions.
6. We also recognise that not all HE provision should be vocationally specific and it should be noted that already only 1/3 of Welsh graduates end up in employment in the Sector. People should be assisted to make an informed choice when entering HE as to the courses with a clear vocational focus - the Foundation Degree label is useful for this. "Graduate Apprenticeships" have also found favour in our Sector, recognising that graduates need support and development time in industry after graduation.
7. **Research and Development:** a second major area of partnership with HE surrounds the capacity of HE to support the technical and scientific research needed by sectors. For us this is more limited than in other sectors such as engineering. However, sports and exercise sciences and psychology underpin high performance in

sport and have enabled UWIC to play a lead role in the UK in the preparation of elite athletes.

8. Our partnership with Higher Education is also evident in Sector research. For example, we recently concluded an investigation into employability skills gaps in the Sector with UWIC, resulting in the publication of a training provider database geared to meet the identified gaps.

Engaging with Higher Education Institutions in Wales

SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the active leisure and learning sector covering sport and recreation, health and fitness, the outdoors, playwork and the caravan industry. As a SSC, SkillsActive can speak with authority about skills needs within the sector.

Industry background (UK)

Active Leisure and Learning contributed £8.6 billion in output to the UK economy in 2004 - growth is double that of the UK economy over the last 5 years

SkillsActive's 5 sectors employ 634,000 paid employees in over 36,500 organisations

Employment Growth has soared in the past 5 years - almost four times that of all UK industries

The sector comprises of micro organisations (73%) and SMEs, with less than 1% of employers employing over 250 employees

Active Leisure and Learning is the largest single sector for volunteering, accounting for 26% of the voluntary workforce

Future growth

The sector is expected to continue outperforming the UK economy until 2014 - with output up to £11.9 billion

Annual staff turn over is predicted to be around 14%, which combined with growth in employment, will result in at least 1 million job

opportunities (paid) between 2004 and 2014

Wales

There are 27,000 people employed within the sector in Wales in around 2,100 organisations

This accounts for around 4.6% of the UK total

Wales has 8% more than its anticipated share of employment in the sector compared to the UK as a whole

64% of Welsh employers employ less than 50 people

Employment is set to grow to around 30,000 by 2014

Sector GVA is £400 million - the largest sector (sport and recreation) produces 50% of that total

Demand side skills needs analysis across Wales

Almost 1 in 4 'establishments' report a vacancy,

45% of establishments with a vacancy deemed them hard-to-fill.

38% of organisations with a hard-to-fill vacancy attributed it to a skills shortage reason

15% of employers report a skills gap amongst their existing workforce

Skills most commonly cited as being in need of improvement are team working skills, customer handling skills, technical and practical and communication skills. Management, IT and Welsh language skills are also cited by a higher than average proportion of employers.

Operational/duty managers/assistant managers, play workers and coaches/fitness instructors/personal trainers account for the largest proportion of skills gaps.

Assessment of supply side higher education provision across Wales

HESA destination data for Welsh HE courses show 39 courses available in the sector in 2003/04 with 31 containing a sport and recreation element, three health and fitness and 13 in the outdoors. There were no HE courses identified in Playwork or the caravan sectors.

Approximately two thirds (64 per cent) of leavers from Welsh institutions are retained in employment in Wales with one third (32 per cent) working in England.

Over 1,200 learners were accepted into Sport and Recreation HE courses in 2003/04, a 40% increase since 1999. Approximately two thirds (67%) of those entrants were male.

More learners studying Sport and Recreation qualifications in Welsh HEIs come from England (50 per cent) than Wales (46 per cent)

Around two thirds (64%) of leavers from Welsh institutions are retained in employment in Wales

Approximately a third of Higher Education leavers in SkillsActive related courses enter employment in the sector.

Main Employer Issues

Employers regularly report an over supply of graduates in areas such as sports science and sports development, and that too many HE graduates lack essential vocational elements and 'employability skills'

Employers seek more of a balanced combination between practical and academic modules.

Employers sometimes believe that graduates have unrealistic employment expectations

Demand for coaching qualifications in the UK has seen huge increases in take up over the last 5 years,

Demand in other qualifications such as Sport Development courses, Sport and Recreation Management, Health and Fitness and Outdoors courses have also increased significantly in the last 5 years.

Proposed Solutions

HEIs should engage with the SSC to help ensure that supply meets demand:

SkillsActive can provide labour market information, intelligence and skills forecasts for the sector. This data should be shared with higher education institutions across Wales to inform the content of relevant curricula. SkillsActive has recently worked in partnership with the University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC) to identify the specific skills that underpin reported 'employability skills' shortages in the areas of team working, customer handling, communication, problem solving and management skills, and specific findings should be used

to inform curriculum development or the content of various programmes.

HEIs should utilise LMI / National Occupational Standards (NOS) / and Sector Frameworks:

As the standard setting body for the industry, SkillsActive develops, reviews and maintains a set of effective and accessible national occupational standards for the active leisure and learning sector, and has developed frameworks for foundation degrees, modern apprenticeships and work based learning, all of which can be shared with Wales' higher education institutions who wish to account of vocational requirements.

HEIs should promote realistic progression routes within the sector:

SkillsActive is also building upon the Sector Skills Agreement by developing a Sector Qualification Strategy (SQS) in consultation with partners across Wales. The overall aim of the SQS is to establish a coherent framework of education and training to meet the needs of the active leisure and learning sector - to address the skills requirements of the sector.

In conclusion, SkillsActive are very keen to work in partnership with Wales' higher education institutions in an attempt to address the concept of employability within the active leisure and learning sector, and to have a positive impact upon the skills and productivity challenges that exist within Wales.

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