

Enterprise and Learning Committee

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide information to members of the Enterprise and Learning Committee in relation to their inquiry into the economic contribution of higher education within Wales.

Background Information

Licensed since August 2005 Proskills is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) which represents employer skills needs of 7 industries within the processing and Manufacturing Sector. The Proskills footprint comprises the print, glass & glazing, building products, coatings and mining & extractives, furniture, paper and industries. A detailed breakdown of the size of the sector within Wales is provided below:

Sector workplaces (source: ABI 2006/Proskills)

| EMP | PRINT | GLASS | COAT | BPR | FUR | PAPER | Total |
|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| 300 | 530 | 330 | 20 | 150 | 800 | 110 | 2240 |

Sector Employees (source: ABI 2006/Proskills)

| EMP | PRINT | GLASS | COAT | BPR | FUR | PAPER | Total |
|------|-------|-------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 3180 | 3730 | 2370 | 260 | 2180 | 7630 | 4740 | 24090 |

Research undertaken as a result of the Sector Skills Agreement process during the summer of 2006 highlighted the following industry characteristics:

90% of businesses are SMEs or micro businesses;

The workforce is predominantly ageing, male and white;

Up to a quarter of all employers recognize that they have a vital need for improved skills, both in their own workforces and in the pools from which they recruit

The most frequently identified skills gaps include basic skills, attitude to work, customer care skills, initiative, flexibility, oral and written communication and management and leadership skills;

Basic skills and basic IT skills in frontline staff are more of a problem in Wales than anywhere else in the UK;

The main problem in recruiting staff at all levels is the lack of applicants with the required skills and/or qualifications. An associated difficulty is that school leavers are taught little or nothing about the sector;

Over 85% of employers say that in-house, work-based training is very or quite important to their business;

Although 61% of employers say that FE colleges & HEIs are not important for their training needs this is a lot lower than the UK average of 76%.

Summary

Proskills collaboration with both HECW and the HE sector within Wales is outlined below.

1. SSC / HE Communications Group

Joanne Thomas, the Proskills Manager for Wales is a member of the SSC / HE Wales Communications Group which consists of representation from HEIs, HEFCW and the members of the Skills for Business Network. The group has met over the last 18 months in an attempt at improving communication and collaboration between HEIs and SSCs. Best practice in relation to SSA development and links to regeneration and collaboration funding bids have also been shared.

2. Sector Skills Agreement with HEFCW

The Proskills Sector Skills Agreement with HEFCW and other Welsh stakeholders was signed off mid November 2007. The final action plan with HEFCW was produced following a series of meetings and workshops with HEIs and HEFCW representatives and details a commitment to the following activity:

The establishment of a Proskills Provider Forum with representation from HEIs (tentative interest has been expressed from UWIC, NEWI and Swansea Inst). This Provider Forum would play a key role in assisting with the development and delivery of provision for Wales as identified within the Proskills Sector Qualification Strategy. The Chair of the Forum will also be required to attend the Proskills Nations Skills Group, thus ensuring strategic sector interaction between employers and providers;

To identify best practice and explore means of effective employer engagement via links with the Workforce Development Centre for Wales (UWIC) and via a pilot approach to boosting employer engagement in collaboration with Swansea Institute;

To explore utilisation of the 'GO Wales' programme as a means of attracting high calibre candidates into the sector;

To explore the possibility of a pilot coaching and mentoring framework with Trinity College based on work they have already undertaken in this field;

To improve understanding and knowledge of our sectors via work with the Welsh Higher Education Careers Service and a link to the Strategic Insight Programme under development by Glamorgan, UWN and UWIC focussing of the secondment of academic staff in industry;

To develop a common understanding of the higher level skills needs of the sector via an annual review and planning meeting with HEFCW.27/05/08

3. National Skills Academy Materials, Production and Supply (NSAMPS)

Proskills is currently in the process of developing its National Skills Academy for Materials, Production and Supply. Although an English initiative at this stage consultation has taken place with WAG and Welsh HEIs.

The Proskills Academy business plan recognises the acute need to invest in higher level skills in order for the sector to remain competitive in the global marketplace and as a consequence has a clear focus on the development of technicians, first-time managers, team leaders and supervisors across the sector in order to develop the 'managers of tomorrow from the technicians of today'.

The Academy will focus on developing experienced, Level 3 skilled technicians to Level 4, 5 and beyond. In addition, there is recognition that UK managers are typically not as well qualified as our US or European counterparts, therefore, in order to generate the demand and appreciation for skills across the sector due consideration must be afforded to enhancing the knowledge and capabilities of the existing industry leaders and senior managers. By developing higher skills programmes to augment the existing sector-related qualifications, thereby demonstrating career progression, it is hoped that the Academy will emerge as a catalyst for young people when considering the sector as a potential career choice. Academy activity may be constrained to England during the first few months, however, the plan is to quickly embrace the highest quality higher education provision within the Academy offer, irrespective of geography and Welsh HEIs will be encouraged to engage with us.

4. Print Forum Wales (Swansea University)

Proskills is a steering group member of Print Forum Wales, an initiative established and run by Swansea University with Knowledge Exploitation Funding.

Print Forum Wales is the only forum in Wales dedicated to promoting collaboration, productivity and innovation in the Welsh Print Industry. The Forum is recognised as the 'voice' of print both nationally and internationally and is run in partnership with Industry to ensure that PRINT continues to make a strong contribution globally.

To achieve this regular seminars and workshops are held where speakers and companies address the latest technological and business issues pertinent to the industry. Proskills staff have regularly contributed to these sessions by delivering presentations and imparting industry knowledge via the running of workshops.

Forum representatives have more recently met with WAG officials to discuss ongoing financial support since the cease of KEF funding.

5. Funding Bids

Proskills has to date been linked to two industry and HEI related bids for funding, both of which were unfortunately unsuccessful:

During March 2006 Proskills submitted a £50k 'Sprint Academy' Skills Development Fund project proposal to ELWa. If successful the project would have been delivered in collaboration with Swansea University to ensure that employers in the print industry in Wales had access to high quality flexible bite-size training minimising the need for off-site training.;

During October 2006 Proskills and Swansea University linked with AMICUS to develop a WULF bid linked to **promoting the print and packaging industry as a career path to key stage 4 pupils of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Unfortunately, this was also unsuccessful.**

Conclusions

SSA research into our sectors clearly predicts a decrease in lower level skills over the next 5-10 years as a direct result of increased automation. This change will require an increase in the higher level skills of employees at both management and technical level. In preparation for meeting this upward shift in skills needs Proskills intends to continue to develop its relationship with HEFCW and interested Welsh HEIs to capitalize upon this untapped opportunity.

Requests for additional information or queries relating to this paper should be directed to either:

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