

Enterprise and Learning Committee

EL(3) 17-08 (p5) : 12 June 2008

Committee Enquiry into the Economic Contribution of Higher Education

Contribution by Asset Skills Cymru

Asset Skills Cymru welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this debate particularly because of the close connections that have been established with Higher Education Institutions through the development of the HE Built Environment Forum described later in this paper. Higher Education plays an important role in developing skills across the Built Environment sector and therefore makes a significant financial contribution to the Welsh economy.

Meeting skills needs in Asset Skills' sectors through strategic connections with Higher Education (HE)

Asset Skills is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) responsible for the skills interests of employers in the Property Services, Housing, Facilities Management and Cleaning industries. It represents employers and organisations throughout Wales and the UK that provide services to owners and occupiers of all types of property (commercial, public and private). Asset Skills covers the following four areas:

Acquiring, planning, surveying and valuing of commercial and residential property

Selling, letting and managing of commercial and residential property, including social housing and the work of local authorities and Housing Associations

Facilities Management (FM)

Cleaning and maintenance

Research has revealed certain areas where there are significant skills shortages within the Asset Skills sectors eg town planners, housing, an age and gender deficit within surveying. A significant number of these skills shortages are related to courses / training within the HE sector.

It is accepted that in order to convey skills / employer needs effectively to HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) it is necessary to have an efficient and responsive mechanism through which to communicate.

To facilitate this communication Asset Skills has set up a Forum of HEIs providing courses within the Asset Skills' footprint of the Built Environment to serve as a conduit between the HEIs and employers.

Background - Asset Skills Cymru

Profile of the Asset Skills Sector in Wales

The Asset Skills sector in Wales employs about 31,600 people

About 45% of the workforce is employed in Property and Housing and about 55% in the Facilities Management and Industrial Cleaning industries

The Property and Housing workforce in Wales has a relatively high percentage of managerial (24%), associate professional and technical (21%) and administrative (29%) occupations, which account for about 74% of the industry workforce in Wales.

The Facilities Management workforce in Wales is characterised by a high proportion of managerial occupations (38%)

93% of all Asset Skills' workplaces in Wales are small, employing between 1-10 people. This is about 10% higher than the average across all sectors in the Welsh economy and emphasises the 'small firm' character of the Asset Skills sector as a whole.

The proportion of the UK Asset Skills workforce employed in Wales (4%) is marginally lower than the proportion of total UK employment located in Wales (about 5%).

The sector covers private, public, voluntary sector and not-for-profit organisations, all of which are seen as equally important, representing a wide range of activities and forms of businesses ranging from small organisations including residential and registered social landlords, tenants and sole traders, through to the very large private and public sector organisations.

Skills needs / issues related to HE

As part of Asset Skills' Sector Needs Analysis (SNA) carried out for our Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) the following were identified as issues and skills needs relevant to the HE Sector:

More effective employer engagement with HE

Undergraduate provision which better meets the needs of employers

Developing qualifications: Demand for specialist skills and qualifications eg regeneration

Refining HE provision in Facilities Management (FM) and developing FM as a career

Making housing more attractive as a career option to graduates

Tackling the gender and age deficit within the surveying profession

Address the undersupply of town planners

Closing the skills gaps between academic knowledge and reality of undertaking work especially as a chartered surveyor

To meet the skills needs that have been highlighted above by our Sector Needs Analysis an HE Built Environment Forum of HE providers working in Asset Skills' sectors has been set up at Asset Skills' instigation. This will provide a link between HEIs and employers to address a number of issues raised such as:

ensure that HE course content and provision reflects employer needs

need and potential course content for foundation degrees

information on skills needed in the Asset Skills' sectors

develop learning partnerships between employers and universities

So far the response from HEIs has been positive. The HEIs that have participated in the Forum to date are:

University of Glamorgan

NEWI (North East Wales Institute) Wrexham

Welsh College of Horticulture

Welsh School of Architecture (Cardiff University)

Swansea Metropolitan University

University of Wales, Newport

UWIC (University of Wales Institute Cardiff)

CRIBE, (Centre for Research in the Built Environment) Cardiff University

The forum is currently chaired by Prof David Jenkins of the University of Glamorgan who is also the HE representative on Asset Skills Cymru employer board and a member of Asset Skills UK Property Board.

A date has been set to start developing HE / employer links with an event in June to which the HEs with an interest in Built Environment have been invited along with key employers in our sectors. It is aimed that this will be the first step in developing communication between employers and HEs in Asset Skills' footprint to address the issues raised in our SSA research.

There are three key goals for the day:

Agree on the problems that need addressing

Identify proposed solutions

Consider potential resources

The need for HE / employer links has been highlighted in England in a survey conducted by Dr Marilyn Wedgwood Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Director of External Relations of Manchester Metropolitan University called "Higher Education for the Workforce:Barriers and Facilitators to Employer Engagement. "The results of the survey presented to the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) built on the recommendations of the Leitch report, and can be found at http://perseus.herts.ac.uk/uhinfo/library/g71653_13.doc It states that there needs to be a 'step change' for HE to relate to employers and this should be facilitated by the government. Also John Denham, Secretary of State for the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills, commented that a key priority in England is fostering of closer ties between HEIs and individual employers.

Other areas of SSC / HE involvement:

Built Environment Forum

Asset Skills is encouraging HEIs in working towards actions and recommendations in the Building Companies:Building Skills Strategic Framework for the Built Environment document where SSC / employer engagement and HEI collaboration is recommended.

Promoting "GO Wales "as an avenue for student placement for employers to recruit students into their sectors

This has proved to be mutually successful scheme providing students with opportunities to work with employers and allowing employers to recruit Welsh students which can prevent 'leakage' of talented graduates to other parts of the country.

Asset Skills' HE information dissemination

Asset Skills Cymru has disseminated to all HEIs via HEFCW a summary of its SSA relating to HE / sector skill needs including career opportunities for graduates.

Opportunity for HEIs to share and collaborate

Prior to the setting up of Asset Skills' HE Built Environment Forum there was no organised interaction between HEIs in this area. As well as providing a platform for HEIs to interact with employers the Forum has provided to an opportunity for HEIs to network and look at areas of cross over and possible collaborative work. A number of collaborative projects are currently being explored.

Key Things for HEIs to contribute to benefit Asset Skills' employers

Support for HE Built Environment Forum so that employers and HEIs have an effective communication channel through which to liaise

Full representation on the HE Built Environment forum of all HEIs with an interest in Asset Skills' sectors

Promote careers within HEIs so that industries within the Asset Skills footprint that would benefit from graduate recruitment are seen as career options

Work collaboratively to address the skills issues raised by the SSA research

Summary / Recommendations

Asset Skills sees HEIs as an important element in delivering their SSA and in meeting the skills needs of employers.

The development of the HE Built Environment Forum which can link HEIs and employers is seen as a key element in delivering Asset Skills' SSA.

Bringing together HEIs which have common ground and can work together to avoid duplication of courses so that resources are best used and provide graduates who are as 'work ready' as possible will benefit Asset Skills' sectors.

The employer led Built Environment Forum which is linked to the Building Companies:Building Skills Strategic Framework for the Built Environment is also seen as a key element of Asset Skills' work in delivering the skills needs in our sectors.

Welsh Assembly Government support is necessary to take these issues forward.

Additional background information on Asset Skills:

Asset Skills is the Sector Skills Council for the Property Services, Housing, Facilities Management and Cleaning industries.

Asset Skills was licensed as an SSC in 2005 and was a combination of national training organisations that joined together.

Asset Skills Cymru's SSA was signed off in October 2007.

Asset Skills' Sector Qualification Strategy was approved in March this year.

Direct funding has been received from Wales since Asset Skills was licensed to facilitate the delivery of sector specific projects.

Asset Skills' Welsh Language Scheme has been approved in draft form and is due to go for consultation in the next two months.

The Head of Asset Skills Cymru is based in Wales. Asset Skills has had a dedicated Welsh presence since it was licensed in 2005.

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