

Enterprise and Learning Committee

EL(3) 17-08 (p10) : Skills for Health

Inquiry into the economic contribution of higher education in Wales

Evidence prepared for the Committee meeting on the 12 June 2008 by Skills for Health.

1. Background

1.1 Skills for Health is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the UK health sector, which includes the National Health Service, independent healthcare providers and healthcare related voluntary and community organisations.

1.2 Skills for Health welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into the economic contribution of higher education in Wales.

1.3 Skills for Health is committed to developing a skilled flexible and productive workforce for the whole health sector in all UK nations, to raise the quality of health, and healthcare, for the public, patients and service users.

1.4 Skills for Health believes that the Sector Skills Agreement in Wales has a key role to play in identifying and articulating future skills needs and stimulating more innovative learning provision in higher education to meet those needs. It aims to improve the skills and productivity of the health sector workforce in Wales, and was developed with input from the higher education sector.

1.5 Data from the Labour Force Survey confirms that in 2007 116,690 people were employed in the healthcare sector within Wales. NHS Wales employs the majority of these -89,007. Of the healthcare sector workforce, 63% are qualified to level 3 or above.

1.6 The report by Lord Leitch, 'The Leitch Review of Skills in the Global Economy', and the recent 'Skills that Work for Wales' consultation document recognise the importance of higher level skills, with a target of 30% of the adult population in Wales qualified to level 4 or above by 2010.

2. Working with Higher Education Providers

2.1 Skills for Health has a Higher Education Strategy, and an Awards and Qualifications process based on agreed learning and design principles. These principles (included at annex 1) include the need for 'packages or units of learning which meet the needs of employers, learners, education/training providers, professional bodies and regulators.'

2.2 Skills for Health is facilitating partnerships between higher and further education institutions and employers to inform the development of learning provision predicated upon employers needs. In practice, this means establishing equal partnerships between education providers and employers, in which each stakeholder understands their respective roles. Following on from this, service needs can be defined, and the functions and competences required to meet these needs. From this a specification for a qualification can be developed, and consideration can then be given to producing flexible educational pathways.

2.3 Skills for Health has a good working relationship with the Council of Deans (representatives of the health departments within Higher Education) and is able to use this to inform and influence the development of education provision.

2.4 Skills for Health is working with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and employers in Wales to explore the use of funding to enable HEIs to undertake further development work with Sector Skills Councils on their shared agenda.

3. Examples of current work within Wales

3.1 Skills for Health has a range of Higher Education demonstrator sites, their aim is to ensure that the training and development provision delivered by higher education is driven by the specific skills and competences required by employers.

3.2 In North Wales a number of employers and higher and further education providers* have been working together using the learning design principles and National Workforce Competences in a two year project, which is now nearing the end of its first year. They have, together, designed new educational pathways, and are now working on the contents of awards and methods of local delivery which are fit for purpose and meet clinical needs. The work conducted relates to the skills needed to address long term conditions/chronic care, a service area highlighted by the Welsh Assembly Governments Chronic Conditions Strategy.

* The participants in this project are North West Wales Trust, Welsh Ambulance Service, Conwy and Denbighshire Trust, North East Wales Trust, Gwynedd Local Health Board (LHB), Anglesey LHB, Conwy LHB, Denbighshire LHB and Flintshire and Wrexham LHB, North East Wales Institute of Higher Education, Bangor University, Coleg Llandrillo, Coleg Menai and Yale College.

3.3 This project will also evaluate how the newly designed education modules are performing and the implementation of the new award structure. The attrition rates of learners, and the number of learners progressing from the award to a role within the health sector, will also be examined.

3.4 Skills for Health is also working in the Public Health arena with the 12 Higher Education Institutions, Wales Centre for Health and

employers. This project is focusing on developing competence based, multi-disciplinary, public health education in the university sector across the country. The National Occupational Standards for the Practice of Public Health will be used as a framework to establish a consistent and quality assured approach to higher education provision.

4. Summary/Recommendations

4.1 Skills for Health enjoys a largely productive relationship with Higher Education Institutions in Wales, with strong examples of partnership working and collaboration. The majority of HEIs have proved keen to work with us and to form partnerships with employers. This is a very positive step.

4.2 The joint projects/collaboration provide valuable opportunities for employers and HEIs to share learning and work together to develop approaches to learning provision which are focused on the needs of employers.

4.3 However, there are areas where further work needs to be undertaken by HEIs.

4.4 One of the priorities must be the structuring and design of education, and specifically the need to provide modular 'bite sized' learning with greater flexibility in design and progression routes, and transferability of competence based learning.

There is a need to reduce the requirement to repeat training that does not carry credit or recognition by the whole sector and beyond. Recognition of generic/core transferable skills is crucial. The HE sector need to consider how the accreditation of prior education and learning (APEL) can be maximised.

4.5 Higher Education faces a challenge in meeting the needs and expectations of a complex sector with changing requirements, an increasing focus on workforce redesign and a desire for flexibility in provision. Higher Education Institutions will need to be responsive and increasingly innovative in their approach to meet these expectations.

4.6 The embedding of competences in Higher Education is key to meeting the needs of employers, and this is a priority if the skills agenda is to be delivered.

Skills for Health
May 2008

Annex One – Learning Design Principles

Learning Design Principles: Skills for Health.

Background

Skills for Health is working towards the development and presentation of a National Occupational Standards (NOS) awards and qualifications framework for the health sector. The incremental creation and maintenance of a complex and rapidly changing range of accredited awards and qualifications which are underpinned and mapped to National Workforce Competences (NWC) or National Occupational Standards (NOS) is ambitious. Many developments are underway to help realise this, for example current work across the UK to both create and reform the awarding of credit for learning achieved. A priority for current developments is a commitment to structuring the design of education and training provision to provide increased 'bite sized' units of learning, greater flexibility in design and progression routes, flexibility and transferability of competence.

Currently qualifications and awards are the primary 'currency' for the measurement of skills, knowledge and /or professional standards across the sector. The term 'recognition and reward of learning' is used throughout this paper to define the range of packages of learning, modules, units, awards and qualifications. It is felt to be an important message that the term 'qualifications' does not alone adequately portray the future educational and training design structures or 'currency' that will be needed to meet the needs of the health sector. Emergent priorities together with the need for workforce redesign to widen access and progression routes both horizontally and vertically all magnify the need for new ways of flexibly providing learning and development that meet multiple priorities and expectations.

This paper presents Skills for Health's learning design principles which have been designed to ensure that the creation of future awards, qualifications and other ways of recognising achievement are undertaken in a way that ensures a cohesive approach to the incremental building of a health sector recognition and reward of learning framework. The use of the learning design principles outlined in this document will collectively 'future proof' or ensure that ongoing developments provide the 'packages' of learning and skills, design structures, flexibility, transferability, progression routes and the over all 'fitness for purpose' for the developing recognition and reward of learning framework.

Recognition and Reward of Learning Framework - design principles

All health related units, modules, awards and qualifications developed with use of the following design principles:-

Recognition and reward of all learning developed in response to robust intelligence on requirement or rationale

Flexible and constantly developing units / modules of learning which both stand alone and enable defined packages of learning which are underpinned and mapped by the use of National Workforce Competences.

A structure that ensures alignments with UK and European educational level descriptors, Career Frameworks, The NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) and country specific level and credit frameworks.

Packages or units of learning which meet the needs of the employer, learner, education or training provider, professional bodies and regulators from use of 'rules of combination' in construction of awards and qualifications.

A structure that facilitates and promotes the principles of skills escalation by the provision of horizontal and vertical progression routes which also provide the opportunity to study a breadth and/or depth of knowledge and skill as required.

The reward and recognition of different types of learning (formal, work based, experiential, informal and theoretical)

Reliable and valid quality assured assessment of learning and flexible continued learning development.

It is recognised that the principles outlined are closely aligned to good practice and standards in learning design adopted by our multiple learning provision partners thus reinforcing the validity and reliability of the Skills for Health design principles.