

Enterprise and Learning Committee

EL(3) 17-08 (p12) : 12 June 2008

Purpose

To provide the committee with an overview of the links between higher education and social care children and young people's sector in Wales, including economic impact.

Background

1.1 The Care Council for Wales (Care Council), an Assembly Government Sponsored Body (AGSB), was established on 1 October 2001 under the Care Standards Act 2000 to promote high standards of conduct and practice among social care workers and high standards in their training.

1.2 The role of the Care Council is to:

register the Social Care Workforce in Wales;

regulate the Conduct and Fitness to Practice of the Workforce;

set and regulate the standard of training required for social workers at qualifying and post qualifying levels;

monitor the quality of social work education in Wales; and

promote and encourage training for the wider social care workforce.

1.3 The Care Council also delivers the Sector Skills Council (SSC) remit for the social care sector (including early years) in Wales as part of a four country alliance, Skills for Care and Development. SSC's are intended by government to drive up the skills and productivity of each employment area. Each SSC agrees sector priorities and targets with its employers and partners to address four key goals:

reducing skills gaps and shortages;

improving productivity, business and public service performance;

increasing opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce, including action on equal opportunities;

improving learning supply, including apprenticeships, higher education and National Occupational Standards (NOS).

1.4 The main focus of our SSC work is to produce a Workforce Development Strategy (Sector Skills Agreement and Sector Qualification and Learning Strategy) for the social care, children and young people's sector in Wales through which employers, government, funding agencies, economic development agencies and learning institutions agree what actions will be taken to make sure the social care, children and young people's sector across Wales has the right people, in the right place with the right skills to deliver the services required.

1.5 The Care Council is the National Assembly for Wales' primary partner in delivering its workforce improvement agenda for the sector and in improving standards and protection for social care service users and their carers. It is able to provide information and advice about the workforce and about learning needs, training and development which contributes to the development of Assembly policy and informs resource planning and budget setting.

1.6 Economic significance of the sector is difficult to quantify but an econometric report prepared for Care Council for Wales by Cardiff University Business School in 2007 estimated that the recent growth of employment in the Care sector should be seen in the wider context of the growth of activity in the health and education sector since the early 1980s. Growth of the sector is strongly associated with increases in public expenditure on health and social services. The Welsh Input-Output tables for 2003 reveal that total output of the whole of the health and social services sector was £6.64bn with gross value added on an estimated £2.46bn. In summary, in 2005 the defined care sector Gross Value Added in Wales is estimated to be between £0.9bn and £1.1bn with an anticipated growth of 3-3.2% pa to 2010 (overall Welsh profile being 1.8-2.0%pa). The strongest contribution to GVA is the earnings in the sector.

1.7 Total employment in the sector grew by 11.2% between 2000-05. This was relatively strong growth with, for example, overall Welsh employment growth of 7.5% over the same period. Employment growth in the care sector is expected to be in a range 2.6-2.8%pa 2005-10 falling to 2.0-2.2%pa 2010-2020. It is important to recognise that whilst these forecast employment growth rates represent a slow down from the situation in 2000-05, the 'slower' rates would still make the Care sector one of the faster growing parts of the Welsh economy.

2. Workforce Issues for the sector in Wales

2.1 Almost 88,000 people are employed in social care, children and young people's sector which is about 6.8% of the total workforce in Wales. People are employed in a range of roles, with the majority of staff providing direct care in nurseries, domiciliary, residential or day

care settings.

2.2 The growth in demand for social care services and the changes services provided has an implication on the workforce in terms of numbers, skills and competencies required. The Care Council has taken various steps, in partnership with the sector (private, voluntary and statutory organisations) so that the sector has the right workforce with the right skills and knowledge and are safe to practice.

2.3 Action has been taken to strengthen workforce information for the sector, there is work in hand to improve workforce planning which will provide better local, regional and national data about workforce learning needs. There are partnerships established at local, regional and national level between employers and HEIs (and other training providers) and employers to ensure there is synergy between the learning and qualifications needs of the sector and the learning provided by the universities specifically in relation to social work training at qualifying and post qualifying level.

3. Social Work Training

3.1 The Assembly has specified that social work training in Wales must be driven by employers and the Care Council as Regulator of Social Work Training in Wales requires Higher Education Institutions to plan and deliver social work training programmes in partnership with social services. This means have written agreements with employers which identify their role in the delivery of the Degree, particularly with regard to the 200 days which all students are required to undertake in a work placement.

3.2 The degree in social work was implemented in 2004. It is;

based on National Occupational Standards so that there is consistency and a practice strengthened curriculum;

has flexible routes, full time, part time, distance learning enabling more people to have access to training;

is supported with an incentive to train bursary funding for students;

3.3 Within the Degree, Local Authorities have the lead role in providing work placements for all students. The Care Council has approved Degree Programmes to deliver a specific number of student places, which is directly connected to the number of work placements made available by employers. This ensures the need for effective links between the HEI business plans and workforce needs of the sector.

3.4 Employers are involved in recruitment, selection, teaching, assessment and quality assurance on each programme. They have a crucial role in ensuring that the right candidates are selected, the teaching and learning is of a high standard and relevant and that students are able to meet assessment requirements and be deemed competent in practice by the end of their training against National Occupational Standards agreed by the sector.

3.5 All students are linked to a Local Authority employer for the duration of their training. The Local Authority is responsible for managing and planning the work placements for their link students in each of the three years of the degree. Students will often choose to seek employment, after graduation, with the employer who has provided their work placements. Those employers who have invested most in the provision of work placements are finding that there are significant benefits for them in being able to recruit and retain newly qualified staff. In 2007, a large Local Authority reported that 73% of their linked students secured employment with them on graduation.

3.6 The sector has a model for the first year in employment to improve retention and effectiveness and effective links with HEIs to support the continuous professional development of social work staff through further training and development.

3.7 These aspects of the Council's work with HEIs all contribute to the economic stability and activity across Wales although given that much of this employment takes place within the public sector the economic impact is difficult to isolate.

3.8 The Care Council is working with the social work training programme partnerships and government through the National Strategic Partnership to make sure:

training programmes respond to the changing role of qualified social workers, and new roles which may emerge;

employers are able to deliver the quantity and quality of Practice Learning necessary to meet the standards and prepare students for competent social work practice;

the Degree reflects policy initiatives, outcomes of inspection reports and trends emerging from Care Council conduct cases;

the intake number of social work students is sufficient to meet the workforce needs of the sector;

flexible access to social work training is sufficient to maximise participation and access across different communities in Wales;

there is analysed information on the work choices of those who qualify to gain understanding of how students use their qualification i.e. how many come into Social Work, how many stay, why do some leave the profession, what do we need to do differently to reduce 'wastage' This is key if retention issues which are of general concern for employers are to be addressed; and

that service users and carers are fully involved in the selection, teaching, assessment and quality assurance of the Degree Programmes Standards for Service Users/Carer Involvement in social work training.

3.9 An analysis of social work training undertaken by the Care Council suggests that steady progress is being made in implementing the degree qualification. It is particularly positive to note the substantial demand for social work training and the continued significant levels

of employer investment in the qualification. There was small increases in the number of Welsh speaking students and male students in 2006/07 as well as an increase in the number of students with disability.

3.10 Employers are also investing in their future workforce through secondment/trainee schemes with 72/325 (2007-08) all social work students being supported financially through such arrangements. Of the other direct entry students, the vast majority are recruited from the local population with the result that in 2007, 90% of those who graduated are now registered with the Care Council as qualified social workers. This enables people to remain in their local areas thus contributing the economic stability of local areas across Wales.

4. Summary / Recommendations

4.1 The Social Care Children and Young People's Sector in Wales makes a substantial contribution to the economic stability and development of Wales and is one of the strongest growing GVA and employment sectors across Wales. Econometric forecasting indicates this will continue until at least 2020.

4.2 Demographic changes and changes in needs of Welsh communities demonstrate that there is going to be a significant increase in the demand for social care workers and the implementation of policy initiatives and service model changes. This is likely to bring greater demands for HEIs in delivering the qualifying training for social workers, the continuous professional development for those workers and possibly additional support to provide workers to undertake new roles emerging from the implementation of Welsh Assembly Government policies such as Fulfilled Lives Supportive Communities and the professionalization of the child care workforce. All of these activities will contribute towards the economic contribution made by HEIs.

4.3 There needs to be close working with the NHS on the development of new roles and potentially existing roles which overlap and this development work is best done through analysis of services for particular groups of service users. This may bring additional contributions for HEIs across the sector.

4.4 The funding available to support training in social care needs to be directed to those areas identified as priorities for the sector and must be available in ways which are flexible to support the geographical and working patterns of those working in the social care sector.

4.5 A review is being undertaken of the local and regional social care workforce development partnerships' building on what has been achieved with a view to considering their potential for the future; this includes the potential to further strengthen the partnerships between colleges and employers. There is still some more way to go to ensure that HEIs across Wales are actively meeting local employers and planning strategically to meet the current and future learning needs of the social care sector.