

Enterprise and Learning Committee

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Committee inquiry into the economic contribution of higher education

People 1st

The Role of PEOPLE 1st - Sector Skill Council (SSC)

As the SSC responsible for the Hospitality, Leisure, Travel and Tourism sector, People1st has the role of giving responsibility to employers to provide leadership for strategic action to meet their sector's skills and business needs. This will enable People1st employers to have a far greater impact on policies affecting skills and productivity, and increased influence with education and training partners.

An SSC with a UK wide remit, People1st 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

SSA Action Plan for Wales partners

As part of the Sector Skills Agreement process action plans between partners in Wales and People1st are agreed. One of these partners is the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). It forms part of the Wales SSA which is being developed between People1st and other key partners in Wales, which in turn forms part of a UK-wide SSA.

This will follow the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) agreement which includes key Divisions which work with all Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) as well as Departments which work with specific SSCs. There will clearly be linkage between the two sections of the Wales agreement.

The Role of the SSA

The aim of the SSA is to secure for each sector covered by an SSC the range and level of skills in its labour force that are necessary to achieve productivity at internationally competitive levels (or the highest quality standards and customer service in those sectors where these are more appropriate measures).

The agreements are designed to deliver action to meet priority skill needs that will drive business improvement. They provide a means whereby employers and employees in each sector can identify skills and productivity needs, the action they will take to meet those needs, and how they will collaborate with providers of training and skills so that skills demand can directly shape the nature of supply.

SSA's enable employers to identify the key issues affecting competitiveness and skill needs in their sectors and to set in place an agreed action plan with key funding and planning partners to address these issues.

The role of HEFCW

HEFCW (the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales) is an Assembly Sponsored Public Body whose mission is to promote internationally excellent higher education in Wales, for the benefit of individuals, society and the economy, in Wales and more widely.

Working with partners, HEFCW deploys funds made available by the Welsh Assembly Government to:

secure higher education learning and research of the highest quality;

maximise the contribution of higher education to the culture, society and economy of Wales;

ensure high quality, accredited teacher training provision across Wales

The Strategic Importance of SSAs for HEFCW

The Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for the higher education sector in Wales, "Reaching Higher", recognises the importance of Sector Skills Councils in enabling HEIs to lock into key growth sectors in Wales. This is reinforced in the Assembly's remit letters to HEFCW; ie that HEFCW should continue to engage with the Sector Skills Councils and the Skills for Business Network in Wales.

HEFCW's current Corporate Strategy and Plan commits it to deliver more productive relationships between HEIs and the public and private sectors, other agencies and local communities so that the higher education sector in Wales:

stands well in comparison with others in terms of economic, social and cultural activity; and

engages actively and fully with communities, business and the public sector in pursuit of the Assembly's core economic and social goals.

In this context, our aim is that by 2010 we will have enabled the higher education sector to contribute to improved business performance, enhanced employment opportunities and higher levels of GDP in Wales through increased engagement with employers and their representative bodies (especially Sector Skills Councils), as measured by:

More graduates working in Wales;

Development of Sector Skills Agreements;

More collaborative research and development;

Increased Technology and Knowledge Transfer and

Delivery of the "Reaching Higher" target of doubling spinouts from Welsh HEIs by 2010, a target of 42 profitable spinout companies (reported via the annual UK Higher Education-Business and Community Interaction (HEBCIS) Survey).

HEFCW considers that its engagement with individual SSCs and the Skills for Business Network, Wales and the development of SSAs in conjunction with WAG and other partners are vital in this respect.

Teaching Funding Method:

HEFCW's teaching funding method allows HEIs in Wales to deliver their courses flexibly both in terms of structure and location, ie a credit based system whereby fundable credit values on modules, as opposed to courses, attract an element of funding. Credit values do not necessarily have to be delivered within the HEI, meaning that the system is flexible enough to cater effectively for work based learning.

Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales:

HEIs in Wales have signed up to the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW), which provides a structure for progression between FE and HE. The CQFW allows institutions to respond more flexibly to employer requirements, by combining new and existing modules to create new courses. It also facilitates the accreditation of learning in the workplace.

The Development of the SSA between HEFCW and People 1ST

HEFCW has welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the development and implementation of SSAs in Wales. In discussion with People1st at meetings of the SSA Project Board and separately, we have highlighted the fact that many of the priorities identified through the SSA may only be taken forward, and ultimately delivered, by individual HEIs or by HEIs working in consortia. We have, therefore, urged People1st to initiate discussions with Welsh HEIs in order to develop their proposals for action. HEFCW's commitments to SSCs are as follows:

To facilitate direct dialogue between SSCs and HEIs (industrial liaison officers, heads of lifelong learning, academic contacts as appropriate), though brokering meetings with individual SSCs and/or convening wider discussion meetings on generic issues;

To provide infrastructure funding to HEIs via the Third Mission Fund to allow them to engage in activities relevant to SSC agendas;

In March 2006, to provide specific funding to HEIs to allow them to scope out their level of engagement with individual SSCs, in a coordinated approach with the Knowledge Exploitation Fund;

Where appropriate, to discuss with HEIs how they might work in collaboration to access HEFCW funding (Reconfiguration and Collaboration Fund; Strategic Development Fund) for specific engagement with SSCs;

To include the SSC agenda in the direction given to the Higher Education Academy's Wales adviser;

To provide SSCs with course/module/credit data when requested;

To help SSCs make full use of opportunities for work placements, work experience, CPD, etc, provided through HEFCW's GO Wales programme;

To consider SSC priorities in the context of adopting a more strategic approach to the next phase of the GO Wales programme;

In 2006, to consult with the Skills for Business Network in Wales as part of a commissioned study to determine the market for foundation degrees in Wales;

With SSDA, to establish a Skills for Business / HE Liaison Group to agree common purpose among HEIs, SSCs and other key stakeholders; to agree areas for potential collaboration; to identify and support existing collaborative work; to disseminate good practice; and to explore potential models of engagement;

To share with SSCs commissioned reports and other documentation as appropriate (eg Institute of Employment Studies report into Graduate Employment and Employability in Wales).

People 1ST / HEFCW Action Plan

1. HEFCW and People 1st to support the development of employability skills in graduates by encouraging involvement in to HEFCW's GO Wales scheme, and promoting the benefits to employers in the sector through marketing and case studies.

2. HEFCW to assist with the brokerage of discussions between People 1st and relevant HEIs, in order to determine the potential for collaborative activity and identify funding opportunities.

Both these actions contribute to priority 2 - Professionalism of Management & Leadership.

People 1st have recently appointed a new Wales Manager who has organised meetings with both HEFCW and individual institutions in order to forge stronger relationships and to review and re-draft new objectives for the action plan.

Implementing the Sector Qualifications Strategy

At the end of June 2008, People1st will submit the SQS action plan for Wales. This will outline how the sector's qualifications should be developed over the next three years. This will have a significant impact on provision in further education and consequently it will be important that these developments reinforce progression into higher education, as well as address the need for higher level skills.

People1st will seek meetings with the following higher education associations as soon as the Action Plan is published:

Council for Hospitality Management Education (CHME)

Association for Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE)

Association for Events Management Education (AEME)

On the back of these meetings People1st would like to form HE expert groups for each nation, made up of HE representatives to oversee an assessment of progression and higher level skills for the sector. This work will need to be undertaken over the four nations, but it is envisaged that the outputs will be different given the differing qualifications and the specific nature of the SQS action plans.

Reports will be published at the end of the March 2008 outlining the findings as well as making recommendations as to ongoing work.