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EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE
WORK-BASED LEARNING

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EVIDENCE FROM ESTYN

Estyn representatives:

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Introduction

There are currently about 115 providers of work-based learning in Wales which are inspected as part of Estyn's six year inspection cycle. These providers are distributed across the sectors as shown in diagram 1 below:

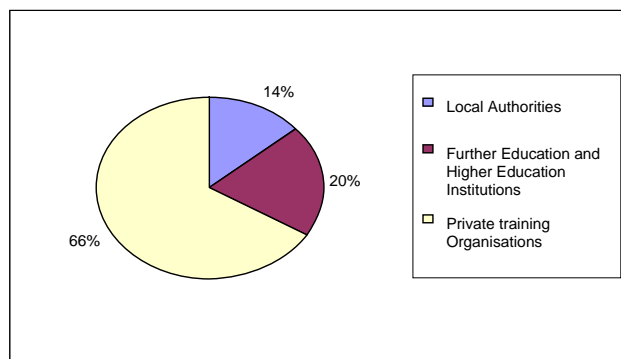


Diagram 1

14% are local authorities, 20% are further and higher (one) education institutions, and 66% are private training organisations.

The size of provider, as defined by the number of learners, varies considerably between providers. Learners on work-based learning programmes follow one of a number of routes including Skillbuild, Foundation Modern Apprenticeships, Modern Apprenticeships and the Modern Skills Diploma. There is good and poor practice across all types and size of provider.

Estyn's Findings

The Annual Reports

The 2003-2004 Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales highlighted the good features and important shortcomings in the performance of the work-based learning sector during Estyn's first cycle of inspections from 1999-2004. Important shortcomings were identified in leadership and management, the management of quality, and the standards achieved by learners. In this cycle we assessed the level of risk of the providers. Diagram 2 below shows the end of cycle outcomes of this assessment, where low risk providers were those with mainly high grades, and high risk providers were those with mainly low grades:

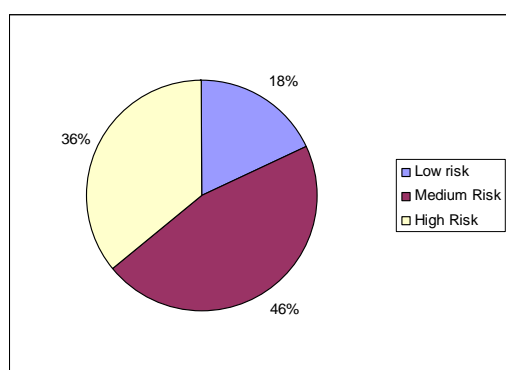


Diagram 2

Eighteen per cent of the providers were low risk, 46% were medium risk and 36% were high risk. This risk profile is a very much poorer profile than the other sectors where we have risk-based information.

The first year of the 2004 – 2010 cycle will be reported on in the 2004-2005 Annual Report which is due to be published later this month. This report will say that work-based learning continues to be a cause of great concern. Almost one-third of providers have shortcomings in the standards of training they provide (grade 4 or grade 5 in inspection areas). This compares with around one-fifth in 2003-2004 (but the number of providers inspected in both years is small).

In the second cycle the providers are inspected on the basis of their risk assessment from the first full cycle. In other words, high risk providers receive a full inspection, medium risk providers receive a standard inspection and low risk providers receive a short inspection¹. Eighteen providers have been inspected under the risk based model since September 2004. Diagram 3 below shows the distribution of the grades awarded by provider.

¹ See Appendix 1

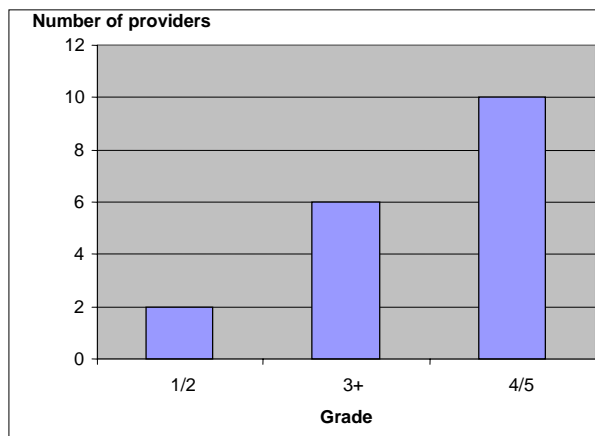


Diagram 3

Only two were awarded grade 2 or above in all inspected areas; 10 providers have significant shortcomings (that is one or more of the inspected areas at Grade 4 or 5); and the other six are at least above the quality threshold (grade 3 or above).

Standards in courses in health, public services and care, and construction, planning and the built environment are lower than in other learning areas. This is a serious issue given that many areas of Wales have difficulties in providing services for the health and care of young people, elderly people and vulnerable members of their communities. It is also a concern when so much of the employment base in Wales is in public services. Although a growing number of learners complete their National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), not enough learners complete the key skills and technical certificates they need to achieve the full qualification framework.

The quality of training is a little better than last year. However, providers still have a lot to do before work-based learning in Wales is good enough.

Improving standards in education and training depends on the quality of leadership and management. The quality of leadership and management in work-based learning providers continues to have shortcomings. This year, leadership in 43% of the providers inspected has shortcomings in important areas or many shortcomings overall. Fifty per cent of the providers inspected in 2004-05 will be re-inspected within the next 12 to 20 months. This is because one or more of their learning areas and/or their leadership and management were below the quality threshold.

Sector improvement

Our evidence shows that some FE colleges are effectively applying their good FE quality systems to their work-based learning provision. This is improving the quality of the training offered. This was not the case in the first cycle of inspections and is not the case across all colleges currently.

Some local authorities, particularly the larger authorities, have improved considerably since the first cycle. However, many of the authorities continue to offer poor quality training. This is a particular matter of concern because they cater for second chance learners with poor school experiences, low self esteem and poor and unrealistic aspirations. Also, this poor quality is because they are not always managed efficiently.

The quality of the private training providers varies widely from the very best in large providers and some of the small specialist providers to the very worst in some large companies where work-based learning is a small part of their overall business.

The success of the 14 to 19 Learning Pathways programme depends on Wales being able to improve its work-based learning sector.

Framework completion

Learners sign up to the achievement of the goals set out in their individual learning plans, which normally include the completion of a full qualification framework. The low level of attainment of full qualification frameworks and of the goals set out in these learning plans are issues in most of the learning areas. Estyn has discussed the reasons for this low attainment with the National Training Federation for Wales (NTF), the Welsh Assembly Government and ELWa. Some of the reasons put forward include the low base from which some learners start and their associated basic skills needs, and the often transient nature of learners in employment.

The Welsh Assembly Government's target of 50% achievement of full frameworks across all sectors presents a challenge for some providers, particularly those working in sectors, such as Care, where outcomes are particularly low.

At inspection Estyn does take account of distance travelled but in many providers this data is not captured. Accurate and reliable data of learners' progress and achievement is essential when providers are evaluating how well learners achieve. The poor quality, or lack of, data in the providers inspected so far has been a major issue for inspection teams when judging a provider's performance.

Basic skills

Many of the learners recruited since September 2004 have basic skills needs at or below level one in numeracy and literacy. Whilst many providers undertake a basic skills initial assessment of their learners, the results are not always recorded in individual learners' learning plans. Although the quality of basic skills support that learners receive is gradually improving, there are still too many learners on too many courses who are not receiving any support. A number of providers have been unable to address issues relating to learners' poor basic skills during their training programmes due to a lack of funding and experienced staff to deliver the training. ELWa has recently

changed the time span and increased the funding for the delivery of basic skills. Nevertheless, the shortage of suitably qualified basic skills staff remains.

Key skills

Providers which integrate key skills with the learner's NVQ achieve the best success rate for full framework completion. In these cases, providers ensure that learners' day-to-day work incorporates the key skills required. However, Estyn has consistently found that many providers miss opportunities for key skills to be developed and assessed in the workplace. As a result, only about a third of learners in the providers we inspected in 2004-05 achieved the key skills they need for their qualification. Many of the staff in work-based learning need training in how to offer learners key skills support as part of their main courses.

The way forward

Estyn has an established partnership arrangement with ELWa which aims to achieve a shared vision that all post-16 learners in Wales have access to education and training of the highest possible quality and standard. In the last 12 to 18 months we have worked with ELWa to set up self-assessment workshops for providers and have contributed to ELWa's own staff development programme to help them to better prepare for their quality assurance role. We have worked closely with the NTF and are developing a formal partnership arrangement to extend this work to improve standards of work-based learning. We are considering carefully other ways of ensuring and reviewing the quality of work-based learning provision and how best to respond to this sector's needs without compromising our position as an inspectorate.

The number and variety of work-based learning providers in Wales means that there is likely to be a high administrative cost in contracting with them all. If funding was more clearly linked to quality outcomes, those providers delivering the best quality provision could be funded to take the delivery lead for a consortia of providers. The main provider would then have more responsibility for driving up the quality of the sub-contractors in the consortia in a more structured way. Thus helping to provide a better deal for the learners and employers in Wales.

Another area for potential development could be the introduction of recognised middle and senior management training opportunities for staff in work-based learning providers. This would create a career structure within and across the provider organisations. Lifelong Learning UK may be able to assist with this type of development in Wales.

In addition, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss further the impact of the Welsh Assembly Government's single target of 50 per cent completion of full frameworks across all sectors. We support this target and recognise the need to ensure that all learners are given the opportunity to attain basic and key skills qualifications. However, it may assist providers if this target was staged over time, for example according to the baseline attainment level by learning areas.

Remit work

We completed remit tasks on barriers to framework completion; and good practice in basic skills provision in work-based learning in 2004-2005. However, we have not been asked for any specific work-based learning remit work for 2005-2006. This lack of specific remit work means that we are unlikely to have the resources to visit providers of work-based learning other than on inspection. Experience in other sectors indicates that provision in poor providers often benefits from the contact maintained through remit visits by inspectors. The Welsh Assembly Government will wish to consider with us areas for future remit work which could include:

- Successful strategies for achieving full framework completions (to include good practice in delivering practical certificates in frameworks and successful strategies for delivery and assessment of key skills in work-based learning);
- Implementing self-assessment and improving quality systems;
- Improving learner's basic skills in work-based learning;
- Enhancing employer involvement in work-based learning;
- Good practice in specific inspection areas in work-based learning (eg construction); and
- Meeting the bilingual needs of learners.

Appendix 1

Risk Model Summary

From September 2004 in work-based learning inspections and from September 2005 in further education, Estyn will be customising the inspection of colleges and training providers in the light of the “risk” presented by the provider. Inspections will be described as either: short, standard or full inspections depending on the “risk” presented by the college or training provider.

The criteria used to categorise the risk in further education institutions and work-based training providers will operate at two levels:

First level: Estyn will use the inspection grades from the most recent inspection to calculate the level of risk. The level of risk will indicate whether the provider will be subject to a short, standard or full inspection.

Estyn will use the following criteria:

- the average grade for standards awarded to the institution or company from all its programme or occupational areas from the most recent inspections; and
- the percentage of grades 3, 4 and 5 for standards awarded to the programme or occupational areas.

A full inspection involves all seven key questions of the Common Inspection Framework and includes all inspection areas at all levels within the provider.

Inspectors will be required to evaluate and report on all key questions across the provider and key question 1 for each inspection area (inspection areas derive from subject/sector areas as defined within the National Framework of Qualifications. They are replacing occupational areas in work-based learning and programme areas in further education and will also be used in the inspection of adult and community education).

New or merged institutions, new work-based training companies and further education institutions (including FE in HE) and training companies with three or fewer areas of learning pose a high risk and will be subject to a full inspection.

A standard inspection involves all seven key questions of the Common Inspection Framework, but is limited to fewer inspection areas.

Inspectors will be required to evaluate and report on all key questions across the provider and a sample of about 50% of the inspection areas under key question 1. The areas selected will include a representative spread of grades awarded to the institution in previous inspections.

A short inspection involves all seven key questions of the Common Inspection Framework, but is limited to even fewer inspection areas than the standard inspection.

Inspectors will be required to evaluate and report on all key questions across the provider and a sample of about 25% of the inspection areas under key question 1. The areas selected will include a representative spread of grades awarded to the provider in the previous inspections.

For all inspections, inspectors will be required to report on the planning and delivery of key skills across the provider, and to report on the standards attained in key skills in the main findings section of the report.

Second level: Nearer to the planned inspection, Estyn will analyse the most recent benchmarked performance data from ELWa.

The second level of risk-based inspections will focus on these performance indicators as criteria for the extent of the risk. If half or more of the performance indicator data from the provider is more than ten percentage points below the National Comparators then the risk will increase from low to medium or from medium to high. We will subsequently make corresponding changes to the type of inspection undertaken.