

THE NATIONAL TRAINING FEDERATION FOR WALES

The National Training Federation for Wales represents some 100 work place learning providers who among them, deliver every post 16 work place learning programmes, covering every level from below entry to level 5, to every corner of Wales.

Its Management Board is composed of two elected representatives from each of the four ELWa regions and the Chair, Company Secretary and Treasurer elected nationally.

NTF Wales' members are significant employers in their own right. However, more importantly they have, collectively, an extensive network of employer contacts covering almost every employment sector.

Members of NTF Wales provide learning opportunities for more than thirty thousand learners.

ELWa is currently preparing a Work based learning improvement plan. NTFW is represented on the Sounding Board considering the draft plan

We should very much welcome the opportunity to make a substantive submission on that plan to the Committee on the future of workbased learning once ELWa's draft plan is in circulation.

We have, therefore confined ourselves, in this briefing note, to identifying a few of the salient features of the current workbased learning programmes.

LEARNING/TRAINING FOR WORK.

Skillbuild, Skillbuild Plus

Skillbuild youth programmes now only serve between 7-9% of the year 11 cohort compared to 40% who stay on in the sixth forms and around a third who enter full time further education.

The majority entering the programme have low or very low basic skills, have been 'turned off formal education' and, often carry other personal and health problems. Much of the work being carried out within the Skillbuild programmes is remedial. The programmes are of 13 week duration with an option to extend for another 13 weeks.

The large majority entering the programmes do so in the hope of getting a job. A recent survey found that a clear majority of participants expressed satisfaction with the programme.

Adults on the programme are primarily referred by Jobcentre Plus personal advisers whose own performance targets are directly related to clients entering employment.

In England this programme has remained with Jobcentre plus.
The programme for Wales has to be focused on employability and employment.

Providers' experience has clearly demonstrated that a job outcome is best achieved by offering key skills, motivational courses and job specific qualifications.

LEARNING AT WORK

Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMAs) Modern Apprenticeships (MAs)

NTFW is totally committed to the developments of quality apprenticeship programmes with frameworks 'fit for purpose'. Apprentices are now no longer predominantly school leavers. In 2003 – 04 trainees over 18 comprised over 70% of starts on MA programmes and nearly 50% on the FMA.

NTFW fully shares the concerns expressed about low completion rates. While there is a considerable debate about the reasons for such a failure, we should like to draw attention to some particular aspects of the issue.

First – the very considerable variations in completion rates between occupational sectors for example between Engineering with a MA completion rate of 42% and Retailing 1%. Employers and employees in certain occupational areas attach little value to the current full apprenticeship framework. This raises the question whether such frameworks are fit for purpose.

Secondly, in many cases the employee will have completed several sections within the framework; but such achievements are not recorded or recognised.

Thirdly, one of the most revealing indicators of employer/employee attitudes to completing is the fact that so many non completers remain with the host firm. Over half of early leavers from the MA programmes remain with the same company. The outcome/achievement has been a sustainable job.

Learning in Work

8 out of 10 of the 2010 workforce are already in work. Work based learning programmes need to reach those who are currently in employment but not receiving any training.

Providers played a major role in the success of the Llanelli Worker Project (LWP)
We understand that rolling out that programme nationally is 'unaffordable'

We, however, also understand that the new Workforce Development fund will be one of the vehicles for delivering learning in the workplace. Given the prominence and successful role played by Providers in the Llanelli project we hope that providers will be associated with any initiative in workforce development.

Quality

NTF Wales is totally committed to driving up quality in work based learning. We are already working closely with ELWa and other agencies to promote quality and best practice.

We particularly welcome the recent introduction of the Quality Investment Fund (QIF), which assists providers to address shortcomings identified in Estyn inspections. NTFW has been and remains actively involved in developing Provider Performance reviews. We believe that, through such a review process, continuous improvements will be achievable.

Just recently the NTFW Board was successful in its Quality Investment Fund bid to develop a good practice handbook in Leadership and Management for Work based Learning providers.

NTFW board members have volunteered to participate in the ground breaking benchmarking pilot project.

The 14 – 19 Agenda

NTFW has been, and is actively involved in the development of the 14-19 agenda, particularly through membership of the geographic pathfinders. The membership is very committed to assisting the development of work based learning experience for the 14 plus.

Partnerships

NTFW is actively involved in a whole range of partnerships - in CCETs, Geographic Pathfinders and the various reviews of work based learning.

The NTF Board works particularly closely with ELWa management through a much valued monthly meeting. National and regional operational groups have been set up to resolve practical operational issues. We sincerely hope these extremely useful arrangements will continue after the merger.

Funding

After years of 'turmoil' with short term contracts, bewildering and arbitrary changes in funding, a greater degree of stability in the funding arrangements is being achieved. Following the tendering process a more flexible approach to Provider profiling, allowing providers to reflect local and regional demand was introduced last August. Quarterly reviews are undertaken to identify those providers succeeding or failing to perform to their profiles and subsequent adjustments made.

We welcome these arrangements and hope that they will be allowed to continue beyond this funding year so that a proper evaluation of the process can be made.

In the longer term, the challenge will be to accommodate work based learning within the new post 16 common funding system. At present work based learning provision is funded on a very different basis from sixth forms and FE Colleges.

Conclusion

As we stated at the outset this brief is an interim one, pending the publication of ELWa's draft improvement plan.

NTFW is fully aware of the role and importance of workbased learning in promoting a prosperous Wales.

It has a vital role to play in achieving that prosperity, through enabling the economically inactive to enter employment and by improving the skills of the present and future Welsh workforce.

We remain, however, deeply concerned about the image and perception of workbased learning. Vocational learning has not enjoyed and still does not enjoy anything like 'parity of esteem' with academic learning.

We have to meet the challenge of changing such perceptions. We have to promote workbased learning as a route for learners of ability, a route which offers the young person the opportunity to learn vital skills, and through such skills enjoy successful, financially rewarding and satisfying employment.