

PET(3) 13-10 Annex 1

Evidence from the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

Petitions Committee Inquiry - Work Based Learning Provision (WBL) for Vulnerable Young People

Background

Work Based Learning Provision

- 1 Under sections 31 and 32 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, the Welsh Ministers have a duty to secure the provision of either proper or reasonable facilities for education (other than higher education) and training for post-16 learners in Wales.
- 2 A strong and credible Work Based Learning (WBL) system is at the heart of the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for education and training in Wales and WBL is an important component in strengthening the contribution of education and training in economic development, making learning a part of working day life, and looking at the interests both of learners and employers.
- 3 The WBL programmes operating in Wales aim to:
 - Provide a broad range of competence-based skills and knowledge to enhance employability and career progression;
 - Enable participants not in employment to acquire skills and work experience as part of a wider drive to raise economic activity rates and help people out of inactivity and poverty; and
 - Help provide employers with a workforce that has the skills to compete in the "knowledge-based" economy.
- 4 The Welsh Assembly Government WBL programmes encompass two 'flagship' programmes i.e. Skill Build and Apprenticeships.

Skill Build

- 5 The Welsh Assembly Government currently funds an *all-age* preparatory and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) skills training programme for both younger people (16-18) and adults (18+) entitled Skill Build. The programme aims to provide learners with the key personal and employability skills and qualifications to enable them to effectively enter the labour market and retain sustainable employment.
- 6 The programme encompasses:
 - The identification of learning barriers that prevent the learner immediately participating in vocational learning at level 1, 2 or 3;
 - The identification and addressing of a Basic Skills need;
 - Learning opportunities which provide learners with the breadth and flexibility of skills they need to enable them to better participate in the workforce and society at large; and

- Occupational learning to vocational level 1 or 2 or 3

Apprenticeships

- 7 Apprenticeships are employment based learning programmes for employed learners. Apprenticeships provide an opportunity for both young people and adults to progress quickly within their chosen occupation, equipping them with transferable skills as well as the ability to carry out a specific skill or trade. They provide a bridge between full-time learning and employment. Investment in the high-quality skills training via apprenticeships offers benefits to individuals, employers and the economy.
- 8 An apprenticeship is not a qualification in itself but a framework designed by the relevant Sector Skills Council or standard setting body containing a number of different qualifications, all of which must be passed in order to complete the framework. The frameworks are designed to equip learners with transferable skills relevant to the wider industry, as well as the specific skills associated with each framework. There are around 190 different apprenticeship frameworks across 80 industry sectors.
- 9 There are three levels of Apprenticeship available through WBL for those aged 16 and over:
 - 1 - Foundation Apprenticeships:** Foundation Apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications such as an NVQ Level 2, Key Skills and, in some cases, a relevant knowledge-based qualification.
 - 2 - Apprenticeships:** Apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications such as NVQ Level 3, Key Skills and, in most cases, a relevant knowledge based certificate.
 - 3 - Higher Apprenticeships:** Higher Apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications such as NVQ Level 4 and, in some cases, a knowledge-based qualification such as a Foundation degree.

10 Terms of Reference for Evidence

Availability and Quality of WBL of Training Programmes

- 10.1 Availability of training vacancies may vary depending on the route in which a learner is interested and where they live. A Careers Wales Adviser can provide information about jobs and training opportunities available in the learner's local area.
- 10.2 During 2009/2010 and based on Provider profiles, the Skill Build programme supported approximately 10,500 16-18 year old learners and up to 6,000 18 plus adult learners. This constitutes a total investment of circa £35.6 million for Youth (including allowances) and £9.4m for Adult.

- 10.3 The total Work based Learning contract value for 2010/11 has been maintained at the levels offered in 2009/10, i.e. circa £127,000,000.
- 10.4 At the 6th April 2009 Economic Summit - a package of at least £20,000,000 was announced to help people gain new skills. Of this, the Assembly Government made available £6 million to increase capacity within the established Skill Build programme in order to respond to rising demands as a result of increasing unemployment, and the need for certain individuals to refocus their skills and aspirations.

Quality

- 10.5 Under the Estyn framework which operated until August 2010, grade 4s or 5s are below acceptable standards. Skill Build as a programme is inspected under the "Foundation for Work" sector subject area. All providers currently have grade 3 (satisfactory) or above. From September 2010 Estyn will no longer award grades to individual sector subject areas, but will come to an overall judgement on each provider's standards and capacity to improve.
- 10.6 Estyn, when inspecting the Skill Build programme, focuses primarily on learners' progress, achievements and success in attaining qualifications. The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) focuses on positive progression as the primary measure for the programme, rather than qualifications delivered - although learning activity success is factored into our measure of quality as a secondary output.
- 10.7 In terms of the most recent (2008/09) performance data for the Skill Build Programme, the majority of Skill Build providers are achieving scores above the Quality and Effectiveness Framework (QEF) threshold for "Good". This is reflected in the 2008/09 national average for positive progressions of 71%, considerably higher than the benchmark for the adult Skill Build programme which for the same period was 45%.
- 10.8 Of the 48 providers contracted to deliver Skill Build Youth in 2008/09:
- 56% were categorised as "Excellent" in their delivery of the Youth programme.
 - 25% were categorised as "Good" in the delivery of the Youth programme (a total of 81% of the providers performing in the two highest categories).
 - 15% were "Adequate" in their delivery of the Youth programme.
 - 4% (or two providers) were "Unsatisfactory" in their delivery of the Youth programme.

- 10.9 It is worth noting that those providers categorised as "Unsatisfactory" are offering very small volumes of Skill Build provision and the data is therefore not considered to be robust as it is subject to the variations linked to small numbers skewing performance.
- 10.10 All of the providers with "Adequate" or "Unsatisfactory" performance categorisations are required to demonstrate to DCELLS that they are addressing the issues and driving forward performance to achieve a categorisation of "Good". They are all subject to follow up as part of the QEF process.

Progression for the vulnerable young person

- 10.11 'Positive progressions' from the Skill Build programme are counted as progression to further learning or employment, and are calculated based on Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) data submitted by providers. From 2010/11 we are strengthening our requirements and making the definition of 'positive progressions' more specific; learners will have to progress to employment or to learning at a higher level. The duration of further learning or employment is also being more closely specified.
- 10.12 A minimum performance target for progressions is being set for the first time in WBL contracts from August 2011, and DCELLS is currently establishing performance thresholds for the next few years which will be issued to providers in September. This will include challenging targets for the achievement of an 'excellent' performance rating.

Youth Employment and Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and Future Jobs Fund (FJF)

- 10.13 In April 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government published its NEETs Plan - '*Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Wales*' - to support and help reduce the number of young people who are NEET.
- 10.14 The NEETs Plan, which primarily focuses on 16-18 year olds in Wales, provides a number of strategic and practical actions to support and help re-engage young people back into education, employment and training and prevent disengagement. It outlines the need to improve systems to ensure young people remain engaged and their progress is monitored. Enhanced advice and guidance for young people is also highlighted with the aim to provide the appropriate support and provision tailored to individual need. It sets out the need to work locally to make sure the right systems, the right provision and the right support are available in order for the Welsh Assembly Government to deliver an integrated seamless service to re-engage this disadvantaged group of young people and where possible reduce duplication.

- 10.15 More recently there have been three reports looking at the broad issue of youth unemployment in Wales. The first is the Wales Employment and Skills Board report on youth unemployment which has been published as part of the Board's Second Annual Report 'Moving Forward; Foundations for Growth'. The second is the report of an internal Operational Review Group on the issue of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). The third is a report of the *Youth Unemployment Task and Finish Group* chaired by Martin Mansfield of Wales TUC.
- 10.16 Each of the reports has had a slightly different focus and remit but a significant number of their recommendations are interlinked. Based on the reports' recommendations, a programme of work to tackle youth engagement and employment in Wales was submitted to Cabinet in September and will be taken forward over the coming months. Furthermore there are proposals to develop a new voluntary work experience programme and a new intermediate labour market programme - both intended to engage, or re-engage, vulnerable young people into appropriate activity.
- 10.17 The Future Jobs Fund was announced in the Budget 2009 and was a fund of around £1 billion to support the creation of jobs for long term unemployed young people and others who face significant disadvantage in the labour market. The fund, run by DWP, aimed to create 170,000 temporary jobs until 2011. The Fund contributes up to £6,500 per job and as a minimum, the jobs must benefit the local community; provide at least 25 hours per week of employment; pay at least at the national minimum wage; and last at least 6 months.
- 10.18 The UK Government now intends to implement a single Work Programme to help unemployed customers back to work. No further bids will be approved and the Fund will close to new bids immediately. There will be no extension of the Future Jobs Fund in to 2011/12.
- 10.19 All existing commitments will be honoured and, to date, more than 28 Future Jobs Fund projects have been approved for Wales with the potential to create more than 10,000 jobs and attract around £60m funding to Wales.
- 10.20 The Future Jobs Fund is part of the wider Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) which offers all long-term unemployed young people full-time training, a real job or work experience. The UK Government has announced that the Young Person's Guarantee will not now be extended into 2011-12 as planned by the previous administration. This extension of the Young Person's Guarantee into 2011-12 was announced in Budget 2010. The Welsh Assembly Government provides the training elements of the YPG through Skill Build.

- 10.21 The YPG will continue to run as programmed across the UK until March 2011.

Financial Support

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

- 10.22 The EMA Wales scheme was fully rolled out in 2006/07 for 16 – 18 year olds within Further Education. It is a weekly allowance, linked to satisfactory attendance, paid fortnightly to eligible learners attending learning centres in Wales. The awards are £10, £20 or £30 per week depending on household income and periodic bonuses of £100 may be paid if learning objectives are met or for returning for the second year of a course.
- 10.23 The original aim of EMA was to address the link between low income and low participation by providing a financial incentive to young people from low-income households to remain in full-time education beyond compulsory education.
- 10.24 DCELLS are currently investigating the potential and feasibility of introducing the EMA (Wales) Scheme into Work Based Learning for young unemployed people from 2012.

Learning Allowances

- 10.25 Currently, youth learners with guarantee/extended guarantee status on Skill Build programmes must be paid an allowance of a minimum of £50.00 per week. Employer contributions must be maximised to support these costs. Learners on Traineeships (L1) will continue to be in receipt of this allowance at least until 2012 (see EMA above).
- 10.26 For Adult learners, learning allowances are paid by Jobcentre Plus to non-employed learners who wish to receive them. The allowance is made up of:
- An amount equivalent to the Jobseeker's Allowance and/or Income Support which a learner would have received whilst unemployed; and
 - a learning premium paid to those undertaking learning.

Travel and Accommodation Funding

- 10.27 Learners on Work Based Learning programmes that are not employed may be eligible to receive a contribution towards travel costs in excess of £5 per week. Learners may claim towards necessary reasonable travelling expenses incurred in connection with travel to and from their place of learning.
- 10.28 In addition, learners that are not employed may be eligible to receive a contribution towards accommodation costs, where the accommodation is essential for the learner to access learning.

Childcare Funding

10.29 Childcare support is available for learners on Work Based Learning programmes who are not employed and who are lone parents. Learners may be eligible to receive a contribution towards the costs of registered or accredited childcare, up to a maximum of £29.75 per day or £148.75 per week for the first child and £51 per day or £255 per week for two or more children.

10.30 Current levels of investment for Childcare, Travel and Accommodation are as shown below:

2008/09

Travel & Accommodation: £857,817.50

Childcare: £144,813.68

2009/10

Travel & Accommodation: £765,239.57 (to date)

Childcare: £311,143.63 (to date)

Learner Support and the Benefits system

10.31 Although this falls within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) remit, officials within DCELLS have looked into the issue of benefit support and entitlements for vulnerable young people and have been provided the following information.

10.32 Young people who are homeless, or living independently, are entitled to £51.85 benefits, plus housing allowance. For a young person referred to Further Education provision, they will continue to receive their benefits allowance, plus the £30 EMA which totals £81.85.

10.33 Those learners who have been endorsed by Careers Wales and referred to Skill Build as the appropriate training route will be entitled to a Training Allowance of £50, paid by the Welsh Assembly Government. This allowance is not passported against any benefits to which they may be entitled. They can however claim the differential of £1.85, which will total £51.85.

10.34 Colleagues at DWP state that EMA was introduced to offer a financial incentive to young people to remain in education and training. It was agreed to disregard it for benefit purposes as it was specifically not for subsistence. DWP cannot disregard monies that are issued for the same purpose as a benefit payment, i.e. for subsistence purposes (as is the case for the Skill Build Training Allowance).

Personal Support and support for care-leavers

- 10.35 There is substantial support available to young people who are living independently or are homeless for them to make informed choices:
- the Children Act 2004, and its associated statutory guidance documents, places a duty on local authorities and a range of partners to co-operate and improve the well-being of children in each local authority area;
 - the Welsh Assembly Government published Stronger Partnership for Better Outcomes and Shared Planning for Better Outcomes outlines the areas of focus we would expect these local authority Partnerships to focus on, including Education and Learning Opportunities and A Safe Home and Community; and
 - the objectives of the Core Aim of Education and Learning Opportunities are that all children and young people should engage in full-time education; have any barriers to learning identified early and removed; reach their full potential; continue in purposeful formal and informal education training or employment to age 19; and achieve social and economic well being.
- 10.36 Support for young people living independently or who are homeless is underpinned by Children and Young People's Partnerships (CYPP). These operate in each local authority area and bring together the various agencies and organisations with responsibility for meeting the needs of those children who are 'most in need'. CYPP plans should set out how agencies and partners will work together to support those young people who are most in need.
- 10.37 For young people aged 18 years plus, including those young people who are homeless, Jobcentre Plus facilitates access to a range of DWP and Welsh Assembly Government programmes and services. This could, for example, include an offer of training or employment through DWP or the Welsh Assembly Government's programmes, or referral to Careers Wales for in-depth career information, advice and guidance. In addition, Jobcentre Plus works with a range of partner organisations, including those in the Third Sector, at a national and local level, to help ensure that young people are sign-posted to services that can help them address specific barriers to moving into training or employment.
- 10.38 Furthermore, the Assembly Government's 'Ten Year Homelessness Plan' includes an action to improve access to training for all homeless people including 16-18 year olds. This plan is being taken forward through a working group focussing on cross-sector working, understanding, partnership and engagement for all service users. The aim is to encourage

communication and liaison between agencies in the homelessness sector and the employment, skills and learning sectors to ensure that development opportunities for service users are optimised.

- 10.39 The Assembly Government Housing Directorate has also used one year funding from the resource accenting exercise to fund a project creating housing services which develop opportunities for young excluded people through learning skills and work. As a part of this activity, the Assembly Government has commissioned an evaluation exercise to review the impact of this project.
- 10.40 The UK Coalition Government announced a series of welfare reforms as part of the Coalition Agreement published on 20th May 2010. One of the key elements of the Coalition Agreement is the introduction of a new single Work Programme and associated measures to support people back into work. Although all of these announced measures are currently being developed, early indication of the shape they will take has been provided through discussion with DWP officials
- 10.41 In summary, DCELLS is working closely with other Assembly Government Departments to ensure that the health and well-being of young people isolated from their families is intrinsically linked to the development of new learning opportunities.

Vulnerable Young People formerly in Care

- 10.42 In terms of addressing the needs of young people formerly in the care of a local authority and who have chosen to live independently, a personal adviser is assigned to the individual, and agrees a pathway plan to enable young people to make informed choices about their future.
- 10.43 The personal adviser is nominated and the pathway plan is agreed before the young person is 16 years old and leaves compulsory education. Planning is centred on the young person who is actively encouraged to put forward his/her views, aspirations and intentions.
- 10.44 The pathway plan is based on an assessment of need and is subject to regular reviews. The entitlement of contact with the personal adviser will be extended to the age of 25 (from 21 currently) following the commencement of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 in Autumn 2010.
- 10.45 Personal Advisers work with a range of partners, including Careers Wales, so that young people in care can receive impartial advice and guidance on the full range of post-16 opportunities available to them. This can include entry into the Youth Gateway programme delivered by Careers Wales which is

designed to assist young people in overcoming barriers to entry into further learning or employment.

Effectiveness of agency collaboration/partnership working in Wales

- 10.46 In order to offer learning provision where it is required, to address capacity issues and to address the need to have viable numbers, it is part of the Assembly Government's Transformation agenda to encourage providers across all types of post 16 learning to adopt a consortia or partnership type approach and this includes a partnership approach within Work Based Learning.
- 10.47 From the outset, the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) fully embraced the Transformation Policy and has been quick to respond positively to ensure that the WBL sector makes an equal contribution to improving learning opportunities for the 14-19 cohort. The Assembly Government has provided a grant to the NTfW to investigate the support that the WBL sector can provide to secure a full learning portfolio to support the implementation of local and regional transformation.
- 10.48 The procurement for the new contracts for WBL from August 2011 requires WBL Providers to be full and active members of local planning networks.

Evidence from the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

MENCAP Cymru - Petition to increase the number of people with a learning difficulty employed by the public sector in Wales.

What is the Minister doing to assist those with learning difficulties to enter employment?

Responsibility

- 1 The Welsh Ministers have functions exercisable concurrently with the Department for Work and Pensions, for making appropriate arrangements for the purpose of assisting persons to train for and obtain employment suitable for their ages and capacity. There are a number of programmes that operate in Wales through the Department for Work and Pensions and its delivery agent, Jobcentre Plus, for people seeking work and claiming benefit.

Commitment

- 2 The Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that all disabled people and those with learning difficulties are equipped with the skills they need to secure satisfying careers.
- 3 The 'Statement on Policy and Practice for Adults with a Learning Disability' issued in March 2007 states that 'The Welsh Assembly Government believes that it is important that authorities seek to maximise an individual's potential to be gainfully or constructively employed'.

Welsh Assembly Government Programmes

- 4 **Skills that Work for Wales** is the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy and action plan for skills and employment for all groups. It presents a personal approach to supporting people to gain relevant skills and helps them find and keep paid employment. It is ideal for young people with learning difficulties as it cuts across all client groups and provides a personal approach and reasonable adjustment in all learning programmes.
- 5 Young learners with learning difficulties have access to careers advice and guidance. By providing young people with learning difficulties with specialist information and advice on the wide range of career and learning options available, they are able to make informed and realistic decisions as part of their ongoing career planning. Learning providers work with employers to identify suitable work experience placements.
- 6 The Welsh Assembly Government supports a range of regional programmes which focus on getting disadvantaged workless people of all ages into employment. As with the DWP/JCP programmes, the Assembly Government's programmes are not restricted to specific age group, health condition or learning abilities.

- 7 All those who meet the qualifying criteria can access the Assembly Government's programmes such as **Skill Build** which supports both unemployed adults and young people by providing the skills and experience needed to access employment and the foundation skills to remain in employment.
- 8 In response to the concerns expressed by some disabled organisations, the Welsh Assembly Government amended its programme under **Skill Build**, such as removing the maximum duration of time a learner can spend on the programme, and linking activities to experience in work rather than formal qualifications for disabled people and those with learning difficulties.
- 9 **Work Based Learning Providers in Skill Build and Apprenticeship Programmes** may claim 'Additional Learning Support' funding for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- 10 **Want2Work** covers selective wards across Wales. The key aim of Want2Work is to identify and plug gaps in mainstream employment programmes, creating additional labour market support opportunities in community locations to a greater number of individuals than that provided by core labour market programmes.
- 11 **Job Match**, with a ESF budget of **£16.2m**, is the delivery arm in the Heads of the Valley Strategic Regeneration Area. It focuses on helping disadvantaged workless people of all ages to find and sustain work. The programme provides guidance, training and jobs for people who are economically inactive across the Heads of the Valleys area. It operates in Bridgend, RCT, Merthyr, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent & Torfaen.

Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training

- 12 There have been 3 recent reviews into youth unemployment and young people not in education, employment or training. These reviews considered preventative measures that are currently taking place across WAG to help prevent young people with additional learning needs and learning difficulties from becoming NEET.
 - a. The Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB) review which considered youth unemployment in Wales and Welsh Assembly Government's response to the issue.
 - b. The Youth Unemployment Task & Finish Group, established by the Minister for CELL and chaired by Martin Mansfield of the Wales TUC, which had an operational focus and aimed to build on the recommendations contained in the WESB report to inform the Welsh Assembly Government response to its recommendations.
 - c. The NEET Operational Review group, which was an internal group consisting of policy leads from across the Welsh Assembly Government, set up to undertake a review of the journey of

children and young people who may become inactive or disengaged from learning.

- 13 All of these reviews considered the impact of policy on young people, including those with special educational needs and additional learning needs, as part of their broad remit.
- 14 The groups recognised that young people with special educational needs and additional learning needs is a factor that could increase the likelihood of young people becoming NEET. The group recognised the work already being undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government to prevent this group becoming NEET, including **transition key workers** for disabled young people and preventative measures such as a series of pilots that will lead to the development of an innovative and improved system for ensuring that pupils with **additional learning needs** (ALN) are met and receive a high quality education.
- 15 The recommendations from the three review groups will be taken forward as one programme of work in the form of the Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan. The Action Plan was agreed by Cabinet on 27th September 2010.

Transition

- 16 The Assembly Government is committed to helping young people with learning difficulties find employment by supporting them through the transition from education to sustained employment and by equipping them with the necessary skills and confidence.

Transition Key Workers

- 17 Key workers are assigned to support young people and their family through transition through individual tailoring of services based on an assessment of need, inter-agency collaboration at strategic and practice levels.
- 18 The establishment of key workers was a key action in the Assembly Government's 'National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services in Wales' and was a recommendation in the former ELLS Committee's report on SEN transition.
- 19 In 2008 the Assembly Government made **£1.5m** available over three years **for five pilot projects** across Wales which were set up based on work already going on, to find out what works best. These pilot projects, which are managed by Care Co-ordination Network UK (CCNUK), have made excellent progress both in terms of direct support to a cross section of disabled young people and in delivering on the agreed key assessment criteria.
- 20 CCNUK is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government to develop **revised key worker standards** to reflect transition (up to age 25) and to develop a **transition key worker framework** to provide guidance on developing

and sustaining key working in Wales. Best practice examples from the pilot projects are being used to support this.

- 21 Feedback on the work of the pilots was disseminated at a conference in March this year, attended by the Deputy Minister for Children. **Another conference is planned for March 2011.** This year's conference was also the launch pad for new Welsh Assembly Government **transition guidance** for young people entitled '**My Life, My Way**' which was written for the Assembly by Learning Disability Wales in collaboration with disabled young people.
- 22 We are continuing our work with the **Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities** with a view to shaping guidance for professionals involved in the special educational needs transition process.
- 23 This year an **additional £1.5m of ESF funding** was allocated under '**Reaching the Heights**' over three years which will put transition workers in place over 15 convergence areas.
- 24 This work will complement similar ESF funding approved for the **Regional SEN Transition to Employment Initiative** (covering 10 convergence local authority areas and led by Caerphilly County Council out of Trinity Fields Special School). This project is based on a successful model which initially operated out of Trinity Fields Special School in Caerphilly, and aims to improve the educational outcomes of young people at risk of underachieving. ESF funding has enabled the development of dedicated transition teams (which include a transition key worker) working out of 'hubs' which are attached in the main to special schools.

Post-16 SEN Task and Finish Group

- 25 In March this year a Task and Finish Group was set up charged with making recommendations in the following areas:
 - establishing an improved and unified system of transition to educational provision in school or FE for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) above the age of 16;
 - achieving better value for money in expenditure on post-16 education for young people with LDD, specifically against the context of financial challenge over the next 3 years;
 - sharing more widely expertise that is currently in special schools and FE colleges in providing for LDD post-16;
 - use of out of county and out of country placements; and
 - investment in post-16 school and FE provision for young people with LDD.

- 26 The group is finalising its written report.

Reform of the Statutory Special Educational Needs (SEN) Assessment and Statementing Process

- 27 The developments in support of improved transition are being taken forward in the context of a wider reform agenda aimed at developing an

innovative and improved system for ensuring that all children and young people with additional learning needs have those needs met and receive a high quality education.

28 Four pilot projects are currently under way involving 8 authorities across Wales which will inform changes to the current SEN statutory assessment and statementing process. These four three-year pilots end in 2011 and cover:

- Quality assurance of ALN provision
- An inter-disciplinary model for children and young people with severe and complex needs
- A model for children and young people with less-complex needs
- The role of the ALN Co-ordinator

Skill Wales

29 The Welsh Assembly Government has funded **Skill** (National Bureau for Students with Learning Disabilities) for three years from 2009-10 to develop its work in Wales. Skill works with learners, learning providers, statutory and other voluntary organisations to promote equality of opportunity in all post-16 education and training. Skill provides free advice to disabled students on a wide range of subjects, including transition to employment, via its helpline and website, identifying other sources of further information and advice as appropriate.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (“ASD”) Strategy – Employment Champion

30 In June this year Gwenda Thomas AM, Deputy Minister for Social Services, provided the Assembly with an update on developments relating to the ASD Strategy. Among these were:

31 Awareness-raising packages for a wide range of professional groups that work with, or come into contact with, people who have autism and their families are being developed at a national level. These materials will be widely distributed in Wales to all GP surgeries, schools and colleges, Careers Wales, Jobcentre Plus, to employers and agencies comprising the criminal justice system, and to many others. Gwenda Thomas AM will be launching these materials on **25 November 2010** in the Senedd.

32 In addition to awareness-raising materials, there are a number of funded actions designed to improve the employment prospects of people who have autism. These include the appointment of the **Wales Autism Employment Ambassador**, who will promote the positive aspects of employing people who have autism with businesses throughout Wales. The Wales Autism Employment Ambassador will be formally launched on **25 November 2010**.

Additional Learning Support for Learners accessing mainstream vocational education and work based learning

33 Further education colleges and work based learning providers receive a funding contribution from the Welsh Assembly Government towards the additional costs involved in securing the human and/or technical support necessary to make their mainstream provision accessible to disabled learners. In 2009-10 over **£6m** was allocated for this purpose.

Careers Wales

34 **Careers Wales Online** (www.careerswales.com) is an innovative interactive service, which provides bilingual information, tools and resources to support all-age, lifelong learning and career planning. It uses progressive technologies to provide information in an accessible and supportive approach, winning a BAFTA for technical and social inclusion.

35 The site supports **14-19 learning pathways** through web option menus, learning plans and shortly will launch the national booking system for work experience for schools. The site also includes **differentiated information for users with learning difficulties**, addressing topics such as **independent living skills, decision making and transition planning**.

Work Placement Programmes within the Welsh Assembly Government

36 There are 3 work placement programmes in place to promote the employment of disabled people and these include people with learning disabilities or mental health issues.

Supported Employment Scheme

37 Supported Employment Scheme was launched in 2008 to enable candidates who have previously been considered by statutory services or employers as unemployable to gain experience of working in the Assembly Government. The scheme provides a one to one trainer to work with the candidate for a period of 30 days (unpaid) whilst learning the job, and following a review, a 6 month paid placement is offered with the possibility of an extension of up to 50 weeks.

38 To date the scheme has hosted 12 candidates, 8 of which successfully moved onto a paid placement and 3 of these have since secured permanent positions.

Reemploy Scheme

39 The Reemploy Scheme offers candidates with a range of disabilities paid work placements of up to 50 weeks. To date 3 people have benefited from a placement. At the outset, the placement and outreach team raise awareness across the organisation of the Scheme and work with managers to identify suitable opportunities that equip participants with a wide range of key skills that will enhance their future employment opportunities.

40 The placement and outreach team remain in close contact throughout the placements. Any additional support is provided as appropriate and reviews with the placement are completed at 3 and 6 month intervals.

Work Experience Placements

41 The Welsh Assembly Government has a 5-day work experience placement scheme for school age children which has been open to pupils of all abilities since April 2008. To date, two students with learning difficulties have successfully completed a placement. Careful consideration is given when accommodating students with learning difficulties to ensure that they are placed in their area of interest. Arrangements for their support worker to accompany them are also made. Depending on the level of support required, meetings are arranged prior to the placement at the pupil's school to ensure that all parties are aware of what is required. Feedback from managers and pupil placements has been positive. WAG continues to encourage take up of this placement scheme by children of all abilities.

42 An independent evaluation and analysis of this and all placement schemes was undertaken by a specialist equality and diversity consultancy earlier this year and showed that the experience of WAG staff and those placed with WAG was overwhelmingly positive. Further work to assess the future focus of work placement schemes in WAG is currently being undertaken as part of the WAG Equality Strategy.

Outreach Work

43 WAG staff continue to take part in a range of careers events with schools. One example is the links we have developed with Woodlands school in Ely, Cardiff. The school is attended by pupils with moderate to severe special educational needs including learning disabilities. Staff attended the School's annual industry day which has resulted in 2 of Woodlands students undertaking work experience with the Welsh Assembly Government.

44 WAG staff also recently promoted work being done to recruit Apprentices to WAG at the high profile SkillsCymru event held at the Millennium Stadium.

Welsh Assembly Government policies to support people with learning disability in work

45 The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for disabled people and achieving a workplace free from discrimination, harassment and bullying.

46 Staff who notify WAG of a learning disability can obtain support from the Occupational Health Team as part of an established process for considering what **reasonable adjustments** can be made for disabled staff to meet their individual needs. For example, we provided dictation software to support an employee with dyslexia.

47 WAG also supports a variety of internal staff networks for under-represented and minority groups which include a **Disability Awareness Staff Support Network** which is open to all staff wishing to share ideas, concerns and proactively work with the organisation to promote equality of opportunity for employees with a disability.

WAG staff data on people with learning disability

48 As of 30 September 2010, a total of 10 employees have chosen to declare a learning disability.

WAG workforce planning targeting disability

49 In April 2008, the WAG set targets for the number staff employed at Executive Management Band and in our Senior Civil Service by gender, race and disability. We decided to concentrate on Executive Management and Senior Civil Service bands because this is where our workforce recruitment and representation data tells us that under-represented groups are negatively represented.

50 Progress against the targets is published each year in our Employer Equality Report. The target was to employ 3% of disabled staff employed at Senior Civil Service level and 4% at Executive Management band. In March this year we met our target for employing 4% of staff with a declared disability at Executive Management band and achieved the same percentage of disabled staff employed at Senior Civil Service level. However, we recognise that the number of disabled staff employed at this level is low and so we will begin to develop an evidence base in late 2010-11 to inform new targets going forward.

51 The WAG annual staff survey is an opportunity for staff to give their views and opinions on working for the Welsh Assembly Government. In the 2008 survey, it was identified that disabled staff answered proportionately more negatively than other staff to many of the survey questions. In response, a member of the WAG Management Board (now known as the Strategic Delivery and Performance Board) undertook some work to further examine the views and experiences of disabled staff. This has helped inform work we are currently doing to develop a **pilot positive action programme** targeted at disabled staff to provide tailored development opportunities and training to facilitate career progression.

52 We are also participating in work being undertaken by the Civil Service Disability Task Group to understand why responses by disabled staff across the Civil Service are also answering proportionately more negative than other staff in the Civil Service wide staff survey, which WAG will also be adopting in 2010. We hope that the feedback will inform our work to

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**Employee types excluded: Agency, Attachment, Locally Engaged Staff, Work Experience, Zero Hours, Consultants and Contractors*

advance equality and diversity in the workplace going forward and in particular show how we can better meet the individual needs of staff.

Equality Employment Duty

- 53 WAG currently evidence work to meet its equality employment duty (imposed by the Race Relations Act specific duties) through publication of an annual employer equality report. Work is underway to publish the 2009-10 report. The Single Equality Scheme also outlines how WAG promotes good employment equality practice.
- 54 The Equality Act 2010 introduces a new general public sector equality duty that will come into force in April 2011. The Act makes provision for the Welsh Ministers to be able to make regulations that impose specific public sector equality duties on relevant Welsh public authorities listed in Part 2 of Schedule 19 to the Act.
- 55 The purpose of these new specific equality duties is to improve performance of the general duty by the public sector. The general duty protects people with learning difficulties against being discriminated, harassed or victimised. Public bodies will need to promote equality of opportunity for and foster good relations with people with learning difficulties.
- 56 WAG started its consultation on the draft Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 on 21 September which will end on 17 December. Under the Equality Act 2010, any such duties would fall under the Welsh Public Sector Specific duties.

Evidence from Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus.

Petition Committee Inquiry into Work-based Learning for Vulnerable Young People

Purpose

The Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus have been invited to provide evidence to the Committee meeting on 2nd November.

The Committee is asked to note the evidence provided here which focuses on the three inquiry questions that the Department is best placed to answer:

- The availability and quality of training programmes, and work-based placements, particularly suitable placements for vulnerable young people;
- Financial support for independently financed young people including training allowances, Educational Maintenance Allowance, benefits and funding for travel costs; and
- The effectiveness of agency collaboration/partnership working on issues in Wales.

Background

The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)

The Department for Work and Pensions was created in June 2001 'to promote opportunity and independence for all'. DWP is responsible for welfare and pension policy and is a key player in tackling child poverty. It is the biggest public service delivery department in the UK and serves over 20 million customers.

The Department has specific responsibility for young people who are claiming benefits. Young people aged 16 and over who are on a low income, looking for work, disabled or caring for a child or older person can claim benefits.

As Education and Skills policy is devolved DWP works with the Welsh Assembly Government, the Scottish Government, and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Education in England, to deliver employment, education and training services to young people aged 16-24 across the UK. The Welsh Assembly Government has specific responsibility for training and learning provision in Wales.

Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus is an executive agency of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Launched in April 2002, Jobcentre Plus brought together the Employment Service and parts of the Benefits Agency that delivered services to working age people. Its aim is to help more people into work and more employers fill

their vacancies, and to provide people of working age with the help and support to which they are entitled.

Jobcentre Plus plays a key role in developing the welfare agenda in Wales and consulting on the potential devolution impact on programmes and initiatives introduced by DWP across Great Britain. In establishing the 'differences' for Wales Jobcentre Plus continues to strive for coherence across nations and to ensure that customers have equal access to programmes and services.

Response to Inquiry

Providing training and work placements for vulnerable young people

Much of the training provision that is available for people on benefits in Wales is commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and its partners. However Jobcentre Plus delivers a number of national programmes which young benefit claimants aged over 18 in Wales can access.

Ministers have announced that many existing national employment programmes will be phased out with the introduction of a new Work Programme from summer 2011. The new Work Programme will support a wide range of customers – from Jobseeker's Allowance recipients who have been out of work for some time, to customers who may previously have been receiving incapacity benefits for many years. The Work Programme will provide personalised support based on the needs of individuals. Stronger incentives will be offered for delivery partners to work with the harder to help.

Until the Work Programme is introduced the Government will ensure that support is available. The Department's programmes which aimed to support young people through the recession are ongoing, including the Young Person's Guarantee.

Young people also have access to mainstream employment programmes such as Work Trials which offer a short trial period in an actual job situation, for up to 15 (and in exceptional cases, 30) working days. They provide an opportunity for unemployed customers to prove themselves to an employer without giving up the security of benefit. Both the employer and customer take part without obligation.

Young customers can also take advantage of opportunities available locally through the European Social Fund. The Fund was set up to improve employment opportunities in the European Union and so help raise standards of living. It aims to help people fulfil their potential by giving them better skills and better job prospects. European Social Fund programmes across England, Scotland and Wales differ in terms of their objectives and the types of customers they support.

Financial support for independently financed young people

In the main, financial support for young people who want to study full-time comes from the educational maintenance system, which is designed for their needs. However the Department recognises that as a result of difficulties in their family life, some young people experience a disrupted education and

need a second chance at learning. Therefore some vulnerable groups are entitled to claim benefits whilst studying full-time.

Young people who have to live away from home² but who want to go back to or carry on in education can claim income support and housing benefit between their 16th and 21st birthdays so long as they meet the normal rules for getting those benefits (savings, residence in UK etc). The course must be full-time (12 hours or more per week) non-advanced or approved training undertaken at a school or college or somewhere that is approved under the Child Benefit rules³. They may also qualify for Education Maintenance Allowance over and above their income support and also housing benefit if they are responsible for paying rent.

The Department currently requires that the young person starts such a course on or before their 19th birthday. This means that a young person who, at their 19th birthday, is in or enrolled in full-time non-advanced education and is able to claim income support (and, if appropriate, housing benefit) because they are estranged from their family or carer, will be able to continue to claim until the end of their course or their 21st birthday, whichever is earlier. DWP officials are looking at whether this lower age limit of 19 can be removed.

In addition, full-time training is available to jobseekers aged over 18 who have significant barriers to employment. Claimants referred to full-time training by Jobcentre Plus receive a training allowance instead of Jobseeker's Allowance. This allowance is generally paid at the same rate as Jobseeker's Allowance but in some programmes can include an additional allowance of either £10 or £15.38 per week, either as an incentive to take up training or to help meet the additional costs associated with participating in the programme.

Jobseekers can take part in any part-time training at any point in their claim. Part-time is defined as less than 16 hours per week. However, Jobseeker's Allowance claimants must remain available for and actively seeking work as their main activity and must adjust part-time study to fit with a job offer or mandatory Jobcentre Plus programmes or interviews.

Help towards travel and childcare costs is available to benefit recipients who are referred to work-focused training by Jobcentre Plus, though conditions and restrictions apply.

Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) is not routinely paid to 16-17 year olds, except in special cases such as severe hardship. 'Severe hardship' is not defined in law rather every claim is considered on its own merits and the totality of a person's circumstances considered. Young people living independently are one group who may be entitled to claim JSA on severe hardship grounds.

² Young people can receive Income Support if, out of necessity, they live away from their parents or any person acting in their place because: they are estranged; they are in physical or moral danger, or there is a serious risk to their physical or mental health.

³ Full-time non-advanced education is A Level/NVQ3 or below or Foundation courses or their equivalent. Approved training in Wales means arrangements under specified legislation known as Skillbuild, Skillbuild Plus or Foundation Modern Apprenticeships.

To ensure that 16 and 17 year olds in receipt of benefit receive the right support, Jobcentre Plus has specialist 16 and 17 year old advisers who are trained to support vulnerable customers. The specialist adviser works with young people to explore job goals/opportunities and identify barriers to work. They provide appropriate help and services to support young people's journey in to work (for example better off in work calculations, local labour market knowledge, benefit advice, assessment of claims for Bridging Allowance). The specialist adviser works with local partners to provide access to appropriate local education/training provision and other relevant services to help the young person progress in to education or employment. This includes liaison with Careers Wales.

Young people in Wales aged 16 and 17 receiving JSA are required to register with Careers Wales who are responsible for providing advice and guidance on training and work to this group. If a young person on JSA hardship decides to undertake full-time training (for example Skill Build), training providers will pay them a training allowance of £50 per week in lieu of a JSA payment⁴ (which cannot be paid whilst on training). The Jobcentre Plus Under-18 Adviser will ensure that the young person also makes a claim for a £1.85 top-up benefit payment which enables them to claim passported benefits. This top-up payment is intended to ensure that the young person is not financially disadvantaged by undertaking training.

Agency collaboration and partnership working in Wales

Jobcentre Plus Wales works on a regular basis with a range of partners to deliver services to young people. This includes the Welsh Assembly Government, Careers Wales, and voluntary and community sector organisations:

Careers Wales

Funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, Careers Wales has responsibility for delivering careers information, advice and guidance to young people across Wales. Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales operate under a Memorandum of Understanding and have committed to work together to achieve a shared vision that all individuals aged 16+ in Wales have access to information, advice and guidance, education, training and employment of the highest possible quality and standards.

Voluntary and Community Sector

Jobcentre Plus Wales has a national agreement with both The Princes Trust-Cymru and Fairbridge Cymru. Each organisation offers a range of programmes giving support to young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) across Wales. These organisations offer non-contracted employment and training provision, some of which is provided through the Welsh Assembly Government's Skill Build Programme.

Jobcentre Plus in Wales works with a range of organisations which help homeless people including Shelter Cymru, The Salvation Army and Wallich Clifford Community. It has strong links with the Welsh Assembly Government and has contributed to their homeless agenda through attendance at relevant strategic meetings and various consultations.

⁴ The maximum weekly rate for all JSA claimants aged 16-24 is £51.85.

Jobcentre Plus also works with partners to deliver specific initiatives in Wales which offer support to young people such as:

School Gates Employment Support Initiative

The School Gates Employment Support (SGES) Initiative provides a package of support for non-working mothers or partners in coupled families, at risk of poverty and who have been adversely affected by the recession. This initiative aims to increase the amount of employment and enterprise support available to parents in and around their children's schools. It is hoped that the SGES initiative will help to increase the number of parents in low income families entering employment. The SGES Initiative is delivered in partnership between Jobcentre Plus and the Welsh Assembly Government in Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent.

Integrated Children's Centre pilots

The Integrated Children's Centres employment support pilots are being run in four Children's Centres. The pilots are testing an integrated approach to engage parents, carers or guardians of children at risk of poverty in labour market related activity, to help move them closer to employment. Dedicated Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers are working closely with Community First and other partners to offer a personalised service based on individual's need.

Reach For Work (Estates community Outreach)

Jobcentre Plus has recently extended its partnership activity to tackle the problem of entrenched worklessness. Reach for Work is a voluntary programme, which involves a team of Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers based in the most deprived areas in Wrexham and working with a range of partners to deliver a holistic, multi-agency approach.