

SOUTH EAST WALES REGIONAL COMMITTEE

POST-16 EDUCATION AND TRAINING: PAPER FROM THE SOUTH EAST WALES ECONOMIC FORUM

Introduction

1. This paper sets out our views on post-16 education and training in the context of the skills needs of the economy of South East Wales addressing the issue of poor adult basic skills in particular. We believe that this can only be addressed within the context of a coherent learning and skills strategy.

2. One aspect of the strategic vision of the South East Wales Economic Development Forum (The Forum) is that South East Wales will be a region where:

"Lifelong learning is a reality for all our citizens. (Where) Wales has a flexible, well educated and multi-skilled workforce meeting the challenges of the global economy; we will have raised the skill base across all ages, skill levels and positions in the labour market."

3. The Forum believes that long term success can only be achieved through:

- A world-class competitive workforce
- Entrepreneurial skills and innovation
- Individuals taking responsibility for their personal development
- The social exclusion agenda being met within a work context
- Lifelong learning becoming a reality

Action Plan for Skills

4. To realise these aims the South East Wales Economic Forum published an *'Action Plan for Skills'* in June 1999. The Action Plan was primarily built on regional economic and labour market analysis stemming from the all-Wales Future Skills Wales project and other information resources. Wide consultation was carried out with representative bodies active in regional economic, skills and community development. It identifies a range of principles to take forward the strategy and these include:

- A demand led perspective;

- Emphasis on changing the learning culture rather than supply-side adjustments;
- Improving Key skill development in schools;
- Promoting a flexible labour market;
- Supporting increased coherence of post-16 training, education development and guidance services;
- Addressing disadvantage;
- Using new technologies to promote skills development;
- Maintaining regional coherence.

5. The driving force of the Action Plan is that economic growth should drive skills planning.

Challenges for the Region

6. Any successful skills strategy needs to address both the disengaged of society and those currently in employment but not participating in learning. This is a particular challenge for South East Wales given the following issues:

- Low levels of attainment for 1 in 6 school leavers;
- Areas with the highest levels of adults with both numeracy and literacy skills deficiencies in Wales;
- Some of the poorest wards in Britain with unenviable rates of poor health and high incapacity benefit levels;
- Long-term unemployment despite a buoyant labour market and New Deal;
- Gender imbalances in attainment levels;
- Significant number of people with a physical or sensory impairment, learning difficulty or mental health problem;
- Unknown size of the carer population;
- A lost generation of the 'over 50s' with much to offer.

7. The Forum recognises the need to develop new approaches to learning in order to motivate new learners from socially excluded communities and those in the workplace who need to update constantly their skills. Informal learning is the first step for many people who would not normally engage in further education or training. Community Education and the Voluntary Sector often provide these

informal learning opportunities. The Forum recognises the importance of building the capacity of both local authorities and the voluntary sector to increase these opportunities for people outside learning in South East Wales. There is great potential to use Objective 1 Funding for this important development.

8. The report of the Government's working group on 'Improving literacy and numeracy' (May 1999), chaired by Sir Claus Moser, states that "the teaching of basic skills to adults is often marginalised . . . , in fact it needs to become a key part in the strategy for Lifelong Learning and for national renewal generally. One promising new vehicle for improving basic skills is the University for Industry (Ufi)".

University for Industry / Learndirect

9. The Ufi initiative aims to provide new opportunities to learn via the use of information and communications technology. It will be customer led in that it will offer learning at the time, place, pace and style of learning required by each individual. It is mainly interactive electronic teaching materials delivered on computer screens, either on-line or by CDROM with tutor support. Ufi will work through franchised centres and will also be accessed through homes and workplaces.

10. The Forum has recognised the potential that new technologies have to take learning outside traditional delivery to groups of new learners from socially excluded communities and the workplace. We have agreed that the development of the University for Industry/ Learndirect initiative should be a strategic priority for the Forum in order to use new technologies to promote skills development.

11. In Wales, Ufi is based on four regional hubs, which are coterminous with the four economic regions of Wales. Hubs are consortia of partners from the private sector, unitary authorities, further and higher education, voluntary sector public sector and others including the trade unions. The vast majority of partners on the Forum are represented within the South East Wales Ufi Hub currently being led jointly by the TEC and the University of Glamorgan.

12. Ufi/Learndirect is one of the mechanisms through which the aims of the Action Plan for Skills outlined earlier can be realised. The emphasis is very much on changing the culture of learning. For instance the voluntary and community education sectors must play a key role in the South East Wales Hub because of the requirement to reach out to people who would not normally participate in learning at traditional institutions. A major partnership has already been formed between Ufi (UK) and the Basic Skills Agency. As a result the Learndirect helpline currently run by TEC South East Wales which provides impartial adult careers advice and guidance will be supplemented by a basic skills helpline.

13. Equally the requirement outlined in the action plan to upgrade the skills of the workforce across the board, is a key objective for Ufi/ Learndirect. The flexible approach to learning inherent in the Ufi/Learndirect initiative can go a long way to realising the requirement for people to constantly update their skills in order to meet the requirements of the flexible labour market. It is an approach which can help to address the issue of equal access to learning for part-time workers who are often less qualified although appropriate child care provision is still needed for more women to work. A recent TUC study which researched the existing learning barriers for part-time workers highlighted that "a larger number of women than men are working part-time well below their capacity".

Regional Coherence

14. The action plan stresses the need to maintain regional coherence for skills development. There are needs for employment and training by those in the least prosperous parts of the region that co-exist with a demand for labour and skills in the most prosperous parts. The South East Wales labour market is characterised by a flow of labour from the north of the region to the south of the region.

15. The significant intra-labour market flows would not be such a great problem in terms of planning learning provision if local economies in South East Wales did not vary to such a great extent. **Annex 1** illustrates this characteristic. The City of Cardiff dominates the South East Wales economy, providing approximately a third of employment. The strength of the Cardiff economy is very much the service sector i.e. Financial & Business Services, Public Administration and Retailing and Catering. Manufacturing accounts for only a fraction over ten percent of the workforce. Contrast this with the valley areas where manufacturing typically accounts for a third of employment.

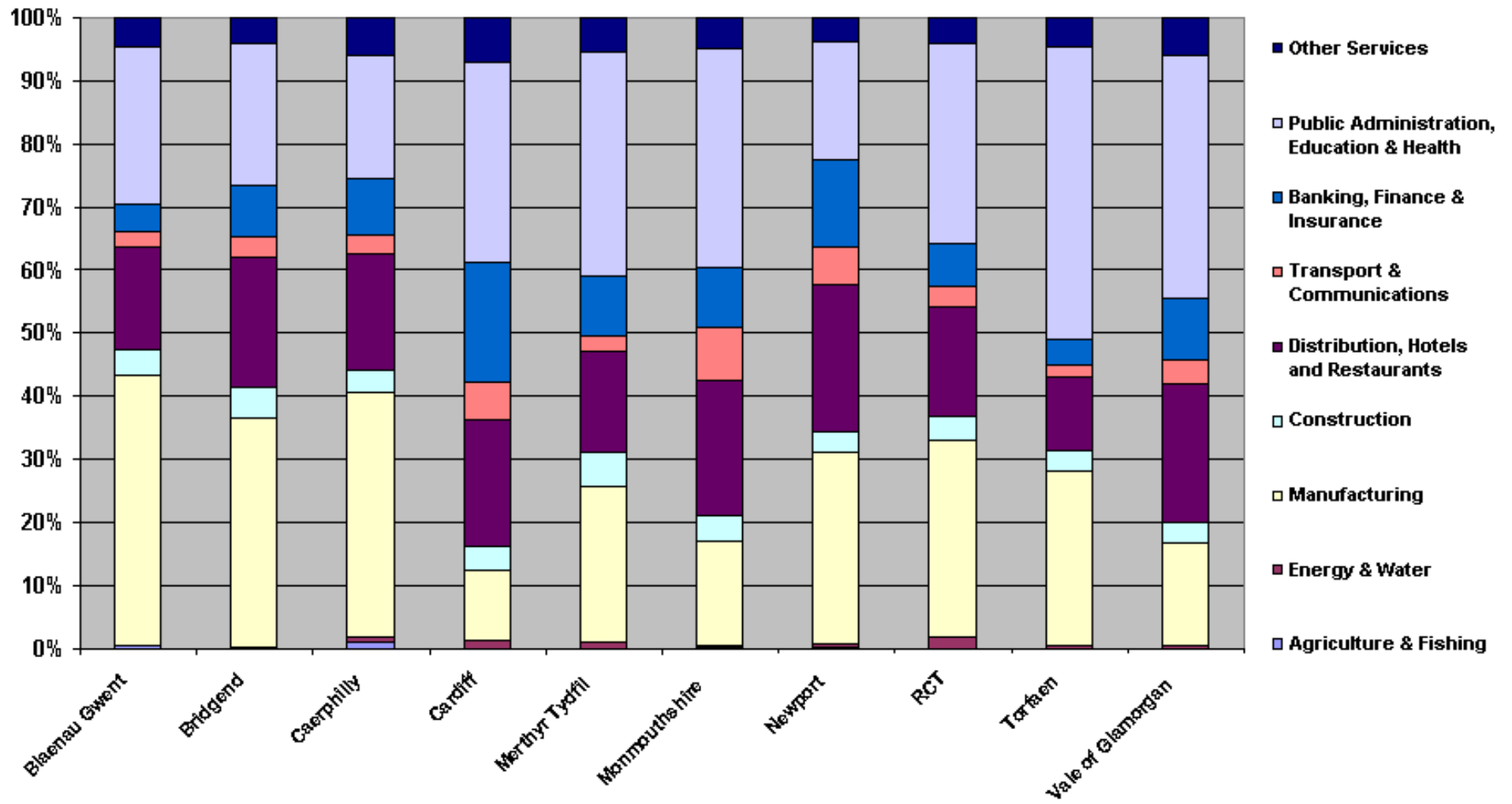
16. If education and training provision is to be matched to economic need, then it should be made clear that an understanding of regional labour market flows and a successful match between the supply-side and the demand-side of the economy are paramount. It follows that in order for this perspective to be maintained it is vital that the institutions tasked with planning and delivering skills provision keep these as guiding principles.

17. The reorganisation of post-16 education and training in Wales will result in the creation of a National Council for Education and Training Wales (CETW) and Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCETs). Although the National Council will have regional offices their role and the role of CCETs has yet to be clearly defined. University for Industry is a key example of a strategic regional approach towards creating a Learning Society. It has huge potential to deliver our challenging agenda but the complexity of delivery should not be underestimated.

18. At present the TEC co-ordinates and resources the South East Wales hub on behalf of the partners and it is essential that the new arrangements post the abolition of TECs can cater for regional initiatives. A major challenge will be to agree a strategy to ensure the continued provision of this considerable input of both human resource and direct financial support. The future economy of Wales will depend on how well the Lifelong Learning agenda is embraced. Education and training is pivotal and the relationship between the forum and both CETW and CCETs needs to be defined clearly so that education and training is matched to the skill needs of the regional economy.

South East Wales Economic Forum June 2000

Employment by Industrial Sector, South East Wales Annex 1



Source: Annual Employment Survey/ Census of Employment September, 1996