

## **SOUTH EAST WALES REGIONAL COMMITTEE**

### **POST-16 EDUCATION AND TRAINING: PAPER FROM THE WALES TUC CYMRU**

1. The impact of poor basic skills is considerable, most jobs (around 9 in 10) require communication skills including reading and writing skills; the majority require some competence in basic maths.
2. In South East Wales, those jobs that have not required basic skills are disappearing rapidly. Employment opportunities for the one in four adults with basic skills needs are diminishing and the potential for companies to compete and develop is undermined.
3. Poor basic skills can cost the regional economy dear. It has been estimated that every company employing over about 50 people could be losing around £165,000 each year.
4. As we strive for a changing Wales with an economy no longer based on low waged low skill jobs we must ensure that local people benefit from the growing opportunities. This can only be achieved through carefully targeted and appropriate provision that supports a learning culture open to all.
5. There is a need to recognise that in order to raise skills levels there must be a comprehensive approach that cuts across traditional boundaries in education and training. CETW will have a critical role to play in ensuring that funding mechanisms support provision wherever and when ever it is required.
6. Support is needed for flexible schemes that reflect the motivations and requirements of individual learners including community based and family literacy schemes. There is a particular need to recognise the potential of workplace provision.
7. At present, the situation throughout Wales leaves many working people with little or no access to basic skills provision. Current funding structures mean that there is no automatic access to free basic skills provision for people in work despite evidence suggesting that people with poor literacy and numeracy are likely to be on low wages.
8. Costs for provision and even assessment vary between providers but as an example a low waged worker in Cardiff could be asked to pay up to £200 for a test for dyslexia.

9. In addition, basic skills provision is currently organised solely through F.E. For many people this creates an additional barrier against participation. People working shifts are frequently excluded from traditional courses that still largely require attendance at regular times.

10. Pilot programmes to develop innovative approaches to workplace provision both in Wales and in England have built upon partnerships between unions and employers and the traditional relationship of trust established between workers and unions. These programmes have proved successful in delivering provision that meets the needs of individuals and employers.

11. The greatest strength of these programmes has been to encourage non-traditional learners in to learning and to provide 'safe' environments for those with even the poorest basic skills to engage with the learning agenda.

12. Whilst varying in nature, programmes have all focused on the changing demands of industry emphasising the need for everybody to refresh and develop skills to compete in the current climate. Basic skills have therefore been set firmly within a wider context of lifelong learning and progression.

13. Evaluation of work-based provision has enabled the TUC to establish a list of critical success factors.

(i) Back up from learning representatives who are in a position to give ongoing peer support to learners.

(ii) Partnership between the union and employer giving a positive message to the workforce.

(iii) Good quality provider with experience of workplace or outreach provision.

(iv) Flexibility of delivery depending on context (i.e. time and place).

(v) Adequate preparation including:

- Time to identify learning needs;
- Proper publicity around workforce;
- Supportive initial assessment (involving representative where appropriate);
- Opportunity for progression.

14. In England the publication of the Moser report has given new impetus to this activity. Moser gave specific recognition to the role of workplace programmes and to the importance of trades

union involvement.

15. As a result of Moser's findings DfEE have invested considerable amounts of funding into supporting innovation and capacity in workplace provision with £3 million being invested in a development fund and a further £1.5 million added to the Union Learning Fund specifically to support basic skills programmes.

16. If the gap between basic skills in England and Wales is not to increase similar investment must be made here.

17. In addition we must look at systems that will ensure that funding for basic skills is not limited to F.E provision. Very few providers in Wales as a whole and fewer in South East Wales have experience and expertise in workplace programmes. Current funding mechanisms only enable colleges to provide WFEFC funded courses within a limited geographical area. The majority of workplace projects therefore, lie outside the funding boundaries of providers with the expertise to deliver.

18. Future planning must provide adequate funding for both the development and delivery of innovative workplace programmes. There must be a mechanism for quality marking provision and for ensuring comprehensive access to the best.

**Wales TUC Cymru June 2000**