

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION ON WORK-BASED LEARNING FOR ADULTS

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Tom Middlehurst, the Assembly Secretary for Post-16 Education and Training, launched a consultation on the future of Work-Based Learning for Adults. The consultation, which was launched on 19 May, ran until 17 July. A consultation paper was produced, highlighting issues which would need to be considered in designing a new Work-Based Learning for Adults programme and identifying questions for respondents to address. A copy of the consultation paper is at Annex A.

1.2 The consultation paper was distributed to a wide range of organisations. It was also placed on the National Assembly's website and copies were sent out on request by Assembly officials. This opened up the consultation to members of the public and organisations not specifically invited to participate.

1.3 The Post-16 Education and Training Committee also had an important role to play in the consultation. The Committee discussed the consultation paper at a meeting on 28 June and raised several issues, which are highlighted in paragraphs 1.8-11.

1.4 The consultation process was seen as vital to the review because it upheld the National Assembly's commitments to strengthening local democracy and promoting the spirit of partnership with other organisations working to improve the lives of people in Wales. In addition, the consultation ensured that the review was informed by the experience and expertise of:

- organisations which had delivered Work-Based Learning for Adults;
- organisations with experience of the problems faced by disadvantaged groups; and,
- business interests with knowledge of the requirements of the labour market.

A list of the organisations invited to participate in the consultation exercise is at Annex B.

1.5 Involving organisations with this wealth of experience has ensured that the strengths of the current programme have been highlighted and improvements have been suggested to enhance the programme's performance in meeting the needs of both long-term unemployed people and employers. Thirty two organisations have responded to the consultation. The list of respondents is at Annex C.

Issues Considered by Respondents

1.6 This paper analyses the responses to the consultation exercise. The questions which respondents were invited to consider cover a range of issues relevant to the review. The responses to these issues are considered in the following chapters.

1.7 Chapter two looks at respondents' views on the types of skills which a re-designed Work-Based Learning for Adults programme should provide and considers whether the programme should also provide skills training to some employed people.

Chapter three acknowledges that many long-term unemployed and economically inactive people face significant barriers to employment. The chapter identifies respondents' suggestions about how Work-Based Learning for Adults can be adapted to meet the needs of the client group more effectively.

Chapter four discusses respondents' views about the types of labour market intervention which are most effective in assisting unemployed people to gain sustainable employment.

Chapter five considers respondents' views on specific aspects of the current Work-based Learning for Adults programme, whether they need to be modified, and if so, how this should be done. Issues considered include:

- the assistance provided by the current Work-Based Learning for Adults programme;
- the mechanism for assessing prospective participants on the programme;
- the mechanism for funding the programme;
- methods of enhancing co-operation between organisations involved in delivering the programme; and,
- effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating the programme.

The final chapter draws some preliminary conclusions, based on the responses, about the features which a future adult training programme in Wales should possess.

The Post-16 Education and Training Committee's Response

1.8 In the course of its meeting on 28 June, the Post-16 Education and Training Committee discussed the consultation paper on the future of Work-Based Learning for Adults and raised several issues to be taken into account in devising a new programme.

1.9 The Committee was concerned to ensure that Work-Based Learning for Adults should be

transferred to the Council for Education and Training in Wales (CETW), and that the decisions should be taken in Wales about how money should be spent on the Welsh programme.

1.10 Committee members expressed the view that the training which Work-Based Learning for Adults currently provides should include information and communications technology training. Concern was expressed that the programme should take into account the caring responsibilities of participants and prospective participants on Work-Based Learning for Adults. Committee members also emphasised the importance of ensuring that the programme took into account the needs of employers.

1.11 Finally, the Committee requested that the Economic Development Committee should be informed of the consultation, so that members could contribute to it if they wished. Tom Middlehurst agreed to write to the Chair of the Economic Development Committee, to draw the consultation to her attention.

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CHAPTER 2: WORK-BASED LEARNING FOR ADULTS AND THE SKILLS NEEDS OF THE WELSH LABOUR MARKET

1 INTRODUCTION

2.1 This chapter focuses on Work-Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) as a mechanism for providing the skills required by the Welsh labour market. It first looks at the current programme's effectiveness at meeting those needs and at suggestions, coming through in the consultation, for improving the programme's responsiveness. The chapter then focuses on the types of skills which the programme should provide. Finally, respondents' views about the merits of extending the programme to some employed people, for the purpose of boosting skill levels, are discussed.

Current labour market needs

2.2 Many respondents felt that the programme needed to do more to ensure that the skills needs of employers were met. A number of suggestions came forward for improving this aspect of the programme.

2.3 Respondents suggested identifying the skills gaps faced by employers. Suggestions for achieving this included:

- Carrying out labour market studies and analyses;
- Improving communications links with employers and increasing consultation with local business fora;

- giving CCETs responsibility for tracking labour market information; and,
- strengthening links between the Employment Service, training providers and employers, so that unemployed people could be prepared for the jobs available.

2.4 Concern was also expressed that WBLA did not allow sufficient choice of training courses to address skills needs. Respondents suggested allowing the programme to support customised training and some non-NVQ training, provided the qualifications were valued by employers.

2.5 Finally, respondents emphasised the need to monitor and evaluate the extent to which the programme met the skills needs of employers, by obtaining feedback from trainees, ex-trainees, training providers and employers. The data should then be used to improve the programme's effectiveness. One respondent, however, cautioned against allowing monitoring and evaluation to become too burdensome.

Skills provided by Work-Based Learning for Adults

2.6 The types of skills considered in this section are:

- basic and key skills;
- vocational skills;
- Welsh language skills; and,
- Skills for people already in employment, to boost the skill levels of the Welsh labour force.

Basic and Key skills/Vocational Skills

2.7 One of the questions asked in the consultation paper was whether WBLA should concentrate on providing basic and key skills, to enable disadvantaged people to obtain employment. Ten respondents favoured this approach. Fifteen respondents, however, felt that, in addition to providing training in those skills, the programme should cover vocational skills and higher level qualifications.

Welsh Medium and Language Training

2.8 Eleven out of the sixteen respondents, who addressed this issue, expressed the view that neither the needs of Welsh speaking employers nor those of Welsh speaking participants on WBLA were adequately catered for. However, they did not identify the geographical locations or subject areas in which provision failed to meet demand. Two respondents suggested that the situation could be improved by allowing the National Council for Education and Training in Wales (CETW) to address the problem. One respondent suggested that research should be carried out to identify precisely both the nature and level of the need for further Welsh medium

provision. So far as the needs of Welsh speaking employers were concerned, two respondents suggested that they could be met by providing WBLA participants with Welsh language and conversation training, as this might considerably improve their employment prospects.

2.9 Of the five respondents who were not convinced that Welsh medium provision on WBLA was inadequate, two respondents, including the TECs, were of the view that the needs of Welsh speakers were met. According to the TECs' experience, wherever there was a demand for Welsh medium training, it was met by training providers.

Employee Access to Work-Based Learning for Adults

2.10 The consultation paper suggested that respondents might wish to consider whether the following groups of employees should have access to WBLA:

- WBLA participants, after they have found work, to help them to sustain employment;
- employees in "entry level" jobs, to help them to progress and to raise the skill levels of the workforce; and,
- employees in management level jobs, because of an identified shortage of supervisory and managerial skills in the Welsh economy.

Respondents' views about making WBLA available for each of these groups will be considered in turn.

Support for Work-Based Learning for Adults Participants who obtain Employment

2.11 Fifteen respondents were of the opinion that WBLA clients should continue to receive support when they first started work. One respondent disagreed. Respondents made a number of suggestions about who should benefit and the types of support that should be provided. Three respondents suggested that continued support should only be available for clients who found work before completing the WBLA training programme. Two respondents were of the view that all WBLA participants who found work should receive initial support. One respondent suggested that continued support should be available to people whose qualifications were below NVQ level ii. Finally, a respondent highlighted the needs of people with learning disabilities and suggested that they should continue to receive support for as long as it was required, to enable them to do the job to the best of their ability and become fully integrated into the workforce.

2.12 Several types of support were favoured by respondents, but the most popular was mentoring and follow-up contacts. Respondents also favoured further training, either in basic and soft skills, or vocational skills up to NVQ level ii and time off to study, with one respondent proposing compensation for employers if training was not directly work related.

Support for Employees in "Entry Level" Jobs

2.13 Twelve respondents supported extending WBLA training to "entry level" employees and five respondents opposed using WBLA for employees. Four respondents, including some who opposed using WBLA for this purpose, were, however, in favour of providing some form of training to this group. In addition to training, two respondents suggested the use of mentors, to help people in "entry level" jobs to progress.

Support for Training Managers

2.14 Respondents were less supportive of using WBLA to fund management training. Only four respondents favoured this, and six respondents opposed it. A further five respondents suggested that funding should be provided for management training, though not as part of WBLA. Five respondents advocated measures to encourage employers to take responsibility for training their own employees, though they also favoured providing assistance to supplement the employers' efforts.

Mechanisms suggested for improving management skills included:

- extending National Traineeships and Modern Apprenticeships to adults, and
- providing secondment opportunities.

2.15 Finally, respondents expressed concern about employees, at all levels, being given time off for training and study. Respondents emphasised the importance of training delivery being flexible, to meet the needs of trainees. Other suggestions included day release schemes and compensating employers for allowing employees time off to train.

CHAPTER 3: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION

3.1 The previous chapter considered the skills required by the Welsh labour market and the assistance that WBLA could provide in meeting those requirements. In this chapter, the focus will be on the barriers to employment which many unemployed and economically inactive people face and the ways in which WBLA could assist in overcoming them.

3.2 The chapter first lists barriers to employment, identified by respondents, which were not highlighted in the consultation paper. The discussion then turns to how WBLA might assist in reducing those barriers. The types of WBLA assistance considered include:

- Reducing the six month qualifying period for WBLA assistance;
- Providing assistance with transport;
- Providing assistance with childcare; and,
- Instituting measures to improve employers' perceptions about disadvantaged groups.

Barriers to Employment

3.3 Most of the barriers identified by respondents can be divided into three categories:

- practical considerations which either prevent, or act as a disincentive, to some unemployed people to find work;
- inability to drive;
- the benefits trap;
- refusal by some employers to employ people from certain areas;
- The "dependency" culture;
- Participation in the alternative economy;
- perceptions of many long-term unemployed people, both about themselves and about work;
- lack of confidence;
- lack of motivation;
- poor perceptions about employment;
- problems with personal appearance and hygiene, faced by some people. and,
- special problems faced by particular groups;
- non-recognition of the qualifications of asylum seekers from some countries;
- the need for more provision of appropriate training and support for people with learning disabilities; and,
- the difficulties of accessing employment faced by ex-offenders.

Reducing the Six month Qualifying period

3.4 Respondents considered reducing the six months qualifying period for some disadvantaged groups and extending WBLA eligibility to others.

3.5 Sixteen respondents favoured early access to WBLA for clients with a record of short periods of employment, including casual and seasonal work, interspersed with short periods of unemployment. One respondent pointed out that failure to give this group early access amounted to penalising them for their willingness to work. Some respondents felt that part time workers should also be given early access. Others, however, suggested that early access should only be available for people with a record of short periods of employment if, in addition, they complied with one of the following conditions: poor basic skills; qualifications below NVQ

level ii; or their jobs were poorly paid.

3.6 Fourteen respondents supported continuing WBLA eligibility to economically inactive people. None of the respondents opposed this proposition. Respondents suggested extending WBLA eligibility to employed people who required upskilling. Groups for whom respondents suggested reducing the six months qualifying period included:

- People with health problems;
- people in families with multi-generational unemployment;
- ex-offenders;
- women returners;
- people with poor literacy or numeracy skills; and,
- people whose first language was not English.

3.7 One issue on which respondents disagreed was whether older unemployed people should have early access to WBLA. This view was opposed by some respondents on the ground that age should not be a consideration. All but two of the respondents who opposed singling out older people for assistance, favoured allowing early eligibility for all, including older people. Six respondents favoured early access for older people, including organisations with direct knowledge of the particular difficulties experienced by older unemployed people. Respondents were not, however, agreed on the age at which older people should receive early access. Suggested starting ages ranged from forty to fifty-five years of age.

3.8 A large number of respondents favoured early access to WBLA for all unemployed people. Eleven respondents were of the view that the six months qualifying period should be reduced and six respondents advocated immediate access for all unemployed people. The main reason given for reducing or eliminating the qualifying period was concern about the loss of confidence and motivation which six months of unemployment could produce and the time and effort required to make unemployed people job ready again.

Transport

3.9 Eleven of the sixteen respondents who expressed a view were of the opinion that WBLA funding should be used to alleviate the transport problems facing many WBLA participants. The others, though in favour of funding being provided to tackle this problem, felt that it should not come out of WBLA. Several suggestions came forward for alleviating the transport problems, some of which were supported by several respondents. Four respondents supported a Two-Wheels or Four-Wheels To Work Scheme. Three respondents suggested providing driving lessons as part of WBLA. Another suggestion, supported by three respondents, was that WBLA clients should be provided with bus passes or season tickets. One respondent pointed out that this would have the advantage of reducing the cash handling and administration normally associated with travel expenses. Finally, one respondent, concerned

about the additional transport problems facing many disabled WBLA participants, suggested relaxing the rules determining access to the Reimbursement of Travel Expenses Scheme for Disabled People.

Childcare

3.10 Ten of the fifteen respondents who discussed childcare were in favour of funding the childcare needs of clients out of WBLA. The other five respondents felt that funding should come from elsewhere. Suggestions came forward about how childcare provision could be funded. Two respondents suggested that WBLA should meet the full childcare costs of clients. Another proposal, supported by two respondents, was for training providers to set up facilities for their clients or develop existing community facilities.

3.11 One respondent linked funding for clients' childcare and transport requirements by suggesting that clients, who could prove childcare or travel costs, should be reimbursed. The respondent pointed out that this would need to be closely monitored and a decision would have to be taken about whether the training providers or the Employment Service should be responsible for the system.

Employer Perceptions

3.12 Finally, respondents considered whether WBLA should support measures to improve employer perceptions about disadvantaged groups. Of the fifteen respondents who discussed this issue eleven were of the view that WBLA should tackle employer perceptions. Of the remaining four respondents, two felt that, although employer perceptions needed to be tackled, WWBLA was not effective for this purpose. Respondents put forward a number of ideas aimed at improving employer perceptions. Four suggested providing awareness training for employers, with a particular focus on employer obligations and disability awareness. Three respondents suggested identifying the needs of employers and ensuring that prospective employees, perceived to be disadvantaged, had the skills to meet these requirements. Other suggestions for improving employer perceptions were:

- Work trials and wage subsidies for people from disadvantaged groups and
- The establishment of a single agency to place people from disadvantaged groups, as many agencies could create confusion and compassion fatigue.

3.13 Finally, respondents drew attention to the difficulties in measuring employer perceptions.

CHAPTER 4: APPROPRIATE LABOUR MARKET INTERVENTIONS

INTRODUCTION

4.1 Having identified barriers to employment and considered specific measures for tackling them in the previous chapter, this chapter discusses the types of assistance which have proved most effective in helping unemployed people, particularly those facing additional disadvantages, to secure and sustain employment. The chapter first highlights the labour market interventions which respondents regard as most effective in helping unemployed people to return to, and remain in, employment. The chapter then assesses whether specific interventions, focusing on the needs of particular disadvantaged groups, should be established. Finally, the chapter considers whether it would be appropriate to modify or discontinue existing labour market interventions.

Effective Labour Market Interventions

4.2 Before considering specific interventions to help unemployed people, respondents considered whether the assistance available, to help disadvantaged groups into employment, was adequate. All of the sixteen respondents who expressed a view felt that more should be done to assist these groups. Only one respondent expressed any doubt on this question, suggesting that the solution might be to target current assistance more effectively, rather than to increase the level of assistance.

4.3 Of the many labour market interventions which respondents regarded as effective, several received widespread support. Ten respondents regarded work placements as a very effective intervention. Eight respondents felt that the job prospects of unemployed people would be increased by training in soft skills such as confidence building, motivation, punctuality, communication skills and team working skills. Five respondents emphasised the need to provide appropriate support for people with heavy caring responsibilities. The following interventions received the support of either three or four respondents:

- job search skills;
- a wider range of occupational skills training, including longer periods of training if necessary;
- basic, key, generic and transferable skills;
- travel concessions;
- careers advice; and,
- the use of the intermediate labour market, so long as it provides transferable skills.

Interventions for Specific Disadvantaged Groups

4.4 Views were mixed about whether interventions, aimed at specific disadvantaged groups,

should be established. The respondents acknowledged the importance of integration, but differed about how this could best be achieved. Seven of the respondents favoured integrated provision, arguing that it increased individuals' motivation. They also felt that it improved personal effectiveness, because participants on integrated interventions learned to work with others.

4.5 Three respondents, though regarding integration as important, felt that other considerations also had to be taken into account in designing provision to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups. A further four respondents, including organisations involved with disadvantaged groups, favoured the establishment of interventions aimed at particular groups. Their argument in favour of this position was that each disadvantaged group faced unique problems and would therefore benefit from interventions designed to address those problems. In addition, one respondent, involved in training people with learning disabilities, argued that, in order to achieve their integration into the workforce, specific training and support were required, to meet their particular needs.

4.6 Finally, two respondents emphasised the importance of monitoring. Monitoring should be carried out thoroughly, regardless of whether a policy of integration is pursued or whether interventions for specific disadvantaged groups are established, to ensure that interventions are effective.

Modifying Existing Labour Market Interventions

4.7 So far, this chapter has focussed on respondents' views about the types of labour market intervention which should be provided to assist unemployed people to secure sustainable employment. However, respondents also considered whether existing interventions needed to be modified, to make them more effective.

4.8 Respondents did not suggest that any existing labour market interventions should be discontinued. However, only one respondent asked that no modifications should be made to existing interventions and eight respondents suggested modifications. Suggestions included the following:

- the establishment of one programme to provide all of the skills training and offer wage subsidies, as in the New Deal;
- Modification of the eligibility and construction of the New Deal for 25+ to integrate with other provision and provide the benefits of the New Deal 18-24;
- Modification of the existing work related options of the New Deal 18-24 into an all age intermediary with real employment status and training;
- the use of WBLA for employed clients and a revamped New Deal 25+ for unemployed clients;
- Establishment of flexible time scales for acquiring skills, to meet the needs of

individuals; and,

- Expansion of the New Deal for Disabled People, so that it operates on a partnership basis and takes full advantage of the expertise available in the public, private and voluntary sectors to improve communications and co-ordination between the Employment service and social services departments in supporting people with disabilities to secure employment.

4.9 Finally, one respondent suggested that all labour market interventions should be monitored, to assess the effectiveness of any modifications.

CHAPTER 5: CHANGES TO WORK-BASED LEARNING FOR ADULTS

5.1 Respondents proposed improvements to the WBLA programme under the following headings:-

- a. current programme structure (overall, strands, outcomes and other issues);
- b. access to appropriate provision;
- c. monitoring assessment processes;
- d. improving the flow of information;
- e. improving funding arrangements (including achievement of greater value for money);
- f. relationship between WBLA and other training programmes.

Responses supporting the continuation of existing features of the programme have not been included.

- a. Current programme structure

5.2 This section summarises respondents' views on:-

- Overall structure of the programme;
- the appropriateness of the current WBLA strands;
- outcomes;
- other issues.

Overall

5.3 Suggested improvements to the programme included:-

- more help with childcare costs and more extensive provision of childcare facilities (7 respondents);
- introduction of a job subsidy or other incentive for employers (4 respondents);
- assistance with transport (4 respondents);

- provision of driving lessons (3 respondents);
- an increase in the training allowance (3 respondents);
- greater use of Work Trials (2 respondents);
- the extension of WBLA to include people (aged over 25) already in employment (2 respondents);
- the introduction of an additional programme, within the overall WBLA framework, to assist the most disengaged (2 respondents);
- the discontinuation of college-based courses for employability training (1 respondent).
- Six respondents felt that WBLA, in its current form, did not fully complement other labour market provision.

Strands

5.4 One respondent considered that dividing the programme into strands inhibited flexibility, suggesting that the strands should be replaced by objectives, with freedom of operation to achieve them.

5.5 Proposed changes to the current strands included:-

- *Recruit and Train* should place greater emphasis on training, for both competencies and qualifications (3 respondents);
- *Employability Training* should include a work placement (1 respondent);
- the focus should be on meeting the needs of the individual (1 respondent);
- *Recruit and Train* should be abolished because it was felt to usurp the employer's responsibility to provide induction training for new recruits (1 respondent).
- *Employability Training* should be more work related so that clients will see it as relevant (1 respondent);
- staff in referral agencies, who provide advice to potential WBLA participants, need to be more aware of the *Employability Training* strand's relevance to their needs (1 respondent).

5.6 Some respondents suggested that additional strands should be developed.

Respondents suggested the following:

- pre-employability training should be introduced or enhanced (3 respondents);
- West Wales TEC's pre-Work-Based Learning programme *Initial Guidance and Training* (IGAT) see Annex D, should receive greater recognition and be funded separately (2 respondents);
- clients not yet ready to start work placements should be able to start their training in a sheltered environment before progressing onto work experience and interviews with employers (1 respondent);

- customised training programmes should be provided (1 respondent);
- NVQ training should be available for people aged 25 and over who were returning to work after a period of childcare or other caring responsibilities, already in employment (1 respondent);
- management and supervisory skills training should be provided to people returning to work after a period of childcare or other caring responsibilities, redundancy or sickness.

Outcomes

5.7 Respondents were asked whether jobs and NVQs were the most appropriate outcomes, and where the greater emphasis should lie.

5.8 Fourteen respondents suggested that the programme should recognise additional outcomes, such as milestones towards jobs or qualifications. This was felt to be particularly important for the more disadvantaged clients, who needed a long period of support before they could achieve either NVQs or sustainable employment. Specific suggestions for additional outcomes included:-

- completion of the Individual Training Plan (6 respondents);
- improvements in attitude and behaviour, such as improved attendance and punctuality, a higher level of motivation, greater self confidence and the acquisition of soft skills (5 respondents);
- certificates for competencies achieved (1 respondent);
- readiness to take on additional responsibilities, such as a supervisory role during work experience;
- securing part time employment;
- participation in voluntary work;
- achievement of relevant non-NVQ qualifications;
- key skills accreditation.

5.9 Views were divided on whether WBLA should concentrate on jobs or qualifications, with 6 respondents favouring qualifications and 5 respondents suggesting that equal weight should be given to both jobs and qualifications. Two respondents felt that WBLA should aim to meet the specific needs of every client, rather than be prescriptive.

5.10 Some respondents, who favoured an emphasis on qualifications, argued that a heavy emphasis on jobs could result in a quick fix, rather than a solution which would meet the needs of the clients and provide them with the skills required to obtain sustainable employment. This, in turn, could lead to clients becoming demotivated, if they did not have the qualifications either to keep their jobs or to find suitable alternative employment.

5.11 Although several respondents agreed that WBLA should concentrate on qualifications

rather than jobs, there was some disagreement about the level of qualifications on which the programme should focus. Two respondents were of the opinion that WBLA should concentrate on providing qualifications at an advanced level to enable Wales to compete internationally, while 3 felt that WBLA should be mainly concerned with providing basic and employability skills.

Other issues

5.12 One aspect of programme content on which a number of respondents commented was the time-scale within which jobs or qualifications must be achieved. Of the seventeen who expressed views, only three were happy with current time scales. The others were concerned that the programme was too short to address the employment barriers faced by the people who were hardest to help. Respondents also felt that, although current time scales were appropriate for short, occupationally specific, or employer focussed qualifications (such as the Schedule 2 course), they were not adequate to address basic and soft skills requirements or to achieve the qualifications required to meet skills shortages. Responses included:-

- time-scales should be more flexible and individually focussed to ensure that participants have sufficient time to acquire the skills and qualifications needed to secure sustainable employment (5 respondents);
- each participant should have an action plan specifying the time-scale within which they are expected to achieve their qualification, and a time limit within which the qualification must be achieved (1 respondent.)
- time-scales should be established according to individual ability, the requirements to be met and the training provider being used (1 respondent);
- individuals should not be marginalised during training because their progress is slower than average (1 respondent).

1. Access to appropriate provision

Access, assessment and Individual Training Plans

5.13 Suggestions included:-

- ES staff should be made more aware of WBLA's objectives (1 respondent);
- comprehensive initial assessments should be introduced, including basic and key skills assessments. An effective partnership should be maintained between the Employment Service, the Careers Company, the training provider and employers. The assessment should identify each client's particular needs and an effective partnership between the relevant organisations should ensure that clients are matched to programmes that address their needs (5 respondents);
- self assessment by clients (2 respondents);
- use of a personal advisor, who would work in partnership with the client to select

- appropriate provision (1 respondent);
- use of IGAT to determine appropriate provision (2 respondents);
- more emphasis should be placed on basic skills assessment (1 respondent);
- more time should be allowed for assessment before clients start on their training courses (1 respondent);
- more extensive assessments should be undertaken to assess skill competence and academic ability (1 respondent);
- independent assessors should carry out the assessment of potential WBLA clients (4 respondents), although 2 respondents disagreed on the grounds that it would result in greater bureaucracy and increased delays in getting clients into training.

5.14 While 4 respondents agreed that an independent assessor should be involved in drawing up the ITP, 6 disagreed for the following reasons:-

- the additional expense involving independent assessors;
- it had already been tried by some English TECs but had proved too bureaucratic;
- training providers should be responsible for drawing up ITPs because they have suitably qualified, occupationally competent staff;
- independent assessors may lack knowledge about the occupational areas involved.

1. Monitoring assessment processes

5.15 Few consistent themes emerged from the range of suggestions for monitoring referral and assessment procedures. Suggestions included using:-

- the funding body to carry out the monitoring, as an audit function;
- Estyn to monitor quality;
- the funding body to carry out client audits through personal visits;
- the pro-forma drawn up by the Training Standards Council for monitoring and assessing programmes;
- external monitoring of referral and assessment procedures to ensure that those for whom the programme is intended receive the help they need;
- A few additional points were made by respondents.
- Two respondents were of the view that the annual self-assessment process, in line with the Estyn framework, would ensure that all procedures were effectively monitored and reviewed.

5.16 Respondents put forward a number of suggestions about monitoring ITPs, ensuring that they were reviewed regularly and that they were carried out in full. Again, there were no consistent themes. One detailed response suggested including an action plan in the ITP. As each objective, identified in the ITP, was achieved, it should be signed off by both the trainee and tutor. Copies of completed action plans should be sent to an external body to be checked

and monitored. Other suggestions included:-

- internal auditing of procedures, followed by external auditing, advocated by two respondents;
- monitoring to take place through the auditing and inspection process;
- regular case studies to be carried out by the referral agency;
- thorough checks that ITPs are on target, including discussions with tutors and mentors to agree changes and discussions with trainees about their ITP and forward planning; and,
- provision of advice by Estyn.

5.17 Three respondents, however, expressed the view that existing monitoring procedures were adequate. One of these respondents made the point that, in addition to the formal, five yearly inspection cycles carried out by Estyn, TECs carried out supportive quality monitoring programmes. These programmes included examination of the relevance, quality and level of inputs into the training and personal support received by trainees. An important quality indicator was the degree to which training programmes achieved their objectives. The respondent was of the view that this ongoing approach to quality assurance and development should be retained in any future programme.

1. Improving the flow of information

5.18 This section looks at how information from WBLA clients and the organisations involved in programme delivery can be used to enhance the programme:-

- how links between organisations involved in WBLA can be strengthened, so that the organisations can share best practice;
- what mechanisms can be developed for obtaining feedback about WBLA from former WBLA clients and organisations involved in programme delivery;
- how feedback can be used to enhance the programme.

How links between organisations can be strengthened

- establish a national network or forum of training providers, with clear terms of reference and a remit to discuss all aspects of WBLA, including best practice, ways of improving standards and ways of enhancing clients' experience (5 respondents);
- efforts should be made to increase networking among all organisations involved in WBLA (4 respondents);
- greater co-operation and openness between training providers, with organisations working together to a greater extent and complementing each other's strengths (2 respondents);
- bimonthly meetings to be held as part of the contractual obligations of training providers

- (1 respondent);
- the establishment of a comprehensive directory of provision (2 respondents);
- a providers' meeting, organised by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (1 respondent);
- collation and circulation of best practice by DfEE (1 respondent);
- the establishment of an Internet network on which trainees would put information about what has worked for them, both to disseminate good practice and as part of their development (1 respondent).

5.19 One respondent, however, cautioned that some private training providers might be unwilling to share good practice.

5.20 The following suggestions came forward about how links between organisations could be strengthened:-

- follow-up questionnaires should be used, either three and nine months or six and twelve months after completing WBLA (4 respondents);
- make efforts to increase networking during the training to encourage responses. Anonymity would encourage feedback (2 respondents);
- evaluation questionnaires could be used both during and after the training (2 respondents);
- interviews, perhaps by personal advisors or disability employment advisors, could be an effective mechanism (1 respondent).
- financial incentives could be used to encourage feedback from clients unwilling to complete evaluation questionnaires (3 respondents);
- encourage former WBLA clients to give relevant information in the context of follow up learning and career action plans which they could maintain in co-operation with Careers Wales. This could provide information about the extent to which WBLA participants kept their initial jobs, stayed in the same employing organisation, moved to other relevant employment and progressed in terms of earnings and job responsibility (1 respondent);
- feedback from employers and organisations involved in delivering WBLA could be obtained through questionnaires, followed by sample face to face interviews. The results would form a database which would be analysed to identify areas for improvement (2 respondents).

5.21 The following suggestions came forward about how feedback can be used to enhance the programme:

- training providers should receive feedback from monitoring and evaluation through written reports and feedback meetings carried out either by ES or by CETW. The feedback should be used to support further development (3 respondents);
- all information gathered should be recorded and evaluated against projected targets and

established performance indicators. These could be used to bring about continuous improvements to training provision (2 respondents);

- a sector group which could promote good practice and provide updates independently (similar to Fforwm) should be formed (1 respondent);
- mechanisms should be built into new contracts to deal with identified weaknesses (1 respondent).

1. Funding arrangements

5.22 This section considers:-

- Improvements to current WBLA funding arrangements;
- weighting;
- ensuring support is targeted at need;
- monitoring funding arrangements; and
- value for money.

Improving funding arrangements

5.23 Only one respondent felt that current funding arrangements were appropriate. Respondents expressed concern that current arrangements could cause cashflow problems for private training providers, who would only receive a 25% start payment and would have to wait until a successful outcome was achieved before receiving the rest of the funding. Respondents recognised that this form of funding might discourage private training providers from providing assistance to more disadvantaged clients because they might not achieve a successful outcome, as defined by the programme, and even if they did, the process would be likely to take longer. Solutions included:-

- introduction of on-programme payments so that training providers can be paid for milestones achieved by participants (11 respondents);
- milestones could include progress towards completing the ITP, successful completion of work experience and successful completion of NVQ units.
- Extend the definition of "successful outcomes" to include: overcoming barriers to employment; distance travelled by clients; or evidence provided by training providers of value added to clients;

There were also different views on when the on-programme payments should be made and the proportion of funding that should be paid at each stage.

Weighting

5.24 Opinions were divided:-

- funding should be weighted in favour of qualifications (5 respondents);
- funding should be weighted equally towards qualifications and jobs (5 respondents);
- funding should be weighted towards jobs (1 respondent).

Respondents also suggested additional funding requirements which WBLA should address:-

- additional funding should be provided to overcome particular disadvantages, such as the geographical barriers (1 Respondent);
- the existing funding regime does not allow for some occupational training being more expensive than others (2 respondents).

Ensuring support is targeted at need

5.25 Some respondents were concerned that private sector training providers might select clients on the basis of their ability to achieve a successful outcome rather than their need:-

- training should not be undertaken by profit making organisations (5 respondents, mostly organisations involved with disadvantaged groups). Two of these respondents suggested that private training providers would discriminate against the most disadvantaged people because they were more costly to train;
- allow private, profit-making organisations to continue to provide some training (11 respondents). One respondent argued that private sector involvement helped ensure efficiency.

5.26 Respondents considered how private training providers could be encouraged to meet the needs of disadvantaged clients:-

- make additional funding available for training the clients who were hardest to help (6 respondents);
- ensure training providers have well-defined equal opportunities policies that operate effectively (3 respondents);
- improve initial assessments to avoid inappropriate referrals. If training providers refuse to take the clients referred to them, they would be required to justify their decision (2 respondents);
- make funding less output related (2 respondents);
- build weightings, incentives and penalties into contracts with training providers to encourage them to train disadvantaged clients (1 respondent).

5.27 Suggestions for providing training in the absence of private training providers, focused on

providing assistance to the voluntary sector so that it could meet those needs. One respondent suggested building up the capacity of the voluntary sector, so that its providers could offer training to all potential clients, including the most disadvantaged. The other suggestion to come forward was similar, to develop a consistent method of funding the voluntary sector to enable it to engage and assist the most marginalised people.

Monitoring funding arrangements

5.28 Three respondents were happy with current funding arrangements and some did not know whether or not current arrangements were effective. Two respondents suggested that monitoring should include self evaluations, monitoring the quality of ITPs and suitability of training, checking qualifications achieved, the new knowledge and skills gained by participants and the extent to which value for money was achieved.

5.29 One respondent suggested reviewing training providers and training courses by using evaluation questionnaires, monitoring success rates and comparing forecasts to monetary outcomes. Another suggestion was to have annual audits, inspections and FAM.

5.30 Finally, an emphasis on the need to monitor quality came through strongly. One respondent expressed the view that, at present, funding is based on a compliance culture and not on a quality culture. Another respondent suggested that quality policies and procedures should be actively encouraged, through the process of self-assessment. The referral agencies and funding bodies could provide monitoring and support and local monitoring agencies, CCET wide, should be established as a CCET inspectorate. The inspectorate's function would be to establish, support and maintain quality standards for the operation of all the CCETs. They would also liaise closely with Estyn in preparing for local inspections and ensuring that local standards are in line with those throughout the rest of Wales.

Value for money

5.31 Respondents suggested many mechanisms for achieving value for money.

These include:

- costing the assistance provided to clients (3 respondents);
- involving Estyn in ensuring value for money (3 respondents);
- carrying out continuous assessment to measure progress, using the ITP as the working document and on-programme quality reviews to demonstrate value for money (2 respondents);
- evaluating the quality of inputs as well as outputs, using the Training Standards Council criteria as a guide. Mechanisms should provide a check on the input and output competence of the individual, the processes used in training and the effective use made

- of developing competence (2 respondents);
- evaluating the personal objectives identified in ITPs and the extent to which they had been achieved. The cost for each objective achieved would be a useful measure of the cost benefit equation. Long term impact analysis within the labour market would provide data on the effectiveness of the programme (1 respondent);
- carrying out quality inspections;
- establishing quality standards;
- rigorous FAM auditing;
- rigorous auditing of clients and paperwork;
- effective use of management information to analyse retention rates, achievement rates and tracking of repeat business;
- customer satisfaction surveys;
- auditing quality and setting key performance indicators, with achievable targets;
- using the same mechanisms for ensuring value for money as are used on the New Deal.

5.32 One respondent pointed out that, having so many Government schemes, with different systems and administrative arrangements, was not conducive to improving value for money.

1. Relationship between WBLA and other training programmes

5.33 This final section considers whether WBLA would operate more effectively if it was merged with other programmes. The section includes respondents' views on:-

- merging WBLA with the Skillseekers programme for young people;
- merging WBLA with the New Deal for 25plus;
- integrating WBLA into an all-age training programme; and
- keeping WBLA as a separately funded, stand-alone programme.

5.34 Merge WBLA with the Skillseekers programme?

- WBLA and the Skillseekers programme should be merged (4 respondents);
- advisable to wait until the re-organisation of post 16 education and training had taken place and has settled down before attempting to integrate WBLA (1 respondent);
- no age restrictions should be placed on the Skillseekers programme (currently open to people under the age of 25) (5 respondents);
- Modern Apprenticeships should be available to people over the age of 25 (5 respondents);
- WBLA and Skillseekers should not be merged because of the potential difficulties of integrating younger and older people on the same programmes and classes, and because this would remove a programme aimed at the needs of disadvantaged groups, in particular people with disabilities who required individual training (3 respondents).

Merging WBLA with the New Deal for 25plus?

- WBLA should be integrated with the New Deal (5 respondents).

5.35 Those supporting the merger pointed to the similarities between the objectives of the two programmes. One respondent also made the point that keeping the two programmes separate would diminish the employment prospects of WBLA clients because New Deal clients came with an employer subsidy.

- WBLA should not be integrated with the New Deal (9 respondents).

5.36 Respondents gave two main reasons for opposing a merger with the New Deal. In the first place, some were concerned that the objectives of the two programmes were not sufficiently similar. They saw the objectives of the New Deal primarily as helping unemployed people to obtain employment, whereas they saw WBLA principally as a training programme. Secondly, although respondents acknowledged the vital role played by the Employment Service, they were concerned that a merger with the New Deal would result in the National Assembly for Wales losing control over an important training initiative.

Integrate WBLA into an all-age training programme?

5.37 Respondents favoured retaining a WBLA-type programme, and some were very positive about the programme's success. However, they did not agree about whether the programme should be kept separate, or integrated into an all-age adult training programme:-

- keep WBLA as a separately funded adult training programme (5 respondents);
- integrate it as one element of an all age training programme (9 respondents).

5.38 Respondents favouring integration argued that this approach would ensure flexibility, so that the needs of all clients, whatever their skills level, could be met. Another argument, supported by six respondents, was that the current situation was very confusing. More coherence was needed because there were too many programmes, each with its own eligibility criteria, administrative and record keeping arrangements. Respondents also felt that a more coherent system would save money and ensure that the money available would benefit the clients.

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CHAPTER 6: VIEWS EMERGING FROM THE CONSULTATION

6.1 The previous chapters identified a range of views arising from the consultation, in response to the questions raised by the consultation paper. This chapter will highlight the main proposals which have emerged.

6.2 Although the following suggestions were the most popular, it should be noted that these suggestions have not necessarily received unanimous support and may, in some cases, have been opposed by several respondents.

Skills Demand

6.3 There was widespread support for the programme to focus on meeting the skills needs of the Welsh economy. Suggestions included:

- Greater efforts to identify the skills needs of employers, by carrying out labour market studies and improving links between employers and organisations involved in delivering WBLA;
- Monitoring and evaluation of the extent to which WBLA meets the skills needs of employers;
- Provision of qualifications, other than NVQs, which are valued by employers;
- Continued provision of basic and key skills, as well as occupational skills;
- Continued support for WBLA participants who have found work, particularly if this occurs before they have completed their training; and,
- Provision of training to employees in "entry level" jobs, though not necessarily as part of WBLA.

6.4 It should be noted that respondents were largely supportive of providing more Welsh medium WBLA training. They did not, however, indicate either the geographical or the subject areas in which this increased training should be provided.

Addressing Barriers to Employment

6.5 The suggestions coming forward strongly on this issue included:

- Early access to WBLA for people with a record of short-term, casual or seasonal work, interspersed with short periods of unemployment, particularly if coupled with either poor basic skills or a record of poorly paid work;
- Reduction of the six month eligibility period to avoid demotivation and loss of confidence;
- Provision of assistance with transport for WBLA participants;
- Provision of assistance with childcare costs; and,
- Adoption of measures to tackle employer perceptions about people from disadvantaged groups.

Appropriate Labour Market Interventions

6.6 One view held by many respondents was that more needed to be done to assist people from disadvantaged groups into employment.

6.7 The following were the most popular suggestions for assisting disadvantaged groups:

- Provision of more work placements;
- Provision of training in soft skills; and,
- Provision of appropriate support for people with heavy caring responsibilities.

Programme Content

6.8 Several suggestions under this heading, which received wide support, have already been referred to. One suggestion put forward by a number of respondents, however, was the introduction of a job subsidy or other incentive for employers, to encourage them to employ WBLA participants.

6.9 With regard to programme strands, respondents felt that Recruit and Train should place more emphasis on training than at present and that Employability Training should contain a work placement.

6.10 The most popular suggestion for a new WBLA strand was Pre-employability training. A Pre-employability model, favoured by some of these respondents, is at Annex A.

6.11 Other suggestions relating to the programme content included:

- Additional programme outcomes, over and above jobs and NVQs; and,
- More flexible time scales for achieving qualifications.

Access, Assessment and Individual Training Plans

6.12 The main points to come through strongly from this section were:

- The need for comprehensive, initial assessment, including basic and key skill assessments;
- A strong partnership between organisations involved in referring onto and delivering WBLA, to ensure that clients are thoroughly assessed and their needs are met; and,
- Thorough monitoring of referral and assessment procedures and Individual Training Plans.

Obtaining and Using Feedback to Improve the Programme

6.13 The following suggestions received the widest support:

- The establishment of a national network or forum of training providers;
- An increase in networking among all organisations involved in WBLA;
- the use of questionnaires, either during or after training, with some follow up interviews, to establish client perceptions of the programme; and,
- the use of surveys, followed by sample face to face interviews, to establish the perceptions of employers and organisations involved in the programme and identify possible areas for improvement.

Funding Arrangements

6.14 Suggestions to come forward strongly regarding funding arrangements were as follows:

- The establishment of on-programme payments, so that training providers would receive funding for milestones achieved, as well as starts and outcomes;
- The extension of the definition of "successful outcomes";
- Provision of additional funding for training the clients who are hardest to help; and,
- Thorough monitoring of funding mechanisms, with an emphasis on monitoring quality.

Relationship Between WBLA and Other Programmes

6.15 No view under this heading received unanimous support. Respondents, however, supported the retention of a WBLA programme to assist long-term unemployed adults. The most popular suggestion was that WBLA should be integrated as one element of an all age training programme.

Respondents favouring integration argued that this approach would ensure flexibility, so that the needs of all clients, whatever their skills level, could be met. Several respondents also felt that the current situation was very confusing. More coherence was needed because there were too many programmes, each with its own eligibility criteria, administrative and record keeping arrangements. Respondents pointed out that a more coherent system would save money and ensure that the money available benefited the clients.

6.16 Despite the support for integrating WBLA as an element of an all-age skills programme, respondents expressed concern about integrating younger and older trainees in the same classroom. Respondents were also concerned to ensure that any future training programme aimed to meet the needs of disadvantaged adults.

ANNEX D

INITIAL GUIDANCE ASSESSMENT AND TRAINING

D.1 Although WBLA and its predecessors have been able to support a wide range of individuals with vocational training and obtaining sustainable employment, it was felt that there was a potential barrier to a small number of eligible individuals. This barrier was based on the belief that some people needed extra support to enable them to feel positively towards training. Support to overcome low self esteem, low ability levels, lack of awareness of what might be available were all built in to IGAT design. It was felt that a major barrier to individuals taking up support from WBLA (or anywhere else) was the need to 'sign off' from the Unemployed Register as, if the support programme did not work out, re-registering and applying for various grants would be a major task, seen as particularly difficult for many in our target group. It was felt that unless an easy to access, minimum bureaucracy support opportunity was made available (one that did not affect their benefit entitlement), then many within the target group faced exclusion from the labour market in spite of the support available within the WBLA mainstream programme. Some (but not all) of these people need to cope with additional difficulties which may include a combination of the following:

1. Mental and/or physical disability;
2. Literacy and/or numeracy problems;
3. Domestic barriers eg. single parents & those with childcare needs;
4. Ex-offenders seeking an opportunity to return to work.

D.2 These clients have great difficulty in accessing employment and training opportunities, often due to lack of job focus. As a result, unemployment rates are well above the average and our experience has taught us that they are less likely to access or complete formal training courses successfully. With the increased emphasis on providing support for "harder to help" clients, while still aiming for a high percentage of successful outcomes from WBLA, it is important that those coming onto the training programme have the best chances of success. Employability Training as part of WBLA, has emphasised the need to help people in the target groups to come to correct and sustainable decisions about the best route forward for them to return to the labour market. With the advent of the IGAT programme, West Wales TEC is able to offer, in advance of structured training, a combination of counselling support and introductory training to those individuals who have shown interest in training as a routeway back into employment. IGAT seeks to confirm the most appropriate avenue of support for the individual, with progress on to WBLA being one of the prime IGAT programme outcomes.

D.3 IGAT aims to expose clients to an environment and culture that enables them to recognise and take advantage of the opportunities to develop themselves to their full potential. The programme is delivered by the existing network of WBLA training providers and is delivered on

a part time basis, usually over a period of up to eight weeks. The programme content is based on the Open University package entitled "Build on Your Skills". This consists of a manual, which is specifically designed for use with groups of up to 10-12 people, to recognise their transferable skills and encourage action planning. Part time delivery ensures that benefit entitlement is safeguarded for the participant. IGAT has been particularly effective in supporting the needs of Employment Service clients appropriate to the New Deal 25 Plus pilot which has been trialled in West Wales and will be introduced throughout Wales from April 2001.

D.4 IGAT seeks to:

- offer non threatening, easy to understand and importantly easy to access support that allows a variety of outcomes
- re-introduce participants to the requirements of the world of work;
- provide an understanding of the social skills which are needed for successful job seeking;
- eliminate the negative effects of long-term unemployment and provide work-based models of behaviour for people in whom such understanding may have been lost;
- provide practical jobsearch skills training and offer some early support with numeracy and literacy, to enable beneficiaries to gain the confidence needed to pursue more in-depth literacy / numeracy training after completing the programme;
- provide participants with access to a range of further options, including training support via WBLA.