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Lletygarwch, Twristiaeth a Manwerthu
HTR-01
Ymateb gan: Colegau Cymru

Welsh Parliament
Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Hospitality, Tourism and Retail
Evidence from: Colleges Wales



Senedd Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry into Tourism, Hospitality and Retail

15 February 2022

ColegauCymru is a post-compulsory education charity; we promote the public benefit of post-compulsory education and learning. We also convene the further education (FE) Principals' Forum, which represents Further Education colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales. ColegauCymru also undertakes research, policy development and provides practical support to FE colleges in Wales, including on work-based learning (WBL) which is a key part of FE college activity.

ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to submit a short evidence paper to the Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee as part of the inquiry into Tourism, Hospitality and Retail, ahead of the oral evidence session on 3 March 2022.

We are grateful to Cardiff and Vale College and Pembrokeshire College, in particular, for their input to this submission.

1. Background

In 2019-20, the total number of learning activities in Retail and Commercial Enterprise in the Further Education sector was 12,600. An additional 6,110 learning activities took place in Leisure, Travel and Tourism.¹

1.1 Concerns about skills and training in tourism, retail and hospitality are not new. In 2017, ColegauCymru, funded by an EACEA grant to EQAVET National Reference Points, undertook an interview-based piece of research focusing on small business skills needs, recruitment, the differences between the training needs of businesses in retail, hospitality and catering, and importantly, how to meet these needs with a focus on how Further Education (and, in some cases Higher Education) should react in terms of developing courses and approaches to teaching and learning more widely. This research was published in "Gammon, egg and chips in a pub night after night."² Many of the policy recommendations in that report are still relevant and are pertinent to the current inquiry. This is especially the case with regard to better promotion of careers and new models of working.

2. The sectors' recent experience with COVID and economic recovery

2.1 There is no doubt that the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors have been badly affected by Covid 19. Feedback from CAVC's Catering, Tourism and Hospitality Employer Board indicates that there is cautious optimism from employers in the sector, who are hoping that the worst may now be over, though

¹ See Stats Wales, <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Further-Education/learningactivitiesfurthereducationinstitutions-by-subject-age>

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<https://www.colleges.wales/image/publications/reports/Gammon,%20egg%20and%20chips%20in%20a%20pub%20night%20after%20night/Gammon,%20egg%20and%20chips%20in%20a%20pub%20night%20after%20night%20English%20Final.pdf>

a concern that that it could take up to five years to return to pre-pandemic 'normal' and anywhere close to 2019-level contributions to GDP was also expressed.

2.2 The shortage of employees in the tourism sector is not limited to Covid 19 but in many cases has been impacted by Brexit, poor transport infrastructure, zero-hour contracts and young people not finding the sector attractive.

2.3 It should be noted that colleges themselves are often also businesses operating in this space: colleges with a commercial offering in tourism, hospitality and retail space report a significant impact on their commercial operations, with hospitality, spas and hair & beauty all affected. Bookings have greatly reduced and restrictions have impacted on operations with opening. This has a knock-on effect on the learners who struggle to obtain 'real' customer facing experience to develop and build their skills levels suitable for employment.

3. The longer-term viability and sustainability of the sectors

3.1 The longer-term viability and sustainability of these sectors remains difficult to accurately predict, with colleges highlighting concerns raised with them about potential supply chain disruption and food price increases as their main concern after employee shortages.

3.2 There is an opportunity to focus on local food as a selling point, perhaps working with local farms and suppliers and putting emphasis on the 'farm-to-table' initiatives. There needs to be a strong focus on the development of a sustainable green environment.

3.3 Support from employers is needed, along with ever-stronger partnerships with colleges to develop and grow talent and make these more favourable industries for people to enter to fill the employee shortages.

3.4 Colleges were keen to emphasise their ongoing engagement with, and support for, employers. This ranges from specific Boards in these subject areas, to events focused on the future of the industries, and to promote their businesses and employment opportunities.

4. Workforce issues – including improving the quality of jobs in the sectors and addressing labour shortages;

4.1 A survey of hospitality students carried out by People 1st International in June 2021 showed that the top 3 factors to attract and retain future talent in a role were:

- work-life balance
- pay
- learning & development.³

4.2 Further Education college engagement with catering and hospitality employers shows that there is growing recognition and acceptance that the culture of the industry has to change radically in order to attract young people into the sector. The established working practices of 60/80-plus hours a week, coupled with split shifts and weekend working needs to change. However, whilst this cultural evolution in working practices has been recognised and acknowledged by employers, employers themselves face challenges in enabling the changes required to address the issue of work-life balance. This is because hospitality unavoidably involves long working days, evenings, weekends and Bank holidays, etc. There is also a vicious circle in parts of the sector insofar as the current staff shortage crisis means that existing employees are having to work longer hours to cover operational requirements. This makes implementation of any changes to existing working patterns extremely challenging.

4.3 Some hospitality employers are responding with initiatives such as closing on Mondays and Tuesdays in order to give staff time off. However, LMI indicates that there is a growing trend amongst young people considering hospitality as a career, of not wanting to work weekends. This is when staffing requirements are at their peak.

4.4 Businesses generally report to colleges that they are finding it very difficult to attract and recruit suitable candidates for front of house, kitchens or retail. Reasons for this include: poor perceptions of working conditions in hospitality; cases of perceived poor motivation and attitudes of young people; training needs; and a lack of common marketing strategy for the visitor economy.

4.5 Employers are concerned that staff shortages will get worse as employers compete with each other to recruit staff from a much smaller, post-Brexit employee pool. Organisations which are able to offer skills training and career development opportunities will likely prove the most successful in recruitment.

4.6 There is an understanding that employers need to improve working conditions and work life balance to attract people back into the industry, with clear progression pathways. A of review qualification delivery is necessary to ensure that curriculum delivery is fit for purpose and meets the needs of the future of the industry.

³ See: <https://people1st.co.uk/insights-resources/research-intelligence/future-talent-in-hospitality>

4.7 Specifically in Cardiff, it is hoped that the soon-to-be launched Priority Sector Skills Academy pilot programme at Cardiff and Vale College will help improve the pipeline into the sector within the Capital Region.

5. Skills in the sectors

5.1 Some colleges report that numbers for FE have been down overall this year due to Covid 19 and the impact on the industry has seen a significant decline in applications and overall enrolments this year. Applications for tourism courses in many colleges are down this year, although many remain positive for a fairly healthy return in numbers for academic year 22/23.

5.2 Covid 19 has caused much disruption to learners across all sectors, not just those entering courses in tourism, retail and hospitality. However, some of the issues are particularly problematic for these sectors. For instance, many learners are lacking softer skills which include communication and social skills and find it difficult to perform and stay on task. There are problems with attendance as some learners struggle to attend full weeks of college due to not being in a structured environment for the past two years. Other colleges reported that learners are not prepared to work in front facing roles as they have not developed the customer service skills and/or confidence. Lack of aspiration also plays a part and Covid has contributed to this.

5.3 The Community Renewal Fund has presented an opportunity for Pembrokeshire College to work with the visitor economy to attract and train new staff and re-train existing staff. Funding was confirmed in November 2021 and the project ends June 22. They are in the process of offering and delivering a wider variety of training to the tourism sector, including allergens, first aid, Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET), ILM, Confidence and Connection programme, social media workshops (User Generated Content) and Barista training. A number of companies are taking part in the training opportunities.

5.4 There are some specific challenges for skills provision in parts of the travel and tourism sector. For instance, the City & Guilds Cabin Crew course has expired and currently no further registrations are permitted. As a result, colleges offering this course may have to look for another awarding body or a slightly different course for September 2022. In Cardiff and Vale College, the course with the highest applications for 22/23 at present is the Cabin Crew course so this is a serious issue.

5.5 Other colleges reported introducing new courses or approaches. Pembrokeshire Colleges started a L3 FE Travel & Tourism course in Sept 2020 to increase awareness of variety of jobs on offer in the sector locally. Their L2 FE Travel & Tourism route has been developed with a combined pathway of further education study plus a work-based qualification. This gives learners a chance to experience the roles first hand before embarking on L3 programmes or other employment. Pembrokeshire are putting on this provision to try to develop the skills in young people to move into the sector. These learners will have half a week in college and half a week in industry.

5.6 Other colleges also recognised that future changes in hospitality will require the need for less classroom-based activity and more real experience with the inclusion of technology.

6. Welsh language

6.1 The Committee might also like to explore the impact and opportunities on the Welsh language as part of this inquiry. The Welsh language is key to Wales' hospitality and tourism offer, in particular, as it differentiates Wales from other parts of the UK. Opportunities for learners to maintain or develop Welsh language skills have been affected by Covid 19 as Colegau Cymru reported as part of a recent Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee inquiry into the Welsh language. This may impact on the numbers of learners able to meet the needs of employers and the economy.

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