



Developing the Network to Deliver Excellence in Vocational Skills
Datblygu'r Rhwydwaith i Gyflawni Rhagoriaeth mewn Sgiliau Galwedigaethol

Submission to the Enterprise and Business Committee

Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work

Jeff Protheroe
Operations Manager
4 November 2014

Introduction

1. The National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) is a membership organisation of over one hundred organisations involved in the delivery of learning in the workplace. It is a Wales wide representative body for all those organisations or individuals involved in the training industry. Members range from small specialist training providers to national and international organisations, as well as Local Authorities, Further Education Institutions and third sector organisations.
2. The NTfW represents the interests of learners, employers and learning providers across Wales and aims inform them about all aspects of the education and training agenda.
3. Members work across Wales in rural, urban, bilingual and Welsh medium settings, and have strong links with over 35,000 employers across Wales ranging from small enterprises through medium sized companies to large multi-nationals and public sector organisations.
4. The NTfW maintains close working relationships with Welsh Government Ministers, Welsh Assembly Members, the Department for Education and Skills, Careers Wales, Jobcentre Plus and Sector Skills Councils.

Aim

5. The aim of this Submission Paper is to provide evidence to the Enterprise and Business Committee ahead of a planned meeting which will take place at the Senedd on Wednesday 12 November 2014.

Background

6. All Members of NTfW are commissioned by the Welsh Government to deliver Work-based Learning (WBL) across Wales. The term 'Work-based Learning' for the context of this submission covers Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Work Ready and Jobs Growth Wales Programmes.
7. All elements of the WBL provision in Wales are part funded by the European Social Fund, through the Welsh Government.

Work-based Learning Programmes in Wales

8. It is worth noting that during 2012/13 some 61,225 individual undertook a Work-based Learning programme in Wales, to whom which, circa 212,000 learning activities were delivered. It is widely recognised that Work-based Learning in Wales, is playing a significant role in developing the skills and employment opportunities of young (54% under the age of 25; 26% under the age of 19) and not so young, people across Wales. During this same period, 64% of leavers went into new or continued current employment.

Traineeships

9. The primary objective of Traineeships is to equip young people with the skills, qualifications and experience to enable them to progress at the earliest opportunity to learning at a higher level or to employment. Traineeships is a non-employed status training programme for 16-18 school leavers not otherwise engaged in post-16 education or employment. Traineeships has been designed to align with 14-19 Learning Pathways forming part of a broader range of options available for school leavers. Traineeships is a flexible programme which requires the development of an individual plan of learning to meet the needs of each young person. The programme provides an opportunity for young people who are motivated by work to develop the breadth of skills, qualifications and experience they need to be attractive to employers. Centre based training provision should complement the use of employer work placements, community projects and voluntary work. Traineeships has three strands: Engagement, Level 1 and Bridge-to-Employment.

Work Ready

10. Work Ready is to support individuals' progress from non-employment into employment. The provision consists of two elements (i.e. Learning for Work and Routeways). Entry to the most appropriate programme to meet each learner's needs will be determined through the Provider's own assessment process. For the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 an additional element of the Learning for Work strand will operate to focus on Essential Skills delivery for learners who are mandated into provision through a formal Jobcentre Plus assessment and referral process. This will be referred to as Learning for Work (Skills Conditionality). Individuals who are 18 years of age or over, have left full time education and are ordinarily resident in Wales, are eligible for entry into this programmes (subject to additional eligibility criteria).

Jobs Growth Wales

11. Jobs Growth Wales is a package of support to help young people aged 16 – 24 into a paid job opportunity for a six month (26 week) period. Participants need to be employed for a minimum of 25 hours per week up to a maximum of 40 hours per week and be in receipt of a wage at or above the National Minimum Wage rate as appropriate for their age. A positive outcome of the programme is to support young people to gain work experience and to enable them to enter sustained employment including, where appropriate, an apprenticeship opportunity.

Apprenticeships

12. Foundation Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship are employment based learning programmes for employed learners at QCF levels 2 and 3 which follow a framework developed by the relevant industry Sector Skills Council. Each framework specifies the learning activities including qualifications covering occupational competencies and the relevant technical knowledge, Essential Skills Wales and Employment Rights and Responsibilities (ERR).

13. Higher Apprenticeship is an employment based programme for employed learners, at QCF level 4 - 6, and follows a framework developed by the relevant Sector Skills Council. Each framework specifies learning activities, including qualifications covering occupational competencies and the relevant technical knowledge, Essential Skills Wales and Employment Rights and Responsibilities (ERR).

What support is most effective and what are the main barriers that face young people trying to enter the labour market?

14. NTfW believes that the most effective form of support for those young people looking to enter the labour market, is to enable them to become 'job ready' before being exposed to a period of real work experience(s) alongside which there is sufficient and appropriate 'in work' support.

15. The main barriers faced by young people trying to enter the labour market are lack of employability skills (inc. literacy and numeracy), lack of employment opportunities, and a relatively complex system for them to navigate to identify the most appropriate route to employment.

16. In addition to the main barriers identified above, WBL providers are increasingly having to support young people with complex barriers such as drug dependency, homelessness and severe behavioural problems either prior to or during the support being offered to develop their employability skills, in order that the young people become 'job ready'.

To what extent is the Welsh Government's strategy for young people who are not in education, employment or training effective and value for money?

17. This is difficult to answer, as the Welsh Government does not currently have a 'strategy' for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS), rather, their aspirations to deal with the issue are laid out in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. As the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework is in the very early stages of being rolled out, it is too early to tell how effective this is, or whether or not it offers value for money.

What progress has been made to date on the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework Implementation Plan?

18. It is still too early to tell what progress has been made to date. However, NTfW would like to raise their concerns with the Committee that there is still a significant lack of brokerage, coordination and support between schools/colleges and other third party support mechanisms and WBL providers. This has a detrimental effect on the young person's ability to be able to fully exploit the relevant opportunities that are available to them.

How effective is the strategic role of local authorities and other key stakeholders including the Careers Service, the Youth Service, and the education regional consortia?

19. In terms of the delivery of WBL in Wales, there is very little evidence within our network of strategic roles for local authorities, the Youth Service or indeed the education regional consortia to play. It would be fair to say that each of the stakeholders mentioned above would have very little, if any, understanding of the offer available to individuals through WBL. However, Careers Wales plays a significant strategic role in the delivery of WBL, especially in relation to raising awareness, and signposting individuals onto Traineeships and, where applicable, Jobs Growth Wales. There is a strong and robust relationship between NTfW (and its Members) and Careers Wales, which will need to become even stronger moving forward if we are to achieve our key objectives, being parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning.

20. It is also worth noting that NTfW (and its Members) have equally strong, and constantly developing, relationships with Jobcentre Plus. NTfW sees this as a key relationship moving forwards in dealing with 18-24 year old non employed individuals.

The extent of discrimination and its impact on the recruitment of young people.

21. It is not felt that discrimination is an issue within WBL, however, it is recognised that more could be done to encourage the take up of WBL programmes amongst groups with 'protected characteristics' NTfW (and its Members) will be looking to work hard with Welsh Government officials and other stakeholders to ensure that WBL in Wales is seen as a viable and inclusive offer.

22. A key area in which NTfW would be looking to address with Welsh Government would be around the contractual obligations on WBL providers, which can have an impact on the responsiveness of providers to be able to support learners e.g. timescales of funding to support learners with assistive technology etc.

How effective are the range of schemes, initiatives and projects aimed at supporting young people into work, for example: Jobs Growth Wales; apprenticeships; traineeships; other projects supported by European funding; and third-sector-run projects? Do they provide good value for money?

23. The latest set of verified statistics on WBL programmes in Wales (2012/13) indicates that on a learner basis (taking only the final programme of the year) 64% of leavers went into new or continued current employment.

Note: the figure above does not count leaver destinations for Jobs Growth Wales, as this is reported separately. However, the latest information indicates that 82% of leavers progress into sustained employment (inc. Apprenticeships) or further learning.

24. NTfW believes that the key to the continued success of WBL programmes in Wales is that they are designed and delivered in a complimentary way that allows an individual 'a ladder of progression' through to, and on from, a 'gold standard' Apprenticeship.

25. Taken as a whole, and with the above data in mind, NTfW believes that WBL Programmes are very effective in assisting young people into work. Indeed, in a recent report¹ the authors outlined that "*apprenticeship completers under the age of 25 also enjoyed a more favourable level of employment than graduates*"

Summary

26. Due to our scope and remit, NTfW feels suitably placed to offer evidence in regards to how best to assist young people into work. During 2012/13, NTfW Members delivered WBL programmes (inc. Traineeships, Work Ready and Apprenticeships) to some 32,920 distinct individuals under the age of 25. The latest set of verified statistics on WBL programmes in Wales (2012/13) indicates that on a learner basis (taking only the final programme of the year) 64% of leavers went into new or continued current employment. Taken as a whole, and with the above data in mind, NTfW believes that WBL Programmes are very effective in assisting young people into work.

¹ Varsity Blues – Time for apprenticeships to graduate? - <http://www.peratraining.com/varsity-blues.pdf> / <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVsRTd8Be20>