

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work](#)

Evidence from GISDA – AYP 21

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

Business and Enterprise Committee Inquiry into Helping Young People into Work

Evidence from GISDA. GISDA provides support and opportunities for young people in North Wales.

November 2014

Overview of GISDA

GISDA is an innovative charity which aims to promote awareness of homelessness in our communities and works diligently to reduce the problem of homelessness among young people.

Aim

Ensure vulnerable young people get the opportunity to improve their quality of life so that they do not face any disadvantage.

Provide opportunities and life skills by providing a wide range of experiences to build the confidence, resilience and skills of young people.

Objectives

[page 2 Business and Enterprise Committee Inquiry into Helping Young People into Work](#)

Promote and ensure equal opportunities for young people to give them the opportunity to become full members of the society in which they live.

Offer and expand services to respond to the demands and needs of our stakeholders.

Facilitate access to support services that contribute to the individual's education, health, welfare and development.

Promote understanding of the needs of the individuals within their community.

Develop and maintain working relationships with partnerships and other agencies in order to extend the range of support services.

Develop a professional and qualified workforce.

GISDA was invited to give oral evidence on the following to the Business and Enterprise Committee on 6 November 2014. This was not possible due to technical difficulties, so written evidence is submitted.

What support is most effective in helping young people re-enter the labour market?

From GISDA's experience of working with young people, some of whom are very vulnerable and from complicated backgrounds, fairly intensive support is needed to help young people re-engage with the labour market. We believe the following –

- Support is needed prior to finding work and in the first months of employment.
- This support should be tailored for the individual when possible.
- Support is also needed for the employer, especially if employing a young person who has not worked much previously.

- Work placements or taster sessions are very helpful, and these need to be attractive and of good quality – again, with support, in order to learn how to be in work.
- The Jobs Growth Wales scheme is a good one – again, we need to ensure appropriate support for the young people taking part in this scheme.
- Jobs Growth Wales would be better if it offered employment for a year instead of six months. It's very difficult for employers to guarantee a job at the end and this can make them reconsider.
- Additional support should be available to employers to encourage them to take placements. It would be good if there was a one day course for employers to raise awareness of empathy for young people, understanding the barriers faced and maybe offer simple ideas on how to address some of the challenges.
- We believe that young people need access to support of a more therapeutic nature in order to help them stay employed e.g. anger management, counselling, developing self-worth.
- It's important that workers who support young people back to work are trained to support them.
- Incorporating the PIE principles – *Psychologically Informed Environments*; (This philosophy derives from a study carried out in collaboration between the Royal College of Psychiatrists and RJA, a consulting company.) Using psychological framework when working with vulnerable people; this means roughly that priority is given to the emotional and psychological needs of service users because this can drive change in individuals; working with challenging behaviour rather than punishing this behaviour and providing elastic tolerance.
- Supporting young people to create work – as part of a GISDA project which helps young people to get support for employment, we have created a skills centre which includes a small number of social enterprises. These initiatives will offer employment, taste sessions and volunteering opportunities for young people to

prepare for work. We believe that this is also a very effective way of supporting the most vulnerable young people back to work.

- Offer mentoring opportunities with companies that provide support services. Our mentoring scheme has been extremely successful in providing opportunities for young people who have received services from us to work as a mentor within the company and then develop as a full-time worker supporting others.
- Encourage local councils as major employers to offer apprenticeships to young people.
- Sometimes, you need to work with the whole family to change things.
- Developing a Youth Development Guarantee similar to other European countries with successful statistics e.g. Finland.

What are the main barriers faced by young people as they try to enter the labour market?

- The education status among professionals in the education field is a problem in Wales. Professionals should ensure that education is a priority before anything else. Even with children in care, far too many social workers prioritise other issues before education thinking they are helping the children, but this is simply not the case in order to ensure the best results.
- At one time children excluded from school were taught at home – this has decreased compared to what it was – this needs to be strengthened and offer different options for different pupils – not just one way because this is not working for everyone.
- Alternative education needs to be outsourced to third sector organisations – children with behavioural needs or vulnerable children sometimes respond better to people who are not within the education system.
- Young people need much more preparation for employment, from homelessness to unemployment, while in school.

- Need to find a way for vulnerable young people to have a positive image of their education before they reach 16 – the cycle needs to be broken so that they put more value on education for their own children.
- Many families cannot cope at the moment and once children enter adulthood, they are less likely to stay at home, especially in poor and vulnerable families – this increases homelessness.
- Many more mental health problems, little provision for young people who are suffering.
- Poverty and the economic recession.
- Lack of suitable housing / accommodation.
- Transport.
- Homelessness has increased – young people's priorities are different – the cost of living is very high. It's very difficult to get a job and keep it if basic needs aren't met.
- Barriers to education – [see annexes of young people's experiences.](#)
- Barriers to work if living in a homeless hostel / supported accommodation.
- No jobs, very few opportunities for work in Gwynedd.
- Rural area – not a lot of opportunities.
- Problems must be linked with European money that is coming to Wales – Axis 3 programme has not been tailored for vulnerable young people – this is a major shortcoming in the programme.
- Public transport is expensive and inconvenient at times, lack of service in some places i.e. much less public bus service now.
- Lack of funding / budget cuts in the third sector will create more barriers.
- Mainstream education does not work for everyone, need more alternative education provision.
- Benefit system is a huge barrier to go to work / education – need to look into this further.

"Jake's" story

"Jake" had enrolled on a full-time college course with six months remaining until he was a qualified bricklayer. He lived at home with his mother and she supported him financially while he was in college.

Recently "Jake" had to leave home, his mother was not happy that he wasn't paying his way and she asked him to leave. "Jake" didn't receive a grant from the college or an EMA grant because his mother was earning a good wage. "Jake" wasn't in a position to get housing benefit because he started a college course after he turned 19.

"Jake" was going to college for 2 days / 12 hours but his course is designated as a full-time course because he also had to have work experience. The course isn't offered part-time.

"Jake" found himself in a position where he either had to leave college before finishing his course and register as unemployed in order to receive housing benefit and a roof over his head or wait to finish his course and sleep on the streets for 6 months.

Tony's Story

Tony had just turned 19 and started a mechanics course in September 2011.

In December he was sent from his mother's house because of an argument with his stepfather. Tony is not allowed to go back home to live and he is temporarily sleeping on a sofa at a friend's house.

Tony will not receive housing benefit or income support because he is in college full-time and because he started his studies after his 19th birthday.

Hi will not be able to stay at his friend's house after Christmas.

The choice for Tony –

Leave his course and hopefully find somewhere to live with housing benefit

OR

Continue with his course to qualify and ensure much better job prospects and future BUT doing this without anywhere to live.

What would you do?

Ashley's Story

Ashley had been supported by GISDA for over a year, this was Ashley's second time with us.

During her time with GISDA Ashley has been on several courses and has been eager to find a programme that suits her. She has looked at a number of college courses and has found it difficult to settle in and enjoy the course. In September 2010 she began an Art and Design course. At the time Ashley had hurt her knee and was receiving employment and support allowance due to the injury. She had a certificate from her doctor to prove she had an injury. This financial support enabled her to attend this college course.

Eight weeks before finishing her course, a course she was attending regularly and was achieving excellent grades in; she felt her knee had improved, so she went back to her doctor for an update on her condition. The doctor confirmed that her knee had improved. Ashley then went to the job centre to explain her situation, and to her great surprise, she realised

[page 8 Business and Enterprise Committee Inquiry into Helping Young People into Work](#)

that an improvement in the condition of her knee was going to cause big problems for her.

The job centre told her, correctly, that she was no longer eligible to receive employment and support allowance. As Ashley wasn't 19 when she began her course (she was 21) and as she wasn't looking for work, she would not be able to apply for jobseeker's allowance. She was not entitled to any financial support from the state. The only financial support available to her would be an adult learning grant that would be £21 a week. Rent was £128.23 a week let alone other living costs.

Ashley was left with little choice but to leave the course she was enjoying and start looking for work. Now she has a job in a hotel and hopes to develop a career in the care sector.

Ashley was told that if she was pregnant, a parent or on a drug / alcohol rehabilitation programme, she would have received financial support to finish the course. Ashley is happy that she isn't in one of these groups, but feels extremely disappointed that she was not able to finish her course. It could have been an option to work 16 hours week and finish the course in her own time, but this was not practical for Ashley and living on benefits for such a long period would be very difficult for her.

Ashley has now stopped thinking about going to college.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THEIR FAMILIES ARE BETTER OFF CLAIMING BENEFITS THAN STAYING IN FURTHER EDUCATION. And because these students are unable to claim benefits while studying and have to wait weeks for grant funding that is insufficient to live on, homeless charity workers in Gwynedd claim there's an increase in the number of young people who have stopped attending further education.

Wendi Jones, Head of Independent Services at Gisda, has tens of examples of young people who cannot afford to stay in education. Unlike potential graduates who are eligible for student loans, these young people "find it
[page 9 Business and Enterprise Committee Inquiry into Helping Young People into Work](#)

impossible" to stay in education without a family to keep them. The job centre is also unwilling to use their discretion to allow vulnerable young people to claim benefits while studying.

Wendi Jones said, "I see more and more of this these days. It keeps people where they are – the unfairness is that it happens to so many young people". Gisda's aim is to "provide an opportunity for people who are vulnerable...so that they aren't disadvantaged by poverty."

The homelessness charity supports over 100 young people in hostels, houses and flats throughout Gwynedd.

One of those is Darren Lee Roberts of Blaenau Ffestiniog.

In September this year he started a year-long course studying tourism at a local college after failing to find work.

He said "it was a fantastic feeling – I never thought I'd get into college – I had little confidence in the interview".

But rules required the young man to stop claiming jobseeker's allowance of £53.00 a week on the day he was to start college because he was not available for work. It soon became apparent that he would be much worse off financially choosing further education over unemployment.

Darren Roberts was eligible for the Assembly's Learning Grant of £1,500 a year and, after paying some of the costs involved with the course earlier in the term, he had £23.00 a week to pay rent and to live on. In addition to being much less than jobseeker's allowance, there was a gap of six weeks between stopping the benefit and receiving the grant. He also wasn't allowed to claim housing benefit to pay the rent because he was not receiving jobseeker's allowance.

A Welsh Government spokesman said that the grant of £1,500 a year was for course costs only, such as books etc. He said that the rules required that students had to be enrolled at a college before that grant money for materials was payable.

Darren Roberts said, "I did not want to give up but I was under pressure – I was gutted. At the end of the second week the pressure with regards to money was too much and I just couldn't live..."

Darren Roberts said he was the only student on the tourism course over 18 – the rest were under 18 and living at home with their parents.

Philip Roberts, Learner Support Manager at Coleg Menai said there had been "tremendous pressure" on students given the "difficult economic situation". "Things are so tight for them – waiting six weeks for their money is too much and that prevents some from enrolling on a course. There are some who do not try further education and there's also a percentage that drop out. It is terribly hard on them."

Caernarfon MP Hywel Williams MP said he had put pressure on the Westminster Government to help people in the same situation as Darren Roberts.

"They face an extremely desperate situation without financial support from family or a partner. The rigid rules of the Department for Work and Pensions insist that they are 'available for work' which prevents them from completing any training. As they cannot live at home for free, the most vulnerable people are totally dependent on welfare."

Claiming benefits as a student.

Osian Gwyn Elis – a Project Officer in a homeless hostel in Pwllheli, is a harsh critic of what he calls "shortcomings" in the benefit system.

He said, "sometimes in certain circumstances it is possible to claim benefit and study part time." He added that he was disappointed "with the lack of commitment" of job centre officials "to try to offer any kind of vision on the matter."

When Golwg approached the Department of Work and Pensions of the Westminster Government in Cardiff, the initial reaction was that it was not possible for students like Darren Roberts to claim benefits. This then changed to "no comment".

Osian Ellis said "the situation is tragic and heartbreaking to any vulnerable person trying to succeed."

(adapted from an article by Sian Williams in GOLWG magazine, December 2011)