

Enterprise and Business Committee

APP14

Inquiry into Apprenticeships

Evidence from HEFCW

Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry into apprenticeships in Wales

I am writing in response to your invitation to contribute to the above Inquiry. We think it slightly premature (as will become clearer below) for HEFCW to submit detailed evidence at this time, but we would like to offer some general commentary on our interests in the apprenticeship agenda in the context of the current challenge set out in our recent remit letter from the Welsh Government.

HEFCW is a Welsh Government Sponsored Body established in 1992 under the Further and Higher Education Act. Since 1993 it has administered funds made available by the Welsh Government in support of the provision of education and the undertaking of research at higher education institutions (HEIs), and the provision of prescribed courses of higher education at further education institutions. It also accredits providers of initial teacher training for school teachers.

Apprenticeships have increasingly become part of the debate about higher education, usually framed in the context of progression routes. This goes back to the publication of *Skills that Work for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2008) and its recognition of the unique place of apprenticeships as part of both the education system and the world of work. Described in terms of frameworks of job-specific and transferable learning, specified by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and formally recognised through qualifications and credit, the Welsh Government committed to create more opportunities for young people to access apprenticeship training: 'support for workforce development will be delivered through an Apprenticeship Programme providing entrants (of any age) to a sector with the suite of skills and competencies they and their employers need'.

Apprenticeships in the context of progression into higher education were subsequently picked up in *For Our Future: the 21st century higher education strategy and plan for Wales* (Welsh Government, December 2009), which recognised the need to provide more diverse ways to learn, including greater opportunities to study part-time and in the workplace. *For our Future* highlighted the need for programmes that enable progression to foundation degree level and beyond, and which utilise the strengths of apprenticeship frameworks.

HEFCW policy has been developed in the context of the call within *For our Future* for greater diversity and flexibility in HE programme design, duration and delivery to match need and demand. I would draw attention to two areas in particular where the debate about apprenticeship models is currently most active:

- *The Regional Dimension to the Planning and Delivery of Higher Education* (HEFCW Circular W11/29HE¹): regions are expected, within their three-year strategies for HE-FE partnership working, to identify appropriate progression routes from work-based provision, *including apprenticeships*, into local higher education provision. As a result, HE and FE partnerships are directing their attention to securing an increase in progression for those in employment. An important element in this is the provision of foundation degree provision.
- *Foundation degrees*: (HEFCW circular W10/29HE²). In January 2011, HEFCW published its policy on foundation degrees and announced the allocation of around £7.6 million *One Wales* funding for the development, promotion and delivery of new part-time foundation degree provision. The policy confirmed the central place of progression as a core feature of foundation degree provision: "the routes of progression should be both occupational and academic and these options should be clearly articulated through the course programme and prospectus".

We are aware of some exciting parallel developments in relation to foundation degree and apprenticeship provision. For example, a longstanding relationship between Glyndŵr University, Deeside College, Airbus and SEMTA has led to the development of the nationally recognised Airbus *Higher Engineering Apprenticeship*, which incorporates the Glyndŵr University Foundation Degree delivered in partnership with Deeside College. This gives the apprentice a clear progression route onto a level 6 BEng honours degree. The partners are currently refining this model to develop a new *Undergraduate Apprenticeship* for a 2012 start. A number of SSCs are piloting similar innovative developments across the UK, both in relation to *higher apprenticeships* and *undergraduate apprenticeships*. We will await with interest the conclusion of these exercises, especially the lessons learned and their implications for Wales, including how they might build upon existing apprenticeship programmes funded in Wales through the Welsh Government's Sector Priorities Fund Pilot programme.

For the first time, the development of apprenticeship frameworks that incorporate HE components (across a range of vocational sectors) has been highlighted in our remit

1

http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2011/W11%2029HE%20The%20Regional%20Dimension%20to%20the%20Planning%20and%20Delivery%20of%20Higher%20Education%202011_12.pdf

2

http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2010/W10%2029HE%20Foundation%20Degrees%20and%20Annex%20A.pdf

letter (2012-13)³. The Welsh Government expects HEFCW 'to engage with SSCs as higher frameworks are developed, and to work with employers and the Work Based provider sector to offer "off the job training" elements of higher level apprenticeship frameworks'. The Welsh Government also expects to see the development of progression opportunities for apprenticeships into higher education (as confirmed in its response to a consultation on the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW, April 2010) and has asked HEFCW to work with its partners to enable such progressions.

We will therefore be addressing this issue over the coming months, taking advice from our Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee and our Student Experience, Teaching and Quality Committee. Our consideration will be in the context of the *Skills and Employability Framework* which we have just produced jointly with Higher Education Wales, CBI Wales and NUS Wales (available on our website this week). The Framework aims to transform graduate employability skills and boost the supply of high quality jobs across Wales. It includes a commitment to agree with the Welsh Government new approaches in the development of apprenticeship frameworks that incorporate HE components. We therefore look forward with interest to your committee's conclusions and recommendations which will help guide our evolving policy on apprenticeships.

Yours,
Phil

Philip Gummatt