

Inquiry into Apprenticeships

Evidence from FSB (additional evidence)

The Enterprise and Business Committee of the National Assembly for Wales

Inquiry into Apprenticeships in Wales

Statements and Facts and Personal Comments by W. Raymond Evans, from Ynys Mon.

Raymond started his working life as an apprentice joiner with the family firm in the 1960's, and eventually achieved the status of Managing Director of the 4th generation Civil and Engineering and Construction SME established in 1919. He is now semi-retired and Company Consultant. Needless to say he is passionate about the training and recruitment of youngsters and has over the years built on the reputation of the Company in maintaining the high standards and craftsmanship and the invaluable contribution of local industry to the success and wellbeing of the local economy. He is keenly involved with the following:

Federation of Small Businesses Ynys Môn (Anglesey) Branch Chairman.

" " " " North Wales Region Vice - Chairman.

" " " " Wales Policy Unit - Member

National Federation of Builders (NFB Cymru): Cymru Executive Board Member.

Ynys Mon and Gwynedd Construction Industry Training Group Founder Member.

His Community interest is as a Councillor, and with Unllais Cymru (One Voice Wales)

It will be apparent that the author's background and involvement is mostly in the Construction and Civil Engineering Sector of Industry. Nevertheless, he submits that the general theme about work opportunities for our young people in all industries is similar and of great concern across the whole spectrum of employment and work ethos in the everyday life of our communities across Wales as a whole.



1. *Is the current apprenticeship system providing effective support to the Welsh Economy ?*

Incentives such as the 'Young Recruits' £50 p/w for the 1st. year of Apprenticeship do little to keep young learners on over the period of apprenticeship. Geographic distribution between training provision and learner domicile causes issues. There are no direct services in many areas of North and Mid Wales e.g. between Amlwch and Llangefni let alone the Lleyn Peninsula and Bangor/Anglesey, and large tracts of Meirionethshire, Denbighshire and Powys. Infrastructure (Public Transport) Investment and Travel Funding may be a better option.

The lack of major employers in rural Wales may mean that employers are small and the high employment costs of additional apprentices inhibits hiring and training. This combined with the erosion of realistic support for industry at a local level leads to a culture of defeatism among the traditional tradespersons and the eventual discontinuity of indigenous crafts.

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There is absolutely no doubt that current procurement policies in Local Authority expenditure is causing great concern and even distress to the network of local industries across the whole length and breadth of Wales.

Employers will not contemplate taking on young people unless they are able to envisage a reasonable future workload, which is not the case at present, with the opportunities decreasing. Even when work is available, it is difficult to make a profit. No one is afraid of fair competition but clearly there is no confidence or incentive to employ and train and even invest in career enhancing training for existing employees.

This is to a great extent being brought about by the current procurement policies and Frameworks Contracts in the Public Sector. It appears that future requirements will be met by large National and International concerns working with a network of local suppliers in the provision of Infrastructure and Construction Projects, together with the supply of services and goods of all kinds supposedly sourced locally.

Such a system does nothing to instill confidence in small businesses to invest in and train young persons. It is seen to be akin to "the march of the supermarkets", which has led to the demise of the high street shopkeepers, innumerable small crafts operations, and small businesses. The promise of additional jobs is a fallacious twist because all that happens is the transference of labour from one system to the other. Even worse is the sad fact that very few of the jobs on offer are in the previously respected traditional skills.

Local initiatives spend locally, their people live and grow on the local economic success when given the opportunity. This cannot come about when any profits made go elsewhere, and if there is no money available for investment in our young people to keep them happy and successful in their own country, they will go elsewhere and be lost to the Welsh economy.

2. Is the current apprenticeship system meeting the current and future skills needs of employers in Wales? if not, what needs to be improved?

This is a question for the industry, and it is suggested that a lack of apprentice uptake will create a skills shortage and when industry 'picks up'; as historical evidence will demonstrate; the rush of trying to push large batches of learners through the system could cause a decrease in standards (Providers being forced to push high numbers through etc.).

It must be recognised that there is already a 'lost generation' of skills due to previous uncertainty regarding employer confidence in the economy, resulting in a dearth of skilled craftsmen available to mentor, train and develop traditional hands-on craftspersons in any or all of the indigenous industries. If apprenticeship recruitment systems fail due to lack of opportunities, for our young people, it is suggested that, some sectors of the Welsh economy may become unsustainable in about one to two generations' time.

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3. *With increased priority on apprenticeships for 16 - 24 year olds, are apprenticeships an attractive option for young people ?.*

The Schools and Careers advisors are possible steering industry recruits. Job security and prospects are seen by parents/guardians as principal factors in directing offspring towards school subject choices. "A" levels and 'clean' industry being focal, Construction related training together with other 'dirty hand' occupations are seen as lower rate employment.

Apprenticeships are an attractive option for younger people but only in general to the lower achievers in schools. At present, schools are filtering lower achievers onto construction programmes. The suggestion is if parents, advisors and schools directed school aged learners to construction, raising awareness of the opportunities and higher qualifications in construction - Higher Education (HE), University training and all the technical routes involving construction, the remaining elements of this fast moving and vital industry would be unveiled resulting in enhanced appeal to a new generation of young person entrants.

Clearly, the key to attracting young people into apprenticeships is to ensure sustainable local economy, leading to employer confidence, and with a reasonable chance of realistic jobs in return for the investment in training and development of recruits.

4. *Do the systems for establishing Apprenticeship Standards and Frameworks and recruiting apprentices work effectively ?.*

Recruiting needs to improve. More emphasis must be given to visiting employers and encouraging employers to take on learners and students.

In the associated Further Education Provision there is also the issue that there is insufficient time to complete frameworks due to the 'size' (credit values) of new Diplomas. Qualifications should be flexible, in that if a learner is currently completing a curriculum in employment, (and this can be demonstrated to be at the standard required), then any qualification should be flexible enough to take note of and recognise this APL/RPL (Accredited Prior Learning/Recognised Prior Learning). This may then address some of the problems with employers releasing apprentices for 1 day a week for a potential of 3 years, or block release over the same duration.

The question is raised, does releasing an apprentice for external training amount to greater, or at least an equal cost to a small company, than the benefits of employing an already qualified and experienced employee/tradesperson? If so, the current system is ineffective.

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In fairness, there is an inevitable unproductive time element to any training which dedicated employers have always accepted, and any proposed incentive scheme should recognise this contribution not as some form of bonus but as a requirement worthy of financial support.

There is a strong view that the systems in place at present for recruiting apprentices are somewhat dated. To work effectively a more positive approach is required, definitely all is not doom and gloom, there are good examples that work in some places so why not in others? Intensive marketing may be the way forward; the mindset of parents/guardians who may never have worked themselves needs addressing, and those who unfortunately care not much about their offspring, need pointing in the right direction.

It has long been recognised that the schools' system tends to point the lower achievers toward the hands on skills, but unfortunately for all the wrong reasons. Careers conventions must take a grip on this, all of industry must be prepared to mentor those who need support, and are keen to make something of their lives. There are plenty of decent young people out there who are available and willing if they were only given half a chance to demonstrate their abilities.

And Finally

As an indicator of the trend in apprentices' recruitment, albeit in Construction, the table below demonstrates the depressed view of many employers in the current economic climate.

Nos. of apprentices recruited into construction trades over the last 5 years (Coleg Menai)

StartYear	BRICK	ELEC	JOINERY	PLUMBING	PLASTER	Total
2007-2008	12	43	30	47	17	149
2008-2009	10	33	28	40	22	133
2009-2010	7	60	17	42	18	144
2010-2011	9	56	19	43	16	143
2011-2012	13	39	19	34	17	122
Grand Total	51	231	113	206	90	691

Comment: The above figures show that over the five years there is a reduction in apprentice intake of 27% overall, but most distressing and in need of urgent remedial action is the marked reduction shown in the last (current) year amounting to 21.5%. This is only a small sample but if reflected on a nationwide basis it is suggested that a serious action plan is required involving everyone concerned with the future generations of the workforce.

Acknowledgements

These responses are presented after dialogue with other industry representatives, training agencies, establishments and also workforce input. Construction Skills Wales (CITB), is a vital component in the mix of apprenticeship promotion initiatives and its contribution together with front line input from the Management of Coleg Menai deserves recognition in this context.