

Joint response from Grŵp Llandrillo Menai & Coleg Cambria

Is the data and evidence being used by the Regional Skills Partnerships timely, valid and reliable? Have there been any issues?

We have no issues with the data being used to inform the skills priorities plan. The RSP uses EMSI/ONS as the college does for regional LMI however this is designed for the long term outlook and not for short/medium term curriculum planning. A small subset of employer sectors are represented on the RSP, and a very small number of actual employers are represented (Airbus & BCUHB). Nearly all members of the RSP are public sector skills organisations, representative bodies (third sector).

How well do the partnerships engage with and take into account the views of those who do not sit on the partnership boards, and how well do they account for the views of the skills providers themselves?

FE, HE/WBL (North Wales Training) skills providers sit on the board and have a voice. There are a wide range of stakeholders on the board and a broader range of stakeholders are invited to events. Employer involvement could be improved - the RSP is dominated by Public Sector & Education representatives. No real structure is apparent for consultation wider than the board itself. The RSP has not created appropriate links with business to identify regional skills shortages which skills providers could support them to fill. Skills providers are the greatest source of “on the ground” LMI and are listened to, however this is not really the way it should work.

How do the key City and Growth Deal roles of the Regional Skills Partnerships influence their Welsh Government remit?

The Regional Skills Partnership receive Growth Deal updates from various Local Authority representatives, members of the Ambition Board and the Chair of the RSP. It is important that the RSP remains independent of the Growth Deal (Ambition). The ambition board have created a Business Leaders Forum to “challenge” the bid (due to a lack of employer representation on the RSP). In addition to this employers are consulted by the CBI and North Wales Business Council forums, which results in employers being overwhelmed with demands on their time, and they are unsure where best to exert their influence. It is vital that the Regional Skills Partnership has appropriate accountability to its members and

Welsh Government via WESB. At present the RSP advises the Economic Ambition Board, and we would not want to see the RSP become an entity which reports to the Economic Ambition Board. It is critical that this structure is streamlined and made more inclusive. This may clarify itself with the creation of PCET as it would make sense for this autonomous body to take responsibility for the RSP's.

Are the Regional Skills Partnerships able to actually reflect current and future skills demands within their regions? What about very specialised skills for which there may be low volumes of demand?

The RSP tends to focus on high level demand projects e.g. Wylfa Newydd, Advanced Manufacturing/Airbus as opposed to discussions around low volume/high value areas of niche demand. RSPs need to have a more direct conversation with local employers to really gauge demand, they currently have no resources to do so. Thus their steer for skills provision comes from those few who shout loudest e.g. Airbus, Horizon, BCUHB.

Do the Regional Skills partnerships have sufficient knowledge and understanding of:

- a. the foundational economy and the needs of those employed within it;
- b. the demand for skills provision through the medium of Welsh?

The foundation economy is identified as a priority area in the Regional Skills Plan. However this sector is poorly represented in the partnership. The RSP has produced a document which has reviewed the use of and requirements of the Welsh language in the area. We are the largest providers of post 16 Welsh language provision in Wales and have had minimal involvement with the RSP in aligning delivery to demand. We have a far greater involvement with the Coleg Cymraeg, Welsh Government in planning Welsh Language provision than we do with the RSP.

Are the Regional Skills Partnerships adequately resourced to fulfil their growing role?

We need to be clear about the RSPs "growing role" if we are able to respond to this. There is a danger in creating another costly, bureaucratic and independent body responsible for public funding. It is difficult to evaluate whether they have sufficient resources as their role is unclear. They do not appear to have sufficient resources to undertake critical roles like; regular employer engagement which we can use to develop provision. They certainly do not appear to have resources to

interact with employers outside of the partnership.

Is there an appropriate balance between the work of the RSPs and wider views on skills demand?

“Balance” is probably not the right word, particularly without knowing who the balance is with. Skills is a recurrent issue for all employer groups, and better engagement with these groups in addition to anchors and other large companies would be desirable. RSPs provide a macro-economic view of the skills needs in North Wales. All Skills providers have a similar view of skills demand based on EMSI LMI data, historical recruitment etc. We lack detailed intelligence on “niche” skill gaps that new employers or new working practices will require us to deliver now or in the future.

Is the level of operational detail set out by Welsh Government for skills provision in higher/further education and work-based learning providers appropriate?

There has been a recent shift from monitoring FE recruitment vs plan at a micro course to sector level. However the arrangements for monitoring sector recruitment vs target often result in a dialogue about annual course recruitment, which has questionable value. The arrangements for reviewing recruitment vs planning is significantly more detailed and operational in FE and WBL compared to the arrangements in HE and Schools. We should focus on providing a medium term strategic direction for the region and allow colleges to manage their offer at the micro level within that overall direction. There is a real danger of creating another tier of bureaucracy, we have only recently got rid of Regional TECs because they were overly bureaucratic, why bring them back? Often there is lack of understanding about national curriculum design/reform, the lead in time required to develop new curriculum, and the role of awarding bodies. The remit for the RSP on employability skills should include the same level of operational monitoring for all providers equally including school 6th Forms, HE (the discussion with HE is about a narrative and does not include performance data) and National Training Providers. If we are to have a thriving skills sector then curriculum streams must be coherent and provide progression.

If there are any, how are tensions between learner demand / learner progression reconciled with Regional Skills Partnership conclusions and the Welsh Government preference for funding higher level skills?

On the whole there are few tensions between RSP and WG priorities. Examples of tensions include when we are challenged to deliver Level 3 skills directly from school when youngsters often need additional skills development at Level 1 or 2 before they can progress to Level 3. We also have concerns about age targets in national priorities for work based learning which conflict with regional targets for apprenticeship delivery. For example in North Wales the RSP has rightly recommended that Health and Social Care is a regional priority which requires recruiting more Level 2 Apprentices. However Welsh government national policy treats over 25 learners undertaking a Level 2 Apprenticeship as non-priority, which means we cannot meet the regional need because of an inappropriate national target. We also have concerns about National work based learning providers/subcontractors who deliver in North Wales, but are not part of the monitoring process against regional targets. Welsh Government and RSP's both have a naivety about higher level skills, in vocational areas young people need to progress through levels - you cannot jump to become a level 3 joiner without having gone through levels 1 and 2. It is about more progressing to level 3 but this cannot be funded by reducing level 1 and 2. It is also important to note that HE are not involved in conversations about learner demand/progression into HE on a regional basis.

Have the Regional Skills Partnerships and Welsh Government been able to stimulate changes in skills provision 'on the ground' to reflect demand?

Certainly the skills offer is constantly changing within colleges but the influence of our direct dialogue with employers is far more instrumental in that change than the planning structures of RSP and WG. The partnership has not identified any provision that the 2 FE institutions have not been able to provide or the requirements for any new provision for the area.

What, in general, is working well and what evidence of success and impact is there?

It's a useful forum for bringing key stakeholders together to hear updates on developments from Welsh Government. The Regional Skills plan is useful to provide a clear direction for skills development.

Are there any aspects of the policy that are not working well, have there been any unintended consequences, and what improvements can be made?

It could be perceived as a board to hold FE providers to account as there is little information on any other education delivery in the area. More could be done to look at what's coming through from schools and what is going on in HE. FE is just one bit of the jigsaw and in the region it is already seen as being responsive to the needs of business and other stakeholders. The planning structure is evolving and developing.