

Grŵp Trawsbleidiol AB a Sgiliau'r Dyfodol

CPG on FE and Future Skills

24/09/19

“Building a Better Wales – lessons from Europe” report launch

Chair

Iestyn Davies, CEO Colegau Cymru

Panel

Dr Mark Lang – Independent Researcher

Sharon James – Deputy Principal, Cardiff and Vale College

Alun Davies – Assembly Member for Blaenau Gwent

Comments

Both Dr Mark Lang and Sharon James highlighted the need for more emphasis on outputs rather than outcomes, and a focus on long term quality. The learner's needs should be at the core of their training programme to ensure they're receiving the correct skills and education.

Sharon commented that colleges are not qualifications factories, but skills machines. Qualifications need to be fit for purpose, and represent the skills we need. High level skills are just part of the jigsaw, and there needs to be parity of esteem no matter where a learner receives their education or training. Sharon also highlighted that since the levy, employers are wanting more apprentices, and now 10% of Deloitte's workforce are apprentices. New apprenticeships are making pathways for disadvantaged learners, and flexible learning (part time, distance, online) is becoming essential in order to upskill those hardest to reach. Sharon highlighted the challenge of careers advice and guidance. It can be difficult to recruit learners to vacancies that exist, so continuous upskilling is crucial to FE staff.

Alun Davies AM noted that we should be learning from our European partners and their best practice. Not only learning from what went well, but what hasn't gone so well. Alun also pointed out that while Germany has a successful economy, a more equal society and a respected education system, it doesn't have any universities in the global top 30 list. In light of this, is Wales' focus on Russell Group universities and league tables actually helpful?

A comment came from the audience pointing out that construction and engineering are leading on parity of esteem, as there are both academic and VET routes into careers which are valued equally. The panel agreed with this comment.

Questions raised during the discussion:

What might we be able to learn from the experience of the Financial Crisis of 2008 to help us prepare for economic shocks related to leaving the EU?

Do the report's findings suggest that we need to rethink Higher Education?

If economic resilience is premised on a deep base of a variety of skills at all levels, perhaps we need to recognise the need for skills below degree level and emphasise that academic and vocation skills are important. Sharon James highlighted the need for a dual system where people can switch Grŵp Trawsbleidiol AB a Sgiliau'r Dyfodol CPG on FE and Future Skills 24/09/19

between each side easily, as well as the need to address parent/family perceptions at A Levels and university are the only worthwhile route.

Wales has lost its heavy industry base – what will replace it in future; what will we be known for, as a country; what is Wales' place in Industrial Revolution 4.0?

It's important to think about what Wales wants to be known for and to take an active role in shaping this. We shouldn't be chasing foreign direct investment at any cost. We know some things we will want more of in the future – work around decarbonisation, skills for public transport and mass transit, skills in creative industries that we can't perhaps anticipate yet. The need to respond to climate change will create new and different jobs. Teaching and the role of teachers will change. We need to anticipate and address this too. Changes to jobs and the economy are more evolution than revolution.

What is the economy?

Dr Mark Lang suggested that we don't understand our economy, even though it hasn't changed.

How important is learner voice?

Sharon highlighted that learner and employer voice are crucial to the work of all colleges, and that their engagements with learners helps meet community and employer need. Learner input is crucial to determine what delivery method is most effective for continuous engagement.

Close

The discussion closed with the idea that we might be about to enter another recession so we need to think about how Wales can evolve into a different future. How can we help firms to adapt and move into other areas? Many colleges have successfully sought partners – Aston Martin and Airbus were mentioned – or tried to adapt provision through initiatives like Personal Learning Accounts. Local action is important – what other positive examples exist?