

Agenda – Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 5 – Tŷ Hywel

Meeting date: 21 March 2019

Meeting time: 09.15

For further information contact:

Gareth Price

Committee Clerk

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Private pre-meeting

(09.15–09.30)

Phil Boshier, Research, will be in attendance to give an overview of the Regional Skills Partnership evidence sessions.

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

2 Papers to Note

(Pages 1 – 14)

Attached Documents:

EIS(5)–09–19(P1) Letter from the Chair of the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee to Chair



Cynulliad
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3 Regional Skills Partnerships: Introductory evidence session

(09.30–10.30)

(Pages 15 – 64)

Jane Lewis, Regional Partnership Manager, South West & Mid Wales Regional Learning and Skills Partnership

Sasha Davies, Chair, North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

Sian Lloyd Roberts, Regional Skills Manager, North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

Richard Crook, Vice Chair, Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership

Beverly Owen, Strategic Director of Place, Newport City Council, Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership

Attached Documents:

EIS(5)–09–19(P2) Research Briefing

EIS(5)–09–19(P3) Evidence from South West & Mid Wales Regional Learning and Skills Partnership

EIS(5)–09–19(P4) Evidence from North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

EIS(5)–09–19(P5) Evidence from Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership

Break

(10.30–10.45)

4 Regional Skills Partnerships: Further Education

(10.45–11.45)

(Pages 65 – 89)

Guy Lacey, Principal, Coleg Gwent

Dr Rachel Bowen, Director of Policy and Development, Colegau Cymru

Mark Jones, Principal and Chief Executive, Gower College Swansea

David Jones, Chief Executive, Coleg Cambria

Attached Documents:

EIS(5)–09–19(P6) Joint response from South East Wales Education Institutions

EIS(5)–09–19(P7) Evidence from Colegau Cymru

EIS(5)–09–19(P8) Joint response from South West and Mid Wales Education Institutions

EIS(5)–09–19(P9) Joint Response from Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Coleg Cambria

5 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (vi) to resolve to exclude the public from item 6

Private de–brief

(11.45–12.00)

6 Draft Report: Research and Innovation in Wales

(12.00–12.30)

(Pages 90 – 125)

Attached Documents:

EIS(5)–09–10(P10) Draft Report: Research and Innovation in Wales

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru

Y Pwyllgor Materion Allanol a Deddfwriaeth Ychwanegol

National Assembly for Wales

External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee

Russell George AM
Chair of the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

8 March 2019

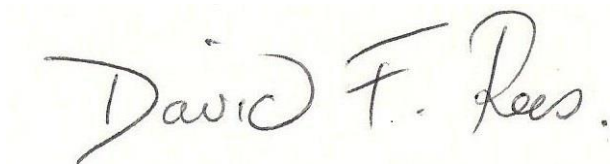
Dear Russell,

The Trade Bill: Second report on legislative consent and associated issues

I am writing to draw your attention to the publication of our report on The Trade Bill: Second report on legislative consent and associated issues.

The report provides our view on the Supplementary Memorandum and the extent to which the conclusions and recommendations made in our first report have been addressed.

Yours sincerely,



David Rees AM

Chair of the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



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The Trade Bill:

Second report on legislative consent and associated issues

March 2019

Summary

We published our first report on the Trade Bill a year ago, in March 2018.

Changes have been made to the Bill during its consideration in Parliament, changes that have led to the Welsh Government publishing a Supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandum.

This report provides our view on the Supplementary Memorandum and the extent to which the conclusions and recommendations made in our first report have been addressed.

We draw 10 conclusions that are aimed at informing the Assembly's debate on the associated legislative consent motion, currently scheduled for 12 March 2019.



1. Introduction

Our previous work

1. We have previously reported on the Trade Bill, in our March 2018 report *The Trade Bill: Report on legislative consent and associated issues*.¹ For the sake of clarity, we refer to it as our “first report” hereafter.

2. The first report concluded that:

“We are unable to recommend that the National Assembly for Wales grants its consent to the provisions in the Bill that relate to Wales.”

3. Our conclusion was based on concerns about the powers to be granted to Welsh Ministers, the granting of concurrent powers to UK Ministers in devolved areas, and protecting the devolution statutes.

4. We did not draw conclusions based on the Bill’s stated policy objectives.

Current consideration

5. Following a hiatus in the Bill’s passage through the Parliamentary process in Westminster, the House of Lords began its committee consideration of the Bill on 21 January 2019.

6. In response to amendments made to the Bill, the Welsh Government laid a Supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandum on 14 February 2019.²

7. It is anticipated that a Legislative Consent Motion will be tabled for debate on Tuesday 12 March 2019.

8. We hope that this report helps inform this debate.

¹ EAAL Committee, *The Trade Bill: Report on legislative consent and associated issues*, March 2018

² Welsh Government, *Trade Bill: Supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandum (memorandum no 2)*, 14 February 2019

2. Provisions of the Bill that require legislative consent

9. The Welsh Government's Supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandum (the Supplementary Memorandum) states that:

"We consider that Part 1 of the Bill and its associated Schedules require consent on the basis that they are making provision for a purpose that is within the Assembly's legislative competence. The following clauses which require consent were already set out in detail in the first legislative consent memorandum [...]: Part 1, clauses 1 to 4 and schedules 1, 2 & 3."³

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 1. We agree with the statement in the Supplementary Memorandum that Part 1 of the Bill and its associated Schedules, i.e. clauses 1 to 8 and Schedules 1, 2 and 3, require the legislative consent of the Assembly, on the basis that they are making provision for a purpose that is within the Assembly's legislative competence.

Conclusion 2. Amendments relevant to the Assembly's competence have been made to these provisions since the original Legislative Consent Memorandum was laid. Moreover, clause 6, a new clause, has been inserted into Part 1 of the Bill since the original Memorandum was laid, and we agree with the Welsh Government that this clause requires the Assembly's consent.

³ Welsh Government, Trade Bill: Supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandum (memorandum no 2), 14 February 2019.

3. Have the concerns we raised in our first report been addressed?

Whilst amendments to the Bill have addressed some of our concerns, they have not addressed them all.

Some of our concerns have been exacerbated by the use of concurrent powers under the EU (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

3. 1. The scope of Ministerial powers

10. In our first report, we concluded that:

“The powers proposed for Welsh Ministers are framed too widely. Our preference would be to see them amended to restrict them to only making provision that ‘is essential’.”⁴

11. This was consistent with the view we took in relation to the EU (Withdrawal) Act 2018⁵ during its passage through Parliament.

12. Our position was not accepted in relation to the Withdrawal Act, and amendments to the Bill have not narrowed the scope of the powers conferred on the Welsh Ministers.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 3. Our concern about the scope of the powers to be granted to Welsh Ministers has not been addressed.

3. 2. Concurrent powers

13. In our first report, we stated our preference for all powers relating to Welsh devolved competence to be granted solely to the Welsh Ministers, whilst

⁴ EAAL Committee. *The Trade Bill: Report on legislative consent and associated issues*. March 2018

⁵ European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 c.16

acknowledging that this position was not supported by the Welsh or UK Governments.⁶

14. This was in line with our position on the EU (Withdrawal) Act 2018.⁷

15. We concluded the following, should concurrent powers remain part of the Bill:

“We support the Welsh Government’s call for the use of powers held concurrently between Welsh Ministers and Ministers of the Crown to require consent. Whilst the Welsh Government’s proposal to require executive consent for the use of these powers is preferable to the current absence of consent arrangements, we would prefer to see the Trade Bill amended to also require the Assembly’s consent for the use of these powers.”⁸

16. The Welsh Government states, in its Supplementary Memorandum, that:

“We have now obtained commitments in the UK Parliament including:

- UK Government Ministers will not normally use the powers in devolved areas without Welsh Ministers’ consent. This is in line with the approach taken in the EU (Withdrawal) Act.
- UK Government will not use the powers to introduce new policy in devolved areas and that administrative efficiency will be the primary driver.”⁹

17. We note that these commitments are non-statutory and therefore not legally binding. Moreover, there is no commitment to seek the Assembly’s consent; only that of the Welsh Ministers.

18. We also have a wider concern about the creation of new concurrent powers for UK Ministers in the Bill.

⁶ EAAL Committee. *The Trade Bill: Report on legislative consent and associated issues*. March 2018

⁷ EAAL Committee. *Six objectives for changing the EU (Withdrawal) Bill*. October 2017

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Welsh Government. *Trade Bill: Supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandum (memorandum no 2)*. 14 February 2019

19. Since the original LCM was laid, the new devolution settlement for Wales, set out in the Wales Act 2017,¹⁰ has come into force.

20. Under this settlement, the Assembly is restricted from removing or modifying UK Ministerial powers in devolved policy areas, where those powers are concurrent with a Welsh Ministers' power (or where the Welsh Ministers need the consent of, or need to have consulted, UK Ministers before they can exercise the power).¹¹

21. Therefore, every time a new concurrent power is created (or a Welsh Ministerial power is made subject to the consent of or consultation with UK Ministers), future Assembly legislative competence is restricted.

22. Non-statutory commitments such as the ones referred to above do not lift this restriction on the Assembly's future competence.

23. A further concern is raised by the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee, which very recently reported its view that the UK Government has breached its existing commitment to refrain from using similar powers under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to introduce new policy in devolved areas.¹²

24. As a committee, we have raised concerns in relation to the approach taken by the Welsh and UK Governments to legislating for Brexit. Of relevance to this report is our concern that concurrent powers provided under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 have been utilised to such an extent by the UK Government (with the consent of the Welsh Ministers) to make corrections to EU law in devolved areas, that the Assembly's role in legislating for Brexit has been diminished.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 4. When we consider the change to the devolution settlement, the CLA Committee's view, and our own concerns about how the use of concurrent powers under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, we conclude that our original concern about the provision of concurrent powers was well founded and still stands in relation to this Bill.

¹⁰ Wales Act 2017 c.4

¹¹ Ibid

¹² see paragraph 8, 3rd main bullet point (at foot of page 6 of CLAC's Report *Scrutiny of regulations under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018: Progress report* of February 2019

3. 3. Parity of powers between UK and Welsh Ministers

25. In our first report, we expressed a concern that the devolved Ministers did not have the same powers as UK Ministers in respect of the modification of retained EU law within devolved areas.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 5. We are pleased to note that amendments that meet this concern have now been made to the Bill, to bring it into line with the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 in this respect.

26. These amendments include the removal of the requirement for Welsh Ministers to obtain the consent of a UK Minister before using the power to make regulations that would come into force before exit day, or that would involve quota arrangements. The amendment instead requires devolved Ministers to consult UK Ministers.

27. However, the amendments would maintain the effect of restricting the Assembly's future competence, because of the consultation requirement (as explained in paragraphs 19 and 20 above).

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 6. We draw to the attention of the Assembly the fact that the requirement for Welsh Ministers to consult UK Ministers before making quota arrangements (or pre-exit-day regulations) will restrict future Assembly competence, in that the Assembly will not be able to remove that duty in the future (due to the change to the devolution settlement under the Wales Act 2017, as described previously).

3. 4. Scrutiny of regulations made under the Bill

28. In our first report, we called for certain powers to be subject to strengthened scrutiny procedures.

29. We called for the clause 1 power to implement the WTO General Agreement on Procurement to be subject to affirmative procedure in the Assembly.

30. Amendments to the Bill have not addressed our call for strengthened scrutiny arrangements in this regard.

31. We also called for **powers proposed for Welsh Ministers under clause 2 of the Bill** to be subject to an affirmative procedure in the Assembly or to a sifting process there.

32. Amendments to the Bill now subject the clause 2 powers to an affirmative procedure in the Assembly (and in the other UK legislatures too).

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 7. Whilst we welcome the strengthening of the scrutiny procedure for the clause 2 powers, we remain of the view that the clause 1 power to implement the WTO General Agreement on Procurement should be subject to affirmative procedure in the Assembly.

3. 5. The clause 2 sunset provision

33. Clause 2 of the Trade Bill limits the time within which powers under that clause can be exercised.

34. Under the amended clause 2, subsection (7)(a) prevents the making of regulations under subsection (1) after the end of the period of three years beginning with exit day.

35. However, subsection (7)(b) allows the extension of this period for a further period. Subsection (8) limits this to an extension of up to three years at a time, but this power can be exercised ad infinitum.

36. Ministers of the Crown can extend the sunset clause if both Houses of Parliament approve draft regulations tabled by Ministers of the Crown.

37. The power to extend the sunset clause is not provided to Devolved Ministers although they would be covered by any extension requested by and granted to UK Ministers.

38. The Assembly would have no formal role in scrutinising the extension of these powers.

39. In our first report, we concluded that:

“The control of powers under the sunset provision of Clause 2 of the Trade Bill granted to Welsh Ministers is more appropriately a question for the Assembly. Consequently, our preference is to see the Trade Bill amended to require the consent of the Assembly before an extension is

made to the five-year period, insofar as it relates to the powers of Welsh Ministers.”¹³

40. Amendments to the Bill have not addressed this conclusion.

41. The Welsh Government, in its Supplementary Memorandum, states that it has received commitments in Parliament that the UK Government will engage with devolved administrations before extending the period during which clause 2 powers can be used under the Bill. These are non-statutory commitments and so not binding in law.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 8. We remain of the view that control, under the sunset provision of Clause 2 of the Trade Bill, of powers granted to Welsh Ministers is more appropriately a question for the Assembly. Consequently, our preference is to see the Trade Bill amended to require the consent of the Assembly before an extension is made to the three-year period, insofar as it relates to the powers of Welsh Ministers.

3. 6. Protecting the Government of Wales Act 2016

42. Our first report included a call for the Bill to be amended so to prohibit the powers it provides to UK Ministers being used to amend the Government of Wales Act 2006.¹⁴

43. No such amendment has been made.

44. It can be noted that a letter from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Exiting the EU to the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee suggests that only Orders in Council under section 109 of GOWA will normally be used to amend the Assembly’s legislative competence; such Orders require the consent of the Assembly, as a statutory precondition.¹⁵

¹³ EAAL Committee, *The Trade Bill: Report on legislative consent and associated issues*, March 2018

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee, Letter to the Chair from Robin Walker MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, 24 October 2017

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 9. Our view remains the same as expressed in our first report i.e. we would like to see the Bill amended to protect the Government of Wales Act 2016 from amendment by UK Ministers utilising powers under this Bill.

4. Amendments that raise new issues for the Assembly

4. 1. Amendments to Clause 1 (implementing the World Trade Organisation original and revised Agreements on Government Procurement (GPAs))

45. These amendments create concurrent powers for UK and devolved Ministers to make subordinate legislation to deal with the consequences of changes to the UK's list of government bodies covered by the GPA (i.e. authorities that have to open up their procurement to other WTO members, subject to thresholds and other rules). Where the change is to a devolved Welsh authority, making these consequential changes would almost certainly be within the Assembly's competence and therefore the amended clause requires the legislative consent of the Assembly.

46. The creation of this kind of "tidying-up" power is normal and, in itself, innocuous. However, the fact that it is a concurrent power does have a slight restricting effect on the Assembly's competence because the Assembly would not, in future, be able to remove or modify the power, in so far as exercisable by UK Ministers, without the consent of the UK Government.

47. As with all concurrent powers, any resulting subordinate legislation made by UK Ministers alone would not be subject to formal scrutiny by the Assembly and, as matters stand, would be in English only.

48. We have previously expressed our preference for all powers relating to Welsh devolved competence to be granted solely to the Welsh Ministers.

4. 2. Addition of Clause 6 (UK participation in the European medicines regulatory network)

49. This clause originates from an opposition amendment, which was passed by the House of Commons. The Welsh Government consider that this clause is within competence to the extent that it requires Welsh Ministers either to implement any international trade agreement under which the UK would continue to participate in the European medicines regulatory network, or to take whatever steps are necessary, within devolved competence, to enable the UK Government to conclude such an international agreement. Therefore the Welsh Government considers that the Assembly's consent is needed for clause 6.

50. We agree with this analysis, save that we consider that the clause would require Welsh Ministers to do both the things identified; we do not see them as “either/or” alternatives.

51. We also point out that clause 6 will apply only if the international agreement reached meets the definition in the Bill of an “international trade agreement”, i.e. a free trade agreement (defined in terms of the WTO General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade rules) or another “international agreement that mainly relates to trade”. Therefore, clause 6 does not impose any duty on the UK Government to seek to enter into an international agreement focused solely on UK continued participation in the network, or mainly relating to non-trade matters.

5. Our view

52. The legislative consent process does not allow for a nuanced interaction with the legislation under scrutiny. Rather, it offers a blunt and binary choice of granting consent for the provisions as drafted or rejecting them entirely.

53. Our consideration of the Trade Bill illustrates the often unsatisfactory balancing act that is required when considering questions of legislative consent.

54. On the one hand, despite some progress, it is clear that many of the concerns we raised in our first report have not been addressed. In one case at least, our concerns have deepened.

55. On the other hand, we are fully cognisant of the need for legislation of this type if a degree of continuity is to be offered to business, workers and consumers when we leave the EU.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion 10. This report provides our assessment of the legislative consent issues associated with the Trade Bill. We report with a view to informing the Assembly's debate on whether it should grant its legislative consent, currently scheduled for 12 March 2019.

Agenda Item 3

Document is Restricted

Evidence from Jane Lewis, Regional Partnership Manager, South West and Mid Wales RLSP

History

The South West and Mid Wales Regional learning and Skills Partnership was established in 2007, originally to bring together training providers and ESF funded projects together to deliver a skills programme for the region that would increase the number of people with higher level skills and encourage people with no skills at all to participate within the programmes available.

In 2015 the partnership re-established itself as an employer led organisation working with Further Education, Work Based learning, Apprenticeship and Higher Education, Careers Wales, DWP, Third Sector and the City and Growth Deals. In 2016 the new governance was established for the Board and Industry Cluster groups were established across 7 key sectors for the region. A private sector chair was appointed, Paul Greenwood, Teddington Engineering and employer numbers on the Board increased to 13 of the 21.

The RLSP is a voluntary partnership working through Carmarthenshire County Council as the financial accountable body all of the partners have signed up to the Terms of reference and code of conduct of the Board which was used by Dr Greystone in his review as a model of good practice.

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

The data used by the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP) is gathered from a number of sources:

Welsh Government data – this is the data source that the RSP's are encouraged to use as baseline data however the data is often over 18 months out of date and it is not received by the RSP's until at least May which only allows the RSP's 2 months to use the data to support the writing of the main report that is submitted in July. This data is also out of date because the information that the providers have is far more time sensitive. The colleges also use EMSI data to inform their provision, this is a tool that can provide the latest data on the skills needs across the region which can help with planning of courses as well as providing economic data of where certain sectors are growing. The RSP's need access to this system and we understand that Welsh Government are currently investigating the provision of this system for partners across Wales.

Other data sources that we use is through the engagement and on line surveys with the businesses across all sectors. In 2018, the RLSP engaged with over 525 businesses to gather real time information. The RLSP also works with Industry sector bodies including CITB (construction); FSB (small businesses); ECITB (Engineering); Chambers of Commerce; Tourist Associations etc. All of this data is up to date and brings to the report a clear understanding of what is required in terms of skills training and support for recruitment of staff.

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?

The RLSP Board is driven by the Private sector with an Industry chair leading the Board and supported by the chairs of the 8 industry cluster group, industry representatives for the Swansea Bay City Deal; Mid Wales Growth Deal and the two Enterprise Zones.

The purpose of the cluster groups is to gather specific information from each of the sectors on what the areas of concern are on training and skills development in their sector. The Chair of each of the cluster groups represent the views of their sector on the main RLSP Board. The group representatives are encouraged to share information about the work of the Cluster group and to get other businesses to join or to work with the RLSP by completing the on line skills and training survey. This survey is circulated to over 10,000 businesses across the region through the database that the RLSP holds; through working with the Regional Economic Development officers within the Local Authorities; through the membership bodies e.g FSB, ECITB, CITB, Chambers of Commerce; Health Board partnerships etc.

The RLSP officers also attend a number of business events across the region to inform business groups who have not previously engaged about the work of the RSP's and to gain information from these companies on the skills issues.

The RLSP engages with schools at the annual careers Fairs across the region with over 8,000 children attending Fairs in 2018 in Ceredigion, Powys, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Neath and Port Talbot and Swansea. During these events the school pupils are asked specific questions on their understanding of apprenticeship; the opportunities available to them through the local FE and HE colleges and career pathways into the key sectors in the region. All of this information is used to inform the annual Employment and Skills Plan.

Finally, the RLSP engages with all of the Employability programmes operating across the region including Cynydd, Workways+; Communities4 Work; Cam Nesaf etc to share the information from businesses on the skills requirements of businesses and in partnership to develop career pathways to help young people who are classed as NEET's; or the Economically inactive or unemployed to get into work.

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

The remit of both roles is clearly defined, the RSP's role in publishing the annual Employment and Skills Plan involves gathering information to inform the provision of skills training over a 3 year period (current reports) by working with Industry and the providers to map out what is already being provided and what needs to change to meet the needs of the businesses across all sectors in the region.

The City and Growth Deal role will compliment this role but will be specifically looking at skills requirements for the 10 projects in relation to the City Deal and these will be longer term skills (15- 20 years) and will potentially be skills that are currently not being delivered in the region or possibly in Wales. The role of the RLSP here will be to work with the 10 projects, the Universities and the Colleges across the region to ensure that we can provide this training and what needs to change within the current provision including the upskilling of teachers/lecturers and training providers. This work will also need to involve the schools and the RLSP has already been working with Head Teachers across the region to identify the best way of achieving this. This will be imperative to ensure that we can enthuse the young to consider the pathways that will give them opportunities to work in the region and potentially to gain the necessary skills and training in the region too.

During 2018 the RLSP prepared a separate Employment and Skills Plan for the Mid Wales Growth Deal area wherein specific recommendations were made to Welsh Government to increase provision in a number of key skills areas following consultation with businesses in the region. The RLSP will continue to support the Growth Deal in Mid Wales work on a similar proposal to the City Deal when the projects have been determined. However the RSP is aware that skills and talent (and the retention of young talent) is a key driver for the growth deal.

The benefit to the businesses of the RSP's working on both areas has to be the information that we are gathering supports both and they are not being asked numerous times for the same information.

The RSP will develop clear protocol to deal with both projects moving forward.

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 work that the RSP undertakes is evidence based via LMI data and stakeholder engagement. We can identify the broader direction and the primary issues that each of the sectors are raising but the very specialist skills in the longer term will be more difficult because the industry itself does not recognise some of these needs. Working with the Universities and colleges there is some clear evidence of the type of training needed and some of the more specialist sector bodies e.g CITB; ECITB and Food Industry sector skills board have all identified skills gaps that are not all full time provision skills but more niche specialist skills required in that specific sector.

During the last three years there has been evidence of some change but this is a slow process which requires clear evidence over a longer period of time than the current annual plans require.

Work Based Learning provider have changed provision to meet the needs of the annual plan and aligned their training to meet the changing priority sectors.

There are some specialist skills being developed to meet the future needs including digital skills specifically for specialist companies; construction skills linked to modular home building and marine energy.

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

a. The foundational economy and the needs of those employed within it

The foundational economy is very important to the South West and Mid Wales region with 67% (272,400) employed within the foundational sectors. The skills requires within this area are very diverse to support the various industries. These needs are identified within the skills surveys distributed by the Skills Partnership and are considered within the cluster groups specifically Food and Land Management; Tourism, Retail and Leisure and the Health and Social Care groups. Brexit is also an area that will impact these sectors and the Skills Partnership is working with employers to demonstrate the demand and the skills gaps.

b. The demand for skills provision through the medium of Welsh.

The RLSP works with the Industry to understand their needs for skills through the medium of Welsh and how much Welsh is used within their business. A specific question is contained within the RSP survey and there is discussion at all sector cluster groups on how important the Welsh language is in their businesses. An example of the type of issue that has arisen is the training of health care workers through the medium of Welsh to ensure that there is sufficient number of people trained in this area who can converse through the medium of Welsh as well as having an understanding of the role through the language.

The RLSP is working with the FE and Work based learning providers to ensure that there is sufficient training provision through the medium of Welsh to support the requirements of Industry.

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

The RLSP works in a cyclical process. Having completed three annual Employment and Skills Plans the process and timelines are planned around consultation, supporting activity and drafting and completing the plan. The RLSP is resourced (£165,000 per annum) to support the majority of the work undertaken, (this funding pays for a small team together with a contribution towards office accommodation and travel and subsistence costs), but this is not sufficient to meet the growing demands.

The need for stronger secondary evidence and data is growing to strengthen the RLSP's ability to produce evidence based plans and it is therefore necessary to have timely secondary data that can complement the primary data gathered by the RLSP and additional funding is required in order to achieve this. The purchase of the EMSI system would help support this additional data to match what the colleges use for their curriculum planning.

The annual agreement received from Welsh Government is also of concern because there is no continuity of contract available for the staff working within the RLSP. An ideal scenario would be a 3 year contract to support the production of a 3 year plan.

The RSP's could also benefit from having a small pot of funding specifically to progress a number of smaller initiatives e.g identifying new practice of working; on short courses; shared models for training and apprenticeships.

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

The work of the RSP's is done in a two pronged approach. Whilst employer engagement is undertaken to capture primary level intelligence this is then complimented by secondary data sources. We take account of wider views on skills demands via a number of Welsh Government approved reports such as; Employer Skills Survey and the Employer Perspective Survey. These provide intelligence at a regional level on a number of issues and skills challenges facing businesses. The surveys utilised by the RSP's to gather local level intelligence are based on the questions asked within these studies therefore it is possible to make comparisons where necessary. We also look at cross-border skills issues as this can affect the movement of labour and one of the major issues for Wales as a whole – Brain Drain. This involves sharing intelligence between the three RSPs and being aware of skills issues within the English border counties.

The Regional Skills Partnerships offer a co-ordinated approach to the development and delivery of skills provision across Wales. There is currently no better or alternative method or vehicle to ensure that the employer voice is heard by Welsh Government. The focus placed on the Regional Skills Partnership by Welsh Government Departments is welcomed by industry as the Regional Skills Partnerships become recognised by Industry as a vehicle for change.

There are models of good practice in the region, specifically around apprenticeship training. The Cyfle shared apprenticeship model has worked getting over 1000 young people into a construction apprenticeship in the region. The RLSP is working with Cyfle and the public sector partners through the Public Service Boards and the City Deal to develop a procurement protocol that would encourage all contractors to employ apprentices for the large scale projects through Cyfle. This is a model that could be replicated into other sectors.

The Greystone review emphasised the transparency of the Regional Skills Partnerships and the cohesiveness and closer working between the three. This is something that each partnership is committed to and approaches have already been amended to ensure that there is greater parity between approaches for the next planning years. e.g same skills survey being utilised by the three so the same information will be used to make recommendations.

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

It would be fair to say that this is an area that could be improved. There are limitations to what we can do as an RLSP with the remit placed by Welsh Government to only focus on Full time FE provision and WBL provision. It would

be beneficial to look at the entirety of the learning landscape to include Higher Education and schools level provision. i.e. the whole 14-19 picture. This would be welcomed by both providers and the RSPs. There needs to be a closer alignment between the two policy areas as they are so deeply connected. This would also align to the PCET reforms.

There needs to be a greater commitment provided by Welsh Government to ensure that the level of operational detail provided meets the needs of both providers and the RSPs. This would allow the process to become much more focussed and efficient. The dis-connect between detail provided to the RSPs and the providers can result in challenges and problems arising during the consultation phase which can take away from the task at hand.

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

Whilst the Welsh Government's vision to increase the number of people achieving levels 4,5 and 6 qualifications is something that we all aspire to achieve in real terms to increase the GVA of the region this conflicts with the needs identified by Industry and Colleges is that the demand is for the levels 1,2 and 3. This is compounded by the high number of students leaving school without the basic skills (English and Maths to a level C or above) or work ready skills which means that colleges have to deliver these skills as well as the vocational skills that the young student has enrolled for. There is a need for an additional vocational offer within schools to meet the demands of students who are not academic to develop a pathway for these young people to gain the higher level skills through an alternative route i.e apprenticeships and vocational training.

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

The feedback from providers and some industry partners is that changes can be seen particularly in the apprenticeship provision. However we need the data from Welsh Government at an earlier stage in order to demonstrate to the Industry partners that their contribution and involvement in the Employment and Skills Plan is making a difference and the provision within FE and apprenticeship is changing to meet their needs.

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

Working with Industry has raised the profile of the work of the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership and the opportunities for them to engage and influence the changes that can be made to the provision of skills training. The industry voice through the skills survey and through the Cluster groups has enabled the training providers to work together to make the necessary recommendations to change the provision of training.

The recommendations made in the Greystone review 2018 have already been adopted by the RLSP and we welcome further discussions with Welsh Government on the future of RSP's in Wales following the review of the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee.

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

The current remit of the RLSP is post 16 FE and apprenticeship training however there is a need to widen this remit and have the ability to influence all post 16 training including A level and HE. The A level provision is particularly important when schools and FE play a role in delivering these qualifications.

The Regional Skills Partnership would value an opportunity to have an impact on the curriculum design within Higher Education and what is offered in the region to meet the needs of employers and to support the development of the higher level skills in region.

The RLSP has had more involvement with schools as a result of the work being undertaken with the City Deal and working in partnership with Careers Wales and Industry the RSLP has been highlighting the potential jobs from the City Deal projects and what skills will be required both now and over the next 10 years. We feel that it would be beneficial for the RLSP to play a greater role in influencing the 14 – 16 curriculum and the opportunity to bring forward greater vocational skills to meet the employer needs.

Evidence from Sasha Davies, Chair, North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

Background

The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership was originally established in 2013 and brings together employers, Further Education, Work Based Learning and Higher Education training providers, the Third Sector, Local Authorities, DWP and Careers Wales. It was recognised as the Skills and Employment work stream of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board to inform and drive the skills agenda in North Wales, and was later recognised by Welsh Government (WG) as a Regional Skills Partnership (RSP).

The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership reviewed its governance structure in 2017 to become employer focused and align itself closer with the skills needs of employers in the region. A private sector chair was appointed in 2017 and employer membership widened with representation from key and growth sectors.

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

North Wales RSP gathers its data from many reliable sources, which include both quantitative and qualitative research.

The main sources of data for North Wales RSP is data and intelligence provided by Welsh Government, Office of National Statistics, Annual Population Surveys and Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES). These sources are reliable, but there is an issue with the timing of receiving the data in relation and the cycle of producing annual skills plans, and in some instances the data can be a few months out of date. Some of these sources are also on an all Wales level, which does not adequately show the situation on a regional level.

Some RSP partners use data harvesting tool EMSI which is a labour market analytics system that provides an up to date and reliable sources of information to help with their planning. FE colleges and Careers Wales in particular use this tool and discussion have taken place with Welsh Government about RSPs investing in this tool which will further strengthen our data.

In addition to the baseline data provided, North Wales RSP routinely use partner data analysis amongst providers in North Wales and cross-border area which includes CITB workforce data, GwE Regional Education Consortia Data, West

Cheshire & North Wales Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Employer Survey, Career Check data from Careers Wales and other business surveys produced on a regional level.

The RSP also gather information through feedback and meetings with employer groups and other stakeholders.

This year, for the first time, the North Wales RSP will also undertake a Skills Survey which will be shared with all partners and more broadly in order to glean primary information from industry/ private sector. This is part of our new employer engagement framework to strengthen our data and ensure that it's up to date.

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

The North Wales RSP have established links with a number of employer cluster-groups within the region, and have used the wider membership base of our partner organisations. We value the input, and access of employer representative bodies such as FSB, North Wales & Mersey Dee Business Council, West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber of Commerce who we routinely engage with outside of RSP meetings.

Access to these networks enables us to engage directly with companies across North Wales, from single entrepreneurs and micro businesses, through to SMEs and to the 60,000 registered businesses across North Wales to collectively support and influence curriculum planning by partners.

However, whilst undertaking an internal assessment of the work of the RSP in the last few months, we have recognised the need to reinforce our employer engagement, and more importantly, to ensure that our skills and employment plan responds to the needs and gaps identified by industry in North Wales. As such, we have now produced an Employer Engagement Framework which will give further clarity on how we engage and involve as many employers/ industry voice as possible.

Hand in hand with this, we are revising the membership of the RSP to include representatives from employers and industry, as we do recognise that this does need to be strengthened further. This is also part of our Employer Engagement Framework.

As previously noted, the RSP will be launching a skills survey as part of our employer engagement strategy, which will be shared widely amongst the

business sector in North Wales. This will ensure that we can reach a wider audience, and glean information from interested bodies.

Whilst developing our skills plans, we undertake an extensive consultative and feedback workshops which targets a number of other organisations to include industry cluster groups, work based learning and private providers, Pre-16 Education providers including GwE, Headteachers and Curriculum leads and post 16 providers.

We also attend business events, and careers events on a regular basis where we make links with businesses, organisations and individuals who are interested in our work.

In addition to working with partners across the region, we continue to routinely and regularly engage with national partners such as the Princes Trust, Learning & Workers Institute, Colegau Cymru, Qualifications Wales, NtFW and other to promote North Wales issues and development on behalf of the RSP.

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

As a dedicated sub-group of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (since 2013), the Regional Skills Partnership has been actively involved in both contributing and supporting the development of the Growth Vision and Growth Deal for North Wales.

Data from the Regional Skills Plan has directly provided the contextual evidence required to substantiate baseline proposals for the Growth Deal in North Wales, and RSP partners have been drafted into developments and discussions, to align sector, regional and future needs of the projects.

The North Wales Economic Ambition Board have also commissioned the RSP to scope out projects in relation to STEM, North Wales Health & Social Care and Digital Skills and Automation and Employability, which are included in the Growth Vision Proposition Document (October 2018). A triparty meeting between the RSP, NWEAB and Welsh Government is also being arranged to discuss a Skills and Employment programme which would include a Skills and Information Gateway and Brokerage for employers.

The RSP is aware that they need to evolve and change in light of regional governance structure of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and the Growth Deal, and discussions are currently taking place in regards to RSP governance issues. (Annex 1 – Governance Map).

Discussions are also taking place on a working protocol between the RSP and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, which sets out the distinct roles and responsibility of the North Wales RSP and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, and the inter-relationship between them to ensure effective co-ordination between the Boards and other subgroups such as the Business Leaders Forum (Industry voice of Growth Deal). As part of these discussions, we would like to emphasise a streamlined approach, and we would not wish to see a duplicative skills and employment group being established.

We would also like to seek further guidance from Welsh Government on their views on how the RSPs fit into governance structure of the Growth Deal.

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 North Wales RSP has seen progress in identifying the current and future skills demands in North Wales region. Both FEIs have worked well in partnership with the RSP and as a region in reaching the optimum level of provision that mirrors the RSP plans and future projections that respond to large scale investments in the area.

Over the last three years, Work Based Learning providers (WBL) have also made huge efforts to focus on the provision in WBL learning for priority sectors and currently 90% of the programmes are aligned to the regional priority sectors.

In broad terms, we believe that we're able to identify the direction and issues that each of our key and growth sectors are raising in the area. Working with national industry bodies such as ECITB, CITB and FMB Cymru for Wylfa Newydd, we identified a shortage of roles and skills in areas such as steel fixers and scaffolders, and broader roles such as carpentry, electricians, bricklayers, etc. due to displacement of labour.

However, identifying specialist skills is proving harder in the long term to recognise. But we are starting to see emerging good practice in the region whereby the RSP has identified the need for a skill provision that is not currently being offered in FE. Recently we have recently seen the introduction of new scaffolding courses in the two FE colleges due to our employer demand. An emerging message from particular sectors is the need for shorter, vocational training rather than full time provision.

The RSP is also currently facilitating discussions on employer clusters and providers in the region in relation to shared apprenticeship opportunities in those

areas where there are specialised skills, low levels of employers or low volumes of applicants and difficulties recruiting.

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

a) the foundational economy and the needs of those employed within it;

In North Wales, where we have identified our three key sectors, and five growth sectors, we have worked with RSP partners, and industry representative bodies to maintain a barometer on current and future trends for skills and employment developments within these sectors – many of which cumulatively, form the foundation economy, which equates to 41% of the current working population in North Wales.

Two of growth sectors in our annual skills plans include the Tourism & Hospitality Industry and Health and Social Care. We are working with an FE colleges to develop a Tourism and Hospitality Centre of Excellence and Tourism Capital project that is part of the Growth Deal for North Wales with the main aim of targeting skills development in this sector of the economy.

We have also worked with the Anglesey Enterprise Zone and Tourism Businesses in Anglesey on 'Discover Tourism' which is an educational resource for primary schools to promote careers in the tourism sector.

We have a representation from Health and Social Care and Tourism & Hospitality on the Partnership.

The North Wales RSP has also supported and coordinated the work of the two FE Colleges delivering full and part-time education and training in the region, to address areas based on the 'Foundation Economy' through Skills Development Fund.

b) the demand for skills provision through the medium of Welsh?

In North Wales, 81% of businesses have staff with Welsh language skills and 57% employers rate staff with welsh language skills as important. As such, we understand the demand and need for skills provision through the medium of Welsh.

North Wales is the first region in Wales to have delivered and published a dedicated document 'Welsh Language at Work in North Wales' which brings together the latest statistics on welsh in the workplace, education, training, Welsh

Government policy and regional support for the Welsh language as an employability skill.

The RSP is currently working through a comprehensive action plan following the consultation and launch of the report in May 2018, and is working closely with GwE, and key partners delivering Welsh language training and learning on the region. Dialogue continues with Welsh Government on this agenda.

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

The RSP role has grown and evolved over the last few years and we welcome the growing influence on key policy areas. However, the RSP is resourced via an annual contract (£165k) with Welsh Government, which funds two full time post and one part time post. If we are to intensify our effort in terms of engagement and communication with employers and industry, consideration should be given to additional resources.

Due to the funding being received on a short term (annual) basis, it also means that the RSP cannot look longer term at issues.

If do see an increase in responsibilities, further consideration needs to be made as regards to resources allocated to the RSP.

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

The main driver for the RSP is to ensure that the region is delivering on the WC strategy and policy drivers on higher level skills (Level 3 and above), and reporting on how this is working, or not.

However, in North Wales, the issue is not provision, but attraction and promotion of industry to get young people to undertake studies ad apprenticeships in the industry. FE have worked with the RSP and industry to invest in new facilities, and new provision to reflect this demand, yet this still does not meet demands.

One of the wider views on skills demand is to consider the provision of pre16 learning, and how well this aligns to industry needs and priorities. A large amount of employer surveys and reports note that young people lack basic skills, and 'work ready' skills and this is an area that the RSP are keen to influence, as it's a recurrent issue.

The 14-19 Network and GwE are both members of the North Wales RSP and we would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with schools, especially in light of the curriculum reform and ensure the influence of business community and industry on the new curriculum in Wales.

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

There are tensions between our regional priorities and Welsh Government policy. The policy and driver by Welsh Government is to increase higher level skills in Level 3 and above. Whilst we agree with the need to drive higher level skills in the economy, on a practical level, the policy doesn't always reflect in learner demand/ progression and the demand by employers for Level 1-3.

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

Partners across North Wales have already begun a process of change and response to previous Skills & Employment plans over the last three years. Response from industry and employers in the region is that changes can be seen, especially with apprenticeships. It's fair to note that FE provision is aligned to RSP priorities, and where there have been gaps, we have worked with FE to plug those gaps. Examples of this include:

- A new Life Science Level 3 started in the North East in September 2018 due to employer demand in the area.
- A new work based learning partnership between a regional FE with Glyndwr University was established in 2018 to deliver higher level food manufacturing training across the region.
- Working with global company SIEMENS in identifying broader skills within the manufacturing sector that will be needed as a result of A.I. and continued advances across Industry 4.0 for North Wales.

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

The change in focus of North Wales RSP in 2017, to align itself closer with industry voice has been key, but, as previously noted, this is something that we as an RSP are keen to develop further. We will continue to lead and facilitate development

in partnership with all key providers, employers, and industry representative bodies across the region to ensure a bridging between industry needs and provision.

The longer term impact of the RSP is something we're eager to consider further, and would welcome further discussions with Welsh Government on how to best measure our success and impact. We are also currently considering the Graystone (2018) recommendations and are eager to improve decision-making, openness, transparency and accountability.

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

As mentioned above, the RSP would welcome a broader remit to include post 16 provision. Currently, we are able to influence FE and Apprenticeship provision in the region, but this does not include looking at the whole post 16 picture which includes A Levels and Higher Education. It would also be beneficial to consider pre-16 vocational provision delivered in school in order to take account of the wider skills demands.

Another issue is that the planning cycle for our plan, as determined by WG, is annually, and as one is completed, work starts on the next. This does not give us adequate time to learn lessons and has not allowed us enough time to analyse feedback as we move into another planning cycle. As such, we are currently looking to develop a three year plan which will allow us to measure impact and success, but will also tie in to the broader Growth Vision for North Wales.

Evidence Submitted by Leigh Hughes, Chair of the Employment and Skills Board, Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership

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

The data used by the Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) is gathered from a number of sources:

Welsh Government data – this is the data source that the RSP's are encouraged to use as baseline data however the data can be 18 months out of date and it is not received by the RSP's until at least May which only allows the RSP's 2 months to use the data to support the writing of the main report that is submitted in July. This data is also out of date because the information that the providers have is far more time sensitive.

We believe the RSPs should all have access to the same baseline as the FE Colleges use (EMSI data) which would ensure that the recommendations across the regions are comparable and based on an accepted data source.

Data sets should not be used in isolation from their wider policy or operational context.

Over the lifetime of the Skills Partnership in South East Wales there has been an improvement in the approach taken to the use of data sets to inform the partners work. However there is a feeling that the board could benefit from specialist inputs and advice from data specialists (e.g those running the Msc Data Science Graduate Programme) to better understand the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of data sets.

The data sets around FE and HE in particular could be seen against these bodies wider regional , national and international remit with a clearer understanding of how such institutions are funded and the existing requirements on them via ministerial remit letters and fee and access plans.

In addition the data provided for full time learners (level 1 to Level 3) does not capture progression to other provision or employment. An example of this is where it appears that there are high numbers of FE students studying level 1 qualifications and a much lower level studying Level 2 or on an Apprenticeship programme, to make an informed decision on increases and decreases in FT and Apprenticeship provision requires more in depth analysis to the data than has previously been provided.

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?

The Employment and Skills Board is driven by the Private sector with an Industry chair driving the Board and supported by the chairs of the 6 priority sector industry cluster groups, representatives for the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, Enterprise Zone Boards, CBI, FSB, South Wales Chamber of Commerce, Further education, Higher education, National Training Federation for Wales

The remit for the RSP from Welsh Government has been to focus and concentrate on priority sectors and those that will deliver the biggest impact to GVA and high value careers and the RSP board is reflective of this.

Board members generally understand their role as representative of the sectors and bodies that put them there. However some organisations may have clearer mechanisms and transparency than others as to how they feedback, consult and feed in – on behalf of sectors / bodies.

The Employment and Skills Board has for some time identified a dedicated employer engagement work-stream within its work programme. It utilises business representatives and sector champions to lead engagement activity, with a particular emphasis on priority sectors. Sector champions connect with industry representatives from across the wider business landscape and from within their sectors to engage employers in the work of the Regional Skills Partnership.

However we also recognise that because someone comes from a sector doesn't necessarily mean they are representative of that sector. Members should be able to demonstrate how they engage and feedback to their wider sector groups. Some progress is being made on this but all board members need to be able to articulate how and when they engage with their wider reference groups.

We acknowledge that those representing membership bodies is an area which we believe can be improved and this year we are working closely together to put in place effective engagement plans when trying to capture the same or similar information. The purpose of the cluster groups is to gather specific information from each of the cluster groups on what the areas of concern are on training and skills development in their sector. The group representatives are encouraged to share information about the work of the Cluster group and to get other businesses to join or to work with the RLSP by completing the on line skills and training survey.

The RSP officers also attend a number of business events across the region to inform business groups who have not previously engaged about the work of the RSP's and to gain information from these companies on the skills issues.

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

The Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership and Employment and Skills Board are integrated within regional structures as a part of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD). The Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership is managed by the CCRCD Programme Management Office and its Employment and Skills Board is formally recognised as one of four Regional Partnership Boards which are supported by the CCRCD and which act in an advisory capacity to the Cardiff Capital Region Cabinet. The Regional Skills Partnership and Employment and Skills Board support the delivery of a shared Cardiff Capital Region employment and skills agenda for the City Deal and Welsh Government.

The Cardiff Capital Region employment and skills function is delivered by a small team, not yet fully staffed, within the Cardiff Capital Region Programme Management Office. The work programme accommodates both the Welsh Government requirements of RSPs, as identified by contract requirements plus delivery of the City Deal five-year business plan. This includes support for regional partnership boards such as the Employment and Skills Board, Regional Skills Partnership activities, development of skills delivery and investment proposals, such as the 'Skills for the Future' programme and the consideration of employment and skills aspects of other investment proposals submitted to the City Deal Wider Investment Fund.

It is fair to say that the ongoing development of key strategic priorities of the City Deal is continually evolving so the integration of the work/role of the RSP in assisting this is 'fluid' at present.

The work of the RSP to meet the WG contract is very clear and concise on what is expected and by when.

The clear definition of roles/responsibilities of both is the current key focus so the RSP board has clear guidance on its role in relation to works associated with City Deal and the Cardiff Capital Region

To ensure widespread clarity and transparency around the role of the RSP the Employment and Skills Board, City Deal and Welsh Government has committed to

ongoing dialogue and communication.

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?

We can identify the broader direction and the primary issues that each of the sectors are raising but the very specialist skills in the longer term will be more difficult because the industry itself does not recognise some of these needs. Working with the Universities and colleges there is some clear evidence of the type of training needed and some of the more specialist sector bodies have all identified skills gaps that are not all full time provision skills but more niche specialist skills required in that specific sector.

There is also a consistent message from the more technically demanding clusters for bespoke, shorter and more-focused training provision as well as in-situ vocational training versus the year-long+ training usually provided by FE and HE.

We continue to be mindful of the growing impact of automation across the economy whilst current intelligence from employers suggests the overwhelming skill requirement across our priority sectors is that of digital technology and ensuring that learning programmes keep up with these advances. Whilst the Compound Semi-Conductor Cluster has identified a need for educational programmes to support skills development in CSC technologies.

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

- a) The foundational economy and the needs of those employed within it and

The human foundational economy (health, social care and education) is a priority sector for the Cardiff Capital Region with a whole range of different skill sets required to support the various industries. These needs are identified within the skills surveys distributed by the Skills Partnership and are considered within the cluster group

The HFE group (made up of members from employers, training providers, FE/HE ensures there is a wide spectrum of skills, experience and knowledge) has identified continued growth in demand for Level 2 Health and Social Care Apprenticeships as the sector continues to grow. The qualification is mandated by the sector. This has been highlighted by the HFE Group as a key challenge and the

need to build capacity within the workforce to ensure sufficient qualified staff are in place to deliver the new standards from September 2018. We also recognise that part of this labour demand will be met by part-time study and graduates from higher education with nurses, doctors and other medical professionals being trained at universities.

The foundational economy sector has identified a clear need for level four pathways to support progression for higher-level teaching assistants and consideration is also being given to whether there is demand for an 'access to teaching' pathway to broaden entry into the sector. It is important to note that gaps exist at Level 4 for both pre- and post-16 learning and development professionals; this will require further exploration. A need has also been identified for Level 4 programmes to support the Ambulance Service, Healthcare Science and Healthcare Therapy.

The RSP recognises that there are significant changes to the human foundational economy sector in terms of technology, with a focus on e-learning and moving towards 'born digital' and paper free environments. This presents challenges for the digital infrastructure, including access to appropriate computer hardware to support new software but also staff development and work practices, which are continually evolving to meet these new challenges, such as agile working policies. There are challenges for employees and learners, who may not be digitally competent, this is particularly relevant in some sectors such as health which has an aging workforce.

Further changes are anticipated due to Brexit, with some of the sectors finding future challenges difficult to predict due to the uncertainty of a post Brexit Britain. Staff replacement could become a challenge, alongside a need to train and upskill the workforce at all levels.

The RSP has previously made recommendation due to size of the sector in SE Wales that it should be split into 2 categories (public and private sector) which was declined by WG. The RSP does not have a remit to look at the public sector element of the HFE despite its large employment numbers

b) The demand for skills provision through the medium of Welsh

The RLSP has worked with the Welsh Language Commissioners office to ensure the questions we ask and the data we collect reflects the advice given. We work with industry to understand their needs for skills through the medium of Welsh and how much Welsh is used within their business. A specific question is contained within the RSP survey and there is discussion at all sector cluster groups on how important the Welsh language is in their businesses.

Our 2018 Annual report stated that in the human foundational economy, policies to support the Welsh Language are seeing an increase in demand for services delivered through the medium of Welsh, in the education, health and social care sectors.

As part of the Regional Skills Partnership's Business Skills Survey 2018, 51% of survey respondents stated that the Welsh language is either 'very important' or 'somewhat important' to their business, although there were significant variations across sectors

This is an area that the RSP could improve on.

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

No there is considerable input in time from Board members who act in a voluntary and representative role. Their supporting organisations and employers in effect provide hidden levels of resource and expertise to the region. In some areas it may be important to consider where specialist advice or expertise is required which is not on a board's membership profile and consider ways that this could be resourced or secured.

The need for stronger secondary evidence and data is growing to strengthen the RSP ability to produce evidence based plans and it is therefore necessary to have timely secondary data that can complement the primary data gathered by the RLSP and additional funding is required in order to achieve this.

Understanding the skills requirements of current employers in the region has the potential to be at the cost of a) potential to attract new inward investors who may be competition to current business in the region and b) ignore the fact that as well as upskilling in the region providers also have a duty to prepare trainees/ students/ learners for a global market place where employment destinations may not sit neatly within a regional boundary..

The RSP works in a cyclical process, three annual Employment and Skills Plans have been completed and the process and timelines are planned around consultation, supporting activity and drafting and completing the plan. The contract from Welsh Government has clear outcomes and an associated payment schedule, however the majority of the work to fulfil the contract takes place in the first quarter and this combined with the issue of an annual funding agreement is of concern because there is no continuity of contract available for the staff working within the RSP. We recommend a longer term view of funding allocation

for both people and resources with a minimum of a three year agreement be considered.

These specific reporting demands of Welsh Government on an set of recommendations risks an operational focus on production of such annual recommendations on scale of provision where more resource and focus is required around long term strategic work that will make a difference in the region.

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

The work of the RSP's is done in a two pronged approach. Whilst employer engagement is undertaken to capture primary level intelligence this is then complimented by secondary data sources. We take account of wider views on skills demands via a number of Welsh Government approved reports such as; Employer Skills Survey and the Employer Perspective Survey. These provide intelligence at a regional level on a number of issues and skills challenges facing businesses. The surveys utilised by the RSP's to gather local level intelligence are based on the questions asked within these studies therefore it is possible to make comparisons where necessary. We also look at cross-border skills issues as this can affect the movement of labour and one of the major issues for Wales as a whole. This involves sharing intelligence between the three RSPs and being aware of skills issues within the English border counties.

The Regional Skills Partnerships offer a co-ordinated approach to the development and delivery of skills provision across Wales. There is currently no better or alternative method or vehicle to ensure that the employer voice is heard by Welsh Government. The focus placed on the Regional Skills Partnership by Welsh Government Departments is welcomed by industry as the Regional Skills Partnerships become recognised by Industry as a credible vehicle for change.

The Greystone review emphasised the transparency of the Regional Skills Partnerships and the cohesiveness and closer working between the three. This is something that each partnership is committed to and approaches have already been amended to ensure that there is greater parity between approaches for the next planning years. e.g. same skills survey being utilised by the three so the same information will be used to make recommendations.

Across all stakeholders within the RSP, employers and providers, there are consistent and frequent calls for authority to influence pre-16 learning. Too much of FE provision is spent bringing students to an acceptable level of numeracy and

literacy. Moreover, attitudes towards certain sectors, careers, jobs and an individual's path to success has been influenced by teachers (and parents) along an unnecessarily narrow route (i.e. GCSE - A levels - university) or precluding industries and learning that could offer an individual their best opportunities for success. The drive for an improvement in basic skills is one of the most clear messages from the RSP in recent times and these need to be tackled at a much earlier age. So too does the need to demonstrate all possible routes to meaningful work and success in adult life beyond the purely academic routes.

The RSP is aware of other Skills groups and believes that better shared learning across these groups would enhance the recommendations presented. An example would be the Compound semiconductor sector – this is identified by the RSP as a priority sector so is developing a new sector group (led by IQE) and we are also aware that WG have set up a CSC working group and that also there is a Catapult Centre for this sector. Why is there a need for 3 groups on the same sector that don't share best practice and knowledge?

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 is a risk that the Welsh Government steer to make annual recommendations in relation to provision lack a long term strategic focus and that in particular for FE the requirement for RSP's to make recommendations in a budget neutral way blurs the role between genuine recommendations for increased demand, skills gaps and skills shortages (which are different) and potentially inappropriate recommendations for decreases in provision that neither take account of the FE sectors wider responsibilities around their local communities and the reality that Universities benefit to the region is only partly served by a local/ regional focus.

It is desirable that career pathways and ladders are signposted up and through professions. Current focus appears to be on particular provision in the middle to lower levels.

The level of detail set out by Welsh Government risks a more operational, functional approach to matching budgets to provision rather than a strategic long term view of how skills provision can be leveraged up in those areas where there are gaps or demand and which parts of the population can access skills and training in emerging and developing sectors.

There are limitations to what an RSP can do with the remit placed by Welsh Government to only focus on Full time FE provision and WBL provision. It would be more beneficial to look at the entirety of the learning landscape to include Higher Education and schools level provision. i.e. the whole 14-19 picture. This would be welcomed by both providers and the RSPs. In addition, it would make operational sense to view post-16 policy as education and not economy. Failing this there needs to be a closer alignment between the two policy areas as they are so deeply connected. This would also align to the PCET reforms.

There needs to be a greater commitment provided by Welsh Government to ensure that the level of operational detail provided meets the needs of both providers and the RSPs.

It is also vitally important that WG provides the RSP with detailed feedback on its recommendations and the impacts they have had on provision and outcome (positive and negative). This will deliver creditability to the employers engaged to show that they are being listened too. To date no feedback has been given by WG on the recommendations provided to allow a 360 degrees review to be undertaken.

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

There is a risk that the RSP recommendations are seen by some in Welsh Government as the only source of advice in relation to the nature and scope of provision in a region. Whilst progression to employment and upskilling are critical considerations for all education and skills providers, not all provision for all categories of learners can usefully be planned through this starting point or lens.

It would be useful to see analysis of any recommendations in regional skills work that related to :

- Those with specific or additional learning needs.

- Engaging / reengaging hard to reach or disenfranchised adult and younger learners in education, training and employment

- The promotion of education, training and employment opportunities for BME communities underrepresented in the workforce.

- Welsh in the workplace.

Higher level skills and applied research requirements of the Economy at L6, L7 and post Doctorate.

Vocational training/pathways in schools

Due to the inappropriate focus producing a major piece of work each year focussing on FE numbers (up and down) there is a tendency for other areas and level of provision to become marginalised.

Whilst the Welsh Government's vision to increase the number of people achieving levels 4,5 and 6 qualifications is something that we all aspire to achieve in real terms to increase the GVA of the region this conflicts with the needs identified by Industry and Colleges is that the demand is for the levels 1,2 and 3. A recent example of this is the continued growth in demand for Level 2 Health and Social Care Apprenticeships as the sector continues to grow. The qualification is mandated by the sector.

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

Anecdotal feedback from providers and employers is that changes can be seen particularly in the apprenticeship provision. However we need the data from Welsh Government at an earlier stage in order to demonstrate to the Industry partners that their contribution and involvement in the Employment and Skills Plan is making a difference and the provision within FE and apprenticeship is changing to meet their needs. The RSPs are at a critical point in the life cycle and feedback on the original recommendations made to Welsh Government through the Planning and Funding Template are due in 2019, this baseline information will provide a factual response and will ensure that RSPs can provide evidence back to industry and stakeholders, therefore demonstrating the credibility of the RSPs.

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

Working with Industry has raised the profile of the work of the Regional Skills Partnership and the opportunities for them to engage and influence the changes that can be made to the provision of skills training. The industry voice through the skills survey and through the Cluster groups has enabled the training providers to work together to make the necessary recommendations to change the provision of training.

Increasing the number and range of apprenticeships – data from stats wales shows that there has been an increase in the number of apprenticeships recruited in the region and alignment to regional priorities is improving

Delivering employment and skills support for industry, infrastructure and other investments to enable growth – working with Transport for Wales to assess and respond to employment and skills demands in support of the Metro investment and wider Wales and Borders franchise.

In addition links between the RSP in South East Wales and higher education are beginning to tackle issues around increasing graduate uptake by SME's through the Skills for the Future Proposal.

It cannot be understated the importance of WG providing feedback in September 2019 as employers (to ensure they remain committed to making a difference) need confidence that their voices are being listened too and that RSP are just a 'tick box' exercise to demonstrate engagement with industry. Employers are used to working in a faster timescale than that of WG (e.g. recommendations made in 2017 take until Sept 2019 to get any evidenced feedback) to achieve positive impact and outcomes.

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

The current remit of the RSP is post 16 FE and apprenticeship training however there is a need to widen this remit and have the ability to influence all post 16 training including A level and HE. The A level provision is particularly important when schools and FE play a role in delivering these qualifications.

The Regional Skills Partnership would value an opportunity to have an impact on the curriculum design within Higher Education and what is offered in the region to meet the needs of employers and to support the development of the higher level skills in region.

The narrow focus on degree apprenticeships being limited to two sectors, with only 350 places across Wales should be a greater concern for boards. Higher Education risks being seen by some sectors as not interested in this type of provision where the reality is that funding is limited and driven by a policy where funds between HE and FE are seen as in competition. This is not helpful to an honest scrutiny of the needs of the economy.

The RSP would welcome the improvement of destination data for better learner outcomes. Quality data in higher education is able to demonstrate learner outcomes and the impact and value of skills investment; this needs to be extended across further education and work-based learning. Longer term measures could identify pathways to employment, relevance of learning and movement within and across different occupations to measure learner outcomes over time.

Understanding an individual learner's outcomes (of any age) is key to recognising the impact and value of skills investment. Collection of relevant data is a priority, with the take-up and completion of courses and qualifications offering two valuable measures to understand the direction of travel for learners across the skills and training landscape.

A key challenge is working collectively to also measure detailed longer-term (12+ months) outcomes. This needs to go beyond looking at whether, at 6 months, an individual is in continuing education or employment and consider pathways, type of employment, the relevance and transferability of the training/qualification achieved, numbers leaving their specialisation or returning to it and numbers leaving or returning after specified time periods.

Expanding the collection of quality destination data, such as that collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for higher education, across further education, work Based learning (including apprenticeships), third sector interventions and European Union

Funded initiatives will aid planning and funding decisions, develop understanding of skills gaps and shortages, identify success/best-practice and allow for a 360 review of skills investment, delivery and outcomes.

Evidence from South East Wales Further Education Institutions

Colegau Cymru South East Wales Regional Group

The Colegau Cymru regional forum for Further Education Institutions in South-East Wales brings together the following colleges:

- Bridgend College
- Cardiff and Vale College
- Coleg Gwent
- Coleg y Cymoedd
- St David's Catholic Sixth Form College
- The College Merthyr Tydfil

The forum currently is asked to nominate one Principal/Chief Executive to sit as a member of the Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership.

In addition to this, one Principal/Chief Executive is a member of the Cardiff Capital Region Economic Growth Partnership.

Consultation Response

Introduction:

The responses provided here reflect the joint and shared views of the regional group of Further Education Institutions in South-East Wales. These responses are an observation of how arrangements in the South-East region are currently working as the colleges are not in a position to give detailed comments on other regions partnership arrangements.

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

The data used by the RSP is not always current or the most recent data available. Much of the data used is able to inform a 'top level' understanding of the region but given that the region represents around half of the population and economic

activity of Wales, sub-regional trends and performance is not always covered. Useful sources of LMI that are routinely used by the colleges to inform their curriculum offer, such as EMSI Labour Market Analytics, are not seemingly used by the RSP. There has been closer working with the colleges to review skills planning and provision data for Welsh Government and this is welcomed by the colleges.

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

The RSP understandably engages with a limited number of businesses across the region. In general these tend to be larger companies who have the resources to allow staff time to be released from their work. However, some very large regional employers are not actively involved in the RSP – the NHS for example. The interests of smaller businesses are only reflected through representative organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses.

The views of skills providers are formally represented in the RSP. However the level of representation has been queried by the colleges given that there is greater representation of FE in the other RSPs. This does not seem right given the significantly greater size of the South-East region and the larger number of colleges operating in it.

There seems to be a lack of clarity currently around the administrative arrangements and organisation of the RSP. There is not a clear statement of the governance arrangements, rights of representation or the organisational structure below Board level.

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?

No. Much of the discussion and dialogue around skills demand is shaped by the aspiration of most stakeholders to support and grow ‘high value’ jobs. There is an understandable desire to try to support and promote economic growth in the region by focussing on higher level skills and sectors where technology is driving significant change. However, the LMI data continues to show that the bulk of employment ‘openings’ across the region in coming years will continue to be in lower skill areas (including occupations in care, hospitality, retail and food preparation). There is a gap in understanding for many employers that the very highest level of skills (above level 6) will inevitably be only required in a minority of

jobs across the region. The most significant demands will continue to be around addressing the Basic Skills deficit for many adults and for upskilling and reskilling the current workforce particularly around level 3 and 4.

The RSP has not considered the potential challenges posed by Brexit yet in any detail and the impact that this will have on future skills needs. The colleges through their own engagement with employers across the region know that there are certain sectors who anticipate major skills related impacts. These sectors include farming and food production, hospitality, health and care and tourism.

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

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

The RSP has recognised the importance of the foundational economy in its various skills plans and assessments. The RSP has established that it recognises the sector, and in particular health and social care, as a priority skills sector for the region.

There has not been any significant consideration of the demand for skills provision through the medium of Welsh.

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

No. The RSP has developed around a number of participant groups who have volunteered time, supplemented by a very small staff team. This has not been sufficient to address the growing role of the RSP. At the same time the resourcing level of the RSP in the future should require and assume the support and commitment of the various stakeholder groups, while ensuring that any unnecessary duplication of work/effort is avoided.

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

No – given the responses to 1-5 above the balance is not appropriate. It would seem that the findings of the RSP to date, which are limited, have been given more weight than other tried and tested ways of gathering LMI to inform

priorities.

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

For further education and work based learning, yes the detail is appropriate. There is significant detail provided to the RSP around further education and work based learning provision. The RSP expresses an opinion on the sectors and provision that should be grown and those areas where there should be a reduction. There is a collaborative approach with the colleges and there is a detailed consideration of the RSPs stated priorities. Performance against this is then monitored and is reported on to Welsh Government. This is an area of growing monitoring and dialogue between the colleges and the RSP.

There is not a similar approach taken to Higher education.

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

As explained above, much of the RSP approach does emphasise higher level skills, as does Welsh Government's approach. However, the provision of skills for adults at all levels are required – there is clear evidence that many adults require access to support the development of literacy, digital literacy and numeracy. These requirements are an essential precursor to gaining higher level technical and vocational skills for many people.

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

To an extent yes. There have been managed increases in, and reductions in, particular areas of the FE and work based learning provision in response to RSP identified sector priorities. However, a significant and sustained growth of provision generally in the STEM area at a regional level will require more young people to be encouraged to pursue this throughout their education – and this falls outside of the influence of the RSP.

We would question whether the RSP or Welsh Government have influenced the provision of the bulk of higher education programmes at first degree level. (This is at a time when we have seen very significant increases in the number of HE

foundation year courses being offered and ever increasing numbers of unconditional offers being made).

What improvements can be made?

Given that the RSPs are being given increasing influence over the prioritisation and spending of around £400m of public money, the colleges' view is that robust, accountable and transparent governance arrangements need to be in place. The current situation does not demonstrate this and the colleges would welcome the development of it and look forward to continuing to play a central part in the development of RSPs.

Evidence from Colegau Cymru

Introduction

ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee's inquiry into Regional Skills Partnerships. ColegauCymru is a post-compulsory education charity; we promote the public benefit of post compulsory education and learning. We also convene the further education (FE) Principals' Forum, which represents the thirteen further education colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales.

Response to the Consultation

Introductory Remarks

Skills planning and provision has always been vitally important but Wales currently faces an unprecedented challenge in terms of trying to prepare for the UK's departure from the European Union. The imminent challenge, particularly of a 'No Deal' exit, alongside the historic and long established problems of deindustrialisation means that the Welsh Government is right to consider the local economic and skills priorities of Wales.

However, the current geographical split of the three regions does not appear to have a sufficiently strong evidence base. The particular challenges of addressing the divergent needs of urban South West and rural Mid Wales is a clear point in case. The designation of the three regions seems to owe more to convenience rather than congruence. In particular, it is important to note that rural communities share specific skills challenges and that mobile labour markets transcend both the southern regions, as well as the border between England and Wales.

Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) currently form a key part of the Welsh Government's approach to skills planning and the role of RSPs has expanded in recent years. Given the observations made in this response it is important to note that ColegauCymru, whilst recognising the vital importance of skills planning, can only give a guarded and cautious welcome to the extension of their role in determining actual course provision. This is particularly the case since recent Welsh Government policy has seen RSPs take on a more direct role in influencing further education provision whereby FE planning now takes the annual employment and skills plans of the RSPs into account. Likewise, RSPs now play a

role in resource allocation. For the 2018/19 academic year, the Welsh Government announced an additional £10m Skills Development Fund to support the upskilling of adult learners in areas that employers have indicated are priorities for the region, via RSPs. Clearly any inadequacies and deficiencies in the model of RSP-led planning could have negative and long lasting impact on the currently high level of learner outcomes achieved for individuals and employers.

In 2018, the “Public Good and a Prosperous Wales – the next steps” consultation document proposed that the new Commission should maintain a strong relationship with the RSPs or any similar regional body. In response to this, ColegauCymru raised concerns that RSPs are in danger of being seen and treated as statutory bodies when they do not hold this status. Similarly, annual skills plans are not statutory. The future role of RSPs and their activity needs to be clarified and agreed.

There is also a lack of consistent transparency over the governance and membership of RSPs. While some publish minutes and meeting dates, this is not consistently across all three RSPs. Likewise, it is not always clear who is a member of each RSP, how they were chosen or appointed, or whether a skills audit has been undertaken to identify gaps in the RSP Board. The make-up of each RSP board is different and while this is understandable in order to reflect local priorities, there should be a more consistent approach to the levels of representation from the public sector (including local authorities), further and higher education, and large and small business. The lack of clear governance mechanisms for the RSPs was recognised in the independent report commissioned by the Welsh Government, but has yet to be adequately addressed.

Assessments of the RSPs from vary, depending on the questions asked or the topics under review. While regional priorities can and will be different, a degree of consistency over role and expectations would not hinder this.

These issues, in addition to those outlined below, need to be addressed if RSPs are to play an effective role in providing meaningful intelligence for skills planning in Wales. This is very much a role ColegauCymru would welcome, provided that the key weaknesses are addressed.

ColegauCymru’s responses to the questions put forward by the Committee is informed by information from across the FE sector.

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

- 1.1 Issues were raised by FEIs over the data used by RSPs not always being current or suitable for the purpose to which it is put. For example, data that is intended to inform long-term outlooks is not necessarily suitable for use in short/medium term curriculum planning. Some colleges also noted that the intelligence from RSPs contradicts or is not supported by that from their own employer engagement channels.
- 1.2 There are essential considerations beyond data and evidence of existing demand. Future skills needs, changes in employment and the impact of automation are all important issues that need consideration in any discussion of skills but the extent to which these are taken into account by RSPs is unclear. The proposals which arise from the data must also prove to be beneficial to all employers and not only those represented at the RSP.

2. 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?

- 2.1 Responses varied depending on the particular RSP but the significant amount of public sector and often education representatives in comparison to those from the business sector, especially SMEs, was noted as a concern by some.
- 2.2 Larger companies often have the resources to allow staff to play a role in RSPs and meetings. Nevertheless, some very large regional employers are not actively involved in RSPs, such as the NHS. More creative ways to engage a range of SMEs need to be explored. Employer engagement generally needs to be improved and cannot be seen as just the responsibility of representative bodies such as FSB Wales.
- 2.3 Involvement of the FE sector in RSPs is not consistent, with greater representation of FE in the North and South West RSPs. This is problematic, given the significantly greater size of the South-East region and the larger number of colleges operating in it.

2.4 There is also a need to acknowledge that training, especially in SMEs, is often through companies providing on and offline courses to existing employees and not in formal further or higher education settings. The extent to which these types of providers are included within the membership of discussions of RSPs is uncertain.

2.5 Administrative arrangements and organisation across the RSPs are not clear. There is not a specific statement of the governance arrangements, rights of representation or the organisational structure below Board level set out for each RSP. Where some of this information does exist, it is not always kept up to date.

2.6 FEIs often question the lack of consistent input from schools and local authorities, particularly as they seek to develop vocational provision. Clearly the provision of A Level learning can also have an impact on the take up of vocational learning and the longer term development of higher level vocational pathways. It is important that the voice of schools is heard therefore around the RSP table.

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

3.1 Again, this varies depending on the specific RSP. The South West RSP has the lead role for delivering one of the 11 City Deal projects, the Skills and Talent initiative, and in doing so, supporting the other 10 projects.

3.2 In North Wales, there are concerns to ensure that the RSP maintains independence from the Economic Ambition Board who are driving the Growth Deal.

The RSP receives Growth Deal updates from various Local Authority representatives, members of the Ambition Board and the Chair of the RSP. There is now also a Business Leaders Forum to provide “challenge” to the development of the Growth Deal, due to a lack of employer representation on the RSP. There is a genuine risk that as a result of this, and other requests for input from business, employers of all sizes are overwhelmed with demands on their time, making them unsure of where best to exert their influence.

3.3 More generally, there is a need to acknowledge the competing priorities and influence of Growth Deals, City Deals, Welsh Government policy and UK Government policy which are not always well-aligned.

4. 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?

4.1 There is an inherent challenge in any asking any organisation to actually reflect current and future skills demands that needs to be recognised. As a result of this, any analysis of skills needs is at least partially selective and heavily dependent on factors such as attendance at meetings, (limited) responses to surveys, as well as employers who argue their case the 'loudest'.

4.2 The North Wales 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 more direct conversations with smaller, local employers to genuinely gauge demand. Their limited resources currently restrict this and therefore the risk is that their steer for skills provision comes from large employers.

4.3 There is a tension in South East Wales between RSP discussion and dialogue around skills demand, shaped by the aspiration of most stakeholders to support and grow 'high value' jobs. There is an understandable desire to try to support and promote economic growth in the region by focusing on higher level skills and sectors where technology is driving significant change. However, the LMI data continues to show that a significant number of employment opportunities across the region in coming years will continue to be in lower skill areas (including occupations in care, hospitality, retail and food preparation).

4.4 There is a gap in understanding that for some employers, the very highest level of skills (above level 6) will inevitably be only required in a minority of jobs across the region. The most significant demands will continue to be around addressing the Basic Skills deficit for many adults and for upskilling and reskilling the current workforce, particularly around Level 3 and 4.

4.5 The impact of leaving the EU and the resulting impact that this will have on future skills needs has not been considered in detail by each RSP. Through their own engagement with employers, FEIs are aware that there are certain sectors who anticipate major skills related impacts. These sectors include farming and food production, hospitality, health and care and tourism.

4.6 Lastly, the idea of annual skills plans needs to be revisited. Two, three or even five year plans, properly monitored, would allow for flexible provision to meet ongoing need rather than reflecting annual short-term priorities.

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

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

- Foundational economy

5.1 The levels of understanding and knowledge of the foundational economy varies across the three RSPs. For example, it is identified as a priority area in the Regional Skills Plan for North Wales but is poorly represented on the partnership. In South East Wales, the RSP has recognised the importance of the foundational economy in its various skills plans and assessments. The RSP recognises the sector, and in particular health and social care, as a priority skills sector for the region.

5.2 There is a need to raise awareness and understanding of the foundational economy with those involved in RSPs and Wales more broadly. The recent Welsh Government activity on this via a workshop in February 2019 is welcome.

5.3 ColegauCymru believes that all too often, the misplaced priority of Foreign Direct Investment still continues to dominate the thinking around economic planning and consequently the demands placed on FEIs.

- Welsh language

5.4 The North Wales RSP produced a document reviewing the use of and requirements of the Welsh language in the area. FE colleges in North

Wales are the largest providers of post 16 Welsh language provision in Wales and yet had minimal involvement with the RSP in aligning delivery to demand. Conversely, the same colleges have a far greater involvement with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and Welsh Government in planning Welsh Language provision. In South East Wales, there does not appear to have been any significant consideration of the demand for skills provision through the medium of Welsh.

5.5 The role of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol in relation to the RSPs should be clarified in order to ensure the most effective partnerships around Welsh medium skills provision, and to avoid duplication across the further and higher education sectors.

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

6.1 One of the major problems is that while the role of RSPs is growing, their remit is not clear. For this reason, it is difficult to assess whether resources are adequate to needs. The role of RSPs needs to be clarified and agreed, with resources then set as necessary, if RSPs are the right vehicle to undertake the responsibilities identified.

6.2 However, in a climate of reduced public sector funding, we should be wary of creating a costly, bureaucratic body. Nonetheless, if RSPs are to be tasked with critical roles like wide-ranging regular employer engagement which FE can use to develop provision, they need sufficient resources to do so and that is not the case at present. Currently, RSPs do not appear to have resources to interact with employers outside of the partnership, but seem able to co-ordinate meetings and prepare the annual Employment and Skills Plan.

6.3 RSPs have tended to develop around a number of participant groups who have volunteered time, supplemented by a very small staff team. This has not been sufficient to address the growing role of the RSP. At the same time, the future resourcing level of the RSP should require and assume the support and commitment of the various stakeholder groups, while ensuring that any unnecessary duplication of work/effort is avoided.

6.4 Importantly, the issue is not just about the amount of resources but also the need to ensure that those employed by the RSPs have the right skills, knowledge and experience to undertake the role, and that they have adequate support and development.

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

There is a need for improvement in this area. There is a sense that in some instances, the findings of the RSPs to date, which are necessarily limited, have been given more weight than other tried and tested ways of gathering LMI to inform priorities. Detailed intelligence on “niche” skill gaps that new employers require or the impact of new working practices is needed. Likewise, future skills needs, changes in employment and the impact of automation are all important issues that need consideration in any discussion of skills but the extent to which these are taken into account consistently by RSPs is unclear.

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

8.1 For further education and work based learning, the detail is generally appropriate. There is significant detail provided to the RSP around further education and work based learning provision. The RSPs express an opinion on the sectors and provision that should be grown and those areas where there should be a reduction.

8.2 However, the level of changes required by Welsh Government in terms of increases/decreases in required enrolment numbers is often very small, leading to challenges. Reducing enrolment numbers by, for example, six students, means running smaller classes without generating any savings to offset the reduction in income. The value of this extremely close scrutiny exercise is questionable. Likewise, it is difficult in the short term to reduce numbers in one curriculum area and to increase another area by the same number.

8.3 Too often, it appears that RSPs and indeed some elements of Welsh Government are ignorant of the reality of maintaining viable and

accessible FE provision. For instance, a viable class size can often be much smaller within vocational provision than for academic teaching but only at a higher cost. Increasing learner numbers might give rise to increased costs and not simply economies of scale. Likewise, concentrating specific vocational provision in a specific campus as opposed to at a number of sites, might appear to make reduction in numbers a viable proposition. This however, does not address the need to maintain local provision as a means of reducing the barriers to participation such as distance to travel, caring responsibilities or indeed the disincentive to participate in vocational training posed by poor access to public transport.

- 8.4 Rather than focusing too rigidly on operational detail, a medium term strategic direction for the region should be agreed. Within this, FEIs should be allowed to manage their offer at the micro level within that overall direction.
- 8.5 The further education sector works closely with the RSPs on skills demand but there is no consistent approach with schools and higher education. The arrangements for reviewing recruitment versus planning are significantly more detailed and operational in FE and work based learning compared to the arrangements in HE and schools. This needs to be addressed with similar, proportionate and reasonable levels of monitoring applied to post-compulsory education. The new body proposed as a result of the Hazelkorn Review is an opportunity to assist this.
- 8.6 The current 'higher skills' narrative particularly with an emphasis towards level 5 and 6 qualifications, whilst relevant to a small number of key employers and sectors, does not necessarily reflect the need for wider transferrable skills and general occupational capability. FEIs will also be engaged in a range of remedial work on essential skills which is not necessarily reflected and understood by the other members of the RSP. They will also be engaged in a wide range of activities to address work readiness and learner motivation within their learning programmes.
- 8.7 These are all part of the social mission of further education and their role as anchor institutions within their communities. These aspects of foundational services are in danger of being overlooked by a narrow sighted view of colleges simply as 'skills factories'. International research shows that flexibility is not only key in the labour market but also in the ability of colleges to respond to individuals' circumstances as well as emerging needs of the market. As the future direction of the economy looks increasingly uncertain, it would be foolish to believe and plan on the

basis that linear projections of need always prove to be accurate and reliable.

9. 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?

- 9.1 On the whole, there are few tensions between RSP and WG priorities. Where these do arise, they tend to concern misunderstandings of progression and higher level skills. For example, it is not possible to always deliver Level 3 skills to young people straight from school when they often need additional skills development at Level 1 or 2 before they can progress to Level 3. In many vocational courses, it is necessary to achieve Level 1 and Level 2 before progressing to Level 3, even if the learner already holds a qualification at one of the lower levels. Reducing funding for lower level courses impacts on the pool of people able to progress to the higher levels and is ultimately detrimental. It is also important to note that HE does not seem to be involved in conversations about learner demand/progression into HE on a regional basis
- 9.2 Predominantly focusing on higher level skills risks reducing the number of lower level courses. In effect, it cuts off the 'progression pipeline' and reduces the opportunities for learners with negative experiences of school to identify an entry point into vocational learning. This has potential unintended consequences such as increasing the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training.
- 9.3 The role of adult learning, upskilling and reskilling needs to be an important part of this discussion. Many adults require access to support their development of literacy, digital literacy and numeracy skills. These requirements are an essential precursor to gaining higher level technical and vocational skills for many people.

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

- 10.1 The skills offer is constantly changing within FEIs but this is often more influenced by direct dialogue with employers. There have been managed

increases in, and reductions in, particular areas of the FE and work based learning provision in response to RSP identified sector priorities. However, a significant and sustained growth of provision generally in the STEM area at a regional level will require more young people to be encouraged to pursue this throughout their education – and this falls outside of the influence of the RSP.

10.2 It is debatable as to whether RSPs or Welsh Government have significantly influenced the provision of higher education programmes at first degree level.

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

RSPs can provide a valuable forum for bringing key stakeholders together to hear updates on developments from Welsh Government. Regional Skills plan can also provide a clear direction for skills development. Some good use has been made of the funding available through RSPs – the Skills Priorities Programme and the Skills Development Fund – to develop and then “pilot” initial delivery of new programmes that respond to the needs identified by the RSP. However, it is not certain that this is the most effective channel for distributing such funds.

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

12.1 One of the unintended consequences seems to be an almost exclusive focus on skills provision and delivery in FEIs. There is frequently very little information on other education delivery in the regions and more could be done to gain a joined up picture of the situation in schools and HE. This is necessary if planning is to be coherent and effective. This would also take account of the progression involved in the education system. FE is just one piece of the jigsaw as planning structures evolve and develop.

12.2 As RSPs are given increasing influence over the prioritisation and spending of increasing amounts of public money, it is essential that robust and transparent governance arrangements are in place which is not the case at present. FEIs welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of such arrangements and look forward to continuing to play a central part

in the development of RSPs.

Conclusion:

ColegauCymru offers the following key points in conclusion:

- The role and activities of RSPs need to be clarified and agreed. This includes whether RSPs are the right body to undertake the activities identified.
- Governance arrangements need to be strengthened across all RSPs and this should be a transparent process.
- Annual skills plans should be replaced by skills plans covering two, three or five years, with suitable monitoring. Longer-term skills needs, changes to the employment landscape and analysis of the impact of automation should form part of these.
- A more joined-up approach to skills planning and provision should be taken that focuses less on just further education institutions and more on the postcompulsory education sector as a whole.
- Understanding of the foundational economy should be improved among those involved in RSPs and the wider regions.
- ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to contribute verbal evidence to the Committee review and would also be happy to supply further information on the extent and range of current provision.

Dr Rachel Bowen

Director of Policy and Development

Evidence from South West and Mid Wales Education Institutions

The following 4 Further Education Colleges operate SW and Mid Wales and have a single representative on the RLSP Board:

- Coleg Sir Gar and Coleg Ceredigion
- Grwp NPTC
- Pembrokeshire College
- Gower College Swansea

The attached response reflects the joint and shared views of the regional group of Further Education Colleges above. These responses are in relation to arrangements in the South West and Mid Wales region as we are unable to give detailed comments on other regions partnership arrangements.

1. In recent years, the SW and Mid Wales RLSP (RSP) has carried out less direct research as a result of reduced funding for this work. However, the RSP still has access to a wide range of employers of all sizes and has carried out an annual “demand” assessment across this employer “base”, although clearly the results of this assessment are based only on the responses that are received.

In recognising this potential deficit, all Further Education Colleges use economic and labour market analytical tools such as EMSI to help plan the curriculum that they offer.

2. Most roles on the RSP Board are representative roles, including 8 employer representatives of specific industry “cluster” groups, as well as representatives from across the education sector, including local authorities (representing the school sixth forms), further education, work based learning and higher education.

As such, the views of education providers are not only heard, but taken account of in the Board’s discussions and considerations.

There is a particular challenge for the SW and Mid Wales RLSPs that it covers a very wide geographic area – from Port Talbot across to

Pembrokeshire and up to the top of Mid Wales – and therefore it is difficult for all areas to have effective representation.

3. The RSP has the lead role for delivering one of the 11 SW Wales City Deal projects, being the Skills and Talent initiative, and in doing so, supporting the other 10 projects as well as supporting the Growing Mid Wales Growth Deal.
4. (5,7) The challenge here is that in view of their set-up, RSPs are “representative”, and for that reason, any analysis of skills needs is always going to be at least a little selective and heavily dependent on such factors as eg the make-up of the cluster groups, the attendance at meetings, the responses to surveys, as well as the employers who “shout the loudest”. Indeed often we can get distorted views where the sectors views are not properly represented around the table.

One example of this ‘deficit’ would be the visitor economy (catering, hospitality, leisure and tourism) where there are skills gaps which have not been highlighted as these as these employers are generally under-represented.

6. RSPs are sufficiently resourced to co-ordinate meetings and prepare the annual Employment and Skills Plan. However, there would be a benefit in having a centrally co-ordinated labour market assessment across all sectors and across the region, but this would require some additional resource.
8. Currently, the level of changes required by Welsh Government in terms of increases/decreases in required enrolment numbers is generally very small and can cause challenges. For example, if we have to reduce our enrolment numbers on any particular course by say 6 students, that simply means that we have to run a smaller class and as such, this does not generate any savings to offset the reduction in income.

However, it is also difficult in the short term to reduce numbers in one curriculum area e.g. hairdressing by say 40 students, and to increase another area e.g. engineering by the same number – as we are unlikely to be able to retrain the hairdressing lecturers to become engineering lecturers and therefore would effectively have to make staff redundant.

9. With many of our students arriving at College with often minimal GCSEs – particularly in English or Mathematics – remedial work is often needed at Levels 1 or 2 to develop basic skills. Therefore, with a focus on higher level skills – for reasons that we understand – there is a risk that we may have to

reduce the number of lower level courses which may e.g. increase the level of potential NEETs in the system.

10. There are plenty of examples of changes to planned curriculum within the Further Education and Work Based Learning sectors, although the changes to the numbers of students enrolled on these programmes are still relatively small.

However to date there have been very few changes in e.g. the school sector and we would question whether there has been effective communication with parents and – if not – maybe this is an additional role that RLSPs could play?

11. The Further Education sector has engaged very positively with the RSP and has used the available funding (provided by the Welsh Government) through e.g. the Skills Priorities Programme and the Skills Development Fund, to develop and then “pilot” initial delivery of new programmes that respond to the needs identified by the RSP.

Indeed the 4 Colleges are committed to working in partnership particularly in relation to joint planning and within the context of a shrinking public sector purse. However there are inherent challenges due to the fact that we operate across a large geographic area which has a very varied economic infrastructure.

12. At the current time, the changes to proposed curriculum need to equally apply to both schools – pre 16 and particularly 6th forms in terms of A Level options - and higher education, as to date, it has only impacted on FE and WBL. It simply doesn't make sense not to include all areas of provision and not just those who are more acceptive of the proposals.

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.

Agenda Item 6

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted