
STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Employability**

DATE **11 July 2017**

BY **Julie James, Minister for Skills and Science**

Today I want to set out my agenda for Employability. I am delighted this follows our discussion on the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys as supporting people into work will be a key feature of the taskforce's work over the coming years.

Engagement with communities, which the Valleys taskforce has started, will continue. But we recognise that there is also a sense of urgency to bring jobs and growth to communities across Wales that need more of both. Access to good quality employment and employability skills is essential and I am pleased to be able to move immediately to address this.

We have seen significant improvements in the employment rate in Wales over recent years. There are now over 1.4 million people in employment in Wales, an increase of 19.1% since devolution but we also know that the rate of unemployment does still remain high in some communities across Wales.

Whilst Welsh Government's contribution to the positive overall rate of employment, supported with EU funding, should not be underestimated, we know the story is not a wholly positive one and we must do more to support the economically inactive, those who would like to work longer hours and those in insecure employment.

The theme of employability runs throughout all four developing cross-cutting strategies. Put simply, employability is not just about jobs and skills, it is about getting every aspect of Government – education, health, housing, communities, transport, rurality, childcare, regional development – working together to support people into sustainable employment.

In April, Cabinet endorsed my cross-Welsh Government approach to employability, setting out our joint goal of sustaining a high rate of employment in Wales, reducing economic inactivity and increasing the number of people in good quality employment. The challenge Cabinet has set me, and will support me to deliver, is to drive this work forward collaboratively to deliver a step change in our approach.

Since April I have put in place the governance structure to direct this work:

I have extended the Ministerial Employability Working Group, to ensure an integrated cross-Cabinet response. I am grateful to my Ministerial colleagues on the Working Group- the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, the Minister for Social Services and Public Health and the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language for their input to this Statement today.

I will use the refreshed Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB), that has already endorsed our employability agenda, to provide strategic direction and challenge from employers and Regional Skills Partnerships and trades unions.

To ensure a far more integrated approach, I have established a cross-Welsh Government Employability Board made up of senior officials across Government. The Board has been tasked with drawing up an Employability Delivery Plan to be published before Christmas.

The Plan will look closely at existing services and infrastructure, assess how well they help people to find and stay in work and consider whether they provide value for money. And, as we are all aware, this will become all the more important in the years following our exit from the European Union.

I will ensure we work in close partnership with our key stakeholders. We will draw up a detailed External Stakeholder Communications Plan that will guide a period of external engagement in order to inform the Employability Delivery Plan.

In the meantime we are not standing still.

Our new employability offer is expected to begin delivery in April 2019. This will be positioned as a single offer under the name, 'Working Wales', and will be underpinned by a new programme for adults along with two new programmes that will deliver employability support to young people. Between now and then we will reconfigure our existing programmes to enable a smooth transition using the Valleys as a test bed to inform the new delivery approach.

We will make amendments to some of our existing employability programmes, including the EU funded ReAct, Jobs Growth Wales and Employability Skills Programme, and ensure these are effectively aligned, to enhance support for unemployed people and those who churn in and out of temporary, poorly paid employment.

We recognise that this cannot just be about support for individuals. We want to support employers to recruit and develop talent within their business, boost productivity and give local people the opportunity of better jobs closer to home. We will deliver integrated business and skills support through Business Wales by enhancing our Flexible Skills and employability programmes. We aim to support one hundred Valleys businesses with the greatest growth potential through what we hope will be one-to-one support to create jobs,

support for recruitment, delivery of tailored pre-work and in-work training and the up-skilling and development of existing staff.

We are keen to promote prosperity for all so that the benefits of economic growth are shared by all those in work. We support improvements in pay and conditions for those in low paid and insecure employment. To this end work has begun on a Fair Work Commission which I chair. Preliminary findings will be reported in the Autumn.

We must provide individuals with clear advice and guidance. To achieve this, we want to develop a common approach to identifying the employment needs of individuals, and support a seamless referral and support process. We want to work across government to design and trial the use of a profiling tool and management information system so that, in future, advisers across Wales, including Careers Wales will use the same system.

Our ambition is to ensure that we reach those furthest from the labour market and provide them with a holistic package of personalised, bespoke and intensive support and mentoring to reduce complex barriers to employment, tackle levels of economic inactivity and deliver on our ambition of developing prosperity for all. We can only truly achieve this through better aligned support brought about by working effectively across Government.

I therefore wish to acknowledge the commitment from the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children to provide community based outreach as outlined in his statement on developing a new approach to resilient communities.

I also acknowledge the work being undertaken by the Minister for Social Services and Public Health in providing specialist employment support for people recovering from substance misuse and mental ill-health conditions.

Our work on employability must take full account of the balance which exists between devolved and non-devolved responsibilities for employability. We want to work in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to influence future DWP programmes and shape how DWP works within Wales in terms of joint planning of employment services and integration within our forthcoming Employability Delivery Plan.

If we are to shape a new employability agenda, we need to drive a coherent approach across Welsh Government and with our partners to address the many barriers preventing people from entering and progressing in good quality, fair employment. This approach will benefit individuals across Wales and deliver the prosperous and secure future that we need to Take Wales Forward.