

Welsh Ministers' Business Scheme

Skills and Science - Annual Update report on implementation of Business Scheme

Introduction

The Welsh Ministers' Business Scheme is a statutory scheme under section 75 of GOWA 2006 and outlines how the Welsh Government will engage proactively with social partners in developing policy and legislation. 'Social partners' are defined in the Welsh Ministers Business Scheme as 'business and employer representative organisations, trade unions and the members they represent'. The First Minister chairs the Council for Economic Renewal which steers this work and also funds a Welsh Social Partners Unit, which supports social partner engagement activity.

This annual update report provides the First Minister and Council for Economic Development with a detailed return of relevant activity that the Skills and Science portfolio has undertaken related to the requirements of the Welsh Minister's Business Scheme over the period October 2015 to end December 2016.

Activity/Engagement

Employer Engagement and Skills Support

Employer engagement and skills support involves one-to-one relationship management of Wales' economically significant companies.

The Welsh Government works with employers to facilitate feedback on their specific needs and alignment to the Welsh Government's relevant skills support programmes, specifically in relation to the Flexible Skills Programme (FSP).

Flexible Skills Programme (FSP)

Employers remain keen to explore opportunities to develop the skills of their workforce and gain access to skill support programmes.

Consequently, the Welsh Government's FSP programme has been designed in response to lessons learnt and recommendations from a number of external evaluations of historic skills support programmes.

Further support is given by a Senior Relationship Manager (SRM) who meets with new and established businesses on a 1-2-1 basis to conduct a growth diagnostic and identify any specific objectives to support their growth.

All Anchor Companies and RICs, high growth Small to Medium Enterprises, and potential inward investment projects have a designated SRM to help them meet their skill needs.

Chwarae Teg

Chwarae Teg engages with employers and individuals to improve gender equality in the workplace utilising funding provided by Welsh Government. Chwarae Teg use a number of different engagement methods for doing this with evidence of positive outcomes.

Chwarae Teg's strength is its specialism and its breadth of delivery. It is employment focussed and works on addressing gender equality across a variety of sectors and client groups.

The Welsh Government has provided core funding to Chwarae Teg based on a 3-year strategic plan and an annual operating plan which have clear links to the Skills Implementation Plan and deliver on the Policy Statement on Skills. Quarterly contract review meetings are also undertaken to measure performance against targets set in Chwarae Teg's Annual Operating Plan.

Regional Skills Partnerships

Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) submit an annual Regional Employment and Skills Plan to Welsh Government, identifying priorities for their region based upon employer need.

RSPs are employer-led strategic bodies representing regional interests to inform a demand-led and sustainable skills system. Each RSP produces an annual employment and skills plan, identifying priorities for their region based upon employer need.

Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB)

A new governance structure has been agreed which sees WESB report to the Council for Economic Development (CED), chaired by the First Minister. The Council provides a forum for engagement, discussion and co-operation on a broad range of matters that influence or impact business and the economy. It's made up of a range of business, social enterprise and trade union representatives

WESB serves as an effective forum for employers to provide strategic input and robust challenge to shape future skills, apprenticeships, higher education and lifelong learning policy.

Consultation

The Employability Plan

Key Stakeholders operating in the third and further education sectors were provided an early overview of the development of the Employability Plan. The feedback informed policy leads.

Key stakeholders were identified in the Third Sector, Further Education, Sector and Regional Skills Partnerships who held a mix of individual meetings as well as presentations and feedback sessions.

The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales (The Diamond Review)

An Independent External Review chaired by Professor Sir Ian Diamond, commenced in April 2014. In December 2015 the Review Panel published an interim report which contained a factual summary of the evidence collected. The Final report, including recommendations, were published in September 2016.

Apprenticeship policy

Social partners were involved in a wide ranging engagement in the Apprenticeship Policy consultation (Jan-April 2015). This included public consultation exercises continuing through individual employer meetings and representative body meetings.

The response level to the consultation was excellent (circa 130 formal responses): 26% employers; 17% employer representative bodies; 3% trades unions.

Future Activity

Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF)

The Wales Union Learning Fund aims to encourage and support learning in the workplace and recognises the unique role of Trade Unions supporting learning and skills development in the workplace.

The Welsh Government continues to work closely with Wales TUC to build on the hugely successful Wales Union Learning Fund and are capitalising on the excellent work of previous rounds to make the latest projects even more effective.

In particular, Welsh Government will continue to work with Trade Unions and with Wales TUC with a particular emphasis on removing barriers for non-traditional learners, in partnership with employers and others.

There will be an evaluation of the 2016-17 delivery and it is expected that the final report will arrive following the end of the contract in April 2018.

Apprenticeship policy

There is scope for potential legislative changes as a part of the Post Compulsory Education and Training Sector agenda to be included in a Technical White Paper (early 2018).

Apprenticeship Levy

The Apprentice levy is a UK wide levy on employers with a pay bill of £3m or more. It was brought in by the UK Government without any consultation with the other devolved nations.

The Welsh Government is in the process of bringing forward new policy that will support the needs of employers in priority areas across Wales, regardless of their levy status.

Our approach to the delivery of apprenticeships will be driven by the needs of the Welsh economy and communities.

Ongoing employer engagement continued through individual employer meetings, group meetings and representative body meetings.

There are also planned employer levy information events (one in North Wales, one in mid Wales and one in South Wales with both private and public sector employers expected to attend).