



[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Inquiry into Assisting Young People into Work](#)

Evidence from Working Links – AYP 12

National Assembly for Wales’s Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry

November 2014 – Assisting Young People Into Work

Response from Working Links

1. Working Links Wales is the largest single provider of employment related services in Wales and one of two prime providers of Work Programme in Wales. Working Links is a UK wide public-private-voluntary company with shareholders who endorse our social purpose and are interested in how Working Links can create long term value, investing in the quality of services and the communities where we operate.
2. Working Links has a strong track record in Wales, working with unemployed people since 2000. Ahead of the award of the Work Programme contract, Working Links invested £2 million into research and development based in part on 450,000 legacy customer records. Since 2000 we have helped nearly a quarter of a million people into work, 30,000 of who are from Wales. Since going live with the Work Programme contract in June 2011, we have expanded our base to meet the increased demand and we now have 15 Working Links offices across Wales as well as numerous partner premises that directly deliver Work Programme on our Behalf such as Pembrokeshire College, Newport City Council, Remploy and Agoriad Cyf. .
3. Other employment and training schemes we run in Wales are Work Choice (Disabled benefit claimants), Community Work Placements (claimants post Work Programme) and a Flexible Support Fund Contract in South East Wales for claimants from day one of their benefit claim.
4. In October 2014, Working Links was also confirmed as the preferred bidders to run Transforming Rehabilitation in three locations: Wales; Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire; and Dorset, Devon and Cornwall. This has propelled Working Links to becoming the largest Social Justice organisation in Wales and we anticipate working with 10,000 ex-offenders annually.

Main Barriers Young People Face and how we address them

5. The main barriers which face young people trying to enter the labour market include poor work ethic, lack of basic skills, lack of sector specific skills, lack of transport and no previous work experience.
6. Negative Work Ethic tends to fall into two areas; those which are heavily reliant on and are influenced by parents and those who are unwilling or unable to commit to regular working hours. The first group are supported financially by their parents and for some that live in social housing with parents it could be detrimental to the household income or benefits if the young person goes in to work. Also, many young people come from homes where parents themselves are un-employed so it has become a cultural norm to live on benefits and therefore the family unit may not support the ability to work 9-5 hours. All of these result in a poor work ethic with no incentive for the young person to go into employment.
7. We have developed numerous programmes to change /challenge young people's negative attitudes towards work such as increasing appointments with us during the week to try to simulate working patterns, specific training programmes such as 'Skills to Succeed' and accredited Inspire courses which set goals and improve confidence.
8. Lack of basic skills: Over 50% of customers we engage with on WP have basic skills issues. We have various diagnostic tools to identify basic skill issues and provide additional training via procured services such as WEA and on-line learning packages, however we are unable to fully met the high demand for this provision.
9. Lack of Sector Specific Skills: Many young people are referred to us with no qualifications and currently most employment sectors require entry level qualifications - such as CSCS for construction. We do provide funding and support to gain these qualifications, however, it would useful if more education under the age of 16 could focus on vocational skills.
10. Lack of Transport: Particular geographical areas of Wales are not easily accessible for young people to travel to work, and many of our young people are not able to apply for certain roles as they may not have the transport to access work, and public transport may not fit the employer demands. Therefore for some larger scale employers such as Amazon, especially during periods of high employment such as at Christmas, we do pay for a mini bus. It is our belief that a review of public transport is required to identify "black-spots" as well as the possibility of a subsidy for young people who are unemployed.
11. No previous Work Experience: Similar to point 5 above, many young people do not have the required qualifications or work experience to enter employment. Whilst this is an obvious disadvantage for any employer, it also means that the young person has not experienced the requirements of a work environment, such as being at work at certain times and other expectations. Where we identify a lack of work experience as a main barrier to employment we will work with key employers to access work trails and volunteering opportunities.

12. Young people also have additional barriers to employment which we see across our wider unemployed cohort such as mental health issues, learning disabilities, substance misuse and others, which we do try to address on an individual basis by signposting the relevant support agencies. However, many of these support agencies have lengthy waiting lists and young people could be waiting for their whole time on the Work Programme (2yrs) to access these services.

The extent to which the Welsh Government's strategy for young people who are NEET is effective and Value for Money?

13. We do believe the Welsh Government's commitment to and support for young people who are NEET is evident with the various schemes that have been launched, however, we are unsure if they are truly reaching the young people that need the service most. Our referrals show us that many young people that come onto our programme have dis-engaged from mainstream education at an early age and have been lost to various support services from then on. We are probably one of the few organisations that they have engaged with for quite some time and we make the assumption that this is mainly due to the mandate element of the Work Programme. The WG NEET's strategy needs to focus more on this more 'difficult to engage' sector if it is to be effective. Pan-Wales solutions with mainstream education providers do not work and there needs to be more creative local solutions, possibly with a mandate element either for the young people or parents, whether that is sanctioning benefits or providing a paid element for engaging, with activity being directly relevant to growth sectors in that young person's direct locality. The issue seems to be about engagement and retention, however young people need to see how the support is directly relevant to them.
14. It is unlikely that the range of schemes currently available to young people in Wales is a suitable option for NEET's, as many young people who are NEET may not be able to directly compete for JGW opportunities or have the required skills to complete an apprenticeship. We feel that schools and colleges could do more to encourage young people who are at risk of becoming NEET to address what the issues are so that they can be supported in the school environment, whether that is to provide more educational psychology support or counselling within the school environment as well as more vocational schemes, as it seems that once they dis-engaged it is too late.

The extent to how effective the range of schemes, initiatives and projects aimed at supporting young people into work, for example: Jobs growth wales; apprenticeships; traineeships; other projects supported by European funding: and third-sector run projects? Do they provide good value for Money?

15. The range of schemes available for young people is varied and immense in Wales, and whilst the number of these options is positive it can at times cause confusion for young people and employers as well as duplicate efforts, and therefore not always be as cost effective as possible.
16. Jobs Growth Wales, apprenticeships and traineeships are all good examples of programmes that can provide the work experience and vocational training desperately required for young people. However, these schemes are not suitable for

all and need better co-ordination to ensure that they provide sustainable employment.

17. In relation to Value for Money, we see many missed opportunities of joint working across providers and funding streams that could improve value for money. We have many examples of where we are not currently utilising funding to provide the best value or the best out-comes for young people. For example, young people accessing training and support pre-work programme, once referred to WP are not able to continue to access this provision. This stipulation means that those accessing assistance could be half way through a basic skills or other training programme and then, when referred to the Work Programme, become ineligible and have to cease their participation.
18. But not everything is a problem. We particularly welcome that the Welsh Government has recently put systems in place to ensure that Work Programme participants are able to access apprenticeship opportunities as a valid employment outcome. This is a major step forward in maximising provision for young people.

Further reflections on European funding streams in Wales

19. Working Links are working with Welsh Government as a key member of the Joint Employment Delivery Board to ensure better alignment of Work Programme with Welsh Government employment and skills initiatives. The current position is that whilst people eligible for Work Programme can access skills training once they are in employment, they are not eligible for ESF funded employment and skills support pre-employment. This is because Welsh Government has in the past had concerns about possible overlap or duplication in funding coming into the system from different Governments and has therefore taken steps to exclude European funding streams from being accessible to Work Programme participants.
20. At the end of April the then Deputy Minister for Skills in the Welsh Government, Ken Skates, made an important and welcome statement to the National Assembly on arrangement to better align employment and skills services to support jobseekers in Wales. In doing so he addressed the core split of responsibilities, looking to ensure that Welsh Government “join up our devolved responsibilities with those that remain at a national Government level.” This statement was important because it set out at the Welsh Government and Department for Work and Pensions are now working together to examine a way forward on this issue. They are therefore both looking to simplify access to respective employment and skills programmes and make them work together better.
21. We believe that the recently announced new round of European Structural Funds presents an excellent opportunity for services to be better aligned to support value added activity to the core Work Programme provision, thereby offering more opportunities assist young people into work.