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Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau

Partneriaeth Sgiliau Rhanbarthol
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Ymateb gan Cadeirydd Clwstwr Bwyd a
Ffermio, RLSP de-orllewin a
Chanolbarth Cymru

National Assembly for Wales
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee

Regional Skills Partnerships

Evidence from Food and Farming
Cluster Chair, South West and Mid
Wales Regional Learning and Skills
Partnership

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

I support the views submitted by the RLSP.

Additional response:

Information from businesses can provide a more immediate reflection of the working environment than the methods outlined by the RLSP submission.

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?

I support the views submitted by the RLSP

Additional response:

As the incoming Chairman of the Food and Farming cluster, there is an additional opportunity to engage with major employers in the geographical area, who supply our business. I appreciate that it is not always possible for them to attend the meetings, therefore having dialogue in a broader supply chain context will be a priority. Essentially, their efficacy to attract and retain staff upstream of the supply chain, has repercussions to all downstream stakeholders.

The challenge is to have qualitative data that represents the needs of the entire geographical area. Businesses will broadly agree and submit the same requirements, however local needs to the North may be different to those in the South and can be influenced by the training provision of the tertiary colleges, or the availability of work based training providers.

Consequently it is important to have broad geographical representation.

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

I support the views submitted by the RLSP

Additional response:

The City Deal and Growth Deal in Mid Wales should herald significant opportunities in the relevant areas. However of the eleven projects highlighted in the Swansea City Deal, there is no explicit food production or manufacturing scheme. Nevertheless if the projected 10,000 jobs are generated, there will be an associated increase in spend at retailers and hospitality providers. This in itself should provide growth opportunities for the food and farming sector to take advantage of.

The Food and Farming sector needs to consider this opportunity and ensure that skilled staff are available to work in supporting the growth of the eleven key projects.

The proposed growth deal for rural Mid Wales, on the other hand, should include food and farming as a key driver for growth. Improvements in the transport infrastructure and digital connectivity should help develop growth opportunities and support the creation of an estimated 4000 jobs.

Key training providers for food manufacturing and farming skills are based in the Mid Wales region. The Food Park in Horeb, Llandyssul, is well placed to continue to develop as a learning and development hub and, I would suggest, be key to developing the sector in the event of a Mid Wales Deal. Likewise LANTRA are based in Builth Wells and companies, such as Cambrian Training, in Welshpool.

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?

I support the views submitted by the RLSP

Additional response:

The role of the RSLP Food and Framing cluster group can highlight specific training needs that sit outside the conventional apprentice pathways. Many items of specialised manufacturing machinery, that are usually manufactured in mainland Europe, require bespoke training.

The group can collate data on specialist training and, schemes such as the LANTRA managed Food Skills Cymru, can provide funding for groups of companies to consolidate their training, thus reducing the cost.

The lack of specialist food engineers has been an issue for numerous years. Cross-cluster communication and collaboration should highlight different career paths for skilled workers. For example, we live in uncertain times with the apparent demise of the UK car manufacturing sector. Data from the RLSP Employment & Skills Plan identifies the employment profile in each sector, and should be a guide to signpost qualified employees from one sector to another.

Do the Regional Skills Partnerships have sufficient knowledge and understanding of

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

I support the views submitted by the RLS

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

I support the views submitted by the RLSP

Additional response:

Companies supplying the public sector must aim to work towards the goals of The Well Being of Future Generation Act, 2015.

One stipulation is that Welsh language is protected. To meet this aim an option of delivery of training through the medium of Welsh needs to be adhered to.

However, a pragmatic approach must also be adopted, and businesses must evaluate any additional costs.

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

I support the views submitted by the RLSP

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

I support the views submitted by the RLSP

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 is important to promote to secondary school pupils that the food sector is a vibrant supply chain, employing 18% or so of the Welsh workforce. There are a diversity of roles, from dairy farming through to accountancy and engineering.

There are existing initiatives that aim to promote the sector to school pupils. The Tasty Careers project attends numerous skills fairs, career fairs and have recently had their Tasty Challenge project approved by the WJEC as a Key Stage 4, Welsh Baccalaureate skills project.

In times of uncertainty regarding migrant workers, businesses in our sector must work harder to develop relationships with local schools through initiatives such as the Business in The Community (BiTC), 'Business Class' project.

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?

I support the views submitted by the RLSP

Additional response:

Entry level jobs are usually the most difficult to fill and, generally, take the longest to develop the skills required to work in the sector. It is felt that once an apprentice has completed level 3, the level of competency required to complete level 4 is easier to bridge.

The essential skill element of the Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships can be off-putting to many potential signatories. Many potential apprentices have finished full time education in order to develop the non-academic skills required in the work place, and have no desire to return to the classroom for non-work related activities. Employers prefer to employ staff with the ability to perform the allocated task, and not necessarily for their digital literacy skills.

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

I support the views submitted by the RLSP

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

I support the views submitted by the RLSP

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

I support the views submitted by the RLSP