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Sgiliau
Partneriaeth Sgiliau Rhanbarthol
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Ymateb gan Valero Energy Cyf, RLSP
de-orllewin a Chanolbarth Cymru

National Assembly for Wales
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee
Regional Skills Partnerships
Evidence from Valero Energy Ltd,
South West and Mid Wales RLSP

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

The data that is gathered by the RLSP is generated via engagement with employers. Timeliness is critical to employers, specifically data and decisions relating to the skills demands of businesses and the mechanisms by which they recruit and train employees. The use of this data to influence Welsh Government skills provision is hugely valuable to employers and is one of the main reasons for employer engagement – their voice is actually heard and acted upon.

In order for employers to benefit from their engagement and to see evidence that their requirements are addressed, the provision of Welsh Government data and the gathering and analysis of employer driven intelligence need to be aligned. Of particular importance is the Welsh Government provision of data relating to funding allocated to FE and apprenticeship learning routes, which must be current in order that employer need can be reflected in the planning of skills provision and to ensure that the RLSP are able to incorporate current and meaningful data in their reporting mechanisms.

It is also important to employers that there is sufficient time to allow for analysis of the data. The identification of any required changes and the opportunity for those changes to be implemented quickly enough for businesses to see the benefit both from the changes but also from their involvement.

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?

Membership of the RLSP Board is predominantly private sector, the chair is from the private sector, as are the chairs of the 8 industry cluster groups. Also included are industry representatives for the Swansea Bay City Deal; Mid Wales Growth Deal and the two Enterprise Zones.

The cluster groups gather specific information and identify areas of concern relating to 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 RLSP database, utilising links with the Regional Economic Development officers within the Local Authorities, and other membership bodies such as the FSB, ECITB, CITB, Chambers of Commerce; and Health Board partnerships.

The RLSP officers also attend business events across the region so that they can promote the work and role of the RLSP to business groups who have not previously engaged and to gain information from these companies on the skills issues.

Presentations from external bodies are a feature of RLSP board meetings. Cluster group chairs disseminate details of such presentations to their group members to ensure that private sector engagement is a two way process.

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

The RLSP'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 (currently) through engagement with employers and providers to establish what is already being provided and identify changes in provision that will meet the needs of the businesses across each sector in the region.

The City and Growth Deals will complement this activity but with specific emphasis on skills requirements for the 10 projects in relation to the City Deal over a broader timescale (15- 20 years). The outcome may potentially identify skills that are currently not being delivered in the region or possibly in Wales. The RLSP will work with the Universities and the Colleges across the region to ensure that we can provide the training required for the success of the 10 projects and to establish any required changes within the current provision including the upskilling of teachers/lecturers and training providers. This work will also impact upon the schools and the RLSP is already engaging with Head Teachers across the region to identify how best way to implement this. It is imperative to ensure that young people across the region are made aware of the pathways that will provide the employment opportunities in the region and the routes by which they can gain the necessary skills and training in the region too.

The work of the Growth Deal in Mid Wales will follow a similar path once the projects have been determined, building on experience gained via the City Deal. Given that skills and talent (and the retention of young talent) is a key driver for the Growth Deal, the RLSP will be instrumental in gathering the necessary data and leading the interface with the Welsh Government to deliver provision according to identified need.

The RLSP will develop clear working protocols related to the City and Growth Deals, avoiding the duplication of engagement with businesses whilst ensuring a consistency of approach across the region.

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. This supports the identification of the broader direction and the primary issues that affect each of the sectors and the associated recommendations. Longer term, more specialist skill requirements are more challenging as in some instances industry itself has not yet recognised some of these needs. Some clear evidence of the type of training needed has been identified through the RLSPs Provider Group and some of the more specialist sector bodies e.g. CITB; ECITB and Food Industry sector skills board have also identified skills gaps. These are not always full time provision skills but more niche specialist skills required within specific sectors.

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

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

The RSP skills surveys identify required skills sets across the industries within the region. Each cluster group considers the data from within their own sector and specific requirements are then tabled and considered prior to any final recommendations that relate to delivery / provision. The level of private sector involvement in the South West and Mid Wales region ensures that industry requirements underpin the regional activity.

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 RLSP skills survey and there is discussion at all sector cluster groups on the Welsh language and its importance within 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.

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 demand.

The increasing need for the RLSP to produce evidence based plans is only achievable with the use of stronger, secondary evidence and data. Additional funding is required to achieve this, and also to continue the growth and reach of the RLSP.

The current annual agreement with the Welsh Government is of concern as this precludes the continuity of employment for the RLSP team. Extending this agreement to a 3 yearly basis would facilitate longer term planning, security of employment and the production of a 3 year plan.

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

The work of the RLSP's has two dimensions. Employer engagement captures primary level intelligence which is then complemented by secondary data sources. The RLSP takes account of wider views on skills demands via a number of Welsh Government approved reports, including the 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, allowing comparisons to be made when required. The consideration of cross-border skills issues is also possible, as these can impact upon the movement of labour and one of the major issues for Wales as a whole – Brain Drain. This requires the sharing of labour market intelligence between the three RSPs and also an awareness of skills issues across the English border counties.

The Regional Skills Partnerships provide a co-ordinated approach to the development and delivery of skills provision across Wales and maintain a channel of communication between employers and the Welsh Government.

The developing role of the Regional Skills Partnership and the recognition of the RLSPs by Welsh Government Departments as a vehicle of change is welcomed by employers.

The Greystone review emphasised the transparency of the Regional Skills Partnerships and the cohesiveness and closer working between them. This is becoming evident through initiatives such as the development of a common skills survey so that the same data is gathered and analysed across the regions.

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

The data currently provided relates only to full time FE and WBL provision, which enables employers to develop a more detailed understanding and influence resource deployment across these two areas. Provision of 14 – 19 data would be more meaningful, allowing employers and providers to plan across a much broader spectrum, from entry level skills through to graduate positions.

The timing of the provision of operational detail is significant, as is the level of detail provided by the Welsh Government. The key to continued employer engagement is to provide evidence that provision and delivery of skills responds to identified skills requirements. For this to be effective, both the RLSPs and the providers require the same level of operational detail to be provided early enough for recommendations to influence the delivery of provision in the following academic year.

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?

These tensions would be significantly easier to address with the provision of the 14 - 19 data as stated in the response to the previous question. Without this level of detail, it is difficult for employers to comprehensively plan their future recruitment requirements.

In many cases there is a preference for higher level skills (up to and including Level 7) to be achieved through part time courses as opposed to direct graduate recruitment, building on experience and qualifications gained via the apprenticeship route, but this is becoming more difficult given the high number of students leaving school without GCSE grade C or above in Maths, English and Science.

The introduction of an extended vocational offer within schools, as opposed to following the traditional GCSE study programme would provide an alternative entry route into the apprenticeship programme. It will take longer for this cohort to achieve higher level skills but they will be effective employees.

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

Only within the apprenticeship provision to date. The provision of the 14 - 19 data would provide the opportunity to consider the correlation between A levels in relation to Diploma provision, and progression through to HE courses.

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

The change of focus from public to private sector, evidenced by the involvement of employer representatives on the sub groups.

The opportunity to influence the current and future skills training and provision.

The effort made by the RLSP team to gather and disseminate information to employers. The extent to which the RLSP team continue to extend employer engagement activities through notification of events, consultations and strategic developments to ensure that employers are kept up to date with skills related developments.

Closer links between employers and providers – facilitated and supported 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?

Consideration of the entire 14 – 19 provision would support a wider understanding of the components of the system, how they influence each other and the potential benefits and progression routes for employers when recruiting and developing employees.

The apprenticeship programme is well established in Wales, and the process is clearly understood. Opportunities for those who do not meet the apprenticeship programme entry criteria are less clear.