

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru	National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau	Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau	Priorities for the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee
EIS 41 ColegauCymru	EIS 41 CollegesWales

Colegau Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee call for evidence on issues for the Fifth Assembly

Colegau Cymru

Colegau Cymru is the representative body for all 14 of Wales' further education colleges and institutions. It is an educational charity and company limited by guarantee. Two thirds of Wales' 16-19 year olds attend college.

Its mission is to promote post-16 world-class education, training and skills in Wales.

Colegau Cymru represents colleges to decision makers and their influencers on policy issues that affect post-16 education and training, including the links between education and the economy, health and wellbeing.

Issues for consideration in the Fifth Assembly

Infrastructure

1. Colleges are supporting the skills needs of rail and transport organisations and are working closely on providing the people and the training to these organisations. The planned completion of the electrification of the railway is 2022 whilst the work on the metro isn't scheduled until later. Our concerns are what will happen to these skilled workers in the interim period and is there an action plan of support?
2. Representing colleges in Wales, the infrastructure links will improve on the M4 and the A55 but are there forthcoming plans to improve rail, road links between North and South Wales?
3. The Fifth Assembly should work with users and providers to establish an affordable and integrated public transport system to help get students to their place of learning.

Skills

4. The availability of the right skills is dependent on employers' knowledge of what skills are required. When the demand is known colleges react are responsive and deliver. Repeated employer skills surveys show that Wales has skills gaps covering soft/employability skills as well as key technical skills.

In response, colleges are proving to be strong performers in developing vocational learners (relevant industry work experience as part of their courses) and apprentices to world class standards. Success rates in post-16 education in Wales has soared from 50% in 2000 to 86% in 2013/14. In addition, most further education colleges offer A levels, and meet or exceed the UK attainment rates each year with strong university provision. Indeed, one college has been named an Oxbridge Hub.

5. Despite the cuts, the sector has embraced change and stands ready to lead the way in defining a bold new role for post-16 education and training. It can only do this if the value we place on skills, and on vocational and academic results, are matched by commitments, not just in words, but in actions too by the Fifth Assembly.
6. Wales needs a change in approach to 16-19 education and training that will provide a bridge between school and the world of work and university; an approach that will underpin the development of a high skill and high wage economy. The UK Governments recent post-16 Skills Plan for England shows a commitment to skills and offers up some

food for thought. One thing is needed and that is a post-16 skills plan for Wales. We would welcome a collaborative approach and an opportunity for further discussion on this matter.

7. We welcome the commitment to all age 100,000 new apprentices and many colleges have successful apprenticeship schemes across a whole range of sectors and at various levels. In fact, the Deloitte apprenticeship scheme is something increasingly other professional bodies are looking to adopt.
8. Our main concern surrounding the apprenticeship commitment is the apprenticeship levy and what this means for Wales. This levy will need to be used to invest in skills that deliver growth and that respond nimbly to employer demand.
9. Colleges mean business and are driving business development in terms of supplying fit for purpose education and training in Wales. A commitment to their flexibility is that all colleges have business development departments to focus on delivering the right courses and skilled people to adhere to employer needs. An opportunity would be to invite a college representative to speak at the committee to gather evidence on successful skills and employer engagement in practice.
10. Entrepreneurship is encouraged and is something that FE celebrate as a sector - colleges have dedicated entrepreneurship mentors that encourage learners to develop their ideas into businesses. A commitment to support, reward and encourage entrepreneurship should be further considered.
11. Post Brexit ColegauCymru and colleges are keen to gain Assembly support for continued work on a European and International level. ColegauCymru and colleges have benefitted greatly over the years in relation to overseas staff and learner opportunities and partnerships through Erasmus +. As a bilingual country Wales continues to learn from best practice from other bilingual countries.

Lifelong Learning

12. The GCSE cohort of 16 year olds was 3.6% lower than in 2015, and with the aging population of Wales, it is increasingly evident that we need to ensure access to lifelong learning and skills. The part time further education budget cut of 50% in 2015/16 added further pressure to an unskilled aging workforce. The Assembly needs to invest in part-time further education for the over 25s, enabling individuals to retrain and reskill for new jobs and careers.
13. The Fifth Assembly should implement the outcome of the Diamond Review ensuring costs of residential full-time higher education provision does not continue to squeeze out other post-16 skills provision.
14. In order to ensure that all activity is coordinated and connected to achieve the desired outcomes for a successful and thriving economy – cross sector collaboration and cooperation is key.
15. In summary ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to input into any policy development or activity surrounding the formation of the economic strategy for 2017. ColegauCymru are also eager to input into the formation of the other three planned strategies identified in the committee as; a united and connected Wales, an ambitious learning Wales and a healthy active Wales.
16. We thank you, and would welcome any opportunity to discuss these issues further with the Committee.

Further Information