

Evidence from Chwarae Teg

Introduction

Chwarae Teg want to create a Wales where women can achieve and prosper; through improving women's representation, improving women's economic position, and reducing the risks posed to women in their everyday lives, from harassment and abuse, to poverty. We work with women and employers to ensure that the potential of their female workforce is maximised, and to promote the benefits – both socially and economically – of diverse and gender balanced organisations. Therefore, the work of Regional Skills Partnerships closely align with our own objectives. We are particularly aware of the changing landscape in Wales in terms of the employment available, and the skills needed for the jobs of the future. We are also aware that women are under-represented in many of the sectors forecast to grow, putting them at risk of being pushed out of the labour market.

We recognise the difficulty and limitations of labour market planning, and that there is no one size fits all approach. We acknowledge the significant challenge RSPs face in their work, therefore the need for adequate resource is essential to enable them to carry out their role effectively – but this resource needs to ensure that the work of RSPs is linking in with wider Welsh Government objectives and stated aims.

Key messages:

1. We support the principle behind Regional Skills Partnerships. Bringing FE, HE, Welsh Baccalaureate and other skills providers together as well as employers into one place to plan on a regional basis is eminently sensible, and fits into wider Welsh Government objectives. However, there remains the potential, and likelihood, that skills providers and businesses within the regions are competing with each other for learners, employers and profile. The factors that motivate the behaviour of education providers haven't changed, and in a time of stretched resources more work is needed on improving what is prioritised in funding allocations. RSPs need to actively counter this.
2. Our recent research demonstrates that £13.6 billion could be added to Welsh GVA forecasts by 2028 if we can achieve full gender equality. A gendered approach is absolutely essential, and needs to be mainstreamed throughout the work of RSPs to ensure they can play an active role in

tackling the underlying inequality that remains in the Welsh labour market. While all 2018 skills reports acknowledge “gender imbalance”, this seems to be treated as a separate social issue and not integral to the work of RSPs.

3. RSPs must make greater use of gender and equalities disaggregated data, ensuring that a gendered approach is taken in analysis of every sector, identifying the key challenges in those sectors and what can be done to best utilise skills and tackle any inequality within that sector. At the moment, this is inconsistent throughout the work produced by RSPs across different regions
4. Partnership boards need to be representative of people living and working in those regions to be most effective. Therefore, RSPs should ensure gender balanced in their governance and leadership structures.
5. RSPs should ensure that they are aligning their work with WG priorities, such as the Fair Work agenda, particularly considering the growing responsibility of these bodies.

Detailed Response:

1. To be effective gender equality should be mainstreamed throughout the work of the RSPs and issues such as inequality and social inclusion must not be regarded as a separate social issue or add-on.
 - 1.1. While all recent RSP reports make reference to gender imbalance; particularly in ICT & Digital sectors, Construction, Advanced Materials, Engineering and STEM; gender equality is not being considered as a core issue.
 - 1.2. This separation of gender equality from the work of RSPs was also found in our analysis of 2015 RSP reports, which makes it particularly concerning that the approach does not seem to have changed or improved.
 - 1.3. For example, the CCR Skills Partnership for 2018 states: “This advice has not separately considered wider issues of NEET, BAME, Widening Access, and social inclusion. We would hope that it supports that agenda but is not replacing the need for that to take place”¹
 - 1.4. RSPs identify ‘skills challenges’ and ‘recruitment and retention’ as key challenges, but fails to recognise the gendered element of those issues, and

¹ <https://www.cardiffcapitalregion.wales/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/regional-es-report-2018-final-publishable-version-v1.pdf>

the way that work to address these issues needs to be done through a gender lens.

- 1.5. RSPs need to ensure they are closely linking in with wider Welsh Government agendas, such as the ongoing Rapid Review of Gender Equality, which recommends mainstreaming gender equality, and the work of the Fair Work Commission.
- 1.6. Two examples of where a gender analysis would be helpful in addressed key issues were raised in the South West & Mid Wales RLSP:
 - 1.6.1. The negative perception of certain sectors, such as food and drink – where women are over-represented – were highlighted, and the report recommended the need for more promotion of these sectors with skills providers. The Fair Work board identified the need to address negative perceptions of certain low-skilled sectors, but the RLSP report does not link into this, or more widely consider how this problem can exacerbate inequality. Our own research on decent work looked at issues around negative perceptions of the Food & Drink sector, and the domiciliary care sector.²
 - 1.6.2. They also raise the importance of career advice and guidance, and the fact that perceptions – including gender stereotypes – are cemented at a young age. This echoes the findings of our recent report, which interviewed women aged 16-25 about their career aspirations. Despite this being raised in the report, there is not a recommendation for skills providers to actively tackle gender stereotypes for girls and boys across the board.³

2. Are Regional Skills Partnerships using timely, valid and reliable data?

- 2.1. It is crucial that RSPs are using gender disaggregated data to understand the varying experiences of men and women across Wales. This currently appears to be patchy, with disaggregated data in some areas but not others.
- 2.2. This inconsistency can also be found in the Welsh Government regional labour market intelligence reports provided to RSPs – there is a gender breakdown of earnings and population, but not of employment or economic activity/inactivity.⁴

² <https://chwarateg.com/research/decent-work/>

³ <https://chwarateg.com/research/bright-report/>

⁴ <https://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/regional-skills-partnerships>

- 2.3. References to gender pay gap information used in the South West and Mid Wales RLSP 2018 report appears to use data from 2016, which does not provide an accurate picture, as annually updated information is accessible via the ONS Annual Survey of Hourly Earnings, or through our own analysis.⁵
- 2.4. This gender disaggregated data needs to be provided from the offset to embed a gendered approach to regional skills planning, as different interventions are required to maximise the participation of women and men in the Welsh economy.
- 2.4.1. RSPs should work more closely with third sector organisations who are already conducting research and collecting this kind of data, and make use of their resources.
- 2.4.2. Our own work in this area would probably support some of the work of RSPs, including recent reports on Young Women’s Career Aspirations, Men’s Perceptions of Gender Equality in the Workplace, and a report exploring Decent Work in the Food & Drink and Domiciliary Care sectors.

3. How well do RSPs engage with others/those who are not on the participation boards? How well do they account for views of the skills providers?

- 3.1. We have engaged with Regional Skills Partnerships previously, attending stakeholder events and utilising their reports, particularly LSKIP. However, the recent transition to the RSP falling within the Cardiff Capital Region was not clearly explained to those who engaged with LSKIP, and the information was difficult to access.
- 3.1.1. Gender balance within Cardiff Capital Region is also very poor, and this is a real concern for the work of RSPs.
- 3.2. There is not enough clarity about the governance structures and memberships of RSPs, and this information can be difficult to find and vary across the three RSPs. It’s crucial for stakeholders to have access to this information in order to understand how RSPs work, and how best to engage. The issues are similar to those highlighted in the Committee’s own report from 2017 on City Deals and the regional economy, as highlighted by the Bevan Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Foundation who said; ‘the

⁵ <http://www.rlp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Skills-Plan-2018-6.pdf>

process used to... [engage] with partners and how partners might become involved in the future are all unclear'.⁶

3.2.1. Governance structures need to be made clear and transparent, with consistency across regions wherever appropriate, to enable better scrutiny and engagement from a broader range of stakeholders.

3.2.2. It is also crucial that membership for partnership boards is gender balanced, and represents a range of views and experiences of people living and working in Wales.

3.2.3. The North Wales Economic Ambition Board RSP have much easier to access up-to-date information online, including meeting notes and minutes, which should be replicated in the other RSP. This was also fed back in the Committee's previous inquiry.⁷

3.2.4. However, there is also overall concern about the distinction between the role of City Deals more broadly, and the role of RSPs to ensure that work isn't being duplicated.

3.3. On our Agile Nation 2 business programme, some of Chwarae Teg's employees fed back on their positive interaction with RSPs (in this case, the South West and Mid Wales RLSP) in keeping us informed about priorities in the area. However, staff had received feedback from the businesses/employers that they worked with about their difficulty engaging with their RSPs, and how they felt their concerns weren't always taken on board – particularly around the need for public skills providers to be more flexible in order for businesses to work with them instead of private providers.

3.4. We would like to see RSPs engaging more proactively with equalities organisations, building this engagement into their work plans, and embedding equality into their core work. We would like to see more clarity on how much each RSP engages with those working within the field of equalities. While we have had some limited engagement with certain RSPs over the years, it doesn't seem to be embedded in their approach, nor is it a mainstream focus throughout their reports.

3.4.1. There is a lack of clarity about how regularly RSPs engage with equalities organisations, and it seems that the onus is on those wanting to engage with the RSP, rather than RSPs regularly reaching out to engage beyond their more immediate stakeholders.

⁶ <http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s68161/Report.pdf>

⁷ <http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s68161/Report.pdf>

3.4.2. Without an equalities approach embedded, RSPs cannot provide accurate and useful recommendations to address imbalance and skills gaps in the labour market.

3.4.3. It is worth noting again that the North Wales Economic Ambition Board appears to have a reputation for more success in this area and is better connected with community organisations.

4. Do they have sufficient knowledge of the Foundational economy and the needs of those employed within it?

4.1. At previous events we've attended, there have been discussions of the foundational economy and this is consistent in reports. However, they have failed to address the gendered element of these sectors, and the wider fair work agenda. These priorities need to be properly linked up, and RSPs need to be working closely with the Welsh Government Fair Work Commission.

4.2. Our recent research on behalf of Oxfam Cymru looked at the issue of decent work in the Domiciliary Care and Food & Drink sectors, which we feel would be useful to the work of RSPs.⁸

5. Are they adequately resourced to fulfil their growing role?

5.1. It's difficult to get an accurate picture due to limited information on the structure and governance of RSPs, but it seems unlikely that they are adequately resourced. Given the importance of their role as the link between supply and demand, more resourcing is needed to keep pace with the level of change in Wales.

5.2. RSPs also need to be resourced to closely link in with other Welsh Government priorities such as the Fair Work Commission, the Future Generations Priorities and the Gender Equality Review.

6. Is there an appropriate balance between RSP views and wider views on skills demand?

6.1. Given the leadership role of RSPs in informing skills delivery it's crucial that they are engaging with a broad range of stakeholders, including those with

⁸ <https://chwaraeteg.com/research/decent-work/>

expertise in gender equality and equalities more broadly so that skills plans are informed by the needs of different populations within the community.

6.2. In order to do this, the capacity and remit of RSPs has to be right and extend beyond just those at the centre of skills provision. A more formalised governance structure will support this.

7. Have RSPs and Welsh Government stimulated changes in skills provisions 'on the ground' to reflect demand?

7.1. There is not widely available evidence of this – RSPs should improve their monitoring and reporting of progress made in their identified labour market areas, and improvements in skills provision regionally, as well as other changes. It's particularly important to monitor whether these changes have had an impact on those communities who are particularly distant from the labour market. At the moment it's unclear to us who would have access for this information.