

Enterprise and Learning Committee

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Skillset's submission to the National Assembly for Wales' Enterprise and Learning Committee's inquiry into the economic contribution of higher education.

Introduction

1. The following submission has been prepared for the Enterprise and Learning Committee's inquiry into the economic contribution of higher education by Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the Creative Media.
2. Skillset Cymru's role is to take forward Skillset's work in Wales, and to implement the Sector Skills Agreement for Wales.
3. We agree for this information to be available on the public domain. If you need to contact us regarding any issues raised on this submission please contact Matthew Basham, Acting Director, Skillset Cymru, 33-35 West Bute Street, Cardiff CF10 5LH. Direct line: 02920 452 828

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1. Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for the Creative Media industries. Jointly funded by industry and government, our job is to make sure that the UK creative media industries have the right people, with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time, so that our industries remain competitive.
2. We are responsible for the following sectors: Publishing, Television, Film, Radio, Animation, Interactive Media, Computer Games, Photo Imaging, Facilities. Please note however, that the publishing sector has only recently come to our footprint. Therefore, the responses here are mainly reflecting our experience from working with the Audio Visual Industries.
3. Some key facts:

The audio visual industries are Wales' largest arts and cultural sector

According to Skillset research, there are around 9,100 people working in Wales in the audio visual sector. 35% of those are working freelance and 29% are Welsh speakers.

The largest sectors in Wales in terms of workforce are Independent Production, Television (terrestrial) and Web and Internet. The TV production sector in Wales is one of the largest in the UK.

1. Below we provide evidence and examples relating to the Committee's questions that we felt we could respond.

Committee's questions:

the effect that the skills agenda is having on HEIs impact on the labour market and whether they are meeting the needs of businesses;

the drive towards collaboration between HEIs and its impact on their local and regional economies;

2. Lord Leitch's report on Skills highlighted the importance of high level skills and set a target for 40% of adults qualified to level 4 and above by 2020. In the Learning Country: Vision into Action, the target for Wales was 30% by 2010 - and the Skills that Work for Wales consultation paper has indicated that these interim targets will remain.
3. Lord Leitch also stressed the need for a demand-led provision on skills and advocated the closer collaboration between Higher Education institutions and industry. It recognised the Sector Skills Councils as a key partner in articulating employer demand and driving this demand at the heart of the skills agenda.
4. The recently published Higher Education at Work - High Skills High Value consultation paper from DIUS recognises the importance of high level skills within the economic context and advises (within an England context) HEIs to work with SSCs, Regional Development Agencies and local employers 'to develop the higher level skills that a particular business needs in a particular sector in a particular place.' The policy document suggests that Sector Skills Agreements for each sector will be taking into account in future funding provision for the Higher Education sector (HEFCE Annual Grant letters)
5. Skillset Cymru awaits the results of the recent consultation policy paper Skills that Work for Wales and welcomes the direction of the paper towards "encouraging higher-level education across all subjects to develop skills that will enhance graduate employability" [para. 3.22]
6. Skillset Cymru published its Sector Skills Agreement for Wales in 2005. Below are the themes we base our actions upon, in order to meet the needs of our industries:

Pre-Entry Provision

Informal and Community Learning

Further and Higher Education

Post Entry Training - entry-level training

Information, Advice and Guidance

Business and Company Development

1. The majority of the companies in the creative media industry in Wales are SMEs. Research carried out as part of the Sector Skills Agreement process identified the need for: targeted contextualised business support, a need for business, management and leadership training, support for small businesses to develop higher level specialized skills.

2. Our research also shows that in our sectors 66% of the workforce is graduates and 24% hold postgraduate qualifications. Over 70% of employers see FE and HE as providing the potential to support pre entry skills and specialized knowledge. The industry has identified a need to work more strategically with FE and HE providers to target resources to known centres or courses of excellence and to assist students and funding bodies making informed decisions about courses.

3. The feedback we get from our industries in Wales regarding the HE provision available in our sectors often mentions the lack of relevance with the reality of the work environment. In particular, in areas like interactive media, there is a feeling that provision, new media practitioners and end- users are at odds in their objectives - at content (too broad or too narrow), level (too deep or too superficial) and ways of delivery (work placements, new technology/software). Therefore graduates often get a generic degree or expertise in non-relevant areas, both hindering their employability prospects. Industry usually resolves to in-house training or private specialised training (at high cost) in order to address skill gaps.

4 Moreover, industry feedback suggests that the institutions are sometimes driven by the funding formulas to focus on number of learners at the detriment of quality and relevance to our industries. As a result, selection criteria may not always rigorously applied and students rejected on first application are accepted through clearing, to make up numbers.

5. We recognise that HE provision is vital to the success of our industries but in order to meet their needs and contribute to their economic development, it needs to be more responsive. We have identified as key factors in increasing industry-HE engagement in Wales (for our sectors) as: flexibility in the provision of learning, quality industry engagement (i.e. work placements and tutor-industry professionals' exchange) and better communication between industry and HE. We also feel that specialist education requires ongoing investment that supports quality, not just quantity.

6. Skillset's work with Further and Higher Education is pioneering in bringing together partnerships of FE, HE and industry in order to address industry's skills needs. Our work with the Skillset Media and Screen Academy Networks and the industry-approved accredited courses, enable education and industry to work together to ensure the UK has the most talented workforce in the world for film, television, animation, interactive media and computer games both now and in the future.

7. The Skillset Screen Academies are institutions which the UK film industry has identified as those offering the highest quality of skills training for film. In Wales, the Skillset Screen Academy Wales (SSAW) was set up by Skillset and HEFCW in July 2005.

8. Working with industry, Skillset also accredits practice-based courses in FE and HE that most effectively provide learners with the skills and knowledge that employers need.

Currently, there are 4 industry accredited HE courses in Wales in two HE institutions:

BA in Computer Animation, HND in Art & Design (Computer Animation) & BA Hons Animation at the Glamorgan Centre for Art & Design Technology;

BA (Hons) Animation at the University of Wales, Newport

These institutions also receive funding through HEFCW and industry support through Skillset in the form of master-classes, work placements and representation in industry festival and events.

1. Another example of Higher Education and Industry working together is the Digital Media Consortia, a partnership of six Higher Education Institutes dedicated to increasing communication and collaboration between academia and the digital media sector. It is the Consortia's intended role to work with industry to help develop new markets and products and develop industrially relevant training provision for the Digital Media Sector. Skillset Cymru was part of the Advisory Board and members of the Skillset UK Interactive Media Forum were involved in developing content for a business support CD Rom.

<http://www.digitalmediaconsortia.com/site/about/about.php>

2. Skillset Cymru is working closely with its partners to develop new Management and Leadership courses for the creative media industries in Partnership with PACT, CYFLE and Learning to Inspire. They will be covering areas such as marketing, budgets and finance, staff and production management. We will be looking at appropriate HE engagement in delivering these courses.

Committee's questions:

the success of HEIs in accessing funding from a range of sources which impacts on the local and regional economies;

the wider contributions of universities to their localities, including community work, cultural contributions and student and graduate mobility and markets;

1. The Skillset Screen Academy in Wales brings together film related courses from The University of Wales, Newport; The University of Glamorgan; Swansea Institute of Higher Education; Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama; Cardiff Business School and the Glamorgan Centre for Art and Design Technology. SSAW produces approximately 300 graduates a year covering Animation, Set Design, Acting and all areas of filmmaking.

2. The overall aim of the Skillset Screen Academy Wales is to enhance the quality of film education (which impacts on all other creative industries through the transferable skills gained), and therefore increase employability within the creative industries and retain creative talent. Some examples of how this is achieved:

SSAW offers learners and graduates a unique placement service, working closely with production companies in Wales.

SSAW also offers students bursaries to improve their final productions and to attend international film festivals to compare work with that of their peers. In addition, SSAW is currently arranging international student exchanges with Canada.

SSAW works alongside partner Academies in Scotland and England to share best practice and collaborate on scheme with a UK-wide or international scope.

1. When SSAW was set up, it received substantial investment from HEFCW. Skillset and industry matched that with a total cash investment of about £1 million and additional in-kind investment through work placements, **Skillset 100** (a database resource of 100 top industry professionals) and **RawStock** (an online community providing a creative network exclusively for Screen Academy staff).

Committee's questions:

to make recommendations arising from our findings.

1. We believe that better communication and flexibility between industry and HE will increase the economic contribution of the HE sector in the Welsh economy and help raise its productivity through the high level skills of its citizens.

2. Greater interaction is needed to ensure specialist training is relevant and graduates are employable. Consistent investment for specialist education focusing on quality will have in the long run greater impact in the economic development. An ongoing tracking graduates project from specialists courses in SSAW has so far shown that out of 87 graduates, 90% have found employment as employees or freelancers and the rest continued to other HE courses or set up their own companies.

3. Sector Skills Councils are strategically positioned to facilitate this industry engagement. Skillset is already working with universities and colleges to collaborate seamlessly with industry partners to develop new curricula, innovative teaching, world-class research and development, and enhanced business acumen. We believe that there is added value in our brokerage role which has already produced models of good practice. We hope that the Welsh Assembly will continue to support us in this work.

4. Lord Leitch pointed out that more than 70% of the 2020 workforce has already left statutory learning provision. We see Higher Education as our partner in driving demand for high level skills at both entry-level and continuous professional development, as well as supporting our businesses to innovate and develop their entrepreneurial activity.

5. We have noted that HEFCW is currently funding a feasibility study on workforce development, and look to the outcome of this study to inform future developments in higher level work-based learning provision. We would emphasize the need for HEIs to formally engage SSCs in this process, in order to continue the close collaboration we currently enjoy with both HEFCW and the HE sector in Wales.