

Extracts Taken From CBI Wales Response To The Welsh Assembly Government's Consultation 'Skills That Work For Wales'



**CBI WALES RESPONSE TO THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT'S CONSULTATION
'SKILLS THAT WORK FOR WALES'**

1. The CBI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Assembly Government's consultation 'Skills that Work for Wales' (STWFW).
2. This response is the result of consultations with members from across Wales, from different sectors of industry and from all sizes, from SMEs to multinational corporations.
3. The CBI deals principally with cross-sector issues which affect the business environment in which all companies operate. The CBI's strength lies in its breadth of membership, which includes companies of every size, including over 200 trade associations and academic institutions, and from all sectors of the economy – manufacturing, construction, retailing, financial services, e-commerce, leisure, transport and so on. The CBI represents companies employing about 50% of the private sector workforce in Wales.
6. This response also includes consideration of the 'Proposals for a Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2008.'

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

8. Investment by employers and employees must be supported by government action to deliver on its ambitions. Business is clear: the government's number one priority must be for young people to leave compulsory full time education literate and numerate- so that firms can give them the skills to succeed in the workplace. But it's critical too that young people develop softer employability skills (such as team working and problem solving, underpinned by a positive attitude). Over three quarters of CEOs say they look for these skills when recruiting graduates.²

14-19 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

42. Employers in Wales expect sixth forms and colleges to deliver increasing achievement at level 2 (5 good GCSEs) - the basic platform for employability- and improving progression to level 3 (2 A-levels) and beyond. The development of effective links between schools and colleges and employers will be essential throughout the 14-19 phase if young people in Wales are to benefit fully from the proposed reforms.
43. The recent OECD report, ranking Wales' secondary school pupils below 33 other countries for standards in mathematics and in 28th place for reading, underlines the need for radical new action to address basic skills but also the importance of ensuring the new 14-19 offering gets the basics right.¹⁹ It also asks the question why these skills were not mastered by pupils while in the primary sector.
44. The CBI believes 90% of young people should achieve the basic skills modules at Level 1 by age 16 (including English and maths GCSE) and 70% at Level 2. At present only 45% of young people leave school at 16 with an A*-C grade in both subjects. The government's aim for ' 95 per cent of young people by the age of 25 to be ready for

¹⁹ <http://icwales.icnetwork.co.uk/news/wales-news/2007/12/05/wales-poor-in-school-league-tables-91466-20204151/>

high skilled employment or higher education by 2015' will require very significant progress to be made in the next seven years.²⁰

45. The new 14-19 offering, underpinned by the 'Proposals for a Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure' is a positive step forward. The CBI supports the objective of the measure to 'ensure that Learners of all abilities... are able to choose from a wide range of applied and generic programmes, from a collaborative options menu' in addition to the effective delivery of the basic curriculum.²¹
 46. We welcome the government's recognition that in order to respond more effectively to the needs of employers greater choice and quality are needed.
 47. We support placing a duty on Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to produce an options menu for 14-16 Learners in Wales. We fully recognise hard decisions must be made but the government should try to maximise the number of incentives within the new system to aid more rapid and voluntary collaboration between and within institutions.²²
 48. The government must ensure that young people have a clear idea about what to expect from the 14-19 pathways. Vocational courses need to be of the highest quality to motivate the best student and to retain employer confidence. Obvious routes of progression must be mapped out. For example, they need to be articulated as clearly as the move from an Advanced Modern Apprenticeship to a Foundation Degree. Young people entering a vocational route are entitled to know the various opportunities for progression.
 49. We would appreciate more information from the government on how the 14-19 offering will respond to the needs of employers. Whether or not the government decides to require a minimum level of vocational courses across a number of local learning domains, it is important that due consideration is given to basic and employability skills and the relevance of the courses to appropriate skills gaps. Courses must enable students to learn more advanced skills.
 50. While we recognise there is an increasing requirement for pupils to experience modern day industry, employers must not be required to offer work placements to young people, although the vast majority, in our experience, are supportive. Providing worthwhile work experience is difficult for smaller firms who often do not have the time or the opportunities to offer. In addition, there are a few companies whose business or working environment is not conducive to work experience. Therefore, the CBI would oppose attempts to make work experience a requirement of business support assistance.
 51. The UK government intends to raise the compulsory education age to 18 in England. The CBI is aware that the government does not intend to implement this policy in Wales. The 14-19 Learning Pathways method seeks to give individuals attractive options, both vocational and academic sufficient to encourage them to voluntarily remain in education beyond 16. We ask the government to carefully monitor the number of 17 and 18 year olds that remain in education in Wales compared to those in England and to monitor the comparative numbers that leave education at 18 with a qualification. If there is a clear indication that Wales' qualification levels are falling behind England, early action should be taken to address this.
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- ²⁰ http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/learning_pathways/?lang=en
- ²¹ *Proposals for a Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 200*, 'p 1.
- ²² *Proposals for a Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 200*, 'p 4.
52. We support the introduction of a Skills Framework for 3-19 year-olds. We believe an approach that helps them to acquire skills in thinking, communication, information and communication technology and number will pay dividends in the long term if the focus on employability skills is maintained as children progress through the education system.