

## Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

### Note of Rapporteur Group visit to Careers Wales

Venue: Careers Wales Association Offices, Caerphilly

Date: Wednesday 15 September 2004 (2.00pm to 5.00pm)

Rapporteur Group:

- Peter Black AM (Committee Chair)
- Jeff Cuthbert AM
- Chris Reading (Committee Clerk)
- David Blair (Members' Research Service)

Careers Wales

- Hywel Jones (Chair, Careers Wales Association and Chair, Careers Wales West)
- Lesley Rees (Executive Director, Careers Wales Association)
- Mark Freeman (Chief Executive, Careers Wales Cardiff and the Vale)
- Wayne Feldon (Chief Executive, Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan)
- Ray Collier (Chief Executive, Careers Wales West)

Introduction

Lesley Rees welcomed the members of the group and introduced her colleagues.

Peter Black introduced the members of the rapporteur group and thanked Careers Wales for hosting the meeting. He explained that this was part of a series of such visits by committee members to education and training organisations in Wales. The purpose of this visit was to foster a greater understanding of the work of Careers Wales; in particular, issues arising from the Careers Wales Review - Final Report.

Careers Wales gave a brief PowerPoint presentation outlining the role of Careers Wales and its key values. Careers Wales was launched in April 2001 as a national, all-age service, providing information, advice and guidance on employment, training and education opportunities. There are seven independent companies, each covering a defined geographical area.

The Careers Wales Association is owned by the seven companies. Its role is to raise the national profile of Careers Wales, and to develop and manage projects on behalf of the seven companies.

Careers Wales explained that, under contract from the Assembly Government, they work at grass-roots level providing the following services:

- Individual careers advice and counselling;
- Career planning for students in all secondary schools and further education colleges;
- Support for young people seeking employment and training, including the highly successful Youth Gateway project;
- Advice and guidance on careers and learning opportunities for adults;
- Working with schools, colleges and employers, to enhance the work-related curriculum through education business links; and
- The 'learndirect' careers information telephone helpline.

Careers Wales endorsed the following key values:

- Putting our customers first;
- Equal opportunity of access to services;
- Delivering high quality of services and customer satisfaction;
- Leading the development of partnerships on careers guidance and education business links;
- Respecting and supporting our staff to deliver quality services; and
- Commitment to the provision of bilingual services.

Careers Wales described some case studies, and presented some statistics on main achievements over the past four years. These statistics covered eight performance indicators, including the number of career interviews held with clients, the number of careers action plans prepared, the number of work experience placements and the number of placements into employment and training. There was general improvement in these indicators over the time period, with a significant increase in the number of adult guidance interviews held: from 7,886 in 2000-01 to 17,777 in 2003-04.

Careers Wales companies were working hard to develop partnerships with stakeholders; including, students, schools, colleges, the Assembly Government, local businesses and Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales. Careers Wales was keen to encourage partnership working not just with external organisations, but also internally between the seven careers companies. Whilst welcoming this partnership role, Careers Wales noted that the commitment in attending meetings and other activities imposed a significant burden on their officials.

Careers Wales described progress on providing an updated and extended Careers Wales Quality Award (CWQA). This has been available to schools and colleges throughout Wales from April 2004. A module relating to work-related education had been added and the award process had been brought up to date. Jane Davidson AM, Assembly Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, had presented CWQA

awards to seventeen schools and three colleges in May 2004. Careers Wales stated that a great deal of work had gone into adapting the award and the extensive supporting material for Careers Wales Online (CWOL). The award will be available via CWOL from October 2004.

Careers Wales outlined work in progress on developing a means of assessing the requirements of learners with special educational needs (SEN). At present there was insufficient provision for SEN students to receive training in the workplace. Peter Black suggested that it might be useful for Careers Wales to present evidence to the Committee in due course, as part of the policy review on SEN; with particular reference to problems during transition from school to college, or the world of work.

Careers Wales outlined the main findings of the Careers Wales Review - Final Report, published by GCL Management Consultants in February 2004. Careers Wales were pleased with the broad findings of the review, which were very positive. Careers Wales presented a table setting out current progress in addressing the five most urgent key recommendations from the report - see Annex 1. In addition to these five key development areas, Careers Wales had added two of their own. These were sustainable funding, particularly after the current European Structural Fund (ESF) grant expires in October 2005, and further examination of the issues raised in Section 8 of the Review Report: An Evaluation of the Current Model.

Jeff Cuthbert asked whether the recent decision by 'Learndirect' to reduce the number of operational centres from four to one would reduce the capacity to give local advice. Careers Wales agreed that this would be a consequence but stated that it was a balance between quality of service and value for money.

Jeff Cuthbert asked why the Careers Wales companies covering Mid Glamorgan and Powys were due to merge in April 2005. Careers Wales said that this was a recommendation of the Careers Wales Review, and was mainly due to the Powys company not being financially viable on its own.

Careers Wales companies confirmed that they were very happy with their working relations with Assembly Government officials. The CWA will submit a report on progress to the Assembly Minister in December 2004.

Careers Wales gave a demonstration of the revamped Careers Wales Online (CWOL) website, which was due to be launched within the next few months. This would provide learners with a valuable resource to help them choose a career, to see what qualifications or experience were required and to access appropriate learning and support. Members of the rapporteur group were given an opportunity to try CWOL for themselves, which they enjoyed.

Peter Black, on behalf of the rapporteur group, thanked all the representatives of Careers Wales for their hospitality and for their most useful and informative presentations and discussion. He stated that a note of the meeting would be presented as a formal Committee paper, and would be posted to the Committee's section of the National Assembly website. Jeff Cuthbert endorsed these remarks and said that he had found the meeting very helpful in furthering his understanding of the role and activity of Careers Wales.