



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 07 Working Links	EIS 07 Working Links

National Assembly for Wales’s Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee Inquiry

August 2016 – Consultation on the Priorities of the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Response from Working Links

Context

1. Working Links Wales is the largest single provider of employment and justice related services in Wales with shareholders who endorse our social purpose and are interested in how we can create long term value, investing in the quality of services and the communities where we operate.
2. We current deliver employment, skills and justice provision in Wales such as Work Programme, Work Choice (Disabled benefit claimants), Community Work Placements (claimants post Work Programme), Flexible Support Fund in South East Wales (Claimants who are transitioning from Employment and Support Allowance to Jobseekers benefit from day one of their benefit claim) , Employment and skills provision to NEET’s as part of the North and Wales TRAC and South East Wales Inspire Programmes. In October 2014, Working Links was also confirmed as the preferred bidders to run Transforming Rehabilitation in three locations: Wales; Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire; and Dorset, Devon and Cornwall. This has propelled Working Links to becoming the largest Social Justice organisation in Wales and we currently support 10,000 ex-offenders annually.
3. Working Links are working with Welsh Government as a key member of the Wales Employment and Skills Board to ensure better alignment of employment and skills initiatives. The current position is that whilst people eligible for Work Programme can access skills training once they are in employment, they are not eligible for ESF funded employment and skills support pre-employment. This is because Welsh Government has in the past had concerns about possible overlap or duplication in funding coming into the system from different Governments and has therefore taken steps to exclude European funding streams from being accessible to Work Programme participants.

4. As Working Links deliver Work Programme in Wales, England and Scotland we are aware of the varying policy decisions and arrangements that are in place across the three Countries. For example, people in England who are unemployed and are engaging with the Work Programme are also able to access ESF Skills provision, however WEFO have not taken this view within Wales.
5. At the end of April 2014, the then Deputy Minister for Skills in the Welsh Government, Ken Skates, made a welcome statement to the National Assembly on arrangement to better align employment and skills services to support jobseekers in Wales. In doing so he addressed the core split of responsibilities, looking to ensure that Welsh Government “join up our devolved responsibilities with those that remain at a national Government level.” This statement was important because it set out that the Welsh Government and DWP are now working together to examine a way forward on this issue. They are therefore both looking to simplify access to respective employment and skills programmes and make them work together better.
6. In August 2016, the Bevan Foundation published a report titled ‘Wales After Brexit’ stating that *“depending on the terms of the exit and on Government policies, there could be a significant loss of investment and employment in Wales”*.
7. In May 2015 a report was published by AMION Consulting, ICF International and Spirul appointed by Cornwall Council on behalf of the Convergence Programme Local Management Committee (LMC) to undertake a thematic evaluation of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly 2007-2013 European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Convergence Programme. The evaluation has been structured to focus on exploring the impact and difference that the programme has made, and its cost-effectiveness. It included comparison data with West Wales.

Priority Areas for this Committee

8. In relation to Paragraphs above Working Links wish the Committee to consider the following Inquiries as part of their future Work Plan:
 - 8.1 A review of the reasons and impact of the variance in policy decision between England and Wales of ESF being available to people who are on DWP Mainstream Programmes;
 - 8.2 A review of the work undertaken since 2014, by the Welsh Assembly to ensure that National and Local devolved priorities are aligned to ensure effective service delivery to the Welsh Unemployed; and recommendations as to what it should do next.
 - 8.3 A review of the impact of Brexit on employment in Wales;
 - 8.4 A review of the outcomes from the current ESF provision within Wales to date against their agreed performance measures. Whilst we are aware of over-arching info-graphics that are available, but a more detailed review is required of each programme and their outcomes against target.
 - 8.5 Based on the above review to also, recommend on how future ESF programmes should be reviewed, commissioned and consequently contract managed, as we believe that the new round of European Structural Funds (2014-2020) presents an excellent opportunity for services to be better aligned to support value added activity

to the core DWP Mandatory Employment provision, thereby offering more opportunities to assist Welsh people out of poverty

8.6 A review as to how the planned single 'Wales Employment Programme' scheduled for April 2018 should work with any future DWP initiatives.