

Welsh Government: Employability Plan

Summary

The [Employability Plan](#) was launched on the 21st March 2018 to tackle unemployment and economic activity. The plan sets out how Welsh Government plan to support the skills agenda, both on an individual and employer level. This briefing will summarise the key points from the plan, however, the one thing the plan lacks is a realistic timescale and we will be keeping tabs on progress.

The plan identifies four key areas:

1. An individualised approach to employability support
2. The responsibility of employers to up-skill their workforce
3. Respond to current and projected skills gaps
4. Prepare for a radical shift in the world of work

1. An individualised approach to employability support

Create a new Employment Advice Gateway

Welsh Government have committed to setting up a new Employment Advice Gateway, to provide independent employment related advice and guidance. [Careers Wales](#) will be given an enhanced role to operate the gateway and will also build stronger links with employers, through the new [Education Business Exchange](#) service (which is very similar to Careers & Enterprise Company programmes).

Promote Inclusivity

The plan is incredibly promotive of inclusivity, diversity and equality – with a number of measures throughout the document tackling issues such as gender pay gap, increasing the number of BAME students in STEM and encouraging flexibility for an ageing workforce. They want to reduce the number of disabled people out of work and monitor programmes to ensure gender equality.

2. The responsibility of employers to up-skill their workforce

Provide quality all-age apprenticeships linked to national and regional priority sectors

Welsh Government state that they will increase the numbers of technical and higher level skills within apprenticeships at level 3 and above, including degree apprenticeships, by investing £115m per annum this Assembly term in quality courses. Initially focusing on

degree apprenticeships in areas with identified skills shortages and utilising an employer led Welsh Apprenticeship Advisory Board to steer and support. Whilst the plan acknowledges the impact the UK Apprenticeship Levy is having on larger firms, the plan states that Welsh Government will respond to the needs of business where it can but is clear that they will not drive down quality.

In addition to apprenticeship engagement, Welsh Government will monitor developments in England that may influence Welsh business needs and provision, in particular T Levels and will work to ensure transportability of qualifications.

3. Respond to current and projected skills gaps

Establish a framework to prioritise skills gap and growth potential areas

Welsh Government have committed to developing a National Framework to prioritise areas where they see growth potential and skills gaps, paying particular attention to the needs of care, construction, engineering, finance, health, hospitality and tourism.

They appear to have acknowledged that they need to develop skills for Wylfa Newydd and future automotive developments. Stating that they are actively considering developing specialist centres to focus on technician support, improving knowledge on automation, AI and future technologies.

While how it will work is unclear, they are going to alter the funding formula for FE colleges, schools and work based learning providers to respond to the requirements of Regional Skills Partnerships, in order to influence provision on priority sectors.

They will also work closely with sectors at risk from a 'poor Brexit deal', to identify skills gaps and significant economic shifts.

Strengthen Regional Skills Partnerships

Regional Skills Partnerships have been around in Wales for some time, yet Welsh Government have admitted they've not been as successful as they could have been. They now plan to strengthen the partnerships governance and expertise to ensure they provide the regional leadership and robust labour market intelligence they are supposed to.

They have now employed three Chief Regional Officers across the country to engage with local authorities, private sector and the partnerships, to develop growth opportunities and tailor activity to the unique requirements of each region.

These partnerships will support priorities identified by enterprise zones, city deals and growth deals, as well as cross border collaborations – but will also create regional employment and skills plans which will identify and target sectors and industries.

Improve digital skills

Wales has identified that there is a serious lack of digital skills among the population, which are necessary for the world of work in 2018 – as highlighted by businesses, “we don’t want coders, we want people who can code”. In order to address this they are going to develop coding and ICT provision at schools and colleges, plus encouraging more women to get into STEM.

Develop skills to support expanding infrastructure

There are lots of opportunities to develop skills for new infrastructure developments over the next 10 years, including Wylfa Newydd, the Metro, 21st Century Schools Band B, Hospital buildings and 20,000 new homes. Employability will be a significant part of the procurement process going forward, so tenders will have to demonstrate how they will improve skills and employment in the area.

4. Prepare for a radical shift in the world of work

Encourage lifelong learning

Welsh Government are keen to encourage lifelong learning and upskilling among the older population, as by 2050, 45% of the Welsh population will be over 50. It is essential that the older generation understand the need to adapt and learn new skills, but on the same note that employers are more flexible in accessing the skills and abilities of an older workforce.

To address this, the government are piloting an Individual Learning Account for workers to fund personal vocation retraining in sectors where there is a skills gap. This was previously done years ago, which historically went down as fraudulent and ineffective, however despite concerns raised by Assembly Members in the Senedd, they are confident with this approach.

Expert panel on automation

An expert panel on automation will be set up by the end of 2018, to review evidence and make recommendations on steps Welsh Government should take to mitigate the employment impact of automation and take advantage of the opportunities which new technologies will provide. It is estimated that 110,000 jobs in Wales will be automated by 2030.

But how useful is this going to be?

While this report sets out many grand visions for Welsh Government, it does not set out a realistic, or honestly, any time frame for achieving these goals. In the delivery section of the plan, it does not set itself a date and instead just states “following publication of this plan, we will undertake widespread engagement with stakeholders and partners to inform the implementation and delivery of these commitments.”

What we do know is that the first program to be rolled out will be the retraining accounts, that should go live in the short term, but the majority of programmes are waiting on Welsh Government announcements. Points relating to digital skills will be dealt with following a Professor Brown’s review on digital skills and the Welsh Economy, which is due to be delivered in January 2019. This has recently been under scrutiny by the Economy, Infrastructure & Skills Committee, where Minister Eluned Morgan has been under fire on lack of action.

Lastly, it is incredibly disappointing that despite Energy and Utility sectors are not recognised as a key sector in the plan, although they have identified engineering as an area with skills shortages, but as of yet not elaborated on the critical sectors that’s within.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this in more detail, please contact Sophia Haywood, Policy & Stakeholder Manager on sophia.haywood@euskills.co.uk