

National Assembly for Wales
Petitions Committee

Work based learning provision
for vulnerable young people

December 2010



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Petitions Committee

The role of the Petitions Committee is to consider petitions submitted by the public, and to take the issue forward on behalf of the petitioners.

Powers

The Committee was established on 26 June 2007 by the Assembly to consider petitions referred to the Committee by the Presiding Officer. It has the power to take any action which the Committee considers appropriate in relation to the petition.

Committee membership

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The Committee's Recommendations

The Committee's recommendations to the Welsh Government are listed below, in the order that they appear in this Report. Please refer to the relevant pages of the report to see the supporting evidence and conclusions:

Recommendation 1. We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that Careers Wales and individual learning providers undertake adequate and robust needs assessment to ensure that provision is designed around individual learner's needs. **(Page 16)**

Recommendation 2. We recommend that the Welsh Government should support the development of a best practice framework for the acquisition of basic skills. This framework should encourage providers to deliver basic skills in a way that is most relevant and appropriate to learners. **(Page 18)**

Recommendation 3. We recommend that the Welsh Government investigate the feasibility of introducing a programme of preparatory courses to enable learners to develop the most basic skills prior to joining formal work based learning programmes. Consideration should be given to whether currently established programmes could be effectively rolled out across Wales. **(Page 18)**

Recommendation 4. We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that best practice between providers in relation to securing placements is shared and disseminated with all contracted providers. This should be completed in time for the start of the new contracts in 2011. **(Page 21)**

Recommendation 5. We recommend that the Welsh Government take a more strategic role in promoting the benefits of work based learning to help increase employer participation. This work should focus on encouraging employers to take on all learners, including the most vulnerable and ensuring that employers in those sector areas where demand outstrips supply participate. Specific focus should also be placed on rural areas and other areas with poor transport links, where there are additional difficulties in securing placements. **(Page 22)**

Recommendation 6. As part of taking a more strategic role, we recommend the Welsh Government should consider whether a specific work based learning programme focusing on the voluntary sector will help improve opportunities and progression rates for the most vulnerable. (Page 22)

Recommendation 7. Additionally, we recommend that the Welsh Government should consider the recommendations that arise from the UK review into employer engagement that will help increase placements. (Page 22)

Recommendation 8. We recommend for the Welsh Government draw up protocols to ensure that transitional arrangements between providers are improved, so that there are no additional barriers to progression. (Page 23)

Recommendation 9. We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that all providers meet their requirements to identify any additional support needs of a learner at the start of the course. (Page 24)

Recommendation 10. We recommend that the Welsh Government build on the work of the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that lack of information sharing does not act as a barrier to effective personal support. As part of this, the Welsh Government should ensure that all agencies are aware of each other's different functions and responsibilities in providing support to vulnerable young people. (Page 25)

Recommendation 11. We recommend that the Welsh Government investigate the feasibility of providing a personal adviser to young people who are living independently but are not care leavers. (Page 26)

Recommendation 12. We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that the learner coach role is suitably well defined to ensure it will increase consistency and effectiveness in personal support to the most vulnerable. This role should ensure that there is effective mentoring for all learners. (Page 26)

Recommendation 13. We recommend the Welsh Government review how the additional learning support fund is accessed, and remove the

barriers which make it more difficult for providers to access it for young people who did not get 'statemented' at school. (Page 27)

Recommendation 14. We recommend that the Welsh Government identify and implement ways in which employers can be more closely supported to help sustain placements for vulnerable young people. (Page 28)

Recommendation 15. We recommend that the Welsh Government introduce additional support for those living independently on work based learning from the start of the new work based learning contracts in 2011. Changes should be introduced to bring their weekly income in line with those living independently and taking full time courses at further education. (Page 29)

Recommendation 16. We recommend that the Government should consider as part of its review into support cost arrangements how the most vulnerable can be best supported so that travel costs and logistics do not act as a barrier to participation. As part of its considerations, the Government should consider whether for the most vulnerable that the provider should cover the travel costs up front as opposed to employing a reimbursement system. (Page 31)

Recommendation 17. We recommend that the Welsh Government provide guidance to work based learning providers to ensure that decisions relating to the deduction of pay take into account the learner's individual situation and does not cause disproportionate hardship. (Page 31)

Recommendation 18. We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that any changes to training allowances account for the specific set of circumstances in which vulnerable young people find themselves in, and do not lead to a drop in income. (Page 34)

Recommendation 19. We recommend that the Welsh Government provide greater clarity about the proposed changes to training allowances for training providers and support organisations to ensure that they are able to best advise potential learners on the options available to them and the financial impact of their decisions. (Page 34)

Recommendation 20. We recommend that the Welsh Government should begin to collate and monitor data relating to learner

experience. We feel it is vital that there is an effective way to assess learners' experiences of work based learning. This should be a key element for performance management and should begin to be collected as part of the new work based learning contracts. **(Page 36)**

Recommendation 21. We also recommend that the Welsh Government investigate ways in which effectiveness of pastoral support per provider can be measured and monitored in the new work based learning contracts, to ensure consistency across providers. **(Page 36)**

Recommendation 22. We recommend that the Welsh Government should establish an acceptable tolerance of 'churn' for providers and monitor providers against this from the start of the new work based learning contracts. **(Page 37)**

Recommendation 23. We recommend that clear protocols be established which enable Careers Wales to bring to the attention of the Welsh Government and Estyn concerns about poor performance and that all Careers Wales services use these protocols to highlight areas of concern. **(Page 37)**

Recommendation 24. We recommend that the Welsh Government identify a lead agency such as Careers Wales, to work on a local level to ensure effective partnership and collaborative working for vulnerable young people. As part of this, we recommend that mapping be undertaken to identify all organisations that provide support to vulnerable young people. **(Page 39)**

Recommendation 25. We recommend that the Welsh Government considers how the 14-19 networks are best supported and funded to ensure that they involve all sectors of education and can best facilitate effective partnership working. **(Page 40)**

1. Background to the inquiry

1. This inquiry resulted from a petition submitted on 3 December 2009 by Action for Children which called for improvements to work based learning provision for vulnerable young people,

We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Assembly Government to provide more work based learning provision that better meets the needs of more vulnerable young people, that really moves them on and ensures they achieve at least NVQ2 level qualifications. We would particularly like to see more provision for homeless young people seeking training who are not in the care of a local authority.

2. Following initial correspondence with the Welsh Government,¹ we took oral evidence from the petitioners, including two young people who had experience of living independently while undertaking work based learning.

3. During this evidence session, the Committee heard of the difficulties faced by young people living independently with one witness describing having to choose between heating and food.² Resulting from this the Committee felt that there was a need for more detailed investigation into the issues raised by the petition.

4. Initially, we sought to see if a scrutiny committee would be able to take forward this work. The Committee also canvassed the views of the Children's Commissioner for Wales who confirmed that this was an issue that merited further investigation. We welcome the work of the Enterprise and Learning Committee into the wider issue of young people not in education, employment or training, but the focus was too broad for a detailed investigation of the specific issues raised by this petition. However, we are pleased that the Committee considered this petition as part of their inquiry, and welcome their recommendations.

5. We also welcome the work that has been conducted into the broader issue of youth unemployment within Wales. Three reports

¹ Petitions Committee PET(3) 04-10 Paper 02A: Annex to paper 02

² Record of Proceedings(RoP) [para 101-107], 11 May 2010, Petitions Committee

have been published recently; Wales Employment and Skills Board report on youth unemployment, a Welsh Government internal operational review group on young people not in education, employment and training and the work of the youth unemployment task and finish group, which was chaired by Martin Mansfield. Based on the recommendations made, the Welsh Government are taking forward a programme of work to tackle youth engagement and employment.³ We hope that our recommendations can help feed into this work.

6. The terms of reference were:

The purpose of this inquiry is to examine the experiences of vulnerable young people; especially those who are living independently, on work based learning programmes.

- The availability and quality of training programmes, and work based placements, particularly placements for vulnerable young people
- Progression for the vulnerable young person building on skills and qualifications gained in the previous placement
- Financial support for independently financed young people, including training allowances, Education Maintenance Allowance, benefits and funding for travel costs
- Personal support for vulnerable young people including differences in levels of support for care leavers
- The effectiveness of agency collaboration/partnership working in Wales

7. There was an open call for written evidence, in which we emphasised that we would particularly welcome the experiences of young people. The Committee had a positive response to this call for evidence receiving 25 responses, and we would like to thank all those who responded. A full list of the evidence is available in Annex B.

8. We also took oral evidence over three meetings during the winter 2010 term from six different organisations and the Welsh Government. We are grateful to all those who were able to contribute to this inquiry.

³ Petitions Committee paper, PET(3)-13-10 Paper 1, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

2. Work based learning within Wales

9. There are two main work based learning schemes within Wales; Skillbuild and apprenticeships.⁴

10. Skillbuild develops occupational skills through work taster placements. In addition, it aims to develop softer skills through motivational and confidence building classes, help with basic skills and specific pre-employment training. This is open to learners of all ages and does not have a set course length. Young learners between 16-18 must have agreement from their local Careers Wales office to enrol on the Skillbuild programme.

11. In 2009/10, the Skillbuild programme provided training for approximately 10,200 16-18 year olds and up to 6,000 adult learners.⁵

12. Apprenticeships offer work based learning for employed learners and provide a bridge between full time learning and employment. There are three levels available through work based learning: Foundation (level 2); Apprentice (level 3); and Higher (level 4). Apprenticeships aim to develop learners' transferable skills while also developing their ability to undertake a specific skill or trade.

13. In 2008-09, there were 84 providers of work based learning in Wales.⁶ They were procured through open tender. Current providers are contracted until 31 July 2011. The tendering process for work based learning contracts from 2011/2014 was opened in July 2010, with new contracts starting on 1 August 2011.

14. Work based learning is inspected by Estyn. Estyn inspected 16 providers and carried out two re-inspections in 2008/09. Estyn graded 77 % of learning areas as good or better, with 22% of these showing outstanding features. 75% of teaching sessions observed had good or outstanding features. However, performance has declined in comparison with previous years, because of the poor performance of three providers, one of whom had their contract terminated.⁷

⁴ Petitions Committee paper, PET(3)-13-10 Paper 1, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Estyn Annual Report, 2008-09, [The Annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2008-09](#)

⁷ Ibid

15. Concerns in relation to work based learning in Wales were investigated by the Wales Audit Office (WAO) in 2006 which looked at the financial and quality controls for work based learning and identified serious weaknesses.⁸ The follow up report concluded that while there had been significant improvements to financial control and learning quality, due to strengthened audit and performance management arrangements, lessons were still not being systematically applied across its organisation. The report did note that new management arrangements were intended to enable better shared learning.⁹

3. Experiences of work based learning

16. The Committee heard a range of views in relation to the effectiveness of work based learning provision for vulnerable young people. A number of organisations, especially those who offer support to this group of young people told us that the current system was often failing the most vulnerable.¹⁰ Training providers told us that broadly provision was appropriate and suitable but confirmed that there were pockets of poor provision.¹¹

17. Estyn told us in written correspondence that,

“From our inspection work and knowledge of the sector the evidence shows that the majority of providers deliver at least satisfactory, if not, good quality work based learning in Wales.”¹²

18. However, they also stated that they do still see unsatisfactory provision in a minority of providers.¹³ The Minister outlined that he felt work based learning provision within Wales was satisfactory in his oral evidence to us.¹⁴

19. We heard that there have been significant improvements in work based learning provision over recent years, which was attributed to a

⁸ *Auditor General for Wales report: Work based learning*

⁹ *Work based learning follow up report*, AGR-LD7756, 22 October 2009

¹⁰ RoP [17] 28 September 2010, Petitions Committee

¹¹ RoP [11-12] 12 October 2010, Petitions Committee

¹² Petitions Committee Paper PET(3)-10-10 Paper 1: New petitions and updates to previous petitions

¹³ PET10: Estyn written evidence

¹⁴ RoP [12] 2 November 2010, Petitions Committee

more strategic approach taken by the Welsh Government¹⁵ and the involvement of Estyn.¹⁶ These improvements were clearly acknowledged by all witnesses.

20. It is our view that broadly work based learning provision is sufficient, and in most cases delivers good outcomes in often challenging circumstances. However, there are still improvements which could help ensure that the most vulnerable young people are able to access and successfully progress through work based learning and into sustainable employment. It is in this context that we make the recommendations contained within the report.

Positive experiences of work based learning

21. Rathbone Cymru and ACT Training were clear in their oral evidence, that they did not recognise the suggestion that a significant number of young people are failing because work based learning does not cater for vulnerable young people.¹⁷ They did however acknowledge that there were pockets of provision which did not best meet young people's needs or offer adequate levels of support.¹⁸

22. The Minister stated that,

“Within our range of schemes, there may be some people who are not benefiting as much as they might, but there are clearly good schemes for vulnerable people being run by reputable providers.”¹⁹

23. ITEC Training Solutions said in their written submission that ‘the best of providers have regularly recorded delivering to learners whilst the funding has run out. That is the extent of the commitment and dedication of the providers that deliver quality of provision and enable access when it is needed’.²⁰

24. These views were supported in other written submissions we considered from training providers. City and County of Swansea

¹⁵ RoP [13] 12 October 2010 Petitions Committee

¹⁶ PET22 City and County of Swansea Employment Training written response

¹⁷ RoP [6-9], 12 October 2010, Petitions Committee

¹⁸ *ibid* [11-12] 12 October 2010, Petitions Committee

¹⁹ RoP [12] 2 November 2010 Petitions Committee

²⁰ PET13: ITEC Training Solutions Ltd

Employment Training described work based learning as ‘an incredible programme which, with a few tweaks could become even greater’.²¹

25. Pembrokeshire 14-19 Learning Network agreed that work based learning was effective in meeting the needs of vulnerable young people because it can offer a more learner focused form of education.²² They also highlight that their successes have been the result of close partnership working and taking a holistic, long term view of the learner’s support needs while ensuring the learner has personalised support. We heard from most witnesses that effective personal support was a key factor in successful work based learning.

26. We heard from all witnesses that working with the most vulnerable can be challenging and that different and innovative approaches are often needed to engage and encourage full participation. Witnesses, including Action for Children told us of the importance of acknowledging and celebrating all achievements,

“For some young people, getting through the day without being rude to someone is a major achievement and needs to be celebrated, and we fail to do this at our peril.”²³

27. Fairbridge de Cymru highlighted the need for ‘time, patience, one2one support and an understanding that there will be ups as well downs with engaging with these young people’.²⁴ Witnesses also stressed that this group have a lot of untapped potential as Action for Children reminded us in their oral evidence to the Committee,

“... we regard it all as negative and that young people bring nothing to the table, whereas what they often bring... is an energy, a resilience and a capacity way beyond what their life experience should have bequeathed them. It should be incumbent upon us to recognise and build that aspiration and ... to mentor them to feed that back to grow that.”²⁵

28. We are concerned that there is a broader issue of under-aspiration with this cohort of young people and more widely with stakeholders involved with this group. This could mean that they may not engage

²¹ PET22 City and County of Swansea Employment Training written response

²² PET18: Pembrokeshire 14-19 Learning Network written submission

²³ RoP [13] 28 September 2010, Petitions Committee

²⁴ PET11: Fairbridge de Cymru written evidence

²⁵ RoP [56] 28 September 2010

with suitable training opportunities, or that they do not know of the opportunities that are available to them. We understand that this is a far wider issue than the remit of the inquiry, but are concerned that it could mean young people do not consider work based learning as an option for them.

29. We would like to place on record our acknowledgment of the improvements that have been made to work based learning provision. We think most providers are delivering good and high quality support and provision to often very vulnerable learners. However, there are areas for further improvement.

Negative experiences of work based learning

30. Action for Children and Barnardo's Cymru were clear in both their oral and written evidence that current provision can fail the most vulnerable. The multiple barriers that these young people face, in conjunction with inadequate financial and pastoral support, results in their dropping out or only attaining basic level qualifications.

31. This view was supported in some of the written evidence we considered, even by those respondents who largely felt that work based learning was an effective programme. City and County of Swansea Employment Training stated that the current model 'doesn't work particularly well for participants with multiple barriers' but they did feel it was a very effective programme more broadly.²⁶

32. ACT Training confirmed that in some cases, provision is not adequate,

"Quite frankly, some of the provision is just not flexible enough, and learners have to fit into that provision as opposed to the provider having to fit the learning around the person, which would be good provision. Where you see poor provision, it is just like a sausage factory."²⁷

33. This was a common reason given for ineffective provision. We heard that the corporate model did not place enough of a requirement for flexible and personalised support.²⁸ Training providers such as City and County of Swansea Employment Training stressed the importance

²⁶ PET22 City and County of Swansea Employment Training written response

²⁷ RoP [28] 12 October 2010, Petitions Committee

²⁸ PET5: Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan and Powys written evidence

of flexibility in enabling work based learning to better meet the needs of the most vulnerable.²⁹

34. We agree with Cymorth Cymru who highlighted that while there may be an increased cost in delivering more individual and personal support, because this will lead to better outcomes, it will prove to be cost effective.³⁰

35. Fairbridge de Cymru identified insufficient needs assessment and referral as a critical element in work based learning failing. They stated that young people can often be placed on courses without the appropriate preparation or skills, and with staff unable to provide specialised support. They note that this can mean young people are 'set up for failure'.³¹ This view was supported by Llamau who stated that effective assessment is critical to developing a personalised and supported learning plan, which will enable the learner to progress.³²

36. Fairbridge de Cymru also cite as a factor a failure for learners to be placed with the right employer and that there are not appropriate progression routes for individuals facing difficulties.

37. We acknowledge that there is a great deal of good practice and effective support within the work based learning system, however, there are clearly examples where the system is failing the most vulnerable. We do not feel it is appropriate to accept that even the most effective systems will fail some. It is essential that improvements are made to reduce the risk of vulnerable young people not successfully completing their training.

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that Careers Wales and individual learning providers undertake adequate and robust needs assessment to ensure that provision is designed around individual learner's needs.

Acquisition of basic skills

38. The Skillbuild programme includes identifying and addressing any basic skill needs a learner may have.³³ Additionally, we heard from

²⁹ PET22: City and County of Swansea Employment Training written evidence

³⁰ PET7: Cymorth Cymru written evidence

³¹ PET11: Fairbridge de Cymru written evidence

³² PET15: Llamau Ltd written evidence

³³ Petitions Committee paper, PET(3)-13-10 Paper 1, Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

the Minister, of work that seeks to address this issue earlier on in the education system, including the national literacy programme which focuses on 7-11 year olds. The Minister told us that he felt these issues should be addressed within the schooling system.³⁴ We also heard that basic skill programmes are available for adults and families.

39. We heard a common problem for learners was a lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills along with other softer skills needed for successful employment. Work based learning providers are responsible for ensuring that learners are equipped with these basic skills to enable them to succeed in their placements. The importance of getting this right was reinforced by many witnesses, as this is often the stage at which the learner will disengage. We heard that failure at this stage can reinforce already entrenched negative feelings of self-worth and alienation and that this is often the ‘last chance’ to engage.³⁵

40. Some learners will not have attended school regularly, and need a considerable amount of support to develop their basic skills. We heard the acquisition of these skills is not always delivered in a way that best suits the learner, and can be in inappropriate environments. G4S stated, ‘The idea to place such young people into an environment already proven to not be conducive to their learning is difficult to understand’³⁶ while Careers Wales supported this saying,

“To find that they will initially spend several weeks, or possibly months in a training centre, focusing on essential skills (literacy, numeracy etc.) is often not what they had expected. Comments from young people suggest that insufficient consideration is given to different learning styles of individuals.”³⁷

41. The need to teach basic skills in a way that is personalised and enables easy practical application is important. It will also improve learner engagement and help to retain learners. We heard positive examples from Rathbone showing how they make basic skills relevant to the learner’s life.³⁸

³⁴ RoP [14] 2 November 2010, Petitions Committee

³⁵ PET 12, G4S Care and Justice Services written evidence

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ PET4, Careers Wales written evidence

³⁸ RoP [97] 12 October 2010, Petitions Committee

42. Alongside the examples from Rathbone and ACT Training we heard of other projects which aim to develop basic skills in a relevant and accessible way for young people. This included work by Llamau, Fairbridge de Cymru and Merthyr Tydfil's Transition into employment programme.

43. We considered written evidence describing the Get Skilled Up programme in Rhyl, which has demonstrated good retention and progression rates. We note that while this programme had a generic core curriculum, individual learning programmes were developed within this.³⁹ This supports the evidence that we heard from witnesses about how an individual and personalised approach is likely to lead to increased and improved outcomes.

44. Some witnesses, including Fairbridge de Cymru, G4S Care and Justice System and City and County of Swansea Employment Training called for the introduction of some form of foundation/pre Skill-build training to be made available. This would be able to address some of the core basic needs prior to the young people joining a more formal learning programme. Examples of what could be covered included: appropriate behaviour; daily routines and punctuality. This would help address risks relating to the learner disengaging from work based learning because of behavioural issues or an inability to meet core course requirements. It would help prepare the learner so that they would be 'more focused, less disruptive and placement ready'.⁴⁰

We recommend that the Welsh Government should support the development of a best practice framework for the acquisition of basic skills. This framework should encourage providers to deliver basic skills in a way that is most relevant and appropriate to learners.

We recommend that the Welsh Government investigate the feasibility of introducing a programme of preparatory courses to enable learners to develop the most basic skills prior to joining formal work based learning programmes. Consideration should be given to whether currently established programmes could be effectively rolled out across Wales.

³⁹ PET9: Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills written evidence.

⁴⁰ PET 12: G4S Care and Justice Services written evidence

Availability of appropriate training placements

45. We heard different views about whether there were sufficient placements available. The petitioners cited this as a key problem, highlighting that the best placements often go to ‘easy to place’ young people.⁴¹ It was also raised as a matter of concern in a number of written submissions. However, training providers told us that they have a surplus of placements. They also told us that while the range of sectors can be localised, they generally do have a broad range of sectors available – including taxidermy.⁴²

46. We heard that there are adequate numbers of places with training providers, but not enough placements. This leads to young people spending a lot of time in the training centre which was a key concern for the petitioners. Neath Port Talbot Youth Service also confirmed this problem in their written submission, stating that while there were adequate training programmes, there were limited work placements which were suitable for a learner’s career choice.⁴³

47. We heard concerns that there is not a broad range of sectors available to learners which can lead to them choosing inappropriate placements, or causing them to drop out. Jobcentre Plus told us,

“There is not a huge range of sectoral routes across the youth programme, from what I have observed. There is quite a focus on things like construction, administration and retail, so the placements are probably not very striking in their variety.”⁴⁴

We agree that this is an area of concern and is limiting young people’s options.

48. We are especially concerned that this is more acute for those who live in areas with poor public transport options. This view was confirmed by Careers Wales.⁴⁵

49. Training providers, such as Rathbone also told us that they cannot always secure placements with companies that are the most attractive to young people,

⁴¹ RoP [10] 28 September 2010, Petitions Committee

⁴² RoP [19-21], 12 October, Petitions Committee

⁴³ PET17: Neath Port Talbot Youth Service written evidence

⁴⁴ RoP [114] 2 November 2010 Petitions Committee

⁴⁵ PET4: Careers Wales written evidence

“...we operate a lot in the Valleys and over in west Wales, and perhaps slightly reflective of the environment is the fact that we have a lot of placements that are reflective of the SME base, and we struggle to get many of the top 300 FTSE companies on board, although they are attractive to the young people because of the brand-name[...] You get young people who want to go into hairdressing, and they want to go to Toni&Guy rather than to Snippets up the road, but that is where the placement is.”⁴⁶

50. We heard that there are a number of factors which can impact on the number of placements available. Estyn highlighted that the young person’s guarantee programme⁴⁷ is starting to put pressure on the limited number of placements which are available. Providers delivering this are effectively joining Skillbuild providers in trying to secure placements which are from the same pool of employers.⁴⁸

51. The economic downturn was also cited as an aggravating factor in reducing the number of placements available. Denbighshire 14-19 Network highlighted that staffing reductions in the public sector are impacting as they have previously been a good source of placement opportunities.⁴⁹

52. The impact of sufficient training courses but insufficient work placements can lead to learners spending a lot of time in the training centre, not achieving much. This can result in disruptive behaviour, a decrease in motivation and ultimately in learners dropping out or being forced to leave training as a result of behavioural problems. It can also lead to learners gaining a negative view of what work is like.⁵⁰

53. Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan and Powys have suggested that for those waiting for placements, there should be opportunities for them to access other services. This would enable a better use of a learner’s time, reduced likelihood of dropping out and freeing up training staff time to do more personalised and individual support work. It has been

⁴⁶ RoP [22] 12 October 2010 Petitions Committee

⁴⁷ This guarantees all young people between 18 and 24 training or a work placement.

⁴⁸ PET10: Estyn written evidence

⁴⁹ PET8: Denbighshire 14-19 Network written evidence

⁵⁰ P-03-270 Petitioners supporting information

suggested that young people could access sport or cultural services during this time.⁵¹

54. The training providers indicated that they each take different approaches to securing placements, and we feel that this is an area where good practice should be shared and disseminated through collaborative networks.

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that best practice between providers in relation to securing placements is shared and disseminated with all contracted providers. This should be completed in time for the start of the new contracts in 2011.

55. A number of witnesses called for innovative and creative ways to encourage employers to offer placements. Cymorth Cymru highlighted that housing associations and support providers often have policies to support disadvantaged individuals to develop skills and that this could be investigated in more detail to open up the number and variety of placements.⁵² This is an idea that we find particularly interesting and feel that there could be real benefits in looking at a pan-Wales approach to offering placements within the voluntary/third sector.

56. City and County of Swansea Employment Training called for the Government to do more to engage employers with work based learning, and for them to lead by example. They suggested that this could be done by extending the statutory requirement for the provision of apprenticeship opportunities as a requirement for all employers with ten or more employees.⁵³ While we find this idea interesting, we are not recommending that this should be put in place.

57. We are aware of a number of different ways in which this issue is being addressed, both by training providers and the Welsh Government, which we welcome. We heard from Rathbone that they are developing partnerships with business in the community to encourage its members to take up placements. We believe that more work like this needs to be taken forward to increase and widen the number of placements and the sectors in which they are found.

⁵¹ PET5: Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan and Powys written evidence

⁵² PET7: Cymorth Cymru written evidence

⁵³ PET22: City and County of Swansea Employment Training written evidence

58. We also welcome the work of the Welsh Government in developing a new voluntary work experience programme and an intermediate labour market programme.⁵⁴ We call for the Government to consider the recommendations made within this report to help shape these proposals.

59. We heard from the Minister that the UK Commission for Employment and Skills are currently looking at improving employer engagement, and that the Welsh Government will look at the recommendations to see if there are further ways to take this forward.⁵⁵ We feel that it is vital that the Welsh Government provide a strategic lead on this issue and ensure that all learners have the fullest range of options available to them regardless of geographical location or difficult personal circumstances.

We recommend that the Welsh Government take a more strategic role in promoting the benefits of work based learning to help increase employer participation. This work should focus on encouraging employers to take on all learners, including the most vulnerable and ensuring that employers in those sector areas where demand outstrips supply participate. Specific focus should also be placed on rural areas and other areas with poor transport links, where there are additional difficulties in securing placements.

As part of taking a more strategic role, we recommend the Welsh Government should consider whether a specific work based learning programme focusing on the voluntary sector will help improve opportunities and progression rates for the most vulnerable.

Additionally, we recommend that the Welsh Government should consider the recommendations that arise from the UK review into employer engagement that will help increase placements.

Opportunities for progression

60. A key aim of the petition was to improve progression rates for vulnerable young people and ensure that they achieve a minimum of NVQ Level 2. We heard a range of viewpoints on the opportunities and

⁵⁴ Petitions Committee paper PET (3)-13-10 Paper 1: Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

⁵⁵ RoP [17] 2 November 2010, Petitions Committee

success of work based learning to progress and help young people into sustainable employment.

61. Progression is the key outcome from the Skillbuild programme and providers must meet specific progression targets as part of their contracts. We heard from ACT Training, that around 85% of their learners progress into jobs. This is measured six months after the completion of training, so can be assessed as a sustainable outcome. This monitoring must be done as part of their contract.⁵⁶

62. However, the Committee also heard anecdotal evidence from support organisations such as Action for Children that progression rates were not as positive for vulnerable young people.⁵⁷ This view was supported by written evidence submitted by a range of organisations.⁵⁸ Estyn also stated that a few learners do not progress, make little progression past NVQ level 1 or take too long to achieve their qualifications.⁵⁹

63. Progression opportunities are closely linked to availability of placements and employment. Additionally, partnership working and transitional arrangements between providers are also key. This was acknowledged by Jobcentre Plus who told us that they are looking at how they can improve transitional arrangements between Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus.⁶⁰ Training providers confirmed the importance of effective transitional arrangements, especially in managing the transition between school and training, and that Careers Wales have a role in strengthening these arrangements.⁶¹

We recommend for the Welsh Government draw up protocols to ensure that transitional arrangements between providers are improved, so that there are no additional barriers to progression.

64. Estyn highlighted that different providers are able to offer different levels of qualification, dependent on their funding which can impact on the learner's progression opportunities,

⁵⁶ RoP [24-26] 12 October, Petitions Committee

⁵⁷ RoP [11] 28 September, Petitions Committee

⁵⁸ Organisations who highlighted a lack of progression opportunities were, Swansea Employment Training, Denbighshire 14-19 Network, Merthyr Tydfil Adult/Youth Services, Fairbridge de Cymru and Llamau.

⁵⁹ PET 10: Estyn written evidence

⁶⁰ RoP [146] 2 November, 2010, Petitions Committee

⁶¹ RoP [56] 12 October 2010, Petitions Committee

“...some of the better providers who are DCELLS funded to deliver NVQ2 and NVQ3 do succeed in progressing Skillbuild learners through to level 2 and 3 or employment.”⁶²

65. In the written submissions, we saw a number of examples of young people who had been unable to progress in their chosen area because of a lack of a NVQ or training provider to cover the sector that they wished to progress in.⁶³ This contradicts some of the evidence we heard in relation to availability of training places, where we were told that there were sufficient training places but not placements.

4. Personal support for vulnerable young people

66. All witnesses agreed that effective personal and pastoral support is key to an individual successfully completing their training. Ensuring that a learner has good personal support will improve retention and progression rates. We heard a range of views on how effective current levels of support are.

67. The level of support required by the most vulnerable is very different from most learners, and these differences must be acknowledged and taken into account. We feel that the identification of these needs at the beginning of the course is critical. We welcome the Minister’s comment that, ‘When people enter work based learning; we expect their basic skills to be properly assessed. Providers do that. Therefore, programmes should be developed that are tailored to the needs of individual learners’.⁶⁴

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that all providers meet their requirements to identify any additional support needs of a learner at the start of the course.

68. When providing personal support, it is essential that all those working with young people provide accurate information and are able to signpost them to appropriate agencies when necessary. Careers Wales act as the primary information source for 16-17 year olds, but Jobcentre Plus have specialist advisers for 16-17 year olds who need to access benefits. We heard that these are often the Jobcentre’s most

⁶² PET 10: Estyn written evidence

⁶³ PET 4: Careers Wales, PET 5: Careers Wales Mid and Glamorgan and Powys written evidence

⁶⁴ RoP [14] 2 November 2010 Petitions Committee

experienced advisors because of the complexities and difficulties faced by this group.⁶⁵ However, we feel that there is some confusion about the different roles and functions.

69. We are concerned to hear that there is an inconsistency in support offered by the different Careers Wales services.⁶⁶ Young people should receive the same level of support from Careers Wales regardless of where they are living. The Minister stated that the proposed unitary structure for Careers Wales should increase consistency in the level and quality of support across Wales.

70. All witnesses stressed the importance of effective collaboration with agencies and we address this issue in more detail in chapter six. However, it is a key element in ensuring that there is adequate pastoral support for a learner. A number of witnesses including Careers Wales highlighted that there can be issues with sharing information between agencies; leading to difficulties in ensuring personalised and individualised support can be put in place to support the learner. They gave specific examples of how this had led to issues arising with specific learners.⁶⁷ Merthyr Tydfil Adult and Youth Services in a joint submission stated, 'There is a need to standardise and enforce information sharing protocols across providers to put the needs of the learner above individual organisations'.⁶⁸ The Department for Work and Pensions acknowledged in their oral evidence that this was a key barrier in effective collaborative working.⁶⁹

71. We welcome the work that the Department for Work and Pensions are doing on a national level to identify good practice and protocols in information sharing. We also welcome that this issue will be addressed in the vacancy matching pilots that Jobcentre Plus are about to carry out in Wales.

We recommend that the Welsh Government build on the work of the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that lack of information sharing does not act as a barrier to effective personal support. As part of this, the Welsh Government should ensure that all agencies are aware of each other's different functions and responsibilities in providing support to vulnerable young people.

⁶⁵ RoP [152] 2 November 2010 Petitions Committee

⁶⁶ RoP [31] 12 October 2010 Petitions Committee

⁶⁷ PET4: Careers Wales written evidence

⁶⁸ PET16: Merthyr Tydfil Integrated Adult Services/Youth Services written response

⁶⁹ RoP [165-167] 2 November, Petitions Committee

72. A repeated theme which we heard was the effectiveness of mentoring in supporting learners through their training. Action for Children told us that care leavers do better in this respect, because they have a personal adviser who often takes on a mentoring role.⁷⁰ Llamau also stressed the need for mentoring arrangements because,

“Due to the nature of their experiences it is extremely likely that this cohort will have occasional crisis, which could negatively affect the sustainability of their placement, and traditionally this has been the point at which many placements fail. However, with support from specialist mentors the young people will be supported to overcome their personal crises, increasing the likelihood that their lives will remain stable and that they will be able to continue in their work placement, improve their chances of obtaining employment and become more financially independent.”⁷¹

73. We strongly feel that effective mentoring for the learner and the employer is a key element of effective work based learning.

74. We welcome the Minister’s evidence in which he talked of plans to introduce a learning coach function into the tendering process for the new work based learning contracts.⁷² However we would have welcomed more information on how this will lead to improvements to personal support for vulnerable young people.

75. In chapter six, we look in more detail at the monitoring and measuring of personal support.

We recommend that the Welsh Government investigate the feasibility of providing a personal adviser to young people who are living independently but are not care leavers.

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that the learner coach role is suitably well defined to ensure it will increase consistency and effectiveness in personal support to the most vulnerable. This role should ensure that there is effective mentoring for all learners.

⁷⁰ RoP [58] 28 September 2010 Petitions Committee

⁷¹ PET15: Llamau Ltd written evidence

⁷² RoP [70] 2 November 2010 Petitions Committee

Additional Learning Support fund

76. Training providers can access the additional learning support fund from the Welsh Government to help them provide support to young people with the greatest needs. Training providers access this through Careers Wales. We heard from some witnesses that providers can find it difficult to access the fund. While access to the scheme has improved, this is mainly in those cases where the learner was ‘statemented’ at school. ACT Training stated applications are either not supported or turned down if the learner does not have a statement and call for this to be investigated and remedied. This creates an additional barrier for already vulnerable people, as they often did not get a statement during school, and are therefore disadvantaged a second time.⁷³

We recommend the Welsh Government review how the additional learning support fund is accessed, and remove the barriers which make it more difficult for providers to access it for young people who did not get ‘statemented’ at school.

Support for employers

77. The importance of giving the employer support in sustaining placements was highlighted in written submissions. Senghenydd Youth Drop in Centre stated that few workplaces can cope with the additional support needed for a vulnerable young person. City and County of Swansea Employment Training also stressed that the success of work based learning is largely dependent on the engagement of supportive employers.

78. We heard of how providing employer support can effectively work in practice from Barnardo’s Cymru, who referred to their project ‘Barnardo’s works’. This offers mentoring for both the employer and employee. Additionally, Barnardo’s fund half of the employee’s salary for the first 12 weeks. Their experience is that

“We have found that it is easier once the young person can engage fully with the employer, because the employer understands the young person in the round, rather than merely someone who has had awful life experiences so far.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Petitions Committee paper: PET (3)12-10 Paper 1 NTFW- ACT Training

⁷⁴ RoP [47-48] 28 September Petitions Committee

We recommend that the Welsh Government identify and implement ways in which employers can be more closely supported to help sustain placements for vulnerable young people.

5. Financial support for independently financed young people

79. Action for Children were very clear in their petition of the severe financial hardship that vulnerable young people can find themselves in while undertaking work based learning. This was made incredibly clear to us in powerful oral evidence from young learners.⁷⁵ It is obvious to us that improvements could be made to help incentivise and support the most vulnerable in work based learning.

80. We feel that for the vast majority of people in work based learning, the financial support is adequate. Our consideration of this issue and our recommendations are only related to those who are most vulnerable and living independently.

81. We are concerned that the level of financial support can act as a disincentive for vulnerable young people to access work based learning. We appreciate that accessing training will have benefits in the longer term, but for some young people they may not be able to make the short term sacrifice for longer term gain. We feel that this should be addressed, and that there are ways in which this can be done. We also think that investment at this stage can be cost effective, as it may reduce the likelihood of state support being necessary in later life.

Income differences between students in Further Education and work based learning.

82. We heard of the difference in financial positions for those who undertake work based learning in contrast to those who go onto further education college full time. Young people in work based learning who are homeless or are living independently receive £51.85 a week, whereas the same young person on a full time FE course will receive an additional £30 a week (Education Maintenance Allowance), which takes their weekly income to £81.85.⁷⁶ We heard evidence from

⁷⁵ RoP [91-106] 12 May 2010 Petitions Committee

⁷⁶ Petitions Committee Paper PET(3) 13-10: Paper 1 Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

young people indicating that this was a substantial difference.⁷⁷ We know that for those living at home, this discrepancy is not always an issue, but for the most vulnerable living independently it can be a stark difference. As we heard from one young person this additional money could have enabled them to have heating during the winter.⁷⁸ We feel that this discrepancy is unfair, and should be addressed for those living independently on work based learning.

83. Jobcentre Plus explained this technical difference between those in further education and those in work based learning,

“The training allowance that is available for young people on the Skillbuild programme is a subsistence allowance, and it is designed to keep young people who would otherwise be claiming the jobseekers allowance. It enables them to take up training and releases them from actively having to seek work. So, it is a like-for-like replacement. The difficulty is that the education maintenance allowance is not a subsistence allowance. It is disregarded for benefit purposes, because it is an incentive to take up specific courses of further education. As it is not intended to be subsistence, you can claim the education maintenance allowance alongside a subsistence benefit. So, the case study quoted in the petition is factually correct: a young person choosing further education over something more vocational will be better off.”⁷⁹

84. Action for Children and Barnardo’s Cymru both stated that if they had to prioritise improvements to the system, their primary aim would be for young people living independently on work based learning to receive the Education Maintenance Allowance payment of £30 a week, in addition to the training allowance. This would bring work based learning provision in line with Further Education provision for those living independently. We support this and call for the discrepancy to be addressed as a matter of priority.

We recommend that the Welsh Government introduce additional support for those living independently on work based learning from the start of the new work based learning contracts in 2011. Changes should be introduced to bring their weekly income in line

⁷⁷ RoP [85-99] 12 May 2010, Petitions Committee

⁷⁸ RoP [85-107] 12 May 2010, Petitions Committee,

⁷⁹ RoP [122] 2 November 2010 Petitions Committee

with those living independently and taking full time courses in further education.

Travel costs

85. Non employed learners are currently eligible to receive a contribution to travel costs above £5 a week. In additional written evidence, the Minister told us that approximately 11,300 learners received support for travel and accommodation costs.⁸⁰ However, witnesses have told us that the cost of travel can act as a barrier to access or may be a factor in young people dropping out of training. We heard from a number of witnesses that the combination of cost and logistics of travel can act as a barrier. Careers Wales said in written evidence that while the Welsh Government has sought to address this, costs are still a leading factor in people dropping out of work based learning.⁸¹

86. We are concerned that for vulnerable young people having to pay for travel costs up front can lead to financial difficulties. Llamau called for travel costs to be covered through the training provider directly as this improves a young person's ability to access training.⁸²

87. For those for whom this is an issue, we feel that it should be incumbent on the training provider to arrange or provide support in arranging travel to ensure that the learner is confident and comfortable with using it. This will help remove an additional barrier for the most vulnerable and will help ensure better retention and progression rates.

88. Difficulty in relation to travel is especially acute for those who live in rural areas and have to travel greater distances to access placements. Poor transport links can make journeys particularly daunting. Providers should be required to provide personal support to ensure that the logistics of travel do not act as an additional barrier.

89. We acknowledge the views of the Minister, who stated that the current system does allow providers to respond quickly to changes in travel costs, and that it does ensure high travel costs are broadly covered. However, we feel that further small changes for this group of

⁸⁰ Petitions Committee Paper PET(3)15-10 Paper to note – Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning additional information

⁸¹ PET4: Careers Wales written evidence

⁸² PET15: Llamau Ltd written evidence

young people, will help increase the effectiveness of covering travel costs. We welcome the review into support cost arrangements which are due to be completed in spring 2011.⁸³

We recommend that the Government should consider as part of its review into support cost arrangements how the most vulnerable can be best supported so that travel costs and logistics do not act as a barrier to participation. As part of its considerations, the Government should consider whether for the most vulnerable that the provider should cover the travel costs up front as opposed to employing a reimbursement system.

Other factors leading to financial hardship

90. Careers Wales evidence highlighted that some work based learning providers may deduct pay if a learner is late or misses training. They acknowledge that this can be appropriate for some, but can have a significant impact on those living independently.⁸⁴ City and County of Swansea Employment Training highlight that attendance for vulnerable young people may also be affected because they have to access support away from the learning provider which results in lower attendance.⁸⁵

We recommend that the Welsh Government provide guidance to work based learning providers to ensure that decisions relating to the deduction of pay take into account the learner's individual situation and does not cause disproportionate hardship.

91. Both Careers Wales and G4S Care and Justice System highlighted that paying learners a week in arrears can have a detrimental impact on those relying on the allowances to survive. This is compounded by the associated costs of starting a course such as arranging and paying for travel, which can act as another barrier to access training.

92. We heard that the complex nature of benefits and funding streams were confusing to young people, and that they were not always provided with accurate information to enable them to make an informed choice about their options. Action for Children told us that they know of young people being given inaccurate information about

⁸³ Petitions Committee Paper PET(3)15-10 Paper to note – Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning additional information

⁸⁴ PET4: Careers Wales written evidence

⁸⁵ PET22: City and County of Swansea Employment Training written evidence

what they are eligible for.⁸⁶ Neath Port Talbot Youth Service also highlighted this as a problem and emphasised that partnership working was vital to ensure young people are signposted to the relevant expertise.⁸⁷

93. Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan and Powys, ITEC Training and City and County of Swansea Employment Training highlighted that the level of training allowance has not been reviewed or changed since 2006, with no adjustment for inflation or cost of living, which compounds financial difficulties and acts as a further disincentive.⁸⁸ According to their submissions, this is an issue that has not gone unnoticed by learners, and a small increase could help increase the programme's attractiveness.

94. The Minister stated in additional written evidence, that training allowances were reviewed as part of work looking at the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).⁸⁹ It is not clear whether learning providers were involved in this review, but in future any review of allowances should include providers as part of this process.

Proposed changes to training allowances

95. We heard from witnesses that the Welsh Government is currently considering the feasibility of introducing an Education Maintenance Allowance Scheme into work based learning. We heard that this could lead to learners receiving a reduced weekly allowance of £30 per week. It is our understanding that the proposals would affect the engagement strand of Skillbuild and would not impact on all those in work based learning. A number of witnesses told us both orally and in writing of their concerns about the proposals.

96. While ACT Training could understand the rationale behind the changes, they said it

⁸⁶ RoP [75] 28 September 2010 Petitions Committee

⁸⁷ PET17: Neath Port Talbot Youth Service written evidence

⁸⁸ PET5: Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan and Powys, PET13: ITEC Training Solutions, PET22: City and County of Swansea Employment Training written evidence

⁸⁹ Petitions Committee Paper PET(3)15-10 Paper to note – Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning additional information

“[...] will be disastrous for that group of people who are really vulnerable, because £30 is a lot less than £50. I am worried about it; I think that there should be an exception to the rule.”⁹⁰

97. ACT suggested that Careers Wales could play a role in assessing the young person’s situation and making a decision on what level of allowance is needed.

98. Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan and Powys indicated in their evidence, that because the most vulnerable are more likely to access this strand of work based learning, it is more likely to affect the most vulnerable. Additionally they stated that it will act as a disincentive and could lead to higher levels of young people not in education, employment or training.⁹¹

99. City and County Swansea Employment Training stated that they were greatly concerned at the proposals, believing that it will lead to an increase in young people not in education, employment or training. They, along with other witnesses, highlighted the difference between attending college full time and work based learning. They said that the learner could be doing more hours in a more physically demanding environment, and that this was best rewarded and incentivised by an allowance that is akin to a wage.⁹²

100. Rathbone told us that when similar changes were introduced in England, and payment was reduced to a similar level of the EMA, there was a significant drop in vulnerable young people accessing the scheme.⁹³

101. We note that a number of witnesses have highlighted in their written evidence that they have made representations to the Welsh Government on this issue.

102. In written correspondence with the Committee, the Minister clarified that the current proposals will mean that from 2011 learners doing 30 hours per week plus will continue to receive an allowance of £50 a week. However, for those doing the 21 hours per week programme, they will receive £30 a week. This will not be means tested until a firm decision has been made about the introduction of

⁹⁰ RoP [89] Petitions Committee 12 October 2010

⁹¹ PET4: Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan and Powys written evidence

⁹² PET22: City and County of Swansea Employment Training written evidence

⁹³ RoP [91] Petitions Committee 12 October 2010

Education Maintenance Allowance as a standard allowance payment into the programme. To differentiate between the standard EMA and the proposals for work based learning, the £30 a week payment has been referred to as a Training Maintenance Allowance in the work based learning tender specification.⁹⁴

103. We welcome the Minister's statement that 'the most vulnerable (e.g. those living independently) will still be able to claim the differential between this allowance and any DWP benefits to which they may be entitled'. However we are still concerned about the confusion around the proposals and the possible impact this may have on young people embarking on work based learning.

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensure that any changes to training allowances account for the specific set of circumstances in which vulnerable young people find themselves in, and do not lead to a drop in income.

We recommend that the Welsh Government provide greater clarity about the proposed changes to training allowances for training providers and support organisations to ensure that they are able to best advise potential learners on the options available to them and the financial impact of their decisions.

6. Quality of work based learning provision

104. Effective performance management is essential in monitoring and managing the quality of work based learning. We heard from witnesses that there have been significant improvements in provision in recent years and that Estyn's inspection role has played a critical role in this. We also acknowledge that there will be further improvements to performance management as a result of the retendering exercise, and we hope that our recommendations can help feed into this.

105. Barnardo's Cymru and Action for Children told us that there was a need for more robust monitoring of whether provision is meeting the needs of the most vulnerable.⁹⁵ Training providers described the improvements in performance management in recent years. However,

⁹⁴ Petitions Committee Paper PET(3)15-10 Paper to note – Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning additional information

⁹⁵ RoP [33-34] 28 September 2010

they did highlight a need for improvements in identifying poor provision.⁹⁶

106. The Committee welcomes the improved progression measurements which will be introduced from 2010/11, which will mean that learners will have to progress to employment or learning at a higher level.

Entry criteria for work based learning

107. We did hear concerns that some providers may be reluctant to offer training to vulnerable young people, because they can be perceived as less likely to complete training plans, which may impact on a provider meeting performance targets.⁹⁷ The Wales Audit Office highlighted that during their follow up work on work based learning provision, some providers were concerned that the performance management focus on outcomes could encourage providers to ‘cherry-pick’ those learners who are most likely to achieve a successful outcome. They stressed that their work did not set out to verify or examine this possibility.⁹⁸ In their written submission City and County of Swansea Employment Training stated that the performance measures could lead to providers ‘being encouraged to cherry-pick programme starters’ with the most vulnerable being further disadvantaged.⁹⁹

108. However, we heard from Rathbone and ACT Training that they were only aware of a ‘couple’ of providers which have entry criteria.¹⁰⁰ This was also reinforced in written evidence where ITEC stated that even as an ‘open-door’ provider they frequently performed above national comparator standards.¹⁰¹ The evidence we have heard does not indicate that there is a widespread issue of ‘cherry-picking’ amongst providers.

Measuring learner experience

109. Throughout our consideration of this issue, we have had difficulty in obtaining empirical data on the learner experience. As a result it is difficult for us to truly ascertain how effective work based learning is

⁹⁶ RoP [40] 12 October 2010 Petitions Committee

⁹⁷ PET4: Careers Wales

⁹⁸ PET24: Wales Audit Office written evidence

⁹⁹ PET22: City and County of Swansea Employment Training written evidence

¹⁰⁰ RoP [69] 12 October 2010 Petitions Committee

¹⁰¹ PET13: ITEC Training Solutions Ltd (ITEC) written evidence

for vulnerable learners, with no data to either confirm or refute anecdotal evidence. We feel that an effective performance management framework should ensure that the quality of training is monitored in the broadest sense. Rathbone Training told us

“...it is also important to get learner feedback so that we can look at the positive progression rates, the qualification rates, the retention rates and what the young people think of their experience. That is something that we collate regularly, as do many providers. However, it could be collated and evaluated independently.”¹⁰²

We recommend that the Welsh Government should begin to collate and monitor data relating to learner experience. We feel it is vital that there is an effective way to assess learners’ experiences of work based learning. This should be a key element for performance management and should begin to be collected as part of the new work based learning contracts.

We also recommend that the Welsh Government investigate ways in which effectiveness of pastoral support per provider can be measured and monitored in the new work based learning contracts, to ensure consistency across providers.

‘Churn’ rate

110. We feel that the ‘churn’ rate per provider should be monitored as part of the new performance management framework. This can provide a good indication of the effectiveness of the training offered as ACT Training acknowledged, ‘a good provider would have very few people leaving its programmes and going back on the same programme as someone else’.¹⁰³ This was a key issue which was raised by witnesses and in written submissions, including Action for Children, Rathbone, ACT Training, and Merthyr Tydfil Adult Service/Youth Services.

111. We welcome the Minister’s statement that the issue of churn will be considered as the Government seeks to improve the performance criteria.¹⁰⁴ We call on the Minister to include measurements to monitor the churn rate per provider and set an acceptable tolerance. This

¹⁰² RoP [43] 12 October 2010 Petitions Committee

¹⁰³ *ibid* [58]

¹⁰⁴ RoP [38] 2 November 2010 Petitions Committee

should be established within the context that there will be times when a learner does need to change providers.

We recommend that the Welsh Government should establish an acceptable tolerance of ‘churn’ for providers and monitor providers against this from the start of the new work based learning contracts.

Addressing poor performance

112. ACT and Rathbone both raised concerns about the mechanisms in which poor performance may be addressed.¹⁰⁵ They felt that there was not an appropriate mechanism for Careers Wales to deal with poor provision or to bring it to the attention of the Welsh Government. We heard that while the training providers welcome the recent streamlining which removed the contract managers, it has led to a gap in management processes which makes it more difficult for poor provision to be challenged and dealt with.¹⁰⁶ The training providers all stressed the importance of appropriate targets to ensure certain minimum standards were being met by all providers.

113. We heard from the Minister that the Estyn inspection regime is robust, and that poor performance is picked up through these processes,

“It [Estyn] has introduced a set of core indicators, which will enable us to look at any suppliers that are underperforming or coasting. So, when we get reports back that a provider has received only an adequate score – or worse in a tiny minority of cases – the provider will have to provide us with a plan of action for addressing those failings, and we will follow that up with them.”¹⁰⁷

114. We acknowledge the improvements in performance management in recent years, but are concerned there is not a sufficiently robust system for concerns about poor provision to be highlighted.

We recommend that clear protocols be established which enable Careers Wales to bring to the attention of the Welsh Government

¹⁰⁵ RoP [28-30, 42] 12 October 2010 Petitions Committee

¹⁰⁶ *ibid* [48-50]

¹⁰⁷ RoP [29] 2 November 2010 Petitions Committee

and Estyn concerns about poor performance and that all Careers Wales services use these protocols to highlight areas of concern.

7. Effectiveness of partnership work and agency collaboration

115. We have heard from all witnesses the importance of effective partnership working in supporting vulnerable young people. We are pleased that work based learning providers are now included in the established 14-19 networks, but note that delays in their being included meant that access to additional support services was not fully embedded.¹⁰⁸ The Committee also welcomes the Welsh Government funding for the National Training Federation for Wales enabling them to collaborate fully both locally and nationally in improving services.

Barriers to effective partnership working

116. Barriers which were identified by witnesses to effective collaboration and partnership working included self-interest and competition, personalities of individuals, geography and location as well as the number of organisations working in this area, and complex structures of accountability.

117. We heard repeatedly that a barrier to effective partnership working was the large number of organisations that provide support to vulnerable young people. Neath Port Talbot stated in their submission that confusion over this can lead to inconsistent support. Action for Children highlighted the complex nature of this in their oral evidence,

“We have recently looked at the situation in Blaenau Gwent and discovered that over 40 different organisations are working with young people in one of the tiniest boroughs in the UK, never mind Wales. I was floored; I had no idea that there were so many and I work with young people. [...] This is not a problem that any single agency can solve on its own, so we do need to work together, but I am quite sure that Blaenau Gwent does not need 40 agencies working with young people.”¹⁰⁹

118. This view was supported by Jobcentre Plus who confirmed that this was a key barrier to effective partnership working,

¹⁰⁸ PET2: ACT Training written evidence to Petitions Committee

¹⁰⁹ RoP [69] 28 September 2010 Petitions Committee

“One barrier in Wales is the complexity of structure. There are local authority boundaries, spatial plan boundaries, local strategic plans and so on. There are many structures which have different accountabilities and slightly different targets, aims and objectives. Getting all that to feed into making a difference for the citizen at a local level is quite a challenge.”¹¹⁰

119. We acknowledge that these are issues which are much wider than the scope of the inquiry, but we do feel that it would be useful for mapping work to be undertaken to identify all agencies that provide support to young people. We support the recommendation of the Enterprise and Learning Committee calling for a lead agency to be identified for young people not in education, employment or training. This agency would enable effective co-ordination of partnerships and manage the journeys for young people.¹¹¹

We recommend that the Welsh Government identify a lead agency, such as Careers Wales, to work on a local level to ensure effective partnership and collaborative working for vulnerable young people. As part of this, we recommend that mapping be undertaken to identify all organisations that provide support to vulnerable young people.

120. Cymorth Cymru highlighted that,

“...it is vitally important that work-based learning programmes are well tied into end-to-end frameworks of support that take individuals right from disengagement to sustainable employment. This requires the involvement of numerous partners, who communicate well and work together to ensure that vulnerable individuals are supported to move towards independence through attainment of learning, skills and employment.”¹¹²

121. Witnesses told us that there can be a tension in collaborative working when you are dealing with organisations that are ultimately competing for business.¹¹³ This view was reinforced in the written submission from the Prince’s Trust who said that the competition

¹¹⁰ RoP [164] 2 November 2010 Petitions Committee

¹¹¹ Enterprise and Learning Committee, *Young people not in education, employment or training*, 15 October 2010

¹¹² PET7: Cymorth Cymru written evidence to Petitions Committee

¹¹³ RoP [110] 12 October 2010 Petitions Committee

between providers for funding was not conducive to developing an environment in which collaboration and partnership working flourish. They call for funding streams to be designed in such a way that they encourage collaboration.

122. We heard from a range of witnesses that the regular tendering process can also create instability for providers which may destabilise provision and divert funds.¹¹⁴ City and County Swansea Employment Training told us that these issues can impact on access to training and delivery. They called for the levels of instability to be minimised through changes in the tendering process.¹¹⁵

Improvements to collaborative working

123. We heard calls that 14-19 network support funding should be made conditional on ensuring all providers and stakeholders are involved, including work based learning providers¹¹⁶ and we are pleased that the Minister in his oral evidence was positive about this suggestion.

We recommend that the Welsh Government considers how the 14-19 networks are best supported and funded to ensure that they involve all sectors of education and can best facilitate effective partnership working.

124. Llamau highlighted the importance of an integrated skills and welfare agenda,

“Discussions need to take place with the DWP and the Welsh Assembly about how the skills agenda and welfare agenda link up more cohesively, as the current system is preventing people in supported or social housing from progressing towards employment.”¹¹⁷

125. We welcome the establishment of the Joint Employment Delivery Board, which seeks to bring improved partnership working between the Welsh and UK agencies. We are pleased to see that a number of projects have already been established which will hopefully lead to improvements in service provision.

¹¹⁴ PET13: ITEC Training Solutions, written evidence

¹¹⁵ PET22: City and County of Swansea Employment training written evidence

¹¹⁶ PET13: ITEC Training Solutions

¹¹⁷ PET15: Llamau Ltd written evidence

8. Conclusions

126. Work based learning can be a very effective method for young people to develop their skills and move into employment. Improvements to work based learning have been significant over recent years. The retendering of contracts provides an excellent opportunity for further improvements to be made, which will ensure that it is an attractive and appropriate scheme for vulnerable young people.

127. We recognise that work based learning works for most young people, but are concerned that the most vulnerable, especially those living independently, face additional barriers. We acknowledge the work of the training providers who largely try to provide support to the most vulnerable. However we feel that some young people are still being failed by the system, and that improvements are needed to minimise the risk of this happening.

128. We also recognise that the current economic climate means that there are limited funds available. However, early intervention will reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training and the likelihood of reliance on the state in the future. This will ultimately prove cost effective in the long term.

129. It is vital that there is effective needs assessment before a learner joins a provider, and additional support for the most vulnerable should be identified at this stage. Alongside this, the acquisition of basic skills is essential to the learner successfully completing their training, and needs to be addressed in a manner that is relevant and appropriate to them.

130. While work based learning is largely a very flexible programme, there need to be safeguards in place to ensure that all providers are offering a flexible and personalised approach that best suits learners' individual needs.

131. The Welsh Government needs to ensure that the benefits of employer involvement in work based learning is widely promoted and employers are encouraged to participate to ensure the widest base of placement opportunities. There should be a focus on ensuring opportunities are available to all, especially those living in rural areas and other areas with poor transport links.

132. Effective personal support is absolutely vital to successful completion of work based learning. We heard that there is not a consistent level of personal support across different providers. We welcome the introduction of the learner coach function in the new contract, but feel that there is still the need for more detail to ensure that personal support is effective for all. This is also an area on which providers should be more closely monitored.

133. We are particularly concerned about the financial hardship that is faced by vulnerable young people, as this can act as a disincentive to starting a course and can be a factor in their not finishing their course. We feel it is vital that the discrepancy in income between vulnerable young people in further education and those in work based learning is addressed as a matter of urgency.

134. While there are effective inspection and performance management systems in place, there is still room for improvement. It is particularly important that learners' experiences are independently collated and evaluated. The Committee struggled throughout the inquiry to find empirical data which would provide a more robust evidence base than purely anecdotal evidence. However, we do feel that there is sufficient anecdotal evidence to suggest that provision is failing some of the most vulnerable.

135. It is vital that all agencies that provide support to vulnerable young people work together, and that there are mechanisms in place to ensure effective partnership working. There is a need for clearer identification and clarity of those who are working with the most vulnerable.

136. We want to ensure that vulnerable young people are supported in work based learning and are able to progress into further training or employment. We need to ensure that this group are able to realise their aspirations and do not feel as though their choices are as limited, as one young person we heard from felt,

“After my training I want to carry on to do level 2 and level 3. Unless the training allowance is to change, I guess that I will be on jobseekers allowance, because I will not be able to afford to live on my own.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ RoP [64] Petitions Committee 11 May 2010

Annex A: Witnesses

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in full at <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-pc-home/bus-committees-third-pc-agendas.htm>

28 September 2010

Cath Black	Action for Children
Chris Ramus	Action for Children
Sally Jenkins	Barnardos Cymru

12 October 2010

Andrew Cooksley	ACT Training
Richard Newton	Rathbone Cymru

2 November 2010

Linda Badman	Jobcentre Plus Wales
Rowan Foster	Department for Work and Pensions
June Price	Jobcentre Plus Wales

2 November 2010

Leighton Andrews AM	Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning, Welsh Assembly Government
Andrew Clark	Acting Deputy Director, Higher Education and Further Education Policy, Welsh Assembly Government
Teresa Holdsworth	Deputy Director of Business and Skills Division, Welsh Assembly Government

Annex B: List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All written evidence can be viewed in full at

http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-pc-home/pet3_listofinquiries/pet_inq_wbl/pet3_inq_wbl_evidence.htm

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Action for Children	PET(3)-11-10 Paper 1
Barnardo's Cymru	PET(3)-11-10 Paper 2
Jobcentre Plus/Department for Work and Pensions	PET(3)-13-10 Paper 2/PET(3)-15-10 Paper to note
Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning	PET(3)-13-10 Paper 1/PET(3)-15-10 Paper to note
National Training Federation for Wales/ACT Training	PET(3)-12-10 Paper 2
Rathbone Cymru	PET(3)-12-10 Paper 1

Annex C: Consultation Responses

The following people and organisations responded to the call for evidence. All responses can be viewed in full at http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-pc-home/pet3_listofinquiries/pet_inq_wbl/pet_inq_wbl_responses.htm

PET1 Action for Children – Gweithredu Dros Blant

PET2 ACT Training

PET3 Barnardo's Cymru

PET4 Careers Wales

PET5 Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan and Powys

PET6 Children's Commissioner for Wales

PET7 Cymorth Cymru

PET8 Denbighshire 14-19 Network

PET9 The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

PET10 Estyn

PET11 Fairbridge de Cymru

PET12 G4S Care & Justice Services

PET13 ITEC Training Solutions Ltd

PET14 Links-Wales

PET15 Llamau Ltd

PET16 Methyr Tydfil Adult Service/Youth Service

PET17 Neath Port Talbot Youth Service

PET18 Pembrokeshire 14-19 Learning Network

PET19 Prince's Trust Cymru

PET20 Rathbone Cymru

PET21 Senghenydd Youth Drop-in Centre

PET22 Swansea Employment Training

PET23 Vale of Glamorgan Children and Young People Partnership

PET24 Wales Audit Office

PET25 Wales & West Housing Association