



Estyn

Rhagoriaeth i bawb - Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

How well do colleges support industry?

The effectiveness of employer engagement and
the support for industry provided by FE colleges



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APRIL 2010

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

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- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ adult community learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ youth and community work training;
- ▲ local authority education services for children and young people;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies;
- ▲ offender learning; and
- ▲ Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) contracted employment provision in Wales.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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Introduction

- 1 This report has been produced in response to a request in the annual ministerial remit from the Welsh Assembly Government.
- 2 Estyn inspectors visited 13 further education colleges between June and September 2009 to undertake the research for this report. They met with college staff responsible for managing and delivering services to employers as well as senior college staff. Inspectors scrutinised in the detail the feedback from employers about their requirements and about the services provided by colleges. This report also draws on findings from the cyclical inspections of further education colleges.

Background

- 3 Most further education colleges in Wales were created originally as technical colleges to meet the needs of mining, engineering and manufacturing industries. The colleges provided employees with the knowledge and practical skills they needed. In most cases, this was done through part-time courses, usually day release and evening classes, in order to meet the demands of technical apprenticeships. Over time, colleges evolved to meet a much wider range of needs, both of individual learners and employers. Most further education colleges now provide a much wider range of provision and a much higher proportion of vocational and academic courses for full-time learners than in the past. Most learners on these courses are aged 16-19 years.
- 4 Most colleges inspected as part of this survey typically have contacts with between 500 and 2,000 employers. Overall, colleges in Wales report links with over 25,000 employers annually¹. The scale and nature of the links between the employers and colleges vary widely. The main factors influencing the variation in the scale of employer engagement are the location, size and nature of the college as well as the nature of the local industry. Colleges in the heavily-industrialised regions of south-east and north-east Wales have more scope to work with larger employers.

What is employer engagement?

- 5 Employer engagement describes the involvement of employers in developing the skills of the current and future workforce through links with education providers.
- 6 Employer engagement includes colleges:
 - working with employers to improve the work-readiness of learners;
 - delivering training and providing consultancy and related services; and
 - working with employers and other agencies to meet the skill needs of local areas.

¹ The Economic contribution of Further Education in Wales. Seventh Economic Summit 17 July 2009

- 7 Colleges in Wales work with all sizes of employers, from the self employed and micro businesses to large multi-national companies. Colleges also engage with employers through the business members of governing bodies. Business governors make major contributions to the strategic development of colleges as well as informing colleges' strategic plans.
- 8 The then Department of Enterprise, Innovation and Networks (DEIN) commissioned Cardiff University² to investigate the economic impact of the purchasing activity of FE institutions, their staff and students. Scottish Executive-commissioned research showed the return on investment in qualifications³. Combining these two indicators (assuming that FE colleges in Wales are broadly similar to FE colleges in Scotland), they indicate that colleges in Wales contribute an estimated £1.4 billion to the Welsh economy⁴.

Recent publications in Wales and the UK that relate to working with employers

- 9 In 2006, DCELLS commissioned Sir Adrian Webb to conduct a review of post-14 education in Wales. 'Promise and Performance', commonly known as the Webb Review was published in December 2007 and covered the following aspects:
 - developments in 14-19 education and training;
 - responsiveness to the skill needs of employers and the economy;
 - adult learning, social justice, and community engagement;
 - the interface with higher education provision; and
 - responsiveness to the learning, support and advice needs of post-14 learners in Wales.
- 10 In December 2007, 'Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills', commonly known as The Leitch Report after its chairman, Lord Leitch, was published. This report put a strong emphasis on meeting the skills needs of those who were already in employment. It identified that short-term responsiveness needed to link with an understanding of longer term sectoral needs and the sector skills councils⁵ had a key role in establishing the links.
- 11 DCELLS published a strategy document entitled 'Skills that Work for Wales' in July 2008. In part, this was DCELLS' response to the Leitch review. In the aspects of the report that related to employers, DCELLS:
 - reaffirmed its commitment to the basic skills employer pledge;
 - made a commitment to introduce a new sector priorities fund;

² DEIN (January 2007) The Impact of Further Education Institutions on the Economy of Wales

³ Scottish Executive (2006) Review of Scotland's Colleges: Unlocking Opportunity: The Difference Scotland's Colleges Make to Learners, the Economy and the Wider Society

⁴ The Economic Contribution of Further Education in Wales, seventh Economic Summit 17 July 2009

⁵ The 25 Sector Skills Councils in the UK are employer-driven organisations representing 90% of the UK workforce. They co-ordinate policies on skills development in the UK workforce.

- supported the establishment of the Wales Employment and Skills Board to advise on the implementation of strategy; and
 - looked to sector skills councils to represent employers to identify priority skills.
- 12 The Wales Employment and Skills Board was duly established and produced its first report in April 2009. This report emphasises the need for a whole-government approach to transform the economy and to make it ready for post-recession renewal. The report included recommendations to:
- eliminate the basic skills deficit;
 - stimulate the flow of transferrable knowledge with strong support for targeted higher level skills;
 - raise the demand for and the supply of management and leadership skills of high quality in all sectors; and
 - encourage the Welsh Assembly Government to work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to tackle unemployment⁶.
- 13 The report recognises the difficulty arising because 'skills' are a devolved matter in Wales, while employment is not.

⁶ The Department of Work and Pensions co-ordinates schemes to assist unemployed people to find work.

Main findings

- 14 Many colleges in Wales are good at working with employers. They are particularly good at:
- managing strategic partnerships with large employers;
 - responding quickly and effectively to new training initiatives and working with employers to deliver them;
 - delivering work-based learning of high quality; and
 - delivering basic skills training to large employers in ways that meet the needs of the employer as well as those of the employees.
- 15 A few colleges manage employer engagement particularly effectively through a service unit dedicated to employer engagement. These colleges place a strong focus on meeting the training and development needs of employers holistically. They also have managers who understand the training needs of local employers well.
- 16 Colleges are not so good at:
- making sure that staff teaching vocational subjects keep up-to-date with current industrial practice;
 - consulting systematically with employers about how their services to employers could be improved;
 - making sure that employers can contact the staff responsible for employer liaison easily;
 - promoting their services to employers through their web-sites;
 - delivering services to employers throughout the year; and
 - making sure that all learners on vocational courses get first-hand experience of working life in the relevant vocational sector, and develop appropriate employability skills.

Recommendations

Colleges should:

- R1 make sure that departmental managers across the college are all responsive to employers' needs;
- R2 communicate more regularly and effectively with employers so they have easy and effective ways to contact relevant college staff;
- R3 promote their services to employers more systematically, for example, through their websites;
- R4 share and implement good practice in the way colleges identify and respond to employers' needs for training and related services;
- R5 establish systematic arrangements for gauging employers' views about college services and feed them systematically into annual self-assessment arrangements;
- R6 make sure they can respond to employers' needs by providing training throughout the year and not only in term-time;
- R7 make sure that all learners on vocational courses get first-hand experience of working life in a vocational sector and develop employability skills; and
- R8 provide staff with structured opportunities to undertake industrial secondments.

The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- R9 review the ways in which the Employer Pledge is offered so that colleges and other providers can use it improve the basic skills needs of employees in small organisations; and
- R10 make employers' training needs a priority.

How well do colleges engage with employers?

- 17 Most of the larger colleges in Wales have very good practices in engaging with employers and have close strategic partnerships with large employers as well as providing good services for many other employers. Other colleges are good at working with employers in a limited range of sectors. About a third of the colleges inspected have strong strategic relationships with employers. In these cases, the colleges and employers work together to on long-term strategic plans for training that are based on projected skills and staffing needs.
- 18 In a minority of colleges, contact between the college and employers is more irregular and often largely responsive to external initiatives, such as the availability of new funding opportunities. Only about half the colleges visited identify improving the skills of the workforce and contributing to economic prosperity as a priority in their strategic plans.
- 19 College staff who provide vocational training courses do not always recognise fully enough that employers require skill development that will improve the performance of the organisation. Employers do not set the desire of employees to gain qualifications as a high priority. Successful engagement with employers often requires a change in culture amongst the staff of the college to recognise the needs of the employer rather than the employee as the primary client.

How do colleges manage their services for employers?

- 20 Colleges in Wales have widely different arrangements for responding to the needs of employers. About half of the colleges inspected have some form of business or employer unit that is primarily responsible for employer engagement. Generally, the larger colleges are more likely to have a dedicated unit for employer engagement. The primary role of the business unit is to respond to the needs of employers. The units normally have dedicated telephone lines and feature in a separate section on the college's website. The business unit markets its services separately from the provision for individual learners. In many, but not all, cases, the college's business unit is also responsible for the management and delivery of the college's work-based learning contract. This benefits employers, as all employer-related services go through the same unit. In other colleges, each department or faculty is responsible for responding to employers' needs. The effectiveness of these arrangements is dependent on the priority placed on responding to employers' needs by departmental managers and this often varies too much even between departments in the same college.
- 21 In most cases, college managers are sensitive to employers' needs. They have up-to-date knowledge of the training needs of employers in the relevant sector and they know what the college can deliver well. Colleges that have managers with these skills respond speedily to new funding opportunities and are able to provide services tailored to the needs of the local employers. However, in other colleges, the links between the college staff and local employers are not embedded well enough within the working practices of the college. In these cases, the arrangements for keeping employers up-to-date with new or revised training opportunities are often not systematic enough.

Case study: Good practice in managing employers' needs

The Business Point Centre at Coleg Llandrillo is based in a business park and serves as a one-stop shop for employers and the services that they need. Staff in the centre do training needs analyses, advise on funding for training, and provide customised training packages to suit specific business needs. The centre also acts as an agency to promote the college's specialist training facilities, for example in motor industry technology as well as providing conference facilities. The centre provides an effective personalised approach to employer engagement.

How do colleges promote their services to employers?

- 22 Many colleges have good arrangements for keeping in regular contact with local employers. In the best practice, staff make regular phone calls or send newsletters of new or revised products via email or through a link to an employer-specific part of their website. As a result, the college keeps employers in the area up-to-date with any new funding, training and service opportunities. In a few large colleges, departments take on the role of keeping employers in particular sectors informed about any changes in training opportunities. These departments, particularly in the engineering and manufacturing sectors, are often very proactive in anticipating any potential changes in employers' training needs as well as alerting employers to new funding opportunities. These arrangements work well in relation to the sectors that the departments liaise with.
- 23 A few colleges arrange special events, such as a principal's dinner or working breakfasts, to promote their services. These are often effective in promoting the colleges' services to employers with whom the college has previously not had much contact. However, a minority of colleges do not market the services that the college provides to employers well enough.
- 24 Many colleges have good promotional materials on short courses suitable for individual employees. They also often use their website to promote provision suitable for individuals who, for example, are eligible to apply for funding through the Welsh Assembly Government's React scheme for training people who have recently been made redundant.

Meeting the training needs of employers and employees

- 25 Many colleges do direct work with employers' staff through a wide range of short courses that often lead to recognised qualifications. The most frequent kinds of training include short courses in marketing, health and safety, food safety, first aid, forklift truck training, customer service, security and management courses. Many of these courses are often delivered on the college's premises. These courses are often promoted well to individuals and to employees through their employer. In many cases, employers pay the course tuition fees, particularly when they have identified the employees' need for the training. However, other employers are often reluctant to pay tuition fees, particularly for full-cost courses, where the training, in their view, does not have an immediate impact on the effectiveness or productivity of their organisation. A few colleges claim that employers are reluctant to offer training that leads to qualifications as this can improve the attractiveness of staff to other employers who are reluctant to pay the cost of training themselves.
- 26 Courses leading to qualifications are often open to all learners and these allow employees from many different types of organisations to attend classes together and to share experiences and best practices.
- 27 Many employees enrolled on NVQ courses do most of their training in the workplace. This happens most frequently in the care and childcare sectors. In these cases, assessors visit learners to assess their competence in the workplace and to provide

support to learners in assembling portfolios of evidence. Staff who do this work often have a very good understanding of the training needs of employers in these sectors. A few colleges do very little of this kind of training but for most colleges this is a significant part of their core business, especially in work based learning.

- 28 Most colleges deliver a range of services to employers where the employer pays the full cost of the course without any subsidy from the funds that colleges receive from the government. These are often described as full-cost recovery courses. In many cases, these are courses that lead to qualifications that staff need to be registered as competent practitioners in particular sectors. These include accredited courses in gas fitting, electrical installation and solar energy installation. In a few cases, colleges specialise in the delivery of these kinds of training to particular sectors, for example in the aerospace industry. One college delivers a range of self-study programmes in aerospace via the internet to learners in the United Kingdom and overseas. In other areas, colleges deliver training in the workplace in programmes designed and delivered in conjunction with employers. A few of these programmes are supported by Proact funds when the employees are at risk of redundancy.

Arrangements for identifying employers' training needs

- 29 Many colleges have good systems for identifying and responding to employers' training needs. A few of the colleges inspected have a dedicated phone line as well as arrangements for employers to make enquiries via the college website. Colleges also make good use of current labour market information through their links with Jobcentre Plus, the local careers service, DCELLS and major employers. They use this information well to identify changing needs in the area.
- 30 A few colleges have developed good systems for logging all enquiries by telephone and email. They use this information systematically to plan, design and promote new provision. A few colleges have done this particularly well in response to the opportunity created by Proact funding.
- 31 Many colleges have good arrangements for consulting with local employers through focus groups or consultative committees that are sector-specific. These are often very proactive groups that help the college to identify emerging trends in the sector and related training requirements. These are also a useful way for college managers to find out employers' opinions on the college provision. In a few cases, the college's governing body also has some form of business and economic development committee that keeps a strategic oversight of this aspect of the college's work. However, in many colleges, the arrangements for consulting employers and their representative bodies are often not systematic enough. In a few cases, employer advisory groups are organised on a faculty or departmental basis rather than on a sector-specific basis and they try to cover too wide a range of employers' needs. As a result, these colleges often do not have enough specific information about what employers' training needs are in particular sectors or what they are likely to be in the near future.

College links with specific groups of employers

- 32 Many colleges have good operational links with the relevant sectors skills councils (SSCs). In a few cases, senior managers require departments and faculties to give

regular and detailed reports on their engagement with the relevant SSC. Many colleges also have staff who are members of a variety of Welsh, regional and local panels in a wide variety of industrial sectors. In a number of occupational areas, Colegau Cymru/Colleges Wales⁷ organise regular meetings between the SSC and college representatives. These are particularly effective in the landbased, engineering and construction sectors. However, in many areas, college staff do not keep in touch with SSC staff regularly enough.

Case study: Good practice in helping companies to innovate

The technology innovation centre at Coleg Menai gives employers access to the latest technology and expertise as well as to various opportunities for financial support for companies who want to innovate. The centre aims to be the link between expertise and industry in the engineering sector and works with partners in Ireland, supported by European structural funds, as part of a technology transfer partnership to assist the development of an innovative outlook amongst small and medium-sized employers and entrepreneurs across the two countries. They tailor the service to the needs of each company or individual entrepreneur. The centre works with an increasing number of companies in the region. In a few cases, companies have reduced their manufacturing costs significantly as a result of adopting innovative practices.

- 33 Liaison groups and meetings offer good opportunities to identify specific needs
Pembrokeshire College has recently set up liaison groups with employers in growth areas, such as the energy and tourism areas, in order to link the college with the sectors' priority growth areas. Many other colleges also host regular meetings for local and regional employer groups. These are often very useful as colleges use them to identify the changing needs of groups of employers in particular sectors.
- 34 Productive relationships with local employers can sometimes lead to employers providing colleges with other benefits, such as sponsorship for selected full-time learners on specific courses in construction and engineering. The sponsors often provide financial support, but also provide sponsored learners with extensive, paid work placements during the college holiday periods.

⁷ Colegau Cymru/Colleges Wales is the representative body of further education institutions in Wales. Prior to 2009 it was named Fforwm.

Feedback from employers

- 35 Many colleges carry out extensive surveys of employers who have regular contact with the college. Some survey mainly employers with whom they engage on work-based learning programmes. Others use on-course evaluations following training courses as well as email contacts and telephone calls to find out employers' views.
- 36 For larger employers, colleges, or departments within colleges, will often call a formal meeting with company training officers or hold employers' events designed to gather feedback. In a few cases, colleges invite employers into the college to observe their employees doing practical training. They then take these opportunities to seek the views of the employer on the quality of the training. A few colleges consult employers as part of their internal self-assessment of the quality of provision in the college.
- 37 A minority of the colleges inspected analyse the findings from many kinds of feedback and use them to improve the quality of their provision and as well as to inform self-assessment reports and quality development plans. In about half of the colleges, around half of employers usually respond to surveys, but it can be much lower. However, many colleges do not hold good enough information on the rate and quality of feedback from employers. They often try to get a better response by a variety of means, including hand delivery of questionnaires, a personal request for completion, the supply of a pre-paid envelope and other incentives, such as participation in prize draws. Colleges generally find that employers express a high level of satisfaction with the training provided when they reply. However, too many employers do not reply, and this undermines the colleges' efforts to improve the service it provides to meet the needs of employers. A few colleges do not have systematic arrangements for consulting with employers about the nature of the services they provide or how satisfied employers are with them.
- 38 A few colleges have identified employers' most common concerns and they include the following:
- Lack of information from colleges at the outset about the design and requirements of programmes;
 - unannounced changes to rooms and inadequate availability of IT facilities;
 - lack of feedback on the progress of apprentices when attending the college, including their attendance and timekeeping;
 - the excessive cost of courses;
 - the lack of flexibility in the times of training events and inability to meet the needs of employees doing shift work;
 - not enough understanding of employers' organisational needs; and
 - lack of information about who to contact at the college in relation to specific queries.

- 39 Most colleges take speedy action to address specific issues raised by employers. Where employers express concerns about the nature of the apprenticeship framework, most colleges encourage employers to contact the relevant sector skills council. Other responses by colleges to meet employer demand include:
- running training programmes during vacations when the college does not run courses for full-time learners; and
 - improving the arrangements for learners' progress reviews so that employers get direct feedback on learners' progress and achievements during their off-the-job training.

Case study: Good practice in using feedback from employers

A member of staff in Coleg Gwent researched existing systems for collecting feedback from employers in the college. The research identified that the college needed a wider range of methods for gaining employers' perceptions of college services. These include the following:

- regular meetings between senior college staff and employers in particular sectors;
- college staff involvement and leadership in local and national networks in particular industrial sectors,
- college links with employer pressure groups;
- regular visits of assessors and other college staff to learners on WBL programmes; and
- employer involvement in college awards events and student sponsorships.

Work-based learning in the college sector

- 40 Colleges are generally very responsive to the needs of employers in devising patterns of work-based training to meet the particular needs of the employer and learners. As a result, colleges provide off-the-job training in a variety of ways. While the Welsh Assembly Government funds most work-based learning, most colleges also deliver work-based learning funded by employers themselves. Colleges hold contracts for about 22% of the work-based training managed by the Welsh Assembly Government. The FE sector receives about 5% of its income through direct work-based learning contracts. Many colleges also provide a lot of training through sub contracting arrangements with other training providers. The number of work-based learners in colleges dropped by 4% between 2006-2007, compared with an overall drop of 15% across all providers of work-based learning. Estyn reports show that the standards of work-based learning delivered in most colleges are good and are often outstanding.
- 41 In certain sectors, such as care, colleges arrange drop-in evening or weekend workshops for learners whose employers do not allow any formal release from work. In other areas, colleges provide both on-the-job and off-the-job training in the workplace. Many use a virtual learning environment well to complement more traditional styles of delivery. A few colleges deliver off-the-job training throughout the year. However, a minority only offer off-the-job training during college term time. As a result, learners involved in this mode of training do not have enough continuity in their off-the-job training during college holidays.
- 42 Most colleges have taken up enthusiastically the opportunity to become involved in the pilot scheme for Pathways to Apprenticeships in 2009-2010. This scheme allows school leavers who cannot find jobs to spend an intensive year training full-time at a college in order to gain the knowledge and skill that they will require for successful completion of an apprenticeship.

Case study: Good practice in developing work based learning frameworks

A few colleges work closely with local employers to devise new ways to meet their training needs. For example, Deeside College received an enquiry from a local paper manufacturing company in relation to meeting their training needs locally. Learners in this company previously had to travel to Germany to do more advanced training in paper manufacturing that was unavailable in the UK. The college was instrumental in bringing the three local paper manufacturing companies together and facilitating a meeting with the relevant sector skills council and officers from DCELLS to plan and design a new apprenticeship training programme that could be delivered locally through a partnership between the college and the local paper manufacturing companies. As a result, learners in these companies can do their training locally at a much lower cost to the employers.

- 43 Most colleges visited as part of this survey find that they cannot meet in full the demand for training from employers through their current contract for delivering work-based learning. This is because they can only provide training up to a certain value, which is determined by its contract with DCELLS. As a result, many colleges deliver courses such as those leading to technical certificates through the further education funding route. Thus they deliver more than the designated contract that they hold for work-based learning. This enables more learners to benefit from work-based learning.

Colleges' response to the basic skills needs of employees

- 44 Many colleges enthusiastically took up the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Assembly Government's Basic Skills Strategy: 'Words Talk, Numbers Count'. The overall aim of the strategy is to reduce the substantial number of adults in Wales with poor literacy and numeracy skills. The Employer Pledge is an important part of this strategy, and private and public sector companies in Wales are encouraged to participate in the scheme. The Employer Pledge seeks to help employers improve the basic skills of their employees.
- 45 Many colleges have worked with employers to identify the nature and scale of their employees' needs in basic skills in relation to job roles and company procedures. They have then helped them to write their action plans for the delivery of basic skills training.
- 46 The majority of colleges have delivered some aspects of basic skills training very successfully to a range of employers. The most successful aspects are often awareness- raising sessions, tasters and basic skills training that is targeted closely to the specific needs of employers, for example 'Maths for Nurses' delivered for a NHS trust and report writing for many public sector organisations. Many colleges have found that training based on health and safety has worked well with caretakers and maintenance staff as the learners have understood the relevance of the training to their own work. Other successes have included training in food hygiene, numeracy for pesticide use, and literacy through learning computing skills. In these cases, the training was focused successfully on the work of the individual and their employers.

Case study: Innovative practice in basic skills delivery

The learndirect team at Coleg Gwent worked in partnership with the basic skills department within the college to provide a local food manufacturing business with a comprehensive staff training solution. The programme, delivered through learndirect and supported by college's basic skills staff, focused on English language and basic literacy needs. The company employs over 830 employees covering more than 20 different nationalities. A programme was required to deliver training in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and to provide a progression route for employees to further develop their skills. A learning centre was set up on-site and the training programme delivered combined learndirect, ESOL and basic literacy and numeracy courses with tailored tutor-led content from the college staff.

- 47 Many colleges help employers to make applications for Employer Pledge funding and to write their action plans for training. In many cases, they provide basic skills support for learners who are following NVQ programmes. This support helps learners to understand the NVQ process and helps them to put their portfolios of evidence together.

- 48 Colleges have generally been successful in delivering the Employer Pledge Action Plan with large employers, particularly those in the public sector, where training can be delivered efficiently to a group of learners with broadly similar needs. Many colleges have also developed very useful customised learning materials for their work on delivering the Employer Pledge.
- 49 Colleges find that the funding for the delivery of the Employer Pledge is not always sufficient to cover the costs of helping employers to write action plans, to make applications for grants and to deliver the identified training. They find it particularly difficult to plan and deliver cost-effective courses for smaller employers whose employees often have very diverse job roles and complex shift patterns.
- 50 Most colleges provide good basic skills support for learners on work-based learning programmes. This support not only assists the learners to gain the required level of key skills for completion of the apprenticeship framework, but also helps them to improve their literacy and numeracy skills more generally. Colleges provide more extensive basic skills support for young learners on Skillbuild programmes as colleges identify that lack of basic skills is a major factor in reducing learners' employability⁸.

React and Proact support schemes

- 51 React and Proact are schemes designed by the Welsh Assembly Government to support training during the recession. The Redundancy Action Scheme (React) is a programme of funding for training provided by the Welsh Assembly Government for people living in Wales who are facing redundancy. It provides funding for individuals who have either been made redundant recently or who are at risk of redundancy.
- 52 Many colleges promote short training courses that meet the conditions of the React scheme and are available throughout the year. They work well with local careers advisers to develop training that meets the needs of people who have been made redundant.
- 53 A few colleges have taken a very positive approach to the opportunity for people who have been made redundant to re-train in another area. They have identified the areas where there are employment opportunities locally and put together an innovative package of learning that provides many of the underpinning skills that are desirable in the vocational area. For example, one college put together a package of IT skills for business-related employment, and first aid and health and safety courses for people looking for employment in the care sector. The college has tailored these programmes carefully to meet the constraints of the React funding regime and marketed them through job centres and careers services as well as through companies who are making staff redundant.
- 54 Proact is designed as a measure to help companies with re-skilling and up-skilling employees when they are experiencing downturns in demand for their products and services. It is specifically intended to up-skill staff affected by short-time working in companies that face the threat to redundancies.

⁸ Skillbuild is a work-based learning programme mainly for young people who have little idea of a career aim and few employability skills.

Case study: Retraining of staff in industry

The engineering and built environment faculty at Coleg Sir Gar has been particularly successful and was delivering training under Proact to 15 companies in the manufacturing sector in September 2009. Most of the training provided employees with qualifications in Business Improvement Techniques (BIT) as well specialised technical training. The college has trained senior staff in the companies to deliver a lot of the training. Nearly all the training is delivered on the companies' premises and leads to qualifications that are all nationally accredited.

Preparing learners for employment

- 55 Nearly all full-time learners on vocational courses have some form of work-related education incorporated into their courses. This frequently involves learners undertaking weekly or block placements with employers in the relevant sector. However, in an increasing number of colleges, largely as a response to increasing health and safety requirements on employers, colleges only arrange employer-based work experience for those learners who are required to do it as a compulsory part of their courses. In most cases, the colleges deliver work-related education by other means. This works reasonably well when the college has extensive realistic working environments of high quality within their own premises, and they can use these to train learners to develop vocational and customer care skills. However, these arrangements do not fully meet learners' needs in preparing them for the challenges and demands of employment in the particular sector.
- 56 Colleges have varying arrangements for managing the links with employers in relation to work placements. Many have a central database in order to co-ordinate learner placements and to reduce the burden on employers. Others make arrangements through individual departments, but provide clear guidance and staff development on college procedures, especially in relation to health and safety, and safeguarding procedures. Most colleges keep all records of work placement activities on an employer database. Most of the colleges visited provide employers with good information about the purposes and objectives of the placement as well as the expected outcomes. In these colleges, the learners are given a thorough briefing on the expected standards of behaviour and conduct while at an employer's premises.
- 57 In a few cases, colleges make innovative use of European Union structural funds to work closely with employers to give learners more experience of the international context of their industry. They arrange overseas placements with sister companies for learners on full-time and work-based learning apprenticeship programmes.
- 58 Colleges often arrange a wide programme of industrial visits in the UK and overseas for learners and encourage them to take part in Young Enterprise competitions. These help learners to gain a better understanding of the ways in which companies operate. Learners often also work on projects and organise events, both within the college and for external agencies.
- 59 About half of colleges visited deliver customised training in employability skills to learners on a few vocational courses. They have done this in response to employers' concerns that new recruits have good technical skills, but often lack the appropriate personal skills, attitudes and behaviours to succeed in the workplace. Many of the colleges have invested heavily in the training of their own staff to deliver employability training. However, the inclusion of employability skills in the curriculum is not a consistent feature across colleges in Wales. Even in colleges that have introduced it, it is often delivered on a limited number of vocational courses.

Keeping staff up-to-date with industrial practice

- 60 A few colleges visited have good formal arrangements for supporting staff to spend up to three weeks in industry each year. In a few cases, particularly in the engineering sector, they work closely with employers to make sure that staff have the opportunity to learn about the most up-to-date practices in the sector. In other sectors, such as catering, staff often work with learners at prestige events. Colleges often arrange for staff to visit other colleges that are recognised as sector leaders in order to learn about best practice.
- 61 Many colleges have found that a minority of staff are reluctant to undertake industrial placement of more than one or two days. These short placements are often arranged through the local education business partnership. However, placements of this duration are not enough for staff to learning fully about changing industrial practices although the placements do raise awareness.
- 62 In most colleges, many part-time staff currently work in industry on a full-time or a part-time basis and they use their knowledge and skills well when teaching about their industry. In a few colleges, full-time and part-time staff do consultancy or commercial work, or both, as part of their duties.
- 63 In many colleges, annual staff appraisals have led to more extensive industrial secondments for some staff.
- 64 Many staff are members of relevant professional associations and get useful information from their respective associations that helps them to keep up-to-date with changes in industrial practice.

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