

**National Assembly for Wales, Children and Young People Committee
Consultation on the
Further and Higher Education (Governance and Information) (Wales) Bill
Written Comments from CITB Cymru Wales (Construction Industry Training
Board**

1. Introduction

1.1

CITB is a social enterprise, devoted to building competitive advantage for the construction industry and the people who work in it ensuring that individuals have the skills to compete for the best jobs and develop fulfilling careers. That companies have a highly skilled workforce that gives them a USP in their sector. The industry has the skills to meet its clients' needs and future challenges. That UK plc has an industry that is world class and can compete with the best on the world stage. CITB Cymru Wales retains its role as a lead partner in ConstructionSkills as an SSC serving Construction. At the Committee's invitation, CITB Cymru Wales will be giving oral evidence to the Children and Young People Committee on 13 June 2013. The following written comments are submitted in support of this.

2. Context

2.1

The Welsh Government published its White Paper on the Further and Higher Education (Wales) Bill in July 2012 setting out proposals for legislative reform relating to both the Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) sectors in Wales. The outcome of the consultation was two-fold: (a) the Further and Higher Education (Governance and Information) (Wales) Bill, which was laid before the National Assembly for Wales on 29 April 2013, and (b) the Higher Education (Wales) Bill consultation document, which was published on 20 May 2013. The main proposals in relation to higher education were set out in the latter, which is currently under consultation until 29 July 2013. The Further & Higher Education (Governance and Information) (Wales) Bill primarily set out proposals in relation to Further Education. Two provisions in particular, however, were of relevance to higher education: Section 7 (deregulation of student numbers) and Section 9 (information supply). HEW's comments accordingly focus on these two provisions and the more general implications for higher education arising from these proposals.

3. Responses to the recommendations.

HE Reform

3.1 The recommendation that the Welsh Government is committed to developing a strategic and forward thinking HE sector in Wales which will form a stronger part of both society and the economy is welcomed as is a recognition that Higher Education has an important part to play in the up skilling of the Construction Industry within a rapidly changing environment and economic climate.

- 3.2 The recommendation that ministers wish to create a system of HE which consists of fewer, stronger HEIs able both to compete internationally in terms of research and student experience and to develop an internationally competitive economy around them needs to be taken in the context of patchy overall provision for the Construction industry across Wales with HEI's offering high quality varied provision in some parts of Wales and in other parts of the country such as North and Mid Wales little or limited provision is and has historically been available with companies looking to North West England or the Midlands for provision.
- 3.3 The recommendation that an efficient, modern and effective system of governance at national and institutional level is central to driving improvement and delivering a dynamic and responsive system of HE in Wales to develop competitiveness the needs of a modern, knowledge-based, globally competitive economy is welcomed. It is essential that this improved governance model includes a significant input from industry on both a regional (local) and national Wales level to ensure that provision meets both identified and perceived local needs and that needless duplication is avoided especially in areas where a high number of providers operate.

4. Proposals for FE

- 4.1 The Further Education Sector in Wales has traditionally been an important provider of Higher Level Education, mainly at levels 4 and 5 HNC/NHD provision for the Construction Sector. The sector generally has credibility and support amongst employers and has shown a willingness to innovate with the development of Foundation Degrees, Sustainability and Green Skills provision and part time courses.
- 4.2 In the light of the above comments it must be stated that Construction provision is expensive and that independent control of College Finances could either be a positive or negative factor in the maintenance of current provision or development of additional new provision depending on the interests of Senior Managers and Governors. The need for well informed and influential representation from the Construction Industry on the new revised Governing Bodies of Colleges would be crucial to this success of reform and to ensure that 'expensive' specialist provision continues and thrives.
- 4.3 Further Education has a key part to play on the development of Higher Apprenticeships. The funding issues which exist with regards to the funding and issue of qualifications at level 4 and above as outlined in SASW (Specifications of Apprenticeship Standards Wales) potentially put the development of Higher Apprenticeships at risk. A solution which may include devolvement of funding directly to FE requires urgent consideration as it is foreseen that skills at these higher levels will be key to driving the industry forward post-recession. It is perceived that Construction related courses HE and FE are 'at risk' across the UK due to the current down turn and cost of provision. This is potentially damaging to the industry's future
- 4.4 The comments that planning and providing professional development for staff including developing specialist vocational courses as well as strengthening quality assurance and management systems exploring the potential for in-company corporate training and the up-skilling workers and technicians are to be welcomed though significant challenges remain for the FE sector is balancing the need for economically viable specialist provision with college budget restraints as such provision though economically important are likely to draw small numbers of participants. Increased autonomy with a lack of central coordination could lead to a situation where a 'post code lottery' of provision will exist across Wales which would not benefit industry.

5 Provision capping and Planning

- 5.1 Accepting the statement *'Thus the Welsh Government is committed to preserving the principle that the state will subsidise HE and maintain opportunities for all. However, in so there is a need to control the total cost of HE to the Government's budget. This will be achieved through arrangements to cap the number of publicly funded student places in Wales'* the effective planning and implementation of this policy will be key to the success of this Bill from the point of view of the industry. A balance will need to be achieved between the provision available and the needs of the industry for highly skilled workers.
- 5.2 The use of local, national and even international LMI data and intelligence should be an important part of the planning and capping process. This process through employer input at the appropriate level in governance can be made more effective and difficult decisions made on the basis of robust information. Employment and employability should play a key part in this decision making.
- 5.3 The Welsh Government will therefore seek a provision in the Bill to enable HE provision to be funded directly by Welsh Ministers in instances where it is strategically appropriate to do so. By way of example, such a power could be used by the Welsh Government to tackle any significant failures to meet identified employer needs and learner demand in identified priorities.

6. General

Subject to the comments above CITB Cymru Wales recognises and supports the main driving principle behind the proposals for deregulation of Further Education institutions to allow greater autonomy in the sector and ensure that, for purposes of public accounting, they are not regarded as central government. Though Restructuring the sector alone will not solve all provision issues with regards to the Construction Industry in Wales as where there are areas of little or no historic provision, credibility within in industry will take time.

CITB Cymru Wales
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