

Developing a policy for the future of the Further Education Sector in Wales

6th Form supplement or FE for everyone?

Wales needs a policy for Further Education

The University and College Union (UCU) is the largest post 16 education trade union in the UK. As part of this wider organisation, UCU Wales represents over 7,000 lecturers in Further and Higher Education in Wales.

We campaign for greater public investment in the post 16 education sector, as well as fair pay and decent working conditions for our members.

Further and Higher education is vital for individual development, social mobility and a successful economy. Learning benefits people of all ages in terms of employability, wellbeing, personal development and self-confidence.

Colleges and universities are key economic contributors, both as local employers and as providers of training and education for the workforce on which local and Welsh economies depend.

To realise its full potential to society, education and training must be adequately funded and fully accessible. Policy should be based on the premise that Schools, Further Education providers and Universities *collectively* help to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty by providing both opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and a 'second chance' for older people to help them exit low pay.

Policy for Further Education

UCU Wales call for there to be a commitment to developing a robust policy for further education. Whilst we recognise the commitment and desire to fund other areas of the education sector to improve quality, tackle poverty and meet employer demands, this current the lack of policy for the Further Education Sector is creating a black hole in which poverty thrives.

This paper sets out reasons for the need to develop a distinct policy for further education in Wales.

To provide second and subsequent learning chances

Traditionally, further education has provided second chance opportunities to adults who for whatever reason, did not achieve their potential at school. There are many bright, but late developers, who without further education, would not be making the positive contribution to Wales that they are now. The ability and need to gain qualifications for life does not stop at 19 years old. Opportunities to access a wide range of qualifications, at differing levels will become increasingly important as the working population ages, resulting in perhaps several career changes throughout working life. Supporting older people to maintain and enhance their potential value to society will be of increasing significance to policy development of the future.

- **To help tackle poverty**

Much emphasis has been placed on early years intervention and improving attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals. However evidence of the success of such intervention is patchy and points toward the effects of early intervention programmes being short lived and not sufficient to close the long-term attainment gap for disadvantaged children. Low educational attainment of parents, affects their children's development and progress at school. Further Education supports an approach to family learning that enables all family members to enhance their learning and can support whole families who are vulnerable to poverty.

- **To help reduce reliance on welfare**

Poverty is caused by low paid work as well as unemployment. Enabling more working people to gain access to qualifications, which will assist them out of in-work poverty, should take equal priority. We recognise the desire for employers to provide funding for the 'up-skilling' for their employees and agree that they should take responsibility for financing the acquisition of skills and qualifications that will directly benefit their business. However, this is likely to leave many employees 'trapped', where the qualifications they need to change jobs to gain better pay and therefore reduce the need for 'in-work' benefits, are not funded by the employer and are too costly to fund themselves.

- **Promoting equality, social mobility and community cohesion.**

Poverty reduces opportunities and makes social mobility more difficult. Poverty is also associated with poor health and worklessness, which can separate people from mainstream society. Current proposals to reduce the budget for part time courses by 50%, is likely to have disproportionate effect on women. In 2012-13 58% of all unique part time enrolments in FE were women and 59% of part time learners over 19, were women domiciled in deprived areas.

- **To assist in delivering high quality apprenticeships**

We support moves to improve the quality and status of apprenticeship programmes in Wales and welcome the desire to create parity between the value of vocational and academic qualifications. Further education, with its teams of highly skilled and qualified vocational staff, is uniquely placed to provide the off-site training and education required to help realise this ambition.

- **To assist the delivery of HE in FE**

In line with the widening access agenda, we recognise the need for the growth of the provision of accessible, higher level qualifications. Investment in further education will be key to this vision, in order to enable staff in FE colleges access to appropriate CPD and

manageable workloads, that allow them to deliver the quality of provision expected at higher levels.

- **To ensure appropriate continuous professional development.**

In order for further education to recruit and retain highly motivated and qualified 'dual professionals', to deliver the quality of teaching and learning required. Policy development needs to focus on a framework that sets out the quality and level of CPD required. This should be a practitioner led approach, based on pedagogic principles and professional need, similar to the New Deal being developed for teachers in schools. However, for FE it must contain access to appropriate industrial updates and development.

- **To assist the implementation of the Programme for Government**

In addition to the strands of the Programme for Government already touched upon, a clear policy for the further education sector would assist in the efficiency and co-ordination of a wide range of initiatives. There is an implied reliance on the FE sector to support programmes such as Jobs Growth Wales, Basic Skills development, Welsh Language, changes to the provision for Addition Learning Needs and no doubt, to implement some of the recommendations from the Donaldson review of the Curriculum. It is clear that the sector is seen as having an important part to play in many areas of Welsh life and as such is worthy of robust policy to define and protect its role in the collective provision of lifelong learning for everyone.

The role of further education is far more than a vocational extension of 6th Form provision. It is a lifeline for many adults to improved health and wellbeing, as well as enhanced employment opportunities. It can be a tool for addressing economic and political needs, but it also empowers individuals to shape their own destiny.

If we are to develop a vibrant economy in Wales, that will be ready to tackle the unknown challenges ahead, we need investment in a high quality, lifelong education at all levels. We need a system that can prepare and support all citizens through the challenges that each life stage brings, so that we can nurture creative and cohesive communities and flexible workforce.

Promoting equality, social mobility, community cohesion and tackling poverty.

Further education provides second chance opportunities to adults who, for whatever reason, did not achieve their potential at school. There are many bright, but late developers, who without further education, would not be making the positive contribution to Wales that they are now. The ability to gain and need qualifications for life does not stop at 19 years old. Opportunities to access a wide range of qualifications, at differing levels will become increasingly important as the working population ages, resulting in perhaps several career changes throughout working life. Supporting older people to maintain and enhance their potential value to society will be of increasing significance to policy development of the future.

The latest statistics available,¹ show that in 2012-13, there were 156,335 unique enrolments, on Further Education programmes. 67% of these were people over the age of 19 years; a clear indication that there is demand for education for adults, outside of compulsory schooling and higher education and yet there is no clear policy in Wales for the direction of this valuable service. Current policy, on the whole, is aimed at the education and training of those aged 19 and under, as illustrated by the publication of the Welsh government's "Qualified for Life" document in October 2014. We would argue that this is at the peril of ignoring the needs of the 105,015 adults over the age of 19 who enrolled in FE in 2012-13. The number of enrolments of those over the age of 19, appears to make a nonsense of the current emphasis for Further Education provision to be focussed on full time programmes of learning for those up to 19 years. We are concerned that we risk of losing a vital pool of untapped Welsh talent if there is no policy to safeguard the provision of Further Education for adults.

Further to this the majority of unique enrolments to part time courses was 69%. 87% of whom were over 19 and 58% of the total number of part time enrolments were female. The current proposals to cut the budget for part time provision in Further education will therefore have a disproportionate effect on women. Contrary to the Government of Wales Act (2006), equality of opportunity for all people will fail to be secured, with current budget arrangements.

Poverty reduces opportunities and makes social mobility more difficult. Poverty is also associated with poor health and worklessness, which can separate people from mainstream society. In 2012- 13 59% of part time learners over 19, were women domiciled in deprived areas. In terms of the Welsh Government 'Tackling Poverty' agenda, this is an indication of the vital contribution that Further Education makes.

There has been much emphasis on the reduction of NEETS, those not in employment, education or training. The Welsh Government's Youth Guarantee, emphasises the needs of those aged 16-19, however the number of NEETs aged

¹ <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Further-Education/UniqueLearnersEnrolledFurtherEducationInstitutions-by-Deprivation-Gender-Age>

19-24 is higher². At the end of 2013, 10.5% of 16-18 year olds were NEET and yet the figure for those aged 19-24 stood at 21.2%. Further Education could play an important role in assisting in the development of opportunities for NEETS, particularly the older age range, but this would require a policy for Further Education which distinguished its role from that of merely supplementary 6th form provision and reinforce the value of the FE sector as a unique provider of lifelong training and education for all.

In-work poverty in particular is becoming a reality for more and more adults in Wales. This group in particular will be hit the hardest by current funding decisions as they will find themselves unable to access the education they need to improve their employment opportunities elsewhere. Research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation³ show that in Wales, although the proportion of low income families has changed little, the proportion of working families living in low income households has risen steadily.

Working adults who cannot afford to fund themselves, will find they restricted to training that is deemed suitable by employers, which may not be the training required to get the employee into better paid employment. Further to this, employers may be unwilling or unable to plug the gap left by the withdrawal of Welsh Government funding. Funding cuts will also mean that in order to try and lessen the impact, colleges will have to pare down their provision and raise course fees, meaning that fewer courses will be available and those that are may be cost prohibitive for many; further limiting educational opportunities available to low paid adults. In terms of tackling poverty and improving the economy of Wales, is counterproductive.

Much emphasis has been placed on early years intervention and improving attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals. However evidence of the success of such intervention is patchy and points toward the effects of early intervention programmes being short lived and not sufficient to close the long-term attainment gap for disadvantaged children. Low educational attainment of parents, affects their children's development and progress at school. Further Education supports an approach to family learning that enables all family members to enhance their learning and can support whole families that are vulnerable to poverty.

"The benefits of learning to families matter because of the way that poverty can be passed on through the generations. Children and adults learning together, for example, can contribute to children's resilience and communication skills, and can help to reduce children's psychological and behavioural disorders. The acquisition of skills by parents can also help children's performance at school. Children's achievement in early life remains the best indicator of their living successful lives as adults. In this context, lifelong learning has an important contribution to make to reducing poverty in the long run."⁴

² <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/young-people-not-education-employment-training/?lang=en>

³ <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-exclusion-wales-summary.pdf>

⁴ Fullick, L., (2009), *Poverty Reduction and Lifelong Learning*, IFLL Thematic Paper 6, NIACE
<http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/IFLL-Poverty.pdf>

The current emphasis on early intervention programmes seems to assume that income is the critical factor in creating the 'right' educational environment at home. Chevalier et al.(2013)⁵, in exploring the links between parental education and income, suggest that although income is an important factor, policies which also recognise the importance of parental education in increasing permanent family income, would have positive effects on intergenerational transmission of education.

"Thus policies alleviating income constraints to alter schooling decisions, may not be as effective as policies which increase permanent income"

The education of parents is then clearly as important as providing early intervention and will produce results more quickly than waiting 10 years or so, in order to evaluate the outcome of current intervention programmes.

The importance of maternal education in particular, has been highlighted by Currie and Moretti (2003)⁶, who found that maternal education was a strong predictor of child health. Such findings provide evidence to support the continuation of and the importance of funding part time adult education, for both the economy and well-being of Wales and call into question a cut to educational funding that will affect women in particular.

Therefore policies that do not address the need for access to lifelong learning and indeed contribute to their demise, are counterproductive to any attempt to reduce the impact of poverty on the educational attainment of young children.

The structure of our society is changing. More people are living longer. It is predicted that by 2020⁷ almost a third (32%) of the working age population and almost half (48%) the adult population, will be people aged 50. As retirement age continues to rise, working for longer will become an economic necessity. The Welsh Government Skills Implementation Plan focus is on securing a resilient and sustainable skills system for Wales and aims to ensure that employability policies consider the challenges faced by older people. However it is unclear how older people will access the education they need to remain competitive in the workplace, if they are unable to access further education. Welsh Government proposals for addressing the needs of training in the workforce are via the Co-investment framework⁸. However this fails to address the need for learning that is not directly related to an employer led agenda. Further to this evidence was identified in the Equality Impact Assessments for the Programme of Wales, which suggested that older workers were much less likely to be offered participation in employer provided training than younger workers.

The Strategy for Older People Phase 3⁹ and the 'Ageing Well in Wales' programme¹⁰ highlight the importance of prioritising employment and learning

⁵ http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/70536/1/2193_8997_2_8.pdf

⁶ <http://www.nber.org/papers/w9360.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-318453>

⁸ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/141120-framework-for-co-investment-in-skills-en.pdf>

⁹ <http://gov.wales/topics/health/publications/socialcare/strategies/older/?lang=en>

¹⁰ <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/themes/opportunities-for-learning-and-employment>

opportunities for older people, to maintain their wellbeing and to empower them to remain engaged in society. Further education can make a major contribution to both learning and social opportunities for older people and help reduce the effects of loneliness and isolation. Therefore we would like to see a Further Education policy that encompasses lifelong learning and addresses the above issues.

Delivering high quality apprenticeships

UCU recently responded to a consultation document from the Welsh Government on the Higher Education Wales Act in which the government is committing to ensure that large sums of public money do not end up in the hands of organisations which are not registered charities. UCU would like to see the next government commit to consider making the same conditions apply to the expenditure on Post 16 education, including spending on apprenticeships.

We would argue that investment in further and adult education would be a more appropriate way of enabling adults to improve their skills, increase their employment opportunities, enhance their wellbeing and improve the communities they live in.

In our response to the Welsh Government's consultation on 'Aligning the apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy,' we argued that

"Apprenticeships need to be a robust and respected vocational route. They need to offer real opportunities for employment and not be a means of cheap labour"

If apprenticeships are to truly be seen as a high quality vocational pathway, there needs to be greater input from, not just employers but also those delivering the programmes. Lecturers in further education have a wealth of knowledge and experience that could be drawn upon, to help develop a world class apprenticeship model. They are dual professionals, not just having industrial expertise, but also that of teaching; giving them a unique role in the development of a skilled workforce.

There is currently much focus on employer need with regard to the development of the apprenticeship programme, but this should be balanced with community and individual need. A more balanced input into the development of apprenticeship routes would help to empower and inform all stakeholders and help to strengthen the understanding and the value of the provision. The focus should therefore be on the needs of industry rather than employer needs and should include the input of the related trade unions, to help ensure that apprentices receive quality training that will lead to sustainable employment.

Currently employers are expected to provide training for their apprentices, but how often, when and where, are at the discretion of the employer. In order to strengthen progression routes there needs to be some clarification and standardisation of expected levels of training, supported by appropriate regulation, otherwise there can be no parity between the quality of

apprenticeships that differing employers provide, which will make it very difficult to determine the appropriate next level of progression.

Whilst it may be appropriate to offer higher level apprenticeships to provide an alternative undergraduate equivalent, we are of the opinion that the apprenticeship route is not generally suited to older adults, most of whom will have had work experience and therefore will not need the 'world of work' element of the apprenticeship scheme. They may also be prevented from taking part due to the 'low pay' offered to apprentices. We would suggest that higher apprenticeships, as a progression route for older adults, should be replaced with appropriately paid employment, offering appropriate continuous professional development, as it is likely that many such adults will already have level 3 qualifications as a minimum. Perhaps what is needed here is clarification of the use of the word 'apprentice'. Apprentice, suggests a person who has limited knowledge and understanding of a particular set of occupational skills, whereas studying a subject at level 4 or above would suggest that the individual already has some mastery of the subject area.

We further argue that despite the promotion of the co-investment model, which relies on the financial contributions of employers, we are not wholly convinced by the argument that funding to the FE sector will 'trickle down' from SME's into the colleges. In order to provide a robust support mechanism, FE colleges need proper funding of their core provision. Current funding cuts are stretching colleges to their financial limits. It cannot be expected that colleges will be able to deliver the remit required of them, to support the apprenticeship agenda, if they do not have the facilities or the staff to support this. Neither can we expect the remaining staff to deliver the level of teaching and learning required to promote the apprenticeship scheme as a high quality alternative route to employment, if they are faced with the ever increasing workloads and class sizes required of the effects of endless 'efficiency gains'. Alongside this, there is likely to be the increasing problem of failing to attract adequately qualified staff with appropriate industrial experience, while working conditions for lecturers continue to be eroded.

Therefore we call for a policy for further education that commits to the inclusion of the FE Sector in the development of a high quality and meaningful apprenticeship programme; one that is developed in partnership with the relevant industries, trade unions, college lecturers and college managers as well as employers, to ensure that the sector receives adequate and accountable public funding, in order to develop a high quality and meaningful vocational route into employment.

Assisting the delivery of HE in FE

The Government in its latest Review of higher education in further education institutions, May 2015¹¹ argues that "There should be a more holistic and regional

¹¹ <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/a-review-of-he-delivered-in-further-education-institutions/?lang=en>

view of post-16 education in Wales, supported by stronger regional planning. Collaboration between higher and further education providers needs to be strengthened so that progression and even simultaneous study in both sectors can become a reality" (p2)

The review makes five recommendations, listed below:

R1 HE in FE part-time delivery to be expanded in critical economic sectors.

R2 HEFCW and ColegauCymru to meet with the Welsh Government to agree on how HE in FE delivery can be developed and expanded to meet the changing needs of the economy.

R3 HEFCW and ColegauCymru to work with Regional Skills Partnerships to ensure joint strategic planning of HE in FE delivery between HEIs and FEIs to support the expansion of delivery.

R4 The Welsh Government to consider how HEFCW's funding and quality assurance arrangements can support the development of HE in FE provision.

R5 HEFCW to consider strengthening guidance on franchise arrangements between colleges and universities to provide stability and support strategic planning between the HE and FE sectors.

UCU submitted evidence to the Independent review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements (Diamond Review) supporting the delivery of HE in FE but we need to ensure that staff are given sufficient CPD time within their workload to ensure the quality and parity of vocational HE and academic HE.

It is the case that staff in further education are required by law to be members of the Education Workforce Council (EWC) and this body should be the body which ensures that staff have access to good quality CPD to be able to deliver HE in FE to support this agenda.

Thus far the focus has been on school teachers and the 'new deal.' We recognise the importance of the new deal and the changes the government wish to see in our school sector, but FE staff have been forced, by law, to be members of the EWC and therefore they should have a reasonable expectation that the EWC will provide at least the same opportunities as is being offered to the school teachers.

The lack of a policy for FE has left FE staff out in the cold, despite our continual reminders to the EWC and civil servants, we have seen little progress on this matter and little engagement with the FE trades unions about CPD suitable for FE staff.

Further the review itself makes no mention of discussions with trades unions about the impact that the recommendations may have on staff in both further and higher education. Does social partnership not apply to post 16 education sector?

Therefore we call for a policy for further education that commits to the inclusion of the professional opinions of lecturers through their relevant trade unions. One that recognises the values and expertise of those with the knowledge and understanding required, to deliver the quality expected in the post 16 education system, across a wide variety of skills and levels.

Further we call for commitment to ensure the democratic election of the representatives of FE lecturers to the Education Workforce Council and for access to appropriate CPD, to ensure that all members of the Education Workforce Council have equal opportunity to develop professional skills.

Assisting the implementation of the Programme for Government

Since the demise of the Funding Council for Further Education we have seen a distinct lack of government policy providing a direction and mission for the Further Education (FE) sector as a whole, with the exception of the Transformation Agenda, which saw institutions in the sector reduce from 23 institutions in 2000 to 12 FE institutions excluding St David's six form college, YMCA and WEA in 2015.

However, the Welsh Government is heavily reliant on the FE sector to deliver its wider policy agenda, yet despite that fact the FE sector has no clear role and function articulated in a government policy document.

The attached appendix serves to highlight the reliance this government has placed on FE delivering for the different policy initiatives it has introduced during this term of office.

The next government of Wales must articulate in policy the role that FE should play in the future life of Wales. FE is uniquely placed to deliver on the Poverty Agenda, widening access to vocational higher education, providing a second chance education for those who didn't make the most of their chances at school and responding to the ever changing needs of employers in relation to the skills issues they face.

Without a current policy for the FE sector, we are witnessing the destruction of its core function, of providing second chance education. The clear steer given to other education sectors has, perhaps inadvertently, contributed to the neglect of a vital part of further education; its contribution to the community as a whole.

The indirect benefits of FE include increased civil participation and improved racial tolerance. At an individual level, adults often cite learning as increasing their confidence and changing self-perceptions.¹²

FE should not be regarded as simply a vehicle to support routes to HE or employment. It has a far greater role which deserves to be protected by its own distinct policy.

APPENDIX

The role of Further Education in the Programme for Government

Agriculture :- Independent Review of Learning delivered by Further Education Colleges and the Relevance of that delivery in Supporting Farm Businesses in Wales, Jan 2015

Section 1.11 reads

¹² Fullick, L., (2009), *Poverty Reduction and Lifelong Learning*, IFLL Thematic Paper 6, NIACE <http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/IFLL-Poverty.pdf>

“ The primary objective of the FE sector with agricultural provision in Wales is the delivery of high quality further education. An additional activity is that of developing progression opportunities from FE to HE. This requires a robust partnership with the university sector not only for academic approval but also to support the development of the subject specialism. I cannot overstate the importance of the latter if we are to establish meaningful and enduring coherence to FE/HE links in agriculture in Wales. It is important for the progression to be provided full time, part-time or work-based.

The FE sector colleges are actually exploring ways to exploit their multi disciplinarily approach by broadening their agriculture mission to enhance rural innovation, enterprise, food chain relationships and efficiencies. They need to be actively encouraged to progress in this direction, as they could be major players in future.

However, we need to be aware that the removal of the higher education funding cap in England together with the possible outcomes of the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance arrangements in Wales, may lead to tension within FE/HE relationships in future due to competition for students in a more market-driven recruitment climate.”

Section 3.16 suggests

“The colleges could play a key role in developing and demonstrating emerging innovative applied scientific thinking into holistic sustainable farm systems. The resources available at IBERS and the colleges working together with the Welsh Government and other agencies could provide an excellent platform for taking our industry forward.

Horticulture: Strategic Action Plan for the Welsh Horticulture Industry, April 2010

Section 3.15 states

“In order to improve the supply of suitably trained and qualified labour within the industry, there is a need to assess skills required by businesses and communicate this to training providers.

There is also a requirement to review the current education and training provision available to the industry and raise the profile of horticulture as a career opportunity. It is important to consider whether appropriate delivery mechanisms are in place to provide the skills and knowledge base to make Wales’ horticulture truly sustainable. The industry and the Welsh Assembly Government also need to invest in skills development and the importance of this is reflected in the Welsh Assembly Government’s Skills That Work for Wales Strategy and Action Plan.”

Section 3.25 argues that

“Recruitment and retention of suitably skilled and trained labour is a challenge in all areas of the horticulture industry, partly due to poor awareness of the variety of career opportunities the sector offers. There is both a challenge and an opportunity to raise the profile of horticulture and to encourage more people to choose horticulture as a career path and to find ways to develop and retain staff.”

Economic Renewal: a new direction, July 2010

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The government state as a matter of fact that “Most importantly we cannot deliver on this vision by ourselves. It requires us to build on the partnerships

forged during the downturn – with the private sector, the third sector, local authorities, Higher and Further Education, the NHS and others.”

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“It is a central tenet of For Our Future that that the provision of foundation degrees in Wales is fully responsive and opened up to the skills needs of our employers, current employees and the future workforce. Equally we expect Higher and Further Education providers not only to work collaboratively and exploit their combined resources in the provision of foundation degrees, but importantly to work closely in networks with employers – particularly at a regional level.”

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“Wales’ changing demography means that fewer young people will be entering the workforce, making it ever more important to improve the existing stock of adult skills. Investment in adult learning, particularly training in the workplace, will be vital in maintaining and enhancing our competitiveness.

There are many ways in which current policies and programmes support adult skills. For example, planning guidance to Further Education institutions instructs them to increase basic skills provision and support local Spatial Plan priorities.”

Science for Wales Delivery Plan, March 2012

Section 5.2 commits to

“The Minister for Education and Skills and Deputy Minister for Skills have published their intention to improve labour market intelligence. This will provide the information needed by learners and education providers to better match the skills of young people to the demands of industry. The coordination and dissemination of this information, through more effective careers advice, will provide the information needed by learners to make informed choices on their futures, including the availability of careers in STEM-related disciplines. This information will be allied to the planning of apprenticeship and further education provision to ensure that state funded education is up to the challenge of securing the skills needed by the current and future STEM business community. The Welsh Government will also work with the higher education community to ensure that STEM pathways, from school to higher education, are available and meet the demands of the Welsh economy.”

Building Resilient Communities: Taking forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, July 2013

On page 9 it is the government aspiration that

“.....more pupils from Communities First areas will go into Higher Education. HEFCW has a specific aim to raise the number of pupils that achieve this goal. The Communities First programme will continue to work both with HEFCW and local Universities and Further Education colleges to support more young people to access Higher and Further Education and remove the barriers that exist.”

Towards Sustainable Growth: An action plan for the Food and Drink Industry 2014-2020

Section 4.4 highlights

“Graduates and school leavers are not attracted in the same numbers as in other industries. Universities and colleges can find it difficult to fill places on food courses and degrees. In contrast university and college leavers with food related qualifications find it relatively easy to secure interesting and rewarding jobs that offer career paths. There is clearly a disconnect. The ‘block’ may be

fewer students studying the sciences post 16 or, more likely; it may be attributable to perceptions or misperceptions about exactly what working in the food industry entails.”

A living language: a language for living – Moving forward, August 2014

On page 14 the government acknowledge

“We also need to build on the work of the bilingual champions in further education and work-based learning to ensure the further development and sustaining of Welsh-medium and bilingual provision post-16 and ensure that the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol continues to develop and thrive.”

Capital Investment Fund 2015-16: Welsh language Centres and learning Spaces Feb 2015

“The Welsh Government is opening a capital investment fund of £1 million for 2015-16 that will be specifically targeted to support the development of centres and/or learning spaces which promote the use of Welsh or immersion in Welsh. This fund builds upon the success of the £1.25m fund for 2014-15, which was a key commitment in our policy document A living language: a language for living - Moving forward published in August 2014.

The funding will be awarded to local authorities, further education institutions or universities who can demonstrate an innovative approach and an emphasis on working in partnership with others for the benefit of the wider community.”

The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework – Implementation Plan 2014 aims to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Welsh Government are determined to reduce the level of NEETs in Wales and the economic and individual costs associated with this. It is clear that this will involve the FE sector.

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“The national measure of young people who are NEET in Wales shows that the figure for 16 to 18-year-olds who are NEET has remained at levels of between 10 and 13 per cent in the last five years to 2012, reflecting the longer term trend, while the rate for 19 to 24-year-olds increased markedly following the last recession in 2008. International comparisons show Wales is not performing as well as other countries.

We are determined to make further improvement. There are clear benefits to the Welsh economy, wider society and most importantly to young people and their families in increasing youth engagement and progression. Wales needs more young people to successfully progress to further and higher education and into skilled employment. The failure to engage young people increases the costs associated with health and social services, and contributes to the challenges associated with long-term unemployment.

A study by the University of York in 2010 estimated the additional lifetime costs associated with being NEET at over £160,000 per person in England in 2008. When applied to the current cohort of 16 to 18-year-olds in Wales who are NEET this suggests the cost to Wales as a whole of failing to engage these young people is circa £2 billion. There is an economic as well as a moral imperative to deliver improvement.”

The document goes on to outline Welsh Government expectations of improving the quality of existing provision and supporting the provision of the **Youth Guarantee**, which is the offer, acceptance and commencement of a suitable place in education or training for any young person making the first time transition from compulsory education at age 16. It is quite clear that FE colleges will be expected to rise to the challenge.

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"[The Youth Guarantee requires] post-16 providers to respond to any challenges identified locally. Many FE colleges are already playing an important role locally in addressing the challenge of reducing NEET. We think the FE sector can do even more. We know that the vast majority of college start dates are still in September and October but the introduction of the Youth Guarantee will require more flexibility than this. We will work with ColegauCymru to identify what more the FE sector can do."

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"Welsh Government to work with ColegauCymru to identify what more the FE sector can do to support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee."

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"We know that many young people who are not currently participating [in education or training] are highly motivated by work, but do not yet have the skills or practical experience to move into employment. That is why we are making substantive experience of the workplace a key element of our 16 to 19 study programmes. By providing young people with meaningful work experience closer to the point at which they will enter the labour market, we will not only better prepare young people for employment, but also make continuing in learning more attractive to those young people who might otherwise not have participated. We have already made experience of the world of work a central feature of our traineeship programme and will continue to push the FE sector to do the same with its programme delivery."

The tracking of those that might be at risk of becoming NEET and providing opportunities for them to engage, is also part of the Welsh Government **Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012-2016** as outlined on page 17 of the plan.

The Skills Implementation Plan 2014 sets out how the Welsh Government proposes to develop a sustainable skills system. Part of this plan establishes a Skills Priorities Programme led by Wales' FE sector.

Page 10 of the skills implementation plan

"[the] **Skills Priorities Programme** will focus on the vital role of further education in responding to local employer demand for skills. The programme will deliver vocational skills provision through further education institutions in line with regional and local employer demand for skills between Level 2 and Level 5.

Also key to the Skills Implementation Plan will be the introduction of the Skills Gateway, an online resource for providing skills and employment information and advice. Many of the courses listed on the **Skills Gateway** for adults, are provided

by FE colleges; indicating an important role for FE in the provision of post 19 learning.