

Inquiry into Apprenticeships in Wales

Executive Summary

- 1 Skills for Justice works with employers, employees and volunteers working in the UK Justice System, Safer Communities, Legal Services and the Armed Forces. We work with key employers, the Governments of the UK and agencies within the skills system, to better equip workforces with the right skills now and for the future.
- 2 We exist to help organisations and individuals to deliver benefit to society by being significantly better skilled, and to influence policy makers to ensure that they take full account of workforce development needs in the sector.
- 3 People working in these sectors do a vital job. Their work affects the quality of life, sense of well being and security of people across our communities. Our work with organisations in the sector to help them develop their staff, gives them the tools to support the existence of a safer, more tolerant and just society.
- 4 We develop high quality Apprenticeship frameworks in response to employer demand and consult with them to ensure that the frameworks meet their skills needs. As a result of our direct engagement with employers, considerable quality assurance measures and robust evaluation, employers have been very positive about the quality and suitability of our frameworks. This written statement reflects upon our experience of developing frameworks for Wales and the experience of the employers within our footprint. We identify the strengths of the current arrangements as well as the challenges faced by employers and employees. In so doing, we hope that the Inquiry can undertake a comprehensive assessment of what is working well and where there is room for improvement. We will offer recommendations based on employer feedback, research and our own expertise. Our objective is to work with the Welsh government to refine the development and implementation process. This will encourage and enable our sector in Wales to offer Apprenticeships that are of high quality and fit-for-purpose.

Introduction

- 5 We support recent efforts to raise the profile and quality of Apprenticeships as well as to increase the number of Apprenticeships available in Wales. We welcome the Inquiry into Apprenticeships and the opportunity to contribute. Many of the employers we work with have not traditionally offered Apprenticeships and we are pleased to have seen an increase in demand from our employers. We feel that this Inquiry is timely and that our employers can offer a fresh perspective on the process of development and implementation of Apprenticeships.
- 6 Our priority is to support employers to ensure that they realise maximum benefits from investing in apprentices. Employer commitment is vital and therefore the employer experience will significantly affect demand for Apprenticeships as a method of recruiting and developing their workforce.
- 7 Our written statement will respond directly to the Terms of Reference with additional comments and information where appropriate. We will only provide comment on those areas with which we are able to speak with authority, based on experience and factual evidence.

Terms of Reference

Is the current Apprenticeship system providing effective support to the Welsh economy?

- 8 We support Apprenticeships as a means of building economic growth and we feel that there are positive elements of the current system. Employers do experience difficulties due to the complexities that can exist under partial devolution. Where organisations are based in England and Wales, employers in Wales have found differences in the levels of funding for Apprenticeships between the two countries. This can lead to situations where Apprenticeship opportunities are more widely available for employees in England than in Wales, even within the same organisation. Employers question the need for a different framework in Wales when the skills required should be consistent, for example for prison officer roles. The lack of explanation for this can be confusing and off-putting.

- 9 The majority of the organisations we work with are in the public sector. We are conscious of the challenges these organisations face due to budget restraints and large-scale public sector reform. We therefore welcome the Community Benefits approach provided it does not restrict employers from using other methods of recruitment or workforce development as appropriate.

Is the current Apprenticeship system meeting the current and future skills needs of employers in Wales? If not, what needs to be improved?

- 10 A recent Employer Skills Survey (ESS) carried out by Skills for Justice found that respondents from Wales suggested a disproportionately high (92% in Wales against 36% across the sector) requirement for improvement in the provision of qualifications in comparison with the other UK nations. We therefore recognise the significance of this question.
- 11 There is a growing interest in Apprenticeships across the UK. Although the demand in Wales has increased over the past 2-3 years, it is not as high as in England. Employers that have not previously offered Apprenticeships are now exploring this option as a means of recruitment and skills development. This is mainly in response to funding incentives; however employers that already offer Apprenticeships are looking to increase the number of Apprentices they take on. This indicates that employers' experiences of Apprenticeships are broadly positive.
- 12 Skills for Justice has developed 3 Apprenticeship frameworks that are relevant to Wales, in direct response to employer demand. These frameworks are based upon Apprenticeships that have been developed for England, tailored to the regulations that apply to Wales. However, we have not been asked to develop any frameworks that are specifically for Wales-only organisations indicating that more needs to be done to drive demand. We are undertaking a piece of work which will provide an evidence base for Apprenticeships to ensure that employers are well-informed about the benefits of the investment.
- 13 Employers that are new to Apprenticeships, but now interested in exploring them, do not have a suitable framework in place and therefore there are currently gaps that need to be addressed.

CASE STUDY

There has been myriad of reforms that have directly affected police forces across Wales. A temporary recruitment freeze, a requirement to find several million pounds of savings and reviews such as that of Police Leadership and Training (Chief Constable Peter Neyroud QPM) have led forces to look again at the way that they manage and replenish their workforce. The Welsh Government have placed an emphasis on Apprenticeships, backed up with funding opportunities and have also carried forward their manifesto commitment to fund 500 PCSOs across Wales. The forces we are working with are keen to maximise the benefit of the current opportunities available to them.

We have recently been asked by police forces in Wales to help them to explore recruitment through an Apprenticeship offer. This includes managing and avoiding redundancies of civilian members of the force where frontline services are a priority. The forces we are working with have a great deal of experience with programmes that enable potential applicants to prepare for a career in the police. These include the Police Cadet scheme, the Advanced Appointment Scheme and Pre-join programmes. Recruitment of PCSOs also fits into these initiatives. It is interesting to note that the Police Cadet Scheme shares many similarities with the structure and goals of an Apprenticeship.

We believe that there are fantastic opportunities for the police, however, we would suggest that some key improvements could be made to the system to support employers through this process. As the conversations are in their early stages it is difficult to refer to specific complexities that may occur. Nonetheless, it is apparent that employers are unable to access the necessary information to explore this route. Although we are in a strong position to provide guidance and interpret regulation, we believe that we could do

more if information was more readily accessible. In terms of Apprenticeships in Wales, we would recommend that SSCs and employers are signposted to places where clear information can be easily accessed and understood.

“I am very comfortable with the police-specific knowledge, with 44 years of experience in policing; what I need is guidance on the Apprenticeship side of things because this application is fairly new to policing” *Phill Pyke QPM MSc (Econ), Assistant Director Learning Development Services, South Wales Police*

This statement not only highlights the support we can and do offer, but it also draws attention to the lack of clear and easily accessible information available about Apprenticeships in Wales. We would welcome efforts to address this as a priority.

- 14 More can be done to increase demand and reduce the barriers employers face throughout the process. Organisations that are specific to Wales are often smaller than those specific to England. This could account for the lack of demand for Wales-only Apprenticeships. The Shared Apprenticeships initiative is a welcome tool to encourage smaller businesses to collaborate for mutual benefit.

- 15 Different sectors experience different challenges in offering Apprenticeships. For example, an increasing proportion of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) workforce are employed on a retained basis. This means that they are not considered full time employees, however, they effectively commit to being available at any time, day or night. They almost always have another primary employer or are self-employed. Offering Apprenticeships to retained staff poses difficulties, as Andrew Pughsley of Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue explains:

CASE STUDY

“It has always struck me as strange that people are able to study an NVQ part-time but those retained staff that are classed as part-

time employees are not offered the opportunity to complete an Apprenticeship that is heavily based on studying an NVQ a fundamental component of the Fire Service vocational qualification.” *Andrew Pughsley, Station manager, People and Organisational Development, Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue.*

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service has been running Apprenticeships for full-time employees and new recruits for several years. The Apprenticeship framework has three components; an NVQ, a BTEC and three functional skill competencies. They have a robust assessment and quality assurance process and an extremely high success rate. The Service would like to offer Apprenticeships to retained fire fighters but they have found that the current system is not conducive to this. Whilst we recognise the need for a specified number of hours to be undertaken by an Apprentice we feel that there is room for flexibility around how those hours are worked up. For example, the majority of retained fire fighters have primary employers and therefore it would seem sensible to explore a shared Apprenticeship where some hours can be accumulated during their ordinary working week. A large proportion of stations now provide First Responder cover therefore, transferable skills such as Application of Number, Communication, ICT and working collaboratively would apply to either role and are skills that benefit all employers, their families and the wider rural community that the majority of RDS members provide cover. Additionally, a framework that enables Apprentices to save up the required hours over time and dispel them over, for example, a one week training course would have greater value than one or two hours per week.

Primary employers would also benefit from courses that are provided to Apprentices by the Fire and Rescue Service such as First Aid, Health & Safety and Fire Safety related training. There is no specific reference to whether part-time employees are eligible

for Apprenticeships, rather the terms of the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales make it extremely difficult for this option to be offered by employers. We are encouraged by the Shared Apprenticeship initiative and would welcome consideration of this potential opportunity when developing and implementing it. This should include a review of the funding arrangements to provide equal support to that afforded to full-time employees.

The distinction between retained employees and full-time fire fighters can cause pinch points in progression routes. An equally recognised Apprenticeship would help to facilitate migration from one phase to the other whilst ensuring that retained employees possess the necessary skills to carry out their duties once fully employed. A related challenge is the consistency of national standards for measuring the competence achieved by Apprentices, even though the NOS is the vehicle for identifying competence against a national model, interpretation of the NOS across the sector varies between services making transferability of qualified fire fighters difficult. Whilst localised decision-making is welcome, a nationally agreed standard of competency would have merit. The introduction of the new Firefighter standards incorporating learning outcomes may be the foundation for this improvement, currently the 3 Welsh Fire and Rescue Services are collaborating on this topic. If the Apprenticeship system is to truly meet the needs of employers, it will need to take account of the challenges faced by atypical sectors and offer greater flexibility to overcome these barriers.

- 16 As an SSC we have knowledge of the skills needs of employers in our sector. Apprenticeships are a useful mechanism for obtaining many of these skills. However, Apprenticeships cannot satisfy all development requirements and therefore we would urge caution against cutting off access and funding for alternative options for development.

With increased priority on Apprenticeships for 16-24 year olds, are Apprenticeships an attractive option for young people?

- 17 We welcome measures that encourage young people to consider the Apprenticeship route into employment. We support measures to improve the information young people receive at school, demonstrating that an Apprenticeship is a respectable alternative to more academic routes to qualifications and employment. We recognise that employers also need to be encouraged to take on younger, less experienced people as an investment for the future. This is crucial at a time of rising youth unemployment and can add significant value in terms of IT skills and innovation. This will only happen if employers appreciate the benefits of offering Apprenticeships and so we welcome measures that will support this. The majority of the organisations that we work with require high level skills and therefore do not traditionally employ younger people. However, the implementation of the Apprenticeship Matching Service and Young Persons Recruit Programme are an encouraging development.
- 18 Whilst we recognise the need to tackle youth unemployment, it is important that employers understand that Apprenticeships are not limited to this age group. In Wales, funding is targeted at this age group and therefore there is a common perception that apprenticeships are *only* for the 16-24 age group. We would urge caution against neglecting Apprenticeship opportunities for people over the age of 24 as these are equally valuable to the economy and usually serve a different purpose, enhancing different skills.

Do the systems for establishing Apprenticeship Standards and Frameworks and recruiting Apprentices work effectively?

- 19 In order for Apprenticeships to enjoy the parity of esteem desired by government, it is critical that they are of high quality. Reasonable guidance and regulation is helpful to us, employers and Apprentices. We would suggest that some measure of realistic job prospects following Apprenticeships should be included in any evaluation of quality.
- 20 There are three elements of the systems that we would suggest cause our employers some difficulty. The first of these, as mentioned above, is the additional complexities and inconsistencies that the requirements for different frameworks between England

and Wales can cause. This can also incur additional costs if the employer works across the nations. Employers would benefit from greater consistency and joined up working between the two nations.

21 Secondly, whilst we recognise the importance of regulation, we have found that the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 and Specification for Apprenticeship Standards Wales can be too prescriptive. This limits opportunities to design frameworks that are suitable to atypical sectors or different delivery methods. The example of retained FRS employees is an example of the problems that can be caused by this. For employers to consider Apprenticeships as the preferred option, a more flexible system would be useful.

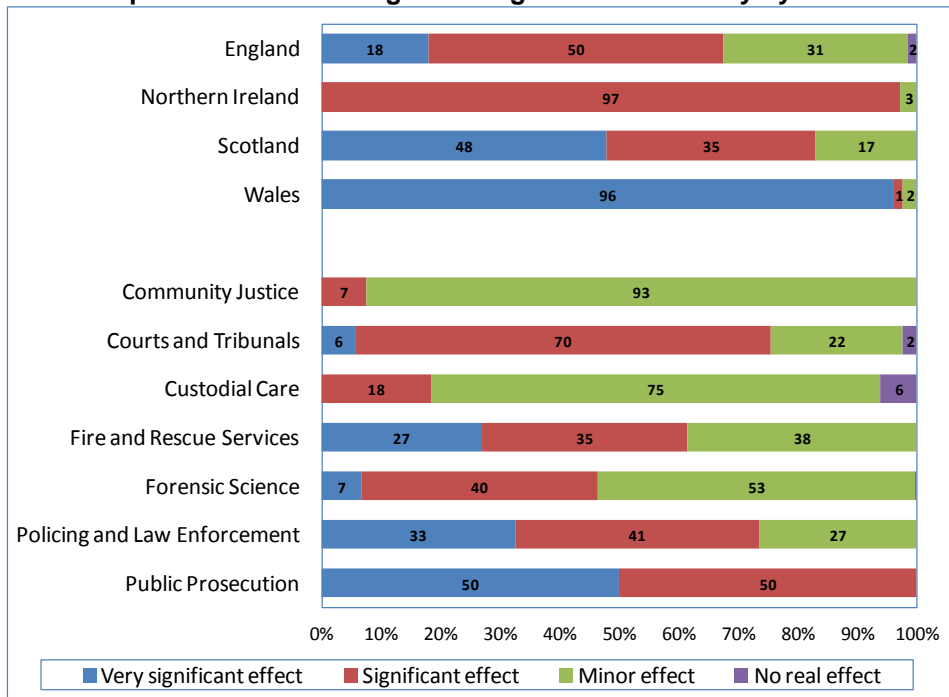
22 Finally, we would welcome easier access to information about how Welsh frameworks are funded, including the figures. Information that is clearer and more readily available would be extremely useful to all concerned.

Factual Information

23 Skills for Justice carried out a comprehensive Employer Skills Surveyⁱ (ESS) and have recently reported on the findings. The ESS helps to gauge the feelings of employers within the UK Justice and Community Safety sector about skills needs and Apprenticeships. This section draws on the findings as supporting evidence for the assertions made in this written statement.

24 The chart below shows that amongst the countries, the greatest impact of shortages in skills is experienced in Wales.

Figure 4.1: Impact of Skills Shortages on Organisational Ability by Countries and Strands



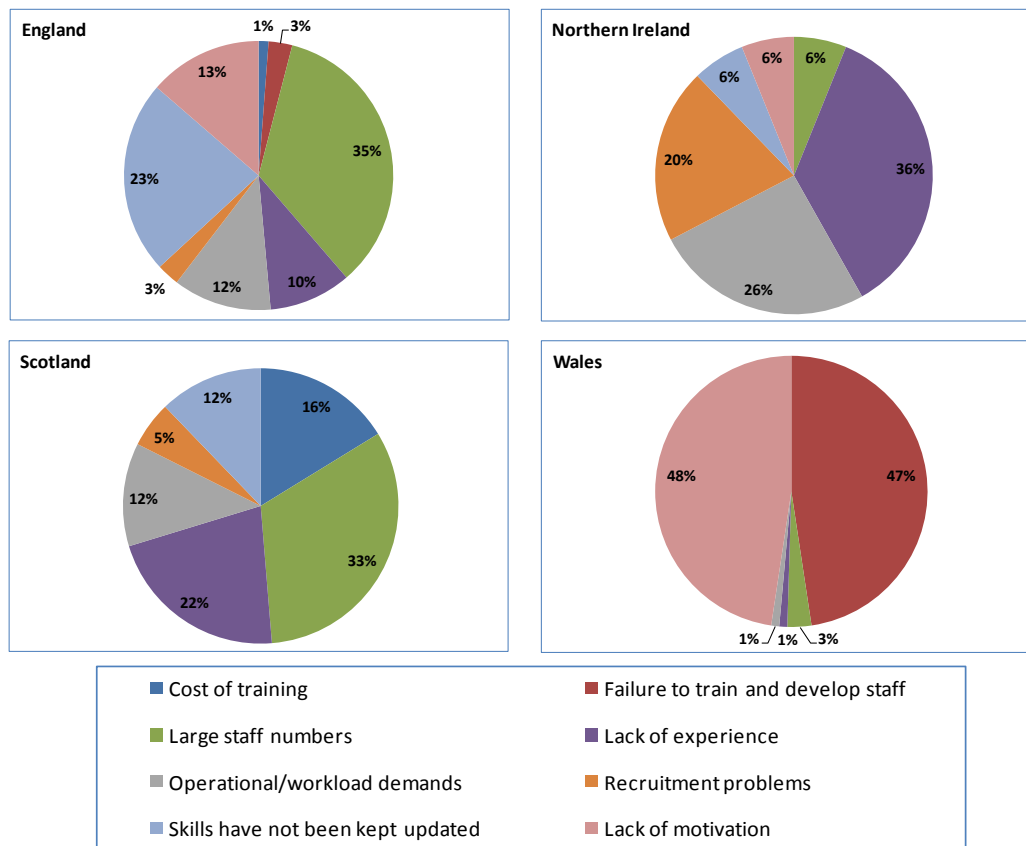
25 The ESS found that respondents from Wales suggest a disproportionately high (92% in Wales against 36% across the sector) requirement for improvement in the provision of qualifications.

26 Almost 72% of all UK employers that responded are positive about Apprenticeships as a route to gaining qualifications and skills. Many already have Apprenticeships in place; others would like to pursue Apprenticeships as an option.

27 Some employers within the sector feel they can benefit from Apprenticeships within the current economic climate. They consider it an attractive means for facilitating the pursuit of qualifications and securing basic skills and technical skills. A number of employers also believe apprentices are important in bolstering support roles and functions.

28 The survey did however highlight two significant challenges for Welsh Government in terms of supporting employers to improve the skills of their workforce; a failure to train and develop staff and a lack of staff motivation. It is possible that the two are inter-connected and therefore encouraging and incentivising employers to provide Apprenticeships for existing staff could realise massive benefits for workforce skills in Wales.

Figure 4.3: Factors Militating Against Employee Proficiency by Countries



29 Interestingly, Wales does not suffer from the challenges caused by large staff numbers to the extent that any of the other nations do. This allows for individual Apprenticeships to demonstrate a greater impact on productivity. However, these smaller organisations may need more support than larger organisations and will therefore benefit from the Shared Apprenticeships initiative. In the ESS 24% of respondents in Wales said that a key political driver of change is the expectations for organisations to collaborate better. They also said that the most significant economic driver will be government funding (34%) strengthening the case for financial incentives.

30 It is also noteworthy to mention that some employers consider Apprenticeships as a crucial tactic for improving the age mix of members of staff. The ESS concluded that one of the priorities for action is for the sector to continue to engage with younger people. Some level of priority should be given to the development of skills that will enable this to happen.

Recommendations

Complexities of partial devolution

- 31 Employers would benefit from greater consistency and joined up working between England and Wales. We would recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government consider the benefits of requiring different framework systems. If it is deemed the preferable option then work should be done to ensure that the complexities caused by this are minimised. Special consideration should be given to the necessity of additional costs incurred as a result of these requirements.

32 Information, Advice and Guidance

We would welcome easily-accessible information that provides clarity on regulation applicable to offering Apprenticeships in Wales. We would suggest that this include information clarifying the distinct differences between the Welsh and English systems. Employers, SSCs and potential Apprentices would find easy signposting to this information helpful.

Funding Arrangements and Flexibility

- 33 The new funding for Apprenticeships has been the main driver of demand. To support employers to manage the variations between the systems in England and Wales we would be grateful for clearer, more easily accessible information pertaining to how Welsh frameworks are funded. It is important that funding allocation is transparently consistent across all sectors and nations. This information would enable us to advise and support employers from the beginning of the process.
- 34 We would welcome a review of the funding arrangements to better reflect the restrictions on sectors that are unable to recruit younger people and require higher level skills. Whilst we recognise the need to address rising youth unemployment as a priority, we are concerned that the emphasis on the 16-24 age group is indicating that other Apprenticeships are not an option for employers. Where 16-24 Apprenticeships are not appropriate, employers should not be discouraged from exploring Apprenticeships for people in different age groups. SSCs are in a strong position to assist with this, having a unique understanding of their footprint and close relationships with employers. We

support the All-age ApprenticeshipsNI approach as it ensures that funding is made available for the most suitable candidate.

- 35 To meet the current and future skills needs of employers in Wales we would recommend that funding opportunities are made available for alternative vocational qualifications where there is employer demand, particularly where they have a history of success in that sector.
- 36 Funding arrangements and regulations surrounding Apprenticeships can be restrictive to atypical sectors. Employers have articulated a desire for tailored, business specific Apprenticeships. Increased flexibility of systems and funding arrangements to accommodate this would be hugely beneficial and improve the return on investment for employers.

Incentives

- 37 We welcome the measures introduced over the past 2-3 years to incentivise employers to offer Apprenticeships. We believe that the following are the most important factors in assessing this:
- Quality of Apprenticeship frameworks
 - Suitability of Apprenticeship frameworks
 - Return on investment for employers
 - Completion rates
 - Level of successful employment following completion

Strong evaluation and provision of evidence through employer engagement will support this ambition.

- 38 Skills for Justice began offering Apprenticeships in 2009. We feel that this has increased our knowledge and credibility as an SSC that develops Apprenticeship frameworks for our sector. We believe that the Welsh Assembly can play an important role in raising the status and credibility of Apprenticeships by offering a number of these opportunities in government departments. This would also provide first-hand experience of the process and help to identify what does and does not work well.

Conclusion

39 Overall we feel that the current system for developing and implementing Apprenticeships has many positive elements. Government funding and policy has been effective in raising the profile and increasing the credibility and quality of Apprenticeships. We believe that there is a need to increase the demand for quality Apprenticeships in Wales and assert that the above recommendations will support this ambition. This will have a significant impact on productivity and be beneficial to the future of the Welsh economy.

40 Skills for Justice would be happy to contribute to future development in this area. We will await with interest the outcomes of the Inquiry. For further information on the content provided in this statement and the work of Skills for Justice, please contact Colette Wymer, Partnership Development Officer on 0114 231 7370 or Colette.wymer@skillsforjustice.com

ⁱ Skills for Justice Employer Skills Survey 2011

Specific employer comments were provided by Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service and South Wales Police Force