



Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref MA-P/EM/1181/18

Lynne Neagle AM
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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CF99 1NA

5 April 2018

Dear Lynne,

Thank you for your letter of 19 March regarding the quality of work-based learning (WBL) in Wales. You mentioned some issues highlighted in recent Estyn inspections of WBL, relating to leadership and learner outcomes.

We are committed to ensuring that all Welsh Government funded provision meets high standards of quality, and like you I was concerned to see the shortcomings highlighted in Estyn's annual report. I have outlined the action we are taking below.

Monitoring of WBL providers' performance

You may be aware that WBL provision is managed under a contractual relationship with performance and delivery monitored on an ongoing basis. As part of our contract management processes, we occasionally identify issues with a learning provider's performance and will work with that provider to ensure necessary improvements are made.

The Welsh Government is contractually able to terminate a WBL provider's contract with no more than 60 days' notice, and will not hesitate to do so if it believes that a provider is unable to remedy inadequate performance within an acceptable timeframe. However, we are committed to giving all providers the opportunity and time to improve before taking such a step. We believe that this gives a degree of stability which is in learners' and employers' best interests.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

An Estyn inspection that judges the performance of a WBL provider as 'Unsatisfactory' or 'Adequate' is not something that is taken lightly. Post-inspection, all providers are required to submit a robust action plan to WG, detailing how they will address each of Estyn's recommendations. Officials then meet with Estyn and the provider to discuss the efficacy of the plan. This meeting will result in one of two outcomes:

- Where it is felt that the plan is relevant, sufficiently far reaching and above all achievable, officials will allow the provider to continue with its contract under strict monitoring conditions. However, the provider is made aware that its contract may be terminated at any time if it is unable to evidence sufficient and timely improvements in performance. This would include a second 'Unsatisfactory' judgement following re-inspection by Estyn.
- Where the plan appears to fall short of what is required to improve performance, or it is clear that improvements cannot be made quickly enough, a provider will be notified of the intention to terminate its contract.

Of the three WBL providers that were inspected in 2016/17, officials already had concerns in relation to some elements of their performance and had already been working with them to address these issues. However, we were not sighted on all of the areas identified by Estyn as these could only reasonably be identified via a thorough inspection process.

Inspections are carried out over a seven-year cycle and so, inevitably, each year's inspection schedule will look at a sample of three or four providers. We do not believe that the providers inspected by Estyn in 2016/17 are representative of the wider WBL network. Of the 19 directly contracted providers, we currently only have concerns about four providers; three of which were inspected this year and the other was inspected in 2016 and judged 'Adequate'.

During the current 2017/18 inspection cycle, Estyn have inspected two further WBL providers. Both providers have received positive inspection results.

Learner outcomes

Your letter also mentioned learners' progress and completion rates. The main performance measure we use for apprenticeships is 'framework success': the percentage of all learners who complete and attain the full framework of qualifications that makes up their apprenticeship programme. We have maintained apprenticeship success rates of more than 80% for several years and I do not consider this to be an area of concern.

I am aware that Estyn inspections look in depth at learner outcomes and, in particular, at how long it takes learners to complete their programmes. The Welsh Government does not routinely use this 'timely completion' measure for a number of reasons: we recognise that individuals learn at different paces and with different degrees of pressure at work, and we expect learning providers to be flexible in supporting learners to achieve their goals, even if this takes longer in some cases than others. It is also worth noting that the available data relies on learning providers' own estimates of expected end dates for learning programmes, rather than an objective analysis of how long it 'should' take an individual learner to achieve. My officials do, however, monitor timely completion and will challenge providers if it is apparent that a large proportion of learners are taking longer than expected to complete their qualifications.

Support for quality improvement in the WBL sector

We have also introduced a wider programme of work to support improvement in the WBL sector. This is led by the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW), the representative body for the sector. In 2016 we introduced a Head of Quality post in the NTfW for the first time, funded by the Welsh Government through the European Social Fund. The postholder, Kelly Edwards, started in May 2016 and we have recently extended her post until May 2021.

Kelly's role is to support and challenge the WBL sector to improve the quality of delivery. She has initiated a wide-ranging programme which includes a Quality Managers' network, an annual Teaching, Learning and Assessment programme, and a series of professional learning events for leaders and practitioners. These cover areas such as digital learning, giving learners effective feedback, coaching and assessment for learning. This is the first time the WBL sector has had a co-ordinated programme of support, and feedback to date has been extremely positive. Alongside this, we are actively promoting best practice through the Apprenticeship Awards and the VQ Awards, both of which have categories to recognise excellent tutors and assessors.

On a more general point, you will be aware that we are developing proposals to establish a new Tertiary Education and Research Commission for Wales, which would have responsibility for planning, funding and quality across the post-compulsory education and training sector, including WBL. The intention is that the Commission will have overall statutory responsibility for both quality assurance and enhancement, giving it a more explicit role in driving improvements. The next stage of consultation will be launched shortly, and we will be seeking stakeholders' views on how the new Commission can best support workforce and leadership development in all sectors.

I hope this response reassures you that we are actively working to ensure high standards of delivery across the whole WBL sector, with a view to ensuring that all learning provision matches the instances of good and excellent practice that already exist.

Yours sincerely



Eluned Morgan AC/AM

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cc Russell George AM
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