

WBL Contract Holders Reference Group

Friday 12 January 2024

10:00am – 12.00pm

Hybrid (Ocean Park House, CARDIFF and online via MS Teams)

Notes and Actions:

<p>Members:</p> <p>ACT Training Ltd – Zoe Goodall and Matt Burnett</p> <p>B-WBL – Berni Tyler and Jenny Badger</p> <p>Cambrian Training Company - Faith O’Brien</p> <p>Cardiff and Vale College - Alan Mackay</p> <p>Coleg Cambria – Vicky Barwis</p> <p>Educ8 – Jude Holloway</p> <p>Gower College Swansea – Rachel Searle</p> <p>Grŵp Llandrillo Menai - Sophie Martin and Emma Williams</p> <p>Grŵp NPTC Group - Nicola Thornton-Scott</p> <p>Itec Skills and Employment – Gareth Matthews</p> <p>Welsh Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alun Gosney • Wayne Scoberg • Catherine Jenkins • Nikoleta Stastna • Michelle Robinson (JGW+) • Amanada Harrison (ESF) 	<p>Secretariat:</p> <p>NTfW – Lisa Mytton (Chairing)</p> <p>ColegauCymru - Jeff Protheroe (Note taking)</p> <p>Meeting Invitees:</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Apologies:</p> <p>Welsh Government - Rhian Edwards</p> <p>Welsh Government – Chris Hare</p>
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1. Welcome and apologies (Chair)

Lisa Mytton (LM) welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies received.

2. Notes and actions from previous meeting (Chair)

As this was an extraordinary meeting to discuss the reduction of bureaucracy associated with the delivery of apprenticeships, in the context of the loss of ESF funding and expected reduction to the apprenticeships budget, the Actions from the previous meeting were not reviewed.

3. Welsh Government Update

a. Apprenticeships (Alun Gosney)

AG provided the following update:

- Apprenticeships Budget – Legal advice has now been received, which has been positive in relation to the proposal to extend the current one-year contract/commission to two – years. Discussions have taken place between WG officials and the Minister's special adviser, who has requested that a 'ministerial advice briefing' be sent. It is expected that a decision be reached before the end of January.
- In the discussion that ensued, it was confirmed that any 'carry-over %' would be based on discussion between officials and individual providers. No % will be applied across the network. It is hoped that the approach will allow/encourage individual providers the flexibility to decide their own approach to a two-year contract. Looking towards the current 23/24 contract value plus a (reduced) 24/25 contract value.

4. Discussion Topic – Reducing Bureaucracy in Apprenticeships Delivery

Lisa outlined the areas to be addressed that have been identified previously:

- Wales Essential Skills Tool (WEST)
- Cross-cutting themes
- Digital Literacy ESWs
- Health and Safety
- Terms and Conditions
- Progress Reviews
- Employee Rights and Responsibilities (ERR)

The ensuing discussion covered the following:

- **ESF validation requirements / learner sign up process (Priority One)**
 - WG – there is an appetite to remove what is no longer needed. Providers need to provide a breakdown of what is felt unnecessary.
 - Pre ESF, it was a simple process – can we just return to this, and use that as a starting point
 - Recognise the need to capture data, but the issue is the requirement for validating (i.e. collecting evidence)
 - There is a requirement to cross-reference requirement against Programme Specifications – clarity needed on whether data needs to be 'validated' (i.e. evidence collected, stored, and available for audit etc.)
 - Amanda – Eligibility requirements are driven by the audit requirement. WG need to undertake work to establish what is needed.
 - There is a need to act quickly on this. We cannot wait until CTER decide what is needed.
 - An agreed position (co-produced between WG and providers) needs to be put forward to CTER.
 - Alignment to FE evidence / audit requirements?
 - Any changes need to be significant, and not just tinkering around the edges. Time is of the essence.
 - Start with Top 5 and continue to work through
 - Michelle – WG is open to making things easier. However, must remain cautious due to any future audit requirements. A Top 5 or Top 10 would be welcomed. Would make sense if Programme Specs (Apps and JGW+) are aligned.
 - Pre – ESF for Traineeships – it was just Careers Wales Referral Form

- **Health & Safety (Priority 2)**

- Have previously asked WG is there is a requirement for providers to continue with vetting and monitoring when apprentices are employed. Removal would be (significant) quick win.
- The Code of Practice has not been updated since 2018. Even this latest one had no significant review from the previous.
- No need to tinker – just remove requirement.
- The need for a ‘Duty of Care’ is embedded throughout the delivery of an apprenticeship programme – reviews, induction, ongoing training etc.

- **Essential Skills (within apprenticeship frameworks) (Priority 3)**

- There has been ‘review after review’
- A quick win would be to remove from Higher Apprenticeship as a start. Alignment with Degree Apprenticeships
- You cannot mention ESWs, without raising WEST – do we need to do with every single learner?

Action – Apprenticeships Certification Wales (ACW) are not recognising all proxies. WG need to review contract with FISS?

Action – A review of WEST is needed ASAP inc. whether demonstrated skill (in the absence of a qualification) can be used as a ‘proxy’ as well.

- **Progress Reviews (Priority 4)**

- Recognise that learning progress needs to be reviewed. A whole range of evidence exists to demonstrate that learning activity is happening – what is the actual impact of reviewing once every 61 days?
- Move to a ‘termly’ review?
- e-portfolios have been a game changer. The current reviews process is antiquated.
- Approach in England is far more flexible.
- The issue is the bureaucracy (61 days, signatures etc.) not the need for a regular review of learning

JGW+ - ‘Clause 61’ – Clause b21 and b22 (in Apprenticeships Programme Specification) allows for piloting activities. This has been used effectively for JGW+

- **Cross – cutting Themes (Priority 5)**

- Create significant on-costs e.g. Welsh language, Anti – racism etc.
- What ‘additional requirements’ are outlined in the Programme Specification
- There needs to be a recognition that apprentices are ‘employed status’ individuals

Action – A review required inc. prioritisation and who ‘owns’ the agenda. Could providers’ approach to all these ‘agendas’ be covered in one overarching Self-assessment Report (SAR)

Action – A discussion with Estyn to agree the ‘so what’ and where is the impact

Action – A need to review the Welsh priority sectors – a discussion with CCC?

Action – Procurement rules often drive activity – will also need to review this in future

- **Other areas to be considered:**
 - Qualification and Framework Reviews
 - Keeping a watching brief on additional requirements ‘through the backdoor’
 - Audit Requirements
 - Reduction in LLWR fields
 - Additional Learning Support funding – development within JGW+? What about apprenticeships.

Action – There is a need to reconvene meeting of WBL Data and Compliance Group to look at minutia of LA forms etc.

7. Any Other Business

No AOB raised

8. Date of next meeting: TBC

ACTIONS

Action	Lead
Action – ESF validation requirements / learner sign up process (Priority One) – an urgent review to be undertaken to establish what requirements can be removed from the validation and sign-up process.	WG
Action – Health & Safety (Priority 2) – the existing requirement for apprenticeship providers to undertake H&S vetting and monitoring to be removed.	WG
Action – Apprenticeships Certification Wales (ACW) are not recognising all proxies. WG need to review contract with FISS?	WG
Action – A review of WEST is needed ASAP inc. whether demonstrated skill (in the absence of a qualification) can be used as a ‘proxy’ as well.	WG
Action – A review required inc. prioritisation and who ‘owns’ the agenda. Could providers’ approach to all these ‘agendas’ be covered in one overarching Self-assessment Report (SAR)	WG
Action – A discussion with Estyn to agree the ‘so what’ and where is the impact	LM / JP
Action – A need to review the Welsh priority sectors – a discussion with CCC?	LM / JP
Action – Procurement rules often drive activity – will also need to review this in future	WG
Action – There is a need to reconvene meeting of WBL Data and Compliance Group to look at minutia of LA forms etc.	LM / JP