
SESSION NOTE FOR UKCES 2010 REVIEW CONSULTATION EVENT WALES – 23 NOVEMBER 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

This session note gives an account of the UKCES 2010 Review Consultation Event held in Cardiff, Wales at the SWALEC Stadium on 23rd November 09. The event was the second in a series of 5 that will be held throughout England, Scotland and Wales over November and December 09 to inform the planning phase of the 2010 Review Programme.

The events are designed to bring together a wide range of stakeholders from the employment and skills system to hold a rich and honest conversation that:

- explores integration and learns about what is already happening in each area;
- generates input to help develop a robust assessment framework for the Review process;
- gives ideas for how the Review could be done;
- stimulates interest in and support for the Review.

This Wales event was co-hosted by the Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB). A total of ~40 participants attended from different types of organisations (e.g. employers, colleges, higher education, skills providers/community based organisations, government agencies/departments, local authorities, Sector Skills Councils) plus UKCES staff.

The main purpose of this note is to serve as a record of the day, summarising the content generated. It is structured as follows: the remainder of this introductory section includes the output from the first session of the day, which explored context, entitled 'Our Changing World'; section 2 covers the barriers and enablers to integration progress; sections 3 and 4 capture ideas in relation to the development of the Review – input on the '5As' assessment framework (section 3) and on the design of the Review process (section 4). Section 5 gives acknowledgements. The final section is a summary of key lessons drawn from the day concerning current progress towards integration.

The session note is being made available on the UKCES. Session participants/other readers are invited to respond, give further thoughts/ideas or feedback, to contribute to the design of the Review process. These responses can be taken account of in a final report on the planning phase, which also signals the formal Review Launch, to be published February 2010.

The first session, "Our Changing World", commenced with participants marking on a large wall-chart timeline, spanning from 1990 to 2020, 3 'layers' of events: i) global, national and local events that have shaped our society and system; ii) events/developments in the employment and skills system; and iii) key professional and personal life experiences which they bring to their work. Table discussions then reviewed the connections between one layer and the employment and skills integration work. The themes and insights generated were fed back to the room.

At the global level, the feedback highlighted large, technological change, the fast pace of change, and the globalisation of economies and its impact on traditional employment, with

knock-on effects on communities, skills and employment. The implications of the growth of the EU were also highlighted, such as the influx of people from new-member countries prepared to take low-paid/skilled jobs.

A key event, in terms of its impact on the economy and the workforce, had been the 1983 miners' strike and the general demise of the mining and steel industries. The public sector was now a very significant employer (around 40% of the workforce), meaning that the likelihood of public spending cuts in the near future would have a significant impact. The growth in the service sector also noted, and the mix in the economy of low skills and knowledge workers. Elitism and social trends were raised e.g. are people from different backgrounds able to access university education? There was a sense that the current recession had hit when Wales was not yet over the last one, inducing greater government intervention than previously.

At the employment and skills system level, it was suggested that there is a flux of constant change, rather than time allowed to make changes work. The system looks fragmented and 'form follows funding' with a short term approach, resulting in loss of expertise. There was the perception that much is happening around the edges but with a question mark over whether the core is right. Are we reaching the hardest to reach? Big solutions are needed for the big problems faced – now and in the future.

Also at the level of the employment and skills system, structural and political changes post-1997 had been key, particularly with the establishment of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) in 1999. The impacts of various changes within and outside the system were highlighted in relation to the integration agenda and this political context. These included the National Planning and Funding System (which tried to draw together planning and funding); the absorption of Education and Learning Wales (ELWa) and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) into WAG (a simplification of systems); the creation of the city strategies and identification of regeneration areas (created targeted programmes looking at integration); the One Wales agenda which set a more ambitious programme for WAG and led to the creation of deputy ministers; and the plethora of funding schemes. The business development agenda was thought to be key to the development of skills and employment. There was also the sense that there is huge opportunity given devolution, but also a challenge in the interaction of Wales within the 'pan-UK complexity'.

At the level of professional and personal experiences, the greater and different demand on current services was noted, together with how people's life and work experiences can be used to have a significant impact on policy-making. One group of participants had considered the lifetime journey of a typical person – from the confusion and uncertainty of teenage years (and the importance of designing skills and employment interventions to meet the needs of young people); to different jobs, cultures and approaches in work experience; and then on to the 'final chapter' of retirement and the need to find ways to capture and share the knowledge and skills gained. With changing demographics and increased life-expectancy, the skills and employment system needs to look across this wider range.

2. CURRENT BASELINE – WHAT IS HAPPENING CURRENTLY WITH INTEGRATION?

What do we mean by integration?

Participants were asked to consider 'what do we mean by integration?' in small groups., subsequently sharing feedback.

One group saw the current situation as jigsaw puzzle pieces that were not yet joined up and where the overall picture wasn't clear. Another drew a circle in which the individual is not in the centre (where they need to be for a 'targeted approach' supported by peers, parents, funding, strategy, etc) but, rather, given the 'hundreds of policy initiatives not linked together' the system is going round in circles with policy, strategy, funding and products, all pulling in different directions. The current situation was also compared to the sale of white goods (toaster, fridge, washing machine) in lots of different shops – what was needed was a single outlet. An 'ABC' system was suggested: any job, better job, career.

Three groups shared metaphors of games/activities for the desired state: a pinball machine representing the individual journey where you access what you need and there is 100% involvement of everyone concerned – the 'integration wizard'; a space invaders metaphor saw skilled individuals receiving constant training to navigate through all the possible pitfalls; and a joined-up climbing frame was envisaged (instead of disconnected ladders).

One group drew a circle for lifelong learning and wanted to see a "seamless service" between employers, Careers Wales, providers, schools, FE and HE. Feedback also highlighted that if the system was integrated, then integration would not be mentioned – the system needed to be connected by hidden wires in a wired-up system (planned by a good electrician!).

Following this exercise, participants then reviewed and added to a map of employment, skills and integrated initiatives in Wales, totalling approximately 30 (please see Annex Ai for the complete list generated during the session). The following case studies provide further detail:

Steel Training Research & Innovation Partnership (STRIP)

This project will aim to support Welsh universities and colleges in improving the industry's competitiveness. Led by Swansea University together with Bangor, Cardiff and Glyndwr universities, and collaborating with 22 companies who make up the partnership, STRIP aims to train workers and provide Masters & Doctorate studies for graduates in Wales, to ensure the higher level skills that are needed by the industry.

The project will develop specialists who can lead the way in creating innovative steel products & technologies, and to undertake projects in areas such as carbon capture and renewable energy.

It will work closely with large steel companies and smaller companies who make up a vital supply chain for the material to identify their training needs.

STRIDES Alliance

STRIDES Alliance is an employment, mentoring and support programme covering the Neath Port Talbot (NPT) area. It will target those individuals who require a first step engagement soft entry approach to develop confidence and motivation. Ultimately, the initiative aims to create a transitional mindset in individuals, to enable them to progress into economic activity.

The project will engage both inactive and unemployed groups including NEET, BME groups, older people, those with health/disability conditions, and lone parents.

Supported Employment & Training Project

Cyrenians Cymru have established this project in order to assist the most disengaged and vulnerable adults in the Swansea Bay community, among whom there is the highest economic inactivity rate. The project is designed to help them develop employable skills and provide access to employment.

Key client groups include mainly homeless inactive and unemployed adults, as well as NEETS, BME groups, older people and lone parents.

Bridges into Work

This initiative is aiming to help 2,878 people across Wales into employment, and to deliver training and qualifications to over 10,000 more.

The project, which will receive £10.5 million from the European Social Fund, will target those who are currently unemployed or on incapacity benefit as well as those with a work limiting health condition. It will also tackle other barriers to employment such as transport, childcare and lack of self esteem.

Through the project, participants will benefit from the guidance and support of a case worker, who will accompany them on the journey into the job market. The case worker will assist them with access to courses to gain new skills such as basic skills training and NVQs.

Barriers and enablers

At this stage, participants were asked to consider the barriers and enablers that affect the progress of integration, both locally in terms of their own work and regionally/nationally in terms of wider initiatives and the IES policy landscape. They were then individually asked to mark which of those were a particular point of interest or concern.

The key barriers to integration that emerged were:

- **Competitiveness for funding within the system**, damaging to working partnerships – there was significant energy around this point.
- **Grant mentality/fees policy** restricting options and choice for employers/employees
- **Complex multitude of services and providers**, with too many complex bureaucratic systems obscuring accountability. This was a popular point.
- **Fragmented commissioning processes** that are not streamlined
- **Overly target-driven** provider models meaning that, as one participant put it, ‘we measure what we can rather than the outcomes that we need.’ As one employer participant stated, employers can be ‘turned off’ by providers’ targets, as these are not relevant to a business’ own outcomes.
- **Duplication of resources and initiatives**
- **Conflicting political pressures**, emphasised by many. One participant from an LA emphasised the need to ‘stop IES being used as a political football’. IES being pushed as part of political agendas was also seen as contributing to a harmful ‘short-termism’.
- **Problematic exit strategies**

- **Constant change** and introduction of new 'irrelevant PIs', making the landscape unstable and difficult to navigate, which several participants agreed with.
- **Piecemeal system with separate structures** that are not joined up across departments.
- **Reactive** – slow response coming too late, with providers and systems entrenched in set ways.
- **Individuals' lack of skills** – vocational and employability
- **Inflexibility of FE** owing to continual inspections.

The key enablers that were highlighted were:

- **Joined-up processes** across central/local Government departments, providers, FE/HE, etc. This idea attracted the most energy from participants.
- **Funding structures to encourage joint working**, encouraging less competitiveness and territoriality among government-funded organisations and fostering a spirit of cooperation. This idea also attracted much energy. It was also suggested that funding could be linked to the social deprivation index in recognition of the importance of social outcomes.
- **Simplification** of commissioning systems at national, regional and local level – linked with reducing duplication.
- **Need for a one-stop shop or 'whole systems' approach** comprising schools, FE/HE, employers, etc, and an all-age coherent careers service, with a shared agenda and all working under the same roof; there was much energy around this point. The increased size of this venture would also make IES services more visible to the customer (however the issue of cost was pointed out as a challenge to making this happen).
- **Building good working relationships** with a network of support spanning the diverse organisations involved and good signposting operating across them, e.g. between JCP and WAG. Participants also emphasised that trust was crucial to this.
- **Autonomy to perform** and **accountability** to assess performance, with better governance – this was a key point drawing much energy from participants.
- **Political buy-in** and also acknowledgment of 'political game-playing'.
- **Legal and process data-sharing**
- **Engaging social enterprises**
- **Making universities more responsive to employer needs**
- **IES pilots** in Wales, seen as an enabler already in place as they are helping to break down policy barriers.
- **Good relationships with employers**, selling them something they really want.
- **Responsive provision** from providers and third sector
- **Proactive** – having a system anticipating future trends and needs
- **Relevant PIs** and stability
- **Recognising successful initiatives**

More specifically to the Welsh context, a participant from a learning provider highlighted the importance of resources for Welsh language learning for those who may not be literate in English, such as NEETs, since understanding Welsh could broaden their employment opportunities.

There was general agreement that the WAG should be an enabler, i.e. that employment policy should be devolved to Wales to facilitate better synergy with skills policy, but that if full devolution of the process cannot be managed, then at least WAG should be involved with co-

constructing, co-planning and co-commissioning. This was a point many people felt strongly about, especially given the noted disparity of programmes between the UK as a whole and Wales. The need for more funding allocated specifically to Wales out of the central 'pot' was seen as key by many.

It was also pointed out that too much research could obstruct progress if research consistently reiterates the same thing, e.g. pointing towards attitudes, lack of transport, confidence and language skills as key barriers to engagement. Some participants also briefly discussed the difference between 'real' and 'perceived' barriers, e.g. transport versus confidence.

3. DEVELOPING THE REVIEW FRAMEWORK – ENGAGING WITH THE 5 AS

The focus of this session was to generate ideas for the development of the Review assessment framework that will be used to measure progress on integration. 5 As (ambitious, aligned, agile, accountable, affordable) have been set as 'success criteria'. These are the parameters for the assessment process and the starting point on which the framework will be built. In this session participants were invited to visit one or more of the 5 As, displayed on panel boards in the room, and consider 2 questions: 1) What would be experienced by you and by your customers (individuals and employers) if this success criteria were met? 2) What data would you collect to measure this?

This section describes the output from this session for each of the 5 As covering participants' choice of 'top experiences to give emphasis to' and their 'top ideas for data measures'. Other broad themes and suggested measures from the written contributions on the panels are also included below.

Ambitious in its aspirations for employers and individuals as customers

The three experiences feedback were:

- Wales would have more **high level skills and jobs**. This would also create 'a vacuum to pull people in' at the lower skills level. There was the conviction here that Wales can lead the world and not just play catch up with other apparently more advantaged economies.
- The system would be **responsive / flexible** rather than one size fits all. Individual written ideas supporting this included: making service providers work effectively together; pooled resources; acknowledging the long term; moving someone from worklessness to employment (sustainable and progressive); and setting people free to be creative – judged by results and jobs not boxes ticked.
- The system needs to **meet individual needs**. Written ideas supporting this area were: re-define NEETs and focus on the hard to reach on an intensive basis; better support and guidance to individuals from non-traditional education backgrounds; individual circumstances would not be restrictive; challenging to individuals; stretching if realistic, demotivating if not.

Four key measures were suggested:

- Job outcome is not always the measure. There is also a need to measure the '**distance travelled**', i.e. how far has an individual grown and made progress even though they may not have secured a job.

- **Sustainability of employment**, i.e. the number of people in employment for more than 26 weeks.
- **Stop collecting data that is no longer useful**
- **Mapping social progress.**

Many other suggestions for data measures were recorded on the panel (and were captured in Annex B). One other idea was logged on the back of the panel: if qualifications are used as a measure, it is really important that they are not 'dumbed down' to make them easier to attain.

Aligned goals, behaviour and resources

The experiences fed back were:

- The **tension between short-term skills needs** (in Small and Medium Enterprises) and the long-term employability strategy. Linked to this was the suggestion to reward and/or acknowledge informal learning in terms of meeting this skills need.
- The **lack of coherence and consistency between initiatives**
- **How unskilled is unskilled work?**
- **Political short-term agendas vs longer-term approaches.**

In relation to data needed the following were suggested, but with the proviso of finding existing data, rather than commissioning new research:

- **Look at SSC/market data to identify labour/skills data.** Note that a levy funded approach could be used as in construction, red meat, fish/aquaculture, horticulture sectors, or could also be obtained through procurement mechanisms.
- **Labour skills retention and progression**
- **Government analysis of the coherence of the system.**

Key themes written on the panel concerned funding, targets, simplicity and vision. On funding, there was a suggestion to channel funding through employers to enable purchase of the right skills and training for the business and workforce; and the idea to link funding to the economic value of the learning provision to give sustainability of employment/ progression and flexibility, and contribute to GDP (be value-adding).

Common targets that were simple and transparent were suggested, as these could then define organisational goals and reward behaviour. For individuals there would be individual goals arising from a simple, focused, realistic, achievable customer journey. Simplicity and a jargon-free 'listen to me approach' – i.e. the provider listening to the customer rather than the customer listening to the provider – was suggested, in tandem with feedback from service users. A point was also made that we need a big picture vision of what kind of country we want to be before we can align ourselves to achieve this.

One other point was made on data: the need to find the evidence on barriers to learning.

Agile to respond to the needs of individuals, communities and employers

Feedback covered the following areas:

- **Employer led flexibility** was seen as absolutely key.
- **Funding channeled through employers**
- A **responsive funding system** was also seen as absolutely critical.

Feedback on data began with the general guidance that if you are going to collect data, collect as little as possible. The top three suggestions were: -

- Did the **company survive and thrive?**
- **Number of participants and achievements**
- **Return on investment analysis**

Other written suggestions for data measures included: reduction in NEETs; engagement of employers with SSCs, providers, HE and FE institutions; progression; and employer evidence/feedback.

Key themes covered on the panel concerned general experiences of agility, individual experiences, and policy and approach.

General experiences included: a flexible approach to meet all stakeholders needs; a system that could cope with specific needs; agility of providers to deliver quickly in changing economic arena – also to provide more one-off contracts; stay focused – cut the frills; reducing bureaucracy – less form-filling and quicker response. There was also the comment that the public sector would not be agile enough to supply this or fund it, as it is too short term and bureaucratic.

Points relating to individual experiences included: flexibility around style/times of learning; more choice; ability to access skills needed at any time as required for employment (not necessarily a full qualification); varying courses to meet individual need, with the argument that communities would cohere as a result; needs met through a 'well connected' range of service providers; more roll-on/roll-off learning in FE and HE too!

Points about policy and approach were: businesses that can compete with the design-enabled Asia and Far East need to have the expertise and skills for the next generation designs and beyond; policy and programmes of engagement of individuals and employers are not disincentivised by welfare payments; and employers would be trusted to know, organise and deliver their own training needs.

Accountable to its users as customers

The three key experiences fed back were:

- The **experience is different** depending on whether you are setting up the system, providing the system or making use of it.
- **Clear roles are a prerequisite** for accountability – who is contributing what?
- **If individuals/employers held the account (£)** they could ensure accountability. Individuals should be consulted but they need objective as well as subjective data.

The three measures highlighted were:

- **Progression** as well as attainment levels for school pupils
- **Simplify and eliminate duplication**
- **Feedback counts** as well as numbers

Additional measures noted on the panel were: surveys of individuals and employers with sustainable jobs.

Points recorded on the panel expanded on the need for feedback and consultation: students could comment on how well they are taught and employers could comment on course content and results; customers could be consulted before programmes are introduced; customer views and experience should be sought and listened to.

Another theme concerned clarity and performance. There was a need for clear and concise services; a suggestion to bring focus and deliver what is required particularly in the short/medium term; only promise what you can deliver, and deliver what you promise. The overall approach would: fund competence and effort, thus counteracting incompetence and 'frills'; support genuine tryers; hold different organisations to account over performance; give a greater sense of learning from experience; have fewer 'counters' so more time and money on education and skills. Overall skills would meet employer needs and employment would be more likely (measured by correlation rate between investment in skills and job procurement).

A general issue had also been raised on the panel as to why are people called "customers" – this was not thought to be the right term.

Affordable over the full economic cycle

Key areas of experience feedback were:

- **Long-term planning** so that budgeting stretched from one cycle to another. Affordability needs to be measured over longer period recognising results are not always immediate.
- **Known cost and funding** (linked into issues raised concerning planning and continuity)
- **Opportunity for learning** – all learners should have equal access to the system and confidence in accessing it.

The three data points fed back were:

- Is there **funding or provision** data?
- Need **future skills** – what data is out there? E.g. is it a question of supply or demand?
- **Cost of providing qualifications** – what can individual, employer or central sources fund? Do we know average cost per qualification?

A comment was made that funding is critical and that there was a need to reduce double-funding going on currently. The significant public sector funding issues for Wales were echoed by points recorded on the panel. It was also suggested that there was a need for a funding provision database covering WBL, ESF, WAG, DWP regeneration areas.

Several other ideas were logged about how to achieve an affordable system. For example, there was the need to focus. However, the question was raised as to how, e.g. on priority sectors, needy individuals, high value jobs, or world class providers? 'Less ideas, less

conferences, and more doing' was one suggestion. Another was to define what we cannot afford as part of the process of identifying what we must afford. It was noted that the cost of providing an individual a job, i.e. the cost of the skills and employment support system, should be sustainable.

Accountability was also noted, and there was the suggestion to encourage participation regardless of income level (data could then cover participation by income groups). Learners' reflections, feedback and satisfaction were also noted as potential measures.

Butterfly Ideas

Several ideas were also recorded on a sheet entitled 'butterfly ideas', i.e. for those not relating to a specific '5A' criteria. These were:

- Achievable [as a criteria] is missing
- If something is not working admit its not working
- Need to include the other 'barriers to employment' e.g. health (GP 'fit note'); transport; childcare, etc
- Tensions between: economic benefits, social benefits, individual benefits (e.g. well-being)
- Remove 'job outcome' funding – pay for provision (based on quality/ sustainability in work)
- Assimilation across policy/delivery agendas - devolved/ non-devolved.

4. DEVELOPING THE REVIEW PROCESS

For this part of the workshop, participants were asked to consider the specific elements of how the 2010 Review of IES should be conducted, thinking about what the Review must seek to accomplish and what it must avoid, who should be engaged, where the Review should be conducted and when.

In terms of what the Review must do, it was strongly felt that end users must be engaged and that those conducting the Review should go to them, e.g. by using outreach and talking to employers' organisations. It was also emphasised that the Review should 'cover all bases' and seek the views of those currently not using the system. Suggestion for this engagement included using technology as an aid, e.g. online discussion forums such as Ning, 'webonnaires' for consultation, incentivising employers to take part, and using the skills and knowledge of learning representatives. One group envisioned the actual structure of the Review as mapping the customer journey from 11years of age to retirement.

Before undertaking this, some felt that the Review should first establish what is happening now, mapping an existing baseline of provision against which to assess progress. However, others emphasised that the Review should take a non-judgemental approach, i.e. not starting from any particular assumptions and 'treating people as adults', and venture 'outside the box' by, for example, considering models that work outside the UK, as recommended by one participant from WAG.

There was also some confusion as to the purpose of the Review and what exactly it would be 'reviewing'. To this end, participants agreed that clear conceptual and practical outlines would need to be drawn, firstly going back to the theory driving the Review and then being very explicit from the start about what the Review is for – and what it is not. The Review should also,

from the start, have a long-term vision rather than focusing on short-term remedies. Throughout the Review, plain English and minimal jargon should be used.

In terms of what the Review should avoid, the two main points made were: that the Review should be careful not to be Anglo-centric in order to reflect the diversity of the nations; and that it should not be overly cautious and support the status quo too much. Some participants felt that the Review should also avoid making the 'simplistic assumption' that if something has been in place for years, it should not be challenged. Others, however, disagreed, emphasising that if a policy works, it should be given due recognition and implemented more widely.

Destructive criticism was seen as another feature the Review should avoid, i.e. it should avoid being critical or signalling out bad practice. Undue focus on one particular area could also lead to an imbalanced view of the situation, as could a focus on limited consultation or 'buy-in'.

'Who' to engage was seen as a critical issue. The group working on this felt that the full spectrum of stakeholders in the system, including learners and communities, should be consulted, but that perhaps this could be filtered by region. The specific people mentioned were:

- Public bodies:
 - Skill councils/WEFO
 - WAG (DCELLS, DE&T, health, transport etc)
 - LAs (education, economic dev, WLGA)
 - JCP (learning action centres)
 - DWP
 - FE/HE and supporting bodies and Careers Wales
- Private organisations:
 - Providers
 - Employers (CBI, FSB, Chambers of Commerce, NTF)
- Skill Sector Councils
- Trade Union representatives
- Voluntary organisations:
 - Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)
 - Trust fund providers
- End users:
 - NEETs
 - Employees
 - Students
 - Graduates
- Not for profit organisations

It was strongly felt that existing networks should be used to tap into these groups rather than trying to establish contacts from scratch, which would work particularly well in the context of Wales given its relatively small size and overlapping working relationships. There was also agreement that there should initially be focused engagement with separate groups which are then drawn together into collective sessions.

It was suggested that the locating of the Review should take into consideration 'problem areas' such as North Wales and perhaps also consider sectoral geographies, e.g. mid-Wales as having a concentrated retail sector but a less developed agricultural sector, and the implications of this for integrating different employment and skills services in different areas.

The rural-urban dichotomy was deemed important to reflect in the locations where the Review takes place, with coastal areas mentioned. Some participants also raised the issue of whether to divide the locations sub-regionally and/or according to the four JCP areas in Wales.

In terms of when the Review should be conducted, this was largely felt to be a question of the Commission's own resources. Attention was also drawn to the need for careful planning in light of the upcoming general election and political arena in Wales. Linked with the 'who', it was felt that dividing the Review into two-three rounds of engagement would make it a more robust process. It was strongly felt that, throughout the cycles of the Review, those involved should consistently be signposted to the Review's progress and outputs of this work.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In bringing the event to a close thanks were expressed to all participants in the day for their time, energy and engagement; Paul Egan and the WESB for co-hosting; Nick McNeill and Linda Davis from WAG who played a key role supporting the day and providing subsequent guidance on case studies; and the team at UKCES.

6. SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

Below are key lessons learned from the Wales session, extracted after the event, to inform UKCES' thinking on current progress towards the integration of employment and skills. Note that this section is not intended as a complete summary of all outputs from the event.

The devolved context of Wales:

- The smallness of Wales, on the one hand, is conducive to better cooperation and trust between different partners in the employment and skills sector; on the other hand, the devolved context presents IES in Wales with the challenge of interfacing with pan-UK complexity. Arguably, devolving employment policy itself to WAG would aid the development of IES in the area.
- The current political agenda is a key concern, especially given the timing of the national election and anticipated changes in the WAG Cabinet in February 2010.

Cutting through complexity and bureaucracy:

- There is a strong need for the simplification of commissioning and funding streams. Complex commissioning can be seen as a barrier to IES given that it often results in competitiveness, hence undermining the working relationships and trust seen as essential to facilitating IES.
- There is the need to reduce bureaucracy and purpose-less data collecting.

Clearing the cluttered landscape:

- The current plethora of short-term programme initiatives that often duplicate efforts and are confusing to customers should be disentangled and streamlined in order to avoid loss of expertise among the people who run them and provide a clearer, more accessible and efficient service.
- A 'one-stop-shop' for individuals and employers on the ground, as well as a more joined-up approach at Government level, would better facilitate the 'whole system' basis of IES, rather than having fragmented separate systems and specialist providers.

Hearing the employer voice:

- More account should be taken of the employer voice and more leadership given to employers by, for example, channelling funding directly through them.
- There need to be clearer links between skills and employment support providers and those involved with business development and infrastructure regeneration.

Understanding the 'customer':

- There is a need to clarify who the 'customer' is and, indeed, if 'customer' is the right word. A clear demarcation of positionality within the system is a crucial means of ensuring accountability.
- Understanding individual learners' journey and job progress is also important; for example, making value judgements about 'up-skilling' may not present an accurate picture of progress – how 'unskilled' is 'unskilled work'? To this end, an understanding of the customer entails not only measuring job outcomes but also tracking distance moved towards the labour market.

Need for greater flexibility:

- Funding should be flexible to meet changing needs across the economic cycle, necessitating long-term planning.
- IES services should be responsive to individuals' needs.

Clarity of vision:

- Employment and skills support are still conceptualised separately; there is, therefore, the need to arrive at a consensus as to what 'integration' is in theory and what it would look like in practise.
- Research seeking to evaluate the progress of integration should have clearly defined aims and parameters in terms of what it is examining.
- The vision for IES in Wales should go hand in hand with the vision for wider social progress, supporting the hardest to reach and enabling equality of opportunity.