Overview

The Wales Labour Market Summit II, held at Bangor University in September 2016, was a knowledge exchange event that brought together academics, policy makers and stakeholders - including representatives from Careers Wales, FSB, Anglesey Council and NWEAB. It provided a platform for debating and informing policy interventions in response to large-scale job losses across traditional industries; and how policy makers and stakeholders can sustainably respond to large-scale investment and job opportunities.

This year’s theme, “Comparing policy interventions to challenge business as usual” saw speakers focusing on three key areas: workplace innovation, labour market supply chains, and job quality. These themes are summarised in this report. All presentations can be accessed online here.

With a focus on North Wales, the Summit also provided an opportunity for comparative reference to other regional and national labour market interventions in the UK and beyond (Scotland, Cumbria, and Finland) with the intention of catalysing change in future policy and practice.

Workplace Innovation

These examples of actual, and possible, workplace innovation from different nations and sectors provide an important evidence base which shows that we can improve on ‘business as usual’; we can change employment practice to ensure fair play for workers and sustainable growth for regions.

Dr Tuomo Alasoini, from Tekes, the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation, discussed successes and ongoing challenges in promoting workplace innovation in the Nordic context over the past two decades.

Professor Patricia Findlay of Strathclyde University discussed the Fair Work Convention and the impacts of the Fair Work Framework in supporting workplace innovation in Scotland; ensuring that organisations deliver fair work that provides effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect.

Professors Karel Williams (Manchester Business School) and Ian Rees Jones (WISERD, Cardiff University) shared their research into adult care across the UK. Their research identifies chronic problems with the formatting, provision, and delivery of residential and domestic care and they argue that there is a need for experimentation and radical social innovation.
Labour Market Supply Chains

Our two speakers in this session discussed supply chain challenges and opportunities in Anglesey/North Wales, and Cumbria. There are some striking parallels between Anglesey and Cumbria; they are both rural, peripheral regions, with a traditional focus on agriculture and tourism. Both regions are seeking to develop labour market opportunities in the energy sector (Anglesey's "Energy Island" and Cumbria's "Energy Coast" initiatives), including marine, wind, and nuclear energy.

Dylan Williams, head of Regulatory and Economic Development at Anglesey Council, and NWEAB supply chain lead, profiled the major transformational projects on the horizon for North Wales and Anglesey, and offered insights into how North Wales can take advantage of the supply chain opportunities offered by such developments.

Professor Frank Peck, Director of the Centre for Regional Economic Development at the University of Cumbria, focused on the role of small and medium-sized enterprises in the supply chain at the Sellafield industrial site in West Cumbria, in particular how changes in procurement processes are creating new challenges for local businesses and why these issues are relevant to policy makers in other nuclear-dependent local economies.

Job Quality

This session tackled the issue of job quality in Wales; providing a statistically-informed discussion of how to accurately measure job quality; and exploring the experience of job quality at an individual level through stories of finding work after redundancy at Anglesey Aluminium.

Professor Alan Felstead, from Cardiff University, explored the state of job quality in Britain and specifically Wales; highlighting the importance of considering criteria such as training, over-qualification and under-use of skills, work intensity, and work anxiety as opposed to focusing on whether or not people are in work and, if so, what level of pay they receive.

Dr Alexandra Plows, of Bangor University, discussed how economic shocks and strains have impacted Anglesey between 2009 and 2016. She provided examples of how individuals and stakeholders have been seeking to tackle de-industrialisation and redundancy, and the challenges they face in securing quality employment.
The day culminated with a panel-style debate and an energetic exchange of ideas between participants, on the question of “What can or should be done to move beyond ‘business as usual’ with labour market policy?” The debate developed some of the themes introduced by the speakers, including: improving job quality, developing sustainable labour markets, finding opportunities in the post Brexit economy, the possibility of developing a ‘Welsh Mittelstand’ (developing medium–large size enterprises), and seeking a better understanding of why small family-owned business sometimes choose not to grow.

Key Findings

The first labour market summit in 2015 identified the challenges of matching supply and demand in the local (North Wales) labour market, and the need to focus on the quality, as well as the availability, of jobs in the region. These are significant challenges and have not gone away. At WLMSII we developed these themes further and found that:

1. Examples of ‘best practice’ workplace innovation initiatives from other nations and regions (Scotland, Cumbria, and Finland) and suggested innovation within specific sectors (health and social care), show that it is possible to challenge ‘business as usual’ and to provide well-paid, quality jobs, develop labour market capacity, and create sustainable regional economic growth.

2. North Wales stakeholders are continuing to proactively develop strategies and initiatives directly aimed at tackling the challenges of matching supply and demand, for example through NWEAB’s focus on supporting local businesses to uptake supply chain opportunities; and local HE provision of training directly linked to identified labour market opportunities (e.g. Grwp Llandrillo Menai’s Energy Centre on Anglesey).

3. The success of all these initiatives are dependent on macro-economic and other factors outside the control of regional actors; for example, the vagaries of market forces, Brexit, and fluctuations in global energy prices. This has a significant impact on supply/demand strategic planning at all levels. Regions such as North Wales are being hard-hit.

4. The labour market of North Wales is mostly made up of micro businesses and there are also high levels of self-employment. There is a lack of evidence/data on the ‘what, how, and why’ of these micro-businesses, and their needs and ambitions for the future. Filling this evidence gap could inform strategic policy planning.
Developing Impact

Over the last 7 years the WLMS team have been researching the North Wales labour market and have learned much through developing connections with many of the stakeholders, including Anglesey Council, UNITE the Union, and bodies such as NWEAB, who are tasked with developing strategies for sustainable regional development and ensuring the availability of sustainable quality jobs.

The 2015 and 2016 Wales Labour Market Summits were organised following the identification of a need to facilitate the process of two-way knowledge exchange between local, regional, and national actors (policy makers, organisations and stakeholders) working on strategy and day-to-day delivery and the academics researching in the field of labour markets and the wider economy.

What we did well:

- 92% of participants felt there was sufficient opportunity for participation
- 85% of participants felt that the format of the summit was effective
- 77% of participants found the event relevant to them and/or their organisation
- 76% of participants felt that overall the event was useful

Where we can improve:

- More presentations from employer representatives, practitioners, and stakeholders
- Inclusion of more statistics and information, potentially from ONS and/or Data Unit Wales, in terms of Labour Market Intelligence (LMI)
- Increase time available for questions after individual presentations

Our thanks to all who attended

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Online Information and Resources:

http://wiserd.ac.uk/training-events/event/wales-labour-market-summit-ii-comparing-policy-interventions-challenge-business-usual/#sthash.YmlvTXi.dpbe

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