Independent Review of Regional Skills Partnerships' evidence-based planning

Report to Welsh Government

May 2019
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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. There are three Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) in Wales, covering South East Wales, South West and Mid Wales and North Wales. Each RSP produces and analyses labour market intelligence, engages with regional employers and advises the Welsh Government on skills provision in the light of employer-led insight.

2. The RSPs form part of the Welsh Government’s broader approach to regional economic development. This includes the commitment in the Economic Action Plan to strengthened strategic planning at regional level and the development of the City Deals in Cardiff Capital Region and Swansea Bay and the Growth Deal in North Wales.

3. In the light of this, SQW was commissioned in March 2019 to consider the consistency of the skills insight and intelligence that is gathered by the RSPs and how it is used and presented; and how the RSPs contribute to, inform and are informed by the plans of the City and Growth Deals. The research took place in March and April and included consultation with RSP managers and chairs, as well as wider stakeholders. It also took account of the evidence provided to the National Assembly’s Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee into the Regional Skills Partnerships, which ran in parallel with this study.

Consistency of intelligence and insight

4. Each RSP currently prepares two key deliverables for the Welsh Government: a Regional Employment and Skills Plan (RESP) and, based on this, a series of recommended adjustments to full-time FE and Apprenticeship numbers for Welsh Government consideration.

5. The RSPs approach the development of the Regional Employment and Skills Plans in a broadly consistent manner, including a review of labour market intelligence and consultation with employers and providers. Historically, the RSPs have been required to prepare the RESP annually: this has been quite resource-intensive, and stakeholders considered that it impeded a more strategic approach. From 2019, RESP preparation will move to a three-year cycle: this should help to reduce the burden of Plan preparation and enable the RSPs to take a longer-term view.

6. All RSPs engage directly with employers, although there could be a more consistent and comprehensive approach to employer engagement. At present, there is variation in the depth and breadth of direct employer contact. However, this is core to the RSPs’ remit, all of the RSPs are committed to strengthening their employer relationships, and there is good practice among the RSPs that can be built on.

7. The RSPs make use of a variety of secondary data, including the labour market information datapacks provided by the Welsh Government. There may be opportunities to streamline the process of data analysis, either by the Welsh Government centrally, or by the RSPs working collectively. This could help to free resource at regional level to focus on direct employer engagement.
8. There are some areas in which the employer voice and LMI data could be supplemented with a wider range of evidence. This might include additional foresighting information, qualitative research with employers and engagement with those employers that operate nationally and are hard to engage at regional level. This could also be delivered or commissioned centrally to minimise the burden on regional resources.

9. Efforts to address learner demand (as well as employer demand and provider supply) are also important. In some cases, the RSPs have initiated work to promote and explain opportunities to potential learners, although this is outside their core remit. However, changing learner demand is important in changing the supply: if resources can be freed up through a streamlining of the more ‘process-driven’ aspects of the RSPs’ role, there may be an opportunity to do more in this area.

10. While the RSPs appear to have sufficient resources to deliver their core functions, there is little spare capacity. Annual contracting is a particular challenge, particularly in attracting and retaining key staff: a three-year contract linked with the RESP cycle could provide greater certainty.

11. The current approach to the adjustment of full-time FE and Apprenticeship numbers is very granular, and because it is carried out as a ‘cost neutral’ exercise, it is something of a ‘zero-sum game’. This does lead to some tension between employers and providers, and there is a strong view from stakeholders that the identification of gaps in provision should be more strategic. New guidance from the Welsh Government is expected to address this, although further work should be done to review the outcomes of the learner numbers adjustment exercise.

Relationships with the regional growth agenda and its governance

12. The City Deal/Growth Deal arrangements have evolved in different ways, as have the RSPs, and there is no single, consistent governance arrangement. However, there is consistent desire – by the RSPs and the regional partnerships - to avoid duplication, and the RSPs have been recognised as the main local skills partnerships by the City Deal/Growth Deal arrangements in Cardiff Capital Region, North Wales and Swansea Bay.

13. This presents some challenges in terms of competing pressures on RSP teams. However, there is an advantage in the RSPs having a close relationship with the City Deal/Growth Deal structures and with the Welsh Government’s Chief Regional Officers: the insight from employers and providers should benefit all three. If the requirements of each funder are clear, there ought to be benefits from working together.
1. Introduction

Purpose

1.1 There are three Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) in Wales, covering South East Wales, North Wales and South West and Mid Wales (see Figure 1-1). Since 2014, they have been tasked by the Welsh Government with reporting, analysing and influencing skills provision based on regional demand, to support economic growth and major infrastructure projects. Each RSP is asked to produce a three-year Regional Employment and Skills Plan, and to provide annual reports and recommendations to the Welsh Government. These inform the deployment of further education and apprenticeship budgets and provide a skills response to a number of wider policy priorities, such as Green Growth and the Welsh language strategy.

1.2 The Regional Skills Partnerships form part of the Welsh Government’s evolving approach to regional economic development. This has been augmented in recent years by the development of the City Deals in Cardiff Capital Region and Swansea Bay and the Growth Deal in North Wales, as well as by the commitment in the Welsh Government’s Economic Action Plan to improved strategic planning at regional level across a range of issues, including skills.

1.3 In the light of this, the (then) Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning wrote to the chairs of the three Regional Skills Partnerships in December 2018 setting out her intention to carry out a review to “ensure better consistency between RSPs, and to make recommendations on the linkages between RSPs, City Deals and Growth Deals”.

Study brief and methodology

1.4 Following the Minister’s letter, SQW was commissioned in March 2019 to consider:

- the consistency of the skills insight and intelligence that is gathered by the RSPs and how it is used and presented
- how the RSPs contribute to, inform and are informed by the plans of the current and emerging City and Growth Deals

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3 Letter from Eluned Morgan AM to RSP Chairs, 13 December 2018
The research took place in March and April. It involved a series of 21 interviews with key stakeholders, including the chairs and managers of each of the three RSPs, as well as several other informed actors in business, provider organisations (higher and further education institutions and work-based learning providers) and government. It also included a review of background materials, including the Regional Employment and Skills Plans, the RSPs’ annual reports to the Welsh Government and the emerging regional economic growth strategies.

In parallel with this study, the National Assembly’s Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee was also carrying out a review of the Regional Skills Partnerships. The terms of reference for the EIS Committee’s review were broader than those for this study and the two exercises were separate. However, the Committee’s lines of enquiry extended to the use and consistency of intelligence and relationships with the regional growth agenda: we have therefore made use of the written and verbal evidence submitted to the Committee where relevant.

It should also be noted that an earlier Independent Report on the Governance of Regional Skills Partnerships was prepared for the Welsh Government by Dr John Graystone in March 2018. The Graystone Review made some 19 recommendations, relating to governance and accountability, as well as to the preparation of Regional Employment and Skills Plans. We have not as part of this study reviewed progress in meeting these recommendations (which remain, at the time of writing, relatively fresh), but we have reflected on the findings of the Graystone Review in relation to our two key research questions.

Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured in four chapters:

- **Chapter 2** outlines the role and mandate of the RSPs and explains how these have evolved in the light of the developing strategic context for skills and economic development.

- Chapters 3 and 4 provide the core of the report. **Chapter 3** looks at the consistency, process and ‘governance’ of gathering skills insight and intelligence. **Chapter 4** then considers the relationships between the RSPs and the regional growth agenda.

- Finally, **Chapter 5** draws some conclusions from the research and identifies some recommendations to the Welsh Government.
2. Background and strategic context

**Summary**

- Following the 2014 Skills Implementation Plan, the Welsh Government designated three Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs). The RSPs produce and analyse labour market intelligence, engage with regional employers and advise the Welsh Government on skills provision in the light of employer-led insight.

- Since the establishment of the RSPs, the regional dimension of the Welsh Government’s approach to economic development has been strengthened, in the context of Prosperity for All and the Economic Action Plan. Alongside this, plans are underway to establish a better coordinated framework for planning post-16 education.

- Both these policy drivers could lead to an expanded role for the RSPs: in this context, a review of their evidence and insight capacity is relevant.

**The policy context**

*The policy origins of the RSPs...*

2.1 The Welsh Government’s original policy approach was set out in the *Skills Implementation Plan*, adopted in 2014. Focused on raising productivity and supporting more people into work, the Skills Implementation Plan included an aim to develop a “model for regional skills delivery”, which would enable learning provision to be aligned with regional strategic investments and growth opportunities. To deliver this, the Plan called for “inclusive and industry-aligned” Regional Skills Partnerships, “working in tandem with City Regions and Enterprise Zones”. While recognising that each RSP may be structured differently according to existing regional arrangements and priorities, it tasked each with developing an annual Regional Employment and Skills Plan (RESP), and with four key roles, which can be summarised as:

- producing and analysing labour market information (linked with wider economic intelligence) to inform regional skills requirements
- reviewing regional skills provision and advising the Welsh Government on the future prioritisation of skills funding
- acting as a strategic body representing regional interests, informed by strong industry engagement and taking account of skills utilisation
- working collectively and strategically to maximise future funding (in the context of a likely reduction in public funds)

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... and the current policy landscape

2.2 Since then, the policy context has developed progressively. *Prosperity for All*, the Welsh Government’s National Strategy, specifically highlights the role of the Regional Skills Partnerships, and commits to working with the RSPs to identify future skills needs and to building on them as the basis for an enhanced regional approach to economic development. Several aspects of the current and evolving policy landscape are important to the future of the RSPs:

- **first**, the regional dimension of the Welsh Government’s approach to economic development has been strengthened. In particular, the Economic Action Plan sets out a streamlined regional geography based around three regions (coterminal with the RSPs), linked with the City Deal and Growth Deal arrangements and with the aim of achieving greater coordination at regional level.

- **second**, the Economic Action Plan signalled a move away from a focus on a series of ‘priority sectors’, towards a framework that recognises an increased blurring of sectoral boundaries on the one hand; the importance of the ‘foundational economy’ (those parts of the economy that provide essential, ‘everyday’ goods and services) as sources of employment (and progression in work) on the other; and interaction between the two.

- **third**, following the Hazelkorn Review of post-compulsory education, the Welsh Government has consulted on proposals to establish a new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) that would, *inter alia*, establish a better coordinated framework for planning all post-16 education and would enable greater dialogue between employers, providers and the Welsh Government. The TERCW is likely to become operational from 2022/23; the consultation proposals envisaged a key role for Regional Skills Partnerships in supporting it by identifying local and regional economic needs.

2.3 More broadly, successive policy statements and strategies place a continuing emphasis on employer engagement and leadership in skills planning. For example, the Apprenticeships Policy and Action Plan notes that “Regional Skills Partnerships will be instrumental in understanding the skills need and demand across Wales”, with a view to realigning Apprenticeship places towards skills shortage sectors.

The Regional Skills Partnerships’ role

2.4 The key roles outlined in the 2014 Skills Implementation Plan remain relevant, and have been reinforced by more recent policy. Currently, each RSP receives £165,000 in annual funding from the Welsh Government: this is intended to cover LMI preparation and analysis,

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6 Welsh Government (2017), *Prosperity for All: The National Strategy*, p.18, p.27
8 Welsh Government (June 2017), *Public Good and a Prosperous Wales: Building a reformed PCET system* (Consultation document WG31891, p.43)
9 Welsh Government (2017), *Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy*, p.14
widespread consultation and engagement with employers and providers and the preparation of the Regional Employment and Skills Plan.

2.5 Alongside the RESP, the RSPs are also tasked with identifying where learner numbers on full-time Further Education programmes and Apprenticeship Frameworks should be adjusted to respond to anticipated economic demand. This is then used to make recommendations to the Welsh Government, to inform funding decisions. Currently, the RSPs are asked to ensure that their recommendations are cost-neutral (i.e. a recommendation for increased numbers in one programme must be offset by reductions elsewhere) and are made at a granular (i.e. individual learner numbers) level of detail. This is however likely to be modified in forthcoming guidance.

2.6 Historically, the RSPs have been asked to prepare the RESP and associated learner numbers recommendations templates on an annual basis. However, the current contract letter from the Welsh Government proposes a longer-term (three year) horizon, to enable a more strategic approach.

The three Regional Skills Partnerships

2.7 All RSPs are asked to deliver a common set of outcomes by the Welsh Government\(^\text{10}\). They also have some similarities in terms of governance, in that all three are chaired by a private sector employer and are constituted as unincorporated partnerships\(^\text{11}\). However, as envisaged in the Skills Implementation Plan, the three RSPs have evolved in different ways. This reflects the fact that they are voluntary groupings built from existing arrangements, rather than created ‘top-down’ by the Welsh Government:

- the **Regional Learning and Skills Partnership for South West and Mid Wales** (the RLSP) is the oldest of the three. It was established in 2007 as a public sector-led body, and subsequently evolved as a private sector-chaired partnership, with a series of industry cluster groups. Geographically, the RLSP is the largest of the three, covering both the Swansea Bay City Deal area (Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire and Swansea) and the Growing Mid Wales partnership area (Ceredigion and Powys). Carmarthenshire County Council acts at the RLSP’s accountable body.

- the **Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership** was originally established in 2014 as the Learning, Skills and Innovation Partnership (LSkIP) for South East Wales. In 2018, it was reconstituted as the CCR Skills Partnership, as part of the wider Cardiff City Deal arrangements. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) remains the CCR Skills Partnership’s accountable body for the purposes of Welsh Government funding.

- the **North Wales RSP** was established in 2013 as the employment and skills ‘work stream’ of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and was subsequently recognised (and funded) by the Welsh Government as an RSP. Historically, the

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\(^{10}\) The Welsh Government contracts with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) for RSP support, with the WLGA in turn contracting with the relevant accountable bodies for each RSP. As part of the Welsh Government’s contract with the WLGA, the RSPs are asked to meet a series of outcomes as set out in Schedule 2 of the Grant Award.

\(^{11}\) The Graystone Review discussed this in some detail.
Partnership was public sector-led, although was reorganised in 2017 to become more employer-focused, with a private sector chair and a series of sector groups.

Looking to the future

2.8 The evolving policy context presents both opportunities and challenges for the Regional Skills Partnerships as they develop. It signals an increasingly important regional role, which will need to involve dialogue between employers, providers and government: exactly the RSPs’ core remit. There is also the potential, through the establishment of the TERCfW, to expand the RSPs’ influence beyond their current focus on full-time FE and Apprenticeships. However, it will also mean a need for an increasingly sophisticated understanding of current and potential economic demand and provision: in this context, reviewing the RSPs’ evidence and insight capacity and their relationship with regional structures is very relevant.
3. Consistency of intelligence and insight

Summary

- Historically, the RSPs have been charged with preparing an annual Regional Skills and Employment Plan (RESP). From 2019, RSPs will be required to prepare three-year Plans: this will be less onerous and should enable a more strategic approach.

- Currently, RSPs make recommendations to the Welsh Government on changes to learner numbers in full-time FE and Apprenticeship programmes. While more needs to be done to review the outcomes of this approach, there is a strong view that the RSPs should take a more strategic view, rather than a granular view of specific provision.

- The RSPs make use of a variety of secondary data, including LMI datapacks provided by the Welsh Government. Potentially, this data analysis could be streamlined.

- All RSPs engage directly with employers. The extent of this varies, although employer engagement is widely regarded as a ‘core remit’ of the RSPs and one which all RSPs are committed to expanding. Stakeholders also considered that employer insight could be better triangulated with other evidence (for example through foresighting).

- The Welsh Government core funding allocation should be sufficient to support the RSPs’ core tasks. However, there is no real spare capacity. Some central analytical support could help to free up resource to focus on employer engagement and insight.

Introduction

3.1 ‘Intelligence and insight’ is at the heart of the RSPs’ role: gaining an understanding of current and future employer demand and using this to inform provision. Within this part of the study, our research focused on:

- the **key outputs** of the RSPs’ activity, in preparing the Regional Employment and Skills Plans and making recommendations to the Welsh Government

- how the RSPs **gather intelligence**, both secondary labour market information and direct employer insight, and how this is triangulated and interpreted

- the budget, core staff and partnership **resources** that the RSPs have available to fulfil their intelligence and insight functions

- the extent to which there is **clarity regarding the RSPs’ role**, and whether additional guidance from the Welsh Government would be useful

- the extent to which there is **collaboration** and sharing of good practice across the RSPs, and how this might be encouraged further.

Producing the outputs: Preparing the plans and recommendations

3.2 The RSPs prepare two key deliverables for the Welsh Government: the Regional Employment and Skills Plan and, based on this, a series of recommended adjustments to future learner...
numbers for Welsh Government consideration, prepared in the form of a ‘Planning and Funding Template’.

**Regional Employment and Skills Plans**

3.3 While the three Regional Employment and Skills Plans do not follow a uniform template, they respond to the Welsh Government’s guidance in setting out the skills issues and challenges for the region in the light of the performance and future direction of the economy, and they outline priority areas for future skills development. To date, the RESP have been prepared annually.

3.4 The RSPs approach the development of the RESP in a broadly consistent manner. In general terms, this involves a process of evidence gathering (described under ‘Gathering the evidence’ below, but including a review of labour market intelligence and consultation with employers and providers) and approval by the RSP Board. Because the Welsh Government has previously requested that RESP are completed in July, the process of developing them has mostly taken place in the first half of the calendar year.

3.5 The development of RESP ensures a presentation of regional skills challenges and priorities in a broadly consistent format (and acts as a goal for the employer engagement process), the requirement to produce RESP annually was described as “like painting the Forth Bridge”, since they were in a perpetual state of revision and absorbed substantial resources to prepare. This seems to be a fair criticism, given that regional skills issues are unlikely to change significantly over a 12-month period and there will always be a time lag in the release of data anyway. The decision by the Welsh Government to request three-year RESP from 2019 (with a shorter annual update) was therefore welcomed by all consultees. This should help to reduce the risk of delay in production (at the time of writing, only one RSP – the South West and Mid Wales – had a 2018 RESP published on its website) and allow for a longer-term, more strategic forward view.

**The Planning and Funding Template**

3.6 The RESP are accompanied by a Planning and Funding Template, an Excel spreadsheet on which the RSPs are required to set out in a standard format their key findings in relation to (inter alia) skills shortages, anticipated occupational changes and the skills issues that need to be addressed in order to meet Welsh Government priorities in respect of areas such as the development of the Welsh language, ‘green growth’ and inclusivity. The Planning and Funding Template also sets out the subject areas in which the RSP wishes to recommend an increase, or reduction, in learner numbers in full-time Further Education programmes or Apprenticeship frameworks, looking three years ahead. Prepared alongside the RESP in July, the Planning and Funding Template recommendations impact (if accepted) from September of the following year.
3.7 The learner number recommendations set out on the Templates are very granular. For full-time further education and Apprenticeships, the most recent combined recommendations of the three RSPs were as follows:

**Table 3-1: RSP recommendations for 2019/20 (full-time FE and Apprenticeships, change in learner numbers)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner type</th>
<th>Recommended increase in provision</th>
<th>Recommended decrease in provision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Education (net change: +7)</td>
<td>Professional Cookery (L2, L3), Hospitality &amp; Catering (L2, L3), Childcare Development (L3), Health &amp; Social Care (L2, L3)</td>
<td>Art &amp; Design (L2, L3), Sport &amp; Leisure (L2), Animal Care (L2), Hairdressing (L2, L3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeships (net change: +45)</td>
<td>Hospitality (L2, L3), Health care &amp; public services (L2, L3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North Wales RSP</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Education (net change: -42)</td>
<td>Mfg &amp; Engineering (L3), Construction (L1, L2, L3)</td>
<td>Health &amp; Social Care (L3), Public Services (L3), Childcare Development (L3), Access to HE Health Science (L3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeships (net change: +85)</td>
<td>Health care &amp; public services (L2, L3); Manufacturing (L2, L4); Engineering (L3, L4), Construction (L3, L4); Management (L4), Leisure, sport &amp; travel (L3)</td>
<td>Business admin (L2), Hair &amp; Beauty (L2), Retailing &amp; Customer Service (L2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South West and Mid Wales RLSP</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Education (net change: -196)</td>
<td>Health &amp; social care (with IWL13, L2), Wall &amp; Floor Tiling (L1, L2), Brickwork with IWL (L1), Trowel Trades with IWL (L1), Plumbing with IWL (L1), Plant Maintenance (L1), Sport &amp; Leisure with Acc. Learning (L1-2), Professional Cookery Acc. Learning (L1-2), Mfg &amp; Engineering (L3), Vet Nursing (L2, L3))</td>
<td>Health &amp; Social Care Accelerated Learning (L2-3), Childcare Development (L1, L2, L3), Construction (L1), Carpentry &amp; Joinery (L1, L2, L3), Brickwork (L1, L2, L3), Painting and Decorating (L1, L2), Trowel Trades (L1, L2), Plumbing (L1, L2, L3), Electrical Installation (L1, L2, L3), Sport &amp; Leisure (L1, L2, L3), Hairdressing (L1, Accelerated Learning L1-2), Professional Cookery (L1), Automotive Engineering (L1), IT Practitioners (L2), IT Users (L1, L3), Public Services (L1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeships (net change: +356)</td>
<td>Health Care &amp; Public Services (L2), Construction (L2, L3), Hair &amp; Beauty (L2, L3, L4), Engineering (L2, L3, L4+), Hospitality (L2, L3, L4+), Manufacturing (L3, L4+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Welsh Government/ RSPs, Planning & Funding Templates 2018. SQW analysis

3.8 This summary of recommendations from the most recent set of templates indicates that there is considerable variance in the way in which RSPs have recommended changes in provision, with more extensive recommendations, a much more granular approach

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12 FE figures are for learner numbers; Apprenticeship figures are for programme starts. The RSP recommendations are expected to be cost neutral. Due to differential programme costs, learner numbers will not necessarily balance.

13 Increased Workplace Learning
(including recommended movements within subject areas), and a clear shift towards work-based learning in South West and Mid Wales, compared with in the other two. The maximum value of the proposed changes (in 2019/20) is around £930,000 in South West and Mid Wales.

3.9 The Planning and Funding Template and the process of recommending changes in provision was a matter of debate at the Assembly EIS Committee enquiry and was discussed by consultees as part of this review. On the one hand, there is an argument that direct ‘line of sight’ between recommendations and practical changes in provision is helpful in keeping employers engaged. Business consultees also cited practical ways in which changes in provision had been made (for example, increasing the provision of work-based learning in South West and Mid Wales, and launching a new composite materials course in Cardiff Capital Region). However, three key challenges were highlighted in relation to the approach:

- first, the granular nature of the recommendations leads to a focus on detail at the expense of the ‘bigger picture’. The total value of the proposed adjustments is relatively small in the context of total skills budgets (up to around £1 million in any one year), and are only focused on further education and work-based learning. But most employers’ short-to-medium skills challenges will be met by people already in the labour market – and many new entrants will be arriving via schools and higher education, which are out of scope for the granular provision planning activity.

- second, the ‘zero-sum game’ nature of the Template planning process presents some challenges for partnership working. More than one consultee referred to the process of agreeing recommendations as ‘horse trading’, in which those sector groups that are best organised are able to have the greatest influence.

- third, while the mechanics of adjusting learner numbers are simple, implementation is more complex. This is partly because increasing some forms of provision are dependent on progression from others. It also reflects the fact that ‘demand and supply’ is not straightforward, since ‘demand’ is driven by learners as well as employers, and there is no guarantee that learners will take up additional places. This is recognised by the RSPs through their work in highlighting career opportunities, but several respondents noted that more could be done on the learner demand side.

3.10 On the whole, there was a strong view that the RSPs should have more of a strategic role in skills planning, rather than a technical, operational one. This view was unsurprisingly expressed by consultees in the further education sector (reflecting some of the responses to the Assembly EIS Committee), but it was also widely expressed by business and other stakeholders: from a business perspective, one consultee commented that while the Welsh Government had a planning interest in agreeing hard numbers, employers were more interested in how their...
skills requirements could be addressed in the round. However, we have not as part of this review considered the outcomes of the learner number adjustments exercise, nor have we looked in any detail at their practical implementation. As the adjustments exercise was an experimental approach, it would be helpful to review the outcomes – as well as the process – before making a judgement on its effectiveness.

Gathering the evidence

3.11 To inform the RESPs and the recommendations contained in the Funding and Planning Templates, the Regional Skills Partnerships undertake analysis of secondary labour market data, as well as consultation with employers.

Labour market intelligence (LMI)

3.12 The Welsh Government prepares annual LMI reports for each of the three RSP regions: the most recent editions (at April 2019) posted on the Welsh Government Skills Gateway website are from August 2017. Each LMI report is an extensive compendium of data drawn from StatsWales, additional FE student data, the Employer Skills Survey, Working Futures and a report commissioned by the Welsh Government on Welsh language skills needs in a series of sectors, with links to the latest data on the StatsWales website, which the RSPs are advised to use. While much of the data are easily accessible elsewhere, via sources such as StatsWales and NOMIS and will already be analysed by providers and other bodies, a central reference source is likely to be helpful, both for RSPs and other partners. The data are also presented consistently for all three RSPs. Each RSP also maintains a regional data observatory, separately branded, but all delivered through the Infobase Cymru platform and containing common datasets as well as bespoke local content.

3.13 All the RSPs reported that they make use of the LMI reports in preparing the Regional Employment and Skills Plans. Three observations were made however:

- first, the timing of the release of the LMI datapacks means that the data are often ‘out of date’ by the time the RESP needs to be produced. With the move to a three-year (rather than annual) RESP cycle, this should also be less of an issue
- second, some reported that some datasets are not included within the pack (for example, from Careers Wales). A number reported that it would be useful to have access to widely-used commercial data sources: the RSPs are sometimes able to access via their further education partners, but the Welsh Government will shortly be procuring interactive LMI analysis tools. The RSPs also access demand-side data from industry partners (for example from the CITB and the Chambers of Commerce)
- third, while the LMI datapack is extensive, it is largely ‘raw’: it sets out the “what”, but not the “so what”. One consultee suggested that more could be done to better interpret the data, perhaps through the use of HE sector partners.

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15 Including data drawn from ONS, HMRC, DWP, Welsh Government (population projections and the Lifelong Learning Wales Record) and HESA
16 Note that we did not consider the use of the regional data observatories as part of this research.
3.14 As noted above, the RSPs find it a challenge to review, analyse, interpret and supplement the central release of LMI in time for submission of the RESP in July. Given that much of the data that the RSPs need to use is derived from a common set of sources, there may be value in greater central analysis, both to support consistent interpretation and reduce the burden on the individual RSPs.

**Insights from employers**

3.15 All three RSPs supplement labour market data with direct employer insight and engagement, and this is a core part of their role. There are some differences in the way in which the RSPs gather employer views (reflecting the different histories of the partnerships), although there is evidence of increasing consistency. In broad terms, employer insight is gained via employer representation on the RSPs themselves; dialogue with a wider network of employers and employer representative bodies; and surveys to capture a broader range of views and skills requirements. The following paragraphs consider each of these in turn.

**Employer leadership and Board representation**

3.16 All three RSPs are ‘employer led’, in that they have a private sector chair (from the energy sector in North Wales, engineering in South and Mid Wales and construction in South East Wales). In all cases, arrangements have evolved over time, with a shift towards greater private sector involvement.

3.17 The extent to which RSP Boards are ‘representative’ of the wider employer voice was questioned in both the Graystone Review and the current National Assembly EIS Committee enquiry. This is difficult to achieve perfectly, although there is evidence that the RSPs have made efforts to improve the ‘representativeness’ of their Board memberships, and there was a general consensus that a reasonable balance had been struck. All three Boards contain a combination of representative bodies (such as the Federation of Small Businesses and Chambers of Commerce) and individual employers. In the Cardiff Capital Region and South West and Mid Wales Partnerships, sector groups have also been established to bring together a wider range of employers, with the chairs of each sector group represented on the main Board (the North Wales RSP is committed to a similar approach, although with the aim of working through existing sector bodies).

**Dialogue with the wider network**

3.18 In those regions where they exist, the sector groups have an important role in reviewing the data analysis and considering future skills challenges and requirements. It was noted that some sectors are easier to bring together than others (reflecting, for example, the existence of established industry bodies (such as the CITB) and larger employers in some sectors). All three RSPs also reported that they engage with employers through a wider programme of workshops and events. The volume of engagement seems to vary substantially however:

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17 Board composition was a key theme within the Graystone Review. The process of evolution to greater employer leadership has varied by RSP. For example, the South West and Mid Wales RLSP was established as a provider partnership in 2007, but later adopted a new (private sector-led) Board structure in 2015. The North Wales RSP’s move towards an employer-led Board is more recent. But the general direction of travel is consistent.

18 There are eight sector groups in South West and Mid Wales, and six in Cardiff Capital Region.
extensive in South West and Mid Wales, where it is underpinned by the sector groups, but much more limited in the North (a point that is acknowledged by the North Wales RSP itself).

3.19 Two of the RSPs (Cardiff Capital Region and South West and Mid Wales) have also carried out annual online employer skills surveys; the North Wales RSP is currently running an employer skills survey for the first time, using a questionnaire based on that developed for South West and Mid Wales. In 2018, the Cardiff Capital Region survey attracted 115 responses which could be taken forward for analysis (a small sample given the size of the potential business base); the South West and Mid Wales RSP survey (which has been running for longer) attracted 550 responses. **There could be a case for greater co-ordination of survey inputs to support greater consistency** (in 2018, the CCR and South West and Mid Wales surveys asked mostly similar, but not the same questions) and potentially greater participation levels.

3.20 **Engagement with employers with a national or UK-wide footprint** was a further area in which some respondents perceived a gap. It was noted, for example, that some organisations will consider Wales as a whole as a single unit for planning purposes and may be difficult to engage with at local level. This seems to particularly apply to firms in the service sector (large multiple retailers, for example, with highly distributed employment patterns). Joint working across the RSPs may be helpful in engaging with this group.

### Triangulating employer insight and intelligence

3.21 While LMI data and employer insight form key parts of the intelligence base, it is important that they are ‘triangulated’ with other forms of evidence. This already happens through the operation of the RSPs as public-private partnerships: while they are employer-led, they all contain provider and local authority representation, and in some cases include separate provider groups. There is some evidence of a better dialogue between providers and employers (for example, providers are now represented on each sector group in CCR and South West and Mid Wales, although this has not always happened). Broadly, providers reported positive relations with the RSPs and their employer representatives, although the frustrations linked with the granular learner number recommendations should be noted.

### Looking to the future

3.22 Beyond the input from other Board members and key stakeholders, some consultees observed that many companies “don’t know what they don’t know”: **insight into current skills requirements may not translate into future demand**, and individual businesses, faced with the pressure of responding to present challenges, may not be best placed to respond to this. However, the pace of technological change, its impact on the concept and nature of work (increasing self-employment, more frequent career changes, greater flexibility) and the opportunities and challenges that this presents for industry and individuals all suggest a need for a more forward-facing focus. Building this understanding would align well with the focus of the Economic Action Plan. Considering the impact of longer-term trends on the local economy is critical.

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19 LSkIP / Data Cymru (2018), LSkIP Business Skills Survey 2018
economy and its skills base should also be an area in which the RSPs could add significant value. Potentially, the Welsh Government could support this through the development of a central foresighting function, perhaps working with a number of businesses and universities.

Challenging the evidence

3.23 In the shorter term, some consultees perceived that while the employer voice is essential, it is not always challenged or explored (for example, in considering whether recruitment difficulties are linked to factors other than skills supply, such as pay and conditions; or the extent to which firms are able to resolve skills or work readiness issues through internal action). These issues are hard to explore through surveys or engagement meetings, but they could be considered through qualitative research. This might add further value and insight to the ongoing programme of employer engagement.

Considering factors other than employer demand

3.24 As highlighted earlier, learner demand is a key driver of skills provision. The RSPs (and other stakeholders) had a desire to do more to address this, through work to increase the understanding - and change perceptions - of career paths, perhaps linked with the increased focus on foresighting highlighted above. The RSPs are already engaged in this, although learner perceptions (including the perceptions of potential learners already in employment) could also be a useful source of intelligence in planning future provision.

Resourcing the Partnerships

3.25 The Regional Skills Partnerships are resourced through an annual grant of £165,000 per year from the Welsh Government to meet their core role (i.e. an aggregate £495,000 across all three partnerships). In some cases, this is supplemented (or will hopefully be supplemented) by additional resources from the City and Growth Deals, discussed further in the next chapter.

3.26 There is some divergence in the core staff resources available to the RSPs, ranging from a team of 3.5 in the case of South West and Mid Wales to 1.2 FTE in Cardiff Capital Region (although CCR is under capacity). The Partnerships have also had some success in securing secondment and project-based resources from partners:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2: RSP staff resources</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RSP</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership</td>
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Opinions varied on the extent to which the RSPs have sufficient resources to operate effectively. In general, there was a view that the RSPs had 'just about' sufficient resources to deliver their 'core contract' with the Welsh Government, and some respondents spoke highly of the quality of the core teams. However, it was generally felt that there was very little slack to pick up additional tasks unless they are separately funded, and there was a perception that demands on time have increased as the RSPs have become established (and, in some cases, as additional requirements from the City Deal/Growth Deal partnerships have emerged – discussed further in the next chapter). It was also noted that there is a significant 'hidden', but essential, cost associated with the contribution of partner organisations and Board members. A relaxation of the pressure to produce an annual RESP, and some centralised data analysis and foresighting could however help to free up regional staff resources for employer and provider-facing activities.

Currently, the RSPs receive funding from the Welsh Government (via the Welsh Local Government Association) through an annual Grant Award. This presents some challenges in staff recruitment and retention especially in those RSPs that are less well-established: this seems to be a more pressing issue than the actual funding value. While secondments from partner organisations have helped to mitigate this, longer-term funding certainty could help to ensure stability and momentum.

Understanding the role, and working together

Throughout the study, there was a strong understanding from the stakeholders we spoke to of the RSPs’ role in gathering labour market intelligence and insight and using this to inform provision. This clarity appears to have improved over time, with several respondents commenting on the improved dialogue between the RSPs and the Welsh Government: it was noted for example that this year there had been more discussion regarding the Welsh Government’s requirements in advance of the publication of the annual contracts. The outputs required in the Welsh Government’s contract are also clearly specified. While it was not part of the remit of this study to review the implementation of the Graystone Review, several respondents spoke about the efforts that had been made to address the Graystone recommendations in relation to accountability20.

However, there appears to be some lack of clarity in two areas:

20 However, there are some recommendations contained within the Graystone Review that ought to be simple to implement, but have not been at the time of writing – for example, not all RSPs have published their terms of reference and Board memberships on their websites.
Independent Review of Regional Skills Partnerships’ evidence-based planning

- first, while the RSPs are established as advisory bodies, making recommendations to the Welsh Government, this does not seem to be fully understood. There appears to be a view from some that when the RSPs are considering proposed changes in learner numbers, they are acting in a decision-making capacity. This confusion has perhaps contributed to the debate around RSP governance and accountability in recent years and is likely to impede partnership working. It would be helpful for this to be clarified, although a move away from making granular recommendations on specific subject provision would also be beneficial.

- second, intended sectoral focus. The original mandate set out in the 2014 Skills Implementation Plan implies an ‘economy-wide’ focus (albeit within the context of an understanding of regional drivers of growth and the most likely sources of future employment). This would appear to be consistent with the approach taken in the Economic Action Plan and the recognition of the importance of the foundational economy across the board. However, in its evidence to the EIS Committee, the Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership noted that “the remit from the Welsh Government has been to focus and concentrate on priority sectors and those that will deliver the biggest impact to GVA and high value careers.” In the context of technology convergence and sectoral blurring, it is not always clear why a particular sector is – or isn’t – designated as a priority. For consistency across the RSPs, it may be helpful to clarify the breadth of their remit.

Finally, while each RSP has evolved from a different starting point, most respondents were comfortable with an element of difference between them. The ability to respond to the local landscape and engage with local employers was seen as requiring some differences in approach, even where there are opportunities to undertake some tasks centrally. Within that context, there is some evidence of the RSPs working together (for example, in sharing employer surveys and the framework for engaging with sector groups), although this has been ad hoc. The Welsh Government has also played a role in convening national meetings of the RSPs and providers, and supporting shared learning was highlighted as an area in which the Welsh Government could potentially support.

“...In the last three months, we are working closer between us – sharing and having conversations and meeting employers together... Lots of open and honest questions have been asked and that has generated more conversation and open dialogue”

RSP, officer

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21 Some consultees spoke in these terms
22 Written evidence to the National Assembly EIS Committee Enquiry from Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership
4. Relationships with the regional growth agenda and its governance

Summary

- The relationships of the RSPs with the City Deal/ Growth Deal arrangements are all different and are still emerging. However, in all cases, there is a desire to avoid duplication, and all current City Deals/ Growth Deals wish to use their local RSP as their key skills partnership.
- While this presents some challenges in terms of competing pressures on RSP teams (and some governance issues), this should be resolved if the requirements of each funder are clear, and there should be benefits from working together.

Introduction

4.1 The Regional Skills Partnerships have evolved at the same time as Wales’ wider approach to regional growth. This itself has two dimensions:

- first, the **regional structures established by the Welsh Government**. These include a Chief Regional Officer for each of the three regions coterminous with those of the RSPs to coordinate the Welsh Government’s activity in conjunction with regional partners across the full spectrum of the economic development agenda
- second, the **City Deal/ Growth Deal partnerships**, which are focused around investment programmes intended to stimulate long term economic transformation.

4.2 Obviously, there is strong alignment between the two. This chapter focuses on the RSPs relationships with the City Deal/ Growth Deal arrangements, reviewing how they relate to them, and how this aligns with the RSPs’ core contract with the Welsh Government. Because each City Deal/ Growth Deal is structured differently, we consider each in turn, before highlighting some overarching conclusions.

Cardiff Capital Region

4.3 The Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership is currently set up as an ‘advisory body’ to the **Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD)** partnership, which itself is governed by a ‘Regional Cabinet’ (a Joint Committee of the ten participating local authorities)\(^{23}\). The CCRCD is a 20-year, £1.2 billion investment programme funded by the Welsh Government, the UK Government and the local authorities, which aims to deliver the proposed South East Wales Metro network, as well as a Wider Investment Fund focused on interventions to support innovation and infrastructure\(^{24}\).

\(^{23}\) The CCR Skills Partnership Board is referred to as the Employment and Skills Board, although we have used the term ‘Skills Partnership’ in this chapter to refer to the Board and the wider partnership, to avoid confusion.

\(^{24}\) CCRCD (https://www.cardiffcapitalregion.wales/about/)
4.4 The investment programme is central to a broader strategy, outlined in the **Cardiff Capital Region Industrial and Economic Plan**, agreed earlier in 2019. The Industrial and Economic Plan sets out (among other priorities) a ‘Skills of the Future’ programme, which itself contains a series of actions, set out in the box below:

**Cardiff Capital Region: Skills of the Future programme**

The Industrial and Economic Plan sets out seven priority actions, associated with the CCR City Deal:

- Developing proposals for data, cyber, digital and software scientists to exploit the potential of the new industries of the future and derive added value from existing and traditional industries
- Developing proposals to service the needs of our priority sectors within the region (e.g. the Compound Semiconductor Cluster)
- Developing proposals for high-quality executive leadership training for business leaders across the region
- Developing a programme of entrepreneurship across the region (targeted at 14-21 year olds) to inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs
- Supporting existing initiatives to increase Apprenticeships in growth sectors across the region at all levels
- Upskilling the public sector with data literacy, R&D, procurement and innovative leadership capacity
- Working with schools, colleges, universities and private providers to ensure that sufficient local talent is nurtured and trained to service the needs of our foundational economy

*Source: CCRCD, Industrial and Economic Plan*

4.5 Given that the IEP is only a couple of months old, these actions are, at this stage, embryonic, and specific delivery arrangements are to be determined. However, the Skills Partnership is likely to have an important role: the chair of the Skills Partnership has observer status on the wider CCR Economic Growth Partnership and the Skills Partnership is reviewing the skills implications of the IEP.

**North Wales**

4.6 The **North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB)** is the regional economic partnership for North Wales. Like the CCRCD arrangements, its governance arrangements are based on a local authority Joint Committee. A commitment from the Welsh and UK Governments to £240 million in investment funding was made in 2018, and discussions are underway regarding further funds. The 2017 Growth Deal bid that preceded the investment commitment contains a series of aspirations in relation to skills, focused on “retaining young people in the region and reducing outward migration”, supporting skills and employment planning, and “equipping young people with the skills needed by employers ready for employment”\(^\text{25}\).

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Currently, the North Wales RSP is described as “the skills and employment workstream of the NWEAB”26. Historically, the RSP was set up as a sub-group of the NWEAB, with the Chair attending the NWEAB. Since the NWEAB was reconstituted as a Joint Committee (on similar lines to Cardiff Capital Region), it has not formally had that status: it is likely instead that the RSP will remain an unincorporated partnership with Gwynedd Council as its accountable body and will be commissioned by the NWEAB to carry out specific pieces of work in relation to skills and employment. For example, the RSP has been commissioned to develop business cases in relation to the NWEAB’s digital skills proposition. Reflecting this arrangement, the RSP currently receives around £30,000 from the NWEAB, in addition to its Welsh Government core grant.

South West and Mid Wales

South West and Mid Wales covers two City Deal/ Growth Deal areas – Swansea Bay and Mid Wales. Both City Deal/ Growth Deal partnerships are represented on the RSP Board.

Swansea Bay

The Swansea Bay City Deal involves a commitment of £241 million from the Welsh and UK Governments to support a programme of 11 projects across South West Wales. While heads of terms were signed in 2017, the programme is based on individual project approvals by both Governments (rather than a devolved fund as in Cardiff Capital Region) and is still in its early stages27. Overall governance arrangements are via a Joint Committee.

The 11 projects in the City Deal portfolio include a Skills and Talent Initiative, which aims to identify the skills gaps that will need to be filled to deliver (and maximise the benefits of) the other ten capital projects and establish the provision needed to address them. It is proposed that the South West and Mid Wales RLSP will manage the delivery of the Skills and Talent Initiative and will receive funding from the City Deal for this. This will be separate from and additional to the RLSP’s ‘core function’ delivered through the Welsh Government contract, and it is intended that the RLSP will remain a separate, unincorporated partnership. It should however help to add value to the RLSP’s core function, especially in understanding future, long-term economic demand. This proposed arrangement has been discussed widely by partners in Swansea Bay, and in our consultations, there was strong support for it.

Mid Wales

Mid Wales (Ceredigion and Powys) are part of the Growing Mid Wales (GMW) partnership. Currently, there is no agreed Growth Deal for Mid Wales, although discussions are ongoing to develop one, and local partners are in the process of establishing a range of regional structures, including a Joint Committee.

There is currently no formal governance relationship between the RLSP and the GMW partnership (other than through GMW’s representation on the RLSP Board), although the RLSP reported that it has prepared a separate employment and skills plan for Mid Wales.

26 NWEAB (https://northwaleseab.co.uk/jobs-and-skills/regional-skills-partnership)
27 Actica Consulting for Welsh Government (2019), Swansea Bay City Deal Independent Review
4.13 The view of GMW is that it would prefer to have a separate Regional Skills Partnership for Mid Wales, aligned with its boundaries. The RLSP takes a different view. We have not taken a view on this, as it is outside the scope of this review.

Some observations on relationships between the RSPs and the emerging regional agenda

4.14 As this overview demonstrates, all the Growth Deal/ City Deal arrangements have evolved in somewhat different ways, as have the RSPs, and there is no single, consistent governance arrangement. However, there is a consistent desire – by both the RSPs and the regional partnerships - to avoid duplication. In North Wales, the RSP started out as a sub-group of the NWEAB and, with some changes to governance essentially retains that status. In Cardiff Capital Region, the former LSkIP partnership has been recast as an advisory board within the CCRCD structure. In South West and Mid Wales, the RLSP remains a separate informal partnership, but will deliver a separately-contracted service for the Swansea Bay City Deal. Only in Mid Wales does a relationship need to be agreed.

4.15 In that context, there is an advantage in the RSPs having a close relationship with the City Deal/ Growth Deal structures, and with the Welsh Government’s Regional Officers: the insight from employers and providers should be relevant to and should benefit all three. As several stakeholders pointed out, specific geographies and ‘alignments’ are only relevant to some partners anyway: travel and investment flows across regions and into and out of Wales.

4.16 Several consultees commented on the extent to which RSP staff are “pulled in different directions” by their Welsh Government contracts and local demands. Given the progress that has been made in streamlining the contracting process with the Welsh Government in recent years, it should be possible to specify the Welsh Government’s requirements with some flexibility for additional activities once these requirements have been met, with any additional analysis or project development required by the City Deal/ Growth Deal teams (or indeed any other partners) separately funded as needed.

“It's ok for the RSP to have two bosses, as long as there's a good understanding of what work goes where”  Business
5. Conclusions and recommendations

Strengthening regional intelligence and insight…

5.1 The Regional Skills Partnerships provide a valuable resource to the Welsh Government (and wider partners) in providing insight into future skills demand and linking this with provision planning. The increasing importance of the regional agenda in economic development policy and the potential for a more coordinated approach to post-16 education suggests an opportunity to develop this role.

5.2 In this context, and in the light of finite resources, this relatively short review highlights some ways in which the ‘intelligence and insight’ role of the RSPs can be strengthened:

- **The RSPs’ role could be more strategically focused.** The change to three-year cycles for the preparation of Regional Employment and Skills Plans should be helpful in this regard, both in reducing the burden of Plan preparation and in enabling the RSPs to take a longer-term view.

- **There should be a more consistent and comprehensive approach to employer engagement.** At present, there is variation in the depth and breadth of direct contact with employers. However, this is core to the RSPs’ remit, and there is good practice among the RSPs that can be built on.

- **To support this, there may be opportunities for some functions to be done centrally,** either by the Welsh Government, or by the RSPs working collectively. This could include some of the LMI analysis and employer survey preparation and commissioning, helping to free resource at regional level to focus on direct employer engagement and build up a joint pool of expertise.

- **At the same time, there are some areas in which the employer voice could be strengthened (or challenged) by a wider range of evidence.** This might include additional foresighting information, qualitative research with employers and engagement with those employers that operate nationally and are hard to engage at regional level: again, this could be delivered or commissioned centrally to minimise the burden on regional resources.

- **Longer-term resourcing would be helpful in enabling the RSPs to secure and retain staff.** Annual contracting is a challenge: a three-year contract linked with the RESP cycle could provide greater certainty (and would help to secure a more consistent approach in relation to the Growth Deal/ City Deal structures and the potential opportunities for partnership funding that may come from this).

- **The RSPs need to be partnerships between employers and providers.** This is an obvious point – but there has been some tension between employer representatives and provider organisations in the past, and this was reflected in both the consultations as part of this review and the evidence to the EIS Committee enquiry.

- **Linked with this, efforts to address learner demand (as well as employer demand and provider supply) are important:** in some cases, the RSPs have
initiated work to promote and explain opportunities in areas of likely future growth. This is outside the RSPs’ core remit – but changing demand is important in changing supply. If resources can be freed up through a streamlining of some of the more ‘process-driven’ aspects of the RSPs’ role, there may be an opportunity to do more in this area.

- **The current approach to the adjustment of learner numbers is somewhat blunt,** perhaps exacerbated by the fact that it takes place at the end of a time-constrained process of data gathering, and perhaps at too granular a level. However, direct influence over provision is likely to be an incentive for employers to engage, and while the process is painful, we ought to review the outcomes. A wider range of evidence (from providers as well as employers) and a less pressured timetable could be helpful.

5.3 Over time, this approach could help to strengthen the RSPs’ credibility as organisations with employer reach and valuable insight, bearing in mind that they are advisory, rather than decision-making bodies, with *influence* (based on quality of evidence) rather than control.

... in the evolving regional context

5.4 It is positive that the RSPs have been recognised as the main local skills partnerships by the Growth Deal/ City Deal arrangements in Cardiff Capital Region, North Wales and Swansea Bay. This should help to prevent duplication, should mean additional resources to supplement the core Welsh Government contract and should mean that there is added value to the Welsh Government and the regional partnerships.
Annex A: Bibliography of background materials

A.1 The following documents were reviewed as part of this study:

- Cardiff Capital Region (2019), *Industrial and Economic Plan*
- Growing Mid Wales Partnership (2016), *Growing Mid Wales Partnership: Framework for Action*
- Learning, Skills and Innovation Partnership (LSkiP) (2017), *Cardiff Capital Region Employment and Skills Plan 2017*
- Learning, Skills and Innovation Partnership (LSkiP)/ Data Cymru (2018), *LSkiP Business Skills Survey 2018*
- National Assembly for Wales (February 2019), Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee Review of Regional Skills Partnerships: Terms of Reference
- North Wales Economic Ambition Board (n.d.), *Smart, Resilient, Connected: A Growth Deal for North Wales*
- North Wales Economic Ambition Board (2017), *North Wales Regional Skills and Employment Plan 2017*
- South West and Mid Wales RLSP (2018), *Regional Employment and Skills Plan, South West and Mid Wales 2018*
- Welsh Government Skills Gateway (2017), *Regional Labour Market Intelligence Report: North Wales*
- Welsh Government Skills Gateway (2017), *Regional Labour Market Intelligence Report: South East Wales*
- Welsh Government Skills Gateway (2017), *Regional Labour Market Intelligence Report: South West and Mid Wales*
In addition, the written submissions to the National Assembly’s Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee’s Review of RSPs were reviewed as part of this study. 29 written submissions were received, from:

- Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership
- Chwarae Teg
- Colegau Cymru
- Careers Wales
- Estyn
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Growing Mid Wales
- Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Coleg Cambria
- Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- Learning and Work Institute Wales
- Merthyr Tydfil College
- National Training Federation for Wales
- North Wales Economic Ambition Board
- NPTC Group of Colleges
- PeoplePlus
- Social Care Wales
- South East Wales Further Education Institutions
- South West and Mid Wales Further Education Institutions
- South West and Mid Wales RLSP (Chair)
- South West and Mid Wales RLSP (Chair, Construction Cluster Group)
- South West and Mid Wales RLSP (Chair, Food & Farming Cluster Group)
- South West and Mid Wales RLSP (Chair, Health & Social Care Cluster Group)
- South West and Mid Wales RLSP (RLSP Manager)
- The Open University
- UK Hospitality
- Universities Wales
Independent Review of Regional Skills Partnerships’ evidence-based planning

- University of Wales Trinity St David
- Valero Energy Ltd
- Welsh Language Commissioner