

# YWCA briefing: Learning and skills measure



## Summary

YWCA welcomes the principles in the Proposed Learning and Skills Measure and welcomes the proposals to widen learner choice. We hope this will be an opportunity for girls and young women to participate in non gender-stereotypical courses and ultimately help them avoid low paid employment. We are however concerned about how vulnerable young people will access these opportunities and whether financial resources will be sufficient to enable the proposals to work. Please see our comments below.

YWCA is the leading charity working with disadvantaged young women. Young women are at the centre of all that we do. They face unique problems in today's society, are largely unheard and lack influence: young women come to YWCA for support, guidance and learning opportunities which are designed with their specific needs in mind and we campaign with them to combat the discrimination and disadvantage they face. Through our help and support we want them to:

- be inspired and determined
- be healthy and safe
- be in control
- speak out and be listened to
- gain opportunities, and give back.

## Proposed learning and skills measure

### Section 8: Headteacher's decision as to entitlement

We understand that headteachers may decide that pupils do not follow a course of study if it is 'not reasonably practicable' (8.b) or 'disproportionate expenditure would be incurred' (8.d). We would like to emphasise the need for very clear guidelines as to what this means so as to ensure consistency in application. We would not wish to see any pupil dissuaded from following their chosen course of study because of financial constraints or because of a lack of collaboration between institutions.

### Section 12: Delivery of local curriculum entitlements; joint working

YWCA welcomes the intention to maximize the provision of courses of study and see this as an opportunity for all agencies to work together to avoid girls being directed into gender stereotypical and subsequently low paid work. If the Learning and Skills Measure aims to bring about wider choice and flexible provision we believe this to be an opportunity for high quality, impartial, innovative work which helps girls look at a variety of course and work choices and the financial implications of those choices.

YWCA notes that, after some debate, the 'duty to seek to enter into co-operation arrangements' has not been strengthened in the Measure and is still only a duty to seek (12.3). As such we believe that collaboration with the aim of maximizing provision of courses should be rigorously monitored. Lack of collaboration will restrict choice. We also suggest that any guidance issued about joint working should include a requirement to work with local voluntary and community organizations.

### Part 3: Learner support services

YWCA responded to the consultation on reducing the proportion of young people who are NEET. We welcomed the development of a model for learning coach support for NEET and potentially NEET young people.

We are unsure how this translates to the proposed learner support services mentioned in the Measure. We believe that learner support must be holistic if it is to help a young person address barriers to learning and it must look at all the issues which affect that young person. Many voluntary and community organizations and youth workers already work with young people and already support them in personal development and in setting goals. Their services are client led and impartial.

It would be sensible for organisations which already have this expertise in supporting young people to be involved in the delivery of learner and pastoral support. We would like to highlight that learner support encompasses, but is wider than, careers advice.

We are concerned that the Measure refers to advice and information 'which is presented in an impartial manner' (Part 3, 37.5.5A.a on page 24). It is vital that advice and information, which relates to course choice and any other issue in a young person's life, is provided without regard to the needs of the institution providing that support, but with total regard to the needs of the young person. Advice presented in an impartial manner is not the same as advice which must be impartial. This should now be addressed in further guidance and monitoring.

## **General comments**

### **Duty of care**

YWCA notes that amendment 34, which required Welsh Ministers to issue guidance about safeguarding vulnerable groups, was defeated. We note that the Committee felt there is sufficient legislation and guidance in this area. However, we would like to highlight that many young people are vulnerable, but do not fall within the legislative framework. Girls' disengagement from school is often a hidden and invisible problem and more easily overlooked than boys more 'acting out' behaviour. Girls may be quietly disaffected and therefore 'excluded' from school even when they are actually attending. This type of disengagement has been described as RHINO (Really Here in Name Only). Research has found that learning mentors and single sex classes can help girls who are quietly disaffected, but the main point here is that we recognize the existence of disengaged young people who may not be at risk of immediate significant harm, but who are at risk of the long term consequences of this disengagement.

This is even more important when we take into account the fact that young people may well be attending courses at various institutions. Those who are disengaged, or at risk of becoming disengaged, are vulnerable if not provided with high quality learner support (see above) and if issues around learner travel (see below) are not clarified prior to implementation.

### **Learner travel**

From what we have read we remain concerned about the resources available for learner travel between institutions and for support for learners who are traveling between institutions.

We note that the policy is to minimize travel, but are unsure how this will be achieved at the same time as maximizing provision. Vulnerable young people may find it less easy to attend different institutions due to their added support needs and low levels of confidence. Those from lower income families will find the cost prohibitive if the travel is not subsidised. The practicalities of learner travel and alternative means of delivering the wider choice must be considered before implementation otherwise the opportunities for wider choice will not be available to all.

### **For more information please contact**

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