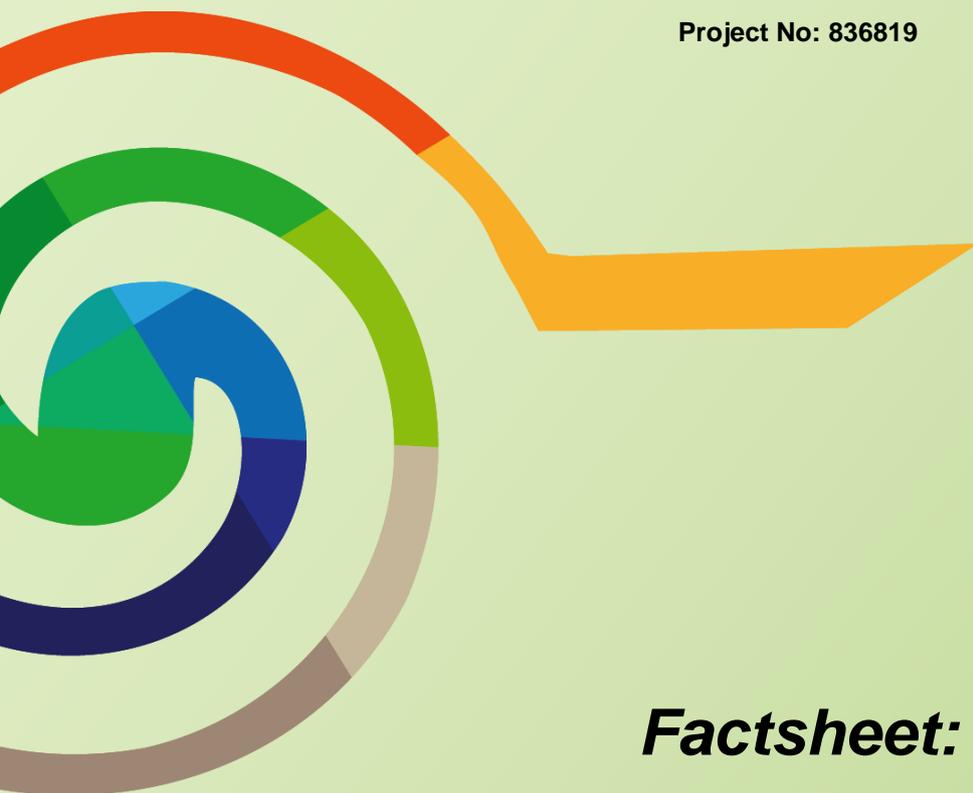


Smart strategies for the transition in coal intensive regions

Project No: 836819



Factsheet:
***Apprenticeship in Ebbw Vale
Enterprise Zone, Wales, UK***

SEPTEMBER 2019



GET

Description

1. **Location:** Ebbw Vale, Wales, UK
2. **Type of action:** Apprenticeship Program
3. **Actors:** Company, government
4. **Financing conditions:** Co-financing scheme from EU, Welsh Government and/or private budget
5. **Fund(s):** EU Fund: European Social Fund (ESF) co-finance (50%-75%), Welsh Government budget and/or private budget

According to T. Merrill and L. Kitson in *The End of Coal Mining in South Wales (2017)*, the economic and political context of coal mining in South Wales, also known as “the Valleys” had a rapid growth in the 1880s during the industrial revolution, a severe contraction during the economic depression of the 1930s, a resurgence during the Second World War, and a gradual but irreversible decline and eventual disappearance in the 1990s. Today the former coalfields of South Wales are an area of just 2,500 square kilometres (km²) with a present population of around 757,000 inhabitants (International Centre for Regional Regeneration & Development Studies, 2003).

The consequences of mine closure are the significant social impact, despite the repeated efforts of the Welsh Government, over the last 30 years, to counter unemployment and economic decline through regional policy. Even if the governmental policies, along this period of major industrial change and realignment, were unable to offset the social impacts of industrial decline in South Wales, a key finding was the need to develop comprehensive measures that generate economic activity, improve infrastructure, maintain social cohesion and establish effective institutions to implement a constant dialog towards the implementation of a stakeholder engagement plan. One of the major lessons learned was the establishment of a critical mass of local skills and resilience to respond to both the pit closure and subsequent future economic changes.

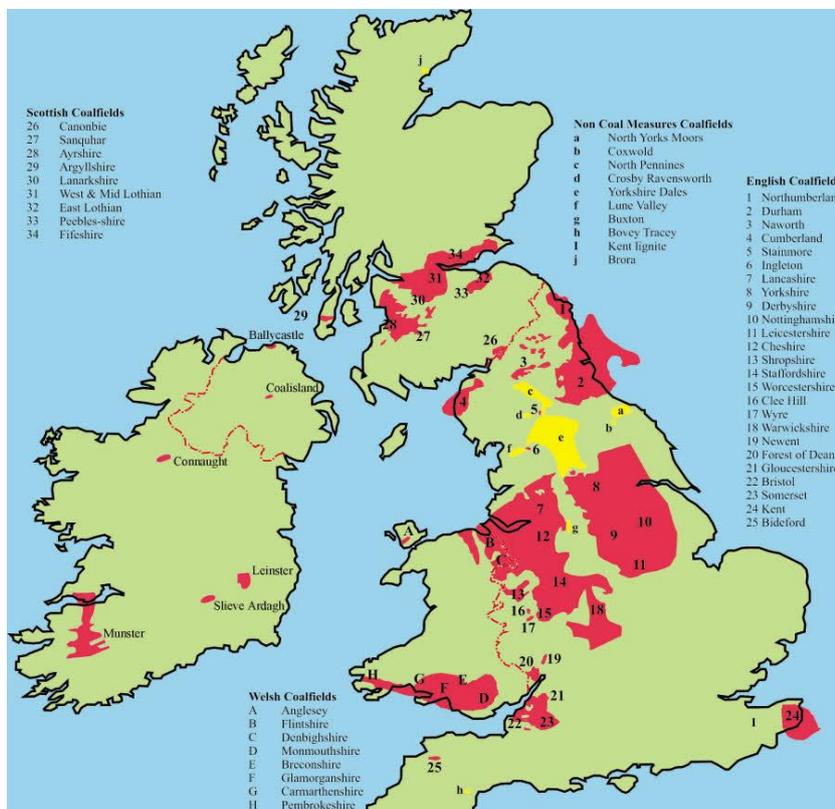


Figure 1: Map of coal mines in South Wales
(source: Northern Mine Research Society, n.d.)

On the topic “Education and skills” the Welsh Government services and information¹ provides online data related to: Schools, further and higher education, skills and vocational training, and student funding.

Regarding our area of interest, namely the restructuring / transformation of the labour market and the professional adults retraining, the Welsh Government supports the complex processes of industrial transition by directing funds from the state budget and ESF (European Social Fund) to developing programs for “Post-16 education and skills”, with focus on “Apprenticeships, skills and training”². To this aim the Welsh Government is offering guidance and services, together with supporting policies, both for people over 16 willing and looking for work and for employees searching to recruit, for:

- Becoming an apprentice / recruiting an apprentice;
- Apprentices: guidance for schools / guidance for local authorities;
- Jobs growth Wales: leaflet for young people (people aged 16 to 24 who are looking for work) / leaflet for employers (how you can take on an unemployed young person and the funding you will receive towards it);
- Traineeships (Brochure for 16- and 17-year olds about gaining skills and experience to get a job or go on to further learning);
- Wales Union Learning Fund (funds available to trade unions to encourage and support workplace learning);
- Working Wales (a more efficient system of employability support); a.s.o.

Several state-owned entities are involved in this “Apprenticeships, skills and training” guidance and support process. For example:

- the Business Wales Skills Gateway team together with the National Training Federation for Wales (NTFW), based on an Expression of Interest (EoI) submitted online by a business/company in the Apprenticeship Programme³, are match-making employers enquiries with apprentice data-base, thus supporting the recruitment process;
- or, Career Choices Dewis Gyrfu Ltd (CCDG), a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government, which provides the all age, independent and impartial careers information, advice and guidance service for Wales, in compliance with YEPP⁴, such as “if you are over 16, living in Wales and not in full-time education you can apply for an apprenticeship⁵. You will gain job-specific skills and professional qualifications while working alongside experienced staff. You will receive a regular wage with paid holidays and the same benefits as other employees.”

In terms of EU Structural Funds, in the current programming period 2014-2020, several projects proposals were approved, for the following NUTS 2 regions - UKL1 (West Wales and The Valleys) and UKL2 (East Wales) in the following priority areas:

- Tackling Poverty through Sustainable Employment;
- Skills for Growth;
- Youth Employment and Attainment,

tackling issues related to:

- ✓ Sustainable integration into the labour market of young people, in particular those not in employment, education or training, including young people at risk of social exclusion and young people from marginalised communities, including through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee;
- ✓ Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings, upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of

¹ <https://gov.wales/education-skills>

² <https://gov.wales/apprenticeships-skills-and-training>

³ <https://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/apprenticeships>

⁴ Youth engagement and progression framework. Implementation Plan, 2013, Department for Education and Skills - Welsh Government <https://gov.wales/youth-engagement-and-progression-framework-implementation-plan>

⁵ <https://www.careerswales.com/en/jobs-and-training/job-seeking/vacancy-search/what-is-an-apprenticeship/>

the workforce, and promoting flexible learning pathways including through career guidance and validation of acquired competences

Out of a total of approx. 795 million GBP awarded EU funds 2014-2020 in the above priority areas, around 43% were projects submitted by the Welsh Government - Department for Education and Skills, as lead organisation.

No financing sources particularly oriented to coal region in transition, but such funds can be used for developing projects supporting apprenticeships programs.

A Welsh case study, as a potential solution to the economic transformation process, related to zones/areas with special measures to attract business activities and generate new jobs, is the Enterprise Zone⁶ in Ebbw Vale, Wales, UK. Ebbw Vale is one of the six south Wales valleys, for which an action plan has been published in 2017, to create 7,000 jobs⁷ and revitalise the area. Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone has a rich international and indigenous manufacturing heritage, including 40 ha of development land with 100% expansion space and fast-tracked planning plus excellent connectivity to the Midlands, contributing to Welsh productivity levels that are higher than the UK average.

The reason why to locate your business in Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone:

- *Business environment* (→ Skill & academia - local universities delivering 2,000 engineering students every year, while the local Shared Apprenticeship Scheme (SAS) is currently swelling the talent pool for manufacturing, engineering and food businesses; on-site e-learning zone under planning; connections with Cardiff and Swansea Universities delivering training and development for local employers; → Already existing indigenous manufacturers and international leaders as Continental Teves, G-TEM, Monier Redland, Northern Automotive Systems, PCI Pharma Services etc.; → Quality of life)
- *Support and incentives* (→ Financial incentives available from Welsh, UK and European sources⁸; → Support from a pro-business government);
- *Business ready infrastructure* (→ Transport links; → Broadband, data security & ICT)



Figure 2: Ebbw Vale, County Borough of Blaenau Gwent, Wales

(source: <https://businesswales.gov.wales/enterprisezones/zones/ebbw-vale>)

Achievements

One of the success models in Ebbw Vale to enhance the critical mass of local skills is “**SAS**” – **Shared Apprenticeship Scheme**, where apprentices move between different employers to share the responsibility for on-site training objectives. This model became popular for enhancing the stock of skills required within a region in order to ensure the availability of

⁶ <https://businesswales.gov.wales/enterprisezones/zones/ebbw-vale>

⁷ BBC news “South Wales valleys action plan for 7,000 new jobs”, 2017 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-40655893>

⁸ <https://gov.wales/get-help-and-support-your-business>

skills linked to major investment or major development. SAS provides a delivery option for those employers who want to engage in the apprenticeship programmes but may be unable to provide the breadth and depth of experience that an apprenticeship framework would require. This type of Shared Apprenticeship scheme is mainly delivered within the construction and engineering industries, but is becoming increasingly popular in other priority sectors also, such as Hospitality. The Shared Apprenticeship Scheme (SAS) protocol includes the requirement for the Regional Skills Partnerships to endorse all new SAS proposals in line with their regional priorities before submitting to Welsh Government for analysis.

One of the projects developed with support from the “Apprenticeship budget” is **Aspire Blaenau Gwent** project⁹.

The Shared Apprenticeship Programme within Blaenau Gwent is a strategic project with a number of partners; Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone, Education, Industry and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. The programme is set to enhance skills development within the manufacturing and engineering companies to develop business growth; whilst tackling unemployment and providing aspirational opportunities for young people across the local authority.

In July 2015, the Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone Board in conjunction with Blaenau Gwent Council received approval from Welsh Government to develop a Manufacturing / Engineering Shared Apprenticeship Scheme. The scheme is working as follows:

- Apprentices (16-24 years old), fulfilling the entry requirements, will be employed by Aspire Blaenau Gwent and placed with a host manufacturing company for the duration of the apprenticeship (2-3 years) following a selection process and interview;
- A learning pathway will be agreed by the Host Company and the apprentice with the partner providers (Coleg y Cymoedd and Coleg Gwent) who are the delivery partners and to who funding has been allocated;
- Apprentices will rotate employers to fulfil any skills gaps; and
- Apprentices will be paid above minimum apprenticeship wage.

Aspire has met with over 50 Manufacturing Employers across the local authority since the programme started (July 2015), of which 15 have become Host Employers and remain actively engaged with the programme, not only supporting Aspire Apprentices but also working with the team to develop and upskill existing employees.



Figure 3: Apprenticeship Awards for Aspire Blaenau Gwent

(source: <https://gov.wales/apprenticeship-awards-cymru/winners-and-finalists/2019-awards/aspire-blaenau-gwent>)

⁹ <https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/business/jobs-skills/aspire-support-for-employees/>

The Host Companies are all in and around the Blaenau Gwent local authority area and range from large international companies to SMEs.

Approximately 80 apprentices have had an opportunity through the Shared Apprenticeship programme. There are currently 34 apprentices still in learning. See below for some statistics:

- Cohort 1 – 4 apprentices;
- Cohort 2 – 6 apprentices;
- Cohort 3 – 5 apprentices;
- Cohort 4 – 7 apprentices;
- Cohort 5 – 12 apprentices; and
- Two female apprentices have engaged with the programme.

Aspire Blaenau Gwent is breathing new life into the local workforce. The practice of rotating apprentices amongst host employers is well established within the local authority and Ebbw Vale-based Aspire has tailored courses and arranged training to suit the needs of the learners by providing additional opportunities in one of the most impoverished areas of Wales. To date¹⁰, it boasts an impressive 100% record of apprentices being employed at the end of their programme, with 64% retained by their initial host.

Challenges

In order to support the coal transition process through economic transformation, the following main five factors¹¹, characterising the challenge of social regeneration, are considered by the Welsh Government:

- *Outmigration* (significant population fluctuation) - to be reduced by generating new businesses and employment;
- *Educational attainment and skills acquisition* - to be improved by linking education and further education, industry and civil society, which will lead to connecting opportunities for personal development to academic and vocational achievements and to employment;
- *Health and well-being* – to be improved, considering that poor health now extends beyond former miners to subsequent generations, due to poverty and deprivation that persist in the Valleys;
- *State welfare support* – to be maintained;
- *Housing* – to provide adequate and good-quality housing by tackling poverty and maintaining a sufficient population level to sustain and grow the local economy.

Enabling conditions

Considering the key lessons learned¹² from the end of coal mining, we may underline that the enabling conditions for a successful economic transformation – mainly in terms of skills needed and labour market issues, are the following:

- Strengthening the local economy, including retraining the workforce and establishing the dual educational system;
- Improving the physical infrastructure and environment;
- Strengthening community cohesion and support for economic transformation, through:
 - ✓ Planning and delivering adequate forms of welfare protection;

¹⁰ <https://gov.wales/apprenticeship-awards-cymru/winners-and-finalists/2019-awards/aspire-blaenau-gwent>

¹¹ T. Merrill and L. Kitson, 2017, *The End of Coal Mining in South Wales: Lessons learned from industrial transformation*, GSI REPORT, International Institute for Sustainable Development, pg.10-13 <https://www.iisd.org/sites/default/files/publications/end-of-coal-mining-south-wales-lessons-learned.pdf>

¹² T. Merrill and L. Kitson, 2017, *The End of Coal Mining in South Wales: Lessons learned from industrial transformation*, GSI REPORT, International Institute for Sustainable Development, pg.4 <https://www.iisd.org/sites/default/files/publications/end-of-coal-mining-south-wales-lessons-learned.pdf>

- ✓ Understanding the supported communities through high-quality and adequately resourced research;
- ✓ Appreciating that economic renewal is greatly strengthened by the existence of a robust and dynamic cultural identity, and that community participation in the process of economic transformation is an important factor in delivering a successful transition from coal era;
- ✓ Acknowledging that communities are not responsible for their own economic decline and are not equipped to bring about change without strategic government;
- Establishing effective delivery/implementation institutions.

Related to financial resources, another enabling condition, the economic situation in Wales is constantly changing and the unemployment supporting programmes, mainly for young people, will have to be sufficiently flexible to adapt to these changes and also respond to Welsh Government priorities.

And last but not least, we must emphasize the importance of the Welsh Government support through appropriate policies for both SAS (Shared Apprentice Programme) and employers and individuals-oriented apprentice programme. In this regard the Welsh Government set out, in 2017, an Apprenticeship Policy and its five-year Action Plan¹³ in order to align the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy.

References and further links

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¹³ Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy, Welsh Government, 2017



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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 836819. The sole responsibility for the content of this report lies with the authors.