
Review and evaluation of Tourism Training Forum for Wales activity 2001-06

For
Tourism Training Forum for Wales

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Executive Summary

The Welsh Economy Research Unit (WERU), Cardiff Business School, was commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of Tourism Training Forum for Wales (TTFW) activity between 2001 and 2006, assessing progress and targets set by TTFW and the sponsoring organisations including the European Union, WTB and ELWa.

In order to undertake the evaluation the research team:

- Scrutinised the contents of TTFW project folders examining activities and reported progress against targets,
- Analysed expenditure, employment data and nature of matched funding,
- Examined prior evaluations of discrete projects,
- Reviewed secondary material from regional partner web-based resources,
- Undertook a primary interview programme of partner organisations to ascertain the relationship with TTFW, nature, history and depth of collaboration, the value of projects, correspondence with industry needs and industry perceptions,
- Interviewed beneficiaries to ascertain the relevance of service provision, and examine issues of additionality.

The report begins with an appreciation of the scale and importance of the tourism sector in Wales. According to official sources, tourism in Wales accounts for around 10 million trips generating £1.8bn of expenditure. The Welsh Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSAs) reveal that tourism in Wales supports 76,000 tourism-dependent jobs or 6.2% of all workers in Wales.

However, these conventional economic aggregates do not highlight the special quality of the sector in terms of its intimate connection with the environment, landscape, heritage and culture, which means that of *all* economic activity in Wales, tourism is the most interdependent and encompassing. Tourism is a window through which Wales can gain access to other opportunities.

The sector faces a number of strategic challenges:

- The extreme sensitivity of the industry to negative events, borne out by the experiences following Foot and Mouth Disease and BSE, and latterly terrorism.
- Global competition in the face of reductions in the real cost of travel.
- Changes in the UK visitor market from long to shorter stays.
- Poor perceptions regarding the quality of sector employment, indirectly linked to increasing numbers of foreign workers who unwittingly detract from 'sense of place' value-adding opportunities.

TTFW was set up in 1998 initially as a voluntary partnership and formally incorporated as a private limited company in 2001. Its mission is to provide HRD leadership, advice and information, and develop the case for tourism training provision. TTFW's central strategic goal of increasing the quality of human resource-linked sector outputs is unanimously shared by all tourism stakeholders.

Funding sources are channelled through TTFW under the following headings as follows:

- Gallu (Sensations) (Objective 1 ESF)
- Medrwn (Integrated Learning in Tourism 1) (Objective 1, ESF)
- Medrwn (Integrated Learning in Tourism 2) (Objective 3, ESF)
- TTFW Best Practice in Provision (Objective 1, ESF)
- TTFW Best Practice in Provision (Objective 3, ESF)
- Interactive Training through Video (Objective 1, ERDF)
- Learning Challenge Fund – ELWa
- WTB

Outputs, projects and activities include:

- Information creation and dissemination via www.whodoiask.com, newsletters, conferencing activities
- CD-ROMs 'Success through your People' and 'More Success through your People Toolkit.'
- Trainers and Training provision provided via identification of exemplars, and mentoring,
- IIP Build a Better Business Programme,
- Profit through Productivity,
- the 'Overnight Success' Programme
- Training courses for tourism operators: Medrwn (Integrated Learning in Tourism) and Gallu (Sensations)
- Research Work including 'Gender Equality in the Tourism Workplace in Wales', 'Assessment of labour market and skills needs of tourism and related sectors', 'Assessment & analysis of overseas workers within the tourism industry of Wales', and 'Mind the Gap'.

Key findings - Performance Review

A standard evaluative template has been used in the main body of the report for each of the projects, with 10 tables in all. The table below provides a short summary of the key findings of this performance review.

<p>Gallu (Sensations)- 2004-07 progress at April 06 Total project funding - £366,280, Actual costs at November 05 - £267,750 (73%) Beneficiary target already exceeded by 3%; companies supported at 91% of target</p>
<p>Medrwn 2004-06 (Objective 1) progress to November 2005 Total project funding - £80,355, Actual costs at November 05 - £96,344 (53%) Beneficiaries at 60% of target ; Companies supported at 80% of target</p>
<p>Medrwn 2004-06 (Objective 3) progress to November 2005 Total project funding - £214,413, Actual costs at November 05 - £130,935 (61%) Beneficiaries at 121% of target , companies supported at 168% of target</p>
<p>Best Practice in Provision (Objective 1) progress to December 05 Total project funding - £580,862, Actual costs at December 05 - £68,109 (63%) Companies supported at 61% of target</p>
<p>Best Practice in Provision (Objective 3) progress at December 05 Total project funding - £387,120, Actual costs at December 05 - £245,675 Companies supported at 49% of target</p>
<p>Training through interactive TV (Objective 1) progress at May 05 Total project funding £134,044. Project complete. Number of SMEs taking up learning opportunities exceeded by 82%</p>
<p>Learning Challenge Fund and WTB Outputs - Targets 1 15 out of 20 exemplars identified, 89 delegates at 2005 conference, 6000 recipients of bi-lingual newsletter (2004-06), 7,927 visits to tourism training guide in 2005, averaging 463 per month.</p>
<p>Learning Challenge Fund and WTB Outputs - Targets 2 70,102 sessions on whodoiask, 12 businesses recruited as exemplars, 10 businesses completed Build a Better Business workshops, 182 Learning from Overnight success videos distributed, 16 Contract to Careers Concepts exemplars identified. Toolkit completed</p>
<p>Learning Challenge Fund and WTB Outputs - Targets 3 Initial MOU with People 1st, 4 joint regional events and TTFW business plan with joint targets. Ongoing collaboration with SPICE, Mind the Gap report completed and disseminated + 4 regional events. Overseas worker research completed.</p>
<p>Tourism Training Guide 36,492 hits, hit rate growth (Dec 05-Feb06) down by 11% LCF target exceeded</p>

The overall progress of TTFW against targets set in relation to the different funding streams has been good, but a number of issues require reflection:

- Some targets have been easily achieved, which suggests that there may be scope for more ambitious targets that better reflect the demand for provision in future EU funding rounds.
- The standard appraisal methods used by WEFO to measure project failure or success do not capture the 'softer' but equally valuable elements of TTFW intervention. A challenge for TTFW will be to develop a system for capturing such data in a reliable and consistent way.
- More detailed beneficiary information is also required, showing precisely how each has benefited from provision, and a more standardised framework for assessing whether a company is helped or not. Certainly TTFW is taking steps towards this in trying to analyse hits and sessions on its web-based resources.
- The outputs assessment identified problems with targets relating to 'trainers trained with smaller firms finding it difficult to provide third party mentoring given severe constraints on their time. This is reflected by difficulties in recruiting to the programmes. It is unlikely that payments to these potential mentors can really compensate for the opportunity cost of their time such that this strand of activity needs to be reconsidered and alternatives evaluated.
- Finally, the Training Guide was taking less 'hits' at a time when the whodoiask website was seeing an increase in usage.

While it is difficult to link the above outcomes with economic aggregates, the Tourism Satellite Accounts can provide an indication of the economic effects of TTFW activity. A very conservative estimate of the total number of beneficiaries reported as a result of the EU funded elements of key projects is around 2,000. Approximately 76,000 people were supported by tourism demand in Wales in 2000. Then TTFW activity in terms of Medrwn, Gallu and Best Practice in Provision alone has engaged directly with around 2% of those employed in tourism in Wales in 2004. The above programmes have strengthened the employment prospects of 2,000+ individuals and safeguarded the value-added attributable to their jobs. In 2000 the TSA framework suggested that £1.1bn of gross value added was supported by around 76,000 tourism industry jobs. Then TTFW interventions have helped to safeguard around 2.6% of jobs the sector, which might be associated with around £29m of gross value added.

Key findings – Strategic Review

This section of the report analyses the success of TTFW in terms of its core strategic objectives which are distanced from and often obscured by the need for the more pragmatic targets that are referred to above. These core objectives are providing leadership, guidance and co-ordination, with the aims of building authority, providing advice, promoting training within the sector, and promoting the sector itself.

It is noted that TTFW has been hampered in achieving a fully evolved leadership role because it competes in some aspects of this role with People 1st.

In general, however, TTFW appears to have correctly identified how best to achieve its strategic objectives and is now working solidly towards their fruition. The research has revealed good support for and understanding of TTFW's work from other tourism organisations and alliances with whom it has successfully built partnerships.

The following views were expressed by TTFW beneficiaries:

- Locations, practical arrangements, pre-course administration and trainers were considered to be good.
- Course topics addressed aspects of tourism delivery, the importance of which had not hitherto been appreciated.

- The networking value of attending courses and visits was appreciated.
- Internet courses had helped in understanding computer jargon, enabling better communication between beneficiaries and ICT professionals, also raising awareness of the need to keep websites up to date and user-friendly.
- Beneficiaries valued highly the general skills they were able to improve via Medrwn/Gallu, as opposed to training for formal qualifications.
- Some beneficiaries would be happy to contribute something towards their costs, but would continue to need subsidies to ensure their attendance on courses.
- Course organisers were found to be receptive to suggestions, manifesting a flexibility vital to small firms.
- Bespoke training courses were considered a necessity for the industry.
- In small organisations staff who had received training via Gallu/Medrwn were now demanding more training.
- Health and safety and risk assessment courses were cheap, which saved beneficiaries money.

However, there were some negatives:

- Occasional mismatches between courses and trainee needs.
- Frustration felt when ideas were being 'sold'.
- Welcome Host was considered by some to be very basic.
- Businesses found it difficult to attend courses during peak season, and would have liked the training calendar to reflect the seasonality of the sector.
- The plethora of tourism support organisations continues to confuse.
- Some course participants observed that many similar businesses would benefit from training, implying low participation.
- The CD-ROM based toolkit was widespread, but few interviewees had found cause to apply it
- It was difficult to link training received and business performance. However, employers who sent employees on courses were much more likely to see productivity improvements.
- Not everyone who had attended courses was aware of other TTFW 'products' such as the training guide.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It continues to be important to develop elements of the supply side of tourism. Improving the quality of the human resources in the sector is one route to enhancing the visitor experience, and making tourism SMEs more effective in taking new opportunities. In the current climate many TTFW products, activities and outputs are unlikely to be delivered commercially. There will continue to be challenges in bridging information asymmetry between the industry and trainers, and then targeting bespoke provision. Whilst intervention is needed, public money used to achieve improvements to human resources is severely constrained.

Longer term security of funding is crucial for TTFW, and it is hoped that there is now more scope for improved security of funding now that the two principal sources of money fall under a single Assembly remit. A strong funding framework will permit proper strategic planning and accountability, currently compromised by demoralising and effortful chasing of small funding packages.

In addition to detailed recommendations above relating to TTFW targets, we urge that:

- The Assembly investigate the benefits of a longer term funding stream to TTFW.
- TTFW try and incorporate softer outcomes in their output capture systems.
- More information is recorded on the nature of beneficiaries and how precisely they have benefited from provision, and with more information on how companies are helped.
- Having taken the functions of WTB in-house, the Assembly re-consider the requirement expressed in the WTB remit letter that a memorandum of understanding between People 1st

and TTFW should be negotiated between them, and the Assembly should assist in determining the respective roles.

- TTFW seek extensions to Medrwn and Gallu under subsequent funding rounds.
- TTFW activities should be supported in the future. Whether TTFW remains a separate limited company or is taken in-house by the Assembly should be determined by which option offers the greatest prospect of continuance, irrespective of the fact that its present form is the most effective model.