



The effectiveness of the Welsh Government's approach to mitigating the impact of large scale job losses

Unite Wales Briefing ahead of Enterprise and Business Committee Meeting



Overview

Unite Wales is most strongly in a position to reflect on the role that Welsh Government has played in mitigating the impact of large scale job losses rather than that of the UK Government, however we understand from experience across the union that the Welsh Government is much more pro-active in stepping in to assist – both when job losses are imminent and also to prevent such losses when they could be on the horizon – than the UK Government traditionally is or has been.

The union is supportive of such schemes as REACT and PRO-ACT as well as vital and innovative initiatives such as the Employer Support Grant which was established to help employers in Wales support former Remploy workers into further employment. We recognise that much of these initiatives and other excellent programmes such as Jobs Growth Wales are made possible by access to European Funding. It is therefore absolutely imperative to Welsh employment and the Welsh economy that we remain a part of the European Union.

We firmly believe that there is a case for Welsh Government support in stepping in to both alleviate and prevent job losses where possible but that this should always be done in the Welsh spirit of social partnership in co-operation with the trade unions, employers and other relevant organisations. Such partnership working is of course key to perhaps preventing getting to a situation where large scale job losses are on the cards.

An example case

Unite was significantly involved with efforts firstly to try and save MURCO Milford Haven and then, latterly to mitigate the impact of job losses at one of the most significant employers in the region. We believe the points made in respect of this case specifically are broadly reflective of the union's views on the Welsh Government's approach to mitigating the impact of large scale job losses.

Given the high profile nature of the closure of the MURCO refinery much of the assistance provided is well documented but those closely involved from Unite are firm in the belief that the assistance the workforce and our members received in this case was outstanding and it is difficult to imagine what more could have been done.

The speedy visit to the site by the First Minister when closure looked a reality was a key and extremely well received response. This was closely followed by the setting up of the ministerial taskforce under the direction of Economy Minister Edwina Hart AM. This could not have demonstrated more to the workforce that they had the whole hearted support of their Welsh Government and helped boost morale when it was at a significant low. The role the union had with both the visit and the taskforce also reiterated the importance of the role and relevance of the trade unions working in partnership as well as reassuring workers that their voice was being heard in the process.

Funding was made immediately available to those at risk of redundancy - the agencies rapidly arranged workshops and provided assistance that included practical and digital assistance, for example, CV writing and the use of LinkedIn for networking. The agencies also worked well together to provide workfares where prospective employers were given an opportunity to recruit those facing imminent redundancy.

In a move crucial to this case and which could perhaps go overlooked in other instances unless duly noted, the agencies also looked at the supply chain and the knock on effect on the local economy and the wider impact of the redundancies.

In the early days when a sale looked possible immense effort went into making sure that licences and permits were in place, this work was carried out by Welsh Government civil servants who put in a tremendous effort to give any potential purchaser the best possible start as a new operator and a transition that would be as smooth as possible. Unite understand that the Welsh Government civil servants also worked closely with civil servants in Whitehall to ensure that no stone was left unturned in order to secure a sale and to make the purchase as attractive as possible.

Due to the efforts of all involved it is believed that most of the contractors that were on site have now found alternative work and we understand that nearly two thirds of those employed by the refinery are now working in the oil industry, albeit very few of those are now working locally.

If anything were to change in the future then we need to plan sustainably for a diversity of employment in each region of Wales to avoid short term dependency on one specific sector of employment or major employer.

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