

Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Impact of Population Change in Wales, HC 103

Wednesday 6 March 2024

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Members present: Stephen Crabb (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Virginia Crosbie; Ruth Jones; Ben Lake; Mr Rob Roberts; Beth Winter.

Questions 134 - 156

Witnesses

I: Walter May, Founder and CEO, GlobalWelsh; and Robyn Lovelock, Growth Deal Programme Manager, North Wales Growth Deal, Ambition North Wales.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Walter May and Robyn Lovelock.

Chair: Good morning and welcome to the second of today's evidence sessions looking at population change in Wales. I am delighted to welcome to this panel Walter May, who is the founder and chief executive of GlobalWelsh, an organisation that promotes and represents the Welsh diaspora globally. We are also joined by Robyn Lovelock from Ambition North Wales, who works closely with the North Wales Growth Deal. Thank you both very much for being here today to help us as we think about what is going on with the Welsh population, the big-picture changes that are happening in Wales and what, if anything, Governments can do to mitigate some of the impacts of those changes, particularly as we are seeing the decline in numbers of working-age and younger people in parts of Wales—the west and the north—and some other trends like that. To get us started with our questions, I will ask Ben Lake to kick off.

Q134 **Ben Lake:** Diolch yn fawr to you both for attending the session this morning. As you will be aware, the 2021 census recorded quite a significant demographic change to the population in Wales. As the Chair mentioned, certain parts of Wales have suffered quite a reduction in the overall population, Ceredigion being one of those areas. Within that, the demographic makeup has also changed quite significantly in that we have aged. The picture across Wales is something similar, with a trend towards an older population. I am interested to hear your thoughts as to whether that presents any particular challenges or problems from your point of view. Can I start with Ms Lovelock, please?

Robyn Lovelock: Good morning. I agree with the general trends that you have just outlined. We see that in north Wales, with the coastal communities in particular ageing. I have not seen the breakdown but the feeling is that those communities are ageing more rapidly. There is rural depopulation as well. We definitely can see that happening in our communities, and particularly we see the impacts on Welsh-speaking communities in the region, where a lot of that change is happening.

Q135 **Ben Lake:** From your point of view of the problems that it causes, is it a matter of ensuring that there is that critical mass to attract interest and investment? Is that one of the issues you are finding?

Robyn Lovelock: I think it is about services at the end of the day. What is there for young people? Are there housing opportunities, social opportunities and, critically, work opportunities? The North Wales Growth Deal, which I work for, has set about trying to address some of those issues through, for example, establishing strong digital infrastructure and getting that up to modern standards, looking at the infrastructure around housing and providing additional housing opportunities in the region, then looking at the career pathways through the wide range of growth deal projects. The awareness has been there for some time with the growth



deal being developed over the last 10 years. There are interventions in place but they do need to be built on. I can talk more about that.

- Q136 **Ben Lake:** Thank you very much. Mr May, can I ask you, first, for your impressions of the consequences of this demographic change we are witnessing in Wales? More specifically, in terms of fostering entrepreneurship and supporting businesses in those parts of Wales such as my own that are depopulating and ageing at a rate of knots, what problems and challenges is depopulation causing?

Walter May: I prefer to look at it as an opportunity. Talented people will leave their place of birth, whether it is Wales or any other location around the world. Every country has issues like this. For small countries it is probably more acute. I think it is something to celebrate that these young people are ambitious and they see their futures somewhere else. It would be great if it was in Wales, and the challenge for us is to make sure that they understand what the opportunities are. Opportunities need to be more visible to keep people or to attract them back.

When people leave Wales, they have experiences that we should then be tapping into and utilising to help Wales to become more prosperous, whether that is by them returning or not. There is a finite set of circumstances in which someone would consider returning. I returned to Wales, but you can define the scenarios in which people might consider returning. Being aware of opportunities in Wales is obviously a part of that, but now with hybrid working they could return and still work somewhere else, as I did. I commuted Monday to Friday for five years, although I would not necessarily recommend that. I think that it is an opportunity rather than a problem, personally. That is my take on it.

- Q137 **Ben Lake:** I have a brief supplementary question, because that moves in to my area—I represent Ceredigion, of course—and the push on digital connectivity being such as it is. In your experience, are you finding that with improved connectivity and the rise of hybrid working there is an opportunity for areas such Ceredigion to make the case for the brightest and best across the world to look again at coming home?

Walter May: Yes, definitely. I know a senior person at *The Economist* magazine who lives back in Wales—in Ceredigion, I believe. She was amazed when she asked her employer if she could do that because she thought they would say no, but they agreed for her to do it. So yes, definitely.

Ben Lake: That is very interesting. We need to celebrate some of those examples a bit more.

- Q138 **Virginia Crosbie:** Thank you for coming here today. My question relates to average earnings and productivity. We have an average salary in Wales of 32K versus 35K in England and Scotland, and that whole low-skill, low-pay trap where we have a limited demand for high-skilled workers so we have a low-skilled workforce. I would be interested in your



thoughts on that please, Robyn.

Robyn Lovelock: The growth deal is set up to look at high-value jobs, particularly in the technology and manufacturing sectors, and pathways into those careers. For example, at the Enterprise Engineering and Optics Centre that has just started construction in Wrexham there is a plan to have 700 trainees associated with that project to support those pathways into higher-value employment.

Within the agrifood and tourism programme, particularly the tourism talent network, one of the projects there is looking to work with private sector companies to support low-skilled employees into the sector so that they see a career pathway from low-skilled entry towards higher-value careers. We do see that as an issue, particularly in rural areas where geographic and transport issues are a challenge to getting people into the employment that would offer higher salaries. There are limitations there and that then promotes people leaving their immediate communities to move closer to the jobs, whether that is in Wales or outside—I live on the border—and that can often be to higher salaries outside. The growth deal is working to get that into place, but it is a longer-term process.

Q139 **Virginia Crosbie:** In your view, what more needs to be done?

Robyn Lovelock: The investment, the challenge on the skills side and the skills pathway into the higher employment opportunities. The challenge that we experience is around inconsistent funding.

With that tourism talent network project, for example, we have shared prosperity funding at the moment and we are able to do a lot of promotion to transform the discussion around career opportunities in tourism. Last week there was an event that engaged about 465 students across Denbighshire in career pathways in tourism, which has led to about 60 expressions of interest in the tourism talent network placements, which is an exciting start for the project.

But that shared prosperity funding will obviously come to an end, so what is going to happen over the next 10 or 12 years of growth deal where we do not have a vision of what that additional revenue funding looks like at the moment? It is difficult to plan those career pathways. By the time you create the understanding of what the career pathways look like, you engage the young people and you understand what they are looking for, the funding has come to an end. But you still to communicate it and get the word out.

As a final point, the challenge is shifting some of the dialogue within our communities around how parents are talking about opportunities with their young people. I see in our community that there is a strong tendency to say that you need to leave to get ahead and to access those higher-paid employment opportunities. Changing those discussions and that sentiment takes long-term investment and opportunity.



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Walter May: It is not something I necessarily have much insight into, but certainly the more ambitious businesses we can start in Wales and help to grow and that are based on talent—in the tech space, for example, you could not get away with paying low salaries because the competition for talent is intense—those businesses need to grow and internationalise, which they often find very difficult. The diaspora can play a big role in that. The competition for talent means that they would have to pay higher salaries, probably comparable with other parts of the UK, including London in some cases.

It is about having growth in the Welsh economy of the types of businesses that have the potential to grow and have to employ high-skilled, talented people. Wales has a lot to offer young, talented people by way of work-life balance, but the salary is always a factor. They might want to come back to Wales but maybe salaries are a barrier for them to return. It is something we need to think about. It will come from growth in young, ambitious businesses, I think.

Q140 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** That leads on quite nicely for me. Walter, what can we learn from the Welsh diaspora to respond to population change challenges such as a reduction in the working-age population?

Walter May: I suspect that very few of them are aware there is a problem. The first thing you do, at least when I engage with someone, is you have to update them: “The Wales you left is not the Wales we have today.” There is definitely an education piece to that.

Individual diaspora have interests in certain subject areas, so it is about tapping into what they are passionate about and how they would like to give back. Generally, they do want to give back. They can give back in time. They can give back in mentorship and sharing their knowledge. They have a network and in many cases they have money that they are looking to invest.

I doubt that they are aware of the population challenge because it is not something they would necessarily be exposed to. If you ask them whether they would contribute back in some way to help to address that, I am not sure what they would say and what they could actually do.

Q141 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** Is your network a platform for doing that education piece?

Walter May: Absolutely, yes. Fundamentally, we focus on four things. One is to help Welsh companies to trade internationally. We take the risk and cost out of doing that by connecting them to diaspora in any part of the world that they want to consider trading in. We want to encourage international investment, both FDI and DDI—diaspora direct investment. We do quite a lot of work in that area. Last year we would have brought nearly £2 million of investment from the diaspora back to Wales into five or six businesses.



Thought leadership is something we major on as well. Within our diaspora we have experts in every field you can imagine and we want them to share that global knowledge with our aspirational businesses. Mentorship is very important as well. We have programmes in each of those areas.

Q142 Tonia Antoniazzi: So £2 million has gone into five or six businesses, and there is the leadership and the mentorship. Is there anything else that the diaspora can do to support jobs growth in Wales?

Walter May: Investment, obviously. If you help these businesses to scale, then by definition they will have to employ more people. Yes, definitely, there are several things. All the things I mentioned potentially lead to growth in businesses. Helping them to scale and investing in them will lead to more jobs, and more higher-skilled, higher-paid jobs.

Q143 Tonia Antoniazzi: Do you think there is a role for politicians in supporting that work?

Walter May: GlobalWelsh is based on a piece of research I did in 2015. Best practice from around the world is a partnership with the public sector. We are a private sector organisation right now. We could do more—a lot more—if we could partner effectively with the public sector. We have done some work for Welsh Government but we have never really been on the same team. We have been at a distance—a separation—and separation does not allow you to maximise the opportunity that presents itself.

We have an amazing diaspora, at least the same size as the population of Wales. We have 3 million advocates for Wales out there. They can sell Wales. They can provide visibility of what is going on in the wider world. They can identify inward investment opportunities for us. They can do a range of things, but it is the tip of the iceberg right now, what they can contribute back.

Tonia Antoniazzi: There is a lot more potential to tap into, yes.

Walter May: Yes, and we have proved out these programmes. We have a platform. You can only bring people together if you have a community platform, so we have built that and we want to make that a place where our diaspora connects with each other but also connects back to Wales.

Robyn Lovelock: I lead on the agrifood and tourism programme within the growth deal. To the question about what politicians can do, I would like to ask that there is a balance around the foundational economy and agrifood aspects of what Wales is good at. The tendency can be to focus on the high-tech and STEM areas in promoting what Wales is good at. We are extremely good at that and we have a lot of investment in the region, but there are also massive shifts going on within agrifood.

The work that people are doing across Wales—but north Wales is obviously my area of interest—and those services around food production, biodiversity and flooding prevention all have important and



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increasing value. For politicians to be able to speak as much about the value that those rural economies bring for our society as a whole in the UK in those upland areas, the rural areas and the rural valleys is critical. Increased visibility in the media, in interviews, in policymaking and in investment will be critical, given the shifts going on in the sector over the coming years.

Walter May: We are just about to start a piece of research with our diaspora and engage more effectively with them to try to establish why they left and what would encourage them to come back. We could ask lots of other questions, maybe the one that you posed there, as to what they could contribute in some way to the population challenge. We could ask them that.

Q144 **Chair:** I will jump in on the questions, here. Walter, I was interested in your own personal story but also the network that you have established and grown.

Last month, the Irish Government, alongside the construction sector in Ireland, launched a campaign to try to attract Irish construction workers living overseas to come back to Ireland because there are so many job vacancies in the construction sector there. In 2015, the Irish Government did a big campaign to try to get members of the Irish diaspora to move back to Ireland to help to be part of the economic renewal of Ireland. Do you think there is a case for us doing something similar in Wales?

What I am getting at is that a lot of what you have described is a natural pattern, isn't it—younger people leaving Wales to go and work elsewhere? It has been happening for centuries, and at some point many of those people will find their way back to Wales, whether it is to retire or while they are still working. That is a perfectly healthy picture. Do you think there is a case, whether it is a Welsh Government marketing campaign or something done in partnership with the private sector, to say to the Welsh diaspora, "You have been successful. Come back to Wales. We need your skills and experience"?

Walter May: Yes. Both Scotland and Ireland have had a thing called a homecoming. I have spoken to a lot of diaspora, as you can imagine, and some of them felt that there was a certain resentment about the fact they had left. We should not feel resentful that they have gone. I never see any acknowledgment by any of the public sector as to how brilliant these people are. We have a thing called "Wonderful Welsh Stories"; if we find a diaspora who has done something exceptional, we write the story. There are a lot of them on our website if you want to take a look.

If I was running the Welsh Government, I would let these people know how proud we are of them, how we respect the fact they have left, and that we want to celebrate their success wherever it is in the world. That is the first thing. In doing that, you then have the right, I think, to say, "Come back and help us—come back and contribute to whatever initiative it might be."



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We have a thing called “Callouts” on our platform: you can call out to the diaspora for whatever you want to call out for. It is used by our members and they call out for all sorts of things. It is really an ask and it can take many different forms. We have a mechanism to do it, but I think it has to start with a certain amount of respect and acknowledgment that diaspora are important to us. They never hear that from anybody.

Q145 Chair: Some of us from the Committee were in the States at the beginning of last year, and we met with the New York Welsh group set up by Ty Francis. It is an extremely impressive group of people from all over Wales doing different things in New York, all very much engaged with what is going on back home in Wales and wanting to feel like they can be part of the future for Wales as well. I think there is definitely something there to tap into.

Robyn, from a north Wales perspective, do you have a view on the theme I have just been talking about—attracting people back to Wales? In the work you are doing with the growth deal, are you seeing any signs of people wanting to come home to be part of that?

Robyn Lovelock: We meet returned diaspora regularly in all our work. As you said earlier, there is a natural ebb and flow. The concern is that the ebb will become greater than the flow back.

In the growth deal we specifically have four areas of equality and wellbeing that we target with all our projects, and those cut across the themes we have been discussing. All our projects look at opportunities for young people, and we have chosen the ages 16 to 35 because that is the main ebb age group. All our projects look at opportunities in rural areas, areas of multiple deprivation and Welsh-speaking communities, so that as the growth deal progresses with implementation we are able to track the impact that we are having on retaining young people and strengthening those pathways. We are implementing that and aware of it, but maybe more could be done through the education system to emphasise what we have in Wales—the opportunities that we have—and help particularly young people to realise what is on their doorstep.

Even just a couple of weeks ago in my local gym, talking to someone who grew up in Llangollen, I heard that he left feeling that there were no opportunities and went to work in Thailand for a while, and then came back to Llangollen. He told me he had never realised, growing up in Llangollen, that there was a river. He said that he knows that sounds remarkable, but it was so commonplace to him, so taken for granted, that it was never a factor in his life. Now he has come back, he has been able to get employment locally. He is training as a raft guide and the river will become his economic opportunity. It really struck me that it is very hard for young people to realise what is on their doorstep until they go. It is great if they want to go, but how do we make sure that we are finding a way to welcome them back and support them as they return?



Walter May: GlobalWelsh has two projects right now. One is in Blaenau Gwent, which is, I believe, the poorest part of Wales economically. We are connecting aspirational Blaenau Gwent businesses to the Blaenau Gwent diaspora.

The thing about diaspora is that if you say, "Yes, you are part of the Welsh diaspora," they feel a relationship to Wales, but much more powerful than that is the place in Wales that they feel connected to. If they left Ebbw Vale 20 years ago and have had a stellar career somewhere else in the world and someone taps them on the shoulder and says, "There are some opportunities here to give back to Ebbw Vale," they would be very keen to know what they are because that is the place they feel an emotional attachment to. It is all about place as well as country and the place is more important. I am from Pontypool and if I ever see Pontypool written down anywhere I am attracted to find out what is going on.

We are doing a project with the Welsh-speaking counties of Ceredigion and Gwynedd, where they again are identifying aspirational businesses and connecting them with their diaspora—Welsh-speaking diaspora by and large. The place is important and I just want to emphasise that.

Chair: That is important because Ceredigion and Gwynedd are the two counties seeing the biggest population decline in Wales.

Walter May: Yes. We are doing a 12-month project with them as a pilot.

Chair: That is helpful. Thanks.

Robyn Lovelock: From a growth deal perspective as well, there are a number of projects going on with M-SParc and the ARFOR programme. It is an exciting way of hosting diaspora back for weekends, with them coming from elsewhere in the UK or further afield with their families to spend weekends in north Wales to get to know particular areas and understand what coming back would look like to see whether that is an option for those families. There are some tangible examples of engaging with diaspora there.

Chair: Very good. Thank you.

Q146 **Beth Winter:** Thank you for giving your time. This is fascinating, particularly talking about the diaspora.

On a national level we still unfortunately have high levels of economic inactivity in Wales, and unemployment. Of the work there is, a lot is low skill, low pay and short term. We have some fantastic local projects, which you have talked about. Just before you came in, we heard from four fantastic young people who are real role models for future generations. I do not want to be too negative, but the question is: how can and should economic investment be targeted in a different way in order to address the impact of population change, given where we are as a nation at the moment? Robyn, do you want to go first because you are



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involved in the growth deal work?

Robyn Lovelock: Can you repeat the question?

Beth Winter: How can or should we tailor economic investment differently or better in order to address the issue of population change?

Robyn Lovelock: Again, this is at the heart of the way that the North Wales Growth Deal is looking at our economic investments in the region. The focus of the growth deal is on jobs and investment, which are important in looking at prosperity for young people. However, the growth deal is also looking at the wider wellbeing questions summarised by the Future Generations goals: what is the impact of the opportunities that we are providing to support equality and community cohesiveness, and how are we supporting less impact on emissions and biodiversity? In each project that we are looking at, we are not just looking at it from one perspective, for young people's futures, but looking at it from a multifaceted perspective so that when we are making the decisions about those projects we are able to balance what will support those future generations with the project.

Q147 **Beth Winter:** Is there enough economic investment? That is the first question. Where the investment is going in, is it going to the right places?

Robyn Lovelock: Is there ever enough economic investment? Of course, we would welcome more, and the balance of that revenue and capital split is critical for us. There is no revenue funding for the delivery of the North Wales Growth Deal. Getting some of those career pathways that I talked about in place is long-term work and it needs consistent investment in the regional skills partnerships and the skills partners to get things like the young person's guarantee operating well and with confidence over multiple years rather than annually, where we do not have a clear plan for the next year or the year after because we are not yet certain of what the investments will be. We can have aspirations but we cannot have detailed plans.

For young people it is about getting those pathways clear and then the communication of them so that they have the confidence that if they do choose a particular training course that will take them one, two or three years, at the end of it we have not just given up on them and moved away from that pathway. It is about building that confidence among young people and the wider sector needs to support that.

Walter May: We are not a growth deal so we do not have money to invest, but I have been involved very heavily in the accelerated growth programme, which was funded by the Welsh Government. It sought the best opportunities to invest in individuals and companies wherever they were in Wales. It certainly was pan-Wales.

Part of the work we are doing with Blaenau Gwent is around aspiration among young people, and providing them with role models—people like them, from the same schools they have gone to, with the same



qualifications or whatever—who have left Wales and achieved amazing things in their careers, and thereby inspiring young people to think that they can achieve much more than they may believe they can.

We did a piece of research around diaspora direct investment, and the result was amazing. We discovered that there are a lot of Welsh people living somewhere else in the world who are investing in companies where they live. The challenge for us is to get them to invest where they were born. Every single town and city in Wales has an amazing diaspora; they just do not know who those people are and they are not engaged with them.

Getting investment from outside Wales as well as the public sector investment that takes place, which we do not have any control over as to how they do it and where they do it, is an additional amount of money, but it is more than that. It is about those people inspiring people from their former schools or towns to aspire to what they have achieved. I am from Pontypool. I am one of six. I lived in a council house and failed my 11-plus, but I have done all right. You need someone to inspire you, and I was lucky enough to have a mentor who did that for me. I think it is valuable to get these mentoring people involved with young people to inspire them.

Q148 Mr Rob Roberts: I would like to talk an awful lot about the North Wales Growth Deal, if that is okay. In December 2020, there was £120 million from Welsh Government and £120 million from the UK Government, so £240 million in total. How much do you have left and what has been delivered so far?

Robyn Lovelock: Last week, as I mentioned, we had the first spade in the ground at the Enterprise Engineering and Optic Centre, which is set to deliver at least 70 jobs for north Wales as well as a strong skills pathway with, as I mentioned, a target of 700 young people being trained through that enterprise engineering centre. That spade is in the ground. The Digital Signal Processing Centre within our digital connectivity programme with Bangor University is up and running in its second year and going into its third year. Those two projects are already out the door, as it were. I have lost track because there are so many trying to get through the stage at the moment, but we have outline business cases and full business cases and about eight out of 22 are about to pass those thresholds and go into delivery.

We recognise that has been slower than we would like for a number of years. However, each of the projects I would say are in the growth deal because they are challenging projects to deliver. We are determined that they will be transformational for north Wales. With a lot of them you could build a building, like the enterprise engineering centre, but you really want to make sure it is not just a building that you are investing in. You want to make sure it will really deliver those skills pathways and the transformational opportunities that will come from them.



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In the tourism sector, with the tourism talent network, again we can support the investments of the hub, with the tourism training hub and the private sector businesses that will host the spokes, but how is that project going to transform tourism within north Wales? The only opportunity the growth deal has to leverage those conversations is before we sign the funding agreement. Once we have signed the funding agreement and the buildings are built, we cannot go back and say, "We thought this was going to be transformational in an XYZ way." Those conversations have to happen before that funding agreement.

We have been absolutely focused. We are all North Walian. We have been focused on exploring the transformational value of each project. Some have therefore fallen off because they were not going to be transformational in the way that we needed them to be. Others are imminent. I am confident about where we are. We are working very hard to get everything into delivery that we have scheduled.

Q149 Mr Rob Roberts: Does the £240 million only kick in when your spade goes into the ground? Up to this point where you now have two projects where spades are in the ground, has any of that money been spent in developing the business cases? Or is it just the construction funding and things that the £240 million covers?

Robyn Lovelock: I am not the lead on the finance, but my understanding is that the main bulk of the spend is on the construction. There is some related design—for example, the design of the buildings—that can be capitalised. As soon as the funding agreement is signed, those capitalised expenses can be claimed. This is the bit that I am less clear on. There is a small proportion of funding across the growth deal that is reserved for delivery—for running the growth deal. There is no revenue funding associated so there is a top slice that is about making sure we have the resources in place to deliver the growth deal. The vast bulk of the growth deal is only spent once the funding agreement is signed.

Q150 Mr Rob Roberts: What I am trying to get to is what we can learn from the growth deal in north Wales that we can repeat elsewhere. It seems to be that the £240 million in December 2020 is now only worth £203 million in buying terms, because of inflation. Has north Wales lost £37 million because it has taken too long to get these projects through? Are we taking too much time? Should the process be more streamlined? Are there too many stages in assessing the business cases? It feels like we have lost £37 million because of inactivity.

Robyn Lovelock: Each project has its own challenges and a pathway that we are clear on. When the growth deal was conceptualised, it was signed on the basis of projects that were very conceptual. For a number of them, when you look into the detail—and I do not want to give specifics of projects that have moved on from the growth deal—we might have committed to a certain number of jobs but when we then looked



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into the detail of how they were to be delivered we could not get the confidence that we needed. Therefore, we chose to go separate ways.

There are lessons to be learned about how developed projects should be at the point of signing the growth deal, but when some projects left the growth deal we were in a strong position to put out a call for new projects. At the beginning of last year, 2023, we put out a call for £30 million of new projects, and fast delivery was a key part of that. We are expecting that the delays in some of those projects that left will be made up for by the speedy delivery of the new projects that are coming in, and that we will overall deliver on our contracted benefits of around over 3,800 jobs and more than £1 billion of investment.

We are confident that we are on track to deliver the overall benefits over the course of the growth deal, but delivering these transformational projects is taking that bit longer. We would be happy to go into the detail of that process.

Q151 Mr Rob Roberts: Super quickly, because time is getting on, when you say "speedy", what does that mean? Secondly, in order to make up that difference of the inflation loss, have you made any representations to both UK and Welsh Governments to say that that funding perhaps should be inflation linked so that we do not lose any money? As I say, we are down £37 million.

Robyn Lovelock: Yes, we would love it to be inflation linked so that there are further opportunities. Some of the business cases are expected to be signed in the summer, so it is really about focused delivery. As I say, we have a large number about to go through key gateways.

Q152 Ruth Jones: Thank you both for coming today. At our first panel we heard from four very eloquent young people telling us about the difficulties that young people are experiencing at the moment. Ms Lovelock, in terms of the growth deal, did you engage with young people? How do you engage with young people to make sure that it is fit for what they want to do? Their aspirations are key. If you do not cook them in, you are not going to get them. How did you deal with getting them in?

Robyn Lovelock: The growth deal projects have been developed over the last eight to 10 years, so a lot of that engagement was around that period. Many of the growth deal projects are being delivered by project sponsors outside of the delivery team. In my programmes those are, for example, Bangor University, Wrexham University and the further education colleges Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Coleg Cambria. They are engaging with young people daily, looking at career pathways and making those analyses. The growth deal as a whole was informed by the experience of those institutions and their work with young people.

When you look at the portfolio business case, you can clearly see those four areas of inequality and the considerations for young people within that around rural lack of opportunity and lack of opportunity in our



Welsh-speaking communities, for example. Some of the key barriers that young people identify around housing and digital access are areas that we engaged with in the design of the growth deal and continue to engage in, for example, with shared prosperity funding at the moment on the digital connectivity programme, in respect of how communities and young people want their digital services to be accessible. That continues.

An ongoing piece of work is the work with the Regional Skills Partnership, which sits within our team, around the young person's guarantee and the big conversations that have happened there across Wales and across north Wales in particular. There is ongoing communication there. I come from a youth background so I would like to see more, but we are limited by the revenue resources in doing that.

Q153 Ruth Jones: I get that; I just think that if a young person does not go to those institutions you have mentioned, how do they get to know about these things? We have heard from young people that communication about these issues is sometimes difficult. Sometimes mum happens upon a course or whatever, but we do not want to leave it to luck. We want to know that young people can be encouraged through these systems. I am just not clear about it.

Robyn Lovelock: I agree and I would like to see more funding go into that space. I think we can do more, but that is a revenue-funded set of work and we have capital funding. We would like more revenue funding to go into that. We think that would be valuable.

Q154 Ruth Jones: A point well made. Mr May, you have talked about your experiences and your life journey, if you like, and how a mentor was helpful to you—there were some nods from behind you there. How do you think your organisation and the diaspora can help young people?

Walter May: We have some great examples of that written up on the website. Older people are predisposed to want to help youth—young people who are ambitious. I would love to see universities and colleges teaching young people how to network within a professional context. There are so many people within our community who would happily support and mentor young people, but they need to be visible to these older people so that they can connect with them and mentor them. We see a lot of young people who just seem like rabbits in the headlights. When you put them into an online business professional network, they do not know how to represent themselves and how to behave. It is a pity because there is tons of opportunity for them to be mentored and to get work experience.

I would love universities to be doing that and they should be doing it. The best way to get an opportunity in life is through networks, not through applying for jobs that are advertised. How you present yourself and make yourself visible in a way that people will find you relatable are skills in themselves. Universities and the schools have a lot to do there and I don't see them doing anything, to be honest.



Chair: Beth Winter has a final question.

Q155 **Beth Winter:** I suppose this is the million dollar question: how do we future-proof our economy? We heard from the young people this morning and the issues they were raising were around housing and mental health support services, as well as employment. There is an expectation, isn't there, for young people to go through the traditional school and university route? Vocational education is being cut at the moment. How do we future-proof the economy to ensure that we stem the population change that is happening, retain the untapped talent that we have here, and address the other end, which is the ageing population? It is a big question and we probably do not have much time, but is there one thing that each of you thinks is essential to future-proof our economy?

Robyn Lovelock: Where to start on that? I think that we have to go into the heart of our communities where these conversations are happening. How are we influencing that dynamic of when young people are going through school and having those conversations with parents and with mentors they meet along the way? How are we supporting those conversations to be positive and talking about the opportunities and influencing at that level? Part of that is through Careers Wales and the colleges and schools networks. I am not an expert in that area but there seems to be something fundamental that needs to change.

At the universities, and I have seen this from my work internationally with young people, it is about looking at stronger linkages not just at the university through the subject matter but through entrepreneurialism as well. Then you get into the likes of the networking and the value that that brings because you are creating an entrepreneurial mindset. Make that fundamental within young people's schooling and university so that they are looking outside of the comfort zone that they see around them and the job opportunities they immediately see, and looking more proactively at the future opportunities.

Beth Winter: Employment is one aspect but the young people talk about a lot of other issues.

Walter May: Most of the conversation here has been around how we attract people back. If we could stop them leaving, that would fix a lot of our problems, but we can't. The thing about attracting people back is that it is difficult to be able to set an expectation or an outcome that you can aim for, because it just is inherently difficult to do.

However, we know that those who do come back have a disproportionate impact on the country. There are plenty of examples of people who have returned and done things that maybe they would not have done if they had stayed. We should design a returners programme, because it does require a particular design and process for how we do it and how we deliver those outcomes.



By far the bigger opportunity—which we are actually already doing—and one you can measure and forecast the outcomes from is to connect with the diaspora—the ones who won't return. They will say to me, "I have no intention of returning," as in moving and physically living in Wales, "but I want to return in terms of the impact that I would like to have on Wales."

We have some amazing diaspora who have come to the end of their corporate lives and who want to give back to Wales, but there is no mechanism for them to do it. These are people like Warren East, who was Rolls-Royce chief executive for five years. We should have some way of engaging people like that into the public sector where they can provide a world view and expert evidence, and possibly advise on policy. There are a number of people like that. I have asked the Welsh Government, "These people have told me they are available to come and help Wales and they would like to get involved in a conversation with Government," and the answer is, "There is no way we can do that," which seems to me a massive missed opportunity.

Robyn Lovelock: I have one last quick point that I do think is important. The other piece is about looking at what the future of work looks like for young people with eyes wide open. A lot of the future skills work relies on data from employers who are informed by various risk assessments. As we look to the future, there are significant changes, for example, within agrifood and manufacturing around the circular economy and foundation economy. We need to be very clear about what those changes are likely to be and we need to be up front and look with a just transition lens at how different those employment pathways will look, so that we do not have the Tata Steel and Ffos-y-fran legacy where that is not anticipated and planned. We have to be very clear that this is where we need to be going, and this will look very different from the experiences of parents, who are maybe more influential on young people's pathways.

Beth Winter: Skills and training are key to that because there is a huge gap.

Robyn Lovelock: Yes. Looking at World Economic Forum risk assessments for the next 10 years, things look very different. We must take that into consideration in what we are communicating to our young people loudly.

Q156 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I am sorry to cut it off when there is a lot more I am sure we could ask, but I am conscious that colleagues want to get downstairs and get their seats for the Budget statement.

Can I finish by putting one question to you, Walter May? It is about the story we tell about ourselves in Wales and the Welsh nation. I think that today is the formal end of Wales Week London. We have had 130 events this year organised by Dan Langford and the team. I think they have done a great job again in promoting Wales. Do you think that we are telling a strong enough and clear enough story, whether it is trying to get people overseas back to Wales or encouraging young people to stay and



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be part of Wales's future? Do you think there is a clear and strong enough message about who we are?

Walter May: We definitely are not. We did a pilot project where that came through loud and clear. I can share the details with you at some point.

Chair: Please do.

Walter May: Yes, I can give you some anecdotal examples of that.

We did some work on inward investment. We identified a range of inward investment opportunities, but the interface between businesses considering setting up an operation in the UK, with Wales as a potential option, was so broken. The interface is very difficult. We do come across them now; the question for us is: do we introduce them to Welsh Government? Do we introduce them to central Government? Do we introduce them to a growth deal? Do we introduce them to one of the councils? That interface needs to be well understood and advanced in terms of how it works, and it is not. We lose a lot of opportunities because of that interface.

Chair: We might well speak to you about those themes in the future. Thank you both for being with us, and apologies that we have slightly run over time. It has been a fascinating session, both the second part and the first part that we held in private with the young people, who were magnificent in opening up and sharing with us their own experiences as young people trying to forge a future in Wales. Thank you to my colleagues. It has been a very good session.