

Apprenticeship pathways

July 2025



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Apprenticeship pathways

July 2025



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddEconomy

Current Committee membership:



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Welsh Conservatives



Hannah Blythyn MS
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Chair's foreword

For many people looking to follow an educational route, apprenticeships are the best choice. They combine learning and earning, work and training. The apprentices we engaged with as part of this inquiry were enjoying their courses and they are indeed thriving as a result of these opportunities.

However, we heard about many challenges facing people who want to undertake an apprenticeship, not least understanding and navigating the apprenticeship system itself. Whilst the academic route is clear, and schools work hard to signpost and encourage their students to progress to a-levels and degrees, the same cannot be said for the apprenticeship pathway.

In fact, we hear that perverse incentives encourage schools not to allow their students to engage with colleges. This means many young people never learn about the courses on offer and don't see the other potential educational path in front of them. These students then follow the academic route even though they might be much happier, more successful and more suited to the vocational one.

This report sets out eight recommendations and 10 conclusions aimed at demystifying the apprenticeship pathway and supporting people to choose the best educational path. The recommendations include ensuring schools and colleges work together to help young people understand the vocational pathway, improving recruitment and retention of trainers and assessors, and work to both upgrade guidance for employers and make faster progress in developing a vocational education and training strategy.

I believe if the Welsh Government heeds the advice in this report, then people across Wales will be able to make better choices about their education and training. This in turn will allow people to improve their skills and increase their earning potential, give employers a more productive workforce, and improve our economy.

I would like to thank everyone who gave evidence to this inquiry, and particularly the people who took part in our engagement work, for helping the Committee develop our understanding and make our recommendations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew RT Davies". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Andrew RT Davies MS
Chair

Recommendations and Conclusions

Recommendation 1. The need for clearer messaging and raising awareness of apprenticeships within schools is clear. Welsh Government must work to ensure schools, colleges and employers engage with each other to present vocational courses as a good quality option. The Welsh Government may wish to explore the evidence base for introducing providers access legislation as part of the solution. This could include exploring lessons learned from the introduction of the Baker Clause, and subsequent amendments which came into force at the beginning of this year, in England. Welsh Government should write to this Committee to explain their findings and views on providers access legislation..... Page 22

Recommendation 2. Welsh Government should set out a detailed explanation for the reduction in the number of apprenticeship starts by skills sector and apprenticeship level, and how this affects the options available post year 11. Page 22

Recommendation 3. There are clear and significant challenges facing apprenticeship providers in recruiting and retaining skilled trainers and assessors. Welsh Government should explore the barriers and work with colleges to consider incentives and ways to address these..... Page 29

Recommendation 4. Whilst the minimum wage for apprenticeships is not in Welsh Government's control they should look at ways to increase real pay for apprenticeships as part of their fair work agenda. Page 29

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should explore funding solutions to expand the degree apprenticeship offer but must also ensure value for money as part of this work..... Page 39

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government and Medr should review existing information and ensure that published information and guidance for employers clearly sets out FAQs regarding hiring an apprentice. Any new material should be based on what employers say they need. Welsh Government and Medr must also take into account the 'time poor' nature of SMEs when engaging with business and make it as easy for them as possible to be part of apprenticeship programmes..... Page 43

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government must make faster progress in developing a vocational education and training strategy, as recommended by the Vocational Qualifications for Wales Steering Group and the Transitions to

Employment report. The Committee should be updated on progress so far and at regular intervals..... Page 52

Recommendation 8. Welsh Government must work with Regional Skills Partnerships, Careers Wales and other stakeholders to collate and understand Wales-wide labour market intelligence. Page 53

Conclusion 1. Whilst there have been some improvements in recent years, the issue of parity of esteem between academic and vocational education remains persistent in Wales. Fully addressing this issue will require significant work not just from Welsh Government and people working in the education and skills sector but also from wider civil society. The perception of apprenticeships being second choice needs to be addressed. As part of this it is vital all learners should be presented with clear and impartial options Page 21

Conclusion 2. The importance of targeted, meaningful work experience is clear. The Committee would like to see the Careers Wales programme for placements targeted at certain individuals, such as those at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET), be expanded..... Page 21

Conclusion 3. The reduction in the number of apprenticeships starts is a concern which needs further explanation..... Page 22

Conclusion 4. Welsh Government should examine ways they can improve access to transport, including looking at cost of transport, for people studying apprenticeships, particularly those from rural areas. We welcome the Welsh Government's £1 bus fare pilot and would like to see any analysis of its effect on young people's access to apprenticeships. Page 29

Conclusion 5. It is often a significant challenge for learners to be able to map out a career path through the apprenticeship levels, especially when compared to the academic route of qualifications. There are roles for Medr, RSPs and Welsh Government to play in ensuring that the provision on offer and the route through it is clear for perspective apprentices, those who have already embarked on courses, providers and employers to understand. Page 38

Conclusion 6. We note that the Children, Young People and Education Committee has taken evidence on Junior Apprenticeships as part of its Routes to Post-16 inquiry..... Page 39

Conclusion 7. We were interested to hear stakeholders’ perspectives regarding junior apprenticeships. It is anticipated this topic will be addressed within the work being conducted by the Children, Young People and Education Committee on Routes into Post-16 Education, and we look forward to reading their findings.
.....Page 39

Conclusion 8. The Committee welcomes Medr’s review of apprenticeships. As part of this review Medr should examine how the overall apprenticeship system can be more flexible and responsive to employer and economic needs, in particular the transition to net zero and the rapidly changing technological landscape.Page 39

Conclusion 9. Employers are critical to a successful apprenticeship programme. However, they face a range of barriers to engaging with the system and taking on an apprentice, such as lacking awareness of the benefits of hiring an apprentice, struggling to provide progression routes for apprentices, and difficulties navigating the system. These challenges are amplified for SMEs and more prevalent in some sectors than others.....Page 43

Conclusion 10. The Committee is concerned about the impact of the reduction in the number of apprenticeship starts. This could lead to longer term skills challenges in some sectors. Welsh Government need to ensure they fully understand the impact of this on business confidence, learners and the Welsh economy.....Page 52

Conclusion 11. The Committee is concerned about the lack of urgency in addressing issues within and around the apprenticeship programme. In particular that if apprenticeships aren’t delivering for the needs of employers and the economy that there will be missed opportunities in emerging and fast-paced sectors.....Page 52

1. Background

Apprenticeships are key to both help Welsh citizens upskill themselves but also to help provide the correct skills to drive forward our economy and produce economic growth. The Committee decided to hold this inquiry to look at access to and routes through the apprenticeship programme.

1. The terms of reference for the Inquiry were examine:

- Pathways between apprenticeship levels: The extent to which there are challenges in mapping out career routes through the different apprenticeship levels, such as from a junior apprenticeship to a degree apprenticeship. Whether this is more difficult in some careers/sectors than others.
- Economy: The extent to which apprenticeship pathways support the needs of Welsh businesses and contribute to filling skills gaps in the Welsh economy.
- Employers: The engagement of employers in facilitating these pathways and attracting apprentices. Is specific support needed for micro, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to engage with the apprenticeship programme.
- Information about apprenticeships: Good practice between careers services, schools, colleges and employers in terms of promoting apprenticeships and the provision of meaningful work experience.
- Equity of support and access for learners: The extent to which apprenticeship pathways are made open to all young people in Wales and any barriers facing specific demographic groups or geographical areas.
- The Welsh Government's role: How policies support apprenticeship pathways and any barriers that need addressing in that regard. The role of the Welsh Government, Regional Skills Partnerships and other stakeholders in identifying and communicating economic and skills

needs to inform apprenticeship frameworks and the delivery of qualifications.

- 2.** The Committee ran a consultation from Thursday, 12 December 2024 to Friday, 7 February 2025 and held five evidence sessions in January and February of 2025. In these sessions the Committee heard from a range of stakeholders including independent experts, providers, regional skills partnerships and the Welsh Government.
- 3.** The Committee also commissioned the Senedd's Citizen Engagement Team to facilitate five online focus groups and an interview with current apprentices and apprenticeship completers across Wales to gather their views and experiences. This information was shared with the Committee in a report which has been published alongside this report.¹
- 4.** The Committee would like to thank everyone who gave evidence to this inquiry.

¹ Welsh Parliament Citizen Engagement Team: [Apprenticeship pathways: Engagement findings](#), February 2025

2. Information about apprenticeships

Awareness and understanding of apprenticeships

Information provided to learners

5. The Committee heard concerns from a large number, and range, of stakeholders around the lack of information provided to learners about apprenticeships. Many spoke of the importance of independent and unbiased careers advice. In their written evidence Medr told the Committee:

“The importance of high quality, independent, unbiased careers advice for learners and of collaboration with employers around information about vocational options were key themes from respondents during Medr’s Strategic Plan consultation. It is critical is that those advising learners have a broad understanding of both current and evolving industry areas and all the education pathways that can support a learner entering into their preferred career or industry.”²

6. Educ8 Training said “the information broadly offered to young people by support agencies, schools and Welsh Government literature can be confusing and lack clarity”. They believe this “can result in misleading, biased, or incomplete guidance, leaving potential learners without access to the comprehensive range of options necessary to make informed decisions about their future”.³

7. Swansea Bay University Health Board told the Committee “more work [needs] to be done from a younger age in schools on apprenticeship routes and pathways and also with parents / carers”⁴. The Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) South West Wales agreed, saying that schools should be “increasing visibility and promoting apprenticeships from an earlier stage” to “help students plan their options and choose apprenticeship pathways post-16”.⁵

² Written Evidence: [Medr](#)

³ Written Evidence: [Educ8 Training Group](#)

⁴ Written Evidence: [Swansea Bay University Health Board](#)

⁵ Written Evidence: [Regional Learning and Skills Partnership South West Wales](#)

Awareness of apprenticeship opportunities

8. Stakeholders also told the Committee that young people aren't always fully aware of apprenticeships as an option available to them and that clearer, more consistent messaging is needed.

9. ColegauCymru noted that from 2019-23 only 2 per cent of school leavers at Year 11 across Wales go on to do an apprenticeship each year.” They felt this “is a clear indication that the level of understanding around apprenticeship pathways is low amongst pre-16 learners”. ColegauCymru noted that the 2 per cent figure was drawn from pupil destination surveys and that the statistic was related to ‘Work-based Training – Employed Status’, so the actual figure “may be lower. It is important that Careers Wales ensures that the data collected during pupil destination surveys is amended to request information on progression onto an ‘apprenticeship’⁶.

10. ColegauCymru went on to say that the “key issue which is raised by apprenticeship providers is the lack of schools’ engagement” and suggest “there is a definite need to educate all involved in the school community - pupils, teachers, parents etc. - around the routes to an apprenticeship”.⁷

11. Cambrian Training’s response to the Committee’s consultation backed this up saying there is “a lack of awareness among careers officers in schools”⁸. The Construction Industry Training Board said that the opportunities provided will “often be reliant on the knowledge of individual teachers/career advisers, which in turn can create considerable variation between localities”⁹.

12. Skills Academy Wales said that:

“in many cases, teachers and careers advisers lack up-to-date knowledge about apprenticeships, particularly in emerging sectors like green and digital”.¹⁰

13. The Committee has previously made a number of recommendations around improving skills provision to support the green economy in its report on the subject. Recommendation 13 specifically states: “The Welsh Government should set out how it will work with Careers Wales to ensure that careers advice is better

⁶ Written Evidence: [ColegauCymru](#)

⁷ Written Evidence: [ColegauCymru](#)

⁸ Written Evidence: [Cambrian.Training](#)

⁹ Written Evidence: [CITB.Wales \(Construction Industry Training Board\)](#)

¹⁰ Written Evidence: [SkillsAcademy.Wales](#)

integrated throughout a pupil's education journey to ensure young people are aware of the opportunities within Wales presented by transitioning to a greener economy"¹¹. The Welsh Government accepted this recommendation "in principle".

14. Skills Academy Wales also raised the influence of parents, adding that "many parents lack a full understanding of apprenticeships and how they can positively align with future employment and career progression".¹²

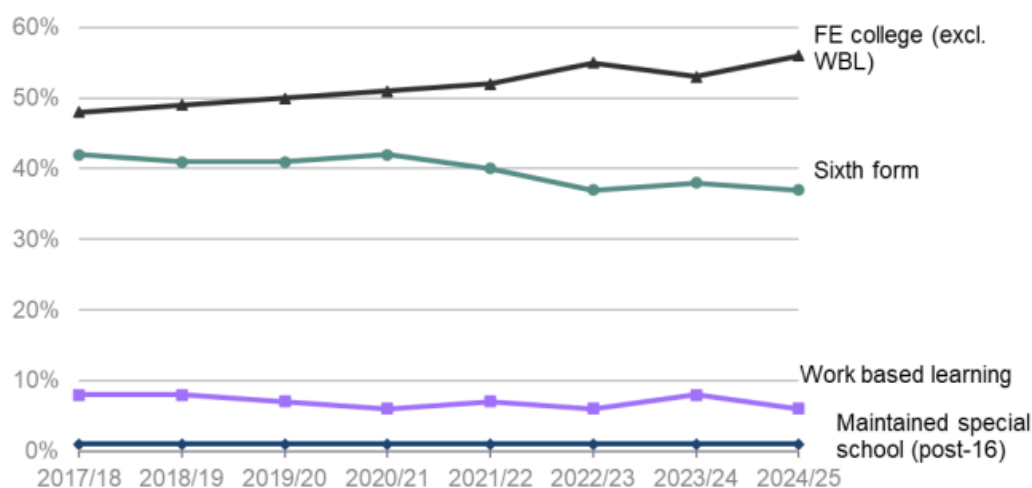
15. The issue with parents' understanding also came out in the Committee's citizen engagement work. One young apprentice said:

"Other than trying to convince my parents, there were no barriers at all for me because everything was very straightforward.....Mum and Dad aren't always right!"¹³

Choice of vocational routes and apprenticeship starts

16. Whilst the Committee heard concerns about a lack of awareness of apprenticeships, statistics show an increasing trend of young people opting to enrol in Further Education (FE) Colleges for year 12 rather than staying in school.

17. Data shows a steady increase in the percentage of year 12 learners studying in FE colleges compared to school sixth forms.



Source: Medr, Progression from Year 11 to tertiary education, August 2017 to January 2025

¹¹ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee: [Green Economy](#), March 2025

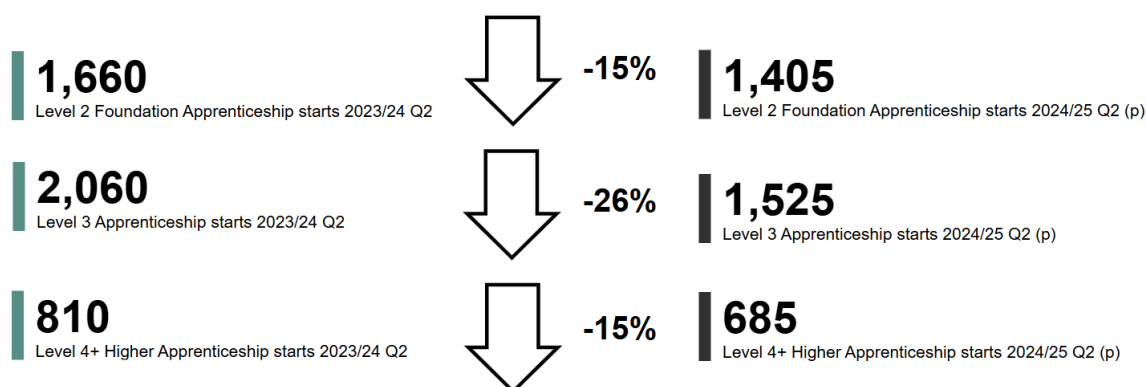
¹² Written Evidence: [Skills Academy Wales](#)

¹³ Welsh Parliament Citizen Engagement Team: [Apprenticeship pathways: Engagement findings](#), February 2025

18. We also note that latest statistics published by Medr show that 49 per cent of the year 11 learners who went to tertiary education in 2024/25 chose to study AS levels, the lowest proportion since 2017/18.¹⁴ Therefore, for the first time, the 2024/25 data shows a majority of students progressing to non-AS level provision, including work based learning.

19. However, when we compare the current and previous years Apprenticeship starts like for like for Q1, there has been a 12 per cent fall in apprenticeships started. From 7,185 apprenticeship learning programmes started in 2024/25 Q1, compared with 8,145 starts in 2023/24 Q1.

20. Latest statistics from Medr's apprenticeship dashboard, published 4 June 2025, compare the current quarter of apprenticeship starts with the equivalent last year.



Number of starts by Year, Quarter and Programme Type

Programme Type ● Level 2:Foundation Apprenticeship ● Level 3:Apprenticeship ● Level 4+:Higher Apprenticeship

21. Medr's statistical release says:

The fall in starts coincides with a reduction in apprenticeship funding in the 2024-25 budget, following the loss of European Social Fund contributions. Changes to delivery started from November 2023, in anticipation of the budget. Of concern is that Higher Apprenticeships saw the largest fall compared to Q1 the previous year.¹⁵

¹⁴ Medr statistics: [Progression from Year 11 to tertiary education, August 2017 to January 2025](#), February 2025

¹⁵ Medr statistics: [Apprenticeships learning programmes started: August to October 2024](#), May 2025

22. We also note that the Medr release refers to the scaling back on the Welsh Government's target:

The Programme for Government contained a target to create 125,000 all-age apprenticeships. During the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee meeting on 26 June 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language agreed a new target of 100,000 all-age apprenticeships to maintain the previous Senedd term's target of 100,000.

Working relationships between schools and providers, and employers

23. The Committee heard evidence from a number of stakeholders that better collaboration was needed between schools, providers and employers.

24. This mirrors findings in the Transitions to Employment report.¹⁶ It noted the views of Further Education colleges and employers that they “experienced difficulties in engaging with learners in school settings with schools keen to ensure that the more academically able learners progress to Sixth Form” but that schools he spoke to “did not recognise this to be the case”. The report pointed to ‘provider access’ legislation in England, commonly referred to as the ‘Baker Clause’, and that it was strengthened in the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, aimed at ensuring the Clause is legally enforceable (referred to in further detail below). The report says:

Whether such a mechanism could work in Wales is something for the Welsh Government to consider, but the very fact that the UK Government felt that it required additional legislation to improve the Clause's effectiveness suggests that careful scrutiny is required¹⁷

25. That report concludes “that there is significant appetite amongst stakeholders for a more joined-up, co-ordinated approach within the secondary and tertiary education sector”. It points to a “clear example of good practice” that came from Llanidloes High School which outlines its collaborative relationship with the NPTC Group of Colleges.

¹⁶ This report was authored by Hevin David. It was commissioned by the Welsh Government independently of his role as a member of this committee.

¹⁷ Gov.wales: [Transitions to Employment – A report for the Welsh Government](#), June 2023

Colleges access to students

26. The Committee heard evidence that further education institutions often struggle to access school pupils and this creates a challenge in promoting the vocational route. ColegauCymru told the Committee these issues had been outlined in two Welsh Government commissioned reports “both the Transitions to Employment Report by Dr. Hefin David MS and the Welsh Government’s Review of Vocational Qualifications led by Sharron Lusher MBE DL.” They went on to say:

“Both reports recommend enhancing collaboration between schools and colleges and providing colleges with greater access to school pupils. This would ensure that learners can make well-informed decisions about their futures early in their educational journey. ColegauCymru believes that there has not been sufficient urgency in addressing these recommendations from both reports, and they should be prioritised by the Welsh Government and the pre- and post-16 education sectors. ColegauCymru believes that the marketing of the apprenticeship offer is key, and that there needs to be a sustained campaign aimed at school pupils, their parents, and school leavers.”¹⁸

27. As referred to above, provider access legislation in England, sometimes referred to as the ‘Baker Clause’ was an attempt to address this issue in England. It was introduced as an amendment to the Technical and Further Education Act 2017, and stipulates that schools must allow colleges and training providers access to every student in Years 8 to 13 to discuss non-academic routes that are available to them. It was hoped this would help address productivity challenges and skills shortages experienced across several sectors of the economy. This regulation has been enforced since 2 January 2018.¹⁹

28. An Institute for Public Policy Research 2019 report found compliance with the Clause had been “very poor” at that early stage.²⁰ The UK Government then sought to strengthen the legislation through the Skills and Post-16 Act 2022 and associated Careers guidance and access for education and training providers.²¹ A minimum number of six providers must be provided by the school. It also introduced requirements for the duration and content of these ‘encounters’ with the aim of ensuring high quality.

¹⁸ Written Evidence: [ColegauCymru](#)

¹⁹ [Asl.org.uk The Baker Clause: Best practice guidance for schools, providers and learners](#)

²⁰ [Ippr.org The Baker clause: One year on](#) | IPPR, January 2019

²¹ [Gov.uk Careers guidance and access for education and training providers](#)

29. Make UK told the Committee the Baker Clause was “a welcome part of the approach in England and it has improved that engagement”²². They said “it has improved the extent to which both the further education sector and employers are able to engage with schools.” However, they did not think it worked perfectly and said there were “still a lot of frustrations from employers about the extent to which schools are receptive to hearing from them”. They felt “a similar legislative approach wouldn’t harm anything, but it’s also not the solution in itself”.²³

Presenting the apprenticeship option to all learners

30. The Committee heard that there’s a reluctance to present apprenticeships as an option for all learners. Estyn said “the information available to pupils when considering their choices is often too limited, with apprenticeships often seen as inferior to opting for A-levels or full-time university degrees”.²⁴

31. Many witnesses highlighted that there is a social bias against promoting the apprenticeship route compared to the sixth form - degree route. South West Wales RSP said that “apprenticeships are a ‘second choice’ option compared to university degrees”.²⁵ The Institute of Civil Engineers Wales agreed saying “apprenticeships still carry a stigma as being a route for those who are not destined for university”.²⁶

32. Cambrian Training told the Committee there is:

“a reluctance to present apprenticeships as a viable option for all pupils, regardless of academic attainment”. It believes that “careers services should start promoting apprenticeships at an earlier stage, presenting them as a parallel pathway to further and higher education”²⁷

33. The Committee’s citizen engagement work supported the suggestion there was an issue with parity of esteem. Whilst participants felt things have improved

²² Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 365

²³ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 367

²⁴ Written Evidence: Estyn

²⁵ Written Evidence: Regional Learning and Skills Partnership South West Wales

²⁶ Written Evidence: Institution of Civil Engineers Wales

²⁷ Written Evidence: Cambrian Training

in recent years, they agreed that apprenticeships need to be introduced to school learners on an equal par with other career pathways.²⁸

Work experience opportunities

34. The Committee heard a lot of evidence around the importance of meaningful work experience for learners and how it can help young people determine their career paths. However Members also heard the picture was fragmented across Wales. This included practical challenges such as health and safety and DBS requirements for under 18 year olds and that access to work experience could be limited by things including if parents could arrange a placement.

35. ACT Training said “work experience is essential to help school leavers determine future educational/career paths”²⁹. Mid Wales RSP told Members “We’re seeing fewer and fewer schools participating in a work experience programme, which is an incredibly important route for employers to recruit apprentices, and it’s so disappointing because it could be so valuable.”³⁰

36. Access to work experience is also part of the CYPE Committee’s current inquiry into Routes into post-16 education and training.³¹ Its Engagement Findings of March 2025 found that of the 295 young people who answered the question in the survey, only 24 per cent said they had received an opportunity to undertake work experience.³²

37. Careers Wales explained that the experience for learners regarding work experience is fragmented:

The picture in terms of work experience is very fragmented across the whole of Wales. You are right—Careers Wales were responsible for a central placing service up until 2015, and then, due to budgetary cuts, this was taken out of our remit. So, it's been quite a while since we were involved in arranging this national work experience placement service. Since then the picture across Wales, as I said, is very different. Some schools, or some local authorities, are funding FE colleges to

²⁸ Welsh Parliament Citizen Engagement Team: [Apprenticeship pathways: Engagement findings](#), February 2025

²⁹ Written Evidence: [ACT Training | ALS Training](#)

³⁰ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 127

³¹ Children, Young People and Education Committee, [Routes into post-16 education and training](#)

³² Welsh Parliament Citizen Engagement Team: [Routes into post-16 education and training: Engagement Findings](#), March 2025

find placements for pupils in schools; as we heard in previous sessions, parents are given the responsibility to look for placements. So, it's a very uneven and inequitable field of play across the board, without considering young people with additional learning needs or disabilities, who have fewer opportunities and are not able to progress as well as their peers in terms of employment³³.

38. Members heard calls for tailored work experience support for specific learners, particularly those at risk of becoming NEET (not in Employment, Education or Training). In their written evidence Careers Wales described a targeted programme they run saying: “This programme is targeted at young people who have been identified as potentially becoming NEET due to their lack of attendance in school.” Their evidence states in the 2023/24 academic year “85.6% of these young people went on to a positive destination at the end of the programme” and “25 young people went on to start an apprenticeship”.³⁴

39. Careers Wales told the Committee “this programme is offered across five local authorities in Wales. We would recommend that the Welsh Government fund this offer for young people across all local authorities in Wales.”³⁵

40. National Training Federation Wales supported the call for meaningful work experience to support learners’ pathway choices and highlighted the role of Careers and Work-related Experiences (CWREs) in the new Curriculum for Wales saying:

“meaningful work experience, that's critical in raising awareness of apprenticeship options. ... But two things there for me are: let's not forget that in the new Curriculum for Wales we've got the CWREs, haven't we? We've got the career work-related experiences coming right through from primary, right through to secondary, which is fantastic. I hope we see a shift in that to having really meaningful work experience. But also ... where is the tertiary model in the local authority ... we have seen the partnerships with schools being much better, the engagement being much better. I can't endorse tertiary for

³³ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 406

³⁴ Written Evidence: [Careers Wales](#)

³⁵ Written Evidence: [Careers Wales](#)

the rest of Wales, but what I'm saying is that it's just evidence where it has worked.”³⁶

41. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy Energy and Planning acknowledged there was an issue with esteem between vocational and academic courses saying “When you meet these apprentices, see the incredible work they’re doing and the exciting fields of work they’re in, and the incredible careers that they’ve got ahead of them, then it doesn’t make sense that there’s not that parity of esteem. So, there’s a lot of work to do there.”³⁷

42. One of the Cabinet Secretary’s officials also told the Committee they were working to improve communication between colleges and schools, saying:

*“working very closely with Medr, who are primarily working on the ground with the different stakeholders—schools, colleges and everyone in tertiary education—as well as Careers Wales to provide the guidance and advice to young people. And we’re aware that there is more work that needs to be done in this area, but we’re working quite closely to improve that provision and to carry it forward and connect the dots, because we’re aware that there are some gaps in the provision”.*³⁸

43. Another Welsh Government official noted “work experience is now a part of the new Curriculum for Wales, and that’s clearly a welcome development as well. But, Careers Wales ... they are a very well-run and very well-led organisation, but perhaps are trying to do too much at the moment, often because we’ve asked it of them.” He went on to say Welsh Government would be “working with Careers Wales colleagues to help shape their offer to make sure that it is properly prioritised, but also deliverable—securing that delivery for them and making the maximum impact in this regard and others.”³⁹

Our View

We believe there must be a continued emphasis on parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes. Within the context of this report, that means that apprenticeships must be promoted as having an equal value to academic

³⁶ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 244

³⁷ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 222

³⁸ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 189

³⁹ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 225-226

choices. Alongside this, understanding the reduction in apprenticeship starts, especially in some skills subjects, is crucial.

We heard a lot of evidence that there was still a stigma or misunderstanding attached to following a vocational educational course as opposed to the academic route. We also are concerned about the challenge around ensuring prospective students, and their parents, fully understand what is available and what they might gain from the vocational route. While this is not a new issue, the Committee believes this lack of understanding and the lower esteem society often gives to the vocational route must be addressed to encourage and support people taking the educational path that is right for them.

Alongside the parity of esteem we are concerned about the information prospective students receive about the educational routes they could pursue. It is clear that more needs to be done to present students with unbiased accurate information about their choices regarding pursuing an academic or vocational route. This could be aided by improving collaborative relationships between colleges and schools including the good practice examples set out in the Transitions to Employment report.⁴⁰

It is very disappointing to see that only 24 per cent of the 295 young people who responded to a Senedd survey had been given an opportunity to undertake work experience whilst at school. Whilst we acknowledge there are challenges associated with arranging work experience placement, we believe high quality work experience is a vital opportunity to ensure students are aware of their options. However, any work experience programme will need to be correctly targeted, resourced and managed, including addressing the practical challenges of health and safety and safeguarding requirements.

Conclusion 1. Whilst there have been some improvements in recent years, the issue of parity of esteem between academic and vocational education remains persistent in Wales. Fully addressing this issue will require significant work not just from Welsh Government and people working in the education and skills sector but also from wider civil society. The perception of apprenticeships being second choice needs to be addressed. As part of this it is vital all learners should be presented with clear and impartial options .

Conclusion 2. The importance of targeted, meaningful work experience is clear. The Committee would like to see the Careers Wales programme for placements

⁴⁰ This report was authored by Hevin David. It was commissioned by the Welsh Government independently of his role as a member of this committee.

targeted at certain individuals, such as those at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET), be expanded.

Conclusion 3. The reduction in the number of apprenticeships starts is a concern which needs further explanation.

Recommendation 1. The need for clearer messaging and raising awareness of apprenticeships within schools is clear. Welsh Government must work to ensure schools, colleges and employers engage with each other to present vocational courses as a good quality option. The Welsh Government may wish to explore the evidence base for introducing providers access legislation as part of the solution. This could include exploring lessons learned from the introduction of the Baker Clause, and subsequent amendments which came into force at the beginning of this year, in England. Welsh Government should write to this Committee to explain their findings and views on providers access legislation.

Recommendation 2. Welsh Government should set out a detailed explanation for the reduction in the number of apprenticeship starts by skills sector and apprenticeship level, and how this affects the options available post year 11.

3. Equity of support and access for learners

Availability of and access to courses

Lack of provision, particularly in rural areas

44. The Committee heard concerns around a lack of apprenticeship provision in some areas of Wales, in particular rural areas, which is restricting opportunities for learners. Members also heard that apprenticeship availability is often subject to the industries of a learner's local economy which means that, depending on where you live, some sectors are more readily available than others. Whilst this is an inherent factor of the differing economies across Wales, it can lead to unequal opportunities for learners unless they're willing and able to undertake long distance travel or move.

45. The National Training Federation Wales told Members

*"there's a number of different barriers that happen across rural Wales—transport infrastructure, things like that. There needs to be, perhaps, some incentives for subsidised travel or remote learning options for both the potential apprentice and the employer. We can look at things like that as well. Incentive for employers—we've actually had, and it's still live at the moment, but the Government does have an incentive for employers to take on a disabled apprentice as well, so that they can have that additional enhancement and enrichment support."*⁴¹

46. Members heard there was a smaller range of apprenticeships both in terms of subject and quality available. Skills Academy Wales told the Committee "the wide range of apprenticeships are less readily available in rural areas, where there may be fewer businesses or industries able to offer these employment opportunities".⁴²

⁴¹ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 268.

⁴² Written Evidence: Skills Academy Wales

47. The Regional Skills Partnership for the South West told the Committee:

“opportunities are not evenly distributed across Wales, with rural areas facing greater challenges in accessing high-quality apprenticeship placements”.⁴³

48. The Institution of Civil Engineers Wales highlighted that both the courses on offer and the quality of provision varied depending on where you were in the country. They told the Committee:

“there is the issue of ensuring that standards are consistent in what is being taught. For example, is someone in North Wales receiving the same education/training as someone in the south of the country. Evidence suggests that this is not the case as there is disparity across the colleges delivering civil engineering programmes through the delivery of different learning modules. Not only does this have an effect on the level of skill and knowledge being acquired, but also has a knock on effect to those progressing to a university programme.”

49. They went on to say:

“it should be noted that there is also disparity of provision across Wales with a focus on the south-east of the country. So, there isn’t an equal opportunity for individuals or employers and this should be addressed”.⁴⁴

50. Sharron Lusher also highlighted this issue telling the Committee “a really important recommendation where we need to make some progress is how we can find more innovative ways of delivering the curriculum in parts of Wales that are perhaps sometimes harder to reach from a learner perspective.”⁴⁵

51. Issues of digital connectivity for rural students were also raised with the Committee. Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership said:

⁴³ Written Evidence: [Regional Learning and Skills Partnership South West Wales](#)

⁴⁴ Written Evidence: [Institution of Civil Engineers Wales](#)

⁴⁵ [Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 41](#)

*"the lack of reliable digital connectivity in some parts of Wales further increases challenges, limiting access to roles that offer hybrid or home-working options. It also creates barriers to studying remotely, making it more difficult to fully utilise the blended learning models offered within apprenticeship programmes."*⁴⁶

52. The issues with provision in rural areas was a matter that came up in the Committee's citizen engagement work. It is such an issue that it impacts parents' decisions on where to live, with one participant telling the Committee:

*"I come from a rural area of Wales but live in the city at the moment, as I want my children to have career opportunities that aren't available to them in rural areas."*⁴⁷

Lack of trainers and assessors

53. The Committee heard there were challenges recruiting apprenticeship trainers and assessors. Whilst Members heard they are absolutely key to the success of programmes, witnesses told the Committee that educator wages tend to be lower than industry salaries, which can make it hard to recruit and retain staff for these vital roles.

54. Three of the four RSPs raised concerns around recruiting trainers and assessors in their written evidence.⁴⁸ South West Wales **noted**:

*"Assessors and trainers are key to the success of any programme and this is an area of concern where we have insufficient numbers to support the growth that we need to achieve and we need to identify ways that we can utilise the expertise of industry in undertaking some of the assessment of students. One of the key barriers in the more rural areas of Wales is sufficient Assessors and trainers who speak Welsh and are able to deliver training."*⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Written Evidence: [Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership](#)

⁴⁷ Welsh Parliament Citizen Engagement Team: [Apprenticeship pathways: Engagement findings](#), February 2025

⁴⁸ Written Evidence: [Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership](#); Written Evidence: [Regional Learning and Skills Partnership South West Wales](#); Written Evidence, [North Wales Regional Skills Partnership](#)

⁴⁹ Written Evidence: [Regional Learning and Skills Partnership South West Wales](#)

55. North Wales RSP said: “In addition, training providers are facing challenges in recruiting appropriately skilled assessors in many areas including digital skills, plumbing and electrotechnical. Providers are experiencing intense competition for talent, as industry salaries are higher than those offered by providers. With limited funding, training providers are unable to compete with these salary offers, which makes it more difficult to attract and retain the skilled assessors needed to deliver apprenticeships.”⁵⁰

Barriers to undertaking an apprenticeship

Transport

56. The Committee heard a lack of access to reliable public transport was a major issue, particularly for learners in rural communities, and was potentially putting people off taking apprenticeships. This includes the cost of travel and the availability of provision.

57. ColegauCymru raised the example of a specific “learner who, in terms of getting to his employment, had to get two buses and he had to work two hours of that day just to cover his costs of getting to and from work.”⁵¹ They went on to explain that “there are companies in Pembrokeshire who won't employ an apprentice unless they've got a driving licence. So, there are lots of challenges out there.”⁵²

58. Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership highlighted that there was an issue with transport links but also often the anti-social hours that apprentices have to work, telling the Committee:

“Within southeast Wales, barriers exist in relation to rurality and transport links, and these can limit access to apprenticeships for some. In rural areas, for example those around the heads of the valleys, public transport can be unavailable or unreliable which poses challenges for potential apprentices. The antisocial nature of certain industries, for example, tourism and hospitality or health and social care further compounds this. This can also affect apprentices who need to travel to college on day release to progress their learning.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Written Evidence, North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

⁵¹ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 326.

⁵² Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 330.

⁵³ Written Evidence: Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership

59. The WLGA told the Committee that “some groups will be disadvantaged where there is a lack of public transport meaning that some opportunities will only be suitable for those who drive”. They noted that “young people aged 16 with limited public transport will be deterred from choosing the apprenticeship route”.⁵⁴

60. The Committee also heard the cost and reliability of public transport was an issue. Educ8 Training ~~stated~~ that “the current system of reimbursing travel expenses rather than providing upfront support makes it difficult for some learners to afford commuting to apprenticeship placements”. They also highlighted that the “lack of reliable transport options can make participation in apprenticeships impractical without additional support.”⁵⁵

Apprenticeship wages

61. Members heard that apprentices tend to be paid less than many low skilled non-training based jobs and that this can be a barrier to uptake. If someone is in their first year of study they are only entitled to the apprentice minimum wage, not the wage tied to their age – which may be higher. This means, at current rates, a person in the first year of their apprenticeship is entitled to a minimum hourly rate of £7.55, whereas if they were working in a non-training based role they would be entitled to £10 an hour if they were over 18 or £12.21 over 21.⁵⁶ It should be noted the Minimum Wage is reserved and set by the UK Government.

62. In their written evidence ColegauCymru stated that “Cost-of-living (including the costs associated with transport, particularly in rural areas) is an issue”, and added that this was especially compounded by the issue of the higher minimum wages for workers over 18 and 21 set out above. They went on to say that according to a Welsh Government Trial:

“learners who earned less were less likely to successfully complete their apprenticeship, with the largest drop in success rates between 2018/19 and 2021/22 observed among those earning less than £15,000. Before the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis, success rates were similar across all earnings levels. The lower success rates for low-earning apprentices could not be fully explained by the type of apprenticeship or learner demographics, and those living in

⁵⁴ Written Evidence: [Welsh Local Government Association \(WLGA\)](#)

⁵⁵ Written Evidence: [Educ8 Training Group](#)

⁵⁶ Gov.uk [Minimum Wage Rates](#)

deprived neighbourhoods had even lower success rates compared to their counterparts in less deprived areas. This evidence suggests that the cost of living was a significant factor in the reduced completion rates for apprenticeships in 2021/22.”⁵⁷

63. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Planning and Energy acknowledged cost, and in particular the cost of transport, was a barrier to people taking up apprenticeships. She told the Committee “there are things that we need to do to explore what more we can do to help young people with the cost of apprenticeships. But I don't have any easy answers for that one today.”⁵⁸ One of her officials added “the apprenticeship minimum wage ... that's not something that the Welsh Government itself sets, but I know that Ministers have lobbied over some considerable time for changes in the minimum pay for apprentices.”⁵⁹

Our view

Whilst many of the barriers people encounter when looking to pursue apprenticeships are related to issues not fully within the Welsh Government's control, it is important Welsh Government use every lever they have at their disposal to remove or reduce them. This could include working with partners, lobbying UK Government or using any power or influence they have to address change. For instance, whilst the minimum wage is reserved, Welsh Government could use fair work policies and influence in the Welsh Public sector to drive an increase in pay for apprentices in Wales.

Welsh Government must also look at structural issues with the apprenticeship system to reduce barriers. For example, whilst the apprenticeship offer will always be tailored to the local jobs market, Welsh Government should look to support the embracing of remote working and learning to help widen students' options. Similarly Welsh Government must examine support for trainers – as key deliverers of the apprenticeship programme.

The availability, reliability and cost of public transport has come through very strongly as a barrier to choosing to do an apprenticeship. Welsh Government, possibly working with Transport for Wales, should examine how they can reduce this barrier.

⁵⁷ Written Evidence: [Colegau Cymru](#)

⁵⁸ [Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 259](#)

⁵⁹ [Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 260](#)

The transport issue is particularly acute for learners who live in rural locations. Welsh Government must look at this as a priority – including examining creative thinking about how those students can access their work and learning.

We note Welsh Government has announced a pilot scheme for young people aged 21 and under to pay only £1 for a single bus fare in Wales and will be interested to see the effect this may have on learners' access to courses and work.

Conclusion 4. Welsh Government should examine ways they can improve access to transport, including looking at cost of transport, for people studying apprenticeships, particularly those from rural areas. We welcome the Welsh Government's £1 bus fare pilot and would like to see any analysis of its effect on young people's access to apprenticeships.

Recommendation 3. There are clear and significant challenges facing apprenticeship providers in recruiting and retaining skilled trainers and assessors. Welsh Government should explore the barriers and work with colleges to consider incentives and ways to address these.

Recommendation 4. Whilst the minimum wage for apprenticeships is not in Welsh Government's control they should look at ways to increase real pay for apprenticeships as part of their fair work agenda.

4. Pathways between apprenticeship levels

Apprenticeship frameworks and pathways

Medr's review of apprenticeship frameworks

64. Upon its establishment in August 2024, Medr took over responsibility for the operational policy and delivery of apprenticeships; this includes apprenticeships pathways and allocating funding. In their written evidence Medr stated they plan to:

“review all 23 apprenticeship frameworks over the next three years. The purpose of the review is to make sure frameworks are current, that they take into account employer skills needs, and that they are robust in covering the skills needed for an individual to be competent in their profession. The reviews will ensure the frameworks respond to the rapidly changing skills needs, with green and digital skills key themes for all reviews. All reviews will look carefully at progression between apprenticeship levels, with the aim of enabling learners to progress more effectively and seamlessly without duplicating learning.”⁶⁰

65. ColegauCymru made some suggestions as to how these reviews should function, including that “all reviews should look at what additional ‘bite-sized’ qualifications should be delivered as part of the overall apprenticeship framework, so that apprentices are gaining ‘in-demand’ qualifications”. They would also like each review to “genuinely seek the views of employers, of whether they see the value and/or requirement of Essential Skills Wales literacy and numeracy qualifications being part of the framework”.⁶¹

Needing a flexible and responsive system for apprenticeships

66. The Committee heard evidence that the apprenticeship system needs to be more flexible and responsive in the face of a changing economy. The Federation of Small Businesses Cymru (FSB) told the Committee:

⁶⁰ Written Evidence: [Medr](#)

⁶¹ Written Evidence: [ColegauCymru](#)

“the system remains reliant on Welsh Government deciding that SMEs’ needs area a priority, and the situation continues with frameworks developed in a small number of areas in response to very large (often public sector) employers. The system needs to be more responsive to SMEs and must be proactive in generating qualifications that are relevant to the Welsh economy, if we are to see the apprenticeship approach mainstreamed.”⁶²

67. Educ8 training group highlighted the need for agility:

“Frameworks have got to evolve as the economy and technology evolve. If you look at AI, for example, we weren't talking about AI two or three years ago; now, that's all we talk about, isn't it? So, we have to find a way of getting the qualifications relevant and agile and quite fluid as well. So, it's important that the review takes place, but we have to find a way to continually review these frameworks, to make sure they're not just relevant today, but that they're relevant for the future as well.”⁶³

68. ColegauCymru outlined how long it had taken to develop a course and the issues they had faced “with tourism, travel, hospitality and catering, which was first discussed post pandemic, as we were coming out of the pandemic, so, 2021-22. The first consultation was in March 2023 and the qualification will come out and come into operation in September 2027, meaning that the first apprentices to complete that qualification will be in 2029.” They went on to say:

“the timescale is too long. Because, in 2029, you've probably got to start reviewing it again.”⁶⁴

69. Medr said they were looking to create a more flexible programme saying:

“We’re planning a big piece of consultation, and we hope that new programme is going to make us more flexible to enable us to,

⁶² Written Evidence: [Federation of Small Businesses Wales \(FSB\)](#)

⁶³ [Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 259](#)

⁶⁴ [Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 196](#)

perhaps, respond more to those industry needs during the course of the life scale of that new programme”⁶⁵

70. They also told the Committee “We’re looking at where there are frameworks that might need reviewing more frequently because of skills needs changing, but also how you reflect that within a framework so that you’re not fixed to something that very quickly goes out of date—whether we can frame that in a way that means we get a bit more flexibility within those frameworks”.⁶⁶

Apprenticeship levels

Mapping out career pathways

71. The Committee heard a lot of evidence regarding challenges in mapping out clear routes of progression through the different apprenticeship levels. Whilst for some careers there was an obvious flow, the Committee heard other learners had much less clear pathways. Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership summed this up saying:

“A lack of clear progression routes from one apprenticeship level to the next is a common issue. Businesses struggle to find providers for certain apprenticeships, and there is often a lack of follow-on qualifications, forcing apprentices to switch providers. This inconsistency hinders the development of a seamless career pathway.”⁶⁷

72. They also said “While some social care apprenticeships, such as the pathway from Health Care Support Worker to registered nurse, have clear routes, others face significant challenges. For example, mapping out career routes for domestic care workers into social care roles is difficult.” They went on to say “Certain sectors face unique challenges with apprenticeship pathways. Engineering and manufacturing, despite strong regional employment, continue to struggle. In construction, apprentices often leave for higher paid jobs after initial training, discouraging companies from taking on new apprentices.”⁶⁸

73. Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership said “Although there has been a rationalisation of apprenticeship frameworks, the volume of pathways available to

⁶⁵ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 26.

⁶⁶ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 67.

⁶⁷ Written Evidence: Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership

⁶⁸ Written Evidence: Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership

individuals and employers can be confusing and unclear. Sectors like advanced materials and manufacturing can have a diverse range of sub sectors which can make it difficult to develop frameworks to suit all roles and levels.”⁶⁹

74. Sharron Lusher implored Welsh Government to “issue statutory guidance on 16 to 19, and they have already issued statutory guidance on 14 to 16, which will help with that transition process. So, with those two things, I would hope that that transition process will be more open and that learners would get access to understanding all of the routes that are available to them, but we need the next part of the jigsaw, which is that 16 to 19 statutory guidance as well.”⁷⁰

75. Some stakeholders have raised that it’s difficult for learners, parents / carers, and businesses to understand available routes through apprenticeship levels compared to traditional academic routes.

76. The Committee heard that the relative simplicity of the academic route compounds these issues. ColegauCymru told Members:

“if you're following an academic route, it's pretty clear, isn't it? You go to school, you do GCSEs and then you do your A-levels, and you might go on to do an undergraduate course, or you might go into employment. One of the barriers I think is parental understanding of the complicated pathways. Just to give you some examples, we've got a learner at Pembrokeshire College who started on Jobs Growth Wales, moved on to level 1 FE, level 2 FE, now is a work-based learning electrician. Another learner completed Jobs Growth Wales ICT level 1, level 2, level 3. They're now doing the NVQ part of the apprenticeship and are in employment. ... So, the routes are complicated and we have to work out some way of making it clear—not necessarily to the individual, but to the parents, as somebody mentioned earlier.”⁷¹

Junior apprenticeships

77. In their written evidence Medr explain:

“Junior apprenticeships are a form of 14-16 vocational provision delivered in a further education college (currently five, in different

⁶⁹ Written Evidence: Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership

⁷⁰ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 52

⁷¹ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 331

local authority areas). Despite the name, they are not an apprenticeship in the traditional sense, as the programme is not linked to any apprenticeship framework. They aim to keep those most at risk of disengaging in the mainstream curriculum by offering a different way of learning. The Estyn review of Junior Apprenticeships in May 2024 highlighted the success of the programme in retaining learners, with the majority going into mainstream post-16 further education provision.”⁷²

78. North Wales RSP highlighted that, currently, junior apprenticeships are not available in their area. However they felt “introducing them could provide vital early entry opportunities in industries such as construction, engineering, and some areas of social care, all of which are facing skills shortages.” They went on to say “Expanding these pathways would also foster greater equity of access, particularly in areas or among demographic groups where apprenticeship opportunities are currently limited.”⁷³

79. However some questions were raised about junior apprenticeships. Estyn questioned the name, stating “The naming of the junior apprenticeship programme is problematic. It is a pre-apprenticeship programme and similar programmes are called different names. It is not an apprenticeship, and not designed necessarily with a progression into an apprenticeship in mind.”⁷⁴

80. Cambrian Training set out a challenge with progression from junior apprenticeships saying “junior apprenticeships and vocational qualifications delivered in pre-16 settings frequently result in learners achieving level 2 outcomes but leave them ineligible for foundation apprenticeships due to their age and inexperience, while also lacking the depth of work experience required for direct entry into level 3 roles.”⁷⁵ This is particularly an issue as Medr say that junior apprenticeships are intended to “make the learner employable or ready to progress onto a higher-level vocational course or apprenticeship at the age of 16”.⁷⁶

⁷² Written Evidence: Medr

⁷³ Written Evidence: North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

⁷⁴ Written Evidence: Estyn

⁷⁵ Written Evidence: Cambrian Training

⁷⁶ Written Evidence: Medr

Degree apprenticeships

81. Medr’s website explains that “Degree apprenticeships in Wales combine the workplace learning of a traditional apprenticeship with a higher education qualification. They can also include professional qualifications relevant to industry.”

82. It goes on to note “Degree apprenticeship qualifications available in Wales are limited to the priority subject areas:

- Digital
- Engineering
- Advanced manufacturing
- Construction”.⁷⁷

83. In their written evidence Medr explain “in order to ensure value from public funding, degree apprenticeships are currently offered in sectors which have potential for high value jobs and strong economic growth”. It adds that its framework review “will be an opportunity to consider and highlight other pathways into higher level skills”.⁷⁸

84. Business Wales set out that there are two costs associated with degree apprenticeships – the apprentices wages and the tuition. They explain the business pay the wages and Welsh Government cover the tuition.⁷⁹

85. Many higher education institutions also supported this. Universities Wales said:

“A significant expansion of degree apprenticeships beyond the current frameworks is required if degree apprenticeships are to play a role in meeting the future high skill needs of Wales.”⁸⁰

86. They also highlighted a potential risk posed as there is a wider range of degree apprenticeships available to study in England saying “Without expansion, Wales risks losing good students to degree apprenticeship programmes across

⁷⁷ Medr.Cymru: [Apprenticeships](#)

⁷⁸ Written Evidence: [Medr](#)

⁷⁹ [Buisnesswales.gov.wales: degree apprenticeships](#)

⁸⁰ Written Evidence: [Universities Wales](#)

the border in England". This risk was also highlighted by a number of other stakeholders.⁸¹

87. Careers Wales specifically suggested "There is a strong need to expand the current Degree Apprenticeships offer to include other areas of need in the region such as Health and Social Care, Construction, Low Carbon/ Green Energy and Leadership and Management."⁸²

88. The Open University said "If frameworks are to be limited to such a small number in the medium and long term, that will undoubtedly start to cause problems for learning progression. In the current system, very many apprenticeships simply do not have a clear path to higher vocational learning". They also highlighted:

*"It is expected that Wales will need 400,000 more graduates by 2035 and that, by the same year, 95% of new jobs in Wales will be graduate level 2. In this context, it should be clear that improving pathways between apprenticeship levels, up to degree level, across a broader range of areas is necessary."*⁸³

89. However Estyn warned "there is the potential for competition or duplication between degree programmes, degree apprenticeships and high apprenticeship programmes leading to a lack of coherent apprenticeship pathways." They suggested "A potential solution would be for apprenticeships at all levels to be delivered through one network of work-based learning providers, ensuring a consistent specification for providers at all levels of apprenticeship."⁸⁴

90. Cardiff Metropolitan University also highlighted issues with the funding model stating that "funding has been ring-fenced by Welsh Government, with the last allocation from HEFCW⁸⁵ at c. £10m. Demand for these courses outstrips the supply, with the number of places needed having exceeded the level that can be funded considerably." They explained this has caused many issues including the University having to turn away applicants, partner organisations having to redesign workforce planning and new pathways (namely rail) putting additional strain on this budget.

⁸¹ Written Evidence: Universities Wales

⁸² Written Evidence: Careers Wales

⁸³ Written Evidence: The Open University in Wales

⁸⁴ Written Evidence: Estyn

⁸⁵ The responsibility for allocating Welsh Government funding for degree apprenticeships has since transferred from Higher Education Funding Council for Wales *HEFCW) to Medr.

91. They summed up the issues saying:

“the ring-fenced budget for degree apprenticeships is too small to meet the demand and the potential supply in Wales and/or ensure the courses are funded at the same level as other undergraduate courses (£9,535 per head) without cutting places. A reconsideration of the funding model and pathway development might be required.”⁸⁶

92. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning told the Committee that flexibility in the apprenticeship system was vital. She said “being agile is really important, and there are some really good examples of colleges being able to adapt their offer very quickly in order to respond to the needs of business”.⁸⁷

93. Her official explained before responsibility was transferred to Medr, Welsh Government had always had a programme of annual review for apprenticeships “because it’s actually really important to make sure that the apprenticeships remain relevant to employers, attractive to people to go on to them.” She went on to explain this need for flexibility was also:

“one of the reasons that we have other funding streams for supporting businesses as well, because there’s such a set of regulations around apprenticeships, developing frameworks does take time. So, that’s why we have things like the flexible skills programme as well, which means that we can be much more agile in responding to shorter term needs that an apprenticeship can’t always deliver in the timescales that we might need.”⁸⁸

94. The Welsh Government’s written evidence said “The Welsh Government is working with Medr to ensure clear pathways and progression between apprenticeship levels and qualifications. Our aim is to create a more joined-up and inclusive sector, with clearer and more flexible pathways for learners to learn at the level and in the place that is best for them.”⁸⁹

95. Regarding degree apprenticeships, a Welsh Government official explained that there were challenges with the idea of expansion which were “not least cost.

⁸⁶ Written Evidence: [Cardiff Metropolitan University](#)

⁸⁷ [Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 209](#)

⁸⁸ [Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 210](#)

⁸⁹ Written Evidence: [Welsh Government](#)

But it's part of what we and Medr will be looking at in terms of our future skills strategy, and the priorities that we will be giving Medr at a national strategic level.”⁹⁰

Our View

We welcome Medr’s review of apprenticeship frameworks. We support calls to ensure views of employers are central to that review so that apprenticeships deliver what the economy needs. Medr must widely consult across the broad sector of employers as well as with students and all the other important stakeholders our skills system has.

A clear pathway for people starting or wishing to progress through qualification levels is important to both make apprenticeships attractive but also to encourage further study. This is an area that must be worked on by Medr and Welsh Government. Ideally we would like to see a clear route that learners can easily follow and understand. This route would also explain how people on the vocational pathway could take ‘sideways’ moves if they wished to change careers, for example to take advantage of emerging technology.

We support the objectives of the Junior Apprenticeships programme and feel Welsh Government may wish to consider if it can be expanded to other locations. We were interested to also hear concerns that the name of the programme could be misleading. A more accurate name could be considered to avoid confusion. We note the Children, Young People and Education Committee has taken valuable evidence on Junior Apprenticeships as part of its Routes to Post-16 inquiry.

It is clear that degree apprenticeships are popular with learners, providers and business. However, as they are oversubscribed we are questioning if the current funding quantum or model are fit for purpose. As such, Welsh Government should consider how they can expand provision of degree apprenticeships to meet demand but also ensure best value for money invested.

Conclusion 5. It is often a significant challenge for learners to be able to map out a career path through the apprenticeship levels, especially when compared to the academic route of qualifications. There are roles for Medr, RSPs and Welsh Government to play in ensuring that the provision on offer and the route through

⁹⁰ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 305

it is clear for perspective apprentices, those who have already embarked on courses, providers and employers to understand.

Conclusion 6. We note that the Children, Young People and Education Committee has taken evidence on Junior Apprenticeships as part of its Routes to Post-16 inquiry.

Conclusion 7. We were interested to hear stakeholders' perspectives regarding junior apprenticeships. It is anticipated this topic will be addressed within the work being conducted by the Children, Young People and Education Committee on Routes into Post-16 Education, and we look forward to reading their findings.

Conclusion 8. The Committee welcomes Medr's review of apprenticeships. As part of this review Medr should examine how the overall apprenticeship system can be more flexible and responsive to employer and economic needs, in particular the transition to net zero and the rapidly changing technological landscape.

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should explore funding solutions to expand the degree apprenticeship offer but must also ensure value for money as part of this work.

5. Employers engaging with apprenticeships

Challenges facing employers

96. Businesses are absolutely critical to the success of apprenticeship programmes – they offer the employment and on the job training which are necessary for the programmes’ success. Given the changing landscape at a UK level, our inquiry has not focused in detail on the wider issues of apprenticeship funding.

97. Hosting apprenticeships should also be beneficial for businesses as they offer a good route of training and progression for staff. However, the Committee heard that businesses face challenges engaging with the apprenticeship programme, especially smaller employers. There may be a lack of awareness of programmes among some businesses.

98. Educ8 told the Committee:

“Employer engagement in apprenticeships is lower than expected for several reasons, ranging from administrative barriers to a lack of awareness about the benefits. Many businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), struggle to see apprenticeships as a viable workforce development strategy due to financial, structural, and practical challenges.”⁹¹

99. They went on to say some employers were not aware of the full benefit apprenticeships can offer, there was often a misconception that apprenticeships are only for entry level roles. They also highlighted concerns that some employees have on return on investment including fears that employee productivity will dip or they may leave after completing their training.⁹²

100. The issue around a lack of understanding of the benefits of hiring apprentices was highlighted by many stakeholders. In their written evidence Cambrian Training said “Apprenticeships represent a critical tool for attracting and retaining staff to support businesses through these difficult times and the dispensation offered to employers, exempting them from National Insurance contributions, provides valuable financial relief”. However they went onto say “SMEs frequently encounter obstacles such as limited administrative capacity,

⁹¹ Written Evidence: [Educ8 Training Group](#)

⁹² Written Evidence: [Educ8 Training Group](#)

financial constraints, and a lack of awareness about the benefits and processes associated with hiring apprentices” and “targeted support to help SMEs promote and engage with apprenticeship programmes would be highly beneficial in overcoming these barriers and ensuring businesses can continue to develop their workforce effectively.”⁹³

101. FSB Cymru explained that SMEs have a particular challenge engaging with the skills system. They told the Committee:

“Pressures on SMEs are that they are time poor, can lack HR support to deal with myriad issues they need in their jobs, and are often left to navigate complex skills system alone. Success in bringing skills system to them will be key to the 250,000 small businesses success in Wales, and to learners’ opportunities, as well as ensuring that our learning priorities are the right ones for our local economies and communities. Support for employers to build their skills for themselves and within their businesses is also important.”⁹⁴

102. Educ8 also outlined issues around employer engagement with training providers. They said some employers do not communicate well with providers and don’t release staff for training. They felt a lack of collaboration between training providers and businesses can result in apprenticeships that do not fully address industry skills gaps and that businesses may feel that apprenticeships are too rigid and not customised to their specific workforce challenges.⁹⁵

Support for employers to engage with the apprenticeship programme

103. The Committee heard calls to increase support for employers to engage with apprenticeship programmes. This included improved information and guidance but also potentially financial incentives.

104. The FSB welcomed the creation of Medr as a single point of contact on skills for business but said “As such, it is important that the strategic priorities identified are implemented and geared toward small businesses and that Medr includes a Medr small business plan that shapes to SME needs”.⁹⁶

⁹³ Written Evidence: [Cambrian Training](#)

⁹⁴ Written Evidence: [Federation of Small Businesses Wales \(FSB\)](#)

⁹⁵ Written Evidence: [Educ8 Training Group](#)

⁹⁶ Written Evidence: [Federation of Small Businesses Wales \(FSB\)](#)

105. The National Training Federation told the Committee:

“Micro and small businesses always struggle with the cost of employing an apprentice and the risk that once the apprentice is qualified they may leave and move to a larger employer – the ESP Apprenticeship wage subsidy WG programme for SMEs was a great incentive to support those smaller organisations to take a risk on employing an apprentice”.

106. They also suggested allowing the training provider to be the employer and so could be a safety net for learners and highlighted a scheme enabling this “was popular in England.”⁹⁷

107. ColegauCymru told the Committee there were mixed views amongst providers around an employer incentive scheme, with most indicating that any funding available should be directed towards meeting existing employer demand. They went on to say:

“all providers recognise that employers are finding it increasingly difficult to justify the recruitment of an apprentice(s) given the increases in employment and business costs. Should funding be made available for an employer incentive scheme, from outside of the existing apprenticeships budget, then any approach to an employer incentive must be co-produced with the apprenticeship provider network, as previous iterations have been overly bureaucratic for both employer and provider.”⁹⁸

108. Welsh Government’s written evidence stated:

Ministers and officials also routinely engage with a very wide range of employers and employer representative bodies on skills matters, including apprenticeships.

⁹⁷ Written Evidence: [National Training Federation for Wales](#)

⁹⁸ Written Evidence: [ColegauCymru](#)

We understand that Medr is working with employers to better understand the barriers they face, especially SMEs, in taking on apprentices and how to broaden the employer base going forward.⁹⁹

Our view

The engagement of employers of all sizes is vital for the success of Wales' apprenticeship programme. Welsh Government and Medr must consider their needs as much as they do learners when developing apprenticeship policy and programmes. As the vast majority of Welsh businesses are SMEs any development in the apprenticeship programmes must take them into account or risk failure. Whilst we did not come to a view on additional incentives for employers, this is something Welsh Government may wish to consider. However, the Committee would like to record its strong belief that apprentices in themselves provide a diverse range of benefits to companies. The value that apprentices can bring to the economy and to individual employers should be promoted as an incentive in and of itself.

Conclusion 9. Employers are critical to a successful apprenticeship programme. However, they face a range of barriers to engaging with the system and taking on an apprentice, such as lacking awareness of the benefits of hiring an apprentice, struggling to provide progression routes for apprentices, and difficulties navigating the system. These challenges are amplified for SMEs and more prevalent in some sectors than others.

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government and Medr should review existing information and ensure that published information and guidance for employers clearly sets out FAQs regarding hiring an apprentice. Any new material should be based on what employers say they need. Welsh Government and Medr must also take into account the 'time poor' nature of SMEs when engaging with business and make it as easy for them as possible to be part of apprenticeship programmes.

⁹⁹ Written Evidence: [Welsh Government](#)

6. Economic needs

109. The Committee heard a lot of evidence about the importance of ensuring that apprenticeship frameworks remain relevant to meet demand, and support economic growth and changing technology.

110. Educ8 Training told the Committee:

“Apprenticeship pathways in Wales are a vital mechanism for addressing skills shortages and supporting businesses. However, their effectiveness depends on continuous employer engagement, adaptive frameworks, and stronger progression routes that reflect the realities of evolving industries. Strengthening partnerships between regional skills partnerships, businesses, and training providers will be key to ensuring apprenticeships remain a strong driver of economic growth in Wales..”¹⁰⁰

111. The WLGA highlighted an issue around there being “insufficient opportunities available for Level 4 qualifications, as a result local authorities are unable to utilise the apprenticeship pathway option in addressing identified skills gaps” in higher level more specialist professional roles.¹⁰¹

112. Members heard calls to ensure data was up to date to better identify skills shortages. The Construction Industry Training Board Wales told Members “Apprenticeship pathways could be better informed by data and information about skills shortages and the forecasted trends in construction activity over the coming years.” They highlighted the recommendation of the Review of Vocational Qualifications in Wales for Welsh Government to define the future demand nationally for occupational and skills needs in Wales, and suggest this could inform curriculum development alongside needs framed by Regional Skills Partnerships.¹⁰²

113. Careers Wales told the Committee about work they are undertaking on a data hub that “has potential to give us the information, and give that kind of thread from pre-16 right through to people in employment and not in employment. So, it could inform how we strategically plan provision, it can look at

¹⁰⁰ Written Evidence: [Educ8 Training Group](#)

¹⁰¹ Written Evidence: [Welsh Local Government Association \(WLGA\)](#)

¹⁰² Written Evidence: [CITB Wales \(Construction Industry Training Board\)](#)

where the skills shortages are.” They went on to say the Hub needs investment and they were in discussion with Medr about the role it could play.¹⁰³

114. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning told the Committee “we have a really broad range of apprenticeships that do meet the needs of industry” and went on to say “businesses often sing the praises of the apprenticeship offer that we do have available here in Wales, but it’s really important that we keep up to date with their needs and understand their needs.”¹⁰⁴

115. Regarding data she said “I think there's always a need for more and better data. I would say that, in relation specifically to apprentices and the related provision in Wales, that will primarily be a matter for Medr moving forward, but, of course, Welsh Government works really closely with the Office for National Statistics on that kind of wider suite of employment data.”¹⁰⁵

116. Regional Skills Partnerships have an important role to play in this regard as set out in our predecessor Committee’s report in 2019. They should play a key part in ensuring apprenticeships reflect the needs of the regional and national economy to mitigate the risks of provision focusing on the very specific needs of some local employers.

Our View

As noted throughout this report we need an apprenticeship programme that is flexible and responsive to meet economic need, service emerging economies and fill skills gaps.

We believe data is vital to ensure the system can be responsive in this way. We will follow the development of the data hub Careers Wales are developing.

Regional Skills Partnerships should be playing a key role in ensuring apprenticeships reflect the needs of the regional and national economy.

¹⁰³ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 397.

¹⁰⁴ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 265-266.

¹⁰⁵ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 186.

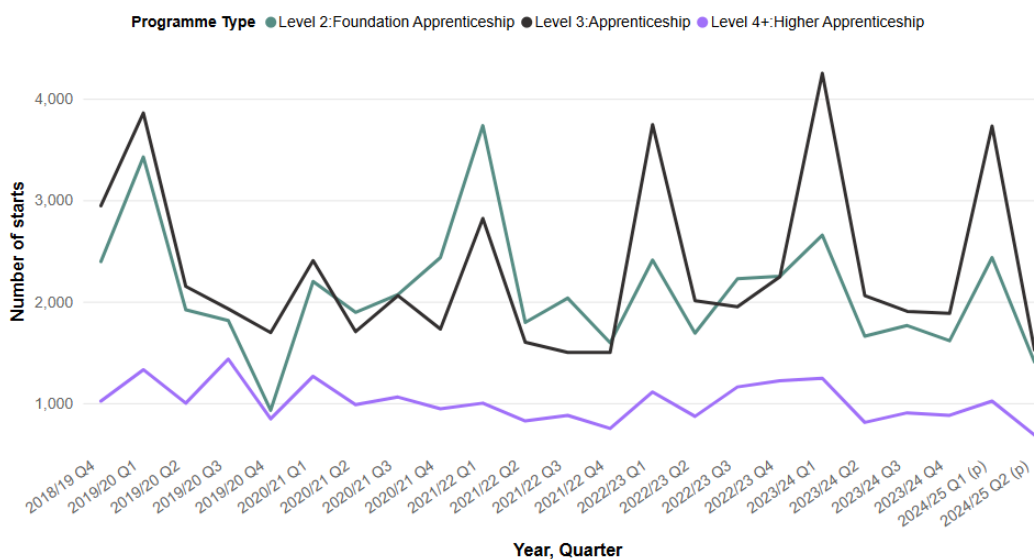
7. Role of Welsh Government

117. Historically, the Welsh Government published quarterly apprenticeship statistics by sector.¹⁰⁶ Medr has taken on this responsibility. These statistics have shown a fall in apprenticeship starts with the two most recent publications indicating:

- There were 4,380 apprenticeship learning programmes started in 2023/24 Q4, compared with 5,715 starts in 2022/23 Q4;¹⁰⁷ and
- There were 3,620 apprenticeship learning programmes started in 2024/25 Q2 (p), compared with 4,525 starts in 2023/24 Q2.¹⁰⁸

118. Medr also have an interactive dashboard on their website which sets out apprenticeship starts in a graph:

Number of starts by Year, Quarter and Programme Type



Source: Medr, Apprenticeship learning programmes started: Interactive dashboard

119. The Programme for Government contained a target to create 125,000 all-age apprenticeships.¹⁰⁹ In June 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and

¹⁰⁶ [Stats.wales.gov.wales: Apprenticeship learning programmes started by quarter, sector and programme type](https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Apprenticeship-learning-programmes-started-by-quarter-sector-and-programme-type)

¹⁰⁷ [Medr.cymru: Apprenticeships learning programmes started: May to July 2024](https://medr.cymru/Apprenticeships-learning-programmes-started-May-to-July-2024)

¹⁰⁸ [Medr.cymru: Apprenticeships learning programmes started: November 2024 to January 2025 \(provisional\)](https://medr.cymru/Apprenticeships-learning-programmes-started-November-2024-to-January-2025-provisional)

¹⁰⁹ [Gov.wales Programme for government](https://gov.wales/Programme-for-government)

Welsh Language set out a new target of 100,000 all-age apprenticeships starts for this Senedd Term.¹¹⁰

120. The Committee heard concerns about the reduction in apprenticeship starts over the last year. The Regional Skills Partnerships suggested this could create skills shortages. North Wales RSP told the Committee “However, the decline in apprenticeship starts, especially in some of our key sectors like construction, health and social care, and engineering, is a growing concern. Apprenticeships serve as a critical pipeline for developing a skilled workforce, and reductions in these sectors could lead to long term skills shortages.”¹¹¹

121. Estyn attributed this fall in apprenticeship starts to the recent reduction in funding for apprenticeships. They explained that, “In the 2024-2025 contract year, a blanket 14% cut was undertaken across the board to apprenticeship providers, with relatively little prior notice.” They went on to say this had “lead to nearly 6,000 fewer apprenticeship starts in Wales this year” and “a £50.3 million ‘short run’ impact on the economy.” They also said health and social care and construction sectors were the most impacted and the “funding cuts are disproportionately affecting the most deprived within the Welsh population.”¹¹²

Vocational education strategy

122. In June 2022 the Welsh Government appointed Sharron Lusher to Chair the Vocational Qualifications for Wales Steering Group.¹¹³ The Group’s report was published in September 2023. The report states:

“Wales does not have a strategy for vocational education and training – indeed it does not have an overarching strategy for post-16 learning”. It says “we need a strategy which brings together the divergent elements involved in vocational education and training and delivery of qualifications, into one coherent plan”.¹¹⁴

123. Sharron Lusher told the Committee that there had been “slower progress on some of the particularly important recommendations, and those would include a vocational education strategy”. She added that the strategy should be “congruent

¹¹⁰ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 26 June 2024, RoP, Paragraph 121

¹¹¹ Written Evidence: North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

¹¹² Written Evidence: Estyn

¹¹³ Gov.wales: Vocational Qualifications for Wales Steering Group

¹¹⁴ Gov.wales: A review of vocational qualifications in Wales, July 2023

with the 14-16 curriculum and which forms part of a wider strategy for post-16 education – not a vocational strategy in isolation”.¹¹⁵

124. The Committee heard that, with so many organisations involved in education and training, a clear vision is needed to get everyone aligned in order to meet the needs of industry and the economy. The National Training Federation Wales told Members “having a comprehensive strategy would provide clear direction and measurable goals for both the Government and providers”. They explained “the golden thread for that strategy then would be Government priorities. So, it all sits neatly together and everybody has a clear vision of what we're aiming to achieve” and that this would be their “north star”.¹¹⁶

125. These calls are echoed in the Transitions to Employment report.¹¹⁷ The report made a number of recommendations to Welsh Government including:

- working, via Medr, with stakeholders to reduce the fragmentation of the sector, and
- to enhance focused choice, variety and consistency in degree and higher apprenticeship provision including considering vertical integration with lower levels.

126. On 24 April the Minister for Further and Higher Education wrote to the Committee, responding to a letter from the Chair regarding developing a national strategy for vocational education and training. The Minister said she was “Taking forward the recommendations of both the Review of Vocational Qualifications and the Report on Transitions into Employment remains a key priority for Welsh Government.” The letter included “a draft delivery plan for the implementation of the recommendations to give the Committee a sense of the scope and scale of the programme, as well as a sense of timeframe for delivery”. This plan notes an indicative timeline for a draft VET strategy in early 2026.¹¹⁸

127. Subsequently on 26 June the Minister for Further and Higher Education issued a written statement giving further details and setting out a proposed timeline for implementing the interdependent recommendations of both the Review of Vocational Qualifications and the Report on Transitions to Employment. The statement said this “includes specifically co-producing a draft Vocational

¹¹⁵ [Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 40](#)

¹¹⁶ [Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 216](#)

¹¹⁷ [Gov.wales: Transitions to Employment – A report for the Welsh Government](#), June 2023

¹¹⁸ [Letter from the Minister for Further and Higher Education to the Chair of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 24 April 2025](#)

Education and Training (VET) Strategy, in the context of the wider Tertiary education agenda.”

128. The Statement said the Welsh Government’s “objective is to support the wider participation agenda by creating clearer and more accessible pathways for all learners. We will also ensure that vocational education and training is closely aligned with the broader skills agenda, responding to employer needs and contributing to the delivery of green jobs.” The statement also gave a more firm time commitment stating Welsh Government officials “will work towards the development of a draft VET Strategy, provisionally scheduled for April 2026.”¹¹⁹

Medr

129. Medr has taken over responsibility for the management of the current apprenticeship contract with providers and for funding apprenticeships. They published their first strategic plan in April. This includes a founding commitment to:

“Ensure that apprenticeship provision responds to the Welsh Government’s priorities and meets learner, employer and economic need”.¹²⁰

130. To meet this commitment Medr told the Committee they would be undertaking:

“extensive engagement with learning providers, industry, employers, stakeholders, apprentices and wider to inform the development of the new apprenticeship programme, which is due to start in August 2027. This will involve research and evaluation of the existing programme, which will include the current delivery model and performance/outcomes across all sectors. We will also look at good and bad practices within Wales and across the UK/world. By the end of 2025 Medr will have developed the New Apprenticeship Programme’s strategic visions and aims and objectives.”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Gov.wales: [Written Statement: Update on Vocational Education and Training](#), 26 June 2025

¹²⁰ Medr.cymru: [Strategic Plan 2025 - 2030](#)

¹²¹ Written evidence: [Medr](#)

131. They have also “developed a programme of work to review all apprenticeship frameworks to ensure they meet the economy and learner needs.”¹²²

132. Many stakeholders commented on the role that Medr can take in terms of engaging with businesses and the Regional Skills Partnerships to promote better joined up working with the education sector. As mentioned above FSB Cymru felt that Medr would make it easier for SMEs to engage with apprenticeships, including around regulation. They told the Committee “having Medr as a central point of contact to simplify the system over which it has regulatory oversight, and also with a remit to serving the economy, is an important and necessary first step”.¹²³

133. The Regional Skills Partnerships suggested they were optimistic about the reviews and working with Medr to support both learners and business needs. North Wales Regional Skills Partnership told the Committee “We look forward to collaborating with Medr in reviewing apprenticeship frameworks to ensure they align with industry requirements.”¹²⁴

Regional Skills Partnerships

134. There are four Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) in Wales.¹²⁵ Each one is a voluntary, non-statutory board made up of employers, education providers and others. The boards make recommendations to the Welsh Government on full-time college and apprenticeship courses and learner numbers. Each RSP was created at different times between 2014 and 2022 and each has evolved independently, shaped by their own regions and respective City and Growth Deals.

135. The Committee heard that RSPs play a key role in their regions in engaging with businesses and identifying skills needs. Educ8 Training said “RSPs act as a bridge between businesses and training providers, feeding employer demands into the skills system to ensure apprenticeships align with regional labour market needs.”¹²⁶

136. Stakeholders commented on the usefulness of labour market intelligence reports each RSP produces for its region. However, many also spoke of the need

¹²² Written evidence: [Medr](#)

¹²³ Written evidence: [Federation of Small Businesses Wales \(FSB\)](#)

¹²⁴ Written evidence: [North Wales Regional Skills Partnership](#)

¹²⁵ [Businesswales.gov.wales Regional Skills Partnerships](#)

¹²⁶ Written evidence: [Educ8 Training Group](#)

for a national picture of skills needs and questioned whether there was a role for the RSPs to play in that regard.

137. Medr explained that they get “really important labour market intelligence ... through their LMI reports, through their occupational trends analysis and, obviously, the three-year regional skills development plans that they put in place”.¹²⁷

138. However there were calls to ensure joined up working across Wales. MakeUK told the Committee it was important:

*“there’s proper alignment and co-ordination at a national level and a regional level between those bodies. It’s right that bodies like the regional skills partnerships are reflecting differences and specific demands associated with local labour markets, but, equally, we have lots of members who operate across multiple sites across Wales, and they want a level of consistency as well in terms of skills policy and the programmes that are available”*¹²⁸

139. They went on to say “So, that’s one area where, maybe, we’d like to see a little bit more and we would like to work with Medr a little bit more to ensure that the right balance is struck, effectively, between national and regional policy making.”¹²⁹

140. Regarding the need for Wales-wide co-ordination on labour market intelligence, a Welsh Government official told the Committee that Welsh Government were looking at:

“how do we make sure that the data that we get at a national level drives the decisions that we need to take? How do we make sure that the contributions of RSPs actually lead to us being able to translate that into priorities to give to Medr, that Medr then can translate into funding methodologies, into distribution to partners? How do we make sure that the range of offers that we’ve got for supporting routes into employment are the right ones? That’s kind of where we are on that journey. And making sure that we do actually take all of that

¹²⁷ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 33

¹²⁸ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 362

¹²⁹ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 23 January 2025, RoP, Paragraph 362

information and turn it into something that suits the economy and the learner.”¹³⁰

Our view

We are concerned around the decline in apprenticeship starts. Welsh Government need to understand the impact of this on business confidence, learners, particularly those from deprived areas, and the Welsh economy.

The Committee has significant concerns regarding the lack of urgency in the development of the Welsh Government’s vocational education and training strategy. A strong vocational education and training strategy should address many of the issue raised in this report and its development and publication should be a priority.

We also believe, based on calls set out in this and the previous section, Welsh Government must work with stakeholders to ensure it has a strong understanding of nation-wide labour market intelligence and uses this to help set the apprenticeship agenda in Wales.

Regional Skills Partnerships should be playing a key role in ensuring apprenticeships reflect the needs of the regional and national economy.

Conclusion 10. The Committee is concerned about the impact of the reduction in the number of apprenticeship starts. This could lead to longer term skills challenges in some sectors. Welsh Government need to ensure they fully understand the impact of this on business confidence, learners and the Welsh economy.

Conclusion 11. The Committee is concerned about the lack of urgency in addressing issues within and around the apprenticeship programme. In particular that if apprenticeships aren’t delivering for the needs of employers and the economy that there will be missed opportunities in emerging and fast-paced sectors.

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government must make faster progress in developing a vocational education and training strategy, as recommended by the Vocational Qualifications for Wales Steering Group and the Transitions to

¹³⁰ Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, 12 February 2025, RoP, Paragraph 273

Employment report. The Committee should be updated on progress so far and at regular intervals.

Recommendation 8. Welsh Government must work with Regional Skills Partnerships, Careers Wales and other stakeholders to collate and understand Wales-wide labour market intelligence.

Annex 1: List of oral evidence sessions.

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the [Committee's website](#).

Date	Name and Organisation
23 January 2025	<p>Rhian Edwards, Executive Director for Policy, Medr</p> <p>Harriet Barnes, Director of Research, Innovation and Skills, Medr</p> <p>Sharron Lusher, Former Chair, Vocational Qualifications Review Board</p> <p>Dr Barry Walters, Principal of Pembrokeshire College, and Chair of the ColegauCymru Strategic Work-based Learning (WBL) and Employability Group, ColegauCymru</p> <p>Lisa Mytton, Strategic Director, National Training Federation for Wales</p> <p>Grant Santos, CEO, Educ8 Training Group</p> <p>Nerys Bourne, Director of Customer Strategy and Service Development, Careers Wales</p> <p>Amie Field, Head of Services for Young People, Careers Wales</p> <p>Jamie Cater, Senior Policy Manager (Employment), Make UK</p>
12 February 2025	<p>Leigh Hughes, Chair, Cardiff Capital Region Employment and Skills Board (ESB)</p> <p>Owain Jones, Regional Learning and Skills Partnership South West Wales Construction cluster group member, and CITB Trustee and Board Member</p> <p>Pryderi Ap Rhisiart, Digital Skills Group Chair, North Wales Regional Skills Partnership</p> <p>Ceri Stephens, Chair, Regional Skills Partnership M&E cluster group, and the Mid Wales</p>

Date	Name and Organisation
	<p>Manufacturing group</p> <p>Rebecca Evans, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning,</p> <p>Welsh Government</p> <p>Neil Surman, Deputy Director - Skills,</p> <p>Welsh Government</p> <p>Rachel Sanders, Head of Apprenticeships,</p> <p>Welsh Government</p> <p>Jo Salway, Director - Social Partnership, Employability & Fair Work,</p> <p>Welsh Government</p>

Annex 2: List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All Consultation responses and additional written information can be viewed on the [Committee's website](#).

Reference	Organisation
AP 01	Cambrian Training
AP 02	Medr
AP 03	National Training Federation for Wales (NTFFW)
AP 04	Careers Wales
AP 05	ACT Training ALS Training
AP 06	Cyfle Building Skills Ltd
AP 07	Federation of Small Businesses Wales (FSB)
AP 08	Institution of Civil Engineers Wales
AP 09	WeGetDesign
AP 10	Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
AP 11	Swansea Bay University Health Board
AP 12	Educ8 Training Group
AP 13	Regional Learning and Skills Partnership South West Wales
AP 14	Nottingham Trent University
AP 15	Social Care Wales
AP 16	North Wales Regional Skills Partnership
AP 17	Aspire Merthyr Tydfil
AP 18	Royal College of Podiatry
AP 19	The Open University Wales
AP 20	Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW)
AP 21	Welsh Language Commissioner
AP 22	Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership

Reference	Organisation
AP 23	Construction Industry Training Board Wales (CITB)
AP 24	Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol
AP 25	Airbus
AP 26	Skills Academy Wales Work-Based Learning Partnership
AP 27	National Union of Teachers Wales (NUT)
AP 28	Universities Wales
AP 29	Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership
AP 30	Estyn
AP 31	Electrical Contractors' Association Wales (ECA)
AP 32	Allied Health Professionals Federation Cymru (AHPF)
AP 33	Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)
AP 34	School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University
AP 35	ColegauCymru CollegesWales
AP 36	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants Wales (ACCA)
AP 37	Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
AP 38	Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
AP 39	Cardiff Metropolitan University