

Agenda – Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee room 5 – Tŷ Hywel
and video conference via Zoom

Meeting date: 23 January 2025

Meeting time: 09.30

For further information contact:

Robert Donovan

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

SeneddEconomy@senedd.wales

Hybrid

Private pre-meeting

09.15 – 09.30

Public session

09.30 – 12.50

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions, and declarations of interest

09.30

2 Papers to note

09.30

2.1 Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Data (Use and Access) Bill

(Page 1)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning – 14 January
2025



3 Apprenticeship pathways – Panel 1 – Strategic Overview

09.30 – 10.30

(Pages 2 – 25)

Rhian Edwards, Executive Director for Policy, Medr

Harriet Barnes, Director of Research, Innovation and Skills, Medr

Sharron Lusher, Former Chair, Vocational Qualifications Review Board

Attached Documents:

Research brief

Evidence paper – Medr

Break

10.30 – 10.40

4 Apprenticeship pathways – Panel 2 – Colleges and Apprenticeship Providers

10.40 – 11.40

(Pages 26 – 30)

Dr Barry Walters, Principal of Pembrokeshire College, and Chair of the ColegauCymru Strategic Work-based Learning (WBL) and Employability Group, ColegauCymru

Lisa Mytton, Strategic Director, National Training Federation for Wales

Grant Santos, CEO, Educ8 Training Group

Attached Documents:

Evidence paper – National Training Federation for Wales

Break

11.40 – 11.50

5 Apprenticeship pathways – Panel 3 – Information around Apprenticeships

11.50 – 12.50

(Pages 31 – 38)

Nerys Bourne, Director of Customer Strategy and Service Development,
Careers Wales

Amie Field, Head of Services for Young People, Careers Wales

Jamie Cater, Senior Policy Manager (Employment), Make UK

Attached Documents:

Evidence paper – Careers Wales

6 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting

12.50

Private session

12.50 – 14.35

7 Apprenticeship pathways: Consideration of evidence

12.50 – 13.00

Break

13.00 – 13.30

8 Green Economy – Consideration of Draft Report

13.30 – 13.50

(Pages 39 – 93)

Attached Documents:

Green Economy draft report

9 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025–26 – Consideration of Draft Report

13.50 – 14.05

(To Follow)

Attached Documents:

Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025–26 draft report

10 UK–EU implementation review of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement – Briefing

14.05 – 14.35

(Pages 94 – 109)

Attached Documents:

Research brief

Rebecca Evans MS
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning

14 January 2025

Dear Rebecca,

Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Data (Use and Access) Bill

At our meeting on 13 January 2025, we considered the Welsh Government's Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) on the Data (Use and Access) Bill, which you laid before the Senedd on 2 January.

We have a number of questions in relation to this LCM and would therefore be grateful if you would be available to appear before the Committee in person on 3 February in order to help inform our scrutiny.

We would be grateful if your officials could liaise with the clerking team to make arrangements.

I am copying this letter to the Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee; the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee; the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee; and the Equality and Social Justice Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Hedges
Chair

Agenda Item 3

Document is Restricted

Response to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee on Apprenticeship Pathways

Medr welcomes the opportunity to provide the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee with evidence to inform its inquiry into Apprenticeship pathways.

Medr (the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research) is an arm's-length body of the Welsh Government, established by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 to fund and regulate the tertiary education sector in Wales. This includes:

- further education
- higher education including research and innovation
- adult community learning and work-based education
- apprenticeships
- local authority maintained school sixth-forms

Our vision is to work in close collaboration with our partners to enable a tertiary education and research system that is centred around the needs of learners, society and the economy with excellence, equality and engagement at its heart.

Medr is due to publish its Strategic Plan early in 2025, following approval from the Welsh Government. The Strategic Plan has been developed in consultation with our partners across Wales. The Strategic Plan sets out our response to the Welsh Government's [statement of strategic priorities for tertiary education and research and innovation](#). It also takes account of the legislative requirements placed on us in the [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Act 2022](#). It outlines our strategic aims and commitments and describes the way in which we want to work to achieve them, integrated with the five ways of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Welsh Government has transferred responsibility for management of the existing Apprenticeship contracts to Medr under the Section 83 agreement put in place in August 2024. The commencement of the apprenticeships provisions in Part 4 and Section 104 (financial support for apprenticeships) of the Tertiary Education and Research (TER) Act is due to transfer relevant functions to Medr in July 2027. At the same time, the Welsh Government will replace the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW), which sets out the minimum requirements of apprenticeship frameworks in Wales, with the Welsh Apprenticeship Specification (WAS). This will align with the commissioning of the next apprenticeship programme, to run from August 2027.

This submission provides background briefing for the Committee clarifying Medr's responsibilities for apprenticeships. We intend to provide a further public submission which will set out Medr's position on the issues raised in the Terms of Reference.

1. Pathways between apprenticeship levels

Medr is responsible for the operational policy and delivery of apprenticeships across Wales. We fulfil this role in the context of our remit for all tertiary education provision and therefore view apprenticeships as part of the wider tertiary education system, as one route for meeting the needs of employers and the economy.

Responsibility on delivering Junior Apprenticeships will transfer from Welsh Government to Medr early in the New Year. Junior Apprenticeships is not a traditional apprenticeship but a form of vocational education and training for 14-16 year old. Junior Apprenticeships offer year 10 and 11 pupils the opportunity to study full-time for a future career, in a college setting, from the age of 14. They function as a two-year programme of work-related education with work experience built in, alongside a Level 2 course that is equivalent to four or five GCSEs, in a range of different vocational pathways. Each apprentice also studies GCSEs in Maths and English alongside their chosen area. Each Junior Apprentice should have access to support with teaching and learning, help with behaviour management, and a designated Welfare Officer to support day to day issues and provide pastoral care. The aim of the Junior Apprenticeship is to make the learner employable or ready to progress onto a higher-level vocational course or apprenticeship at the age of 16.

Apprentices gain work experience, learn new skills and gain a nationally recognised qualification while earning a wage. This is completed through an apprenticeship framework, which sets out the programme of learning and qualifications from level 2 up to degree level. There are 23 apprenticeship frameworks across all sectors in Wales. The frameworks are delivered through two sources:

- Levels 2 – 5 apprenticeships are delivered by 10 contracted learning providers (6 further education colleges and 4 independent training providers) across Wales. The providers were appointed through a public procurement exercise. Each provider has subcontracting arrangements in place which may include other colleges in consortia arrangements. The contracts were awarded from August 2021 up to July 2027.
- Degree apprenticeships at level 6 are delivered by 8 universities in Wales (including the Open University) and are grant funded under separate arrangements. Degree apprenticeships are available in digital, engineering, advanced manufacturing and construction.

Medr is committed to working towards creating a tertiary education system where learners receive the highest-quality provision, with clearer and more flexible pathways. One of our key priorities is to ensure apprentices gain the skills, knowledge and qualifications they need to progress within their chosen career, whilst responding to the changing economy skills needs. Increasing progression from lower level to higher level apprenticeships is paramount to this.

2. Economy

Medr is responsible for developing and issuing apprenticeship frameworks in Wales. Responsibility for the regulation of qualifications which form a compulsory part of each framework sits with Qualifications Wales.

Apprenticeships are a key driver to raise skill levels, drive productivity and help grow a skilled and diverse workforce that is fit for purpose. There are growing demands for new skills and upskilling as a result of new technologies, artificial intelligence and our transition to a net zero economy.

Medr is working to identify how we can respond to these growing demands in a more agile and responsive way to ensure the right qualifications and skills are delivered to meet employer, learner and economy needs. Medr has developed a programme of work to review all apprenticeship frameworks to ensure they meet the economy and learner needs. An apprenticeship framework sets out the programme of learning and qualifications from level 2 up to degree level, which includes qualifications, essential skills and on the job learning. Over the next three years the 23 apprenticeship frameworks will be reviewed to ensure they meet the economy and learner needs. The framework review process includes the establishment of a steering group (consisting of sector experts, technical experts, industry bodies and key partners, such as Qualifications Wales) to inform the development of the frameworks, public consultations to ensure the frameworks meet industry and learner needs and quality assurance. This process could create new frameworks, such as the proposed Renewable Energy framework which will be developed in 2025, or consolidate existing frameworks. The Apprenticeship Frameworks will then be published on the Welsh Government's apprenticeship framework library.

The framework reviews will ensure our frameworks can respond to the rapidly changing skills needs going forward. Green and digital skills are key themes throughout all the reviews. All reviews will be delivered with the apprentices' progression throughout the levels (level 2 up to degree apprenticeships) being considered from the outset. This will enable learners to progress more effectively and seamlessly through the levels and will remove duplicated/repeated learning.

We are working with Welsh Government and the Regional Skills Partnerships to identify and address our key sector priorities, this includes supporting the Welsh Government deliver its Apprenticeship Policy Statement.

3. Employers

Medr has committed to developing strong links with business, industry, Regional Skills Partnerships, Corporate Joint Committees and employers to understand the skills needed for a productive workforce.

The contracted apprenticeship providers and universities work with employers directly to create apprenticeship opportunities and recruit apprentices across all sectors in Wales.

The contracted apprenticeship programme provides dedicated funding to employers to recruit disabled people. The Incentive Scheme (EIS) provides financial support of £2,000 to employers to help provide opportunities for disabled apprentices.

In addition to financial support, we deliver supported apprenticeships. They provide additional support to disabled apprentices with intensive and wide-ranging employment and learning needs to access and complete an apprenticeship. Support provided may be through job coaching or other specialist resource.

Employers who may not be able to employ an apprentice on a full time basis can take advantage of the shared apprenticeship model. Apprentices can gain qualifications across a number of employers rather than being employed by a sole employer through the shared apprenticeships model. This is particularly beneficial for micro businesses and SMEs.

However, there is a need to widen the employer base. Medr is exploring options to understand the barriers employers face, especially SMEs, on taking on apprentices and how to increase the employer base going forward. Our engagement with the Regional Skills Partnerships is focused on understanding the skills needs and priorities in each region, to inform tertiary planning and provision so that the needs of individuals, employers and the local economy are met.

4. Information about apprenticeships

Sharing good practices to promote apprenticeships and meaningful work experience is a collaborative responsibility across our key partners. Medr is committed to working with these partners, including Welsh Government, Careers Wales, and tertiary education providers to encourage more learners to access the right advice and guidance to support their transition into apprenticeships.

There are already significant good practices across Wales of collaborative working. We will learn from these good practices and build upon them to strengthen our network. However, there is more we can do to ensure learners and employers have the right information to make an informed choice on the skills they need to progress in their chosen occupations. The importance of high quality, independent, unbiased careers advice for learners and the importance of collaboration with employers around vocational options was a theme from respondents during Medr's Strategic Plan consultation.

Medr is aware of the recommendations in Hefin David's Transition to Employment Report and recognises the opportunities we have in addressing some of the recommendations to improve work experience in Wales. Medr will work with Welsh Government to explore the scope for taking them forward.

5. Equity of support and access for learners

Medr is committed to ensuring our all age apprenticeship programme is inclusive to all, including disabled people, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people, women and those with low skills across all sectors in Wales. Medr will continue to encourage young people onto apprenticeships as part of the Welsh Government's Young Person's Guarantee.

One of Medr's key priorities is to support creating a positive future for the tertiary education sector and for Wales, and will do so through continuous improvement, including more equitable opportunities. We will continue to seek opportunities to improve the uptake of apprenticeships from people with protected characteristics.

Medr monitors data to understand how delivery is performing and will consider whether interventions would be helpful.

The Employment and Enterprise Bureaus, funded by Medr and operated by 12 FE colleges, support learners by providing advice and guidance and developing employability and enterprise skills. The Bureaus help to build links between learners and employers, through a range of activities such as careers fairs, employer information sessions, employers providing advice on opportunities in their sector. These relationships can lead to the creation of work experience opportunities or apprenticeships.

6. The Welsh Government's role

Medr will work collaboratively with the Welsh Government to respond to the skills priorities it sets. Medr is responsible for the operational policy and delivery of apprenticeships across Wales. This includes transforming the Welsh Government's Apprenticeship Policy Statement into deliverable actions to meet learner and economy needs.

Medr is responsible for the development and issuing of all apprenticeship frameworks in Wales from level 2 up to degree level, which includes qualifications, essential skills and on the job learning. Welsh Government has delegated the role of Apprenticeship Issuing Authority in Wales to Medr. The key role of the Issuing Authority is to quality assure the frameworks to make sure they meet industry standards and meet the requirements set out in the legislation – the Specification for Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW).

Medr is responsible for managing and funding the apprenticeship contracted providers and the universities that deliver degree apprenticeships, working within the budget envelope set out by Welsh Government.

Medr will design future apprenticeship provision to respond to the Welsh Government's skills priorities and to meet the needs of learners, employers and the economy. Over the next few months Medr will commence 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.

The outcome of the committee's inquiry will help inform the development of the future apprenticeship programme in Wales.

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Response from the National Training Federation Wales (NTFW) to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry into Apprenticeship Pathways

Pathways between Apprenticeship Levels: Mapping out career routes through different apprenticeship levels presents several challenges. Learners progressing to higher levels often face difficulties in securing tasks or responsibilities aligned with the apprenticeship framework or required level, leading to interruptions and breaks in pathways. This issue is particularly pronounced in sectors such as Care, where age restrictions on certain tasks prevent younger learners from advancing. Additionally, 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. Higher-level apprenticeships (levels 3 and above) often necessitate skills in managing people and related tasks, which are typically suited to more experienced candidates. Addressing these structural and developmental challenges through clearer pathway planning, flexible programme design, and tailored support mechanisms is essential to promoting sustained learner progression and workforce readiness.

Lack of information on career pathways through Apprenticeships for parents/carers/learners/employers is also a challenge - The Careers Wales and working Wales sites do mention pathways but these are more about education pathways rather than sectoral and the ACW website desperately needs updating – Visual sectoral pathways with links through to an improved ACW site and the AVS would be beneficial.

Some career pathways are very well established and present little challenge for progression, e.g., Accountancy from level 2 to 4/Engineering up to Degree Apprenticeships, in both most learners progress from each level to the next, natural technically career-focused pathways. However, there are eligibility restrictions on entry at Level 2 for some pathways where it is a mandatory requirement, e.g., to complete Accountancy at Level 3 you need to complete the level 2 but because it is not a mandatory requirement of the Level 3 that a learner has to have completed the Level 2 first, then a learner with a Degree (not a finance degree, e.g., History/Sociology etc.) would not be eligible for funding for the Level 2 Apprenticeship and would have to pay to complete that before progressing to the Level 3.

There are other pathways that have multiple options e.g., Digital – learners may vary their pathway from telecoms to data or from Software to Cyber as they progress however that requires providers to have the resources to support what is an expensive pathway for employing staff in such specialist areas, collaboration has been sought with Universities to work in partnership to allow progression, even jointly deliver, but HE also have resource issues and sometimes this can result in displacement of learners.

Furthermore, higher-level apprenticeships (levels 3 and above) often necessitate skills in managing people and related tasks, which are typically suited to more experienced candidates. Job descriptions should clearly outline expectations for these responsibilities; however, this prerequisite can act as a barrier to progression for less experienced apprentices. Addressing these structural and developmental challenges through clearer pathway planning, flexible programme design, and tailored support mechanisms is essential to promoting sustained learner progression and workforce readiness.

Economy: Apprenticeship pathways play a crucial role in supporting the needs of Welsh businesses and contribute to filling skills gaps in the Welsh economy. For many SMEs, apprenticeship programmes remain a vital means of delivering training and development aligned to national standards, facilitated by quality-assured providers. However, uncertainty around future apprenticeship funding in Wales and inadequate investment in developing appropriate vocational qualifications is fostering concern among employers, discouraging them from fully adopting apprenticeships as a primary skills development strategy. This hesitancy is further exacerbating the gap between current workforce capabilities and future skills requirements. The more technical and time-intensive nature of revised apprenticeship qualifications introduced by Qualifications Wales may also pose challenges for employers, particularly at foundational levels, where shorter, more practical training models are often preferred as stepping stones for workforce development and career progression.

WG have always responded well to demands from employers on apprenticeship programmes/pathways, however speed of response is the challenge, e.g., there is no current Insurance Higher Apprenticeship available as the last Competent Qualification ran out at the end of Dec (this had been extended twice previously) – though there is limited demand the Insurance sector is a large part of the financial services sector in Wales and the framework was not fit for purpose.

Apprenticeships are intrinsically linked to the wider qualification review/development system and the current sector reviews etc, in their current format, are lengthy and expensive to complete, there needs to be a more fluid way of keeping pace, e.g., Medr led task and finish groups with employers, providers and Awarding organisations actively involved to clearly identify what is needed, there are a lot of qualifications that are fit for purpose such as Industry/vendor quals that could suit employer needs particularly in niche technical skills, where demand is not high but key employers don't have an option. – see Insurance example above, this slow responsiveness can hinder gap filling in emerging sectors or fast paced sectors.

Employers: Recruiting staff within micro and SME businesses continues to be a significant challenge, whether for apprenticeship roles or other positions. However, evidence suggests that staff retention rates improve notably when employees are engaged through apprenticeship programmes, highlighting their value as a workforce development tool. Micro, small, and medium-sized businesses, particularly within the hospitality sector, are under increasing financial and operational pressures. Recent data from Altus Group (2024) highlights that rising National Insurance contributions, increases in the minimum wage, and

higher business rates are contributing to record levels of business closures across the UK. These financial burdens are directly impacting recruitment efforts, including the ability to recruit and retain apprentices. Despite these challenges, the hospitality sector remains the second-largest employer in Wales and is prioritised within all Regional Employment and Skills Plans for 2022–2025.

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, small employers often face additional challenges related to progression opportunities, particularly at higher apprenticeship levels, as their size and structure may not support the higher-level roles and salaries required by apprenticeship standards. SMEs frequently encounter obstacles such as limited administrative capacity, financial constraints, and a lack of awareness about the benefits and processes associated with hiring apprentices. Providing additional funding 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.

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, perhaps even allowing providers to be the employer under an ATA (Apprenticeship Training Association – was popular in England) type system with wage support could help as well and the provider could then be the ‘safety-net’ for any learners where needed e.g., change of programme/redundancy– the shared apprenticeship model could be adapted though increased investment would be required.

Information about Apprenticeships: Best practices for promoting apprenticeships involve directly engaging with employers to foster strategic and operational relationships while investing in the sector. Many employers have successfully embedded apprenticeships into their career pathways, making them a crucial component of their recruitment and retention strategies. Furthermore, schools should collaborate with training providers and employers to offer meaningful work experience opportunities that align with students’ career aspirations. Such initiatives would allow students to gain practical experience and develop industry-specific skills, thereby enhancing their employability and reinforcing the value of apprenticeships as a legitimate and rewarding career pathway.

Other challenges are competence-based e.g., some sectors like Management/Project Management/HR and Health and Social Care - as the increase in level requires an increase in management responsibility (e.g., staff management/strategic business planning/budgets) rather than a technical focus such as Digital/Accountancy/Engineering and therefore unless an Apprentice is promoted into a role with those responsibilities, and the employer is prepared to allow them time to become competent, it is more difficult for them to demonstrate competence, therefore progression is often delayed until learners have progressed in their careers and wish to then undertake the next stage of learning.

Equity of Support and Access for Learners: In roles that involve shift work, non-standard hours, or are located in areas with limited public transport—such as mid-Wales—individuals often face significant challenges related to transportation and accessing employment opportunities. This issue is particularly evident in industries such as hospitality, care, and food services, where flexible or extended working hours are common. Additionally, the lack of reliable digital connectivity in some parts of Wales further compounds these 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.

Training providers actively work to address accessibility issues by collaborating with supported employment specialists, such as Elite and Agoriad, and through its supported shared apprenticeship programme. These initiatives aim to help disabled and disadvantaged individuals gain access to apprenticeship opportunities. However, funding for such programmes is limited and does not provide sufficient support to meet the needs of all individuals who could benefit. Furthermore, for those with additional learning needs, there is a lack of both funding and flexibility within current programmes to deliver the necessary support, coaching, and adjustments required to ensure equitable access and successful outcomes. Without enhanced funding and tailored support structures, these barriers will continue to restrict opportunities for individuals to access apprenticeships and realise their full potential in the workforce.

Another challenge is the age eligibility for non-priority sectors such as Administration/Management where, unless a learner immediately progresses from one level to another, they may not be able to progress unless they are aged 16-24 at the time of progression and 'new to job role' which needs to be evidenced. If the age restriction was removed then learners could progress at their own pace and in line with their careers/employer needs.

Use of RPL by all post-16 institutions in Wales to prevent duplication of activity e.g., learners with a Level 4 Apprenticeship shouldn't have to repeat the full 1st year of a Degree Apprenticeship, there is also a lack of understanding in HE of Credit Values of QCF qualifications as many of the awards do not align directly with, HE credits and therefore viewed as a lesser qualification. The WBL element is overlooked as valid learning time that equates to, HE credits.

Barriers – other than those mentioned above re; learner costs and SME/Micro business costs some aspects of the Apprenticeship policy needs reviewing to meet employer needs, e.g., length of programme where providers are penalised financially for achieving a framework with a learner at less than 80% of the set length of stay (which varies by framework and level), when an employer wants an apprentice to achieve sooner it means greater input from the provider therefore the resource cost is the same though the funding isn't (this particularly applies when providers are required to mirror Levy funded programmes in England with a minimum length of stay of 12 months and 1 day); the ACW website is not fit for purpose compared to the Institute for Apprenticeships (IFA) website in

England, employers, learners and parents can become frustrated and not engage when they find it difficult to identify the information they need.

The Welsh Government's Role: While regional skills partnerships (RSPs) have played a role in promoting skills development to employers and schools, there is limited evidence to suggest that they have significantly increased the uptake of apprenticeships or influenced the development of apprenticeship frameworks. This shortfall is further compounded by the Welsh Government's decision to reduce apprenticeship funding, which is expected to result in 6,000 fewer apprenticeships in 2024–2025. Such cuts have not only hindered efforts to promote apprenticeships but have also led to hesitancy among employers to fully engage with these programmes, further limiting workforce development opportunities.

Although the RSPs and Welsh Government research have provided clear plans to identify and address skills needs across Wales, they lack the ability to influence the broader diversification of vocational qualifications taking place across the UK. This misalignment is creating additional challenges for Awarding Bodies, which are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain or develop new qualifications tailored specifically for Wales. Consequently, a growing number of Awarding Bodies are withdrawing qualifications from Wales due to concerns over viability, exacerbating the lack of choice and flexibility for employers and learners. Welsh Government needs to continue to use the RSP and Apprenticeship Contract Holders Group (vis Medr) as methods of identifying frameworks needed but ensure these are created quickly and that funding is available, listening to the employer voice in particular as they are key to ensuring the development of future Apprenticeships continues in Wales. Finally, addressing these funding shortfalls and qualification challenges is essential to ensuring that apprenticeships remain a viable and attractive option for skills development in Wales.

Consultation on Apprenticeship pathways Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs committee.

Response from Careers Wales – January 2025

Introduction:

Careers Wales provides a national careers information, advice and guidance service for the people of Wales, supporting young people and adults to make successful transitions into education, employment and training (EET). Independent guidance support, now guaranteed for all young people in education, is the first step towards building our future workforce. Careers guidance plays a crucial role in helping individuals connect their current aspirations and abilities to future possibilities, enabling them to reflect on their ambitions, skills, and qualities and prepare for rewarding careers. Combined with a targeted personalised approach, Careers Wales plays a significant part in addressing inequality and breaking down participation barriers. By working in partnership with employers, teachers, parents, and guardians, we ensure young people make informed, intelligent career choices.

Our Brighter Futures strategy outlines our role:

- Keeping people switched on to learning
- Encouraging people not to close down opportunities too early
- Broadening horizons and challenging inaccurate assumptions
- Creating relevant experiences and exposure to the world of work
- Contributing to improved education, economic and social outcomes

As an all-age careers service, our ongoing support for individuals continues through to adulthood. Our Working Wales provision supports people looking for employment or seeking to progress with their career, helping them to overcome barriers and progress into fair and decent work and training. We provide vital redundancy support as well as supporting those who are seeking a career change or are economically inactive. This work directly contributes to addressing the skills challenges in Wales.

Our innovative business engagement activities are designed to address the identified skills shortage in the workplace by brokering vital relationships with schools. Through these partnerships, we provide young people with work-related experiences and exposure to the world of work, while simultaneously helping businesses enhance their future workforce.



Response to consultation questions

1. 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.

Career planning is not a linear one-size-fits-all process – and this is also true of mapping the various pathways into jobs and careers. Information on apprenticeships and the four levels is available in various formats. Young people in school can access information from their careers adviser as can teachers and parents. Up to date information is available on the Careers Wales website, outlining the four distinct levels, how to apply and the employers who offer apprenticeships. Careers Wales's website is used widely in schools as part of CWRE delivery. During the last year (1/1/24 – 31/12/24) there were 54,000 views on the apprenticeship search section. The most viewed area around apprenticeships is '[Employers who offer apprenticeships](#)'.

There is also information on apprenticeships on the Medr, Business Wales, Welsh Government and UCAS websites. A review of these sites confirms that there is information on the different types of apprenticeships and levels, however, a mapping of pathways into various careers isn't included. The Careers Wales website has a link to over 780 job information pages that outline how to progress in that specific job role. Our qualified careers advisers will support young people and adults to navigate the information when discussing their career ideas.

Junior apprenticeships were created as a means of encouraging young people to engage in vocational qualifications. The Estyn report published in May 2024 shows that only 5 colleges offer year 10 and 11 junior apprenticeships. (Bridgend College, Cardiff and Vale College, Coleg Sir Gar, Gower College Swansea and NPTC Group). The programme is more of an introduction to vocational learning than apprenticeships and is not based on any apprenticeship framework. There are no junior apprenticeships available in North Wales and a low number of Welsh speakers access the provision.

In the report '[Understanding apprenticeship progression](#)' (L&W Institute 2020) the main barriers that prevented employers from offering progression through apprenticeships included difficulties in fulfilling occupational requirements of apprenticeship standards; standards not keeping up with industry changes; the minimum length of apprenticeships being considered too long; and managing the required % off-the-job requirement. Employers were also restricted by a lack of available standards or provision to offer a full apprenticeship progression pathway. Finally, some employers and providers cited wider organisational barriers preventing staff progression, for example a lack of vacancies at more senior levels.

A limited number of sectors offer degree apprenticeships; therefore, many occupations are only available at foundation and apprenticeship level. Employers in Wales can offer a degree apprenticeship in IT, engineering, construction, or advanced manufacturing through a partnership with a university in Wales. The offer of degree apprenticeships in England is much broader covering vocational areas such as social care, logistics, supply chain management, and sustainability.

Many job roles now require workers to upskill and retrain to comply with net zero and technological requirements. Providing adults with a pathway to demonstrate these types of changes would be challenging as each individual customer has a wide range of prior learning and experiences – and therefore there is no



universal approach. Careers Wales supports adults who have been made redundant, who are unemployed or are seeking a career change. Navigating the availability of training provision available in Wales can often be challenging. For example, reskilling may require an individual to re-start their whole professional training rather than top up with short courses that are available. This is challenging for many adults who have families and financial commitments. It would be helpful if adults could access fast-track training, using accreditation of prior learning (APL) to accredit existing complementary skills.

2. Economy: The extent to which apprenticeship pathways support the needs of Welsh businesses and contribute to filling skills gaps in the Welsh economy.

It is challenging for micro enterprises, which account for 95% of businesses in Wales to manage and promote apprenticeships. The smaller number of large businesses in Wales also mean a lower number and turnover to provide an adequate cohort size for providers to run apprenticeships with minimum viable numbers. According to Stats Wales, there were 46,610 learners in Wales undertaking apprenticeships programmes.

- 46% male
- 54% female
- 38% aged 25-39
- 37% undertaking foundation Apprenticeships (level 2)
- 43% undertaking Apprenticeships at Level 3
- 20% undertaking Higher Level 4+ apprenticeships.

Most apprentices engage in programmes after gaining employment which are not advertised as an apprenticeship. From this practice, most apprenticeships are not advertised as vacancies or appear on the Welsh Government's apprenticeship search page, therefore there is a mismatch in the perception of apprenticeship availability and vacancies. Careers Wales provides a vacancy bulletin to customers who are seeking work or apprenticeships, and the number of apprenticeships available on the bulletin is significantly higher than those advertised on the official Welsh Government apprenticeship finder. Analysis of this data shows that over 63% of the apprenticeships advertised on the Careers Wales vacancy bulletin did not appear on the Welsh Government apprenticeship search.

The National Training Federation Wales (NTFW) reported that the health and social care and construction industry have suffered the most due to the Welsh Government budget cuts. They report that in 2023 there was a reduction of 565 apprentices in construction. Data provided by Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), suggests that there is a need to increase the workforce by 2200 a year until 2028 and funding cuts to apprenticeships will exacerbate these shortages ([The Impact of Apprenticeship Funding Cuts in Wales](#)). Degree Apprenticeships in Wales are currently available in the digital and engineering sectors. There remains a pressing need to further expand the Degree Apprenticeship offering to address key regional demands, including areas such as health and social care, net zero and leadership and management.



3. 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.

An employer's size has an impact on their ability to use apprenticeships to progress staff. Smaller employers may have fewer available roles for apprentices to progress into, less opportunity for apprentices to develop and demonstrate competencies required by standards, and limited resources to manage the additional workload of implementing apprenticeships within their business.

Stronger progression routes exist where apprenticeships are embedded within professionally accredited pathways, and where employers have an established history of using apprenticeships or vocational training for staff development.

The continuing decline of the number of apprentices being visibly available on the Welsh Government's apprenticeships search tool could be a false indication of low availability.

The [Evaluation of the Degree Apprenticeship Programme](#) in Wales (February 2023), reported "concerns amongst stakeholders that failure to expand the degree apprenticeship offer will lead to increasing numbers of employers sending their employees to England to access provision there (with the inherent risk that they may not return). Furthermore, degree apprenticeship courses are now being made available to search for in the UCAS database. Whilst this will provide a considerable boost in the opportunities available to those looking to study at university, it will illustrate the extent of disparity in the range of degree apprenticeships on offer in England in comparison to those offered in Wales."

4. Information about apprenticeships: good practice between careers services, schools, colleges and employers in terms of promoting apprenticeships and the provision of meaningful work experience.

Careers Wales promotes parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways, particularly ensuring young people and their parents are aware of apprenticeship pathways and are supported to access them as appropriate. We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to ensuring apprenticeships contribute to the goals of a stronger, fairer, greener economy and are committed in raising awareness of opportunities in key areas.

One of our key performance indicators is linked to learner's improved understanding of their options following an interview with their careers adviser. 97% of young people who responded to our customer satisfaction survey said that the careers adviser had helped them understand their options. (Response rate of 26% from our customers in schools).

We provide an enhanced service for those young people who indicate that their first-choice option is to enter the labour market via direct employment or apprenticeship. This support includes ongoing mentoring and employability support with application processes, CVs and interview preparation.

Careers Wales arrange a breadth of activities to raise awareness of apprenticeships across schools in Wales. Activities include:

- employer presentations
- site visits
- work experience
- workshops on what employers are looking for in their apprentices



- apprentices coming to talk about their own experiences of working.

Raising awareness of apprenticeships with our adult customers is also a key feature of our support offer. A recent example is an event held at our Merthyr careers centre to highlight the availability of apprenticeships with EE. 33 potential applicants attended and were supported to make an application and understand how an apprenticeship could work for them. EE is committed to provide opportunities for individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds and were pleased with the turnout and support provided by Careers Wales. Until 2015, Careers Wales managed the work experience placing service, where 90% of KS4 were placed. This provision was removed from the remit of Careers Wales by the Welsh Government with the expectation that schools would continue to offer work experience to their learners and risk assess placements themselves. The current offer for young people is fragmented and dependent on individual schools and local authorities funding a vetting service. Careers Wales would support the need to conduct a feasibility study around the demand and appetite of schools and local authorities to re-instate a central work experience placing service.

A recommendation from the Transitions to Employment report (Dr Hefin David 2023) was the need to develop a targeted offer of tailored work experience for KS4 learners who are disengaging with education and are at risk of becoming not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Careers Wales have delivered a tailored work experience (TWE) programme on behalf of the Welsh Government for the last 3 years. For the 2023/24 academic year:

- 380 learners completed a work placement
- 85.6% of these young people went on to a positive destination at the end of the programme
- 25 young people went on to start an apprenticeship.

This programme is targeted at young people who have been identified as potentially becoming NEET due to their lack of attendance in school. Currently, 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.

Several European countries are known for their effective apprenticeship programmes. Notable examples include:

- Germany's dual education system is highly regarded. It combines classroom instruction with on-the-job training, allowing apprentices to gain practical experience while studying. This system is well-integrated with the needs of the labour market, ensuring high employment rates for graduates.
- Switzerland has a robust apprenticeship system that offers a wide range of vocational training options. Apprenticeships are available in various fields, and the system is designed to be flexible, allowing apprentices to switch between different career paths if needed.
- Austria's apprenticeship program is similar to Germany's, with a strong emphasis on combining theoretical education with practical training. The program is well-supported by both the government and industry, ensuring that apprentices receive high-quality training.
- The Netherlands has a well-developed apprenticeship system that emphasizes collaboration between educational institutions and employers. This ensures that the training provided is relevant to the needs of the labour market.



5. 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.

Our Career Check survey data demonstrates that young people at the age of 14 – 15 are aware of apprenticeships and it is consistently a first choice for 13.5 % of the cohort and second choice for 21% of the cohort. However, when we compare this with the destination survey there is a difference in take up with only 1.6% of young people leaving Year 11, who left school in 2024 entering work-based training (WBT) with employed status.

This is due to various factors:

- Lack of availability in some areas of Wales
- Entry requirements higher than those held by the young person
- FE colleges may require a young person to attend college for a year before progressing onto an Apprenticeship
- Cost of living pressures from family such as impact on child benefit, cost and availability of transport and manging on apprentice wage
- Lack of provision of apprenticeship in the career area of the young person e.g. law, art and design
- Lack of confidence that they will receive support from employer or to enter workplace at 16
- Lack of transport

The trend of accessing work-based training post 18 is slightly higher, with 4% entering work-based training with an employer at the end of Year 13.

The Wales Centre of Public Policy report on 'inequity in tertiary education', highlights the challenges facing young people from more socio-economically deprived backgrounds and states that they are less likely to progress to tertiary education. They are also less likely to take up higher-level apprenticeships. Almost one in four (23%) of those undertaking work-based learning programmes were from employment-deprived households. A clear trend can be seen in employment deprivation status according to the level of work-based learning qualification being undertaken. Levels of employment deprivation were highest among learners undertaking engagement (33%) or Level 1 (31%) training. These figures decline steadily for those undertaking foundation apprenticeships (23%), apprenticeships (18%), and higher apprenticeships (12%).

Low pay is a barrier for older apprentices who want to change career, due to their financial responsibilities they would not be able to access an apprenticeship with good career progression and prospects.

PISA results show that Welsh learners are falling behind their peers in the rest of the UK with their basic literacy and numeracy skills and therefore may not have the relevant qualifications/skills to access an apprenticeship. Many apprenticeships will require learners to acquire level 2 English and Maths before they can progress to a level 3 apprenticeship.

Other barriers include:

- Lack of work experience iimpacting on young people's exposure to the workplace
- Young people with a disability are more likely to stay in education rather than enter work or training – they are more likely to face transport challenges and are more likely to become NEET
- There continues to be a gender imbalance within sectors for example fewer females start on construction and engineering apprenticeships.



Another key consideration is that with the increase in demand for Welsh language skills in public and private sectors, there is a need for Welsh language apprenticeships.

6. 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.

Medr will play a key role in reviewing the availability of suitable and accessible apprenticeships for all people across Wales. We welcome their ambition to work in partnership with the Welsh Government and others, to define what the Welsh apprenticeship provision should look like to meet the needs of learners and the economy in Wales, promote strong engagement with employers and ensure rigorous standards of occupational competence.

We would recommend that the Welsh Government review the Transitions into Employment report and consider recommendations around work experience and Degree Apprenticeships. CWRE is a critical part of the curriculum and can be a key contributor to exposing children, young people, parents, and teachers to the world of work. Whilst Careers Wales offer a broad range of employer engagement activities for secondary schools, there is a need to review the appetite for a work experience placement service for all pupils. Careers Wales would support the need to conduct a feasibility study with schools, local authorities and key stakeholders around the demand and requirements for re-instating a work experience offer. 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.

There are limitations on the data in Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) about where young people end up after vocational education in further education and if the pathways are progressive and clearly linked to their chosen course of study. Availability of data that shows progression and completion rates for all apprentices linked to young people's career aspirations would support measuring outcomes and strategic planning. In addition to this, Careers Wales currently facilitates the 5 Tier Model on behalf of Welsh Government as part of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, this model is used to track young people between the ages of 16 and 18 through their various destinations. This data is provided to local authorities for strategic planning and supporting young people. Careers Wales have presented the Welsh Government with a prototype of an all-Wales data intelligence hub, which could utilise data from Careers Wales, schools, colleges, local authorities and Department for work and Pensions. The Welsh Government should consider further development of an all-Wales Data Hub that will inform careers guidance and local authority service provision, allow education providers to consider the appropriateness of their learning offer to fulfil the needs/aspirations of learners, but also inform analysis and evidence for the needs of current and future labour markets and industries.

Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) play a key role in identifying skills shortages in their region and mapping against provision. They are key in linking employers, educators, and other stakeholders with the Welsh Government.



Useful links:

[Understanding-Apprenticeship-Progression.pdf](#)

[**A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales.pdf**](#)

[Expert-reflections-on-the-challenges.pdf](#)

[Evaluation of the Degree Apprenticeship Programme](#)

[All there is to know about European apprenticeships close to hand | CEDEFOP](#)

[Apprenticeships - European Commission](#)

https://www.ntfw.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/20241119_The-Impact-of-Apprenticeships-Funding-Cuts-in-Wales.pdf

[**Apprenticeships: policy statement | GOV.WALES**](#)

Agenda Item 8

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Agenda Item 10

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