

Agenda – Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee room 2 – Senedd
and video conference via Zoom

Meeting date: 12 February 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 – 11.50

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions, and declarations of interest

09.30

2 Papers to note

09.30

2.1 Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and the Welsh Government on Investment zones

(Page 1)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning to the
Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee – 29 January
2025



2.2 Legislative consent: Employment Rights Bill

(Pages 2 – 5)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee to the Llywydd – 31 January 2025

Letter from the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee to the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership – 31 January 2025

2.3 Holyhead Port storm damage and closure

(Pages 6 – 11)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair to the Minister of Transport, Government of Ireland – 4 February 2025

Letter from the Chair to stakeholders – 4 February 2025

Letter from the Chair to the Chair of the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee – 5 February 2025

2.4 Follow-up to 15 January 2025 Committee meeting – Young Person's Guarantee

(Pages 12 – 14)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership – 4 February 2025

2.5 Legislative consent: Data (Use and Access) Bill

(Pages 15 – 18)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning to the Chair of the Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee – 5 February 2025

2.6 Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and Welsh Government

(Page 19)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee – 5 February 2025

2.7 Meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Group for Trade

(Page 20)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning – 5 February 2025

3 Apprenticeship pathways – Panel 4 – Regional Skills Partnerships

09.30 – 10.40

(Pages 21 – 67)

Leigh Hughes, Chair, Cardiff Capital Region Employment and Skills Board (ESB)

Owain Jones, Regional Learning and Skills Partnership South West Wales Construction cluster group member, and CITB Trustee and Board Member
Pryderi Ap Rhisiart, Digital Skills Group Chair, North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

Ceri Stephens, Chair, Regional Skills Partnership M&E cluster group, and the Mid Wales Manufacturing group

Attached Documents:

Research brief

Evidence Paper – Cardiff Capital Regional Skills Partnership

Evidence Paper – Regional Learning and Skills Partnership South West Wales

Evidence paper – North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

Evidence Paper – Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership

Break

10.40 – 10.50

4 Apprenticeship pathways – Panel 5 – Welsh Government

10.50 – 11.50

(Pages 68 – 77)

Jack Sargeant MS, Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership, Welsh Government

Neil Surman, Deputy Director – Skills, Welsh Government

Rachel Sanders, Head of Apprenticeships, Welsh Government

Attached Documents:

Evidence paper – Welsh Government

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

11.50

Private session

11.50 – 12.35

6 Consideration of evidence following the meeting and draft engagement report

11.50 – 12.10

(Pages 78 – 96)

Attached Documents:

Engagement Report

7 Legislative Consent: Employment Rights Bill – Consideration of draft report

12.10 – 12.15

(To Follow)

Attached Documents:

Draft report

8 Soil Health: Consideration of Scope and Approach paper

12.15 – 12.25

(Pages 97 – 105)

Attached Documents:

Scope and Approach Paper

9 Green Economy: Consideration of draft report

12.25 – 12.35

(To Follow)

Attached Documents:

Draft report

Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio

Agenda Item 2.1


Ein cyf/Our ref: RE/27/2025

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Mike Hedges MS
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Senedd Cymru

29 January 2025

Dear Mike,

In accordance with the inter-institutional relations agreement, I am writing to notify you that a Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and Welsh Government was published on 8 January 2025. It can be found [here](#).

This Memorandum of Understanding summarises and formalises the overarching principles for and approach to the use of UK Government funding for Investment Zones agreed between the UK Government and the Welsh Government.

I have also copied this letter to the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee and the Finance Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
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Gohebiaeth.Rebecca.Evans@llyw.cymru

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee

Welsh Parliament
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SeneddLJC@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddLJC
0300 200 6565

Rt Hon Elin Jones MS
Llywydd and Chair of the Senedd Commission

31 January 2025

Dear Elin

Legislative consent memoranda on the Employment Rights Bill

At its meeting on 27 January 2025, the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee considered the legislative consent memorandum and supplementary legislative consent memorandum laid by the Welsh Government in respect of the Employment Rights Bill on 5 December and 19 December 2024, respectively.

As part of our consideration, we considered a provision identified by the Welsh Government within clause 26 of the Bill. In the legislative consent memorandum, the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership, Jack Sargeant MS, states that clause 26 inserts a new section 78A into the *Equality Act 2010* which enables the making of regulations requiring certain employers and public bodies to prepare and publish an "equality action plan" dealing with matters of gender equality. The Minister also states that most devolved Welsh public bodies are excluded from this provision, but the Senedd Commission (under its previous name of the National Assembly for Wales Commission) is within the scope of the Bill.

We have written separately to the Minister to seek further information in respect of this provision, but we would also be grateful if you could set out any engagement you have had with the UK Government or the Welsh Government on this clause, and outline any views you may have on its inclusion.

I would be grateful for a response to these questions by Thursday 13 February 2025. You will be aware that the Business Committee has set a reporting deadline of 7 March 2025 for the memoranda.

I am copying this letter to the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership, the Chair of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee and the Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Hedges". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Mike Hedges
Chair

Jack Sargeant MS
Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership

31 January 2025

Dear Jack

Legislative consent memoranda on the Employment Rights Bill

At its meeting on 27 January 2025, the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee considered the legislative consent memorandum and supplementary legislative consent memorandum which you laid in respect of the Employment Rights Bill on 5 December and 19 December 2024, respectively.

To inform our consideration of the memoranda, we would be grateful if you could provide further information in relation to some of the clauses of the Bill which you believe require consent, as set out below.

As you state in the legislative consent memorandum in respect of clause 26, the Senedd Commission is within the scope of this provision. Could you please provide further information as to why it is appropriate that the Senedd Commission is within its scope, while most devolved Welsh public bodies are excluded?

Clause 26 also provides that a Minister of the Crown must consult the Welsh Ministers before making regulations that apply to a number of bodies under this provision; however there is no similar requirement to consult the Welsh Ministers when making regulations that apply to the Senedd Commission. Could you please explain why this is the case?

Clauses 49, 52 and 54 remove or amend various provisions of the *Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992*, as amended by *Trade Union Act 2016*; provisions which have been disapplied as regards devolved Welsh authorities by the *Trade Union (Wales) Act 2017*. Clause 71 accordingly repeals section 1 of the 2017 Act given it will become redundant and no longer have legal effect. Given that the subject matter of the 1992 Act is now expressly reserved under paragraph 141(d) of

Schedule 7A to the *Government of Wales Act 2006*, could you please clarify why you believe the provisions within clauses 49, 52, 54 and 71 require the consent of the Senedd?

As you state in the supplementary legislative consent memorandum, the Government amendments to clause 25 will result in powers being conferred on the Welsh Ministers in respect of devolved Welsh authorities. Please could you clarify, as per the requirement in Standing Order 29.3(iv), which Senedd procedure will be applicable to subordinate legislation made in exercise of these powers?

I would be grateful for a response to these questions by Thursday 13 February 2025. You will be aware that the Business Committee has set a reporting deadline of 7 March 2025 for the memoranda.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee and the Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Hedges". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Mike Hedges
Chair

Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

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Darragh O'Brien T.D.
Minister for Transport

04 February 2025

Dear Minister,

Holyhead Port Storm Damage and Closure

The Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee has decided to undertake a short inquiry into the recent storm damage and related closure of Holyhead Port. Members agreed to focus the inquiry on:

- **Causes:** the factors contributing to the severity of the damage;
- **Communication:** the approach to communication during and after the storm, including communication with port users, communities and businesses affected by the closure as well as between Governments;
- **Remediation:** the speed of response in assessing and repairing the damage, including the support provided by Governments; and
- **Impact:** the impacts of the closure, as well as the extent and effectiveness of the steps being taken to mitigate impacts.

As the Committee intends this to be a short, focused inquiry, we will not be opening a public consultation. However, we have decided to write to key interested parties for their views.

We would be keen to hear your views on the causes, communications, remediation, and impact. We would also welcome any other information or evidence on the matter that you see fit. Providing this evidence would help us understand the circumstances which led to the Port's closure, the issues that



arose from it, and allow us to form recommendations for the Welsh Government to help avoid a repetition of said issues.

Thank you in advance for your engagement. If possible, I would appreciate your contribution by 19 February to help inform our evidence session scheduled for 6 March.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew RT Davies". The signature is written in a cursive style with some capital letters.

Andrew RT Davies MS

Chair: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English

04 February 2025

Dear stakeholder,

Holyhead Port Storm Damage and Closure

The Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee has decided to undertake a short inquiry into the recent storm damage and related closure of Holyhead Port. Members agreed to focus the inquiry on:

- **Causes:** the factors contributing to the severity of the damage;
- **Communication:** the approach to communication during and after the storm, including communication with port users, communities and businesses affected by the closure as well as between Governments;
- **Remediation:** the speed of response in assessing and repairing the damage, including the support provided by Governments; and
- **Impact:** the impacts of the closure, as well as the extent and effectiveness of the steps being taken to mitigate impacts.

As the Committee intends this to be a short, focused inquiry, we will not be opening a public consultation. However, we have decided to write to key interested parties for their views.

We would be keen to hear your views on the causes, communications, remediation, and impact. We would also welcome any other information or evidence on the matter that you see fit. Providing this evidence would help us understand the circumstances which led to the Port's closure, the issues that arose from it, and allow us to form recommendations for the Welsh Government to help avoid a repetition of said issues.

Thank you in advance for your engagement. If possible, I would appreciate your contribution by 19 February to help inform our evidence session scheduled for 6 March.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew RT Davies". The signature is written in a cursive style with some capital letters.

Andrew RT Davies MS

Chair: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English



Llyr Gruffydd MS

Chair

Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

5 February 2025

Dear Llyr,

Holyhead Port Storm Damage and Closure

The Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee has decided to undertake a short inquiry into the recent storm damage and related closure of Holyhead Port. The Committee has agreed the inquiry should focus on:

- **Causes:** the factors contributing to the severity of the damage;
- **Communication:** the approach to communication during and after the storm, including communication with port users, communities and businesses affected by the closure as well as between Governments;
- **Remediation:** the speed of response in assessing and repairing the damage, including the support provided by Government; and
- **Impact:** the impact of the closure, as well as the extent and effectiveness of the steps being taken to mitigate the impact.

We intend to hold a one-day evidence session on 6 March and are hoping to hold four panels covering:

- Ports;
- Trade and Logistics;

- Business and Local Government; and
- The Welsh Government position.

As the Committee intends this to be a short, focused inquiry, we will not be opening a public consultation. However, we have decided to write to key interested parties for their views. This will include the Irish Government, business representatives specifically including freight, representatives of tourism providers in north Wales and workers' representatives.

As this is a cross-cutting issue which covers policy within both our Committees' remits, I would like to invite members of The Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee to participate in this inquiry and attend our session on 6 March. I have asked our Clerk to discuss the practicalities of this with your Clerk.

I look forward to working with you and your committee on this important issue.

Kind regards,



Andrew RT Davies MS

Chair: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref PO 42 2025

Andrew R.T. Davies
Committee Chair

AndrewRT.Davies@senedd.wales

4 February 2025

Dear Andrew,

Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee 15/01/2025 Follow up on the Young Person's Guarantee

On 15 January 2025, I attended the Committee meeting to discuss the Welsh Government draft budget for 2025/2026. During the meeting, I offered to write in more detail about what the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) has provided to young people in Wales.

The YPG is a Programme for Government commitment launched in November 2021 to provide everyone between 16 and 24 in Wales with the offer of support to gain a place in education, training, an apprenticeship, find a job, or become self-employed. Since its launch, over 45,000 young people have been supported through our employability and skills programmes alone.

Delivery of the YPG is underpinned by a variety of employability, business and training support options, with the primary referral mechanism being provided by Working Wales, which offers free and impartial careers advice and guidance if you are aged 16 or above. As well as providing details of the principal programmes under the YPG I have provided a number of case studies which bring to life the support provided by the programme:

Jobs Growth Wales+ (JGW+), our flagship programme under the YPG, provides a tailored package of support for young people aged 16-19 with training and development activities through employment, formal training or voluntary work. So far, 13,345 young people have been engaged through JGW+ since the programme launched in April 2022.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Amy, from Bargoed, is an example of a young person in Wales who has benefitted from the Jobs Growth Wales+ programme. Amy was diagnosed with a sight impairment at the age of 7. She joined JGW+ on the Engagement strand and quickly progressed to Advancement enabling her to study for a Level 1 Health and Social Care qualification. The programme provided funding for Amy to have a personal laptop and course tutors downloaded appropriate software which made the screen more accessible, enabling her to complete courses much quicker than before. Through a combination of courses aimed at CV writing and interview preparation, Amy was able to secure experience in a working environment and is now pursuing a career in the childcare industry.

Cez, 17, from Flintshire, is another who has secured a work placement having participated in the programme. Cez learnt about how to apply for a job and what to include in a CV with the tutors also providing information about different industries and offering new ways of learning tailored to her needs. Following the careers advice and support she received through the Jobs Growth Wales+ tutors, Cez had an interview, and was successful in securing a placement at a local estate agency.

Communities for Work+ (CfW+) provides specialist employment advisory support and mentoring for NEET individuals and those facing a complex barrier to employment, aged 16 years and above. So far, 9,750 young people have been engaged through CfW+.

Jade, a young mother with complex barriers from Torfaen, benefitted from the support provided by CFW+. Jade was a full-time mother who had previously completed a hair and beauty course in college but was unsure of her next steps in her career. Through the support provided by CFW+ in terms of advice, guidance and preparing for interview, Jade was successful in applying for a volunteering role in a Torfaen Play Scheme. Arrangements were then made for Jade to complete a childcare course which enabled her to apply for and secure a paid employment role in the Play Scheme.

Inspiring Skills Excellence in Wales delivers a programme of activities that strengthens the understanding, awareness and delivery of vocational education, skills standards, training, and career pathways for learners, practitioners, and businesses in Wales. The programme encourages engagement and participation in Skills Competitions to raise standards for both competitors and practitioners; supports national and international competitors to develop their skills to a world class standard and provides sector specific professional development for practitioners and training managers in Wales. In 2024 – 2025 the programme engaged with 1,500 young people in local competitions across Wales.

At the WorldSkills Final in Lyon in September 2024, 6 Welsh students competed as part of Team UK, with one Welsh competitor, Ruben Duggan, winning a silver medal. Nearly a third of the WorldSkills UK training team came from the education and training sector in Wales.

At the recent WorldSkills UK National and SkillBuild Finals in November 2024, Wales emerged as a standout region in the competition. A total of 70 medals were won by the 118 Welsh competitors, setting the stage for Wales to host the WorldSkills UK Finals for the first time in November 2025.

Big Ideas Wales provides support for young people to overcome challenges to becoming self-employed. It helps young people learn about business, work with an adviser to prepare for self-employment and potentially access a financial grant to help start up a business.

Since 2021, Big Ideas Wales has delivered 6,283 workshops, led by entrepreneurs, to reach 240,343 young people under 25 years of age. In that period, 3,646 young people aged 16-24 have been engaged in the start-up programme that provides business advice and guidance. The Barriers to Start-Up Grant launched in July 2022 and has provided

financial support for 609 economically inactive and unemployed individuals with a grant of up to £2,000 to start their own business, alongside a package of business support and advice. Following the support (either financial and non-financial) 669 have gone on to start a business.

Poppi, a 20 year old entrepreneur from Neath Port Talbot launched her own catering business thanks to the support provided by Big Ideas Wales. Poppi attended culinary and catering courses, completed Level 2 Hygiene and Health and Allergy Awareness courses and received valuable advice and resources that have supported her in launching her own business. Big Ideas Wales also supported Poppi in a successful application for a Barriers to Business Grant of £2,000 which went towards more appliances for her business.

ReAct+ provides grant support for vocational training, travel costs and care related to training for those seeking to re-enter the labour market, aged 20 years and above. The grant is targeted at those under formal notice of redundancy, those who have been made redundant in the last six months, ex-offenders and offenders serving community sentences. The programme has supported 726 young people since its launch in June 2022.

The programme has helped people like Luke, a 24 year old man from Cwmfelinfach, kickstart his dream career after he was made redundant shortly before the birth of his first child. Luke met with a Working Wales adviser to discuss his career goals and they started developing a package of support that would help him get back into employment. This included funding for all the essential training courses required for Luke to navigate his career change.

Apprenticeships in Wales combine practical training in a job alongside additional study, allowing an apprentice to gain work experience, learn new skills and get a nationally recognised qualification while *earning* a wage. The YPG commenced in November 2021 and figures, available on Medr's website, show that since the third quarter of 2021/22, there have been over 20,600 apprenticeship starts.

Sayfan Iqbal, a 22 year old creative apprentice from Cardiff, was selected from hundreds of applicants for a full-time apprenticeship role at ITV Cymru Wales' waterfront HQ in Cardiff Bay. Safyan was born with poor hearing, which worsened over time until he had surgery aged 11 to fit a cochlear implant which helped him to hear more clearly. As part of his apprenticeship he learnt a variety of skills including how to operate cameras and shoot and edit as part of his ambition to become a camera operator or filmmaker.

I hope that I've been able to highlight the significant progress made against the Young Person's Guarantee and provide an illustration of the tangible and meaningful impact on the young people of Wales.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JACK SARGEANT". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Jack Sargeant AS/MS

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership
Y Gweinidog Diwylliant, Sgiliau a Phartneriaeth Gymdeithasol

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Delyth Jewell MS
Chair Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport
and International Relations Committee
Senedd Cymru

05 February 2025

Dear Delyth,

Further to the laying of a Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) on the Data (Use and Access) Bill ('the Bill') on 2 January, I attach a copy of our updated assessment in relation to any potential impact of the Bill on the Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA). I am copying this letter to each of the Committees to which the LCM has been referred.

The previous First Minister made a commitment regarding the sharing of assessments of the impact of UK Government Bills on the TCA in January 2024, when responding to the Committee's recommendations relating to the International Relations Annual Report 2022-23. The commitment stated that *'the Welsh Government LCMs on Bills that impact on the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement should set out our assessment of such an impact'*.

I would like to clarify how I intend to fulfil the commitment. The TCA is the UK's most important trade deal and as such, the Welsh Government always considers how draft legislation could impact on our existing international obligations. Many UK Government Bills will have no identifiable impact on the TCA, or on any of our international obligations. In these cases, we would not provide an assessment to the Senedd. Where a Bill has a clear impact on the obligations made in the TCA, an assessment will be provided to the Committee only in relation to the provisions which the Senedd is asked to consent to. Including the provisions that do not engage devolved matters within technical assessments of Bills would place an unreasonable burden on Welsh Government teams and duplicate work that the UK Government will have already carried out. Assessments will continue to be provided in writing, as a separate document to the LCM itself.

In cases where my officials are concerned that UK government policy is incompatible with the TCA, we will continue to raise these concerns directly with the UK government.

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We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

However, it is ultimately for the UK government to ensure it has carried out its own due diligence and is compliant with any international obligations.

I trust that this approach will provide the Committee with the information required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Evans". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a long, sweeping underline.

Rebecca Evans AS/MS

Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio

cc. Chair, Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

Chair, Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

Chair, Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee

Annex 1 - Trade and Co-Operation Agreement and the Data (Use and Access) Bill – Analysis

Will the Bill impact the UK's compliance with data protection provisions in the TCA?

1. Our view is that the UK Data (Use and Access) Bill ('the Bill'), will not have a direct or immediate impact on the UK's compliance with the Trade and Co-Operation Agreement (TCA), which is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the UK and the EU.
2. Our view is that the changes to the UK data protection framework proposed by the Bill as drafted are unlikely to impact on the UK's compliance with the TCA, as its data protection provisions are generally broad and high level, except rules on data transfer relating to law and enforcement matters, which are more specific.
3. However, as with the previous UK Government's Data Protection and Digital Information (DPDI) Bill (which fell following the dissolution of Parliament), we are concerned that this Bill could signal the beginning of the UK's divergence from the data protection regime currently in place across the EU by diluting the protections provided by UK legislation set out in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). Regulatory divergence over the medium-to-long-term has the potential to undermine the data protection provisions in the TCA across a broad range of policy areas, including digital trade which is essential for public services and private businesses, and law and enforcement.

Why could the UK's divergence from the EU's data protection regime undermine the TCA?

4. Data adequacy decisions¹ made by the EU about the UK confirm that the UK is recognised as having an equivalent level of protection for personal data as the EU, enabling personal data to flow freely between the EU and the UK, supporting public services and private businesses. The UK adequacy decisions also help to facilitate implementation of the TCA which includes a commitment by the EU and UK to uphold high levels of data protection standards.
5. Our view is that there a number of provisions within this Bill that potentially undermine the current data protection framework, and therefore may threaten relevant adequacy decisions.
6. The key concerns relate to:
 - provisions which will dilute a data subjects' rights, such as the dilution of protections around automated decision-making;
 - the addition of duties for the Information Commissioner which may impact upon the requirement for the Commissioner's complete independence, free of direct or indirect external influence;
 - the different standard of treatment of international data transfers compared to the EU, which may be an impediment to adequacy should this matter be litigated; and,
 - The totality of the Secretary of State's regulation-making powers result in a high degree of control around data protection with limited safeguards.

¹ [Adequacy | ICO](#) – UK Information Commissioner's Office website

7. The potential loss of EU data adequacy is a key concern from a trade perspective. This would be a major threat for Welsh exporting businesses whose main overseas market continues to be the EU, and which rely on smooth data transfers with the EU, particularly multinationals with parent or sister companies based in EU countries. If the UK were to lose its data adequacy status, implementation of the safeguards required by the EU would mean additional administrative and reporting requirements for businesses, as they would be required to undertake additional, potentially costly, compliance activities.
8. From a broader perspective, the loss of data adequacy could also impact the delivery of those public services which rely on the flow of personal data from the EU, for example in education and local government. From a Health perspective the risks are even more significant, with the loss of data adequacy potentially affecting the Welsh NHS and impacting aspects of our cooperation with the EU on health.
9. The UK government has provided assurances that it sees no threat to the adequacy agreement by the Bill. However, we have no evidence to prove or disprove this. Welsh Ministers have requested that the UK government shares a copy of its risk assessment on this matter, but we have not had it. Officials also will continue to seek assurances from the UK government on this matter.
10. Officials will continue to monitor the potential impact of the Bill on EU data adequacy and the TCA as it continues its passage through Parliament.

Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio



Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref: C&GDMOU25

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Mike Hedges MS
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Senedd Cymru

05 February 2025

Dear Mike,

In accordance with the inter-institutional relations agreement, I am writing to notify you that a Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and Welsh Government was published on 28 January 2025. It can be found [here](#).

This Memorandum of Understanding summarises and formalises the overarching principles and approach to the use of UK Government funding for city and regional growth deals agreed between the UK Government and the Welsh Government and local authority regional partnerships.

I have also copied this letter to the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee; Local Government and Housing Committee and the Finance Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rebecca Evans'.

Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Agenda Item 2.7

Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our Ref: DC/RE/10486/24

Andrew RT Davies MS
Chair of Economy, Trade, and Rural
Affairs Committee

SeneddEconomy@senedd.wales

5 February 2025

Dear Andrew,

I am writing to inform you, in line with the inter-institutional relations agreement, that a meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Group for Trade took place on 22 January 2025.

The meeting discussed engagement between the UK government and the devolved governments, the UK trade strategy, and provided updates on several active trade negotiations.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Economi, Ynni a Chynllunio

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Agenda Item 3

Document is Restricted

Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Inquiry into Apprenticeship Pathways

1. Background:

- 1.1 In relation to its skills agenda, Welsh Government is committed to a regional approach. Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) advise Welsh Government on the strategic direction of travel for skills and make recommendations on areas of growth or decline, based on robust evidence and strong engagement with employers and regional stakeholders.
- 1.2 Four Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) operate across Wales (North, Mid, Southwest, and Southeast) and act as a vital interface to represent the skills and occupational demands of employers and deliver labour market intelligence to Welsh Government, setting regional priorities to inform the deployment of employability and skills funding.
- 1.3 RSPs deliver activities which are articulated through a Welsh Government grant funded programme of work. Funding is offered on an 'equal share' basis and regardless of the size of the region (both population and economic output).
- 1.4 Hosted by Newport City Council, the Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership (CCRSP) undertakes the role of the RSP across the 10 Local Authorities of SE Wales and workstreams are steered by the CCR Employment and Skills Board.
- 1.5 Underpinning the work of the CCR Employment and Skills Board are a broad range of employer led priority sector cluster groups that are significant to the regional economy. The cluster groups consider the skills needs for the region and make recommendations to the Board.
- 1.6 Launched in November 2022, the CCRSP has produced a 3-year Employment and Skills Plan 2022-25 which is used to shape the skills priorities for employers across the region and influence the provision offered through the FE and Work Based Learning sectors. The Plan has been informed through the triangulation of labour market intelligence, research and employer engagement and has been shaped by the CCR Employment and Skills Board.

2. Introduction:

- 2.1 The CCRSP is fully supportive of Welsh Governments initial ambition to create 125,000 apprenticeships over the Senedd term and the desire to increase opportunities for people of all ages and background to develop transferable skills in the workplace.
- 2.2 Through the Employment and Skills Plan 2022-25, CCRSP has committed to broaden the apprenticeship offer at higher levels by responding to government policy. Here, the CCRSP is:
 - Using evidence to influence the development of new apprenticeship frameworks at all levels.

- Increasing apprenticeship uptake across priority sectors (including Higher and Degree Apprenticeships) and building on the successful Aspire, Y Prentis and Sgil Cymru Shared Apprenticeships models.
 - Supporting an increase in the recruitment of trainers and assessors to ensure capacity within post-16 work based learning.
- 2.3 The CCRSP recognises the value of apprenticeships in providing sustainable career pathways, addressing regional skills gaps, and supporting businesses across the southeast Wales region. The CCRSP welcomes the opportunity to provide the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee with evidence to inform its inquiry into apprenticeship pathways.

3. **Pathways between apprenticeship levels:**

- 3.1 As a result of employer and stakeholder engagement activities we are aware that there are challenges in mapping out career routes through the different apprenticeship levels, from a junior apprenticeship to a degree apprenticeship. This is more profound in certain sectors of the regional economy. Linked to this, junior apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships are generally in their infancy and as a result they are only available in certain sectors. CCRSP has championed the expansion of degree apprenticeships, and particularly into the construction industry, however, there is some way to go before there is full sector coverage.
- 3.2 Although there has been a rationalisation of apprenticeship frameworks, the volume of pathways available to 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. There are also age restrictions in sectors such as care where younger learners can be prevented from engaging in certain activities thus preventing progression. CCRSP is also aware that certain apprenticeship frameworks have eligibility restrictions on entry which may also pose challenges for progression.
- 3.3 CCRSP is aware of challenges presented due to the speed of transformation that is taking place within certain industries, for example, digital technology and net zero. Rapidly evolving skills demands faced by employers, and many niche roles, mean that it is very difficult to ensure that apprenticeship frameworks and pathways have currency. Developing these frameworks and pathways can take a long time and through specialist organisations. CCRSP would welcome innovation to ensure that apprenticeship developments keep at pace with industry need. Adopting a more flexible approach to reviewing frameworks and pathways could help address emerging sector developments and better embrace the needs of industry. Naturally, Medr will have a key role to play in addressing such issues into the future.

4. **Economy:**

- 4.1 The Regional Skills Partnerships have a key role to play to ensure that apprenticeship frameworks and pathways align and support the needs of industry. The CCRSP works with employers, cluster groups and key stakeholders to better understand skills needs and this labour market intelligence (LMI) is used to influence the development and deployment of apprenticeship programmes.
- 4.2 Apprenticeships play a crucial role in addressing skills gaps and shortages faced by employers from large multinational organisations to SMEs and micro-organisations. Through apprenticeships, employers and learners gain access to high quality learning and development, accredited qualifications and delivered by quality assured providers. Apprenticeships are an essential component of post-16 education and training and help boost skills, enhance productivity and develop a workforce to meet the needs of industry.
- 4.3 CCRSP is also aware that training providers often face challenges in recruiting appropriately skilled assessors across a range of sectors, particularly those who can operate through the Welsh language. As a result, talent acquisition is intense and competitive. The role of the assessor forms a critical component in the delivery of high-quality apprenticeship programmes.
- 4.4 CCRSP is aware of the challenges presented through budget reductions which is a concern for employers and stakeholders alike, particularly those operating in high demand sectors such as construction, engineering and health and social care. A decline in apprenticeship starts is likely to have a negative impact on businesses as programmes offer a critical pipeline for developing a skilled workforce. Reducing the apprenticeship budget could lead to long term skills shortages within sectors that are already experiencing significant skills challenges.

5. **Employers:**

- 5.1 The CCRSP works with a range of employers across the southeast Wales region, particularly those that operate in key and growth sectors. CCRSP works to better understand skills gaps and shortages and then brokers solutions in collaboration with Welsh Government and stakeholders. It is fair to say that the RSPs play a critical role when influencing the development and deployment of post-16 education and training, including apprenticeships, and on behalf of employers.
- 5.2 The role of employers is critical when ensuring the apprenticeships are industry-led and help address their skills challenges. Within the southeast Wales region, the CCR Employment and Skills Board, and associated cluster groups, have played an important role to support the development and roll out of the successful regional shared apprenticeship schemes including Y Prentis, Aspire and Sgil Cymru. Similarly, the CCRSP has played an active role in broadening the regions degree apprenticeship offer to employers including the recent expansion into construction and rail engineering.

- 5.3 CCRSP strongly believes that employers play a key role in developing and maintaining fit for purpose apprenticeship programmes. In this regard, RSPs conduct an annual occupational trends exercise in collaboration with employers and cluster groups. The purpose of the exercise is to identify job roles that are growing, priority or in decline. This LMI is then used by Welsh Government to inform their investment in National Occupational Standards (NOS) which provide the 'building blocks' for vocational qualifications and apprenticeship frameworks.
- 5.4 The southeast Wales region is comprised of large anchor companies, SMEs and micro-organisations. Many employers actively utilise the apprenticeship frameworks and pathways that are currently available. However, employers often voice a desire to engage with programmes but are unsure of the process and pathways available to them, particularly in fast paced sectors where transformation is constant. Here, the Business Wales portal provides a useful source of information but awareness raising needs to be prioritised and there is a fundamental requirement to ensure that website content is up to date and reliable.
- 5.5 Focussing specifically on SMEs, apprenticeships provide a valuable tool for building a skilled and competent workforce. Apprenticeships provide a cost-effective mechanism to address some of the recruitment challenges faced by SMEs and offer significant opportunities through succession planning. However, many SMEs face significant financial and operational challenges which can negatively impact their ability to recruit apprentices. SMEs can struggle with the cost of employing an apprentice, and therefore, additional funding or targeted support would help small businesses overcome barriers and engage with programmes.

6. Information about apprenticeships:

- 6.1 Within southeast Wales, there are many strong examples of good practice between careers services, schools, colleges and employers in terms of promoting apprenticeships and the provision of meaningful work experience. The CCRSP has produced a range of resources, including priority sector careers guides, to raise awareness of the job opportunities and pathways across the region.
- 6.2 The work of Careers Wales and FE colleges is naturally central when promoting information on apprenticeships, for example through employer presentations, site visits and employer workshops which all support CWRE within the Curriculum for Wales. Careers Wales is working hard to connect employers with schools, however, some employers, and particularly SMEs, seem unaware of the support on offer and lack the internal resources to fully engage. Similarly, work needs to continue to ensure learners acquire knowledge on the pathways available following post compulsory education and to ensure informed choices can be made.

- 6.3 'Building on approaches to careers education, information, advice and guidance to address issues of sector perception and promote key sectors as viable career options' is a cross-cutting theme identified through the CCRSP Employment and Skills Plan. In this regard, CCRSP and Careers Wales have developed a collaborative Action Plan to support delivery. The action plan very much 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.
- 6.4 CCRSP is fully aware of the importance of meaningful work experience and has previously supported approaches to establish a national strategy for work experience in Wales. CCRSP would support developments linked to the reintroduction of a centralised approach to work experience and has actively pursued discussions with stakeholders. At present, the current approach appears fragmented, and as a result CCRSP would support a targeted offer of tailored work experience, particularly for those at risk of becoming NEET, and as set out in the 'Transitions to Employment Report' (Dr Hefin David, 2023).
- 6.5 Focussing on good practice within the region, the 'Cardiff Commitment' is helping young people to understand the opportunities available to them across the Cardiff area. Led by Cardiff Council, the initiative offers information, experiences, opportunities and skills to support young people progress their careers and learning journey. Similarly, the 'Blaenau Gwent STEM Facilitation Project' has established a coordinated programme of support, centred on industry, within the Tech Valleys. The project, working with schools, seeks to raise the awareness of opportunities among children, young people and wider communities to enhance ambitions.
- 6.6 Sharing information and good practice to promote apprenticeships and meaningful work experience is a collaborative responsibility across a range of stakeholders including Welsh Government, Medr, Careers Wales and providers of education and training. Effective approaches should help learners to access the right advice and guidance to support their apprenticeship journey.

7. **Equity of support and access for learners:**

- 7.1 CCRSP holds the view that equal access to apprenticeships for all young people is crucial, and we are committed to working closely with Careers Wales, Medr and Welsh Government to raise awareness of apprenticeship opportunities. CCRSP remains committed to supporting an all-age apprenticeship programme which is inclusive to all.
- 7.2 CCRSP has continued to support the successful shared apprenticeship programmes that operate across southeast Wales, and as led by Y Prentis, Aspire Blaenau Gwent and Sgil Cymru. These initiatives provide valuable opportunities for individuals to develop skills and gain meaningful employment and aligned to our commitment to inclusivity. CCRSP recognises the positive impact these programmes have on both apprentices and employers and hope to see them continue and expand in the future.

- 7.3 CCRSP is working to address issues related to parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways and we are fully aware that apprenticeships are often considered an inferior route when compared to formal academic routes, particularly by individuals who have influence over the decisions made by young people i.e. parents, teachers and carers. CCRSP is also aware of issues related to gender imbalance in certain sectors, for example, construction, engineering and manufacturing. More needs to be done to address the gender imbalance that exists across the key sectors of the regional economy.
- 7.4 Supporting disabled learners remains a priority for key stakeholders but employers are often unaware of the support available and the reasonable adjustments that can be made to help individuals find employment. In this regard, the CCRSP operates as an intermediary and cascades information across its networks.
- 7.5 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. Additionally, 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.
- 7.6 Some apprenticeship programmes may require stringent entry requirements, for example, specific GCSE grades for English and Maths. On occasions, this can exclude capable applicants in accessing programmes. Employers have noted that many skilled tradespeople currently in the workforce would not have been able to access their apprenticeships under these entry requirements. Addressing these barriers is essential for creating a more inclusive and accessible apprenticeship system for learners.

8. **The Welsh Government's role:**

- 8.1 Through an agreed collaborative approach with Welsh Government and Medr, CCRSP plays a key role to ensure that the apprenticeship programme in Wales meets the needs of employers and enables learners to achieve their potential. A broad range of stakeholders also have a role to play to both develop and deploy apprenticeship programmes.
- 8.2 Historically, Welsh Government has responded well to ensure that apprenticeship programmes are fit for purpose, however, the speed of the response can sometimes present challenges for employers. As discussed earlier, the transformation that is taking place within certain industries, for example, digital technology and net zero and rapidly evolving skills demands faced by employers ensures that frameworks and pathways must quickly evolve to maintain currency.

- 8.3 CCRSP would welcome innovation to ensure that apprenticeship developments keep at pace with industry need. Adopting a more flexible approach to reviewing frameworks and pathways could help address emerging sector developments and better embrace the needs of industry.
- 8.4 Into the future, CCRSP anticipates a close collaborative working relationship with both Welsh Government and Medr when responding to the skills priorities for employers. From August 2024, Medr became 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.
- 8.5 Addressing identified challenges is essential to ensuring that apprenticeships remain a viable and attractive option for skills development in Wales. The CCRSP is committed to working in partnership with Welsh Government and Medr and looks forward to learning more about the recommendations of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry into Apprenticeship Pathways.

Response from the Regional Skills Partnership (South West Wales) to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee on Apprenticeship Pathways

The South West Wales Regional Skills Partnership thanks the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee to the opportunity to provide evidence both verbally and in writing into the enquiry for Apprenticeship Pathways in Wales.

The four Regional Skills Partnerships in Wales work with Industry; skills training providers and key stakeholders to develop a clear understanding of employer needs now and in the future. Each partnership works within our own region but the RSP's also work together to share knowledge on the individual regional skills requirements and how these meet with Welsh Government National skills priorities. This joint working enables us to learn from good practice happening across the regions.

Apprenticeships is a key factor in ensuring that we have a skilled workforce for the future, providing a clear pathway for individuals to follow and addressing the immediate skills needs that many of our businesses across all sectors are facing.

The detailed information for this submission has been gathered from our business leaders; through our cluster groups and forums and highlights the support that businesses have for the apprenticeship programme in Wales.

Pathways between Apprenticeship levels.

Recruiting apprentices and availability of apprenticeships that meets Industry needs is a key area of concern for many and there are many reasons why the pathways are not always open to all. The number of frameworks on offer which is often confusing to the individual and to the employer with pathways for development through the levels often not clear.

The advancement of new technologies and new ways of constructing homes and buildings also need to be recognised within these pathways and frameworks need to be updated to meet these changes. Regular rapid reviews of apprenticeship provision and how they meet industry need is a priority to maintain the interest of the apprentices and the commitment of the employer to the programme. There are too many examples of individuals dropping out of the programme to take up work without a qualification, an example of this is the construction sector where so many jobs are currently and will be available as we transition into the Green homes and fully retrofitted homes but individuals are not completing their training because the level 3 is too high and is a barrier for them.

Training through the apprenticeship model should also allow all apprentices to be fully ready for work additional training to make them ready to start work should be included. For example a plumber requires additional qualifications over and above the Apprenticeship training to make him/her to be able to work this used to be available through the Personal Learning Account training but this has now been removed.

Higher level and Degree level apprenticeships are welcomed by Industry and these opportunities for progression through the Apprenticeship route need to be promoted through careers guidance to ensure that everyone is aware of the opportunities to earn and learn and

gain that all important work experience as they progress their education through the workplace.

Barriers that have been highlighted include

Geographic Barriers: Apprenticeships are often concentrated in urban centers, making it difficult for young people in rural areas to access placements with the lack of reliable public transport in some regions makes commuting to apprenticeship sites challenging.

Socioeconomic Barriers: Financial constraints are a significant barrier, as some apprenticeships offer lower wages than traditional employment, making it difficult for young people from low-income backgrounds to participate.

Awareness and Perception Issues: There is a lack of information about apprenticeship opportunities and career progression routes among students, parents, and educators. Additionally, there is a societal bias that apprenticeships are a "second-choice" option compared to university degrees, discouraging some students from considering them

Employer and Industry Barriers: Some sectors offer only entry-level apprenticeships, making career progression difficult. Small businesses may lack the resources or knowledge to take on apprentices, reducing the number of opportunities available.

Educational Barriers: The requirement for certain qualifications, such as GCSEs or NVQ Level 3, can be a barrier for some young people. There is also a lack of support in schools and colleges for developing interview skills and preparing for apprenticeship applications

Economy

The Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) works with industry to understand the skills needs and how the workforce of the future can be shaped through the development of good apprenticeship opportunities with clear pathways being developed from school through to further education and potentially on to higher education with the degree apprenticeship. The RSP supports the degree apprenticeship and higher level qualifications and would support the development of further degree apprenticeships in other sectors.

The reduction in funding for apprenticeships and decline in apprenticeship starts in key sectors is a concern and there needs to be a clear message to all potential apprentices and employers that there is a pathway to follow and we need our construction workers to support the new projects that are coming on line in the region including the Celtic Offshore Wind; the Celtic Freeport and other investment opportunities that will be generated as a result of those projects.

There is a need for new apprenticeship frameworks to meet our new energy and green economy and to support the retrofit economy that will be with us for some time to come but many of the current frameworks are not fit for purpose.

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 through the language. Health and Social Care is a key sector where many of the apprenticeship opportunities require the individual to learn through the medium of Welsh and this is not always possible.

There were a number of comments from businesses where they felt that there was confusion in what was available and additional support could be given to sectors, the examples given are listed below:

Engineering: There are challenges in interpreting pathways between different engineering disciplines. Combined engineering courses in colleges require advice on specialisms and progression.

Combustible Fuels and Renewable Energies: This sector faces issues with training new staff, especially in regions with significant outward migration problems.

Financial Services: There is a lack of career pathways available for financial advisers.

Publishing: Smaller publishing houses are at a disadvantage compared to larger ones, affecting apprenticeship opportunities.

Scaffolding: This trade has fewer formal academic pathways and is often perceived as having a linear career path.

Social Care and Social Work: The sector face challenges in mapping out apprenticeship routes.

Child Care and Early Years: Similar to social care, this sector has complexities in apprenticeship pathways.

Electrical and Mechanical Engineering: The baseline delivery in these fields is misaligned with industry needs.

Digital Pathways: complexities in apprenticeship routes.

Employer

Collaboration and joint working is key to a successful partnership and the RSP works closely with employers across the region through our Industry Cluster groups to understand their concerns, the gaps and why some apprenticeship pathways do not align with their requirements. The rising cost of employment is one of the key concerns raised by the smaller employers and their need to keep costs low are a priority. All employers are keen to support apprentices, but barriers often deter them from taking on apprentices. These barriers shared often include:

Mismatch with Industry Needs: Many respondents feel that current apprenticeship pathways are not aligned with the actual needs of the industry. They mention that qualifications are outdated and do not reflect current skill requirements, such as sustainability and technology use.

Lack of Practical Elements: Some apprenticeships are seen as too theory-heavy and lacking in practical elements.

Emerging Sectors: There is a gap in apprenticeship programs for rapidly evolving industries like green energy and advanced digital technologies. These sectors require more targeted apprenticeship programs to meet future demand.

Higher-Level Apprenticeships: There is a shortage of Level 4–7 apprenticeship opportunities in many industries, making career progression difficult.

Employer Engagement: Some businesses, particularly SMEs, struggle to engage with apprenticeships due to financial constraints, administrative burdens, or a lack of awareness about available funding and support.

Regional Disparities: Opportunities are not evenly distributed across Wales, with rural areas facing greater challenges in accessing high-quality apprenticeship placements.

Curriculum Issues: The curriculum is seen as failing to meet the needs of the industry, particularly in terms of meeting the needs of NET ZERO and the current job market.

Requirement for GCSE – the apprenticeship route requires a GCSE in Maths and English, this is seen as a barrier by employers to individuals following an apprenticeship.

Funding and Incentives: Lack of funding and incentives for employers to take on apprentices is a significant barrier.

Digital Divide: The digital divide needs to be addressed to enable young people to gain the most from apprenticeships, particularly in sectors like publishing.

Perception and Awareness: there is not enough promotion of the benefits of apprenticeships in schools.

Information about Apprenticeships.

There are some good examples of where Apprenticeship collaborations have worked successfully and there is a clear pathway for individuals. The information shared on opportunities through Careers Wales, through the Further Education Colleges and in some schools is excellent but there are many gaps where the message is not available and the

larger companies have the resources to attend events to showcase their opportunities many of the smaller companies do not have that luxury and rely on others to share their information.

The South West RSP is managing a City Deal Skills project and were able to develop an apprenticeship framework for User Experience, this was a gap in the skills landscape in Wales and in 2023 the RSP worked with the Further Education and Higher Education establishments and with Industry to develop and launch the Level 2 – 4 Apprenticeship initially delivered through Gower College and the Level 6 Degree Apprenticeship delivered through University of Wales Trinity St David. This apprenticeship is now available to all colleges in Wales to deliver. This is one example and there are many more.

There are examples of good practice where Apprenticeship information is shared to encourage participation, this includes Industry groups with the colleges and the RSP's own Industry cluster groups; Careers Wales jobs fairs and mock interviews; work experience programmes to showcase Apprenticeship within industry sectors; employer engagement and mentor initiatives and digital platforms and outreach campaigns.

In our consultation with industry there were a number of suggestions and comments about how the apprenticeship programme had been successful or could be improved/further developed:

Financial Incentives and Funding Support: Monetary incentives during the lockdown were also mentioned as effective

Simplified Administrative Processes: Reducing bureaucracy and providing clear guidance helps SMEs navigate the apprenticeship system more easily.

Tailored Training and Flexible Delivery: Customized apprenticeship frameworks that align with business needs, including part-time and modular learning options, encourage participation.

Shared Apprenticeship Scheme: This scheme offers employment security for apprentices and allows 'host employers' to have apprentices without the complexities of employing them directly.

Good Communication from Government and Providers: Effective communication and support from government and training providers are essential for engaging SMEs

On-Site Hubs: Programs like Cyfle Building Skills Ltd's on-site hub offer ten-day placements with essential PPE and allowances, providing candidates with practical experience and online learning opportunities

Early Promotion and Preparation: Schools increasing visibility and promoting apprenticeships from an earlier stage can help students plan their options and choose apprenticeship pathways post-16

Equity of support and access for learners

Equal access for all is important and the RSP works with Careers Wales; Employability programmes; Schools; Colleges, Employers and Industry stakeholders to ensure that the message about apprenticeships is clear including the pathways available to learners. The RSP works closely with Medr sharing information about issues being raised about the training available or sharing good practice.

In South West Wales there is an excellent example of a Shared Apprenticeship model within the construction sector. The Charity is nearing the goal of 1000 apprenticeship starts since setting up in 2012, this model enables learners to gain experience with a number of individual companies across the region and working with the colleges as the programme training providers. There are some exceptional examples of apprentices who have been through the programme and have progressed to higher qualifications for example a female learner trained as a plumber and in 2024 she qualified as a Quantity Surveyor.

Raising awareness of opportunities across the genders is key, barriers still remain in certain industries that it is very much male dominated but there needs to be an improved message that there are opportunities for all. Importantly is raising the awareness of the career pathway through the apprenticeship route to parents is also key and destroy the myth that apprenticeships are a “second choice”.

Supporting disabled learners is a priority, there is a barrier for employers being unaware of how to make the right adjustments to employ people with a disability, the information about support available is shared by the RSP to businesses but there are still some employers who are not aware.

Rurality and educational barriers were also highlighted. South West Wales has very rural communities and it is often difficult for learners to attend college without the necessary public transport and this often limits participation in apprenticeship or attending college. The requirement for GCSE or NVQ level3 can be a barrier for some individuals to access apprenticeship.

Welsh Government’s Role

The RSP plays a role in the partnership between Welsh Government and Medr ensuring that the Apprenticeship Programme in Wales meets the needs of employers; enables learners to achieve their potential and to grow the workforce of Wales by sharing opportunities with the next generation. The Welsh Government and Medr have many key roles from policy making to funding of the apprenticeship programme and the RSP can be conduit between industry and the Policy makers/funders, identifying opportunities to increase the delivery or change options by working with industry and the training providers.

Many employers would like to see an expansion of the apprenticeship programme to levels 4 -7; improvement in career guidance to promote more apprenticeships alongside other ways of learning; improve the frameworks for apprenticeships to ensure they are up to date and meet industry needs; aligning policy and economic needs more construction, healthcare and



engineering apprenticeships to reduce the shortfall in those sectors and create new opportunities through the green economy.

The RSP is committed to work in partnership with Welsh Government and Medr and look forward to learning more about the recommendations of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry into Apprenticeship Pathways.

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

The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) welcomes the opportunity to provide the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee with evidence to inform its inquiry into Apprenticeship pathways.

The North Wales RSP is one of four partnerships across Wales, bringing together employers, skills providers, and key local stakeholders to better understand employer skills needs at a local and regional level. In North Wales, we have identified nine priority sectors that we are actively working across to ensure skills provision aligns with industry demands, supports economic growth, and helps build a resilient workforce for the future.

The RSP recognises the value of apprenticeships in providing sustainable career pathways, addressing regional skills gaps, and supporting businesses. Below, we address each theme in the inquiry, reflecting on our regional perspective and insights into apprenticeship pathways in North Wales.

Pathways between apprenticeship levels

There are notable challenges in mapping career progression across different apprenticeship levels, and these challenges are more prominent in certain sectors. In advanced manufacturing, the diverse range of sub-sectors, each with its own specific skill requirements, makes it difficult to design apprenticeship frameworks that suit all roles and levels. Similarly, in specialised or technical roles across these sectors, clear pathways for advancement are not always well defined, creating barriers for progression.

Industries with rapidly evolving skill demands, particularly green and digital skills, as well as those with niche roles, often struggle to find apprenticeship frameworks that meet their needs or align with the specific requirements of certain occupations. This misalignment creates barriers for apprentices seeking to progress from foundation level 2 apprenticeships to higher level apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships.

The time lag in developing apprenticeship frameworks is too long, meaning qualifications often fail to keep pace with employer needs. Adopting a more flexible approach to apprenticeship frameworks, including regular content reviews and the integration of targeted modules, could better address industry needs. This would allow for the inclusion of emerging technology areas, such as green and digital skills, within existing frameworks, ensuring apprenticeships remain relevant and future focused. We look forward to collaborating with Medr in reviewing apprenticeship frameworks to ensure they align with industry requirements.

Higher level apprenticeships (Level 3 and 4) often require apprentices to evidence competence in managerial tasks, but some job roles at these levels don't offer the opportunity to show or develop these competencies. As a result, apprentices are unable to progress from foundation level apprenticeships to higher levels, as the pathway does not align with certain job roles and responsibilities, creating a gap that is too wide.

We welcome the introduction of the new degree apprenticeship in construction, which provides valuable support for non-trade roles in the industry. However, 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/Green and Leadership and Management.

Economy

By understanding the skill requirements of employers and collaborating with training providers, sector experts, Welsh Government, and Medr, we help shape the apprenticeship programme to address skills gaps and shortages, ensuring that apprenticeships remain relevant, accessible, and effective in supporting economic growth and workforce development.

We are working closely with the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone, Anglesey Freeport and the Growth Deal portfolio to establish a clear skills pipeline into jobs, including apprenticeships. This also extends to projects linked to renewable energy, such as RWE's Awel y Môr and BP/EnBW's Morgan, Mona, and Morven offshore wind projects, ensuring the region's workforce has the necessary skills to support the transition to a low carbon economy, while also creating new opportunities.

Apprenticeships are essential for boosting skill levels, enhancing productivity, and building a diverse, highly skilled workforce that meets modern industry demands. As technological advancements, artificial intelligence, and the transition to a net zero economy drive the need for new skills, apprenticeships provide a practical solution for workforce development. They help employers bridge skills gaps, adapt to industry changes, and equip employees to meet both current and future challenges.

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.

In construction, for example, a shrinking apprenticeship pipeline could delay the development of projects, increase costs, and limit economic growth potential.

Similarly, in engineering and manufacturing, a reduced number of apprentices could undermine innovation and competitiveness, especially in areas requiring technical expertise to address challenges such as decarbonisation and technological advancements.

In health and social care, the decline in apprenticeships could worsen workforce shortages, further straining services already under pressure. Adding to this challenge, significant workforce demands are expected over the next 3 to 5 years, but budget constraints for some training providers and long waiting lists for key qualifications pose a major regional challenge in meeting these needs.

The tourism and hospitality sector, a key driver of the local economy, could also face significant recruitment challenges, impacting visitor experiences and the region's reputation.

The decline in apprenticeship starts in 2023/24 is a troubling trend that highlights the need for targeted interventions. Without a sufficient pipeline of skilled workers, critical sectors may struggle to meet both current and future demands, hindering economic growth and the ability to adapt to emerging challenges.

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.

Employer

The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership works with employers across our key and growth sectors to understand their skills needs and gaps. We recognise the vital role employers play in developing and maintaining a successful apprenticeship programme. Our employer base includes both larger, anchor companies as well as SMEs. Employers who have engaged with our work have noted that they would like to offer apprenticeship opportunities but are unsure of the process and pathways available for them. Our role is to assist employers by linking them with training providers. We also report on gaps in current apprenticeship provision to Welsh Government. By engaging closely with employers of all size through our employer cluster groups and other engagement activities, we gain valuable insight into their current and future challenges. This intelligence is essential for shaping apprenticeships that effectively address industry needs and support long term workforce development.

For SMEs, apprenticeships are a valuable tool for building a skilled workforce tailored to their specific needs. SME's often face challenges in recruiting staff with the right skills and apprenticeships provide a way to bridge this gap by offering hands on, practical training aligned with the organisational requirements. This enables SMEs to develop talent from the ground up, ensuring apprentices gain the technical skills and workplace experience required to effectively contribute to their needs.

Apprenticeships play a crucial role in succession planning, particularly for SMEs with an aging workforce, by bringing in fresh talent to meet long term skills needs. They offer a cost-effective way for smaller businesses to invest in workforce development. However, many SME's have told us that they struggle to engage with the apprenticeship programme due to limited capacity, resources, or awareness. Many are simply unaware of the available apprenticeship options and who provides them, highlighting the need for targeted support and clearer guidance. In a 2022 employer survey, 86 employers reported that they and their workforce faced barriers to training. Of these, 50 said the high cost of training and the inability to spare staff time as key challenges, while 47 also highlighted difficulties in finding training providers that could offer training at suitable times and locations.

Our newly launched [North Wales Skills Portal](#) aims to simplify this process for employers by providing them with streamlined access to information, connecting them with training providers and ensuring they can take full advantage of the apprenticeship programme. The portal has been co designed in partnership with employers, individuals, training providers, Careers Wales, and other key stakeholders in the region to ensure it meets the needs of both employers and individuals.

Information about apprenticeships

There are some strong examples of collaboration between employers, colleges, schools, and Careers Wales through career focused events, employer visits to schools, and school visits to employer premises, all of which support CWRE within the Curriculum for Wales. While Careers Wales is doing commendable work in connecting employers with schools, many employers, particularly SME's, are unaware of this support and often lack the internal resources to fully engage as they would like to. As a result, we typically see the same group of employers participating, with SME's remaining underrepresented in these opportunities.

A great example of collaboration in schools across Anglesey and parts of Gwynedd is the partnership with Grwp Llandrillo Menai (GLLM), where GLLM handles the health and safety vetting required for learners to undertake work placements. This support eases the burden on schools, which often lack the internal resources to carry out this vetting process themselves. As a result, schools in these areas can offer their Year 10 students a valuable work placement/ experience.

However, one of the challenges identified in our region is the need for better coordination between schools, colleges, and employers. Learners do not always have full clarity on the possible pathways following post compulsory education. In some cases, young people are not fully aware of the apprenticeship options available, or the steps needed to access these opportunities. Clearer, more consistent messaging about apprenticeship routes and career progression pathways is crucial to help young people make more informed decisions about their futures.

The North Wales RSP were able to take part in Dr Hefin David's report into Transitions to Employment and recognise the opportunities to address some of the recommendations made in the report on authentic and meaningful experiences of the world of work and clearer learner pathways.

To help address this challenge, we have been working with Anglesey Council's Education Department on a Careers Pathway pilot programme. The Ynys Mon Career Pathways pilot programme, conducted collaboratively between the RSP, Ynys Mon Learning Service and Youth Service, all five secondary schools, Careers Wales, GwE and Grwp Llandrillo Menai aim was to enhance local career readiness, align educational paths with workforce needs, and bolster economic growth in Anglesey. Through this group, we have also delivered several pilot projects, including [Inspire to Build](#), which was recently run for a cohort of Year 12 and 13 learners across Anglesey secondary schools. These initiatives help bridge the gap between education and employment, providing young people with hands on experience and clearer career pathways. We are in the process of sharing this initiative with other local authorities across the region to encourage them to adopt a similar approach. By expanding this pilot, we hope to foster greater collaboration and create more cohesive career pathways for young people across North Wales, ensuring that all areas benefit from improved coordination.

Additionally, we have developed the [Young Person's Toolkit](#) to bring together various options and pathways available to young people at every stage of their career, guided and steered by their feedback. We continually expand and update the toolkit with new resources to ensure it remains relevant, valuable, and aligned with regional priorities, including the promotion of apprenticeships as a key opportunity.

The Welsh Government's commitment to ensuring apprenticeships contribute to the goals of a greener, more inclusive economy resonates with the work we are doing in North Wales. As we focus on areas such as green skills and digital skills, apprenticeships are a key tool in building the skills base to support these goals.

Equity of support and access for learners:

Ensuring equal access to apprenticeships for all young people is crucial, and we are committed to working closely with training providers, Careers Wales, employers, and key stakeholders to raise awareness of apprenticeship opportunities. With the establishment of Medr, we are confident that career pathways across the entire tertiary system will become clearer, enabling learners to better

understand the opportunities available locally and help them make informed decisions about their futures.

We are very supportive of the Supported Shared Apprenticeship programme running in North Wales through the partnership between Grwp Llandrillo Menai and Agoriad. This initiative provides valuable opportunities for individuals to develop skills and gain meaningful employment, aligning with our commitment to inclusive and sustainable workforce development. We recognise the positive impact this programme has on both apprentices and employers and hope to see it continue and expand in the future.

However, several barriers still exist that limit access to apprenticeships for some people. In rural areas, unreliable public transport makes it difficult for individuals to access apprenticeships and employment, particularly in sectors with irregular working hours or shift work, such as hospitality, health and social care, manufacturing, and food services. This issue also affects apprentices who need to travel to college on a day release basis as part of their training programme.

Additionally, some providers require apprentices to hold specific GCSE grades in Welsh/English and Maths, which excludes otherwise capable applicants. Employers have noted that many skilled tradespeople currently in the workforce would not have been able to access their apprenticeships under these entry requirements.

Currently, junior apprenticeships are not available in North Wales, but 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. These apprenticeships would offer structured, on the job learning from an early age, which could help reduce the growing number of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Expanding these pathways would also foster greater equity of access, particularly in areas or among demographic groups where apprenticeship opportunities are currently limited. By ensuring that all young people, regardless of background or location, can access these opportunities, we can better equip them with the skills necessary for successful careers.

Addressing these barriers is essential for creating a more inclusive and accessible apprenticeship system for all learners.

The Welsh Government's role

The RSP plays a vital role in collaboration with Welsh Government and Medr in ensuring the apprenticeship programme meets the needs of employers and the wider economy. We focus on identifying skills gaps, supporting the development and improvement of relevant qualifications by utilising our local labour market intelligence.

Despite policy support, challenges remain in making the apprenticeship programme fully accessible and effective. Some businesses, especially SMEs, are reluctant to take on apprentices due to concerns about administration, funding, or a lack of awareness of available support. In rural areas, transport and connectivity issues can make it difficult for learners to access workplaces or training providers. Entry requirements, such as specific GCSE grades in Maths and English/Welsh, can also exclude capable individuals who may thrive in practical, work based learning.

We look forward to the outcome of the inquiry to help inform development of the future apprenticeship programme for Wales.

Mid Wales Regional Skills Response to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee on Apprenticeship Pathways

Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership have consulted with a number of key businesses and stakeholders in the region who currently employ an apprentice as part of their workforce. They were presented with a series of preset questions from which the RSP was able to draw out the challenges for the current pathway.

Below is an executive summary that provides an overview of the responses from businesses in Mid Wales. Appendix 1 provides further details of responses.

Executive Summary

Pathways Between Apprenticeship Levels

Businesses in Mid Wales are encountering difficulties in creating clear career routes through different apprenticeship levels. This challenge is particularly evident when transitioning to degree apprenticeships, leading to uncertainty and hindering career progression for apprentices.

Sector and Recruitment Challenges

The consultation highlighted several sector-specific recruitment challenges. In engineering, the absence of degree apprenticeships limits local opportunities, potentially leading to a skills gap. Mechanical and welding fields suffer from a scarcity of Level 2 apprenticeships, while electronics apprenticeships are virtually non-existent due to a lack of teaching resources. Additionally, the revised four-year plumbing and electrical qualification has been criticized for not meeting industry needs and being too long.

Financial constraints, exacerbated by changes in National Insurance rates, further complicate the recruitment and retention of apprentices.

Attracting Apprentices

Businesses are eager to attract more people into apprenticeships, but the lack of degree apprenticeships in the region affect career progression and diminishes the appeal of apprenticeship programmes.

Service Industries

Particularly those in high paced office environments, find it challenging to integrate apprenticeships into their operations. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) struggle to balance the immediate demands of their business with the long-term benefits of apprenticeship programs, often due to limited resources and time.

Course Availability and Distance

In rural Mid Wales, businesses face significant challenges related to course availability and distance. Suitable courses are often located far from the businesses, forcing them to send

apprentices to other regions. This issue is compounded by delays in course start dates, which do not always align, causing further disruptions.

Local Authority Challenges

Local authorities in Wales face several challenges with apprenticeship pathways. There are fewer degree apprenticeships available compared to England, and accessing training in rural areas is difficult due to travel distances. Additionally, differences in apprenticeships between England and Wales complicate the transfer of apprenticeships. Funding constraints also limit the creation of new vacancies and the support for apprenticeship routes.

Progression Routes

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.

Customising Learning

Local apprenticeship provisions often do not offer the comprehensive and versatile learning experiences needed for a well-rounded education. Learning to cover all necessary skills is seen as beneficial but is not always available.

Social Care Apprenticeships

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. One health board highlighted the lack of funding for new vacancies and the operational costs associated with supporting apprenticeship routes as major barriers.

Sector-Specific Challenges

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. Advanced manufacturing suffers from inconsistent higher education provision, and technical support roles are particularly challenging. Environmental health degree apprenticeships are available in England but not in Wales, and social care and therapy roles face low uptake due to low wages.

General Support and Challenges

Feedback on the support for engaging with apprenticeship programs is mixed. Some businesses feel supported, while others experience limited communication from training providers and find the recruitment process disjointed. Local authorities express a need for more guidance on providers and qualifications, as well as resources to promote apprenticeships.

Accessibility

Accessibility to apprenticeship pathways is a significant issue, particularly in rural areas. Poor public transport networks make it difficult for young people to access workplaces or colleges, especially for late evening classes. Apprenticeships are often perceived as a second choice compared to A-levels and university routes, and efforts are needed to change this mindset. The availability of apprenticeship pathways is also less in rural areas compared to urban centres.

Additional Barriers

Further barriers include the inability of FE providers to deliver courses to small numbers of learners, the lack of part-time provision in Mid Wales, and transport issues for non-drivers. These challenges limit the range of apprenticeship options available to young people in rural areas.

Welsh Government Role

Although policies have supported apprentices across the region, many of the businesses and communities in rural Mid Wales still face the same challenge of travel and access to provision. Rural businesses (SME) raise the concerns relating to resources required to support apprenticeships and the lack of incentives to recruit apprentices. Additionally, the longevity of contracts in the current economic climate, particularly in the construction sector is also a barrier.

The role of Welsh Government alongside Medr and the RSP creates a strong partnership that engages meaningfully and provides a platform from which business feel heard. This partnership also has the ability to make meaningful change. It is imperative that businesses within our region can see the impacts of their engagement therefore feedback from Welsh Government through the RSP of developments and changes are key to building confidence and developing a stronger economy.

Appendix 1 - Detailed Responses.

Pathways Between Apprenticeship Levels

The consultation with businesses and stakeholders in Mid Wales revealed several challenges in mapping out career routes through different apprenticeship levels, from junior to degree apprenticeships.

Sector and Recruitment Challenges

Businesses face broader sector challenges and recruitment difficulties, with specific issues including:

- **Engineering:** The lack of degree apprenticeships limits opportunities for aspiring engineers to gain necessary qualifications and experience locally, potentially leading to a skills gap.
- **Mechanical and Welding:** Limited choices for Level 2 apprenticeships.
- **Electronics:** Absence of apprenticeships due to a lack of teaching resources, making it difficult to offer and sustain programs.

Training and Support

While some businesses find training and support adequate, others, particularly in the plumbing and heating industry, have concerns about the revised four-year plumbing qualification not being fit for purpose. Additionally, changes in National Insurance rates have made it financially impractical for some businesses to take on apprentices.

Attracting Apprentices

The lack of degree apprenticeships in the region affects career progression and makes it challenging to attract apprentices. Service-based businesses struggle to integrate apprenticeships into high-paced environments, and SMEs find it difficult to dedicate time to apprentices due to the immediate needs of the business.

Course Availability and Distance

Businesses face challenges related to course availability and distance, particularly in rural areas. Finding suitable courses within a reasonable distance is problematic, leading some businesses to send apprentices to other regions. Delays in course start dates due to mismatches between career routes and course availability are also an issue.

Local Authority Challenges

Local authorities face several challenges, including:

- Limited degree apprenticeships in Wales compared to England.
- Difficulty accessing training in rural areas due to travel distances.

- Challenges in transferring apprenticeships between England and Wales due to different standards.
- Efforts to formalize informal career pathways with the help of funding.

Progression Routes

There is a lack of clear progression routes from one apprenticeship level to the next. Businesses struggle to find providers for certain apprenticeships, and apprenticeships do not always align with local authority roles. Starting with lower-level apprenticeships and moving to specialized qualifications is necessary, but providers not offering follow-on qualifications require apprentices to switch providers.

Customising Learning

Local provisions often do not offer the full package or versatility needed for a well-rounded learning experience. Customizing learning to cover all necessary skills is beneficial.

Social Care Apprenticeships

While there are clear routes for some apprenticeships, such as from Health Care Support Worker to registered nurse, issues remain in mapping appropriate career routes across multiple counties. These challenges are related to a lack of funding for new vacancies and the operational costs associated with supporting apprenticeship routes, including paid time to study and mentor costs. Additionally, there is a lack of appropriate part-time educational provision locally to support mapping across different apprenticeship opportunities.

Challenges in Different Careers/Sectors

The consultation revealed a general consensus that mapping out career routes through different apprenticeship levels is more difficult in some sectors than others. Respondents identified several specific sectors facing significant challenges:

Engineering & Manufacturing

Despite strong regional employment, challenges persist in mapping career routes. The lack of degree apprenticeships and inconsistent higher education provision are notable issues.

Construction

Apprentices often leave for higher pay after initial training, discouraging companies from taking on new apprentices. This high turnover rate complicates career mapping and retention.

Advanced Manufacturing

There is an inconsistent provision of higher education throughout Wales, making it difficult to establish clear career pathways.

Technical Support

This area is identified as particularly challenging, with businesses struggling to map out effective apprenticeship routes.

Electrical Engineering

Businesses in Mid Wales face difficulties without access to courses out of county, limiting the availability of local training options.

Environmental Health

Degree apprenticeships are available in England but not in Wales, creating a disparity in opportunities.

Trading Standards, Public Health, Planning & Civil Engineering

There is a lack of funded degree-level apprenticeships linked to local authority roles, hindering career progression in these fields.

Social Care and Therapies

Fields like Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, and Radiography face challenges due to low wages and low uptake in social care roles.

Inconsistent Higher Education Provision

This issue is noted across various sectors, particularly in Advanced Manufacturing and technical fields, affecting the ability to map out clear career routes.

Support for Apprenticeship Pathways

Businesses have mixed feelings about how well apprenticeship pathways support their needs and contribute to filling skills gaps in the Welsh economy:

General Support

- Some businesses feel apprenticeship pathways do not support their needs at all.
- Others emphasize the importance of apprenticeships in maintaining a pipeline of talent, especially with an ageing workforce.

Sector-Specific Insights

- **Construction:** Apprenticeships are crucial for passing down skills from an ageing workforce to new generations.
- **Engineering:** Apprenticeships help develop local talent and contribute to the local economy, despite difficulties in recruiting skilled staff.
- **ICT:** Success in recruiting lower-level ICT apprentices who progress to higher qualifications and employment, but struggles in recruiting for higher-level specialist roles.

- **Health and Social Care:** Apprenticeship opportunities play a vital role in meeting the needs of local authorities and health boards. The Joint Health and Social Care Apprenticeship pathway between Pembrokeshire County Council and the Hywel Dda University Health Board is a good example, with all apprentices retained across the local authority and health board.

Challenges and Limitations

- Some businesses struggle to dedicate time to apprentices due to high workloads.
- Apprenticeship schemes only partially address skills gaps, with larger gaps in experienced engineering staff due to historical apprenticeship gaps.
- Availability of suitable courses and travel distances for some courses result in continued skills gaps in certain areas.

Local Authority Perspectives

- Apprenticeship pathways are valuable for attracting young people, but availability and travel distances for suitable courses are issues.
- Easier pathways for lower-level roles, but difficulties in recruiting for higher-level specialist roles, leading to skills gaps in areas like ICT, Environmental work, Civil Engineering, Planning, and Occupational Therapy.

General Observations

- Apprenticeships are seen as key to the workforce pipeline, enabling young people to remain within the county.
- Current apprenticeship pathways cover the basics but could be more detailed to better meet business needs.

Support for Engaging with the Apprenticeship Programme

The consultation revealed mixed feedback from businesses regarding the support they receive to engage with the apprenticeship programme.

Lack of Support

Some businesses feel they do not receive sufficient support at all. The recruitment of apprentices is described as disjointed and not well supported, with costs often placed on the employer, making it challenging to participate in the programme.

Positive Feedback

On the other hand, some businesses feel the support is good and flexible. However, even among those who view the support positively, the process is often seen as long-winded, and providers are not always proactive in their engagement.

Communication Issues

Limited communication from facilities offering apprenticeship training courses is a common concern. While engagement exists, there is a need to make the programme more accessible and exciting for young people in Mid Wales.

Local Authority Perspectives

Local authorities also face challenges in engaging with the apprenticeship programme. There is no regular opportunity for representatives to communicate directly with those developing apprenticeship programmes. More support is needed due to the wide-ranging nature of apprenticeships, and there are unrealistic expectations on teams to know everything about all apprenticeships. Additional support and guidance on providers and qualifications would be helpful, along with resources to promote apprenticeships both internally and externally.

Health Board Example

Pembrokeshire Council offers an adult social care apprenticeship programme and participated in a pilot with the Health Board to establish a Health and Social Care apprenticeship route. However, the joint programme cannot currently run due to funding issues in both the Health Board and Local Authorities, particularly the cost of backfill and paid study time. Additional funding to support these gaps would strengthen the offer and collaborative working between local large organisations and the local authority.

General Observations

Simplifying the apprenticeship programme to make it easier to understand would be beneficial. While some businesses are involved to some extent, there is a general consensus that there is room for improvement in the support provided.

Accessibility of Apprenticeship Pathways in Wales

The consultation explored the accessibility of apprenticeship pathways for young people in Wales, identifying several barriers that affect specific demographic groups and geographical areas.

General Perception

Apprenticeships, once a popular option, are now less talked about unless promoted by organizations due to funding constraints. This shift in perception has impacted their accessibility and attractiveness to young people.

Rural Transport Issues

One of the significant barriers is the difficulty in accessing workplaces or colleges, especially for late evening classes. In some cases, higher education requires up to 90 minutes of travel each way, making it impractical for many young people.

Demographic Barriers in Powys

Many young people in Powys prefer going to Shrewsbury rather than staying in Powys for learning opportunities. This preference highlights a demographic barrier where local options are less appealing or accessible.

Perception of Apprenticeships

Schools often view apprenticeships as a "second" choice compared to A-levels and university routes. Efforts are needed to change this mindset and promote apprenticeships as a viable and valuable career path.

Rural vs. Urban Availability

Apprenticeship pathways are less available in rural areas compared to densely populated areas of Wales. This disparity limits the opportunities for young people in rural regions to access apprenticeship programs.

Location of Colleges

The main colleges offering apprenticeships are limited, with Newtown being a primary location in Powys. This centralization restricts access for those living in more remote areas.

Challenges in Rural Powys

The effective choice of apprenticeship routes is limited due to the location of companies versus schools and colleges. This geographical mismatch makes it challenging for young people to find suitable apprenticeship opportunities locally.

Powys County Council Initiatives

Powys County Council is making efforts to ensure apprenticeship pathways are accessible to all young people. This includes support in the application process and guaranteed interviews for care-experienced applicants. However, transport issues due to poor and costly public transport networks remain a significant barrier.

Ceredigion County Council Challenges

In Ceredigion, fewer apprenticeships are available compared to England, with limited providers. Rurality and lack of public transport create barriers, especially for those who cannot drive. Reliable broadband is also an issue for remote working roles. Limited learners for specific qualifications make it difficult to find training providers, leading to reliance on larger, distant providers and increased costs.

Additional Barriers

Further education (FE) providers in Powys often cannot deliver to small numbers, limiting the range of options available. Part-time provision is not always available in West Wales, particularly for roles within Allied Health Professionals. The lack of local travel provision can be a barrier for non-drivers or those without access to a car.



Welsh Government evidence paper on Apprenticeship Pathways

12/02/2025

This paper provides an overview of apprenticeship pathways in Wales. It describes the range of apprenticeship frameworks available and the key role apprenticeships play in supporting the Welsh economy.

The paper outlines the way in which the Welsh Government works with employers to shape skills and apprenticeship policy in Wales. It describes how individuals and employers can obtain information, advice and guidance on apprenticeships, and sets out actions being taken to improve equity and access to apprenticeships for learners.

Finally, the paper sets out the Welsh Government's role in setting strategic skills priorities for Wales and the role of Medr in delivering the apprenticeship programme.

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1. Introduction

- 1.** Apprenticeships are at the heart of the Welsh Government's ambition to create jobs and support green growth.
- 2.** Apprenticeships provide valuable skills and training, empowering individuals to build successful careers. They open doors to a wide variety of career pathways, allowing individuals to explore different industries and roles. Opportunities in Wales span from foundation to degree-level apprenticeships. They provide transformational opportunities for people of all ages.
- 3.** By supporting apprenticeships, employers benefit from a skilled and motivated workforce tailored to their specific needs. Investing in apprenticeships contributes to economic growth by developing a highly skilled workforce. The apprenticeship programme also supports key public sector workforce needs.
- 4.** We continue to invest heavily in apprenticeships. This year and in 2025-26 we are investing £144m in apprenticeships to ensure delivery of our 100,000 new apprenticeships target.

2. Apprenticeship pathways

- 5.** Apprenticeships form an important part of the Welsh Government's Young Person's Guarantee for 16-24 year olds. In Wales, we have:
 - apprenticeships at level 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6
 - shared apprenticeships
 - pre-apprenticeships such as Junior Apprenticeships and Jobs Growth Wales Plus
 - support for inclusive apprenticeship approaches
 - an apprenticeship matching service
 - a strong and quality-assured network of apprenticeship providers.
- 6.** 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.
- 7.** 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.

3. The extent to which apprenticeship pathways support the needs of the Welsh economy

8. There are currently 23 apprenticeship frameworks across all sectors in Wales which are set out in the table below.

Business & Management	Digital Technology	Public Services
Education & Information Services	Protective Services	Health & Social Care
Childcare	Healthcare	Design
Creative & Media	Catering & Hospitality	Food & Drink
Travel Tourism & Leisure	Agriculture & Environment	Life Sciences
Automotive	Transport & Logistics	Property Services
Construction & Building Services	Energy	Engineering
Advanced Manufacturing & Materials	Retail, Hair & Beauty	Legal & Financial Services

9. Apprenticeships are a key driver to raise skill levels, improve productivity and help grow a skilled and diverse workforce that meets the needs of the Welsh economy. 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.
10. Our Economic Mission drives our approach to apprenticeships, supporting our vision for a more prosperous, greener and equal economy. Apprenticeships support a number of cross-government commitments, including meeting our net zero ambitions, growing the foundational economy and supporting priority industries. We continue to promote and prioritise quality apprenticeship investment in those sectors that will support economic growth and community cohesion, including those in

higher level, more technical sectors, supporting STEM apprenticeships and net-zero preparedness. We are committed to increasing the numbers of degree apprenticeships.

- 11.** Since August 2024, Medr is responsible for developing and issuing apprenticeship frameworks in Wales. We understand Medr has developed a programme of work to review all apprenticeship frameworks to ensure they meet the needs of the economy and learners going forward.

4. Employers

- 12.** Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) provide the local/regional expertise to help employers identify relevant partners, funding streams and labour market intelligence, amongst other things. RSP Boards are chaired by an employer and are made up of employers, education providers and others.
- 13.** There are four RSPs in Wales - North Wales Regional Skills Partnership, South West Regional Learning and Skills Partnership, Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership and Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership. They make recommendations to Welsh Government on key skills and employability priorities, based on labour market intelligence and employer-led insight. They act as strategic partnerships and directly support Growth and City Deals.
- 14.** Ministers and officials also routinely engage with a very wide range of employers and employer representative bodies on skills matters, including apprenticeships.
- 15.** 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.

5. Information about apprenticeships

- 16.** Information on how to find and apply for an apprenticeship is available on the Welsh Government website: <https://www.gov.wales/find-apprenticeship>.
- 17.** Business Wales provides advice to employers about how to go about recruiting an apprentice and the support available: [Apprenticeships | Business Wales Skills Gateway](#).
- 18.** Careers Wales provides an all-age impartial, careers guidance service. Their careers advisers help young people understand their options, plan their careers and help prepare them to enter their chosen career path whether that is further education, employment or training. Careers Wales works with all secondary schools, special schools, Pupil Referral Units and colleges across Wales and facilitates a wide range of employer engagement activities, enabling employers to share knowledge and experience to give learners insight into the world of work.
- 19.** Working Wales, delivered by Careers Wales, targets those aged 16+ who are looking to get into work, training or to further their careers; it provides free, impartial, employability and careers guidance tailored to an individual's needs and circumstances. The service provides a national entry point to employability support, referring individuals onto appropriate employability programmes supported by the Welsh Government including apprenticeships.

6. Equity of support and access for learners

- 20.** The Welsh Government Apprenticeship Policy Statement (February 2024) recognises that inequality has a negative impact on economic growth and social outcomes. We are acutely aware that barriers exist excluding groups from accessing and completing apprenticeships. Whilst we have increased the diversity of apprenticeships, specific barriers remain. Learners can face difficulties in finding suitable work placements, especially where employers believe they may need to provide additional support. There can be real or perceived discrimination with fewer apprenticeship role models from the Black Asian Minority Ethnic communities or from disabled groups.
- 21.** We are working to increase diversity in apprenticeships. The Inclusive Apprenticeships Disability Action Plan has supported the growth of disabled apprenticeships. In 2022/23, 11.6% of all apprenticeship learning programmes were started by learners who identified as having a disability and/or learning difficulty, compared with 5.8% in the academic year 2016-17.
- 22.** Our network of Disabled People's Employment Champions help close the gap between disabled people and the rest of the working population.
- 23.** Supported Shared Apprenticeships provide additional support to disabled apprentices with intensive and wide-ranging employment and learning needs. Support provided may be through job coaching or other specialist resource.
- 24.** We also intend to modify the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales including by changing the essential skills entry requirements for levels 2 and 3 for those people with learning difficulties and disabilities. This will provide a more inclusive offer and widen participation by enabling more disabled people to access the apprenticeship programme.
- 25.** The updated Anti Racist Wales Action Plan published in November last year sets a goal to increase the number of ethnic minority people starting and completing Apprenticeships. To achieve that goal we are committed to working closely with Medr. Programme performance data, including trends, benchmarking and completion data, will be collected and published regarding ethnic minority participants on Apprenticeships. We are committed to sharing good practice, developing case studies and ensuring that all promotional materials include ethnic minority people.

7. Role of the Welsh Government

- 26.** The Welsh Government sets national skills priorities for Wales, including for apprenticeships, and provides funding to Medr to deliver the apprenticeship programme.
- 27.** Medr manages and funds the apprenticeship contracted providers and the universities that deliver degree apprenticeships, working within the budget provided by the Welsh Government.
- 28.** The Welsh Government is responsible for the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW) which sets out the minimum requirements to be included in a recognised Welsh apprenticeship framework. Compliance with the SASW is a statutory requirement of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.
- 29.** Medr is responsible for developing and issuing apprenticeship frameworks in Wales. The Welsh Government has delegated the role of Apprenticeship Issuing Authority in Wales to Medr. The 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 legislation.

Agenda Item 6

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Agenda Item 8

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