

23 January 2025

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee
SeneddEquality@Senedd.Wales

Dear Ms Rathbone MS

Inquiry on Disability and Employment

Many thanks for your letter regarding the Equality and Social Justice Committee inquiry into disability and employment. You have specifically requested information on increasing participation of underrepresented groups including disabled people within Apprenticeships.

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

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

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

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

Rydym yn croesawu 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 correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence in Welsh will be answered in Welsh, and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

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Medr is responsible for the operational policy and delivery of apprenticeships across Wales. Medr is committed to working towards creating a tertiary education system where learners receive the highest-quality provision, with clearer and more flexible pathways. One of our key priorities is to ensure apprentices gain the skills, knowledge and qualifications they need to progress within their chosen career, whilst responding to the changing economy skills needs.

Medr is committed to ensuring our all age apprenticeship programme is inclusive to all, including disabled people, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people, women and those with low skills across all sectors in Wales.

One of Medr's key priorities is to support creating a positive future for the tertiary education sector and for Wales, and will do so through continuous improvement, including more equitable opportunities. We will continue to seek opportunities to improve the uptake of apprenticeships from people with protected characteristics, including disabled people. Medr monitors data to understand how delivery is performing and will consider whether interventions would be helpful.

As you are aware, the Welsh Government has a target to create 100,000 all-age apprenticeships. Progress towards this target began being measured from May 2021. By April 2024, there had been 59,565 apprenticeship starts under the target measure. The breakdown of the target measure figure by disability/learning difficulty status:

- 11% with a disability and/or learning difficulty
- 89% without a disability and/or learning difficulty

Please find below information on the support that is currently available to disabled apprentices:

- Supported Shared Apprenticeships
Supported Apprenticeships provide additional support to disabled apprentices with intensive and wide-ranging employment and learning needs to access and complete an apprenticeship. Support provided may be through job coaching or other specialist resource.
- Employer Incentive Scheme
The apprenticeship programme provides dedicated funding to employers to recruit disabled people. The Incentive Scheme (EIS) provides financial support of £2,000 to employers to help provide opportunities for disabled apprentices.
- Apprenticeship Additional Learning Support
Dedicated support is available for apprentices with additional learning needs, which includes, ALN key workers, communicators, ancillary and counselling.

A key theme of Medr's strategic plan is to understand and try to address the barriers to participation across tertiary education, not just apprenticeships. To support this, we are commissioning research to collate good practice across Wales, the UK and the world on improving diversity within apprenticeships. The outcome of this will inform the future Apprenticeship Programme, which is due to commence in 2027, and will help strengthen the existing programme, including whether alternative interventions would be helpful.

I hope you find this information useful.

Yours Sincerely

Heather Davidson
Head of Apprenticeships