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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Jenny Rathbone MS
Committee Chair - Equality and Social Justice Committee
Welsh Parliament

SeneddEquality@senedd.wales

23 January 2025

Dear Jenny,

The Disability Employment Gap and the education system

Thank you for your letter concerning the enquiry into the disability employment gap in Wales. We have considered your queries and provided detailed responses below.

In addition to the detailed responses, we would like to emphasise our collective commitment to ensuring that all learners, including disabled learners, are supported as they progress through our education system into employment or self-employment opportunities.

By ensuring that inclusion and equity are fully embedded into our education system, we aim to improve outcomes for all learners. Systemic reforms to the education system are under way in Wales, including the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales and implementation of an Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system.

The [Curriculum for Wales](#) sees every learner as an individual with different strengths and areas for development and gives teachers more flexibility to teach in a way that best meets the individual needs of each child. Alongside the Curriculum for Wales, the ALN system helps ensure that where children and young people need additional learning provision to meet their ALN, they have that provision planned and protected in a statutory plan called an individual development plan (IDP).

The ALN system is replacing the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system and is underpinned by the ALN and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act and ALN Code for Wales. Further information on how education is changing in Wales and the ALN system can be found on the [Welsh Government website](#).

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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.

As young people progress through our education system, we have put in place the support required to enable them to progress into employment, including advice and guidance and specific employability and skills programmes.

[Stronger, Fairer, Greener - our Plan for Employability and Skills](#), published in March 2022 sets out how we are addressing economic inequality, including ensuring nobody is left behind. It sets out the steps we are taking to support people in Wales to navigate and respond to work-related challenges they may face. This includes support for their physical and mental health as well as opportunities for training, upskilling, seeking alternative career pathways or starting their own business.

We have also put in place a range of resources to help employers understand the social model of disability, support them with the recruitment and retention of disabled workers and learn about making reasonable workplace adjustments. This work is led by our team of Disabled People's Employment Champions (DPEC), all of whom have lived experience of being disabled or caring for disabled people. Further resources are also provided through [Business Wales](#) and their Disabled People's Employment Advisers.

You will be aware of the Disability Rights Taskforce, which has worked with disabled people with expertise, Disabled People's Organisations, and Welsh Government policy leads. Its purpose was to bring members together to address the challenges and barriers, which were identified in the Locked-Out Report <https://www.gov.wales/locked-out-liberating-disabled-peoples-lives-and-rights-wales-beyond-covid-19> and which impact many disabled people. The taskforce provided strategic oversight of ten working groups including Employment and Income, Children and Young People and Travel.

The Taskforce has worked with more than 350 external stakeholders and 200 policy leads and has been supported by the Welsh Government's Disability Disparity Evidence Unit and the Disabled Peoples Employment Champions. The recommendations of the taskforce are informing a cross-Government action plan, which will be consulted upon in the Spring. Building on this, we have provided a detailed response against each of the questions posed in your letter below:

1. The need to ensure equitable access to work placement opportunities and the need to work with employers to achieve this

Every effort is made to ensure that young people have equitable access to work placement opportunities.

Through Careers Wales, we provide advice, guidance and support for young people, including those with a disability, to secure work opportunities - [Employment Support | Careers Wales](#).

In addition to supporting young people, our Disabled People's Employment Champions, employed by the Welsh Government, provide practical support to employers across Wales on employing disabled people. Disabled People's Employment Champions offer a free service for public and private sector employers across Wales.

The Champions, supported by Business Wales Disabled People's Employment Advisors, can provide advice and help on issues such as:

- Inclusive recruitment
- Financial support
- Practical advice on staff retention and reasonable adjustments in the workplace
- Ensuring Human Resources policies and workplaces are inclusive

- Promoting the Social Model of Disability
- Supporting employers to progress to Disability Confident leader status

Through Business Wales, we have also put in place support for employers to remove barriers to employment opportunities, more details of which are provided in the answers to your more detailed questions below.

2. Your assessment of how the Careers Wales work experience scheme for learners in year 10 and 11 is able to support disabled learners? What data you can share with us regarding the proportion of those learners who are disabled?

A school's curriculum offer in Years 10 and 11 must provide all learners, including disabled learners, with a broad and balanced learning and experiences. It should be designed with the 4 components of the [14 to 16 learner entitlement](#) in mind. Particularly, reflecting on learning and progress and post-16 planning; and wider learning and experiences across the curriculum. This should encompass all the learning and experiences that a learner encounters within their 14 to 16 journey.

This provides an opportunity for schools to provide more tailored and specific [careers and work-related experiences \(CWRE\)](#) within Years 10 and 11 to meet their learners needs. Effective CWRE comprises of age and developmentally appropriate careers education, supported by a wide range of relevant work-related learning experiences and environments. To help ensure learners are engaged in CWRE, schools and settings should have regard to a range of factors including additional learning needs.

Through the Renew and Reform project, which aimed to address the impact of Covid-19 on education and training, the Welsh Government asked Careers Wales (CW) to deliver a Tailored Work Experience (TWE) project, to help reengage year 10 and 11 learners with their GCSE studies so they could transition successfully onto the next stage of their education or training journey. From 2022 to 2024, Careers Wales received an additional £517,000 to work with 2 schools from each of the 22 local authorities in Wales to offer 500 TWE placements. By the end of March 2024 over 600 young people had taken part in a TWE placement.

For 2024/25, Welsh Government secured a further £250,000 for the TWE project, enabling the project to continue on a smaller scale. Careers Wales were asked to offer a further 250 placements for learners, across 5 clusters of Local Authorities. Careers Wales can identify 55 learners from their records who have been placed on a TWE placement and had a disability.

Careers Wales has a team of ALN advisers who work predominantly in special schools and resource bases. Careers Wales work with young people to help them understand their options, make good decisions about their future and support them to implement their plans.

Data

The Public Sector Equality Duty Report 2022/23 shows that Careers Wales supported 2,096 disabled young people in statutory education and 880 young people in 16-17 post statutory education (the 2023/24 report is due to be published this spring).

During 2023/24 Careers Wales provided 4,686 one-to-one interactions to young people who have a statement / statement equivalent or an individual development plan. As part of their ALN support Careers Wales also attended 3,612 transitional reviews with schools, providers, parents and young people to ensure a smooth transition.

The My Future section on the Careers Wales website supports young learners up to Level One with easy-to-read careers information. During 2023/24 this page was accessed by 6,600 users, also nine new videos were added to showcase different jobs including an animator, office worker and fitness instructor.

Careers Wales also publish annual reports, detailing progress towards their key performance indicators – the latest annual report can be found via the following link: [Our annual report | Careers Wales](#).

In addition, Careers Wales produce case studies that illustrate and highlight the impact of their work, including those with a disability. We have provided one such case study below:

Case study – Tailored Work Experience

Placement: Garage

X was referred to TWE as he was showing signs of disengagement at school. X wears a cochlear implant for his left ear and finds it hard to throw himself into school due to his hearing loss.

Since starting his placement X has increased his days and now attends twice a week. The garage is hugely supportive of X. X helps out over the holidays and receives high praise from the employer for his work ethic. X's low attendance at school has increased to 94% since attending TWE. The school reports 108 positives and 49 negative records and said that X attending TWE twice a week is a great outcome for him, he has grown in confidence when communicating with staff and his peers since starting TWE and is happier at school week.

X finds his placement really interesting and appreciates the trust the staff at the garage have in him to allow him to work on complicated jobs with them. He said he's learning to problem solve. X said it feels great to be good at something and feels happier and more confident since being on placement. The garage are immensely proud to have him at the garage and would love to offer him an opportunity when he finishes school.

3. More broadly, your assessment of how the "Careers and work related experiences" (CWRE) part of the Curriculum for Wales and associated statutory guidance is supporting disabled learners.

Effective Careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) is comprised of age- and developmentally appropriate careers education embedded across the areas of learning and experience (Areas).

The guidance states that to help ensure that learners are engaged in CWRE, schools or settings should have regard to a range of factors such as learners' age, knowledge and additional learning needs. It also states that in order for practitioners to maximise the benefits of work-related experiences, it is useful to ensure that experiences are accessible to all learners and take into account their specific needs and interests.

The guidance builds on this and sets out that when considering work-related experiences, it is important for practitioners to challenge their own perspectives as well as those of learners, parents and carers, on issues such as workplace stereotypes. Labour market information enables learners to be aware of trends in pay, roles and location.

Schools and settings should incorporate developmentally appropriate, impartial and current labour market information, at a local, regional and national level, to ensure CWRE provision is well designed to meet the needs of all learners.

Careers Wales CWRE support is available to all young people, (including those who have a disability) in mainstream and special schools. Careers Wales work in partnership with all mainstream secondary and special schools to agree and then organise bespoke events such as visits to employer premises or visits by employers to schools to provide a talk to learners.

Careers Wales also hold a series of regional 'What Next' career fairs for learners with ALN. The aim of these events is to highlight the employers and providers that can offer progression routes for these learners. Contributors at the events bring interactive and engaging activities that enable learners to 'have a go' at a range of careers related tasks to illustrate opportunities that might be open to them when they leave school. Feedback from learners, teachers and employers is always very positive. The Careers Wales Big Ideas Wales role model workshops are also offered to ALN learners.

Careers Wales have a number of resources available to support schools deliver CWRE, including:

- The CWRE toolkit, a resource to support all teachers, senior leadership teams and those supporting young people, to realise and embed CWRE in their schools and settings. The resource is made up of a toolkit and a toolbox which provides information and resources to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of careers education provision.
- The Careers Wales Quality Award which aims to support all schools and settings with learners aged 3 to 16, with the development of purposeful and relevant CWRE across the curriculum. The award is currently being piloted ready for 2026.

4. *The extent to which schools and other education settings are working with employers and third party organisations to provide high-quality enrichment experiences for learners, in line with Welsh Government's statutory guidance. What data can you share with us?*

Schools

The Curriculum for Wales, and particularly the opportunity to take a more individualised approach to learning and tailor their offer, is supporting our school leaders to increase equity and inclusivity for all our learners, including those with disabilities.

The Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance is a clear statement of what is important in delivering a broad and balanced education for all learners. It challenges schools to choose the specific experiences, knowledge, and skills that best support their learners, raising expectations. High quality learning experiences should promote learners' independence, offering challenge and the opportunity to experience success along their learning journey. These experiences should respect and value the uniqueness of every learner.

Careers Wales bring together schools and businesses, with the aim of informing, inspiring and motivating young people about their career opportunities. Careers Wales have the following offer:

- The Valued Partner Initiative which recognises sustainable relationships between employers and schools. CW provide additional support to help maintain and strengthen relationships and have widened the Valued Partner Initiative to include teacher employer encounters, to support teachers gain a better understanding of the current world of work.
- Up to 6 employer-led activities in each secondary school, PRU and special school. They are bespoke and based on Career Check data, LMI and the needs of the school. Activities include single employer events (presentations, site visits, mock interviews etc), multiple employer events (speed networking and carousel days), and specific curriculum enrichment input.
- The development of nine employer-led, sector-based challenges to embed CWRE. Careers Wales have developed the curriculum-related challenges in partnership with: Vishay (Compound Semi-Conductors) and Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive, Toyota (Advanced Manufacturing) and Ysgol Treffynnon and Starling Bank (Fintech) with Llangatwg Comprehensive. These challenges are currently being piloted before being made available to other schools in 2025. Further challenges are planned with, Digital Health and Care Wales, Celtic Group, Drop Bear Brewery and RWE Renewables.
- What Next? regional careers fairs for ALN learners.
- Access to an extensive library of employer videos.
- Supporting schools to develop alumni networks.
- Tailored Work Experience (TWE) programme.
- Big Ideas Wales, which includes a national enterprise challenge in primary schools and at least 1,000 entrepreneur role model workshops in secondary schools per annum. The activity is led by a diverse network of over 400 entrepreneurs, known as Role Models, to share business experiences and personal journey of entrepreneurship and bring areas of the curriculum to life. The network includes disabled entrepreneurs such as [Mark Williams](#) of Limb Art in North Wales to inspire learners and share their lived experiences.
- The Alumni project.

In October 2024, Careers Wales launched Bluestone on their CareersCraft resource. Learners can now explore the wide range of careers in tourism and hospitality. From lifeguards to chefs, spa assistants and photographers, learners can now explore the roles and consider the skills needed for them and consider how these skills may be transferable to, or from, other careers.

Careers Wales also support employers to engage with schools. This includes:

- Bespoke advice and guidance on working in education and how to design their input, with access to training if required.
- A dedicated section on our website packed full of information for employers.
- Annual Valued Partner awards to recognise and promote employer contributions.

Data

All available published data has been provided in our response. To summarise this component, in providing support to schools, Careers Wales have delivered over 1,500 group sessions to over 26,000 learners and over 1,100 employer events. In addition, Big Ideas Wales includes a national enterprise challenge in primary schools and at least 1,000 entrepreneur role model workshops in secondary schools each year.

Further Education (FE)

Embedded within the Employment & Enterprise Bureaus in each college across Wales, an Enterprise Champion has been funded in all FE colleges to raise awareness of entrepreneurship as a career option, provide opportunities to learn and practice entrepreneurship skills and explore self-employment as a career option and supporting those students who want to become self-employment or starting a business to do so. Responsibility for the Bureaus has been transferred to Medr as of August 2024. The Enterprise Champions work across the student cohort ensuring that disabled students can access support and guidance by targeting courses where there is a higher number of disabled students, responding to where a tutor has requested specific support for a group of students as well as promoting achievements of disabled students.

Employment and enterprise bureaus

The key objectives of the bureaus are to offer a recruitment service to local employers and increase the employment opportunities available to learners within colleges.

The [funding](#) supports the costs of an entrepreneurship champion who:

- works with learners (and leavers) from the institution to champion entrepreneurship and support staff to embed entrepreneurship in the curriculum, and
- provides bespoke support to learners and leavers to develop their entrepreneurship ideas and business knowledge, and improve pathways and support them into self-employment and business start-up.
- Employment and Enterprise Bureaus help employers to connect with students and develop their future workforce.
- The Employment and Enterprise Bureaus provide a package of opportunities for students, full and part-time, to build essential employability and enterprise skills. The Bureaus are part of the Welsh Government's Young Person's Guarantee – a commitment to provide everyone under the age of 25 and living in Wales with support to gain a place in education or training and help to get into work or become self-employed.
- The Bureaus, operating in Further Education College in Wales, are inviting employers to engage with them to meet students and discuss employment opportunities they may have within their organisations.
- Each Bureau offers tailored support to students within their college but is open to nurturing ongoing opportunities with employers in their region.

Higher Education (HE)

Universities continue to provide targeted employability support to students from under-represented groups, which includes disabled students. As set out in the circular '[Targeted Employability Support for Students: Delivery Plans and Allocations](#)', £2m was made available for academic year 2023/24. This builds on the activity delivered in academic year 2022/23 against Circular W22/21HE.

Whilst universities have flexibility to build their provision and offer to best meet the needs of their students, it is expected that support includes:

- Mentoring,
- blended delivery of a range of employability activities, including entrepreneurship support,
- signposting / supported access to each university's core employability,
- careers guidance, enterprise and well-being provision,
- provision of funding for costs associated with development of employability and / or work experience to ensure finances are not a barrier to benefiting from the support,
- work experience, of varying lengths and formats.

The Welsh Government provides additional grant funding to support all HE institutions in Wales to promote entrepreneurship, connect with entrepreneurs, and provide support for student and graduate entrepreneurship. They support graduate transition into entrepreneurship and business startup, each publishing their impact report annually.

5. How is the Welsh Government ensuring that disabled learners have the flexibility and support they need to access further education? What your expectations are of how FE, HE and their careers departments support disabled learners onwards into internships and apprenticeships? And how are you engaging with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning in this regard.

All colleges and universities have equalities plans in place and work collaboratively to achieve commitments including promoting equity of access and equality of opportunity. Medr reviews their Strategic Equality Plans, which set out how they will meet duties under the Equality Act, including the protected characteristic of disability.

Colleges are working collaboratively across Wales to meet their equality commitments. They attend ColegauCymru's FE Equality and Diversity Strategic Group. This network considers matters of equality, diversity and inclusion, and reports to the Principals' Forum on actions to make progress.

Universities work collaboratively to achieve equality commitments, including widening participation, and identifying equality gaps in attainment. They have supporting networks and Equalities Leads in place to support and monitor progress.

Further Education

In August 2024, Additional Support Guidance was issued to further education providers to assist with working flexibly and securing support to make provision accessible to learners. It also assists with the costs of making reasonable adjustments, for learners with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

College activity is delivered in line with the Social Model of Disability, which includes:

- Bespoke Careers Fairs and events for students with additional learning needs or quiet hours for those attending main events.
- Offering intensive coaching to students with disabilities.
- Tailored resources and sessions as appropriate, and information sessions on disability rights and adjustments in the workplace.
- Employers who advertise through colleges are committed to adhering to the Fair Working Policy in Wales.

- Working with employers to support and facilitate inclusive recruitment.
- Working specifically with Disabled Confident Employers to create placements for students with disabilities ensuring reasonable adjustments are taken into account.

Specific examples of activity include:

- Grŵp Llandrillo Menai supported 31 individuals with a disability into apprenticeships with a disability uplift intended to support employers to remove barriers for learners in line with the social model of disability.
- Coleg y Cymoedd invited Disability Confident organisations to exhibit and offer specialised information and advice at their annual careers fair, including organisations such as Drive, Maximus and PHS 'Project Search' which is a tailored supported internship for 18-24 year olds with ALN and/or Autism.
- The College Merthyr Tydfil supports an Internship Programme with Independent Living Skills (ILS) learners, where they have the opportunity to undertake internships with Prince Charles Hospital.
- The College Merthyr Tydfil is also working closely with Maximus to support progression into employment for learners with an ALN. Maximus supports learners by attending Careers and ALN events where they offer tailored assistance and resources to help find work.

Higher Education

Universities are focused on embedding employability into the curriculum so that it is accessible to all. Careers departments work with disabled students so that they have appropriate information and advice to build successful outcomes in line with their career plans when they graduate, including employment, internships, self-employment and/or further study.

Universities also work with employers and other stakeholders to deliver targeted interventions to their disabled students to meet their career and employability needs.

The [Targeted Employability Support for Students](#) funding from Medr enables universities to provide tailored support, for those from under-represented groups, including disabled students, to enhance their employability and help them to obtain and sustain graduate level activity when they leave higher education. This includes the [Employability e-Hub](#) - a resource for students who wish to work in Wales. It is committed to helping students along their individual path to success, and provides valuable opportunities including:

- work experience,
- career coaching,
- skills development,
- direct engagement with employers.

The [Reaching Wider](#) Programme is a collaboration of FE, HE and other educational partners delivering widening access activity to encourage school and college learners to consider the futures and their education aspirations as well as academic skills building and mentoring.

It is funded by [Medr](#) and includes all FE and HE institutions in Wales. They also work with local authorities, employers, schools and third sector organisations to improve the education outcomes of learners. It is a regionally focused and long-term programme to widen access to HE and higher-level skills. It aims to increase HE participation from under-represented groups, including disabled students, by raising educational aspirations and skills and creating innovative study opportunities and learning pathways to higher education.

Medr

Medr's [Strategic Equality Plan](#) and equality objectives take account of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). It contributes to meeting the Welsh Government's ambitions for an integrated and equitable tertiary education, tackling inequalities and promoting equality of opportunity.

Their [Strategic Plan](#) is intended to be set direction and give a sense of priority - it will be supported by an Operational Plan, developed by Medr, which will provide more detail to monitor progress and ensure delivery of individual work streams.

Apprenticeships

Since September 2024 Careers Wales has offered a career's guidance interview to all key stage 4 young people before they leave statutory education. This ensures young people are provided with impartial information and are made aware of all their future pathway options, including, FE, apprenticeships and Jobs Growth Wales+ to make an informed decision regarding their next steps. For those in special schools and resource bases Careers Wales will negotiate the best time to start working with a young person. For some this will be year 9 as they may need a lot of time working with an adviser whilst for others it may be later in their education.

Careers advice and support is tailored to an individual's need but could include:

- Support to develop their career management skills such as decision making and planning,
- Guidance to help a young person identify what type of work they would like to do and how they could get there,
- Practical support to ensure that they have a good transition from school,
- Signposting/referring to other agencies that provide additional support services,
- Advocating on behalf of an individual,
- Negotiating with providers on behalf of an individual,
- Outlining options for parents.

For all Key Stage 4 young people who have identified that they plan on leaving school and are looking to enter the labour market, Careers Wales offers ongoing follow up support which may include support with interview skills/applications.

From April to November 2024 Careers Wales provided 41,000 guidance interviews to over 30,000 learners, including 34,460 guidance interviews to 25,244 Key Stage 4 learners, 52% of year 11 learners, and 2,621 interviews to 1,945 ALN learners.

We are working to increase diversity in apprenticeships and promote social mobility as an investment in economic success and lasting growth. For example, the Inclusive Apprenticeships Disability Action Plan has supported the growth of disabled apprenticeship. 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.

The Employer Incentive Scheme also encourages employers to recruit disabled people by providing a financial incentive and in-work support for this cohort to enable them to successfully complete their apprenticeship programme.

The Supported Shared Apprenticeships provides 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.

We have also recently agreed to modify the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW). Part of these modifications include opening up 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.

Regarding engagement, Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries are working towards delivery of the Programme for Government commitments and First Minister's priorities that fall across all portfolios. We meet regularly with Ministerial colleagues, to keep them apprised of areas of cross cutting mutual responsibility. The Minister for Further and Higher Education works closely with the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership on areas of mutual interest. There is also a Ministerial expectation that officials, from across Welsh Government, work closely together to identify and address gaps in provision and identify future opportunities.

6. What are the implications, if any, of relatively new Additional Learning Needs legislation and guidance on careers advice and support for disabled young people?

The new Additional Learning Needs legislation and guidance has created one unified system from 0-25 with an Individual Development Plan (IDP) that follows a child and young person through all stages of their education. From September 2025 all disabled young person with ALN will now have an IDP. Careers Wales have reviewed and re-aligned their approach to careers advice and support in light of the new legislation.

Careers Wales have set out and shared with schools and families a clear offer alongside the ALNET Act Implementation. All young people are entitled to access careers information, advice and guidance from Careers Wales, delivered via face to face, telephone, video or digital means. Careers Wales also has a team of ALN advisers who work predominantly in special schools and resource bases. All careers advisers work with young people to help them understand their options, make good decisions about their future and know how to implement their plans. This work may begin earlier than year 11 where appropriate.

For young people identified as having ALN, Careers Wales offer to attend Individual Development Plan (IDP) reviews and have identified those who are leaving to enter the labour market as a priority group. In those reviews Careers Wales may contribute to the transition element of the IDP, advocate on behalf of a young person and make parents aware of opportunities. This year, as young people with IDPs are now in college, Careers Wales have also offered to attend college IDP reviews for young people who are leaving college to enter the labour market.

During the 2023/24 academic year, Careers Wales carried out 1,445 interviews with ALN Learners across all year groups and settings (43 in KS3, 117 in KS4, 249 in post-16, 131 in FE). The move towards the full roll-out of ALNET is increasing the number of interviews undertaken as the emphasis for Career Wales' work changes from Learning and Skills Plans (LSPs) and funding applications, to increased direct work with young people. Careers Wales also attended 218 ALN reviews, as well as undertaking almost 5,000 advocacy and liaison interactions on behalf of young people.

7. *Any other information you want to draw to our attention as to how the Welsh Government is supporting learners in their transition from school-age to the world of work for disabled people?*

Review of Vocational Qualifications

Taking forward the recommendations of both the [Review of Vocational Qualifications](#) and the [Report on Transitions into Employment](#) is a key priority for Welsh Government. Both reports outline where improvements could be made to ensure a smoother transition for all learners from school into employment, including disabled people.

Since the summer 2024, we have established small internal and external working groups (Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and Medr thus far – with a view to expanding the membership as required) to look in depth at the recommendations and consider how best to engage the sector. The working groups will be instrumental in overseeing the delivery of the recommendations outlined in both reports.

It is important to note that there are many co-dependencies associated with delivery of the recommendations. The strategic relationship between Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and Medr is of significant importance in terms of achieving delivery.

The 14-16 Learning Guidance, published in September 2024, sets out our policy for learning and teaching in years 10 and 11, alongside the legal requirements for schools and will form part of the Curriculum for Wales framework guidance. The guidance aims to support schools to design their 14 to 16 curriculum offer, which they will need to have in place by September 2025.

The importance of years 10 and 11 in a learners' education journey is well known, particularly how their choices and achievements can influence their future pathways. The guidance therefore introduces the 14 to 16 Learner Entitlement ('the Learner Entitlement'): the learning that all learners in year 10 and 11 will benefit from under the Curriculum for Wales. In addition to a broad offer of qualifications, the entitlement also looks to ensure all learners are supported to understand their strengths and interests, and to plan their next steps once they leave compulsory education at 16, helping them with this significant transition.

Through the guidance we set out our clear national expectations to help provide equity and consistency in the curriculum experienced by learners across Wales, with all schools valuing the same things that contribute to a learner's progression and successful onward transition.

Being part of the Curriculum for Wales framework, the 14-16 guidance places the learner at the centre with a clear focus on all learners being supported to make progress and supported to consider the full range of options available to them post-16.

Disabled People's Employment Champions

One of the strategic objectives of the Disabled People's Employment Champions is to work with policy leads across Welsh Government to contribute lived experience and knowledge to influence the development of wider Welsh Government policy which impacts on disabled people's employment. The champions are delivering this by supporting the work of the Young Person's Guarantee Board and the development of the new Welsh Government Employability Programme. They have also established an effective working relationship with Careers Wales and in 2025 will explore opportunities to work more closely with Medr.

Inspiring Skills Excellence in Wales

Our [Inspiring Skills Excellence in Wales](#) project, funded by the Welsh Government, delivers a programme of activities linked to Skills Competitions that raise awareness of vocational education and training and career pathways.

The project works with partners to promote and facilitate engagement and collaborative approaches between schools, learners and employers to build confidence and knowledge of the world of work, and support learners to make informed choices about their careers and their futures.

In particular, it offers opportunities for learners, apprentices and trainees with disabilities and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) to challenge and benchmark their skills by taking part in Inclusive Skills / Foundation Skills competitions, locally and nationally across a range of sectors.

In Wales, the Skills Competition Wales delivers 9 Inclusive Skills / Foundation Skills competitions, from Catering and Media to Woodwork and Independent Life Skills. In January 2024, over 200 learners participated in these competitions from across Wales.

8. How are you engaging with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning to ensure that young people have as wide a range as possible of options post-16? For example, we have heard concerns of a “cliff-edge” faced by disabled people in accessing certain age-restricted placements and schemes e.g. Jobs Growth Wales? What consideration has been given to widening access to disabled people of all ages?

As highlighted in response to question 5, the Minister for Further and Higher Education works closely with the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership on areas of mutual interest and there is also a Ministerial expectation that officials, from across Welsh Government, work closely together to identify and address gaps in provision and identify future opportunities. This is hopefully illustrated in the cross-cutting nature of the work being undertaken as detailed in the responses to the specific questions raised.

Jobs Growth Wales+

Jobs Growth Wales+ (JGW+) was originally procured in 2021 with the tender documentation specifying an age range of 16-18. As a result of the impacts of the Pandemic, this age range was extended to allow young people aged 19 to also enter the programme. However, it is not possible to alter the age range any further as this would fundamentally change the offer and could therefore be open to legal challenge from potential suppliers.

Any future programme that is operational from 2027 will consider examples of best practice and will benefit from lessons learnt during the operational delivery of existing employability support, this will include support for specific cohorts such as the required support for disabled people.

As part of the programme we do publish data on the number and composition of participants on JGW+ including those with a disability – this information can be accessed via the following link - [Jobs Growth Wales+ statistics: April 2023 to March 2024 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

Vocational Qualifications review

We published our response to the Vocational Qualifications Review (VQR) at the end of April 2024 and are working with colleges to ensure that our approach responds to the needs of learners and our changing economy.

We are progressing discussions about how best to align delivery of these recommendations with related strategic commitments, including our economic mission, related skills development requirements and increasing participation.

Our priority is for all learners to have a positive learning experience, ensuring they can progress confidently to their next steps in education and/or employment.

We will continue to work with Careers Wales to determine how we can best ensure young people, at key transition points, have access to impartial careers information, advice and guidance; ensuring they are aware of all the option routes, including learners with disabilities and learning difficulties.

In addition, Qualifications Wales have been working to pilot the development of route maps for vocational areas. Once the findings of the pilot have been considered, it is hoped that these route maps will be further developed and included on a suitable digital platform so that they are accessible and engaging for learners and stakeholders alike.

Business Wales

Big Ideas Wales has a Participation Fund to support clients that require additional help to access the business support. This has assisted with costs to remove barriers for clients including translation, transportation, carers and practical support to attend and participate in events or 1:1 meetings.

As part of the commitment to the Programme for Government to close the gap between disabled people and the rest of the working population, Business Wales works closely with the Welsh Government's Disabled People Employment Champions to provide support to ensure that the service develops and considers the needs of those who are disabled. The Business Advisers work closely with the Disabled People's Employment Champions and Disabled People's Employment Advisers within the Business Wales service.

To support disabled entrepreneurs, Business Wales and Disability Wales has produced a good practice guide. The guide provides information and practical advice for business support organisations and advisors on how best to engage with and support disabled people who are starting, sustaining or growing their business in Wales

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/good-practice-guide-supporting-disabled-entrepreneurs-wales>

Business Wales start-up support is available to assist individuals to overcome any barriers to participation in self-employment; and works with businesses to improve employment practices through specialist HR and equalities advice and supports employment opportunities for disabled people.

Specialist support to improve practices is available from Disabled Peoples Employment Advisers who work across Wales and provide tailored support according to client need on a one-to-one basis or at staff meetings. This is part of a wider advisory service for employment, skills and fair work, including stimulating job creation and improving employment policies and practices in inclusive recruitment and retention, encouraging business to review the equalities pledge and wider schemes such as Disability Confident.

We also provide funding to Social Firms Wales to provide bespoke specialist business support to social enterprises. Social Firms Wales supports social enterprises who support and/or employ people with disabilities and have a self-employment and supported self-employment service which includes additional support for people living with neuro-diverse conditions. The support package aligns with the Programme for Government commitment to tackle challenges faced by people across Wales and how to improve their lives.

Business Wales promotes self-employment and employment opportunities for disabled people through events, newsletters and social media channels, as well as Business Wales advisory support.

This includes a range of information and guidance on the Business Wales website on supporting disabled people within the workforce [Disabled People's Employment | Business Wales Skills Gateway \(gov.wales\)](#). [The Disabled People's Employment Champions have recently commenced a project to review and update all web-based content and refreshed content will be published throughout 2025.](#)

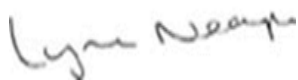
Business Wales has developed an online module developed to help employers increase their knowledge and understanding of the social model of disability [Course: Understanding the Social Model of Disability \(gov.wales\)](#) Work is underway to make this training available to public sector employers

Conclusion

We hope that we have provided a comprehensive response to the queries outlined in your letter and set out the work being undertaken by Welsh Government to support all learners, particularly those with a disability.

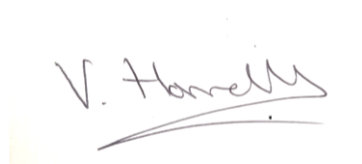
In turn, we are copying this letter to the Chairs of the Children, Young People and Education Committee; and the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee.

Yours sincerely



Lynne Neagle AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Vikki Howells AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Addysg Bellach ac Uwch
Minister for Further and Higher Education