

**To the Members of the Health and Social Care Committee,**

I am writing in response to the Committee's findings regarding the Welsh Government's Draft Budget. I would like to highlight three specific recommendations and provide evidence on the unintended consequences of not investing in the apprenticeship budget to support the recruitment, training, and qualification of Health and Social Care staff, which is crucial for alleviating pressure on the NHS.

**Recommendation 15:** The Welsh Government should write to this Committee setting out how it has prioritised funding for social care within this draft budget.

**Recommendation 16:** The Welsh Government should provide further information on the timescales for publication of social care workforce data.

**Recommendation 17:** The Welsh Government should provide an annual update to the Committee on the work being undertaken to recruit and retain staff in the social care sector. This should include information on progress in improving access to sickness pay for social care workers.

The health and social care sector is an integral part of Wales's society, addressing the needs of the most vulnerable populations. Despite its significance, the sector faces persistent challenges, including recruitment and retention issues, skills shortages, and the increasing complexity of care needs. Apprenticeships have been identified as a vital solution to these problems, providing accessible pathways to skilled roles and long-term careers in the sector.

Yet, immediately after last year's cut to the apprenticeship budget, there was a 34% reduction in starts on Level 2 Health and Social Care apprenticeships – the critical qualification needed to work in the sector. This dramatic decrease was highlighted in the latest apprenticeship data published Welsh Government, covering Quarter 3 of 2023/24 (Feb-April 2024).

It is likely that this trend will continue, potentially undermining the additional £649m investment the Welsh Government is making in the health and social care.

**Evidence on the Unintended Consequences of Not Investing in the Apprenticeship Budget:**

1. **Recruitment and Retention Issues:** The sector is already experiencing significant challenges in attracting and retaining staff. Without adequate investment in apprenticeships, these issues will likely worsen, leading to increased pressure on existing staff and a decline in the quality of care provided.
2. **Skills Shortages:** Apprenticeships are essential for developing a skilled workforce capable of meeting the complex needs of the population. A lack of investment in

apprenticeship programs will exacerbate skills shortages, making it difficult to maintain high standards of care.

3. **Increased Pressure on the NHS:** The health and social care sectors are interdependent. Insufficient investment in social care apprenticeships will lead to a shortage of qualified staff, increasing the burden on the NHS as more individuals will require hospital care due to inadequate support in the community.

### **Strategic Approaches and Government Commitments:**

The Welsh Government has adopted several initiatives aimed at promoting and sustaining apprenticeships in health and social care, as outlined in various strategic documents, including the Social Care Workforce Delivery Plan 2024–2027, the Annual Report 2023–2024, and the Apprenticeships Policy Statement. These documents highlight the critical role of apprenticeships in building a skilled and resilient workforce.

### **Statements from Welsh Government Officials:**

- Vaughan Gething, Minister for Economy: "Investing in apprenticeships is crucial for the future of our economy and the well-being of our communities. We must ensure that our health and social care sectors have the skilled workforce they need to thrive." [7 February, 2022]
- Julie Morgan, Deputy Minister for Social Services: "Apprenticeships provide a vital pathway for individuals to gain the skills and experience necessary to support our most vulnerable citizens. We are committed to expanding these opportunities to address the workforce challenges in health and social care." [17 July, 2023]
- Huw Irranca-Davies, Chair of the Senedd Health and Social Care Committee: "The decline in apprenticeship numbers is deeply concerning. We need a concerted effort to reverse this trend and ensure that our health and social care services are adequately staffed and equipped to meet future demands." [12 October, 2023]
- Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and Welsh Language: "Apprenticeships are a cornerstone of our skills policy and a central commitment in our Programme for Government. They support our drive to raise skills levels, drive productivity, and create more resilient communities." [1 March, 2023]
- Eluned Morgan, Minister for Health and Social Services: "We are committed to ensuring that our health and social care workforce is motivated, engaged, and valued. Apprenticeships play a crucial role in building the capacity, competence, and confidence needed to meet the needs of the people of Wales." [6 June, 2023]

In conclusion, whilst we welcome the protection of the budget following last year's cuts and the impact on new apprenticeship starts it is imperative that the Welsh Government prioritises investment in the apprenticeship budget to support the recruitment, training, and qualification of Health and Social Care staff. This investment is essential for addressing the current workforce challenges and ensuring the sustainability of high-quality care services in Wales.

Thank you for considering our evidence and recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Lisa Mytton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lisa Mytton

Strategic Director

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