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



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our ref JS PO 111 2025

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

13 March 2025

Dear Andrew,

Apprenticeship Pathways Inquiry

Thank you for your letter of 25 February to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning. I am replying as the Minister responsible for skills and apprenticeships in Wales. I regret that I was unable to attend the Committee meeting on 12 February due to personal circumstances. However, I set out below the Welsh Government's response to the Committee's follow-up questions.

What progress has been made in developing a national strategy for vocational education and training?

This is a matter for the Minister for Further and Higher Education and I have asked that she write to the Committee.

Are you content with the advice and information that learners are provided with regarding apprenticeship opportunities, in particular the service provided by Careers Wales?

Yes. Careers Wales is only one part of a wider context in which young people receive careers information - we know other key influencers are parents, teachers and peers. However, Careers Wales offers professional, impartial careers information, advice and guidance tailored to each individual young person's needs.

Latest statistics show that over 95% of pupils who received careers guidance through Careers Wales entered education, employment or training on leaving school. The latest Careers Wales Quarter 3 report also shows over 96% of young people in education reported a raised awareness of the opportunities available to them following a careers guidance.

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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.

The new Careers Wales offer of a careers guidance interview to every young person went live at the beginning of September 2024 and has been well received by learners, schools and parents. By the end of December Careers Wales had provided this support to 61% of the current Year 11 cohort.

The Careers Wales website provides geographic intelligence for young people, so that they can see, for example, where particular types of apprenticeships are offered around Wales.

How aware are you that there has been a drop off in meaningful work experience in schools since Careers Wales stopped performing a central co-ordinating role in 2015? To what extent could this be a barrier to learners understanding their options as far as apprenticeships and work-based learning goes?

We are aware that the offer of work experience placements varies across Wales. The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) National Conversation (2023-24) highlighted:

- a lack of availability of 'quality' work-related experience deemed essential to acquiring life skills and understanding career pathways;
- 1 in 5 (21%) of respondents had never undertaken any form of work-related experience;
- transport remains a key barrier, particularly for those in rural areas or facing financial constraints - over half of young respondents (54%) said better public transport availability would help them travel to the job, education or training they want.

Meaningful work experience is much broader than a work experience placement. The new curriculum for Wales recognises this and has introduced Careers and Work Related Experiences as an area of learning. Work related experiences now features throughout our children and young people's curriculum from the age of 3, rather than it being a standalone KS4 work experience placement.

Careers Wales support schools to link with employers and deliver Careers and Work Related Experiences in many ways, including:

- delivering a new Careers Wales Quality Award to support the implementation of CWRE across the curriculum;
- working with all secondary schools and thousands of businesses across Wales to facilitate a wide range of employer led curriculum activities and information events for learners;
- bringing together schools and employers with the aim of informing, inspiring and motivating young people about their career opportunities. Activities include, employer presentations, site visits, 'World of Work' days, mock interviews and careers fayres;
- Careers Wales also offer a facilitated database [Education Business Exchange \(EBE\)](#) that lists local and national employers and alumni from a variety of sectors who are interested in working with schools to develop exciting curriculum enhancing programmes for pupils. This is available to all secondary schools, Pupil Referral Units and special schools.

To what extent are you aware that learners are being put off from pursuing an apprenticeship or from continuing to the next level due to difficulties in mapping out clear pathways? Are the opportunities available for learners to progress through the levels if they wish to?

This is certainly something we hear about from apprentices, employers and training providers. It is, however, a complex issue because many factors can affect an individual's choices or an employer's ability to offer clear progression routes. Medr are working closely with providers and are looking at ways of improving progression pathways. That is their role and the government welcomes that work. I also look forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations in due course as to how we might address these challenges working with Medr.

How can there be more flexibility within the system to allow apprenticeship pathways to respond quicker to the changing needs of fast paced and emerging sectors?

This is something we are looking at in the light of wider thinking across the UK about the need to make our skills provision more flexible in order to respond to fast-changing needs. We are engaging widely with employers, apprenticeship providers and Medr to shape a more fit-for-purpose future skills strategy and system for Wales. We need to take account of but not be driven by the UK context, including the impact of the planned Growth and Skills Levy and the developing UK industrial strategy. We are engaging closely with the UK government on those issues.

As the Cabinet Secretary made clear in the evidence she presented, we very much welcome this inquiry by Committee which will help us identify some of the changes we may need to make in Wales to create the flexible and responsive skills system we all want.

There are a number of obstacles that smaller businesses face regarding the apprenticeship programme, such as limited administrative capacity and a lack of awareness about the benefits of apprentices. Who should be addressing these challenges and how?

What more can be done to encourage employers, in particular smaller businesses, to engage with the apprenticeship programme and provide apprenticeships?

The Welsh Government recognises the challenges facing small businesses. The Committee has already heard 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.

The Welsh Government will continue to work closely with Medr and others to improve take up of apprenticeships by employers of all kinds.

A number of reports have been published in recent years with recommendations to the Welsh Government, and other key stakeholders, regarding apprenticeships. How confident are you that these interlinked recommendations are being taken forward and who is monitoring them?

Responsibility for apprenticeships policy sits clearly with me as the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership. At official level, there is a relatively new Skills Division in Welsh Government (established last year) to provide a clear focus on skills and apprenticeships and to help drive forward improvement.

Wherever relevant officials and Ministers work together across portfolios to ensure a joined-up approach. In particular, the Minister for Further and Higher Education and I work very closely together on skills matters to ensure that our joint work with Medr is fully aligned and supports our shared policy goals.

Finally, **on progress of, and funding for, the implementation of recommendations made in Sharron Lusher's Review of Vocational Qualifications in Wales and Hefin David's Transitions to Employment report**, I shall arrange for the Committee to receive an update in due course.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JACK SARGEANT". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underneath the name.

Jack Sargeant AS/MS

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership

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