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Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1SN

16th March 2025

Dear Mr Davies,

Re: Apprenticeship pathways – work experience

Further to your letter of the 25th February, please find attached a Report that the Welsh Independent Schools Council have prepared to assist with the The Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry into apprenticeship pathways. Please acknowledge safe receipt.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'E Verrier'.

Emma Verrier
WISC CEO

Report for Andrew RT Davies

Under Part 1- Quality of Education of the Independent Schools Regulations it is stated that to be compliant schools should ensure the following provision:

2(2)(e)- For pupils receiving secondary education, access to up-to-date careers guidance that- i) is presented in an impartial manner

ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options, and

iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential

WISC sent a questionnaire to member schools asking the following:

Who oversees careers guidance in your school? (ie the Head? Head of sixth form? Other?)

How is careers guidance delivered within your school curriculum?

How are learners informed about all of the choices available to them upon leaving school?

What other factors influence the choices learners make?

When and how is meaningful work experience arranged for learners in your school?

Do you encounter any difficulties delivering careers guidance/arranging work experience?

How confident are you that you ensure all pupils are able to fulfil their potential?

27 out of 77 member schools responded to the questions, 11 mainstream and 16 special schools. Answers between the two sectors were very different due to the variation of set-up, types of pupils and numbers. The special schools have access to Careers Wales support and clearly value this and make appropriate use of this resource, whilst Mainstream schools are not able to access this support.

We have therefore, reported separately using the information from the two sectors.

Mainstream Schools

When it comes to who oversees careers guidance in these schools, the role often falls to an academic deputy or head of 6th form, with some schools having a designated head of careers.

Careers guidance is invariably delivered through the current school curriculum, mainly initially through PSHE lessons. From Year 11 onwards, guidance becomes more focused and, as is often the norm in independent schools, the support given is individualised in

tutor sessions and through advice from staff. About half the schools that provided information use Morrisby assessment and careers platform, whilst other individual schools mentioned Gatsby Benchmarks, Future Smart Careers and Unifrog. One school stated they use an independent careers advisor. These platforms clearly help inform pupils about the choices available to them on leaving school. Once again, all schools explained that they give plenty of support through personalised interviews and tutorials. About half of the schools mentioned that they use visits to fairs and universities to inform students further about their choices and alumni links and use of parent knowledge and experience were also cited.

A large number of factors were described as being influences on the choices that learners make. The main influences that the majority of schools remarked on were students' strengths and weaknesses, parental influence, already chosen career paths, financial factors and peer decisions. Other influences declared were distance from home, ALN support, available subjects to be taught, gap year programmes and travel experiences.

It varied considerably as to how and when meaningful work experience is organised for learners. Many schools clearly make use of contacts they have built up over time, including alumni, as well as useful contacts that family members may have. Some work experience is timetabled for Year 11 onwards with some of this being arranged in the post-examination period. One school stated that their work experience takes place out of term time. In a few schools, students are expected to arrange any work experience themselves.

Difficulties that schools face over delivering careers guidance and arranging work experience are also varied. It is sometimes hard to match the learners' interests suitably and schools in more rural areas, and on occasions in North Wales, face particular problems. Finding appropriate times within a busy curriculum and the suitable resources were stated by about half of the schools providing information as causing issues. Employer Health and Safety restrictions can cause difficulties when trying to arrange some work experience. Lack of access for mainstream independent schools to Careers Wales means schools are reliant on their own staff and the links they can make.

Most schools are confident or very confident that the support given to students regarding careers guidance and work experience is meaningful and valuable and that their learners therefore achieve their potential.

Special Schools

As in mainstream schools, the person overseeing careers guidance varies. In most cases this person has at least one other role within the educational setting.

Careers guidance is delivered through PSHE, enrichment and Health and Wellbeing sessions. In all respondents' schools it is embedded within the curriculum and may make use of either bespoke programmes or for example, the King's Trust Qualification, also guest speakers and one to one advisory sessions. Some pupils receive input from their LA, and one school stated that they are taking part in a Careers Pilot scheme recommended by Swindon LA.

All special schools stated that they make use of Careers Wales resources and support. Many of their students have opportunities to attend careers exhibitions and make college visits. Students are given individualised advice and support to guide them in their choices.

There are many factors influencing students' choice and several schools stated how hard this can be for their learners who have often had previous bad experiences or who have significant learning and behavioural difficulties. Influencing factors, therefore, are frequently related to the young person's capability of being able to engage with independent work or further learning. Other factors are related to being able to gain relevant qualifications, the need to be nearer family, what ALN provision is available, location and friendships.

The style and timing of work experience is varied within the special schools that responded. It may be linked with a behaviour programme, and for some pupils it may not be appropriate at all. Some schools make use of their own on-site facilities such as the garden or library to offer their learners work experience whilst others reach out to the local community. It is clear from responses that schools need to keep flexible over their arrangements with timing being varied and some work experience covering one day a week for a period rather than a block of time being used.

To have assistance with arranging work experience, some schools access Future Smart Careers and Careers Wales, also Foothold Cymru. A few schools stated that they do not encounter any difficulties, whilst some others explained that not all their learners can engage, not all employers are willing to accept placements and that matching pupils to their interests can be challenging. Health and Safety factors also impact.

The majority of schools are confident that they are able to offer guidance and experiences that will enable their learners to fulfil their potential with appropriate support along the way, although for quite a number of settings outcomes can be variable.