

# Cross-Party Group Minutes

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## Meeting Minutes:

<b>Cross Party Group Title:</b>	Cross Party Group on Construction
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	13.01.25
<b>Location:</b>	MS Teams

## In attendance:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Title:</b>
Joyce Watson MS, (JW)	
Alexander Still, Member Support Staff (AS)	
Andrew Eldred, ECA (AE)	
Caroline Kuchta, IAA (CK)	
David Humphrey, Morgan Sindall (DH)	
David Kirby, CIOB (DK)	
Gareth Davies, Knox and Wells (GD)	

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Gareth W Evans, UWTSD (GE)	
Heather Davidson, Medr (HD)	
Ifan Glyn, FMB (IG)	
Jeff Protheroe, Colegau Cymru (JP)	
Jill Fairweather, ECWL - Tertiary Edu, Culture, Heritage & Sport - Cadw (JF)	
Keith Jones, ICE (KJ)	
Leigh Hughes, Felicitas Consultancy (LH)	
Malcolm Davies, LGHCCRA (MD)	
Mark Hennessey, ASD Build (MH)	
Mark Isherwood MS (MI)	
Matt Kennedy, CITB (MK)	
Nigel Donohue, IAA (ND)	
Rhian Edwards, Medr (RE)	
Robert Stroud, EET (RS)	
Zak Clark, CITB (ZC)	
Owain Jones, TRJLTD (OJ)	

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**Apologies:**

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Title:</b>

**Summary of Meeting:**

Meeting started at 13:59. JW welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologised that there has been a delay in this meeting due to diary commitments.

JW outlined that the meeting took place in a new Senedd term and thus there is a need to elect a new chair and secretariat.

AS nominated JW as chair on behalf of Hefin David and MK seconded the nomination.

MK nominated CITB, in partnership with CIOB, as the secretariat.

JW highlighted that Medr is the new name for the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research and invited RE and HD to talk through what Medr will oversee.

RE thanked JW for the invitation and outlined that they are keen to have an active presence in the CPGs that have a connection to the broad portfolio of Medr.

RE outlined that Medr became operational in August 2024 as a result of the Education and Research Act 2022 and is an Arms-Length Body.

RE highlighted that Medr is both funder and regulator for the entire tertiary education system in Wales and covers, HE, FE, apprenticeships, adult education and Lifelong Learning, vocational education and training and sixth forms with a budget of £900 million.

RE outlined that the Tertiary Education Research Act had 11 crosscutting strategic duties that Medr must undertake, for example: providing lifelong learning, equality of opportunity, etc.

RE highlighted that the Welsh Government also issued Medr with a statement of priorities in February 2024 which covers five years and puts emphasis on certain areas for Medr to explore.

RE outlined that Medr submitted their first Strategic Plan to two ministers before the Christmas break and are awaiting responses from ministers and plan to publish it towards the end of May.

RE handed over to HD who talked through some priorities in relation to apprenticeships.

HD stated that, in construction, in the first  $\frac{3}{4}$  of this academic year, Medr has helped 2165 apprenticeship starts which is an increase of 90 starts from the same time last year.

HD outlined that the current apprenticeship programs levels 2-5 are delivered by 10 lead contractor learning providers across Wales, which are appointed through a public procurement exercise with the current contracts due to end in July 2027.

HD highlighted that Medr are working with CITB to include a new design apprenticeship pathway and are considering what the future should look like for the apprenticeship provision in Wales post 2027.

HD outlined that the engagement process would be starting shortly for this, and it would be beneficial to engage with those present, directly or in larger groups to discuss the challenges and barriers and the needs for the future apprenticeship program.

HD highlighted that Medr are holding a workshop on 30 January to consider the impact of the removal of the level 2 construction qualification that will bring together Qualifications Wales, learning providers, Regional Skills Partnerships and members of industry.

HD welcomed anyone that would want to join that workshop to start thinking about possible solutions and how we can fill that gap to support learners.

JW thanked HE and RE for presenting and asked where Medr sees the media's role in helping to retain apprentices and some of the "big picture" policies.

RE outlined that Medr are looking at how an individual can come into the system and access the system at various points in their life - and looking at other opportunities outside of apprenticeships, such as shorter, sharper skills interventions for those who an apprenticeship may not be suitable for.

DK highlighted that CIOB have undertaken a new piece of research around the barriers to SMEs and is happy to share with RE.

LH highlighted that there is a nervousness and a lack of tutors or teachers to meet current provision with the need to not just focus on new entrants but also to focus on the teaching skills.

LH outlined that due to the ever-changing fiscal environment, there is no current provision in Wales for areas which industry will move to over the next 20-30 years such as on and offshore wind.

RE outlined that there is no easy answer to LH's first point but recognised that there is pressure as there is increasing numbers of individuals coming into the system.

RE highlighted that Medr has a precedent in pipeline demand in terms of PLA but acknowledges that there needs to be thinking around an agile way in terms of funding to ensure that Medr can support development and growth of provision that isn't necessarily volume driven.

JF asked whether there is likely to be funding available for train the trainer program specifically around the level 3 award in energy efficiency measures for older and traditional buildings.

HD offered to pick this up externally with JF and RE and both accepted.

MK asked to what extent is Medr looking across the border to England with Skills England to see the parallels and whether there is an element of cross learning and sharing best practice.

MK also asked if there as any view around alternative pathways and how they might work/interact with Medr.

RE highlighted that Medr are watching Skills England and the consultation on Industrial Strategy with great interest and what they intend to do in terms of levy reforms.

RE stated that government officials within Welsh Government are trying to work through those in terms of how the government will respond to policies.

RE outlined that in terms of alternate pathways, Medr would need to understand the barriers to those and where they sit within the system.

HD added to RE's point around Medr being keen around ensuring alternate pathways sit within the development of the new program going forward.

MD asked how organisations would build on their relationships in order to get industry accredited and certified meaning individuals can then take part in public sector funding programs.

RE outlined that there is not an easy answer but there is need for a broader conversation on that as accreditation may not come under Medr's remit of skills enhancement.

MD offered to share a paper that would outline how to address that, RE accepted.

LH outlined that the birthrate in Wales is decreasing and so is the size of the workforce and thus transitional skills are an important part of the future of industry, alongside flexible micro credentials.

LH highlighted that pre credentials are seen as a positive step forward within industry but micro credentials are seen as a challenge – and the need to look into how to develop and deliver flexible micro credentials.

JW asked about the messaging around green jobs and skills as, from her observation, there is little understanding around it.

RE outlined that Medr will work with their providers and government to understand how those providers are delivering those messages to their communities.

HD highlighted that Medr is developing a framework for renewable energy looking at bringing energy apprenticeships into renewable energy.

HD outlined that the focus should be on green skills as opposed to green jobs and that its about getting those messages across about how it will benefit industry.

GE highlighted that there are concerns that while industry will continue to modernise, education will be left behind and that there is a need for Medr to ensure collaboration between HE and FE.

JF asked if any work had been done around alternative pathways and the provision of NVQs.

RE highlighted that there is no current work stream that is underway and offered to have an external conversation with JW.

JW moved the meeting to the retrofit workforce skills presented by the Installation Assurance Authority (IAA).

ND stated that the IAA is focussed on making sure industry “gets what it needs, not what it is perceived to need”.

ND outlined that the IAA issued around 7500 Homebuilders Skills Cards linked to CITB construction skills.

ND highlighted the launch of the National Energy Efficiency Centre to develop and share training standards with an emphasis on apprenticeships, upskilling, and sustained funding for SMEs.

ND outlined the importance of making compliance affordable as high costs deter SMEs and individual homeowners from engaging in retrofit projects.

ND noted the need to prepare for growing demand in retrofit as part of the decarbonisation agenda, requiring both skills pathways and financial incentives.

ND stated that giving SMEs access to public procurement, along with sustained funding that transcends government, could be ways in which to get a “fair deal for SMEs”.

ND outlined that AI 360 is aimed at generating interest and an interactive experience to pull knowledge and information as part of the learning experience.

ND highlighted a piece of research commissioned by IAA on career pathways aimed at new entrants and career returners, which should be published in March.

ND outlined that the research focusses on how to integrate retrofit techniques into three key routes: technical route, technical management route and business route, as to not limit career routes.

JW thanked ND for presenting and opened up the room for questions.

MD suggested Medr should work closely with IAA to address the supply chain of products and get those products into the workforce awareness programme.

ND outlined that the IAA has invested around £700,000 to set up the facility with a 10-year lease and that industry has been willing to engage through active sponsorships which are providing equipment and materials.

ND highlighted that there is a challenge to get colleges to engage as it can be seen as a financial risk.

JF asked whether IAA is teaching learners about sustainable techniques and if they are covered by a guarantee.

ND outlined that the IAA are approved for a 25-year guarantee and offered to have an external discussion with JF.

JW thanked those for presenting and asked if there was any other business – none was forthcoming.

JW closed the meeting.

Meeting ended at 15:35.