

7 October 2025

Andrew RT Davies
Chair, Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Dear Chair,

Apprenticeship Pathways – Medr response

Your Committee will recently have received Welsh Government's response to its report on apprenticeship pathways. As indicated in that response, a number of the report's recommendations relate to areas for which Medr now has operational responsibility. I am pleased to provide here details of Medr's planned activities which are relevant to the Committee's recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Medr agrees with the Committee about the importance of high quality, independent, unbiased careers advice for learners and of collaboration with employers around information about vocational options. Medr's strategic duties include encouraging participation in tertiary education and promoting equality of opportunity and lifelong learning. In support of these duties, our strategic plan sets out the following commitments:

- We will work with partners to promote the benefits of learning throughout life and set targets to increase participation, particularly among those underrepresented in tertiary education, who may face social, economic, cultural or organisational barriers to learning
- We will work with partners, including the Welsh Government and Careers Wales, to encourage more pre-16 learners to transition to tertiary education and reduce the proportion of people not in education, employment or training (NEETS)

Rydym yn croesawu 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 correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence in Welsh will be answered in Welsh, and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

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Our activity in 2025-26 to support the achievement of these commitments includes:

- We will evaluate, fund and monitor the Reaching Wider Programme to ensure it contributes effectively to encouraging transition to, and participation in, tertiary education and lifelong learning, particularly amongst groups underrepresented in tertiary education
- We will work with local authorities, schools and FE institutions to review the current transition funding guidance to ensure that funding enables learners to be better informed and confident about their tertiary pathway choice
- We will work with the Welsh Government to support the development and implementation of its revised 16-19 Curriculum Guidance, seeking to ensure accessibility for a breadth of options for all learners in Wales, and aligning to the ambitions of the Curriculum for Wales

We also have responsibility for funding and supporting the development of Junior Apprenticeships. While the primary purpose of this intervention is to support learners who are at risk of dropping out from education before the age of 16, they may also function as a route into apprenticeship provision at levels 2 and 3, as they provide an experience of vocational learning.

We continue to fund Employment and Enterprise Bureaus in further education colleges to support learners by providing advice and guidance and developing employability and enterprise skills. The Bureaus help to build links between learners and employers, through a range of activities such as careers fairs, employer information sessions, and employers providing advice on opportunities in their sector, including apprenticeships.

These activities complement our partnership working with Welsh Government and Careers Wales to ensure that relevant information about apprenticeships is available in advice and guidance materials. This includes supporting Welsh Government's Apprenticeships Week promotional activity.

Recommendation 2

In the annex to this letter, we provide details of number of apprenticeship starts by employment sector, by level and by age, to support the Welsh Government's analysis of the reasons for the trends shown by this data. Further data is available through the [Apprenticeship learning programmes started: interactive dashboard](#). This includes data for the first three quarters of academic year 2024/25. Final data for 2024/25 will be available in February 2026.

Data on progression from Year 11 to tertiary education, including apprenticeships can be found in our statistical release: [Sta/Medr/04/2025: Progression from Year 11 to tertiary education, August 2017 to January 2025 - Medr](#).

Recommendation 3

Our strategic plan sets out our aim to ensure learners receive the highest-quality provision in a tertiary education sector that strives for continuous improvement. We are clear that a skilled and motivated education workforce is essential to achieving Medr's long-term ambitions, and have made a commitment to support the workforce to access effective professional learning and share best practice. During 2025-26 we are exploring a more consistent approach to professional development activity across the tertiary education sector by scoping requirements and assessing where Medr can add value.

As we develop the new apprenticeship programme to be delivered from August 2027, we will consider how the design ensures that providers have a workforce that is able to deliver high quality and responsive provision. This is likely to be reflected in our funding model through increased unit costs, so that providers can attract, retain and develop appropriately skilled trainers and assessors. Currently, Welsh Government policy is to maintain pay parity between staff in schools and further education, but this does not include staff delivering the apprenticeship programme. Any pay increases have therefore needed to be funded from within the existing budget. Within a fixed funding envelope, there is a trade off between adequately funding provision to ensure a high quality learner experience, and the number of opportunities that can be created as unit costs rise.

Recommendation 4

We will work with the apprenticeship provider network to support Welsh Government to communicate with employers about the importance of fair pay as part of the attractiveness of the apprenticeship offer for employees.

Recommendation 5

As part of our ongoing programme of framework reviews, we are exploring whether there are appropriate pathways in place to support learners to progress onto higher level learning, including degree apprenticeships and other higher level qualifications.

The new apprenticeship programme for delivery from August 2027 will strengthen the alignment between apprenticeships at all levels from level 2 to level 6, as the funding and expectations are now managed within a single organisation. The development of the new programme also includes a review of the funding model across the whole programme to ensure it delivers value for money and meets economic need.

Any significant expansion of provision at higher levels, in particular of degree apprenticeships, will have policy and budgetary implications, and will need to take into account any changes to the funding model for higher education provision. We will work with Welsh Government to consider possible options.

Recommendation 6

A review of the information available to employers on recruiting an apprentice is already underway, including a review of the support and guidance provided by Business Wales. Our operational plan for 2025-26 includes activity to strengthen mechanisms to ensure that employer and learner feedback is used to improve the current apprenticeship programme.

We recognise there are challenges for SMEs in engaging with apprenticeships, and our work to develop the new apprenticeships programme to be delivered from 2027 includes exploring how we might address the barriers such employers face. We will continue to fund the shared apprenticeships programme, which enables an apprentice to complete their programme through work with several employers to ensure they can access activity to meet the full requirements of the framework. Shared apprenticeships are available across all regions of Wales in all sectors with schemes running in construction, engineering, creative and digital media, technical theatre and community sports. We are exploring whether the scheme can be widened to include green skills.

Recommendation 7

This recommendation is the responsibility of Welsh Government. We look forward to working with them as they develop a vocational education and training strategy through their stakeholder group.

Recommendation 8

As outlined in the Welsh Government's response, our strategic plan includes commitments to respond to government's skills priorities, including through the apprenticeship programme, and to build relationships with stakeholders to understand economic demand. In delivering these commitments we will undertake the following activity in 2025-26 to help us understand Wales' economic and workforce needs:

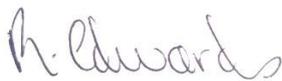
- We will take account of research, data and labour market information to better understand the specific and transversal skills needs of Wales to inform our engagement with tertiary education providers, and our funding priorities
- We will establish and build on mechanisms to understand current and future skills needed for a productive workforce across Wales by working collaboratively with key organisations, including the Regional Skills Partnerships and Corporate Joint Committees
- We will scope and establish mechanisms to enable us to test our understanding of the skills needs of Wales with employers, business and industry

- We will work with industry to undertake sector deep dives to understand how existing provision could better respond to existing skills needs, and use this to help plan future apprenticeship provision

Medr has agreed a set of principles for partnership working with the Regional Skills Partnerships which includes attendance at their Boards and their involvement in our programme of apprenticeship framework reviews. In addition to our analysis of labour market information, we are undertaking deep dives into specific sectors to explore the extent to which the current skills system offer in the round meets the needs of employers and the economy. The first sectors we are reviewing are construction and health and social care.

We thank the Committee for its report, which provides an important evidence base which we will take into account as we design the new apprenticeships programme for delivery from August 2027. Our aim is for the new programme to be more flexible and responsive to the needs of employers, learners and the economy. We look forward to further engagement with the Committee in future as our work to deliver Medr's Strategic Plan continues.

Yours sincerely,



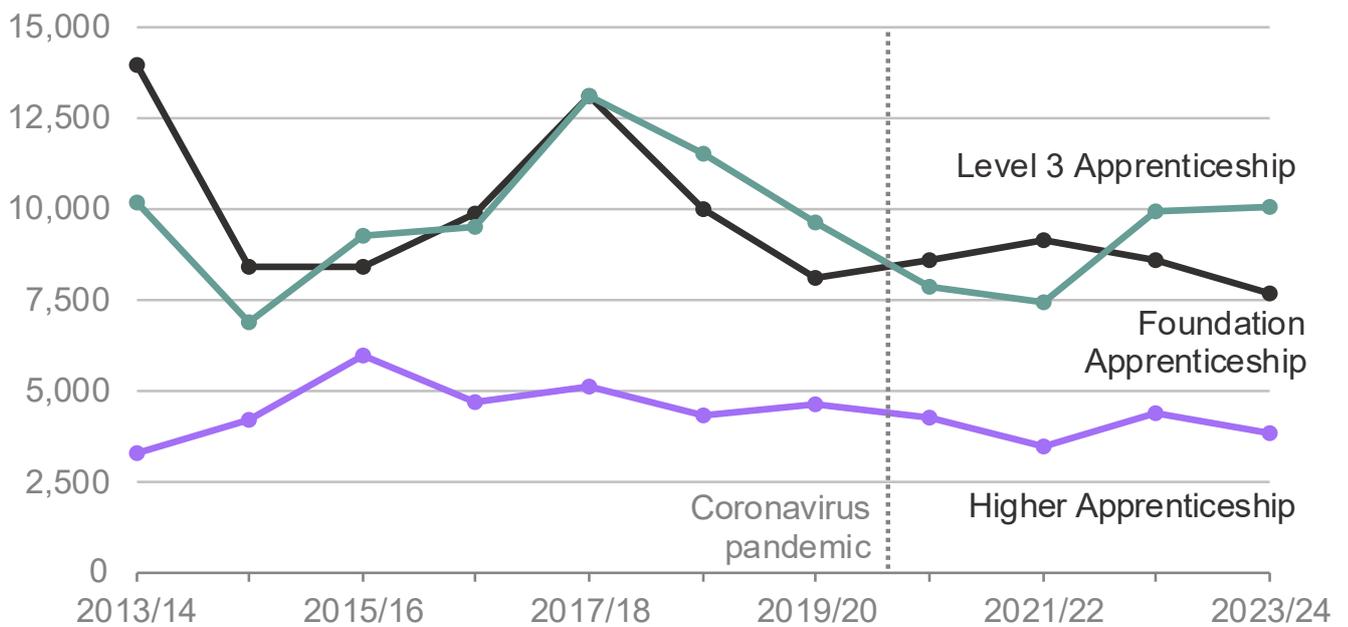
Rhian Edwards

Executive Director for Policy and Investment

Annex: Trends in apprenticeship starts by level, sector and age, August 2023 to July 2024

Apprenticeships started by level and academic year

Figure 1: August 2013 to July 2024

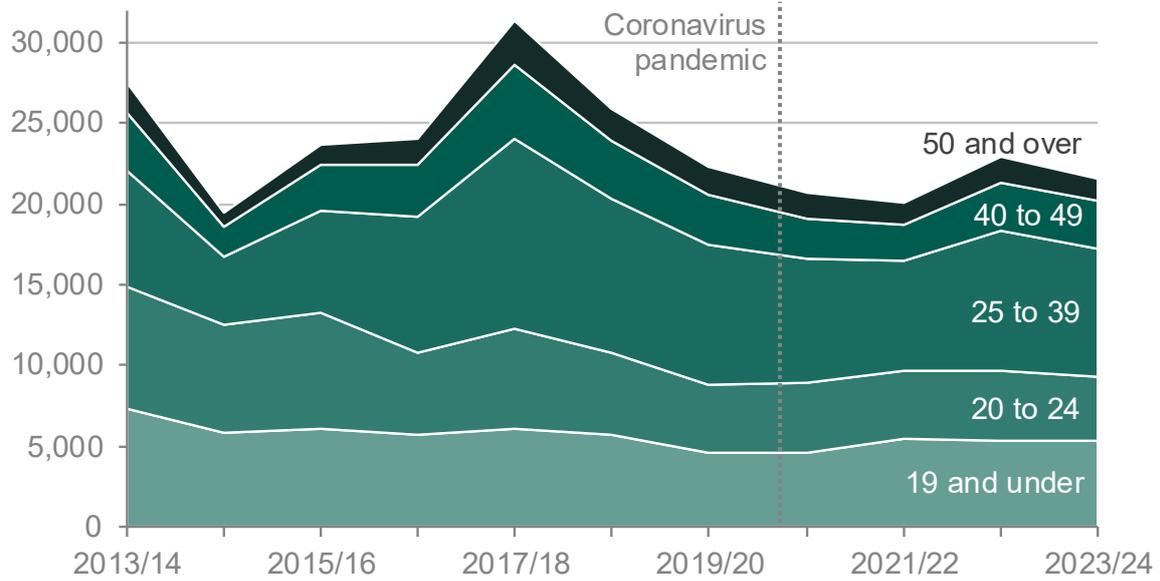


Description: There were 10,095 level 3 apprenticeships, 7,690 foundation apprenticeships, and 3,840 higher apprenticeships started in 2023/24.

[StatsWales \(Apprenticeship learning programmes started by quarter and year\)](#)

Apprenticeships started by age and academic year

Figure 2: August 2013 to July 2024



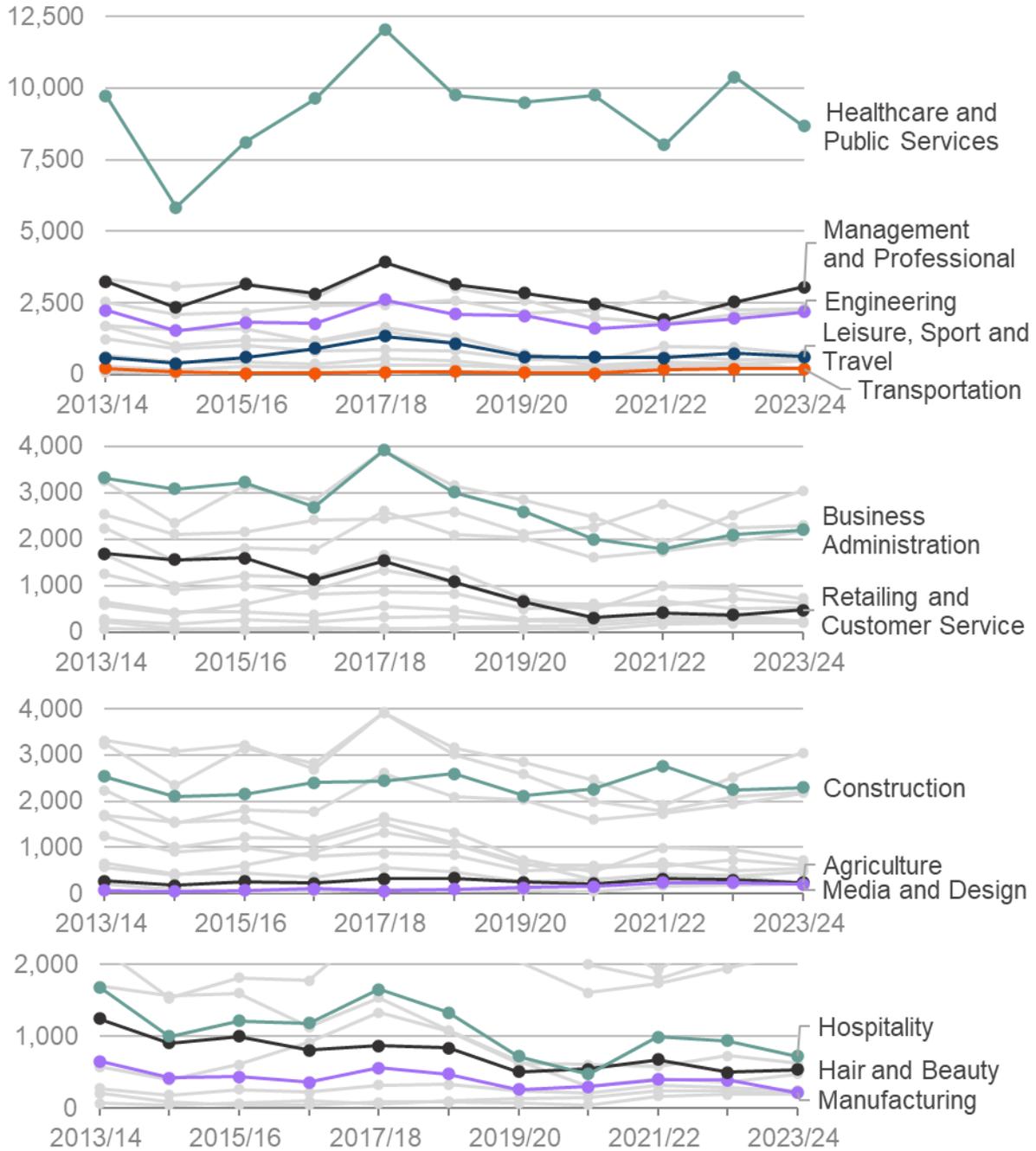
Description: There were 5,390 apprenticeships started in 2023/24 by learners aged 19 and under. This is similar to the previous two years.

Note: Age is at 31st August in the academic year started.

[StatsWales \(Apprenticeship learning programmes started by quarter and year\)](#)

Apprenticeships started by sector and academic year

Figure 3: August 2013 to July 2024



Description: There are four sectors where the number of apprenticeships started in 2023/24 was higher than it was in 2021/22, and 2014/15. The sectors are: Healthcare and Public Services; Management and Professional; Engineering; Leisure, Sport and Travel; and Transportation.

[StatsWales \(Apprenticeship learning programmes started by quarter, sector and programme type\)](#)

Medr

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