

Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Apprenticeships in Wales 2017

Purpose

The aim of this Inquiry is to provide an opportunity for the Committee to follow-up Apprenticeship related issues. Some of these matters were raised during the recent Apprenticeship Levy Inquiry but were not directly related to the Apprenticeship Levy.

Methodology

The outreach and youth engagement teams arranged workshops, interviews and visits for Committee Members to gather the views of apprentices and non-apprentices on specific aspects of access to and information on apprenticeships. The objective was to target apprentices at various levels, non-apprentices, Welsh speakers and disability groups, which also included a range of ages of males and females.

Workshops were held with Hefin David AM and Caerphilly Youth Forum, AFASIC Youth group and Deffo Cymru. Outreach interviewed apprentices and non-apprentices at the National Assembly, Caerphilly Youth Forum, AFASIC Youth group and Deffo Cymru. Finally, Russell George AM, Hannah Blythyn AM, Hefin David AM, Vikki Howells AM and Mark Isherwood AM visited apprentices at BT and non-apprentices at the Prince's Trust Cymru.

Comments/Recommendations made by the young people who took part in the interviews and workshops.

Advice and Guidance

- Young people find it hard to access information on apprenticeships, they don't know where to find it.
- The Careers Wales website is not advertised well. Young people either didn't know about it or had difficulty in using it. It was slow, difficult to navigate, there were problems uploading CVs and the Apprenticeship Matching service does not adapt well to all search criteria such as geography.
- Young people felt that the careers advice in school was aimed at those who would take the academic route of further and higher education; some young people suggested that schools were only interested in pupils who were academically successful and who could contribute to school attainment statistics. Advice and guidance on apprenticeships was generally not available or insufficient.
- Young people felt that careers advice and information on apprenticeships should take place before they chose their options in year 9, some suggested that it should start during primary school.



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- Young people identified key influencers as family and friends. Many only knew about apprenticeships from their parents/siblings. This either influences their decision to apply for an apprenticeship or introduced them to the stigma surrounding apprenticeships.

Barriers:

- Young people felt that there wasn't enough support for apprentices and that they were neither students nor employees. Some felt that it would be beneficial for them to be part of the student's union in order to access support and benefits available to students – an example given was access to bereavement counselling and mental health support.

- Gender stereotyping was identified as a potential barrier. Many felt that engineering, mechanics and science based apprenticeships were aimed at men and this was off-putting for women. Similarly, men also felt that some apprenticeships were aimed at women and that they would be 'laughed at' if they undertook an apprenticeship in hairdressing for example.

- More needs to be done to promote through STEM schemes. BT have STEM Ambassadors, and involve female apprentices in this to promote the opportunities for girls.

- Young people felt strongly about the apprenticeship pay and that it is a barrier to young people. Some described the pay as 'slave labour' or 'cheap labour'. An apprentice at the Assembly highlighted the benefits of earning the living wage, she described how it made her feel like an equal to her colleagues and gave her the ability to pay for travelling costs and to buy clothing. Young people highlighted that, after the day to day costs of employment, they had little to no money left over from the basic apprenticeship wage.

- Some young people were not aware of the progression available with apprenticeships and the possible qualifications they could achieve. This resulted in some young people opting for further and higher education rather than an apprenticeship.

Positive aspects of an apprenticeship:

- Apprentices felt that they could learn a trade and build a career whilst getting paid at the same time.

- Many did not see further and higher education as an option because of their experience at school, the debt associated with higher education and that employment is not secure as a result.

- Many appreciated the progression available through the stages and levels, and the support available from colleagues and managers to achieve that.

- Apprentices valued opportunities to experience other departments.

- Some apprentices saw the benefit and opportunity to do a top up degree; by doing an apprenticeship first and then a degree, paid for by their employer. This removed the barrier of student debt and gave them 'the best of both worlds' by obtaining experience and a degree.

- Apart from one individual, all apprentices interviewed had a good experience of apprenticeships. One young person had two brothers who also did apprenticeships.



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- The application process for applying for an apprenticeship was good. It was all done online and straightforward.
- One apprentice highlighted the benefit of doing her apprenticeship through the medium of Welsh, explaining that it gave her more employment opportunities for the future”.

Comments made by young peoples with disabilities.

- The apprentice was offered no additional support from his college but was given extra help from his employer, this help was voluntary and not part of the apprenticeship programme.
- The apprentice believed that his disability (hard of hearing) was a real barrier to getting an apprenticeship. Many employers don't know how to support people with disabilities and “aren't willing to take a gamble on a disabled person”.
- Employers within the trade industry feel that there is a danger to employing people who are hard of hearing, the apprentice explained that “if something is falling from the ceiling, they can't shout at you to warn you”.

Suggestion and questions for Welsh Government:

- More publicity and promotion of apprenticeships is needed.
- More information for parents on apprenticeships.
- There has been an increase of promotion on social media but it needs to be better. Facebook is probably the best social media platform to target.
- Careers Wales could make some YouTube videos which shows the variety of apprenticeships around Wales, and this could be shown in schools and advertised on social media platforms.
- Make sure options are promoted to students in schools and information given to pupils before year 9.
- Promote what is an apprenticeship, the variety of those on offer, and the expectation of what is needed for an apprenticeship – not everyone requires five GCSEs etc.
- More information on higher apprenticeships and the progressions available.
- Apprenticeship events, similar to job fayre events held by universities, where businesses can promote their apprenticeship schemes.



