

Inquiry into Apprenticeships

Key Issues

1. How effective is employer involvement in the apprenticeship system in Wales? Has this changed as a result of the current economic circumstances? Are employers able to find sufficient numbers of young people with the skills and aptitudes that they require? Do relationships between employers and training providers work effectively? Are apprenticeships still limited to certain sectors?

Where there are good and trusted relationships between employers and training providers, together with a sound employer knowledge base of apprenticeships, there is very good level of employer involvement and also effective working arrangements.

Economic circumstances will always have an effect on apprenticeship numbers especially where there is a degree of investment in the training in the early years of the training of a young person.

There is also no doubting the fact that the level of knowledge within the schools sector with regards apprenticeships is generally poor. Many young people who come into FE have had very little reliable careers tutoring in schools promoting alternative pathways other than to HE education.

There is a certain degree of limitation to apprenticeships in the traditional sectors of the economy although in recent years promoting the alternative service sector routes has been successful.

Apprenticeships are funding driven and Priority sector funding can be limiting in the types of programmes that can be offered to employers with no or little financial support for training.

2. Do social enterprises make effective use of apprentices?

Perhaps not as much as they could do because they may tend to see themselves as outside the traditional routes of apprenticeships and maybe not as knowledgeable about the options open to them. However, this we have no clear evidence to support this statement.

3. Has the number of apprentices employed by local authorities, and the public sector generally, increased or decreased? Should the public sector be recruiting more apprentices?

In our experience, there has been a gradual increase in recent years but for many years, the need to decrease pay costs and costs to LA budgets, a lot of

work especially construction work has been outsourced to contractors or subcontractors. This, we believe has had a detrimental effect on the number of apprentices regularly employed in the construction sector not just within the public sector. Many private sector companies work solely on a sub-contractor basis that means few chances for apprentices in the numbers that were usually the norm. We believe the public sector should recruit more apprentices.

4. The Welsh Government is encouraging Community Benefits clauses in public sector contracts which can be used to promote the employment of trainees and apprenticeships. Is this an effective mechanism for increasing the numbers of apprentices?

Yes it is welcome but it is generally a small contribution for the reasons outlined above. Sub-contractors still do not employ enough apprenticeships as there used to be employed when there were many larger companies. The construction industry is a classic example of this. Further, the larger employers who were advocates of apprenticeships such as the nationalised industries, international companies who located to Wales and some 'blue chip' companies do not exist any longer and so there has been a lesser number employed.

5. What is the average profile of an apprentice, for example age, gender, employment sector? Is this profile changing and, if yes, what are the reasons for this? The National Training Federation for Wales reports that the average age for an apprentice is 26. What are the reasons for this? Are apprenticeships generally successful from the perspective of the apprentice? Have apprenticeship completion rates changed in recent years? In practice, are apprentices guaranteed a job at the end of the apprenticeship?

We would say that this is dependent on the sector and at this provider but we have seen a general rise in the age of employed apprentices training with us. In the construction sector, for example, we would say the typical profile would be a 20 year old male and similarly for engineering. The profile is not currently changing for us in those sectors although there have been some very slight increases in the number of females in engineering companies.

Regarding the average age being 26, this could be due to the economic climate and redundancy related issue of people requiring changing occupations to secure employment.

Yes, apprenticeship success rates have increased in our experience at gaining frameworks. In our experience, there are no apprentices who are guaranteed a job but they have a more effective chance of gaining employment after going through an apprenticeship programme.

6. Do CareersWales and Jobcentre Plus provide effective support for people wanting to find apprenticeships? Does the new Apprenticeship Matching Service, run by Careers Wales, work effectively?

In Answer Yes, but in our experience this can sometimes be hindered by the lack of information on fundable and non fundable apprenticeship programmes. The new system in our experience is working well.

7. Why do young people decide to be apprentices? What factors influence their decision?

We feel that many factors affect the decision to apply for an apprenticeship. For example, Parents, Poor exam results, lack of university places, the want to do something more practical whilst earning money. We also feel that the support of parents is critical to the successful completion of an apprenticeship framework which can be extremely challenging in some sectors especially the STEM areas.

8. Are apprenticeships an attractive option for young people of all abilities or are apprenticeships seen as a second best option compared with higher education? Are attitudes changing and if yes, what are the reasons for this?

We feel that the sector where the apprenticeships are delivered is an important factor in attracting the varying levels of academic abilities. We have learners that have very good academic abilities that progress to degree level with their employer whilst completing the different apprenticeship levels. We also have learners with poor academic abilities but are very practical and hands on. So the apprenticeship programme benefits both types of learners.

Yes, we feel the attitude has changed especially in the current economic climate and the rise in educational fees. However, the traditional employment of a young person at the age of sixteen is unusual in today's marketplace. Depending on the sector, university under graduates are now being attracted to apprenticeships and therefore have to go back to a level 2 vocational qualification because they haven't got the skill base to carry out the apprenticeship role.

9. Are apprenticeships fully understood by those who have most influence on the choices of young people for example parents/carers, careers teachers in schools, teachers generally? Is there too much complexity and choice of programme?

We feel in answer you need to look at the individual parties, employers can be very limited in knowledge of apprenticeship opportunities, and we spend much time in building the employers understanding of the apprenticeships to promote and benefit current and potential new learners.

Parents and Carers may not fully feel apprenticeships are better than academic courses, Teachers in Schools also may feel that apprenticeships are the last resort for those who are academically challenged. This is where Careers, Job Centres and training providers need to build up the relationships to actively promote the benefits to ALL potential partners in advising on apprenticeship programmes.

10. How effective is Welsh Government policy on apprenticeships? How does its policy of apprenticeships fit into its wider economic and skills strategies?

It is in our opinion effective in many ways, but with targeting priority sectors being set based on Sector Skill Council (SSC) knowledge can disadvantage those skill sets that do not fall under Governmental priority sectors. Some sectors can be a

victim of economic crises and what is a priority one year can easily slip out of that the next as we saw with the crash of 2008.

11. Education and training, including apprenticeships are devolved matters, but employment law is not. Do young people have sufficient rights and access to apprenticeship training? If not, how could the situation be improved?

We feel that learner enquires received by us for apprenticeship programmes are within access to the learner, but due to contractual WBL funding we cannot always offer the route due to funding restrictions. We do however look to deliver or advise of where to go for the training to support all learners who enquire through us. This situation could be improved with a more even spread of WBL funding between providers in Wales.

12. Are the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) promoting and supporting apprenticeships effectively? How does the capacity of SSCs affect their performance in this area?

We feel the SSC's do promote our occupational Apprenticeships throughout our regional area but we also feel the performance in our area is adequate across some sectors. Unfortunately, however, some SSCs do not have the knowledge base or manpower to be able to make the links between them and so there are some lost opportunities especially where there are many roles in a sector that may bridge more than one SSC.

13. Is European funding being used to support apprenticeships effectively?

Yes, we access ESF funding for apprenticeship programmes and feel it is an effective way of delivering apprenticeships to those employers that qualify for the funding and may not otherwise be able to pay for the training or employ apprenticeship schemes.

14. Are there examples of good practice apprenticeship systems in other countries that Wales can learn from?

Yes, we can learn a great deal from looking at other countries educational systems for delivering vocational qualifications and apprenticeships. In some countries apprenticeships and becoming skilled workers are held in high esteem whereas the perceptions in the UK can be tainted by misinformation. Trades Unions are very active in some European countries in driving the apprenticeship concept.

Coleg Morgannwg has taken part in many European projects linking with vocational schools in Germany, Italy, Spain and others and have also taken part in apprenticeship exchange programmes where apprentices have undertaken a two week workplacement within a company in Spain.

We at Coleg Morgannwg also work on an international education Practice Firm model which links the delivery of WBL qualifications to unemployed and employed status learners. This project links to 42 international countries and

gives us the opportunity to analyse delivery across a vast amount of programmes.

Many funded and commercial apprenticeships are delivered through governmental funded programmes and link heavily with unemployed, disabled, minority sectors linking JCP's, Careers and employers together in the training cycle.