

Inquiry into apprenticeships in Wales

The Welsh Government Enterprise and Business Committee is undertaking an inquiry into Apprenticeships in Wales.

Inquiry Terms of reference

- Does the current apprenticeship system provide effective support to the Welsh economy
- Is the current apprenticeship system meeting the current and future skills needs of employers in Wales?
- With increased priority on apprenticeships for 16-24 year olds, are apprenticeships an attractive option for young people?
- Do the systems for establishing Apprenticeship Standards and Frameworks and recruiting apprentices work effectively?

Key Issues that the Committee may wish to consider as part of these terms of reference include:

1. How effective is employer involvement in the apprenticeship system in Wales?

It is fairly effective but more so among larger companies. Sector Skills Councils do not always engage with large numbers of SME's which mean that these employers are not always involved in developing frameworks that suit their needs. The greatest impact is found to be the relationship between the employer and the provider.

2. Has employer involvement in the apprenticeship system changed as a result of the current economic circumstances?

Yes, I think any scheme which involves any financial responsibility for employers has been impacted by the current economic situation. Employers in some sectors are not able to offer the opportunities as they do not have the work available within their organisations to employ apprentices. However, enablers such as the Young Recruits Programme have been key factors in helping employers financially to employ apprentices. Therefore, we have not seen a reduction overall in apprenticeship numbers.

3. Are employers able to find sufficient numbers of young people with the skills and aptitudes that they require?

Sometimes not, however this can be because they may not be aware of all the avenues and agencies they can explore to do so. There is a wealth of competition for the numbers of young learners leaving school between providers and schools themselves. Many of those learners with qualifications that some employers would require, or that would be required for some apprenticeships, are encouraged to stay on in school by either parents and or the schools themselves. There is a need to improve parents understanding of the benefits of apprenticeships and to promote the progression routes available to higher education.

We find that in some more technical routes that employers approach the college looking for learners who have attended full time courses to offer work experience – with a view to an offer of an apprenticeship.

4. Do relationships between employers and training providers work effectively?

Within Coleg Menai relationships are very effective. The dedicated resource of Work Placement Officers who are the key link with apprenticeship employers proves effective in managing this relationship and allows the work based assessors to focus on delivery. Having a large number of providers, delivering the same frameworks within a local authority, can cause confusion for employers and needs to be carefully managed by providers working together.

5. Are apprenticeship opportunities still limited to certain sectors? If so, which in your opinion would benefit from apprenticeship expansion?

The Welsh Government has asked that providers focus on Priority Areas and when providers have followed this requirement there are less opportunities in non-priority areas. In Coleg Menai this has resulted in an increase in priority routes of Construction, Engineering and Care, while some of the non priority routes of Business Admin, Customer Service, Retail and Hairdressing have needed to be reduced as a result. Therefore, although we do receive requests from employers/learners in these areas, we can only support in limited numbers.

6. Do social enterprises make effective use of apprentices?

We don't think that this is an area that is well developed. Social enterprises often have a chronic lack of funding and the pressures of employing an apprentice, often restricts this option.

7. 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?

Coleg Menai merged with two local authority Training Providers in August 2010. One worked closely with the Council who employed a number of apprentices and this has continued. This Council is looking to expand apprenticeships into other sectors e.g. Care in the coming year. The other Council in question has very small numbers currently. As a whole numbers for the local authorities in question have remained static and could be developed as a number of departments in the Councils are not employing apprentices.

We currently sub-contract to the NHS for a nursing programme but the strategic aims of the NHS are changing and this is impacting on the programme. Nurses are no longer the key focus but they are looking at increasing the number of employed Health Care Assistants that achieve the Level 3 Diploma via the apprenticeship route.

The college itself has increased the number of apprentices it is employing during the last year.

8. 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?

This could be effective and the public sector should be seen to take the lead in this area to encourage private firms to do the same. However, these clauses need to be monitored to ensure that they happen in practice and that they produce long term sustained employment.

This has been effective with Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd as it is clearly monitored, but this has not been the standard practice.

9. What is the average profile of an apprentice in your organization? Has this profile changed or is it changing and, if yes, what are the reasons for this?

Age Band	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
16-18	32%	38%	43%
19-24	38%	32%	34%
25+	30%	31%	23%

Gender	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Female	50%	55%	48%
Male	50%	45%	52%

Employment Sectors:-

- Health, Public Services and Care
- Education and Training
- Business Administration and Law
- Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
- Construction, Planning and the Built Environment
- Retailing and Customer Service
- Hair & Beauty
- Hospitality and Catering

The focus of the Welsh Government has been to prioritise younger learners for apprenticeships. Coleg Menai has responded to this, which has resulted in an increase in the percentage of 16-18 year olds and a reduction in the 25+ age bracket. However, we are offering alternative training to those who are 25+ through our FE provision.

10. Are apprenticeships generally successful from the perspective of the apprentice?

Yes, because the apprenticeship combines relevant work experience with the facility to gain valuable qualifications which the apprentice can then take with them to future employers. A high percentage of our apprentices gain the full framework and gain permanent employment.

11. Are apprenticeships generally successful from the employer's perspective?

We would consider they are as long as that employer is willing to invest the time to train the apprentice effectively. Where this occurs there is often a vast improvement for the employer from a business perspective through the contribution the apprentice makes. The last 3 years data suggests that 96% of learners achieving the apprenticeship continue with their employer at the end of the apprenticeship. A further 2% enter new employment or become self employed. This demonstrates the success to the employer.

12. Have apprenticeship completion rates changed in recent years? If so, how? In practice, are apprentices guaranteed a job at the end of the apprenticeship?

Our framework attainment rates have been consistently above the national comparators for the last few years, and results in general have increased in line with this trend with some peaks and troughs within each sector.

Level	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09
FA	90%	81%	84%

A	84%	75%	79%
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Although not all apprentices are guaranteed a job at the end of their programme, the majority of employers will try their best to accommodate the apprentice in employment if they are financially able to do so. Over the last three years 96% of learners completing their framework have continued their employment with a further 2% entering new employment or becoming self employed.

13. Do Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus provide effective support for people wanting to find apprenticeships?

We work closely with Careers Wales to provide details of the apprenticeship offer and the entry requirements for each route in order that young people are given appropriate advice and guidance. It is our experience that advice on apprenticeships from Careers Wales staff can be inconsistent due to a lack of knowledge of occupational sectors, however, in most cases the advisors will contact us directly to ensure that our Work Placement Officers speak to the clients.

Our collaboration with Job Centre Plus hasn't produced evidence of apprenticeship advice, rather on further training or work experience for clients.

14. Does the new Apprenticeship Matching Service, run by Careers Wales, work effectively?

This appears to add another layer of unnecessary bureaucracy. Feedback from employers is negative and having used the system to advertise ourselves we can see that the number of potential apprentices accessing the system is low. When larger organisations use the site they put a link through to their own website as they have their own recruitment procedures to follow.

Early signs are that this is improving since the launch of Jobs Growth Wales, with more young people logging onto the website to review vacancies, though this is still not a high application rate in Gwynedd and Mon.

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

Those apprenticeships that are seen as traditional influence a large number of young learners, but also the opportunity to earn while learning is a major factor. The training received whilst on the apprenticeship is also important to them as is skills, interest, job satisfaction, career opportunity.

Some routes are now being seen as a genuine alternative to A levels through to higher education e.g. Nursing Cadetship programme and the Engineering Shared Apprenticeship programme.

16. Are apprenticeships an attractive option for young people of all abilities or are apprenticeships seen as a second best option compared with higher education?

For some sectors, particularly the Engineering sector, apprenticeships are seen as equally valuable as higher education. This is in part due to the financial implications of going to university, particularly in light of the increase in fees and the long term financial burden higher education places on the learner. Employment with a larger organisation is often an excellent route to higher education without the financial penalty of incurring debt. Unfortunately the same may not be true for many other sectors.

17. Are attitudes changing and if yes, what are the reasons for this?

Although attitudes are changing this is a slow process and is achieved through continued marketing and good news stories. The way apprenticeships are portrayed by academics and schools has significant impact on young people's and parents' perceptions.

18. 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?

Teachers in schools generally have little knowledge, or understanding of specific routes and sectors and are not best placed to advise young people. Careers within the schools are given information on the apprenticeships available but we tend to rely on being able to promote programmes at events within schools and open days to provide the message to young people and parents.

Parents are often faced with conflicting and contradictory advice. Generally the best people to advise on apprenticeships would be the employers who are actually facilitating them as they are more aware of what certain careers entail and so can offer in depth advice or information.

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

The Government is clearly committed to apprenticeships but perhaps the communication of its strategy for apprenticeships could be improved.

20. 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?

Every effort is made to help young people, at all levels within relevant organisations in our experience, but as mentioned in the responses above, schools, parents and employers should be more closely involved.

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

A great deal is being done to promote apprenticeships but perhaps more effective use of the media, particularly the TV and Internet could be beneficial in targeting the young people more directly in a way they respond to. The capacity of SSC's, are severely limited in this area in relation to promoting Welsh apprenticeships rather than generic UK wide pathways. We work with many of our employers who are SME's to increase their understanding of what a SSC is and their role.

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

European funding is fundamental to the work we do with apprenticeships.

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

Wales excels in its appreciation of the value of apprenticeships for the young as a whole.