

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee on the Routes into post-16 education and training](#)

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Ymateb gan: Make UK

Response from: Make UK

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## About Make UK

Make UK, The Manufacturers' Organisation, is the representative voice of UK manufacturing, with offices in London, every English region and Wales.

Collectively we represent 20,000 companies of all sizes, from start-ups to multinationals, across engineering, manufacturing, technology and the wider industrial sector. Everything we do – from providing essential business support and training to championing manufacturing industry in the UK and internationally – is designed to help British manufacturers compete, innovate and grow.

From HR and employment law, health and safety to environmental and productivity improvement, our advice, expertise and influence enables businesses to remain safe, compliant and future-focused.

## Summary of and context for response

1. Make UK data demonstrates that Wales generates 15.4% of its national output from manufacturing, which is well above the UK average of 9.4%. The manufacturing industry in Wales contributes to 0.5% of the UK's total output, making up a significant proportion of the 3.3% of the UK's total output that Wales contributes to overall.
2. Three major subsectors account for just under half of Wales' manufacturing output. The largest is the Transport Equipment industry, with 15.5% of all manufacturing output. This is followed by the Food & Drink subsector at 14.7% and then the Metal Products subsector at 13.7%.
3. Manufacturing is well known as a well-paid sector with numerous opportunities for progression. However, across Wales, there are clear labour and skills gaps in the sector, and the number of apprentices enrolling on courses in manufacturing and engineering continues to fall. This reflects similar situations across the UK and offers significant cause for concern.
4. In our response, we highlight the fall in apprenticeship numbers and the suspected cause of these: the Apprenticeship Levy, cuts to education programmes and broader perception issues within the sector. We also provide a number of recommendations that aim to address these. We have called on a number of resources, including surveys and evidence from our Labour Market and Skills Policy Committee, to answer questions posed in this review.

## Quality of information given to learners about the full range of post-16 options

- **Quality and nature of information provided to learners within schools and those educated other than at school (EOTAS).**
- **Quality and nature of information provided directly to learners by Careers Wales.**
- **The extent to which further education colleges are able to engage directly with learners in schools.**

- **The extent to which learners in schools are made aware of the options available to them in school sixth forms and local further education colleges, and how closely schools engage with local colleges. Are there any conflicts of interest between sixth forms and further education colleges and is this more prevalent in some areas of Wales more than others?**
  - **The extent to which employers are able to engage directly with learners in schools, for example at careers events.**
  - **Who else influences learners future career choices (e.g. parents, teachers, peers), and how well are those people supported to do this.**
5. Evidence from Make UK points suggests that, much like the situation in other nations, the quality and nature of information provided about the full range of post-16 options is limited, in both its delivery and breadth. Often A Levels and more 'academic' routes are privileged over vocational training and further education, reflecting the lack of parity of esteem between these two post-16 routes.
6. This is reflected in the funding model for Welsh schools, which is based (amongst other things) on a 'return to school' rate, encouraging pupil retention post-16 for funding purposes even where this may not be in the learner's best interest<sup>1</sup>. It is unsurprising that, given this funding model, feedback from some of our members has highlighted a difficulty in entering schools to promote or raise awareness of pathways outside of an academic route. Learners from across the country who we have spoken to have emphasised similar themes – highlighting that their vocational education journey has been largely self-researched.
7. It is therefore all the more important that resources from the Welsh Government are effective in answering common questions and providing clear guidance for learners and those influencing their choices (parents and guardians). While Careers Wales provides an overview of apprenticeships and, for example, CV writing tips – both of which are helpful – there is a lack of thorough career mapping available on the website. This limits learners and businesses from accessing information on where apprenticeships could lead, which would help them to make a decision based on long-term goals.
8. Though it is not difficult to map out career routes through different apprenticeship levels for manufacturing and engineering, it is time-consuming. IfATE has done an excellent job of creating a comprehensive tool, which shows how different qualifications can lead to careers, and while more detail could be added, this is already very helpful<sup>2</sup>. We would recommend that a similar model is adopted in Wales.

## How effective careers support is at compulsory school age

- **To what extent careers support at pre-16 is resulting in positive or negative outcomes post-16 e.g. young people finding themselves not in education, employment or training (NEET).**
- **Whether work experience opportunities for learners of compulsory school are operational, effective and meaningful and any barriers in that regard.**

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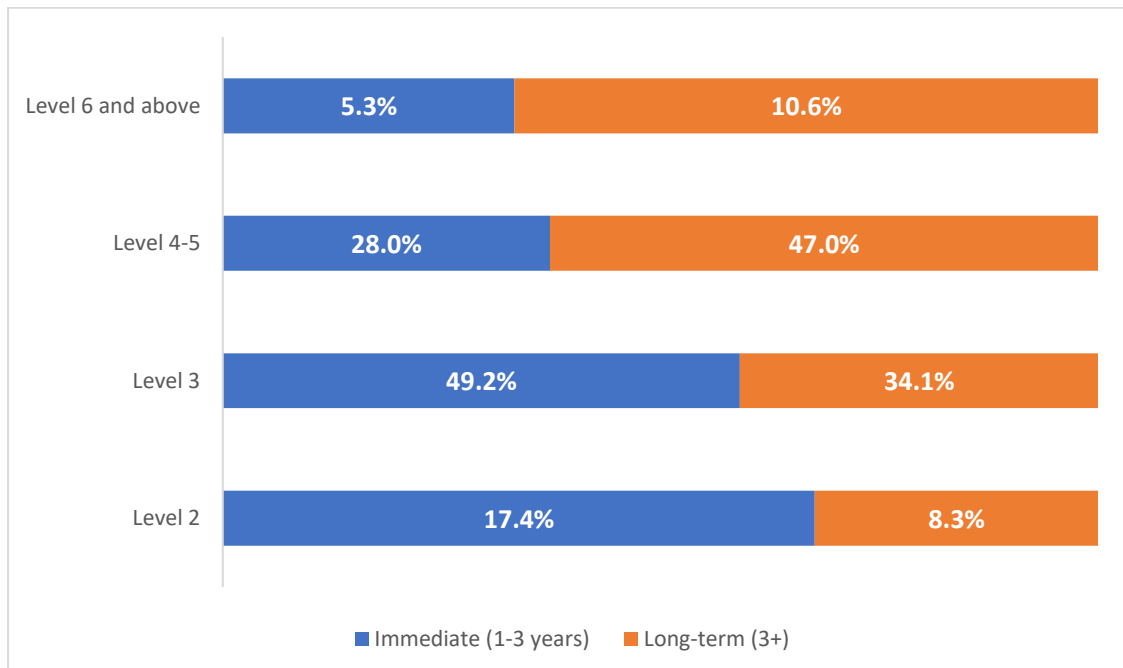
<sup>1</sup> [18-028-web-english.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Occupational Maps: Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education](#)

9. No further comment.

## Changes in routes post-18

- **Is there evidence that learners are changing their choices post-18, including a drop in Higher Education enrolments, and if so why?**
10. Over recent years, Make UK has noted the increase in employer demand for higher level skills in the long term – with particular emphasis on Level 4 and above. We have also noted greater awareness of the opportunities of degree apprenticeships – for both learners and employers. These involve the opportunity to save money and leave university without debt for the learner, and for employers, the option of a reliable method for develop a learner’s technical skills to suit a job role, as well as upskill current employees.
11. On this basis, we would advocate greater support for degree apprenticeships, especially when we consider that the majority of Welsh apprentices in the manufacturing sector fell within the level 2 and 3 categories in 2023, with very few taking up training at Level 4 or above.
12. This follows a similar trend to the previous 5 years and suggests some difficulty in progression through different apprenticeship levels in Wales. Indeed, fewer apprentices progressed beyond Level 4 in manufacturing and engineering in Wales than elsewhere (for comparison purposes, in 2023/24, the percentage of advanced apprentice starts in England is 10% and in Wales, this is 0.5%<sup>3</sup>). Naturally, this is concerning for employers, who know that it is crucial to upskill the workforce of today to ensure a consistent talent pipeline for the further growth and success of their business.
13. *Make UK, 2030 Skills Survey (2022)*



<sup>3</sup> [Apprenticeship learning programmes started by quarter, sector and programme type](#) and [Microsoft Power BI \(gov.uk apprenticeship starts in England\)](#)

## Welsh-medium provision

- **The availability of post-16 options (both academic and vocational) through the medium of Welsh, and how this impacts on young people's choices.**

14. No further comment.

## Equity of access

- **Are some groups of learners disadvantaged by the current system (e.g. pupils from low-income households, learners with travel needs)?**
- **What support is available for learners to improve access (financial or otherwise)?**
- **Is there any regional variation in the information and support provided about post-16 across Wales? Are there any particular challenges facing learners in rural areas?**
- **Are there any other equality issues?**

15. Challenges facing learners in rural areas may arise from the risk of inconsistent approaches between local areas creating uncertainty for manufacturers who operate multiple sites overly specific approaches, limiting learners' potential. Indeed, while we support the principle of Regional Skills Partnerships in developing approaches which reflect the specific characteristics and demands of local labour markets, Medr will have a vital role in ensuring that there is also space for consistency and certainty across different regions of Wales, in its co-ordination of the work of the RSPs.

16. Welsh manufacturers have expressed frustration that the Welsh Government has implemented significant cuts to the apprenticeship budget in 2024. This will inevitably limit the extent to which employers who want invest in and recruit apprentices are able to find the right local training provision, as well as the extent to which they can invest to advertise/reach out to and recruit from a range of different backgrounds. The Welsh Government should revisit the funding settlement for the apprenticeship programme, and consider how this funding could better support the provision of apprenticeship training relevant to the needs of employers, including degree-level apprenticeships.

17. Nonetheless, we support the Welsh Government's recent decision to uplift the household income thresholds for families to apply for the Education Maintenance Allowance. This may help to provide transport to and from work and college for Welsh apprentices, who would otherwise struggle to access the courses offered by providers and employers, and is a positive step towards improving access for financially marginalised learners.

## Post-16 destination data

- **Is there sufficient post-16 destination data collected to understand trends and inform what education institutions deliver? If not, what data is required to fully understand the post-16 landscape?**

18. While it is useful that the Welsh Government collects post-16 destination data in its Pupil Destination survey, it would be helpful to see some more granular or qualitative analysis – for example, being able to distil the data by sector or A Level subject. This would allow

employers to see whether there is good retention in the wider sector and exchange best practice in cases of high numbers of learners staying on or completing further training.

19. Moreover, it would be helpful to note the underlying causes of the decision-making process for the learner in case there are ways that Government or employers can support learners in remaining in education or employment.

## Welsh Government's role

- **How effective is the Welsh Government's approach to support participation in the full range of post-16 education and training options?**
  - **Are learners, their families and schools aware of available Wales-wide support and programmes, such as the Young Person's Guarantee?**
  - **Outcomes from Dr Hefin David MS's 'Transitions to Employment' report.**
20. Last year, the Welsh Government chose to cut funding by 14% to its apprenticeship programme in 2024/2025. The defunding of this programme does little to demonstrate support for the full range of post-16 education and training options and creates further challenges for the longevity and growth of the sector in their recruitment of young people and reskilling of the workforce.
  21. Evidence from Make UK members suggests that the cost of manufacturing and engineering apprentices, particularly for energy, equipment and material, have continued to grow without equivalent support from Government, especially in light of long periods of high inflation. This has resulted in providers reducing their course offerings, lowering access for those who want to train.
  22. This is only further evidenced by looking to recent statistics. In 2023-2024, the same year in which Government chose to cut funding, there were only 8515<sup>4</sup> in Manufacturing and Engineering apprentices in Wales (1.5% of which were women). As noted above, these have mostly occupied Level 2 and 3 positions and follows the trend of a decline in the number of apprentices taking up training in the manufacturing and engineering sector.
  23. While this is not to say that these apprentices have not progressed at all (our research demonstrates that the vast majority of apprentices recruited by our members stay on with the same firm in their trained role after completion of their qualification), it remains concerning, particularly as a lack of learner/worker progression limits a business' ability to grow.
  24. This is crucial when we consider that the vast majority of manufacturers are SMEs, who are often short on both time and resources. While manufacturing business are largely very conscious of the benefits of apprentices, the labour and skills gap has made SMEs more cautious about investing in talent that they may not retain (for example, apprentices leaving after training).
  25. In order to support participation in the full range of post-16 options, it is necessary to consider specific support for SMEs businesses to engage with the apprenticeship programme. By creating access to good quality information, advice and guidance about apprenticeship opportunities, employers who are not already engaged in the system can also understand how the system works and how to become involved. The Welsh Government should consider

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<sup>4</sup> [Apprenticeship learning programmes started by quarter, sector and programme type](#)

how it could provide more effective support to SMEs to deliver apprenticeship opportunities for the first time. This could include:

- a. **Simplified and tailored guidance for SMEs.** Time and capacity-constrained SMEs need access to simple, easy to understand guidance to support their apprentice recruitment, retention and development. Manufacturing SMEs who may see the long-term value in taking on apprentices may be dissuaded from doing so by the fear of engaging with a complex system of which they lack sufficient understanding. They also typically need greater support to understand how best to mentor and supervise apprentices in order to progress them onto higher apprenticeships or full-time skilled work; the Welsh Government and Medr could work with industry to develop tailored guidance that is useful and accessible to SMEs.
- b. **Apprenticeship Ambassadors across the country.** England has successfully developed a network of Apprenticeship Ambassadors to provide support to firms with less experience of apprenticeship delivery and raise awareness of the training options available to employers considering how best to invest in workforce training. The Welsh Government and Medr could look to replicate this as part of improving the support available to SMEs.
- c. **Incentives for SMEs to recruit apprentices.** The Welsh Government has introduced incentive payments associated with the recruitment of apprentices with disabilities and long-term health conditions to promote greater inclusion within the programme. The use of incentives to promote positive behaviour from employers – particularly those SMEs concerned about their capacity to deliver training and support apprentices' development – could be an effective way of increasing SME engagement and confidence in taking on apprentices.

26. The Welsh Government should further consider the implementation of recommendations in Dr Hefin David MS's 'Transitions to Employment', which we wholeheartedly support.

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