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Welsh Parliament

Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

Inquiry: Apprenticeship pathways

Ref: AP38

Evidence from: Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)





WLGA Written Evidence Response

Senedd Apprenticeship Pathways Consultation

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Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

We are the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); a politically led cross-party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the three fire and rescue authorities and three national park authorities are associate members.

We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

Our ultimate goal is to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

We'll achieve our vision by

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce



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This document provides written evidence to the Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry on Apprenticeship pathways. To align with the terms of reference for the inquiry, each response has been prepared in line with the relevant section.

1. Pathways between apprenticeship levels

The extent to which there are challenges in mapping out career routes through the different apprenticeship levels, such as from a junior apprenticeship to a degree apprenticeship. Whether this is more difficult in some careers/sectors than others

Local Authorities feel that current challenges exist with mapping out career routes and found this to be more prevalent in some sectors than others. Examples are

- Landscape architecture,
- Arboriculture,
- Green skills,
- Trading standards,
- Public Health, Public protection and Environmental health
- Building Control
- Planning & Civil Engineering,
- Architecture
- Social care,
- Revenue and Finance (not just finance/ATT),
- Animal Care and
- Procurement.

Local Authorities feel that there are some areas for development in the current system. Challenges exist when considering progression within the current system in terms of:

1. Clarity
2. Availability of the routes
3. Appropriateness of the routes and
4. Financial.

Clarity

In terms of clarity, the overall view is that progression routes are not always clear when moving from one apprenticeship level to the next. Some confusion exists in terms of the work-based-learning requirements to progress through various levels.

Availability of routes

In relation to availability of routes, there is a view that there is a lack of availability of higher level/Level 4 qualifications and career specific routes through all levels meaning that progression is not always being aligned to the learners previous



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learning pathway. Additionally, some apprenticeships which align with local government occupations may not be available through providers in Wales for example Trading Standards. Unintended consequences of this could be that when moving between levels the apprentice has to move to a different provider which could impact on an individual's development of skills and knowledge in the particular field, which may not always be a sustainable way of learning and provide the value intended. Additionally Local Authorities are having to look outside of Wales to source a provider as well as the type and level of apprenticeships required which results in an increase in costs and could mean that Local Authorities are not receiving the full benefits of their investment through the apprenticeship Levy.

Appropriateness of routes

The absence of suitable routes can also be a challenge as this forces employers to adapt or adopt allied frameworks which do not fully match to a role which an employee within the Local Authority sector currently performs. Also, some frameworks are not sufficiently aligned or relevant to the sector and industry needs potentially meaning that pathways are not sustainable or relevant.

Finance

Finally, Financial challenges remain which are prevalent and bring challenge to using the current system. An example provided by one of our Local Authorities is where a junior level apprenticeship is funded, but the second level may not be. As a result of current financial challenges within all Local Authorities in Wales, this is likely to hinder career progression through the apprenticeship route on the basis that financially Local Authorities may not be able to fund further training and investment in employees through the apprenticeship pathway, therefore restricting the opportunities of the scheme. There also needs to be consideration on the return on investment with regards to the apprenticeship levy in Wales and the financial cost of the levy versus the benefits for Local Authorities.

Local authorities believe that pathways should be developed to be more employer led, to ensure appropriate and necessary skills sets are gained and candidates are job ready. One Local Authority would like to be able to access and provide more funded Degree level apprenticeships linked to roles within the Local Authority in order to be able to offer an alternative to university, supported by a clear career path. This will ensure that apprenticeship pathways help address outcomes of workforce and succession planning and support investment in both employee's and their local communities. Secondly, to widen the availability of roles it is suggested that an increase in the offering of higher-level courses (other than ILM courses) in specific areas may help, for example Engineering and Planning. Finally, there is a suggestion for the guidance to be developed in a more simplistic and accessible format.

As a result of challenges which have been identified, Local Authorities may not be able to fully utilise the apprenticeship system to achieve capacity building and address the needs identified through succession and workforce planning, as a consequence they do not feel they achieve the value which apprentices should



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bring in all areas of the Local Authority, but particularly in addressing hard to fill positions or specialised roles.

Economy

The extent to which apprenticeship pathways support the needs of Welsh businesses and contribute to filling skills gaps in the Welsh economy.

In Wales, Local Government is one of the biggest employers and can often be one of few major employers in a locality, therefore has a significant contribution to the Welsh economy in terms of employment.

Generally, there is a mixed view on the extent to which apprenticeship pathways used by Local Authorities contributes to addressing skill gaps and investment and growth in the Welsh economy, with the suggestion that more consultation is needed with local government employers to ensure the range of apprenticeship pathways offered are fit for purpose and aligned with current and future employment needs.

For some apprenticeship pathways can be seen as an enabler for Local Authorities to invest in their employees throughout various stages of their careers, supporting the development of knowledge and skills. Providing opportunities to develop the workforce in entry level jobs and then progress with their careers, a key contributor to supporting an improvement in economic and social wellbeing and sustainable employment. Pathways can also provide an important mechanism to update or offer re-skilling to staff in response to changing roles or business requirements, therefore supporting the employee and economy more broadly to provide a just transition and maintain sustainable employment.

The variety of pathways available was noted as being important here. There is a view that some pathways are easier to access for example, in the lower-level roles in ICT. One Local Authority shared their success in recruiting ICT Apprentices that have since progressed with their learning and development to complete higher level qualifications and associated employment therefore benefiting the local economy.

However, challenges remain where Local Authorities wish to address skill gaps in higher level more specialist professional roles, for example in ICT Software Developers, Environmental work, Civil Engineering, Planning and in particular Occupational Therapists. There are insufficient opportunities available for Level 4 qualifications, as a result local authorities are unable to utilise the apprenticeship pathway option in addressing identified skills gaps.

It is suggested that to adequately align programmes with evolving economic demands requires continuous reviews and more work between education, local government employers and policy makers. More consultation is required with recruiting managers, HR professionals and front-line colleagues to identify where those skills gaps are, what qualifications they feel are required for progression and



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personal development and how the apprenticeship framework can be designed to overcome them.

Pathways can be strengthened by improving the links between economic and employers skills gaps data with education and Post 16 training. There is a suggestion from one Local Authority of the need to develop STEM skills and increase participation in schools (formal and informal curriculum) in order to increase aspiration and interest in allied pathways within Local Authorities. Identifying relevant pathways and skills gaps to develop training and apprenticeships to address skills gaps/skills of the future is suggested. One Local Authority would also like to see more specific qualifications to meet the skill gaps in specialist areas.

There is also a view that the levy arrangement in Wales should be evaluated to assess the cost versus benefits to Local Authorities and provide for a return on their investment and ensure it remains beneficial to developing the Welsh economy. Currently financial pressures on Local Authorities mean that they are having to restrict 1) Recruiting to their workforce and 2) Investing in staff development and are not utilising the apprenticeship route as fully as they would like to, which in turn impacts on employment in local and national areas. An analysis of the impact of the levy in meeting employer needs in local government and more broadly could form part of this evaluation to ensure a strong and sustainable way forward for the apprenticeship route in Wales.

As one of the largest employers in Wales, there is some support amongst Local Authorities that a fully funded apprenticeship, specifically for Local Government in Wales and/or public service would be beneficial to the economy. This should be accompanied by a clear progression route. The majority of respondents are supportive of this approach to encourage avenues such as 'grow your own' and to showcase career pathways in Local Authorities, particularly in hard to fill roles, supporting employment and therefore the economy. It is thought that this approach could cover the more generic/core roles that are in most Local Authorities/public services and would increase awareness of the work and responsibilities of Local Authorities and provide access to employment through various content and levels of the pathway. It would need to be recognised as an entry route into local government/public services and provide progression into more specialised roles at a higher level with a Local Authority setting. Pathways would need to recognise that public services are diverse in the offering of the routes available to ensure value is added.

The Welsh Government supported public services Graduate Scheme was highlighted as an approach which could be adopted in designing an apprenticeship pathway to support Local Authorities/public services but on a lower level to support entry level employment

Employers



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The engagement of employers in facilitating these pathways and attracting apprentices. Is specific support needed for micro, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to engage with the apprenticeship programme

Local Authorities remain committed to supporting and offering appropriate apprenticeships but would welcome more support, guidance and funding/financial assistance to achieve this in addition to addressing the challenges which have been shared within this document.

Further support and guidance on apprenticeship providers in Wales and specific apprenticeship qualifications and routes in the different service areas/specialisms within a Local Authority setting would be beneficial. Additionally, any change to entry qualifications which could impact how Local Authorities advertise and recruit could be supported further and clearly communicated. One suggestion was to provide more support/resources to help Local Authorities promote apprenticeships internally and externally (for example a power point slide presentation showcasing a range of successful examples of apprenticeship that have led onto careers in Local Authorities/Public sector would be a useful suggestion for a way forward).

The National Training Federation for Wales (NTFW) presented at a local government meeting in mid Wales in 2025 which was very helpful and well received, but ongoing support to maximise access to and use of apprenticeships is required.

There is a view that increased financial assistance/funding would support the ability of Local Authorities to engage further with apprenticeship programmes in addition to addressing the challenges raised in this response.

It was suggested that consideration be given to how Local Authorities fund salary costs for apprenticeships, and whether there is the opportunity to offer an incentive or support as there is a view that this would be beneficial, particularly considering the significant financial difficulties faced by Local Authorities. This approach would be seen as a means to allow the Local Authority to promote and extend the reach of apprenticeships to provide all service areas with the opportunity to engage and recruit an apprentice in times of financial constraint.

Information about apprenticeships

Good practice between careers services, schools, colleges and employers in terms of promoting apprenticeships and the provision of meaningful work experience

Local authorities remain committed to operating a high level of engagement with schools, colleges and careers services and there is a desire to continue with this collaboration but more generally, Local Authorities feel there could be improvement in this area and engagement to date has had varying levels of success



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There is a view that some schools continue to promote University more than any apprenticeship routes and that schools need to raise more awareness of the career roles and progression routes that are available within Local Authorities.

Links could also improve with education providers, for example in social care, to ensure training provision is more vocational and less academic therefore providing a more meaningful and seamless approach to work experience and employment. This would help with attrition rates in a sector which faces recruitment and retention challenges and ensure that apprentices are fully prepared for the realities of work.

With regards to career services, there is view that Careers Wales work in relation to apprenticeships is limited beyond their core offer in schools with regards careers advice and guidance or work experience and it is suggested that more work is carried out to consider work experience, training and apprenticeship pathways as a seamless process including partners from education, careers and business.

Equity of support and access for learners

The extent to which apprenticeship pathways are made open to all young people in Wales and any barriers facing specific demographic groups or geographical areas

Geographical location and transport options are important challenges to raise especially within our rural communities. There is concern that some groups will be disadvantaged where there is a lack of public transport meaning that some opportunities will only be suitable for those who drive (young people aged 16 with limited public transport will be deterred from choosing the apprenticeship route to address skill gaps was one example provided).

One suggestion is to strengthen funding in this space to ensure access is not restricted to any learning group due to geography and transport. Additionally, it has been identified that some specialist roles in small rural Local Authorities result in limited number of learners for a specific qualification. As a result, there is a greater reliance on larger providers which raise unintended consequences of 1) increasing costs and adding further pressure to Local Authority budgets and 2) limiting the use of the apprenticeship route as a mechanism to support addressing identified skill gaps.

Many Local Authority roles now also provide for hybrid working and therefore reliable broadband to those living in rural areas may unintentionally cause barriers for members of that community who wish to access employment through the apprenticeship scheme.

One Local Authority feels that the current system provides for less apprenticeships on offer in Wales. There are also views that the current system is too limited when considering subject areas which might be of interest to some young people. An



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unintended consequence of this may be that the scheme does not enable Wales to fully achieve the goals under the NEET agenda to its desired capacity.

Other demographic challenges include ensuring the system is available for under-represented groups in local communities based on ethnicity and disability and ensuring that the branding of apprenticeships in Wales is not only targeted to young people. Increasing the starting and completion of the apprentice option for ethnic minority people also supports the goals and actions contained within the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan.

Where necessary Local Authorities will consider reasonable adjustments to support individuals in the community or employee's wishing to enter the apprenticeship route and to support their career progression and will continue to do so.

The Welsh Government's role

How policies support apprenticeship pathways and any barriers that need addressing in that regard. The role of the Welsh Government, Regional Skills Partnerships and other stakeholders in identifying and communicating economic and skills needs to inform apprenticeship frameworks and the delivery of qualifications.

Generally, it was felt that there could be a strengthening of relevant policies. To address any barriers and continue to develop the practice in Wales, there are a number of areas which could be improved such as policy review, funding, stakeholder engagement with Local Authorities and pastoral support.

There is a view amongst some local authorities that a more frequent review cycle for apprenticeship policies would be beneficial involving key stakeholders.

In addition, a review of funding is needed that would enable Local Authorities in Wales to realise a return on their financial investment in the scheme. Aligned with this, local authorities would like to see a review of the levy arrangement in Wales to ensure Local Authorities are able to access suitable apprenticeship provision and receive the benefits and a return on their investment in the scheme.

Policy must also focus on strengthen links between taking the skill gaps identified by Local Authorities in Wales via their workforce and succession planning, the development and funding of suitable apprenticeship frameworks and the role of key stakeholders in schools and colleges in promoting and communicating appropriate apprenticeship pathways to meet such gaps and stimulate interest in the sector. This approach should also consider national data on hard to fill posts within Local Government in Wales to ensure systems are in place for use by all stakeholders to ensure that apprenticeship provision addresses the economic and skills challenges on a local and national level.



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There is a view that Regional Skills Partnerships could strengthen their employer engagement policies to ensure that pathways are developed to meet employer needs in local government to strengthen local and national employment opportunities.

Finally, there is a view that Welsh Government policy should also focus on the need for fully funded pastoral care through mentoring support within the apprenticeship framework which is available for both apprentices and employers.
