



Andrew RT Davies MS  
Chair, Economy, Trade, and  
Rural Affairs Committee

27 March 2025

Dear Chair,

During the general scrutiny session on the Foundational Economy on 14 November 2024, the following questions were identified as areas that I would follow-up with the Committee.

**In relation to the railway engineering degree apprenticeship run by the University of South Wales and Coleg y Cymoedd, please can we be provided with the current recruitment figures, as well as the projected recruitment figures in the years ahead.**

Medr, which is the new post 16 tertiary authority, has advised that the January 2025 end of year registration estimates from providers showed that there were two new entrants estimated to complete the USW BSc Railway Engineering degree at the end of 2024/25, and 10 continuing students (from 2023/24) that were estimated to complete at the end of 2024/25.

As Medr have not asked USW to submit their estimated bids for Degree apprentice starts for 2025/2026, they are unable to predict any recruitment figures in the years ahead.

**Please can we be provided with further detail on steps being taken to support skills apprenticeships in the housing sector, particularly in regard to housing decarbonisation.**

We are prioritising investment to meet our current and future skills needs through developing apprenticeships in growth sectors and emerging occupations in line with priorities determined by Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs), labour market information and sector reviews carried out by Qualifications Wales.

We are working closely with Medr who are reviewing the content of apprenticeship frameworks and pathways with a focus on developing and adapting those apprenticeships that support our net zero and sustainability goals. Medr currently has a Housing framework at level 2 and Level 3 and have just developed a level 4 framework. The newly developed Level 4 Housing framework is expected to be published by the end of February 2025 and will contain modules on sustainability.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

A review by Qualification Wales, in 2018, found that employers believed construction apprenticeships in Wales did not meet their needs. Following this review, Qualification Wales, working with the sector, developed new arrangements where most learners complete a Foundation qualification in college in the first year and then progress to an apprenticeship at level 3. Under these arrangements, only a minority of learners are expected to directly start an apprenticeship at level 3 after leaving school.

We are currently working with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), training providers and Qualifications Wales to review the impact of these new arrangements, with a particular focus on entry requirements, the effect on construction apprenticeship starts, progression and completion.

We have a Programme for Government commitment to expand shared apprenticeships for new employers, sectors and regions. To achieve this expansion, we introduced a new funding and delivery model in 2022. Providers in the construction sector are continuing to offer non-Welsh Government funded, shared apprenticeship provision to employers allowing them to continue to access CITB funding. For example, Melin Homes works with Monmouthshire County Council and Y Prentis on construction-based apprenticeships.

Colleges are also boosting their Green Skills offer in the Construction Sector, by providing a range of courses aimed at upskilling in relation to energy efficiency measures as well as delivering courses aimed at demystifying the retrofit agenda.

In line with the Programme for Government commitment to increase degree apprenticeships, CITB, working closely with the Welsh Government and stakeholders including employers, universities and professional bodies, was the lead developer progressing a new construction pathway and developing new pathways in civil engineering, quantity surveying, surveying and construction management. Following this work, pathways of the construction degree apprenticeship framework have been offered from September 2024 by the University of South Wales, the University of Wrexham and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

**In reference to the social partnership duty, can the Minister please confirm if all the trade unions within Transport for Wales are now signed up to that social partnership duty and way of working. Furthermore, and more broadly across other public bodies, is there confidence that they're going to be supported with facility time as well?**

Public bodies which are subject to the well-being duty in Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 must set and publish objectives designed to maximise their contribution to achieving each of the well-being goals; and take all reasonable steps in meeting their objectives.

Since 1 April 2024, those public bodies now have a social partnership duty to seek consensus or compromise with their recognised trade unions, or where there is no recognised trade union other representatives of their staff, when setting or reviewing and delivering their well-being objectives. The duty is therefore placed on the public bodies rather than the trade unions. I can confirm that Transport for Wales is captured by the social partnership duty and therefore is required to seek consensus or compromise with all its recognised trade unions.

Decisions on facility time are determined locally and Welsh Government does not have levers to intervene in local decision making on this issue. Welsh Government does however recognise the value of facility time and views facility time as an investment rather than a cost. It is key for ensuring workers have the opportunity to be represented collectively,

ensuring workers are informed about proposed decisions that may affect them, and providing workers with the means to participate in and influence those decisions. Welsh Government has reiterated to public bodies the importance of facility time and the expectation for Trade Unions to have the appropriate time to be able to fully engage in the implementation of the Social Partnership Duty.

During the session the Welsh Government also committed to provide the Committee with updates on the following, once progress has been made in their respective areas:

**The outcome of the first meeting of the task and finish group established by the Social Partnership Council, once it has taken place.**

The planned inception meeting for the group on 25 February has been postponed following apologies and a new date is being sought.

**Details around investments in the semiconductor industry, following the completion of consideration by the Cabinet Secretary of two current development cases.**

The Welsh Government has supported a £51m investment into Vishay Intertechnologies. This included investment into new equipment at their Newport plant, supported by a £5m grant from Welsh Government. This investment will help safeguard 200 jobs at the plant. This has been announced and is in the public domain.

The second investment is currently being finalised and is at the legal documentation stage. We expect to make an announcement in early March subject to successful completion of the legal documentation and due diligence and will update the committee following completion.

I trust this information covers all the questions that were asked during the general scrutiny session.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JACK SARGEANT". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underneath the name.

**Jack Sargeant AS/MS**

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership

Y Gweinidog Diwylliant, Sgiliau a Phartneriaeth Gymdeithasol