

9 May 2025

Dear members of the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee,

### **Colegau Cymru – further evidence on 14-16**

Thank you for requesting further information to assist with the inquiry into Routes into Post-16 Education and Training in relation to 14-16, and the Junior Apprenticeship programme. We have provided answers to the questions posed by the Committee below, but if you need anything further, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

**1. Approximately what proportion of children in the participating schools are currently eligible for the Cardiff and Vale College Junior Apprenticeship programme? Who assesses eligibility and how? Are there significant numbers of children who are at risk of disengaging from education or training who are not currently able to access this provision due to capacity/funding limitations (and if so, approximately how many)?**

#### **Introduction**

Junior apprenticeships provide a vocational education and training opportunity for learners aged between 14-16 particularly those who are at risk of Not being in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) or learners that do not adjust well to the typical academic school system.

The programme offers a two-year programme of work-related education with work experience built in, alongside a Level 2 course that is equivalent to four or five GCSEs, in a range of different vocational pathways. Each learner also studies GCSEs in mathematics and English alongside their chosen area.

There are different delivery models for 14-16 provision in FE colleges, and 5 out of the 12 FE Colleges in Wales have previously accessed 'junior apprenticeship' funding and provided a variety of options for courses including:

- Public services
- Landscaping
- Fabrication and Welding
- Automotive Engineering
- Construction
- Hair and Beauty
- Hospitality and Catering
- Media

## Eligibility

It is difficult to quantify how many children in the participating schools are currently eligible for the Cardiff and Vale College Junior Apprenticeship programme as Cardiff and the Vale College are not privy to this information. However, any year 10 or year 11 child who is at risk of becoming NEET would potentially be eligible. Eligibility is assessed via a panel consisting of the local authority, the school and the college.

Where active junior apprenticeship pathways are available, access to junior apprenticeship programmes within colleges are mostly targeted to specific pupils or groups of pupils rather than these programmes being available on an open access basis to all Year 10 and 11 pupils.

A variety of referral and selection methods are used by colleges, schools and local authorities in local areas offering junior apprenticeship programmes in order to identify potential learners and allocate available places. Targeted approaches tend to prioritise those who were struggling to engage with mainstream school provision and were particularly at risk of becoming NEET. but also show an interest in vocational learning.

The option of a junior apprenticeship programme, where these are available, is often considered as an alternative option to other education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) options including pupil referral units (PRUs).

The larger junior apprenticeship college providers tend to receive substantially more applications each year than they can accommodate. For example, in 2024 Cardiff and Vale College had 175 Junior Apprenticeship applicants but could only accommodate 90, and this appears to be an emerging pattern year-on-year.

A 2024 Estyn Review of the Junior Apprenticeship Programme<sup>1</sup> found that recruitment and selection methods were particularly systematic and robust where such programmes were oversubscribed. The most robust processes involved provision of extensive information on applicants and formal panel decision making and approval methods.

Transition arrangements are particularly important and beneficial to ensuring an appropriate match between applicants and the nature of the programme. Where these work well, there is close contact, open information sharing and regular dialogue between school and college staff leading up to learners commencing the junior apprenticeship programme and throughout the initial stages of the programme.

---

<sup>1</sup> [A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales - Estyn](#)

Participation in the junior apprenticeship programme based wholly or primarily in a FE college involved considerable change for learners and parents, both in terms of travelling to the college and the nature of the learning programme itself. For example, the time and distances involved to get to the college where the programme is delivered were often considerably greater than that required to travel to their local school. Learners must also be able to adapt to college life including interaction with a much wider age range of learners in and around the wider learning environment, or becoming more independent in making their way to and from college where this requires use of public transport. Colegau Cymru is proactively engaging with the Welsh Government on Learner Travel, including participating in the Learner Travel Summit in May 2025.

These factors are important considerations for all parties involved in discussions and decision-making about individual learners' potential participation in a junior apprenticeship programme. In particular, this highlights the importance of identifying those learners who are most likely to have, or be able to develop, the necessary resilience and commitment to engage, sustain and benefit from such provision.

College, school and local authority representatives do recognise the logistics of attending college full-time and the nature of the programmes do not always suit everyone and that having their parent school act as a safety net is particularly important. The Estyn Report into Junior Apprenticeships found that in the most effective cases, providers reassure learners and parents or carers that the move from school to college is not intended as a 'one-way street' and that a place at school would still be available should this be needed.

The Estyn report also found that all Junior Apprenticeship providers recognised the importance of providing any additional support that was needed by individual learners. Many providers made sure that individual support needs were discussed and addressed as part of the referral and selection processes. However, individual development plans were not always shared or transferred across from school to the college and as a result this hindered or prevented continuity of support for the individual needs of the learners involved.<sup>2</sup>

**2. Based on the numbers of pupils currently participating in the Cardiff and Vale College Junior Apprenticeship programme, what would be the approximate cost per annum of scaling up:**

---

<sup>2</sup> [A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales - Estyn](#)

**a. the Junior Apprenticeships provision that is currently offered at Cardiff and Vale College to all colleges across Wales? On whom would these costs fall?**

An independent study has found that the Junior Apprenticeship Programme at Cardiff and the Vale College will save the economy £570,000 per person in preventative spend over the course of a 40-year working life and 60-year adult life, in addition to providing numerous additional benefits to learners.<sup>3</sup>

For Cardiff and Vale College the cost (including Welsh Government funding) equates to between £10,500 to £12,500k (this includes all delivery, transport and provision of FSM).

This represents a saving of between £4,633 to £6,633 for each learner enrolled in comparison to the cost of comparable EOTAS provision. Extrapolating to a cohort of 100 learners the annual saving is substantial, with the taxpayer benefiting between £463,000 to £663,000 for every 100 learners. This saving in the context of impact and added value, is important.

The main challenge with funding and finance, primarily relates to the fragmented funding model, with this coming from a mix of local authority / school budgets and a top up from Medr. As local authorities and schools face continued financial challenge, pressure continues with regards to any funding which leaves the school system to support alternative delivery. Whilst this approach protects school budgets, it reduces the scope to increase Junior Apprenticeship delivery, and for the forthcoming year, maintaining existing numbers is a challenge too. This landscape may vary between different local authorities, but it provides a perspective, and if we are to do the best thing for the learner then we need to make it easier for funding to flow/follow the learner in a way which best suits their needs. The Junior Apprenticeship programme is one solution, as part of a broader portfolio of options available to young people and for some it represents the best option. We need to find a way to support this delivery model for those which fall into this category. Bureaucracy around budgets should not be the main constraint to maximising the life chances of our young people.

**b. an alternative 14-16 provision comprising a mixture of in-school and in-college learning (for example, provision whereby pupils spend 2 days per week in college, and the rest of the week in school)? On whom would these costs fall?**

Coleg Sir Gâr and Coleg Ceredigion provides an alternative method in providing vocational skills courses to 14–16-year-olds. They have approximately 900 learners

---

<sup>3</sup> August 2023 by Dr Steve Garner - Reducing inequalities in educational outcomes at CAVC.

from schools across Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion who study with them for between 2 and 4 hours a week. The delivery model is agreed by the college and the school. For example, some schools send their pupils to the college (they are bused into the College and back to attend class), or college staff go into schools to deliver the vocational qualification - in Llanelli there is a vocational centre on one of the school sites (the college services the construction centre). They also have a Youth Access provision. This is where some pupils from across a range of schools join a full vocational programme for 2 or 3 days a week. The other days they are in school picking up the statutory requirements of pre-16 education. Coleg Cambria is also delivering a similar model.

Coleg Cambria has 1004 14-16 year olds studying 30+ programmes/qualifications at the college each year.

This is across three different local authority areas and the majority attend for between 2-4 hours a week.

The largest scale programmes are in Wrexham where the local authority manages the process with the college, and it is the local authority who offer the places and arranges for learners to be bused to and from school to attend.

For the above programmes, Coleg Cambria charges £87 per hour to cover the costs of the lecturer in the class, they do not charge per learner, and have on average 12-15 learners in a group. This does not make any money for the college but they run it as a loss as they believe it is important to give young people an experience of college and a wider range of educational opportunities to support and motivate. Coleg Cambria is in the process of reviewing, and will likely have to increase, the £87 per hour charge due to the extra pressures facing the FE sector.

In Denbighshire, Coleg Cambria operates the above model but also runs an agricultural programme 3 days a week Tuesday-Thursday for year 11 students (15 year olds) to come to college and infill into Entry/Level 1 groups (around 5 learners a year).

- They have a Learning Support Assistant with them from the local authority
- A member of the Denbighshire team is on-site each day to support with any issues
- Coleg Cambria is paid £140.40 per learner per week from Denbighshire Council.

These learners have been with Coleg Cambria through the School Link programme in year 10 but then leave school before completing the second year of their GCSEs. They join either at entry or level 1 group, with their post-16 learners and follow the same qualification with a view to them then progressing onto level 2 with the Coleg when they turn 16 the following academic year.

The local authority arranges transport.

**3. Do you have any other observations or comments about the Junior Apprenticeships programme or similar school/college partnerships specifically as a way to improve engagement with young people who are disengaging from education or training, and/or struggling within a school setting? Are there any practical implications of delivering Junior Apprenticeships/similar provision for FE colleges' wider post-16 provision**

#### **Further Background/Case Studies**

The 14-16 pathways programmes, including Junior Apprenticeships, provide a valuable alternative to the traditional GCSE academic schooling system, particularly benefiting those who may not thrive in the traditional academic settings. These alternatives are especially crucial in the wake of the pandemic, which saw a significant increase in school absenteeism. Post-pandemic, some schools reported absenteeism rates as high as 42.6%. This issue is more pronounced among learners from a lower socio-economic background, as seen within learners who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), who had an absenteeism rate of 20.1% compared to 9.8% for non-FSM learners during the 2023/2024 academic year. Offering this alternative education pathway for 14–16-year-olds can encourage these students to remain engaged in education, developing practical skills which will help them towards furthering their education or employment opportunities in the future. <sup>4</sup>

14-16 pathways have had a significant and positive impact on learners' attendance rates at school or college, encouraging students to develop industry specific skills, thus enhancing their employability in the future. The benefits extend beyond the individual, creating growth and opportunities within communities and contributing to the economy in the long term. Estyn's Review of the JA Programme in Wales found that earlier pathways for 14-16 improved levels of engagement and attendance, high success rates

---

<sup>4</sup> [Absenteeism from secondary schools: September 2023 to August 2024 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

in vocational qualifications offered and strong progression rates into further education and training.<sup>5</sup> Bridgend College has seen 86% of their learners on a JA programme progress into another full-time course during the academic year 2022/2023.<sup>6</sup>

The JA program at Cardiff and Vale College has seen high success rates, with an average of 86-88% of learners achieving vocational qualifications and GCSEs. The majority of these learners have progressed to further education or employment opportunities. The benefits of this programme extend beyond short-term achievements, having a significant long-term impact.

Estyn's review of Junior Apprenticeships also found that many of the learners gave positive feedback in relation to the hands-on, practical elements of the JA programme and frequently mentioned the overall positive impact their participation in the JA had on their mental health and wellbeing. Parents of the learners also reinforced this positive sentiment and commented on their children's improved mood and engagement towards learning and wanting to pursue further education and skills courses:

*'I experienced better student support, less pointless lessons, a better environment, formed better friendships with people in my class and got good support from my learning coach. The JA programme really helped me achieve excellence. The college saw you as an individual and there was a lot of extra help where that may have been needed. Also in exam season they would offer one-to-one revision to help you achieve your main objective. I became a much better person because of the JAs. If it wasn't for the JA programme I would have no education. I owe everything to them.'*

*'Junior apprenticeship is helping me a lot – from staff members to well-being. Any problems I have I can talk to staff who help me with problems in college to personal problems. I never got on with my teachers at school which was affecting my education. Smaller classes than school, teachers treat us with respect, the hair and beauty classes, making friends with people that like what I like. The college is fun, I really love the course and we all like bricklaying a lot. I'm learning a lot more than in school, enjoying college gives me something to wake up to and enjoy. I think the college is very suitable for kids like me who can't cope in normal schools. It is a very good opportunity to get a good job when we grow up. I enjoy doing bricklaying and carpentry. I do it to get a good job. It's nice to meet new people and I enjoy exploring the campus at break.'*

---

<sup>5</sup> [A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales - Estyn](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Junior Apprenticeships - Coleg Penybont](#)

*College is good way to teach kids who are not suitable for school. It's a more hands-on way of learning and it will help me get a good job which is a very good opportunity for me as I didn't work well in school.'*<sup>7</sup>

*'The Junior Apprenticeship program has helped me manage my anxiety and become more outgoing, allowing me to interact better with other students. One of the highlights of my course was achieving my personal targets. I hope to continue with a post-16 automotive course and eventually become a qualified mechanic.'*<sup>8</sup>

### **Barriers for a wider roll-out:**

5 out of the 12 colleges have accessed funding for Junior Apprenticeship programme 14-16. Consequently, learners in many parts of Wales do not have the same opportunities to participate in these schemes compared to others. This can be due to an absence of collaborative arrangements between the local authorities, colleges and schools to support 14-16 pathways. Some colleges also find a lack of consistent information being provided by schools to pupils about alternative options for education and training. Schools should work collaboratively with colleges and local authorities on 14-16 pathways.

Other issues relate to recruiting sufficient numbers of applicants to these courses, especially in colleges with more sparsely populated catchment areas, or in rural areas where travel can be a barrier.

For further information please contact Clare Willims, Policy Officer on [clare.williams@colegaucymru.ac.uk](mailto:clare.williams@colegaucymru.ac.uk).

---

<sup>7</sup> [A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales - Estyn](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Junior Apprenticeships - Cardiff and Vale College](#)