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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: PO238

Buffy Williams
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Dear Buffy,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee on 2 April to discuss routes into post-16 education and training, and for your follow up letter. Please see below the additional information we agreed to supply, and answers to your questions.

Officials will hold discussions with Medr regarding providing apprenticeships data to the committee.

The Education Business Partnership run by Careers Wales

The Careers Wales [Education Business Partnership](#) (EBP) facilitated offer brings employers and schools together to provide opportunities for learners and teachers to meet and interact with them. The EBP aims to inform, inspire, and motivate young people about their future career. Careers Wales facilitates single and multiple employer events/activities with individual and clusters of schools.

Schools are keen to build and strengthen links with employers to enrich teaching and learning across all subjects. Talking about job roles, an organisation or industry and sharing knowledge and experience gives learners a unique insight into the world of work. Careers Wales EBP works with employers and schools and helps to arrange a variety of activities including:

- Presentations to help relate specific subject areas to the world of work (in person or virtually)
- Employer vlogs and videos
- Visits to employer premises
- Careers carousel and employer networking days
- Specific workshops (for example, interview hints and tips or mock interviews)
- Careers fairs

Careers Wales is also available to help employers prepare before they engage with learners. They can give advice and help employers to think of ideas for activities and ways of keeping learners engaged.

In addition, the **Careers Wales School Valued Partner Initiative** gives recognition to employers who support individual schools through a minimum of 3 Careers Wales employer engagement activities per year. Schools can have multiple partners and employers can be partners of more than one school. Careers Wales provides partners with additional support to help them strengthen the relationship. More recently as part of this offer Careers Wales also supports teacher employer encounters, allowing teachers to gain a greater insight of the world of work to take back into the classroom.

Work experience opportunities for year 11 pupils

Careers Wales work with all secondary schools, special schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and thousands of businesses (local and national) to provide learners with a breadth of work-related experience opportunities. This offer of support includes supporting learners, teachers and employers.

Careers Wales has facilitated **employer led activities and information events** for learners (EBP offer). Activities can include: employer presentations, site visits, 'World of Work' days, mock interviews and careers festivals.

During 2022-23 and 2023-24, 631 young people were placed into work experience as part of the Tailored Work Experience programme. A November 2023 report identified excellent outcomes for participants.

For 2025-26, Careers Wales have been asked to build a Tailored Work Experience offer within their core offer. This ensures an immediate continuation of delivery. A further 100 learners will be placed on a tailored work experience placement this year.

Over the summer term, during each secondary school's partnership agreement conversation, Careers Wales will ask about current work experience placement offers and explore any needs. Careers Wales will then provide a detailed picture of what is currently on offer, what support has been identified as essential and potential options on what a Careers Wales offer could look like in the future.

Expansion of Junior Apprenticeships across Wales

Whilst most learners will continue to benefit from a purpose-based, broad and balanced curriculum under Curriculum for Wales, Junior Apprenticeships are an alternative offer for a small, but important, cohort of learners who are otherwise at risk of disengaging from education completely.

Given the success of the Junior Apprenticeships programme, which we discussed at Committee, we are keen to see the programme made available in more FE colleges, across Wales. By increasing the Junior Apprenticeships budget by 50% to £600k in 2025-26, we are enabling more learners to benefit from this successful programme.

Positive conversations have already taken place between Medr, Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority and secondary schools, and Coleg Y Cymoedd, to potentially make Junior Apprenticeships available there from September 2025.

Officials continue to work with Medr to scope further expansion of the programme, and will engage closely with colleges, schools and local authorities across Wales as part of this work, to build on this initial expansion. This will feed into work to develop the draft budget for 2026-27 during the autumn.

Separately, we are making good progress in addressing the recommendations made by Estyn in their [thematic review of Junior Apprenticeships](#). Medr's Programme Directory is being updated for 2025/26 to be clear how learners undertaking the Junior Apprenticeship programme will benefit from the new, Made-for-Wales GCSEs in Mathematics, English and Welsh. Officials are also working with Medr to develop more detailed operational guidance which will clarify funding arrangements and set out responsibilities for schools, colleges and local authorities.

Data on Welsh domiciled students whose first choice was a Welsh provider

The Welsh Government does not hold this information. The Committee may wish to contact UCAS for this information.

Scholarships for learners who choose to study through the medium of Welsh

The Coleg Cymraeg has opened doors for more students to study through the medium of Welsh in Higher Education Institutions in Wales. Over 1,900 students have received undergraduate scholarships from the Coleg to study through the medium of Welsh.

By funding lecturing posts, creating learning resources, and offering scholarships to students, the number of courses where it is possible to study them partly through the medium of Welsh has increased. Courses can now be studied through the medium of Welsh across most of the main subject groups, and the Coleg has funded Welsh-medium provision in new fields such as Veterinary Surgery and Dentistry.

The Coleg offers a Main Scholarship of £1,000 a year for up to 3 years to students who study at least 66% or 80 credits a year of their course in Welsh in any subject. There is also an Incentive Scholarship which offers £500 a year for the length of the course to students who study at least 33% or 40 credits of their course in Welsh in any subject.

Subject specific scholarships are available in subjects such as maths, nursing, medicine, and law. Local grants are also available to students from Ynys Môn and Gwynedd who commit to studying through the medium of Welsh. The full list of scholarships is as follows:

- The Gareth Pierce Bursary: £3,000 to study at least 33% of their Maths course in Welsh
- Nursing Scholarship: £500 a year for 3 years to study at least 33% of their nursing course in Welsh

- The ‘Defi Vet’ Veterinary Scholarship: £500 per year over 5 years to students at Aberystwyth University who follow at least 40 credits per year through the Welsh language
- The Medicine Scholarship: £500 a year to students who are studying a Medicine course at a university in Wales, and studying at least 33%/40 credits of the course in Welsh.
- The Cyngor Môn Scholarship: £500 a year to students who live in the Anglesey area, who are studying at least 33%/40 credits a year of their course in Welsh
- The Cyngor Gwynedd Scholarship: £1,000 a year for up to 3 years to students who live in the Gwynedd area who are studying their whole course (100%) in Welsh
- The Gwilym Prys Davies Scholarship: £1,000 a year for up to 3 years, open to students who are studying Law, who live in the Meirionydd or Rhondda Cynon Taf areas and who are studying at least 66%/80 credits a year of their course in Welsh. This fund is only applicable for courses at Aberystwyth or Bangor universities.
- The William Park Jones Scholarship: £1000 per year, for three years. This fund is open to students who want to study an education degree course (with QTS), who will study at least 66% of their course through the medium of Welsh, and who live in Gwynedd or Anglesey.
- The “Llŷr Roberts Memorial Bursary”: a bursary for undergraduate students studying through the medium of Welsh, and is open for any subject. The bursary will sponsor a trip which is linked to the student's studies. The intention is to award up to 4 bursaries each year, worth £500 each.

Timelines on responding to the review of vocational qualifications

As we set out in our written evidence to the Committee, taking forward the recommendations of both the Review of Vocational Qualifications and the Report on Transitions to Employment remains a key priority for Welsh Government. It is important to note that there are many co-dependencies associated with delivery of the recommendations and that the strategic relationship between Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and Medr is of significant importance in this context.

Our aim in implementing the recommendations is to align with the wider participation agenda, including in relation to the 16-19 local curricula and to work with Medr, Careers Wales, the UK Government and other stakeholders on skills priorities. Working with these partners, our ambition is to create clearer and more accessible pathways for all learners, whilst supporting them to access appropriate guidance and the learning that is the best fit for them.

A focus for us in 2025 is to identify the short, medium, and long-term actions required of Welsh Government and our partners to enable collaborative delivery of the recommendations – some of which have fairly significant lead times for example the introduction of VCSE's, which will be available for first teaching from September 2027.

Action is already underway on many of the qualification-specific recommendations in the Vocational Qualifications Review, being progressed by Qualifications Wales and Medr, in partnership with Welsh Government. Examples include the expansion of sector review stakeholder group membership (recommendation 6), the scrutiny of sector review findings at Board level (recommendation 7), and the development of VCSE's (recommendation 22). Qualifications Wales has also published a [progress report](#) (Sept 2024) on their targeted approach for increasing the number of Welsh medium qualifications available to learners (recommendations 19 and 20).

In terms of the timeline for responding to the review, officials are exploring with key partners the scope to co-produce a draft Vocational Education and Training (VET) Strategy over the next 12 months. Wider stakeholder engagement will follow, and it should be noted that these discussions might impact this timeframe.

As you will be aware, many of the recommendations link to the wider skills agenda, and we will continue to work closely with my Ministerial colleagues, and across Welsh Government, Wales and the UK, to align our policy aims where appropriate.

Attached is an initial timeline for delivery of this work, including setting out our intention to issue a further update in June.

The OECD report you've just published says that, unlike many countries, Wales does not have a measure of completion that sets out the basic competencies that young people are expected to have at the end of formal schooling at 18. It says this means that society focuses on learners achieving three A levels at A*-C rather than a measure that is accessible for all learners. How does the Welsh Government respond to this conclusion? And are you considering acting on it?

It is certainly not the case that Welsh Government focuses solely on those achieving three A levels at A*-C in relation to the achievements of 18-year-olds. Our [consistent performance measures for post-16 learning](#) include both completion and pass rates by students in A levels, vocational qualifications and the Welsh Baccalaureate. It is true, however, that unlike many OECD countries – but similar to all other UK nations – there is no single measure of completion at 18. This is directly linked to the fact that the national curriculum in Wales, England and Northern Ireland extends to the end of compulsory schooling at 16, not 18.

Following the publication of OECD's report, we are developing guidance for Medr on the formation of local curricula for 16-18-year-olds. This guidance will continue to emphasise the importance of students having access to a wide range of courses of study – both academic and vocational – and the role of schools, further education colleges, local authorities and Medr in delivering that. As part of this work, we will also explore with partners how the wider 16 to 19 learning experience can be enhanced for all learners, drawing on the findings of the OECD report and supporting our priority of increasing participation in further and higher education.

Medr's commitment within their [Strategic Plan](#) to 'set ambitious targets for learner outcomes and experiences, acknowledging that measures of success and performance indicators will vary with learner circumstance, need and in differing parts of the sector' will also be important in this context, and we will work closely with them as they take forward this work.

Over and above the creation of Medr, are there any other big structural changes on the table? For example, we've heard arguments from some professionals in favour of a move away from school 6th forms to a full tertiary model post-16.

We do not currently have plans for any further structural changes. Medr is the regulatory body with responsibility for the funding, oversight and regulation of tertiary education and research in Wales encompassing post-16 education, including local authority-maintained school sixth forms.

Medr will work closely with local authorities in assessing the most effective way of organising post-16 education in different areas of Wales. That might vary significantly between local authorities, particularly when considering local transport and travel times, the different preferences of learners, and the need to ensure Welsh-medium post-16 pathways.

To support this, we have amended the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, providing Medr with powers to make proposals to restructure local authority maintained school sixth form education.

Through these amendments, we are establishing a legislative framework that enables Medr to take a strategic approach to the organisation of sixth form provision across Wales. Given Medr's role across post-16 education, it will be able offer a wider perspective to school sixth-form provision, thereby ensuring it supports choice, progression and also ensuring that unnecessary duplication of provision within the post-16 sector is avoided.

The Medr strategic plan 2025 – 2030 presents a number of high-level commitments aimed not only at providing assurance and robust regulatory conditions, but also at driving improvement in the sector. Much of the detail is expected to be covered in respective annual or operational plans - but at its core there is a focus on learner-centred provision.

Practical examples include the development of a new quality framework and registration system, along with a national plan for accessing Welsh language across the sector. Medr will also bring about a renewed focus on driving innovation and research in the sector in Wales.

We will work closely with Medr as these work areas and others evolve.

14-16 Learner Entitlement

In September 2024 Welsh Government published statutory guidance for schools on [14-16 learning under the Curriculum for Wales](#). The guidance sets out clear national expectations to help provide a consistent approach across all schools for this critical stage of learners' education. Central to the guidance is the 14 to 16 Learner Entitlement: the learning that all learners in year 10 and 11 will benefit from under the Curriculum for Wales. More information about the entitlement, and the four components which make it up, can be found in the guidance itself. The guidance comes into force in September 2025, when Year 10 learners will be learning under the Curriculum for Wales for the first time.

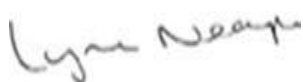
Supporting their learners to make informed choices about next steps is one of the most important roles for schools in year 10 and 11, and this forms an integral part of one of the four components of the learner entitlement: Reflections on learning and progress and post-16 planning. The guidance sets out what this could look like in practice, for example: 'undertaking a balanced options analysis for post-16 pathways, ensuring that learners are fully advised and able to make informed decisions (for example having sufficient information around the options available at further education institutions and other post-16 providers)'.

Given its status within statutory guidance, we have been clear that it will also be important for the learner entitlement to be reflected in information and evidence about schools used for improvement and accountability purposes, including by Estyn in their inspection of secondary schools from September 2025. Other mechanisms to ensure schools are following this guidance include engagement of Medr (in the context of their strategic duty around collaboration) and local authorities.

In relation to published information about schools, we recently consulted on our proposed [14-16 Learner Entitlement Indicators Framework](#). The framework is designed to reflect the breadth of the 14-16 learner entitlement, and to support understanding of its delivery by schools, replacing the “Key Stage 4 interim performance measures” (including the Capped 9). The consultation closed on 14 March, and we are currently analysing the responses.

Please let us know if the committee requires any further information.

Yours sincerely



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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



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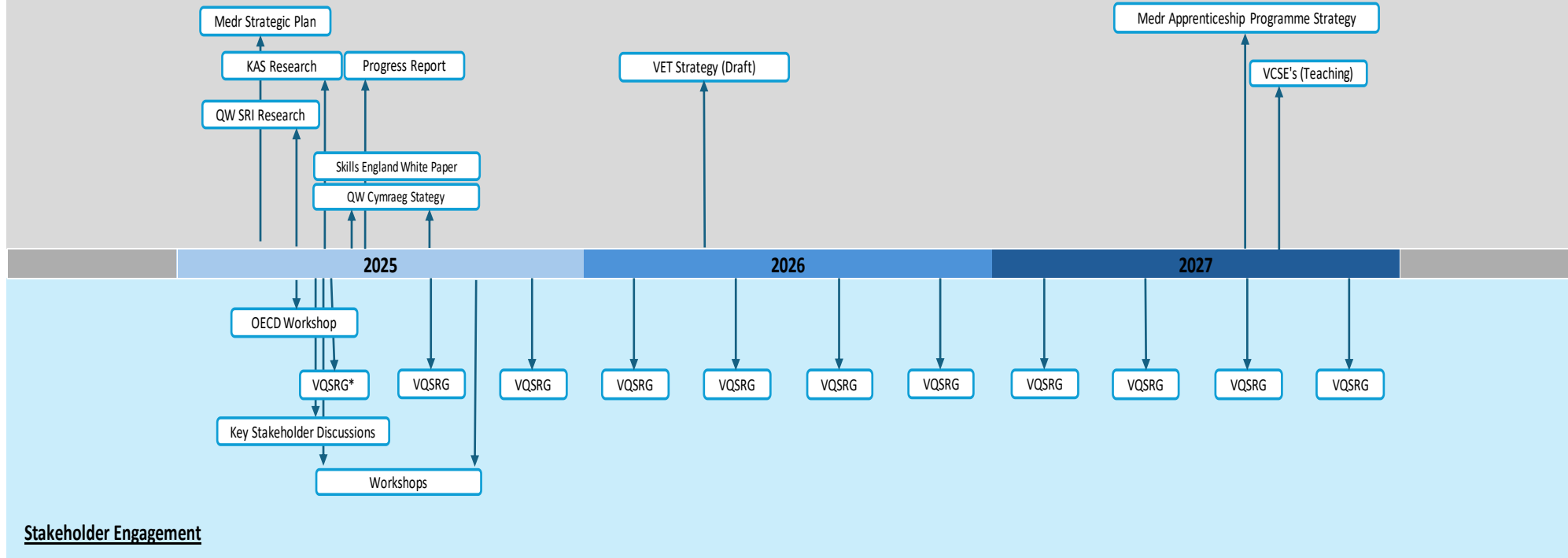
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Research/Reports/Delivery



*Vocational Qualifications Stakeholder Reference Group