

Senedd Cymru

Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion Gwledig

Ymchwiliad: Llwybrau prentisiaeth

Cyf: AP04

Ymateb gan: Gyrfa Cymru

-

Welsh Parliament

Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

Inquiry: Apprenticeship pathways

Ref: AP04

Evidence from: Careers Wales





Consultation on Apprenticeship pathways Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs committee.

Response from Careers Wales – January 2025

Introduction:

Careers Wales provides a national careers information, advice and guidance service for the people of Wales, supporting young people and adults to make successful transitions into education, employment and training (EET). Independent guidance support, now guaranteed for all young people in education, is the first step towards building our future workforce. Careers guidance plays a crucial role in helping individuals connect their current aspirations and abilities to future possibilities, enabling them to reflect on their ambitions, skills, and qualities and prepare for rewarding careers. Combined with a targeted personalised approach, Careers Wales plays a significant part in addressing inequality and breaking down participation barriers. By working in partnership with employers, teachers, parents, and guardians, we ensure young people make informed, intelligent career choices.

Our Brighter Futures strategy outlines our role:

- Keeping people switched on to learning
- Encouraging people not to close down opportunities too early
- Broadening horizons and challenging inaccurate assumptions
- Creating relevant experiences and exposure to the world of work
- Contributing to improved education, economic and social outcomes

As an all-age careers service, our ongoing support for individuals continues through to adulthood. Our Working Wales provision supports people looking for employment or seeking to progress with their career, helping them to overcome barriers and progress into fair and decent work and training. We provide vital redundancy support as well as supporting those who are seeking a career change or are economically inactive. This work directly contributes to addressing the skills challenges in Wales.

Our innovative business engagement activities are designed to address the identified skills shortage in the workplace by brokering vital relationships with schools. Through these partnerships, we provide young people with work-related experiences and exposure to the world of work, while simultaneously helping businesses enhance their future workforce.



Response to consultation questions

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.

Career planning is not a linear one-size-fits-all process – and this is also true of mapping the various pathways into jobs and careers. Information on apprenticeships and the four levels is available in various formats. Young people in school can access information from their careers adviser as can teachers and parents. Up to date information is available on the Careers Wales website, outlining the four distinct levels, how to apply and the employers who offer apprenticeships. Careers Wales's website is used widely in schools as part of CWRE delivery. During the last year (1/1/24 – 31/12/24) there were 54,000 views on the apprenticeship search section. The most viewed area around apprenticeships is '[Employers who offer apprenticeships](#)'.

There is also information on apprenticeships on the Medr, Business Wales, Welsh Government and UCAS websites. A review of these sites confirms that there is information on the different types of apprenticeships and levels, however, a mapping of pathways into various careers isn't included. The Careers Wales website has a link to over 780 job information pages that outline how to progress in that specific job role. Our qualified careers advisers will support young people and adults to navigate the information when discussing their career ideas.

Junior apprenticeships were created as a means of encouraging young people to engage in vocational qualifications. The Estyn report published in May 2024 shows that only 5 colleges offer year 10 and 11 junior apprenticeships. (Bridgend College, Cardiff and Vale College, Coleg Sir Gar, Gower College Swansea and NPTC Group). The programme is more of an introduction to vocational learning than apprenticeships and is not based on any apprenticeship framework. There are no junior apprenticeships available in North Wales and a low number of Welsh speakers access the provision.

In the report '[Understanding apprenticeship progression](#)' (L&W Institute 2020) the main barriers that prevented employers from offering progression through apprenticeships included difficulties in fulfilling occupational requirements of apprenticeship standards; standards not keeping up with industry changes; the minimum length of apprenticeships being considered too long; and managing the required % off-the-job requirement. Employers were also restricted by a lack of available standards or provision to offer a full apprenticeship progression pathway. Finally, some employers and providers cited wider organisational barriers preventing staff progression, for example a lack of vacancies at more senior levels.

A limited number of sectors offer degree apprenticeships; therefore, many occupations are only available at foundation and apprenticeship level. Employers in Wales can offer a degree apprenticeship in IT, engineering, construction, or advanced manufacturing through a partnership with a university in Wales. The offer of degree apprenticeships in England is much broader covering vocational areas such as social care, logistics, supply chain management, and sustainability.

Many job roles now require workers to upskill and retrain to comply with net zero and technological requirements. Providing adults with a pathway to demonstrate these types of changes would be challenging as each individual customer has a wide range of prior learning and experiences – and therefore there is no



universal approach. Careers Wales supports adults who have been made redundant, who are unemployed or are seeking a career change. Navigating the availability of training provision available in Wales can often be challenging. For example, reskilling may require an individual to re-start their whole professional training rather than top up with short courses that are available. This is challenging for many adults who have families and financial commitments. It would be helpful if adults could access fast-track training, using accreditation of prior learning (APL) to accredit existing complementary skills.

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

It is challenging for micro enterprises, which account for 95% of businesses in Wales to manage and promote apprenticeships. The smaller number of large businesses in Wales also mean a lower number and turnover to provide an adequate cohort size for providers to run apprenticeships with minimum viable numbers. According to Stats Wales, there were 46,610 learners in Wales undertaking apprenticeships programmes.

- 46% male
- 54% female
- 38% aged 25-39
- 37% undertaking foundation Apprenticeships (level 2)
- 43% undertaking Apprenticeships at Level 3
- 20% undertaking Higher Level 4+ apprenticeships.

Most apprentices engage in programmes after gaining employment which are not advertised as an apprenticeship. From this practice, most apprenticeships are not advertised as vacancies or appear on the Welsh Government's apprenticeship search page, therefore there is a mismatch in the perception of apprenticeship availability and vacancies. Careers Wales provides a vacancy bulletin to customers who are seeking work or apprenticeships, and the number of apprenticeships available on the bulletin is significantly higher than those advertised on the official Welsh Government apprenticeship finder. Analysis of this data shows that over 63% of the apprenticeships advertised on the Careers Wales vacancy bulletin did not appear on the Welsh Government apprenticeship search.

The National Training Federation Wales (NTFW) reported that the health and social care and construction industry have suffered the most due to the Welsh Government budget cuts. They report that in 2023 there was a reduction of 565 apprentices in construction. Data provided by Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), suggests that there is a need to increase the workforce by 2200 a year until 2028 and funding cuts to apprenticeships will exacerbate these shortages ([The Impact of Apprenticeship Funding Cuts in Wales](#)). Degree Apprenticeships in Wales are currently available in the digital and engineering sectors. There remains a pressing need to further expand the Degree Apprenticeship offering to address key regional demands, including areas such as health and social care, net zero and leadership and management.



3. Employers: 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.

An employer's size has an impact on their ability to use apprenticeships to progress staff. Smaller employers may have fewer available roles for apprentices to progress into, less opportunity for apprentices to develop and demonstrate competencies required by standards, and limited resources to manage the additional workload of implementing apprenticeships within their business.

Stronger progression routes exist where apprenticeships are embedded within professionally accredited pathways, and where employers have an established history of using apprenticeships or vocational training for staff development.

The continuing decline of the number of apprentices being visibly available on the Welsh Government's apprenticeships search tool could be a false indication of low availability.

The [Evaluation of the Degree Apprenticeship Programme](#) in Wales (February 2023), reported "concerns amongst stakeholders that failure to expand the degree apprenticeship offer will lead to increasing numbers of employers sending their employees to England to access provision there (with the inherent risk that they may not return). Furthermore, degree apprenticeship courses are now being made available to search for in the UCAS database. Whilst this will provide a considerable boost in the opportunities available to those looking to study at university, it will illustrate the extent of disparity in the range of degree apprenticeships on offer in England in comparison to those offered in Wales."

4. Information about apprenticeships: good practice between careers services, schools, colleges and employers in terms of promoting apprenticeships and the provision of meaningful work experience.

Careers Wales promotes parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways, particularly ensuring young people and their parents are aware of apprenticeship pathways and are supported to access them as appropriate. We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to ensuring apprenticeships contribute to the goals of a stronger, fairer, greener economy and are committed in raising awareness of opportunities in key areas.

One of our key performance indicators is linked to learner's improved understanding of their options following an interview with their careers adviser. 97% of young people who responded to our customer satisfaction survey said that the careers adviser had helped them understand their options. (Response rate of 26% from our customers in schools).

We provide an enhanced service for those young people who indicate that their first-choice option is to enter the labour market via direct employment or apprenticeship. This support includes ongoing mentoring and employability support with application processes, CVs and interview preparation.

Careers Wales arrange a breadth of activities to raise awareness of apprenticeships across schools in Wales. Activities include:

- employer presentations
- site visits
- work experience
- workshops on what employers are looking for in their apprentices



- apprentices coming to talk about their own experiences of working.

Raising awareness of apprenticeships with our adult customers is also a key feature of our support offer. A recent example is an event held at our Merthyr careers centre to highlight the availability of apprenticeships with EE. 33 potential applicants attended and were supported to make an application and understand how an apprenticeship could work for them. EE is committed to provide opportunities for individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds and were pleased with the turnout and support provided by Careers Wales. Until 2015, Careers Wales managed the work experience placing service, where 90% of KS4 were placed. This provision was removed from the remit of Careers Wales by the Welsh Government with the expectation that schools would continue to offer work experience to their learners and risk assess placements themselves. The current offer for young people is fragmented and dependent on individual schools and local authorities funding a vetting service. Careers Wales would support the need to conduct a feasibility study around the demand and appetite of schools and local authorities to re-instate a central work experience placing service.

A recommendation from the Transitions to Employment report (Dr Hefin David 2023) was the need to develop a targeted offer of tailored work experience for KS4 learners who are disengaging with education and are at risk of becoming not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Careers Wales have delivered a tailored work experience (TWE) programme on behalf of the Welsh Government for the last 3 years. For the 2023/24 academic year:

- 380 learners completed a work placement
- 85.6% of these young people went on to a positive destination at the end of the programme
- 25 young people went on to start an apprenticeship.

This programme is targeted at young people who have been identified as potentially becoming NEET due to their lack of attendance in school. Currently, this programme is offered across five local authorities in Wales. We would recommend that the Welsh Government fund this offer for young people across all local authorities in Wales.

Several European countries are known for their effective apprenticeship programmes. Notable examples include:

- Germany's dual education system is highly regarded. It combines classroom instruction with on-the-job training, allowing apprentices to gain practical experience while studying. This system is well-integrated with the needs of the labour market, ensuring high employment rates for graduates.
- Switzerland has a robust apprenticeship system that offers a wide range of vocational training options. Apprenticeships are available in various fields, and the system is designed to be flexible, allowing apprentices to switch between different career paths if needed.
- Austria's apprenticeship program is similar to Germany's, with a strong emphasis on combining theoretical education with practical training. The program is well-supported by both the government and industry, ensuring that apprentices receive high-quality training.
- The Netherlands has a well-developed apprenticeship system that emphasizes collaboration between educational institutions and employers. This ensures that the training provided is relevant to the needs of the labour market.



5. 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.

Our Career Check survey data demonstrates that young people at the age of 14 – 15 are aware of apprenticeships and it is consistently a first choice for 13.5 % of the cohort and second choice for 21% of the cohort. However, when we compare this with the destination survey there is a difference in take up with only 1.6% of young people leaving Year 11, who left school in 2024 entering work-based training (WBT) with employed status.

This is due to various factors:

- Lack of availability in some areas of Wales
- Entry requirements higher than those held by the young person
- FE colleges may require a young person to attend college for a year before progressing onto an Apprenticeship
- Cost of living pressures from family such as impact on child benefit, cost and availability of transport and manging on apprentice wage
- Lack of provision of apprenticeship in the career area of the young person e.g. law, art and design
- Lack of confidence that they will receive support from employer or to enter workplace at 16
- Lack of transport

The trend of accessing work-based training post 18 is slightly higher, with 4% entering work-based training with an employer at the end of Year 13.

The Wales Centre of Public Policy report on 'inequity in tertiary education', highlights the challenges facing young people from more socio-economically deprived backgrounds and states that they are less likely to progress to tertiary education. They are also less likely to take up higher-level apprenticeships. Almost one in four (23%) of those undertaking work-based learning programmes were from employment-deprived households. A clear trend can be seen in employment deprivation status according to the level of work-based learning qualification being undertaken. Levels of employment deprivation were highest among learners undertaking engagement (33%) or Level 1 (31%) training. These figures decline steadily for those undertaking foundation apprenticeships (23%), apprenticeships (18%), and higher apprenticeships (12%).

Low pay is a barrier for older apprentices who want to change career, due to their financial responsibilities they would not be able to access an apprenticeship with good career progression and prospects.

PISA results show that Welsh learners are falling behind their peers in the rest of the UK with their basic literacy and numeracy skills and therefore may not have the relevant qualifications/skills to access an apprenticeship. Many apprenticeships will require learners to acquire level 2 English and Maths before they can progress to a level 3 apprenticeship.

Other barriers include:

- Lack of work experience impacting on young people's exposure to the workplace
- Young people with a disability are more likely to stay in education rather than enter work or training – they are more likely to face transport challenges and are more likely to become NEET
- There continues to be a gender imbalance within sectors for example fewer females start on construction and engineering apprenticeships.



Another key consideration is that with the increase in demand for Welsh language skills in public and private sectors, there is a need for Welsh language apprenticeships.

6. 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.

Medr will play a key role in reviewing the availability of suitable and accessible apprenticeships for all people across Wales. We welcome their ambition to work in partnership with the Welsh Government and others, to define what the Welsh apprenticeship provision should look like to meet the needs of learners and the economy in Wales, promote strong engagement with employers and ensure rigorous standards of occupational competence.

We would recommend that the Welsh Government review the Transitions into Employment report and consider recommendations around work experience and Degree Apprenticeships. CWRE is a critical part of the curriculum and can be a key contributor to exposing children, young people, parents, and teachers to the world of work. Whilst Careers Wales offer a broad range of employer engagement activities for secondary schools, there is a need to review the appetite for a work experience placement service for all pupils. Careers Wales would support the need to conduct a feasibility study with schools, local authorities and key stakeholders around the demand and requirements for re-instating a work experience offer. There is a strong need to expand the current Degree Apprenticeships offer to include other areas of need in the region such as Health and Social Care, Construction, Low Carbon/ Green Energy and Leadership and Management.

There are limitations on the data in Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) about where young people end up after vocational education in further education and if the pathways are progressive and clearly linked to their chosen course of study. Availability of data that shows progression and completion rates for all apprentices linked to young people's career aspirations would support measuring outcomes and strategic planning. In addition to this, Careers Wales currently facilitates the 5 Tier Model on behalf of Welsh Government as part of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, this model is used to track young people between the ages of 16 and 18 through their various destinations. This data is provided to local authorities for strategic planning and supporting young people. Careers Wales have presented the Welsh Government with a prototype of an all-Wales data intelligence hub, which could utilise data from Careers Wales, schools, colleges, local authorities and Department for work and Pensions. The Welsh Government should consider further development of an all-Wales Data Hub that will inform careers guidance and local authority service provision, allow education providers to consider the appropriateness of their learning offer to fulfil the needs/aspirations of learners, but also inform analysis and evidence for the needs of current and future labour markets and industries.

Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) play a key role in identifying skills shortages in their region and mapping against provision. They are key in linking employers, educators, and other stakeholders with the Welsh Government.



Useful links:

[Understanding-Apprenticeship-Progression.pdf](#)

[**A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales.pdf**](#)

[Expert-reflections-on-the-challenges.pdf](#)

[Evaluation of the Degree Apprenticeship Programme](#)

[All there is to know about European apprenticeships close to hand | CEDEFOP](#)

[Apprenticeships - European Commission](#)

https://www.ntfw.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/20241119_The-Impact-of-Apprenticeships-Funding-Cuts-in-Wales.pdf

[**Apprenticeships: policy statement | GOV.WALES**](#)