

**Senedd Cymru**

**Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion Gwledig**

**Ymchwiliad:** Llwybrau prentisiaeth

**Cyf:** AP15

**Ymateb gan:** Gofal Cymdeithasol Cymru

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**Welsh Parliament**

**Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee**

**Inquiry:** Apprenticeship pathways

**Ref:** AP15

**Evidence from:** Social Care Wales





**04 February 2025**

## **Consultation response - Apprenticeship pathways**

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity for Social Care Wales to contribute to the consultation, “apprenticeship pathways.”

Social Care Wales is the workforce regulator and strategic workforce development body for the social care workforce. We also have a role in supporting the development of the early years and childcare workforce. As part of our role we set standards, support the development of qualifications and apprenticeship frameworks of the care and support social care and early years and childcare workforce. Social Care, early years and childcare workers have a critical role in supporting some of the most vulnerable individuals in our communities, so we want to support the workforce to have the knowledge and skills to protect, empower and support those who need help. Given the essential role of these workers, many roles require set qualifications to meet professional and service regulatory requirements.

The [Health and Social Care Workforce strategy](#) has a theme dedicated to education and learning, with an ambition that by 2030 the investment in education and learning for health and social care professionals will deliver the skills and capabilities needed to meet the needs of people in Wales. Apprenticeships are a key element to supporting individuals commencing into social care and early years careers as well critical in the registration of the social care workforce at all levels.

We have split our response into two sections;

- 1) to reflect the experience and challenges we have had engaging with learning providers, employers and learners undertaking apprenticeships.
- 2) the work that we have undertaken to try and support the sector implement approaches to apprenticeship delivery programmes.

We look forward to further learning from your work.

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Prif Weithredwr/Chief Executive: Sarah McCarty

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## **Our experience of working within the sector**

The sector does not tend to employ apprentices in the same way as other industries as they recruit care workers and then look to train and qualify them. It is fair to say that some Local Authorities have schemes which employ people as apprentices which are successful and enable progression and retention, but these schemes are the exception rather than the rule across whole sector.

It is important to highlight here the impact that the pandemic had on the delivery and achievement of vocational qualifications and therefore apprenticeships as access to practice-based assessment opportunities became limited in the sector, it has taken some time to “recover” the momentum however there are some signs of recovery based on data available.

We have generally seen improved completion statistics for apprentices completing apprenticeship frameworks from 2022/23 to 2023/24.

Children’s Care Play Learning and Development Level 2 Core & Practice; increase of 38%

Children’s Care Play Learning and Development Level 3 Core & Practice; increase of 64%

Children’s Care Play Learning and Development Level 4 prof practice; Increase of 15%

Health and Social Care Level 2 Adults increase of 6%

Health and Social Care Level 3 Adults decrease of 15%

Health and Social Care Level 3 Children and young people increase of 24%

Health and Social Care Level 4 Professional Practice increase of 190%

Health and Social Care Level 4 Independent Advocacy increase of 200%

Health and Social Care Level 5 Leadership and Management Practice increase 200%

We will continue this trend of comparing year on year achievements. But from the data available, we can have a level of confidence that the frameworks are achievable and stabilising, after the impact of the pandemic.

Health and social care consistently attract more apprenticeship learners than any other sector or industry. Data is available on the Welsh Government interactive



learning programmes dashboard [Apprenticeship learning programmes started: interactive dashboard | GOV.WALES](#) and the category for health and social care and early years and childcare is captured under Healthcare and Public Services.

The majority of social care, early years and childcare roles require specific qualifications, either set out in [qualification frameworks](#) set by Social Care Wales and/ or through minimum service standards inspected by Care Inspectorate Wales and contribute to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable individuals. The apprenticeships on offer support the workforce to achieve the qualifications required for practice in the sector, so any changes in apprenticeships can therefore have a significant impact on the ability of the workforce to meet regulatory and wider policy commitments for example the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the roll out of the childcare offer.

We undertake ongoing engagement with learning providers, employers and learners and from this work we can identify key information in relation to the themes identified by the Committee. A number of challenges have been identified which can be categorised into the following and apply to all or some of the frameworks across health and social care and childcare.

### **Equity of support and access for learners:**

- Recognition of prior learning and the experience of learners in needing to repeat learning when moving learning providers
- Duration of frameworks (time allowed on programme)
- Attrition of learners from programmes
- Information provided prior to joining the sector can be misleading in relation to the career pathways and qualification requirements for the sector

### **Employers**

- Service pressures and the capacity to support placements and/or apprentices.
- Funding for frameworks: A major area concern in recent times has been the reduction in funding for apprenticeships, mainly as a result of the loss of European funding. We are still waiting to see the full impact of this reduction but are aware of the report produced by the National Training Federation for Wales and Colegau Cymru highlighting the potential impacts of this reduction.

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## Pathways between apprenticeships levels

Social Care, Early years and childcare do not currently have any high-level apprenticeships. Pathways in the frameworks appear straight forward but there is sometimes a gap between the levels of expectations moving from the skills-based roles at level 2 and 3 into the more managerial and supervisory roles associated with Levels 4 and 5.

There sometimes unintended challenges from the entry requirements to access an apprenticeship e.g. 16 hours employment or more for a sector that has a significant part time work force but also parts of the sector that are not able to show their employment as such e.g. foster carers so therefore unable to access and benefit from access to apprenticeship frameworks.

However, the points raised with us focus on:

- Access to qualifications and capacity to deliver, particularly assessment capacity.
- Qualification assessment, including the introduction of end point assessments for the relevant qualifications.
- Qualification delivery including expertise of “teaching staff” and ability to recruit and maintain a sustainable delivery workforce.
- The ongoing challenges of delivering and achieving the essential skills element of the frameworks.

## Our response to supporting apprenticeship pathways

As part of our remit for the development and implementation of apprenticeship pathways frameworks and the support needed for the sector we have undertaken the following areas of work over recent times:

- Qualifications and standards team who provide ongoing support to Awarding Organisations, learning providers, employers and learners to support the development and delivery of vocational qualifications including apprenticeships
- [Dedicated web pages](#) to support the understanding of apprenticeships
- WeCare Wales which is our careers and job seeking programme of work which aims to continually promote the opportunities for employment within the sector through clear careers information and support of WeCare Wales and has pages dedicated to [apprenticeships](#)

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- We also have a full campaign during apprenticeship week showcasing those people in the sector who have stories to tell about their apprenticeship experience.
- We have worked closely with both Careers Wales and Job Centre Plus to support their work including providing ongoing briefing for their advisors to ensure they are up to date with sector developments. This has included providing links to our resources to ensure a direct level of support is in place for job seekers. Feedback for these sessions have been overwhelmingly positive.
- The qualification and standards team have worked in partnership with employers, learning providers, Further Education colleges and City and Guilds to develop guidance for employers in relation to [apprenticeship placements](#) in social care.
- The Social Services Practitioner (SSP) vocational qualification is a work-based learning qualification that can be accessed by apprenticeship funding. We have worked with the Open University so that learners who complete the City & Guilds SSP qualification, can progress onto the second year of the Open University Social Work Degree in accordance with the usual university and employer application and recruitment and sponsorship processes. This is a major step in widening access and enhancing career pathways
- In response to challenges around the achievement of essential skills we identified the need for a project with two phases:
  - Phase 1) Research existing resources to help us identify how learning and teaching resources currently being used to deliver Essential Skills qualifications to Health and Social Care (HSC) and Early Years and Childcare (EYCC) learners can be improved to better reflect the sector, and
  - Phase 2) Develop a set of national, sector specific, bilingual learning and teaching resources based on the outcome of the research.

To date we have completed phase one and are in the process of completing phase during 2025.

- We provide annual grant funding to the Local Authorities in Wales to employ regional careers connectors whose primary aim is to work within the locality to promote careers in the sector. The funding supports seven such posts and they work with employers, learning providers, (compulsory and post compulsory), careers services and employment organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and job centre plus to help provide support, resources and raise awareness and understanding of careers in the sector.

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In conclusion, it is critical that we support all learners regardless of age, to be able to clearly see the pathways open to them, whether that be into further learning and education or into employment. As you can see, we are making efforts to support this but recognise that there is a lot more to do, working in partnership with all key stakeholders to ensure the benefit of all.

Yours sincerely,

Jon Day

Assistant Director - Workforce  
Social Care Wales

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