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CONSULTATION ON APPRENTICESHIPS

The two questions listed below are the main focus:

- **Information about apprenticeships:** How can good practice be shared between careers services, schools, colleges and employers in terms of promoting apprenticeships and providing meaningful work experience?
- **Support and equal access for learners:** To what extent are apprenticeship routes open to all young people in Wales and what obstacles face specific groups in terms of demographics or geographical area?

1. Information about apprenticeships

Schools strive to the best of their ability to provide detailed and up-to-date information for learners about the options available to them once they have reached the end of their period of statutory education. This information is presented to them in various ways e.g sharing leaflets and prospectuses, presentations at school (e.g. at assemblies), open evenings/careers evenings. Inevitably, schools have more information about the courses they offer in school and naturally, they want to keep their learners, if they think that returning to school is a sensible step for them. One of the challenges is the fact that institutions are 'competing' for learners, as more learners means more funding. Funding courses is a real challenge in the current economic climate, and institutions want to retain as many learners as they can in order to get as much funding as possible.

Still, pursuing an apprenticeship is an option that should be offered to our learners, bearing in mind that an apprenticeship offers a wide range of opportunities. It was stated in 2017 'As a government we are committed to developing a culture in Wales where recruiting an apprentice becomes the norm for employers, giving individuals access to high quality job opportunities and skills.'¹ I wonder, however, whether this commitment was fulfilled? In

¹Aligning the apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy – Welsh Government (February 2017) page 2

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2025, eight years after the publication of the aforementioned document, Is it common for employers to hire apprentices?

The aforementioned document recognised that 'apprenticeships will need to integrate more effectively into the wider education system' and that 'stronger co-operation between academic and vocational education, and the way in which these systems work together is required'.² It is vital that learners receive unbiased, high quality advice.

We need to think innovatively and creatively when offering various options to learners, taking into account all the possible choices. Are apprenticeships being adequately marketed in our schools and institutions? Shouldn't we consider how an apprenticeship can be combined with periods in school/college - one experience focusing on the practical element and the other focusing on the theory element.

We can't forget that the World of Work is part of the Curriculum for Wales:

'School's curricula should enable learners to gain experiences related to work and careers, developing knowledge of the breadth of opportunities available to them throughout their lives. This learning will help them make informed decisions about their career pathways.'³

Similarly, the value of apprenticeships is recognised in the document 'Apprenticeships: policy statement'

'It is vital that we have an apprenticeship system that is responsive and flexible to the needs of employers and individuals.'⁴

It should certainly be prioritised, but schools need support - teachers should not be expected to organise administrative details e.g. insurance etc. for work experience placements.

Having information about the different career paths, including apprenticeships, is crucial as part of the World of Work project. When discussing apprenticeships, it's also important to share information about the fields in which they can be pursued. Apprenticeships must be secured in emerging fields – employment is not a static area. Technological developments and other advances mean that new jobs are being created. Every student must be fully informed about the possible options, the dates of the recruiting process, and what the exact terms and conditions of the apprenticeship will be. This is clearly stated in the Welsh Government's 2017 document:

² Ibid pages 2 and 3

³ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/cross-cutting-themes-for-designing-your-curriculum/#gyrfaoedd-a-phrofiadau-sy%E2%80%99n-gysylltiedig-%C3%A2-byd-gwaith>

⁴ Apprenticeships: policy statement Apprenticeships objectives focusing on developments and challenges currently faced by individuals and employers (February 2024)

'Potential apprentices, parents and employers have to have clear and readily available information on the opportunities that are available to them, particularly young people leaving school who just have information on sixth form and higher education options. To support this we will simplify and improve the interface between employer and learner, making it easier for employers and training providers to market apprenticeships themselves.'⁵

In light of the above statement, it is necessary to consider if this has been fulfilled and whether parents, employers, and potential apprentices are receiving clear information about the opportunities available to them. Has the situation changed since 2017?

We must ensure that opportunities are available for those who currently offer apprenticeships to discuss with companies and organisations that are considering offering apprenticeships. It would be advantageous to discuss experiences and have open conversations about the advantages and difficulties. Similarly, it would be good if learners in schools had the opportunity to discuss the experiences of those who are currently apprentices, with the opportunity for them to learn the pros and cons of undertaking an apprenticeship. The truth is that we need someone to coordinate between schools, colleges, employers, parents/carers, learners etc.

2. Equal support and access for learners

One obstacle to ensuring equality of opportunity is the lack of opportunities to complete an apprenticeship through the medium of Welsh, especially in some areas. We need to work with employers, promoting the benefits of the Welsh language and creating a 'habit' of taking every opportunity to use and promote it. It would be a good idea to compile a list of apprenticeships that are accessible in Welsh and encourage employers to join that list. Welsh-medium apprenticeships support the work of developing a Welsh-medium workforce and show young people the value of Welsh for the workplace and how it contributes to the Welsh economy. Expanding Welsh-medium apprenticeships would contribute positively towards the target of a million Welsh speakers.

There is also a need to ensure that a range of apprenticeships are available in rural areas. Although the nature of the apprenticeships will not be the same in different areas, still, it is important that young people everywhere have the opportunity to pursue an apprenticeship. We mustn't forget that young people in rural areas may face the challenge of having to travel considerable distances, in order to reach their place of work. We must consider this and

⁵ Aligning the apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy – Welsh Government (February 2017) page 22

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make sure that individual opportunities are not unduly impaired by geographic challenges.

The difficulties faced by potential apprentices from low-income families must also be taken into consideration. There may be financial implications when starting as an apprentice. When promoting apprenticeships, it's important to make sure that potential apprentices from low-income households have access to certain resources and transportation.

It is also important that the opportunity to undertake an apprenticeship is a viable option for ALN learners. It is essential to carefully consider the options and how to ensure first-rate provision for this group.

According to Welsh Government statistics:

'Disabled young people are far more likely to be NEET than young people that are not disabled. This difference is even more pronounced for 19 to 24 year olds compared to 16 to 18 year olds. In the three-year period ending March 2024, the proportion of disabled people who are NEET rises from 19.1% at age 16 to 18 to 38.7% at age 19 to 24.'⁶

Would expanding the apprenticeship opportunities and ensuring suitable provision for these young people be a step in the right direction in terms of reducing the numbers of NEETs? Schools are able to provide for disabled people until the age of 18/19, after which they are unable to do so. These young people need to be targeted sooner. Although schools can provide for disabled people until they are 18/19 years old, it is not always true that school is the best place for these learners.

Increasing the number of work experience opportunities would help ensure that learners pursue suitable apprenticeships. Careful consideration must be given to career paths in sufficient time to be able to provide learners with the right kind of support. Authentic, high-quality work experience opportunities can help learners decide which path to follow later in life.

Closing comment

The document referred to above, 'Aligning the apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy (Welsh Government – February 2017) sets out a number of recommendations and actions over a period of five years. It would be helpful to determine the degree to which this document's goals have been

⁶ <https://www.gov.wales/young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-neet-april-2023-march-2024-html>

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achieved. It seems that revisiting the document and further work on making it a reality would be a beneficial step.

There is also a need for greater collaboration between education institutions, Careers Wales and businesses and organisations, to ensure:

- a) that there are more opportunities for our young people
- b) that the most suitable experiences are offered to our learners
- c) that Welsh medium provisions are encouraged and promoted
- d) that attention is given to offering authentic, valuable experiences to learners with ALN, and that these learners are targeted and prepared in a timely manner for experiences in the world of work.

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