

Lynne Neagle AS/MS  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Andrew RT Davies MS  
Chair, Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

2 October 2025

Dear Andrew,

Thank you for your letter to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning and Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnerships on 1 August. The letter was written in your capacity as Chair of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, and requested further information on the Junior Apprenticeship (JA) programme following the Committee's meeting on 17 July.

To clarify, while JAs are delivered through further education institutions—creating some overlap with the Minister for Further and Higher Education's remit—they are a form of pre-16 provision and therefore fall within my portfolio. As such, I am responding to the Committee's comments.

As outlined to the ETRA Committee on 17 July and referenced in the Welsh Government's response to the Committee's recent report on apprenticeship pathways, the JA programme is not a formal apprenticeship. However, it is designed to help 14 to 16-year-olds progress onto apprenticeships they might not otherwise have the opportunity to access.

JAs are sometimes incorrectly viewed as provision for learners less academically able and/or posing challenges for schools. JAs are instead principally for learners at risk of disengaging, but who show an aptitude for vocational study. The Welsh Government will continue to work with Medr to ensure this message is clearly communicated.

I want more learners to benefit from this successful programme. This is why we are encouraging take-up through additional funding. While most costs are met by local authorities, the Welsh Government provides top-up funding which is administered to colleges by Medr and has increased this budget by 50% to £600,000 for 2025/26.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I am pleased to confirm that Coleg y Cymoedd is delivering JAs for the first time this academic year, and that Coleg Grŵp Llandrillo Menai has restarted its JA offer through a small pilot for Year 11 learners. My officials continue to work with Medr, local authorities and colleges to plan for further expansion.

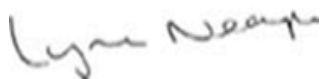
As mentioned at the evidence session in July, I am aware that the number of JA learners has unfortunately decreased at Cardiff and Vale College this academic year. Officials have raised this issue with the local authority and have been reassured that funding is still available for schools to put forward learners. I am also pleased that, overall, JA numbers and providers are expected to increase this academic year across Wales.

My officials are also engaging with Medr to improve the quality of JA data and information to the Welsh Government. This will supplement a growing evidence base, which currently includes the report produced by Estyn in May 2024 which set out the transformational impact of the programme on learners.

Of course, JAs are not the only option for learners at risk of disengaging. I'm aware of other successful partnerships across Wales between schools and colleges that offer 14–16-year-olds alternative opportunities to study vocational qualifications in college, while continuing most of their learning in school. Whilst I welcome all of this provision, I nonetheless continue to expect the majority of learners to engage with a purpose-led, broad and balanced curriculum under the Curriculum for Wales.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to visit colleges delivering the JA programme and to speak with many of the young people involved. The programme is clearly valued by learners and has a positive impact on their lives.

Yours sincerely,



**Lynne Neagle AS/MS**

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