

Introduction

1. The National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this hugely important inquiry.
2. The NTfW is a 'not for profit' membership organisation of over 100 organisations involved in the delivery of apprenticeships and employability skills programmes in Wales. We are a pan-Wales representative body for the network of quality assured work-based learning providers, who are contracted by the Welsh Government to deliver their apprenticeship and employability programmes. All providers who are commissioned by the Welsh Government to deliver work-based learning programmes in Wales are members of the NTfW. As such, the NTfW is seen as the authoritative organisation on apprenticeships and employability skills programmes in Wales.

Aim

3. The aim of this Submission Paper is to provide evidence to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee ahead of a planned meeting which will take place at the Senedd on Wednesday 17 May 2017.

Background

4. Work-based learning programmes in Wales

The following table outlines the budget allocations in recent years, which covers the last Assembly term:

	Apprenticeships	Traineeships	'Adult Programmes'	Total WBL
2011/12	£72.5m	£29.6m	£8.8m	£110.9m
2012/13	£89.5m	£35.5m	£13.0m ¹	£138.0m
2013/14	£105.8m	£24.8m	£6.5m ²	£136.6m
2014/15 ³	£62.0m	£16.4m	£5.5m	£83.9m
2015/16 ⁴	£122.4m	£44.3m	£3.3m	£170.0m
2011/16	£545.4m	£184.2m	£42.2m	£771.3m

¹ Includes bespoke programmes

² Includes bespoke and Work Ready (successor to Steps) Programme

³ 8 month period (1 August 2014 – 31 March 2015)

⁴ 16 month period (1 April 2015 – 31 July 2016)

5. Apprenticeship starts

The following table outlines the number of apprenticeship starts in recent years, which covers the last Assembly term:

Academic Year	Apprenticeship Starts	Cumulative
2011/12	17,910	17,910
2012/13	28,030	45,940
2013/14	27,485	73,425
2014/15	19,505	92,930
2015/16	23,135	116,065

To review progress since the 2012 report of the Enterprise and Business Committee Including looking at the role of key players: the Regional Skills Partnerships; the Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB); and Sector Skills Councils

6. The NTfW recognises that there were 20 recommendations made following the Apprenticeships in Wales inquiry in 2012. Many of these recommendations were aimed at increasing the awareness of apprenticeships amongst employers and young people, particularly school pupils. It is the view of NTfW that little progress has been made since the 2012 inquiry to change the perception, and take up, of apprenticeships amongst these two important cohorts.

7. Although there has been little change in the perception and take up of apprenticeships in Wales since 2012, there has been a significant change to the infrastructure that underpins apprenticeship policy at both a Wales and UK wide level. In the four and a half years since the last review, there have been a number of reviews and policy changes to apprenticeships across the UK, which has had a significant impact on the apprenticeship offer to both employers and individuals.

8. The two most notable changes are the introduction of the Apprenticeships Skills Policy Plan in Wales, and the whole apprenticeship reform programme in England which is having an indirect impact on the Welsh apprenticeship programme.

9. However, in a period of significant change to the apprenticeship offer, one thing that has not changed over this time is the unified support for Wales's Apprenticeship Programme, which is still seen as the "gold standard in vocational education".

10. One area where the NTfW feels there has been no progress made since 2012, is the ability for apprenticeship providers (regardless of organisation type) to gain better access to schools, in order to allow them to engage with school children to discuss apprenticeships as a viable offer. To support this position, in May 2014 Estyn undertook a review of 'Learner support services for pupils aged 14 – 16'¹ and identified:

"In a majority of schools, the information on course, career opportunities and progression routes provided to pupils is not up to-date. As a result of this and of a bias toward retaining pupils in sixth forms where they exist, pupils are not always given accurate or impartial information when choosing their options. Most careers advice and guidance for pupils and parents are provided at options events, which provide generic information, but do not involve specific conversations about individuals"

Furthermore:

"Schools have not considered carefully enough how they should replace the services previously carried out by Careers Wales, including making use of Careers Online, and other sources of information about further and higher education, training, apprenticeships and careers".

11. As a result of this thematic review, there were a number of recommendations, one of which was for the Welsh Government to:

"R9 - update its guidance for schools on careers advice and guidance to reflect recent changes to the role of Careers Wales"

¹ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/learner-support-services-pupils-aged-14-16-may-2014>

12. The position above is further supported by the lack of pupil progression on to an apprenticeship directly from school. Careers Wales Pupil Destinations from Schools in 2016² indicates:

- Of the 31,524 pupils who left Year 11 in 2016, 13,586 (43%) continued their education at school, 14,125 (45%) continued their education at a further education college, and only 401 (1.3%) entered work-based learning with employed status.
- Of the 12,744 pupils who left Year 13 in 2016, 7,946 (62%) progressed to higher education, 2,037 (16%) continued their education either at school or college, and only 202 (1.6%) entered work-based learning with employed status.

13. The above being said, it is important that the Committee recognises some of the work that Welsh Government has done, alongside Careers Wales, NTfW members and other key stakeholders, with initiatives such as 'Have a Go'³, 'Opportunities Awareness' and Skills Cymru. All of which have played a significant role in beginning to raise young peoples' awareness of vocational learning, specifically apprenticeships.

14. One of the most positive changes to the apprenticeship offer in Wales during the period since the last inquiry, is the take up of apprenticeships at the higher levels (Level 3 and above) especially the take up of Higher Apprenticeship Frameworks (at Level 4 and above) We are now in a situation, where apprenticeships at Level 3 and above account for over 50% of provision, which is in stark contrast to where we were in 2012. This has demonstrated that the provider network can develop its provision to meet the needs of the Welsh economy, but it does take time to build capacity and capability to do so.

15. Apprenticeship start per level since 2012

The following table outlines the number of apprenticeship starts per level in recent years, which covers the last Assembly term:

Academic Year	Foundation Apprenticeship (Level 2)	Apprenticeship (Level 3)	Higher Apprenticeship (Level 4+)	Total Apprenticeship Starts
2012/13	15,255 (54%)	10,550 (38%)	2,275 (8%)	28,030
2013/14	14,000 (51%)	10,185 (37%)	3,330 (12%)	27,485
2014/15	8,430 (43%)	6,895 (35%)	4,175 (22%)	19,505
2015/16	8,410 (36%)	9,300 (39%)	5,980 (25%)	23,690

Note:

Verified data on 2016/17 will not be available until November 17 at the earliest. However, it is expected that the trend over recent years will continue.

16. It is clear to many, that the role of Sector Skills Councils, and Standard Setting Bodies, in Wales is a diminishing one. There are very few who now have a footprint, or indeed a presence, here in Wales. This is understandable given the demise of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) and the move, in England, away from National Occupational Standards (NOS) to apprenticeship standards aka 'Trailblazers', and the establishing of Sector Panels as part of the Institute of Apprenticeships.

17. As part of the Apprenticeship Skills Policy Plan, there is a clear indication that the role of Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) and a reconstituted Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB) will form part of this future. This is welcomed by the NTfW, as it is

² <http://destinations.careerswales.com/>

³ <http://www.haveagowales.co.uk/>

hugely important that the ‘employer voice’ is central to any apprenticeship programme. However, the NTfW has concerns around the resourcing of each of these bodies, as they will certainly need to undertake the functions that have until now been undertaken by pan-UK organisations.

18. Approximately £5.5bn is spent every year on procurement in Wales. This money is spent on small, medium and large businesses that deliver services on behalf of the government. The Welsh Government therefore has an important and powerful role in issuing conditions on how the money is spent and is able to influence on how these businesses operate. We therefore ask the Committee to consider writing to the Welsh Government to ask them to consider introducing clauses into procurement contracts that commit the successful businesses to create sustainable apprenticeship opportunities and use the NTfW as the body to direct those businesses to for guidance and support

To scrutinise the accessibility of independent careers advice on Apprenticeships and other vocational options

Particularly for young people, either in school, from Careers Wales, online or from other sources

19. In too many instances schools do not adequately highlight the opportunities and benefits of apprenticeships, and in some instances they are only promoted to those young people who are perceived to be less able. This reflects a deep misunderstanding of the value and benefit of apprenticeships, particularly at the higher levels (at Level 3 and above) and that many graduates go on to become apprentices after three years of university education. These misconceptions need to be tackled in order to create an education and skills system that truly reflects the needs of learners and the Welsh economy. We ask that the Committee considers calling on the Welsh Government to issue guidance to schools on how best to highlight the benefits of apprenticeships to all school pupils.

20. We believe that the following changes are needed to the Common Area Prospectus application process⁴ (CAP) that will go some way in achieve parity of opportunity between academic and vocational education (particularly apprenticeships):

- An enhanced, simplified and fully integrated process to ensure that it adequately reflects apprenticeship opportunities across a wider geographical area, and ones which are not restricted to local authority boundaries e.g. within recognised travel to work areas.
- The CAP should be mandated for use by schools, and Welsh Government should monitor its use to ensure consistency throughout Wales.

21. Furthermore, we would urge Welsh Government to provide a remit to Estyn to inspect the quality of impartial careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) offered to all pupils regardless of ability, to include the use of the CAP, as part of their inspection arrangements.

⁴ <http://www.careerswales.com/en/cap/>

Is the Careers Wales' Apprenticeship Matching Service fit for purpose?

22. No. An area where NTfW feels the AMS could improve significantly is the ability to advertise apprenticeship vacancies throughout the year i.e. which employers generally recruit apprentices, but who do not currently have a 'live' vacancy. As an example, this could be large employers who annually recruit apprentices, stating that they will be recruiting and during what times etc.

How can better parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes be achieved?

23. The NTfW has stated on many occasions, that we need to move the discussion from 'parity of esteem' to 'parity of opportunity'. To gain real parity of esteem will take a generational change. However, we have an opportunity to make an immediate change to providing opportunities. Only those people who have gone through a vocational route will be able to give it the admiration and respect it deserves. It is not until we get more people choosing a vocational route as a route to a successful career will we change that mind-set.

24. Targets have a crucial role to play in driving policy and behaviour, and we therefore believe that the Welsh Government should set a national target for the number of school pupils who wish to see progressing directly onto an apprenticeship following Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5.

25. Changes to the role of Careers Wales have resulted in a reduction in organised work experience for young people across Wales. The NTfW believes that the Welsh Government should urgently address the declining emphasis on work experience. All schools should be provided with an opportunity for all pupils, regardless of ability, at Key Stage 4 to undertake meaningful work experience. We believe that the work-based learning sector has a role to play in this work due to the experience and employer links that already exist.

26. In addition to structured work experience, the changes to the curriculum within Wales also offer an opportunity to raise school pupils' awareness of vocational education. NTfW believes that the developments around vocational opportunities at Key Stage 4 (delivery of IVETs) should utilise the experience and employer links that already exist within the work-based learning sector, as it is strongly felt that the sector has a significant contribution to make in this area. This should allow for a smooth transition to an apprenticeship, should that be in the best interest of the learner.

To investigate the main barriers to taking up Apprenticeships

How accessible are Apprenticeships for people with disabilities (all ages)?

27. The NTfW feels that with the advent of the new Apprenticeship Skills Policy Plan, and a move towards more 'recruitment in' of apprentices, as opposed to existing members of staff undertaking apprenticeships, the provider network will begin to work with employers to influence behaviour, with a view of addressing any unconscious bias.

28. With the support of Welsh Government, the NTfW has employed an Equality and Diversity Champion to work with the provider network and other interested stakeholders to understand the issues, identify any provider barriers, and share best practice. As a result of the work undertaken by Equality and Diversity Champion, the relationship between WBL providers and organisations such as Remploy has developed significantly.

29. Early indications following discussions with stakeholder organisations point towards a situation where the barriers are more to do with employer behaviour and access to the apprenticeship programme itself – which is not unique to this cohort of individuals.

How can people from the lowest income families be supported to take-up Apprenticeships?

30. It is widely accepted that individuals from the lowest income families do not have the social capital to be able to enter into the labour market easily. The NTfW believes that the most effective form of support for those young people looking to enter the labour market, is to enable them to become 'job ready' before being exposed to a period of real work experience(s) alongside which there is sufficient and appropriate 'in work' support. With this in mind, the NTfW is working with Welsh Government to develop an 'Access to Apprenticeships' programme, which will aim to prepare young people to enter the labour market via an apprenticeship.

What good practice exists and what more can be done to address gender stereotyping?

31. There is some good practice which exists that demonstrates that providers are working hard with employers to tackle the issue of gender-stereotyping. This can be seen by the success of many individuals throughout the Apprenticeship Awards Cymru process. There are a number of highly successful females in areas such as engineering, and conversely, males working in the hair and beauty sectors. However, and as has been identified with the issues around apprentices with disabilities, there is still a great deal of work to be done by the provider network in influencing employers to see the benefits of a diverse workforce.

32. However, and as has been identified with the issues around apprentices with disabilities, there is still a great deal of work to be done by the provider network in influencing employers to see the benefits of a diverse workforce. With this in mind, the WBL Equality and Diversity Champion is working with organisations such as Chwarae Teg and the Wales Women's Equality Network to address the issues of gender stereotyping.

To scrutinise the development of higher level Apprenticeships, with the support of further and higher education institutions

How effective is progression between other work-based learning and Apprenticeships and between Levels 2, 3, 4 and above Apprenticeships?

33. There is no published statistics on the level of progression between apprenticeship frameworks. However, anecdotally progression between Foundation Apprenticeships (Level 2) and Apprenticeships (Level 3) is generally quite strong.

34. The main consideration here has to be that apprenticeships are fundamentally a competence based programme, and unless an individual is making constant progress in their career throughout the term of their apprenticeship, then it will be quite difficult to move throughout all of the levels. However, with the recognition that the Welsh economy is in need of higher level skills, providers are increasingly looking at ways to work with individuals and employers, to ensure that there is a 'ladder of progression' for all involved.

How can employer engagement with Apprenticeships be improved?

35. Clearly, the apprenticeship levy is having a significant impact on raising the awareness, and interest, in apprenticeships with those employers who are in scope to pay it. The key thing here to do is to ensure that these employers are able to access the type of provision they want, and in such a way that it does not create any unnecessary burdens.

36. As with individuals trying to access the apprenticeship programme, employers too need a 'one stop shop' where they can go for all the information they need in terms of apprenticeships. The issue we have now however is with whole range of stakeholders, with the very best of intentions, talking about apprenticeships, employer looking to engage do not know where the best place to go is.

37. With the increased awareness around apprenticeships and the introduction of a number of new stakeholders, the NTfW believes that it is time for Wales to have its own 'National Apprenticeships Service' which could act as the 'one stop shop' for individuals and employers. The NTfW feels that it is in a great position to be the 'honest broker' for all apprenticeship enquiries and would be keen to work with Welsh Government and others to develop this concept.

38. In our evidence to the Committee's inquiry into the Apprenticeship levy, the NTfW wrote:

"The Network wants to ensure that the positive messages around the success of the Apprenticeship Programme in Wales reach all employers, especially those who are impacted directly by the apprenticeship levy. We would ask the Committee to urge the Welsh Government to take a 'whole systems' approach to delivering on its apprenticeship commitment. Welsh Government should ensure that their business engagement and economic development teams actively work with the NTfW (as the expert body on apprenticeships in Wales), who can act as a 'funnel' for enquiries in regards to the availability of apprenticeship provision across Wales and other employer queries.

Welsh Government should be very clear with all employers (regardless of size or sector) in relation to what are the "Welsh Ministers priorities." Currently, there is a considerable amount of interest and promotion around apprenticeships – which is of course welcomed – but the headline messaging around apprenticeships is at odds with contractual requirements around age, sectors and volumes.

Furthermore, the Welsh Government needs to ensure that there is a strong marketing campaign for apprenticeships, to run alongside the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, to include where employers need to go to get further information.

Historically, the Apprenticeship Programme in Wales has received wide cross Party support, which has led to a significant investment in various budget settlements. However, as the funding for the Apprenticeship Programme in Wales has been part of budget negotiations, this has led to significant variances between financial (and operational) years, which have a de-stabilising effect on sustained provision, especially as priorities tend to change with each financial settlement."

It is felt that the issues raised above are also valid for this inquiry, particularly in relation to raising the level of employer engagement with the Apprenticeship Programme.

Summary

39. We believe that the following changes need to be implemented in order to achieve parity of opportunity between academic and vocational education in order to build on the success of the Apprenticeship Programme in Wales:

- Setting national targets for schools on the number of pupils progressing directly on to an apprenticeship following Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5;
- Changes in schools, to include the monitoring of impartial CIAG by Estyn; the mandatory use of CAP; capitalising on the changes to the curriculum; and the development of a universal work experience programme;
- Incorporating apprenticeship targets in public procurement.