

The Learning, Skills and Innovation Partnership (LSkip) is the Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) for South East Wales. The Partnership brings together education, industry and other stakeholders to determine economic priorities for skills investment and associated recommendations, that will develop the employment and skills necessary to meet the demands of the regional economy and enable it to grow. The Partnership is supported by an industry led Employment and Skills Board, which brings together a wide variety of stakeholders from across the region.

To review progress since the 2012 report of the Enterprise and Business Committee, Apprenticeships in Wales.

The Apprenticeship programme is well regarded in Wales, however, whilst the policy and landscape that supports apprenticeships has continued to evolve and significant efforts continue to be made to address the issues identified, many of the challenges remain and will need further support and development into the long term. Much of these are covered in response to the questions asked of the 2017 inquiry and so will not be repeated here.

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?

Careers information, advice and guidance is viewed as a critical component to support the decision making process and ultimately the choices made by those seeking pathways to employment. It is important that individuals are made aware of the wide variety of different occupations and opportunities that exist within our economy and are also informed of the *potential* that these will offer for employment both now and in the future, as a part of their long-term career aspirations. Unfortunately, current evidence suggests a significant mismatch between the subject areas chosen by young people and those opportunities that offer the greatest potential for employment across the regional economy. Further investigation highlights that there is insufficient/inadequate independent careers information, advice and guidance available, that due to budget pressures and changes at Careers Wales there is no longer universal provision for all learners, so the majority do not receive any support and what support is available is targeted at those at risk of becoming NEET. In the absence of any universal provision, careers advice in schools is variable and there are mixed messages regarding the quality of career information, advice and guidance provided. Many highlight that for those that do not receive Careers Wales support, advice is becoming increasingly limited to online resources, guidance from parents and whatever information and industry engagement the school is able to support or provide.

The lack of careers information, advice and guidance for *all* learners leaves too much to chance and is inadequate in informing and preparing those who are making choices linked to their future career aspirations. More needs to be done to raise awareness of the broad range of occupations available including those featured across apprenticeship frameworks and the many different levels available, highlighting the progression and future opportunity that these can afford. Greater

efforts must be made to inspire and interest individuals in occupations that will offer them potential in the future, in areas that will support business growth and economic development, to raise prosperity.

Inspiring interest in occupations is often successful when achieved through industry or role model engagement, whilst understanding the nature and range of options when selecting pathways to employment will often benefit from independent careers advice and guidance. This suggests that the solution requires a collaborative approach with input from multiple sources, including employers, industry bodies, schools, colleges and Careers Wales. The BITC Business Class model delivered through Careers Wales has been regarded as successful, but there is a challenge over whether the costs might prohibit its sustainability into the future, beyond those that can afford and are prepared to fund it.

Whilst some argue that schools are broadly inaccessible or do not do enough to highlight apprenticeship opportunities, recent feedback suggests that some schools would welcome a lead/nominated work based learning provider as a vocational link, coordinated in conjunction with ntfw. With service level agreements between schools and work based learning providers established to support regular visits and presentations to promote apprenticeship opportunities, including parent evenings, employer links, work experience and others. This idea will be followed up by the RSP to determine the appetite and implications of this approach as a potential model to support future practice.

Comments from employers to the RSP demonstrate a willingness across industry to engage with schools and participate in schemes to raise awareness of the many different occupations that exist in a modern business context, to challenge perceptions, inspire individuals and break down barriers. However, whilst there are successful initiatives, many employers were unsure how to get involved, some had tried to engage but had struggled to get schools to respond and others suggested that better coordination was required. Equally whilst there are a lot of different schemes to support engagement with schools, many felt that there was a lack of coordination or visibility between or across these schemes and no understanding of which environments are well catered for and by whom, and where there is a gap in provision.

Coordination to support engagement between education and industry and the provision of more universal careers information, advice and guidance is a key area for further action and investment.

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

An apprenticeship matching service is much needed and further development and investment should be supported, however the current online service is regarded as not particularly user friendly or effective and is perceived as limited, including the range of apprenticeship vacancies listed, some of which are not advertised in a timely manner, also nuances within the search feature can inhibit the number and range of options returned. More needs to be done to improve the site, raise awareness of it and the opportunities within it, amongst all of those exploring future employment options, including school leavers.

The site needs to be streamlined and promote apprenticeships throughout the year. It needs to increase the number and range of opportunities it offers and develop into a trusted source of information on apprenticeships, with links to relevant information that extends beyond simply advertising apprenticeship vacancies. The main landing page of this site could be improved to better advertise apprenticeships and their benefits and/or feature new or exciting apprenticeship opportunities, as well as providing access to an improved search facility for vacancies.

A further suggestion is that there should also be a function within the site for those who wish to undertake an apprenticeship to register for and request apprenticeship opportunities. This would highlight the level of demand/interest from learners, the extent to which this demand is or is not met and offer a focus for targeted action.

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

It is important to both raise awareness and challenge perceptions of apprenticeships and their benefits, targeting individuals choosing future occupational pathways, employers and key influencers such as parents and teachers, to promote parity.

Some consider that academic and vocational routes are set up in competition with each other, a suggestion would be to promote parallel routes to the same occupational objective together and use case studies of individuals to demonstrate the different pathways and their benefits to achieving the same occupational outcome. This is particularly relevant when promoting, for example, higher level apprenticeships or the professions, where different pathways, academic and vocational, can achieve the same professional status and qualification to practice. Degree apprenticeships may also offer potential to promote parity.

Role models and case studies are needed from within industry to raise awareness, inspire and sell the benefits of vocational and apprenticeship routes amongst those looking for pathways to employment, highlighting successes across the spectrum of occupations and levels available. It is important that examples are as diverse as the apprentices themselves and reflect their different age ranges, genders and other characteristics to demonstrate their universal appeal and also break down any perceived barriers.

In addition, there is a need to provide opportunities for those in education to engage with and see the value of vocational and work based learning opportunities and outcomes as an alternative pathway. Work related education and training including Saturday clubs and work experience, and pre-apprenticeship programmes can offer a useful bridge to inspire and engage those making decisions regarding their future and aid transition to apprenticeships and other learning in the workplace.

Employers, particularly those not currently or traditionally engaged in offering apprenticeships or those for whom apprenticeship delivery has not changed or expanded in recent years, should be engaged to explore their apprenticeship offer, conversations with some employers highlights some misconceptions around who apprenticeships are for, the levels and range of frameworks available, and how this can benefit their business, including the opportunity to expand their apprenticeship offer into new areas. This was particularly relevant in areas such as higher level

apprenticeships, where parity between academic and vocational routes needs to be promoted. The apprenticeship levy has created renewed interest in apprenticeships amongst employers and this can be used to drive better engagement and increased use of apprenticeships by employers as an alternative but equal opportunity for occupational qualification.

There is a need to actively challenge the perceptions of key influencers and persuade them of both the parity between different pathways and the benefits of each. Key influences such as parents and teachers need to be part of a wider discussion that drives better education and awareness of how apprenticeships and vocational pathways have and are evolving, the nature and range of options available and the benefits they offer.

To investigate the main barriers to taking up Apprenticeships?

A key barrier is the perception of key influencers on learner choice, particularly parents and teachers, much more needs to be done to challenge these perceptions, educate and raise awareness of the potential and benefits offered by apprenticeships, highlighting the wide range of occupations and different levels available.

Equally, traditional perspectives on apprenticeships need to be challenged and some employers might benefit from support to explore the use of apprenticeships within and across their business, developing their understanding of apprenticeships and how to access them, the extended range of frameworks, occupations and levels that now exist and the ability to develop new frameworks where there is clear and sufficient evidence of need.

For individuals, finding an apprenticeship place can be difficult, as can navigating the systems and processes to access apprenticeships, there is a need for a far more effective and pro-active dedicated support service to recruit and match apprentices to potential opportunities. Further there is a need to understand the extent to which the demand for apprenticeship places cannot be met, to understand any shortfall in opportunities.

Many suggest that a pre-apprenticeship or access to apprenticeship programme would be of great benefit in transitioning people to apprenticeships, there appears to be significant support for a pre-apprenticeship programme targeting 14-16 year olds and for others it is suggested a more universal 'access to apprenticeship' programme might be of value. In both cases the objective is to make the candidate work ready and prepared for entry into employment via an apprenticeship pathway.

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

Apprentices are often recruited via a competitive recruitment process, which should offer equal opportunity, further research is needed to understand any issues, potential barriers and what support might be required.

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

A pre-apprenticeship or access to apprenticeship programme is suggested as a mechanism to engage candidates in apprenticeships, ensure they are work ready and supported into structured employment via an apprenticeship pathway.

There is also some challenge over the differing minimum salary levels applied to apprentices, based on age, consideration should be given to whether the lower salary level is sufficient to meet ordinary living costs. Further support could be considered for those from the lowest income families to meet additional costs, such as travel to work costs and maybe subsistence, whilst undertaking the apprenticeship programme.

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

Much work is being done by both education and industry across sectors to address gender stereotyping, with good examples in areas such as construction, engineering and others. This scale of the challenge is significant and so this work needs to grow and continue but again it is not sufficient to just work with those individuals making career choices, it must also impact key influencers such as parents and teachers and also permeate working environments, to positively encourage and promote a diverse workforce.

Programmes that use role models and develop ambassadors or champions that can challenge traditional views and break down any perceived barriers are to be welcomed.

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?

Traditionally progression between level 2 and 3 programmes has been considered the norm, with more of a challenge highlighted in progressing through to level 4 and beyond, particularly when constrained by the limitations of job roles to enable the candidate to demonstrate competence at the higher levels.

Clear and coherent progression routes are needed through to the highest levels, whether through apprenticeships or transition between and across academic and vocational programmes to enable progression.

The limited number and range of higher level apprenticeships and the lack of a clear framework for the delivery of degree apprenticeships is an issue. The number and range of higher level apprenticeships needs to be increased to provide more opportunity for participation and progression at levels 4 and beyond and to promote greater parity of opportunity for qualification achievement in occupations at levels 5 and beyond. There is also a need for a clear policy, framework and funding to support the introduction of degree apprenticeships, in response to a clear demand emerging from some employers and professions.

There is an opportunity to promote collaboration in development and delivery of a broader range of higher level and degree apprenticeships, drawing on the expertise of work based learning providers, Further and Higher Education, to recognise and benefit from the contributions and/or strengths of all providers.

How can employer engagement with Apprenticeships be improved?

Better promotion, education and awareness is needed of the opportunities and benefits presented by apprenticeships. Case studies and role models should be used as part of a structured campaign to raise the profile and potential of apprenticeships amongst employers but also key influencers such as parents and teachers and within schools.

Extending successful shared apprenticeship schemes, such as that operated in Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone, that are developed in response to demand stimulated amongst groups of employers, can help to grow SME participation in apprenticeships. Greater flexibility around the delivery model for apprenticeships, to reduce the administration and bureaucracy, could assist as this is often regarded as a barrier and burden for SMEs and particularly small employers.

Providing support for employers, particularly those new to apprenticeships, is critical with a single point of contact or source of information needed to explain what apprenticeships are and how they can benefit the business, advice on how to access apprenticeships and a brokerage service to connect employers with providers. Some employers will get this information and advice direct from work based learning providers whilst others will seek third party guidance and support on how apprenticeships work and the options available before doing so. There is the potential to offer tailored support and/or to also link this to other sources of business advice and guidance.

The apprenticeship levy is raising awareness and is a key driver of employer interest in apprenticeships, this presents a challenge but an even greater opportunity to engage employers and introduce them to apprenticeships or extend their use of apprenticeships. This interest in apprenticeships by employers must be capitalised on and clear access to support, advice and guidance for employers must be offered to capture this interest and where appropriate increase the number and range of opportunities offered.