

Apprenticeships in Wales

February 2018



The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

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Apprenticeships in Wales

February 2018



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016 to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account by scrutinising expenditure, administration and policy matters, encompassing (but not restricted to): economic development; transport; infrastructure; employment; skills; and research and development, including technology and science.

Committee Chair:



Russell George AM
Welsh Conservative
Montgomeryshire

Current Committee membership:



Hefin David AM
Welsh Labour
Caerphilly



Vikki Howells AM
Welsh Labour
Cynon Valley



Mark Isherwood AM
Welsh Conservative
North Wales



Adam Price AM
Plaid Cymru
Carmarthen East and Dinefwr



David J Rowlands AM
UKIP Wales
South Wales East



Lee Waters AM
Welsh Labour
Llanelli



Joyce Watson AM
Welsh Labour
Mid and West Wales

The following Members were also members of the Committee during this inquiry:



Hannah Blythyn AM
Welsh Labour
Delyn



Jeremy Miles AM
Welsh Labour
Neath

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Chair's foreword

At the start of 2017 the Committee heard urgent concerns about the imminent arrival of the Apprentice Levy. With introduction racing towards the horizon, we decided to do a short piece of work looking at the impact the levy might have in Wales, and what the Welsh Government was doing in preparation.

Due to the time constraints posed by the introduction of the levy, that inquiry was narrowly focused, but in taking evidence we heard lots about wider aspects of apprenticeships that were worthy of further consideration – so this second inquiry was an attempt to address those issues.

While we badged it as an inquiry in to apprenticeships, the terms of reference were fairly wide-ranging and allowed us to look at issues including careers advice and aspects of vocational training in general.

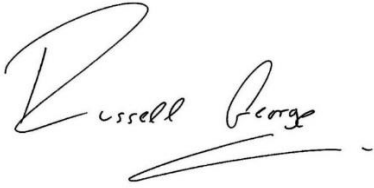
We are grateful to the individuals and organisations who gave evidence to the committee, their input has been invaluable.

There is much that is positive about Apprenticeships in Wales but there were a few surprises. We were surprised that the number of disabled apprentices in Wales was far below the rate achieved in England. We were concerned that a lack of providers may be preventing young people undertaking apprenticeships through the medium of Welsh, and we heard of the economic barriers – cost of travel, a suit for interviews etc – which can prevent young people from taking up opportunities.

There also remains a stubborn gender segregation when we talk about apprenticeships. Both the Welsh Government and stakeholders are committed to address this, and are taking steps to do so, but progress has been slow. This issue is not unique to Wales.

During the course of our investigation we heard concerns about the way careers advice is delivered in schools. As a result, we delayed publication of this report, to look more closely at the role of Careers Wales, and how it is delivering its responsibilities. This delay has given us assurance that the organisation has a credible plan, and is working closely with Welsh Government to address these issues.

This report does not mark the end of our interest in apprenticeships and work-based-learning. In April the Committee will review the impact of the Apprenticeship Levy around the first anniversary of its introduction, and later this term we are planning a short piece of work looking at the future of skills in Wales.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Russell George". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Russell George AM
Chair - Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should ensure there is no let up in support to tackling the wider prejudices and conventions regarding gender and careers so that the widest opportunity is available to all..... Page 11

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Recommendation 9. The Welsh Government should ensure that it has taken all necessary steps regarding future funding of degree level apprenticeships and that Welsh universities are clear about how they can engage and contribute to the apprenticeship landscape..... Page 23

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Recommendation 12. The Welsh Government should set a deadline for commencing teaching of degree level apprenticeships and share this with the Committee and stakeholders..... Page 25

Recommendation 13. The Welsh Government should consider what levers it has to encourage all partners to participate fully in the common area prospectus.
..... Page 29

Recommendation 14. Estyn should consider how best to include in its inspections the availability and quality of careers advice on vocational courses and training (including apprenticeships) in schools. The Welsh Government should also look at what levers it has to incentivise schools. Regional Education Consortiums should consider what support and challenge they can provide to schools in this area..... Page 29

1. Background to the Inquiry

Summary

1. In 2017, the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee conducted a short piece of work looking at the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy and the impact it would have on businesses in Wales.
2. This inquiry provided an opportunity for the Committee to follow-up a range of matters raised during the recent Apprenticeship Levy Inquiry which were not directly related to the Apprenticeship Levy itself.
3. This included issues like:
 - The Careers Wales Apprenticeship Matching Service;
 - Parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes;
 - Accessibility of apprenticeships to people from low income families; to disabled people;
 - The barriers to taking up apprenticeships;
 - Gender stereotyping;
 - The development of higher level apprenticeships; and
 - Employer engagement.
4. The full terms of reference are set out in Annex A.

Consultation and written evidence

5. The Committee's consultation ran from Tuesday, 4 April 2017 to Wednesday, 3 May 2017. All 26 responses can be seen on the [**consultation page**](#).

Oral Evidence

6. The Committee took oral evidence at its meetings on [**17 May**](#) and [**7 June 2017**](#). The Committee took evidence from Julie James AM, the then Minister for Skills and Science ('the Minister') on [**7 June 2017**](#).
7. Following consideration of the evidence in Autumn 2017, the Committee invited Careers Wales to give further evidence on [**23 November 2017**](#).

2. Access to apprenticeships

8. This chapter considers the evidence the Committee gathered in relation to a range of groups with specific characteristics.

Gender

9. The raw statistics on gender and apprenticeships are stark.

10. Evidence submitted by Chwarae Teg noted statistics produced by Stats Wales that 1.6% of construction apprentices and 3.1% of engineering apprentices are female, compared with 96% of children's care, learning and development apprentices and 91% of hairdressing apprentices.¹

11. Colegau Cymru noted in their written evidence a number of positive interventions being made by stakeholders and government alike, but that progress has been limited:

“Despite a long track record of trying to address gender imbalance and stereotyping of particular occupations, progress in areas such as construction has been very limited. Taking apprenticeship learning programmes in construction in 2015-16 as an example: of the 4,675 foundation, apprenticeship and higher apprenticeships, 4,555 were male as compared to 120 females.”²

12. Colegau Cymru noted that under representation by gender and race was not unique to Wales, but suggested “providing additional funding for the recruitment and retention of non-traditional candidates using payment-by-results” could be a solution.

13. Chwarae Teg noted there was widespread acceptance that “apprenticeships remain notably gendered” and that there is agreement that action to address this should be a priority. Their evidence suggested targets could be the answer:

“Targets should be put in place for providers to ensure that all of those engaged in delivering apprenticeships are actively addressing issues of

¹ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 18 Chwarae Teg (figures from Stats Wales Learning programmes for Foundational Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships Accessed 02/05/2017)

² Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 09 Colegau Cymru

gender stereotyping. This would ensure consistency of approach and provide focus for WG and providers.”³

14. The evidence from Chwarae Teg also noted that the UK Government’s Transport Skills Strategy⁴ includes an “ambition for at least 20% of new entrants to engineering and technical apprenticeships in the transport sector to be women by 2020”.

15. Karen Higgins from the South East Wales Regional Skills Partnership summed up the feelings of most stakeholders when she appeared before the Committee:

“We’ve mentioned gender stereotyping; it’s still a challenge. I think a lot of people are doing a lot of hard work and making a lot of effort to try and address those issues, but it still feels like there’s a long way to go.”⁵

The Minister’s view

16. The Minister said the Government needed to do “a lot more work” on gender:

“Figures look okay at a headline level in gender terms. We have equal numbers of women and men on apprenticeships. But when you go down a level, we’ve got the same problem we always have, which is that a large number of the women are in social care-type apprenticeships, and a large number of the men are in ‘hard’ type apprenticeships.”⁶

Committee view

Conclusion 1. The availability of data regarding gender has improved and it seems clear that gender issues with regard to apprenticeships are understood, and that there is a desire to address them. However, progress has been slow.

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government should ensure there is no let up in support to tackling the wider prejudices and conventions regarding gender and careers so that the widest opportunity is available to all.

³ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 18 Chwarae Teg

⁴ Department for Transport, Transport Infrastructure Skills Strategy: building sustainable skills Moving Britain Ahead 2016

⁵ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 151

⁶ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 385

Apprentices and disability

17. One in five working age people in Wales have a disability or long-term health condition, as defined by the Equality Act 2010. Yet, Remploy’s written evidence highlighted that only 2.7% of learners in work-based learning provision and 1.3% of apprentices in Wales are disabled. This compares to 9% in England.

18. These figures suggest there is a structural discrimination problem.

19. Remploy suggests some reasons for the low figures in Wales might include:

- a lack of awareness of apprenticeships by parents, employers and learners;
- difficulties in finding suitable work placements;
- few apprenticeship role models for disabled people; and
- existing support for learners not being accessed or fully utilised.

20. As a result, Remploy suggested:

“The Welsh Government could consider is the introduction of a target for work-based learning providers for the percentage of disabled people starting and completing apprenticeships.”⁷

21. The National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) felt that disabled participation, as well as the participation of other minority groups, could be improved by better awareness of apprenticeships in general.⁸

22. The Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RSLP) for South West and Mid Wales felt that there is a piece of work to be done:

“to identify what are the barriers for people with disabilities getting an apprenticeship offer from an employer...I think we could offer them support, working with Remploy, for example, to ensure that the

⁷ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 22 Remploy Cymru

⁸ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 National Training Federation for Wales

employers know about what adaptations need to be made to make that offer to people.”⁹

23. The National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS) Cymru echoed this in its written evidence, where it recommended that the Welsh Government should publish more detailed data in order for conclusions to be made about the accessibility of apprenticeships.¹⁰

24. The Learning, Skills and Innovation Partnership (LSKIP) said:

“a pre-apprenticeship programme would be well received, not least in making sure that, for some people, they are work-ready before they go on to a full apprenticeship programme. So, certainly, we would support that.”¹¹

25. Remploy noted that it runs a project along these lines, which maintains “a steady pool of disabled candidates”, ready to take up opportunities as they become available. At present this programme is delivered on a “very informal” basis. As a result Remploy suggested the Welsh Government could seek to formalise the project through a pilot or new initiative:

“it would be a cost-neutral way for the Welsh Government to increase the number of disabled apprentices.”¹²

26. Remploy also pointed towards its joint report with Mencap, **Raising Aspiration: widening participation in Supported Internships**, which reported on the benefits of a period of structured employment for disabled people prior to their application for an apprenticeship.

27. In 2014, Estyn published a thematic report entitled **Barriers to apprenticeship**. The report contained the findings of a review into the barriers for those with disabilities when entering apprenticeship programmes. It also contained information on the barriers experienced by learners from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. A follow up report, **Breaking down barriers to apprenticeship**, was published in 2015.

⁹ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 186

¹⁰ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 25 National Deaf Children’s Society

¹¹ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 26 Learning Skills and Innovation Partnership

¹² Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 22 Remploy Cymru

The Minister's view

28. In her paper to the Committee, the Minister noted the Welsh Government had appointed a champion to increase participation of protected groups on apprenticeships and to embrace diversity within the programme, and was running pilot schemes:

“The Welsh Government has appointed an Equality and Diversity Champion to improve the engagement of protected groups onto apprenticeship programmes. ... Targeted action in conjunction with wider specialist organisations such as Remploy is also taking place to reduce barriers faced by those with protected characteristics when accessing the Apprenticeship programme. Welsh Pilot work has commenced with Remploy to match clients on the Work Choice programme to Apprenticeship opportunities in their area.”¹³

29. In oral evidence, the Minister noted:

“We’re also working with some companies who are helping us train our employers to be what they call ‘disability-confident employers’—so, actually helping them make the reasonable adjustments necessary...there’s absolutely no reason why we shouldn’t have as diverse an apprenticeship workforce as we have in any other area, and we’ve got a number of programmes running, which are pilots at the moment, with Remploy and others.”¹⁴

30. In her follow up letter to the Committee, the Minister indicated that further work to scope and pilot pre-apprenticeship programmes was on-going:

“Our Apprenticeship plan also outlines scoping and piloting pre-apprenticeship programmes across Wales and we expect to make announcements in the coming months.”¹⁵

Committee view

Conclusion 2. The disparity between the proportion of disabled Apprentices in Wales compared to the number in England is striking. Clearly, there is work to be

¹³ Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, [EIS\(5\)-14-17\(p5\)](#), 7 June 2017

¹⁴ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 384

¹⁵ Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, [EIS\(5\)-16-17\(p6\)](#), 29 June 2017

done to raise awareness, but the gap is so great that consideration should be given to whether explicit targets are needed.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government should produce a clear, disabled person specific action plan to address the under-representation of disabled people in Apprenticeships.

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government should provide more support to employers in raising awareness among a wider range of young people of the benefits of apprenticeships.

Welsh Language Apprenticeships

31. The Welsh Language Commissioner felt Welsh-medium apprenticeships have not been given sufficient attention and highlighted the lack of clear, consistent data in this area. She said:

“The public data regarding the use of Welsh within work-based learning programmes and apprenticeships in particular is limited and patchy.”¹⁶

32. She also highlighted four possible reasons for the apparent low rate of Welsh use in apprenticeships and other work-based learning.

“Different factors can influence the use of Welsh within work-based learning programmes and apprenticeships specifically, including a lack of demand from learners; a lack of an active offer of Welsh-medium or bilingual provision; a lack of bilingual assessors; and the extent of Welsh-medium and bilingual provision.”¹⁷

33. Urdd Gobaith Cymru (The Urdd) highlighted that it does offer an apprenticeship programme through the medium of Welsh. However it noted that the organisation finds it difficult to ensure that vocational qualifications are available in terms of provision and validation through the medium of Welsh.¹⁸

34. The Urdd felt that, amongst other things, Welsh-medium apprenticeships support the development of a Welsh-medium workforce and demonstrate to young people the economic value of the Welsh language.

¹⁶ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 01 Welsh Language Commissioner

¹⁷ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 01 Welsh Language Commissioner

¹⁸ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 07 Urdd Gobaith Cymru

35. In its oral evidence, the NTfW highlighted the growth in Welsh and bilingual learning in Wales – rising from 2.7% to 12% over the last four years. Jeff Protheroe said:

“Providers will have, within certain sectors, targets to achieve in terms of bilingual and Welsh-medium provision within certain sectors such as construction, childcare and hospitality. So, targets do play a role in driving behaviours, and the network, to give them their dues, are very good at responding to those stimuli and changing their apprenticeship offer.”¹⁹

36. South West & Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership reported:

“...what the employers are saying to us is they’re having real difficulty in finding trainers who speak Welsh to be able to train the people. They’ve got the employees who can speak Welsh but they haven’t got the trainers who can deliver the training through the medium of Welsh.”²⁰

The Minister’s view

37. The Minister set out the Welsh Government’s actions to improve the provision of Welsh medium apprenticeships and WBL in her oral evidence to Committee:

“...we’ve been working very hard with our provider network to make sure that we have good Welsh language provision across Wales, especially where the demand is higher. (...) The Have a Go stuff seems to really enthuse people.”²¹

Committee view

Conclusion 3. The Committee notes the improvement there has been in the % of Welsh medium apprenticeships and work-based learning in recent years. But there remains a gap between the likely demand and ability to meet it. The lack of accurate, publicly available data makes it difficult to address this issue.

¹⁹ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 17 May 2017, paragraph 221

²⁰ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 162

²¹ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 388

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government should meet urgently with FE Colleges and Y Coleg Cymraeg to discuss what support may be required to ensure that there are enough trainers available to support Welsh-medium apprenticeships.

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government should set a target for the number of Welsh Medium apprenticeships – the new Welsh Language strategy sets specific targets for pre 16 Welsh Medium education, but not for post compulsory education.

Support for people from low income households

38. The financial cost of entering employment was highlighted as a major barrier to the take up of apprenticeships from low income households. For example, the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) noted:

“In some areas young people eligible for free school meals are half as likely to start a level three apprenticeship...Apprentices from low income families miss out on the financial support that is available to those in full time education or training, for example the Special Support Grant available to university students.”²²

39. In oral evidence the representative of South West & Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership noted:

“...one of the pieces of evidence that we have about people from lower-wage families getting into apprenticeships is about the distance they have to travel to work and the cost of travelling to work in relation to the amount of money they’d get paid from the apprenticeship wage.”²³

40. Others who referred to issues around the cost of participating in an apprenticeship, particularly the cost of travelling to a place of work or learning, included Cardiff and Vale College (CAVC), Estyn, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Coleg Sir Gâr, CITB and Grwp Llandrillo Menai.

41. FSB Wales noted the contrast between the support available for students, and that for apprentices.

²² Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 20 Construction Industry and Training Board

²³ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 187

“...the Welsh Government’s new student finance support package for Higher Education is based on equivalency with the living wage while apprenticeship funding does not apply the same logic.”²⁴

42. CAVC suggested advanced payments could ease applicants through some initial barriers.

“...advance payments to cover the first month of employment, provision of suitable business clothing for interview and initial employment period would significantly help to remove barriers to entry into apprenticeships.”²⁵

43. The Open University recommended the creation of “hardship funding or bursaries for those from disadvantaged backgrounds”,²⁶ as are available to University and further education students, to help them meet the costs of starting an apprenticeship. Grwp Llandrillo Menai raised the issue of the impact on the wider family’s benefits when one of the children take up an apprenticeship.²⁷

44. In its oral evidence the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership/North Wales Economic Ambition Board highlighted its work with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and other partners to provide specific funds to get people back to work:

“If they haven’t got particular equipment to work on a construction site, we will provide them with that equipment. If they haven’t got an interview suit, there are funds so we can get them a suit to get them to that interview.”²⁸

The Minister’s view

45. The Minister told the Committee she was lobbying for a raise in the minimum wage, describing current rates as “very low”:

“So, in terms of the transport costs, that’s a real problem. We’ve maintained the education maintenance allowance, obviously, and we

²⁴ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 08 Federation of Small Businesses

²⁵ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 14 Cardiff and Vale College

²⁶ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 11 Open University

²⁷ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 19 Grwp Llandrillo Menai

²⁸ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 195

know that people use that for transport costs for college. We've got the financial hardship fund; we're in negotiations around that. The problem is if we supply it specifically as part of the apprenticeship programme, it's a taxable benefit. So, you actually get into some severe difficulties with that. So, we're actively looking at it and we're aware that it's a problem. We're also working with some of our employers about what their transport arrangements are. I have some anecdotal evidence around people holding on to old shift patterns that start at 6:00 without ever considering whether that means that people can't access public transport, for example. So, working with our employer base to ensure that they actually think actively themselves about how their workforce gets to them will be part of that, although it won't be all of it, because, obviously, there's a cost implication as well."²⁹

Committee view

Conclusion 4. There is substantial evidence that financial barriers are discouraging and, in some cases, preventing many young people from taking up apprenticeships. The support required to overcome this barrier, or perceived barrier, may only need apply in the first year of an apprenticeship, where the average annual wage is likely to be well below the basic rate tax threshold. While there are likely to be tax implications, the Committee is not convinced that these will be insurmountable.

Conclusion 5. There is a strong moral case for the Welsh Government to apply similar levels of support to apprentices as would be available to their peers in full-time education. Parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes needs to be underpinned by parity of support for learners.

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government should create a competitive hardship fund for apprentices on the lowest pay levels or create other concessions, such as concessionary bus or rail cards, as exist for other students.

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government should establish a universal grant to cover living costs for all apprentices, as is due to be available for Welsh university students from 2018/19.

Recommendation 8. The Committee has decided not to ask for specific targets for disabled people, gender, Welsh speaking access to apprenticeships. This

²⁹ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 387

would risk the creation of a tick-box culture. However, the Committee is clear that apprentices in Wales are not yet fully representative of the wider society they are drawn from. The Welsh Government should provide the Committee with an annual update covering all protected characteristics, and access from low income communities. The Committee hopes that making this data public will act as a spur to widen access to apprenticeships to all in Wales.

3. Progression and higher level apprenticeships

Ensuring a continuum of training

46. In the past, a number of trainees found it difficult to find training opportunities that enabled them to continue to progress. The absence of a clear pathway or continuum was itself a barrier for many.

47. The Committee supports the Minister in her plans to establish a continuum of training:

- From Junior Apprenticeships age 14 plus (Levels 1 and 2), through Foundation Apprenticeships;
- Apprenticeships (Level 3);
- Higher Level Apprenticeships (Level 4 plus) and
- Degree Level Apprenticeships (Levels 5 and 6).

48. During her evidence to the Committee, the Minister mentioned a successful pilot scheme for 14-16 year olds, which have been branded Junior Apprenticeships. In her follow up letter to the Committee, the Minister noted:

“Officials are in the process of scoping the content and costs of expanding the Cardiff Junior Apprenticeship 14-16 year olds model across Wales. Officials have sought expressions of interest from further education colleges and all have responded positively.”³⁰

49. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) noted:

“Arrangements for apprenticeships in Wales do not currently allow for universities being an apprenticeship provider in Wales. In England, at least 60 universities and other HE institutions are implementing or planning to implement degree level apprenticeships in the 2017/18

³⁰ Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, **EIS(5)-16-17(p6)**, 29 June 2017

academic year and there are expected to be more than 7,600 degree apprentices in 2017/18.”³¹

50. HEFCW said that allowing students to achieve a university qualification (up to, and including, level 8) through a vocational route would help drive parity of esteem. It also recommends that “vocational and academic routes are promoted alongside each other”. HEFCW also suggested that there should be flexible pathways that allow individuals to switch between vocational and academic routes as they progress to higher level qualifications.

51. The Open University noted:

“the non-availability of university accredited ‘Degree Apprenticeships’ in Wales is resulting in a failure to address vocational vs academic parity...We would hope this is addressed as a priority.”³²

52. HEFCW reported that “key Welsh Government decisions are still required in relation to the future funding of apprenticeships at degree level and the role that universities can play in the overall apprenticeship landscape”.³³

53. A strong concern was raised by Grwp Llandrillo Menai that, even where higher level apprenticeship frameworks existed (at levels 3 and 4), potential candidates were not always in position to be undertake them:

“...key problem moving up the apprenticeship levels is that level 3 and higher require supervisory/management experience. Not all young people at 19+ have job roles that cover the level 3 or 4 competency requirements as they have not gained a promotion as yet.”³⁴

Committee view

Conclusion 6. The Committee supports the Welsh Government’s drive to create a clear pathway for apprentices to continue in vocational education to degree level and beyond.

³¹ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 17 Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

³² Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 11 Open University

³³ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 17 Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

³⁴ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 19 Grwp Llandrillo Menai

Conclusion 7. The Committee notes the ongoing development of Degree level apprenticeships and the greater number of frameworks available in England, compared to Wales. While steps are in place to address this, it is unclear whether the pace is sufficient.

Recommendation 9. The Welsh Government should ensure that it has taken all necessary steps regarding future funding of degree level apprenticeships and that Welsh universities are clear about how they can engage and contribute to the apprenticeship landscape.

Recommendation 10. The Welsh Government should provide the Committee with an update on the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships in October 2018.

Will the new emphasis on higher level apprenticeships harm the care sector?

54. Stakeholders expressed concern that the new focus on higher level apprenticeships may harm their operations – particularly where they rely on a lower-skilled workforce. Social Care Wales, in its written evidence, indicated that it need to:

“train around 27,000 level 2 workers in adult residential social care and care at home by 2023...Any removal of level 2 funding for our sector will have a negative impact on reaching the registration targets, the retention of the workforce and the care for vulnerable people.”³⁵

55. As a result, it doubted whether the sector’s “requirements have been fully considered”.

56. Remploy, Centrica, Estyn and the Older Peoples Commissioner all emphasised the need to retain lower level apprenticeships. Estyn made the case that these can be the entry point for further training and employment:

“There is a need to promote and market training programmes at level 1 and 2 because these programmes may lead eventually to the take-up of higher qualifications. There are many employment opportunities for learners with level 1 and 2 qualifications.”³⁶

³⁵ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 05 Social Care Wales

³⁶ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 Estyn

57. HEFCW highlighted the work that is currently going on to develop degree level apprenticeships in Wales. It reported that it has required institutions to plan to develop degree level qualifications in the areas of engineering, advanced manufacturing and ICT.

58. The Committee appreciates that the Welsh Government **has asked Estyn to review Higher Apprenticeships in 2017/18** and looks forward to seeing the results of that review.

The Minister's view

59. In her paper to the Committee, the Minister noted that there has been a "significant growth" in the number of Higher Apprenticeships over the last few years. The paper notes that:

"There are currently 59 Higher Apprenticeship frameworks available spanning levels 4-7. Several Higher Apprenticeship frameworks include qualifications delivered by universities. Higher Apprenticeships represented 25 per cent of starts in 2015/16, 4 percentage points higher than the 2014/15 figure."³⁷

60. That paper also highlighted that

"In December 2016, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) invited plans from institutions to develop and combine vocational and academic degree level qualifications which could form part of an apprenticeship. HEFCW identified engineering, advanced manufacturing and IT/computing as particular areas of interest...New policy is being developed that brings together apprenticeships and higher education – sectors with different processes and cultures – therefore requiring the widest possible input and perspectives from stakeholders."³⁸

Committee view

Conclusion 8. The Committee is concerned by the delays to the publication of the Welsh Government's Employability Plan, which was originally expected at the start of 2017, and is now anticipated early in 2018.

³⁷ Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, **EIS(5)-14-17(p5)**, 7 June 2017

³⁸ Ibid

Recommendation 11. The Committee would welcome biannual updates from the Welsh Government until the new Employability programme starts in April 2019.

Conclusion 9. The Committee welcomes the intention to establish a Junior Apprentice model for 14-16 year olds, and supports the Minister's aim to roll it out across Wales.

Conclusion 10. The Committee welcomes the development of Degree level apprenticeships and notes the disparity in the number of frameworks available in England, compared to Wales.

Recommendation 12. The Welsh Government should set a deadline for commencing teaching of degree level apprenticeships and share this with the Committee and stakeholders.

Conclusion 11. The Committee supports the Welsh Government's move to prioritise higher level qualifications in principle. It believes this is vital if Wales is to move to a higher value economy. However, there are clear concerns from stakeholders in key sections – particularly foundational sectors like social care – that this could result in a lack of support for the entry-level qualifications they need. It is not clear whether the Government has fully persuaded stakeholders that it has a fully developed programme to address these concerns.

4. Careers advice

Access to independent careers information about vocational courses or apprenticeships in schools

61. This is an area where very little progress seems to have been made since the Enterprise and Business Committee's 2012 report, which recommended the Welsh Government should:

“Ensure all young people and their parents receive high quality advice about opportunities provided by apprenticeships well before pupils choose their options for GCSE and vocational courses, and encourage schools to promote apprenticeships as a viable alternative to higher education.”³⁹

62. However, as a result of funding cuts to Careers Wales since that report was published, the NTfW felt that

“...particularly the role that Careers Wales advisers would have played in schools, as the professionals offering impartial careers advice and guidance. I think what we've seen is a roll-back of that service within schools.”⁴⁰

63. LSKIP felt that “the lack of careers advice and guidance for all pupils is a major issue”.⁴¹

64. Good careers advice and guidance can help:

- Improve the accessibility of apprenticeships and work based learning, and reduce gender stereotyping;
- Increase the number of apprenticeships being taken up;
- Improve the Welsh economy by ensuring people are being trained with the right skills.

³⁹ National Assembly for Wales, Enterprise and Business Committee, **Apprenticeships in Wales**, October 2012, Recommendation 13

⁴⁰ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 21 National Training Federation for Wales

⁴¹ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 26 Learning Skills and Innovation Partnership

65. However the majority of written consultation responses noted issues with the quality and availability of careers advice in Wales. A number of issues were highlighted, including the lack of trained careers advisors and the lack of knowledge of apprenticeships and vocational training by school staff.

66. Another issue raised was the tendency for schools to encourage pupils towards the study of A Levels, often within that school. CAVC argued that greater access to schools by FE and work-based learning organisations could be broaden the range of advice young people receive about future careers.

67. This was echoed by Estyn:

“There needs to be better impartial advice and guidance regarding these pathways for learners in schools, and closer collaboration between schools, colleges, work-based learning providers and employers regarding career options.”⁴²

68. CAVC believes that uptake of apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities could be improved if the Post-16 system was clearer:

“The current Post 16 offer is confusing, therefore difficult for learners and parents to understand. The Post 16 plan in England has gone some way to try and resolve this issue. A similar plan should be available in Wales which aims to simplify the system.”⁴³

69. The NTfW suggested that the Welsh Government could remit Estyn to inspect/assess the levels of careers information about vocational courses and training (including apprenticeships) in schools, which may encourage schools to improve the advice services they provide.

70. Estyn published a **report** in September 2017 on how schools plan for careers advice in light of the new curriculum arrangements in the Autumn, as part of **its 2016-17 Remit**.

71. NTfW highlighted that it works with the Welsh Government to produce an online prospectus which attempts to set out all post-16 options available to young people. However, Shirley Rogers, Director of Service Delivery at Careers Wales

⁴² Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 Estyn

⁴³ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 14 Cardiff and Vale College

noted that this is “dependent on providers putting their information onto that prospectus, which doesn’t always happen.”⁴⁴

72. During the Committee’s meeting with Apprentices at BT, a number told us they had started university courses, and in some cases completed them, because they had felt that was the only opportunity available, and because they hadn’t know about apprenticeships.

73. Better careers advice for young people has the potential to reduce the wasted time and money spent by young people starting courses that are not the most suitable way for them to develop their lives.

The Minister’s view

74. The Minister’s paper to the Committee, in advance of her attendance, stated that as the result of the remit letter issued to Careers Wales for 2017-18, she expected to see increased levels of engagement and interaction with young people in education.

75. In oral evidence, a Welsh Government official noted that Careers Wales had undergone a consultation and produced a new strategy for the future which puts more effort and energy in to working with young people and schools:

“Over the last few years, the ratio of careers advisers per school has fallen. And this year, Careers Wales are actively working to put capacity back into the system earlier on... So, the target really this year is to ensure that all young people in key stage 4 receive the support that they need in order to make a successful post-16 transition.”⁴⁵

76. In her follow up letter to the Committee, the Minister set out in more detail the targets to which Careers Wales will work. These included that:

- All learners in Year 9 will be introduced by teachers or Careers Wales Advisers to ways of accessing support and information from Careers Wales.
- All Year 9 /11 parent events will be supported by Careers Wales.

⁴⁴ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 17 May 2017, paragraph 8

⁴⁵ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 286

- All Year 11 learners will be on the Careers Adviser caseload until they are settled in their post 16 destination.⁴⁶

77. When asked whether she would find it helpful for schools to be required much more stringently to deliver this kind of broad connection with the world of business, and to be evaluated on it, the Minister replied:

“There is something about how you’re evaluated and people working to the evaluation tool, so we do need to make sure that schools are properly rewarded, if you like, for getting people into the right vocational pathways, as well as into the right academic pathways, and that’s an ongoing discussion.”⁴⁷

Committee view

Conclusion 12. There is a need for earlier intervention in providing independent careers advice to pupils before they make their GCSE choices. It is not clear how this should be provided.

Conclusion 13. In the current climate, it appears unlikely that the bodies most heavily involved with increasing awareness of apprenticeships and their benefits – eg Regional Skills Partnerships, Careers Wales and the NTFW – will be able to count on any additional resources to do this work.

78. NTFW said in evidence that not all post-16 providers have signed up to the common area prospectus. This resource would be greatly enhanced by ensuring all partners take a proactive approach to adding their details.

Recommendation 13. The Welsh Government should consider what levers it has to encourage all partners to participate fully in the common area prospectus.

79. While the Committee notes the renewed emphasis from Careers Wales to support schools in providing careers advice, there is more that can be done.

Recommendation 14. Estyn should consider how best to include in its inspections the availability and quality of careers advice on vocational courses and training (including apprenticeships) in schools. The Welsh Government should also look at what levers it has to incentivise schools. Regional Education

⁴⁶ Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, [EIS\(5\)-16-17\(p6\)](#), 29 June 2017

⁴⁷ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 310

Consortiums should consider what support and challenge they can provide to schools in this area.

Careers Wales

80. Following its initial session with Careers Wales, and considering some of the criticisms of careers guidance, Committee members voiced concerns about whether the organisation had the right plan in place to deal with the challenges it faced.

81. The Committee was greatly reassured by the performance of acting chief executive Graham Bowd and Chair Debra Williams during their appearance before the Committee in November.

82. The dramatic reduction in funding for Careers Wales over the last five years has seen its head count halved. This has naturally led to things that the organisation used to do, no longer being part of its core remit.

83. The organisation's three year strategy, **Changing Lives**, emphasises three core functions:

- Advice to young people going in to post-16 learning;
- Digitalisation of services;
- Supporting schools and other providers to deliver advice.

Committee view

Conclusion 14. The Committee notes and supports the joined-up approach being taken by Careers Wales and Welsh Government based on the Changing Lives strategy document. This is a three year approach and it will be crucial that Welsh Government ensures consistent funding and support for the strategy throughout the three year period if it is to succeed.

Work placements for all school pupils

84. There is anecdotal evidence (in addition to the Committee's evidence) that the number of work placements for school pupils has fallen dramatically since responsibility was removed from Careers Wales for facilitating work placement opportunities for school pupils; the NTfW undertake risk assessments of work placements for their own training programmes.

85. However, the Committee also heard strong evidence that work placements can play an important role in helping young people to consider vocational

options. For instance, the North Wales Economic Ambition Board reported that the promotion of work placements “has been a positive precursor to supporting those from low income backgrounds into apprenticeships”.⁴⁸

86. The current curriculum does include a “**Careers and the World of Work**” framework, which sets out a series of learning outcomes related to employment. But this doesn’t go as far as requiring actual work placements. In any event, the curriculum is being fundamentally reformed following Professor Donaldson’s **Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales**. The Donaldson Review also falls short of recommending work placement opportunities for all students.

87. In its oral evidence, Careers Wales said its ceasing to be directly involved in coordinating work placements for students was “a massive loss”. Its representative went on to note that:

“I think the intention was that our withdrawal from that service would be replaced by the wider careers family, namely schools, in delivering that service. Schools have their own agendas in terms of budget, priorities, et cetera. I think we’re seeing now that us withdrawing hasn’t been matched by something coming back in. But I would agree that work experience is hugely critical to this agenda.”⁴⁹

88. The NTfW reported that this reduction in work experience places “has had a detrimental impact”.⁵⁰

89. Careers Wales outlined its plans for the future, which involve developing an employer engagement database known as the “*Education Business Exchange*”. This database will be filled with the details of employers who are willing to work with schools to support the world of work aspect of the curriculum. It would then be down to schools to engage with those employers in the form that they feel fit.

The Minister’s view

90. In her oral evidence, the Minister said she wanted to avoid the “classic work experience” where young people sit in a corner and make coffee:

⁴⁸ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 15 Regional Skills Partnership – North Wales – North Wales Economic Ambition Board

⁴⁹ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 17 May 2017, paragraph 96

⁵⁰ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 17 May 2017, paragraph 166

“One of the tasks for Careers Wales, working alongside the regional skills partnerships, and in conjunction with things like Business Class and so on, will be to produce a toolkit that a smaller firm can use and know that, if they offer that week’s work experience to somebody, it will be a worthwhile week to have and it won’t be just, ‘Stand over there and make coffee’, for a week. I think it puts a lot of smaller firms off. They don’t want to give that poor experience, so they’d rather not give it at all.”⁵¹

Committee view

Conclusion 15. The evidence shows the importance that stakeholders place on pre-16 work experience and the Committee is concerned that the number of young people taking part has fallen sharply.⁵²

Conclusion 16. The Committee notes that the Education Business Exchange will be rolled out later this year, and will take a keen interest in whether it succeeds in encouraging businesses and schools to work together to offer greater numbers of meaningful work experience placements.

Making the Apprenticeship Matching Service fit for purpose

91. The Welsh Government accepted a recommendation in the 2012 report relating to the effectiveness of the Apprenticeship Matching Service (AMS). The functionality and popularity of the current AMS was widely commented on during the Inquiry. The general feeling was that it was not well used by employers or apprentice candidates.”⁵³

92. Some of the stakeholders directly addressed the issues related to the AMS, which is hosted on the Careers Wales website. Grwp Llandrillo Menai does not consider the AMS “fit for purpose”.⁵⁴ It argues that there are a number of problems with the service, including that it is not used by over 18s and that it is not promoted independently of Careers Wales’ wider website. CAVC states that the current AMS is “cumbersome and difficult for employers and the potential

⁵¹ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 332

⁵² 2010-11, 31,000 work experiences, and in 2013-14, 23,000. SOURCE

⁵³ National Assembly for Wales, Enterprise and Business Committee, **Apprenticeships in Wales**, October 2012

⁵⁴ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 19 Grwp Llandrillo Menai

apprentices to complete the full details”.⁵⁵ Coleg Sir Gâr reports that employers’ opinion of the AMS is “less than favourable”, due to the difficulty they find in using it. Coleg Sir Gâr also notes that employers consider the AMS “less effective than more traditional means of advertising”.⁵⁶ The FSB Wales called for the Welsh Government to review the AMS.⁵⁷

93. Contrasting these views, Estyn states that:

“Generally the apprenticeship matching service works well, but this relies on the learners being aware of apprenticeships in order for them to keep themselves informed of apprentice recruiters. Feedback from employers indicates that they are content with the standard of applicants that they receive.”⁵⁸

The Minister’s view

94. In her written evidence, the Minister noted:

“The evaluation of Work-based Learning Apprenticeships 2011-2014 reviewed the Apprenticeship Matching Service. Since then we have been pursuing other forms of engagement with young people via Facebook, Social networking and Twitter.”⁵⁹

95. In her oral evidence, the Minister added:

“we have a problem with the apprenticeship matching service, which I know Members will be familiar with, and which hasn’t been working well, and we will be completely redoing that.”⁶⁰

96. The Minister noted that the AMS was being developed into a “better, more twenty-first century” service:

“...we’re also trying to corral all of the offer of apprenticeships into a place where people can go, because at the moment what you’ve got is

⁵⁵ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 14 Cardiff and Vale College

⁵⁶ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 02 Coleg Sir Gâr

⁵⁷ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 08 Federation of Small Businesses

⁵⁸ Written evidence, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 Estyn

⁵⁹ Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, **EIS(5)-14-17(p5)**, 7 June 2017

⁶⁰ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 285

live vacancies only. That's all very well, but, if you're trying to plan for two years' time what you want to do, that's no good to you. What you need is the range of apprenticeships on offer, even if there aren't live vacancies at the moment, and so on."⁶¹

Committee view

Conclusion 17. The Committee notes the Minister's clear intention to improve the Apprentice Matching Service. The evidence is clear that this is necessary and overdue. The Committee will take a keen interest in the development of the services.

⁶¹ National Assembly for Wales, Economy Infrastructure and Skills Committee, Record of Proceedings, 7 June 2017, paragraph 339

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. The availability of data regarding gender has improved and it seems clear that gender issues with regard to apprenticeships are understood, and that there is a desire to address them. However, progress has been slow..... Page 11

Conclusion 2. The disparity between the proportion of disabled Apprentices in Wales compared to the number in England is striking. Clearly, there is work to be done to raise awareness, but the gap is so great that consideration should be given to whether explicit targets are needed..... Page 14

Conclusion 3. The Committee notes the improvement there has been in the % of Welsh medium apprenticeships and work-based learning in recent years. But there remains a gap between the likely demand and ability to meet it. The lack of accurate, publicly available data makes it difficult to address this issue. Page 16

Conclusion 4. There is substantial evidence that financial barriers are discouraging and, in some cases, preventing many young people from taking up apprenticeships. The support required to overcome this barrier, or perceived barrier, may only need apply in the first year of an apprenticeship, where the average annual wage is likely to be well below the basic rate tax threshold. While there are likely to be tax implications, the Committee is not convinced that these will be insurmountable..... Page 19

Conclusion 5. There is a strong moral case for the Welsh Government to apply similar levels of support to apprentices as would be available to their peers in full-time education. Parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes needs to underpinned by parity of support for learners..... Page 19

Conclusion 6. The Committee supports the Welsh Government’s drive to create a clear pathway for apprentices to continue in vocational education to degree level and beyond..... Page 22

Conclusion 7. The Committee notes the ongoing development of Degree level apprenticeships and the greater number of frameworks available in England, compared to Wales. While steps are in place to address this, it is unclear whether the pace is sufficient..... Page 23

Conclusion 8. The Committee is concerned by the delays to the publication of the Welsh Government’s Employability Plan, which was originally expected at the start of 2017, and is now anticipated early in 2018. Page 24

Conclusion 9. The Committee welcomes the intention to establish a Junior Apprentice model for 14-16 year olds, and supports the Minister’s aim to roll it out across Wales..... Page 25

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Annex A – Terms of reference

The Committee looked at the following issues:

- To review progress since the 2012 report of the Enterprise and Business Committee: **Apprenticeships in Wales** (PDF 403KB);
- Including looking at the role of key players: the Regional Skills Partnerships; the Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB); and Sector Skills Councils;
- 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?
- Is the Careers Wales' Apprenticeship Matching Service fit for purpose?
- How can better parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes be achieved?
- To investigate the main barriers to taking up Apprenticeships?
- How accessible are Apprenticeships for disabled people (all ages)?
- How can people from the lowest income families be supported to take-up Apprenticeships?
- What good practice exists and what more can be done to address 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?
- How can employer engagement with Apprenticeships be improved?