

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report produced by the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee entitled “Apprenticeships in Wales”.

Skill Policy Overview

In February 2017, the Welsh Government published its ‘Apprenticeships Skills Policy’¹. The policy is aimed at aligning apprenticeships to the needs of the Welsh economy so that the skills system is responsive to industry changes, as well as investing in areas that will provide improved economic and social returns.

During September 2017, the Welsh Government published its National Strategy, ‘Prosperity for All’², it forms the backbone of all policy development in Wales. The strategy identifies skills as one of the priorities furthermore the other priorities also rely on the skills agenda - early years, housing, social care, mental health and employability.

In December 2017, to support delivery of ‘Prosperity for All’, the Welsh Government also published its Economic Action Plan for Wales³. It contains key actions in relation to skills, including: aligning economic regions to those used for other footprints including Regional Skills Partnerships; and introducing a strategic planning system for education and skills delivery across post-16 education.

The Employability Plan, published on 20 March, sets out how the Welsh Government will support those furthest from the labour market, the economically inactive and those at risk of redundancy, into work⁴. ‘Working Wales’, the new employability programme from the Welsh Government, is being rolled out and it aims to simplify employability support for unemployed and economically inactive individuals.

Detailed responses to the report’s recommendations are set out below:

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.

Response: Accept

Tackling gender equality is at the forefront of our apprenticeship skills policy and we remain committed to improving access to apprenticeships and ensuring equality and equity of opportunity for all apprentices. In 2016/17, 60 per cent of learners pursuing

¹ <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/skillsandtraining/apprenticeships/apprenticeships-skills-policy-plan/?lang=en>

² <http://gov.wales/about/programme-for-government/?lang=en>

³ <http://gov.wales/docs/det/publications/171213-economic-action-plan-en.pdf>

⁴ <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/skillsandtraining/employability-plan-for-wales/?lang=en>

an apprenticeship were female and 40 per cent were male.⁵ However, this statistic masks gender disparity in some sectors.

Recent measures and activity to help address gender-disparity include:

- Instructing apprenticeship providers to provide extra support/mentoring to tackle gender-stereotyping, for example, women undertaking a construction apprenticeship.
- Working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to promote the benefits of diversity across the Welsh workforce, focusing on employers who recruit apprentices; joint events will be held from April 2018.
- Working with key organisation such as Industry Wales to carry out a review of recruitment practices for apprenticeships in the Engineering sector to determine what practices have an effect on the number of women who become apprentices.

In addition, we are encouraging our providers to tackle this gender imbalance by taking targeted action such as:

- Using individual apprentices as positive role models and ambassadors to promote gender balance in all sectors, for example, through visiting schools to share their experiences.
- Collaborative targeted activities/events with women, for example, Gower College Swansea's 'Believe and Achieve' project.
- Using our 'Have a Go' initiative in schools to enable young people to try out activities and eradicate the gender stereotypes around all sectors.
- Taking part in Chwarae Teg events such as #Notjustforboys as exhibitors.
- Collating and promoting case studies of apprentices.

To help consolidate and complement this activity, the Welsh Government has provided a dedicated Equality and Diversity Champion, whose role includes working to promote equality for women in the workplace and assisting providers in challenging gender stereotyping in certain industry sectors. The Champion has mapped equality and diversity good practice across the apprenticeship provider network. Apprenticeship providers have undertaken self assessments to determine both strengths and improvement areas and they have produced a work plan identifying strategies, activities, training and resources required to drive improvements.

Welsh Government have procured a comprehensive Equality toolkit to support the apprenticeship providers and employers and this includes specific modules on gender identity, stereotyping and unconscious bias.

Our recently published Employability Plan⁶ likewise places issues of equality and fairness at the forefront of our approach. There is gender disparity in accessing educational opportunities such as STEM courses. We will encourage our educational institutions to do more to get women into priority sector courses. If we

⁵ Welsh Government, Further education, work-based learning and community learning: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/further-education-work-based-learning-community-learning/?lang=en>

⁶ Employability Plan (2018) page 31: <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/skillsandtraining/employability-plan-for-wales/?lang=en>

do not see real and swift progress, we will consider whether introducing targets and quotas is necessary.

Financial Implications: None. This was identified as a key development area in the Apprenticeship Policy document and any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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

Response: Accept

We recognise that participation of disabled people in apprenticeships could be improved and it is not proportionate to the disabled population of Wales. We are committed to improving our approach and we are scoping out ways to ensure that apprenticeships engages more effectively with disabled people.

We have been working with Remploy to match those who are participating in the Work Choice programme into apprenticeship opportunities. This brings together the combined efforts of two major programmes, ensuring disabled people access work and receive skills that will help them remain and progress in employment.

Last year we facilitated workshops between apprenticeship providers and regional Remploy offices and have introduced a case worker approach with the aid of designated Remploy Apprenticeship Co-ordinators. We know entering employment is a difficult time for any new apprentices, even more so for this group, that is why Remploy continue to offer support throughout the first year of the apprenticeship to aid and ease transition of new apprentices.

We have already improved our marketing materials in this area and later this year we will implement a marketing campaign concentrating specifically on apprentices with Mental Health conditions. We are seeing positive changes via our extended Equality and Diversity Champions sixteen out of the nineteen lead apprenticeship providers have committed to signing the 'Time to Change' pledge and are working towards developing a proactive stance regarding Mental Health action plans.

Our drive for equality of opportunity is focused on removing potential barriers to apprenticeships experienced by under-represented groups, recognising that some apprentices may also need additional support to remain and succeed. To this end, officials are in the process of setting up an "Inclusive Apprenticeship Working Group" comprising of representatives from disability organisations across Wales, including the Equality and Human Rights Commission. This group will produce an Apprenticeships Disability Action Plan. The first meeting of the group will take place during May of this year.

Financial Implications: Unknown. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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.

Response: Reject

The Welsh Government already provides extensive information on the benefits and opportunities that apprenticeships provide to young people. This includes:

- Supporting annual careers and skills events such as SkillsCymru – a key platform for employers to showcase the opportunities they have available for individuals and aspiring apprentices. There are also a range of activities that demonstrate the benefits of doing an apprenticeship.
- Promotion of vacancies via the Apprenticeship Matching Service.
- Promotional brochure and flyer targeting young people – available online and distributed through partner organisations and the network of providers.
- Promotional brochure targeting employers – available online and distributed at employer engagement events and via the network of providers.
- Multi media campaign and PR targeting businesses across Wales – including digital, radio and press advertising.
- Multi media campaign and PR targeting young people linked to GCSE and A level results to assist young people in reviewing all options available to them – including digital, radio and social media channels.
- A daily schedule of social media posts promoting the range of apprenticeship vacancies to young people and the benefits.
- Video collateral promoting real life case studies promoting the benefits of recruiting apprentices and choosing the apprenticeship route.
- Events during Apprenticeship Week to engage new businesses that aren't involved with apprenticeships to understand the benefits of recruiting an apprentice.
- School engagement campaign where former apprentices return to their local schools to encourage young people to consider the benefits of doing an apprenticeship.

Financial Implications: None.

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.

Response: Accept in Principle

Welsh Government officials are already in regular contact with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and an advisory board, which includes senior managers from the FE sector, is in place to obtain their views on future support to develop Welsh-medium provision.

The final report of the task and finish group established to review the activities of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol was published on 25 July 2017. It included a recommendation to expand the remit of the Coleg to include further education colleges and the work based learning sector. On the 12 December the formal response to the report was published which accepted all of the recommendations in full.

The Coleg was tasked with establishing a post-16 advisory board made up of stakeholders with expertise in the sector. The board will advise on future interventions required to develop Welsh-medium post-16 provision which will be developed into a formal action plan. The advisory board met for the first time on the 26 January 2018. One of the discussion areas was the Welsh language skills of teaching and assessing staff across the post-16 sectors; this is one known factor which can limit the available Welsh-medium provision. Interventions such as the Cymraeg Gwaith programme are already in place to enable tutors and assessors to gain and/or improve Welsh language skills and further actions will be considered as part of the action plan.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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

Response: Accept

The Welsh-medium Education Strategy published in 2010 included targets for post-16 education. Targets for the initial five years of the strategy up to 2015 were included along with indicative targets up to 2020.

The new Welsh language strategy *Cymraeg 2050* provides a clear vision for post-16 Welsh-medium provision with the specific aim to: *“develop post-compulsory education provision which increases rates of progression and supports everyone, whatever their command of the language, to develop Welsh language skills for use socially and in the workplace”*.

As work progresses to build an action plan for developing Welsh-medium post-16 provision, future target setting will be considered as part of this process. In the meantime progress against the targets set out in the Welsh-medium Education Strategy will continue to be published.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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.

Response: Accept in Principle

We recognise that travel costs can be a potential barrier for young people accessing an apprenticeship. The recent Welsh Government consultation on “*Discounted Bus Travel for Young Persons in Wales*” focused on delivering more effective local bus services, including offering discounted bus travel to apprentices⁷. Responses to the consultation are currently being reviewed. A competitive hardship fund would need to be considered against the outcome of the *Discounted Bus Travel for Young Persons in Wales* consultation.

Previously, officials have explored directly subsidising travel costs. However, subsidising travel costs is likely to be classified as a taxable benefit; any support for apprentices that supplements the wage would need to be declared for HMRC to consider whether it is taxable income. As this support would not be universal, the expectation is that it would be considered taxable.

Financial Implications: Financial implications will be considered if travel concessions are introduced.

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

Response: Accept in Principle

The issue of parity between vocational and academic routes is also pertinent to England, where the UK Government has launched a major review of post-18 education to ensure more people have a genuine choice between high quality technical, vocational and academic routes.

The review is looking at the whole system of post-18 education funding in England, including how people from all backgrounds can access, progress and succeed in post-18 education and how disadvantaged students receive additional financial support from the government, universities and colleges.

The review will be informed by independent advice from an expert panel; the panel’s report will be published in early 2019.

The Welsh Government awaits the panel’s report in order to help us determine our approach in Wales.

Financial Implications: None at present. Any financial implications would need to be considered once we determine our approach in 2019.

⁷ <https://beta.gov.wales/discounted-bus-travel-younger-people-wales>

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

Response: Accept in Principle

The Welsh Government will publish (or continue to publish as appropriate) as part of official statistics an annual update covering groups with protected characteristics (where data is held) and Welsh speakers and deprivation-based up-take of apprenticeships based on the domicile of apprentice.

Please note that there appears to be a contradiction between this recommendation and recommendation 5 which asked for targets for apprenticeships through the medium of Welsh.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government has been working with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to develop degree apprenticeships. In 2016, a budget was allocated to HEFCW to enable institutions to develop degree level qualifications which could in the future be incorporated into apprenticeship frameworks. The 2017-18 HEFCW remit letter highlighted the opportunities for the higher education sector to support the delivery of higher level apprenticeships.

The Cabinet Secretary wrote to HEFCW in February 2018 signalling her intention to provide HEFCW with a budget to fund the higher education sector for the delivery of degree apprenticeships. Initial estimates for the delivery of degree apprenticeships stand at around £20m, for the first three years of its operation. Annual funding will be confirmed in the remit letter. It is a matter for HEFCW as to how that budget is allocated.

Welsh Government and HEFCW continue to work together on a range of matters to support delivery of degree apprenticeships such as marketing.

Sector Skills Councils, commissioned by Welsh Government, have been engaging with the sector to ensure their contribution to the development of the learning offer. Frameworks are currently being developed for digital, engineering and advanced manufacturing.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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

Response: Accept

An update on progress on development and delivery of degree apprenticeships will be provided to the Committee in October 2018.

Financial Implications: None.

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

Response: Accept in Principle

The Welsh Government will provide annual progress to the Committee on implementation of the Employability Plan following its publication in March 2018.

Financial Implications: None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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

Response: Reject

The Welsh Government is making a budget available to HEFCW to allocate to those institutions it funds for delivery of degree apprenticeships. Those institutions, as autonomous bodies, will determine when delivery commences. Delivery is also dependent upon employer engagement. The Cabinet Secretary for Education has advised HEFCW that she expects an element of delivery to commence in September 2018. It is therefore not appropriate for the Welsh Government to set a deadline.

Financial Implications: None.

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

Response: Reject

We recognise the value of all young people having access to a full range of provision to help them make informed choices on their future learning and training. As in previous years, we have remitted Careers Wales to maintain the Common Area Prospectus and to enable post-16 providers to input and/or update their Local Curriculum offers. We do not believe it would be appropriate to mandate all providers to upload their offers onto the Common Area Prospectus; officials will work with Careers Wales to raise awareness of the Prospectus and its benefits across schools, colleges and work based learning providers with a view to increasing the number of providers including their provision on the Prospectus.

We encourage providers and employers to post apprenticeship vacancies on Careers Wales' Apprenticeships Matching Service as the dedicated tool to support and help people who are looking for apprenticeship opportunities. This recognises that apprenticeships are jobs with training where the availability of an apprenticeship is dependent upon employers making those jobs available.

Financial Implications: None.

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.

Response: Reject (sentence pertaining to the Welsh Government)

The Committee has concluded that there is a need for earlier intervention in providing independent careers advice to pupils before they make their GCSE choices. There is already a wealth of quality information, advice and support in place to help young people make the right choices about their future.

Careers Wales provides the independent service to young people in schools with services available to support those in Key Stage 3 before they take GCSE options. Careers Wales has significantly increased the number of advisors working with schools and has an extensive range of bilingual resources and tools to help young people think about their choices.

Career Wales' latest report (September 2016 – August 2017) provides figures on delivery and interaction with young people in schools; for example, 15,903 Key Stage 3 and 51,498 Key Stage 4 students participated in group sessions in the last academic year.

Students also have the opportunity to take part in individual interviews. The latest figures show there were 2,996 Key Stage 3 and 20,791 Key Stage 4 students who participated in one-to-one interviews in the last academic year.

Young people are able to engage with careers advisers either directly via their school or via email, webchat or telephone based services. There are resources which help young people think about their subject choices and how these link to possible future areas of study or work available on www.careerswales.com.

Figures for Key Stage 3 support between 01.09.16 – 31.8.17:

- Number of clients receiving an interview – 2,996
- Individual interviews with Careers Advisers – 3,220
- Individual interviews with Careers Assistants – 5
- Number of clients attending a Group Session – 15,903
- Number of advisers in group sessions – 590

There are separate figures for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) during the same period:

- Transition / Annual Reviews attended with pupils with statements of SEN – 799
- Transition / Annual Reviews with non-statement pupils – 103
- Number of reports prepared for Transitional / Annual reviews attended with statements of SEN – 555
- Number of reports prepared for Transitional / Annual reviews with non – statement pupils – 57

We have also put in place measures to help engage young people leaving school or college. Activity includes:

- Introducing **Junior Apprenticeships** for pupils aged 14 to 16 to provide a first step towards an apprenticeship.
- Offering an **enhanced payment to providers** to encourage take-up of apprentices aged 16 to 19.
- **Annual campaigns to raise the profile of apprenticeships**, together with focusing on advertising vacancies when students leave school or college to maximise choice.
- The **Preparation to Apprenticeship Programme** aimed at 16-19 year olds helps young people enter vocational learning at a level three even if they have an equivalent academic qualification.

Our biggest development is called **Have a Go**, aimed at raising the profile of vocational education by allowing young people to have a vocational experience in a college or school. It's been highly successful, engaging with over 55,000 young people over the last year.

We are moving to a more defined and cyclical process for advertising apprenticeship vacancies for 16-19 year olds, which will be maximised during the period when student leave school/college.

In terms of school-employer engagement, We continue to support the **Business Class** employer engagement project that has established more than 80 partnerships between secondary schools and employers. Ministers have provided an additional £400,000 to Careers Wales in 2017/18 to support school-employer engagement and support schools' delivery of careers and the world of work curriculum.

Careers Wales has launched the **Education Business Exchange Service** which provides a facilitated database of employers and their offers to school. Over 60 schools in the Valleys Task Force area and Ceredigion have been trained to use the Exchange as part of the first phase of the roll-out.

Careers and the World of Work (CWW) forms part of the basic curriculum for all registered pupils aged 11 to 16 at maintained schools. Schools, colleges and other learning providers in Wales have the flexibility to plan and deliver careers and the world of work programmes in the most appropriate way to best meet the needs of learners, e.g. it could be delivered as an integrated model across a wide range of curriculum subject areas. The person who coordinates CWW needs to ensure that a wide range of partners are involved in the delivery of this area of the curriculum, such as Careers Wales, employers and role models.

Each of these measures is helping to encourage and persuade schools to engage with FE colleges and employers and change behaviours and attitudes towards vocational learning in schools.

Regarding the part recommendation relating to Estyn, they have informed officials that they welcome the Committee's report. Estyn has considered careers advice within inspections for many years and will continue to do so. Their evidence base considers the availability and quality of careers advice, even when it is not explicitly mentioned in reports, because their reports capture particular strengths and shortcoming of each school and most aspects of a school's work are mentioned by exception. Estyn will continue to review their inspection arrangements to ensure that they align with new developments, including the growing importance of careers advice on vocational courses and training (including apprenticeships) in schools.

Financial Implications: None.