

**Senedd Cymru**

**Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion Gwledig**

**Ymchwiliad:** Llwybrau prentisiaeth

**Cyf:** AP39

**Ymateb gan:** Prifysgol Metropolitan Caerdydd

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**Welsh Parliament**

**Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee**

**Inquiry:** Apprenticeship pathways

**Ref:** AP39

**Evidence from:** Cardiff Metropolitan University



## Overview

- i. Degree apprenticeships combine the work-based element of an apprenticeship with the framework of a higher education qualification. Cardiff Metropolitan University offers degree apprenticeships in data science, cyber security and software engineering. The funding for these courses is administered Medr, formerly by HEFCW.
  - ii. Degree apprenticeship funding has been ring-fenced by Welsh Government, with the last allocation from HEFCW at c. £10m. Demand for these courses outstrips the supply, with the number of places needed having exceeded the level that can be funded considerably. This has meant:
    - Applicants being turned away, albeit preferring to wait to study at the University rather than transfer to another institution.
    - Partner organisations having to redesign their workforce planning.
    - New pathways, for example in rail, putting additional strain on the budget.
    - Institutions having their allocations 'baked-in', with the providers that took an early market share now holding a dominant position.
  - iv. Furthermore, the increase in the maximum fee to £9,250 did not automatically apply to degree apprenticeships; the regulatory change only applied to those courses covered by tuition fees. The change was confirmed in February 2024, which was too late for any consideration of whether degree apprenticeships could match that increase per head. This situation is repeating with this year's increase to £9,535, expanding the funding gap between degree apprenticeships and other undergraduate courses.
  - v. In sum, the ring-fenced budget for degree apprenticeships is too small to meet the demand and the potential supply in Wales and/or ensure the courses are funded at the same level as other undergraduate courses (£9,535 per head) without cutting places. A reconsideration of the funding model and pathway development might be required.
- 1. Pathways between apprenticeship levels: The extent to which there are challenges in mapping out career routes through the different apprenticeship levels, such as from a junior apprenticeship to a degree apprenticeship. Whether this is more difficult in some careers/sectors than others.**

- 1.1 A single 'vertical' route to a degree apprenticeship does not exist. They are not available in many of the health science professions, sport or management, with these routes ending at level 5 for apprentices. Healthcare and public service apprenticeships alone account for 44% of starts in Wales, but pathways do not continue to degree level.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.2 Degree apprenticeships are available in a far greater range of subjects and at higher levels in other parts of the UK, albeit with England looking to curtail the range of level 7 apprenticeships (Master's).<sup>2</sup> Careers Wales argues of "a strong need to expand the current Degree Apprenticeships offer to include other areas of need in the region such as Health and Social Care, Construction, Low Carbon/ Green Energy and Leadership and Management".<sup>3</sup>
- 1.3 Wales experiences major shortages in many of the same professions as other parts of the UK, leaving it at a disadvantage if provision is narrower. This is most notable with regards to shortage professions for the public sector, with NHS England making degree apprenticeships integral to its long-term workforce plan.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.4 UK Government will create degree apprenticeships for medicine and healthcare science, with existing apprenticeships for nursing, nursing associates, midwifery and allied health professionals all set to be doubled. By 2031, degree apprenticeships will be 22% of the intake for the above professions.

**Table 1: NHS England workforce targets**

Professional group	Training intake (2031)	% of 2022 intake
Medical	15,000	160–200
GP	6,000	145–160
Nursing	40,000	165–180
Nursing associates	10,500	200–210
Midwifery	4,269	110–113
Health visitors, district nurses, qualified school nurses	3,788	169–209
Advanced care practitioners	6,371	186

<sup>1</sup> StatsWales. 2025. [Learning programmes for Foundation Apprenticeships? Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

<sup>2</sup> UK Government. 2024. [Prime Minister overhauls apprenticeships to support opportunity](#). London: UK Government.

<sup>3</sup> Careers Wales. 2025. [Consultation on Apprenticeship pathways Economy? Trade and Rural Affairs committee](#). Cardiff: Senedd Cymru.

<sup>4</sup> NHS England. 2024. [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#). London: NHS England.

Allied health professionals	18,822	119–125
Healthcare scientists	1,326	120–133
Clinical psychologists, child and adolescent psychologists	1,024	120–134
Pharmacists	4,970	131–155
Dentists	1,133	123–140
Dental hygienists and therapists	518	120–140
Medical associate practitioners	1,802	127
Approved clinicians	127	100
Peer support workers	2,230	115
<i>Total</i>	<i>131,738</i>	<i>150–160</i>

1.5 The Welsh plan depends on an increase in international recruitment, while the English plan points to decreased reliance on overseas staff.<sup>5</sup> With UK Government having responsibility for both NHS England and immigration, this creates a dependency beyond devolved control. If immigration policy results in a downturn in international staff, Wales will need to use all possible levers to accelerate domestic training as fast as possible.

1.6 The apprenticeship distribution is somewhat convoluted. Level 4 qualifications are offered by further education institutions and training providers, but there are also degree apprenticeships that span these levels, and time differences vary across qualifications. For example, Level 4 Data Analytics is 24 months with a training provider, but Level 4 Data Science, feeding into a degree apprenticeship, is 12 months.

## 2. **Economy: The extent to which apprenticeship pathways support the needs of Welsh businesses and contribute to filling skills gaps in the Welsh economy.**

2.1 As above, the fact that level 6 apprenticeships do not exist across all subject areas means the needs of Welsh businesses are unfulfilled. There are regular requests for degree level apprenticeships in management and human resources, but this is not something offered in Wales.

2.2 The absence of level 7 qualifications within Wales funded by the apprenticeship levy is a further issue. While the reforms pursued in England have merit, sector specifics mean that level 7-degree apprenticeships still have a key role to play. There are many fintech businesses in Wales and, within this

<sup>5</sup> Welsh Government. 2023. [National Workforce Implementation Plan; Addressing NHS Wales Workforce Challenges](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

sector, level 7 skills are desirable (especially data analytics). The demand for fintech for appropriate skills is unmet in Wales, and meeting such demand should be a cornerstone of skills policy.<sup>6</sup>

**3. Employers: The engagement of employers in facilitating these pathways and attracting apprentices. Is specific support needed for micro, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to engage with the apprenticeship programme.**

- 3.1 Universities often experience delays in funding allocations, leading to apprenticeship spaces being predominantly taken by larger organisations with well-planned recruitment cycles. Late funding confirmations and limited budgets have created hesitancy in engaging with SMEs, further exacerbating their challenges in securing apprentices.

**4. Information about apprenticeships: Good practice between careers services, schools, colleges and employers in terms of promoting apprenticeships and the provision of meaningful work experience.**

- 4.1 Demand for information on degree apprenticeships is high, as evidenced by the volume of enquiries received by university recruitment teams. This year, as part of National Apprenticeship Week, the university will host a live webinar in partnership with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to promote degree apprenticeships. To date, much of the focus has been on engaging employers to create vacancies, as demand has outstripped supply in Wales.

**5. Equity of support and access for learners: The extent to which apprenticeship pathways are made open to all young people in Wales and any barriers facing specific demographic groups or geographical areas.**

- 5.1 There has been a potential disadvantage for traditional school/college leavers who wish to move straight to a degree apprenticeship. The high level of demand to date has meant those with more experience have emerged through the recruitment processes in many instances. Many of our employer partners have now adjusted recruitment processes so that experience was not necessarily a predominant factor.

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<sup>6</sup> FintechWales. 2024. [Fintech.in.Wales;Annual.Report-.8689\\_8680](#). Cardiff: FintechWales.

**6. The Welsh Government's role: How policies support apprenticeship pathways and any barriers that need addressing in that regard. The role of the Welsh Government, Regional Skills Partnerships and other stakeholders in identifying and communicating economic and skills needs to inform apprenticeship frameworks and the delivery of qualifications.**

- 6.1 The development of new degree apprenticeships in Wales has faced challenges. Initially, a Framework Development Advisory Group was established by Welsh Government to support new pathways, only for it to be withdrawn a few months later due to budget constraints. This created uncertainty, with universities and businesses engaging in development work only to halt progress abruptly.
- 6.2 Future initiatives should ensure that funding is secured before commitments for expansion are made. Uncertainty in skills policy is believed to be exacerbating a mismatch between training provision and employer needs.<sup>7</sup> The increased demand and need for degree apprenticeships might necessitate a reconsideration of the funding model (as recommended in Hefin David's report for Welsh Government).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Tahir, I. 2023. [Investment in training and skills](#). London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

<sup>8</sup> David, H. 2023. [Transitions to Employment: A Report for the Welsh Government](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.