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Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion Gwledig

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Cyf: AP05

Ymateb gan: Hyfforddiant ACT | Hyfforddiant ALS

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Welsh Parliament

Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

Inquiry: Apprenticeship pathways

Ref: AP05

Evidence from: ACT Training | ALS Training



Consultation response from ACT Training and its subsidiary ALS Training 14TH Jan 2025

The **Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee** is undertaking an inquiry into apprenticeship pathways. The Committee is seeking views on the following terms of reference:

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.

Some career pathways are very well established and present little challenge for progression, e.g., Accountancy from level 2 to 4/Engineering up to Degree Apprenticeships, in both most learners progress from each level to the next, natural technically career focused pathways. However there are eligibility restrictions on entry at Level 2 for some pathways where it is a mandatory requirement, e.g., to complete Accountancy at Level 3 you need to complete the level 2 but because it is not a mandatory requirement of the Level 3 that a learner has to have completed the Level 2 first, then a learner with a Degree (not a finance degree, e.g., History/Sociology etc,.) would not be eligible for funding for the Level 2 Apprenticeship and would have to pay to complete that before progressing to the Level 3.

There are other pathways that have multiple options e.g., Digital – learners may vary their pathway from telecoms to data or from Software to Cyber as they progress however that requires providers to have the resources to support what is an expensive pathway for employing staff in such specialist areas, collaboration has been sought with Universities to work in partnership to allow progression, even jointly deliver, but Higher Education (HE) also have resource issues and sometimes this can result in displacement of learners.

Other challenges are competence based e.g., some sectors like Management/Project Management/Human Resources (HR) and Health and Social Care - as the increase in level requires an increase in management responsibility (e.g., staff management/strategic business planning/budgets) rather than a technical focus such as Digital/Accountancy/Engineering and therefore unless an Apprentice is promoted into a role with those responsibilities, and the employer is prepared to allow them time to become competent, it is more difficult for them to demonstrate competence, therefore progression is often delayed until learners have progressed in their careers and wish to then undertake the next stage of learning.

Another challenge is the age eligibility for non-priority sectors such as Administration/Management where, unless a learner immediately progresses from one level to another, they may not be able to progress unless they are aged 16-24 at the time of progression and 'new to job role' which needs to be evidenced. If the age restriction was removed then learners could progress at their own pace and in line with their careers/employer needs.

Lack of information on career pathways through Apprenticeships for parents/carers/learners/employers is also a challenge - The Careers Wales and working Wales sites do mention pathways but these are more about education pathways rather than sectoral and the Apprenticeship Certification Wales (ACW) website desperately needs updating – Visual sectoral pathways with links through to an improved ACW site and the Apprenticeship Vacancy Service (AVS) would be beneficial.

Use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) by all post16 institutions in Wales to prevent duplication of activity e.g., learners with a Level 4 Apprenticeship shouldn't have to repeat the full 1st year of a Degree Apprenticeship, there is also a lack of understanding in HE of Credit Values of Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) qualifications as many of the awards do not align directly with HE credits and therefore viewed as a lesser qualification. The Work Based Learning (WBL) element is overlooked as valid learning time that equates to HE credits.

Welsh Government (WG) allowing more and more HE qualifications into frameworks where work-based assessment is not critical to accreditation means a misalignment with ESTYN criteria for inspection etc., such as learner-led teaching learning and assessment.

In addition, Awarding Organisations are removing/not revising critical qualifications due to financial viability (Insurance example above plus there is no longer a Level 4 in Banking) this has an effect on frameworks where employers need to use them to upskill and create those career pathways. Notwithstanding that reductions in the Apprenticeship budget can also put pressure on the system as there may not be enough funding to go round all of the employer demands, e.g., if a new framework is released half way through a funding year (Aug to July) the employers involved in it's creation may want to start new apprentices once published however there needs to be a provider (10 contract holders across the whole of Wales) and they may have committed all of their funding to other employers/frameworks already – suggestion, as new frameworks are published 'pump funding' could be provided in response to employer demand.

Another solution to a barrier to entry, stated by learners and employers, would be the removal for the requirement for Higher Apprentices to complete Essential Skills Qualifications (ESW) in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, (as for Degree Apprenticeships) particularly if the Initial Assessment (WEST) proves the individual is currently working at or above the level of the ESW.

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

WG have always responded well to demands from employers on apprenticeship programmes/pathways, however speed of response is the challenge, e.g., there is no current Insurance Higher Apprenticeship available as the last Competent Qualification ran out at the end of Dec (this had been extended twice previously) – though there is limited

demand the Insurance sector is a large part of the financial services sector in Wales and the framework was not fit for purpose.

Apprenticeships are intrinsically linked to the wider qualification review/development system and the current sector reviews etc, in their current format, are lengthy and expensive to complete, there needs to be a more fluid way of keeping pace, e.g., Medr led task and finish groups with employers, providers and Awarding organisations actively involved to clearly identify what is needed, there are a lot of qualifications that are fit for purpose such as Industry/vendor quals that could suit employer needs particularly in niche technical skills, where demand is not high but key employers don't have an option. – see Insurance example above, this slow responsiveness can hinder gap filling in emerging sectors or fast paced sectors.

The Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) Structure in Wales allows for regional input on requirements, however there is limited apprenticeship funding and the delivery of some apprenticeships is more expensive than others, e.g., Digital/Engineering/Accountancy.

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.

Micro and small businesses always struggle with the cost of employing an apprentice and the risk that once the apprentice is qualified they may leave and move to a larger employer – the Emploability Skills Programme (ESP) Apprenticeship wage subsidy WG programme for SMEs was a great incentive to support those smaller organisations to take a risk on employing an apprentice, perhaps even allowing providers to be the employer under an ATA (Apprenticeship Training Association – was popular in England) type system with wage support could help as well and the provider could then be the 'safety-net' for any learners where needed e.g., change of programme/redundancy– the shared apprenticeship model could be adapted though increased investment would be required.

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

Not forgetting Training Providers as well. Work Experience is essential to help school leavers determine future educational/career paths, there is a lot of activity that happens on a local basis however it is not consistent across post16 settings, particularly where competition for the learner is perceived.

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.

All Apprenticeships are advertised on the AVS platform, all employers recruiting apprentices have to abide by employment law and not discriminate in any way making adaptations for all learners as necessary. For young people embarking on their first apprenticeship initial travel/lunch costs could be prohibitive until they receive their first month's pay, some sort of travel/lunch allowance for younger apprentices e.g., those aged 16-24 for the first 6 months of an apprenticeship could be a solution.

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.

Barriers – other than those mentioned above re; learner costs and SME/Micro business costs some aspects of the Apprenticeship policy need reviewing to meet employer needs, e.g., length of programme where providers are penalised financially for achieving a framework with a learner at less than 80% of the set length of stay (which varies by framework and level), when an employer wants an apprentice to achieve sooner it means greater input from the provider therefore the resource cost is the same though the funding isn't (this particularly applies when providers are required to mirror Levy funded programmes in England with a minimum length of stay of 12 months and 1 day); the ACW website is not fit for purpose compared to the Institute for Apprenticeships (IFA) website in England, employers, learners and parents can become frustrated and not engage when they find it difficult to identify the information they need.

Role of WG and RSP – Continue to use the RSP and Apprenticeship Contract Holders Group as methods of identifying frameworks needed but ensure these are created quickly and that funding is available, listening to the employer voice in particular as they are key to ensuring the development of future Apprenticeships continues in Wales.

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