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Welsh Parliament

Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

Inquiry: Apprenticeship pathways

Ref: AP08

Evidence from: Institution of Civil Engineers Wales



**The Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
CARDIFF**

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Dear Committee Chair,

Consultation on / Inquiry into apprenticeship pathways

On behalf of the Institution of Civil Engineers we are delighted to have the opportunity to give our comments into the inquiry into Apprenticeship pathways. .

Introduction

The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) is a professional engineering institution with a history stretching back over 200-years. Since its inception in 1818, the institution's remit is to protect society through ensuring that engineers and technicians working in the built environment are working to the highest standards. Recognition of competence is through the award of an internationally recognised professional qualification. The ICE has over 97,000 professionally qualified members working across all aspects of the built environment.

A growing number of professional registrants with ICE are individuals who have successfully completed apprenticeship programmes, and ICE, along with employers, now recognise the apprenticeship route in to civil engineering as an established one and supports the continuation of provision of programmes to fill skills gaps and develop individuals to work at the highest standards whilst helping to reduce the impact of climate change through projects that they are involved in.

Pathways between apprenticeship levels

The individual nations of the UK operate different apprenticeship systems which is ok in isolation, but consideration should be taken of the employers who work across the UK. Many of the large civil engineering design consultancies or contractors work across the UK and they have to contend with different systems and levels of complexities when trying to secure apprentices to work on local schemes. It is not easy and opportunities for those wishing to start or progress their career in civil engineering may lose the opportunity to do so. Employers seek clarity of the system to enable recruitment.

Additionally, there are those who are advising individuals on career paths, schools, parents and guardians, who need clarity on what is available to potential apprentices, not only as a first step, but also, should they continue to decide to progress further, as many wish to do.



To increase the clarity, visibility, there is a need for a readily accessible toolkit which clearly defines the routes available and their requirements. For example, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) in England produced an [online occupational route map](#) which shows where technical education can lead. In the case of professional civil engineering, the pathway is clearly defined and separates it from the more traditional construction trades.

Such a tool would also help potential employers also identify where their apprentices can progress to next or simply identify what is available to them to enable recruitment for gap filling in the skills portfolio to support the business.

ICE receives enquiries directly from either individuals looking to start a programme, or from parents and guardians looking on behalf of the people they look after. Perhaps a demonstration of the lack of visibility?

Once an individual secured an, there is the issue of ensuring that standards are consistent in what is being taught. For example, is someone in North Wales receiving the same education/training as someone in the south of the country. Evidence suggests that this is not the case as there is disparity across the colleges delivering civil engineering programmes through the delivery of different learning modules. Not only does this have an effect on the level of skill and knowledge being acquired, but also has a knock on effect to those progressing to a university programme.

To ensure that level of learning and skill is at the right level required by the particular industry it is suggested and recommended, that engagement with professional membership bodies (e.g. the Institution of Civil Engineers) would be of major benefit to ensure the highest standards are met. In other countries in the UK, professional body involvement is encouraged in the development of apprenticeship programmes

By ensuring the highest standards are met, this will improve the currency of the apprenticeship programmes and re-assure employers that their apprentices are receiving the best education and training possible.

Disparity of college content delivery has been mentioned, it should be noted that there is also disparity of provision across Wales with a focus on the south-east of the country. So, there isn't an equal opportunity for individuals or employers and this should be addressed. However, the introduction of the level 6-degree apprenticeship is welcomed and supported, particularly the new civil engineering degree apprenticeship in both south Wales (USW) and north Wales (Wrexham University) is to be applauded and will lead to a broad availability of careers in civil engineering across the country.

Economy

Apprenticeship provision supports the economic development of Wales by not only enabling people in to work but also enabling organisations to fill skills gaps or enable existing employees to adapt to change through programmes which provide the opportunity for upskilling.

Often, the apprenticeship pathway provides an alternative opportunity to develop for those who may come from unsupportive, or diverse backgrounds or for those who do not see a full-time college or university programme as the way forward for them. Providing apprenticeships is good for people, good for business and good for Wales.

Employers

Employers are placing greater importance on apprenticeship programmes to secure the right people for the right job to avoid loss of skills and secure the future of the business. A well supported apprentice also has the added benefit of bringing loyalty to an employer who has invested well in their training and development, so stabilising the workforce. To ensure stability and success, employer engagement at the earliest opportunity has proven to be vital.

This early engagement with employers helps to demonstrate the type of commitment they are engaging with and the level of support and training that is required to bring an apprentice up to the level of competence required in the role they have been employed to do. We often see employers who are not fully engaged, not aware of the commitment and as a consequence, apprentices have poor experiences. For example, challenges exist in the public sector where limited funds are available, leading to minimal works requiring limited opportunities for staff and thus apprentices alike. Similarly challenges exist in Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs), where support is needed to ensure apprentices have good experiences.

Where a SME cannot provide for the duration of the programme, apprentice employment agencies or organisations can step in and act as the 'employer' and send the apprentice to where the work is: known as a shared apprenticeship. This is not ideal as the apprentice is not settled, may experience differing levels of support and may find themselves with periods where they are not working resulting in a bad experience for the individual though no fault of their own.

As with all apprenticeship systems across the UK, there is a lot of bureaucracy which is a problem and may be seen as a barrier to recruitment for SMEs who do not necessarily have the resource to manage it, this needs to be addressed.

The introduction of the construction related degree apprenticeships in Wales has opened the opportunity for employers to maintain the employment of, or to employ Welsh apprentices which will minimise the skills and brain drain across the border with England which has happened previously as there was no provision. But employers need to be made aware of this facility.

Information about apprenticeships

In some quarters, apprenticeships still carry a stigma as being a route for those who are not destined for university. To overcome this, and to promote the wider opportunities apprenticeships provide, greater access to information and apprenticeship publicity is required. (In England, degree apprenticeships are advertised on The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).)

Future promotion could not only include opportunities but also highlighting success stories; allowing apprentices to celebrate their experiences and achievements and encouraging employers to say what benefits apprenticeships bring to their organisations. To help achieve this, engagement with Careers Wales is needed.

Influence from different quarters, such as trade bodies, also affects the perception of apprenticeships as a pathway to embarking on or developing a career. Where these bodies are involved, they tend to focus on areas which are familiar to them and less on the professional technical pathways. The lack of focus on the latter, then not only devalues and hides opportunities, but in doing so hinders business and the economy. Apprenticeships, regardless of the level of professionalism required, should be considered of equal value to employers, their business and Wales.

Equity of support and access for learners

With an improvement in apprenticeship knowledge and awareness, the messaging reaches a wider audience and therefore enables a more diverse workforce. This in turn leads to greater organisational productivity as often described in scholarly articles.

The Welsh Government's role

The Welsh Government's role is to fund, support and promote knowledge of apprenticeships to all, regardless of background and place in society. Increased knowledge and understanding will lead to better experiences for apprentices and improve the status of the apprenticeship as a pathway in to employment, and in turn help drive the Welsh economy forward.

To maintain stability and reduce the brain drain across to England, for professional apprenticeships, the Welsh Government should consider extending the civil engineering apprenticeships to level seven, this will match against the full Chartered Engineer academic level.

Yours sincerely



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Notes:

Founded in 1818, the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) is a UK-based international organisation with over 93,000 members, ranging from students to professionally qualified civil engineers. As an educational and qualifying body, with charitable status under UK law, we support our members throughout their careers, and help society to have trust and confidence in infrastructure professionals. Under our Royal Charter, ICE has become recognised worldwide for its excellence as a centre of learning, a public voice for the profession and a leading source of expertise in infrastructure and engineering policy.