

Senedd Cymru

Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion Gwledig

Ymchwiliad: Llwybrau prentisiaeth

Cyf: AP17

Ymateb gan: Ysbrydoli Merthyr Tudful

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Welsh Parliament

Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

Inquiry: Apprenticeship pathways

Ref: AP17

Evidence from: Aspire Merthyr Tydfil



Pathways Between Apprenticeship Levels

One of the major challenges in apprenticeships is the difficulty of mapping clear career routes between different levels, such as progressing from a junior apprenticeship to a higher or degree-level apprenticeship. Some sectors, such as engineering and healthcare, have well-established pathways (albeit somewhat confusing at times), while others, such as digital technology or creative industries, may lack clear progression routes.

Business engagement is crucial in helping define these pathways, ensuring that apprentices understand their career options and how they can transition between levels. Mentoring plays an essential role in guiding apprentices through these transitions, offering career advice and helping them gain the confidence to pursue higher qualifications. Strong pastoral care can also support apprentices in overcoming personal challenges that may hinder progression.

It would be far easier for businesses, apprentices, parents and providers etc to have a simplified guide to apprenticeship pathways and the transition routes between the varying levels.

Economy

Apprenticeships are instrumental in addressing skills shortages and supporting the needs of the Welsh economy. However, for them to be effective, pathways must align with industry demands in a local, regional and national context. Business engagement ensures that apprenticeships are designed to fill skills gaps, particularly in sectors where recruitment challenges exist, such as advanced manufacturing, construction, and healthcare.

Pastoral care is essential in supporting apprentices from diverse backgrounds to complete their training and transition into the workforce successfully. Intense mentoring ensures that apprentices gain not only technical skills but also soft skills, such as problem-solving and teamwork, which are essential for long-term employability. We often deal with social, family issues that could have a negative impact on the apprenticeship journey.

Employers

Employer engagement is fundamental to ensuring the success of apprenticeships. However, micro-businesses and SMEs often face challenges in participating due to a lack of resources or awareness of available support. To address this, targeted support,

such as financial incentives, simplified application processes, and access to mentoring schemes, is needed.

Pastoral care and mentoring are particularly beneficial for small businesses that may lack the HR capacity to provide structured support for apprentices. By offering external mentoring and pastoral care services, businesses can ensure that apprentices receive the guidance they need without overburdening employers.

Information About Apprenticeships

Effective promotion of apprenticeships through careers services, schools, and colleges is essential in ensuring young people are aware of their options. Collaboration between employers and educational institutions can help create meaningful work experience opportunities, giving students a clearer understanding of different career pathways which can often lead onto apprenticeships.

Business engagement in outreach activities, such as career fairs, industry talks, and mentoring programmes, can help demystify apprenticeships and showcase the opportunities available. Pastoral care is also crucial in helping students navigate the transition from education to employment, ensuring they have the necessary support to make informed career decisions.

From a local level, it is imperative to use existing intelligence, often set within the Local Authority, to encourage business participation in the recruitment of apprentices, demystifying the perceptions of the difficulties to recruit due to the lack of post recruitment support.

Equity of Support and Access for Learners

Ensuring that apprenticeship pathways are accessible to all people in Wales is critical for social mobility and economic growth. However, barriers such as geographical location, socio-economic background, or additional learning needs can hinder participation. This is where programmes such as Aspire come in, utilising dedicated mentors, linking in with programmes that support the hardest to reach in order to provide apprenticeship opportunities.

Business engagement is essential in addressing regional disparities by ensuring opportunities are available across different parts of Wales, including rural areas. Pastoral care plays a key role in supporting disadvantaged learners, helping them overcome financial or personal challenges that may prevent them from completing their apprenticeships. Targeted mentoring initiatives can also provide additional

support for underrepresented groups, such as women in STEM careers or individuals with disabilities and those furthest from the labour market.

We have also developed a pre-apprenticeship 'Pathway To Work' model that supports our young Care Leaver (Children Looked After) with supported employment which is proving successful in leading into apprenticeships.

The Welsh Governments Role

The Welsh Government plays a crucial role in shaping apprenticeship policies and ensuring that pathways align with economic, and skills needs. Policies must support clear progression routes, encourage employer participation, and provide adequate funding for apprenticeships, particularly for SMEs.

Regional Skills Partnerships and other stakeholders are instrumental in identifying local skills shortages and ensuring apprenticeship frameworks are responsive to industry demands. Business engagement in these discussions helps ensure that apprenticeship programmes remain relevant and effective.

Pastoral care and mentoring should be embedded within government-supported initiatives to improve apprenticeship retention and completion rates. Providing dedicated funding for pastoral and mentoring services could enhance support for apprentices, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Welsh Government need to recognise the wealth of support and knowledge available within Local Authorities and utilise this breadth of knowledge to support apprenticeships and local businesses.

Conclusion

Business engagement, pastoral care, and intense mentoring are critical elements in ensuring the success of apprenticeship pathways in Wales. By addressing challenges related to progression routes, employer involvement, equity of access, and policy support, these factors help apprentices develop the skills needed for long-term career success while also benefiting businesses and the wider economy. A collaborative approach involving businesses, government, and education providers is essential in strengthening apprenticeship pathways and ensuring they meet the evolving needs of the workforce.

Kindest Regards

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