

Senedd Cymru

Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion Gwledig

Ymchwiliad: Llwybrau prentisiaeth

Cyf: AP25

Ymateb gan: Airbus UK

-

Welsh Parliament

Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

Inquiry: Apprenticeship pathways

Ref: AP25

Evidence from: Airbus UK



Apprenticeship Pathways Consultation Response - Airbus Submission

1. About Airbus

- 1.1. Airbus is proud to have over 100 years of British heritage and is world-leading in the aerospace, helicopters and space and defence industries. The United Kingdom is one of our four home nations and we are honoured to have such a strong and ever-growing relationship. The UK is vital to our global operations and success.
- 1.2. Airbus is a major contributor to the UK economy, with significant investment taking place at multiple sites. Throughout the UK, we have over 25 sites and employ over 12,000 direct employees, the largest site, located in Broughton Wales, has over 5,000 employees. Our supply chain in the UK supports over 79,000 jobs and includes 3,000 suppliers. Our early careers population in our commercial division includes over 1,000 employees and we have trained over 4,000 apprentices over the last decade; with an average spend of £125,545 on each of our apprentices in 2020. Currently Airbus employs over 649 apprentices across its commercial division in the UK.
- 1.3. Airbus is especially proud of its Welsh footprint and contributes an estimated £311 million to the Welsh economy. This includes over 48 SMES in our supply chain and over 5,500 employees across our two sites located in Broughton and Newport. In Broughton, over £2 billion has been invested into the site in the last decade and Newport specialises in secure communication services for the Ministry of Defence.

2. 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.

- 2.1. Airbus' apprenticeship programme is award-winning and has trained over 4,000 apprentices in the last decade. The programme has a proven track record of elevating careers with 70% of UK senior managers at Airbus starting their careers as apprentices. In Wales, Airbus typically recruits between 100-150 apprentices annually across a range of schemes with various entry requirements. In 2024, Broughton site welcomed 153 apprentices into its early careers cohort with a further 153 projected for 2025.
- 2.2. We offer a wide range of apprenticeship schemes, at multiple different levels, such as an Undergraduate Apprenticeship programme, in which apprentices study for a BEng Hons in Aerospace Engineering at Swansea University. This programme offers a full degree with no fees plus vocational training and a salary. This course lasts a total of 40 months. In addition to engineering degree apprenticeships, Airbus offers various other roles on its programme, including Applied Business Management or Applied Data Science. A degree level apprenticeship requires 112 combined UCAS points, including a minimum of Grade B in maths and C in physics.

- 2.3. Another apprenticeship we offer in Broughton is our Craft Apprenticeship. This specialist programme is designed to develop high level aeronautical engineering skills by combining academic and vocational studies in aeronautical engineering. With our academic partner Coleg Cambria, which is accredited by Swansea University, we offer a number of placements across our operations including Wing Manufacturing, Programme Management and Planning and In-Service Support. Our Craft apprenticeship is focused on the manufacturing of the wing sets and requires a minimum of five GCSEs including grade 4 in Maths, English Language and Science.
- 2.4. Airbus' focus is to recruit the correct profile that fits the apprenticeship that is on offer rather than offering a pathway to change apprenticeship programmes. It is important we strike a balance of attracting talent with potential to progress but also protect our core Advanced Manufacturing capability in North Wales. However, on our Adult Apprentice programme, we have three successful cohorts of employees, totaling over 70, who have transferred from semi-skilled roles, to becoming adult apprentices. The next cohort will launch in April 2025.

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

- 3.1. The contribution that apprenticeships make to securing Airbus' long term objectives of transitioning our business to a decarbonised future is vital. The sector is going through a period of intense, disruptive change, moving from aluminum to composites, and moving from kerosene to sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and hydrogen. Consequently, the apprentice talent joining our business today will become the leaders of the future, responsible for delivering this transformational shift which can only be achieved through adopting a step change in our methodology and manufacturing processes. Having the ability to develop talent to overcome these challenges with our apprentices, is vital to grow and sustain Airbus' operations in the long term.
- 3.2. In the short to medium term Airbus has announced a rate production increase to 75 single aisle aircraft per month in order to meet the full demands of our single aisle A320 family aircraft and to manage the significant order backlog (currently 8658). This has created a necessity to develop a future skills base through apprenticeships that is knowledgeable in innovative design and building techniques to meet the increased demand. It also presents many opportunities to develop new innovative ideas and for our workforce to acquire new skills in disciplines such as: digital, robotics, alternative fuel systems, data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI).
- 3.3. Attracting a steady flow of talent is critical to our operations in Wales, with Broughton being our largest site in the UK. Apprentices grant us the opportunity to upskill and reskill the wider workforce. Apprenticeships are critical in future proofing Airbus operations and the wider aerospace sector in Wales.
- 3.4. Airbus works in partnership with our education providers, Coleg Cambria and Swansea University to refresh their curricula and ensure it keeps pace with the developing requirements of future aerospace and advanced manufacturing. This partnership is also critical in supporting the aerospace supply chain in Wales.

4. 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.

- 4.1. Airbus has numerous schemes such as our STEM Outreach programme to attract the next generation of apprentices into its roles. This includes careers fairs and engagement with schools surrounding the sites, our digital work experience scheme, and social media campaigns from our own channels including display advertising.
- 4.2. Our STEM outreach programme is focused on sending Airbus early careers members to careers fairs and local schools across North Wales. Last year they attended a total of 202 career events and school visits which totaled 14,068 interactions with young people.

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

- 5.1. The Airbus apprenticeship programme is award winning in its offering to young people. There are clear pathways to having a successful career after the apprenticeship has finished. Over 70% of senior managers are previous apprentices which includes our current Head of Site. This showcases the opportunities we offer to be upskilled and career potential even after an apprentice has completed their programme.
- 5.2. At Airbus we are proud to offer multiple incentives to the community of North Wales to help attract apprentices and peak young peoples' interest in STEM. Broughton site has held various competitions including the Beluga awards, which gives opportunities to students who need that little extra encouragement to improve their attendance and grades to reach their full potential. Six schools participated in 2024. We have also hosted careers advisers on site, who collaborated with Careers Wales and local councils to encourage local career advisors to showcase our apprenticeship scheme and promote Airbus roles and apprenticeships.
- 5.3. The Airbus digital work experience programme, which has been completed by over 20,000 students since 2021, has offered valuable work experience to young people aged 14-19 since 2021. Each participant is asked to rate their experience out of 10, with an average score of 8.5 out of 10 and statistics suggesting young people are more likely to consider a role in the sector after completing the work experience.

6. 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.

- 6.1. The Virtual Work Experience scheme, creates a pathway into a career into aerospace for those at the beginning of their career. Within this scheme, we aim to have at least 40% of those participating to identify as female. For those who have participated in the scheme, statistics show that 54% declared themselves as an ethnic minority and we know that 19% of participants

receive free school meals, an indicator of deprivation, and that around 30% expect to be the first in their family to attend university.

- 6.2. Airbus is always open to making the apprenticeship programme more accessible to all demographics and widening participation. We currently employ 79 adult apprentices through our internal adult apprenticeship scheme which allows for the internal up-skilling of our current workforce. We are exploring schemes to offer foundation apprentice opportunities to widen participation and create new opportunities to under-represented groups in our apprentice scheme. This scheme would offer extensive pastoral care services to best fit the needs of this group.
- 6.3. Airbus has prioritised inclusion and diversity (I&D) as one of its four sustainability commitments. This priority reflects the 140 nations and 20 different languages within Airbus. In line with Airbus' values, a comprehensive I&D strategy drives our approach to embedding and expanding I&D. In addition, Airbus has a number of targets to monitor gender diversity including an annual recruitment objective of 33% in white collar and 12% in blue collar roles in 2025, in addition to the number of management positions held by women of 33% in 2025). Other initiatives within Airbus include the Women Innovation Network (WiN), Spectrum, Pride@Airbus, Generation-A, Seniors Talent and (Dis)Ability ambassadors networks which are key to raising awareness of I&D, promoting inclusion, equal rights and increasing visibility.

7. 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

- 7.1. The current apprenticeship scheme offered by the Welsh Government is strong and enables Airbus to grow its apprenticeship intake annually. The current barriers come from the supply chain and their ability to fund high quality apprentices.
- 7.2. One role of the Welsh Government might be at a strategic level where it could implement a strategy for skills development that aligns with UK wide economic goals and industry needs. Such an approach should be closely connected to the new Industrial Strategy with funding initiatives that address critical skills shortages that should be implemented including significant investment into STEM subjects in schools through funding into equipment, facilities and staff.
- 7.3. The Government should work in collaboration with business to establish and maintain 'regional hubs' of various industry types. This empowerment would allow for regions to set their own skills strategy based on areas of strategic strength. The Government should invest in broadening education outreach programmes in deprived areas through investment in policies that ensure equitable access to education and training for all young people.

- 7.4. **Airbus asks that the Skills and Growth Levy is reformed to become more flexible in its uses. In its current form, funds raised by the levy can only be used in England. This disadvantages companies who have significant infrastructure and sites located throughout the UK. Research by the City & Guilds and 5% Club in February 2023 found that employers only spent on average 55% of their skills and growth levy fund in the last five years, meaning that nearly half of the generated funds have not been used by levy paying businesses. £4.6 million of Airbus funds has expired and a further £4.5 million underspend is available for use. A lack of flexibility in the fund restricts business such as Airbus to utilise the fund as effectively as possible. These underspent funds could be utilised in upskilling the Broughton workforce, which is essential in supporting productivity improvements and future aircraft programmes.**

8. Summary

- 8.1. Apprenticeships are vital to the growth of the advanced manufacturing sector in the UK. Airbus commercial' 649 apprenticeships provide a clear pipeline of future talent, tailored to the industry's needs and innovative technology. These apprenticeships also develop a future skills base crucial to improving the UK's long-term skills capability and resilience. Our award winning apprenticeship programme has offered opportunities to thousands of young people in the last decade and has a clear pathway to upskilling and senior manager roles. Welsh Government intervention in skills is crucial for consistent long term growth in the region with strategic and funding opportunities vital for this. We ask for further flexibility in utilising the Skills and Growth levy, to allow for our underspent funds to be used in the upskilling of our workforce or to allow the funds be spent in devolved nations.

Contact:

Helen SWIFT
Public Affairs Wales / Materion
Cymreig

Noah WOOD
Public Affairs Intern / Intern Materion Cymreig