



Transitions to Employment

A Report for the Welsh Government

Dr Hefin David MS

JUNE 2023

**TRANSITIONS TO EMPLOYMENT:
A REPORT FOR THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

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Preface

This report examines the experience of those professionals supporting learners in the transition from education to employment in Wales. The opportunity to carry out this work came about through informal discussions I had with the First Minister, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and the Minister for the Economy. Welsh Government officials then identified where they would welcome some further research and provided me with a brief, which is explained in the introduction below.

I have always believed that progress is made through meaningful dialogue and so it has been a pleasure to engage in discussion with a wide variety of stakeholders from across the secondary, tertiary and higher education sectors. Employers and trade unions too provided valuable insights as to where the student and employee experience could be enhanced. I carried out over twenty-four hours of semi structured interviews in all, which were recorded and transcribed. All the respondents who have been directly quoted have given their permission for those quotes to be used in the report.

The findings are a direct result of those interactions. I was able to identify the fragmented nature of the secondary, tertiary and higher education sectors and, with clear guidance from those that know those sectors best, make recommendations that the Welsh Government can follow to make improvements. Welsh Government officials provided me with information as to where progress is already being made and the intention of the recommendations is to work with the grain of what is already happening.

Throughout the research, reference was made to the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CETR) which will replace the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). Much hope is placed on the new body, specifically that it will create a seamless experience for learners as they move through their educational career. I am cautiously optimistic that this can happen, but it will require much more collaborative working across the secondary and tertiary sector than has historically been the case. This is the theme that runs through the report.

I have also considered the role of degree apprenticeships and have made recommendations regarding their future, in terms of vertical integration; variety and choice; and further analysis of their costing and funding. I would like to see a wider discussion in this regard which will enhance the delivery of higher apprenticeships.

I refer to the excellent ongoing work to support learners with additional learning needs into employment. This can be further enhanced with the right targeted help to existing practitioners. I have considered how we can support those with protected characteristics and provided some recommendations on how Welsh language learning can be developed.

I carried out this work with the support of my office team and I should thank Alex Still my Senior Advisor and Laura Green, my Community Engagement Officer for the invaluable contribution they made in helping draft this report. We want work to be a useful guide for Ministers when considering how best to support learners into meaningful employment and we look forward to the Welsh Government's response.

Dr Hefin David MS
Member of the Senedd for Caerphilly

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Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Learners should be provided with authentic and meaningful experiences of the world of work supported by the new Curriculum for Wales provision for Careers and Work-Related Experiences from 3-16. Welsh Government should ensure that further education institutions, employers and other relevant stakeholders have appropriate access to learners throughout their school career, particularly at age 11-16.

Recommendation 2: Welsh Government should ensure that learners have full clarity on what options are available to them in post-compulsory education at an early stage, allowing them to make viable and informed choices. Learners should also be able to map learning pathways according to their ambition and skills.

Recommendation 3: The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) should work with academic and vocational education providers in order to reduce the fragmentation of the sector and provide mutual benefits to learners, schools and further education. The relationship between FE, employers and schools is vital to underpin this.

Recommendation 4: Welsh Government should ensure that an offer of a meaningful work experience placement is made available to all learners aged 14-18 in Wales. This offer should include a supported targeted offer of tailored work experience for Key Stage 4 (KS4) learners who are disengaging with education and are at risk of becoming NEET.

Recommendation 5: Work experience placements should be matched as closely as possible to a learner's interests and skills and arranged with reference to the learner's pathway to potential future qualifications and employment and should also consider the local labour market, utilising local intelligence and the expertise of regional skills partnerships (RSPs).

Recommendation 6: The Welsh Government, through CTER, should work with education providers, employers and other key stakeholders to enhance focused choice, variety and consistency in degree and higher apprenticeship provision. Vertical integration with lower levels also needs to be considered. Public sector bodies such as Transport for Wales could take an exemplary lead on this, demonstrating the value to employers and associated societal benefits.

Recommendation 7: Different costing and funding models for degree apprenticeships need to be evaluated and consulted on by Welsh Government. The share of the burden on the public sector, employees and employers needs to be considered in the context of the long-term value gained. Higher and degree apprenticeships need to be targeted to areas of highest demand for skills.

Recommendation 8: The Welsh Government should review support for job coaching for those transitional learners with Additional Learning Needs who request it. With reference to the good practice developed by Engage to Change and Learning Disability Wales, an ALN job coaching strategy should be prepared, expanding the provision of specialist coaches to support learners with ALN to gain paid employment.

Recommendation 9: Alongside the other recommendations, an element of Welsh language awareness and skills should be included as appropriate for all learners regardless of their Welsh language skills. Welsh language awareness and skills includes: increasing

awareness of Wales as a bilingual nation; promoting the advantages of bilingual skills in the workplace; and introducing or consolidating Welsh language skills including relevant vocabulary and key phrases for the workplace.

Recommendation 10: With regards to all the other recommendations, the Welsh Government should ensure that opportunities within careers and work-related experience (CWRE) are broadened as much as possible to include learners with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010; young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET); as well as raising awareness amongst the already most able and talented learners of vocational opportunities that may be available to them.

1. A review of the transition from education to employment in Wales

The aim of the Welsh Government's new Curriculum for Wales and the Tertiary Education and Research legislation is to transform teaching and learning in Wales to support young people in moving confidently into the world of work, with relevant and desirable skills, knowledge, and abilities.

While foundations are being laid to build a more supportive learning career in Wales, there is still a need to ensure that children and young people are supported in their practical experiences and understanding of the world of work.

For the new legislations to be successful, it is important that the work is done on the ground and that all education institutions in Wales (schools and providers, Further Education and Higher Education) are working together to enable a more seamless transition between their phases of learning. This work has become particularly relevant because of the COVID-19 pandemic, where disruption to education has required and enabled education providers to work much more closely together to support learner transition around their qualifications. There is a clear opportunity to enhance this emerging good practice to support learner transitions.

Employers in Wales are also major beneficiaries of the investment made by the Welsh Government in education at all levels from early years to secondary schools, further education colleges, apprenticeship providers and universities. This research and any subsequent actions will continue to have positive effects on employers locally and on the economy as a whole; and hopefully in turn, will help to retain talented young people in Wales.

1.1 Objectives

This research aims to:

- Review how education providers (schools and FE in particular) provide practical work-related experiences in the context of teaching and learning, and make recommendations around the focus, consistency and effectiveness of these. This will include how models of industry knowledge transfer initiatives can be scaled up across the FE sector.
- Consider the effectiveness of the relationships between schools, FE and HE, in supporting learners to transition between them as part of the learner journey to the world of work, drawing specifically from the evaluation of the Post 16 Renew and Reform Programme, and make recommendations for good practice and opportunities for improvement.
- Consider what further steps HE institutions, the Welsh Government and others can take to prepare students for the world of work in Wales and encourage our graduate community to locate in Wales and be supported to develop broader employment and economic opportunities here.

1.2 Methods

This piece of work was commissioned by the Minister for Education from Hefin David MS, because of his background in education and experience in the Senedd.

He oversaw and engaged in the following activities with the support of his own team and officials from Welsh Government:

- A short desk-based review of work-related experiences in education institutions, approaches to transition between educational phases, and pathways post-HE.
- Interview representatives from the major education providers in Wales, about their experiences of working with employers.
- Interview representatives from the employer associations and trade union representative bodies in Wales, about their experiences of working with education providers.
- Interview representatives of the Welsh Government funded intermediate bodies engaged in facilitating better links in both directions between education and employers.

1.3 Outcomes

The results and recommendations from this research have been collated into a short report. This report will then form the focus for an oral statement and plenary debate in the Senedd, as well as presentations and engagement with employer and education representatives.

2. Working together to provide choice for learners

Qualifications Wales states that *'vocational qualifications make up a large proportion of qualifications taken in Wales and there are a wide range on offer in schools, colleges and work-based learning settings'*.¹

They identify specifically that learners aged 14-16 can undertake initial vocational qualifications alongside more traditional GCSEs. However, respondents across the tertiary sector identified a need for an understanding of these opportunities to be further embedded throughout the entire learning career, as early as primary education.

Practitioners in further education told us that it could be difficult to meet with learners prior to transition from secondary education. Learners at all ages should have the opportunity to gain a full range of experiences, including skills growth and information gathering prior to making fully informed decisions about their learning pathway. The evidence we gathered for this report from the full range of respondents suggests that this is not consistently the case at this present time.

This section will explore some of the challenges faced by learners as they move from early secondary to early tertiary education. It will examine the ability of education providers at all levels to offer authentic experiences to learners, the ability of learners themselves to map learning pathways and the difficulties caused by the fragmented nature of the education sector. The nature and structure of the qualifications undertaken is a matter for Qualifications Wales, the independent regulator, through the 'Qualified for the Future Programme' and the Welsh Government Vocational Qualifications Advisory Group. As such, this is beyond the scope of this report.

2.1 Building links with the world of work

We were told by some secondary sector respondents that schools had hitherto been discouraged from providing a great deal of work-related learning, due to the focus on GCSEs and A Levels, the emphasis on academic performance by Estyn and demands on teaching staff. However, schools are developing 'in-house' vocational study as a result of the requirements of the new Curriculum for Wales and in order to meet the changing demands of their learners. The Curriculum for Wales sets Careers and Work-Related Experiences as a mandatory element of learning from 3-16, bringing the emphasis into primary schools as well as secondary schools.

Careers Wales works with every secondary school across Wales and bring together schools and employers with the aim of informing, inspiring and motivating young people about their career opportunities. They also build the skills, knowledge and confidence of educational professionals to deliver effective careers programmes.

It was clear that despite this, schools predominantly rely upon the time and initiative of teaching staff to identify and form relationships with professionals and employers in order to provide learners with significant practical experiences. Mr Chris Parry, Head Teacher of Lewis School, Pengam told us that he had a dedicated member of staff responsible for

¹ [Vocational Qualifications | Qualifications Wales](#)

building those links but that was in addition to that staff member's teaching duties. He said that the school chose to:

'try and kind of build on opportunities and expertise that we had in school and rely on the community a lot (and) actively go out and seek (links with employers)'

This informal approach is very much unlike post-16 education institutions, who have staff employed specifically for the purpose of seeking out vocational opportunities. Coleg Y Cymoedd, for example, told us that they had two dedicated and specifically funded employment engagement teams that would be responsible for networking with external stakeholders and providing in-house assistance for learners.

Achieving a comparable level of vocational support has become an increasing challenge for schools since the contraction of Careers Wales, who previously supported in delivering external work experience for every learner. Schools reported that the resources for locating and risk assessing each employer is outside of their capabilities. As a result, these opportunities are now being brought to the learner, both as part of the curriculum and through extracurricular activities but at a resource cost within the school.

i. Case study – St Martin's Comprehensive School, Caerphilly

Through the enterprise faculty at St Martin's, the role of Authentic Learning Lead (ALL) was created and serves the purpose of creating contextual opportunities, based around real life experiences, as well as ensuring that learners have access to advice and contacts in their areas of interest/talent.

Through the ALL role, a vast database of professional contacts has been built, which allows the school to tap into the skills and knowledge of their own local, staff, parent and alumni communities, to bring work-based opportunities to the learners.

Head Teacher Mr Lee Jarvis said: 'We've even built our facilities around that want or desire to have authentic learning at the heart of everything we do.' This is evidenced by the school's public, student-led restaurant, hairdressing salon and on-site beekeeping facilities. They are also the only school in the Caerphilly area to run a full-time vocational course.

While some of these opportunities appear as part of the curriculum, the school also ensures that every learner has access to these 'real life' experiences through a range of extracurricular activities, including 'stand down days'.

At St Martin's six academic days are planned and built in throughout the school year, where the usual timetabling is stood down in place of a day of further enrichment activities. Whilst these activities do fall outside of the curriculum, they significantly enhance what is being taught in the classroom. These days may include a focus on careers, charities and wellbeing. Stand down days are run and alternated for Years 7 – 13 and, as we understand it, this is unique to St Martin's Comprehensive School.

Ian Price, Director of the employers' organisation, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Wales told us that his members' experience of engagement with schools was not always positive. He said:

'Employer engagement with schools is very, very patchy and very, very inconsistent. Where you've got an employer that's sufficiently motivated and a school that's sufficiently

interested, you'll see some brilliant stuff going on. But equally, where you haven't got the two of those, it's a real struggle... the examples of negative experiences by schools going into employers and schools engaging with employers is huge.'

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) agreed that the loss of the more in-depth support provided by Careers Wales had implications for staffing. However individual school leaders were clear that the benefits of the work they do far outweigh the costs, as the expertise brought in through local contacts provided a significantly more meaningful and tailored approach for the learner.

Seeking professional contacts through teachers, parents, alumni and local businesses allows schools to access the wider skills and knowledge of those close to the institution. It allows for a more authentic delivery of experiences, based on the interests of the learner and the employment opportunities linked to the local area. The building of these opportunistic contact databases also allows for a beneficial relationship between the school and the employer, due to the mutual interest in developing a skilled future labour market.

However, as discussed in section 2.4, better collaboration between key actors in the sector may enhance the opportunities for employer engagement.

2.2 The competitive learning environment

The efforts made by schools to build their links with employers demonstrates the increasing value the secondary sector puts into vocational education. However, some further education providers reported to us concerns that they are not able to reach potential future learners early enough to provide guidance on the wider range of vocational study they offer in addition to A Levels. Jeff Protheroe of Colegau Cymru/Colleges Wales told us:

'...we have a number of organisations, schools, colleges, independent training providers, third sector organisations, all competing within the same pool (for learners)'

He added:

'I think at a strategic level there are good relationships between schools and colleges but in terms of being able to open up opportunities to all learners, then there is more work to do.'

It was similarly suggested by a number of frustrated tertiary practitioners that some secondary schools could be directing selected learners toward A Levels and on occasion limiting opportunities for further education providers to engage with those learners. It is evident there is still a great deal of work that needs to be done on cooperation and information sharing between schools and further education institutions in parts of Wales.

One clear example of good practice came from Mr Daniel Owen, Head Teacher of Llanidloes High School. He identified his school's collaborative relationship with the NPTC Group of Colleges, which includes Afan College, Brecon Beacons College, Neath College and Newtown College² (see also Case Study ii). Mr Owen told us that:

² <https://www.nptcgroup.ac.uk/>

'...one of the things that we're really committed to... is the fact that it's all got to be about the student's most appropriate pathway. It's not about recruitment or retention, it's got to be about the right pathway. And there's a real pressure on schools (because of) post-16 education funding... there's a real pressure there, which schools because of their moral responsibility have to resist.'

Mr Owen said that the NPTC Group were collaborative and engaged well with the school in a mutually beneficial relationship. He said:

'NPTC, for example, they were in this week. We also sent the entire cohort of Year 11, over to NPTC for an employer engagement event, where they shared the opportunities that exist locally in the college. And so rather than just hand-pick students for that event, sometimes students might want to change pathways after they've had the opportunities placed in front of them by NPTC. So, I serve on the local employer engagement group, which includes NPTC. And we've got a whole group of employers represented on that, which again, looks at how we can link schools and colleges together.'

Principal and CEO of NPTC Group, Mark Dacey, agreed with Mr Owen's view. He said that schools can play the role of gatekeepers when it comes to access to learners, building their interests and their educational choices but this should not become a barrier to external providers and employers. Mr Dacey said that the NPTC Group model worked in the wide geographical context in which it operated but required continued collaboration, underpinned by organisational structures and mutual trust.

ii. Case study - Llanidloes High School, Powys

Llanidloes High school is based in a rural setting in Mid Wales, surrounded by a strong agricultural economy. The staff use this position to pro-actively seek out relevant (and alternative) vocational experiences.

The school has two key staff who are responsible for researching work-based opportunities. A Social Inclusion Manager is employed through the school budget and a Learning Coach is funded through the school's Pupil Development Grant funding. This is aimed at supporting more disadvantaged pupils.

Learners in Years 10 and 12 have work experience. Some have attained paid management apprenticeships through BMW and visited Belgium to work with Formula 1. Learners have also recently had the opportunity to work alongside a team on the construction of a local wind farm, as a result of an opportunistic contact.

Head Teacher Mr Daniel Owen said: 'We'd love to be doing more, particularly at Key Stage 3. So, the emphasis from Welsh Government in the new Curriculum for Wales is so clear - the door is wide open. It's prompting schools to really search for these opportunities, because we all want those authentic experiences that students need to have.'

Llanidloes High maintains very strong links with local colleges who regularly attend the school's employer engagement events and give presentations to learners about their options post-16.

Mr Owen said that he strongly believes that local schools and colleges should use all opportunities to share information and collaborate where possible.

Powys County Council set up a Strategic Management Board in order to try and break down some of the barriers between different institutions, which has been very successful.

Recommendation 1: Learners should be provided with authentic and meaningful experiences of the world of work, supported by the new Curriculum for Wales provision for Careers and Work-Related Experiences from 3-16. Welsh Government should ensure that further education institutions, employers and other relevant stakeholders have appropriate access to learners throughout their school career, particularly at age 11-16.

2.3 Mapping learning pathways

It is vital that the learner has full clarity on possible pathways following post compulsory education and as discussed in Recommendation 1, there is need for a significant improvement in communication between schools and further education providers.

Some schools suggested that learners who are more attracted to vocational learning may often prefer to stay in school where they have built up a network of emotional support over the previous 5-7 years. While this may be the case, this should be a fully informed decision by the learner.

We were told that learners within the gateway 11-14 cohort would benefit greatly from a more transparent and informed approach to future possibilities relating to learning and employment, which is best achieved through the collaboration of schools and colleges. Lisa Thomas, Principal and CEO of The College, Merthyr Tydfil said:

'ESTYN have undertaken a number of thematic reviews on 16 to 19 provision and there are key recommendations that came out of at least two relatively recent reports. The same issues come up time and time again and yet we don't seem to be making a great deal of progress in ensuring that young people have a full range of impartial advice and guidance on what options are available to them at 16.'

It was also suggested to us that the FE sector as a whole is underinformed as to the educational history and career destinations of learners. Yana Williams, Principal and CEO of Coleg Cambria told us:

'And it's (about) requiring schools to provide the Welsh government with destination data, so saying, where do all of your students go..., (so you) you should... know where your 16-year-old is going when they leave your school, you should know where they're going. And that would ensure that over the two years previous to that, you're engaging with your local schools, and employers or apprenticeship providers, because you're encouraging those learners to progress on to something after they leave that school.'

Careers Wales keep a record of annual pupil destinations through a survey of school leavers, undertaken on behalf of Welsh Government³. It provides a useful snapshot of pupil destinations, the destination information is recorded, as a result of the pupil's known activity on 31st October. The 2022 destinations survey reports the destinations of 55,715 young people. The overall 'no response' rate was 1.6%. Of those classified as continuing in full time education, going to FE was a more popular route for both males and females. The

³ <https://careerswales.gov.wales/education-and-teaching-professionals/pupil-destinations>

difference was greater for males (62.2% going to FE, compared to 37.8% staying in school) than it was for females (57.5% going to FE, compared to 42.5% staying in school).

We were also told by Daniel Owen that local authorities could play a key role in providing a broad range of information to learners as they move into the gateway cohort age group. This should then be continued in a way that suits the learner throughout their secondary education, avoiding the 'cliff-edge' learners currently face when they reach age 16.

Other FE professionals told us that a form of individual skills record, which follows the learner through their education, would allow them to reflect on past learning experiences and skills built. This, alongside a map of potential learning pathways, would present each individual with the information they need to consider which routes and potential fields of work are best suited to them personally.

If this is to be successful it is crucial that all stakeholders are committed to the process of promoting choice and informed decision making from an early age.

Recommendation 2: Welsh Government should ensure that learners have full clarity on what options are available to them post-compulsory education at an early stage, allowing them to make viable and informed choices. Learners should also be able to map learning pathways according to their ambition and skills.

2.4 Addressing the fragmented sector

It became clear during the interviews conducted as part of this research that there is a great deal of fragmentation across the secondary and tertiary sector. This has a limiting effect on the ability of learners in Wales to access vocational opportunities and clear information relating to the potential pathways of future learning and employment.

Some stakeholders tentatively suggested that the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER)⁴ has the potential to act as a coordinating body for good practice across the sector. One college principal told us:

So, it's got the potential, I guess, for all of us we're still trying to understand what this dotted line through to Welsh Government is. So, I think CTER could...have those discussions. Maybe not initially, I think there's probably some, a lot of work around stability initially, with all these different organisations coming together, but it potentially could.

Another principal added a note of caution, given that CTER is not yet operational:

'I think there's going to be a reality for the Commission, which is going to have to manage a budget. So, I think some of, some of these issues are going to be driven simply by the fact that money is going to be scarce. And I think that will drive some decision making.'

In addition to CTER and the Welsh Government's Post-16 Renew and Reform Programme⁵, our research identified a crucial need for an increased focus on the aforementioned gateway age group; providing them with earlier access to meaningful vocational experience, along with a complete package of information on the pathways available to them in future.

⁴ [Commission for Tertiary Education and Research \(CTER\)](#)

⁵ [Welsh Government's post 16 renew and reform programme](#)

There are both mutual and transformative benefits that could come as a result of effective coordination and the collaboration between schools and colleges. For example, schools could use FE resources to gain access to college databases of employers, easing staff workload and opening up further opportunities to their learners. Meanwhile colleges could reciprocally get access to learners much earlier in their school career, simplifying their role and providing a wider choice of opportunities to the learner. This would also assist employers with engagement with schools.

Fundamentally, this bonded approach would more naturally enable clearer education pathways which are built around the learner. Better collaboration has the potential to vastly expand prospects of learners with regards to vocational opportunities and preparation for the transition into employment; but Welsh Government should ensure that CTER have a role in overseeing all the institutions involved and, that its board is fully representative to reflect this.

Recommendation 3: The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) should work with academic and vocational education providers in order to reduce the fragmentation of the sector and provide mutual benefits to learners, schools and further education. The relationship between FE, employers and schools is vital to underpin this.

3. Supporting the learner into work

Traditionally, work experience has been provided for pupils aged 14-18 but the level of that provision has declined in recent years⁶. It is in the GCSE age cohort (i.e., 14-16) where learners have ordinarily undertaken their first period of organised work experience, and where they are required to make choices of potentially long-term significance regarding their future careers and/or educational pathways. All participants who took part in this research agreed that this provision should be restored and enhanced.

Those working in early years told us that there is a strong argument for these practical experiences to begin as young as primary school age and this is now included within the new Curriculum for Wales. While we support this view, given the scope of this study, this report will focus specifically on secondary and tertiary provision. Study of the impact of primary stage work-based learning on later decisions of learners is recommended as a further piece of work.

It is appropriate, therefore, to consider what can be done in this crucial area to help improve the transition from education to employment.

3.1 Providing meaningful work experience

Schools that we spoke to were keen for their learners to engage in and find meaningful work experience as part of their GCSE and A Level programmes. However, they stated that a scaling back of operations and resources at Careers Wales meant that they were now far more reliant on informal parental networks for securing placement opportunities, and on teachers carrying out the relevant administrative work in addition to their classroom duties. Furthermore, Careers Wales were no longer able to carry out the necessary risk assessments and health and safety checks for learners ahead of their placements, leaving schools to take on responsibility for this. For example, Mr Jarvis at St Martin's School, Caerphilly, told us that:

'You'd have to do all the checks, health and safety checks on a car garage down the road as a school, and then if something happens, all of that responsibility is back on you. Whereas Careers Wales used to do it...and they don't now.'

Careers Wales did not contradict this statement, attributing the organisation's reduced capacity to UK-wide fiscal austerity measures that necessitated a change in its remit in 2015. Mark Owen, Head of Stakeholder Services, stressed that his organisation was committed to providing the best possible service within its current budgetary settlement. However, he added that:

'Up until 2015, Careers Wales, we had a remit to support work experience. So, we used to, we used to arrange for all, well, 90 plus percent of Key Stage 4 students to go out on work experience, and then a big chunk of sixth form students who needed it for vocational progression we used to, we used to put them out as well. And that, that, that obviously, that was taken out of our remit in 2015... We used to offer services like employer mentoring,

⁶ [School pupils' work experience axed over safety row - BBC News](#)

teacher placements, you know, so there are whole things that we can no longer afford to do.'

Mr Owen at Llanidloes High School also recognised the situation facing schools and the challenges caused by reduced the capacity at, and remit of, Careers Wales, although expressing sympathy for the latter:

'I mean, it's, it's a question of resourcing, isn't it? And, you know, the reason why a number of schools stepped away from doing work experience was because there was, you know, cutting the resourcing of Careers Wales. And, and they had to take decisions on what they could and couldn't achieve realistically. And so schools, I think, that are really committed to work experience have stepped up with that, and still work in close partnership in maybe a more, more sort of tailored way, which in particular focuses on supporting those who are at risk of not being in education, employment or training. And in a really sort of bespoke way, according to local needs in the way in which perhaps around earlier, so I wouldn't want to criticise too heavily colleagues in Careers Wales because I think with very stretched resources, they probably do as much as they possibly can, and their support is appreciated.'

While Careers Wales have a Valued Partner Initiative, whereby they support local employers to create long-term relationships with local schools, overall, the factors Mr Owen identified have combined to affect the quality and availability of meaningful work experience for 14-18 learners in Wales, with changes to working patterns post-pandemic an additional challenge.

Further education (FE) colleges generally told us that they fared better in terms of securing employment and work experience opportunities for their learners. This is partly because of the nature of their educational offer and partly because they employ full-time staff whose role it is to improve the employability of learners in relation to local labour market intelligence.

iii. Case Study: Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai is a large, multi-campus FE college spread across Northwest Wales with over 20,000 students and employing around 2,000 staff⁷. Its campuses are based in a part of Wales where the economy is dominated by sectors such as agriculture, forestry, and tourism, and where there are no large conurbations. As such, it is easier for the college to build links with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) than with large employers. Many of these SME employers are found within the foundational economy (see below).

Learners who take work experience placements with SMEs (sometimes micro businesses) often find subsequent employment with SMEs and this has consequences for career progression. However, group CEO Dafydd Evans told us that 'the big advantage that we have...is that we've got a £12 million apprenticeship contract' which allows them to employ 'work placement officers, who are dedicated, really, their only job is to go out there into industry looking for placements.' They are in effect 'a bit of...an account manager for want

⁷ [About Us | Grŵp Llandrillo Menai \(gllm.ac.uk\)](https://www.gllm.ac.uk)

of a better word, with...the employer. And that's really the infrastructure that allows us to find the placements' in different sectors of the economy across a large geographical area.

FE colleges and employers did, however, tell us that they experienced difficulties in engaging with learners in school settings with schools keen to ensure that the more academically able learners progress to Sixth Form. This resulted in some learners who attend FE college post-GCSEs not being sufficiently prepared for the nature of FE and work-based learning. The schools that we spoke to did not recognise this to be the case.

In England, the Department for Education (DfE) has introduced the 'Baker Clause' (named after a former Secretary of State for Education), which mandates schools to allow learners access to a range of employers and education providers (such as FE colleges) during the school day⁸. The Clause came into existence with the Technical and Further Education Act 2017⁹, but doubts about its effectiveness¹⁰ led the DfE to introduce new legislation (the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022¹¹) which is aimed at ensuring the Clause is legally enforceable¹². Whether such a mechanism could work in Wales is something for the Welsh Government to consider, but the very fact that the UK Government felt that it required additional legislation to improve the Clause's effectiveness suggests that careful scrutiny is required.

iv. Case Study: Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP) for South-West Wales

The RLSP for South-West Wales covers the Swansea; Carmarthenshire; Neath-Port Talbot; and Pembrokeshire local authority areas. Jane Lewis of the RLSP told us that it had 'developed a pilot project with Pembrokeshire College, which actually shows you a really good example of where the, the commitment from industry to actually work with schoolchildren, and students from the FE college...giving up their time to go into the school every Friday afternoon, to ensure that they have the...knowledge and awareness of what the opportunities are in sort of...marine engineering, and...the net zero skills, which is what the project is all about, is...phenomenal. And...there are...so many businesses in this region who would be prepared to do that. And as you're probably aware most of our businesses are SMEs and micros, we don't have a huge number of large-scale employers.'

The RLSP fosters good relationships with local employers, HE and FE colleges in a predominantly rural area where SMEs dominate the employment landscape. This ensures that the quality of opportunities compensates for the smaller quantity available (relative to Southeast or Northeast Wales), and those available opportunities are more likely to provide a tailored learning pathway through the form of an apprenticeship at FE college or a degree apprenticeship at university.

Wales' use of regional skills partnerships (RSPs) provides it with a bespoke infrastructure and opportunity to invest in skills in a way that is responsive and sensitive to local and

⁸ [What is the Baker Clause | CASCAID](#)

⁹ [Technical and Further Education Act 2017 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ [DfE took no action against schools that ignored Baker clause \(schoolsweek.co.uk\)](#)

¹¹ [Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

¹² [FE News | Skills Bill Amendments - the 'Baker Clause' is now legally enforceable](#)

regional labour markets. RSPs bring together key stakeholders in a forum to coordinate many of the issues that this review has been asked to consider. We interviewed two RSPs simultaneously (covering parts of Wales where there are a relatively large number of SMEs in proportion to large employers) and our conversation suggested that perhaps more could be done to formalise the role of schools, FE colleges and Careers Wales within their remit. Sian Lloyd Roberts of North Wales Regional Skills Partnership told us that:

'...what's been raised actually quite a bit during those conversations we've been having with employers in North Wales and other stakeholders, and also with individuals actually, is that the work experience elements, it's very much needed. Employers have told us via, via survey, and also in workshops and consultation groups, that they're really keen to offer work experience opportunities for people in school, but also for FE students, etc. but they just don't know how to get to them. And how they can engage with, you know, the school system, education system, and also how they can engage with FE as well.'

We therefore believe that there is significant appetite amongst stakeholders for a more joined-up, co-ordinated approach within the secondary and tertiary education sector.

v. Case study: Careers Wales

As part of the Welsh Government's education COVID-19 recovery plan¹³, Careers Wales placed around 100 young people into tailored work experience. Its success ensured that it has now received funding to place 500 young people in a similar way during the 2023-24 academic year, with potential for further extension.

Mark Owen of Careers Wales agreed with us and other stakeholders that, whilst recognising the challenges presented by the current economic climate and changes to ways of working, 'that's a model I think that could be scaled up'. Working with the Seren Academy (a Welsh Government initiative 'dedicated to helping Wales' brightest state-educated learners achieve their full academic potential'), a particular stream could be dedicated to helping able learners from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds – and may be less likely to have the social capital to help them progress – secure work placements within different professions. This is something that we would like to see the Welsh Government explore further.

Recommendation 4: Welsh Government should ensure that an offer of a meaningful work experience placement is made available to all learners aged 14-18 in Wales. This offer should include a supported targeted offer of tailored work experience for Key Stage 4 (KS4) learners who are disengaging with education and are at risk of becoming NEET.

3.2 Work experience matching learners' potential

Matching students to appropriate work experience will require schools, in collaboration with Careers Wales, FE and Welsh Government to look to develop a clear offer that would enable all young people to participate in meaningful work experience to inform their future career pathways. A more supported tailored offer should be available to those identified as

¹³ [Renew and reform: supporting learners' wellbeing and progression \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

needing the additional support to stay in or to reengage in employment, education or training. A clear pathway should be developed to ensure work placement opportunities are appropriate and meaningful for individual learners

Learners, parents/guardians, schools and careers advisers should also consider the value of placements with employers in the foundational economy. Supporting the foundational economy has increasingly become a focus of Welsh Government policy in the last decade, with a delivery plan published in 2021¹⁴, and research by the Bevan Foundation¹⁵ and the Institute of Welsh Affairs¹⁶ adding analytical weight and a critical overview of developments so far. Policy around the transition from education to employment should not deviate from this agenda. Furthermore, there is no reason that a commitment to meaningful work experience cannot and should not link into the Welsh Government's Net Zero Skills Action Plan¹⁷, with employers, FE colleges and training providers (such as CITB and the Learning & Work Institute) indicating their support of such an agenda in recent publications.^{18,19}

Key to delivering meaningful and tailored work experience to learners is a comprehensive careers advisory and support service. A common theme emerging from discussions with stakeholders was an atomised and disjointed set-up in Wales. Careers Wales is unable to provide the service that it once did due to resource and capacity issues, as well as changes to its remit in 2015 which removed responsibility for work experience. Careers education is the statutory responsibility of individual schools and colleges. Changes to the curriculum in Wales, making careers and work-related experience (CWRE) compulsory from age 3 to 16, have the potential to be transformational in terms of careers education. However, the right structure must be in place to deliver it, such as a Wales-wide service bringing learners, providers and employers together at the academic and vocational level.

The Welsh Government must work with stakeholders to create a more holistic and joined-up approach as opposed to one that is piecemeal and based on a patchwork of short-term initiatives reliant on limited funding. This would aid and abet access to learners in schools for FE colleges and employers, something that two recent Estyn thematic reports identified as an area in which improvement is needed^{20,21}. It would be appropriate to make use of existing expertise within Careers Wales to deliver such a service, but the organisation must be appropriately resourced considering the aforementioned curriculum changes.

Ian Price, Director, CBI Wales told us that he could see Careers Wales acting as a coordinating body to make better use of its current structure:

'one of the suggestions has always been that a role for Careers Wales may be a signposting role, rather than a delivery role. So, they sit above all this and then direct people or employers or educational providers to best schemes to suit all each individual, and you have

¹⁴ [Foundational economy: delivery plan \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

¹⁵ [The business potential of the foundational economy in the south Wales valleys - Bevan Foundation](#)

¹⁶ [IWA Analysis: Where Next for the Foundational Economy? - Institute of Welsh Affairs](#)

¹⁷ [Stronger, Fairer Greener Wales: Net Zero Skills Action Plan \(gov.wales\)](#)

¹⁸ [b06414_net_zero_report_wales_v7.pdf \(citb.co.uk\)](#)

¹⁹ [GreenSkillsReport-2022.pdf](#)

²⁰ [Thematic survey report \(gov.wales\)](#)

²¹ [Partnerships with employers in secondary and special schools \(gov.wales\)](#)

Careers Wales sitting here, instead of in some instances what you get is some of these schemes competing against each other.'

This echoes the previous concerns raised with us over a fractured and disjointed landscape in the sector.

A genuinely comprehensive careers advisory and support service would need to overcome certain barriers for it to be truly effective. For example, it would require sufficient Welsh Government backing and resourcing, as well as that from the UK Government including from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Angela Kenvyn of Learning Disability Wales, who leads on the Engage to Change project, told us that the division between devolved and reserved matters can often frustrate the delivery of policy objectives in the area of employability and skills, and therefore *'there needs to be much better coordination between them.'* This will inevitably impact on education to employment transition.

vi. Case Study: The Cardiff Commitment

The 'Cardiff Commitment' brings together employers, employment agencies, FE colleges, schools and universities within the City and County of Cardiff and which is managed by Cardiff Council. Its 'Open Your Eyes' Week adopts a holistic approach to providing learners in schools (including primary-age pupils) in a way that Careers Wales cannot and no longer have the remit to do so. We believe that this is something which can be adopted by other local authorities and potentially scaled up to a Wales-wide initiative.

Sharon James, Principal, Cardiff and Vale College provided us with a very encouraging description of her organisation's involvement in the scheme. She told us that:

'The Cardiff Commitment consists of a number of employers, HE, FE and schools' representatives, who discuss the creation of employment and work experience opportunities to support young people's access to impartial advice and guidance, and to raise awareness of the range of opportunities throughout Cardiff. One of the successful schemes is the employers visiting schools from Year 7, as part of 'Open Your Eyes' week. So, for example, these young people, will be visited by a professional from industry who will come and talk to the school and run workshops with the pupils, to give them greater understanding of the opportunities available. This is bringing more employers into schools, providing teachers and pupils with a greater understanding of the specific industry. Some schools are aligned to major employers, who have sort of adopted a particular school. These employers go into the school environment to develop the pupils' employability skills. This will hopefully lead to greater employment opportunities for these pupils in the future as well as bridging the skill gap in local industries.'

The Cardiff Commitment was praised in Estyn's 2022 inspection report of the local education authority (LEA)²², which called it a 'a powerful lever for attracting investment from businesses and industry in education, training and employment opportunities for young people', and whose 'priorities align closely with regional goals through the work of the

²² [Inspection report Cardiff Council 2022 \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/inspection-report-cardiff-council-2022)

Cardiff Capital Region Skills Partnership. This has produced an effective, cohesive strategy that benefits young people.'

Recommendation 5: Work experience placements should be matched as closely as possible to a learner's interests and skills and arranged with reference to the learner's pathway to potential future qualifications and employment and should also consider the local labour market, utilising local intelligence and the expertise of regional skills partnerships (RSPs).

4. Developing higher level apprenticeships

This report has identified the need for consistency and continuity in vocational educational pathways. It has also made the case for the opportunity for learners to make considered choices well before they commence vocational programmes. The 11-14 'gateway' age is a key time which can have long term consequences for the learner.

4.1 Consistency and continuity in apprenticeship programmes

Consistency and continuity also requires that there are opportunities for learners to continue their vocational development past level 5. Higher level and degree level apprenticeships are the route to achieve this. The Welsh Government has stated that 'degree apprenticeships are on track to become a critical component of the skills system in Wales'²³. The Government has already initiated a pilot programme of degree apprenticeships in the areas of digital industries, information and communication technologies, engineering and advanced manufacturing.

Degree apprenticeships however remain limited in scope and there is some uncertainty about provision, particularly with regard to funding. The programme has been evaluated through a Welsh Government consultation, the findings of which were published in February 2023²⁴. The recommendations in this section of the report are intended to support the wider recommendations found in the Welsh Government evaluation.

4.2 Consistency of pathways to level 6

We were told by Dr Francis Cowe, who is responsible for the University of South Wales further education strategic partnerships and degree apprenticeship provision, that the Welsh Government degree apprenticeship policy is right to focus on key sectors that will support local jobs with existing employers. Dr Cowe identified that the areas in which current provision could be improved included outreach to local communities, addressing the lack of gender balance and ethnic diversity as well as getting older people in work to consider higher level options.

He told us that there are opportunities to expand the provision of degree apprenticeships beyond the current areas. There is sectoral demand for the development of leadership and management, construction project management, digital engineering and rail engineering. These level 6, and indeed prospectively level 7, apprenticeships would serve to address skills shortages but also provide continuity and progression from lower levels. The benefit to the employee of expanded provision is a clear educationally supported career pathway and ultimately would serve to raise the value of such qualifications in public esteem.

We visited the Transport for Wales training facility in Cardiff where they currently offer, in partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd and the University of South Wales, apprenticeship programmes from levels 3- 5 including HND and foundation degree equivalents. We met a number of apprentices, all of whom were employees of TFW. They told us that the

²³ [Welsh Government response.pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#)

²⁴ [Evaluation of the Degree Apprenticeship programme: final report \(summary\) | GOV.WALES](#)

apprenticeships provided career stability and the ability to progress within the organisation. We spoke to two train driver apprentices who told us their vocational programmes had enabled them to change careers smoothly and with limited personal inconvenience.

The University of South Wales has pre-validated a rail engineering degree apprenticeship programme that complements and adds continuity to the level 4 and 5 provision currently available. The programme sits outside the Welsh Government's degree apprenticeship pilot framework and so is presently ineligible for funding. We feel that this degree apprenticeship should be funded.

The Welsh Government and the wider public sector is a significant employer in Wales. Transport for Wales has demonstrated that it, as a public body, can take a lead in growing apprenticeship provision. The Welsh Government should assess whether other parts of the public sector could form similar partnerships with further and higher education to develop level 6 apprenticeships.

vii. Case Study: Transport for Wales

The Transport for Wales apprenticeship offers an NVQ Level 3 Qualification in train driver operations and is the first of its kind for Wales.

Transport for Wales (TfW) is hoping to sign up more than 100 apprentices before the end of 2021 and aims to take on around 100 more apprentices each year for the next five years.

The impressive apprenticeship scheme sees TfW as the first rail operator to offer the accredited qualification and has seen a combined effort to bring the project to fruition by TfW's training team alongside Rail Delivery Groups train driver academy, Coleg y Cymoedd and ASLEF who are the national trade union for train drivers.

4.3 Toward the expansion of degree apprenticeships

Dr Cowe told us that while the balance of support for degree apprenticeships between the Government and employers was good, there was a public cost, which limits the size and scale of what can currently be provided. Indeed, the Welsh Government's Economy Minister Vaughan Gething recently announced that due to budget pressure, the target of creating 125000 apprenticeships by the end of this Senedd has been pushed back by one year. Although funding is a major problem, there is still the opportunity for the Welsh Government to focus on the quality of provision.

We feel that the degree apprenticeship programme can be expanded and enhanced if it is properly targeted to areas of high employer demand and toward sectoral benefit. This requires employer engagement with the development of programmes. The ability and inclination of higher education institutions to deliver degree apprenticeships in specific areas should also be a consideration in their focused expansion.

If expanded level 6 provision is to be sufficiently focused and coherent with lower levels, then partnership working between higher and further education providers is vital. To this

end, the University of South Wales has established a five-year strategic alliance with nearby further education providers²⁵.

viii. Case Study: USW Strategic Partnership

The USW Strategic Alliance 2022- 2027 is a memorandum of understanding between USW and Coleg Gwent; Coleg y Cymoedd; Y Coleg Merthyr Tudful; Cardiff and Vale College; and Coleg Penybont. It is intended to reflect the maturity of the partnership between the institutions and reinforce their mutual values of cooperation.

The strategic partnership makes a commitment to the development of the region, working with both Welsh Government and the Cardiff Capital Region.

It is a welcome collaboration that seeks to develop academic and vocational programmes in partnership with employers. The focus of curricula development is in the high demand areas of green skills/ future technologies and future fuels; health, social care and allied professions; public services, including police, prisons, probation and youth justice; and creative industries.

The strategic alliance is specifically intended to coordinate curricula development and contextualise learning and validation in order to enhance coherency in progression. It also makes reference to degree apprenticeships and aims to explore with partners the potential for new degree apprenticeship provision with mapped progression routes.

During the Fifth Senedd, the then Economy Infrastructure and Skills (EIS) Committee produced a report on Degree Apprenticeships²⁶. The evidence gathering was curtailed by the covid pandemic and so the scope was more limited than originally intended. Nonetheless, some useful recommendations were made, which were accepted by the Welsh Government.

Significant among these were the recommendations that the Government work with stakeholders to support the development of new degree apprenticeship frameworks. The recommendations were made before the legislation was passed establishing the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER). The Government now has the opportunity to provide CTER with a remit to coordinate this development in partnership between FE and HE. The USW Strategic Alliance is an exemplar of how this can be managed in practice.

We were also told by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) Wales and CBI Wales that early employer engagement and co-design of degree apprenticeship programmes was vital if employers were to recognise value in the programme.

Ian Price, Director of CBI Wales told us:

²⁵ University of South Wales Strategic Alliance 2022-2027

²⁶ [Degree Apprenticeships \(senedd.wales\)](https://www.senedd.wales/degree-apprenticeships)

'I don't think there's quite a clear understanding of what it means. I think certainly the businesses I know that are aware of degree apprenticeships don't feel there's enough choice in degree apprenticeships. It's very limited to certain areas and I would like to see that broadened.'

He added:

'A university designs a degree apprenticeship course and then ways to recruit, when actually what should be happening is that the employers are speaking to the universities, speaking to the colleges (as in the case of) the TfW model and having a degree-apprenticeship that is co-designed and co-funded.'

Ben Cottam, Head of FSB Wales sounded a note of caution from the small business sector:

'...if you've got that infrastructure and presumption of co-design then that obviously favours larger organisations that have that training specialism within them, and... a lot of the bigger employers will have their own representative through the RSPs, will influence their own RSPs. It would be difficult for us (small firms) to engage that multitude of thousands of businesses and their interests and needs in RSP. The co-design concept is a good one but making it accessible and you know feeding in even the aggregated needs of much smaller businesses is really difficult to do.'

Ben Cottam felt that HE and FE could do more to engage with SMEs, particularly micro-firms and suggested that further discussion with FSB Wales was needed here.

Universities Wales also raised programme design issues, specifically that greater use of strategic partnerships and vertical alignment can help support delivery, remove barriers to progression and avoid duplication within the funding system. This would include, for example, conversations on how prior learning will be recognised prior to individuals starting standalone level 4 or 5 qualifications to ensure that there was a clear progression route. The risk of not doing so is that the learning by the individual cannot be recognised due to the regulatory and quality environment providers operate in (to maintain the integrity of qualification) and that learner would have to carry out further study before they can progress.

Universities Wales also raised concerns about progression. Due to the way that different levels of vocational and apprenticeship provision are funded and arranged, there are obstacles to many learners' progression to higher levels. For example, around 90% of non-degree higher level apprenticeships are in subject areas where there is no equivalent degree apprenticeship, predominantly health and social care and management. That means those apprentices have no work-based route to a degree. Greater qualification alignment between secondary, further and higher education is clearly necessary.

The University and Colleges Union (UCU Cymru) have also identified issues around progression and argue that CETER has a significant role in resolving a lack of coherency. They have stated²⁷:

“A commission which brings together two separate funding bodies does not, of itself, deliver the necessary culture or desired coherency across the FE and HE sector. Rather, it must work to align funding with a common set of principles to ensure consistency for learners across the PCET sector. If lifelong learning is to be a goal for every citizen, the Commission must focus on the structural barriers which currently hold back these developments and inhibit genuine collaborative working within the sector.”

UCU Cymru state that they envisage *“a social model of education in which provision wraps around the rhythm of a learners’ life as it is actually lived.”* They add:

“Recognising no real distinction between the ‘academic’ and vocational’ we don’t see why an apprentice who embarks upon a course at the age of 14 should not enjoy the opportunity to emerge with an equivalent masters in her early twenties or late thirties. However, if government are serious about increasing accessibility, we need to design coherent pathways and develop the transferable credit system to underwrite them. Given the recognised need to develop medium-level skills throughout every Welsh region, one solution will be to increase access to financial support for those who can only study in small chunks, such as one module at a time due to family commitments and other life pressures. Nevertheless, if this learning is to be meaningful, institutions and employers will need a ‘common currency’ though which it can be applied and understood.”

Recommendation 6: The Welsh Government, through CETER, should work with education providers, employers and other key stakeholders to enhance focused choice, variety and consistency in degree and higher apprenticeship provision. Vertical integration with lower levels also needs to be considered. Public sector bodies such as Transport for Wales could take an exemplary lead on this, demonstrating the value to employers and associated societal benefits.

4.4 Degree apprenticeship funding options

The EIS Committee report on degree apprenticeships also referred to the way in which the qualifications were costed. The committee called on the Welsh Government to develop a consistent costing model. In response, the Government stated that costs of degree apprenticeships are aligned with tuition fees for full time undergraduates.

The National Training Federation for Wales told the committee in the evidence gathering session that different apprenticeships would generate different costs, depending on the nature of the vocational work involved and recommended an activity costing model. If degree apprenticeships are to be financially viable for providers, including employers, there clearly remains a need to provide clarity on this matter.

²⁷ UCU Cymru Response to the Innovation Strategy for Wales

We heard from witnesses who argued that there were alternative ways to pay for degree apprenticeships that could reduce the financial burden on the public purse, providing the costs issue was resolved. It was suggested that, as employers gain long-term high-level skill development from the graduate employee, they should fund 50% of the degree, with the Welsh Government providing 50%.

Alternatively, with the support of student loans, employees could pay 50%, with Welsh Government and employers splitting the rest to pay 25% each. This is a matter that will become more pressing if Welsh Government wish to see an expansion of apprenticeship numbers. The Welsh Government must consider whether, as with other undergraduate degrees, there is consistency in asking students to contribute and that the fact that the student is earning while learning is considered a factor in determining the contribution. The National Union of Students (NUS) Wales and the National Society of Apprentices (NSoA) were keen to emphasise to us that they would not support tuition fees for degree apprenticeship students, stating:

“NUS Wales and NSoA rejects the premise that loading cost and debt onto young workers is the way to create a ‘more equal, fair and just Wales’ with fair work at its core.”

The funding landscape for higher level apprenticeships is further complicated by the introduction by the UK Government of the apprenticeship levy. This is a levy paid by employers to the UK treasury. Employers will have to contribute 0.5 per cent of their total wage bill to HM Revenue and Customs. Employers in England then have an allowance of £15,000 per year to offset against the Levy.

In Wales, where apprenticeship policy has developed differently, a proportion of funding is awarded to the Welsh Government according to the Barnett formula. However, this is significantly less than the amount generated through the levy. The problem is that employers may feel that are being required to contribute twice for vocational training, particularly those who are based across the UK and are used to the system in England. Therefore, the targeting of higher and degree level apprenticeships to areas of highest skill demand remains a key consideration in their development. The resolution of the apprenticeship levy issue will require continued discussion between the Welsh and UK Governments.

Recommendation 7: Different costing and funding models for degree apprenticeships need to be evaluated and consulted on by Welsh Government. The share of the burden on the public sector, employees and employers needs to be considered in the context of the long-term value gained. Higher and degree apprenticeships need to be targeted to areas of highest demand for skills.

5. Opportunities for all

5.1 Transition for those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is particularly challenging for those with Additional Learning Needs. The movement from an educational environment to adult social support is difficult and opportunities for meaningful employment can be difficult to find. We spoke to Angela Kenvyn who is the manager for the Engage to Change²⁸ project (see case study ix). Ms Kenvyn told us that job coaching was a fundamental factor in helping people with ALN into work.

Ms Kenvyn is directly employed by Learning Disability Wales (LDW) and in November 2022 Zoe Richards, their Chief Executive Officer, wrote to the Economy Minister to make the case for enhanced job coaching for those with ALN.

She said:

“Evidence from both the Engage to Change and JobSense projects, demonstrates that the role of a specialist qualified job coach is an effective intervention... The role of the job coach in helping the potential worker identify and overcome sometimes complex personal barriers can bring them to the decision to apply for and get a job. This level of assistance is not commonly available from the more generic scheme providers. Knowledge of people’s disabilities, their impact on getting a job, and knowledge of wider issues disabled people face is an additional benefit of specialist job coach involvement.”

“Furthermore, the role and presence of a specialist job coach helps to overcome practical concerns the employer may have over employing someone with a disability. The job coach can talk through these and provide practical examples on how a wide range of perceived problems have been overcome in the past. This helps move employers to a decision to employ rather than not. When involved, the job coach can inform and help with additional government supports such as Access to Work, how to use it in their situation, and how to obtain the funding. Employer knowledge of this scheme remains low and contributes to the employer not being able to see a way to overcome common perceived problems.”

Ms Richards said that the personal development support grant of £500 to be used by individuals to source job coach support, was insufficient and not appropriately targeted. She said that services would be better placed if job coaches were contracted via an agency framework, which would offer enhanced choice to individuals.

The evidence from both the Engage to Change project and the wider experience of LDW suggests that the Welsh Government need to examine job coaching for ALN students transitioning into paid employment. While a call for a National Job Coaching Strategy may be beyond the scope of this project, we feel that the Welsh Government should assess the job coaching needs and subsequent provision for those with ALN, alongside their Into Apprenticeships support²⁹.

²⁸ <https://www.engagetochange.org.uk/>

²⁹ <https://www.gov.wales/apprenticeships-guide-disabled-learners-html>

ix. Case Study: Engage to Change

Engage to Change is a Wales-wide project which helps 16–25-year-olds with additional learning needs (ALN) to develop their transferrable skills and overcome barriers to paid employment. The project is delivered through a consortium of organisations led by Learning Disability Wales (LDW). It has now reached the end of its seven-year funding period and staff are currently working on legacy programmes.

We visited the project in Cardiff University and spoke to some of the young autistic people who had been coached into meaningful paid employment through the coaching support provided by the programme. The programme has provided supported internships, job matching, and work experience tailored to the needs of those with ALN.

LDW told us that they had proposed a form of National Job Coaching Service for learners with ALN to the Welsh Government, as one that could be scaled up Wales-wide based on the success of Engage to Change. This idea helped to inform the Welsh Government’s Jobs Growth Wales Plus scheme, and job coaches will be funded until March 2023. LDW are lobbying for more to be provided (and for longer) via Careers Wales. However, the vision of a National Job Coaching Service has not yet quite been realised due to barriers aforementioned, in particular the divisions between devolved and reserved responsibilities.

Recommendation 8: The Welsh Government should review support for job coaching for those transitional learners with Additional Learning Needs who request it. With reference to the good practice developed by Engage to Change and Learning Disability Wales, an ALN job coaching strategy should be prepared, expanding the provision of specialist coaches to support learners with ALN to gain paid employment.

5.2 Developing Welsh language skills and awareness

The Census 2021³⁰ results showed a decrease in the percentage of children and young people reported as being able to speak Welsh, since 2011. In both 2011 and 2021, children and young people aged 5 to 15 years old were more likely to be reported as being able to speak Welsh than any other age group. However, the percentage of 5- to 15-year-olds reported as being able to speak Welsh decreased, from 40.3% in 2011 to 34.3% in 2021. This suggests a need for an increased focus on the Welsh language during early education and continued throughout the learning career.

The Welsh Government’s Welsh in Education Workforce Plan³¹ already sets out the steps it will take over the next 10 years to increase the number of teachers and support workers able to work through the medium of Welsh and teach Welsh. The plan also includes actions to support the development of the Welsh language skills and expertise of the existing workforce, which will increase awareness and use of the Welsh language through education. In turn, this will increase bilingual skillsets of young people transitioning into employment.

³⁰ [Census 2021](#)

³¹ [Welsh in Education Workforce Plan](#)

The new curriculum puts a key focus on the Welsh language³² and allows schools the freedom to incorporate the language across other subject areas, opening up the possibilities of exposure to new bilingual terms relating to the workplace. This will be strengthened by the Welsh language standards that are already to be met by employers³³ and in the Government's push to reach a target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050³⁴. However, in order to create a nation where people speak and use the language as part of their everyday lives, Wales also needs to increase the number of learners in Welsh-medium schools³⁵. This will have a knock-on effect in the future workplace.

This research shows that Welsh Government's funding for community-based language initiatives is having a clear impact in practice, on the ground. According to professionals with a focus on growing the Welsh language, the requirements set out in the Welsh Language Standards across the economy has seen that the demand for a bilingual workforce is increasing. Principal of Coleg Y Cymoedd - Jonathan Morgan told us that colleges are *"committed to the promotion and facilitation of the Welsh Language and continue to see new opportunities to ensure the language continues to grow"*.

The continued prioritisation from Welsh Government on the focus of encouraging bilingual skills is important, to ensure the growth and protection of Welsh speaking across sectors. As well as, to support the continued use of the Welsh language throughout the transition from education and into employment.

x. Case study: Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

Coleg Cymraeg works with further education colleges, universities and employers to create opportunities to train and study in Welsh. Coleg Cymraeg has provided £160,000 of investment to Coleg y Cymoedd over the last four years, which has supported their campuses to provide a Welsh medium and bilingual provision to learners, whatever their Welsh language skills. This provision is available in a number of fields including as Sport, Health and Social Care and Public Services.

Coleg Cymraeg's vision for the sector is to ensure that the Welsh language is accessible to all. As well as, building a Welsh and bilingual education and training system which is open to everyone. To achieve this, a skills development model is being used to increase levels of awareness, understanding, confidence and fluency – leading to the upskilling of everyone in the sector.

With the support of Coleg Cymraeg, Coleg Y Cymoedd in Ystrad Mynach is increasing the level of support for learners to use and develop their Welsh language skills within their chosen vocation. It is ensuring sufficient staffing capacity at a range of linguistic levels to support learners and apprentices and developing bilingual and Welsh-medium provision in their colleges across the country. Finally, the Coleg is ensuring sufficient resources and qualifications are available to support this learning through the medium of Welsh.

Recommendation 9: Alongside the other recommendations, an element of Welsh language awareness and skills should be included as appropriate for all learners regardless

³² [Summary of legislation - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

³³ [Welsh language standards \(welshlanguagecommissioner.wales\)](#)

³⁴ [Cymraeg 2050: Welsh language strategy | GOV.WALES](#)

³⁵ [Census 2021](#)

of their Welsh language skills. Welsh language awareness and skills includes: increasing awareness of Wales as a bilingual nation; promoting the advantages of bilingual skills in the workplace; and introducing or consolidating Welsh language skills including relevant vocabulary and key phrases for the workplace.

5.3 Protected characteristics

Fundamental to opening up opportunities to as many learners as possible is broadening access to those opportunities amongst marginalised learners. These include learners with any of the nine protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 (age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation)³⁶; and young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)³⁷. Broadening access to appropriate learning and training opportunities, as well as the accompanying impartial advice and guidance, is particularly important when such learners are located in communities that rank high on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)³⁸.

Coleg y Cymoedd told us of Careers Wales that *'primarily now their work is probably more doing NEETs and looking at the NEETs agenda compared to the old day, days where we would have had a careers adviser who would have met with all the learners'*.

The college believed this was due to limited resources within Careers Wales. However, if there is work already being dedicated to such marginalised groups, it would make sense to build on existing good practice by mainstreaming it across the post-compulsory education and training (PCET) sector. Not all learners need a one-to-one session with a careers adviser. Careers Wales must be able to focus their effort and limited resource on those that need their support and are also available to anyone else that wants to get in touch.

Furthermore, opening up opportunities works both ways. The most able and talented learners should be made fully aware of vocational opportunities that may be available to them. The 'traditional' academic route of A Levels and university may not necessarily be the most appropriate pathway for all such learners. Interestingly, Coleg y Cymoedd noted that two nearby local authorities (from neither of which they draw the majority of their student cohort) had moved to a fully tertiary provision of PCET and added that *'if you looked at the learner outcomes...where data was shared across colleges, the best results'* were in one of those local authority areas.

xi. Case Study: Seren Academy

The Seren Academy is a Welsh Government initiative 'dedicated to helping Wales' brightest state-educated learners achieve their full academic potential'³⁷. Its primary focus to date has been in helping to secure the most able and talented learners at Welsh state secondary

³⁶ [Protected characteristics | Equality and Human Rights Commission \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/protected-characteristics)

³⁷ [Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\): October 2021 to September 2022 | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/young-people-not-in-education-employment-or-training-neet-october-2021-to-september-2022)

³⁸ [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation \(WIMD\) 2019: Results report \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/welsh-index-of-multiple-deprivation-wimd-2019-results-report)

schools obtain places at prestigious universities³⁸. However, the programme could also be utilised to link such learners with vocational opportunities, such as higher-level apprenticeships, of which they may not necessarily be made aware in a more traditional school sixth form setting.

Dawn Chadwick, Head of the Seren Academy, told us her team is working with her vocational qualifications (VQ) colleagues to explore and map out how Seren learners can be informed about higher and degree apprenticeships and the career opportunities available to them in Wales and beyond. We need to map out the current provision and communications with learners and develop a programme of opportunities for the Seren learners to learn about the pathway of a degree apprenticeship, so they can make an informed decision about their educational journey. We're also in touch with UCAS as they explore the degree apprenticeship application process. The Seren Academy's delivery programme has been mapped out against the new Areas of Learning Experiences identified in the new Curriculum for Wales. Seren currently supports the top learners from four AoLEs and the team are now looking into how we can also support those who are the top learners in the other two AoLEs to excel to the highest level.

The Institute for Physics (IoP) expressed their concerns with a fragmented vocational learning sector that echoed many of the comments we had previously received. The IoP recommended that the gender imbalance in the STEM science-based subjects should be addressed by amending the Welsh Government's existing frameworks to '*make clear that providers need to gather more information about students' aspirations—subject choices, career intentions, post-16 education routes*' so that learners are guided by aspirations and not stereotypes. In terms of access to apprenticeships, the IoP also recommended that financial support needed to be increased for those from disadvantaged backgrounds; as well as for those living in rural areas who wanted to access technical apprenticeships, which are mainly located in the major employment centres and industrial areas of Wales.

Recommendation 10: With regards to all the other recommendations, the Welsh Government should ensure that opportunities within careers and work-related experience (CWRE) are broadened as much as possible to include learners with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010; young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET); as well as raising awareness amongst the already most able and talented learners of vocational opportunities that may be available to them.

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APPENDIX: List of Interviewees and Respondents

The following is a list of all individuals and organisations either interviewed by us, or who submitted written evidence to us, as part of our research whilst carrying out this review. The list is in alphabetical order by name of the individual (where one person was interviewed) or organisations (where more than one person was interviewed).

ASCL (Association of School and College Leaders) Cymru

Cardiff and Vale College

Careers Wales

CBI (Confederation of British Industry) Wales

Dawn Chadwick, Head of Seren Academy, Welsh Government

Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

Coleg y Cymoedd

Colleges Wales/Colegau Cymru

Dr Francis Cowe, Director of FE Partnerships, University of South Wales

FSB (Federation of Small Businesses) Cymru Wales

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

IOP (Institute of Physics) Wales

Angela Kenvyn, Engage to Change Project Manager, Learning Disability Wales

NAHT (National Association of Head Teachers) Cymru

North Wales Regional Skills Partnership

NPTC Group of Colleges

National Union of Students (NUS) Wales

Daniel Owen, Head Teacher, Llanidloes High School

Chris Parry, Head Teacher, Lewis School Pengam

Jeff Protheroe, Strategic Advisor for Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeships, Colleges Wales/Colegau Cymru

Regional Learning and Skills Partnership for South-West Wales

St Martin's School, Caerphilly

Transport for Wales

UCU (University and Colleges Union) Wales

Universities Wales