



Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

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06/02/2025

Dear Chairperson,

Consultation: Apprenticeship pathways

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the above consultation. My response will focus on the apprenticeship sector in a Welsh language context. One of the Welsh Government's aims in its *Cymraeg 2050* strategy is to expand further and higher education provision in Welsh and provide opportunities to pursue Welsh-language apprenticeships. The aim is to support everyone, no matter how fluent they are in Welsh, to develop Welsh language skills for use socially and in the workplace. However, there is a lack of Welsh-medium provision in the post-16 education and training sector, particularly in more vocational areas.

We have discussed this in our recent response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's consultation on routes into post-16 education and training. We attach a copy of this response as it relates to your consultation. We believe it will help you understand the challenges facing those seeking to take a Welsh-medium route through the post-compulsory education and training sector, including apprenticeships. Similarly, we would like to draw your attention to our research [report](#) on the views and experiences of post-16 learners in Welsh-medium or bilingual education in schools and further education colleges across Wales. We outline below the main issues discussed in both documents.

Risks and Priorities

There are a number of challenges in the post-compulsory education and training sector, including:

- lack of Welsh-medium provision
- inaccessibility of Welsh-medium provision due to distance
- lack of Welsh-medium qualifications

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- young people's lack of confidence in their Welsh language skills
- learners' perception that further studies are likely to be in English or that there are better study prospects through the medium of English

The post-compulsory education and training sector should aim to overcome these challenges by focussing efforts on the following priorities:

- reversing the decline in the numbers studying a substantial proportion of their education through the medium of Welsh in the post-16 sector, particularly in further education colleges and work-based learning
- ensuring that young people continue to develop their Welsh language skills and adopting the Government's proposed Welsh language continuum for that purpose
- increasing the availability of Welsh-medium qualifications and encouraging take-up by learners
- providing opportunities for individuals to gain confidence in Welsh, positively influencing their perception of the importance of the language within the context of work
- creating a workforce with adequate Welsh language skills, strategically deployed across and within different organisations in Wales

Potential of Welsh-medium apprenticeships

Apprenticeships create a key link between education institutions, Welsh speakers and the companies and sectors seeking workers with bilingual skills. Through this link, it is possible for the sector to meet the needs of Welsh speakers and their communities in a highly effective way. Apprenticeships can place Welsh speakers exactly where they are needed and thereby contribute directly to the achievement of some of the core objectives of the *Cymraeg 2050* strategy. There is huge potential to expand Welsh-medium and bilingual apprenticeships, particularly given that the numbers undertaking Welsh-medium apprenticeships remain very low at the moment. The Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities has called for better planning by local authorities, health boards and other major public sector organisations so that more Welsh-medium apprenticeships can be offered. In the Commission's opinion, this would create favourable conditions to enable young people to stay in their communities in areas of higher density linguistic significance.¹

Welsh language data in the apprenticeships sector

One of the challenges in the post-16 sector is a lack of clear data on the Welsh language. Robust, up-to-date data is essential to establish the number of learners studying through the medium of Welsh. Information about learners' Welsh language skills must therefore be shared between schools, apprenticeship providers and employers. Learners' progression also needs to be monitored to measure their progress in the context of the Welsh language as they accomplish their apprenticeships.

¹ The Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities: [Empowering communities, strengthening the Welsh language](#)



The development of Welsh-medium work-based learning starts from an extremely low baseline. The latest data on the work-based learning sector shows some increase in Welsh-medium and bilingual learning activities (see the table below). Despite this, the overall increase in Welsh-medium and bilingual provision is mainly based on an increase in learning activities involving 'a small amount of Welsh-medium learning'. While we would not wish to discount the significance of this progress, there is a need to ensure that more learners undertake a more significant proportion of their learning and training through the medium of Welsh in the work-based learning sector.

Table: Learning activities by medium of provision in work-based learning, Lifelong Learning Wales Record, Welsh Government²

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Welsh only	0.3% 620	0.4% 685	0.3% 515	0.3% 520	0.4% 565	0.5% 675	0.8% 945	0.7% 750	0.6% 710
Bilingual	3.4% 6,475	3.1% 5,045	3.2% 5,135	2.9% 4,850	2.9% 4,305	2.9% 3,620	3% 3,730	2.9% 3,065	3% 3,640
A significant amount of Welsh-medium learning	0.2% 325	0.3% 415	0.3% 465	0.3% 530	0.3% 435	0.3% 380	0.4% 555	0.6% 595	0.5% 580
Small amount of Welsh-medium learning	3.2% 6,110	4.7% 7,675	6.9% 10,945	6.7% 11,010	8.3% 12,355	9.3% 11,495	13.3% 16,525	19.5% 20,450	25.5% 30,325
English only	92.8 174,875	91.5% 148,665	89.3% 142,285	89.3% 147,775	88.1% 130,455	87.0% 107,850	82.5% 102,239	76.3% 79,810	70% 83,210
Welsh and bilingual - total	7.2%	8.5%	10.7%	10.3%	11.9%	13.0%	17.5%	23.7%	29.6%

² [Learning activities by medium of delivery and provider type in work-based learning](#)



Welsh-medium qualifications

The lack of Welsh-medium qualifications is a problem and means that Welsh-speaking learners do not have the same range of choice of qualifications as their peers in the English-medium sector. Among the challenges identified by Qualifications Wales are difficulties with recruiting and retaining Welsh-speaking assessors and the need for long-term funding to cover the costs of providing external assessments in Welsh.³ Qualifications Wales has a strategy to increase the availability of Welsh-medium qualifications. This includes targeting post-16 vocational qualifications according to strategic priority areas, consulting with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and working proactively with awarding bodies. Qualifications Wales reported that it had surpassed its initial target of 120 qualifications to prioritise to be made available in Welsh between 2023 and 2025. Further work in this direction should be supported.

It must be kept in mind that the Welsh-medium provision in the sixth form in schools is much stronger than that offered by the vast majority of post-compulsory education providers in further education colleges. However, it is the further education colleges, rather than the schools, that offer the widest choice of vocational courses and qualifications. This means that learners are most likely to go to a further education college to follow a course of this type. Learners who choose a vocational route are, therefore, less likely to be able to choose Welsh-medium provision and qualifications than those who continue to study at school.

The role of employers in highlighting the demand for Welsh language skills

There is an emphasis in *Cymraeg 2050* on the importance of post-compulsory education and training providers in maintaining learners' Welsh language skills to meet the growing demand for a bilingual workforce. We believe that employers also have an important part to play in this context, both in terms of creating demand for apprentices and workers with Welsh language skills and encouraging learners to value and develop those skills. There are by now around 125 organisations across Wales under the Welsh language standards regime, including some of Wales' largest employers. There is no question that the standards regime is responsible for substantially increasing the demand for individuals who can work bilingually. We also know that Welsh is a skill valued by many organisations outside the Welsh language standards regime. These include small and large businesses, some of which have received the Cynnig Cymraeg recognition from the Commissioner. Consideration should be given to how to support employers in highlighting the need for a workforce with Welsh language skills. Apprenticeship providers and employers should work with each other, as well as schools, to ensure that there is a clear route from statutory education to the workplace that maximises learners' Welsh language skills.

³ Qualifications Wales: [Progress Report: Our approach to increase the availability of Welsh-medium post-16 vocational qualifications](#)



Identifying needs as a basis for planning

Tied to this, skills needs must be understood and provision planned on that basis. In this context, there is an important role for the Regional Skills Partnerships. Following a report in 2019 by the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee on the [Regional Skills Partnerships](#), the Welsh Government agreed that the Partnerships' ability to collect and analyse data on the Welsh language must be substantially improved.⁴ The North Wales Regional Skills Partnership has mapped out apprenticeship pathways and the Welsh-medium/bilingual provision in its area. All Partnerships should be supported to provide comprehensive information on the provision of Welsh-medium apprenticeships across Wales and to maximise their links with employers to identify their needs. This would be a basis for the deliberate and efficient planning of provision and support for apprentices with Welsh language skills.

Building on good practice

Three organisations that make a key contribution to Welsh-medium apprenticeships are the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, Urdd Gobaith Cymru and the National Centre for Learning Welsh. Their work includes training apprentices in a number of different sectors, working in partnership with employers and education and training institutions, and providing Welsh language courses and specialist resources. Since 2019 the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol has been implementing the [Further Education and Apprenticeship Welsh-medium Action Plan](#). The plan sets out actions over the short, mid and long term in relation to six key strategic areas, including increasing staffing capacity, improving provision and expanding resources. All three organisations must be supported in continuing their work to maintain the momentum they have established. The Culture, Communications, Welsh language, Sport and International Relations Committee, in its scrutiny report on the Welsh Government's draft budget for 2024-25, said, "Ensuring continued growth in the number of learners undertaking some or all of their post-16 education in Welsh, and in particular via apprenticeships and work-based learning is vital."⁵

Medr will have a central role in coordinating this work using a collaborative approach to develop Welsh language provision across the tertiary education sector, including apprenticeships. The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol will have a special role in the context of Welsh language provision. We support Medr's commitment in its draft strategic plan to develop a national plan to increase opportunities for learning and assessment through the medium of Welsh. We welcome the fact that developing Welsh language provision is one of its five strategic aims. We look forward to working with Medr, the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and other stakeholders to contribute to future developments.

I hope the above comments will be helpful to the consultation.

⁴ [Response by the Welsh Government to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee's report on Regional Skills Partnerships](#)

⁵ Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee: [Scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget for 2024-25](#)



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Yours faithfully,

Efa Gruffudd Jones
Welsh Language Commissioner