

Enterprise and Business Committee

APPO4

Inquiry into Apprenticeships

Evidence from ISA Training

Inquiry into apprenticeships in Wales (Welsh Government Enterprise and Business Committee)

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Enquiry Terms of reference

- Does the current apprenticeship system provides effective support to the Welsh economy
 - Is the current apprenticeship system meeting the current and future skills needs of employers in Wales?
 - With increased priority on apprenticeships for 16-24 year olds, are apprenticeships an attractive option for young people?
 - Do the systems for establishing Apprenticeship Standards and Frameworks and recruiting apprentices work effectively?
1. How effective is employer involvement in the apprenticeship system in Wales?

This is dependent on the apprenticeship route and the ability of the employers to be able to have the time, knowledge and infrastructure to feed into the apprenticeship system. Large employers are more effective at this as they have the capacity and the incentive to get involved. SME and small businesses often have the desire to get involved but due to the size of the business and their commitment to it they are unable to do so. We work with many SMEs and micro businesses who commit a considerable amount of time and effort into the apprenticeship system.

2. Has employer involvement in the apprenticeship system changed as a result of the current economic circumstances?

This would be difficult to quantify but there is definitely more awareness of apprenticeships as a result of the economic climate. This is most probably due to apprenticeships being in the news more frequently and the drive to promote and recruit them. Apprenticeships are now being viewed as a meaningful alternative to academic study via sixth form and university. This still requires more education for schools and careers to ensure that they

promote/offer apprenticeships to all learners regardless of ability as an alternative to traditional routes post 16.

3. Are employers able to find sufficient numbers of young people with the skills and aptitudes that they require?

In our industry there is no issue with recruiting suitable apprentices with the desired skill sets. If there are any skills shortages these would concur with SSC research in that the apprentices lack basic skills in literacy and numerous and confidence. Employers are less interested in the basic skills and more keen to find confident able young people.

4. Do relationships between employers and training providers work effectively?

We work very hard to build positive relationships with our employers. This relies on excellent communication between us the employer and the learner. Our staff are the key to this as they are the ones that hold together the relationships. We have a learner, staff and employer involvement strategy to ensure we complete the feedback loop and that everyone is involved in the apprenticeship and its quality. All employers ISA works with understand clearly the 'tripartite' relationship that must exist between the learner, the employer and the trainer/assessor. This is a key component to supporting the apprenticeship programme.

5. Are apprenticeship opportunities still limited to certain sectors? If so, which in your opinion would benefit from apprenticeship expansion?

N/A

6. Do social enterprises make effective use of apprentices?

N/A

7. Has the number of apprentices employed by local authorities, and the public sector generally, increased or decreased? Should the public sector be recruiting more apprentices?

Apprentices should be in workplaces that benefit them and their education, naturally the most effective apprenticeship programmes would be in the private sector but if there are benefits to the public sector then this option should be explored.

8. The Welsh Government is encouraging Community Benefits clauses in public sector contracts which can be used to promote the employment of trainees and apprenticeships. Is this an effective mechanism for increasing the numbers of apprentices?

Sounds like a loop hole and will facilitate pumping funding back into the public sector is this appropriate?

9. What is the average profile of an apprentice in your organization?

Age: 16-25

Gender: female

Employment Sector: hairdressing and beauty therapy

10. Has this profile changed or is it changing and, if yes, what are the reasons for this?

Not changing

11. Are apprenticeships generally successful from the perspective of the apprentice?

Clearly feedback needs to be obtained from the apprentices themselves to gain accurate feedback. Our evidence suggests that well over 80% complete their apprenticeships. This has clear benefits to them in that they then have the ability to work, earn and learn at the same time. WE would hope the enquiry would interview apprentices for their view.

12. Are apprenticeships generally successful from the employer's perspective?

As the apprentices are employed by the employer success would be to some extent in the employer's hands. If the employer invests time and effort and is committed to let the learner develop their skills and complete their qualifications then the apprenticeship will be a success for all involved. Occasionally learners are taken on as apprentices to support the work of the business but are not given the support and training by the employer that they need to succeed.

13. Have apprenticeship completion rates changed in recent years? If so, how?

Yes they have improved year on year in line with requirements for improvement from DfES and Estyn. The sector has worked hard to improve the quality of the training for the apprentices by sharing best practice, rigorous monitoring and excellent support mechanisms.

14. In practice, are apprentices guaranteed a job at the end of the apprenticeship?

All our apprentices are 'employed status' apprentices and have a contract of employment with their employer. However, there is never a concrete guarantee as in the current economic climate businesses cannot accurately predict if they will be in a position to offer continued permanent employment at the end of the apprenticeship. We make every effort to ensure, as best we can, there is an opportunity for continued employment when we commence an apprenticeship programme with employers whom we work

15. Do Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus provide effective support for people wanting to find apprenticeships?

Careers Wales do and they have effective links with providers. It would be beneficial if they were to run more events to promote the different opportunities as these are very useful. Job Centre Plus are less effective as they do not have the same links which disadvantages for the post 18 group of learners.

16. Does the new Apprenticeship Matching Service, run by Careers Wales, work effectively?

The system is commendable and is a useful tool for providers, learners and employers. However we find that our employers prefer to source their own apprentices and that many apprentices are progressed from our education programmes into apprenticeship schemes. The matching service is time consuming for all parties. It would be disappointing if the tool became mandatory for funding purposes as it could slow down the recruitment of apprentices.

17. Why do young people decide to be apprentices? What factors influence their decision?

We think this question would need to be put to a focus group of apprentices to get a true picture of why they make the decision to be an apprentice. Their decision will be heavily influenced by their previous education experiences and the options presented to them by family, friends, school and Careers guidance.

A very important point: - within the hair sector this is the accepted route into becoming a professional hairdresser and has been for the past 20+ years

18. Are apprenticeships an attractive option for young people of all abilities or are apprenticeships seen as a second best option compared with higher education?

The view is changing as university becomes a very expensive option for young people. Apprenticeships are more high profile than they have been in

the past and they are becoming a viable option for all abilities of learners. However there are still many barriers to overcome before they have true parity of esteem with other routes.

19. Are attitudes (as per question 20) changing and if yes, what are the reasons for this?

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20. Are apprenticeships fully understood by those who have most influence on the choices of young people for example parents/carers, careers teachers in schools, teachers generally? Is there too much complexity and choice of programme?

No they are still not fully understood by those who have the most influence. It is not to do with complexity or choice it is about recognising and promoting the value of learning and earning as a credible route to a successful career. Many of the teacher and careers advisors will have no knowledge of apprenticeships as they will have followed a traditional academic route themselves. It is about getting the right people to talk to learners and in educating those who influence young people.

21. Education and training, including apprenticeships are devolved matters, but employment law is not. Do young people have sufficient rights and access to apprenticeship training? If not, how could the situation be improved?

We can't always provide the apprenticeships that young people require due to the way in which starts are distributed and capped by age and route. This does not however have any direct link to employment law.

22. Are the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) promoting and supporting apprenticeships effectively? How does the capacity of SSCs affect their performance in this area?

The Hair & Beauty sector has only just secured SSC status through Skills Active. We assume that as HABIA (Standard Setting Body for Hair & Beauty) were not funded or resourced sufficiently, this was the reason why they weren't promoting or supporting the apprenticeship programme effectively.

Time will tell whether Skills Active have the resources to promote and support apprenticeships effectively within our sector.

23. Is European funding being used to support apprenticeships effectively?

Yes the funding is so valuable in enabling these programmes to exist and to give all the apprentices some excellent opportunities to progress their learning, skills, development and careers.

24. Are there examples of good practice apprenticeship systems in other countries that Wales can learn from?

In many other countries (Germany; Australia; Switzerland; Austria; Denmark) the Apprenticeship route is recognised as the true source of a skilled workforce which sustains international competitiveness. Apprentices are at the core of the economy and so should be in Wales.

The commitment of time our employers, learners and ourselves invest in the apprenticeships - five years to become a professional L3 hairstylist, illustrates and recognises apprenticeships as a critical educational and training crossroad.