

Medr response to Children, Young People, and Education Committee's report on 'routes into post-16 education and training'

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg |

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Response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's report on 'routes into post-16 education and training'

Introduction

Medr welcomes the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee report on [Routes into post-16 education and training](#). The report, published on 12 November 2025, included 16 recommendations. We accept the findings and recommendations as they relate to Medr.

As the national steward of tertiary education and training in Wales, Medr is committed to shaping a tertiary education system in which everyone can acquire the skills and knowledge they need for a changing economy and society.¹ We recognise that coherent, easy-to-navigate learning pathways and improved flexibility will facilitate increased participation and retention and give learners greater access to opportunities that enable them to thrive.

The creation of Medr, and the commitments we have set out in our [Strategic Plan](#), contribute to making learner journeys more simple and flexible. Medr has a Strategic Duty to promote lifelong learning and widening participation across the post-16 sector, including further education, apprenticeships, adult and community learning, higher education, and work-based learning. This broad remit places Medr at the centre of delivering the report's ambitions for a more coherent, flexible and collaborative post-16 sector that encourages learners to obtain education and skills via whichever educational pathway is right for them.² We will do so by aligning our regulatory and funding frameworks and will continue to work with Welsh Government and partners across the post-16 sector to create a sector where learners can move confidently between pathways and access high-quality learning opportunities.

In our role overseeing a joined-up tertiary system, we are committed to building an understanding of learner behaviour and decision making, including through the effective use of data, so that we can identify the factors that drive learner choices and develop robust insight into learner journeys across the system. We are already making improvements to the breadth and timeliness of the data we publish, and through our Strategic and Operational Plans we have committed to strengthening the evidence base that underpins policy development and system stewardship. Central to this work is our commitment to working collaboratively with key stakeholders to further improve the breadth and timeliness of data, ensuring it supports a more coherent, responsive and learner focused tertiary education system.

This response outlines the actions we are taking, or are planning to take, to address the findings relating to data, funding and policy reform. The report also makes a number of recommendations for Welsh Government where Medr can be expected to have a role. Our contributions to these recommendations are set out below.

¹ Strategic Aim 2, [Medr Strategic Plan 2025-2030](#)

² **Recommendation 1:** The Welsh Government should create a robust, over-arching, national strategy for post-16 education and training which includes, but is not limited to, pathways into employment. The strategy should encompass both academic and vocational pathways, thereby creating a strategic vision for a coherent and collaborative post-16 sector that encourages learners to obtain education and skills via whichever educational pathway is right for them.

Recommendation 10:

Medr should improve the quality and timeliness of published data about learners' education and training between the ages of 16 and 18, in response to the concerns set out in this report. In doing so, Medr should pay particular attention to:

- **data that follows learners' pathways at each stage after they leave year 11, to help understand learners' choices and where, why and when learners may be leaving or dropping out of education and training; and**
- **data about learners in FE colleges and work-based learning, particularly learners who are undertaking level 1 and 2 courses, including destinations for those on one-year courses**

Accept

Medr currently publishes a range of statistics on different aspects of the tertiary education system. We aim to publish this information in as timely a manner as possible and consider user needs when developing our statistics.

When Medr was formed in August 2024 we inherited a number of data functions. We have since committed to make improvements to the breadth and timeliness of the data we publish, for example:

- In February 2025, we published an [analysis of progression from Year 11 to tertiary education between August 2017 and January 2025](#). We plan to update this annually.
- We will be introducing a new practice of publishing earlier provisional data for enrolments in [FE, work based learning and adult community learning](#). Provisional data for 2025/26 will be included in the February 2026 publication.
- We have made improvements in the timeliness of apprenticeship starts publications data by using earlier data freezes for publications.
- We have also recently published an [analysis of learner destinations from post-16 learning](#)

We continue to work closely with UCAS to ensure appropriate use of their data on applications to HE.

Our Strategic and Operational Plans include commitments to develop a strong evidence base, informed by data.³ As part of this work, we are developing a progression measure to track the journey of learners when moving between sectors, levels and programmes of study. This will provide a more timely indication of progression within the tertiary education system than is provided by our existing learner destinations statistics.

³ *We will establish baseline data to provide a strong evidence base for our own planning and decision making and for informing government policy. Informed by data, and working with stakeholders, we will identify priorities for improvement, linked to national milestones (Strategic Plan, Founding Commitment)*

We are working to develop the way our data is presented to improve visibility and promote access and will be engaging with stakeholders for feedback on content in the coming months.

Recommendation 14:

Medr should work with ColegauCymru to evaluate where there are gaps in data about learners in FE colleges (such as their destinations post-18), and take steps to address those gaps by developing an accurate, timely and reliable dataset with a view to making that an annual release by the end of the 2025/26 academic year.

Accept

As outlined above in our response to recommendation 10, we are committed to improving the breadth and timeliness of our data.

We published an [analysis of learner destinations from post-16 learning](#) in December 2025. There is an inherent time lag in these statistics due to the complex data matching processes needed to calculate them. The development of more timely educational progression statistics (referred to in our response to Recommendation 10) aims to address these gaps.

Whilst our priority is to always ensure a statistical output which is robust and accurate, we will continue to work to make improvements to the timeliness of all our future publications wherever possible. As part of our processes for developing new and existing statistics, we will engage with key stakeholders including, but not limited to, ColegauCymru.

Recommendation 15:

As part of its approach to developing a degree apprenticeship framework for August 2027 onwards, Medr should carry out an assessment of the benefits or otherwise of the following in relation to increasing the number of degree apprenticeships available:

- **employers contributing to the cost of degree apprenticeship tuition fees, alongside the salary they pay the apprentice; and**
- **giving HE institutions the autonomy to develop degree apprenticeships independently of the Welsh Government**

Accept

Medr is currently developing a new Apprenticeship Programme to commence in August 2027 which will cover all levels of apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships. The new programme will be more responsive and flexible to address skills priorities to meet our changing economy. Medr is working to identify how the programme can respond to

changing demands in an agile way to ensure the right qualifications and skills are delivered to meet employer, learner and economic needs, including the balance between apprenticeships offered at different levels. We recently consulted widely on the new programme. The outcomes of the consultation will be published in spring 2026. An updated funding model is a key element of the new programme development. In considering the potential for employer contributions towards degree apprenticeships, we will take into account the outcomes of the Welsh Government's call for submissions on tertiary education participation and sustainability. We are also engaging with employers to understand the barriers and opportunities for them in relation to apprenticeship provision.

Medr, as the designated Issuing Authority, is responsible for developing and issuing [apprenticeship frameworks](#) in Wales. To be considered a Welsh Apprenticeship, provision must be included within a published framework. All frameworks are developed and tested in collaboration with industry experts, learning providers or universities and key stakeholders to ensure they meet the needs of the Welsh economy, evidenced by strong labour market intelligence and employer support, as well as meeting the requirements of the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards Wales (SASW). There are currently 23 apprenticeship frameworks across all sectors, and Medr has an ongoing programme of framework review to ensure they are up to date. Each review considers whether the framework includes appropriate pathways and progression routes, including to degree level. Degree apprenticeships were added to the construction framework in 2024/25, expanding the range of frameworks in which degree apprenticeship provision is available. A new construction degree pathway in Design will commence in September 2026. Maintaining an ongoing programme of framework review is a key element of ensuring that the new apprenticeship programme is responsive and agile.

Response to Recommendations where Medr can make a Contribution

Recommendation 1:

The Welsh Government should create a robust, over-arching, national strategy for post-16 education and training which includes, but is not limited to, pathways into employment. The strategy should encompass both academic and vocational pathways, thereby creating a strategic vision for a coherent and collaborative post-16 sector that encourages learners to obtain education and skills via whichever educational pathway is right for them.

Medr will continue to work to deliver of a more coherent and collaborative post-16 sector in line with our strategic duties by aligning our regulatory and funding frameworks to support a more integrated and learner-centred post-16 system. Achieving this vision requires genuine collaboration across the sector, and we are committed to working closely with partners to ensure that reforms are shaped by practical insight and the shared priorities set out in the report.

Medr has also recently undertaken a comprehensive mapping exercise of Higher Education provision which provides a strong evidence base to inform future policy direction and will form the basis of our submission to the call for evidence on participation and financial sustainability from the Minister for Further and Higher Education.

Medr continues to contribute to the Welsh Government's Vocational Education and Training (VET) Stakeholder Reference Group, which is considering future priorities for a VET strategy for Wales.

Recommendation 3:

The Welsh Government should expand the Junior Apprenticeships scheme to ensure that it is available to learners across Wales who are at risk of disengaging with their education. In doing so, it should address Estyn's concerns about Junior Apprenticeships, including about inconsistencies in the referral criteria, in the information provided to parents and in quality assurance processes; and ensure that robust safeguarding measures are embedded into the programme to protect 14-16 year-old learners as they experience education in a post-16 setting.

Expansion of the Junior Apprenticeship programme

In line with our Strategic Duty to encourage participation in tertiary education, Medr, working with the Welsh Government and the sector, successfully expanded Junior Apprenticeship provision to two further colleges in Wales for the 2025/26 academic year. Junior Apprenticeships provide learners at risk of disengaging from education with a meaningful pathway to Further Education (FE), apprenticeships and employment. Seven colleges across Wales now offer this provision. This was largely made possible by the

additional £200k (taking the total to £600k) invested in the programme by Welsh Government for 2025/26.

Medr will continue to work closely with the Welsh Government and further education colleges on the continued expansion of junior apprenticeships programme, increasing provision and choice for young learners in Wales, particularly those who have challenges engaging with more traditional pathways. Welsh Government has allocated an increased budget of £1m to support this further expansion in 2026/27. Nationwide adoption would, however, require a further increase in budget.

We recognise the importance of providing clear pathways for learners on junior apprenticeships to progress on to further learning, including higher level apprenticeships, and the importance of quality assurance in ensuring that the programme equips learners with the skills they need to progress (see below).

Concerns raised by Estyn

In response to Estyn's recommendations on addressing inconsistencies in referral criteria, quality assurance, information provided to parents, and safeguarding measures, Medr has worked with Welsh Government, Local Authorities and colleges to develop a guidance document that begins to address these issues.

The guidance encourages FE Colleges, schools and Local Authorities to ensure a robust selection process that includes determining a learner's aptitude for vocational learning. The Learner Entry and Eligibility Criteria also states that the selection process must consider whether the learner is at risk of becoming NEET and likely to benefit from this provision.

In relation to Estyn's concerns relating to quality assurance, Medr's guidance states that FE colleges should submit timely data to LLWR in line with the Post-16 Data Management Principles 2022. The Data Submission Requirements section requires institutions to ensure that data is submitted in the correct format and in a timely manner, in line with the conditions set out in the annual Terms and Conditions of Funding.

Medr will use LLWR data to monitor compliance with the programme specification. This will include programme monitoring of data and activity datasets to check that programme delivery requirements are being met. Medr is currently working to develop performance measures that includes learner destinations as this will be crucial in evaluating programme delivery. The aim of this provision is to enable learners who successfully complete the JA Programme to progress on to further learning, apprenticeship or employment at the age of 16.

The guidance also requires colleges to share information with learners, parents, and schools to ensure they are fully informed of the suitability of individual courses, taking care to avoid and work to overcome traditional gender stereotypes. It also requires schools to work collaboratively with the college to ensure that prospective learners and parents/carers receive comprehensive, impartial advice and guidance about all curriculum options that would be appropriate for the individual learner, as well as Junior Apprenticeships, where these are available.

Colleges are required to perform robust individual risk assessments, including operational risk assessments, and clarify responsibility for safeguarding arrangements for all learners and follow the 'All Wales Child and Adult Protection Procedures 2008' and the 'Prevent Duty Guidance 2015' when dealing with disclosures, concerns or allegations relating to safety, welfare and wellbeing. This includes any work experience placements arranged by the college. The guidance also requires schools to take responsibility for operational risk assessments for learners where they are dually registered and requires Local Authorities to provide support and guidance in relation to any safeguarding issue that cannot be resolved between the school and the college.

We will continue to work with Welsh Government and the sector to address the concerns raised by Estyn.

Recommendation 5:

The Welsh Government, working with Medr, should carry out a review of post-16 funding and legislation to explore:

- **whether, and to what extent, the current funding system incentivises competition between providers that affects the impartiality of careers advice for learners;**
- **how individual schools and colleges have overcome funding challenges to work together effectively**
- **whether any changes should be made to the post-16 funding system and legislation to incentivise collaboration between post-16 institutions (e.g. by moving away from a funding model based on pupil numbers, by providing grant funding to reward collaboration, or otherwise)**

The tertiary education sector is diverse, and we are committed to ensuring that our policies and funding create a system that fosters collaboration and enables more opportunities for every learner to realise their potential. In responding to Medr's strategic duty to promote collaboration and coherence in tertiary education and research, we have in train a programme of work which aligns with this recommendation. The full provisions of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 will come into force over the next few years which will support us in taking these ambitions forward.

In our Operational Plan, we have committed to developing and consulting externally on our funding policy principles. We have also committed to conducting a thorough review and analysis of the current tertiary education funding models to identify priorities for change. This work will need to align with the priorities of the next Welsh Government and consider the outcomes of the current government's call for evidence.

In October 2025, Medr launched a Post-16 Strategic Development Fund to encourage more collaboration within the tertiary education sector. The bidding process provides us with further intelligence from the sector about the type of projects that could be possible with some strategic investment, to inform future planning.

Recommendation 9:

The Welsh Government should explicitly include the impact on young people's access to post-16 education and training amongst its terms of reference in the forthcoming independent evaluation of its pilot of £1 maximum single fare/£3 maximum daily fare bus travel for young people.

While transport to and from educational settings is not within Medr's remit, we are aware from regular discussions with providers of the extent of this issue for learners across the tertiary education sector in Wales. We raised this at the Welsh Government's Learner Travel Summit in May 2025.

We will continue to work with Welsh Government to provide sector- and learner-information to inform its considerations, to feed into the post-16 workstream on learner travel.

Recommendation 11:

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out an analysis of:

- **why it believes that there is such a discrepancy between the proportion of learners who want to undertake an apprenticeship and the proportion of learners who end up doing one; and**
- **the extent to which barriers facing employers (such as the funding for apprenticeship programmes, and a lack of awareness amongst small to medium businesses) have contributed to the significant discrepancy between the demand for apprenticeship amongst young people and the actual number of apprenticeships available.**

As part of our wider engagement with employers and learners, Medr is seeking to better understand the factors and barriers that influence both learner choices and employer capacity, including funding constraints and awareness among small and medium sized businesses, and is reviewing employer engagement and initiatives such as the shared apprenticeships programme in collaboration with partners including Business Wales. This work directly supports the Welsh Government's aims by ensuring apprenticeship provision is responsive to the needs of learners, employers and the wider economy, while also helping to remove barriers to participation for both young people and businesses.

In developing the new apprenticeship programme to be delivered from August 2027, we are exploring what additional support employers need to be able offer apprenticeships, including the availability, accessibility and appropriateness of information available to them. Our ongoing engagement with employers provides insights into employer needs and barriers to accessing appropriate tertiary education provision.

We continue to fund shared apprenticeships, which particularly enable SMEs to offer apprenticeships by enabling learners to complete the apprenticeship requirements across several employers, and we are reviewing how this successful model can be best incorporated into the new programme. Our ongoing programme of framework reviews considers whether the pathways available are appropriate for enabling learners both to enter and to progress within an employment sector.

We will continue to work with Careers Wales, as well as with the tertiary education provider network, to improve the information, advice and guidance available to learners about apprenticeships. Medr is undertaking a programme of work with providers to strengthen the learner voice, which will contribute to our understanding of the factors influencing apprenticeship choices. Alongside this, we are establishing employer forums to explore the barriers employers face – including funding challenges and limited awareness among SMEs. This combined approach will support a clearer analysis of the reasons behind the current discrepancy and inform targeted actions to improve both learner engagement and employer participation.

More broadly, Medr is exploring mechanisms for establishing structured, strategic discussions with employers through business representative organisations, with the aim of building a mutual understanding of how the tertiary education sector in Wales can meet current and future skills needs and how Medr can support the development and availability of appropriate provision.

We recognise the need to improve advice and guidance to address the gap between learners' interest in apprenticeships and actual participation, however it is important to acknowledge that learners access apprenticeships through a range of pathways. When the proportion of learners undertaking an apprenticeship between age 16 and 19 are taken into account, the gap between aspiration and participation is notably smaller.

Recommendation 12:

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out:

- **why it believes that young men appear to be consistently more likely to become NEET than young women;**
- **how its work to improve the rates of participation in post-16 education and training has taken into account the different challenges facing young women and men; and**
- **whether it believes that any further work needs to be undertaken to better understand the underlying causes of NEETs, particularly in relation to variations in NEET rates between young women and men in Wales**

We recognise that participation rates in tertiary education are too low and the number of people not in education, employment or training is too high when compared to other regions of the UK. The persistently high level of NEETs in Wales is affected by a complex range of factors and will require a range of cross-Government interventions to tackle them.

Encouraging participation, promoting equality of opportunity, and lifelong learning in tertiary education are strategic duties for Medr set out in the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022. In our Strategic Plan we have committed to work with partners, including the Welsh Government and Careers Wales, to encourage more pre-16 learners to transition to tertiary education and reduce the proportion of people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

We have committed to develop an evidence base on participation in tertiary education, identifying levels of participation across the tertiary sector by region, drawing on social research and Medr's broader engagement activity. We will also set targets to increase participation, particularly among those underrepresented in tertiary education, who may face social, economic, cultural or organisational barriers to learning. One example of an intervention aiming to tackle this issue is the Junior Apprenticeship Programme (see response to recommendation 3).

Medr's equality of opportunity condition for regulation and funding emphasises the importance of widening participation, particularly for groups traditionally under-represented in tertiary education. As part of this focus, providers are expected to demonstrate meaningful actions that improve access, retention and outcomes for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. This aligns closely with initiatives such as the Reaching Wider programme, which prioritises engagement with school and college learners living in the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, helping to ensure that those facing the greatest structural barriers are supported to progress into higher-level study.

Recommendation 13:

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out its expectations of how post-16 education and training providers should provide careers advice and guidance to young people to help them make informed decisions about their steps post-18. In doing so, the Welsh Government should outline clearly where responsibility lies for that advice and the role of Estyn in holding institutions to account for the support they provide.

Within all post-16 mainstream programmes of study in local authorities and further education colleges, there is both a Work-Related Experience (WRE) strand and a Community Learner Industry Focus (CLIF) strand, which ensures that academic learning can be directly linked to real-world practice and community impact.

Medr provides funding to 12 FE colleges to run Employment and Enterprise Bureaus. The funding supports learner transition from education into employment or self-employment by developing the employability and entrepreneurial skills they need to achieve positive outcomes. The Bureaus prepare learners to enter the labour market, ensuring they are fully informed of the career options available to them, and facilitate links with employers, increasing the opportunities available to learners within colleges.

Ensuring access to careers advice will require close collaboration between Medr and key partners such as Careers Wales. Our strategic plan includes a commitment to work with

partners, including Welsh Government and Careers Wales, to encourage more pre-16 learners to progress into and succeed in tertiary education and to reduce the proportion who become NEET.

We recognise the leading role that Careers Wales, schools and local authorities all play in providing advice and guidance to pre-16 learners. This is critical to ensuring that young people have clear information on the full range of opportunities available to them after leaving compulsory schooling. Medr's work on learner voice includes the development of a new learner survey, which will help us to better understand learners' views of their experiences of tertiary education and how well it prepares them for their next steps into further learning or employment.

Reaching Wider plays a vital role in raising aspirations for higher education by creating inclusive, supportive pathways for learners who may not have previously considered university as an option. Through its mentoring programme, students are paired with trained mentors who offer encouragement, relatable guidance, and practical support in navigating educational choices. This personalised approach helps learners build confidence, understand the opportunities available to them, and develop clear goals for their future. Together, Reaching Wider and its mentoring programme empower individuals not only to imagine themselves in higher education, but to take the concrete steps needed to make those ambitions a reality.

Welsh Government is currently developing 16 to 18 local curriculum guidance for Medr which will set out the legal duties on the formation of 16 to 18 local curricula in Wales, which includes considerations of advice and guidance relating to the provision available in the post-16 space. We will work with WG following consultation.

Medr

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