

RESEARCH REPORT

Apprenticeship Programme in Wales: consultation

Prepared for:
Medr





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1. Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

In September 2025, Medr launched the Apprenticeship Programme in Wales consultation. It sought views from a range of stakeholders, including training and tertiary education providers, industry representatives, employers, and local authorities to help shape the new Programme from 2027.

The aim was to build on earlier engagement, deepen understanding of what is working well, and identify further improvements to ensure the new Apprenticeship Programme effectively meets the future skills needs of learners, employers, and the wider economy.

A broad range of stakeholders were invited by Medr to contribute to the consultation by responding to the online consultation questionnaire ([26 open-ended questions](#) developed by Medr) and / or shared their views by attending the five consultation events which were held online and face-to face.

Medr commissioned Beaufort Research to help facilitate the events with Medr and to analyse the outputs from the events and the online responses. The online consultation was open 15 September – 31 October 2025 and the five consultation events were held each week between 24 September and 22 October.

1.2 Findings summary

Feedback on the High Level Principles

- Stakeholders widely agreed the principles are comprehensive, positive, and provide a strong foundation for the new apprenticeship programme.
- The all-age approach and focus on flexibility, quality outcomes, and progression opportunities were strongly endorsed for supporting workforce upskilling and succession planning.
- Stakeholders valued the ambition for a system that meets learner and employer needs, with active employer involvement and alignment to Welsh industrial and skills strategies.
- While the principles were believed to cover essential areas, some stakeholders highlighted potential challenges in achieving them, particularly around flexibility and funding allocation.

- The current definition of ‘apprenticeship’ was generally seen as clear and accurate, but some stakeholders felt it could be enhanced to better reflect lifelong learning, career progression, and the diversity of apprenticeship opportunities.

Feedback on the proposed apprenticeship sector frameworks

- Stakeholders were broadly supportive of consolidating frameworks, with the new structure seen as promoting flexibility while still meeting the needs of learners and the Welsh economy. Stakeholders felt that the broader categories would help ensure that the frameworks remained relevant and adaptable to changing circumstances.
- The importance of ongoing review, stakeholder involvement, and adaptability to regional priorities was stressed to keep frameworks relevant.
- Some queries were raised about the clarity and practical implementation of some of the proposed frameworks. Stakeholders noted that certain sectors may be too broad or not clearly defined, which could lead to confusion.
- Stakeholders supported the proposals for how the frameworks could evolve over time including integrating priority skills (e.g. digital, green and soft skills), enabling flexibility and movement between sectors, and introducing micro-credentials / flexible ‘bolt-on’ courses and qualifications.
- The use of Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) and employer input was highlighted as essential for informing the development and review of frameworks. Stakeholders stressed that frameworks should be aligned with Regional Skills Partnerships and City and Growth deals, and that robust mechanisms for stakeholder input and transparent review cycles would be crucial for long-term success.

Feedback on learners

- Examples of what stakeholders felt works well with the current learner journey included strong provider expertise and support, and holistic and pastoral care; robust qualifications; close collaboration between providers, employers, and learners; aspects of the learning experience (e.g. real-world experience, high-quality teaching); the all-age approach and ability to earn while learning.
- A key theme was to strengthen Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) - especially from schools - upskill teachers, and to use engaging, accessible materials and relevant case studies. High profile communication campaigns were also recommended.

- Celebrating vocational routes and ensuring apprenticeships are valued alongside academic pathways were also deemed key.
- Suggestions for improving the learner journey covered embedding Essential Skills naturally, recognising prior learning, greater flexibility in delivery (e.g. modular, blended), more coherent progression routes between levels and sectors and enhancing learner support (e.g. peer networks).

Feedback on employers / industry

- Stakeholders' views on key areas to address that would encourage a wider range of employers to engage centred on:
 - Improving employer understanding and guidance through clear, targeted communication that emphasises apprenticeship benefits, and creating a central information hub / 'one-stop shop'
 - Simplified processes and reduced bureaucracy
 - Financial and non-financial incentives, especially for SMEs
 - Ongoing, proactive support, mentoring, and peer networks for employers
 - Greater flexibility in programme design and delivery
 - Stronger, more diverse employer involvement in programme design, delivery, and evaluation e.g. establishing / strengthening employer-led advisory boards, sector groups, and co-design panels; and embedding regular, structured feedback loops.

Feedback on engaging learning providers

- In terms of how providers can be more effectively engaged in the design, delivery, and evaluation of apprenticeship programmes, different types of stakeholders confirmed that providers should be strategic partners from the outset. Formalised consultation and continuous collaboration were deemed important to ensure programmes meet learner, employer, and regional needs.
- Suggestions for strengthening collaboration included regular, joined-up strategic forums and multi-stakeholder roundtables.
- Calls were also made for more frequent, transparent feedback loops, continuous evaluation, and structured data collection (e.g. Wales-wide learner surveys) to inform programme design and delivery.
- More broadly, current strengths identified from a provider perspective included strong provider-employer partnerships, learner support and inclusion, robust quality assurance, and blended learning.

- Areas for improvement suggested including greater funding flexibility (e.g. sustainable, multi-year funding), review of the '80% duration rule'¹, and closer provider-employer co-delivery.

Feedback on Welsh language apprenticeships

- There was strong support among stakeholders for embedding the Welsh language as a core principle in apprenticeship programme design, delivery, and evaluation.
- For stakeholders, the long-term success of this ambition depended on strategic investment to increase Welsh-medium provision through workforce development, increasing bilingual resources, employer engagement, and robust monitoring of take up and demand. More Welsh-speaking trainers and assessors are required to achieve this.
- While most stakeholders advocated for ambitious, inclusive, and practical approaches, a minority cautioned against imposing requirements where demand was low.

Feedback on inclusive apprenticeships

- Stakeholders' solutions for underrepresented groups' participation focused on:
 - Sustained, inclusive campaigns and targeted outreach to learners, parents, employers, and communities – and using diverse role models
 - Exploring options for financial support (e.g. bursaries, hardship funds, travel and childcare support)
- Funding wraparound support for mental health, ALN, and disabilities; embedding mentoring, coaching, and personalised learning plans; expanding post-completion support.
- Working with other organisations (e.g. Business Wales) to support employers in gaining wider knowledge of diversity, inclusive recruitment, and reasonable adjustments.
- Allowing flexible entry requirements (e.g. allowing learning providers to best assess the suitability of a programme based on their detailed knowledge of the learner); expanding bridging and pre-apprenticeship programmes.
- Maintaining, expanding and simplifying the Supported Apprenticeships and Employer Incentive Schemes.

¹ Apprentices must be in learning for at least 80% of the expected programme duration for the provider to draw down the full funding value for the apprenticeship framework. If an apprentice completes earlier than this, the provider receives a reduced funding amount.

(Some solutions put forward by stakeholders in the consultation are beyond the scope of the Apprenticeship Programme.)

The consultation underscores the pivotal role that high-quality information, advice, and guidance play in broadening learner participation, as well as the urgent need to engage a wider range of employers. Medr is already implementing plans to engage with employers to capture primary insights directly from employers and learners so that further enhancements to the apprenticeship offer in Wales can be fully developed.

2. Consultation background, objectives, method

2.1 Consultation aim and objectives

This consultation sought views from a range of stakeholders, including training and tertiary education providers, industry representatives, employers, and local authorities to help shape the new Programme post 2027.

The aim was to build on earlier engagement, deepen understanding of what is working well, and identify further improvements to ensure the new Apprenticeship Programme effectively meets the future skills needs of learners, employers, and the wider economy.

The objectives of the consultation were to seek views on:

- The High Level Principles to guide the new apprenticeship programme
- A definition of an apprenticeship
- Apprenticeship sector frameworks
- Employer engagement
- Apprentice learner journey
- Inclusive apprenticeships
- Apprentice outcomes
- Strengthening Welsh language opportunities.

2.2 Consultation method and sample

A broad range of stakeholders were invited by Medr to contribute to the consultation by responding to the online consultation questionnaire ([26 open-ended questions](#) developed by Medr) and / or by attending one of the five consultation events which were held online and face-to face.

This consultation sought views from a range of stakeholders, including training and tertiary education providers, industry representatives, employers, and local authorities to help shape the new Programme.

The five consultation events took place in 2025 as described overleaf.

Event date 2025	Format	Number of individuals
24 September	Teams	51
1 October	Face-to-face, Llandudno	38
8 October	Teams	69
15 October	Face-to-face, Cardiff	51
22 October	Teams	65

The online consultation was open from 15 September to 31 October 2025 and generated 84 responses.

Some solutions put forward by stakeholders in the consultation are beyond the scope of the Apprenticeship Programme.

3. What the new Programme is trying to achieve

This chapter focuses on the High Level Principles, Medr's draft definition of an apprenticeship, programme flexibility, innovation, and what success would look like in five years' time.

3.1 Are these High Level Principles right for the new apprenticeship programme in Wales?

Following initial engagement with key stakeholders, Medr developed a set of High Level Principles for the new Apprenticeship Programme. They aim to provide a clear strategic framework to guide the Programme's development ensuring it remains responsive to workforce needs, aligned with organisational values, and capable of delivering sustainable, high-quality learning outcomes. (See Appendix 1 for the full list of High Level Principles.)

Overall feedback on the High level Principles Stakeholders generally agreed that the High Level Principles were comprehensive, positive and appropriate and provided a strong foundation for the new Programme, with some commenting that they reflected current practices.

The High Level Principles were widely praised as positive and aspirational, demonstrating a strong commitment to inclusivity and responsiveness. The all-age approach to apprenticeships in Wales was strongly endorsed, with stakeholders highlighting that this inclusive model allowed existing employees to benefit, thereby supporting workforce upskilling and succession planning. There was also strong support among stakeholders for the principles' focus on flexibility, quality outcomes, and progression opportunities.

Stakeholders valued the ambition for a learner-centred system that also met employer and economic needs. There was also support from stakeholders on the recognition that active employer involvement was needed in shaping and supporting apprenticeships. The principles were further welcomed for their alignment with Welsh industrial and skills strategies, the recognition of regional

differences and local economic needs, and for incorporating previous stakeholder feedback.

While the principles were largely seen as covering all essential areas, stakeholders highlighted potential challenges in achieving them. Some wanted more detail on how these principles would be implemented within the new Apprenticeship Programme. Also, for some, the principles did not represent significant changes from the existing system, which was considered effective but could benefit from improvements, particularly in terms of flexibility and funding allocation. These concerns are discussed throughout the report in the relevant sections.

Effective management of expectations around funding availability emerged as a critical factor for achieving the High Level Principles and the success of the Apprenticeship Programme.

3.2 How can we make the apprenticeship programme more flexible to meet learner and employer needs, including responding to economic shifts, labour market demands, regional differences and future workforce trends in Wales?

While increasing flexibility was a prominent theme in stakeholders' consultation feedback, most suggestions in this area were closely aligned with topics that are addressed in other sections of the report. These included:

- Enhancing employer involvement in identifying emerging skills needs and shaping curriculum content
- Implementing more agile and responsive processes for reviewing and updating apprenticeship frameworks
- Expanding the use and availability of digital and blended learning
- Offering modular and credit-based delivery that enables apprentices to build qualifications in smaller, stackable units
- Increasing the flexibility of entry and progression pathways allowing learners to join and advance through apprenticeships at different stages and speeds

- Embedding funding flexibility and stability to support providers in responding to fluctuating demand and enabling learners to progress at their own pace without financial barriers
- Strengthening regional responsiveness to ensure that apprenticeship provision can be tailored accordingly
- Addressing barriers for underrepresented groups by creating more inclusive and flexible pathways.

3.3 What innovations or changes would you like to see in the future apprenticeship programme to ensure it remains relevant, inclusive, and impactful for the next generation of learners in Wales?

The main suggested changes offered by stakeholders for this question are already covered in other sections. For completeness, the themes in response to this question are outlined below:

- Leverage technology further by creating a central digital platform for learner engagement, tracking, and contract management, expanding remote and hybrid delivery and streamlining administrative processes using technology
- Involve employers in ongoing design, review, and delivery of frameworks and strengthen partnerships with SMEs and industry bodies as well as supporting shared apprenticeship models
- Target outreach and support for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, increase Welsh-medium and bilingual pathways and provide flexible assessment, delivery, and wraparound support
- Recognise prior learning and offer clear, visual career pathways
- Embed literacy, numeracy, digital, and Welsh language skills within vocational contexts, adapting Essential Skills requirements to sector and learner needs while integrating sustainability, AI, and green skills across all frameworks
- Move towards outcome-based funding models
- Use data-driven monitoring of outcomes and sector trends
- Strengthen careers advice and guidance at all education levels, increase visibility and parity of apprenticeships with academic routes.

3.4 What would success look like in five years' time?

The themes for this question largely reflected the Programme's current perceived strengths, stakeholders' proposed improvements in other chapters, and the aspirations outlined by Medr in the High Level Principles.

Participation, inclusion, and diversity

- Increased participation and completion rates across all demographics, especially among underrepresented groups (e.g. women in STEM, disabled people, those with additional learning needs, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, Welsh speakers, rural communities, adult learners, and career changers).
- Unemployment among young people including NEETs would be significantly lower.

Employer engagement and system responsiveness

- There would be stronger employer engagement and partnerships. Employers, especially SMEs, would be deeply involved in programme design, delivery, and review.
- Providers would be well connected to local industry, forming a coherent network that simplifies access for employers and learners. This would ensure that apprenticeship content was closely aligned with current and future skills needs, including digital, green, and sector-specific priorities.
- Employer satisfaction rates would be high as apprenticeships would be seen as responsive to workforce needs.

Quality, completion, and progression

- Quality benchmarks would be consistently met and would be measured through robust indicators such as learner satisfaction, timely completions, and positive employment outcomes, therefore ensuring the Programme was effective and trusted.
- There would be higher completion and progression rates, supported by clear and well-communicated pathways from entry-level through to degree apprenticeships.
- Apprenticeships would lead to sustained, skilled employment and long-term career success.

Funding stability and flexibility

- The Programme would have multi-year, stable funding cycles that provided certainty for long-term planning and investment.
- Funding arrangements would be flexible and responsive to emerging needs, enabling innovation and adaptation as priorities evolve.
- Parity in funding would be guaranteed across sectors and regions.

Welsh language and regional equity

- Welsh-medium and bilingual apprenticeship provision would have expanded at all levels to ensure language choice was fully supported.
- Equitable access to apprenticeships would be available across all regions, including rural and disadvantaged areas.
- Apprenticeships would actively contribute to sustaining the Welsh language and culture, embedding linguistic and cultural heritage within the skills system.

System flexibility, modernisation, and digital transformation

- The Programme would have modern, modular, and flexible apprenticeship frameworks. These would incorporate unit-based and micro-credential approaches to enable learners to build skills in a more adaptable way.
- Robust digital systems would be in place to support tracking, delivery, and administration, ensuring efficiency and transparency.
- Hybrid and flexible learning options would be available to accommodate industry needs and shift patterns, making apprenticeships accessible and practical for learners and employers.

Data, impact measurement, and continuous improvement

- Stronger destination and impact data such as sustained employment and career progression would be captured routinely to measure long-term outcomes so that success was not only determined by completion rates alone.
- Evidence-based research would be used to inform policy and practice, ensuring decisions were grounded in robust analysis.
- There would be continuous review and updating of apprenticeship frameworks in response to labour market intelligence.

Parity of esteem with academic routes

- Apprenticeships would be promoted and recognised as equal to academic pathways in status and opportunity.

- Schools, parents, and the wider public would value apprenticeships as a high-quality option, with clear and accessible progression routes to higher learning.
- Ultimately, apprenticeships would be seen as a first-choice, high-status route rather than a fallback.

3.5 Does the definition of a Welsh apprenticeship set out what the new Programme needs to deliver?

Medr's definition of an apprenticeship is outlined below:

'An apprenticeship is a paid job with training. Apprentices gain experience, learn new skills and gain a nationally recognised qualification while earning a wage. This is defined through an apprenticeship framework.'

Overall impression

Generally, stakeholders tended to agree that this definition of an apprenticeship was broadly accurate and clear. For some, the definition covered the essential elements of an apprenticeship, i.e. paid employment, training, and nationally recognised qualifications. However, some felt it was narrow in scope and lacked aspirational language. The definition, which stated that an apprenticeship is 'a paid job with training', was considered at times to be clear but basic.

Limited scope

A prevalent evaluation of the definition was the belief that it did not fully reflect the broader purpose of an apprenticeship as a structured pathway for lifelong learning, progression, and career development.

In addition, it was often believed that the definition needed to reflect the diversity and breadth of opportunities available. Some stakeholders noted that apprenticeships can span all levels, including higher and degree apprenticeships, where individuals may hold significant responsibilities or senior roles. It was felt by some, however, that the definition seemed to focus primarily on young people with phrases like 'gain experience' and therefore did not acknowledge apprentices of all ages and circumstances.

Insufficient employer and provider focus

The definition was perceived as too learner-centric by some, with insufficient emphasis on the critical roles and responsibilities of employers and training providers.

Need for more aspirational language

Stakeholders sometimes felt the definition should be more inspiring / aspirational, emphasising professional development, career pathways, and parity with other educational routes such as university. For some a 'paid job' sounded temporary and could potentially be mistaken for an employability programme or wage subsidy.

Eligibility and clarity

For some, the definition needed to clarify that apprenticeships are work-based learning experiences and that employment was a prerequisite for participation. In addition, a few stakeholders doubted whether the term 'framework' would be widely understood outside the sector and therefore questioned the need for the line 'this is defined through an apprenticeship framework'.

Occupational competence and qualifications

Some suggested the definition did not fully emphasise the validation of occupational competence and so felt the definition should focus on skills development, career progression and competence, not only qualifications.

Need for multiple definitions

A few stakeholders suggested it was difficult for a single definition to capture the breadth and range of apprenticeships available.

Points to consider

Given the points made above, the following suggestions for the definition were offered by stakeholders. Alternatively, these suggestions could be incorporated into the development of a broader contextual vision statement, which would help expand on the current definition whilst also addressing stakeholders' feedback:

- Expand the definition to make it more inclusive and relevant to all ages and levels of apprenticeships
- Clearly state the roles of employers and training providers, highlighting the tri-partite partnership involved
- Emphasise the benefits to the employer
- Emphasise the 'occupational competence', 'skills / reskilling' and 'knowledge' gained, and the flexibility offered by an apprenticeship

- Clearly communicate that employment is a mandatory requirement for participation. This will help manage expectations and ensure that learners, providers, and employers have a shared understanding of the eligibility criteria
- Use aspirational language that emphasises 'career development', 'lifelong learning', and 'professional development'
- Consider changing 'nationally recognised qualification' to 'industry recognised qualification' to indicate responsiveness to industry needs, and to emphasise partnership
- Consider developing multiple definitions to reflect the variety of apprenticeship pathways
- Emphasise the ability to earn while learning as this was seen by a few as a major advantage, especially in the current cost-of-living context
- Consult learners on the definition to ensure they understand it.

4. Apprenticeship sector frameworks

This chapter centres on reactions to sector framework plans for the 2027 Programme. Currently, 23 apprenticeship frameworks exist across all sectors. To enhance responsiveness to evolving demands, Medr is undertaking a comprehensive review of all frameworks between 2025 and 2027, with particular emphasis on green and digital skills. These reviews will prioritise seamless learner progression from Level 2 to degree apprenticeships, minimising duplication and facilitating effective advancement. Additionally, Medr aims to strengthen and simplify the quality of sector frameworks by introducing a new, streamlined structure with 18 frameworks, addressing evidence that the current system can be challenging for learners and employers to navigate.

Stakeholders were presented with the list of 18 frameworks that Medr has developed based on feedback from previous stakeholder engagement. Stakeholders were given the opportunity to comment on the new frameworks and identify any issues or gaps.

4.1 Are these sectors right to meet the needs of the economy and learners?

General reception and scope

The consolidation from 23 to 18 frameworks was, on the whole, largely welcomed by stakeholders. The broader categories were viewed as beneficial for promoting flexibility and meeting the needs of the Welsh economy and learners. The proposed sector frameworks were generally endorsed as a solid basis for ongoing development and growth.

It was thought that the sector frameworks' long-term effectiveness would rely on strong systems for continuous review, active stakeholder involvement, and the agility to meet changing needs. Regular reviews and adaptability to regional priorities within Wales were seen as essential, ensuring that qualifications remained relevant and were tailored to the needs of local businesses.

Queries and reservations

Some stakeholders expressed reservations about the practical implementation, clarity, and responsiveness of some of the frameworks to rapidly evolving labour market demands. Points made included the following:

- Although the majority of stakeholders agreed that green skills needed to be embedded across all sector frameworks, a few believed topics such as *Sustainability, Net Zero Technologies, Climate Adaption* needed their own distinct framework to reflect emerging priorities e.g. decarbonisation and the growing need for workforce capacity in carbon management, environmental planning, and sustainable procurement. In addition, regional variations in green skills demand were noted, such as wind energy in Mid Wales and marine energy in West Wales, and there were calls for the flexibility of frameworks to accommodate such differences
- The separation of *Health* from *Care* was sometimes questioned, with suggestions to combine them for better workforce mobility and perceptions of the sector. It was also suggested that these sectors naturally belong together given the common linkage in government priorities. In addition, a few pointed out that not all health-related pathways would have scientific content e.g. medical administration
- There were some mixed views about the *Education and Early years* category. A few suggested *Childcare* should be explicitly mentioned to aid understanding and prevent any misunderstanding. A small number believed *Childcare* should sit within the care sector. However, others felt *Education and early years* was a natural grouping
- The distinction between some sector titles (e.g. *Food and Drink vs Hospitality and Catering*) was unclear to some, potentially causing confusion for employers and learners
- The grouping of *Engineering and Manufacturing* was also seen as potentially confusing by a few, given the diversity within these areas and the need to recognise their distinct technical demands. The placement of specific pathways within the frameworks was debated on occasion. For example, some stakeholders preferred *Civil Engineering* to be included under *Construction and Built Environment* whilst others believed it belonged in *Engineering*
- There were also requests for clearer guidance on where the following fields / pathways would be included within the proposed sector frameworks: culture and heritage, life sciences and pharmaceuticals, marketing, scaffolding, ecology and biodiversity, housing, and tourism management.

4.2 Are there any broad occupational sectors that you would expect to see that are not included?

Most stakeholders agreed that the proposed list of sectors provides sufficient coverage of current needs while remaining broad enough to accommodate emerging pathways. However, a few suggestions were made by a relatively small number of stakeholders, these included:

- Degree-level apprenticeships (Level 6) are not available across all sectors, although some considered there was a wider demand. There were calls among stakeholders for analysis across sectors where degree apprenticeships were not available and where there is evidence of demand not being met. For a few, the absence of Level 7 opportunities was viewed as a missed chance to enhance progression
- A few stakeholders called for individual pathways to be added at varying levels in different sectors but this was beyond the scope of this consultation.

4.3 How should sector frameworks evolve to reflect emerging industries, skills needs, and regional priorities within Wales, what is the evidence base for this?

Stakeholders' recommendations for improvement and how the sectors can evolve over time

Priority skills to be integrated across all sectors: stakeholders endorsed the need for digital skills, AI modules and green skills to be integrated across all sectors, as well as having their own sectors e.g. digital. Some also believed key skills such as numeracy and literacy, and soft skills should be embedded into core units, especially at lower levels, as they are transferrable skills across all sectors and enhanced employability, particularly for younger learners.

Flexibility between frameworks and clear pathways: stakeholders sometimes questioned how frameworks allow for movement between sectors (e.g. from catering to hospitality, or from engineering to energy) and whether skills and qualifications are transferable across frameworks. It was widely suggested that the frameworks should allow for fluidity and flexibility, enabling movement

between sectors and bespoke pathways for employers and learners. In addition, stakeholders strongly believed the progression routes between levels and sectors for learners could be clearer.

Micro-credentials and flexible 'bolt-on' qualifications: stakeholders regularly confirmed the need to introduce these components to enable flexibility and responsiveness into the system which could enable more rapid updates to frameworks.

It was suggested that quick, 'pick and mix' add-ons could be accessible to employers and were seen as a flexible tool to create bespoke and tailored pathways to meet employer needs. They would also facilitate ongoing professional development within established industries. Additionally, these bolt-on and stackable credentials could help learners gain further skills relevant to emerging industry needs.

Streamlining Framework updates and funding: for most stakeholders, a more agile funding system and streamlined review processes were believed to be essential to keep frameworks current and responsive to industry changes. It was widely felt that the process for updating frameworks and qualifications was too slow and bureaucratic. Many noted that this lack of agility limited the system's ability to respond to emerging skills needs, particularly in fast-developing areas like AI, data analytics, and advanced engineering.

Clearer sub-sector definitions: it was believed by some that it could be difficult to determine the appropriate sector for certain apprenticeships based solely on the name of the sector framework. While the broad categories were inclusive and cover a wide range of sectors, some stakeholders felt that there was a degree of confusion among employers about the titles and categorisation, indicating a need for clearer communication and guidance, especially with emerging industries.

Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) and Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs): to ensure the frameworks respond to changing skills demands across the economy, stakeholders recommended that LMI data should inform the development and ongoing review of apprenticeship frameworks. Also, regarding the evolution of sector frameworks to reflect regional priorities, stakeholders stressed alignment with RSPs and City and Growth deals, especially for rural economies. Establishing annual or biennial review cycles, with transparent mechanisms for stakeholder input, was believed to be crucial

to their longer term success (see 6.4 for further discussion on regional economic development planning).

Employers' voice: stakeholders stressed the importance for employers, especially SMEs, to have greater involvement in framework design and review. There was concern among a few stakeholders that frameworks were often designed without enough direct employer input. A few also stressed the importance of consulting with the right stakeholders e.g. Sector Skills Councils, industry bodies and employers when developing and reviewing frameworks, to ensure they met real-world needs (see chapter 6 for further discussion on employers).

The Welsh Government website's framework library: A few stakeholders commented that it was difficult to access this library and that it lacked an effective search function while some noted that certain pathways were missing from the site. More broadly, it was suggested on occasion that Medr could do more in the future to make the frameworks and pathways accessible to learners and employers. It was believed that clear communication and simplicity were vital for frameworks to be accessible.

Alignment with other organisations: aligning the framework sectors to those of other organisations was proposed by a few. The types of organisations suggested varied and included Further Education, Estyn, Qualifications Wales and Sector Subject Areas. A few suggested that more partnership working was needed across such organisations to aim to align the sectors over time as it would be beneficial to avoid learner confusion and allow learners to progress seamlessly.

5. Learners

This chapter covers views on opportunities to improve the learner journey, prioritising and measuring outcomes, and attracting learners into the apprenticeship Programme.

5.1 What aspects of the current learner journey in apprenticeships work well, and where do you see opportunities for improvement to better support learners throughout their learning?

5.1.1 What aspects currently work well

Provider expertise and learner support

The existing strong network supporting learners including mentoring and individualised learner support was often highlighted as a positive by different types of stakeholders. Mandated regular assessor visits were also thought to provide valuable ongoing support and help maintain engagement. Good assessors were building relationships with apprentices and employers, which supported retention and success. According to a few, providers had improved their understanding of learner needs and were responsive to them.

Some stakeholders also referred to seamless onboarding and robust induction processes, although there was also reference to how onboarding could still be challenging in some cases, for example with delays in learning providers' sign up processes.

Holistic and pastoral support

Building on the points above, some stakeholders of different types highlighted support that extended beyond vocational training. It helped to address areas such as mental health, digital inclusion, and general wellbeing with wrap-around support.

The learning experience

Several points made by stakeholders referred to the learning experience itself. Examples included high-quality teaching materials, engaging practical, on-the-job learning, and hybrid delivery models, which were welcomed for improving attendance and work-life balance. However, a few cautioned that lower-level

apprenticeships still required more in-person contact. The effectiveness of face-to-face sessions for sustaining learner progress was emphasised, and some learners were thought to prefer traditional face-to-face approaches.

Progression and career pathways

This theme attracted positive comments as well as suggestions for improvement (see 5.1.2). Some stakeholders referred to the value of clear progression routes, where frameworks are considered well designed. It was noted that learners benefit from being able to see a pathway from entry-level to higher apprenticeships and employment. Degree apprenticeships were recognised as effective routes for long-term career progression. Also, offering Level 2 alongside Level 3 frameworks was thought by a few to aid apprentice progression, ensuring that learners at different starting points could advance.

Where infrastructure allowed apprentices to explore opportunities and transfer qualifications to new roles, this was seen as effective for supporting completion and capacity building. However, budget restrictions were reported to have reduced the availability of such opportunities, limiting internal progression and development.

More broadly, the all-age approach to apprenticeships in Wales was widely praised.

Learner outcomes and achievement

Stakeholders valued the robust, professionally recognised qualifications that apprenticeships in Wales provide. It was believed by a few that there was evidence of increased framework attainment rates and high achievement.

Apprenticeships were also credited with boosting learners' confidence, self-esteem, and ability to earn an income while learning. Skills competitions and extracurricular opportunities were seen as further enhancing motivation and recognition.

Work experience and the maturity gained during an apprenticeship were further valued elements for learners. The opportunity to develop life skills and experience personal growth were deemed key benefits of the apprenticeship journey as well.

Partnership and collaboration

Strong partnerships between providers and employers, as well as effective subcontractor networks, were identified on occasion among stakeholders as

also supporting positive learner experiences. The most successful apprenticeships, according to a few, were those where the employer, learner, and provider worked closely together, with regular communication and shared responsibility for learner progress.

Peer support and networks

The value of peer support and opportunities beyond the qualification, such as guest speakers, networking, and cross-sector apprentice networks, was deemed a strength where it was thought to be in place.

5.1.2 Opportunities for improvements to better support learners

Stakeholders referred to a number of areas where they felt learners could be better supported.

Careers guidance and awareness

Stakeholders across organisation types regularly highlighted Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG), as presenting a key opportunity for improvement. This is covered in 5.3.

Essential Skills Wales and assessment barriers

Different types of stakeholders often felt improvements were needed in relation to Essential Skills. Examples put forward included:

- Embedding and contextualising Essential Skills more naturally into vocational training. The Integrated Skills Pilot, a few stakeholders thought, may help address this issue
- Adopting a portfolio approach and simplifying assessment and qualification processes
- Exploring how to achieve a better balance between learner needs and framework requirements regarding Essential Skills, for example around the timing of literacy and numeracy delivery
- Essential Skills could be optional.

Opportunity, access, flexibility, and progression

Some stakeholders thought improvements were needed regarding the limited availability of apprenticeship places, including with larger employers, leading to oversupply of applicants and bottlenecks. Different types of stakeholders regularly remarked that not enough employers are engaged with the system. A further observation made was of a perceived bias among learners towards apprenticeships with large, well-known companies, which can limit exposure to opportunities with SMEs.

A further area for improvement voiced from time to time among different types of stakeholders related to the challenge that can exist of navigating progression routes, which were felt to be confusing in some cases compared with academic pathways. For example, reference was made to how few individuals could reportedly clearly progress from school to a degree apprenticeship (e.g. in the public sector) without navigating a sometimes unclear route.

There were also calls among different types of stakeholders for more flexible delivery and assessment, for example modular / stackable units, blended learning, and flexible starts and durations.

Additional suggested improvements around delivery and progression included:

- Sustainable, multi-year funding (mentioned among a mix of different types of stakeholders) which was associated with being able to plan ahead more effectively, invest in staff and resources, and respond more effectively to economic and skills needs. Stable funding was also believed to help the system cope with economic fluctuations, rising costs, and changing demand, ensuring that apprenticeship opportunities remain available and accessible. Additionally, reference was made to how stable funding was essential for developing new pathways, supporting underrepresented groups, and enabling providers to innovate in delivery and support
- Providers being able to flexibly tailor delivery of frameworks to learners
- Improved transitions from school to apprenticeship and from apprenticeship to employment or further learning

Employer engagement and capacity

Employer engagement was widely recognised as essential to apprenticeship success and a positive learner journey. However, a few stakeholders reported that employer staff shortages and competing employer priorities could result in less satisfactory apprentice development. Also, it was thought that employers on occasion were reluctant to release apprentices for learning (e.g. in health and social care); and apprentices could be expected to complete learning in their own time.

Learner support

Some suggestions for improving the learner journey, mentioned by a mix of different stakeholders, centred on support for learners. Within this, a few stakeholders noted that learners could face long periods without provider contact, and that the quality of the learner experience varied depending on provider and employer, especially regarding pastoral support. Suggested improvements around learner support included the following:

- Learner support should commence as early as possible. A view was expressed that appropriate workplace attitudes and behaviours require more emphasis, with younger learners needing guidance on workplace conduct
- Ensuring effective, ongoing mentoring, pastoral support, and regular review throughout the apprenticeship journey
- Develop a mentoring standard to support apprentices effectively - mentoring was not necessarily a natural role for an experienced employee
- Develop more support networks, such as peer groups or forums for apprentices, to help reduce isolation and provide mutual support, especially for those who are the only apprentice in their workplace or who are in rural areas.

Recognising prior learning

Linked to the flexibility theme, a mix of stakeholders highlighted the need for truly individualised learning plans that recognise prior learning and tailor qualifications to job roles. This would reportedly allow flexibility and reduce situations where learners repeat skills requirements they already possess.

5.2 What outcomes should be prioritised for apprentices (e.g. sustainable employment, qualifications), and how can these be effectively measured and supported?

Stakeholders highlighted the following themes when considering what outcomes should be prioritised for apprentices and how they could be effectively measured.

Sustainable employment

A range of stakeholders regularly made sustained / sustainable employment a primary outcome for apprentices. Suggestions for supporting this outcome included employer partnerships, 'after care' follow-ups, mentoring, alumni networks, and workforce planning to ensure long-term employability.

Proposed measurement of this outcome included tracking destinations and employment status at fixed intervals, retention figures, and progression to 'substantive roles'. Learner and employer satisfaction and wage progression were also mentioned as possible measures.

There was an occasional call for greater clarity about what ‘sustainable employment’ means in the apprenticeship context, for example where jobs are funded by short-term contracts.

Recognised / regulated qualifications

Many stakeholders also felt that achievement of recognised, regulated qualifications are key to prioritise. They need to be portable, valued across sectors, contributing to professional progression and to lifelong learning, and aligned to professional standards. Attainment / certification rates and professional accreditation achieved were given as examples of measuring this outcome.

Soft skills

A further required core outcome regularly mentioned by different types of stakeholders was soft / transferable skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, problem solving, digital literacy, leadership). Measurement could be via learner / employer surveys or competence sign-off by practising professionals. Welsh language skills could form part of this priority, felt a few, with a suggestion for tracking them via the Côt i Ddisgrifio Gallu yn y Gymraeg².

Additionally, a number of stakeholders commented that apprenticeships should support not only technical competence outcomes but also personal growth, confidence, and wellbeing. For these outcomes to be fulfilled, it was anticipated that there would need to be effective initial advice and guidance, consistent mentoring and review throughout the Programme, and continued engagement with employers.

Combined measures

It was commonly felt that a more holistic approach to measurement was needed, combining quantitative data with qualitative feedback. Examples included completion / timely completion, sustained employment, progression, learner / employer satisfaction, competency attainment, readiness for work and economic impact. There were occasional suggestions that the following could support the process: unique identifiers across education / employment datasets, enhanced link visits and insights reporting, and publicly accessible data dashboards for enrolment, retention, completion, and destinations.

² This refers to a statutory code being developed by Welsh Ministers under the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025. Its purpose is to provide a detailed, common framework for describing different levels of Welsh language ability. It is intended to help users, such as educational institutions, employers, and government bodies, to consistently describe and measure an individual's proficiency in Welsh.

As part of these combinations, said a few stakeholders, more nuanced outcome measurement could be used that accounts for socio-economic factors, regional differences and learner distance travelled.

Equality and inclusion

A further outcome deemed important by a mix of different stakeholders was parity across underrepresented groups, explicit ALN support, and data disaggregation by protected characteristics and social grade.

5.3 How can we attract more, and/or a wider cohort of apprentices, regardless of background or starting point into the Programme?

Better communication and CIAG

A mix of different stakeholders regularly highlighted the need for clearer, more consistent and impartial guidance about apprenticeship programmes and their benefits, especially from schools. Further suggestions made included the following:

- More targeted marketing, especially via social media, to educate learners about what apprenticeships are and the opportunities they offer (see chapter 9 for the inclusivity perspective)
- Earlier career guidance, ideally before age 16
- Upskilling teachers and careers advisers to improve awareness and signposting
- Better promotion of apprenticeships as viable alternatives to A levels and university, with clear progression pathways - case studies and success stories should be shared more effectively, for example by having current or alumni apprentices visit schools
- A more joined-up approach to information and guidance, involving organisations such as Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales. A 'one-stop shop' for all apprenticeship information, guidance, and vacancies was proposed as a way to simplify access for learners
- More engaging promotional materials with simple language - these could include infographics illustrating apprenticeship journeys and career pathways
- More year-round targeting could help raise awareness and consideration, rather than focusing communications around a specific time of year

- Working with stakeholders to support learner, providers and employer understanding of the progression routes from the new VCSE qualifications (to be delivered from 2027).

Addressing parity of esteem issues

A recurring theme among different types of stakeholders was the need to address the perceived lack of parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications. There were recommendations for:

- A joined-up approach involving education, government, and industry to tackle this systemic issue
- Improved initial CIAG at primary and secondary education stages
- More flexible programmes and delivery models which would be attractive to more audiences as well as establishing parity of esteem with other education models
- Exploring apprenticeship 'branding' and addressing any attached stigma
- Vocational qualifications should be celebrated more prominently to reduce stigma and promote parity with traditional academic routes.

6. Employers / industry

The focus of this chapter is encouraging employers (especially SMEs) to offer apprenticeships, engaging them in design, delivery and evaluation and how best to support them, as well as supporting regional economic development and place-based skills planning.

It should be noted that there was limited representation in this stage of the consultation process from employers directly. Medr is taking steps to ensure that the voice of employers is captured through planned, separate consultation activity with partners.

6.1 How can we widen the number and range of employers offering apprenticeships, especially SMEs?

Improving employer understanding and guidance - and promoting benefits
A range of suggestions were put forward across different types of stakeholders to improve understanding and guidance for prospective employers as well as how to convince them to engage:

Clear, simple, targeted communication

- Provide clearer, simpler communication about apprenticeships – one employer explained how they currently had to ‘dig for information’ because there was just so much available; develop sector-specific guidance

Benefits and changing perceptions

- Ensure communications prominently feature the benefits of apprenticeships, including for upskilling existing staff, their all-age aspect, and provide employers with success stories and clear information about expectations and benefits
- Change employer mindsets so apprenticeships are seen as a valid and valuable pathway to skilled employment and career progression
- Highlight incentives and funding support available and steps being taken to simplify processes (see below)

Centralised / accessible information

- Develop a single, centralised ‘one-stop shop’ or digital portal for employers, providing all guidance (including on funding and the apprenticeship process from initial interest to implementation), templates, legal responsibilities, and resources needed before and during the apprenticeship journey. This could

also involve developing standardised employer guides collaboratively across providers, Business Wales, and related organisations to ensure consistency and reduce confusion

- Introduce regional apprenticeship coordinators who could provide localised support to helping businesses navigate the process more efficiently
- Ensure information is kept up to date, jargon-free, concise, and tailored to different business sizes and sectors.

Offering incentives

Some stakeholders of different types felt that there were not enough financial incentives for SMEs to encourage engagement, and that small businesses could struggle to see the return on their investment. Concerns were also raised about learners dropping out and retention post-apprenticeship.

Stakeholders therefore strongly stated that incentives would help to encourage more employers, especially SMEs, to consider taking on an apprentice, for example:

- Offer incentives such as wage subsidies, grants, start-up bonuses or National Insurance reductions for specific age groups or priority sectors to stimulate demand while ensuring sustainability
- Offer additional incentives for the first or second years of young apprenticeships and cash incentives for employer and learner to encourage progression, especially from Level 2
- Develop a dedicated apprenticeship fund covering wage subsidies, off-the-job training, and mentor time
- Address perceived barriers to taking up wage subsidies, such as lack of awareness, administrative hurdles, and the perception that incentives do not fully offset the costs and risks
- Explore how to better financially support employers who take on an apprentice for four years, given that some do not realise that the funding duration is shorter
- Support SMEs to incentivise apprentices to stay with the employer after programme completion
- Consider non-wage incentives (e.g. equipment grants, tax credits).

How to reach employers

Stakeholders also offered a range of suggestions for reaching and engaging employers including the following:

- Advertise pan-Wales and initiate targeted engagement beyond open consultations to increase awareness and understanding, particularly among SMEs and rural micro-businesses – meet them in their workplaces
- Create clearer, distinct communication channels, with business support organisations focusing on employer information and linking apprenticeship discussions to broader business development issues
- Conduct surveys via providers, industry bodies or other stakeholders as intermediaries to increase employer response and reach SMEs more effectively
- Build strong relationships through employer advisory boards and networking
- Create dedicated roles or personnel to help employers, sector by sector, understand apprenticeship benefits and adapt recruitment practices
- Involve Medr representatives in conversations with providers, employers, and trade associations to enhance prestige and importance
- Leverage word of mouth and peer recommendations, as small businesses are reportedly more likely to engage when they hear positive stories from other businesses; engage past apprentices to speak with employers about the benefits of apprenticeships.

Supporting employers taking on apprentices

Reducing employer burden and increasing ongoing support

Stakeholders across different types widely believed that SMEs perceive apprenticeships as complex, resource-intensive, and difficult to navigate. Barriers to entry identified included finding suitable training providers, recruiting suitable apprentices, navigating complex funding mechanisms, administrative burden / paperwork, compliance requirements, funding cycles that appeared to favour large employers, and disruptions caused by apprentices' time away for core studies.

Suggestions to help address these barriers included the following:

- Develop a simplified digital system, or a single point of contact (e.g. a named advisor from the provider or a regional hub) to guide SMEs through onboarding, compliance, funding processes and to offer regular check-ins and troubleshooting support
- Develop a comprehensive 'Employer Charter / Handbook' clearly outlining roles, responsibilities, time commitments, and expected outcomes from the training and workplace mentoring
- Develop centralised support resources and brokerage models for SMEs

- Provide toolkits and templates for induction, learning plans, documenting on-the-job training, and skills tracking to reduce administrative burden
- Provide regular, structured updates on apprentice progress, attendance, and milestones via digital dashboards or scheduled meetings; and offer clear schedules for reviews, assessments, and training
- Ensure consistency in quality of communication and training from training providers to employers; a couple of employers reported variability in this respect
- Ensure digital systems are user-friendly and up to date
- Introduce a prestige certification recognising employers who actively support apprenticeships, akin to Investors in People. National Apprenticeship Week was highlighted as a key promotional opportunity that could be better utilised

Mentoring, peer support, and networking

Stakeholders often highlighted the importance of mentor training and peer support especially for SMEs. Specific suggestions included the following:

- Develop buddying or mentoring schemes which would enhance employer confidence and improve apprentice retention. Short, accessible training could be offered for workplace mentors and supervisors, covering topics such as setting expectations, feedback, and supporting wellbeing
- Create networks or cohorts for SMEs, including peer groups or digital platforms (e.g. WhatsApp groups) for sharing best practice, experiences and advice

Improving flexibility

Some stakeholders also emphasised that growth in employer participation would require greater flexibility in apprenticeship duration and content. This could include:

- Allowing employers to select core and optional framework elements, with optional parts funded separately to reduce costs and resource burdens
- Using more part-time, modular, or shared apprenticeships, allowing SMEs to participate without overburdening staff
- Flexibility in content, delivery, and assessment to align with local business practices and sector needs
- Employers and providers should have more autonomy to tailor delivery within pathways, with sector representatives regarded as experts in pathway development.

6.2 How can employers be more effectively engaged in the design, delivery, and evaluation of the apprenticeship programme to ensure relevance and impact?

Co-design and framework development

Several suggestions were put forward among stakeholders for effectively involving employers in co-design and framework development, including the following:

Establish and strengthen employer-led advisory boards, sector groups, and co-design panels

- Involve employers as genuine partners, not just consultees, in shaping apprenticeship frameworks. Stakeholders often advocated for the creation or strengthening of employer-led sector boards, advisory groups, and steering panels at national and regional levels to ensure alignment between policy and operational delivery
- Explore the lessons learnt from the English Trailblazer³ groups so that employers can be involved at the outset in designing what they need to sustain their workforce and industries

Embed regular, structured feedback loops

- Develop ongoing engagement with employers through regular feedback mechanisms, annual surveys, and continuous review processes - use digital tools as a means of capturing real-time employer feedback and authentic experiences, supporting continuous improvement
- Design a well-promoted, dedicated system or contact point for individuals and organisations to provide feedback or suggest updates to Medr regarding frameworks

Use intermediaries and representative bodies for structured input

- Leverage organisations such as trade associations / sector bodies (e.g. FSB), Chambers of Commerce, and RSPs to coordinate employer input and ensure sector-wide relevance. These intermediary organisations were seen as playing a valuable role in bridging the gap between providers and smaller businesses
- Assess the benefits of developing a pilot where a trade body / bodies to support the gathering of employer intelligence

³ See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/group-of-persons-trailblazer-groups>

Ensure transparency and visibility of the design process

- Improve communication about how employers can get involved, and make the framework design process more visible and accessible
- Offer formal recognition for employer involvement.

Inclusive and proportionate representation

Stakeholders often advised that initiatives to engage with employers should ensure that they are representative of the full spectrum of employers. Examples of suggested enhancements from stakeholders in this area included:

- Creating advisory groups and consultations which are structured to reflect the diversity of the sector, not just those with the most resources or capacity
- Fostering stronger links between SMEs, training providers, and RSPs to ensure local needs are understood and met
- Tailoring engagement mechanisms to sectors (e.g. health, construction, digital) and region, using local forums and sector bodies to coordinate input
- Recognising SMEs' limited capacity for extensive consultation. This could include providing financial or practical support (e.g. funded time, simplified processes) to enable SME involvement
- Trusting providers to understand and meet employer needs without overburdening employers with input requests.

Validation and evaluation

There was support for involving employers in validating programme developments, reviewing assessment methods, and evaluating outcomes (e.g. learner readiness, progression, and business impact).

Collaboration in delivery and assessment

Several stakeholders supported the idea of co-delivery models where employers and providers share responsibility for training and assessment. Examples given of actions included:

- Encouraging providers to visit workplaces more frequently and adapt delivery to live projects within their job role
- Involving employers in shaping assessment tasks and providing feedback on learner competence
- Funding mentor training and support tools to enable employers, especially SMEs, to confidently engage in delivery and evaluation.

6.3 How can businesses be better supported when working with an apprentice? What information would be useful to employers, prior to taking on an apprentice and during the apprentice's learning journey?

The main themes that emerged under this consultation question have been covered in this chapter. These included providing clearer guidance, simplifying process and reducing the administrative burden, offering financial incentives and more involvement in design, evaluation, surveys and feedback loops.

6.4 How can we ensure a programme that supports regional economic development and place-based skills planning?

Exploring how the Programme will support regional economic development and place-based skills planning ensures apprenticeships are targeted to the skills needs of local employers, not just national averages. It focuses the Programme on productivity and business growth in each area and helps frameworks adapt to emerging industries and regional priorities. This supports funding and delivery that are relevant, timely, and impactful for communities across Wales.

Robust, granular labour market intelligence (LMI)

Some stakeholders of different types recommended enhanced and more effective use of LMI as a foundation for effective planning. Examples of proposals are given below:

- Develop a national system for collecting, analysing, and disseminating up-to-date LMI, including both quantitative data and qualitative insights from employers and providers
- Make LMI the basis for commissioning, funding, and adapting apprenticeship provision at regional and local levels
- Regularly review regional outcomes and adjust provision in response to changing economic and workforce trends.

Flexible programme design

As covered elsewhere in the report, there were calls for more flexible programme design, in this instance to support regional economic development.

It would, for example, reportedly allow for the creation of new or bespoke pathways for emerging industries or high-demand occupations within the region. It could involve facilitating local commissioning by empowering regions to commission or adapt provision in response to their own LMI.

Cross-sector and regional collaboration with public sector

Some stakeholders felt that cross-sector and regional collaboration would enhance provision. Examples given included:

- Building partnerships by bringing together public sector, private sector, FE / HE providers, and industry bodies to coordinate work based learning training provision and avoid duplication
- Engaging local authorities and community groups to ensure local knowledge and lived experience inform programme design, especially in rural and deprived areas
- Recognising local authorities as anchor employers, offering apprenticeships that support community development and set standards for regional practice.

Geographical and sectoral coverage

A few stakeholders highlighted improvements they wanted to see that related to regional and sectoral coverage:

- Ensure provision is available in every part of Wales, including rural and post-industrial areas, and not just in areas of immediate growth
- Provide targeted support for sectors like heritage, tourism, and sign-making, where employer numbers may be small but regional impact can be significant
- Promote local delivery models for example by using mobile training units, blended learning, and smaller local providers to reach all communities.

Governance and accountability

Stakeholders on occasion advised that supporting regional economic development required sound governance and accountability, such as:

- Setting clear accountability structures e.g. defining roles for Medr, RSPs, providers, and employers in regional planning and delivery
- Monitoring and reporting outcomes e.g. tracking regional apprenticeship starts, completions, and employment outcomes, and making data publicly available
- Ensuring equity and consistency by using transparent processes to guarantee fair access and consistent standards across regions.

7. Learning providers

This chapter covers feedback on two questions on engaging with providers, strengths regarding providers and any areas for strengthening.

7.1 How can providers be more effectively engaged in the design, delivery, and evaluation of apprenticeship programmes to ensure relevance and impact?

A mix of stakeholder types responded to this question. Some felt that provider engagement is already strong, but that there may be room to enhance it. Some points to emerge are covered elsewhere in the report. The main themes are given below.

Early and ongoing co-design with providers

In terms of how providers can be more effectively engaged in the design, delivery, and evaluation of apprenticeship programmes, stakeholders including providers confirmed that providers of all types should be strategic partners from the outset. This includes formalising provider consultation and continuous collaboration so programmes are agile, coherent, and aligned to learner, employer and regional needs. A call was made to actively listen to providers who work closely with small and micro businesses to ensure their needs and challenges are heard in the development of apprenticeship programmes.

Structured forums and collaboration mechanisms

A regular suggestion, including from among providers, was to use joined-up strategic forums. These could include RSP facilitated roundtables and multi-professional stakeholder groups (e.g. involving learners, SMEs, and unions).

Feedback loops, evaluation and data-sharing

Stakeholders including providers regularly suggested that more frequent, formal, regular, transparent communication loops would help providers to more effectively engage in the design, delivery and evaluation of apprenticeship programmes. Examples within this theme to support engagement included continuous evaluation, structured data collection (e.g. a Wales-wide learner survey), and shared evaluation. According to a provider, regular, formal communication loops between Medr, Qualifications Wales, Welsh Government, and providers needed to be strengthened, for example to learn from past

experiences with apprenticeship design. Regular audit of the communication provided by the learning providers with the employer was also requested by one employer.

7.2 What is working well and what needs to be strengthened from a provider perspective?

A mix of stakeholder types responded to this question. A number of the points made are covered elsewhere in the report.

What is deemed to be working well

The two more prominent themes to emerge were:

- Strong provider–employer collaboration and partnerships, consortia working effectively with Medr and sectors, proactive engagement, and responsive delivery
- Learner support and inclusion - mentorship, pastoral care, and commitment to widening participation.

Further positive points made included the following:

- Longstanding experience, robust quality assurance and governance, and professional learning which underpin consistent standards
- Blended learning and tailored on-the-job training help meet diverse learner and employer needs
- Senior leaders aligning priorities with policy and adapting to emerging skills needs (e.g. green technologies, health sciences)
- Providers offering Welsh-medium options to meet language needs
- Delivering structured qualifications, ensuring health and safety compliance, and providing HR-type resources for small businesses.

What is deemed to need strengthening

A range of points were made although some were less directly tied to providers or were also made in the previous question. The more prominent theme to arise related to the perceived need for improved funding flexibility and stability which is covered earlier in the report. Further suggestions made regarding what needs strengthening regarding providers included the following:

- Reviewing the '80% duration rule'⁴ – it was seen by a number of providers as penalising providers who deliver apprenticeships more efficiently, as well as a cause of learner dissatisfaction and a barrier to flexibility
- Providers should work more closely with employers to co-deliver learning, embedding workplace projects and industry input into formal teaching
- Ensure providers send employers monthly reports of where learners are in their journey, how close they are to completion, and date of completion
- Medr needs to require that all providers can demonstrate their knowledge, skills and experience of working with adults as well as school leavers in the design and delivery of apprenticeships, in particular Foundation Apprenticeships
- Increase availability of end-point assessors, streamline validation, and strengthen RPL systems
- Investment in staff CPD, digital infrastructure, and recognition of WBL assessors
- Address gaps in provision and support expansion into emerging sectors
- Clarity on the new grant-funded model and the process for collaborative working between different providers (e.g. HE / FE partnerships)
- Stronger links between FE and HE, and a more inclusive voice for subcontractors.

⁴ Apprentices must be in learning for at least 80% of the expected programme duration for the provider to draw down the full funding value for the apprenticeship framework. If an apprentice completes earlier than this, the provider receives a reduced funding amount.

8. The Welsh language

This chapter covers responses to questions on the Welsh language. It includes stakeholder's perceptions of the barriers that hinder higher take up of Welsh language apprenticeship courses and the stakeholders' suggestions on how these barriers could be overcome and how Welsh language skills can be more meaningfully embedded into apprenticeship programmes.

8.1 Barriers to accessing Welsh language apprenticeships

There was acknowledgement that more needed to be done to encourage higher take-up of Welsh language apprenticeships among learners and that more could be done to effectively embed the Welsh language in the apprenticeship programme. However, the commitment to bilingual provision was seen as fundamental to treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English and ensuring that all learners can thrive in a truly inclusive apprenticeship programme.

Barriers or challenges that prevent take-up

Stakeholders were asked what, if anything, hindered higher uptake of Welsh language and bilingual apprenticeships. The main points are listed below:

- Shortage of bilingual staff - one of the main challenges raised among stakeholders was the reported shortage of bilingual lecturers, assessors, trainers, and tutors, especially in certain sectors. This staff shortage affected delivery and assessments and limited the ability to offer Welsh-medium provision. Some believed recruitment was difficult owing to lack of incentives and salary disparities between industry and education
- Lack of translated materials - numerous responses pointed to insufficient Welsh-medium resources, including teaching materials, assessment tools, and digital platforms. Delays or gaps in translation, and lack of sector-specific content, were seen as major obstacles
- Employer practice - stakeholders acknowledged that many employers did not operate bilingually. Stakeholders suggested some employers were unaware of the benefits or lacked the incentive to support bilingualism. This in turn made completing the course through the medium of Welsh off-putting for learners
- Demand varies by region and sector - stakeholders sometimes noted that demand for Welsh language provision was low in certain areas. This led to

funding issues when delivering to small cohorts. However, Welsh-medium provision was especially relevant in certain regions and therefore should be made as seamless as possible, concluded some

- Confidence - a recurring theme was that some Welsh-speaking learners lacked confidence in their Welsh language skills, especially written Welsh or technical vocabulary. A few stakeholders believed this was especially true of slightly older apprentices who had been out of Welsh language education for a while
- Lack of funding - some felt more funding was needed to include more bilingual or Welsh-speaking apprenticeship places, upskill staff so they could deliver courses bilingually, and to cover the high costs of translation and bilingual resources
- Administrative burden - some providers and employers mentioned that paperwork, compliance requirements, and reporting for Welsh-medium provision could be complex and time-consuming. In addition, awarding bodies could face challenges when there were few students requesting Welsh-medium assessment, and significant investment was needed to offer qualifications in Welsh
- Perceived lack of relevance in some sectors - a few industry stakeholders (especially in engineering and manufacturing) expressed concern that Welsh language requirements may not align with business needs or may be seen as an extra hurdle. Additionally, some felt there was still a cultural belief among learners and employers that anything official was usually required in English, and that the language of industry continued to be English
- Attitudes - some Welsh-speaking apprentices and staff reportedly preferred English, and learners possibly did not want to be separated from peers by studying through the medium of Welsh
- Awareness and visibility of Welsh-medium pathways - a few stakeholders believed learners and employers were not always aware of Welsh-medium options, or that these were not promoted effectively in schools and careers guidance
- Lack of centralised information - stakeholders occasionally commented that there was no central platform to find out who delivers Welsh-medium provision and where
- Digital equity - a small number of stakeholders mentioned the limited bilingual functionality in digital learning platforms and e-learning systems as a barrier to some learners.

8.2 How can we encourage a higher take up of Welsh medium provision and bilingual workplace opportunities across Wales?

Potential solutions

Embedding Welsh from the outset: In the main, stakeholders strongly advocated for Welsh language planning to be built into apprenticeship frameworks and programme design, not as an optional add-on but as a core principle. This included setting clear expectations for bilingual delivery and assessment and ensuring parity between Welsh and English across all materials and communications. A few suggested implementing sector-specific targets and minimum standards.

Strategic workforce planning: Stakeholders regularly highlighted the need for strategic planning to address shortages of Welsh-speaking tutors, assessors, and mentors, especially in vocational sectors. Further investment was thought to be needed in recruitment, training, and retention of Welsh-speaking staff. Some suggested funding professional development programmes and creating a database of Welsh-speaking assessors.

Building confidence through bite-sized learning: embedding small, bite-sized Welsh language learning in programmes could build confidence and normalise use of Welsh at work, said some. This could involve free Welsh language courses and embedding Welsh language modules as add-ons within apprenticeship frameworks. For some, Welsh-medium or bilingual apprenticeships needed to be a natural, unremarkable option. Stakeholders also believed more needed to be done to encourage apprentices to request support in Welsh without stigma.

Flexible language use: allowing apprentices to speak Welsh during verbal interactions while keeping written work in English, suggested some, would help create flexible bilingual pathways. This approach would let apprentices use Welsh language elements based on their confidence and skills, rather than forcing a strict choice between English or Welsh.

Bilingual materials: continued support and investment was needed to cover costs of translating qualifications, resource creation and digital platforms so that organisations such as awarding bodies could be better supported in these efforts.

Technology and innovation: investing in technology, including AI, to support Welsh language learning and provision was a further recommendation.

Employer incentives and recognition schemes: some recommended targeted support and incentives for employers to offer bilingual apprenticeships, including financial rewards, celebrating bilingual success stories, recognition schemes, providing toolkits and training and guidance on integrating Welsh into workplace practice.

Demand-led approach: for some, highlighting the business advantages of Welsh language skills would increase employer demand for Welsh-speaking apprentices. Encouraging employers to value these skills was expected to improve uptake and relevance for learners. Additionally, further efforts could be made to support recruitment of Welsh-medium school leavers into Welsh apprenticeships.

Monitoring and accountability: there was consensus among stakeholders on the need to track and publish Welsh-medium uptake, usage, and outcomes, with regular reviews and targeted interventions to address disparities. Some stakeholders also advocated for ongoing evaluation and refinement of Welsh language provision informed by learner voice and employer feedback (e.g. engagement forums and national surveys).

Learner financial incentives: some stakeholders noted that financial incentives existed for learners to study through Welsh, especially in higher education. However, these were not thought to be always available for apprenticeships outside higher education.

Collaboration: sectors should work collectively to fill gaps in Welsh-speaking staff and assessors, added a few stakeholders. Additionally, collaboration between providers, Medr, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, and employers was seen as essential for identifying demand and sharing best practice.

Regional targets: there were calls from some stakeholders for proportionate or regional targets to be set for Welsh language provision, reflecting local needs. It was also suggested that providers should target reaching out to Welsh-medium schools.

Attitude shifts: it was believed to be important to highlight the benefits of knowing Welsh for work and career growth. Sharing positive examples or case studies was deemed beneficial by some.

Sector-based approach: some sectors, like health and social care and hospitality, were deemed more suited to Welsh language provision. Using targeted strategies for each sector could therefore be beneficial, recommended a few stakeholders.

Accessible assessment materials: some stakeholders highlighted the need for formal service-level agreements with awarding bodies to ensure equal treatment of Welsh and English in assessment timelines and standards. It was also suggested that assessment questions needed to be translated into accessible Welsh that matched learners' proficiency levels.

Additional observations

- The increase in Welsh language schools was expected to naturally stimulate demand for provision
- Stakeholders occasionally expressed concern that Welsh language requirements may be a distraction or an additional hurdle, particularly where demand is low or resources are limited. They advocated for localised, demand-led provision and cautioned against imposing requirements that do not reflect industry needs
- A few stakeholders were concerned about reverting to funding models based on percentages of Welsh delivery rather than normalising and encouraging the use of Welsh in workplaces.

9. Inclusive apprenticeships

The questions covered in this chapter centre on barriers and solutions for underrepresented groups' participation in apprenticeships, targeted recruitment strategy suggestions, and funding of the Supported Apprenticeship programme and the Employer Incentive Scheme.

9.1 What barriers currently exist for underrepresented groups in accessing and succeeding in apprenticeships, and how can the design of the new Programme address these challenges and encourage retention of learners?

Awareness, perceptions, and information gaps

The theme from chapter 5 of better communication and CIAG was also very prominent for underrepresented groups in terms of accessing and succeeding in apprenticeships. Suggestions from stakeholders for addressing this barrier that are not already covered in chapter 5 included the following:

National, regional campaigns and marketing

- Launching inclusive marketing campaigns that use diverse role models and ambassadors to showcase the breadth of apprenticeship opportunities regardless of age and background
- Developing tailored case studies to highlight success stories from underrepresented groups
- Using inclusive language and imagery in all materials and communications, and considering alternative terminology to broaden appeal
- Advertising opportunities in Welsh and minority languages, and via local channels

Community engagement

- Collaborating with community groups, local organisations and expert agencies to ensure outreach is culturally sensitive and reaches the right audiences at the right time with appropriate CIAG. Partnerships could also be built with charities, faith groups, and youth / support services (e.g. looked-after children teams and family support teams)

- Engaging parents / families / other influencers in disadvantaged communities to promote apprenticeships as valued pathways and demonstrate parity of esteem with academic qualifications
- Providing marketing material in different languages especially when engaging local communities and parents whose first language may not be Welsh or English

Events / outreach activities

- Attending job fairs, cultural festivals, and any disability-focused expos to raise awareness of apprenticeship opportunities
- Developing targeted campaigns in non-traditional venues and highlighting transferable skills
- Convening supported / shared recruitment events with on-site support staff (e.g. job coaches, interpreters, application support), safe spaces, and interview adjustments

Inclusive practices and representation

- Promoting all careers for any gender by challenging stereotypes and using real-life examples, such as women in construction, to broaden appeal and showcase diverse pathways
- Targeting communications for specific groups such as prisoners and ex-forces personnel
- Increasing diversity among leadership and staff in organisations who deliver or support the delivery of the apprenticeship programmes to better reflect the communities served

Alternative terminology and models

- Revisiting use of the word 'apprentice' in the context of an all-age offer (e.g. 'funded work-based learning' was suggested so as to appeal to mature employees and higher-level managers)
- Developing models like Pathways to Work to support looked-after children and other vulnerable groups
- Learning from other initiatives such as the Regional Electrotechnical Training and Careers Alliance's (ETCA's) collaborative partnerships in England and developing similar initiatives for Wales.

Financial barriers

Stakeholders across different types regularly cited financial issues making it difficult for underrepresented groups to access and succeed in apprenticeships. Examples included how low apprenticeship wages, lack of financial support for travel, equipment, or childcare, and the risk of losing benefits are barriers for disadvantaged groups, older learners, rurally based learners, those with digital literacy challenges, those unable to live with their family, and those with caring

responsibilities. Stakeholders suggested several long term improvements, that are across Governments responsibilities, to mitigate these barriers. They included:

- Exploring options for bursaries, hardship funds, childcare subsidies and completion incentives to make apprenticeships financially viable for a more diverse group of learners
- Reviewing the apprenticeship salary structure regardless of age, or offering adult wage supplements to support those with family responsibilities and living costs
- Offering tailored support for equipment, transport, and digital access, including investment in public transport aligned with apprenticeship locations and shift patterns
- Expanding existing support schemes for travel and subsistence
- Bringing training closer to learners, especially in rural areas, via mobile units or local hubs.

Disability, ALN and ALS, and wellbeing related barriers

Some stakeholders from a mix of organisations highlighted perceived challenges around support for learners with disabilities or ALN, including lack of reasonable adjustments, specialist support, or accessible materials. Some also believed that the current additional learning support (ALS) funding can be complex and underutilised, and called for simplification and better access. It was noted by a few stakeholders that ALS funding is currently under review by Medr. Suggested improvements from stakeholders on this issue included:

- Simplifying and standardising funding methodologies to ensure equitable access and support for those with additional needs
- Enhancing wraparound support for mental health, neurodiversity, and ALN, including proactive reasonable adjustments
- Exploring how wellbeing support could be shared as a service
- Funding personalised inclusion passports⁵ where required and learning support plans for all apprentices
- Providers to be resourced to offer support for apprentices with additional learning needs equivalent to that available in FE
- Embedding mentoring, coaching, and pastoral care into all apprenticeship frameworks

⁵ A personalised inclusion passport is a confidential, person-owned document that formally records agreed-upon support needs and adjustments for individuals with a disability, health condition, or other personal circumstances.

- Implementing sector-wide disability action plans and inclusive learning initiatives
- Expanding post-completion support and transition pathways for apprentices.

Employer practices and workplace barriers

There were also instances where stakeholders identified employer bias, lack of inclusive recruitment, and unsupportive workplace cultures as barriers for underrepresented groups. Additionally, small employers may lack the resources or knowledge to support diverse apprentices.

Learners were believed on occasion to be unsure about the support or preparation available as they enter the world of work, and it could be complicated to identify the right contacts for assistance with impairments or mental health needs.

To address these challenges concerning employer engagement and inclusive recruitment practices, stakeholders advocated:

- Educating / training employers on diversity, neurodiversity, inclusive recruitment practices, the Social Model of Disability, unconscious bias, and inclusive language (e.g. compulsory short training for apprentice line managers on inclusive supervision, reasonable adjustments, and mental-health first aid)
- Supporting employers to create inclusive job descriptions, interview processes, and workplace cultures that welcome diverse talent
- Continuing to incentivise recruitment and retention of disabled learners through funding and recognition schemes; badges or accreditation could be developed for employers meeting inclusion standards
- Signposting employers to schemes like Access to Work to support additional costs for Supported Apprenticeships
- Promoting and simplifying access to disability incentive programmes
- Strengthening employer-provider collaboration and monitoring
- Encouraging employer accountability through data, targets, and retention-linked incentives; this could include embedding equality KPIs into provider funding and quality assurance (e.g. clear evidence is provided of how employers and providers have embedded Wales Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations (2011) and Public Sector Equality Duties into their business practices).

Entry requirements and academic barriers

Some stakeholders of different types felt entry requirements (e.g. GCSEs in English and Maths) were perceived as a barrier without checking, for example for adults, care-experienced young people, and those with non-traditional learning experiences. Essential Skills requirements were also highlighted as a barrier for underrepresented groups (see also 5.1). Solutions proposed among stakeholders to address these barriers not already mentioned earlier in the report included:

- Diversify application methods (e.g. alternatives to written forms and standard interviews for those with ALN /neurodivergence)
- Assessment methods more tailored to the individual
- Learning providers to assess the suitability of a framework based on their detailed knowledge of the learner.

Bridging programmes and entry-level opportunities

The lack of Level 2 apprenticeships, e.g. in construction, and employability programmes for those not ready for higher-level courses was identified by some as a barrier for underrepresented groups. The impact of the pandemic on learner work-readiness was thought by a few to persist. Means of addressing these barriers to emerge from stakeholders included the following suggestions to explore further (some are outside Medr's remit):

- Provide supported work experience for learners before they leave school, especially for young people with additional needs
- Develop more taster sessions, work placements, short courses, and pre-apprenticeship or bridging programmes to help those not yet ready for full apprenticeships
- Introduce foundation or entry-level apprenticeships as stepping stones within the framework for learners who lack work-readiness skills
- Use time-limited, subsidised job-coach supported placements before a full apprenticeship
- Guarantee a foundation apprenticeship place to any employed adult with below Level 2 qualifications who wishes to progress in their current sector.

Language barriers

A few stakeholders mentioned language barriers, including for Welsh speakers and ESOL learners, and the need for more bilingual provision and support – for example in health and social care and engineering especially at advanced apprenticeship levels. Providing more funding in these areas was expected to help.

Additional actions

Finally, a number of cross-cutting recommendations were put forward among stakeholders to support inclusivity:

- Allow for greater flexibility in learning (e.g. for carers, adults managing work and family responsibilities)
- Develop more robust participation, retention, and outcomes data for underrepresented groups; and use sector and regional demographic data to identify gaps and target outreach where representation is low (e.g. setting specific participation targets for adults with no qualifications in each region, with resources allocated accordingly)
- Continue to integrate equality and diversity considerations into programme design and quality monitoring
- Ensure all improvements are informed by direct learner voice that incorporates the voices of underrepresented groups to flag and address issues early
- Medr to consider the findings of Estyn's review into the Independent Living Skills Curriculum in Further Education
- Integrate policy with anti-poverty and social mobility strategies.

9.2 What targeted recruitment strategies can support participation from underrepresented groups?

Stakeholders' suggestions mainly focused on themes that have already arisen in previous questions (e.g. more community and school outreach, early engagement, inclusive marketing / communications and employer engagement suggestions).

9.3 Do the proposals have any positive or negative impacts, or unintended consequences, in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion?

Perceived positive impacts of stakeholders' proposals

Stakeholders regularly reported that the proposals they put forward, such as inclusive outreach, role models, and diversified application routes, have the

potential to deliver positive impacts for equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Examples included:

- Broadened access and representation, especially for individuals with ALN, minority ethnic people, disabled people, care-experienced young people, and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds
- Improved retention rates through wraparound support, mentoring, coaching, and reasonable adjustments
- Empathetic support through lived experience, with staff from underrepresented groups providing culturally competent support
- Data-informed action, using demographic data to target interventions and monitor progress.

Negative impact risks / unintended consequences

Some stakeholders identified risks and unintended consequences associated with targeted recruitment strategies. These included the following:

- Complex paperwork for additional learning support / incentives could slow apprenticeship starts and deter SMEs
- Concerns about merit and positive discrimination with employers hiring based solely on protected characteristics
- Digital access must be addressed to ensure equitable participation
- Employers may prioritise incentive applicants for short-term gains without genuine commitment to inclusive workplaces
- Recruiting from underrepresented groups without meaningful inclusion and progression opportunities could feel performative rather than transformative
- Risk of alienating other underrepresented groups if initiatives appear to focus too narrowly on one protected characteristic
- Small and micro-employers may lack resources and expertise to support apprentices, risking uneven experiences and outcomes
- Staff with lived experience may be expected to 'carry' the emotional labour of inclusion, which must be balanced with structural support and shared responsibility
- Targeted programmes may unintentionally reinforce perceptions of deficit rather than empowerment, leading to stigma or labelling
- Targeted recruitment strategies could risk pushing some learners down predetermined routes rather than apprenticeships being one of several options
- If funding remains short-term, disadvantaged learners are most affected if programmes cease mid-journey

- There is a risk of underfunding for the delivery of more flexible programmes, which could undermine positive impacts.

9.4 Should we continue to fund the Supported Apprenticeship programme and the Employer Incentive Scheme?

Stakeholders overwhelmingly supported the continued funding of the Supported Apprenticeship programme and the Employer Incentive Scheme. Some also called for expansion, refinement, or simplification.

Stakeholders stated that the schemes are vital for promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in apprenticeships. They cited proven effectiveness in widening participation and sustaining learners, especially those with additional needs or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The schemes were viewed as incentivising employers, particularly SMEs, to recruit and retain apprentices, offsetting costs and encouraging inclusive recruitment.

Recommendations for improvement and expansion

A common point made was that while support is strong, both schemes could be improved or expanded. Suggestions offered among stakeholders included:

- Redesigning schemes to be more evidence-based, outcome-driven, and inclusive (e.g. outcomes / retention-linked funding payments, phased payments across milestones (start, 6 months, 12 months) to encourage genuine employer support
- Expanding eligibility, for example permitting some funding to support care leavers, long-term NEETs, and a wider age range to ensure equitable and inclusive access
- Giving consideration to how to support people with learning difficulties who do not necessarily have a diagnosis of a learning disability
- Simplifying administration and reducing complexity for providers and employers
- Medr to review how effectively the current Supported Apprenticeship programme is being targeted and delivered against annual target profiles. This should comprise consultation with the full range of stakeholders including individuals and organisations from underrepresented groups to

build understanding of the reasons for low engagement with the Programme.

9.5 Are there other options in addition / instead that would help support inclusive apprenticeships more?

The main themes suggested by stakeholders for this question are already covered in this section (e.g. employer incentives and training, targeted financial support, more outreach, improved mentoring, pastoral care, and mental health support).

9.6 What could we do to support participation in apprenticeships for those who are underrepresented?

Stakeholders responding to this question proposed a range of actions to support underrepresented groups into apprenticeships which have already been covered in this section (e.g. stronger outreach, improved CIAG including from schools, bridging pathways, developing regional one-stop hubs, and more employer support and training for inclusive recruitment).

10. Appendices

Appendix 1: High Level Principles

Medr is proposing that the High Level Principles for the new Programme are that it will:

- Be an all-age programme
- Deliver apprenticeships from level 2 to level 6
- Respond to changing skills demands across the economy and regional skills needs
- Respond to the Welsh Government's skills priorities, including responding to changing technologies and green skills
- Meet the needs of learners and support their progression through the tertiary education system and into and throughout their chosen career
- Be agile and responsive to ensure the right qualifications and skills are delivered to meet employer, learner and economy needs
- Deliver inclusive apprenticeships which are accessible for learners from a range of backgrounds and with protected characteristics
- Increase apprenticeship opportunities available in Welsh
- Offer high quality provision which strengthens outcomes and attainment of learners

Appendix 2: Proposed new sector frameworks

Care
Health and science
Engineering and manufacturing
Creative, design and media
Business services and management
Public and protective services
Education and early years
Catering and hospitality
Construction and the built environment

Legal, finance and accounting
Digital
Hair and beauty
Agriculture, environmental and animal care
Transport, automotive and logistics
Energy
Food and drink
Property services
Sport and leisure

Appendix 3 : Stakeholders' good practice examples for widening participation and for attracting underrepresented groups

Some stakeholders shared good practice examples that are reported to have supported underrepresented groups in apprenticeship recruitment and retention, and to have supported inclusivity. Examples included the following:

Learner support and inclusion

- Additional learning support, including tailored learning plans, job coaches, and reasonable adjustments, was believed to have proven effective in improving retention and completion rates
- Mentoring and pastoral care models that have reportedly shown improved retention and completion rates
- Partnership models between local authorities and FE providers have reportedly successfully supported adults retraining or upskilling
- Buddy systems
- A college hospitality programme where learners with additional needs create and deliver menus in a public restaurant setting. This was seen as fostering real-world experience and confidence for learners, and as an example of how apprenticeships can be tailored to diverse learner needs and provide meaningful employment pathways
- The Aspire 'Pathway To Work' model which is tailored for one stakeholder's Children Looked-After cohort, alongside the Aspire QuickStart initiative
- The apprentice network in Gwynedd was given as a positive example of peer support, providing a sense of community and additional learning opportunities for apprentices.

Community partnerships and outreach

- Wider recruitment campaigns have reportedly increased diverse participation particularly in trade occupations
- A fire service's outreach to women and minority groups

Funding and financial support

- Supported Apprenticeships and Employer Incentive Schemes (see 9.4) were described as having helped reduce barriers and promote inclusive recruitment
- Financial support with transport, helping to widen participation

Sector-specific initiatives

- Developing sector-specific initiatives and toolkits, for example with the Welsh Apprenticeship Alliance (e.g. A465 Heads of the Valleys project), Social Care Wales's Care Academy model reportedly provides effective guidance on supporting apprentices from diverse backgrounds with enhanced workplace support, Solar Energy UK's initiative to build a more inclusive solar industry, and MCS Foundation's efforts to get Gen-Z into retrofit and renewables jobs
- Health sector experiences in North Wales reportedly show that Supported Apprenticeships benefit from a central hub providing additional support to apprentices and local employers
- Deloitte's bespoke programmes

Historical models

- Draw on learnings from previous programmes like Skills for Industry and Upskilling@Work, Skillsbuild, Training for Work, and New Deal

Flexible delivery and accessibility

- Modular accreditation, flexible delivery, and embedded ALN/ESOL support have reportedly improved access and retention.

Also, some stakeholders highlighted the effectiveness of programmes like Trailblazer and Connect to Work in supporting people with complex needs into employment. Such initiatives should be continued and expanded to further widen participation, according to stakeholders making the point.