

Building vocational skills for economic renewal:

**Written evidence to the Enterprise and Business Committee's
Inquiry into Apprenticeships in Wales**

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Colegau Cymru
Uned 7 Cae Gwyrdd
Greenmeadow Springs
Tongwynlais, Caerdydd CF15 7AB
Ff: 029 2052 2500
E: helo@colegaucymru.ac.uk
W: www.colegaucymru.ac.uk

Colleges Wales
Unit 7 Cae Gwyrdd
Greenmeadow Springs
Tongwynlais, Cardiff CF15 7AB
T: 029 2052 2500
E: hello@collegeswales.ac.uk
W: www.collegeswales.ac.uk

Introduction

ColegauCymru, which represents the 17 further education (FE) colleges and two FE institutions in Wales, welcomes the opportunity to give written and oral evidence to the Enterprise and Business Committee's inquiry into apprenticeships. The inquiry is timely. In the context of recession and high youth unemployment, the role of apprenticeships is of pivotal importance to Wales.

As we seek a path to recovery and full employment, enhanced vocational training involving experience in the workplace is of central importance. The development of the apprenticeships programme in recent years is very much to be welcomed and has been one of a suite of successful measures adopted by the Welsh Government (including ProAct and ReAct) to address both the pressing issue of youth unemployment in Wales and the broader skills agenda.

In order to contribute to this jointly held objective, this paper aims to:

- (i) outline the importance of the Welsh Government's apprenticeships programme in helping Wales recover from recession and to deliver long term growth by enhancing the skills of our workforce
- (ii) demonstrate how colleges and training providers have taken the leading role in the Apprenticeship and Pathways to Apprenticeships programmes to deliver the objectives of the Welsh Government; and
- (iii) propose ways in which the Apprenticeship and Pathways to Apprenticeship programmes may be further enhanced to ensure that they deliver the economic renewal that Wales needs in these challenging times.

ColegauCymru would be happy to provide the committee with any other additional information or evidence that may be helpful in conducting the inquiry in the coming period.

Investing in apprenticeships - investing in Wales's economic renewal

Despite the extremely testing economic outlook we have the opportunity to rebuild our industrial future founded on a skilled workforce and employers who are committed to development of their staff for the 21st century labour market. The importance of enhancing vocational skills specifically through programmes such as apprenticeships is particularly important for Wales' economy.

The need to develop a skills base for a renewed emphasis on industrial and construction industry growth is supported by a clear evidence base on projected labour demand in Wales up to 2020. According to the latest estimates from the UK Commission on Employment and Skills' *Working Futures* report: "Wales is the only nation/region [in the UK] where skilled trades occupations are expected to grow in employment, and not decline" and that employment growth in Wales is projected to be: "above the UK average...for the primary sector and utilities, construction, and

trade, accommodation and transport”.¹ This gives a particular impetus to approaches designed to enhance Wales’ vocational skills base, such as the apprenticeship programme. It leads us to conclude that investment in vocational learning should be proportionately higher in Wales than in other parts of the UK where a downturn in labour demand for skilled trades roles is projected.

This picture for Wales is supported by some significant shifts that make be occurring in the wider global economy in the coming period. The Economist recently devoted a special issue to what it has called the coming ‘third industrial revolution’ for manufacturing and innovation. It reported that: “the wheel is almost coming full circle”, with some highly skilled manufacturing jobs coming back to western nations from Asia in the coming decade as a result of higher labour costs and higher energy and transportation costs in getting products back to western markets.²

Wales needs a skilled vocational workforce to ensure that we can make the most of any such shift, as any ‘race to the top’ of the value chain in products and services will require a strong cadre of skilled and adaptable people with intermediate and higher level skills. Colleges are very well positioned to respond to this intermediate and high level skills agenda as they deliver the range of programmes from entry level basic skills through to Foundation degree and Masters degree provision in some cases. As such, colleges are engines of both employability and progression, boosting the productivity of Wales’ labour force.

But the contribution of apprenticeships in Wales goes beyond equipping people and businesses with the skills to perform in the new industrial economy that we expect to emerge in the coming years. It also assists various public bodies and the health and social care sectors to fill the various skills gaps that exist across Wales. The apprenticeships programme therefore helps to fulfil Wales’ pressing health and social care needs as well as helping deliver for our industrial and economic future.

Colleges as successful partners in the delivery of apprenticeships

FE colleges in Wales, with their partner training providers, are the key delivers of the learning element of the apprenticeship programme in Wales. This is not a new area of activity: it has been embedded in colleges across Wales over a long period, as evidenced by longstanding work based relationships with anchor employers such as Airbus, GE Aviation and TATA. Colleges, however, are not resting on these laurels and are becoming increasingly entrepreneurial in the way that they work with employers to take forward work based learning opportunities in general and apprenticeships in particular.

A transformed FE sector in Wales with fewer but larger colleges will have a significant number of colleges with the critical mass and relevant linkages - ‘anchor colleges’ if you will - to engage in even stronger strategic level relationships with anchor companies and regionally important employers. At the other end of the

¹ Welsh Government synopsis of UKCES *Working Futures 2010-2020* report, December 2011, p.1 & 5.

² Special Report, ‘A third industrial revolution’, *The Economist*, 21st April 2012, p.4.

spectrum, developments such as shared apprenticeships and other joint apprenticeship vehicles hold out the promise of new and innovative ways of working with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Wales. These developments have already got off to a good start between many colleges and SMEs.

Colleges also play a particularly direct role in the apprenticeship programme, as a number of institutions directly employ and train their own apprentices (there are currently almost 50 apprentices employed by FE colleges across in Wales). Some colleges, such as Deeside College, plan to increase significantly the number of directly employed apprentices in the coming year.

Apprenticeship frameworks and standards are designed to deliver the right mix of on the job training and enhanced skills through an integrated educational pathway. Apprentices are both learners and employees and this dual status is important in giving participants experience both of the labour market and of the knowledge and skills through the learning that roles in technical and/or professional trades require.

Though the apprenticeships programme is focussed on young people, at the same time it should not be closed to learners over 25 who may not have received the opportunity to engage in vocational or work based learning. The all age element of the programme therefore has a legitimate place, both for the learner and the employer, which should not be lost.

Pathways to Apprenticeships – an emerging success

Crucial to the delivery of the apprenticeship programme in Wales has been the Pathways to Apprenticeship (PtA) programme. Funded directly by the Welsh Government and the European Social Fund, PtA has provided the platform for young people to gain the necessary baseline skills and qualifications to prepare them for the main apprenticeship programme.

Colleges play the central role in delivering PtA, which is a one year intensive programme giving learners the wherewithal to make the most of their apprenticeship. PtA has been successful in achieving this aim - and has done so in the relatively short period that it has been fully in operation. The PtA programme has been a game changer for many young people in Wales who would not have been able to progress to an apprenticeship opportunity otherwise.

The systematic provision of such preparatory programmes is an area where Wales may well be ahead of England. A recent Ofsted good practice guide on apprenticeships highlights the need for such programmes across the border.³ There are around 2,000 PtA places in Wales during the current academic year and each Pathway is aligned to the Welsh Government's economic renewal sectors. The PtA programme is in place until 2014, when the current Convergence and Competitiveness Programmes come to a close.

³ 'Apprenticeships for young people: a good practice report', Ofsted, April 2012, Ref No: 110117, p.14-18.

Rapidly improving completion rates for apprenticeships

Colleges and work based learning providers (some of which are in consortium arrangements with colleges) have been making strides in the quality of their provision and in the retention of apprentices. Overall completion rates for Foundation Apprenticeships and main Apprenticeships have increased substantially from 2006/07, when the completion rates were in the 48%-58% range, to a completion rate in the **81%-83% range in 2010/11** (see Annex B for a breakdown). Credit for this improvement lies with the employers, the learners and the colleges.

Developing Apprenticeships – the next steps for Wales

Though the renewed apprenticeships programme in Wales including PtA has proved to be increasingly successful, the NAW's Enterprise and Business Committee has indicated that it will be looking for ways in which the programme could be improved during the current Assembly term. ColegauCymru believes that there are five specific areas in which the apprenticeship programme could be further developed to the benefit of learners and employers in Wales.

1. Developing progression to Higher Apprenticeships

One measure that may assist the fuller development of the apprenticeship programme is the more rapid development of Higher Apprenticeships. This particular apprenticeship scheme includes within it both 'on the job' experience and time in a college or other education provider, studying for a level 4 qualification - typically a HND/HNC or a Foundation Degree. The educational element of a Higher Apprenticeship has a clear vocational orientation relevant to the role in which the apprentice is employed. This programme is at a very early stage in Wales currently and we would like to see a more rapid move to increase its uptake, perhaps as a result of the current review of Further Education in Higher Education being undertaken by the Welsh Government's Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

Extending the apprenticeships programme to level 4 and level 5 learning would have the benefit of giving a clearer progression pathway for who may have only considered the academic route to a skilled profession or trade (see point 2 below). This is already a route that Airbus UK, for instance, has successfully introduced in the past decade (for instance its BEng with IEng apprenticeship). The fuller development of the Higher Apprenticeship route would give the programme a higher status which could help combat some of the inaccurate understandings of the vocational education route to employment.

2. Raising the status and profile of Apprenticeships in Wales

As mentioned above, there are, regrettably, still indications that the status and profile of apprenticeships and the vocational route into employment more generally is still

treated by many as inferior to the traditional academic route. This is something that the third Assembly's Enterprise and Learning Committee has heard about directly.⁴

This attitude has proved difficult to dispel among parents, learners, the media and others who influence young people in schools. Research by Loudhouse in 2011 of 500 pupils in the UK entering year 10 showed that 74% were unable to name a national vocational qualification, 81% unable to name a BTEC qualification and 93% unable to identify an apprenticeship as a post-GCSE option.⁵ Further research in 2011 by Chrysalis of 1,620 15-19 years and 1,693 parents in the UK showed that 28% of young people and 23% of parents had not heard the term 'vocational education' and only 37% of parents were confident about giving information about vocational qualifications.⁶

Coordinated efforts such as Apprenticeships Week, Vocational Qualifications (VQ) Day and other promotional activities (that are supported by the Welsh Government and other partners) are part of the strategy to combat such prejudices. The best way to combat such attitudes is to ensure that accurate and unbiased information is given to potential vocational learners (and their parents) at school on the nature of the options they have, and the concrete outcomes that are likely to result from those options. Such advice must be geared to the needs of the learner and not of the institution.

ColegauCymru is committed to working with partners to ensure that there is a genuine parity of esteem between the apprenticeship route into employment and other routes to work. This should not be an impossible task: in countries such as Germany and Austria the vocational route to a career is highly respected and affirmed in the culture and the education systems of those nations.

3. Mainstreaming the Pathways to Apprenticeships programme

Given the early success of the PtA programme, there is a case for considering mainstreaming the funding of the programme into the new planning and funding system for post-16 education - currently under review by DfES. The central importance of the PtA programme means that after 2014, when the current ESF funding ends, the programme should be considered 'core business' for colleges in preparing learners for the apprenticeship programme, and thus granted mainstream funding by DfES. Ensuring the longer term sustainability of PtA in this way would help ensure that the successes of PtA are perpetuated beyond 2014 for the benefit of young people in Wales.

⁴ The committee heard evidence from EngineeringUK that 40% of advisers wrongly believed that the traditional academic route was the only route to an engineering career. See Members Research Service Briefing, 'Apprenticeships in Wales and the UK' (December 2011) p.6.

⁵ Loudhouse Research commissioned for the Association of Colleges for Colleges Week 2011.

⁶ 'New directions: Young people's and parents' views of vocational education and careers guidance' Jon Batterham and Tom Levesley, Chrysalis Research, for the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development (2011).

4. Granting FE colleges a strategic leadership role in coordinating aspects of the apprenticeships programme in Wales' regions

Ensuring that employers of all sizes and sectors are fully engaged in the development and design of apprenticeships is a key priority for the programme. Although we consider the various frameworks and standards for apprenticeships to be adequate and they do involve employer and Sector Skills Council input, further measures could be taken to improve the regional coordination of apprenticeships within Wales.

In particular, we consider that FE colleges in Wales should be enabled ***to play a strategic leadership role within the regions of Wales*** together with employers and training providers in helping to determine the priorities for the apprenticeship programme in terms of its focus and sectoral breakdown.

Working closely with Regional Learning Partnerships and employer representative bodies, colleges could facilitate a common approach within the region for the priorities in the apprenticeships programme, ensuring it genuinely fit the needs of regional economies in Wales and had a pro-active focus on anchor companies, regionally important employers and the Welsh Government's priority sectors. This role would helpfully build on the role of the nascent Apprenticeship Matching Service, which is currently being rolled out across Wales.

This strategic role could also apply to aspects of the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England and Wales (SASE/W), where, despite a degree of flexibility from the Welsh Government, there is still some undue complexity in the requirements for aspects of apprenticeship frameworks. This affects small and larger employers alike. This is something that colleges and employers will wish to address with the Welsh Government in the coming period.

5. Bringing PtA and Jobs Growth Wales into a closer connection

Both the PtA and Jobs Growth Wales (JGW) are programmes designed to ensure that young people are not left without options in the jobs market. Job seekers require a combination of work experience and skills in order to gain access to the labour market. Individuals with both of these key elements will be in the best position to gain employment.

In this respect it is worth considering how the apprenticeship programme and JGW could be aligned more closely. A learning element to complement the work experience that JGW provides might better equip individuals to gain and sustain access to the labour market in Wales. It would therefore be helpful for PtA and JGW to be brought into closer connection for the benefit of young people in Wales from 2014. ColegauCymru would be happy to explore options with the Government.

Conclusion

The apprenticeship programme in Wales has successfully enabled individuals to enter the jobs market with an appropriate set of 'on the job' experience and technical and vocational skills. FE colleges in Wales have played a leading role in ensuring that the programme has succeeded in delivering on the objectives set out for the programme. Completion rates for apprenticeship provision have significantly improved since 2006 and work with employers and SSCs on properly tailoring apprenticeship frameworks to their needs is well advanced.

The emerging 'transformed' FE sector in Wales has the critical mass to take these partnerships to the next level, leading strategic level relationships with anchor companies among others to ensure that Wales' vocational skills base is equipped to deal with the opportunities to the coming 'third industrial revolution' with its projected upswing in the number of trades jobs in Wales in the next decade.

We have set out in this written evidence a number of ways in which the apprenticeship programme could be further developed during this Assembly term. We believe that the proposals put forward in this document would enhance the programme significantly enhanced. We look forward to the oral evidence session with the committee.

Annex A: Illustrative sample of FE college-based apprenticeship programmes in Wales

Coleg Gwent

The college has sustained and successful apprenticeships programmes with **TATA** in Llanwern, **Doncasters** in Bleanavon, **BAE Systems** in Glascoed and with **Contour Aircraft Systems** in Cwmbran. Progression to high level skills is a priority for the college and its partners and so students come back in their 2nd, 3rd and 4th year of their apprenticeships to complete a full Level 3 Diploma and then a HNC/HND alongside a Level 3 NVQ completed using the college's work based assessors out on their own sites. Typical examples of apprenticeships in construction are sustainability skills, vintage wood skills and external wall insulation.

Coleg Morgannwg

Coleg Morgannwg has a long tradition of apprenticeship training with a range of large blue chip employers and a wide range of SMEs particularly in the engineering, manufacturing and construction sectors, while also being responsive to needs across a board range of other sectors. The college has a long and well established partnership with the aerospace sector in South Wales. The partnership with **GE Aviation** in Nantgarw has been sustained for over 20 years and the college delivers training both on and off the job to 60 aircraft engine apprentice technicians and 17 business administration apprentices. (The college was awarded the Chairman's Prize for Apprenticeships by the Wales Quality Centre in 2011 for its partnerships with GE). Many apprentices go on to study higher level qualifications such as HNC and Foundation degrees. The college has recently become a preferred provider of apprenticeship training for **British Airways Maintenance** in Cardiff, **British Airways Avionics** in Llantrisant, **Axiom Manufacturing** and **Pullmans** in Cardiff. The college also works in partnership with private training providers to provide apprenticeship training to a number of leading manufacturing companies such as FSG Ltd, Allevard Springs, Cottam & Brooks, and the college also partners other large companies such as the Royal Mint, L'Oreal, Panasonic, Sony etc.

Coleg Sir Gâr

The college has a suite of apprenticeship programmes in a variety of skilled trades and its innovative work in the **Constructing Carmarthenshire Together (CCT)** partnerships is particularly worth highlighting. One element of CCT consists of a large scale shared apprenticeship scheme employing 50 apprentices - with a successful completion rate of 98%. Apprentices in the scheme benefit from being able to work for a variety of companies, rather than being limited to one small construction employer. 'Building Your Own Future' is another key aspect of the partnership. It is a six week long course promoting construction as a career, targeted at unemployed young people. It gives participants direct experience of the

trade, with young people seeing at first hand the work of real tradesmen while getting the chance to make something themselves at home or with a group. This work is supported by the Next Steps competition, which gives those over the age of 16 the chance to compete for a place on the CCT apprenticeship programme. Progression in vocational skills is an integral element of the partnership. The 'Building Cadetships' element of the CCT, modelled on a scheme first developed in Australia, allows people individuals in the construction trade to upskill. Several students have already enrolled on Foundation degree programmes at Coleg Sir Gâr as part of the Building Cadetships Scheme.

Deeside College

Deeside College currently delivers over 3,000 work-based vocational qualifications including over 1,700 apprentices at over 1,000 employers' premises throughout North Wales. Among the wide range of apprenticeship programmes, the college has delivered a wide range of apprenticeships to **Airbus** for a number of years, helping the company to find and recruit suitable applicants. A close on-going relationship with **UPM Shotton** allows apprentices to be trained with the college but also to undertake training with state-of-the-art facilities at Gernsbach in Germany. The college has been integral to the new composites training and has integrated that into the apprenticeship programme.

The college and **DRB Engineering** have developed a strong relationship based on the shared conviction in the importance of apprenticeships to young people. The college also runs a successful shared apprenticeship scheme. The college was a pilot for the successful shared apprenticeship scheme in engineering, which was found to be popular with local employers as it allowed those companies who could not finance their own full time apprentice to share an apprentice for the first year. The college has 30 staff completing apprenticeships. The college plans to roll out a scheme to employ young people on an apprenticeship programme beginning in 2012/13.

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai has proved highly flexible in its delivery of a diverse range of apprenticeship programmes, including e-learning, weekend and evening delivery at different centres across the North West Wales region. The Grŵp has also piloted some particularly innovative ways in which a range of employers can be involved in the apprenticeships programme. **Cwmni Prentis Menai Cyf (CPMC)** is one such vehicle: it helps the area's engineering industry by facilitating the creation of high quality employment and training opportunities, which in turn advances the economic development of North West Wales. It does this by providing a cost-efficient and simple way for businesses to hire apprentices when this might otherwise not be possible due to the current economic climate. By employing the apprentice directly, CPMC gives the employer a safety net while the apprentices get the opportunity to complete their apprenticeship elsewhere if needed. 30 apprenticeships have been created so far. Companies such as International Safety Components, Môn

Maintenance, DMM, Marco Cable Management, FAUN Trackway, Roberts Port Dinorwig, Rehau and Magnox, work with Grŵp Llandillo Menai on apprenticeships relating to the future of the nuclear industry in North Wales.

Yale College, Wrexham

The college has a broad range of successful apprenticeship programmes with local and regional employers. Many of the apprentices at the college in recent years have succeeded in progressing in various skills competitions including WorldSkills. The range of partner employers includes **JCB** (Wrexham) for engineering, **British Home Stores** (Broughton) for customer service & retail, Kellogg's (Wrexham) for engineering, **Kronospan** (Chirk) for engineering, **Scottish Power** (Wrexham) for customer service, **Cadbury's** (Wrexham) for engineering, **Magellan Aerospace** (Wrexham) for engineering.

Merthyr Tydfil College

The college offers apprenticeships through its work based learning provision in the construction and motor vehicle areas. These apprenticeships are with small and medium sized enterprises in the locality. The college also offers PtA in exterior wall insulation as well as construction and motor vehicle. 45 learners currently in college are studying on the above routes.

ANNEX B - Framework success rates for 2010/11 work based learning provision by sector, subject area and programme type (Source: Lifelong Learning Record)

	Foundation Apprenticeships		Apprenticeships		All Apprenticeships	
	No. of Leavers Attaining Full Framework	%	No. of Leavers Attaining Full Framework	%	No. of Leavers Attaining Full Framework	%
1: Health, Public Services and Care	1,760	79%	1,430	80%	3,190	80%
3: Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	55	74%	10	*	65	71%
4: Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	910	82%	850	88%	1,760	85%
5: Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	885	78%	675	76%	1,560	77%
6: Information and Communication Technology	540	84%	210	83%	750	83%
7: Retail and Commercial Enterprise	2,275	81%	825	83%	3,100	82%
7(a): Retailing and Customer Service	1,300	84%	460	86%	1,760	85%
7(b): Hair and Beauty	380	74%	170	75%	550	74%
7(c): Hospitality and Catering	595	81%	200	84%	795	81%
8: Leisure, Travel and Tourism	135	75%	140	86%	275	80%
13: Education and Training	60	91%	315	88%	375	89%
15: Business, Administration and Law	1,060	83%	1,145	86%	2,205	85%
All sector subject areas	7,685	81%	5,600	83%	13,285	82%