



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Menter a Busnes
The Enterprise and Business Committee

Dydd Mercher, 16 Mai 2012
Wednesday, 16 May 2012

Cynnwys
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Byron Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Keith Davies	Llafur Labour
Julie James	Llafur Labour

Alun Ffred Jones	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Eluned Parrott	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Nick Ramsay	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Conservatives (Committee Chair)
David Rees	Llafur Labour
Kenneth Skates	Llafur Labour
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

**Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance**

Gary Griffiths	Pennaeth Prentisiaethau Airbus yn y DU Head of Apprenticeships, Airbus in the UK
Helen Mary Jones	Prif Weithredwr, Youth Cymru Chief Executive, Youth Cymru
Mike McKenna	Cadeirydd Kronospan Chairman of Kronospan
Elliott White	Prentis—Technegydd Offerwaith, Kronospan Apprentice—Instrumentation Technician, Kronospan
Richard Wilkins	Prentis y Flwyddyn Airbus yn y DU Apprentice of the Year, Airbus in the UK
Allan Williams	Rheolwr Hyfforddi a Datblygu, Cyngor Bro Morgannwg Training and Development Manager, Vale of Glamorgan Council

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Siân Phipps	Clerc Clerk
Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Anne Thomas	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.32 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.32 a.m.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Nick Ramsay:** I welcome Members, witnesses and members of the public. This meeting is bilingual, and headphones can be used to hear the simultaneous translation from Welsh to English on channel 1 or for amplification on channel 0. The meeting is being broadcast and a transcript of the proceedings will be published. I ask Members please to turn off their mobile phones and any other electronic equipment. There is no need to touch the microphones as they should operate automatically. In the event of a fire alarm, please follow the directions of the ushers. We have received one apology today, from Dafydd Elis-Thomas, but there are no substitutions.

9.33 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Brentisiaethau yng Nghymru—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth
Inquiry into Apprenticeships in Wales—Evidence Session

[2] **Nick Ramsay:** We will now start our inquiry into apprenticeships in Wales. I welcome the witnesses and thank them for coming here today to help us with our evidence session. This is the first session of the committee's inquiry into apprenticeships in Wales, and its main aim is to explore whether the current system is effectively serving the needs of the Welsh economy and the needs of employers and young people.

[3] I congratulate Richard Wilkins on becoming Apprentice of the Year. That is excellent. I also welcome Gary Griffiths, head of apprenticeships at Airbus in the UK, Elliott White, apprentice instrumentation technician at Kronospan, and Mike McKenna, the chairman of Kronospan.

[4] We have a wide range of questions for you and time is limited so, if at any point during today, I move things along, that is not because we are not listening to what you are saying, but because the Members need to get through a lot of questions. The first question is from Byron Davies.

[5] **Byron Davies:** My first question is to the employers: why would you employ apprentices?

[6] **Mr Griffiths:** From Airbus's point of view, we have developed apprentices as part of our skills strategy, so we are looking to develop an offer of progression for existing employees, but also to bring new blood into the organisation.

[7] **Byron Davies:** Is it a worthwhile exercise? Do they stay and complete their apprenticeships?

[8] **Mr Griffiths:** Absolutely. The apprentices who join our organisation come through quite a rigorous process to get an apprenticeship and then, post apprenticeship, we find that the retention of those people is high: around 80% to 90%.

[9] **Byron Davies:** What is your experience, Mr McKenna?

[10] **Mr McKenna:** I can echo that. Our retention rate is above 80% over a long period of time. Why should we train apprentices? Well, who else is going to train them? I have the advantage of having been a commercial apprentice many years ago in a large business. We took on 100 craft apprentices and 50 student apprentices per year, so I have seen for myself the benefits of the scheme. While we are not a big business in the same sense as the one that I worked for, and we are a smaller employer, we need to ensure that we have people who have the skills that we need as a business so that we can continue to develop. No-one else is going to train them.

[11] **Byron Davies:** I have a question for the apprentices, Richard and Elliott. Did you wake up one day and decide that you were going to be an apprentice? What brought you into it?

[12] **Mr Wilkins:** For me, I was toying with the idea of whether to go to university and, through Careers Wales, I stumbled across an opportunity to do an apprenticeship. I thought that it would be a good way of getting a degree and on-the-job experience, which is priceless

these days.

[13] **Byron Davies:** Were you encouraged by anybody?

[14] **Mr Wilkins:** Yes. I had many peers who provided me with a lot of information, and I went to the open day that was held back in November. All the information provided was up to date, and there was good guidance about what it would be like to have an apprenticeship in Wales and with Airbus.

[15] **Mr White:** I have always been interested in technology and development. I studied technology for GCSE, and the course included industrial technology, so we were working on the type of things that I am working on now in work. When I left, I did A-levels and then I went on to do the electrical engineering ONC before I started at Kronospan. That was what made me think, 'This is what I want to do', so I applied for the apprenticeship.

[16] **Byron Davies:** So, you were always looking to work towards that.

[17] **Mr White:** Yes.

[18] **Keith Davies:** Wrth ddarllen y dystiolaeth sydd o'n blaen, mae'n glir i mi bod gwahaniaeth rhwng y bobl sy'n dechrau prentisiaeth pan fyddant yn 16 oed a'r rheini sy'n dechrau pan fyddant yn 18 oed. Gofynnodd Byron ichi yn gynharach faint sy'n para, faint sy'n methu ac a oes gwahaniaeth rhwng y plant sy'n dechrau prentisiaeth pan fyddant yn 16 oed a'r bobl ifanc sy'n dechrau pan fyddant yn 18 oed. A yw'r rhai sy'n 16 oed yn para ac yn llwyddo? A oes gwahaniaeth sylfaenol rhwng y ddau?

Keith Davies: In reading the evidence before us, it is clear to me that there is a difference between people who start an apprenticeship aged 16 and those who start when they are aged 18. Byron asked you earlier how many remain, how many fail and whether there is a difference between the children who start an apprenticeship at 16 years of age and the young people who start when they are 18 years of age. Do the 16-year-olds carry on and succeed? Is there a fundamental difference between the two?

[19] **Mr Griffiths:** For clarification, my understanding is that the question was about whether we retain people post apprenticeship, as opposed to people not completing the apprenticeship.

[20] **Keith Davies:** Yes.

[21] **Mr Griffiths:** On the completion of apprenticeships, 100% of our people complete the programme—that is, they complete the whole framework of the apprenticeship—as well as many other activities and qualifications that we do besides.

[22] On the difference between somebody coming in aged 16 and somebody coming in aged 18, we have developed the undergraduate apprenticeship programme to bring people in who have A-levels, and those people go on to do a full BEng with honours during the apprenticeship. So, at an academic level, they are at a far higher level. The 16-year-olds all come in to do a craft apprenticeship, so they are looking at something that is perhaps more long term if they want to go through an engineering route. That is the principal difference. If they are coming in at 18 years of age to join the undergraduate apprenticeship, they are coming in with A-levels.

[23] We also have the opportunity to take people in at all ages, under the all-age apprenticeship that is offered in Wales. From our point of view, it gives us a great opportunity to have a cross-section of people from all walks of life, and they interact well together. There are benefits for the young school leaver to be working alongside a 30-year-old, and vice

versa. In my evidence, I noted that when people join our craft apprenticeship after their sixteenth birthday, it is usually because they have gone on to do other things but have not been happy or not found them fulfilling. Sometimes, they get disillusioned with what they are doing and come back and decide that they want to do an apprenticeship.

[24] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Deallaf fod tri math o brentisiaeth, sef prentisiaeth sylfaenol, prentisiaeth a phrentisiaeth uwch. Beth yw'r canran o brentisiaid sy'n symud ymlaen i brentisiaethau uwch yn eich cwmnïau, gan ddechrau gyda Gary?

Alun Ffred Jones: I understand that there are three types of apprenticeship, a basic apprenticeship, an apprenticeship and an advanced apprenticeship. What is the percentage of apprentices who progress to an advanced apprenticeship in your companies, starting with Gary?

[25] **Mr Griffiths:** We recruit people directly onto the undergraduate apprenticeship and the higher apprenticeship, but we also develop people from the craft programme to go on to the higher apprenticeship. This year, we will be recruiting around 30 new people onto the undergraduate apprenticeship and around 50 onto the craft apprenticeship. This year, we will be launching an existing-employee apprenticeship for our skilled workers who want to go into engineering, and we will take on 10 of those people in September. so, the total number of people who will be doing a higher apprenticeship on the Broughton site will be in excess of 40.

[26] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Rydych yn dweud yn eich tystiolaeth fod angen gweld mwy o bobl yn symud ymlaen i brentisiaethau lefel uwch. Sut mae gwneud hynny? Beth fyddai'r manteision i chi o weld hynny'n digwydd?

Alun Ffred Jones: You said in your evidence that we need to see more people progressing to higher-level apprenticeships. How can that be achieved? What would be the benefits to you of that happening?

[27] **Mr Griffiths:** We say that because of how technology is changing. We need people to be able to perform the requirements of supporting the engineering faculties within the organisation. We need manufacturing engineers, quality engineers and design and system engineers. We would prefer to look at growing our own, rather than always bringing in graduates. We have found that to be extremely successful. We have talked about retention, and we retain our apprentices for far longer than we retain our graduates. Our retention of graduates varies, but it is often quite poor. We find that they come to us to get work experience and then go off to other places.

[28] **Mr McKenna:** All our apprentices come in on a foundation base, but we want those people to progress as much as they can, in the same way as Airbus, as a substitute for graduate recruits. It is a much longer-term programme than a pure apprenticeship, as far as we are concerned.

[29] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Pa mor llwyddiannus ydych chi o ran symud pobl i'r lefelau uwch?

Alun Ffred Jones: How successful are you at moving people to the higher levels?

[30] **Mr McKenna:** Very successful. We have a number of engineers and leaders for the future from the 35 people whom we have already recruited.

[31] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I'r prentisiaid, a yw'r system yn hawdd i'w deall? Ble ydych ar yr ysgol?

Alun Ffred Jones: To the apprentices, is the system easy to understand? Where are you on the ladder?

[32] **Mr White:** I would say that it is very easy to understand. Everything is explained

before you start. You get the structure of the apprenticeship and so you know exactly where you will be and what you will be doing. You know exactly what you need to achieve and your targets for every month, six months and 12 months.

9.45 a.m.

[33] **Mr Wilkins:** From my perspective, every three months or so, you go to a different department. Quite often, in other apprenticeships, you only go to different departments for a week or two, so you do not get a meaningful task, but because you are in a department for three months or so, you get integrated into a team and you are doing on-the-job tasks with real-life applications. Every so often, normally about every six months, you sit down with a training adviser and go through your progress. Likewise, on the academic side, you sit down with your tutor and go through what you can improve on and how you think you can use the academic qualifications in your job. For me, I did a business degree through Bangor University, and then I was applying the principles, like risk management, purchasing and so on, in my job. Often, I would have a project given to me, and one was on process improvement; I used the principles from my academic side that applied to the activity. Again, that gets reviewed every so often, so it gives you a good chance to show off what you have learned.

[34] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Hoffwn ofyn cwestiwn i Mike a Gary. Mae nifer y prentisiaid wedi disgyn drwy Gymru yn ystod y blynyddoedd diwethaf. Beth yw eich profiad chi fel cwmnïau, ac a yw hynny'n adlewyrchu eich llwyddiant fel cwmnïau? Hynny yw, rwy'n cymryd eich bod yn cymryd mwy o brentisiaid os ydych yn ehangu eich busnes.

Alun Ffred Jones: I would like to ask a question to Mike and Gary. The number of apprentices has declined throughout Wales over recent years. What is your experience as companies, and does that reflect your success as companies? So, I presume that you take on more apprenticeships if you are expanding your business.

[35] **Mr Griffiths:** From an Airbus point of view, we very much look at our resource requirement for the site to ensure that we are going to meet the build programme that we have for each year. We plan three years ahead and only recruit people when there are positions at the end. So, we know that our build programme will require us to have x number of skilled people and y number of engineers, and that is the reason why we recruit those people. It is very much based on resource demand.

[36] **Mr McKenna:** Our approach is a little different. We realise that we need to invest in the long-term future, so it does not matter how the business is performing—we have to be bringing apprentices through the system. These are good-quality people that we can absorb within the business.

[37] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning, all. I want to explore the characteristics of the apprentices that you have, and the advantages and disadvantages of the all-age apprenticeship system in Wales. What are your views on that?

[38] **Mr Griffiths:** From our point of view, as I mentioned before, it adds great value to the overall programme. We get people who are perhaps a little inexperienced and who benefit from having somebody more experienced with them, but it also helps the more experienced people as well. So, from the point of view of what the overall programme looks like within the new entry apprentices, those are the benefits. With regard to our existing workforce, what we have been looking for for some time—and have now managed to develop—is a programme that offers progression from level 2 through to level 6. The whole idea is to make sure that people have the opportunity for development if they are academically or vocationally capable of going through that programme. It gives us an opportunity, looking at

our resource strategy, to make sure that we have sufficient people in those positions to carry out those different roles.

[39] **Joyce Watson:** I would like to explore the entry point age. Not everybody has their head on in their teens and early 20s. They come to it a bit later. I am particularly looking at the advantage of people who might have missed out the first time round and want a second chance.

[40] **Mr Griffiths:** Yes, and those are the people who are our existing employees, so there are people who come into the role as a semi-skilled operator, and they get the opportunity to, first of all, get qualifications to recognise that level 2 or semi-skilled level, and then they get an opportunity to progress to level 3, which is a skilled status. As I previously mentioned, we have just introduced one for the skilled to go into engineering as well, so we have progression from level 2 right the way through to level 6 using the apprenticeship model. We have built our skills strategy completely around the apprenticeship model in that regard.

[41] **Mr McKenna:** From my point of view, taking on a young apprentice—and I am not being ageist—is a £60,000 investment for the business at the outset. However, if I take on a more mature apprentice, someone who is, let us say, beyond their teenage years, then that is potentially a cost of £150,000 to me, because of adult rates of pay. So, if someone of more mature years wants the opportunity to do an apprenticeship, then our approach is that they need to work within the business and prove their value to the business before we are prepared to make the long-term investment. We have started to do that with more than 50 people now.

[42] **Joyce Watson:** Keeping to types of people, I am particularly interested in gender stereotyping that exists within workforces. I notice that Airbus has a commitment to increasing the number of female staff members by 25%, although I do not know what the base rate is. It is well documented that science, technology, engineering and maths belong to males not females. So, first, is there gender stereotyping in apprenticeships? Secondly, while I welcome your commitment to increasing the numbers, how do you intend to do that?

[43] **Mr Griffiths:** It is an aspirational target that we have developed, not just for apprenticeships, but for Airbus generally, across all its entities. We can see that we are losing a huge percentage of the working population by not encouraging more females into engineering, so we are working hard to try to do that. We are working with our on-site education liaison manager to work in the schools. We also get our female apprentices and heads of business to go out to demonstrate that you can progress to high levels within the organisation.

[44] So, we are committed to this, but, unfortunately, the stereotyping that you mentioned is not necessarily within engineering but outside of it. Trying to get young girls, at the ages of 12 or 13, to see that engineering could be a career for them is the most difficult thing. When you start explaining to them that they could join as an apprenticeship at 16, complete that apprenticeship within three years and then go on to work as a skilled person earning £33,000 or £34,000 a year, they then start to understand that it could be something for them to consider.

[45] We ask for a B grade or above in maths and physics at A-level for our undergraduate apprenticeship programme, but we find that, whereas quite a few males and females take maths as a subject, a surprisingly low number of females take physics. I looked up some figures yesterday and, in Wales, according to the information that I found, only 283 females in Wales successfully completed A-level physics. So, more support is needed to encourage more females to study physics.

[46] **Keith Davies:** Codwyd un neu ddau **Keith Davies:** One or two interesting points

o bwyntiau diddorol. Yn fy marn i, ffiseg yw'r pwnc lefel A anoddaf—mae'n anodd i fechgyn ac i ferched, ac ni wn beth yw'r ateb i hynny. Yn eich papur, rydych yn sôn bod eisiau cael mwy o bobl i gymryd prentisiaeth ar lefel uwch, er mwyn cael gradd. Nodaf hefyd eich bod yn sôn yn eich papur eu bod yn ennill £13,500 yn y flwyddyn gyntaf, £15,000 yn yr ail flwyddyn a £18,000 yn y drydedd flwyddyn. Dywedwch fod hynny'n gostus ond bod y Llywodraeth yn cyfrannu. A yw disgyblion chweched dosbarth sy'n astudio lefel A mewn ysgolion neu golegau yn ymwybodol bod y prentisiaethau hyn ar gael? Mae'n well o lawer iddynt ddod atoch chi ac ennill yr arian mawr yma na mynd i brifysgol, gyda'u rhieni yn talu. Sut ydych yn rhoi'r wybodaeth i bobl, a beth yw cyfraniad y Llywodraeth at yr arian? Rydych chi hefyd yn sôn yn eich papur am sgiliau hanfodol ac am bobl yn astudio lefel A mewn mathemateg a ffiseg, ac rydych yn dweud—

have been raised. In my opinion, physics is the most difficult A-level subject—it is difficult for boys and for girls, and I do not know what the solution to that is. In your paper, you mention that we need more people entering apprenticeships at that higher level so that they gain degrees. I also note that your paper refers to the fact that they earn £13,500 in the first year, £15,000 in the second year and £18,000 in the third year. You state that that is expensive but that the Government contributes. Are sixth-formers studying A-levels in schools or colleges aware that these apprenticeships are available? It is much better that they come to you and earn this good money than go to university, for which their parents have to foot the bill. How do you provide that information to people, and what is the Government's contribution to that funding? You also refer in your paper to key skills and people studying maths and physics at A-level, and you say—

[47] **Nick Ramsay:** Keith, you are asking a long string of questions.

[48] **Keith Davies:** This is important, Chair, because there is a review of qualifications, and Gary says in his paper that pupils studying A-level physics and maths ought not to have to do up to level 3 and should have a concession for ESW application of number. Have you submitted that to the Government?

[49] **Mr Griffiths:** Yes, I have. I have put that to Huw Evans as part of his review. What we are trying to promote and get across to young people is that there are apprenticeships available, and we are promoting ours in particular. We hold an information day every year. Last year, 5,500 people attended that in our West Factory. We have deliberately ensured that it is not an information day purely for Airbus. We wanted our providers, such as Yale College, Deeside College, Glyndŵr University and Bangor University to be there, and Careers Wales came along as well. They came to promote apprenticeships generally. We take our position as the anchor company extremely seriously, and that is one of the roles we can commit to, while also promoting our own apprenticeships. There will be some people who do not meet the entry requirements for our programme who would still like to have an apprenticeship. The providers were asked to ensure that, wherever possible, they could encourage people to do that. They also promoted Pathways to Apprenticeship at that event.

[50] **Joyce Watson:** May I ask the same question of Kronospan?

[51] **Mr McKenna:** We have not been successful in recruiting any females into what is a heavy process engineering environment. We have had a few applicants. Some have failed for academic reasons—they have not achieved the required standard, and we will not compromise on that. However, what is interesting to us is that, as a business, the gender balance across our European factories is 50:50 in industrial areas as much as it is in commercial areas. I remember that, the first time I went to the Czech Republic many years ago, there was a lady who was well into her 50s working away on a pretty dirty old lathe. It is alien to us in the UK, and it is going to take a long time to change those entrenched values, but we keep working at it.

[52] **Joyce Watson:** You recognise that there are entrenched values, and I accept that they exist in society and in the workplace. We must all accept that. This is a question to both of you. When you have females showing an interest—and you are the end of the line so it must start before they get to you—how do you sell the idea of working in your company as something that is not alien and how do you sell it as a friendly place for them to take their place?

[53] **Nick Ramsay:** Who is that question directed to?

[54] **Joyce Watson:** I am asking it of both, because one has not recruited any, so there is obviously something happening there, and one is looking to increase the number of females recruited.

[55] **Mr Griffiths:** From an Airbus point of view, when we go out and talk to young girls, we start as young as possible to promote the idea that engineering is not what their preconceived ideas of it might be or, more importantly, what their parents' and teachers' preconceived ideas of it might be. We try to take the female apprentices with us and make sure that they can see and understand by talking to the apprentices that they are treated in exactly the same way. I would reinforce what my colleague said. We do not lower our entry requirements to try to get more females in. What we need to do, however, is to try to make sure.

10.00 a.m.

[56] **Joyce Watson:** I am not asking you to lower your entry requirements: you are answering a question that I did not ask. What I am asking you, all things being equal—I accept all things being equal—is what you do to help females to come in. I did not ask about the entry requirements.

[57] **Mr Griffiths:** Okay. We promote the apprenticeships by using female apprentices. We also take into schools senior people who have come through an apprenticeship route or through the degree route to demonstrate that there are jobs in organisations such as ours that females do, and do particularly well.

[58] **Mr McKenna:** For us, it is going to be a challenge for the first female who enters. At the end of the day, however, the opportunities that it presents for that individual are absolutely tremendous. It is actually quite challenging for a guy like Elliott to come into our type of environment. We have people from a range of backgrounds. Some of them need sheltering, so our approach is that we try to tailor our development programme to these young individuals. There is not a fixed blueprint that we would use.

[59] We have just made an offer to an apprentice for this year, and he was very emotional in the interview. You would have said that this tough environment in which we work is not a place for this guy to come into, but we will work at it—his father works in the business and his father is a great guy—and he will be supported by people who live in the local community and they will make sure that he matures, develops and gets through it.

[60] **Nick Ramsay:** Thanks. I would just reassure the witnesses that all the information that you provide in your answers is helpful to this committee.

[61] **Kenneth Skates:** I am just going to jump in at this point and offer an observation and ask whether it is still the case that there is a cultural problem here. I attended a comprehensive that feeds students through to both companies, and when I was reading A-level physics and maths, there were 20 students in each subject, and, in each subject, only two of the students were girls. The problem was more about expectations and that was partly related to the school

and was partly cultural. Are you saying that this is still a problem that you are trying to overcome?

[62] **Mr Griffiths:** From a maths and physics point of view, we will often have people who are perceived to be bright for our craft apprentices. We are looking for exactly the same entry requirements that a sixth form would look for. I mentioned in my paper that there needs to be an understanding that what we are offering on a craft programme is to level 3 and an A-level standard. Beyond that, they can progress to degrees. So, it is important that we get into schools and work with parents to let them understand that real progression is available and that there is not just one route to get you where you need to get to.

[63] However, it is certainly the case—I am going only by the figures that I got yesterday—that there is still a big problem with the number of females doing physics, in particular. Maths is not so much of a problem. The number has increased since 2010, but only very slightly. Also, what is very noticeable is the number of people who start it at AS-level and then drop it when they go on to A-level, and that is true of boys and girls.

[64] **David Rees:** Out of curiosity, with regard to the female entrants, do more come in at the age of 16 than at the age of 18?

[65] **Mr Griffiths:** In our case, it is about the same. They are pretty equal. Our problem is to try to get enough females applying so that we can get to the target of 25%. We are not getting hundreds applying. The number of people who applied for our apprenticeships this year was in the order of 1,500 and only 70 of those were female. That is what we have to try to improve.

[66] **Nick Ramsay:** That is fine. That is very useful.

[67] **David Rees:** So, in a sense, we are not just talking about those doing A-level physics, but those doing physics at O-level and basic skills below that as well.

[68] **Mr Griffiths:** Absolutely.

[69] **Eluned Parrott:** Looking more broadly at advice to young people across the board, you talk in your evidence about there being a lack of independent advice in schools. Do you think that that is because teachers do not necessarily have a good understanding of how apprenticeships work or do you think that there is a bias in the system, whereby more esteem seems to be attached to higher education and the talented students are encouraged in that direction? Where do you think the balance lies between those?

[70] **Mr Griffiths:** I think that it is a bit of both. We are really working hard to try to get teachers to understand that apprenticeships are high level and that they go through to have an equal degree and more, because they get the vocational qualifications and experience as well. So, we are bringing teachers in and working with them to show them exactly what our apprentices do. However, there is also this problem about teachers wanting to get them into the sixth form and prime their academic routes. That is where they seem to get the kudos, perhaps.

[71] **Eluned Parrott:** Do you agree, Mr McKenna?

[72] **Mr McKenna:** I can only echo those comments.

[73] **Eluned Parrott:** Okay. Obviously, there are advisory services that go into schools, such as careers advisory services, but also such things as ambassadorial programmes, engineering in education schemes, STEM ambassadors and things along those lines. Why do

you think that those schemes are not necessarily having the impact that you would like them to?

[74] **Mr Griffiths:** There is some movement, but I do not think that it is moving quickly enough. We would like it to be a lot more rapid in trying to convince young people that this is a direction in which they should go. We have received 1,500 applications for our apprenticeships, so there are people out there who want an apprenticeship.

[75] **Mr McKenna:** The people who are involved in, for example, Engineering Council schemes have already made the decision about the route that they want to take; they are not the problem. When I started my working life, the first priority was to get an apprenticeship. A small percentage of people would go into higher education and the rest went into the normal world of work, which became the youth training scheme and so on. That has been lost and we do not have it back yet. My perception is that, in education—this comes back to what was said earlier—the teaching staff appear to be motivated to make sure that people are going into higher education because it is a gravy train, it means funding, and it keeps the establishment healthy.

[76] **Nick Ramsay:** You might have intended to do this anyway, Eluned, but I would like to direct this question to Richard and Elliott and ask them about the advice they received and their view on this.

[77] **Mr Wilkins:** Some teachers were aware of apprenticeships, but, quite often, particularly when I was in the sixth form, I was encouraged to go to university. The teachers did not really see apprenticeships as a good alternative to doing a degree. However, a couple of teachers, particularly science teachers, were aware of apprenticeships. I was also aware of the past students who had undertaken apprenticeships and who had experience and had gone back into the school to give pupils information regarding their experience. So, we were encouraged, through the school, by past students to do an apprenticeship, but, from the teachers' perspective, it was always geared towards doing a degree and going to university.

[78] **Eluned Parrott:** Where did you find out about apprenticeships?

[79] **Mr White:** Through personal research. There was mention of it, but I can only agree with Richard that in school and sixth form in particular, it was all 'university, university, university'. I will always remember that I told one teacher that it was not my ambition to go to university, but I was still made to fill in UCAS applications and told that I had to do it. I said that I was not going to go, but I was made to do it.

[80] **Kenneth Skates:** That is very interesting.

[81] **Mr Watkins:** I found out about the apprenticeship through Careers Wales, which was helpful. Only a couple of teachers picked up on the point that I did not want to go to university. Without those two or three teachers, I probably would not have been encouraged to do an apprenticeship.

[82] **Eluned Parrott:** Once you had made that decision, did you find it easy to find out and get information about the routes through apprenticeships?

[83] **Mr Watkins:** Yes, the open day provided all the information that I needed. I was quite lucky that two of the students that did it a couple of years before me came in and did a talk for me, so they gave me more information about their experiences and what they did, and I was encouraged to go forward for that. It was definitely a good alternative to going to university.

[84] **Eluned Parrott:** Did you get the same kind of support and advice with your applications for apprenticeships as you would have had for your applications through UCAS?

[85] **Mr Watkins:** Yes.

[86] **Mr White:** Yes.

[87] **Eluned Parrott:** That is fantastic, thank you. Going back to the employers, there have been suggestions that there should be a marketing campaign to raise the esteem of apprenticeships and to inform people. Do you think that that kind of public relations approach would work, or do you think that a schools liaison engagement approach would be more valuable?

[88] **Mr McKenna:** We have been into the three feeder schools to our operation, and, without being too blatant about it, we have promoted apprenticeships as a sensible route into the world of work. That has been a useful exercise. It is fine for a company like ours, because we are offering a good quality apprenticeship. However, there are an awful lot of apprenticeships that are not of great quality, in my opinion, and part of the problem is that 'apprenticeship' is an abused term. That does not help.

[89] **David Rees:** On that point, do you discuss apprenticeships with your supply chains and look at the apprenticeships schemes that they may offer to encourage apprenticeships down the line as well?

[90] **Mr Griffiths:** Yes. Only yesterday, I had a meeting with Magellan to talk about this. We have made a commitment to the Welsh Government to support and almost sponsor the pathway to aerospace apprenticeships, and we have developed that pathway. We are trying to get other organisations involved, and we would like companies in our supply chain such as Magellan to come on board. So, we work closely with our supply chain. It should be borne in mind that some of our supply chain companies are bigger than us: there are GKN plc and Spirit AeroSystems and others, which are huge organisations. We work very closely with the likes of GKN plc in Filton, for instance, but other companies also piggyback our programme in Broughton, such as Thomas Cook, Hawker Beechcraft, Apple Aviation, the Hyde Group and others, which also benefit from everything that we are doing to try to develop our programme. So, yes, we talk closely with other organisations.

[91] **Mr McKenna:** We encourage our prime engineering suppliers to listen to what our experience has been and sell the concept to them. It is much more difficult in the forestry industry, because it means going into rural areas and it is much more fragmented. However, it is needed there as much as anywhere else. That is an area of concern for us. We talk to our key suppliers, but many of them are very small businesses—some are almost one-man businesses—so it is difficult.

[92] **Mr Griffiths:** I made reference in my evidence to the marketing of the undergraduate apprenticeship, which is something that the Government could look at.

[93] **Nick Ramsay:** Eluned, have you finished?

[94] **Eluned Parrott:** I have a final question to the two apprentices. If you were trying to promote apprenticeships to young people, how would you go about it?

10.15 a.m.

[95] **Mr Wilkins:** I think that it has to be done through schools. That is the most important point. Many people who I speak to, who are younger than me, perhaps do not get the

information. I was quite lucky to get the information. However, often, it needs to be provided through schools.

[96] **Mr White:** I would agree. I had no information about apprenticeships in schools; I did not know anything about them. It was all done through personal research and speaking to family members and friends who were older and had been through apprenticeships. So, it was a case of word of mouth.

[97] **Mr Wilkins:** I was speaking to Gary yesterday about the fact that schools are now starting to provide information on this, but it still needs to be promoted, to give it the drive that it needs.

[98] **David Rees:** On that point, do you find that family support is helpful in terms of making those decisions? Families will also push for higher education.

[99] **Mr Wilkins:** Yes. My family encouraged me to do the apprenticeship. They did not want me to move away from home, so they encouraged me and gave me the support that I needed. In fact, they took me to the open day, gathered information and did research themselves. They spoke to family members who worked at Airbus. So, it was good to get that perspective and support from the family.

[100] **David Rees:** So, schools also need to look at encouraging parents to understand the benefits.

[101] **Mr Wilkins:** Yes. I think that, sometimes, parents do not understand the concept of an apprenticeship, because apprenticeships are quite broad in terms of what they offer. So, possibly, we need to educate parents about apprenticeships.

[102] **David Rees:** I have a couple of questions on skills, which is an important aspect. On the undergraduate programme, I noticed in your paper that you mentioned three years of funding for years 1, 2 and 3. Is the undergraduate programme a three-year apprenticeship scheme?

[103] **Mr Griffiths:** All of our apprenticeships last 38 months. So, they start in September and then, three years later, they complete in November. So, the programme essentially lasts for three years.

[104] **David Rees:** So, in my old terminology, apprentices are like sponsored students in effect.

[105] **Mr Griffiths:** No. They are full apprenticeships. They do a vocational qualification—for example, NVQ level 4—and they do essential skills, although I have made some reference to that. They do the foundation degree over the first two years and then they top up in the third year to the full BEng with honours. They are also incorporated engineers with institutions including the Royal Aeronautical Society and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. So, from an academic's point of view, they will do 120 credits per year. However, as I keep pointing out, these individuals are employed people—they start work at 7.45 a.m. in the morning. We do not have half terms and we do not stop for the summer, so they work right the way through. That is the benefit of these apprenticeships.

[106] **David Rees:** So it is an extended year.

[107] **Mr Griffiths:** Yes. It is a proper, full apprenticeship; it is not a sponsored sandwich course.

[108] **David Rees:** Thank you; that was not quite clear in the paper.

[109] **Mr Griffiths:** The funding that we are talking about with all of our apprenticeships relates to the delivery costs. We do not receive any funding for the delivery costs—we do not receive anything in fact, because it goes to the providers—of the vocational element or, in terms of the craft apprenticeship, the further education element. We pay the students' fees and so on.

[110] **David Rees:** This question is to both employers. There has been a great deal of reference over recent weeks to the basic skills levels in Wales and you have identified that you want 5 GCSEs at C and above. How do you view the basic skills of people coming in at the age of 16 rather than 18?

[111] **Mr McKenna:** I tend to say to people, 'Do not get me going on that one'.

[112] **David Rees:** It is important. If we are looking to develop apprenticeship programmes, we need to understand where we have to pitch the entry level. That is of critical importance.

[113] **Mr McKenna:** As I have already said, we will not compromise on that basic academic requirement. Why? Previous experience tells us that that is a bare-minimum standard. Every apprentice who comes to work for us will struggle with the mathematics. They do not understand it at first, but after a year, they do. They are all struggling with it and they all understand that it is crucial to the whole thing—it all revolves around that.

[114] **Mr Griffiths:** From our point of view, we have seen an improvement in the basic skills of our apprentices as they join us. However, that could be for one of a few reasons. I did some work looking back over the last few years. As part of a Welsh Government initiative, we undertake a basic skills assessment of all our apprentices when they join us and, six or seven years ago, we saw that we were getting people who had a grade C at GCSE in English or mathematics who were in coming with an entry level 3 or a level 1—they were not at the level that we were expecting them to be, which was level 2. We are now finding that that is improving. That could be because we have so many people applying that we can select people who are, possibly, academically more capable than was the case a few years ago. We have not done any real research into what lies behind it, but that could be part of it. The other reason is that there are some improvements throughout the system.

[115] **David Rees:** Earlier on, you mentioned that you have a long-term strategy—I think that you said that it was for three years—to develop the number of apprentices. What discussions have you had to identify those skills needs with providers, in order to ensure that their programmes meet your skills requirements?

[116] **Mr Griffiths:** We work extremely closely with our providers. We have moved away from having a tendering process. We work in partnership and have developed a partnership relationship with all our providers, in Broughton and in Filton—it has been more difficult in Filton than in Broughton. The work that we have done with Deeside College over the years has paid dividends. For the first time in several years, we will, this year, introduce a plant maintenance apprenticeship, and I contacted the head of engineering at Deeside College to ask what he could do to support that. I had an answer there and then that they could do it, and he sent me a proposal on how they could do it. We have had negotiations and discussions, and we now have a model with which we are happy. So, it is all about working closely with the providers.

[117] **Byron Davies:** This is slightly out of context, but I was interested in asking the two apprentices why they did not want to go to university. Why did you want to be apprentices?

[118] **Mr Wilkins:** It was personal choice, to be honest. I thought that, with the apprenticeship, you could get a degree and on-the-job experience, which is priceless. A lot of people do not know about what apprenticeships can offer. Yes, they can offer recognised academic qualifications, but the on-the-job experience is priceless. Someone coming out of university with a degree like mine would not be able to do the day job, because they do not have the on-the-job experience. Working alongside engineers who have been there for 10 or 20 years, you pick up what they know and apply it to the job. For real-life applications, an apprenticeship outweighs a degree.

[119] **Nick Ramsay:** So, you liked the practical aspect of it.

[120] **Mr Wilkins:** Exactly, yes. As I said, it is priceless. With the qualifications that you get, you end up a more rounded individual. Charity challenge is another aspect of the apprenticeship, so you get involved with the community, which makes you a better person—speaking from personal experience.

[121] **Byron Davies:** Would you agree with that, Elliott?

[122] **Mr White:** I would agree, yes. There is also the issue of university debt that everybody hears about—if you go to university for three years, you come away with a lot of debt and less of a chance of getting a job. If you have been working in a company for four years, you know that company, you know how it operates, and although you are not 100% guaranteed a job, you are 99% sure that you will get a job at the end, especially if you put in hard work and effort.

[123] **Keith Davies:** A ydych chi, fel cwmnïau, yn barod i gefnogi rhywun sy'n mynd drwy brifysgol? Mae rhai cwmnïau'n fodlon noddi myfyrwyr sy'n astudio peirianeg yn y brifysgol am bedair blynedd a hefyd yn fodlon cynnig blwyddyn o waith yn ystod y cyfnod hwnnw. A ydych chi fel cwmnïau'n barod i gynnig y fath gefnogaeth i fyfyrwyr prifysgol, a hefyd i gynnig gwaith iddynt dros fisoedd yr haf ac yn ystod y flwyddyn pan nad ydynt yn mynychu'r brifysgol?

Keith Davies: Are you, as companies, willing to support a student going through university? Some companies are willing to sponsor students who study engineering at university for four years and also to provide them with a year's work during those four years. Are you as companies willing to provide that sort of support for university students, and also willing to provide work for them during the summer months and during the year when they do not attend university?

[124] **Nick Ramsay:** Simple 'yes' or 'no' answers at this point are quite welcome by the Chair. *[Laughter.]*

[125] **Mr Griffiths:** We operate a direct entry graduate programme, and we recruit about 60 or 70 graduates a year. We do not offer a sponsorship programme as you have just described, but we offer support by bringing people in who have completed their university courses.

[126] **Joyce Watson:** In relation to the apprenticeship frameworks, how are the relevant sector skills councils supporting employers and their apprenticeship programmes?

[127] **Mr Griffiths:** We work closely with the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies. We do some work with Skills for Logistics, because, for Richie, support in relation to supply chain logistics comes through that different sector skills council. SEMTA works closely with us and we have developed frameworks and national occupational standards with it. So, yes, we are closely aligned.

[128] **Mr McKenna:** We have no direct involvement with SEMTA, which is the organisation that should support us. I had a discussion last year with someone from the sector skills councils in Wales, and therefore I expected someone from SEMTA to make contact with us, as one of the major employers in north-east Wales, but I have not heard from anyone. However, for me, it does not matter too much, because, at the end of the day, we are doing what we need to do for our business, irrespective of any state organisation or framework.

[129] **Nick Ramsay:** David, please be brief, because we are into the last few minutes of this session.

[130] **David Rees:** You are large employers in your areas, as Tata Steel is in my area, but how many of your apprentices come from outside your areas?

[131] **Mr McKenna:** None.

[132] **Mr Griffiths:** It is about the same as our split in the factory. About 60% are Welsh and 40% are English. However, within that 40% who are English, probably 80% or 90% come from within 10 or 15 miles of the factory. We have apprentices from all over the world. We have apprentices from Singapore, Australia and a lot from Toulouse, because a lot of their parents work for Airbus in Toulouse. So, although we have apprentices from all over the world, our apprentices are predominantly from the local area.

[133] **Nick Ramsay:** Ken Skates has a burning question that he needs to ask.

[134] **Kenneth Skates:** I just want to say how proud I am to see two of the finest companies in the world and two of the best apprentices in Europe here today.

[135] **Nick Ramsay:** You do not have to comment on that. *[Laughter.]*

[136] **Kenneth Skates:** Your companies employ 3,000 people from my constituency, directly and indirectly.

[137] **Joyce Watson:** Are the new apprenticeship frameworks that were introduced in March last year sufficiently customer-focused and flexible to meet your needs as employers?

[138] **Mr Griffiths:** You can see from my written evidence that I have some major concerns about their lack of flexibility and their complexity. Wales has supported employers far more within the specification for apprenticeship standards than England. England is quite determined that its way is the only way, whereas we have had very meaningful discussions with the officials in Wales over introducing more flexibility. However, it is too complex; it has gone backwards.

[139] **Nick Ramsay:** It was remiss of me at the start not to thank you for your written evidence. It was helpful in framing our questions to you. With that, I thank Gary Griffiths from Airbus and Mike McKenna from Kronospan—two fine companies, as Ken pointed out. I particularly thank Richard Wilkins and Elliott White. It has been good today to hear the apprentice side, and how you think that we can improve apprenticeships in Wales. The information that you have provided will help us to try to advise the Government on how to improve future apprenticeships so that other young people can benefit in the way that you have. Well done.

[140] I bring this session to a close. We will now have a very quick comfort break.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.30 a.m. a 10.37 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.30 a.m. and 10.37 a.m.*

Ymchwiliad i Brentisiaethau yng Nghymru—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth
Inquiry into Apprenticeships in Wales—Evidence Session

[141] **Nick Ramsay:** Welcome back, Members. I welcome to the meeting Allan Williams, training and development manager with the Vale of Glamorgan Council. Thank you for coming in today. We pay particular thanks to you because, with the local government elections having just taken place, it was not easy to get witnesses from local government, and so we thank you for providing your written evidence. We have a number of questions for you, so, rather than asking you for opening comments, if you do not mind, we will get straight to the first question, which is from Byron Davies.

[142] **Byron Davies:** Hello, there, and good day. This is a very straightforward, simple question. What are the benefits of apprentices to your organisation?

[143] **Mr Williams:** Knowing that I was coming here, I went around and asked some of our recent in-take of apprentices how they were getting on, and they were really happy. It took me a little bit by surprise, in fact. The main benefit, as they saw it, was that they had training while they were working, which is a choice that they made. They have their qualification, which is mainly an NVQ level 2 in business administration for the foundation modern apprentices, but they also gain experience of working, which makes them marketable within an office environment. Last year, we took on 14 foundation modern apprentices—FMAs, as they are called—and they all got jobs, either on full-time or part-time contracts. Those jobs were mostly within the council, but some were outside. So, those are the benefits. They get training and work experience, but the fact that they got jobs was the icing on the cake.

[144] **Byron Davies:** These are austere days, and I note from your submission that the Vale of Glamorgan Council has decided to increase apprenticeship opportunities. You also say that the completion rates have improved dramatically. Why have you decided to increase those opportunities, and why do you think there has been an improvement in completion rates?

[145] **Mr Williams:** I think that the truth is that most of us are parents, and so we identify with the fact that young people are struggling to find employment. We not only see that in the statistics but we also hear it from our friends, and we are all worried about our own children—although mine are grown up now. So, I think that that element plays a part. It would be wrong of me to say that the fact that we are losing staff did not also play a part. The foundation modern apprentices, in particular, come in at the lowest level—the office junior level, if you like. We have been successful at integrating them into general office work, and they provide an extra pair of hands. After a while, they are very effective, and some of them, extremely effective. So, those two things together probably are the main factors.

[146] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Bore da. Rwy'n edrych ar eich dystiolaeth, a diolch amdani, ond hoffwn ddeall yn well. Rydych yn rhestru 24 o brentisiaethau—er eich bod yn gwneud pethau eraill—ond a wyf yn iawn felly i ddweud mai 24 o bobl yn unig sy'n dilyn cwrs prentisiaeth o fewn y cyngor, neu a oes rhai o'r pethau eraill hyn, fel lleoliadau gwaith a hyfforddeion proffesiynol, hefyd yn rhan o gwrs prentisiaeth ffurfiol?

Alun Ffred Jones: Good morning. I am looking at your evidence, and thank you for it, but I want to understand this better. You list 24 apprenticeships—although you are doing other things—but am I therefore right in saying that only 24 people are undertaking apprenticeship courses in the council, or are some of these other things, such as work placements and professional trainees, also part of formal apprenticeship courses?

[147] **Mr Williams:** No, the professional trainees and the work placements and so on are not formal apprenticeships. So, it is only the 24—although that will actually increase to nearly

40 this year, because the craft apprenticeship scheme will be increased as a result of the Wales quality housing standard scheme. We decided to take on more craft apprentices to help us to achieve that standard. That figure of 24 is a bit low, so we are preparing to take on more, but it will be under 40. As I said, we are increasing the number in the foundation modern apprenticeship scheme to 20, at least, with the extra craft apprentices.

[148] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Imi gael bod yn glir eto, a yw'r prentisiaethau hynny yn bennaf i ddatblygu'r sgiliau yr ydych newydd ei ddisgrifio, sef crefftau sy'n ymwneud â thai ac yn y blaen, neu a ydynt yn cynnwys hefyd brentisiaethau mewn meysydd eraill o fewn y cyngor?

Alun Ffred Jones: For me to be clear, again, are those apprenticeships mainly to develop the skills that you have just described, that is crafts relating to housing and so forth, or do they also incorporate apprenticeships in other fields within the council?

[149] **Mr Williams:** The craft apprenticeships would overwhelmingly be in building work—with a plasterer, a plumber and so on—but the foundation modern apprenticeship covers the office junior/business administration side, and we have maybe one motor mechanic in the organisation.

[150] **Alun Ffred Jones:** A gaf i ofyn eto a yw prentisiaethau ffurfiol o fewn y rhestr arall hon, sy'n cynnwys y rhaglen O Fudd-dâl i Waith ac yn y blaen? Beth yw'r hyfforddeion proffesiynol, er enghraifft? At beth y mae hynny'n cyfeirio?

Alun Ffred Jones: May I ask again whether formal apprenticeships come under this other list, which includes the Welfare to Work programme and so on? What are the professional trainees, for example? To what does that refer?

[151] **Mr Williams:** I put them in because I was not sure how wide your scope was. The professional trainees are not formal apprentices in the sense that they are registered somewhere, but, in the past month, we have taken on six people on three-year contracts and each one will participate in a formal qualification. So, for instance, in my field of human resources, our professional trainee will work towards membership of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, which is the professional body for HR. They will be there for three years and they will also do the first stages of the diploma and then the MSc in HR. So, although it is not formally recognised as an apprenticeship as such, it has all the hallmarks of an apprenticeship.

[152] **Alun Ffred Jones:** A gaf i ofyn felly ynghylch rhai o'r penawdau eraill yr ydych wedi'u cynnwys yn y rhestr hon, er gwybodaeth? Gwelaf fod hyfforddiant galwedigaethol yno. At beth y mae hynny'n cyfeirio, er enghraifft?

Alun Ffred Jones: May I therefore ask in relation to some of the other headings that you have included in this list, just for information? I see that vocational training has been noted. To what does that refer, for example?

10.45 a.m.

[153] **Mr Williams:** That refers to children who go the army school—and that was new to me, I have to say, when I asked around. I did not even know that there was an army school in Cardiff. However, they choose to go from formal education to spend some time in the army school in preparation. So, that is what that refers to.

[154] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning. I am particularly interested in the characteristics of apprentices, so could you discuss the advantages or disadvantages of an all-age apprenticeship system in Wales?

[155] **Mr Williams:** It is good that we have that all-age system, and we have included a

range of people. Two ladies spring to mind who are well into their 40s, and they wanted to get into office work for the first time, having done retail and various other things. We took them on, and they were a great success and got full-time jobs with us. So, the all-age side is good, although I must say that we mainly attract people who are 16 or 17 years of age, possibly because of the money that we pay. We pay them £75 a week, so obviously someone with a family is not going to be able to support the family on £75 a week. I do not know whether I am going off-piste here a little, but I think that the schemes have been good. Some of the changes have been a bit challenging to our council and to me. I found them really irksome and unnecessary, and a distraction. The last change, which was about 18 months ago, had such an impact on us in the Vale that I nearly abandoned the scheme altogether, which would have been a great shame because all those people whom we have helped and who have got jobs would not have got them. Sometimes I think that, when you change things, there is a law of unexpected consequences.

[156] **Joyce Watson:** Staying on that theme, is there gender stereotyping in apprenticeships? If so, how does it happen, and how do you deal with it?

[157] **Mr Williams:** We have two female plumbers, both of whom came from a hairdressing background, I think. They did not like hairdressing after going through the training, and both happened to choose to become plumbers. In the past, we have taken on two a year, and I think that we have at least one left with us now going through that three-year process. I guess the natural thing, traditionally, has been for such apprentices to be boys. I do not see that as any exclusivity on our part, as we have looked to take on anyone who we thought was suitable, really—but of course they have to apply. So, I would not say that there was a gender thing there. In the FMAs, which are the bulk of the apprentices that we take on, I guess that the majority are girls who find office work attractive. I would say that it is probably 60% girls, and the rest boys. However, that is how they apply, and it has not been designed like that in any way. I do all the recruitment, and I can assure you that I have not had a bias.

[158] **Joyce Watson:** You brought that word ‘bias’ up, so could I just explore that? I would call it gender stereotyping, but the choice of words does not matter, because the outcome is the same. As an organisation that is going out there to recruit—as a public body, actually—what do you do to actively promote equal opportunity? In other words, breaking down those barriers that exist, because the figures tell us so.

[159] **Mr Williams:** I am not sure what you mean.

[160] **Nick Ramsay:** I am not either.

[161] **Joyce Watson:** Then I will explain. If you are recruiting people—I do not know what system you have; I assume that you go into schools or invite people by application—do you make a real effort at that point, especially with the public sector duty to have gender equality, to put into the terms with which you approach people or they approach you that there are equal opportunities?

[162] **Mr Williams:** I would say ‘yes’. We do not go out to schools at the moment. We have done so in the past, and we have made sure that we have spoken to all the pupils in any given year and presented exactly the same materials to all of them. If girls or boys have come forward, we have given them exactly the same information. As our track record indicates, our apprenticeships have been open to girls and boys. Some years, we would get more boys taking up the foundation modern apprenticeships or maybe about 50%. At the moment, it is about 65% girls. It is the same for the craft apprenticeships. We would say to anyone in the year that we were looking at that these apprenticeships were available, and they are readily accepted in the workplace, no matter what gender they are. We now go through Careers

Wales, so we do not go directly to the schools. As a Government body, I would imagine that it would have a very strong—

[163] **Nick Ramsay:** Allan, I think that you have answered that question fully, and we need to make progress.

[164] **David Rees:** Good morning. I have just one point before I go on to another question. Your professional traineeship scheme sounds very much as if it is for graduates; it sounds like a graduate scheme.

[165] **Mr Williams:** We were very keen on recruiting people who had A-levels. So, the scheme was more focused on people who had the option of going to university, but chose to go down a more professional route—not necessarily an apprenticeship, but that sort of route. So, the advert was put out there in those terms. Due to the climate that we are working in, a lot of graduates applied, but our aim was to target A-level students.

[166] **David Rees:** The aim was to target, so you have a mix of people who—

[167] **Mr Williams:** We have.

[168] **David Rees:** [*Inaudible.*]

[169] **Mr Williams:** That was the HR one, which is a bit more academic, I guess. Sorry, the HR one was more of a graduate scheme, but the others have been—

[170] **David Rees:** A mix.

[171] **Mr Williams:** Yes, a mix.

[172] **David Rees:** I just wanted to clarify that; thank you. Skills in the public sector are clearly different to skills in the engineering sector, as we have discussed before. Have you done a skills audit or a review of skill requirements to identify the skills that you will be looking for in apprentices?

[173] **Mr Williams:** We are just about to finish a workforce plan that includes an element such as this. It is very much a first shot at this, and it is by no means perfect. I went around all the heads of service teams to discuss where they were going, what their service would look like and where the gaps may be. It was a typical workforce plan, really. So, there has been a first stab at it. It is not perfect by any means, but we are realising that services are changing and the way in which we deliver services is changing. We have to do more with less—a hateful phrase—so we are looking to redesign our workforce somewhat. So, yes, a first stab has been taken at it.

[174] **David Rees:** Have you had discussions with other authorities to look at whether there is a common skills requirement for local authorities?

[175] **Mr Williams:** There are meetings between the training managers of south-east Wales, who get together to discuss it. We are in partnership with Bridgend for some of the work; for instance, our audit team is a joint one. It has not developed quite as much as we would have liked, and we do not have a sector skills council for councils. That would be the natural place to discuss the sort of thing that you are talking about. We make suggestions, but we do not have that. So, there is a little bit going on, but not as much as there probably should be.

[176] **David Rees:** Have you identified the skills levels that you would expect on entry, and

how do you think the skills of the individuals coming from education meet those expectations?

[177] **Mr Williams:** We have a clear view about what we want. Over the last two years—certainly in the apprenticeship field, but also, as I mentioned, in the professional training field—the skills have improved and the quality and character of the applicants has definitely improved considerably. In some ways, this has a downside, because the temptation is to take the graduate and not the guy or the girl with two A-levels. So, because they are on offer, it seems unfair not to take the people who are most qualified.

[178] **David Rees:** Therefore, the programme that you are looking at is not focused completely on the creation of an apprenticeship for developing those individuals; it is partly to fill positions with people who may have even more skills than those that you are asking for.

[179] **Mr Williams:** We have kept the apprenticeship scheme very focused. We could have taken graduates for the FMA, which pays £75 per week, as we have had many applications to that scheme, but we have not gone down that route. We have looked at—

[180] **David Rees:** Your FMA scheme is clearly focused on—

[181] **Mr Williams:** It is focused on new entrants: those who have mainly GCSEs, occasionally A-levels, but certainly not a degree.

[182] **David Rees:** You mentioned that a large proportion of those are kept on, therefore, the skills that you develop are very beneficial to the local authority.

[183] **Mr Williams:** Yes, absolutely. If someone completes the programme—whether a craft or a business apprenticeship, or a professional trainee job—for us, it is a bit of a disaster if they leave, because part of our workforce planning suggests that we need these people in place. Holding on to them is not always easy. For example, we had two female plumbers, one of whom went to work in private industry almost as soon as she was qualified; the other one is still there, thank goodness, but she has not quite qualified yet. There are people who want to take those with good skills and a good attitude to work from us. So, ideally, we would like to keep them.

[184] **Nick Ramsay:** Keith Davies, do you want to ask about completion rates?

[185] **Keith Davies:** O ran y brentisiaeth sylfaenol, sylwaf fod un yn para 65 wythnos a'r llall yn para tair blynedd. Rydych wedi sôn am ddwy ferch, a derbynaf eu bod wedi dilyn y cwrs tair blynedd. Rwyf am drafod y rhaglen 65 wythnos. Cyhoeddwyd datganiad i'r wasg gan Gyngor Bro Morgannwg ym mis Ionawr, sy'n dweud,

Keith Davies: With regard to the foundation apprenticeship, I notice that one lasts for 65 weeks and the other for three years. You have mentioned two girls, and I take it that they have followed the three-year course. I would like to discuss the 65-week course. A press release issued by the Vale of Glamorgan Council in January stated that,

[186] 'There is also a successful Foundation Modern Apprentice scheme for administrative apprentices, which this year has seen 18 people go through its books. Five are still being trained by the council, eight have secured employment elsewhere and two left to go into full time education.'

[187] Therefore, three are unaccounted for.

[188] Pa mor hir yw'r cwrs; ai dim ond 65 wythnos ydyw? A ydynt yn derbyn How long is the course; is it only 65 weeks? Do they receive a qualification at the end of

cymhwyster ar ddiwedd y cwrs? Mae crwt ifanc yn fy ardal i, yn Llanelli, wedi cael swydd prentisiaeth gyda'r cyngor, ond nid yw'r cyngor yn gallu rhoi swydd parhaol iddo wedi hynny. Felly, a oeddech yn bwriadu cynnig swyddi parhaol i'r 18 ar ôl y brentisiaeth, neu, fel sydd yn y datganiad, ai dim ond pump sy'n cael swydd parhaol fel arfer ac mae'n rhaid i'r gweddill fynd i rywle arall?

the course? There is a young boy in my area, in Llanelli, who has secured an apprenticeship with the council, but the council cannot offer him a permanent job. Did you intend to offer permanent jobs to all 18 following the apprenticeship, or, as the press release states, is it only five who are offered full-time jobs usually and the others have to go elsewhere?

11.00 a.m.

[189] **Mr Williams:** When we take them on—and, as I said, I do all the recruiting, so I make it absolutely clear that there is no guarantee of a permanent job—the 65 weeks is for them to get their level 2 NVQ. They are guaranteed those 65 weeks so that they can get a level 2 NVQ in business administration. Many of them, particularly the better ones or those who are in an area where an office junior is needed, might well leave before the 65 weeks are up. However, we would carry on training them and they would still have an allowance of time in which to do their NVQ. So, the 65 weeks is a set time, but sometimes if they get a job opportunity beforehand and get the job, then that is fine. In fact, we would encourage them to do that, certainly after about 52 weeks. The majority—and I think that I said this earlier—who get jobs now get temporary contracts. I can think of one girl who got a six-month temporary contract in the place where she was an FMA. That tends to roll over, but they cannot give a contract that is longer than six months. So, for the people who are taken on for 65 weeks, that tends to be the case. Most of them from last year now have jobs in the council, but they either have temporary contracts or one or two of them have part-time contracts.

[190] **Keith Davies:** A ydynt yn gwybod ar y dechrau nad oes sicrwydd o swydd iddynt ar y diwedd?

Keith Davies: Do they know from the outset that there is no guarantee of a job for them at the end?

[191] **Mr Williams:** Absolutely. I emphasise clearly that it is a 65-week commitment from us. We work with Acorn, one of the suppliers, and these individuals are on Acorn's books, so it also encourages, helps and supports them to find jobs at the end of the process, because we cannot guarantee a job for them at the moment because of the situation that we are in. That is why temporary contracts are issued, because we cannot guarantee what our finances will be like down the line. So, yes, we are absolutely clear on that.

[192] **Kenneth Skates:** May I ask about your experience of working with Careers Wales with regard to apprenticeships? How have you found it?

[193] **Mr Williams:** It has been very good; I have no complaints.

[194] **Kenneth Skates:** Are there any problems in recruitment?

[195] **Mr Williams:** No; they have been very good. They have definitely improved over the last 18 months. They seem to be more proactive now. They have initiated a request for meetings and they are offering—not just on the apprenticeship side—people who can work 30 hours a week for 16 weeks or something. So, they seem to be very good. The last lot of apprentices that we got were recruited entirely through Careers Wales.

[196] **Nick Ramsay:** With regard to off-the-job training and training providers, how do the off-the-job training arrangements complement and support the on-the-job training that the council provides?

[197] **Mr Williams:** Again, we are very happy with that. We currently work with Acorn, but previously we have worked with Barry College. In both cases, we were very happy.

[198] **Nick Ramsay:** I think that that was in your written evidence. Are there any other providers that you work with, other than Barry College?

[199] **Mr Williams:** Not at the moment; there is just those two.

[200] **Eluned Parrott:** I wanted to ask you a bit about community benefit clauses, which you say in your written evidence are a good thing. Obviously, one of the most common community benefits is the idea of contractors being obliged to take on local apprenticeships and local trainees. How could that be better achieved and do you foresee any pitfalls with that?

[201] **Mr Williams:** The obvious pitfall with that is that cost must be added on somewhere, so the contract price goes up. The more you load on these things, the more careful you have to be that the whole thing does not get out of hand. However, having said that, as long as it is monitored, the benefits are wonderful because what youngsters need in particular, but not just youngsters, is that practical experience of building a house or working in a factory or whatever it might be. In the Vale, we are looking very seriously—I think that it is in place now—at asking contractors to take on a certain number of apprentices. Kids are not stupid. They spot when something is not real or genuine. They spot if you have just created something and if they are just there filling in time. They get very dissatisfied with that, even if they are getting their £100 a week, or whatever it might be. However, if they have a real job and they can say that they are contributing to a factory or building a house, then they see it as being genuinely part of the workforce and they get a lot more out of it.

[202] **Eluned Parrott:** Do you, as an authority, monitor the outcomes for those young people who are taken on as apprentices through your contracts in terms of the quality of the experience that they have, in terms of whether or not that leads to a career opportunity, or whether it was more of a short-term thing to satisfy the contract?

[203] **Mr Williams:** We have not done it so far. As I said, I know that the policy is being mooted at the moment. I think that it has been accepted that we should write them in to our contracts, but we have not actually completed—

[204] **Eluned Parrott:** You have not got to that point yet.

[205] **Mr Williams:** No.

[206] **Eluned Parrott:** There may be people who would argue that, during difficult economic times, the public sector should be taking a lead in employing more apprentices. Do you believe that that is the case and, if so, how do you think that ought to be funded?

[207] **Mr Williams:** I think that it is the case, as long as there is genuine work there for them. As I said, we pay the craft apprentices and the FMAs—the foundation 1 apprentices—ourselves, but the training is free. The other day, I went to our finance director and asked for another £10,000 so that I could increase our FMA numbers from 14 to 20. She said, ‘Yes, and I will recharge some of the service managers half the costs’. So, we are trying to expand the budget, if you like. If we had more money, the answer would be, in the present climate, ‘Yes, we would take more on’. So, if you gave the Vale £20,000, we would take on another 10. It really is that cheap for us to take on a genuine increase in the numbers.

[208] **Eluned Parrott:** Are you happy with the volume and the calibre of the applications

that you get to your apprenticeship programmes?

[209] **Mr Williams:** On the volume, yes, but the calibre, if anything, is far too high. We have seen a massive increase in quality in the last two years. Before, people would apply and you would wonder if they really wanted a job as their social circumstances were not always the best. We always took on a certain number that you would not take on if you were looking for a permanent job, because of the commitment side of it. People would not turn up and they would disappear. However, in the last two years, the quality really has gone through the roof.

[210] **Eluned Parrott:** Finally, we have heard evidence that there is an esteem problem with apprenticeships and that they are not seen as valuable as a higher education route into the workplace. Would that be your experience and, if so, how do you think we ought to tackle that?

[211] **Mr Williams:** I just think that it is different. Kids understand that an apprenticeship is something solid and good and, if it is done properly, really worth while and attractive to them. I do not think that you need to do anything. The FMA is much shorter, because it is 65 weeks, but again, most of those kids seem to have a very clear view: they want to get some training and some work experience so that they can get a job in an office. I really do not think that there is any need to do anything about that. I do not think that there is an esteem problem.

[212] **Nick Ramsay:** Do any Members have any succinct closing questions?

[213] **Keith Davies:** Yn eich tystiolaeth, **Keith Davies:** In your evidence, you say that rydych yn dweud bod gan bobl ifanc ormod o young people have too many rights and hawliau ac felly nid yw cyflogwyr yn hapus therefore employers are not happy to employ i'w cyflogi. Beth rydych yn ei olygu gan them. What do you mean by that? hynny?

[214] **Mr Williams:** I have come across this twice in the last few years in the field of apprenticeships. About 18 months ago, there was a change in the scheme that meant that young people had to belong to the organisation itself. That is significant for councils because it means that there are all sorts of rights and contracts. It is a nightmare. It took me six months and I gave up on it in the end. I would have given up completely on FMAs but I was quite passionate about them. I had recruited all the kids myself and had seen what they had done, so I was passionate about carrying it on and increasing the numbers, particularly in the current economic climate.

[215] It was our good intention that young people could not just have a contract with the trainers, but would have to have one with the organisation employing and paying them. However, as a result, we nearly had to throw the scheme out. The other thing was that it increased the cost. It was not by a huge amount, but whereas before they were working 37 hours a week and we were paying £75, the pay went up to the national standard. That is fine but, as a result, I had to reduce their hours to six hours a week because we could not pay the extra money. Sometimes, the law of unintended consequences kicks in. I would regard us and other councils as good employers; we are not trying to rip these kids off, or use them and then throw them out. You can see how strongly I feel about this, because it came so close to ending the scheme altogether. Things are introduced that look like they are giving young people rights, but actually they are taking them away.

[216] While I am on the subject, another thing was introduced prior to that. I always used to take on some kids that were a bit of a punt because of their social background. Let us be fair, there are children in some horrible circumstances out there. You would never offer them a serious contract or a job, but I always would, just to see whether one or two could come through. However, because of the changes that made it more difficult to get rid of them if they

did not turn up day in and day out, I had to concentrate on the good, middle-class kids with two parents who were supportive and made them come to work every morning. Therefore, sometimes, the rules that you have to introduce in order to change things, and which seemingly improve things, are not actually helping the ones that you are really trying to help.

[217] **Joyce Watson:** On the same theme, how can we avoid the problems that arise from good intentions?

[218] **Mr Williams:** I guess through consultation with people like me who are at the coalface, to use an old-fashioned and out-dated phrase. That is about the only thing I can say.

[219] **David Rees:** As a local authority, you are in a slightly different position to many other organisations because you may be able to have some influence on education. Do you have many discussions with the education department to ensure that apprenticeships are promoted to young people in schools?

[220] **Mr Williams:** In the past, yes, but at the moment, no, because we are doing it through Careers Wales. As corporate parents, we also aim to take on looked-after children. Therefore, every looked-after child that applies for an FMA post, for instance, is guaranteed an interview. We provide them with extra support to assist them to compete on a level playing field.

[221] **Nick Ramsay:** That is great. Allan Williams, thank you for being here today and feeding into our inquiry into apprenticeships. Your evidence has been very helpful.

[222] **Mr Williams:** Thank you.

11.15 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Brentisiaethau yng Nghymru—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth Inquiry into Apprenticeships in Wales—Evidence Session

[223] **Nick Ramsay:** I welcome Helen Mary Jones, the chief executive of Youth Cymru, to today's committee meeting and to our inquiry into apprenticeships in Wales. This takes me back to when I used to sit opposite you in this very room when we were questioning people and taking evidence. We have a lot of questions to ask you, so, if you do not mind, rather than ask you for any opening statements, we will go straight into those questions.

[224] **Ms Jones:** That is fine.

[225] **Nick Ramsay:** The first question is from Alun Ffred Jones.

<p>[226] Alun Ffred Jones: Bore da. Mae awgrym go gryf yn eich tystiolaeth bod llawer o'r bobl ifanc rydych wedi bod yn eu holi ychydig yn ansicr o beth ydyw prentisiaeth a'r llwybr i mewn. Yn eich barn chi, beth yw lefel dealltwriaeth y bobl ifanc rydych chi wedi bod yn ymwneud â hwy o holl faes prentisiaeth?</p>	<p>Alun Ffred Jones: Good morning. There is a strong suggestion in your evidence that many of the young people that you have been questioning are slightly uncertain as to what exactly apprenticeships are and the pathway to them. In your opinion, what is the level of understanding among young people that you have been in contact with, with regard to the whole field of apprenticeships?</p>
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<p>[227] Ms Jones: Mae angen rhoi <i>health warning</i> yn y lle cyntaf ynglŷn â natur y</p>	<p>Ms Jones: A health warning needs to be issued, first of all, on the nature of the</p>
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dystiolaeth. Fel rydym wedi ei wneud yn glir yn y papur, tystiolaeth gwbl *anecdotal* ydyw. Rydym wedi siarad â phobl ifanc mewn gwahanol gymunedau ar draws de Cymru. Nid oedd amser gennym i fynd i'r gogledd. Nid oedd mwyafrif y bobl ifanc y siaradwyd â hwy wir yn deall. Cafwyd rhai agweddau eithaf negyddol a oedd yn deillio o brofiadau pobl o gael eu cymryd ymlaen ar rywbeth a oedd yn cael ei alw'n brentisiaeth er nad oedd yn brentisiaeth swyddogol, efallai. Fel y nodir yn y papur, roedd y bobl ifanc yn ei weld yn *rip-off*: eu bod yn gweithio am gyfnod am gyn lleied o arian, ac, ar ôl hynny, bod rhywun arall yn cael ei gymryd ymlaen. Roedd rhai yn deall yn iawn; roedd rhai o'r bobl ifanc wedi ystyried prentisiaeth ond bod pethau yn ei gwneud yn anodd iddynt wneud hynny.

[228] Yn bennaf, fe'm trawyd gan y diffyg dealltwriaeth ymhlith y to ieuengaf yn yr ysgol. Siaradwyd â phobl ifanc o Gaerdydd i Hwlfordd. Bu'r rhai hynaf yn sôn am aros yn yr ysgol, mynd i'r coleg neu fynd yn syth allan i'r gwaith. Serch hynny, nid oedd y disgyblion o dan 15 oed wedi ystyried prentisiaeth fel opsiwn. Mae hynny'n golygu, pan wnânt benderfyniadau yn 14 mlwydd oed ynglŷn â pha lwybrau y maent am eu dilyn yn yr ysgol, na fydd y mwyafrif ohonynt yn meddwl yn nhermau prentisiaeth. Fel mudiad, nid oeddem yn teimlo ein bod mewn sefyllfa i awgrymu pethau penodol ichi. Fodd bynnag, efallai y buasem yn awgrymu bod angen ichi sicrhau bod pobl ifanc yn dysgu ynghynt ynglŷn ag opsiwn prentisiaeth fel eu bod yn gallu gwneud penderfyniadau ynghylch cyrsiau TGAU a chysiau galwedigaethol a fyddai, o bosibl, yn bwydo i mewn i brentisiaethau.

[229] **Alun Ffred Jones:** A wnaeth unrhyw un ohonynt gyfeirio at Gyrfa Cymru, o gwbl, fel ffynhonnell wybodaeth?

[230] **Ms Jones:** Ni wnaeth y rhai ifanc, o dan 15 mlwydd oed, gyfeirio ato. Yr oedd profiad y rhai hŷn yn wahanol iawn. Credai rhai ohonynt—yn enwedig pobl ifanc Caerdydd—eu bod wedi cael gwasanaeth a chynghor da iawn a bod llawer o opsiynau wedi'u rhoi ger eu bron. Dywedodd eraill, 'Ches i ddim cynghor; ches i ddim help'. Fel yr wyf wedi ei nodi yn y papur, roedd nifer

evidence. As we have made clear in the paper, it is entirely anecdotal. We have spoken to young people in various communities across south Wales. We did not have time to go to north Wales. Most of the young people that we spoke to did not really understand. Some had relatively negative attitudes that came from people having been taken on on what was called an apprenticeship, but which was not really an official apprenticeship as such. As we say in the paper, the young people saw it as a rip-off: they work for a period for very little money, and then, after that period, someone else is taken on. Some young people fully understood what apprenticeships were; some young people had considered apprenticeships but found that there were factors that made taking on apprenticeships difficult.

What struck me most was the lack of understanding among the youngest group of schoolpupils. We spoke to young people from Cardiff to Haverfordwest. The older pupils talked about staying on at school, going to college or going straight out into the workplace. However, those under 15 years of age had not even considered apprenticeships as an option, which means that when they make decisions at 14 years of age in terms of which pathways to follow at school, they do not think in terms of apprenticeships. As an organisation, we did not feel that we were in a situation to make particular suggestions or recommendations to you. However, I would suggest to you that you need to ensure that young people learn about the apprenticeship option earlier, so that they can make decisions about GCSE courses and vocational courses that could then feed into apprenticeships.

Alun Ffred Jones: Did any of them refer to Careers Wales at all as a source of information?

Ms Jones: The younger ones, under 15 years of age, did not refer to it. The experiences of the older students were quite different. Some, particularly in the Cardiff area, thought that they had had excellent service and advice and that they had been given a number of options to consider. Others said, 'I did not get any advice; I did not get any assistance'. As I have noted in the paper, some of these young

o'r bobl ifanc hyn wedi colli llawer o ysgol ac yn ei chael yn anodd i ymdrin â'r system swyddogol. Roeddent wedi cael mwyafrif eu cyngor oddi wrth eu teuluoedd, y gymuned neu grwpiau ieuenctid. Pan ddywedant, 'Ches i ddim cyngor', mae'n ddigon posibl bod cyngor wedi bod ar gael iddynt ond nad oeddent yno i gael y cyngor.

people had missed a lot of school and found it difficult to deal with officialdom. Most of the advice given to them came from their families, the community or through youth groups. When they say, 'I did not get any advice', it is quite possible that the advice was available to them but that they were not there to actually access it.

[231] **Byron Davies:** Good morning. I have been looking at some of the key themes that have emerged from this issue. I would be interested to hear your comments on this, but I must say that it is disappointing to find that young people say that apprenticeships are seen as a bit of a rip-off. I was interested in the impact on family finances; families may cease to receive child benefit. This demonstrates a real barrier to getting into employment, does it not?

[232] **Ms Jones:** The finance issue was one. I should stress that I am not an expert on when the child benefit kicks in and when it does not, so what I am reporting are young people's perceptions, whether they are correct or not.

[233] **Byron Davies:** My question, really, is: how do we change this?

[234] **Ms Jones:** There were young people who were definitely telling me that they had decided to go to college rather than take up apprenticeship options, even though those options were available, because of the impact on family finances. One young person reported feeling very awkward because he really wanted to take up the apprenticeship, but he knew the effect that that would have on his family. Of course, in terms of any recommendations that you as a committee might make, that is a non-devolved issue, but I suggest that perhaps something could be done with regard to the way in which the education maintenance allowance is applied. There may be something that the Welsh Government can do to help with that where it really is an issue.

[235] In terms of the negative perceptions, one way that that could be dealt with—and, once again, the issues relating to young people's rights are not devolved—is by ensuring, for example, that when public financial support is given to any apprenticeship scheme, it is done in a way that ensures that young people really benefit from it and, as far as possible, that they get jobs. However, if they do not get a job, at least they take away qualifications that they can use elsewhere. I also think, as I said in the points that I made in response to Alun Ffred Jones, that, if we could get in there earlier and raise this with young people aged 11 to 14, as they come to make their educational decisions, to try to persuade them to consider apprenticeship as a real option, then that might be a way of breaking down some of those negative barriers. Of course—and, once again, this is purely anecdotal—we also had the young people who were more intellectual, if you like, who were saying that they might have wanted to do more practical studies, but, because they were clever enough, they were pushed down a purely academic route even though that was not what they wanted to do. That only came up in one conversation, but I talked to some of the workers in the settings that I visited who said that they had also heard that. So, it is an issue that needs to be tackled on a lot of fronts. With regard to the financial issue, there may be a limit to what the Welsh Government can do, but perhaps something creative could be done with the education maintenance allowance.

[236] **Nick Ramsay:** I would like to bring in Joyce Watson, who has a supplementary question, at this point.

[237] **Joyce Watson:** As you have said, some of the young people were not in education, employment or training; have you split the figures in relation to those individuals, because that might have a huge bearing on some of the answers that they gave?

[238] **Ms Jones:** I do not have those figures available today. I made it clear to the committee support team that the evidence that I could offer would be anecdotal. I can go back to look at that, but, in terms of the nature of the engagement, it was everything from a fairly formal focus group, where the young people had a chance to discuss it beforehand, to sitting in a youth club with young people coming at me from all angles, some of whom would sit down and talk for 10 minutes, while others would say, ‘There’s no point even talking about apprenticeships, it is a complete waste of time’. So, it might be difficult for me to get the figures, but, anecdotally, the young people who were the most excluded from the system would also have the most negative approach. However, one young woman who was volunteering in one of the youth work settings, who was a graduate, said that her family’s experience of apprenticeships was that they had been a total rip-off. She was the person who said that this is not an option for working-class young people. So, there is a correlation, but it is not necessarily an exact correlation. I think that it is more to do with the experiences of people they knew. Where those were good experiences, the young people would say that this was something that is worth doing, even if it meant that they would be short of money for a while. If young people had spoken to people who had had a bad experience, then that was reflected in their own attitude and what they then said to others.

[239] **Keith Davies:** Rydych wedi sôn am y bobl oedd yn colli arian, mewn ffordd, oherwydd nad oeddent yn derbyn y lwfans cynhaliath addysg, ond, yn y papur, rydych yn sôn bod pobl yn y coleg a oedd yn dilyn cwrs trin gwallt yn dweud y byddai’n well ganddynt wneud prentisiaeth

Keith Davies: You talked about people who were losing money, in a way, because they were not receiving the education maintenance allowance, but, in your paper, you say that there were people in the college pursuing a hairdressing course who said that they would rather take up an apprenticeship

[240] ‘because they wanted to be earning and learning’.

[241] Mae’r ddau beth yn bwrw yn erbyn ei gilydd. Mae un yn cwyno nad ydyw am wneud prentisiaeth oherwydd bod y teulu yn colli arian, ond mae rhywun arall am wneud prentisiaeth oherwydd y byddant yn cael eu talu.

Those two things contradict each other. One person complained that he did not want to pursue an apprenticeship because the family would lose money, but someone else wanted to take up an apprenticeship because they would be paid.

[242] **Ms Jones:** Rydym yn sôn am dystiolaeth gwbl *anecdotal*. Mae profiadau pobl ifanc yn wahanol. Efallai, er enghraifft, bod y ferch ifanc—ac roedd mwy na un—a oedd yn gwneud trin gwallt yn dod o deulu nad oedd yn gymwys i gael yr EMA. Ni chefais gyfle i ofyn hynny. Roedd yn fwy na chael yr arian, fel rwy’n dweud yn y papur. Roedd yn ymwneud ag eisiau dysgu sgiliau sy’n siwtio’r cyflogwr unigol.

Ms Jones: We are talking about entirely anecdotal evidence. Young people’s experiences are different. Perhaps, for example, the young girl—and there was more than one—who was doing hairdressing came from a family that did not qualify for the EMA. I did not have the opportunity to ask that. It was about more than getting the money, as I said in the paper. It was to do with wanting to learn skills that suit the individual employer.

[243] Yn achos y bobl trin gwallt, roeddent yn dweud bod gan bob salon ffordd wahanol o wneud pethau. Felly, gallent dreulio tair blynedd yn y coleg yn dysgu a chael tystysgrif, ond, pan fyddent yn mynd allan i’r gymuned, efallai nad hynny fyddai’r salon eisiau. Mae’n ymwneud â bod yn fwy

In the case of the hairdressers, they said that every salon has a different way of doing things. So, they could spend three years learning and attaining a certificate in college, but, when they go out into the community that may not be what the salon wants. It is about being more relevant in terms of what

perthnasol o ran beth maent yn ei ddysgu.

they learn.

[244] Roedd cyfeiriadau at y mater o goleg, EMA neu prentisiaethau a *child benefits* yn dod i fyny yn aml ac roedd y gweithwyr a oedd yn gweithio gyda'r bobl ifanc hefyd yn dweud eu bod yn ymwybodol ohonynt. Roedd yn batrwm mewn mwy nag un lle, ac roedd mwy nag un set o bobl ifanc yn dweud ei fod yn broblem.

References to the issue of college, EMA or apprenticeships and child benefits came up often and the workers who worked with the young people also said that they were aware of them. It was a pattern in more than one area, and more than one set of young people said that it was a problem.

[245] **Keith Davies:** Wrth gwrs, os ydynt dros 18 oed, ni fyddent yn ei gael beth bynnag. Dim ond ar blant rhwng 16 a 18 oed mae hyn yn effeithio.

Keith Davies: Of course, if they are over 18, they would not get it anyway. Only children between 16 and 18 are affected.

[246] **Ms Jones:** Wrth gwrs.

Ms Jones: Of course.

[247] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I fynd yn ôl at agweddau'r bobl ifanc at brentisiaethau, o ran yr agweddau negyddol a gafwyd, mae'n bosibl nad prentisiaethau ffurfiol oedd y cyrsiau roedd rhai o'u cymhreiriad wedi bod yn dilyn. Gallent fod wedi cymysgu, oherwydd diffyg gwybodaeth, rhwng prentisiaeth ffurfiol a'r cyrsiau sydd fod i helpu pobl mewn rhyw ffordd neu'i gilydd.

Alun Ffred Jones: To return to the young people's attitudes to apprenticeships, in terms of the negative perceptions you heard about, it is possible that their peers had not been following formal apprenticeship courses. They could have mixed up, due to lack of information, formal apprenticeships and the courses that are supposed to help people in some way or another.

[248] **Ms Jones:** Yn hollol, neu gallai cyflogwr gymryd person ifanc ymlaen a'i alw'n brentisiaeth, ond, ar wahân i ddysgu ar y swydd, nid oes dysgu swyddogol a ffurfiol. Mae diffyg dealltwriaeth am beth yw prentisiaeth. Ni chyfeiriodd un o'r bobl o dan 15 oed at brentisiaeth fel opsiwn, a'u hunig ddealltwriaeth o brentisiaethau oedd y rhaglen deledu, *The Apprentice*. Nid oeddent wedi ystyried y peth oherwydd ni chawsant fewnbwn cynnar er mwyn iddynt ddeall beth yw prentisiaeth go iawn a beth yw cyflogwr sy'n cynnig *job* nad yw wir yn brentisiaeth. Gallai hynny fwydo mewn i'r syniadau negyddol a'i wneud yn anoddach i bobl ifanc wneud y dewisiadau iawn.

Ms Jones: Absolutely, or an employer could take on a young person and call it an apprenticeship, but, apart from learning on the job, there is no official and formal learning. There is a lack of understanding about what an apprenticeship is. Not one person under age 15 referred to apprenticeship as an option, and their only understanding of apprenticeships was the television programme, *The Apprentice*. They had not considered it because they did not get early input in order for them to understand what is an apprenticeship and what is an employer offering a job and not really an apprenticeship. That could feed into the negative ideas and make it harder for young people to make the right choices.

[249] **David Rees:** I want to go back to the point on rip-offs, and on what you have just said as well. Are the schemes that they are talking about recognised schemes? Are they identified by Careers Wales, or have they simply got a job and the employer has called it an apprenticeship?

[250] **Ms Jones:** My impression is that they are not formal courses; it more that somebody calls something an apprenticeship opportunity so they can take on a younger person and pay them less. However, I cannot put my hand on my heart and say that, because the young people themselves may not know on what terms they were taken on. Also, some of them were

talking about other people's experiences. So, that is my impression.

[251] There was also a sense with some of the young people that they did not want to be bothered with any of that. They just wanted to get out and get a 'proper job'. A couple of young people we spoke to who were doing apprenticeships were struggling to stick with them because their friends had jobs that might not have any prospects but were paying them more at the time. When you are 16 or 17 years old it is difficult to keep your eye on the prize when your friends can go out at the weekend and have new clothes and so on and you cannot. Those were people following formal schemes. That was not scepticism about the scheme; they were comparing their situation with people who were earning more. They were sensible enough to know that, in a couple of years' time, they would be better off than so-and-so who is working in a shop or whatever, but it was still hard for them to stick it out.

[252] **David Rees:** Peer pressure is difficult, especially at a young age. On pre-apprenticeship training and the development of skills in that area, which you have mentioned, what did the young people who you talked to think of those types of schemes, which might prepare them and develop their skills? A lot of the people who you talked to had peers who had dropped out of school at an early age, but by developing those skills they could go on to apprenticeship schemes. How did they view those types of approaches?

[253] **Ms Jones:** The ones that I spoke to were very positive about the schemes that they were working with. The Engage project in Neath Port Talbot, for example, works with young people of a school age who are not at school—some have been excluded and some simply will not go. They were very positive about the kind of help that they had received in terms of developing life skills and basic literacy, and in terms of the really good advice that they had received about where they might go. Again, some of the young people in the YMCA in Cardiff said very much the same things.

11.30 a.m.

[254] However, what we were hearing from the staff, which I think has been included in the evidence, is that the way in which the funding streams for that work are put together—and this is something that the Welsh Government can influence—is not always helpful in dealing with the most difficult young people. There is this pressure on schemes to show that young people are getting certificates. I was told, 'I'll get funding if I get this young person through their Duke of Edinburgh Award, but what I need to be doing is to be sitting down with him and dealing with the fact that he cannot read and write—but it's going to take a long time to get him through his basic skills certificate.' So, there is a question—and, again, I can only pose the question; I do not know what the answers to it are—of whether the support for those sorts of schemes to get young people job ready, and therefore apprenticeship ready, are flexible enough. You want outcomes and results—and I am not suggesting that people should be paid without us being able to see those results—but some schemes that are working with young people said that they were pushing people down a certain route because that is what they had to do to tick the boxes and get the funding, but acknowledged that what they really needed to be doing was spending more time on things such as basic hygiene, timekeeping and literacy skills. However, those things do not tick the boxes. They were talking about trying to balance that out in how they handled things. However, the young people engaged in those schemes said that the schemes were very much designed to meet their needs and were very positive about them.

[255] **Joyce Watson:** We have talked a lot about advice and guidance, and I know that, when you were an Assembly Member, you were a great believer in advocacy. Do you think that young people have enough independent and up-to-date advice, particularly from schools and sometimes parents and guardians?

[256] **Ms Jones:** The picture varies widely. Some of the young people in Cardiff, for example, were really enthusiastic about their individual learning coaches. Some of those young people had had real issues at school but were now in college, and they felt that the information and the advocacy given to them by their coach had really made a difference. Young people in the Engage project said that that project had helped them with that kind of information. Our concern is that that information often comes late in the day, rather than at an earlier stage in young people's education. The whole question of parity of esteem between vocational education and academic education has been discussed endlessly in Welsh public life, but what we were hearing—and I stress that this is anecdotal—is that that is not what young people feel in schools. A young man said, 'If you go to college to get A-levels and you are going to go to university, you will get all of the advice in the world, but, if you are not doing that, they don't want to know.' He was talking there about the careers advice in his school.

[257] So, it is a varied picture, but there was positive feedback in relation to learning coaches and for the individual programmes that David Rees was asking about. There is good stuff out there, but there is a question about how consistent it is and at what point and where it is provided to enable young people to make those choices.

[258] **Eluned Parrott:** I want to follow up on the idea of apprenticeships having an image problem. We have heard evidence about a lack of esteem, particularly among advisers, teachers and parents, and also about the bad experiences that dissuade people from pursuing apprenticeships. While there are some fantastic schemes out there, there is a lot of inconsistency in terms of what an apprenticeship means on a practical level. In fundamentally tackling this esteem problem, should we be looking at the apprenticeship product itself and understanding exactly what we mean by it, or do we need to look at how we promote and communicate it to young people, or is it a combination of those things?

[259] **Ms Jones:** From what young people and people working with them have been telling us—and I stress, again, that this is anecdotal—it is very much a combination of both. There are some really good opportunities out there, but, as we identify in the paper, there may be some very practical barriers, around finance or transport, to enable young people to access those opportunities. There are also some bad employers out there who are calling things apprenticeships when they are nothing of the kind. I also think that, from what young people are telling us, there are still issues in schools. The whole purpose of the 14-19 pathways is for vocational education to start to be treated on a par, but some brighter young people—and I quoted one of them, but he was not the only one—find that the way in which their choices are structured when they are aged 14 mean that they have to go down an almost purely academic route. That suggests to us that there is an issue about parity of esteem in schools, and there may be some work to be done with schools in that respect. However, more clarity about what an apprenticeship is would be helpful, so that if a young person is, theoretically, being offered an apprenticeship by an employer, they know what questions to ask to see whether it is an apprenticeship or a 'rip-off', to use the young people's language.

[260] **Eluned Parrott:** To follow that up a little, how easy is it for a young person actively considering the idea of going for an apprenticeship to draw down reliable and responsible information about the options available to them? Did you get any evidence on that?

[261] **Ms Jones:** The evidence that we are presenting suggests that that varies very much, depending on where you are, the particular schemes that are available in your local area and how skilled your individual learning coach happens to be. Having said that, I ought to stress, as I said earlier in response to Alun Ffred Jones, that some of the young people to whom we were talking may have had opportunities to receive information and guidance but, for whatever reason, did not access them. If they do not get that information at the age of 14 or 15, when they are at school, what other options are there for them to get that information

further down the line? Our evidence is that it is a mixed picture, but I can say that only on the basis of the young people to whom we spoke, and those may be issues that you will wish to explore with the providers when they come in.

[262] **Eluned Parrott:** Is there a national system from which people can draw down information, or is it very much a localised, shopping-around experience that people are having?

[263] **Ms Jones:** My understanding is that, in theory, Careers Wales ought to be the gateway for that. The information that we have, from the young people with whom we spoke and the people working with them, is that that works better in some places than others. So, there is lots of enthusiasm for it in Cardiff, while most young people in Haverfordwest were asking 'Who are these people?' However, that may not reflect the operation of Careers Wales in different parts of Wales. I was a bit more concerned that people involved in some of the projects working with some of the more disadvantaged young people were saying that they felt that the projects were not being given the information to offer to young people, because perhaps Careers Wales, employers or others felt that those young people were not suitable candidates for an apprenticeship. That would be more of a concern.

[264] **Kenneth Skates:** I have just one question about north-east Wales. Is there any potential for you to engage with your partners in north-east Wales on this very issue? I really think that attitudes may be different up there, given the high concentration of apprenticeship schemes, not just in more affluent areas, but also in the likes of Caia Park and Plas Madoc, which are very deprived areas.

[265] **Ms Jones:** If that would be useful to the committee, we could certainly do that. We had to turn this around within a very tight timescale, so it was just a question of which of our partners we could set this up with. There were also issues about the fact that this is the time when young people are sitting exams and when some are beginning their apprenticeships. So, it is a bit of a churn time. However, if the committee felt that that would be useful, we could either provide further written evidence or engage with our partners up there and arrange visits.

[266] **Kenneth Skates:** It would probably be mutually beneficial for both your organisation and us to ensure that this is truly a pan-Wales set of anecdotal evidence.

[267] **Nick Ramsay:** That is a good idea, Ken.

[268] **Ms Jones:** We can very easily do that. It will take some time, however, because, in the summer, for example, young people tend not to go to their youth clubs as much as they would when the weather is foul. However, I will discuss with the support staff how we might help with that.

[269] **Kenneth Skates:** Grand. That is great, thank you.

[270] **Nick Ramsay:** Do any Members have any further questions?

[271] **David Rees:** One thing mentioned as a big problem in the section on barriers is transportation. It could be both, but is it because of the cost of transportation, because these may be families on low pay, or is it because of the lack of provision of transportation? These are mainly 16-year-olds who would not have a car, anyway.

[272] **Ms Jones:** It is both. For some young people, by the time they have paid for their food and their bus, they would be taking home less money than they would had they gone to college and got an education maintenance allowance for that. For others, it was a question of whether they could physically get there. We spoke to one young man in Haverfordwest who

had a really good opportunity for an engineering apprenticeship, but it was in another part of Pembrokeshire where there was no bus, so there was no possibility of getting there.

[273] **Nick Ramsay:** Have you found a different set of pressing issues stopping young people in rural areas such as Pembrokeshire or parts of mid Wales from seeing apprenticeships in a positive light?

[274] **Ms Jones:** Transport was certainly an issue—actually, it was more of an issue both in Haverfordwest and also with some of the young people whom we spoke to in Neath Port Talbot, who were at the top of the valley. They came from all over the county borough, so the young people whose homes were in Neath did not see transport as a problem, but the young people whose homes were up at the top in places such as Ton did see transport as a problem. So, there is the issue of cost, the issue of whether there is any transport at all, and, if so, of when transport is available. There was a young person in Cardiff who had not been able to take up an apprenticeship option because it would have involved his working shifts and, while there would have been buses had it been a nine-to-five job, there were not when he needed to be there at 5 a.m. or to come home after midnight. There is a whole set of issues around transport that will not be easy to solve, and we know from other work that the Assembly has done over the years that it affects young people's access to leisure and education choices. One of the young women to whom we spoke in Haverfordwest really wanted to study art in Carmarthen college, but was having to do a different course in the college at Haverfordwest because she could not get to Carmarthen. So, transport for young people—and I know that Joyce Watson has been very concerned about this over a number of years—involves a whole set of issues, including cost, availability and timing.

[275] **Joyce Watson:** As you have raised it, I will tell you that I did a degree, which took me four years, and meant I had to travel from Haverfordwest, which you have mentioned, to Swansea four days a week. I know that I could have gone to Carmarthen from Haverfordwest on the train—I know that for a fact, because that is where I live—but is there an issue with some people expecting things to run absolutely on time? In other words, are they not allowing for the fact that they might have to wait around for half an hour, or that they may have to negotiate different timetables and so on? Did you find that people's preparedness went beyond, 'My course starts at 9 a.m., so I am not going to arrive at 8.30 a.m. or 8 a.m.'? I had to do that, and that is why I am asking the question. It was my experience over four years that I would very often have to wait maybe an hour, because that was how the transport ran. However, I could see the end goal.

[276] **Ms Jones:** In the young people who specifically mentioned transport issues to us, no, they did not lack preparedness, because these were highly motivated young people. They were not necessarily academic types, but they were highly motivated young people who had had potential opportunities that they could not follow through. A lack of preparedness might be more of an issue with the young people who were just negative about the whole thing. There was a young man saying that he could not get from Haverfordwest to where he needed to go because there was no transport that could get him there by 7 a.m.. There is also a question to be asked about whether it is possible, under those circumstances, for employers to be more flexible. I do not know the answer to that but, for the motivated young people, the answer is 'no', although I can see that it might be an issue for others.

[277] **David Rees:** There are two issues that you could clarify for me. First, on gender balance, you said that there was a need to heighten awareness of the gender disparity. I have two points on that. You say in your evidence that there was none among the hairdressing students. I am sure that you do not mean that, because that is stereotyping hairdressers. I am sure that it is equal.

[278] **Ms Jones:** I spoke to about 15 hairdressing students in Cardiff and one of them was a

boy. So, there was a gender disparity there. However, on awareness, the reason I mentioned the hairdressing students was because, if you took the hairdressing students out of the picture—because they had a particular set of issues about why they were keen to get apprenticeships, and were very knowledgeable about it—we found that it was young men who were significantly more likely to be aware of apprenticeships as an option, significantly more likely to have been proactively offered it, and significantly more likely to see it as something for them. I mentioned hairdressing students because there were so many of them in the focus group—as that was the approach that I took—that, had I included them, it would have seemed as though the overall awareness of apprenticeships between young men and young women was equal. However, if they were taken out of the equation because of their particular set of circumstances, which I think is justifiable, it was clear that young men were much more likely to be aware of apprenticeships as an option than young women. Again, I stress that this is anecdotal evidence, so I am not claiming that, overall, it is statistically significant. For example, except for the young people who had really profound additional learning needs, all the young men in the Engage project in Neath Port Talbot had been offered an apprenticeship as an option and had seriously considered it. However, the groups of 16 and 17-year-old young women in some of the other settings that we went to were as unaware of apprenticeships as an option for them as the younger children were.

[279] **David Rees:** So, that statement reflects the awareness of individuals about the existence of apprenticeships per se, not apprenticeships in particular subject areas, does it?

[280] **Ms Jones:** Yes, and I was really raising a question about whether some of those who give young people advice are potentially perpetuating the stereotypes. I can only raise it as a question, because I do not have enough evidence to say that that is a fact. There are two questions, really. First, are apprenticeships available in the types of work that young women are, traditionally, more likely to do? We want to break down those things. Secondly, are some of the people giving careers advice and guidance themselves more likely to see apprenticeship as an option for young men and traditionally male trades rather than for young women? It is only a question, Mr Rees. I cannot say whether that is a fact or not.

[281] **David Rees:** May I take that a little further? You go on to talk about the fact that some of these individuals did not have the happiest of experiences at school, so should we be looking to raise awareness at a younger age? If they have an unhappy experience and leave or do not attend towards the latter years of their period at school, if we do not get it right, they will still not be aware, will they?

[282] **Ms Jones:** I was surprised that none of the young people under 15 to whom I spoke mentioned apprenticeship as a possible option. They mentioned staying on at school, going to college, going straight to work, and going to university, but not one of them said, 'I'm thinking about an apprenticeship'. In an ideal world, I think that those young people ought to be thinking about it at that stage, because, as you say, if they then drop out at least it will be in the back of their minds, but also because they need to be making choices at age 14. There was a particular example of a very academically bright young man who wanted to learn more practically, but the pressure from his family and school was for him just to do GCSEs and not BTECs or some other qualification that might have prepared him for a career as an engineer. I have been very careful not to be too specific because I do not want to identify individuals, but he will not mind me saying that he wants to be an engineer and he does not want to go to university to do it; he wants to do it through practical learning.

[283] **Nick Ramsay:** Are there any final questions to Helen Mary Jones? I see that there are not. Thank you, Helen Mary Jones, for coming here today to give your thoughts and for the very insightful evidence on young people's views of apprenticeships. We will feed that into our inquiry.

[284] **Ms Jones:** We are very grateful for the opportunity. I have put it in the paper, but I also want to put it on record that the young people wanted me to thank the committee for listening to their views. As I have said in the paper, they asked me whether the committee members would listen, and I said, 'They will certainly listen, but that does not necessarily mean that they will agree'. I will talk to the committee support staff about how I can pick up on Mr Skates's point, because I would also like to talk to some of my colleagues in the north west, so perhaps I will take a couple of days to go up there and put some more evidence together.

[285] **Nick Ramsay:** I should also thank you for your written evidence. If there is anything else that you would like to add, feel free to do so.

[286] **Ms Jones:** I will have to talk to staff about the practicalities, but if I am able to do that, we will prepare a further paper.

[287] **Nick Ramsay:** I think that you know the procedures well enough. [*Laughter.*]

[288] **Ms Jones:** I am not sure, Chair. I said to the security staff that I was not sure whether this is a case of poacher turned gamekeeper or gamekeeper turned poacher. I am not sure which way around it is, but I am sure that I can find my way out, at least. Thank you very much for this opportunity. It is much appreciated by the organisation but, more importantly, by the young people. Diolch yn fawr.

[289] **Nick Ramsay:** I bring this session to a close.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.49 a.m.

The meeting ended at 11.49 a.m.