

# Apprenticeships

## Provider Data

**10**

Ten training providers are commissioned contractors to deliver apprenticeships.

Six of the contracts are delivered by further education colleges and four by independent training providers. These 10 providers work with a range of other training providers using partnership and sub-contracting arrangements to deliver training for programmes at foundation apprenticeship, apprenticeship and higher apprenticeship levels.

## Learner Data

**47,855****46,610****39,370**

No. of apprenticeship learners 2023-2024

No. of apprenticeship learners 2022-2023

No. of apprenticeship learners 2021-2022

**16,475****17,480****15,635**

No. of foundation apprenticeship learners 2023-2024

No. of foundation apprenticeship learners 2022-2023

No. of foundation apprenticeship learners 2021-2022

**22,020****20,070****16,395**

No. of apprenticeship level 3 learners 2023-2024

No. of apprenticeship level 3 learners 2022-2023

No. of apprenticeship level 3 learners 2021-2022

**9,360****9,060****7,340**

No. of higher apprenticeship learners 2023-2024

No. of higher apprenticeship learners 2022-2023

No. of higher apprenticeship learners 2021-2022

## Follow-up Data

No. in follow-up: **1**

## Inspection activity

No. of core inspections: **3**

## Summary

Most learners made sound progress in their apprenticeship programmes, developing valuable practical and theoretical skills. They often took ownership of their learning, although a minority remained overly dependent on assessors. Teaching and assessment were generally well planned, with varied and engaging methods, although some sessions lacked stretch and challenge. Learners with additional support needs (ASN) were generally well supported by tutors, assessors and specialist staff, who benefited from clear professional learning. Pastoral care was strong, with learners accessing a wide range of support services. Leadership was effective, with clear strategic direction and improvement planning. Providers worked well with employers and partners, although employer involvement in the learning process was too inconsistent.

The three core inspections carried out during 2024-2025 were the final inspections under the current cycle, with all ten lead apprenticeship providers having been inspected. One provider that was placed in follow-up during the 2023-2024 academic year has made progress against their recommendations but remains in follow-up as of their last progress visit in July 2025.

## Teaching and learning

In the three providers inspected, most learners made at least sound progress in their apprenticeship programmes. Many developed a wide range of relevant practical and theoretical skills that they applied effectively in their workplaces. As a result, employers valued the positive impact and productivity their learners added to their organisations. Higher-level learners often took ownership of their progress by negotiating assessment targets and reflecting on their learning. A few learners made rapid progress and took on increased responsibilities in their roles. However, a minority continued to rely too heavily on assessors to guide their progress.

Most learners communicated confidently using appropriate terminology and collaborated well with tutors, peers and employers. In the best examples, learners participated actively in discussions and applied prior learning to new and complex tasks. For instance, engineering learners used problem-solving techniques to tackle workplace scenarios, while childcare learners explained safeguarding procedures clearly and confidently. Most learners demonstrated professional behaviours and engaged well in both off-the-job training and workplace learning.

Teaching and assessment were generally planned and structured well. Most assessors and tutors delivered engaging sessions that linked theory with practice. Many used varied approaches—such as video analysis, simulations, and digital collaboration tools—to sustain interest and deepen understanding. Delivery staff frequently drew on their vocational expertise to contextualise learning and promote relevance. For example, assessors in construction effectively modelled risk assessment and health and safety procedures aligned to workplace standards.

Most learners received constructive feedback that helped them improve. In the best cases, assessors recorded detailed feedback that supported reflection and set clear next steps. Most tutors and assessors used questioning effectively to check for understanding and encourage deeper thinking as at Associated Community Training (ACT Ltd). However, in a few sessions, questioning lacked challenge, and delivery was overly tutor-led, limiting opportunities for learners to develop higher-level thinking skills. While short-term targets were often well defined, medium to longer-term planning was less consistent in a few cases. As a result, not all learners were making the progress they could make towards completion of their programmes.

Learners across all providers developed their digital skills well. Most used e-portfolios and digital tools to track progress, submit work and engage appropriately with resources. In workplace settings, many used specialist software to complete tasks such as engineering calculations or marketing analytics. Literacy and numeracy development was generally integrated effectively into vocational learning. For example, learners in bakery and construction used job-specific formats to practise ratio, measurement, and report writing. Most learners produced written work of a sound standard, but a few continued to make basic errors despite receiving feedback that addresses these errors.

Learners with ASN made sound progress from their individual starting points. Assessors and tutors adapted tasks suitably and used a range of inclusive practices to ensure participation. They provided personalised support, additional time, verbal assessments and assistive technology. Learners responded well to these approaches and gained confidence in their learning.

The use of Welsh language was promoted appropriately across all three providers. Most learners completed introductory online modules, and a few fluent Welsh speakers undertook aspects of their programme in Welsh. Where assessors used Welsh in delivery and feedback, learners responded positively. However, the number of learners completing written assessments in Welsh remained low.

Provision planning was responsive to learners' and employers' needs, with strong links to regional and Welsh Government priorities. Providers delivered a wide range of programmes across sectors including health and social care, ICT, construction and emerging green technologies. Many learners enhanced their skills through enrichment activities, mini-qualifications and skills competitions. While employer engagement in programme design was generally strong, their involvement in progress reviews was less consistent, reducing opportunities for collaborative development in a few cases.

Overall, framework completion rates for all apprenticeships improved during 2024-2025 and rose steadily over the three years since the COVID-19 pandemic. Foundation apprenticeships showed the strongest improvement, whilst apprenticeships also improved. However, higher apprenticeships showed minimal improvement across the three year period.

Learners performed consistently well in engineering and manufacturing technologies with attainment levels now at or above pre-pandemic levels. Hair and beauty and education and training learners also performed well across the cycle. Performance was less strong in construction, especially at apprenticeship level and agriculture, horticulture and animal care. The health, public services and care and hospitality sectors have been amongst the slowest to recover since the pandemic but showed improvement in 2024-2025 at foundation and apprenticeship level. However, higher apprenticeships remain weak in these sectors. Around half of learners in the providers inspected during 2024-2025 completed their frameworks later than expected.

## **Well-being, care, support and guidance**

Nearly all learners benefited from strong pastoral and personal support that helped them to settle into their programmes and make sound progress. Induction processes were comprehensive and well-structured, providing clear guidance on apprenticeship requirements, available support services, and safeguarding procedures. Most learners understood the value of their programmes and how they contributed to their personal and career development.

Assessors and tutors built positive, trusting relationships with learners and checked regularly on their well-being. In many cases, these relationships helped learners to develop confidence and resilience,

with several learners citing the importance of flexible support in overcoming personal and professional challenges. Many assessors adapted delivery and assessment approaches to accommodate individual needs and preferences. For example, assessors used verbal discussions instead of written assessments, adjusted session formats, or extended deadlines to support learners with ASN or complex personal circumstances.

All three providers had robust systems in place for identifying and supporting learners with ASN. Learners benefited from timely referrals, diagnostic assessments, and tailored adjustments such as access to assistive technology, reading tools, or exam arrangements. Read about how [Coleg Cambria in Wrexham](#) supports learners with ASN. Staff received regular professional learning to improve their confidence in supporting learners with diverse needs, and in some cases this training was also offered to employers. Providers made good use of tracking systems to monitor interventions, share strategies across teams and ensure that reasonable adjustments were consistently applied.

Most learners reported feeling safe and free from harassment during their apprenticeship. Providers maintained appropriate policies and procedures for safeguarding and safe recruitment, with centralised monitoring of training compliance and Disclosure and Barring Service checks. Designated safeguarding leads received higher-level training and worked with partners and external specialists to review and improve safeguarding processes. Where necessary, referrals were tracked, reviewed, and used to inform policy updates and staff training. All providers had introduced initiatives to improve learners' awareness of radicalisation and extremism, although not all learners developed their ongoing understanding of these matters well enough.

Learners had access to a broad range of well-being resources, including counselling, mental health support, financial assistance, and flexible learning options. For example, learners accessed hardship funds to support digital inclusion or received personalised pastoral support through 24/7 online platforms. A strong focus on mental health and equality was evident across all three providers, supported by awareness-raising campaigns, learner forums, and professional learning events.

Providers gathered learner feedback through surveys and focus groups and used this intelligence well to refine support services. As a result, most learners felt well-supported throughout their programme, understood how to access help, and were confident in raising concerns when needed.

## **Leading and improving**

Across the three providers inspected, the leadership and management of apprenticeship provision was strong and underpinned by clear strategic direction, a collaborative culture, and a sustained focus on quality improvement. Senior leaders provided purposeful oversight of provision, underpinned by well-articulated visions and values that prioritised learner outcomes, staff development and sector responsiveness.

All three providers demonstrated effective governance structures. In the consortium model, partners shared a strong ethos of openness, mutual accountability and collective improvement. Read more in [B-WBL's inspection report](#). Roles and responsibilities were clearly defined at all levels. Regular meetings and communication channels ensured that partners remained informed of priorities, risks and contract requirements. Strategic objectives aligned well with Welsh Government priorities and regional skills needs, with providers engaging constructively in regional partnerships, employer forums and industry networks.

Self-assessment and improvement planning processes were well established across the providers and generally informed by a wide range of performance data, learner feedback and stakeholder engagement. Quality assurance systems were robust and included regular observations, audits, and data reviews. In the best cases, providers used performance indicators sharply to identify underperformance and trigger timely interventions, which had led to improvements in learner outcomes. However, not all providers placed enough focus on analysing and targeting improvement in completion rates.

Providers worked with a wide range of employers, including small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and larger, national organisations. While most employers supported apprentices well, employer involvement in learner progress reviews remained limited in all three providers and in a few cases, predominantly in the health and social care sector, learners could not attend off-the-job training during working hours. Nonetheless, providers continued to foster productive partnerships with employers, including in emerging sectors such as green industries, financial services and clinical health.

All three providers demonstrated a strong commitment to professional learning. Staff at all levels engaged in regular training that was both mandatory (e.g. safeguarding, Prevent) and developmental (e.g. essential skills, questioning techniques, digital delivery). Professional learning was often tailored to the work-based context and, in the case of the consortium, extended to include peer reviews, themed conferences and cross-partner workshops. A growing emphasis was placed on upskilling staff to better support learners with ASN and to embed Welsh language and culture across programmes. Coleg Cambria, for example developed strategies to embed the Welsh language and culture fully into their apprenticeship provision. This investment supported staff motivation, retention, and ongoing improvement in teaching practice.

## Overview of recommendations from inspections

There were three inspections in the apprenticeships sector.

Three providers were given a recommendation related to **teaching and learning**, focused on completion within expected end date, improving attainment rates for underperforming subject areas, strengthening the level of challenge and target-setting to ensure that all learners make the progress they are capable of.

One provider was given a recommendation relating to **well-being, care, support and guidance**: to ensure that all learners routinely develop their knowledge and understanding of extremism and radicalisation.

One provider was given a recommendation relating to **leading and improving**: to ensure that employers provide the necessary support for their apprentices, including allocating time to attend off-the-job activities and being actively involved in planning and reviewing learner progress.

## Follow-up

One apprenticeships provider was placed in follow-up (Estyn review).