

BESA CONDEMNS 'NONSENSICAL' CUTS TO APPRENTICESHIP FUNDING

2 years ago



The [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) has reacted angrily to the Welsh Government's decision to cut funding for technical apprenticeships by almost 25%.

The Association has thrown its weight behind a campaign led by the National Training Federation Wales (NTFW) and Colegau Cymru, who represent the Welsh further education sector, to have these "catastrophic cuts" reversed.

They estimate that the reduced support, which is part of the Welsh government's new 'Economic Mission' and includes lost funding from the European Union, would result in 10,000 fewer apprenticeship starts across Wales in 2024/25 – a drop of almost 50%.

Vale of Glamorgan MP Alun Cairns also condemned the cuts as "shameful" and criticised the Welsh administration for prioritising spending on extra politicians over the additional skills needed to grow the economy.

The NTFW said the impact of the spending cuts would be felt most keenly in the 16-24 age group, by those in the lowest socio-economic groups, and among women. Their analysis also indicated that it would lead to a significant fall in the number of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic apprenticeship learners. "These are the wrong cuts at the wrong time," said a statement from the two Welsh bodies.

The latest planned cuts follow a £17.5m reduction in the overall Welsh apprenticeship budget linked to "a perceived lack of demand for apprenticeships among employers", despite the Welsh government's own data showing an increase in apprenticeship starts in the first half of 2022/23.

Prospects

"These cuts are nonsensical," said BESA's director of training and skills Helen Yeulet. "The Welsh government's own 2021 evaluation highlighted the importance of apprenticeships to economic growth and improving career prospects for thousands of people."

"Current indications are that demand from employers will increase during 2023/24 across Wales, but if the apprenticeships are not funded there simply won't be enough people to fill the roles just when the need for more skilled people is rising."

A recent study by the construction products supplier Kingfisher estimated that the UK would lose out on £98billion of growth by 2030 due to a shortage of tradespeople, and BESA added that the sector continued to suffer from poor productivity linked to lack of skills and innovation.

"Apprenticeships are so important locally, helping to create opportunities for the next generation and develop skills for life. All while making a huge contribution to the economy," said Alun Cairns MP. "The Welsh Government has chosen to instead prioritise spending millions on 20mph zones and extra politicians in Cardiff Bay. The Welsh Government cuts to apprenticeship schemes here in Wales are shameful."

Yeulet added that removing funding from apprenticeships was "astonishingly short-sighted" and pointed out that the UK government had just announced a £50m fund to stimulate the uptake of apprenticeships in technical areas where there are shortages, including engineering, "because it recognises the need to increase diversity and freshen up the talent coming into technical professions that underpin economic growth".

"This decision by the Welsh government is going in completely the opposite direction and the long-term implications are not hard to predict," she said.

ColegauCymru and NTfW called on employers to get behind their campaign to "make the case for apprenticeships and ensure that catastrophic and irreversible damage is not done to the apprenticeships programme in Wales".

"Skills and further education are not a 'nice to have' - they are fundamental to our economic recovery. The time to invest in our learners and workers is now. Attracting inward investment and supporting key anchor companies relies on investment in skills," their statement said.

They urged anyone concerned about this issue to make representations to the Welsh Government and contact their local college or independent training provider to discuss how to help protect apprenticeships.