



Ein cyf/Our ref FM -/01125/20

Dawn Bowden MS  
MS for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney

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24 June 2020

Dear Dawn

I am writing in response to your letter dated 9 June in relation to your concerns about youth unemployment in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

We have a good track record in creating new opportunities for training and skills and we will continue to draw on this as we work on the recovery from the pandemic.

In the past our training and skills programmes have made a real difference in our communities – they have seen the proportion of working age people in Wales with no qualifications more than halved over the course of devolution and the number of those with higher education level skills has gone from just over one in five to more than one in three.

During our subsequent exchange in Plenary on 10 June, we discussed the success of the Aspire scheme and its expansion to other areas beyond Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil.

The Aspire scheme is a shared apprenticeship model and is a unique and innovative way of supporting apprentices in Wales. It provides flexibility for apprentices to move between different employers to share the responsibility for on-site training. The model has worked well in many of our rural and valley communities.

We have extended funding for five shared apprenticeship projects, including the two Aspire projects you mentioned during the Plenary session. We also have Cyfle (plumbing and electrical) in West Wales, Y Prentis (construction) in the Valleys Taskforce area and the West Wales Shared Hospitality programme. There may be instances where employers struggle to recruit apprentices via traditional methods over the next 12 months and our shared apprenticeship approach will be able to help.

Each shared apprenticeship project follows a specific approval process. A business case is submitted and assessed against a specific set of criteria, including market need, operating model, added value, quality, employment law, eligible costs, exit strategy and regional skills partnership endorsement. We will approve applications against these if budgets allow, subject to Ministerial approval.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We are currently working on a new and comprehensive employability and skills support package, which is very much being shaped in the context of coronavirus. We are still working on the exact details of this but – in the same way our business support scheme has – it will add value to rather than duplicate any initiatives the UK Government may bring forward in this space.

We want everyone over 16 in Wales to have an offer of support and advice to find work, to pursue self-employment or find a place in education or training. Over and above existing skills and employment support, we are preparing to use an additional £40m from our Economic Resilience Fund to deliver this.

We also want to support employers to recruit those people who are more likely to have been affected by coronavirus – young people, people from BAME communities and disabled people.

This government shares your concerns about protecting a generation from unemployment caused by coronavirus and we are poised to act quickly to support the most vulnerable.

These are incredibly challenging times, but this should be a moment for fundamental change in our economy, so we can build back better and ensure our future is fairer, more inclusive and more sustainable than our past.

Thank you for writing to me about this very important issue.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Drakeford". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**MARK DRAKEFORD**