



**Stronger | Futures | Cymru**



**Ceidwadwyr  
Cymreig**

**Welsh  
Conservatives**

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# Stronger Futures Cymru



## **A skilled workforce enables a nation to prosper - fuelling innovation and driving an economy forward.**

In an increasingly competitive global market, it is more important than ever that Wales continues to develop and adapt its skills in preparation for the future.

Welsh Conservatives have an ambitious vision for Wales, its people, businesses and economic future. After 16 years of devolution, Wales continues to have some of the poorest education standards<sup>1</sup>, highest unemployment rates,<sup>2</sup> and highest levels of welfare dependency<sup>3</sup> of all the UK nations and regions. Businesses right across Wales are struggling to recruit highly skilled workers and as a result,

our economy stands to be undermined. We believe things need to change. Welsh Conservatives want to raise standards and deliver a robust skills and training framework that will build the aspirations and skills of people in Wales, put people in jobs and propel our economy forward.

Whether you are leaving education, looking to access vital work experience, want to learn a trade or need advice on entering the workplace after long-term unemployment, we will support you to develop yourself. Through offering a more extensive skills development scheme, we hope to open up more opportunities for you and your family and create a more inclusive economy. By strengthening individual ability, we can grow stronger together.

<sup>1</sup> Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results from PISA 2012.

<sup>2</sup> ONS, Regional Labour Market, Headline Indicators September 16th 2015.

<sup>3</sup> ONS, Regional Labour Market, Claimant Count by unitary and local authority, September 16th 2015.

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## **Strengthen the ties between education, employment and the local business community.**

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Basic education lays the foundation for lifetime learning. Welsh Conservatives want to see greater collaboration between education and businesses to ensure that younger people not only receive an academic education, but leave school with experience, “work ready” skills and vocational training. Welsh Conservatives would encourage schools across Wales to increase their engagement with local employers. Members from the local business community could participate on school governing panels to advise on how best to integrate “work ready” skills into the curriculum.

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## **Work with employers to increase and diversify apprenticeship opportunities in Wales.**

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Apprenticeships play a vital role in developing an individual’s skills for the future whilst simultaneously helping businesses expand. In recent years, we have seen the Welsh Government considerably reduce the budget for apprenticeships, seriously jeopardising the opportunities for people in Wales. We will work with schools, colleges and businesses to promote the benefits of apprenticeships and deliver industry forecasting to ensure relevant, realistic and sustainable skills delivery for the future.

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## **Replace Jobs Growth Wales with our ‘Journeys to Work’ work placement scheme.**

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We will offer 12 month work experience placements to help all those, who despite wanting to work, do not have the relevant experience. We will extend the opportunity to people of all ages to help support as many people as possible on their journey into sustainable, progressive employment.

*“By strengthening individual ability, we can grow stronger together.”*

# Bridging the Gap

In recent years, Wales has become the location of significant investment, which will create fantastic opportunities for Welsh individuals and businesses. From the Wylfa Newydd development on Anglesey to the electrification of Welsh Railways, these developments will need diverse and skilled people in order to be built, operated and sustained.

However, these large developments are not the only ones facing a skills gap. Right across Wales, smaller businesses have long faced the significant challenge of recruiting the right people for the job. 72.5% of Welsh businesses experienced difficulty in recruiting the right staff in 2015 <sup>1</sup>. A further 61% of Welsh businesses in Wales fear they will not be able to recruit enough high skilled workers to meet demand and grow, which has increased by 29% since 2014 <sup>2</sup>. As concerns continue to worsen, the need to address Wales' skills gap has never been more important.

If our economy is to progress, our skills and knowledge base must develop too. Like many other European countries, Wales is not alone in the challenge of plugging the specialist skills gap. Roles which require Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) skills are becoming increasingly more prevalent, but at present, there are serious concerns surrounding Wales' ability to develop this knowledge base.

But, it is not just our specialist industries that are facing a skills shortage. Wales' skills gap affects all levels of our economy and public services – from our health and social services to tourism and agriculture. For our economy to grow in a balanced and sustainable way, we need to support skills development right across the spectrum.

Apprenticeships and work experience opportunities can be springboards into employment. They not only play a crucial role in enabling businesses to grow, and trades to continue, but offer great opportunities for learners to gain skills and develop. The more experience and skills a person has, the more opportunities and job prospects become available to them. Academic learning is not attractive or suitable for all, so it is vital that other alternatives are put in place to ensure that all people in Wales have the same opportunities.

# 72.5%

Of Welsh businesses have experienced difficulty in recruiting the right person for the job.

<sup>1</sup> South Wales Chamber of Commerce "All Wales Quarterly Economic Survey" Q2 2015.  
<sup>2</sup> CBI, "Inspiring Growth- CBV Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2015" 2015.

*We will deliver a more robust training programme by:*

## **Extending opportunities for all**

We don't believe there should be an age limit on learning. We want to deliver training opportunities to all those who seek it. Starting with those in schools and colleges we want the progression from school or training to work to be as seamless as possible.

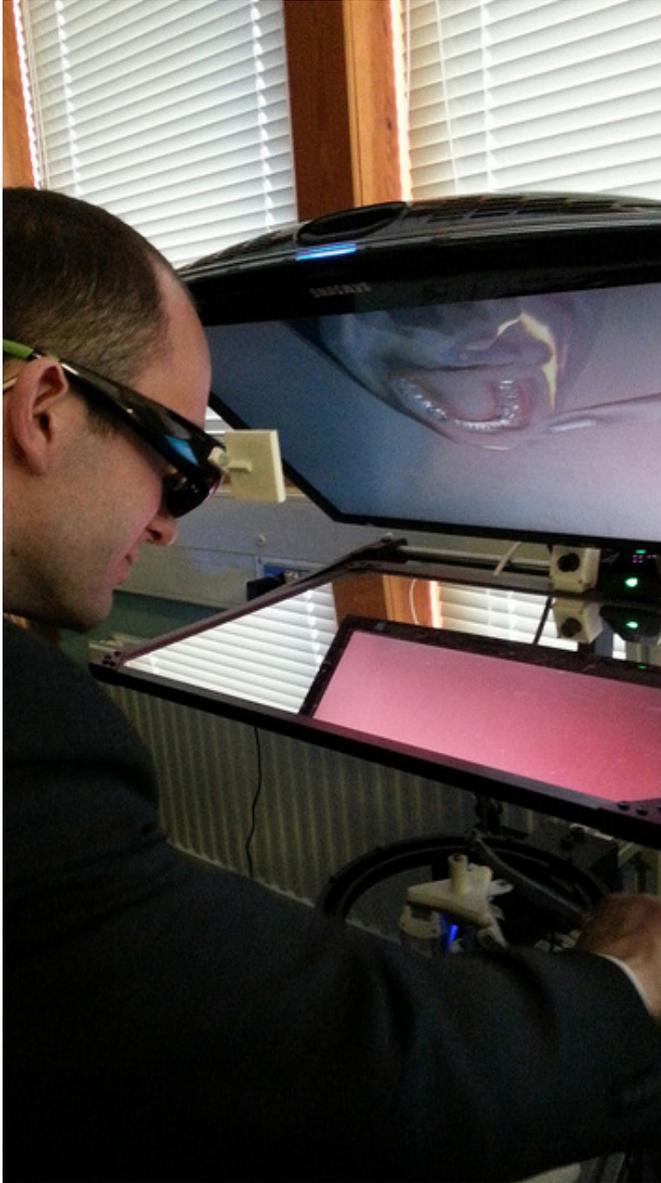
## **Delivering higher quality, targeted training**

Extend paid work experience placements to 12 months with a greater emphasis on training.  
Use labour market intelligence to deliver apprenticeships in line with future skills needs, rather than ages.

## **Making the process easier for businesses**

Allow businesses to have greater design of training, as nothing is better than industry led knowledge.  
Simplify the application and assessment processes for businesses.  
Support training in the form of an employment incentive grant.  
Implement a three month probation period for those on work experience placements to ensure that the role is right for the individual and business.

# Nurturing Ambition



**Welsh Conservatives want to strengthen the ties between education, employment and the local business community to ensure Welsh students are well prepared for the steps after education.**

**We will strengthen ties between education, employment and local business by;**

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Delivering **ongoing careers advice** to students and delivering high quality work experience placements.

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**Working with local employers** to ensure a student's education is not just academic, but vocational too.

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Promoting the versatile options that await students after education, including **apprenticeships and training opportunities.**

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Our children and young people have many aspirations, but not always is the support there to help them realise their goals. From a young age, to those who are leaving education, many may aspire to follow a certain path or pursue a certain career, but they are not sure how best to reach it. We feel that a conversation about a young person's future should not be had in their final years of school, but given consideration throughout.

A daunting experience for even some of those with the greatest levels of support, it can be very challenging for a young person to decide which path to take once they reach their final years of school. For many, advice

on what to do next may be non-existent.

To avoid students falling between the cracks, Welsh Conservatives want students to have a greater awareness of the opportunities available to them. We will encourage schools and local business communities to strengthen their links, to ensure that students have a greater understanding of the opportunities available around them. As the nature of the job market changes, local employers can help schools with their insights on how best to deliver modern day employability skills to prepare students for future employment.

We believe that these stronger relationships will bring about seamless transitions from education to employment.



# Apprenticeships

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**Apprenticeships play a vital role in developing an individual's skills for the future whilst simultaneously helping businesses expand. They can kick start careers for younger people, and enable those who are older the opportunity to retrain and follow a different path, whilst earning and learning at the same time.**

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## **Greater Promotion**

We want apprenticeships to be viewed with the value they deserve. At present, take-up of apprenticeships is still very low with school leavers in Wales. In 2014, of all year 13 school leavers in Wales, 64.2% went on into higher educations, where just 1.62% entered employed training<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in 2014, just 10% of parents wanted their children to choose an apprenticeship or training course as a post-16 education option<sup>2</sup>.

We want to work with businesses, schools and colleges to better promote apprenticeships to students. From building an individual's skills to earning a wage, they offer an invaluable experience for those that choose them. Not only do they provide the opportunity to gain in-depth industry knowledge, apprentices receive highly respected qualifications.

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## **Greater Targeting for Sustainability**

An apprenticeship scheme can not only work to develop an individual's skills, but can work to propel our economy forward. We will use labour market intelligence to ensure that apprenticeship training is working towards filling Wales' future skills needs. This way, newly qualified apprentices can put their hard work and training into action, and have confidence that once they complete their training they will be able to find a job.

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## **Greater Flexibility**

To ensure that apprentices' receive a well-rounded experience of their chosen industry in Wales, we would like to introduce the option of "sandwich" placements. Where possible, an apprentice can spend half of their time with a smaller business and the other with a larger organisation to ensure they gain versatile hands on experience in their chosen field.

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## **Easier for Businesses**

Wales' economy is predominately built on micro, small and medium sized businesses. For a smaller business, it can be difficult to open up a role for an apprentice. To

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<sup>1</sup> Destination of School Leavers, Careers Wales, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> National Survey for Wales, May 2014.

encourage smaller sized businesses to take on apprenticeships, we will offer Apprenticeships Grants for Employers (AGE) to those that have not taken on an apprentice before.

We believe that industry knowledge knows best, that is why we will place greater onus on businesses to design and direct training for apprenticeships, to develop the skills that they believe the industry needs.



# Journeys to Work

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**Although many people want to find work, it can be increasingly difficult without the right experience or support. This can be the case for many young people leaving education and for those looking to re-enter the jobs market after time out of work.**

In place of the Welsh Government's 'Jobs Growth Wales' we will deliver our own work experience scheme '*Journeys to Work*' that will help those without relevant work experience gain the skills and confidence they need to get on.

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## Expanding opportunities

Currently, the Welsh Government's Jobs Growth Wales scheme is offered to those aged 16-24. Although this age group remains a target focus, *Journeys to Work* will offer support to older adults who are looking to re-enter the work place. Long term unemployment is a concern for many of Wales' older people, with 36% of those aged 50-64 not in work<sup>1</sup>. *Journeys to Work* will help support both young and older people to gain the experience they need to enter the workplace.

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## Joined-up support

A joined up approach to tackling Wales' skills gap is crucial. This is why we will deliver our scheme in tandem with the UK Government's Work Programme. *Journeys to Work* will open up its opportunities for those who partake in the Work Programme to ensure that they also can access up-skilling and training opportunities. This way, those seeking to re-enter the jobs market do not get lost in government red tape, and can access the opportunities that will enable them to improve themselves, and enter the jobs market at a higher footing than when they left.

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## Higher Quality Placements

*Journeys to Work* placements will have a greater emphasis on developing the individual, rather than the "tick box" approach to work experience that we see now. Through offering 12 month placements, the individual will be embedded in the business, and play a vital role in helping the business to function and grow. 12 months will enable the individual to be a valued member of staff which we believe will lead to greater employment prospects for those who take part in a placement.

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<sup>1</sup> Enterprise and Business Committee – Employment Opportunities for People Over 50 – July 2015.

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## **Easier For Businesses**

We want to ensure that businesses and individuals are correctly matched. We will implement a three month probation period for those on work experience placements to ensure that the role is right for the individual and business.

We will provide businesses with an employment incentive grant to enable them to offer work experience opportunities. This way we will offer a more efficient and sustainable programme to support people into work.





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