****

**WBL Apprenticeship Contract Holders Reference Group**

**Friday 10th January 2025**

**10.00am – 12.00pm**

**Meeting Minutes and Actions**

**Attendees:**

* **Secretariat:**
  + **NTfW - Lisa Mytton - Chair**
* **Medr:**
  + **Heather Davidson**
  + **Geoff Hicks**
  + **Carly Davies**
  + **Nikoleta Stastna**
  + **Catherine Jenkins**
  + **Emma Evans**
* **Providers:**
  + **B-WBL - Berni Tyler**
  + **Cambrian Training Company – Faith O’Brien**
  + **Cardiff and Vale College - Alan Mackey**
  + **Coleg Cambria - Vicky Barwis**
  + **Edu8 Group – Jude Holloway**
  + **Gower College Swansea - Rachel Jones**
  + **Grŵp Llandrillo Menai - Sophie Martin**
  + **Grŵp NPTC Group - Nicola Thornton-Scott**
  + **Itec Training Solutions – Gareth Matthews**
  + **ALS – Sarah John**
* **Apologies:**
  + **Colegaucymru Jeff Protheroe**
  + **ACT – Zoe Goodall**
  + **Medr – Rhian Edwards**

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

* **LM welcomed everyone to the meeting, and the apologies were given and accepted.**

**2. Budget discussions update following December’s meeting**

**Geoff Hicks**

Geoff gave an overview in terms of the draft budget as its stands.

**Faith O' Brien**

Asked about the terms and length of the contract

**Geoff Hicks**

24-month contract, difficult having one-year allocations, because it's one financial year allocations. Then we have to convert into an academic year, it’s really hard to manage so discussion around if we could always move to a two-year contract.

It would make it a lot more manageable and interesting, it's really hard to argue, to increase apprenticeship budgets when you don't know whether it's going to be lost again in the next academic year because it's not baselined. So, if we move to a two-year contract, I think it frees up a bit of space for government to be a bit more positive in terms of what can be given as additional funding to apprenticeships. We aren’t worried that it may or may not be baselined in the future years, because we're always going to be operating over a two-year basis, WG were really positive for that as a thought process.  
**Faith O' Brien**   
Just to reinforce, I haven't got an issue or any concerns with the two-year contract.

It's the principle that if there is going to, if it's clear that there is an underspend by a provider, and the trend analysis shows that that there's going to be pressure on the second year. It’s having some sort of methodology whereby it can be looked at and pulled back in instead of that re profile just being back ended through the two-year cycle.  
If that makes sense as in contract management.

**Geoff Hicks**

It does make sense, and it's something that we would want to work with this group as to how we do that at the moment. You are right, there are one or two providers that if we stick to just 24/25, we're looking at a possible under delivery in 24/25, but we're not talking massive amounts. We're talking very, very small amounts and so we need to think how it is now going to get mopped up in a two-year exercise and it won't be reclaimed and redistributed to others because over a two-year period that will usually get mopped up.

We need to consider how we bring something in that monitor and looks at repurposing? If we do move to 24 mths? It's also about how do we manage that in the very short time that we have now? I've told government we need to have an answer on this by the end of January because otherwise we're going into another month, I’m not recommending that anybody takes their foot off the gas at the moment because there's a risk we don't deliver.  
So I do want to reprofile if that's OK, we're on quite a quick turnaround whereby the end of next week, the week afterwards, I should be able to give you an update as to where Welsh Government sit on this.

**Faith O' Brien**   
That's great, Thank you, Jeff.

**Nicola Thornton-scott**

I just wanted to pick up on what faith was saying there. It's not necessarily, and I can't speak for the other providers, but it's not necessarily that there's an under performance. It's the way that we've had to reduce the provision because of the ESF funding that that wasn't attributed to the contract. So, in our case we we've lost nearly three million of our contracts.  
Now try to take 3,000,000 out from one July to the 1st of August.  
Is a horrendous planning exercise to do so. It has been done on a managed bit by bit process and I can quite easily spend that contract value this year. But what it does it create is an even more burden for next year because the carryover is going to be higher. There will be less starts next year and that will mean that sub contracted provision within our partnership won't get any starts at all, which will put the viability of those organisations and that provision at risk. So, what we're hoping is that since that loss of the ESF funding, we're able to bring the contract down over a one- or two-year period if that makes sense, because I've got take £3,000,000 out of my provision and that can’t be done overnight.  
I've got to do it on a gradual process.

**Geoff Hicks**

It absolutely makes sense to me like that, and I think throughout our contract management meetings, those conversations happen with the contract managers so that we understand that position.

**Nicola Thornton-scott**   
So I think it's about being clear on what is under performance and what managing the process of trying to readjust the contracts down to the value that we're now at.

**Sophie**

We're in a slightly difficult position that we're significantly overspent, but similarly to what Nicola was saying, we're managing that and we have plans on how to manage that. So, it coming over two years is helpful to us because even though I might not be able to reduce it down any more than what I'm overspent, we have got plans with how we can do that into next year. While still maintaining the coverage of provision because obviously when you've got large construction and engineering that have significant carryover. So even though it won't help us financially because it will still have an impact on next year, I'll be able to manage it more by being over two years.

**Geoff Hicks**

I think that's what we're trying to achieve. There's no getting away from the fact that it is a change to what you're currently delivering and what as a sector you have to manage.

**Rachel Jones**

Echoing what Sophie and Nicola said. I think the other area that it's helpful for us is the fact that, you know, as providers, we're all trying to work with employers and the economy and what they're planning. And you know when you're profiling and looking over 12 months and you can see what actually our carryover is going to be and its huge. I don't know what the situation is with starts next year, etcetera. Knowing that I've been able to look over a two-year period allows us to ease that far more.

**Sarah John**

I was just going to ask, has any modelling been done yet on what the carryover value of the current in learning would be? Because we don't have many apprenticeships that are only one year in duration. What’s it looking like? The actual value of next year's spend would be if all the learners are in learning now carried over.

**Geoff Hicks**   
It's around what I shared with government yesterday, it’s around 60% of the contractors carry over learners.

**Sarah John**   
I think it will be interesting if we all did some calculations on what we think our starts might be for next year based on trends

**Geoff Hicks**   
So what I shared with WG was compared to the 40% new starts in this year, so.  
It is a sizeable chunk in reduction in new starts.

**Lisa Mytton**   
Geoff, apologies, just before you summarise, I've got Nick the wants to come back in and then when you do summaries, I'll just share some of the feedback I had with Welsh government as well.

**Nicola Thornton-scott**   
Just to say we've already done that remodelling as far as our partnership is concerned and our carry over is 74%, which will allow 24% for starts. That's why I'm concerned.  
Because that will definitely put our provision in jeopardy and cause us huge challenge for next year to keep continuity of provision open.

**Lisa Mytton**   
Geoff, just before you come in, if I if I could just add, you know for some of the conversations we have, Data is of paramount importance and if, I can have that ASAP and obviously the reason for that is because inevitably with this six-week window to convey concerns about a cash flat budget and impact of carry over to WG especially on the health and social care starts, etcetera prior to Christmas overall were looking at about 72%. If we've got Nick saying 74%, we need to make sure what the actual figure is

**Faith O' Brien**

So, CTC normally have averaged carry over of about 57 to 60% and we're going into next year with a carryover of 74/75%. But I think we'd need the previous average for the last three years. To validate the difference in percentage, carry over.  
**Geoff Hicks**   
If you could Commission something from us, if you want something from us would be the best thing to do because obviously the figures I've given you, as I said, it's based on historic data we have. It was only just a really quick summary of what I've heard today, as I think that a two-year contract is welcome. The caveat for that is that we need to create a new mechanism for monitoring. In year performance, because otherwise all we can consistently be doing is rolling that over into next year, especially if we do get agreement from government that we can have a two year approach every year as the new norm.  
I'm going to carry on pressing to try and get this as an option.

**Alan Mackey**

A point that was made in the meeting that we had just before, before Christmas, which was around the additional 2 million, which I think we discussed a few different options with mental health for supported apprenticeships. But I thought the consensus from that meeting was that 2 million actually be utilised for apprenticeship starts. Was there any progress made on that, Jeff? Any decision made on that 2 million?

**Geoff Hicks**

No update on that. There won't be an update on that until the end of January.  
That there will be options to go to Medr board. Their new board to me, I can't predict where they're going to go with that one, so I will. I will obviously share that there was a desire from the network that it would be put into the contract.

**Lisa Mytton.**  
Thanks and thanks all for the questions and the observations and thanks Geoff for the update.

**Nicola Thornton-scott**

Just quickly picking up on what Alan said there, we started to have the conversations with the Welsh Government representatives around the October, November time going into December.  
Then we had the agreement that the two-year approach was agreed. So, by the time we were asked to do a profile, I'm sure I knew what the contract value for 24/25 was because we then profiled for the two years.

**Catherine Jenkins**   
That was in May.  
We did a re profile in May.

**Nicola Thornton-scott**   
All right. OK.

**Sophie**   
To clarify that we might have profiled in May, but those discussions started back pre-Christmas, so we all knew to take our foot off the gas because that's what was coming.  
So I'm kind of agreeing with Nick that we did have nearly two years because we knew what the contract value would be. So obviously, if we know that this year is carrying into next year, that's really helpful by the end of January.

**Geoff Hicks**

By the end of January, I will have something definitive for you.

**3.Framework meeting next steps**

**Heather Davidson**

We've now finalised the so I can share the spreadsheet with everyone So, this is the finalised version of the apprenticeship framework. Based on conversations we had and what needs to be done when, where your concerns are, where your issues were on the framework alongside the other sort of piece of evidence that we looked at what needs to be done.,

There will be a steering group now set up for each of these framework reviews that will include obviously internal people in Medr, but also stakeholders. experts, members of the network to be able to discuss what needs to be done, what the qualifications are looking at qualification, end dates, etc There'll then be a consultation exercise that will be held.

We need more discussion on how we engage with employers on this.

There's obviously calls to review each of the qualifications and to think about things like net zero. Bolt on qualifications, micro credentials of those type of things that are needed within these reviews. So once all that's done, we. come back together as a steering group to agree what's needed in the framework Then we will do a funding review, apparently the review is done afterwards, so we're now going to do it before any frameworks is going to be issued.

We need to look at how what the process needs to be if new frameworks need to come into place. We talked the other day about consolidating energy for example, so we'll have a renewable energy framework. We'll get all this out to you and any sort of comments on that, I would be appreciated.

**Sarah John**

Thank you, Heather. Apologies because I wasn't in that framework review meeting. We have got pressures. I know that Matt sends them through to Nicoletta, but the insurance framework, for example, ran out level 4 in December and had been extended twice previously. And that the whole qualifications is not fit for purpose and the employers know what they want and we know what would be ideal. And we have been asking historically for it to be reviewed, has there been a review of the frameworks on the ACW to say which ones are running out soon or which ones have run out to sort of prioritise those urgent ones?

**Heather Davidson**   
So that is being done in sort of parallel, the team is looking at all of the qualifications and what's running out when what we need to do about it. So that work is going ahead as well. But if there is anything specific that you're aware of, just drop me a line and we can look at that as a matter of urgency.

**Sarah John**

Thanks, Heather. Much appreciated.

**Rachel Jones** Hi. Thanks, Heather.  
Similar to Sarah. Really. There's a couple that we're still waiting and chasing. I’ll send it you separately longer term, and equally the housing level 4, we've been waiting for a while, but what's the time scale we're looking at?

**Heather Davidson**

**I**f we start planning looking at some of that and maybe we can get back together, Lisa, and have a bit of a workshop looking at those scenarios and see sort of time scales realistic, you know when people can engage when people can bring that Information back together.

**Lisa Mytton**

I can't see any other hands up in relation to this particular agenda item, so if there isn't anything else to add.

**4.Apprenticeship week**

**Heather**

**We r**eally just to see what's happening across Wales and then trying to make sure that we link anything in with the Welsh Government's doing sort of meeting with them this week as well. And they're hoping to get every minister out to meet some employers to celebrate. Sort of successes of apprenticeships. So, they've asked whether you can send through any employer details that you think would be good. They're also pulling together some case studies as well that they're going to publish during the apprenticeship week. So, if there are any case studies that you think would be really good as well, it's just a written one. We really need to think about what the key messages are and where we're actually sending people to.

**Lisa Mytton**

Great. Thanks, Heather. So just from a network perspective, what I can share with you is.  
The comms and marketing team for the 10 Commission contract holders a meeting on Tuesday. We've already sort of given them some Information on Apprenticeship Week and just to reiterate for everyone that on the 12th of February, we have got an apprenticeship week event at the Oriel in the Senedd. You each have a stand with two members of staff and we are encouraging you to invite an employer or two to that as well. That is being organised via the Cross-party group. That Jeff and I lead on and so hence the organisation and we're very, very grateful of that is happening.  
**Alan Mackey**   
Can Heather send out a note to us all requesting and giving us a contact? Point of who? To who to get back to Heather.  
**Heather Davidson**   
Yeah, no worries. We'll do that,

**Sarah John**   
It was just following up what you just said, Heather, about the directing employers and parents and potential apprentices. Is the ACW website going to be ready?

**Heather Davidson**   
Can I come back to you on that one?

**Lisa Mytton**

On overview of the construction meeting on the 30th with Medr and the team, other stakeholders, Jeff and myself There are a number of concerns so they can be addressed and discussed during that meeting I'll catch up with Jeff on the evidence that he has from your curriculum group and quality group as well. As I said, we'll collate that evidence together and then we'll catch up with our colleagues in Medr to see how we can take this forward and address some of these issues

**Heather Davidson**   
for background, this was so the level two we want to re implement a Level 2 construction framework as you all want. The issue that we've got, we haven't got a qualification for level 2 to be able to put into the framework. So, we've had multiple meetings with Qualifications Wales to discuss this to see what we can do to support. If you could come armed at our meeting with the evidence that you may have, for Level 2 and 3, What are the entry issues that that you're getting? Have they been early leavers?

5. AOB

**Geoff Hicks**

Firstly, I did a terrible job of introducing Carly and unfortunately, she's left now, but Carly is new to Medr started this week. Her role as head of Performance Coordination. So, Carly will be taking over many of the responsibilities that Alan Gosney used to undertake just for you to know.

I've had some draft data through around the achievement rates for 23/24. I can't share them at the moment because they need to be validated, but first I just want to say that it looks like a stepped improvement from previous years, which is great so. Overall, a 74% success rate across the network. If I look at foundation apprenticeships, there's a 75% success rate that ranges from 60% and one provider up to 85%. So overall, good news for those some things, as always, some things we can pick out of there and ask some questions.

The one thing that really concerns me, and this flags back to something I raised in one of the previous CCH meetings, is since PAGS have gone. Data audit has become non-existent.  
We are aware that in at least one provider, 74 learners just disappeared from the data between the October freeze and when this data was put together That would have changed their outcomes from High 60s to Mid-50s. If we'd included those 75 for learners.  
I've asked the contract managers to do some spot checks on this, so just to prepare you, I'm not going to focus on just the one provider. I think we're going to do some spot checks across all providers to start looking at data and I think as Medr it needs to become a bit of a priority for me to look at how we have some sort of assurance on your data So, I think it'd be really helpful for us to just do that little spot check exercise and then progress onto a how do we monitor data?

**Lisa Mytton** Sounds like a sensible approach to be honest with you.

**Alan Mackey**   
Could you just give us the range again of the FA as well please? Sorry, I didn't quite catch that one.

**Geoff Hicks**

60% to 82%. As soon as this has been validated, then I think it's ok for me to share this data, I just been uneasy about sharing it until its validated.

**Faith O' Brien**

It would be really good for the likes of Nicoletta, etcetera, to come up and have a little look at what we do as providers in terms in terms of our audit methodology and our regime throughout the 12 months we invest in a qualified auditor and they are a permanent member of staff that audits all of our sub-contractors and internal delivery

**Geoff Hicks**

Thanks that’s something I've asked Carly to look at. Because you will all do your own self-assessment and self-audit anyway. That will be the first step as to look at that and see if there's any best practice within the sector.

**Catherine Jenkins**

I just want to say that I agree with you. we used to have to produce our provider self-assessment to Welsh government as providers. What we were doing for internal audit and how we evidenced all the different aspects like suspension. That’s something I'm really keen to reintroduce, to be honest. It was really useful as a starting point for any audit really.

**Nikoleta Stastna**

I don't know where you whether you have noticed? The specification document and some of the forms has been published on the media website. We will have to inform the Welsh Government, obviously, to link the current version to what they have on the Welsh Government website, so if you need to view the most recent version, please use the Medr website.

**Lisa Mytton**

Thanks Nicoletta. OK, colleagues. Thank you again for a very interesting meeting. As always, some great contributions as well. And thank you so much. Of course, to our colleagues at Medr really for the updates and the partnership and the relationships that we have.  
It is much appreciated.

**6. Date of next meeting – 7th March 2025**

**Actions**

**1. Lisa/Jeff to request data needed from Geoff on the percentages of carry over learners and impact on starts by 1st February**

**2. Additional £2M Geoff to see if it can be used to support starts by next meeting**

**3.Geoff to send out profile information by end of January**

**4.Sarah to inform Heather of issues with Insurance frameworks**

**5.Rachel to Informa Heather of issues with Frameworks**

**6.Heather to send out framework information spreadsheet by end of January**

**7.Heather to send out information on Steering groups next steps for frameworks by next meeting**

**8.All to send and share information on Apprenticeship week by 8th February**