

PM wants one in five apprenticed

Prime Minister Gordon Brown says he wants to see one in five young people on apprenticeships within 10 years, in a push to win the global "skills race".



A national apprenticeship service is to lead the expansion

He appealed for more employers - in the public services as well as in companies - to offer the training courses.

Mr Brown told a conference of business leaders in London that currently one in 15 youngsters is on an apprenticeship.

As a first step, the number of places on offer for 16 to 18-year-olds would be increased by 90,000 by 2013.

Reflecting on his recent visit to China and India Mr Brown said: "A generation ago, a British prime minister had to worry about the global arms race.

"Today a British prime minister has to worry about the global skills race - because the nation that shows it can bring out the best in all its people will be the great success story of the coming decades.

"So it is time for a wake-up call for young people, employees and employers - that we now summon ourselves to a new national effort and mobilisation to win the new skills race."

'No sitting back'

The biggest barrier to full employment was not a shortage of jobs but the shortage of skills among those who were unemployed and economically inactive.

In the last 10 years, apprenticeship places had risen from 75,000 to nearly 240,000, Mr Brown said.

They now covered areas such as computer game testing, broadcasting, film and video, hospitality and catering, with new schemes coming along all the time.

"But we cannot simply sit back and congratulate ourselves on that success," he said.

New measures to expand the system include:

- a national apprenticeship service to lead the expansion
- making it easier for employers to improve the range of apprenticeships by, for example, enabling them to

- include their own accredited qualifications
- a pilot wage subsidy programme to make it more attractive for small businesses to offer high-quality training
- targets for increasing apprenticeships in the public sector
- a task force to improve the take-up of apprenticeships in London
- possibly using the public procurement process to encourage companies on government-funded contracts to offer apprenticeships

The shadow innovation, universities and skills secretary, David Willetts, said the government had failed before.

"Why should they do any better this time round?"

"In recent years, the number of young people who are doing nothing - the so-called Neets - has risen and the number of Advanced Apprenticeships has fallen."