

World-class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All

1. Have the barriers to the growth of the Apprenticeship programme been accurately and comprehensively identified?

The report does in the main accurately reflect many of the barriers to the growth of the Apprenticeship programme but concern remains that the role of the training provider has increased substantially during recent years without the support to mirror the increased role. It is essential that the apprentice, employer and work-based learning (WBL) provider work effortlessly together to sustain and further develop the partnership necessary to produce a high quality provision. The 'smaller' provider especially needs dedicated support to further develop their provision.

During the last few years WBL providers have worked effortlessly to raise quality and delivery of provision and it would be further enhanced via a dedicated capital investment initiative.

It is essential that local network organisations continue to play an immense role in supporting WBL providers. Networks are paramount in supporting WBL providers, working very closely in partnership with existing partnership organisations. However, the role of the networks and how they can continue to support the provider members (North Yorkshire has 22 WBL provider member organisations) must be closely considered.

The network organisations have a huge role to play in helping to build relationships between WBL providers and schools. All young people have a right to make an informed choice in respect of progression post-16 education and as such the networks work closely with schools to develop the provision of IAG – the networks and providers have essential expertise and are premier deliverers in updating information to young people, employers, parents and teachers. Recognition for this resource must be recognised.

In addition, it must be recognised that a major barrier to young people taking up Apprenticeships currently is due to the lack of information being passed on to them at school. It is clear as young people drop out of college and sixth form in November and come onto the Apprenticeship programme that they are much better suited to this route, however many of them have never received any guidance about Apprenticeships through school.

2. Will the proposals to strengthen the Apprenticeship programme – including revisions to the blueprint – be welcomed among Apprentices, training providers and employers?

The government is clearly backing Apprenticeships as a key driver in their plans for growing skills in the economy with relevant recognition of an Apprenticeship qualification. However, there remains concern amongst WBL providers (and some employers) that an Apprenticeship still lacks credence amongst other

current qualifications. The role and status of an Apprenticeship must be clear especially as the introduction of 14-19 Diplomas further develop.

There is a need to ensure the role of the provider is adequately identified and recognised. There must be sufficient flexibility built in to make Apprenticeships more valuable to employers, but without making them too onerous so that they are put off. Care should also be taken to ensure the suitability criteria does not make Apprenticeships “exclusive”, which may be intimidating to some young people, but at the same time they must remain credible.

3. Have we identified the right range of functions for the NAS?

The overall aim of providing a one-point resource makes a positive suggestion especially if, in doing so, the role of WBL providers and their provision would be viewed on an equal footing with FE colleges and school 6th forms. Currently, this is very often not the case. However, networks are currently working very closely with schools to promote work-based learning and must be supported to further develop that role.

Providers in Partnership (PiP) has recently worked in close partnership with Guidance Services, Aimhigher and Connexions to fund an extremely well received school theatre production on progression routes to Year 11 pupils across York and North Yorkshire.

PiP and its 22 provider members have built up extremely good working relationships with key partner organisations and schools and any new service must build upon and complement the strategic plans already in place – it is vital that a new service does not duplicate or lessen the work which is already in place.

The single organisation will need to be very carefully managed and co-ordinated to remain effective. There does appear to be quite a lot of duplication with what WBL providers do already. It does look like their role is brought into question. They are experts and not to continue to use their knowledge and expertise, contacts etc. would result in a major backwards step. There are some extremely effective partnerships that already perform some of the functions of the proposed NAS and it would be wrong to displace these to introduce a new set-up. However, it is recognised that some of these partnerships may need additional support, they still have the basis of strong and effective working practice.

How will the NAS be funded? Will it take a slice of the Apprenticeship budget to create another organisation to do what is already working?

The role working with schools needs to be much more formal and robust. They have to accept that Apprenticeships are a viable option for pupils of all ability, Providers, Consortia and Connexions should continue to develop this in conjunction with the Education Business Partnerships and employers.

4. What more can be done to encourage employers to offer Apprenticeship places? How can we encourage those who already do to offer more places?

The majority of WBL providers source Apprentices from current employer bases. They know the employers and experience shows they understand the needs of an employer and have no hesitation in not contracting further with an employer who does not understand the commitment or obligation of employing an apprentice. North Yorkshire has a high percentage of small, medium enterprise (SME) businesses. This can cause difficulty when employers are considering employing an apprentice due to time and resource issues. This in turn can result in an additional resource implication for the provider as North Yorkshire has one of the largest rural regions in England.

There continues to be concerns re the introduction of an employer wage subsidy – in the past apprenticeships have been viewed by some as a ‘cheap labour force’, a stigma which must be avoided at all costs. Incentives have never really worked to any great effect and can be difficult to control and administer. They tend to take away the focus of why the Apprentice is really there. Recognition of employers can work as this gets publicity for their businesses. The government needs to look at other ways to make it easier to take Apprentices rather than through cash enhancements, tax incentives could be one way.

Employers need to be encouraged by showing positive impact on their productivity and bottom line. Apprentices need to be vital to this and not just “additional staff” in the work place. Qualifications need to be flexible enough to fit into what employers do (accepting that all employers are not multi-national companies) and their role must be clearly defined from the outset.

Apprenticeships must be seen within a level playing field alongside other academic and educational achievements.

It is good that there is a push to increase the number of Apprentices in the public sector, this should be developed and sustained.

5. Have we identified the right measures for effecting a culture change around Apprenticeships?

To effectively introduce a culture change around Apprenticeships, there needs to be much greater recognition and understanding of the programme and opportunities further down in the education system (this could even mean as far down as year six and seven), to get the message across and start young people and their parents seeing the benefits to all abilities.

Increasing the commitment and involvement from employers so that they can sell the programmes better to new and existing staff would also help with the overall culture change. This would bring more credibility for the programmes if opportunities were advertised by the employers from the outset and they were

able to speak to more young people about what being an Apprentice meant within their company.

It is vital to ensure the level playing field really exists in every way and WBL providers are given the tools to promote Apprenticeships at every level.

Greater promotion aimed locally (with funding assistance), is beneficial, using local people and real case studies that people can relate to. Promotion should be targeted and developed with the people that it is intended for to ensure it is effective.

6. Have we identified the right measures to address the Apprenticeship programme's diversity issues?

It is essential that not all providers are held together as being the same where MLP is concerned and some flexibility in particularly difficult vocational areas (e.g. the Sea Fishing Industry), there must be some recognition of extreme factors affecting this type of provision and the specialist nature of it's delivery. In these instances there must be additional support offered as opposed to removal of contracts to ensure vital qualification routes are not lost and industries suffering as a result. (There is a specific case in North Yorkshire that has not received equitable treatment).

In order for diversity issues to be eradicated, organisations like the LSC must stop using stereotypical images in their marketing materials and make sure future publications reflect the changes in society and in business in to be able to encourage wider participation across communities.

It is agreed that increasing the opportunities for Apprenticeships post 25 will be a positive step that will open up the market and hopefully increase participation – this would also have a positive effect on the Fishing Industry provision in North Yorkshire as there is an untapped market that is currently out of reach.