

Pearson response to the Commons Select Committee
Inquiry
Apprenticeships and Traineeships for 16 to 19 years olds
September 2014

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1. Introduction to Pearson

Pearson welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Education Committee's Call for Evidence. With large scale reform of Traineeships and Apprenticeships currently being undertaken, it is welcome that the importance of this and its impact on the 16-19 learner is subject to the Committee's on-going scrutiny.

In preparing our response, and in line with our own position on the current Apprenticeship reforms (Appendix 1), we have consulted with our customers, our International Expert Panel and within our own organisation to inform our response.

2. Areas for consideration and recommendations

An integrated employability curriculum

Every young learner needs to be engaged with the world of work throughout their schooling, especially from the age of 14. To achieve this, vocational and academic curricula need to be integrated and balanced to meet the needs of the individual to prepare for their future careers. The introduction of Progress 8 measures, Key Stage 4 vocational qualifications and technical levels seek to address this but currently do not align fully with Traineeships or the new Apprenticeships (Trailblazers).

- *Recommendation – preparation for Traineeships and Apprenticeships needs to be integrated across the 14-19 age range to ensure full alignment with work based programmes.*
- *Recommendation – workforce development for educators within schools to enable high quality vocational delivery.*
- *Recommendation – greater employer engagement in 14-16 education and delivery to increase learners' employability skills.*

A stable and clear structure for employability

Unlike other areas of the education and training system, the 16-19 area, including Traineeships and Apprenticeships, is subject to a range of different funding requirements and agencies, government departments, qualification sets and initiatives. This somewhat anomalous position does not allow for a focussed approach to the further development of the skills, knowledge and behaviours required for the world of work.

- *Recommendation – the creation of a cross departmental 'youth skills' division to ensure coherence and articulation with other areas.*
- *Recommendation – greater articulation between Traineeships and Apprenticeships using one brand.*

A collaborative approach

The development of Traineeship and Apprenticeship standards and programmes needs to be a trusted partnership between employers, educators, trade associations and assessment organisations with each investing their expertise to ensure high quality outcomes with a quantifiable return on investment for all - learners, employers and government.

- *Recommendation – the development of a government sponsored infrastructure to support the industry sector; this could be through the development of sector bodies or professional bodies which represent the views of employers, champion standards*

and assessment development and work closely with other organisations to ensure the quality of assessment and delivery.

An efficacy approach

Outcomes for learners should be measured across the educational and vocational systems, with clear reporting.

- *Recommendation – the development of a coherent and open access data system to evidence and support learner destinations.*
- *Recommendation- entry to sustainable employment for 16-18 year olds needs to be reflected in school accountability measures.*

A vocational campaign

There is a profound lack of public understanding of the short and long term value of vocational learning including Traineeships and Apprenticeships. This needs to start with impartial and knowledgeable career and pathway advice and information within schools.

- *Recommendation – the development of a fully funded and auditable careers service.*
- *Recommendation – a highly visible and sustained campaign aimed at learners and the general public together with an informational campaign targeted at educators.*

3. Response to the call for evidence

The effectiveness of Apprenticeships and Traineeships for 16-19 year olds, including in terms of meeting employer needs in various sectors, and providing young people with a solid foundation for employment in general or in particular occupations or for further study

The use of both Traineeships and Apprenticeships for this age range is not consistent for a number of reasons.

They do not currently fully align with the rest of the education and training system and the link to employers and employment. In other international jurisdictions (for example Switzerland) highly effective and integrated structures have been developed to deliver relevant and required skills and development benefits to this age range. These structures demonstrate clear progression pathways based on a two way link between education and training. While a more balanced curriculum of core, academic and vocational subjects is in development, there currently remains a disjoin between school or college programmes and full Apprenticeships.

There is little quantitative or qualitative data to demonstrate the true impact that Traineeships have had in the market place or their benefit to the learner. We recommend that there needs to be a core pathway using the Apprenticeship brand for this age group, with a clear route from Level 1 to Level 6 and beyond. This would provide greater coherence and clarity for learners, employers and the general public.

The 'job readiness' requirement from employers continues to prove challenging for schools, colleges and independent providers. We would encourage the development of more effective local and national networks between educators and employers to ensure required skills, knowledge and behaviours are developed in individual learners as part of an Apprenticeship pathway. We consider that the Group Training Association model could play a more effective role particularly in engagement with local employers of all sizes. This model has been shown to work well in Australia and there are examples of its effective application in the UK.

The range of apprenticeships and traineeships available to young people

The range of Apprenticeships currently available to young learners is sufficient. The current offer of Traineeships is still developing and therefore it is difficult to quantitatively define if they are wholly appropriate. However feedback, while limited, from our centres questions if, as broad programmes, Traineeships are successful in meeting the needs of individual learners. They are also viewed by those delivering as "cumbersome".

We welcome the broadening of the Apprenticeship offer under 'Trailblazers', the development of a wider range of occupations and the emergence of sectors broader than the initial STEM areas (Phase 2 onwards). International evidence suggest that 'traditional' sectors for Apprenticeships, for example construction, will not meet the skills needs of a more service led economy. We would therefore encourage a move into the more 'professional' areas, both at entry level (Traineeships) and 'professional' training (Apprenticeships) for example in fields such as accountancy, law etc.

On leaving school full time, 16-19 Apprentices may have very different needs to their 19+ counterparts. These may be pastoral, but may also centre on their work readiness and broad understanding of the workplace itself. We recommend the continued development of National Occupational Standards (NoS) or their equivalent and their greater use by employers in the design of Traineeships and Apprenticeships to ensure national

comparability across and within sectors, and as benchmarking for the basic levels of understanding that 16-19 year olds require when entering industry.

Traineeships should be re-designed to give young people the opportunity to demonstrate their potential to employers, and should reflect the types of skills, knowledge and behaviours required by employers in the definition of their Apprenticeship standards. There should be a clear link, understood by employers, learners and parents or carers of the purpose and progression route from Traineeship to Apprenticeship.

Current levels of employer engagement in apprenticeships (including in providing places or defining standards and setting assessment), and what further steps the Government could take to improve this

We consider a better balance needs to be found between the roles of government, employers and educators in defining and delivering apprenticeships. Whilst the principle that employers set the standards, curriculum and assessment regime is sound, we are concerned at the current level of SME engagement in the development of Apprenticeship standards, with representation by large employers much more prevalent.

We would recommend greater employer engagement within the school environment. We also recommend that employer engagement, strongly linked to the definition and revision of standards, quality and assessment, needs to be provided by established and respected associations. In the past this was the role of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and we encourage the re-establishment of this co-ordination or management representation as a way of ensuring consistency within and across sectors. This approach is seen in many successful European systems, enabling clear employer engagement from large and SME employers alike. (99% of all businesses in England are SME [Holt, May 2012]).

We consider that an area of focus for government should be on ensuring a pipeline of future Traineeship and Apprenticeship learners by improving the careers service to liaise with employers to identify current and future needs. Currently, demographic and social factors influence whether many learners follow an academic or vocational pathway. In the long term, curriculum and training could be tailored to provide direct routes for those who wish to progress straight to employment rather than further or higher education.

Entry to sustainable employment at 16, 17 and 18 either through a Traineeship or Apprenticeship needs to be reflected in school accountability measures, so that schools release more young people into the vocational system rather than promoting an academic route for those for whom this may not be suitable.

The impact of recent changes to the funding of apprenticeships and traineeships

We are concerned that the current changes in funding will decrease the uptake of Apprenticeships and Traineeships overall. Employers often lack the infrastructure to deal with direct funding and find it bureaucratic and onerous.

80% of apprentices are within businesses with fewer than 200 employers (The Work Foundation, 2013), but much of the day to day channelling of funding is via providers or FE colleges. Unlike many large employers, SMEs can find it difficult to manage the funding (due to resource, complexity etc.). This situation is unlikely to change and we recommend that further support is given to SMEs with the changes in funding to ensure they remain committed to 16-19 Apprenticeships starts. The introduction of mandatory employer contributions could have a negative effect on the 16-19 age group of learners with employers, particularly the SME market, reticent to take on a young person when older individuals in the market place may be viewed as more work ready.

Traineeships and Apprenticeships need to be seen as part of the established educational route to work, enabling development before and in the workplace prior to the achievement of full employment, with this education continuing to be supported, in part by a government funded system.

To realise the potential of young individuals and to fully prepare them in and for the world of work could involve a shift in government funding support as it is known today. Government may instead wish to focus on supporting the infrastructure, rather than the direct delivery of Traineeships and Apprenticeships and encourage take up in focus sectors with skills shortages, national or local, niche or difficult-to-recruit sectors. This would release capital from employers for the development of young people into work-ready employees.

Whether the Government's investment in apprenticeships represents value for money in terms of the future wage returns for young people and their employability

The perception that HE graduates will always go on to fulfilling careers and earn considerably more than Apprentices in the long term is changing. Learner perceptions of the value of completing an Apprenticeship and employers' views of graduates answering all their recruitment requirements is also undergoing change. The 'Varsity Blues: Time for Apprenticeships to Graduate Report' (June 2014) highlighted that in some sectors Apprentices have equal or even greater earning capacity in the long term. While more detailed research into this area is required, this is encouraging and supports government's continued financial commitment to Apprenticeships.

Government's role must be to continue to invest in the availability of Apprenticeships in the SME workplace. This investment in apprenticeships ensures parity with graduates in terms of contribution to the Exchequer. Further focus should be given to the career and wage progression of this age group in order to track economic return.

Proposed funding changes may have the potential to reduce the barriers to SMEs employing apprentices. The proposed funding models will allow for a number of local businesses to work in collaboration to employ groups of apprentices across a range of employers. This should facilitate a more varied experience for the apprentice, but we recognise that there remain challenges around post-Apprenticeship progression, and the sustainability of employment by SME employers.

How the Government could encourage businesses of all sizes and in all sectors to offer apprenticeships, including improved fiscal, regulatory and other measures

We would recommend greater clarity on the purpose of both Traineeships and Apprenticeships and their primacy in the vocational education and training system. We believe that a common understanding of purpose and sense of place is essential to the development of high quality employability pathways. It would also prove beneficial for greater research into the economic and social benefits of Apprenticeships to both individuals and employers.

This has at times been lost during the current reforms which have led to a lack of coherence. For example, the development of the new Apprenticeship standards has not been specifically aligned to 'Tech Levels' which require employer support as part of their recognition. Additionally there is no requirement for the new Apprenticeships to contain formally accredited qualifications (ie through Ofqual) which may have unintended longer term consequences for learner progression. The development of an aligned and flexible academic and vocational system where both are given equal esteem and standing and

which is understood by all parties including learners, employers, educators and the wider public will undoubtedly give business increased confidence and lead to greater engagement.

We consider that the promotion of Traineeships and Apprenticeships as a credible and respectable alternative to Higher Education requires attention. This is particularly evident in the supply of information, advice and guidance (IAG) or careers advice within schools. The development of a fully funded and auditable service would raise the profile and value of the vocational pathway and allow for greater engagement of the local and potentially national employer network.

What factors prevent more young people considering apprenticeships and how these could be overcome?

Sustained and targeted investment in this area is essential in order to raise the awareness, profile and value of the vocational education and training pathway. This should be supported by one unified brand and narrative for Apprenticeships.

Stability and clarity are often cited by employers and hence young people as a reason for lack of engagement. (19% of employers - CBI/Pearson Education Skills Survey 2014 - indicated that less frequent changes to the skills system would help to reduce dilution of employers and the wider public's understanding of Apprenticeships). This unified message could then support broader employer engagement and understanding by those who advise young people of their choices in schools and through Jobcentre Plus.

Public perception (learner, parent/carer, employer) of the long term value of Traineeships and Apprenticeships and the wider area of vocational education and training is key to ensuring greater learner demand. The role of IAG and careers advice is essential but perhaps some of the answer lies in the education of the public amongst whom the academic route is frequently viewed as higher status with greater economic return. The data on economic return to counter part of this perception needs to be researched, analysed, published and promoted.

Whether young people are adequately prepared for apprenticeships and how that preparation should be improved

This age group can be viewed by employers as not 'mature enough' for the work place. The Traineeship programmes present an ideal opportunity to prepare young people for the world of work and Apprenticeship schemes, but should be further supported by the pre-16 curriculum.

We support government's ambition that learners achieve a recognised level of English and maths. However, we question whether GCSE is always the most appropriate qualification for all learners to aspire to especially in the context of work based training and learning. The applied nature of Functional English and Functional Maths qualifications are in many ways more demanding and certainly more appropriate for the workplace. It is therefore unfortunate that these have become referred to as 'stepping stone' qualifications to GCSE implying that in some ways they are easier to achieve.

We are encouraged by the inclusion of vocational subjects in the Progress 8 measure. However, this needs to be supported by appropriate workforce training together with employer collaboration to ensure that vocational programmes are fit for purpose and include work skills (behaviours and attitudes) that are often seen by employers as more important than content.

The provision of IAG to fully prepare the learner, alongside outcome based work experience, externally assured and relevant to the career aspirations of the individual young person, should be employed more to give insight into job roles and sectors.

FE colleges have a pivotal role in the development of a young person through pre-apprenticeship, foundation learning and work experience in collaboration with local employers and Local Enterprise Partnerships. Full time provision linked directly to employment and the workplace with continued support will also support the learner transition from education to employment and training.

How the Government could encourage more young people to consider apprenticeships and traineeships

We are encouraged by the link of the new Apprenticeship standards to professional body status thereby professionalising Apprenticeships themselves, but would suggest that further promotion to the younger learner is required to ensure that the relevance to career progression is understood by school leavers.

Greater employer engagement in schools (pre 16) as an integral part of education would allow young people to have a better understanding of the workplace and its requirements including employability or attitudinal skills.

We believe that further development is required of the models emerging in the promotion of Traineeships and Apprenticeships. This could include work placements across a range of sectors, and the business-led model focussed around a single employer or group of employers. We consider the key is the recognition that Apprenticeship and Traineeships are a valued part of the education to employment system, and lead to long term sustained employment.

Appendix 1 – Pearson’s position statement on Apprenticeship reform

Over the last few years Pearson UK has focussed on vocational pathways through education and in particular the Apprenticeships in world class systems. Through the guidance of our International Expert Panel (which includes representatives of the world’s most successful vocational systems) and deep engagement with employers and professional organisations in the UK we have built a clear picture of what we believe needs to be in place to ensure success.

Pearson’s position on Apprenticeships

1. We strongly welcome the commitment made in the UK to Apprenticeships. It is a characteristic of the best vocational systems that this approach to learning on the job is pivotal to building esteem in the system and developing a pipeline of learners aligned to the needs of employers and the industrial strategy of the country as whole
2. This in itself is not enough, however. Looking at best practice around the world (in places like Australia, Denmark, Germany, Singapore, and Switzerland) the common denominator is that they have well-developed national vocational systems. This needs to encompass other types of work based training and vocational pathways and experience that happen in schools, colleges and private training providers from an early stage. This will help ensure a strong pipeline of learners coming through our educational system where apprenticeships are not the “final resort” but a strong potential choice from early secondary and part of a range of options that keep choices and opportunities open – and develop skills that are not too occupational in their focus.
3. In support of this all young people, including those already in employment, need access to high quality Information Advice and Guidance. This type of careers guidance needs to be funded so that quality is not determined by what is still available in school and college budgets. Such advice needs to be audited to ensure standards and impartiality.
4. We support the involvement of employers of all sizes actively in the system. It is essential that any system has the deep and sustained engagement of employers. In our view this is best done through sector bodies that are well placed to represent the views of SME’s and the specific needs of the sector). Successful jurisdictions such as Switzerland have successfully integrated employers as part of the education system and not something that sits outside it.
5. In the so-called dual system countries like Germany and Switzerland, these sector bodies play several key roles: they take the lead in defining the skills and knowledge needed for entry-level employment in their industry; they participate in assessing the degree to which students have mastered those skills at the end of the training period; and most important, they provide paid apprenticeships and the coaching and mentoring to support student learning and development at the workplace.
6. The key to engaging employers is to persuade them that it is in their long-term economic self-interest, and the interest of their sector, to join forces with the education system to ensure that their industry has a steady flow of well-prepared, fully vetted candidates for entry level employment.
7. Pearson supports employer led apprenticeship design and content, but with funding it should be a matter of choice. Pearson supports government funded support for apprenticeships and would recommend that any jurisdiction looking to introduce Apprenticeships, consults fully with employers to understand desired outcomes and appropriate funding models to achieve them.

8. Alongside the strong focus on the demand side there also needs to be an equal focus on high quality teaching and learning. Employers must focus on accredited programmes that deliver the highest standards of practical learning – both occupationally focused and transferable in terms of the skills they develop. There needs to be a strong programme of supporting and mentoring work based learning as well as an inspection process that maintains quality both in the work place and in the more “traditional” learning environments.
9. There needs to be a commitment to standards across the system with high level apprenticeships as the pinnacle in the market. Some universities should focus their entire offer on high level “vocational courses” with programmes and research that are entirely focused on employer related outcomes (see the Swiss system for an example of this in practice)
10. On assessment, we recommend that the assessment of a learner’s competence, knowledge and understanding is most effective if the apprentice can demonstrate ‘mastery’ throughout the period of their apprenticeship, and assessors could provide feedback to learners on their progress. Apprenticeship programmes will encompass underpinning knowledge and skills as well as competency elements which all require an appropriate assessment methodology and timing. The knowledge component may legitimately be assessed by a formal end test but it would be difficult to create an end test where an apprentice was able to demonstrate all the competency elements acquired after a two or three year programme. It is therefore appropriate to employ a range of assessment methodologies including when they are administered.
11. It is essential that high standards in English and Maths should be at the heart of all Apprenticeships. There is an important role for standalone qualifications that are entirely fit for purpose for employers’ needs around literacy and numeracy, although the key element is continuous learning to support employability and skills to do a role effectively. Whilst teaching of English and Maths may be in context they should be generic in their testing so that learners are equipped with skills that may be transferable during their working life.