

Pocket Watch: Richard Review of Apprenticeships

2012/65

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"We cannot expect apprenticeships to be well regarded if we do not make it clear what they stand for"

Introduction

This week, the Richard Review published its [report](#) on how the Government in England should take apprenticeships forward. Launched earlier this year, the Review in the words of Doug Richard the author, was not so much a review as a strategy for supporting a core part of the Government's growth and skills agenda. Eschewing the siren voices to adopt the well regarded Rhineland models ("I have not set out to turn English apprenticeships into German ones,") Doug Richard instead adopted three current domestic reform mechanisms: system simplification; devolution of funding and responsibility to the key users, in this case employers; and streamlining the qualification system and applying competitive tendering. In all there were ten recommendations, to be taken as a whole rather than as separate items

How is the Report structured?

The Review was asked to consider six questions. It began by trying to clear the air on the key question of just what an apprenticeship should be, before looking at how they should be delivered, assessed, funded and promoted. In each case, the format adopted was: how are things working now, what issues were raised in the consultation, what might work better and what would the impact of any changes be? The aim was to set a clear vision for the future

What's the current position?

The latest set of stats show apprenticeships starts overall continuing to grow to just over half a million between August 2011 and July 2012 but a drop for 16-18 yr olds. Elsewhere, new quality arrangements on programme durations and provision for English and maths have been instigated and further proposals for reform outlined in key Reports by Jason Holt and by the BIS Committee

What three messages stand out from the Richard Review?

First, apprenticeships "must be attached to a real job and deliver broad and transferable skills;" pre apprenticeship or trainee programmes should be separate. Second, rather than the current set of extensive qualification offers, clear industry standards, "preferably one per occupation," setting out what an apprentice should be able to do at the end, should be developed by employer groups with a 'best' qualification selected for each occupation. Third, tripartite contributions should continue but purchasing power for investing in training should be granted to employers preferably through a system of tax credits, although funding for English and maths should remain with Government

Some of the recommendations

- "The focus of apprenticeships should be on the outcome...with just one apprenticeship qualification for each occupation"
- "The Government should set up a contest for the best qualification...with employers or other organisations invited to design and develop qualifications for their sectors"
- "The testing and validation process should be holistic, at the end, and assess whether the individual is fully competent and employable within their sector"
- "All apprentices should have achieved Level 2 English and maths before they can complete their apprenticeship"
- "Purchasing power for investing in apprenticeship training should lie with the employer. Government should only contribute to the cost of training that supports the apprentice in reaching the industry agreed standard"
- "Government should encourage diversity and innovation in delivering apprenticeships"
- "Boosting learner/employer demand is a responsibility of Government"



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