

# Apprentice Charter

**A discussion paper**

January 2016

## Introduction to Learning and Work Institute

On 1 January 2016, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion joined together to become Learning and Work Institute. Building on the expertise of both organisations, Learning and Work Institute strives for a fair society in which lifelong learning, support and work help people realise their ambitions and potential throughout life. We do this by researching what works, influencing policy and implementing new ways to improve people's experiences of learning and employment.

## Rationale for the Apprentice Charter

With a government target to deliver three million apprenticeships by 2020, it is more important than ever that this expansion does not come at the expense of quality. The majority of apprentices are satisfied with their programme and many employers are offering outstanding opportunities, including chances to work across the organisation, and even work and study abroad. But the most recent apprentice satisfaction survey results (BIS, 2014) show that one third of apprentices didn't even know they were on an apprenticeship<sup>1</sup>. If we're going to ensure apprenticeships are world class and boost opportunity and the economy, we need to do better. The Apprentice Charter will help us to do that.

Apprenticeships can offer great opportunities for people of all ages, but if we want to see more of the most talented young people choosing an apprenticeship, we need to show them that it offers a genuine alternative to an academic route, with as good or better outcomes. In order to attract the brightest and best applicants to apprenticeships, there should be better ways to identify the highest quality employers – the *Apprentice Charter* quality mark will deliver this demarcation and support the best employers to recruit the highest quality applicants, driving competition around quality within the market for apprentices.

Apprenticeships are regulated in two main ways; as programmes of training and learning through Ofsted, Ofqual and government funding agencies; and as jobs through employment legislation such as health and safety and minimum wage regulations. The Enterprise Bill, currently before Parliament, protects the term 'Apprenticeship' in law to mean a statutory apprenticeship and the 2015 Spending Review announced the formation of a new independent and employer-led 'Institute for Apprenticeships' to set standards to ensure the quality of the training and qualifications.

The current regulatory framework represents minimum requirements for the delivery of the training, learning and qualifications which support an apprenticeship, rather than an aspiration to the highest possible quality of the overall experience, the delivery and the outcomes. We do not believe that it is possible or desirable to implement a further government-led regulatory or inspection framework to deliver this aspiration..

We believe that higher quality must be articulated as the overall experience and the outcomes of the apprenticeship programme rather than more narrowly as the training and the qualification. This will improve retention, productivity and progression – apprentices who are supported holistically throughout their programme are more likely to complete, to offer a better return on investment to their employer and to continue in employment or further training – helping to fill the intermediate and high-level technical skills gaps and shortages.

The majority of apprentice employers are offering fair access to high-quality programmes, and we believe that those who deliver the best quality should be recognised and rewarded, this is particularly important as employers are required to contribute more to the cost of training through the apprenticeship levy.

We need to make sure that everyone who is able has access to an apprenticeship – currently only 10% of apprentices are BME, despite BME applicants making up 18% of total applications. Although the majority of apprentices are women, some 53%, their distribution by sector means they make up the majority of healthcare and hair and beauty apprentices. They are likely to be paid significantly less than apprentices in construction, engineering and vehicle maintenance, sectors which continue to be dominated by men. This contributes significantly to the apprentice gender pay gap, which remains at around 21%<sup>2</sup>. We believe that these and other access issues continue to undermine the apprenticeship brand.

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<sup>1</sup> Apprenticeships Evaluation (Learners), BIS, December 2014

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/what\\_we\\_do/media\\_centre/press\\_releases/319\\_apprenticeships\\_where\\_pay\\_gap\\_first\\_appears](http://www.youngwomenstrust.org/what_we_do/media_centre/press_releases/319_apprenticeships_where_pay_gap_first_appears)

## How will it work?

The Apprentice Charter will examine a set of measures that describe the wider experience of being an apprentice. These will be closely aligned with Ofsted's *Personal development, Behaviour and Welfare* theme, as well as with *Outcomes for Learners*. The measures may cover; information, advice and guidance, mentoring and support, employee benefits, the opportunity to work across the business and progression outcomes.

We know that great apprenticeships come in lots of different shapes and sizes, so the Apprentice Charter will be developmental, with support and advice for what employers might do to meet bronze, silver or gold standards. We'll also allow employers to submit evidence of other things that they believe shows they are meeting the requirements of the Charter. We also know that the new apprenticeship standards and the new Institute for Apprenticeships will focus on ensuring the quality of training, so we are limiting our Charter to the whole apprenticeship experience.

The final measures will be identified and set by employers and apprentices who are involved in leading the Charter, with the support of Learning and Work Institute.

Participants in the Charter will complete a self assessment, using an accessible online tool. Each measure will comprise a number of questions, with supporting guidance to explain what we're looking for. We know that an apprenticeship experience in an SME is different than in a large company, so we'll have different expectations of different sized businesses, although we'll be looking at the same areas. A key part of this assessment will be providing evidence that apprenticeships are delivering good outcomes for learners, which may range from remaining in employment to progressing to further study.

Apprentices will be invited to complete a survey about their experiences, – a further piece of evidence to support the business' application. These results will be shared with large employers, where anonymity of respondents can be assured.

Learning and Work Institute will visit a number of applicants to see how things are going on the ground. This will provide a good sense of how the apprenticeship works, as well as what the environment for apprentices is like.

The pilot for this system will be supported by Fairtrain – an organisation which successfully delivers a work experience kite mark at the moment.

In order to gain access to the self assessment tool, and to receive the quality mark, participants will be charged a fee. Participation fees will be determined through the use of a scale based on the size of employer, but we'd be happy to discuss costs in further detail with any interested businesses.

Businesses will be able to gain either a Bronze, Silver or Gold Apprentice Charter quality mark – which they will be able to use in their promotional materials and recruitment activity. Our aim is that the National Apprenticeships Service and others will support the promotion of employers who have gained the Charter, using it as a measure of assurance.

Learning and Work Institute will offer to work with businesses who do not currently meet the standard of the Apprentice Charter, or who would like help moving from Bronze to Silver or Silver to Gold. This developmental part of the Charter is essential to help improve standards and quality across the whole programme.

## What's the business case?

We believe that delivering excellent apprenticeships is good for business, but we also recognise that any scheme that requires investment (either in time or money) requires a solid business case. We believe we can add value to businesses in several ways. The Charter will:

- **provide leaders and managers with new independent insight** into the overall learning and working experience of their apprentices and help to identify best use of resources and ways to improve profitability and sustainability through engaged staff and apprentices:
- **support businesses to develop the personal, behaviour and welfare offer to their apprentices** – helping them gather evidence and improve their delivery in a key area of Ofsted inspection:
- **offer businesses the opportunity to learn** from the results of apprentice surveys from their own business and others, allowing them to bench mark their performance against other similar businesses;
- **support retention, reducing cost** – we believe that apprentices who get the best experience, and most support, are more likely to remain in the organisation and become advocates.
- **attract the best talent.** We know that businesses need to attract the best possible candidates, to increase retention and productivity. The Apprentice Charter is a quality mark that will support young people to identify great opportunities and demonstrate that your business is a great place to work and learn. We believe this will particularly benefit small and medium sized organisations whose apprenticeship programmes are less well recognised by applicants and parents.