

Draft Strategic Guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships

L&W Consultation Response

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Learning and Work Institute

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Learning and Work Institute is a new independent policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

We bring together over 90 years of combined history and heritage from the 'National Institute of Adult Continuing Education' and the 'Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion'.

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About Learning and Work Institute

An independent policy and research organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. We bring together over 90 years of combined history and heritage from the 'National Institute of Adult Continuing Education' and the 'Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion'. We want everyone to have an opportunity to realise their ambitions and potential in learning, work and throughout life. We believe a better skilled workforce, in better paid jobs, is good for business, good for the economy, and good for society.

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SUMMARY

Learning and Work Institute welcomes the opportunity to respond to this important consultation. We hope that our recommendations aid the Government in refining its strategic guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) and strengthen its structure and how it supports the sector in ensuring the quality of apprenticeships.

The Department for Education has an important role to play in providing robust and effective strategic guidance that will help the Institute for Apprenticeships to succeed. It must also ensure that the remit of the Institute, and the way in which it conducts its duties, reflects the Government's ambition to improve the quality of apprenticeships and raise the status of apprenticeships so that they are viewed by individuals, families and employers to add value to people's lives, careers and businesses.

Our response to the draft strategic guidance is formed of three distinct areas for consideration, specifically:

- Apprentice voice
- Ensuring quality
- Access and Inclusion

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department should enshrine, through the IfA's strategic guidance, the importance of **meaningful involvement of apprentices** in its work. We welcome the proposed Apprenticeship Panel but this should be a requirement, rather than a suggestion. We also strongly recommend that the IfA Board appoints at least one director who is an apprentice. Apprentices should be seen and heard in the work of the Institute for Apprenticeships.

The IfA should **develop world-class measures of quality** that go beyond what is currently proposed. This should be laid out in the Department's strategic guidance as a vital function of the new organisation.

An **annual apprenticeships quality report** should be produced which sets out what the Institute for Apprenticeships has done to monitor and improve the quality of apprenticeships design, delivery, assessment and, importantly, outcomes for apprentices and employers.

The Department should suggest that the IfA secures consistency of assessment standards in the interest of apprentices and employers, such as through the development of a **common competency framework** for assessors

Too many groups are under-represented in apprenticeships. The Department should charge the IfA with responsibility to **develop, monitor and support the sector to widen access to apprenticeships**. This work should also inform the IfA's role in advising the Department on apprenticeship funding, which should include **introducing an Apprentice Premium** to better target support and form part of the IfA's annual report.

To help fund widening access activity, the IfA should be responsible for a **quality and access fund**, funded through the levy, which helps level the playing field between the amount of widening access work that takes place in higher education.

APPRENTICE VOICE

Learning and Work argues that both apprentices and employers are primary beneficiaries of apprenticeships. We view the Government's target of three million apprenticeship starts as the start of three million careers. Further, we do not dispute the crucial responsibility of employers to play an active part in the development of apprenticeship standards. Through strategic guidance, we strongly recommend that the Department take steps to increase the visibility of apprentices and involvement of apprentices within IfA decision making.

We welcome the proposal to recommend that apprentices are represented through an Apprenticeship Panel committee and believe insights and recommendations from this group will be valuable in supporting the IfA to deliver its core functions, particularly with regards to access and quality. The Department should enshrine the formation of the Apprenticeship Panel as a requirement rather than something which is "strongly encouraged".

Membership of the Apprenticeship Panel committee should also be carefully considered. In light of the changes to the apprenticeship system, the range of apprentices will be more diverse than ever before (both in terms of the level and nature of the apprenticeships being undertaken, apprentice demographics and previous employment and skills history) and will have a range of different support needs. As such we argue that the Government recommends the composition of the Apprenticeship Panel reflects this and includes input from both new and converter apprentices, as well as apprentices with protected characteristics.

How the Apprenticeship Panel and apprentices more widely contribute to the work of the IfA can be defined further as part of the operational planning, however it is vital that a very clear direction is set through strategic guidance; that the contribution of apprentices matters just as much to the development of the apprenticeships system as employers.

The Apprenticeship Panel should be part of the IfA's apprentice engagement strategy, though not all of it. We strongly believe that the Department should appoint at least one apprentice to the Board of the IfA. An apprentice, and a recent 'alumni' apprentice would add significant value to the work of the IfA Board. Their perspectives would strengthen the accountability of the IfA's leadership team, bring ideas to the table from experience, improve strategy and operational efficiency and provide the Board with the insight it currently lacks.

Ensuring the apprentice voice and experience is represented at all stages of the process is crucial and we also suggest that former apprentices are included as part of the 'group of persons' involved in the preparation of standards and assessment plans to ensure their ongoing improvement.

QUALITY

L&W believe that quality should sit at the heart of every apprenticeship, underpinned by the development of high quality standards and assessments and the registers of approved training providers and assessors. As apprenticeships are primarily a job-with training it is important to note that quality cannot be solely judged on the training elements, the business elements are also critical.

The core principles that have driven the apprenticeship reforms which the Government expects the IfA to operate within recognise that an apprenticeship should:

- Develop transferable skills, and maths and English, to progress careers.
- Lead to full competency and capability in an occupation, demonstrated by the achievement of an apprenticeship standard.

Learning and Work Institute believes that the draft guidance around apprenticeship quality is under-developed. For too long, apprenticeship quality has been defined narrowly by the duration of programme and the extent to which the standard being worked towards is 'employer-led'. Both of those elements are important but they are not sufficient, nor do they provide a meaningful framework with which to measure and account for quality. We therefore recommend that the Department's strategic guidance is strengthened to be much more explicit about the high quality experience every apprentice has the right to expect both in learning and at work. The IfA should be required by the Department to develop world class benchmarks and quality measures not only around content and delivery, but also outcomes.

The Department should require an annual report of apprenticeship performance using the agreed measures of quality. Example quality measures include:

- Job outcomes of people who have completed an apprenticeship,
- Growth in earnings growth six months after completion
- Progression to higher levels of learning
- Satisfaction rates of apprentices and employers
- Comparative international benchmarks of the breadth and depth of apprenticeships with other countries, such as Germany.

Learning and Work suggests that Government guidance to the IfA explicitly includes a recommendation that consideration is made when developing and approving standards and assessments to ensure employers are offering enriching and supportive environments appropriate to both new and converter apprentices. This will ensure that apprenticeships provide the opportunities that apprentices need to develop skills which are transferable in their wider occupation and meet the needs of employers whilst offering an individual a foundation on which to build or develop their career.

In line with the principle of ensuring high quality working environments for apprentices we also suggest that the Government recommends Trade Union representatives are included in Quality Partnerships to ensure consistency of approach and objectives. How these organisations will work together e.g. how regularly they will meet, should also be clearly defined.

A key role for the IfA will be providing external quality assurance to check quality and consistency of assessments offered by different assessment organisations against the same standard. The changes to the apprenticeship system have effectively created a new professional community of apprenticeship assessors, with assessors coming from a range of backgrounds, including employer and provider backgrounds, with a range of skills. We suggest the IfA are encouraged to consider the development of a common competency framework for assessors, including criteria for assessment skills and professional experience and knowledge. This will enable assessors and assessment organisation to effectively audit any skills gaps against common criteria and seek appropriate training and support. Adherence to these competencies could subsequently be considered as a Quality Mark or criteria for inclusion on the register of approved assessment organisations.

To enable this continued quality assurance in apprenticeships whilst also preparing for its responsibilities for technical education it is crucial that the Institute is appropriately resourced (including sufficient relationship managers to support employers in the development of standards and assessment plans).

ACCESS AND INCLUSION

L&W are committed to ensuring the system works effectively, with opportunities to develop skills open to all – and no participation penalty for particular groups of young people or adults. This is not currently the case: ethnic minorities are significantly under-represented in apprenticeships, as are people with disabilities, those leaving care or caring for others.

Huge gender disparities also exist, with apprenticeships in low-paid sectors dominated by women. In 15/16 men made up the majority of apprentices in Construction (98%), Engineering (94%), ICT (82%), Leisure (67%), Agriculture (65%), and Arts and Media (59%); whilst women made up a greater proportion of apprentices in Health (81%), Education (80%), Business (63%) and Retail (60%).¹

The Government has taken steps to help widen access to apprenticeships in the new system including:

- making a commitment to increase the proportion of apprenticeship starts by individuals from BAME backgrounds by 20% by 2020. (In 15/16 individuals from BAME background made up just 10.5% of starts, compared to a general working age population of 15.6%);
- accepting and working towards the implementation of the recommendations made by the Maynard Taskforce to remove barriers to apprenticeships for those with learning difficulties and disabilities (In 15/16 9.9% of apprenticeship starts were made by people with learning difficulties and disabilities); and
- ensuring that extra resources will be available for people from disadvantaged areas to access apprenticeships and that there will be full funding of all 16-17 year olds.

Whilst these steps are positive, they do not reflect the level of effort and investment which has been dedicated to widening participation in Higher Education (with HEFCE funding for Widening Participation totalling nearly £373 million in 2014/15, inclusive of widening

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/562485/Apprenticeships_evaluation_2015_-_Learners.pdf

access, retention, and disability)². Further action is needed to ensure apprenticeships are accessible to all regardless of an individual's background and we believe the IfA has a key role to play here. We recommend the Department strengthens the IfA's strategy guidance to give them a remit to develop initiatives to support apprentices from disadvantaged groups (such as bursaries and outreach) and report to the Department on this annually. An example of this would be the introduction of an [Apprentice Premium](#)³ to help support disadvantaged groups, which L&W has recommended previously.

Widening access activities could be funded through a Quality and Access Fund, top-sliced from the Levy. The development of such activities could be informed by emerging findings of best practice when engaging with individuals with protected characteristics which are being shared with the Department through L&W's research activities engaging with a variety of expert partners.

It is noted that the draft strategic guidance includes a suggestion that the IfA might consider requirements to benchmark quality internationally and outcomes. We recommend the Government establishes minimum reporting requirements for the IfA to guide the Institute in the types of data that need to be collected and how so performance can be monitored based on who is taking part in apprenticeships and their subsequent outcomes and progression so effective comparisons can be made between apprenticeships and other pathways.

² <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2015/Name,104404,en.html>

³

http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/sites/niace_en/files/files/LW%20AppLevy%20Policy%20Briefing%20October%202016.pdf