

Skills Commission Inquiry Call for Evidence: Apprenticeships & Social Mobility

Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers 31 August 2017

1. About the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)

ATL, the education union, is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, head teachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom. AMiE is the trade union and professional association for leaders and managers in colleges and schools, and is a distinct section of ATL. We recognise the link between education policy and members' conditions of service.

ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate locally and nationally. ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

ATL welcomes the Skills Commissions' recognition that there are concerns around apprenticeships and social mobility.

2. Summary

- a. The narrowing of the school curriculum over the past four years has resulted in young people from disadvantaged backgrounds having fewer opportunities to understand the career opportunities, including apprenticeships, available to them.
- b. The narrower, more academic curriculum restricts young people's ability to develop the employability skills required to succeed in employer-led apprenticeship recruitment processes.
- c. The requirement to achieve level 2 maths and English may deter young people from applying for apprenticeships. Those young people who have not achieved a C or equivalent in GCSE maths and English will also be at a disadvantage. Employers will view these candidates as more of a risk than those who have already attained these grades and will not therefore need to achieve them during the course of their apprenticeship.
- d. Young people are often unable to access of adequate careers advice education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in schools and colleges. This restricts their ability to understand the range and appropriateness of apprenticeships available to them and their capacity to distinguish between poor and good quality apprenticeship programmes.
- e. There are insufficient numbers of good quality apprenticeships available to meet demand.

- f. Existing older employees are more likely to be recruited onto apprenticeship programmes than young people.
- g. There is considerable regional and sectoral disparity in the availability of apprenticeship programmes, which prohibits access to disadvantaged young people.
- h. The number of poor quality apprenticeship programmes remains an issue and limits young people's ability to progress. The needs of learners need to be given greater priority through good quality apprenticeship programmes as set out by ATL.
- i. There are concerns that the apprenticeship levy will not result in new programmes being made available to young people.

3. Do you think there are any barriers to disadvantaged young people accessing apprenticeships?

- a. Government education policies have perpetuated the struggle for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The narrowing of the school curriculum means that young people are less likely to develop a knowledge of the range of career opportunities, including apprenticeships, available to them. Offering a curriculum that is rich in knowledge, skills and understanding, and that is also relevant and engaging to children and young people, helps keep them engaged with school and broadens horizons.
- b. The new national curriculum, however, has come under much criticism for being limited, prioritising the learning of fact over offering a rounded curriculum. In addition, vocational and non-Ebacc qualifications have a low status in school accountability measures. Of the four headline measures for schools that were introduced in 2013, these qualifications can only contribute as part of one, the progress 8 measure.¹ We are already seeing less curriculum time given to subjects such as drama, music, art, design and technology and dance. Without a rounded experience of a variety of subjects, young people will not understand what opportunities are available to them on transitioning to the world of work or further learning.
- c. Accountability measures have resulted in a further narrowing of the curriculum within subjects. Recent research commissioned by the NUT shows that children in England today are experiencing a narrower curriculum than in the past because of high-stakes testing.² The use of those test results to judge the quality of schools and teachers as well as pupils, and the sanctions imposed when targets are not met have increased the stakes around testing, the result of which is that teachers 'teach to the test', narrowing the curriculum in their subject area.
- d. Employers have deplored this trend for an increasingly narrow curriculum as not preparing young people for life beyond school. Research by the

¹ Reforming the accountability system for secondary schools, Oral statement to Parliament, David Laws, 2014

² Exam Factories: The impact of accountability measures on children and young people, Merryn Hutchings, London Metropolitan University, 2015

British Chamber of Commerce showed that 88% of firms believe that school leavers are not prepared for work.³ Of these, 57% of employers believe that this is because of a lack of soft skills such as communication, team working and resilience. Teachers say that the biggest challenge to their ability to teach 21st-century skills was a lack of time within a strictly regulated curriculum.⁴

- e. Apprenticeship recruitment processes will put young people with low educational attainment at a disadvantage. This is because disadvantaged young people, who have experienced the narrowing of the school curriculum described above, will not have had the opportunities to develop the skills that employers are looking for.
- f. The maths and English requirements for apprenticeship completion are also likely to act as a barrier to disadvantaged young people accessing these programmes. The new standards for level 3 apprenticeships require that level 2 English and maths are achieved prior to the learner taking their end-point assessment. We know that when the Level 3 Early Years Educator apprenticeships required English and maths GCSE at grade C, or the equivalent (prior to the government agreeing to broaden this requirement), there was a sharp decline in the number of starters.⁵ Furthermore, employers are less likely to recruit candidates who have not achieved a grade C or equivalent in maths and English GCSE to apprenticeship programmes. This is because it will be less risky to recruit those who have already achieved these grades, rather than expect them to achieve it during the course of their apprenticeship programme.
- g. Young people face challenges choosing appropriate career pathways and routes to employment as a result of inadequate careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG). In 2014, a report commissioned by the Sutton Trust found that the quality of CEIAG that young people receive affects social mobility.⁶ In 2011, the coalition government placed a legal duty on schools and colleges to provide careers guidance. However, this was accompanied by 'weak statutory guidance and little help or support'.⁷ As a result, there has been a decline in the quality and quantity of the careers guidance available to 'young people in England and the emergence of a 'postcode lottery' where some young people have access to much better career guidance than others.'⁸
- h. There are insufficient numbers of apprenticeship programmes available. Whilst the apprenticeship levy is likely to change the situation (albeit with the limitations discussed below), it is doubtful that the number of apprenticeships available will be sufficient to meet demand. In May 2015, research commissioned by IPPR found that whilst there were 1.8 million applications for apprenticeships, just 166,000 apprenticeship vacancies

³ British Chamber of Commerce Workforce Survey, July 2014

⁴ Driving the skills agenda: An Economist Intelligence Unit report sponsored by Google, 2015

⁵ <http://feweek.co.uk/2017/03/03/early-years-educator-apprenticeship-requirement-u-turn-confirmed/>

⁶ Advancing ambitions: The role of career guidance in supporting social mobility, Tristram Hooley, Jesse Matheson, A.G. Watts, 2014

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

were advertised in the previous year year.⁹ Ofsted recently reported that 'the supply does not meet demand for high quality apprenticeships at level 3, with available data showing around nine applicants for every vacancy'.¹⁰

- i. While many young people apply for apprenticeships, the majority are unsuccessful. Teachers are frequently criticised by employers and Government ministers for failing to advise young people about apprenticeship opportunities. However, of all the registrations on the government's 'Apprenticeships' website, 46% are aged 16-18 years, and 60% of applications to apprenticeships are made by young people under the age of 18 years. Despite this, only 27% of level 2 apprenticeship starts are aged under 19 years. This indicates that young people are aware of apprenticeships and are also actively pursuing opportunities in this area, albeit unsuccessfully. This is supported by the fact that the majority of those starting on apprenticeships are older. Indeed, 48% of apprenticeship vacancies are filled by existing staff. Rather than teachers giving no or little advice on this area, it would appear that the problem of young people not taking up apprenticeships is due to employers finding it easier and cheaper to recruit older existing employees. The limited apprenticeship opportunities available for young people, is evidenced by the fact that the latest figures show that only 6% of 16-17 year olds are on apprenticeship programmes.¹¹
- j. Apprenticeship opportunities in an industry in which young people have interests and talent may not exist near where they live. This is because there is considerable regional variation in the availability of apprenticeships and the apprenticeship national minimum wage is too low to enable young people to leave home and live in a different area of the country. London for example, has nearly 15% of England's population, but only 8% of apprenticeships (compared with 13% of the population and 16% of the apprenticeships in the North West). Furthermore, the apprenticeships available in London are concentrated in the arts, media and publishing sectors. Apprenticeships in engineering and manufacturing are concentrated in the North West and West Midlands. In addition, there are fewer apprenticeships available in many rural and coastal areas.

4. How well do you think disadvantaged young people progress in apprenticeships?

- a. The poor quality of many apprenticeship programmes continues to be an issue. Ofsted recently reported that inspectors 'find that too few apprenticeships deliver professional, up-to-date knowledge and skills in the sectors that need them most and too many are of poor quality'.¹² The number of apprenticeship starts have surged over the past six years. However, this increase was mainly due to the large volume of starts in the customer service, retail, administration and care sectors. Ofsted recently stated that many of these apprenticeships are of poor quality, with 49% of provision judged inadequate or requiring improvement. Furthermore,

⁹ Learner Drivers, Local Authorities and Apprenticeships, Luke Raikes, 2015

¹⁰ The Annual Ofsted Report on Education, Children's Services and Skills 2015/16

¹¹ Ofsted Annual Report, 2013/14, further education and skills.

¹² The Annual Ofsted Report on Education, Children's Services and Skills 2015/16

apprentices in the food production, retail and care sectors were completing apprenticeships by having low-level skills accredited. Ofsted also stated that high quality apprenticeships are typically found in industries with long-established reliance on apprentices to develop their future workforce.

- b. The proliferation of apprenticeships in sectors such as construction, hairdressing, business administration and health and social care disadvantage young people's social mobility. Besides having highly casualised workforces, these sectors are non-traditional in terms of apprenticeship delivery, and therefore have a tendency towards narrow programmes of learning. The omission of a requirement for recognised qualifications in the new trailblazer apprenticeship standards will also further restrict mobility. Such apprenticeships are unlikely to be portable between employers, occupations, sectors and countries.

5. What impact do you think the apprenticeship levy will have?

- a. There is concern that the levy will fail the government's intention to encourage employers to increase the number of apprenticeship opportunities available. There has been no modelling of the levy, and there is no guarantee that it will be used by employers to take on apprenticeships, or whether it will be regarded a tax. Many employer representatives have voiced concerns over the apprenticeship levy and called for a delay to its implementation.¹³ Indeed, in a Confederation of British Industries survey, 72% manufacturing and 45% services (retail & hospitality, transport & distribution, and other services) employers stated that the apprenticeship levy is the wrong approach to solving skills gaps as it is costly and bureaucratic.¹⁴

6. Is there anything additional you think government/employers/training providers could do boost social mobility in apprenticeships?

- a. Safeguarding the quality of apprenticeships is imperative. There are successful apprenticeship programmes that work and are rightly given as exemplars to young people and adults and the tradition of an apprenticeship system appears to be crucial to the success of these, as is the understanding of the employees who work with the apprentices and the ethos of the company. Such apprenticeships are known as 'expansive', as defined by Professor Lorna Unwin at the Institute of Education.¹⁵ The opposite, 'restrictive' apprenticeships, focus on a narrow conception of training.
- b. The quality of apprenticeships must also be protected so that the learner's needs are emphasised as well as those of the employer. ATL has set out the features of a good quality apprenticeship as follows:

¹³ Government must listen to the concerns on Apprenticeship levy, Institute of Directors press release, August 2016

¹⁴ The Path Ahead, CBI/Accenture Employment Trends Survey, 2015

¹⁵ Creating and Supporting Expansive Apprenticeships: A Guide for Employers, Training Providers and Colleges of Further Education, National Apprenticeship Service, 2011

Pay a fair rate

The current minimum wage rate for an apprentice is £3.30 per hour. This applies to apprentices aged 16 to 18 and those aged 19 or over who are in their first year. However, some apprenticeships are paid substantially more than the minimum, and include additional benefits, for example travel cards. Apprenticeship should be financially viable for apprentices, taking into consideration costs such as travel and subsistence, and appropriate clothes for work.

Are jobs with a productive purpose and progression

Apprentices should have parity of terms and conditions with all other employees. Good quality apprenticeships will have progression opportunities to genuine, secure and long-term employment at the end of the training.

Include high quality learning and qualified vocational educators in the areas of teaching, training and assessing

An apprentice should have a dual status as a learner, as well as an employee, and feel valued within and by the education system. Apprentices must be given sufficient paid time off the job to study in college or in a dedicated workplace training centre. Training must be relevant to the job and recognisable in the sector. Good quality apprenticeship programmes should include a technical knowledge qualification (such as a BTEC) and a competencies qualification (such as an NVQ), which will ensure progression and mobility between employers, occupations and sectors on completion. In the best possible apprenticeships, general education (comprising citizenship topics) supports personal and professional development, as well as occupational readiness.

Ensure clear development of the apprentice's skills

On the job training should be fundamental to the apprenticeship. There should be a clear system for supervision, support and mentoring, by appropriately trained work colleagues. Apprenticeships should develop skills relevant to, and an expertise in the occupational field, rather than focusing on meeting employers' immediate skills needs. Professional registration should be achieved as part of the apprenticeship programme where it exists.

Include a training plan

A training plan should set out the apprenticeship standards, each element of the programme and the rights and responsibilities of the apprentice, employer and training provider. The training plan should be agreed and signed off by each stakeholder (including the apprentice's parent or carer if under the age of 18 years).

Involve trade unions at all stages

Trade unions should have a constructive role in the development and delivery of the apprenticeship programme. Unions will negotiate around aspects of the apprenticeship, support apprentices and work with the employer to ensure the quality and success of the programmes. The union rep should play an integral role in supporting, developing and advocating for apprentices. Union representatives, especially union learning reps, are ideally placed to act as mentors to apprentices.

Are accessible to, and achievable by all

A good apprenticeship programme will include strategies to ensure that apprenticeships are accessible to the widest possible demographic and diverse spread of people. Particular attention will be given to enabling people from disadvantaged groups to take up any opportunities offered and support given to complete them successfully, thereby achieving the full benefit of apprenticeship