

Written evidence submitted by Professor Alison Fuller and Professor Lorna Unwin¹**1. Introduction**

All advanced economies are faced with the challenge of ensuring their education and training systems are responsive to the dynamic shifts in the way work is organised and the types of knowledge and skill required by employers. As a model of learning, apprenticeship has remained remarkably resilient over time and across countries because it adapts to these shifts, whilst also providing individuals with a supportive framework in which to develop occupational expertise and the broader attributes required to work in different occupational contexts². Today, apprenticeship is also regarded as:

- a potential platform for higher education and certainly for advanced further education
- an alternative route for young people who do not choose to remain in full-time education after 16 and/or do not achieve the GCSEs required to study at higher levels

The demands on apprenticeship are, therefore, considerable. In this note, we set out the steps that need to be taken to improve the quality of apprenticeships in England for 16-18 year olds. In doing so, we argue that improving apprenticeship quality is part and parcel of improving standards in vocational education and training (VET) more generally.

Individual demand for apprenticeships is already exceeding the supply of employer places. In light of the legislation to ‘Raise the Participation Age’ to 18 in 2015, many more young people than is currently the case are likely to seek places on VET programmes, including apprenticeship. The attraction of these programmes may also grow as the landscape of higher education adapts to funding changes. We are already seeing the growth of the Higher Apprenticeship programme. The prize we all want to aim for is to increase apprenticeship and other vocational opportunities whilst also improving quality.

2. What do the statistics on Apprenticeship for 16-18 year olds in England tell us?

The latest data full year data (2012-13) on apprenticeship starts (derived from the Individualised Learner Record) show that 16-18 year olds are in the minority. The majority of apprentices are aged 19 and over and almost a half are 25 and older when they start their apprenticeship³.

¹ Alison Fuller is Pro-Director (Research and Development) and Professor of Vocational Education and Work at the Institute of Education, University of London and Lorna Unwin is Professor Emerita (Vocational Education) at the Institute of Education, University of London.

² Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2013) (eds) *Contemporary Apprenticeship: International Perspectives on an Evolving Model of Learning*, London: Routledge.

- 25+ - 230,300 (45%⁴ of all starts)
- 19-24 - 165,400 (32% of all starts)
- Under 19 - 114,500 (22% of all starts)

Although the starting age of apprentices across Europe has been getting older due to the delayed nature of transitions from education to the labour market, England stands out because it has such a large proportion of older adults who join an apprenticeship whilst they are with their existing employer – a practice known as ‘conversion’. England and Australia are the only two countries where government funding is available to support ‘adult apprenticeship’.⁵ When we acted as special advisers to the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Select Committee’s Scrutiny of the Draft Apprenticeships Bill in 2007/08, the Committee pursued this matter with witnesses from the then Learning and Skills Council and noted that:

We established during the course of the inquiry that the majority of apprentices were not new recruits to a business but existing employees who are in work and who “convert” from their current jobs to apprenticeships with the same employer.⁶

The Select Committee recommended that official statistics should differentiate between apprentices recruited to a new position with an employer and those who had been ‘converted’. In its response, the then government agreed this should be done, though stated that the earliest date for the change would be from August 1st 2010. Four years later, this change has still not been made. This makes it impossible to develop a clear picture of which employers (in both the public and private sector) are preferring to use apprenticeship as a vehicle for training older employees rather than recruiting 16-18 year olds. It must also be remembered that some 16-18 year old apprentices are also ‘conversions’. The reason that this matter is serious for both adults and young people is that there is still a possibility that apprentices are being accredited for what they already know. Furthermore, it suggests that government and its agencies responsible for the funding, promotion and management of apprenticeship are still focusing primarily on quantity rather than quality. Providing funding for the ‘conversion’ of existing employees has been a major catalyst for the rapid increase in the number of apprentices in recent years. The National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Select Committee have both raised concerns about the quality of ‘adult apprenticeships’ and the use of government funds to support them.⁷ For the purposes of this inquiry, the Education Select Committee needs to explore the extent to which the existence of ‘adult apprenticeships’ is holding back the expansion of apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds.

³ The most recent statistics August to April 2013-14 show that the proportion of starts in the 16-18 age group has increased to 30% but it is not yet clear if the number of 16-18 starts has increased.

⁴ Percentages are rounded to the nearest one percent

⁵ For recent statistics, see NCVER (2014) *Apprenticeships and traineeships 2014 – March Quarter*, Adelaide: NCVER.

⁶ House of Commons (2009) *Pre-legislative Scrutiny of the Draft Apprenticeships Bill, Session 7, Volume 11*, London: The Stationery Office (Evi.77).

⁷ We are currently completing a study (funded by the Nuffield Foundation) of ‘adult apprenticeships’ and will be reporting in December 2014.

The latest confirmed statistics for the number of 16-18 year old starts in 2012/13 confirm that relatively few young people within the total 16-18 population start an apprenticeship. The total number of 16-18 year olds in England was 1,975,000 at end 2012⁸.

Under 19 Apprenticeship starts by the level of programme 2012-13.

Level 2	Level 3	Level 4+	Total
80,900 (71%)	33,100 (29%)	600	114,500

The majority of apprentices are male (62,800), and, as the following table shows, the sectoral spread reflects continued gender segregation across the labour market:

Top ten sectors: Under 19 starts by gender - 2012-13

Sector framework	No. of females	Total starts	% Female
Business administration	11,300	16,200	70
Hairdressing	9,700	10,400	93
Children's care learning and development	8,000	8,400	95
Construction skills	100	7,800	1
Customer service	3,900	6,700	58
Hospitality and catering	3,000	6,500	46
Engineering	200	6,300	3
Vehicle maintenance	100	5,300	2
Health and social care	4,000	4,600	87
IT and telecoms	500	3,600	14

This table also shows the continued dominance of apprenticeships in service sectors. This means that young women are more likely to be in Level 2 apprenticeships where pay rates are lower and where there can be fewer opportunities for progression to Level 3.⁹

3. Apprenticeship – a missed opportunity?

Apprenticeship in England is amazingly under-utilised as a pathway for 16-18 year olds. Given that, between 16 and 18, almost two thirds enter some form of vocational programme (in school, college or other form of training provider) and/or employment. Figures in the Wolf Review (2011) confirmed this:

- 3+ A levels - 33%
- 1 or 2 A levels plus other qualifications – 6%

⁸ DfE SRF 22/2013 provision figures to end 2012.

⁹ For further detail and discussion: a) Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2014) *The Challenge Facing Young Women in Apprenticeships*. In Schoon, I. and Eccles, J.S. (eds) *Gender Differences in Aspirations and Attainment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and b) Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2012) *Banging on the door of the university: The complexities of progression from apprenticeship and other vocational programmes in England*, SKOPE Monograph 14, Oxford: University of Oxford.

- Level 3 vocational course – 18% (mostly BTEC Nationals)
- Level 2 or below – 30%
- Age participation rate (18/19 year olds) in HE (only) 36%

In previous years, Programme-led Apprenticeships (PLAs) were encouraged as a response to the lack of employer demand and willingness to recruit apprentices. In the PLA model, the young person could pursue some aspects of their apprenticeship framework in college, with the framework completed via a placement with an employer. Hence, those on PLAs did not have to have ‘employed status’. PLAs have now been withdrawn (in line with the requirements of the 2009 Apprenticeship, Skills, Children, and Learning Act), but the challenge of generating apprenticeships to help meet individual demand from young people has remained.

Lack of employer demand is not confined to England. Some other European countries (notably the Netherlands and Denmark) also responded to this problem in a similar way by developing what they call ‘school-based apprenticeships’. For example, in The Netherlands, apprenticeship and full-time VET courses operate in equilibrium according to fluctuations in the labour market, with the latter providing places when apprenticeship numbers drop due to changes in the economic climate. Both routes lead to the same Diploma. A mandatory work-based element (a 10 week ‘internship’ each year with a public or private sector organisation, including the opportunity to spend one internship overseas) means that VET students still gain valuable work experience and vocational training and, crucially, small and medium-sized employers (SMEs) who cannot commit to taking an apprentice still benefit from having a well-trained young person on their premises for a few weeks. In Germany, a model known as the ‘transition system’ has been created to provide pre-apprenticeship education and training for young people who are waiting for an apprenticeship to become available in the ‘dual system’ as there is currently a shortfall of places.

In order to ensure the focus of attention is on quality, rather than just quantity, we need to ensure that the co-ordinating agencies at local level are first and foremost concerned with supporting employers to build their businesses through high quality workforce development. In all countries with strong vocational education and training systems, the organisation of apprenticeship is regarded as a matter of shared responsibility at local level involving employers, employer bodies (e.g. Chambers of Commerce), local authorities, and vocational training providers. This helps to ensure that access to apprenticeships is transparent, quality is safeguarded, and that achievement is celebrated. In England, the arrangements are much more fragmented with many organisations playing a role within a highly centralised system. In the architecture of apprenticeship, employers have become far less visible than they would have been 30 years ago and local communities no longer have a meaningful stake in its performance. There are, of course, examples round the country where the relationship between employers and local communities have been maintained – where young people and their parents trust the quality of apprenticeships provided by certain employers and associated training providers.

In order to establish a more meaningful threshold for quality in apprenticeship, we need to be clear about how apprenticeships are currently organised. Many different types of apprenticeships exist in England. This variety reflects the diverse nature of the economy and the range of occupational and organisational settings in which apprentices work and learn. Designing and managing apprenticeship programmes is a complex process. The needs of employers and apprentices have to be met, as well as the requirements set by government and its agencies and the qualification awarding bodies. This means we can't design apprenticeship around a 'one size fits all' approach. It is only with the advent of the trailblazer reform process that there has started to be a debate about whether some jobs/occupations/sectors have the capacity and the appropriate level of skills to sustain a quality apprenticeship.

The current Trailblazer reform programme, introduced following the Richard Review of apprenticeships, is giving some employers (mainly large ones) a leading role in developing the new apprenticeship 'standards'. It isn't clear, however, how far these reforms will be effective without a related strategy for ensuring employers (of all sizes) have the necessary expertise and capacity to run apprenticeship programmes and, importantly, to provide opportunities for young people.

In other European countries, apprenticeship is much more clearly delineated by 'occupation' rather than by apprenticeship framework and job role (as has been the case in the English apprenticeship system), thus enabling discussions to take place about the implications of shifts in the supply and demand of apprenticeships for the local and national economy. Importantly, too, using the much clearer label of 'occupation' means that young people and their advisors, employers and anyone seeking an apprenticeship have a much more understandable basis on which to search and base their decisions¹⁰.

4. Supporting employers to run quality apprenticeships for economic and social benefits

As a country, we could make a real difference by encouraging employer involvement at local level to generate the symbiotic relationship between the economic and societal benefits of apprenticeship. This could be done through local Apprenticeship Boards comprising experts from industry, further and higher education, and training providers. They would be responsible for overseeing apprenticeship standards and awarding completion certificates (as is the case in the strong apprenticeship systems in other European countries). This would position apprenticeship as an engine for local economic growth and regeneration by increasing the pool of highly trained workers, as well as being a showcase for innovative vocational teaching and workplace change.

From our research on apprenticeship over a number of years, we have developed the 'Expansive-Restrictive Framework' (see figure 1) as an analytical tool for employers and training providers. This has been used as the basis of a guide (commissioned and published by government) to support employers, colleges and training providers¹¹. The

¹⁰ For a discussion, see: Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2014) *Apprenticeship and the Concept of Occupation*, London: The Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

framework sets out the institutional conditions (workplace and relevant partners) required to underpin an ‘expansive’ apprenticeship and how they need to be related. This relationship is currently underplayed in the English system due to a desire to let ‘a thousand flowers bloom’, rather than establishing the firm infrastructure required to ensure consistency of quality.

¹¹ See Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2014) Creating and Managing Expansive Apprenticeships: A Guide for Employers, Colleges and Training Providers – available from:
<http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/~/media/Collateral/BrochuresLeaflets/Creating-and-Supporting-Expansive-Apprenticeships-290514-10.ashx>

Figure 1: The expansive/restrictive framework



EXPANSIVE	RESTRICTIVE
C1 Apprenticeship develops occupational expertise to a standard recognised by industry	Apprenticeship develops skills for a limited job role
C2 Employer and provider understand that Apprenticeship is a platform for career progression and occupational registration	Apprenticeship doesn't build the capacity to progress beyond present job role
C3 Apprentice has dual status as learner and employee: explicit recognition of, and support for, apprentice as learner	Status as employee dominates: limited recognition of, and support for, apprentice as learner
C4 Apprentice makes a gradual transition to productive worker and is stretched to develop expertise in their occupational field	Fast transition to productive worker with limited knowledge of occupational field
C5 Apprentice is treated as a member of an occupational community with access to the community's rules, history, occupational knowledge and practical expertise	Apprentice treated as extra pair of hands who only needs access to limited knowledge and skills to perform job
C6 Apprentice participates in different communities of practice inside and outside the workplace	Training restricted to narrowly-defined job role and work station
C7 Apprentice's work tasks and training mapped onto the occupational standard and assessment requirements to ensure they become fully competent	Weak relationship between workplace tasks, the occupational standard and assessment procedures
C8 Apprentice gains qualifications that have labour market currency and support progression to next level (career and/or education)	Apprentice doesn't have the opportunity to gain valuable and portable qualifications
C9 Off-the-job training includes time for reflection and stretches apprentice to reach their full potential	Supporting individual apprentice to fulfil their potential is not seen as a priority
C10 Apprentice's existing skills and knowledge recognised and valued and used as platform for new learning	Apprentice is regarded as a 'blank sheet' or 'empty vessel'
C11 Apprentice's progress closely monitored and involves regular constructive feedback from range of employer and provider personnel who take a holistic approach	Apprentice's progress monitored for job performance with limited developmental feedback

The ‘Expansive-Restrictive Framework’ deliberately presents its characteristics as two ends of a continuum. It doesn’t condemn restrictive apprenticeships. At best, they will give apprentices the opportunity to enter employment, develop the skills, knowledge and experience that their employers need along with nationally recognised qualifications. The point here is to ask whether these apprenticeships are making the most of their apprentices’ potential and, importantly, whether the employing organisation could use the apprenticeship to expand its own horizons. Asked to name an ‘expansive’ apprenticeship programme, the government and the general public would probably say ‘Rolls Royce’. This is partly because of the long-standing reputation of the company and also because engineering expertise represents the ideal combination of theoretical (codified body of knowledge) and practical skills. Yet ‘expansive’ examples can be found in all sectors – what they share is a commitment to the nurturing of expertise over time so that as organisations they can continue to deliver high quality goods and services, and to ensuring the apprentices have a platform of skills and knowledge to progress.

5. Conclusion

If apprenticeship is to fulfil the aspirations for 16-18 year olds shared across the main political parties, then it is important that young people are given the opportunity to participate in apprenticeships that can be located towards the expansive end of the continuum. Achieving this goal has implications for funding and the design of apprenticeship frameworks and provision. In particular, it is likely that apprenticeships as a vehicle for facilitating the entry of young people into the labour market and the development of their occupational skills and expertise will need to be different to those designed for older adults. Alison Wolf raised this point in her *Review of Vocational Education*, but implied that the main difference should centre on the inclusion of Maths and English in apprenticeships for 16 to 18 year olds. We would argue that this offers a necessary but not sufficient response. In our view, the expansive –restrictive framework offers the much more comprehensive quality criteria required for improving the apprenticeship learning environment (both on and off-the-job).

In thinking about the current role of apprenticeship and the reform programme, there is a need to go beyond a simple principle that ‘if they’re participating, that’s ok’ to putting quality at the heart of planning and programme evaluation. Whilst the country’s best apprenticeships rival the quality available in the strongest apprenticeship systems internationally, weak minimum standards mean that quality is uneven. This is a particular concern from the perspective of 16-18 year olds, who need apprenticeship to provide a secure vehicle for transition, and platform for progression.

Two ‘stand out’ differences between apprenticeship for young people in England and in other European countries are: a) the length of the programme; and b) the availability of planned and structured off-the-job training. First, the minimum duration for apprenticeship in England is 12 months whereas in our neighbour countries the minimum duration is at least two years, and more often is longer (for example, in Germany most apprenticeships are three or three and a half years). Second, ‘learning time’ in

apprenticeships in England is specified in terms of guided learning hours (GLH). The number of these can vary widely from apprenticeship to apprenticeship and there is no mandatory requirement for the GLH to be organised in terms of regular, formal off the job provision to support the acquisition of vocational knowledge and continued general educational development. Without this longer and more structured approach, it is possible for a school leaver to complete a 12-month apprenticeship before they reach their 18th birthday, leaving them vulnerable either to becoming NEET if there is no job for them at the end of their apprenticeship, or to continuing in their job following the apprenticeship but with no further training.

Recommendations

1. All apprenticeships started by those aged under 19 should be at least two years in length, and include planned and structured off the job training in a further education college or approved training provider equivalent to at least one day a week.
2. To address the problem of demand for apprenticeship from 16-18 year olds outstripping the supply of employed-status places, there needs to be much better co-ordination and integration of full-time college-based and work-based apprenticeship provision, such that the college-based route can expand and contract as required.
3. A more robust and consistent system of full-time vocational education and training (VET) courses should be created. Work placements should be made a mandatory part of college-based provision (equivalent to 50 days per year).

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