

## Thousands of young people denied apprenticeship opportunities

Downing Street refused to deny during the summer recess that the government's manifesto commitment of 3 million apprenticeship starts by April 2020 can no longer be achieved. But leaving aside any debate on setting numerical targets, everyone should be very concerned that current start numbers for apprenticeships are way down on previous years. On A level results day, thousands of 18 year olds did not have a genuine choice between an apprenticeship and university despite it being proposed as the 'new norm' by the government five years ago. The situation was equally bad for those pupils receiving their GCSE results who wanted to start earning while learning in an apprenticeship instead of doing A-levels. They were facing a 41% reduction in the number of apprenticeships available to them. Intermediate (starter) level apprenticeship starts are more than 50% fewer than they were two years ago while opportunities for young people at lower and higher levels have fallen by a third. The social mobility agenda has taken a major battering from poor implementation of the levy reforms which were actually meant to propel us towards the 3 million target as well as improve the quality of apprenticeship training.

The spread of apprenticeship opportunities left across the country has also become very uneven because most of the large levy-paying employers who now account for the majority of them are located in London and the south east or in larger cities elsewhere. The situation is not helping the recruitment and training strategies of important sectors such as hospitality and social care which are most affected by Brexit. Despite the monthly official statistics regularly reporting continuous, large falls in starts, ministers have taken no action. AELP is calling on the government to urgently review its levy reforms to restore the number of apprenticeships which were previously being offered by small and medium sized businesses across all areas of the country. It also wants ministers to bring back the incentives that encouraged firms to recruit young apprentices, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Families cannot claim child benefit after a child turns 16 if that child starts an apprenticeship. This is because the government does not define an apprenticeship as a form of 'approved education' for benefit purposes. Training providers report that this makes many parents/carers reluctant to allow their child to pursue an apprenticeship for fear of losing some of their benefits. The government should therefore change its definition of 'approved education' to include apprenticeships (see more at: <http://bit.ly/2NrdYsb>).

## Good quality training comes at a price

Education ministers are now keen to emphasise that quality matters more than quantity when it comes to securing a successful outcome to the apprenticeship reforms. But serious questions have arisen over whether good quality apprenticeships can still be delivered across all sectors because of new costs arising from the reforms, new funding rules and funding caps set by the relevant government agencies. A potential crisis is looming over the introduction of the end point assessment requirements for apprentices because for some programmes, such as those for chefs, healthcare and auto, the funding limits are not nearly enough to cover the requirements. This can result in assessor capacity issues or the programme simply becoming unviable. Furthermore an additional expense has been imposed by the introduction of external quality assurance on the EPA process.

The Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) has been reviewing the funding of 31 apprenticeship standards, many of which are for key business sectors. Some rates may be cut by up to 33%. AELP's representations will focus on the rigorousness of the review process itself, IfA transparency over the cost calculations made for deciding the new rates and the need to allow adequate time for employers and providers to make the transition if ministers do sign

off funding rate reductions. If ministers have abandoned the 3 million target and are stressing the importance of quality instead, they should understand that adoption of the IfA recommendations may adversely impact on the quality of apprenticeship training. They should explain how any reduced rates will still deliver quality because any resulting decline will be extremely damaging to the reputation of apprenticeships.

## Damaging GCSE resits policy must end

The government is letting a generation of young people down by blindly persisting with its damaging compulsory GCSE resits policy for English and maths. Official data shows that the pass rate for maths retakes (17 year old and over) has fallen by 2.8% from 26.5 to 23.7%. In raw numbers, 137,000 out of 180,000 resits have resulted in failure. The pass rate for English GCSE resits saw a small increase to 34.2% but 99,000 out of the 148,000 entries were still ending in failure. 70% of boys are failing to achieve a pass. The Times Educational Supplement has come across examples of young people who have failed up to 9 times. AELP believes that we shouldn't be subjecting tens of thousands of vulnerable young people to multiple failure and demotivating them for another couple of years, so it's time for the Education Secretary to draw a line through this failed policy. Instead the government should allow students to actually learn relevant maths and English through functional skills as they can do in an apprenticeship. Functional skills are now harder and more challenging and yet an apprentice only gets funding at half the rate to do their maths and English compared to any other learner, so this needs rectifying as well.

## 783,000 NEET young people need access to more Traineeships

Traineeships can potentially act as a ladder to apprenticeship opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and as a programme to secure sustainable employment, and many AELP provider members believe that they represent a highly effective tool for social mobility. Yet there were only 15,000 traineeship starts in the first three quarters of the 2017-18 academic year. In our Autumn Budget 2018 submission (see Submissions at [www.aelp.org.uk](http://www.aelp.org.uk)), AELP is not seeking additional funding for traineeships. Instead the government needs to instruct the Education and Skills Funding Agency to remove traineeships from the calculation of individual providers' Qualification Achievement Rates (QAR) because the ESFA continues to penalise providers through their QAR data even when trainees are progressing into outcomes officially defined as the programme's goals, namely employment, an apprenticeship or further education/training. High quality providers are withdrawing from traineeships as a result and after 4 years of inaction, the government needs to put this right.

## Level 2 skills training is vital for a post-Brexit economy

AELP welcomes the DfE's review of level 3 and below qualifications. In a recent policy submission, we said that the government urgently needs to step up its response to addressing lower level skills gaps in the economy with Brexit only months away. Making a series of recommendations, the submission points out that over 42% of the school population at 16 have not achieved a full Level 2, thereby reducing their chances of gaining sustainable employment. For a large proportion of school leavers, a single leap to Level 3 is impossible and recognition of achievement at Level 2 is therefore vital for motivation and progression. The paper provides evidence of the huge reliance that key sectors have on workers qualified at Level 2 and the very concerning implications of this if migratory controls are introduced after Brexit. AELP strongly repudiates the maligning of Level 2 apprenticeships as not 'proper apprenticeships', saying that it is completely unjustified, especially since the introduction of the new standards. The submission adds that it beggars belief that anyone after reading the lists of skills, knowledge and behaviours required under a standard (see submission's appendix) would maintain that a person completing such a programme could not call themselves an apprentice. The AELP submission can be read at:

<http://bit.ly/2tiTZmH>.

## The entire Adult Education Budget should be put out to tender

The government is devolving the adult education budget (AEB) to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) with a timetable that provides clarity for stakeholders. Much of the current subcontracting on AEB is the by-product of an inefficient funding system as government procures non-grant funded AEB whereas grant funded providers are given an annual allocation to spend that is consistently and sometimes hugely underspent. AELP is calling for the entire AEB to be put out to public procurement to ensure full value for money. In areas which do not have MCAs, the budget should be procured through Local Enterprise Partnerships.

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