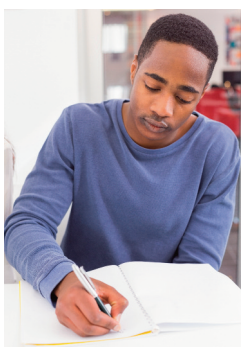




A UCU charter for real jobs and apprenticeships



Apprenticeships are a distinctive and highly valuable part of the vocational education sector, ensuring that those who want to earn while they learn have the opportunity to do so. They provide an important route to employment and higher levels of learning, directly connecting people to the labour market and contributing to an educated, productive, innovative and engaged workforce and citizenry.

When compared with similar level qualifications, apprenticeships offer a significant earnings premium to individuals – for example, by the time they are 28 men with a level 3 apprenticeship earn 37% more than those who left school with only A-levels and 35% more than those who left school with only a level 3 vocational qualification.¹ They also offer clear benefits to employers, with 72% reporting that apprenticeships helped to improve their product or service quality, and 68% reporting that they led to improved productivity.²

Given the value of apprenticeships to individuals, employers and society it is right that they have risen up the policy agenda in recent years. In 2015, the government committed to the employer-led reform of apprenticeship programmes and the rapid expansion of apprenticeship numbers, aiming to reach the target of 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020. The introduction of an apprenticeship levy has been crucial in underpinning this reform, leveraging support for apprenticeship training from large employers.

However, the University and College Union is concerned that the drive to grow apprenticeships has too often been at the expense of quality and genuine job creation.

ISSUES WITH CURRENT APPRENTICESHIPS IN ENGLAND

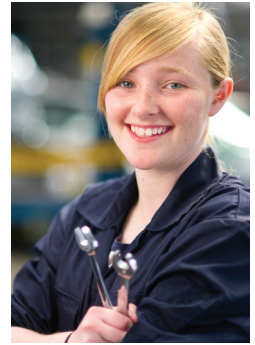
Education should be at the heart of apprenticeships

The definition of apprenticeships used by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education is ‘a job with training to industry standards’. UCU does not believe this reflects the central importance of education within apprenticeship programmes.

Apprenticeships are not just about training for tasks or for specific job roles; they should include a broad education which prepares people for the changing world of work and empowers them to be engaged, adaptable and resilient. There is an important role for

wider learning objectives such as rights and responsibilities at work, as well as developing a range of skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork.

Our approach to general education within apprenticeships is clearly out of step with our international neighbours. In England, general education (including maths and English) adds up to between 50 and 100 hours over the duration of an apprenticeship, whereas German and Swiss apprenticeships require 400 hours of general education across a range of subjects.⁴



With education forming the core of apprenticeship programmes, we would also expect to see educators having a key role in their development. However, the focus in England has been on employer-led reform rather than meaningful partnership working.

Apprenticeship funding needs to be reviewed

The apprenticeship levy, while providing a funding boost for apprenticeships directly from employers, does little to influence where apprenticeship opportunities are, what level they are at, or who can access them.

It has been too easy for levy paying employers to recoup their payments by rebadging existing training schemes as apprenticeships. Apprenticeships can be taken by people of any age, so there are quick wins to be had by converting experienced, existing staff into apprentices without creating any additional job opportunities. Young people in particular are disadvantaged by the tendency to create apprentices from incumbents.

There has also been significant growth in the number of management and senior executive apprentices through the creation of apprenticeship MBAs.⁵ While education for all staff is welcome, there is a question over the effectiveness of the levy if funds are being directed towards senior staff at the expense of hiring new apprentices and creating additional job opportunities. The growth in higher-level apprenticeships – which are often more expensive to deliver – has also raised concerns from the National Audit Office about the overall financial sustainability of the apprenticeship programme.

UCU would therefore like to see robust evidence that levy funds are being used for additional opportunities, meeting the skills needs of the workforce, and paving the way to higher-level learning rather than being used to enhance already highly skilled employees.

Quality must be central to apprenticeship delivery

Robust quality arrangements are crucial in ensuring that the apprenticeship brand is not undermined by poor provision. However, the quality assurance arrangements for apprenticeships are complex with the Institute, Ofqual, Ofsted, Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and Department for Education all playing a role. This means the lines of responsibility are extremely unclear when accountability and transparency should be paramount. External quality assurance of the end point assessment for a standard is similarly complex with four different options available.



The Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP) provides little guarantee in terms of provider quality, but potentially gives a false impression to employers and apprentices because the training provider has been included on an official register. As highlighted by sector press, good quality and established providers were excluded from the register while organisations with no track record were included.⁶

There is also no mandatory requirement for qualifications within the new apprenticeship standards – even those at degree level. UCU believes that qualifications play an important role in supporting progression, confidence and social inclusion. Graduate professions such as nursing and teaching which are being developed as apprenticeships are at real risk of being deprofessionalised if qualifications are removed.

In a system where employers have ownership over designing standards, can be their own training providers and provide their own external quality assurance, an independent qualification ensures the education has transferable value both in the labour market and for further study.

Apprenticeships policy should focus more closely on equality

There is a lack of commitment to tackling inequalities in apprenticeships. Although some equalities monitoring takes place, this does not focus on levels or sectors of apprenticeships.

It also does not look at gender at all. This is a mistake because apprenticeships remain highly gendered with women much more likely to be in sectors offering lower wage returns and career opportunities. For under 19s in 2013/14, 98% of construction apprenticeships, 97% of engineering apprentices and 86% of ICT apprenticeships went to men. Traditionally gendered career choices – which have a far reaching impact on lifetime opportunities – are being reinforced by current arrangements.⁷

There are similar concerns for black⁸ apprentices, as Jeremy Crook, Chief Executive of the Black Training and Enterprise Group, writing for the Learning and Work Institute points out: 'BAME people remain particularly under-represented on apprenticeships in sectors like engineering and manufacturing, where average earnings tend to be higher, and over-represented in lower earning sectors such as retail.'⁹

Apprenticeships can also only be offered as full time job roles. This excludes those with caring responsibilities or health conditions that make it difficult to take up full time work, which disproportionately affects women and people with disabilities. Furthermore disabled apprenticeship applicants have to contend with employer prejudices about their abilities and reluctance to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees.

The apprenticeship reforms have been a real missed opportunity in addressing these inequalities. UCU would like to see additional supplementary funding to improve access to apprenticeships; mandatory employer reporting on the apprenticeship gap for people with protected characteristics; and better advice and guidance to underpin the apprenticeship programme.

UCU'S ALTERNATIVE: A CHARTER FOR REAL JOBS AND APPRENTICESHIPS

For too long the blame for youth unemployment and skills shortages has been laid at the door of bad courses and bad teaching - UCU rejects this. Our members know that successive government policies and the failure to fund education properly have led to too many young people being excluded and marginalised from education and work.



The technical and vocational sector has been in a state of constant revolution since the 1960s, often to try and mask the failings of government to provide decent employment opportunities for young people. Over the last 35 years a failure of government policies to provide well paid, secure jobs has led to the institutionalisation of unemployment and precarious employment practices amongst young workers.

The current government policy of achieving 3 million apprenticeships now looks unachievable, and the recent announcement by the Department for Education that it has asked police to investigate fraudulent practices within the largest provider that has received £30 million of government funds, 3aaa, reveals just how bankrupt the government apprenticeship programme is. Its focus on the wants of employers above the needs of apprentices and the expertise of teachers has led directly to this fiasco. This needs to stop – our young people deserve better.

UCU wants an expansion of high-quality apprenticeships. These must have education at their heart, relate to real job opportunities, and get to the root of tackling inequality in access to education and the labour market.

HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION AND CLEAR PROGRESSION ROUTES

- Apprenticeships must offer a clear programme of education and training that restores the link to occupational identity combined with a broad based underlying curriculum.
- Off-site learning is of vital importance throughout the duration of the programme. Time away from work allows the apprentice to embed their learning, to participate in critical reflection, join a community of learners and develop the theoretical underpinning necessary to practise their craft. It also prepares the ground for learning at higher levels and allows them to receive English and maths education from specialist teachers.



UCU believes that colleges are ideal places to foster these types of learning.

- Partnership working between industry, teachers and trade unions will provide the right apprenticeship programmes for individuals, communities and employers. Teachers must be given the time, space and resources to cultivate these relationships for mutual benefit, and for their educational expertise to be respected.
- There must be clear transition points available between different levels so apprentices are able to progress more easily to higher levels of education and don't fall out of learning by default once their initial apprenticeship is complete. We need more work to be done to ensure we are opening up access to higher and degree apprenticeships, and that they aren't just going to people with existing high level skills.
- It is essential that the stripping out of qualifications from apprenticeships is reversed.
- Quality assurance arrangements must be urgently reviewed to clarify lines of responsibility, prevent the approval of apprenticeship standards that are too narrow, and ensure tough action is taken when the education provided is not up to scratch.

FAIRNESS AND ACCESS

- Apprentices should have parity of terms and conditions with all other employees. They must be paid a fair rate and the gap between apprenticeship minimum wage and national minimum wage should be abolished. All quality apprenticeships will have progression opportunities to genuine employment and will not be a way of cutting costs by employing staff more cheaply on a temporary basis.
- Many apprenticeships go to existing employees. This needs careful monitoring to ensure that those who need them most to get into work are not being excluded. While we would not wish to prevent existing staff from taking up apprenticeships, it is important that the focus of apprenticeships shifts more toward providing additional labour market opportunities. This also means refocussing apprenticeships as a programme for young people – currently people aged 24 and over account for over two-fifths (41%) of all apprenticeship starts.¹⁰
- All levels of apprenticeships should offer equal access for marginalised and disadvantaged groups. This will require robust Access to Work funding and reasonable adjustments for disabled apprenticeship applicants, plus supplementary funding to support the entry of underrepresented groups including those from the most disadvantaged areas and backgrounds.
- Employers should reflect the communities in which they work, and annual reporting on 'the apprenticeship gap' for those with protected characteristics (similar to mandatory gender pay gap reporting) by levy paying employers should be required. UCU also has a role to play in holding our own institutions to account to support

those from disadvantaged or non-traditional backgrounds to move into the teaching profession so that the education workforce more broadly reflects our students.

- Employers must take the educational needs of their employees seriously. They should be given a statutory right to paid educational leave and to workplace training committees. Trade unions must be given negotiating rights for education and training.
- There needs to be scope for part time and flexible apprenticeships to be developed. Currently apprenticeships can only be offered as full time jobs. This excludes anyone who needs more flexibility in their working arrangements.
- We need to recognise the important role of impartial information advice and guidance in addressing some of the inequalities in apprenticeships. Young people need good information about different pathways, sectors and the choices available to them. A high quality, face-to-face service is essential if we are going to stop replicating the trend whereby women, black and disabled learners often enter into lower skilled, lower paid sectors.



CLIMATE JOBS

- Finding a solution to the climate crisis will help solve the economic one. We need jobs that deal with the impact of climate change as well as those that will prevent a further descent into global warming.
- The Labour Party manifesto pledge to create 500,000 climate jobs is one that UCU supports, and we believe that it would provide the basis of creating tens of thousands of well skilled and secure employment opportunities for young workers. Colleges must be at the centre of training and educating this future pioneering workforce.
- The green skills gap is now a major stumbling block to delivering a Just Transition to a zero-carbon economy. UCU believes an integrated skills strategy should cover:
 - the effective embedding of Education for Sustainable Development across the curriculum
 - the rapid introduction of a short-course sustainability skills programme to train the existing workforce
 - an expansion of quality apprenticeships based on a coherent system of delivery addressing the inequalities in apprenticeships to ensure access by under-represented groups
 - promoting effective community engagement by the further and adult education sector to support the supply and demand issues of skills and jobs.



FUNDING

- Teachers transform lives. A high quality education is underpinned by an experienced and dedicated workforce. Apprenticeships and vocational education are central to the government's ambitions for delivering a successful industrial strategy, however teachers in further education are now earning over £7,000 per year less on average than teachers in schools. If the sector is to remain vibrant and resilient to future challenges we must ensure that the workforce is well paid and well supported.
- Funding bands for apprenticeships must reflect adequately the cost of training and education. Trying to force a market where employers negotiate the cost is inappropriate and will not lead to the best standard of education.
- Additional support funding must be increased and linked to ensuring equal access to apprenticeships.
- The apprenticeship levy needs to be broadened out so that employers can spend the money on the most appropriate type of training for their workforce rather than the levy driving the investment decision. This will help protect the integrity of the apprenticeship brand.
- To allow the further education sector to properly plan how they are going to be able to educate and train the future workforce its funding allocation must be, at least, on a three-yearly basis. The present yearly cycle of funding does not allow colleges to plan provision that meets the long-term needs of the workplaces and communities they serve.

¹ <http://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverdp010.pdf>

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/230389/Apprenticeship_Evaluation_Infographic_-_V2_-_FINAL_-_190813.pdf

³ <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship/>

⁴ https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/apprenticeship-in-england-united-kingdom_9789264298507-en#page1

⁵ <https://www.ft.com/content/f4bd5e9c-4fb4-11e8-9471-a083af05aea7>

⁶ <https://feweek.co.uk/2017/12/15/non-levy-tender-shocker-defunct-provider-gets-contract-but-outstanding-college-misses-out/>

⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509123/Social_Mobility_and_Child_Poverty_Commission_Submission_on_Apprenticeships_final.pdf

⁸ In UCU the word black is used in a political sense to describe people who self-identify as being from a visible minority (more usually from an Asian or African heritage) with a shared experience or understanding of discrimination

⁹ https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/All-Change_Where-next-for-apprenticeships-1.pdf

¹⁰ <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06113#fullreport>