

Written evidence from IASME (SFF0005)

1. What kinds of skills do you think will be needed for the future of the UK economy? Is the UK's skills and training system capable of equipping increasing numbers of people with these skills?

Our organisation works in Cyber Security and there is a well documented shortage of people with the required Cyber Security skills in the sector. In addition to the classic Cyber Security skills we also need to develop risk and compliance professionals, professional project managers, communications professionals, Human Computer Interaction professionals.

One of the biggest issues with the cyber security training is the lack of entry level jobs. People do train in cyber security via a wide range of courses but very few are respected enough to result in a paid job.

A large part of the UK strategy is about combatting the issue of cyber crime, but we also need to consider the skills required to allow users of IT and information to do the right thing, every time. For example, making processes simple, currently, we are hung up on the technical skills, but the non-technical 'secure by design' and usability by design are as important in protecting our infrastructure and information as any technical skills.

2. Is it clear to everyone involved in the skills system what the respective roles of the Government, employers, individuals and institutions are within that system?

No, the development of skills is behind the curve of skills requirements. Employers need to be able to identify the skills they are going to need in five years time and government needs to plan to deliver them. The timescale on developing skills needs to be shortened and the dependence across the skills pipeline needs to be removed. For example, currently a Level three apprenticeship cannot be developed unless there is a level four equivalent qualification.

This means:

- If there is no need for a level four, the level three is unlikely to be developed.
- Skills development is top down from degrees to vocational, and it should be the opposite. The lack of vocational course by-passes a lot of capable candidates.

3. What is the appropriate level of government intervention in the development of skills policies? How can government best add value in this area?

- Reduce the complexity and time it takes to develop skills policies and training. An apprenticeship takes in excess of 18 months by which time the requirements are changing.
- Allow more flexibility in the delivery of skills training to allow awarding bodies to alter courses for current and local requirements.
- Consider how skills development can be more agile in its approach

4. Are current Government policies on skills, particularly apprenticeships and training, sufficiently clear? Have policies and the institutional set-up been sufficiently consistent over time? If not, what changes or reforms would you recommend?

Processes need to be streamlined. There is a disconnect between training people in a certain sector and the entry level jobs available in that sector. There may be a skills shortage with experienced professionals but training a lot of new entrants will not solve the problem – government must help address the pipeline of entry level employment to get more experienced professionals

5. Are the right institutions in place to ensure an effective skills system for the future? Should co-ordinating institutions be national, regional or sectoral, or a mixture of each?

We suggest that skills development should be aligned with the professional bodies who represent the various professions rather than a “one size fits all” approach.

6. Concerns have been raised over the operation of the Apprenticeship Levy, particularly in relation to the decline in young people taking on apprenticeships. Is there a case for reforming the levy, for example by ring-fencing more levy funding for training for younger apprentices?

In our experience the reason companies do not take on more apprentices are:

- The quality of apprenticeship training is very low in our experience.
- Apprenticeships require training and experience in a wide selection of areas within the subject of that Apprenticeship. This is very hard, if not impossible, for most micro and small company to fulfil. For example, we have a cyber security

apprentice and some of the course and the required experience we can satisfy. However, as an SME with a relatively narrow business, there are quite a few elements of his course where he needs experience that our company does not cover. To enable him to get this experience we have to try and find other organisations that do this part of cyber security and will accept this person for a week's experience. This is hard and time consuming to arrange. They seem to have been designed for large organisations with delivery of a wide selection of services.

- It is very time consuming for the manager of the apprentice in terms of the college requirements and support of the apprentice – this also makes it hard for SMEs.

The levy is generally a good idea and does incentivise more apprentices. Limiting it to younger people would be a negative step because we take on new hires of all ages and find they bring a lot of life experience to the roles. It would be unhelpful to exclude them from this funding.

7. What should the role of business be in encouraging the development of skills in the UK? Should business be a consumer, funder, trainer or co-designer of skills provision?

Industry identifies the skills they need and consume the output of national training initiatives, they should therefore be the leaders in the design of the skills development.

8. In a more mobile, flexible labour market, what incentives do employers have to provide training for their employees? Why do you think that employer investment in training has declined in recent decades?

When an apprentice completes their training, they are often enticed by larger salaries and are free to leave the organisation that trained them.

The current situation of a lack of experienced individuals results in larger organisations poaching newly qualified recruits from the smaller organisations that cannot afford the same salaries. SMEs specifically do not train and certify individuals to the higher level qualifications because, as soon as they do, those individuals are approached by large organisations and offered significantly higher salaries. Some large organisations use this method for recruitment instead of investment in training themselves.

9. Should further incentives be put in place to reverse the decline in employer investment in training, and if so, what form should these incentives take?

Yes that would be a good thing but we don't know how it might work.

10. What incentives do individuals have to involve themselves in apprenticeships and training? Is the system available and attractive enough to encourage individuals to seek training, and if not, what can be done to improve this?

- A lot of people would like to do an apprenticeship but the challenge is in finding an employer that is willing to take on an apprentice.
- Apprentices are often paid much less than the living wage and so many cannot afford this level of pay.
- There is still some snobbery about apprenticeships not being as good as the classic degree – particularly from parents. This is despite many companies preferring an ex apprentice to someone with a degree.
- There are still organisations that request A levels and a degree before you can apply to them rather than apprenticeships and experience.

11. How does the UK's approach to skills and training compare to those of other countries? Are there examples of good practice that the UK should be learning from?

We do not have the visibility of this to comment

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