

## Written Evidence by Professional Skills Academy (FES0016)

### Education Committee

#### Further Education and Skills

Located in the North West of England we are a Main Provider of Apprenticeships. Providing our experience and observations we believe we help the Curriculum and Assessment Review group understand why changes are needed in regard to the following points.

#### Curriculum and qualifications in further education

*Driving better standards in further education; the quality and consistency of provision and outcomes.*

Networking between colleges and awarding body accredited training providers to engage quality assurance contact and guidance to encourage best practices co-consistency between further education traditional courses and vocational schemes (such as by college students moving into Training Provider Apprenticeships).

*Post-16 numeracy and literacy, including GCSE resits.*  
*and*

*The strengths and weaknesses of T Levels as the main qualification option for students wishing to pursue a technical route into further education.*

Instead of pass indicator the candidate should have a traffic light result giving those better choices and guidance on what areas to self-improve – indicating their achieved strengths and further learning need indicators that will avoid mental stress of a marked fail result.

*The reform of level 3 qualifications.*

Level 3 Qualifications should all be Leading Awarding Body approved and supported by Awarding Body robust continuous improvements and quality resources, allowing for fast response changes in content reflecting the advancing modern world, especially in new age green areas of climate change, environment and sustainability.

Level 3 qualifications should all have green generic content reflecting upon their skill sector recognition within critical education and skills responses to climate change. Those gaining a Green Credibility Indicator should be signposted to network with the employment sector and industries to help develop and meet National targeted demand of green skilled jobs.

#### Delivering further education

*Funding for further education, including whether the additional £300 million announced by the Chancellor in last year's Budget is sufficient and how it should be distributed.*

*and*

*The effectiveness of current funding arrangements in tackling the attainment gap in further education.*

£300 million divided by the number of MP constituencies results in £500k each; however there is no regional weighting. The North of England (levelling up) should receive £1m in each Northern constituency with Local Skills Boards targeting spend into employment and industries and able to identify community cohesion and empowerment priority indicators.

### **Skills and apprenticeships**

*How to resolve the skills shortage and narrow the gap between the skills that employers want and the skills that employees have.*

“Golden Green Providers” – addressing climate change skills:-

Climate change needs addressing by targeting 300,000 additional green jobs to be given special attention in attracting finance calculated to reflect the cost of providers training 300,000 learners across the national skills spectrum. Based on the Apprenticeships grant average at Level 3 of £5k each, it suggests additional budget of £500 million a year, in each of 3 years, enabling local communities to catch up on the green jobs target of Government.

*The level of collaboration between the further education sector, local government and employers in responding to the skills shortage.*

Red Tape has often been criticised by the stakeholders in the learner journey.

Apprentices enter at their identified suitable level. New learners often join with having had bad experiences at school or college from what they felt was testing in such as English and Maths where qualifications were taken. Others did not take the exams owing to the mental stress these can cause. Apprenticeships should concentrate on the key knowledge; skills and behaviours (KSBs) detailed in the specific standard and not be required to achieve English or Maths qualification.

Schools and Colleges should be encouraged to offer such qualifications separately to all.

Employers dislike the Red Tape paperwork at the time of engaging a Training Provider. It is acknowledged many employers are SMEs not having HR departments; often it is the CEO or Director doing the paperwork, busy people with responsibility in growing their competitive business. In order to get onto the approved training provider list quality checks are carried out which result in a trusted organisations. Sign up should be simplified and automatic to speed the employer process. Maintaining trust in quality should require every Training Provider to be an Awarding Body Approved Training Organisation which exposes them to annual quality check. In effect the employer can then directly engage their self-preferred Training Provider.

Apprenticeships administration should not be subjected to cumbersome Red Tape. Where the Training Provider was Awarding Body Approved there are already requirements in engaging new learners. A right balance between speed and quality can recognise the professionalism of the Training Provider by accepting the learner details, course content, timescales and progress recording are held at the Training Providers location able to be quality checked by a periodic sampling. Taking in Apprenticeships onto the Provider places should be quicker, easier and simpler in attracting potential apprentices. The use of double checking of information should be ended as the duplication of checking is unnecessary, the Main Provider take responsibility for the information in line with data protection and in ensuring it is complete and accurate not given over to the Apprenticeship Service as they are detached from the actual stakeholders.

*The role of Skills England in meeting the Government's industrial strategy and boosting economic growth.*

Public clarity in explaining the role of Skills England along with making smooth connection between skills, education and the evolving inventive sector. Modern inventions such as AI to be embedded into college education to prepare a generation of young people for the advanced industrial future landscape where traditional jobs will disappear. AI and such inventions are high skill level and fast learner programmes not suitable for vocational apprenticeships. They should be responsive fast learning courses of three months, funded directly by their employer.

Boosting economic growth skills should remove vocational apprenticeships from Universities that would dedicate Universities to the delivery of quality driven Degree education. These are the vital part of high level specialist technical and strategic thinking education. Confusion arises when Universities expand to less than Level 6 which should be the entry level of their portfolio – forging Universities into the specialist category of World Class Degrees would be attractive to inward overseas students, high valued income from the international investment. UK high level students should best attract employer sponsorship or take individual grants as their individual and progressive achievement journey can involve 5 to 8 years of University.

*Current challenges for apprenticeships, including employer engagement, funding issues, and apprentice pay.*

North of England (levelling up) should receive extra £1m in each Northern MPs constituency in supporting their Local Skills Board to target spending into local priority employment and industries. Local Skills Boards should be represented by residents from the local region that has taken an Apprenticeships provision (providers and learners).

EPAs should be an area of concern in it taking a large slice of funding from each learner. It takes the Training Provider an average 350 hours direct training equal to 50 days involving all knowledge, skills and behaviour training plus input from work place mentors. The End Point Assessment takes up to 20% of the standard levy finance per person using average of twelve hours (equal to less than 2 days). This is disproportionate in payment input time. It should be a maximum take out by EPAs of 6% of the standard levy finance per person and have the maximum allowed EPA per person payment set at not exceeding £1000. In return the training provider should be allowed to carry out assessments during the learner's journey moving away from mental stress risk where programme achievers see EPAs as an end test.

Government level of mutual respect and trust should increase with Approved Main Providers of Apprenticeships being treated as fairly as private training providers who receive employer payments at the start of learner entry. Main Providers should receive 100% of the agreed levy payment at the start of the Apprenticeship. The requirement, as in the private training sector, would be for the Main Provider to ensure the learner has access to their full timeline quota with a learner right to transfer to another provider which would require the Main Provider to pass over an unused percentage of the time quota. Awarding Bodies use time quota methods of a set duration where the learner has that time length to complete their learning. It should be included into Apprenticeships rule to cut out Red Tape financial monthly monitoring by the Apprenticeships Service (using a simple mechanism such as used by Awards for All and used by other funding schemes. This method puts learners in control of their learning with an improvement to Provider v Learner relationship with the learner having 3 years to complete their fully paid for Apprenticeships through their approved Main Provider.

There should be modular Apprenticeship top ups where a learner wants to gain specific skills and Main Providers could provide a menu of enrolment modules generic across all standards which enable someone that did not achieve their full EPA to book into a referred module.

Funding per head of Apprenticeship should be reclassified as individualised de-minimis in terms of valued levy payment per person set at a maximum individual value of £12,000 per year. This reduces putting people off taking up a place as funding will become defined as a responsible individualised Apprenticeship bursary. The individual value should be per year to encourage stepping up to higher skills levels with each Apprenticeship allowed to access up to three progressions (either side step or into higher level) this would be especially useful in the construction sector where National house building targets recognise time is money just as much as delay reduces the required build quantity completions. Construction should be put into a specialist category where regional governments can link into community planning.

*The role of devolution in addressing regional skills needs and apprenticeships.*

Government employment mechanism places MPs at disadvantage and disengagement on apprenticeships. Anomaly arises because employment of MPs staff members must be on IPSA contracts, this precludes them from also being on an Apprenticeships scheme. With there being a vast range of Apprenticeships this stops the MPs from engaging such as the Fundraising, Bicycle Mechanics or Junior Management Standards which would otherwise enable MPs to take part in connecting knowledge and skills in such standards across their constituency. MPs should be allowed to have IPSA contract staff put by the MPs onto the Apprenticeships scheme, (650 MPs x 4 each plus one assessor in each MP office provides 3250 Apprenticeships into local community skills engagement). Better connectivity with community and elected MPs improves by allowing the same funding mechanism as if the MPs was a local employer.

Brand identity is of paramount importance. Young people are especially attracted to new and exciting ideas, such as seen with the range of social media Unicorn start-ups emerging over the last few years like the Multiverse which has praise across industry and globally. Needed is an iconic name that reflects the tremendous academic studies and research that presents the dynamic solution as the Omniversity, defining futuristic education and vocational training.

Each region should appoint an Apprenticeships Ambassador as part of promoting the drive to enhance, simplify, widen choice and react to global competition through innovative methods.

*The quality and availability of work placements within vocational courses.*

Apprenticeships need to present quality in upskilling to grow the UK economy. The approach must include appropriate pace, relevant place and personalisation. In this reach is missing the self-employed and small SMEs owing to entry requirement. It is known many UK businesses start small. Apprenticeships should be opened up to self-employed, SMEs with as few as one employee and Voluntary and Community Sector including small community sports clubs. The UK has more than four million SMEs which represent opportunity to skill up 4 million more apprenticeships if entry rules are adjusted to include small work place organisation, encouraging them to take their learner in their vocational sector or themselves upskill their competitiveness.

Apprenticeships must value the ability to enrich lives and communities in diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, empathy and life skills. There needs to be inspirational fresh starter Apprenticeships aiming engagement at targeting the 9 million people without jobs (classed as economically inactive).

There are nearly 1 million young people outside education, employment or training and one approach would be a National Pride Programme, launching starter standards, such as 13,000 Neighbourhood Watch Apprenticeship at Level 2 in training local people towards them then becoming upskilled into Neighbourhood Officers, a programme partnered with local councils.

Another area of a National Pride Programme would be for 15,000 Community Health and Wellbeing Practitioners at Level 2 – achievement then taking them onto becoming Level 3 a programme partnered with the NHS.

The cost of motoring and damage to clean air should add into the National Pride Programme the Bicycle Mechanics Level 2 Apprenticeship – a partnership with Sports England, CVS and Federation of Small Business by changing the Apprenticeships entry rules to encourage every SME businesses with 1 to 249 employees to become classified as a UK Workplace Wellbeing Community, enabling each of the 5.8 million SMEs to install their own workplace Bicycle Mechanic Level 2 – (current employee or new start) offering support to their cycle to work local community in partnership with the Regional Transport Authority.

Not to forget the very important area of social care. A partnership with Save the Children, NSPCC, The Children's Society, Mind Charity and Local Councils to bring a flow through for school leavers who do not have a job after 3 months of leaving education. Offering life skills in being aware and how to deal with Mental Health and Social Care, to include those excluded from Apprenticeships such as the at home carers who look after a family member. The in job hours requirement for these should be reclassified to include 30 hours as a home carer. Going onto the Flagship Care Apprenticeship at Level 2 should not affect their carers allowance but enable the carer time to home study and learn skills that help them be a better skilled carer with them building a portfolio towards taking up future social care employment.

It is urgent for Awarding Bodies to be tasked into designing a raft of inspiring new entry level Apprenticeships at level 2 by government grant with smooth transition into level 3.

Under an umbrella of Individual Profile in Active Citizenship Apprenticeships new provision needs to reach into multiple sectors offering Level 2 and Level 3 that avoids the generational potential national disaster. The core skills and knowledge will need to motivate community cohesion. Training Providers to become inspirational by creating methods and ideas within a new partnership between City and Guilds, Skills England, local authorities Voluntary and Community Sector along with Government in challenging levy paying employers to provide leadership and coaching (from 8000 larger employers of 250 or more employees) to take part. These to fund an Omniversity set up in each MP constituency to coordinate Apprenticeships (creating young mind artistic spaces by engaging with local art colleges and such as Lowry and Tate Galleries. Co-funded from National Lottery and Arts Council these will become the people skills Omniversity of Salford, Omniversity of Liverpool, Omniversity of Sheffield and so forth across the Nation with the central theme of green sustainability in empowering local people to address different economic and environmental issues that threaten life on earth.

### **Supporting young people, widening access, and narrowing the attainment gap**

*The difficulties facing further education students, including mental health issues and access to mental health support, and cost of living pressures.*

The cost of living for students has risen needing a fresh look at how knowledge and skills are funding in terms of the research elements required along their learner journey. Grant funding for Apprenticeships should be implemented allowing up to £500 for books and £500 for other learning tools (such as Apps, sector social media membership and student desk top material).

*Access to higher education, other qualification levels, and employment; career and course guidance.*

There are life situations in need of additional attention in providing access to narrowing the skills gap. An example is the Prison service especially in addressing the early release and to rebuild opportunities in avoiding reoffending. The overall average cost for running a prison place for a year (per prison place) in 2022-23 was £51k (population 78,000) costing over £4billion a year. There should be a Future Skills Commission for Prisons changing the rules of Apprenticeships to allow exoffenders and early release people an access to a no job placed Apprenticeship as part of supporting their gap in knowledge endured during being away from employment. New Start Apprenticeships should be a Life Beyond Bars collaboration linking with Rail Track, Timpson, Tesco, Catch 22, XOBikes and Unicorn status employers such as Multiverse along with other trusted organisations to build skilled innovation towards stable employment through the development of knowledge and skills.

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In summary the author acknowledges the vast success of Apprenticeships which has helped millions of people develop meaningful skills, build their careers and boost economic growth. The work of stakeholders has provided practical wealth into the Apprenticeships programme reaching into every community and will continue to add success into millions of lives.

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