

31st January 2017

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Response to Government Consultation: Draft Strategic Guidance to the Institute for Apprenticeships

The British Woodworking Federation responds to this consultation, on behalf of the Confederation of Timber Industries (CTI).

Who we are

The British Woodworking Federation (BWF) is the trade association for the woodworking and joinery manufacturing industry in the UK. We operate as part of **the Confederation of Timber Industries (CTI)** an umbrella organisation for the UK's Timber supply chain from forest to end-of-life recycling. CTI represents Producers, Manufacturers and Distributors of Timber across all the supply chain. Our membership is made up of Trade Associations, NGOs and Research Institutes. Timber contributes substantially to the UK Construction, Manufacturing and Service Industries, providing jobs across the skills spectrum and adding value of £20 bn to the UK economy and employs around 350,000 people.

Our Response

We welcome the government's decision to create the Institute of Apprentices to (IoA) ensure the quality of apprenticeships in the UK economy. As a sector, we have a strong tradition of apprenticeship training, and it is important that the term 'apprentice' is protected to equal quality and fit-for-purpose training and competency assessment for training. The IoA must have the power and the tools to ensure that – in consultation with employers – apprenticeships maintain these high standards.

Operating within a broader context

We support the government's intention for the IoA to have the remit for technical education. Building the bridges between schools, to post-16 technical education, to apprenticeships (standard and higher levels) is critical to achieve a UK workforce that is ready to enter the workplace.

We believe that the IoA needs to work closely with the Department for Education (DfE) to ensure that technical and apprenticeship education/training is given parity of esteem with that of academia. This requires comprehensive and impartial careers guidance in schools to ensure young people can make informed decisions about their career pathways, and to ensure that our education system delivers skills individuals that are work ready, and in disciplines that the economy needs. There needs to be clear engagement in the school system to ensure curriculum translates into employability skills, both in general soft skills and occupational specific skills.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

A strong dialogue between the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and the IoA is also of importance. Many 'hidden' sectors fail to expose themselves to potential candidates because there is no means to steer them to other opportunities. Alongside quality and impartial careers advice, NAS should have a system of 'clearing' – as there is with university higher education – so that oversubscribed occupations can be funnelled into other sectors that look for similar skills, rather than losing those candidates from the apprenticeship system. The IoA, in conjunction with employers and employer groups, should be part of the solution to making this system a reality.

Core Principles

We strongly support the core principles set for the IoA. In maintaining the value of the word 'apprenticeship', it should only apply to skilled occupations, and not be used as a vehicle for unskilled occupations to simply make use of government or levy funding for apprenticeships.

In the development of English and Maths skills, while we recognise apprenticeships need to develop these, it remains the responsibility of the school system get students to the required standard. Where this has not been achieved by the time they leave school, this responsibility should still rest with government (and funded accordingly, and separately) rather than employers picking up the failings in the school system. We advocate for the teaching of maths in particular, to have greater application to its use in the working world, so that students understand its importance when they come to enter the workplace.

We particularly support the principle for apprenticeships to lead to full competency and capability in an occupation. Rigorous training is central to this, but we believe the achievement of a qualification is also critical to achieving this principle. Taking the construction sector, which has a card system that centres around the NVQ system that assesses competency on-the-job, the apprenticeship model must deliver this outcome alongside training programmes, for without, would lead to another layer of cost and time for employers to get their operatives to begin working. The Apprenticeship system must be flexible to allow the inclusion of nationally and industry recognised qualifications as part of any Apprenticeship Standard.

Standard Development and Approval

As an employer representative body ourselves, we recognise the importance of ensuring that employers are at the heart of any development of Apprenticeship Standards and support the IoA upholding this precedent. We also recognise the importance of supporting employers through the complexities of shaping standards, rules, and processes in order to keep their engagement. The IoA has a role in this, and so should Standard Setting Bodies/Sector Skills Councils and Trade Bodies, who will have greater understanding of what is needed to translate employer skill needs into a format acceptable for Standard Development.

Assessment

We support the flexible approach for external quality assessment, with employers deciding the best means by which to uphold quality standards.

We support the SFA's appointment as the certification body for standard achievement issuing. It is important that a dialogue is established between the SFA and the IoA to maintain quality and consistency, and although we understand skills policy is devolved, it should have a dialogue with relevant authorities appointed by the devolved administrations, with many companies operating across borders.

Other Functions

We support the annual report structure to ensure the Secretary of State can monitor the effectiveness of the IOA in delivering against the core principles. We believe that employers and employer groups should also be canvassed on its effectiveness on delivery.

We support a regular review of Apprenticeship Standards as a matter of course, and the frequency of this should be set by the employers responsible for the creation of the standard. There should also be a mechanism for employers (regardless of whether they were on the initial development group) to be able to signal an earlier review of Standards if it is deemed necessary to ensure it responds to new skills requirements and innovation.

Working with key partners

A collaborative approach is crucial for ensuring the quality of apprenticeships when inspections/audits are undertaken of training institutions. IoA will be the 'experts' in helping prep these organisations to effectively assess the quality of education in apprenticeship delivery, and should play a key role in the assessment criteria used by these partners. IoA should draw on its pool of employers and employer bodies in performing this function.

Engaging Apprentices

We support the apprentice voice being heard in the IoA and apprenticeship development generally. We would recommend that the IoA work closely with the National Union of Students to create and feed into any 'Apprenticeship Panel' and generally for oversight of the IoA's work.

Overseeing a fair and open system

We agree with the notion that organisations should not be seeking to profit from the new apprenticeship system. We think this is particularly poignant with End-Test assessment organisations. Employers want the significant majority of funding to go towards the rigorous training programmes within Apprenticeship Standards and not the pockets of profiteering assessment organisations.

Yours Faithfully,



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