



Skills Commission call for evidence on apprenticeships and social mobility

Response from the Chartered Association of Business Schools

The Call for Evidence documents are available at:

http://www.policyconnect.org.uk/sc/sites/site_sc/files/news/464/fieldnewsdownloads/callforevidence-stakeholders.pdf

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Chartered ABS response to the Skills Commission call for evidence on apprenticeships & social mobility

The Chartered Association of Business Schools is the voice of the UK's business and management education sector. The UK's business and management education sector represents 1 in 7 university students and contributes £3.25b to the UK economy. Its management students go on to lead global businesses and its entrepreneurs contribute to our dynamic economy. Its research has an impact across society and helps to turn our capacity for invention into viable businesses. Our members consist of 120 business schools and higher education providers, as well as affiliate stakeholders, corporate members and international partners.

Apprenticeships policy in the UK has undergone a period of rapid transformation in recent years, with the recent introduction of the apprenticeship levy, a move from frameworks to standards, and the Government target of 3 million apprenticeships by 2020. Whilst this increased focus on apprenticeships is welcome, it is vital that disadvantaged young people, who arguably have the most to gain from apprenticeships, are not overlooked in the race to meet this target.

Accordingly, the Skills Commission published a call for evidence on 2 August 2017 to investigate how these recent reforms to the apprenticeship system support social mobility.

The Chartered ABS undertook to gather evidence on this topic on behalf of the business and management education sector. To this end a survey was distributed to members on 11 August with a deadline for returns of 25 August.

The findings from this survey have been consolidated in the analysis below.

1. Do you think there are any barriers to disadvantaged young people accessing apprenticeships? Please give examples if you have any.

The vast majority of respondents believe that there are at least some barriers to young people accessing apprenticeships with only one answering that there are none. There were two main barriers mentioned. Firstly, getting a job with a participating employer in the first place can be a challenge for a disadvantaged young person. 'They have to get the apprenticeship job in the first place in order to get on the course; the same potential disadvantages apply here to any qualifications-based entry requirements where social effects are evident.' In addition, for degree or higher apprenticeships in particular, many disadvantaged young people may not meet the entry criteria or be able to navigate the admissions process.

2. How well do you think disadvantaged young people progress in apprenticeships? This can either be to a higher level apprenticeship/qualification or a better paid role within a company.

Several respondents felt they were unable to answer this question adequately. Others felt that progression was variable and is dependent on the individual or other factors such as the level of support received from the employer. 'I think this really depends on the company they work for as disadvantaged young people may need more support and encouragement to complete. If they can see the career progression possibilities within the company at the end of the apprenticeship this will help to motivate them'. Most feel that disadvantaged young people can progress well under the right circumstance.

3. What impact do you think the apprenticeship levy will have? For example on the number of apprenticeships available, the age at which people are employed on to apprenticeships, the levels and regional availability of apprentices. Are these changes positive?

Most respondents were supportive of the apprenticeship levy with one stating that it 'is the best thing to have happened to disadvantaged aspiring young people wanting to get a degree qualification.' This approval was not quite universal with several comments outlining possible negative effects. These mainly focussed on the belief that training budgets are finite and that legislating for an increase in one area will result in a decrease in other areas. 'It's hard to anticipate how this will play out, but if employers are 'forced' to take on HDA students then perhaps they will invest less in lower level apprentices (e.g. L3), and - of more concern to HEIs - less in Executive Education and CPD.' This may negatively impact further career progression.

4. Is there anything additional you think the government/employers/training providers could do to boost social mobility in apprenticeships?

Most respondents feel that the various institutions could do more to provide information and promote the benefits of apprenticeships to young people - schools in particular are seen as lacking in this area. 'Much more publicity at school level is needed to get the message across that degree apprenticeships offer a viable alternative to a traditional degree - very few schools seem to include them in any depth in their post-18 routes information.' This lack of information given by schools may arise from a nervousness that this scheme may go the way of 14-19 Diplomas. Consistency in government policy would go a long way to resolving this nervousness.

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