

John Hayes MP

Minister of State for Further Education,
Skills and Lifelong Learning

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Dear Colleague

APPRENTICESHIPS – PROTECTING AND DRIVING UP QUALITY

I wrote to you earlier this month to encourage you to get involved with National Apprenticeship Week, which is taking place 6-10 February. Ahead of that I am writing to update you on the latest developments in the programme and what we are doing to assure quality.

As you know, we have been proud to deliver record growth in Apprenticeships, at every age and level of programme, and in every part of the country. Now, as we look to build on that success, quality is my top priority, ensuring that every Apprenticeship matches the standards of the very best.

Apprenticeships are a tried and tested model with a proven track record of delivering benefits to apprentices and employers. Through apprenticeships individuals gain new skills that enhance their career prospects over the long-term – with those with an Intermediate Level Apprenticeship earning on average between £48,000 and £74,000 more over their lifetime than similar individuals with a Level 1 or (other) Level 2 qualification; and those with an Advanced Level Apprenticeship earning on average between £77,000 and £117,000 more over their lifetime, compared with similar individuals with a Level 2 qualification.

For employers, evidence shows that apprentices increase productivity and efficiency, with 80% of those who employ apprentices agreeing that they make the workplace more effective, and 88% agreeing that Apprenticeships lead to a more motivated and satisfied workforce. Research also suggests that employers recoup the costs of investing in an Apprenticeship within two to three years in most cases.

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Independent evaluation indicates a very significant total economic return (consisting of benefits to individuals and employers) for each pound of Government investment in the Apprenticeship programme.

But, despite this already impressive record of delivering benefits to those involved, the Government recognises the need to protect and continuously improve the quality of Apprenticeships, and to crack down on provision.

The Government has already introduced extensive measures to safeguard and improve quality. The Apprenticeships programme is now underpinned by statutory standards. Published in January 2011, the *Specification of Apprenticeship Standards in England* (SASE) sets out the standards that all Apprenticeship frameworks in England must meet. SASE is designed to ensure the consistency of Apprenticeship and that all frameworks offer on and off the job guided learning leading to the achievement of recognised high quality qualifications and an Apprenticeship Completion Certificate.

In addition, Key Skills in English and maths are being replaced by Functional Skills because they are more stretching and transferable qualifications. We are now working to help training providers introduce the new qualifications.

Also, we have moved to ensure that all apprentices are employed. Apprenticeships offer young people and adults the opportunity to develop their confidence, skills and knowledge through a blend of formal off-the-job training, combined with mentoring and feedback in the workplace. This is what sets an Apprenticeship apart from training schemes.

But, having already taken these steps to improve the programme, I am determined to do more still. Quantity must be matched by quality; So, measures announced in recent months include:


- more robust and timely action to crack down on poor provision from training providers that do not meet the standards that learners and employers demand – including withdrawing funding where quality does not improve;
- requiring every provider to support their apprentices in the achievement of GCSE equivalent in English and maths;
- driving quality through consumer empowerment and transparency by improving employer and apprentice access to objective and comparable information on providers;
- having an independent employer-led review of Apprenticeship standards that will look at how we can ensure continuing quality improvement for every Apprenticeship so meeting the evolving needs of employers;

- ensuring that all Apprenticeships involve a rigorous period of learning that normally extends over at least 12 months, with that being a requirement for all 16 to 18-year old apprentices from August 2012, as new contracts to training providers are issued;
- Assessment of the means of extending this minimum requirement to other age ranges;
- Expecting the National Apprenticeship Service to work with the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils to tighten guidance in developing Apprenticeship frameworks and assessment of existing frameworks to ensure that expectations on national standards and rigour are met; and
- Expecting the Skills Funding Agency to tighten the contracts with colleges and other training providers to allow the immediate withdrawal of funding from provision where quality standards are not met,
- Review sub-contracting arrangements to assure and strengthen the quality of delivery where such arrangements in are in place.

The Apprenticeships programme has proved itself to be a success, but it is vital that we build on the excellence of what has already been achieved. A crucial part of that is building and maintaining standards and quality in the programme, which we are well on the way to doing.

Finally, I hope that as many of you as possible will join me in making National Apprenticeship Week, from 6 February, a great success once again.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Hayes', written over a horizontal line.

JOHN HAYES