

ON- AND OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING IN
APPRENTICESHIPS IN ENGLAND



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DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in sections written by the authors are those of the authors and do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

INTRODUCTION

Gatsby has a long-standing interest in raising the quality of apprenticeships. High-quality apprenticeships increase productivity, which in turn improves national prosperity, and enables individuals to have fulfilling and rewarding careers.

The quality of an apprenticeship is determined by the quality of education and training that is received by the apprentice. Much of the recent discussion about apprenticeships has focussed on the regulatory and funding environment. This is critical to the understanding and sustainability of apprenticeships, but it is what is happening on the ground that will ultimately determine whether recent and current reforms deliver a high-quality national system of apprenticeships.

For the majority of European apprenticeship systems, it makes sense to conceptualise apprenticeship training in two forms: on- and off-the-job. Gatsby therefore commissioned two research projects so as to understand more about how the reforms were changing the training of apprentices:

- *On-the-job training in apprenticeship in England* by Michaela Brockmann and Ian Laurie at the University of Southampton
- *The factors affecting the quality of the 'off-the-job' element of apprenticeships in the West Midlands region* by Rob Smith and Vanessa Cui at Birmingham City University.

These two pieces of research show that while (as in all apprenticeship systems) the role of the employer is key, the demarcation between on- and off-the-job training is much less straightforward in England than elsewhere. We were delighted that the researchers subsequently agreed to work with us to produce a single report which describes their research and includes an agreed set of recommendations based on their findings.

The structure of this report is as follows:

- Part 1** A brief history of apprenticeship policy and an overview of current policy
- Part 2** On-the-job training
- Part 3** Off-the-job training
- Part 4** Conclusion and recommendations

PART I A BRIEF HISTORY OF APPRENTICESHIP POLICY AND AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT POLICY

TWENTIETH-CENTURY APPRENTICESHIPS AND EARLIER

Throughout most of Europe, apprenticeships were originally defined by a contract between an apprentice and their master, with the terms, conditions and completion of the contract being overseen by the relevant Guild. The restriction of trade by Guilds to those who had completed an apprenticeship made the training attractive (not to say essential) and, as a result, apprentices would often pay a master a premium to be taken on as an apprentice.

In 1563 the Statute of Artificers attempted to regulate apprenticeships in England by laying down conditions such as the length of the apprenticeship – seven years – and the numbers of apprentices that a master could take on. In the 19th century many of the original trades identified in the Statute no longer provided effective coverage of the labour market and so the Statute was repealed. Despite this, in many industries an apprenticeship was still seen as an effective way of enabling young people to enter the workplace.

Apprenticeship training in a more recognisable form started to emerge at the start of the 20th century, with it becoming ‘common practice in many trades in the 20th century for apprentices to spend a proportion of their time engaged in further training at a technical school’ (Cowman, 2014: 5).¹ Additionally, vocational qualifications, such as those offered by City & Guilds, started to be taken as part of the apprenticeship.

Apprenticeships continued to be a significant form of youth training throughout the 20th century, reaching a peak in the 1960s before starting a gradual decline, ‘with half as many apprentices in employment in 1995 as there were in 1979’ (Mirza-Davies, 2015).² Although there were attempts to reform apprenticeships throughout this period of decline, it was not until the introduction of the Modern Apprenticeship in 1993 that significant change took place (Gospel, 1997).³

MODERN APPRENTICESHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIP FRAMEWORKS

Modern Apprenticeships were designed around National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) which drew their content from occupational standards developed by employer bodies. The NVQ was a modular qualification which, in theory, made it easier for employers to match pathways within the NVQs to the training they already offered for specialist roles within their organisation (Fuller, 1996).⁴ However, many observers noted that NVQs were frequently much

1 Cowman, K. (2014) *Apprenticeships in Britain c. 1890-1920: an overview based on contemporary evidence*. [Online]. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/402423/Apprenticeships_1914.pdf [Accessed 30 October 2020]

2 Mirza-Davies, J. (2015) *A short history of apprenticeships in England: from medieval craft guilds to the twenty-first century*. [Online]. London: House of Commons Library. Available from: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/economy-business/work-incomes/a-short-history-of-apprenticeships-in-england-from-medieval-craft-guilds-to-the-twenty-first-century/> [Accessed 30 October 2020]

3 Gospel, H. (1997) *The revival of apprenticeship training in Britain?* [Online]. Centre for Economic Performance discussion paper no. 372. London: London School of Economics and Political Science. Available from: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/20302/1/The_Revival_of_Apprenticeship_Training_in_Britain.pdf [Accessed 30 October 2020]

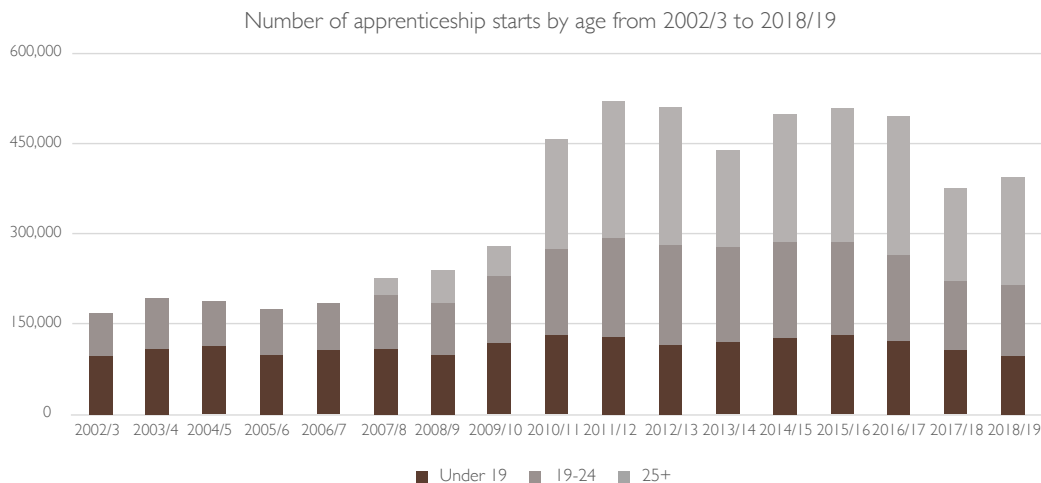
4 Fuller, A. (1996) Modern Apprenticeship, process and learning: some emerging issues. [Online]. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 48(3), 229-248. Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1363682960480302?needAccess=true> [Accessed 30 October 2020]

narrower than the qualifications which had previously been taken as part of apprenticeships (Grugulis, 2003).⁵

The 2001 Cassels Report (Department for Education and Skills, 2001)⁶ attempted to broaden Modern Apprenticeships by proposing a national framework for apprenticeships that consisted of ‘an integrated mixture of specific occupational competence, underpinning vocational knowledge and general skills attested by widely recognised diplomas at foundation and advanced level’. The apprenticeship frameworks that were developed usually contained an occupational qualification such as an NVQ as well as a technical certificate which covered the underpinning occupational knowledge.

As in the past, a Modern Apprenticeship was based on a written agreement between the employer and the apprentice, and also as before, apprenticeships were very much aimed at young people. However, Modern Apprenticeships did not stipulate a minimum apprenticeship length. Rather, the agreement specified the training and qualification that the apprentice would complete, with funding from the government. The participation of government in the funding of apprenticeships led the Institute of Directors to note:

Contrary to the traditional pattern of apprenticeship recruitment, with employers determining the number of apprentices recruited to suit their requirements, [Modern Apprenticeship] recruitment is orchestrated by the Department for Education and Skills, the Learning and Skills Council and supported by a network of training providers (Harris, 2003: 40).⁷



Data source: Department for Education (2020) Apprenticeships and traineeships data. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships>

5 Grugulis, C.I. (2003) The contribution of National Vocational Qualifications to the growth of skills in the UK. [Online]. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41 (3), 457-475. Available from: [https://bradscholars.brad.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10454/954/An%20assessment%20of%20NVQs%20\(BJIR\).pdf;jsessionid=47DC37340E5D37894F0186E6264105F6?sequence=1](https://bradscholars.brad.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10454/954/An%20assessment%20of%20NVQs%20(BJIR).pdf;jsessionid=47DC37340E5D37894F0186E6264105F6?sequence=1) [Accessed 30 October 2020]

6 Department for Education and Skills (2001) *Modern Apprenticeships: the way to work*. The Report of the Modern Apprenticeship Advisory Committee. [Online]. Available from: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6323/1/MA_The_Way_to_Work.pdf [Accessed 30 October 2020]

7 Harris, M. (2003) *Modern Apprenticeships: an assessment of the Government's flagship training programme*. [Online]. IoD Policy Paper. London: Institute of Directors. Available from: <https://studylib.net/doc/14473590/modern-apprenticeships--an-assessment-of-the-government-s> [Accessed 30 October 2020]

A significant development, which continues to shape apprenticeship provision to this day, was the introduction of adult apprenticeships in 2005. The chart above shows how allowing the over-25s to become apprentices made a significant difference to the numbers and demographics of apprenticeship, so that almost 50% of apprenticeship starts in 2018/19 were by over-25s who were often incumbent workers.

Much of this shift towards adult apprentices was driven by the new Coalition Government scrapping the adult training initiative, 'Train to Gain', in 2010 and redirecting the funding to adult apprenticeships (Fuller et al., 2015).⁸ Apprenticeships were seen by government as an important way of addressing the country's perceived deficit in intermediate-level skills when compared with other OECD countries; a deficit that persists (Bosworth and Leach, 2015).⁹ This was in addition to apprenticeships' role in enabling young people's transition into employment. Comparisons with other countries also suggested that the architecture supporting apprenticeships in the UK, in which providers designed programmes and procured places, was costly and ineffective (Steedman, 2010).¹⁰

Concerns around the use of apprenticeships with adults who received little or no training resulted in the 2013 Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2013).¹¹ This set out the minimum requirements to be included in a recognised English apprenticeship framework. A key aspect of SASE was that both intermediate (Level 2) and advanced (Level 3) apprenticeship frameworks had to:

specify the number of Guided Learning Hours (GLH) that an apprentice must receive to complete the framework. This must be a minimum of 280 GLH of which at least 100 GLH or 30% (whichever is the greater) must be delivered off-the-job and clearly evidenced. The remaining GLH must be delivered on-the-job and clearly evidenced. Guided learning relates to training which is designed to achieve clear and specific outcomes which contribute directly to the successful achievement of the Apprenticeship framework (BIS, 2013: 11).

THE RICHARD REVIEW AND APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS

The 2012 Richard Review¹² provided a detailed evaluation of apprenticeship frameworks. Richard recommended jettisoning the then 'extraordinary number of qualifications' (Richard 2012: 6) and replacing them with a smaller number of occupational standards. Richard warned against the use of apprenticeships as a catch-all qualification encompassing all levels of vocational training in all occupational areas:

8 Fuller, A., Leonard, P., Unwin, L. and Davey, G. (2015) *Does apprenticeship work for adults?: the experiences of adult apprentices in England*. [Online]. London: Nuffield Foundation. Available from: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/does-apprenticeship-work-for-adults>

9 Bosworth, D. and Leach, A. (2015) *UK skill levels and international competitiveness 2014*. [Online]. (Evidence Report 96). London: UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/470017/skill_levels_2014.pdf [Accessed 23 November 2020]

10 Steedman, H. (2010) *The state of apprenticeships in 2010*. [Online]. London: Centre for Economic Performance, The London School of Economics and Political Science. Available from: <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/special/cepsp22.pdf> [Accessed 23 November 2020]

11 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) *Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England*. [Online]. (BIS/13/686). London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Available from: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/17405/1/bis-13-686-specification-of-apprenticeship-standards-for-england-sase.pdf> [Accessed 30 October 2020]

12 Richard, D. (2012) *The Richard Review of Apprenticeships*. [Online]. (BIS/12/1323). London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34708/richard-review-full.pdf [Accessed 30 October 2020]

We are wrong to think apprenticeship is the only effective form of vocational training, which must be stretched to fill every task. Training to improve the skills of someone who has been in their job for some time, or is not yet ready to commence a job, are vital in their own terms... But they require different models; imposing an apprenticeship model on these functions risks delivering poorer value for money, the wrong approach to training, and risks distracting apprenticeships from their core purpose (Richard, 2012: 6).

The Review concluded that: 'For apprenticeships to be successful there must be adequate and balanced demand for apprenticeships by employers and learners' (Richard, 2012: 122).

Importantly, the Richard Review also identified the importance of differentiating between off-the-job training and in-work training and for this reason advocated off-site training:

Off-site training, not just off-the-job, is important to specify because today, when training is on-site but off-the-job, this can often be hard to distinguish from normal on-the-job training and easily merges into work and loses its value. Too often today the requirements for off-the-job learning this can be limited to self-guided learning, and provider-led assessment, with little meaningful training away from the burdens of day to day work (Richard 2012: 90).

The government's 2013 implementation plan (BIS, 2013)¹³ developed many of the themes from the Richard Review. It defined an apprenticeship thus:

An Apprenticeship is a job that requires substantial and sustained training, leading to the achievement of an Apprenticeship standard and the development of transferable skills.

This definition is underpinned by four principles of future Apprenticeships:

- an Apprenticeship is a job, in a skilled occupation;
- an Apprenticeship requires substantial and sustained training, lasting a minimum of 12 months, and including off-the-job training;
- an Apprenticeship leads to full competency in an occupation, demonstrated by the achievement of an apprenticeship standard that is defined by employers; and
- an Apprenticeship develops transferable skills, including English and maths, to progress careers (BIS, 2013: 9).

Under the plan, 'trailblazer' groups of employers were tasked with devising sets of standards, no longer than two sides of A4, to replace the old apprenticeship frameworks. It translated the Richard Review's vision into an interaction between three stakeholders: employers, apprentices and government, in which:

¹³ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) *The future of apprenticeships in England: implementation plan*. [Online]. (BIS/13/1175). London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253073/bis-13-1175-future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-implementation-plan.pdf [Accessed 30 October 2020]

the government's role is to set the principles and criteria for Apprenticeships to ensure they are rigorous and responsive; the apprentice's role is to work hard in their pursuit of the Apprenticeship standard and the employer's role is to drive the system, ensuring that Apprenticeships deliver the skills required to meet their needs and the needs of the future economy (BIS, 2013: 10).

THE APPRENTICESHIP LEVY

The 2015 Conservative manifesto pledged to create three million new apprenticeships by 2020. To help drive this expansion, the first budget after the election introduced an apprenticeship levy, the details of which were set out in the 2015 November Spending Review:

It will be set at a rate of 0.5% of an employer's paybill. Each employer will receive an allowance of £15,000 to offset against their levy payment. This means that the levy will only be paid on any paybill in excess of £3 million and that less than 2% of UK employers will pay it (HM Treasury, 2015).¹⁴

For employers who were not subject to the levy, the government committed to pay 90% (later changed to 95%) of the costs of the apprenticeship. It is worth noting that previously there had been an expectation that employers would contribute to the costs of an apprenticeship, but that it was unclear whether this was happening in practice. A study by the Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER) suggests that 'the number of Apprenticeship starts has declined by approximately 24% following the introduction of the Levy' (Battiston et al., 2020).¹⁵

Various policy announcements in 2015 positioned apprenticeships as 'the flagship programme for delivering the skills that employers need' (BIS, 2015: 35).¹⁶ The reforms presented apprenticeships as a medium-term investment, with buy-in from employers to be secured because '[t]he cost of apprenticeship training pays for itself within one or two years of completion, through the increased productivity of the former apprentice' (BIS 2015: 3). The reform programme of 2015 was ambitious, aiming to:

incorporat[e] the features of well-regarded apprenticeship systems abroad into our own. These features include greater employer ownership, a good grounding in English and maths, careers guidance and high quality, well-equipped training providers' (BIS 2015: 4).

These reforms positioned employers at the heart of the new apprenticeships: *Nobody understands the skills employers need better than the employers themselves. That is why we are placing them in the driving seat. They are designing apprenticeships so that they focus on exactly the skills, knowledge and behaviours that are required of the workforce of the future (BIS, 2015: 2).*

¹⁴ HM Treasury (2015) *Spending review and autumn statement 2015*. [Online]. Policy paper: Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-and-autumn-statement-2015-documents/spending-review-and-autumn-statement-2015> [Accessed 30 October 2020]

¹⁵ Battiston, A., Patrignani, P., Conlon, G., Dickerson, A. and McIntosh, S. (2020) *Exploring trends in apprenticeship training around the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy: emerging evidence using a matched apprentice-employer dataset*. [Online]. (Briefing Note 011). London: Centre for Vocational Education Research and London School of Economics & Political Science. Available from: <http://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverbrf011.pdf> [Accessed 30 October 2020]

¹⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2015) *English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 vision*. [Online]. (BIS/15/604). London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482754/BIS-15-604-english-apprenticeships-our-2020-vision.pdf [Accessed 30 October 2020]

However, BIS also noted that apprenticeships were not just about meeting the demand of the employer, stating that:

A key expectation of our reforms is that apprenticeships must be more than just training for a single job or employer: they must ensure that apprentices can adapt to a variety of roles, with different employers, and develop the ability to progress their careers. All employer-led apprenticeship standards must therefore demonstrate acquisition of transferrable skills – such as self-management, communication and interpersonal skills, problem solving, innovation and creativity. (BIS, 2015: 12-13)

In *English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 vision*, the government also acknowledges the role training providers would have in apprenticeships:

Every apprenticeship must have an Apprenticeship Agreement. This contract of service between the apprentice and the employer confirms that the apprentice is undertaking an apprenticeship and the standard they are following. It must be in place in order for an employer to claim Government funding. Supplementing this is a new required ‘Statement of Commitment’ signed by the employer, provider and apprentice. This sets out the key expectations, roles and responsibilities of each party involved in the apprenticeship (BIS 2015: 15-16).

The 2015 November Spending Review also announced the creation of

a new employer-led body to set apprenticeship standards and ensure quality. The body will be independent of government and will also advise on the level of levy funding each apprenticeship should receive. Funding caps will be significantly higher for programmes which have high costs and are of high quality (HM Treasury, 2015).

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE) is now responsible for the development and approval of apprenticeship standards and their associated assessment plans. It also sets the funding cap for the different standards. The table below shows the numbers of apprenticeship standards currently¹⁷ available for delivery in the different routes at the different levels.

Table 1 The numbers of apprenticeship standards available for delivery by route and level as of March 2020

Route	Level						Total
	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Agriculture, environmental and animal care	12	11	1		1	1	26
Business and administration	1	10	11	4	4	1	31
Care services	1	1	1	2	2		7
Catering and hospitality	5	3	2				10
Construction	35	27	8		12	2	84
Creative and design	1	21	5	2	2	5	36
Digital		6	10		5	1	22
Education and childcare	1	3	1	1	1	1	8
Engineering and manufacturing	27	48	16	5	17	10	123

¹⁷ As of 27 March 2020.

Hair and beauty	4	1					5
Health and science	7	15	4	9	21	9	65
Legal, finance and accounting	4	12	9		7	6	38
Protective services	1	8	5		2		16
Sales, marketing and procurement	8	12	7		5		32
Transport and logistics	14	9	3	2	5		33
Total	121	187	83	25	84	36	536

Data source: Institute for Apprenticeships (2020) Search the apprenticeship standards. Available from: <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards>

Alongside the introduction of IFATE and the levy, changes were made to the way that minimum training was specified, with apprentices now required to spend a minimum of 20% of their paid working time in off-the-job training (Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), 2017).¹⁸ These new requirements, backed by a new definition of off-the-job training, now drive apprenticeship provision. These reforms seek to ensure that apprenticeship includes a substantial amount of training compared with a past where too many apprenticeships involved little actual training (Field, 2018).¹⁹

SUMMARY

Apprenticeships have a long history in England. Throughout their history the essence of a successful apprenticeship has been a mutually beneficial relationship between the employer and the apprentice.

Particularly in the last twenty years, apprenticeships have been seen by government as a solution to problems such as social mobility, skills shortages, and productivity. As a result, government has become a much more active participant in apprenticeships – incentivising employers to offer them, and regulating to protect public investment and individual apprentices.

The tension between meeting the employer's need for productive work, the apprentice's need to develop skills which will have long-term value, and a range of government agendas is not a new one. The two following chapters present findings of research into the training of apprentices both on and off the job, exploring how the two forms are delivered and how these tensions are currently playing out in workplaces and classrooms in England. The Conclusion to this report (see page 36) explores how these tensions might be resolved.

¹⁸ Education and Skills Funding Agency (2017). *Apprenticeship off-the-job training: policy background and examples*. [Online]. (DFE-00152-2017). London: Department for Education. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-off-the-job-training> [Accessed 23 November 2020]

¹⁹ Field, S. (2018). *Taking training seriously: lessons from an international comparison of off-the-job training for apprenticeships in England*. [Online]. London: The Gatsby Charitable Foundation. Gatsby Foundation, London. Available from: <http://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/final-apprenticeships-and-off-the-job-training-may-2018.pdf> [Accessed 30 October 2020]

PART 2 ON-THE-JOB TRAINING IN APPRENTICESHIP IN ENGLAND

Michaela Brockmann and Ian Laurie, University of Southampton

This section discusses findings of a small-scale study into the extent, content and nature of the on-the-job training received by apprentices at Levels 2 and 3, compared with entry-level employees going for the same job. In particular, we sought to identify the elements that are distinctive about on-the-job training in apprenticeships and about those delivering this training.

In view of the variation in the nature of apprenticeships across different sectors and employer organisations (Fuller and Unwin, 2017), the research was conducted across five contrasting sectors: Engineering and Construction (sectors that have traditionally provided apprenticeships and where high-quality provision is found), Retail and Social Care (where apprenticeships are a relatively new phenomenon and training provision is often poor), and Digital (also a new sector for apprenticeship but generally at the higher end of quality provision).

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of current regulation, we started by researching policy documents, followed by interviews with national and sector-level stakeholder bodies. In the main part of the study, we then conducted interviews with two employers in each of the five sectors (one large employer and one small-to medium-sized employer (SME)).²⁰ The data presented here are based on 21 interviews with 37 managers, trainers, supervisors and apprentices in each of these organisations (see Table 1 for details). The interviews enabled us to investigate the actual practice of workplace training in the current policy context, paying attention to the individual perspectives of managers, trainers and apprentices.

Table 1 Summary of employer interviews.

Employers by sector	Interviews and Participants
Engineering	
Large	1 joint interview with the Director of Skills and the Apprenticeship Manager 1 joint interview with two Trainers 1 joint interview with three Apprentices
SME	1 joint interview with two Managers 1 joint interview with a Technician/Trainer and an Apprentice
Construction	
Large	1 joint interview with one Manager and one Project Manager/Trainer 1 interview with an Apprentice
SME	1 joint interview with the Resource & Development Manager and with a Surveyor/Trainer 1 interview with an Apprentice

²⁰ Due to difficulties in identifying a retail SME willing to take part in the study, we recruited an independent regional retail store. Although technically classified as a 'large' employer, it constituted an interesting contrast with the national retailer.

Digital	
Large	1 joint interview with a Manager, a Trainer, and an Apprentice
SME	1 joint interview with a Manager and a Trainer 1 interview with an Apprentice
Social Care	
Large	1 interview with the Learning & Development Manager 1 interview with the Care Home Manager/Trainer
SME	1 joint interview with the Director and two Managers/Trainers 1 joint interview with three Apprentices
Retail	
National Retailer (large)	1 interview with the Apprenticeship Manager 1 joint interview with the Area Manager and the Store Manager 1 joint interview with two Apprentices
Regional Retailer (large)	1 interview with the Learning & Development Manager 1 interview with one Apprentice

THE CONTEXT

The growing popularity of apprenticeship as a model of learning (Fuller and Unwin, 2009, 2013) in recent decades relies on an appreciation of the benefits of workplace or 'situated' learning in the formation of skills (Evans et al., 2006). These centre on ideas whereby apprentices are initiated into an occupation through participation in the work environment (or 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991)). In this model it is recognised that apprentices are learners who gradually become more proficient as their knowledge and skills increase over time, through deliberate guidance and support. The role of the employer is of course crucial here.

As is well-known, however, apprenticeships in England have been driven by third-party training providers, diminishing the central role of employers so critical in dual apprenticeships on the Continent (Kuczera and Field, 2018). Unlike in those systems, there are few requirements on employers in England wanting to recruit an apprentice. Indeed, as long as certain criteria are met, any company may provide apprenticeships, regardless of experience of doing so, or of having the necessary resources (e.g. in terms of trained staff) (e.g. Fuller and Unwin, 2017). Whereas training providers are subject to inspection by OFSTED, there is no such quality assurance system in place for on-the-job training provided by the employer, other than the training provider monitoring the apprentice's progress.

There is thus little in the current regulations in terms of employer responsibility for the apprenticeship in general and for on-the-job training in particular. Only the funded (off-the-job) element is regulated, and this is the responsibility of the training provider. Under the previous statutory legislation (DfE, 2018) the requirement was for 280 Guided Learning Hours (GLH), which included on-programme assessment. The assessor would visit the workplace to observe the apprentice carrying out specific tasks, which commonly did not entail any learning, but an accreditation of existing skills. According to the IFATE representative interviewed for this study, the previous focus on assessment encouraged the widespread practice of recruiting apprentices whilst providing little or no training, leading to 'a high volume of low-quality apprenticeships' (particularly with large

employers in certain non-traditional sectors). The new off-the-job funding rule seeks to ensure that apprentices have access to substantial training.

The main requirement for an employer wanting to offer an apprenticeship as stipulated in the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)'s Apprenticeship Funding Rules and Guidance for Employers (2019) is that an apprenticeship must be based on a 'contract of service' between the employer and the apprentice. The apprentice must have a job role 'that provides the opportunity for them to gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to achieve their apprenticeship' and the employer must provide 'appropriate support and supervision on the job'. These last two requirements are not specified in any detail in the guidelines. Indeed, it is the training provider's responsibility to ensure that they are met, as indicated in the Commitment Statement (ESFA, 2019b).

In the ESFA's (2019a) definition of apprenticeship, it is further stated that:

*Through their apprenticeship, apprentices will gain the technical knowledge, practical experience and wider skills they need for their immediate job and future career. The apprentice gains this through a wide mix of learning in the workplace, formal off-the-job training and **the opportunity to practise these new skills** in a real work environment. (Emphasis added)*

Interestingly, the (somewhat vague) requirement on the employer to enable the apprentice to **practise new skills in the work environment** appears to be the main reference to on-the-job training. Indeed, as explained by the ESFA representative interviewed for this study, rather than opting for regulation, the government's approach was to promote 'best practice', which was outlined as follows:

*An apprentice should have people around them that they can learn from, and these should **be competent individuals that understand that they are an apprentice and that they will be learning new skills**. While it will normally be the training provider teaching new knowledge, skills and behaviours to reach occupational competency, the employer should be providing support in the workplace **to consolidate those new skills and practise them** and just have people, e.g. line manager, colleagues, mentor or coach to ask for help. (ESFA representative) (Emphasis added)*

As this report shows, awareness and understanding of apprenticeship as a model of learning differed considerably between the employers we interviewed.

EMPLOYERS PROVIDING QUALITY ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

All our engineering, construction and IT companies provided comprehensive on-the-job training as part of high-quality apprenticeships. These employers took a central role in co-ordinating, delivering and monitoring apprenticeships, out of a concern for staff retention and developing their future workforce:

...in the next ten years 40% of our workforce are due for retirement age so it makes absolute sense to have a talent pipeline that comes through...
(Apprenticeship Manager, Large Engineering Employer)

[we] spent a lot of money on upskilling [our] workforce as part of the philosophy to make sure that the staff we have are retained [...] Construction is a really volatile environment in terms of staff movement and churn rates... (Surveyor/Trainer, Construction SME)

Notably, on-the-job training was designed to develop occupational competence. Apprentices were trained in job roles characterised by occupational breadth, based on an understanding of the organisation as a whole and their position within it. Managers and trainers explained that this was vital for collaboration and teamwork between different parts of the business. In Construction, apprentices were placed with diverse areas of work for a matter of months at a time:

... [the apprentice] would need to learn the commercial side of things, because our commercial and operational teams need to understand each other, so you would spend something like three months on that side. You would also learn all the other elements, so the estimating, the planning and that is the way that he gets an [overarching] theory behind the whole business, how everything he does impacts on them, and how everything they do impacts on him (Manager, Construction SME)

It was apparent that on-the-job training went far beyond what was required by the standards or frameworks. Many participants commented that the skills element could be achieved in a much shorter period of time and through a narrower scope of activities. At the large Engineering employer, apprentices were put on a series of placements on the shop floor:

...the idea of having different rotational placements we know that that gives people a broad exposure and it puts them into different sort of environments [...] because you could arguably cover your NVQ or your development competence qualifications in maybe one or two placements but we've deliberately done it in a variety... (Trainer, Large Engineering Employer)

The training aimed to develop apprentices for job roles far broader than the scope of the apprenticeships. Nevertheless, employers felt that the apprenticeship offered a model of learning that benefited their organisation. It provided an important structure for on-the-job training, and the off-the-job element ensured vital theoretical underpinning. Apprenticeship was valued as initiation into a community of practice, enabling apprentices to gain an understanding of the work environment:

So that's one of the reasons why the apprenticeship is so good, because you literally come in at the entry-entry level, understand the way we process things from the beginning [...] [the training provider] provides a schedule throughout the whole of their apprenticeship and then we [...] plan their year basically around it, to make sure that they can fulfil the course as well as the job. (Manager, IT SME)

As reflected in the above quote, the off- and on-the-job elements were commonly closely aligned, allowing the apprentice to apply in the workplace the knowledge gained off the job. To this end, employers adopted a carefully planned approach, collaborating closely with training providers. Many employers developed their own in-house training plans:

...what we try to do is base what they are doing [on site] around what they are doing on their day release at college. If they are looking at brickwork for example, I will make sure that [the apprentice] is helping on the brickwork package... (Manager, Large Construction Employer)

We work out where to put them, who to put them with, assign them a mentor, enrol them into college and give them a training plan that works alongside that, so that they focus on their training plan when they are with us four days. (Manager, Construction SME)

The plans covered extensive on-the-job training which integrated the apprenticeship criteria so as to ensure that apprentices met the requirements of the job as well as that of the apprenticeship. It guided day-to-day on-the-job training and progression:

[The apprentice] would work alongside me and we would work through his training plan together, to make sure that he is making the progress that he needs to make, to demonstrate to the business that he is achieving what he needs in the apprenticeship. (Surveyor/Trainer, Construction SME)

Whilst employers made sure that the apprenticeship criteria were covered within their in-house training, their primary concern was with occupational breadth and that the apprentice was becoming a full member of the community of practice:

...we will try and make sure that during the course of those two years, we have ticked each box. But, generally in terms of general learning, it is trying to make him part of the team [...] and just being involved in all elements throughout the day-to-day running of the site. (Manager, Large Construction Employer)

The main elements of on-the-job training were mentoring and shadowing. These terms were used interchangeably and involved the apprentice working alongside a trainer or senior worker, observing or assisting them. Mentoring and shadowing took place throughout the apprenticeship and were deemed critical in the process of 'bringing on' apprentices: initiating them into a community of practice and training them in a wide range of skills. Enabling the apprentice to gradually take on more responsibilities was a crucial part of the process. In the IT SME, apprentices were placed with a mentor over months at a time in each of the different work areas, starting with the hardware workshop:

...we bring in a school leaver and on day one, we teach them the very basics of IT [...] we do that by installing them in our workshop for between six to eight months on average. Their initial exposure to IT is done by shadowing a full-time employee who does that job today. (Manager, IT SME)

Mentoring was seen as crucial in ensuring apprentices became fully proficient in a wide range of skills. This was a gradual process, reflecting the complexity of the areas of work and the skills needed:

[The apprentice] would sit with me as new sub-contractors come to [the] site, and I would go through the [task] with him and I would explain to him what we are looking for here [...] how we are making sure it is safe on site, how we are making sure the quality is there. He would see me do it and then I would watch him do it, and it would be a process until he is comfortable just doing it himself autonomously, without my support. But, it wouldn't be until I am ready to let him do that on his own... (Surveyor/Trainer, Construction SME)

Through day-to-day participation across the work environment under the careful guidance by senior workers, apprentices were learning about entire processes:

...that's where the working together at the first stages come into play... I'm not only learning about components and the mechanical side of things; I'm learning a process, a thought process, a way to work to teach you to be clean, good housekeeping and do this this way [...] rather than if you were to do things your own way you might be all over the place... (Technician/Trainer, Engineering SME)

Mentoring was deemed critical in ensuring that apprentices became fully proficient in what were highly technical skill areas. The gradual transition from novice to expert (Lave and Wenger, 1991) was essential, and employers stressed that it was vital that apprentices had achieved a certain level of knowledge and skills before they could be expected to work independently:

I think they need to get themselves to a certain level before they can be let loose to work on stuff on their own [...] I do a lot of engine rebuilds, diagnostic work and servicing as well [...] if I give something to [the apprentice] I need to be 100% sure that he's capable so I haven't got to go back to it and rectify issues. (Technician/Trainer, Engineering SME)

The apprentice at the Construction SME related that during his first job with the company he was 'just following the site manager'. Since then he had gradually taken on more responsibility, all the while working alongside a senior person. As he was coming to the end of his two-year apprenticeship, he was looking forward to being assigned jobs of his own:

I've just grown in my knowledge and still working with somebody, but I don't think they'd put me alone up [there] until now that I'm towards the end of it [...] they wouldn't throw me in the deep end because there's so much that could go wrong [...] I've got to the point where I can take tasks [...] we just divide the workload up. And I think soon I'll be going on and just having my own job completely, which will be a nice step. (Apprentice, Construction SME)

The trainer at the large engineering employer explained that mentoring was crucial in ensuring that the work was carried out safely. Once an apprentice started working on the shop floor they were allocated a mentor who was 'a fully-skilled person' and would 'teach them their trade':

...they will teach them exactly how to do it and that's when they start learning [...] within six months the business will see a skill in them where they are confident enough for them to say, "we are building this [component] but I am going to give you this one bit to build yourself safely"... (Trainer, Large Engineering Employer)

Within all four organisations, apprenticeship was founded on a culture of workplace training in which apprentices' status as learners rather than workers was fully acknowledged. Creating learning opportunities and sharing knowledge were critical elements in everyday practice:

You are under pressure to get the job done but it's still a relaxed enough atmosphere, you can still take a few minutes to discuss things [...] If there's ever something quirky or interesting going on, most people come over and have a look... (Technician/Trainer, Engineering SME)

Apprentices in these workplaces were not expected to be fully productive during the apprenticeship, whilst employers saw the training they provided as an essential investment:

The first two years I don't ... maybe the latter part of the second year I look at their productivity and how efficient they are, but [...] they're apprentices, so I might look at it but it's for my benefit just to see they're progressing. (Manager, Engineering SME)

EMPLOYERS PROVIDING LIMITED ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

The most striking aspect of the apprenticeships delivered in the social care and retail sectors was that apprentices were first and foremost fully productive workers rather than learners. For the managers, trainers and apprentices in these organisations, the 'apprenticeship' referred solely to the training employees received as part of the funded off-the-job element, the 20% of their contracted working hours. The apprenticeship was seen as separate from a young person's job and, just as regular employees, they were not deemed to require training whilst at work:

...they're on a normal full contract with a full salary and therefore they operate in those four days as a full employee. The difference is that they've got the opportunity of having that learning on the fifth day, and then putting that learning into practice [...] they would be supervised in some way but not [...] closely supervised, they would be working as an employee. (Apprenticeship Manager, National Retailer)

Notably, the apprenticeship was the responsibility of the training provider:

... we went through all sorts of paperwork with the company, because obviously it's an outside company that do the apprenticeship [...] I signed forms [which included] everything that would be in it. (Apprentice, Regional Retailer)

Off-the-job training was delivered through a set of modules, as part of which apprentices were required to complete a series of tasks or workbooks, supported largely by e-learning. The training provider ensured that the apprenticeship criteria were met. A designated person (variously referred to as 'tutor', 'trainer' or 'coach') visited the apprentices at monthly or two-monthly intervals to review their progress through observations and reviews:

...the trainer goes in to see how they've got on with their e-learning and observes them in work and does the e-learning and coaching with them in their store (Apprenticeship Manager, National Retailer)

Employers saw their responsibility mainly in terms of line-managing the apprentices, including ensuring they were given sufficient time 'to work on their apprenticeship' and acting as a point of contact for the apprentices. Asked whether they had a training plan in place, the store manager of the national retailer referred to the training provider:

That's set by the trainers really, we just we're aware of what they're doing at what stage... (Store Manager, National Retailer)

Managers in these organisations positioned themselves as highly supportive of apprenticeships, insisting that they were always there to provide advice and feedback on the off-the-job element ('the apprenticeship'):

...they've always got me if they need some help with any of those experiences and I've helped both of them a fair bit... (Store Manager, National Retailer)

However, it was clear that responsibility for seeking out learning opportunities was firmly with the apprentices. Employers encouraged them to approach relevant senior workers in order to research aspects of their work and complete their modules. For the Learning & Development Manager at the Regional Retailer, it was about 'empowering apprentices to understand that the apprenticeship was very much a self-driven thing':

...we get them to self-manage [...] there's a store manager there who's very experienced, that's a fountain of knowledge, but they're very busy. Don't wait for them to say, "Right a couple of hours, come sit with me". Actually, you go and demand their time and you tell them what you need from them [...] [for example] if you're struggling with the finance module say to them, "Can I spend a day with you when you're going through the management account figures?" (Learning & Development Manager, Regional Retailer)

This quote reflects the likely time constraints and potential barriers to on-the-job apprenticeship training. The same manager conceded that supporting apprentices presented a challenge due to high workloads and 'the seasonal calendar in retail':

...we have to be quite creative with looking at opportunities [...] So if they're working on a particular workbook [...] they are going away and exploring things from the context of an organisation but also then coming back and finding somebody within the organisation [...] But it is a challenge. (Learning & Development Manager, Regional Retailer)

With little support in place, the apprentice for her part felt left to her own devices, leaving her unsure whether it was acceptable to ask for support:

I had a tutor who came every six weeks-ish, but other than that it was pretty much, 'Here's your workbooks, off you go'. It was very much: you need to find out about this? Go and talk to them. You want to find something about head office? Go and talk to them. Which to start with was a bit like, 'Really, can I just do that?'... (Apprentice, Regional Retailer)

Similarly, whilst the manager of the national retailer encouraged apprentices to seek opportunities for shadowing (for example, in the bakery), by his own admission there was little time in practice:

...we would recommend that they went and shadowed a baker in another store and that way they aren't going to be dragged into normal work [...] But to be honest with you, typically [...] that one day a week off the job is really more about

research and e-learning and meeting their coach so that's quite well taken up with that sort of supported learning (Apprenticeship Manager, National Retailer)

Not only would it require the apprentice to feel confident organising these activities against the likely workplace pressure experienced by senior staff; the apprentice also had to negotiate competing demands in the absence of meaningful support. Apprentices across the four organisations revealed that they struggled to find time to complete the modules because of the pressures of day-to-day work.

As a direct result of apprenticeship within these four organisations being understood as the off-the-job element only, there was no or little on-the-job training for apprentices. Day-to-day work was about applying the knowledge and skills learnt through the off-the-job element. While employers were keen for them to integrate theory and practice, the onus was again on the apprentices:

I strongly advise them to kind of amalgamate the two into each other, don't just think, "I'm on an apprentice day I've got this work to vacate, put that to bed, now I've got this day job", I definitely encourage them to cross over between all of it because that will help not only their apprentice work, but it will help them at work with things they're learning. (Store Manager, National Retailer)

This was echoed by the Apprenticeship Manager who referred to a unit on merchandising the apprentices had completed during the off-the-job element:

...what they'll be doing in the other four days is perhaps filling the shelves using those new skills, recognising the importance of date rotation, helping put away the deliveries, literally they're working but they're able to build their level of knowledge. (Apprenticeship Manager, National Retailer)

On-the-job learning was commonly viewed as unproblematic and not something that needed particular support. Learning would happen naturally as part of day-to-day (productive) processes and working as part of the team – for any member of staff, apprenticed or non-apprenticed. Apprentices were expected to 'pick things up' as part of their day job:

I think that's just the natural process of how care works. If you're working with someone in a caring environment you learn from people around you. (Learning & Development Manager, Large Residential Care Provider)

Apprentices with both social care employers were left to their own devices fairly quickly. One apprentice referred to learning by 'trial and error', adding that 'there's always management to phone':

...sometimes we don't even know we're gaining the information. One day I'll be working with a service user, the next thing you know [their] health condition changes, we start learning about that condition and it doesn't even mean that we've had to learn it from a tutor, the office or even online, we just kind of pick up the knowledge of what we need to do and how to approach the situation. (Apprentice, Home Care Provider SME)

Both social care employers emphasised the importance for all employees (including apprentices) being trained before they started working with vulnerable service users so that training was largely front-loaded. The focus was on in-house training provision, mainly delivered through classroom and e-learning, governed by the Care Certificate (a set of standards designed to develop the UK's health and social care workforce) that all staff were expected to complete.

We have huge amounts of training that we have to achieve 100% on [...] everybody that works here has to achieve it. And there is an extensive amount of courses. (Care Home Manager, Large Residential Care Provider)

The apprenticeship was largely subsumed by this, and there was little extra training or support for apprentices. The Care Home Manager suggested that apart from some optional modules the apprentices could take, the training was 'exactly the same' for all staff. Following the induction, apprentices worked alongside a senior care worker until they were deemed competent to work on their own. This was the same for all employees new to care. However, opportunities for on-the-job training were limited. Representatives of both social care organisations explained that it was not acceptable practice to train staff in the presence of vulnerable service users:

...it's not very dignified for the person [...] you can't do that because for them to be able to do the job well they need to have the training [before they start working]. And it's not suitable to do the training and work at the same time, you just can't (Care Home Manager, Large Residential Care Provider)

Apprentices related they received feedback after a home visit rather than within the service user's home environment:

... we could be on a shift with [the trainer] and she's always like assessing us as well when she's working with us, observing us [...] so there's that advice there for afterwards for the next time rather than on the spot (Apprentice, Home Care Provider SME)

Most apprentices with the large residential care provider were 'conversions', i.e. existing staff who had been with the employer for a while, and who were therefore expected to work independently. Similarly, new recruits with prior experience as care workers were not deemed to require any training but simply needed their existing skills assessed:

...when you have an apprentice who is coming on who has already worked for a number of years in that industry, some of it is not necessarily new learning to them, so it's not necessarily a case of having to teach them, it's a case of assessing them... (Learning & Development Manager, Large Residential Care Provider)

This reflects the previous apprenticeship specifications, when apprenticeship all too often was about assessing existing skills. It was evident from our study that this model may still shape employers' understanding of apprenticeship.

SUMMARY

The engineering, construction and IT employers in our sample provided comprehensive training programmes, including extensive on-the-job training, as part of a strategy of workforce development. It was designed to develop occupational competence of rounded employees, who had an understanding of the organisations as a whole and their positions within them. Many employers had developed their own in-house training plans. Whilst the training covered the apprenticeship criteria, it was commonly far broader and more in-depth than what was required by the frameworks or standards.

These employers valued apprenticeship as a model of learning. The off-the-job element provided vital theoretical knowledge to underpin occupational practice. The frameworks or standards constituted a useful structure, and employers sought to organise the apprentices' on-the-job training in line with the off-the-job element to facilitate the integration of theory and practice. To this end, the close collaboration with training providers was vital.

In these organisations, mentoring and shadowing were crucial elements of on-the-job training, the aim of which was to gradually develop apprentices' expertise. Apprentices worked alongside a senior worker or trainer for much of the entire duration of the apprenticeship, whilst gradually taking on more responsibility. They held the dual status of learner and employee throughout the apprenticeship.

This approach contrasted sharply with that adopted by our retail and social care employers, where apprentices were fully productive workers for 80% of their contracted hours, in comparatively narrow job roles, and with little or no on-the-job training. They were completing their apprenticeship within the remaining 20% (the funded off-the-job element), separately from their day-to-day jobs. This was delivered by a training provider, whilst the employer role focused largely on line-managing the apprentices. In social care, front-loaded training according to the standards of the Care Certificate was mandatory for all new staff to prepare them for work with vulnerable service users. The apprenticeship standard was developed according to the same criteria and closely matched training for all staff.

All four employers valued apprenticeship as a way of developing 'future leaders', although exposure to areas beyond apprentices' jobs was often largely through off-the-job activities. Whilst the employers positioned themselves as highly supportive, it was clear that the onus for creating learning opportunities was firmly on the apprentices. High workloads, time pressures, and low levels of visibility and awareness of apprenticeship within the companies were potential barriers to achieving this. Employers highlighted the importance of learning as occurring naturally as a result of day-to-day practice. Whilst apprentices were encouraged to apply the knowledge and skills they had gained through the off-the-job element, this was without structured support (conflicting with the approach promoted by the ESFA representative as outlined earlier).

While apprenticeships delivered by the first group epitomised many of the elements of a high-quality apprenticeship, there appeared to be a lack of awareness and understanding of apprenticeship as a model of learning within the retail and social care employers. Whilst an apprenticeship should arguably cover 100% of contracted hours, in these organisations it functioned rather as a staff development programme, separate from the apprentices' day jobs. The question needs to be asked whether this kind of training should indeed be running under the apprenticeship brand.

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PART 3 THE FACTORS AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF THE 'OFF-THE-JOB' ELEMENT OF APPRENTICESHIPS IN THE WEST MIDLANDS REGION

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This section draws on data about off-the-job-training (OffJT) in apprenticeships from research that sought to explore the following question:

How do training providers put together and deliver off-the-job-training as part of high-quality apprenticeship programmes?

The study was conducted in two phases. First, case study data was gathered for two training providers in the West Midlands region of England. This sample focused on two providers of different specialisms (nursery nursing and advanced manufacturing) outside of those traditionally associated with apprenticeships (see Lahiff & Guile 2017). In each of the case study providers, researchers interviewed: apprenticeship managers, curriculum planners, employer liaison officers, employers and apprentices (16 interviews in total). To supplement these two case studies, 14 further interviews were subsequently undertaken with a broader range of training providers, employers and others.

Table 1. The OffJT interviews

Employers	7
Providers	16
Apprentices	4
Other stakeholders	3
TOTAL	30

In total, the research spanned 18 different organisations. The aim was to develop a situated understanding of the delivery of OffJT that contributed to successful apprenticeship training programmes. Evidence was gathered through interviews with employers, apprentices, organisational leaders, OffJT curriculum managers, teachers and other staff with significant roles connected to the examples of OffJT at the heart of this study.

RESEARCH CONTEXT: THE WEST MIDLANDS REGION

The research was conducted in the West Midlands, which has a wide range of engineering and manufacturing, and also service industries. New industries (for example, in media, event lighting and sound engineering) are a regional feature, and the establishment in 2016 of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) is also significant in the field of apprenticeships due to its role in the coordination of supply and demand to meet local skills shortages.

DEFINING OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING

The law defines off-the-job-training (OffJT) in apprenticeships in this way:

“off-the-job training” means training which is not on-the-job training and is received by the apprentice, during the apprentice’s normal working hours, for the purpose of achieving the approved apprenticeship standard to which the agreement or arrangement relates. (Apprenticeship Regulations 2017)

Key in this statement is the requirement that OffJT takes place during working hours. OffJT also contributes an important knowledge base to apprenticeship programmes, ideally providing a breadth of knowledge and theoretical underpinning to allow for ‘recontextualisation’: the transferability of learning between contexts (Fuller and Unwin 2009) across the sectors. The Richard Review (2012) suggested that the off-site aspect of OffJT may also be important in order to differentiate between OffJT and in-work training:

Off-site training... is important to specify because... when training is on-site but off-the-job, this can often be hard to distinguish from normal on-the-job training... and loses its value. Too often today the requirements for off-the-job learning this can be limited to self-guided learning, and provider-led assessment, with little meaningful training away from the burdens of day to day work. (Richard 2012: 90)

In addition, OffJT also includes a responsibility to meet students’ needs in relation to English and maths. In this, it responds to the ‘increasing proportions of employers [who] report difficulty in finding appropriate communication, literacy and numeracy skills’ (BIS 2015: 5).

WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS

There is a body of research literature relevant to understandings of how OffJT might contribute to a successful apprenticeship programme. Guile and Young (1998) see it as a contributory element to what they call the ‘institution of apprenticeship’. They define this as:

the constellation of both legal and contractual rules and relations governing the status of employment, the associated workplace entitlements and the formal and informal educational processes that socialise a young worker into a workplace and occupational culture. (Guile and Young 1998: 188)

This ‘constellation’ signifies the forces and agencies in society that structure apprenticeships and also provides a bridge into a discussion about the relationship between in-work training and OffT and what underpins this; namely, a shared understanding between employer, provider and the apprentice. Importantly, this constellation concept takes account of how policy, social and economic conditions might shape and impact on the different meaning(s) ascribed to the apprenticeship.

The institution of apprenticeship carries with it a folk memory seeded during a period of large-scale industrial expansion in which apprenticeship provided a transition into adult working life. During that period, OffJT was commonly offered through day release under a per capita funding regime for training providers. But social and industrial change has been huge since the establishment of that model.

Not only has the nature of work become more fluid, but the providers of OffJT operate within a different, now marketised, landscape, and under a funding system that is tightly regulated and subject to high levels of accountability.

This context suggests that successful apprenticeships are likely to depend upon the strength of relationships between the different stakeholders (employers, providers and apprentices), and on a shared understanding of the meaning of the apprenticeship as a training programme with specific features. This is likely to include common understandings about the relationship between in-work training and OffJT.

RESEARCH DATA

The research informing this section involved the development of two case studies. These sought to provide a full picture of the views of all stakeholders involved in the apprenticeship. To that end, managers, teachers, employers and apprentices were interviewed. The case studies were then supplemented with interview data from a wider sample of organisations.

Case Study A Advanced Technical Training (ATT)²¹

Advanced Technical Training (ATT) is the pseudonym of a training provider based outside a West Midlands city. ATT was one of a group of 'trailblazer' employers who worked together to design new standards for their occupational area. Over a four-year period, ATT's apprenticeship curriculum offer was refined into a two-year full-time programme that offers a Level 3 foundation qualification in engineering, and covers the key areas of metrics, materials, automation and advanced machining. This is followed by one year during which apprentices work on placement with a local employer.

The first cohort of apprentices on the ATT programme were taken on as employees of ATT's parent company while undertaking a full-time two-year programme. ATT were in receipt of significant government grant funding which facilitated the recruitment of apprentices who did not contribute to the parent company's productivity. Apprentices completed the third year of the programme with employers who paid ATT a fee for the two years' training they had already received. By the time the research took place, ATT were in the fourth year of the programme and were recruiting from schools and colleges,²² and apprentices are also recruited from other (local) levy-paying companies. In order to gain entry to the programme, 16-18 year-olds had to have achieved a grade 4 in English and Maths GCSE. This knowledge was then built on in relation to the fundamentals of engineering. According to interview data, the apprentices from external levy-paying companies spend around 39% of their time on OffJT.

The ATT front-loaded foundational course was positively regarded by ATT's apprentice employers:

(W)hat we liked about the ATT was that they get the basics out of the way first... They're there for two years, they kind of do their graft on the manual machines, learning... fundamental parts of engineering before they actually get here. (Employer)

²¹ This is a pseudonym.

²² ATT apprentices were being paid above the minimum apprenticeship rate but a fair amount less than a full-time 'normal' employee.

The benefits of the front-loaded model extended to the value of the English and maths. In the ATT model, maths was closely related to practical application. An employer with two ATT apprentices, one of whom was following a traditional day-release route rather than a front-loaded model, commented on how knowing the fundamentals before arriving in the workplace was vital in his company because of the pace of the project-based work that they specialise in:

It's such a fast pace. If you think of trying to start somebody from scratch... you know, we've got a machinist... trying to get jobs out the door that are under pressure. So for them to take a step back and train somebody up from scratch... it's quite hard to do. At least with the ATT guys, they know the fundamentals...

The productivity question is not simply about offsetting the wage paid to an employed apprentice; it is also about the time taken by existing staff who need to mentor that individual. ATT's two-year front-loaded approach to OffJT addresses this issue.

ATT's distinctive OffJT model is informed by a particular set of values. The sense of purpose underpinning this provision is orientated i) towards meeting the needs for future development within the parent company, and also, crucially, ii) by a sense of the direction of travel in the technical engineering industry more broadly. This second aspect attempts to engage with imagined futures:

I think engineering technicians of the future need to have a broader set of skills... so we talk about Industry 4.0 which, in essence, is the interconnectivity of systems. You've got intelligent systems working collaboratively to improve design and manufacture. Americans phrase it, "Every component is better than the last," so if that's coming off a production line you've got systems measuring how it's been made.... so the next one that comes off the line will be made better. (CEO ATT)

This passage also evidences a commitment to servicing needs that are external to the company; here conceived of as 'Industry 4.0'. This speaks of an imagined community of forward-looking engineers, and OffJT is there to provide important underpinning knowledge within apprenticeships that transcends job role and facilitates the development of innovation.

The way in which ATT provide their OffJT is distinctive and contributes to a unique version of apprenticeship. A two-year foundational, pre-placement OffJT is possible as it takes in around twenty carefully selected apprentices a year into a bespoke, advanced engineering training space, drawing on its parent company's hi-tech training provision. During the third and final year, it then seeks employers from its existing networks for placements with a view to them recruiting its trainees at a notional cost. It seems likely that this front-loaded approach is more feasible for ATT than it may be for other providers because of the niche position it occupies in the training market and the grant funding it was receiving at the time of the research.

Case Study B Realtime Training²³

Realtime Training, the pseudonym of a subsidiary of a large national group, was a well-established large provider that was delivering thousands of apprenticeships nationally. It provided apprenticeship training as well as a range of study programmes and work-related training to young people aged 16 and over. The company had a history of developing programmes for young people categorised as at risk of becoming Not in Education Employment or Training (so-called 'NEET').

Realtime Training apprenticeship provision had two main areas: Level 2 apprenticeships for young people and school leavers – often coming from backgrounds with significant levels of socioeconomic hardship, and Level 3 apprenticeships which focused on technical and IT subject areas. The Realtime interviews centred on apprenticeships based in local nurseries. The OffJT teacher was full of praise for one nursery owner:

(S)he does want to see the best for her students... She has got a passion for learning herself, because she is still training and always doing a different university degree and things like that. I think she doesn't want to hold her staff back either and so she is always sourcing. She has just sourced a Level 5 management for two more members of staff... She is like, 'No we'll get you trained.' because... she likes to give it back... she always feels that if we don't keep training these young people somewhere along the line the skill set is going to stop.

The data gathered from ATT and from Realtime Training highlighted invested employers like the nursery owner above as key players in realising the full individual and company benefits of the apprenticeship programme. However, participants across the research as a whole were of the view that the invested employer is far from typical. The Realtime OffJT teacher outlined some of the issues she had faced with other employers:

I have also got nurseries that will make [apprentices] work their 30 hours over four days and have a day off in the week which is fine. If that is how they want to work that is fine as long as the learner is happy with having a day off a week... But then when I am due out they make them come in on their day off... So that poor learner is not getting paid for that day.

The passage suggests that in some cases OffJT is being deliberately pushed to the edges of working time, which means it falls outside the government's definition. The same teacher also outlined other circumstances in which OffJT was taking place in apprentices' own time:

Sometimes, I have to do it remotely over the phone... They have done a full day's work... I email them the PowerPoint and go through what I would do with them on a one-to-one over the phone. Some of them it works for, some of them it clearly doesn't work for... they don't relate to what you are saying as such.

The data from Realtime suggest strongly the importance of time in the way OffJT is taking place in different employment contexts and in different vocational areas. One of the most significant themes to emerge from research participants working within training providers (apart from ATT) was the challenge of meeting the 20%

23 This pseudonymous training provider has ceased trading since the research was undertaken.

mandatory minimum of time for OffJT. In the Realtime context, even when working with established partners such as the nursery chain featured above, this was still an area of contention. The Realtime manager explained:

I'm not convinced that us, as a company, are doing what we should be doing if I'm honest. I'm not so sure that everybody is getting the 20% off the job. We're having to try and be inventive, not fraudulent but inventive in how we're doing it. We're having to literally try and get them to record if they do something for 10 minutes because it needs to add up... So in theory when you work it out it works out at about one day's training per week... what we have to do now is depend on the learner documenting their own areas of learning as well as the employer.

The passage suggests that the 20% stricture means that in some providers a form of administrative fabrication is taking place in order to achieve the requisite number of hours. This was supported by other interview data from the Realtime teacher, who revealed that most site visits to deliver OffJT lasted an hour to an hour and a half. The emergence of such strategies of adaptation (and gaming) in marketised further educational provision is researched and well-documented (see for example Smith and O'Leary 2013). The project data suggest that these phenomena are occurring in some apprenticeship provision, with the reasons underpinning this varying from company to company and from subject to subject. One example from the data is as follows:

Interviewer: *What are the barriers then?*

Respondent: *Employers don't want to release staff for that length of time. You think of when they do day release at a college... That's 20% of the week then isn't it?... For us, as a training provider, the same provider, the selling point has always been well, we don't take them away from you... I must admit the 20% is a struggle. Employers just do not want to buy into that. (Manager)*

This passage reveals the importance of the Richard Review's insistence (Richard 2012: 10) that being off-site is connected to the quality of OffJT. Otherwise, getting round the 20% mandatory minimum becomes an administrative hurdle to be tackled by the provider and is sometimes imposed on the apprentice.

With a pattern of input that involves a teacher visiting a workplace and spending an hour with each apprentice, the fitness for purpose of the space in which the OffJT interaction takes place assumes a high level of significance. In the Realtime nursery provision, the available workplace space was often constraining. The teacher described taking an apprentice through a PowerPoint on her lap. She commented that minimum staffing numbers also influenced how space was used in the nursery workplace:

Because of ratios in both nurseries and schools you are not going to be able to have more than one student out at the same time to do a group session so it is one-to-one. Because I have a private day nursery [in another location] and in there I think I have got seven learners. You try and take seven off the floor! They are short-staffed with their ratios and then if Ofsted come in they are stuck. (OffJT Teacher)

The staff / children ratio is an issue that is particular to nursery nursing. According to the teacher we interviewed, this could mean that OffJT took place sitting in the corner of a room where small children were playing.

There are some nurseries that will say to me, 'You can have her but you need to sit in the room.' (OffJT Teacher)

The manager corroborated this view but saw the problem as being the 20% prescription:

I don't think the OffJT is fitting with employers' needs. The places of work are bound to ratios... So employers are finding it very difficult... and... my priority as a nursery nurse would be the ratios of those children. (Manager)

The Realtime teacher also justified the reduced time spent on OffJT:

A lot of childcare is on the job. The only off-the-job sections really that I think you can't learn on the job is like your legislations, British values, health and safety, child protection. But I think there is too much, maybe too much emphasis on the off-the-job because I think the whole thing about NVQ was for them to learn on the job. (OffJT Teacher)

This response introduces another factor that is influencing the way OffJT is undertaken: in this case, legacy qualifications are influencing the way current apprenticeships are playing out, particularly in 'new' subject specialist areas.

The providers we have focused on so far were both offering valuable training packages, but the defining contextual feature of each was financial. While ATT, subsidised by a parent company, could provide an intense, time-rich training experience that led on to work placements, Realtime Training, being heavily reliant on providing OffJT as a major source of income, in some cases pragmatically adopted a time-poor delivery model while 'creatively' engaging with DfE regulations.

Interviews at Realtime Training, as with ATT, indicated that the extent and quality of employer engagement with the provider impacted on OffJT. For the employer that has engaged fully with apprenticeships as an important means of building capacity in the company, OffJT relates to expansion and growth and extends beyond the short-term interests of the business. Both case studies provided evidence of employers who were fully invested in apprenticeships to assist their companies' growth, and also saw apprenticeships as benefiting the occupational area more generally, as the following examples will illustrate.

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS WITH OTHER APPRENTICESHIP PROVIDERS

From here the research design sought to reach out further into the field to establish the extent to which the issues surfacing in the case study data were more broadly experienced by other providers. This proceeded through the identification of research participants in a range of different training providers, with some having a fund of experience with different companies.

The case studies suggested that the way OffJT is implemented is a product of the relationship between the stakeholders. Recognising this is particularly important if we are to understand the constraints and challenges that impact on the quality of OffJT.

[Apprenticeship] is a tripartite agreement... there is an agreement between the provider... and then you've also got the employer who signs a tripartite agreement and the apprentice, so it's an agreement between all parties. So it's not just

the training provider who has the risk, it's also the employer as well. (Karen,²⁴ Apprenticeship Manager, private training provider)

Karen here is commenting on how the complexity of establishing an apprenticeship training programme demands a high level of understanding and trust that can then yield benefits for all stakeholders. As stated above, the invested employer is a key force for cohesion in the realisation of this shared understanding of apprenticeship. Simon is CEO of an SME, a specialised construction firm, and fits the description of the invested employer. He expressed strong views that construction could and should be viewed as a career, with young people starting as unskilled but then being supported to develop their skills and experience to the point where they could run their own company. This view was rooted in his personal experience as someone who had left with school with one O-level.

Simon had set up his own bespoke five-year version of an apprenticeship course in conjunction with a local college, using day release and stipulating some specific course input. The apprentices from Simon's firm were middle-aged and unskilled, and through an apprenticeship with OffJT at college, they gained a qualification and also promotion and new roles and responsibilities within the organisation. Simon's commitment shone through when he described his apprentices as 'our next lifeblood'. For him, the apprenticeship was necessary: 'We've got to grow our own'. His approach was grounded in a view of the long-term sustainability of the company. He recognised his investment was unusual, and he gave an insider's view as an employer who had attended careers fairs with other employers:

The big boys want numbers because they look at it as income stream.....All they're interested in is that financial vehicle. After two years [the apprentices] then become expensive. What they then do then is thank you very much. You can go away now because we're taking in another load of 16-year-olds. We've got physical evidence of that because when we've done the school fairs we've got spaces for two apprentices... We've got companies alongside us who are looking for 90... I've said, 90 places? You must have a lot of work on. No, we just train them but we expect 'x' amount to fall by the wayside... When people are taking on 90 apprenticeships at the age of 16 and you cut the 16-year-old loose at 18 the first thing you've just done is killed his attitude towards work. The problem is he's got two years and so where does he go?... I just say what an incredibly selfish attitude.

This passage illustrates a number of key points. First, it says something important in relation to the size of the employer. For Simon, that apprenticeships deliver the skills and knowledge that he requires is critical. His interview was peppered with stories about individuals including young people with low or few qualifications: how he had recruited them thinking they had 'potential', and how they had developed and grown in confidence once employed. His interview illustrates powerfully an ethic of care. This is also seen in his condemnation of 'selfish' employers who instrumentalise (young) people to access an income stream, then discard them thereby 'destroying their attitude to work'. In a sense this is a localised version of the objectification of people that originates in a human capital perspective (Becker 1993). An unfortunate consequence of the current 'skills discourse' is a tendency for it to create the social conditions in which employers and providers

²⁴ All names in this section are pseudonymous.

alike objectify young people by using them to access (government) funding in this way (see Duckworth and Smith 2018). Simon's investment in the apprenticeship scheme also manifests some of that orientation towards a broader concern about the development of the knowledge and skills base within an industry which was in evidence at ATT through the notion of 'industry 4.0'.

The absence of an ethic of care or a broader perspective also feeds into employers' anxieties related to the 20% minimum for OffJT. Douglas, CEO of a small training provider, commented on providers and employers seeking ways round delivering this requirement:

I think you will find... they're trying to find loopholes to avoid them being off the job for 20%. So, some [providers] will go out to site and sit with them on site and say that is off-the-job because they... are not doing work stuff. But it is not really the spirit of it. It is gaming the system really. They should be off-site doing a substantial training programme or a substantial qualification one day a week, but they are not, because that costs the company money...

Douglas here once more underlines how the space in which training takes place can impact on quality. Being on-site, he suggests, creates an opportunity for 'gaming' that is 'not really the spirit of it'. A pattern of 'gaming' also emerged in other interviews. Nuala, the training manager for a large industry-specific training provider, explained:

There is a huge bureaucracy around it... from a provider perspective, the paperwork, the bureaucracy is huge... It is really off-putting. And if you are an employer... You're paying all this money to the levy, it is quite easy then to just say, "Well, we have got 20 managers in here. Let's just convert them to apprenticeships. We can spend that levy money and they can all get qualifications."

Nuala's experience is not isolated. Jackie, a senior executive with a large national training provider with two decades of experience, took a similar view about employers' attitudes:

...very few levy employers are actually using their levy to support new apprenticeship recruitment. The vast majority of levy-paying employers are utilising their levy for apprenticeships, which are effectively upskilling what was their existing workforce or you know, diversifying the skill-set of their people into slightly different jobs, rather than actually recruiting.

These providers' contributions may account for the bulge in adult apprenticeships that has characterised trends in recruitment since the end of 2017 (see Whieldon 2019). In a regional college, Beth, the apprenticeship manager, conscious of the gaming issue, talked about the need for a different mind-set:

Don't think of it as 20% off the job, think of it as 100% training programme of which 20% is at college. That's the mind-set change we need.

This observation once more emphasises how important cultural perceptions about apprenticeships are in shaping how they play out. At the local level, these are mediated through the relationships between providers and employers, and hinge on them arriving at a common understanding of what a good apprenticeship looks like.

The interview data from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) provided more insights into the need for a 'neutral' non-market intermediary role. This role was seen effectively to promote a shared understanding of apprenticeship in a way that safeguarded quality.

Lucy, apprenticeship manager for the WMCA, also suggested that SMEs do not always know how apprenticeships might feed into their work. Her view was that there is a need for some kind of 'honest broker' – not someone who has a course to 'sell', but someone who can help SMEs look at their existing 'skill- and knowledge-set' and help them look ahead to the future to plan how expansion and succession might work for them using apprenticeships. In effect, this was a role that the authority was undertaking.

I used to go in. It's about finding the right training programme and succession planning in their business. They're not all on board with it. But you've got to start having the dialogue. (Lucy, WMCA apprenticeship Manager)

In our sample, this brokerage was a role taken on not only by WMCA but also by local college providers. Typically, it involved visiting employers to explain the benefits of apprenticeships and the importance of training as a strategy for growth and development of the company. This supportive 'broker' relationship was also key in mediating the requirements of OffJT. Shelley, the employer liaison manager in a big regional college, explained how providers often needed to talk employers round to the 20% OffJT time requirement before they could promote the greater benefits of apprenticeships.

What I would say, is that the 20% off the job is... challenging for firms and you can completely understand why... it doesn't take long to do your maths, and say, ... "We can't make this happen".

Echoing the employer in the ATT case study, Shelley commented on how this might be a particular consideration 'in environments where they're relatively fast-paced, (and) there's a lot of customer interaction'. The evidence suggested that the 20% minimum OffJT meant providers having to convince employers to engage with apprenticeship training. Overcoming this hurdle involved outlining a strategy which in this college's case involved online working amongst other things. While the interview did not explore the inventiveness of these strategies, it was clear that the pressure to meet this minimum, if not mediated by the provider, meant the employer would be unlikely to enter into an apprenticeship arrangement at all.

The evidence reviewed so far shows providers with an approach underpinned by an altruistic set of values as well as those who risked 'selling' apprenticeships to 'uninvested' employers as a mutually beneficial means of gaining income. The brokering of arrangements, particularly in the establishment of relations between provider and employer, emerged as a critical moment. Shelley's interview illustrated this:

Actually, once you start to talk to [employers] and take that 20% and dissect it and explain what is covered by 20% off the job, then it starts to get easier and you can start to say, "Okay, right this is how we can make this work". But the straight 20% off-the-job... can cause people to go, "Arggh!" (Shelley, college employer liaison manager)

The interview data once more illustrate the importance of providers and employers reaching a common understanding about the meaning of the apprenticeship, but also the supportive role that is being undertaken by college providers and, more generally in the West Midlands, by the WMCA. A regional stakeholder perspective came across strongly, particularly in interviews with college staff. This perspective positioned apprenticeships as an opportunity with the potential to strengthen cohesion across municipal areas:

We've got a really strong relationship with (the regional authority), we've a multi-layered relationship... supporting their strategies, running programmes, a whole host of activities that we're aligned to in terms of their skills strategy... we are doing a lot of work with a lot of stakeholders... to look at the misconceptions of apprenticeships and vocational learning...

Because this is all about trying to retain talent in our city and grow talent in our city... As a college historically of course your roots are in your community, and that's two communities in my world, that's my public community, my born and bred people who live locally, and the business community. You know, if you can get the economics right and match the two together then the provision will thrive, in a really simplistic utopian view, it will thrive. (Shelley: college employer liaison manager)

Shelley's comments again foreground the socially-situated nature of apprenticeships that depend on shared understandings between networks of committed stakeholders for their meaning and value. They also rely on historical and current understandings of local industry and employment.

SUMMARY

According to our research data, the best examples of OffJT involved apprentices spending time away from the workplace (usually one day) often with other apprentices from different firms. This way of delivering the OffJT ensured that they accessed a broader learning experience related to the vocational area than might be offered in their job role. During the early stages of their apprenticeship, this learning helped to establish foundations for the more advanced skills and knowledge required later in their training. It also offered them a broadened horizon of the employment terrain in their vocational area.

Our data identified different modes of delivery: a front-loaded two-year model, a 'traditional' day / block release model and a convenience drop-in on-site model. Within these different models, what influenced the quality of OffJT most powerfully was the extent to which stakeholders had a shared understanding of the apprenticeship as training programme with complementary elements and their commitment to delivering these. This understanding was underpinned by ongoing interactions with providers about OffJT and how it fitted with in-work training. An ethic of care for the apprentice on the part of both parties also contributed. This was supplemented by an understanding that the benefits of the apprenticeship were likely to be long- rather than short-term, and that the apprentice would acquire learning and skills that were likely to be broader than those required for their immediate job role.

In poor examples, OffjT had been squeezed outside of work time and reduced to ad hoc drop-in sessions utilising workbooks in which the apprentice was tasked with keeping a log of activities to be counted as contributing towards the 20% minimum. Some of these examples of OffjT were taking place in the workplace, which our data show is not sustainable for the providers and not effective for the apprentice.

From the evidence, we can see that the success of apprenticeships is largely dependent on the relationship between the OffjT provider and the employer, who need to come together to construct a training programme which combines training in the workplace with OffjT making up 20% of the programme. The relationship is not book-ended (i.e. consisting only of contact at the beginning and the end of the programme) but needs to be sustained through ongoing interactions to develop a shared understanding. Through these interactions, OffjT should benefit the employer by providing the apprentice with important underpinning knowledge, but it can also help to enrich the knowledge base in the workplace.

Finally, the importance of advice, guidance and support for SMEs to take up the opportunities offered by apprenticeships was a key finding. In our research, this supporting role was offered by civic bodies at regional level and also by colleges. This connected to a broader set of values relating to the needs of specific local industries or the economic and skills needs of the region. This wider frame of reference formed part of the shared understanding that underpinned successful apprenticeships with complementary OffjT and in-work training.

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PART 4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The on- and off-the-job research presented above was carried out in a pre-COVID-19 world, and while there is no doubt that the pandemic may well further impact apprenticeships, the findings of the research remain relevant.

The economic fallout from COVID-19 is likely to result in reduced availability of apprenticeship places, and financial pressures on employers will almost inevitably lead to calls for more flexibility and reduced training requirements. We would strongly argue that if England hopes to level up to an economy that works for everyone, then it needs to aim to have a stronger, higher-quality apprenticeship system that is the equal of those seen elsewhere in Europe.

REFLECTIONS

Both sets of research highlight the critical role of the employer in ensuring the quality and duration of apprenticeship training both on and off the job. England is unusual in that the regulations around apprenticeship say very little about the active engagement of the employers in training.²⁵

In countries such as Germany where there are clearer lines between the on- and the off-the-job training (the so-called dual approach), there is a regulation which covers the occupational training and a curriculum which describes the off-the-job element of the apprenticeship. Perhaps as a result in Germany the workplace element is generally much more tightly regulated (Brockmann, Clarke and Winch, 2011).²⁶ Also, staff in organisations responsible for training apprentices are required to have certain qualifications (such as that of master craftsperson in Germany), while there is no mandatory training for their counterparts in England.

In other European countries, apprentices tend to be younger and are entrants to the workforce rather than existing employees. They are treated more as students, and they tend to be paid a lower wage. As they progress through the apprenticeship and their productivity increases, their salaries rise towards that of a skilled worker. Employers play an active role in the quality assurance and/or assessment of apprentices, usually coordinated by intermediary bodies such as Chambers of Commerce. There also tends to be more of a collective understanding about what apprentices learn in and away from the workplace. These differences are to some extent a reflection of the cultures and institutions in other countries. Nevertheless, we can learn from some of the principles upon which other high-quality systems are built.

The starting-point for improving the system is to ensure that there is a shared understanding – between government, employers, providers and apprentices – about the purpose of apprenticeship and the consequent need for high-quality on- and off-the-job training. Historically in England, and as remains the case currently in most other countries, an apprenticeship was seen as a route that provided young people with the training which equipped them to enter and then progress in an occupation. This sense of an apprenticeship as an introduction to an occupation is

25 Kuczera, M. and Field, S. (2018) *Apprenticeship in England, United Kingdom*. [Online]. (OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training). Paris: OECD Publishing. Available from: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/apprenticeship-in-england-united-kingdom_9789264298507-en#page3 [Accessed 30 October 2020]

26 Brockmann, M., Clarke, L. and Winch, C. (2011) *Knowledge, skills and competence in the European labour market: what's in a vocational qualification?* Abingdon: Routledge.

what distinguishes an 'apprenticeship' from simply 'training'.

A good apprenticeship makes considerable demands on the employer and the off-the-job training provider. As evidenced by the studies presented here, the extent to which on- and off-the-job training are integrated is key, and this can vary from one employer to another, and from one sector to another. While we have seen examples of 'apprenticeship' being used as a label for training happening alongside a job, we have also seen clear examples of good practice where the demands on employers and training providers are being met.

To offer a high-quality apprenticeship, employers and training providers must enable an apprentice to become proficient in the relevant occupational role through a combination of on- and off-the-job training that includes:

- underpinning knowledge and skills required by the occupation;
- knowledge and skills that enable progression in relevant work or education;
- English, maths and digital skills;
- relevant essential skills such as teamwork and problem-solving;
- appreciation of the wider industrial context that the apprentice will be entering and progressing within;
- understanding of the environment in which the apprentice will be working;
- qualifications or certificates that are required to work in the occupation; and
- progression towards professional registration where relevant.

There are large numbers of apprentices in England receiving very high-quality education and training as described above with the involvement of fully-invested employers. Where this was not happening within the research described here, the employer concerned normally fell into one of two categories:

a The minimally-invested employer

Our research suggests that there are a group of employers who are only minimally invested in apprenticeships. In the worst cases, there is a sense that an apprenticeship provides the employer with a continuous stream of cheap labour. On-the-job training goes little further than basic induction, and the off-the-job training is seen as an unwanted burden.

Not all employers can or should be offering apprenticeships. Even in the highest-quality apprenticeship systems, it is still a minority of employers who offer apprenticeships. However, at present there are few publicly-funded alternatives to apprenticeship for employers who are looking to train their workforce. The need to improve productivity and the threats from automation suggest that there is a role for government to subsidise upskilling and reskilling. There are some cases where an apprenticeship may be an appropriate response, but trying to force all training into the apprenticeship model risks breaking it. The government needs to find mechanisms outside of apprenticeships to fund adult training. Hopefully, this will ensure that apprenticeship is used when it is the best and most appropriate training response rather than one of the only training responses available.

b The partially-engaged employer

Many of the employers that were interviewed for the research are looking to do the best that they can by their apprentices, but they did not appreciate the full training potential of apprenticeship, or how critical their own role is in making the apprenticeship high quality. In some cases, this took the form of not engaging with what apprentices were learning off the job. In others, there was limited consideration about how to make on-the-job training an authentic part of the apprenticeship, rather than the 'apprenticeship' being about what happened off the job.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to increase still further the numbers of apprentices who are benefitting, we suggest that the following needs to happen.

The employer

1. The employer should treat an apprentice as an apprentice for 100% of their time.
2. The employer should offer high-quality on-the-job training and instil organisation-wide support for the apprentice.
3. The employer should provide mentoring and shadowing.
4. Employers should work together to explore how they can improve the quality of training. This could include setting up inter-company training centres that could give apprentices the opportunity to work on equipment or processes which are not available with their current employer; coordinating inter-company visits for apprentices; networking for apprentices; or providing mentors for apprentices.

The partnership

5. Employers, off-the-job training providers and apprentices need to work in partnership to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of each are clear and understood by all parties. A shared understanding of what apprenticeship means is essential.
6. The employer, off-the-job training provider and apprentice should meet regularly to review progress and discuss training needs.
7. The employer and the off-the-job training provider should develop a training plan that links the on- and off-the-job training and helps the apprentice understand their progression towards occupational competence.
8. The employer and the off-the-job-training provider should inform the apprentice about their opportunities to progress following their apprenticeship, including progression within work and options for further study.

Additional support and guidance

9. Employers offering an apprenticeship for the first time should be given more support. This might include financial incentives directed through local funding via the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) or Combined Authority, or partnering with other employers who have successful apprenticeship schemes.
10. A kitemark for good apprenticeship employers should be developed based on the recommendations in 1-8 above. An extension of this approach could be to link the support in recommendation 9 to achieving the kitemark.

11. IFATE should work with employer groups, professional bodies, trade associations and other stakeholders to develop exemplar training plans for different apprenticeship standards that could act as a starting point for the discussion between the employer and the off-the-job training provider.
12. Whilst we do not think that Ofsted should inspect apprentices in the workplace, we do think that it would be reasonable for Ofsted to meet with employers to ensure the quality of employer–provider interaction and that they should be able to inspect the training plans.

An apprenticeship is more than a job with training to industry standards. An apprenticeship is a form of learning, and apprentices should benefit from the opportunity to be able to learn both on and off the job. This means that they should be treated as an apprentice – someone who is entering an occupation that is new to them – for 100% of their time. This gives individual apprentices the opportunity to fully benefit from training in the workplace alongside off-the-job training, thereby driving up skills and productivity.

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