



Association of
Employment and Learning
Providers

AELP Submission: #97

**AELP response to the call for
evidence on The Workforce of the
Future inquiry**

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Executive Summary

The Skills Commission – an independent body made up of leading figures across the education sector such as parliamentarians and experienced practitioners – has issued a call for evidence as part of its ongoing “Workforce of the Future” inquiry.

Reflecting on the issue of careers information, advice and guidance (IAG), the Commission believes that the current crisis brought about by the outbreak of Covid-19 over the course of 2020 offers an opportunity to reflect on the sector’s approach to this issue. The economic crisis and impending changes to immigration rules put a significant onus on both the Government and the education sector to review their approach to careers IAG to support transition into employment.

The Association of Employment and Learning Provider (AELP) thinks that the current system of careers IAG is not fit for purpose, failing people because it does not ensure inclusivity and awareness of opportunity.

Young people in schools are still encouraged to follow a university route, whilst not being exposed to the benefits and opportunities available in technical education. Only 11% of 15-18 pupils are actively encouraged to explore an apprenticeship and training providers are often prevented from accessing schools to provide information about technical education, despite there being a legal obligation to make it happen.

Furthermore, the careers landscape is characterised by deep fragmentation with different programmes sharing the same responsibilities and advising the same cohorts of learners. The National Retraining Scheme (NRS) became little more than a digital career signposting service, despite being launched to much fanfare in 2017 with the Industrial Strategy, and simply duplicated the roles of respectively the National Careers Service (NCS) and Job Centre Plus (JCP).

AELP believes that the system for careers IAG needs a more joined-up approach to provide a high-quality service to every cohort of learners by:

- Facilitating collaboration between schools and training providers.
- Refocusing existing initiatives and programmes.
- Investing in better workforce development for teachers.
- Incentivising schools to promote apprenticeships.
- Enforcing the Baker Clause.

Facilitating collaboration between schools and training providers

Schools should deliver a comprehensive and impartial careers guidance service that enables children and parents to make informed choices about future career prospects, but schools keep failing in this crucial task by frequently preventing FE providers and colleges from presenting what they have to offer. Several AELP members often report being turned away from advertising opportunities in apprenticeships and technical education at the school gates and research by the IPPR shows that over two-thirds of schools do not respect the Baker Clause.

The relationship between schools, providers and employers is essential to delivering a skilled workforce and developing local economies. Providers need access to schools in order to

recruit the apprentices that will become the skilled workers of tomorrow. Between 2016/17 and 2018/19, apprenticeship starts between the ages of 16 and 18 went down from almost 123,000 to little more than 98,000.

Recruiting young apprentices is crucial to reducing skills shortages and weaning employers off their current reliance on the free flow of skilled migrant labour from the EU. For the economy to grow in the aftermath of Brexit and the outbreak of Covid-19, we cannot just rely on reskilling existing adult workers, but must instead ensure there is a steady flow of fresh homegrown talent.

By hindering this dialogue, schools are neither acting in the interest of their pupils nor looking after the wellbeing of their local communities. Providers have good connections with employers, as well as access to both current and former apprentices. Regional and local provider networks can help schools arrange meetings between apprentices and pupils to explore the opportunities available in technical education. There is literally nothing better than listening to ex-apprentices about their journey and experience.

We need to harmonize the working relationship between schools and training providers, address individual concerns, and empower the different stakeholders in their respective roles. AELP suggests using regional networks to facilitate cooperation between schools. Given adequate levels of funding, regional networks that are made up of a range of training providers and employers can be the conduit for a controlled and managed approach to support schools fulfil their legal obligations under the Baker Clause and providers secure access to pupils.

Regional networks are uniquely positioned to act as impartial brokers between schools and providers and foster collaboration between the two sides. On one hand, they can help schools give pupils comprehensive careers advice in full compliance with the Baker Clause by managing and controlling the flow of requests from training providers and employers, thereby allaying a key concern about the volume of interest that schools currently get. On the other hand, they can guarantee fair access to pupils for training providers and employers looking to recruit the workers of tomorrow.

Refocusing existing initiatives and programmes

There are several programmes and initiatives currently delivering careers IAG to every cohort of learners.

The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) is a national network connecting schools, colleges, providers and employers to deliver careers advice to young people throughout England. Founded in 2015, the CEC is made up of enterprise co-ordinators who work with groups of 20 schools or colleges to develop career plans and connect national and local employers. Co-ordinators support enterprise advisers, who are matched to specific schools or colleges to help them develop effective career plans and opportunities for students by interacting with local employers.

The National Careers Service (NCS) is a publicly funded careers guidance tool for people over the age of 13 in England. Launched in 2012 to pool elements of previous careers services for adults and young people, the NCS provides information and guidance on learning, training, career choice and development online or by telephone, replacing the wider Connexions service which previously was focused on young people only.

The delivery of careers IAG remains incoherent and fragmented, with more than one service targeting the same audience group and providing overlapping services. This becomes more apparent when looking at the future rollout of the NRS, which essentially replicates the work

of the NCS and duplicates what we already have when it is funding on actual participation that is vitally needed.

We need to refocus programmes to deliver fewer services that are more accurately targeted at distinct groups of people who need them, avoiding unnecessary cost on resource duplication and bringing more coherence to the careers system. That is why AELP recommends refocusing existing careers IAG services to avoid resource duplication and bring clarity.

The CEC should concentrate its resources on collaborating with established networks and existing organisations with the simple objective of increasing awareness of apprenticeships and further education among young people in schools.

The NCS should focus primarily on continuing to provide careers information and advice to adults over the age of 18, something for which it enjoys a long-standing reputation and solid track record.

The NRS should be focused on participation-led funding for existing programmes allowing existing workers to cope with increasing automation in the workplace by becoming a “traineeship for adults” with clearly defined outcomes. This would avoid any overlap with the existing functions of the NCS and be a better use of public funding.

Investing in better workforce development for teachers

School teachers play a crucial role in the life of young people, especially because they are authoritative figures when pupils start contemplating their future career prospects. They are gatekeepers to a number of career opportunities young people look at as they consider their future direction of travel in what is the first step of their professional life.

Given the importance of this role, we would expect teachers to approach this task by offering as broad and impartial advice as possible. Unfortunately, the evidence shows that teachers are not just failing in this task, but they are giving young people an inaccurate picture of what the labour market actually has to offer.

Considering that the average cost of going to university is around £50,000, serious questions should be raised about the ethics and value in directing every child down this path. A survey already shows that only 11% of people aged 15-18 are encouraged to choose an apprenticeship, but another report by Education and Employers highlights a huge gap between young people’s job aspirations and what is actually available to them. For example, pupils aspiring to work in art, culture, entertainment and sports are five times more than the available jobs in these sectors.

This shows that – without impartial and comprehensive careers advice and guidance – young people are unprepared to make one of the most important decisions in their lives. That is why we need effective careers advice and guidance in schools to make sure that pupils possess a good understanding of what opportunities and rewards the labour market has to offer.

However, doing that requires work on training existing and aspiring teachers to act as impartial gatekeepers. Through their training and personal journey, teachers are more likely to appreciate traditional academic career routes over ones available in apprenticeships and further education. Therefore, they tend to advise students based on their personal experience, as well as being motivated by external incentives to keep pupils in schools after the age of 16, rather than drawing on a thorough understanding of what works best for individual pupils and what the labour market actually has to offer.

We must focus on better workforce development within teacher training colleges to ensure that they possess a full knowledge and appreciation of apprenticeships and technical education by making these topics a key part of the teacher training syllabus. AELP believes that knowledge of apprenticeships and technical education should become a key component of the teacher training syllabus.

Pursuing a more coherent and less fragmented careers strategy requires a change of attitude towards apprenticeship in schools within both existing and aspiring teachers, but especially with the recruitment and selection of individuals responsible for careers information and guidance.

Schools need to look out for dynamic and open-minded people who are capable of involving pupils and guide them in the most important decision of their early professional life, rather than going through the motions and treat careers IAG as a tick-box exercise. They should make pupils feel involved and excited about what lies ahead for them in terms of potential career opportunities, helping them choose what works best for them rather than what has worked for their teachers.

Incentivising schools to promote apprenticeships

There is another reason why so few young people in schools are encouraged to pursue apprenticeships or go into technical education, which runs parallel to the lack of effective and comprehensive careers information, advice and guidance.

Schools benefit from pupils staying on beyond the age of 16 because they are more likely to maintain their place in the performance league table as this provides schools with greater financial incentives. This means that they are incentivised to prevent pupils from leaving for alternative routes after the age of 16. The deck is stacked against apprenticeships and further education in favour of more traditional routes, such as A Levels, leading to academic options. It is critical that there is “levelling up” between academic and vocational opportunities.

The most logical solutions to this conundrum would consist of rewarding progression towards apprenticeships or other forms of training similarly to progression towards A Levels and then university. AELP recommends financially incentivising schools for pupils who leave after GCSEs to embark on apprenticeships or other forms of training.

Rewarding progression to apprenticeships would help remove the in-built bias towards A Levels and academic routes within schools, while at the same time sending a message that technical education is truly on the same level as university education.

Enforcing the Baker Clause

Throughout the late 1990s and the 2000s, successive government placed a huge amount of emphasis on the importance of giving every pupil the chance to go to university at the expense of technical education. This belief has been reinforced by decreasing numbers of apprenticeship starts, rising shortages of skilled labour in key economic sectors (e.g., social care, construction, hospitality), and increasing reliance on migrant labour from neighbouring countries.

These factors have in turn propelled apprenticeships and technical education to the front of the government’s list of priorities, especially in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. The launch of the industrial strategy and the apprenticeship reforms of 2017, chiefly amongst them the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, showed just how central this issue has become for policymakers. The Baker Clause must be looked at through this lens.

Introduced at the behest of former education secretary Kenneth Baker and incorporated as part of the Technical and Further Education Act 2017, the Baker Clause compels schools to ensure that “a range of education and training providers” have access to pupils from year 8 to year 13. This would equip young people to receive a comprehensive overview of opportunities available within apprenticeships and technical education that enables them to make an informed decision about their future.

Despite the good intentions of this policy, the evidence shows that schools continue to shy away from their legal duty to give training providers fair access to pupils in 66% of cases. To add insult to injury, the DfE has been reluctant to make sure that schools actually comply with the law. We need schools to fulfil their legal obligation to give their pupils comprehensive and impartial careers advice and guidance, but that will not happen anytime soon unless they understand the severe implications of breaking the law.

AELP thinks that the Government should crack down on non-compliance with the Baker Clause by instructing Ofsted to make it a material consideration as part of the inspection process.

Schools will be more likely to comply if they are made aware of the practical implications of non-compliance on their overall score and reputation. Knowing that failing to adhere to the Baker Clause will mean schools cannot achieve a higher grade than “good” in an inspection, thereby preventing them from receiving an “outstanding” grade, should help focus minds.

Regional networks can help schools handle the flow of access requests from providers, as well as giving them a more accurate understanding of the dynamics of the labour market and the local economy. As the regulator, one option would be to move to a position where upon inspection a school’s overall Ofsted grade could be limited in respect of non-compliance with the legal requirement laid out by the Baker Clause. We have seen the use of “limiting grades” used effectively before with Every Child Matters and Safeguarding to ensure the priority and focus it required and a step change in attitudes.

AELP believes there should be at least 3 career-focussed interactions per child with representatives of the FE sector between year 9 and year 11.

Schools would also benefit from a clear set of benchmarks, which explain in greater detail what compliance and good practice look like. Setting a minimum number of 3 interactions between pupils and representatives of training providers, apart from career fairs or exhibitions, would be a good place to start.



Association of Employment and Learning Providers
2nd Floor,
9 Apex Court
Bradley Stoke
Bristol
BS32 4JT

t: 0117 986 5389

e: enquiries@aelp.org.uk

www.aelp.org.uk



@AELPUK



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