



The 5% Club & AELP Employer Summit

Event summary | February 2024

Overview

35 employer representatives - including UCAS, Amey, the Ministry of Defence, Grant Thornton UK LLP, Arcadis, RNIB, Mace and KPMG LLP - met under the auspices of the 5% Club and AELP at BPP's City of London centre in February to explore practical ways to improve how the apprenticeship system works. Participants began with a wide ranging exploration of issues that identified 7 major themes. The next part of the discussion focused on these 7 themes, with participants choosing which theme they participated in.

The seven themes that emerged from the first exploration were:

1. Functional & inclusive maths
2. How to support SMEs
3. Standards
4. End Point Assessment
5. Devolution
6. The role of the employer
7. Careers Pathways



Here are the main issues and proposed solutions that each group then identified:

1. Functional and inclusive maths



Issues identified

- ▶ Apprenticeships are employer-led but Functional Skills (FS) are not. Employers recognise the value in good maths and English but have little interest in formal qualifications. For them the apprentice being professionally competent is more important - although for the apprentice the portability of their qualifications is important.
- ▶ Why are experienced apprentices who have been in employment for many years, already using Maths and English in the workplace, being forced to do Functional Skills?
- ▶ Overseas qualifications do not hold the same value as a GCSE, which discriminates against those from outside the UK.
- ▶ Maths creates the biggest issue for learners, English less so.
- ▶ The additional time related to FS learning will become a barrier to learning.



Solutions proposed

- ▶ Take Functional Skills out of apprenticeships to remove the pressure felt by apprentices and allow them to concentrate on their vocational course.
- ▶ Allow apprentices who are competent in all other areas but who have not passed Functional Skills to pass their apprenticeship, with the highest award being a pass i.e. apprentices without functional skills are unable to receive a merit or a distinction.
- ▶ Make FS relevant to the job role and life experiences.
- ▶ Recognise overseas qualifications for English and Maths to ensure those with those qualifications are not discriminated against.
- ▶ Identify and address the elements that learners are continuously failing in the functional skills exam.
- ▶ Exempt senior workers who have been in employment for many years from Functional Skills, through providing evidence within their roles descriptions that demonstrate the level of competence required.

2. How to support SMEs



Issues identified

- ▶ SMEs, and in particular micro businesses, cannot provide apprenticeships due to the admin burden and rules around PAYE (flexi apprenticeships need more focus).



Solutions proposed

- ▶ Reduce/remove admin burden for SMEs and micro businesses as this is a barrier (they often don't have the skills or time to complete the admin required for an apprentice).
- ▶ Local/regional bodies to engage more with SMEs and provide more support and guidance.
- ▶ Trade bodies are very trusted, could they act as a hub to promote and guide SMEs with apprenticeships? Especially those SMEs that are interested in apprenticeships but don't know how to access funding or find a provider.
- ▶ Other organisations that could be used include:
 - ▶ LEPs/LSIPS.
 - ▶ Local authorities.
- ▶ Support larger levy payers to provide local admin support to help with levy transfer and provide onboarding support for the SME and apprentice.
- ▶ Training providers/colleges could be incentivised to recruit/train apprentices in SMEs.

3. Standards



Issues identified

- ▶ Too many obsolete elements within standards.
- ▶ Inflexibility – everything needs to be covered.



Solutions proposed

- ▶ Consistent national standards with flexibility built in (perhaps allow pick-and-mix modules).
- ▶ Remove obsolete elements ASAP.
- ▶ Flexibility around finishing EPA/ Timescales.
- ▶ Creating pathways, programmes should have clear career pathways from one level to the next.
- ▶ Include an 'employer-led unit' within an apprenticeship to allow for specifics to be covered. E.g. the Plumbing Standard specifies plastic pipe to be used, but the employer only worked with copper piping due to working in prisons.
- ▶ Enable employers to 'swap' criteria, in agreement with the training provider before enrolment, to allow greater flexibility.

4. End Point Assessment



Issues identified

- ▶ Important to define the actual role of Endpoint Assessment.
- ▶ Drifted away from the principle of the Richard Review and independent check of competency.
- ▶ What does it achieve? Employers are interested in the skills as opposed to the exam at the end; learners need to prove they are professionally competent but is this proven by an exam?
- ▶ The length of time it takes to go through EPA, inconsistency of duration and duplication of assessment.



Solutions

- ▶ The DFE and IfATE are considering how End Point Assessment is working, its design, and ultimate goals. They will welcome your views.
- ▶ IfATE are always keen to hear from employers about how EPAs are working and would encourage you to get in touchStreamlined approach to EPA.
- ▶ Clear SLAs on when EPA results are received.

5. Devolution



Issues identified

- ▶ There should be equality of opportunity across the nations and areas.
- ▶ It is difficult for employers and providers when borders are crossed.
- ▶ Issue on both funding landscape and qualification consistency and accessibility.



Solutions proposed

- ▶ More information/understanding for employers (and providers).
- ▶ Devolved local/regional authorities need to be clear about the role they are fulfilling.
- ▶ Portability of product and funding across the UK.
- ▶ Enable levy paying employers to use unspent levy funds (in the English system) to train their employees in devolved nations.

6. Employer Role



Issues identified

- ▶ Line managers can make or break the apprenticeship for the learner.
- ▶ But line managers don't understand the programme themselves and therefore struggle with supervising learners.
- ▶ There is no accountability for the employer if the learner does not complete the apprenticeship. The onus is all on the training provider - up to 60 metrics reported by Providers but none by Employers.
- ▶ How is success measured?
- ▶ Employers becoming disillusioned through the trailblazer process when it is long and doesn't end up being what they need.
- ▶ Apprenticeships should be wanted by the employer to get the best people for the jobs, not shoehorned to fit.



Solutions proposed

- ▶ Standard training for line managers around day-to-day guidance and one-to-one support.
- ▶ Strengthen the tri-partite agreement.
- ▶ Explore measures for apprenticeship success beyond the current achievement rates mechanism, this in turn would support training providers in terms of completion payments, etc.

7. Careers Pathways



Issues identified

- ▶ Traineeships have been abolished. These were a vital first step for many people and provided a stepping stone into an apprenticeship.
- ▶ How to create pathways without traineeships?



Solutions proposed

- ▶ Pre-apprenticeships there needs to be a level below full apprenticeships that leads to an apprenticeship e.g. a 'foundation apprenticeship' (we would then have Foundation Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships).
- ▶ Programmes need clearly defined pathways through and between them.
- ▶ Flexibility around modules in certain circumstances would be a big win. For example, with The Ambulance Service, learners must have a driver's license for a car before starting their course. Obtaining a driving license is not included in the standard, flexibility to add this as an example would be good.



☎ 0117 986 5389

✉ enquiries@aelp.org.uk

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