

# Choosing apprenticeships

***The Government's 14-19 reforms have highlighted the important role of careers education and IAG practitioners in helping young people to choose the qualifications and pathways that are right for them. This briefing focuses on the planned national expansion of apprenticeships. How are apprenticeships changing? What's involved in applying for an apprenticeship? Where can they lead? These are questions that practitioners need to be able to answer if they are going to be of real help to young people, their parents/carers and other staff.***

## What you need to know

### The policy context

The Government is committed to expanding apprenticeships as a way of strengthening the national skills base, meeting the needs of employers and providing a mainstream option for 14-19 year olds.

In May, the Prime Minister announced a statutory entitlement to an apprenticeship place for all suitably qualified young people who want one by 2013. Over the past decade, the number of young people and adults starting apprenticeships has more than doubled and it is anticipated that one in five young people will undertake an apprenticeship by 2020.

The practical steps towards realising this vision include:

- increasing funding for apprenticeships by almost a quarter between 2007-08 and 2010-11 to over £1 billion
- establishing a new National Apprenticeship Service
- increasing apprenticeships in the public sector by setting targets in key areas
- setting up the London Apprenticeships Task- force (July 2008)
- Setting up the National Vacancy Matching Service - a national database to match potential apprentices with employers offering apprenticeship jobs.

### Key Facts

- Currently, over 130,000 employers are offering apprenticeship places in over 180 different types of apprenticeships across 80 industry sectors (Many are in modern sectors where there have never been apprenticeships before, e.g. e-skills, tourism, creative industries, local government, retail).
- Apprenticeship completion rates have risen to 63% in 2006-07 compared to 24% in 2001-02.

**Key Facts** continued

- Apprenticeship 'starts' have increased from 65,000 in 1996-97 to 180,000 in 2006-07. They are projected to grow to almost 210,000 by 2010-11. Men made up slightly more than half of this number (54.2%).
- The proportion of apprenticeships which are at level 3 is around 30% in recent years. The balance between level 3 and level 2 apprenticeships reflects employer demand and apprenticeships at level 3 are expected to grow.

**Types of apprenticeship**

Apprentices are employed and paid whilst they train. There are two levels of employer-led apprenticeship. **Apprenticeships** are available at Level 2 and **Advanced Apprenticeships** are available at Level 3. They all lead to NVQs and Key Skills qualifications. Some apprenticeships also offer a technical certificate such as a BTEC or City & Guilds and other qualifications or requirements as specified by the particular occupation.

The **Young Apprenticeship** programme enables young people at Key Stage 4 to take vocational qualifications (such as NVQs) at Level 2. This gives them a platform from which they can progress to post-16 apprenticeships, if they wish. Young Apprenticeships are provided through partnerships between schools, colleges, training providers and employers. Young people spend up to two days a week in the workplace with an employer, training provider or college. This is on top of subjects in the core national curriculum, which are protected so that young people still have access to a balanced curriculum and a broad

set of options. Ofsted reported last year that the Young Apprenticeships programme is continuing to improve. Better collaboration in Young Apprenticeships partnerships has brought about stronger provision. They also found that better monitoring of progress and improved advice and guidance have raised achievement and sustained high levels of motivation and enjoyment. Employers also saw significant benefits for themselves and for young people.

Programme-led Apprenticeships (PLAs) can also be undertaken. There were around 23,000 participants in October 2007. Of these, 72% are being delivered through work-based learning and the rest through further education. Participants are non-employed. The aim of Programme-Led Apprenticeships is to prepare participants for employment and possible completion of the full apprenticeship framework.

**Key challenges**

Practitioners need to be aware of a number of key challenges linked to the further development of apprenticeships:

**1. Achieving the expansion in the number of places**

Measures in the draft Bill include proposals to streamline the administration of apprenticeships and encourage more companies to offer apprenticeships, particularly small- and medium-sized enterprises. Your local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) can provide details of the strategy for expanding the supply of apprenticeships in your area.

**2. Continuing to improve completion rates**

Apprenticeship completion rates are at a record level. Reasons for non-completion can vary from

lack of individual motivation to poorly-designed programmes. Where practitioners can play their part is by helping young people to understand the expectations of employers, develop employability skills and make well-informed choices.

### 3. Preparing young people well

Young people may not have realised that increasingly apprenticeships are being linked to high aspirations and progression. Events such as Apprenticeship Week (25-29 February 2008) and the National Apprenticeship Awards (10 July 2008) illustrate the new marketing and re-positioning of apprenticeships. Less well-qualified and less well-motivated young people are likely to experience stiff competition for apprenticeships. Young people may find that it is not enough to meet the minimum entry requirement especially as they may also be competing against adults with better work experience.

Young people will need help with finding out where and how to apply for apprenticeships. They can speak to their Connexions personal adviser, log on to [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk) or call the apprenticeships helpline on 08000 150 600 for more information about the opportunities in their area. Some regions are developing on-line vacancy services but in most areas and sectors information is not all in one place. Organisations that provide advice on where to look include Connexions services and sector skills councils, e.g. SEMTA for the engineering sector (<http://www.semta.org.uk/pdf/Suggestions%20apprents%20England.pdf>)

The LSC is developing a National Vacancy Matching Service from April 2009.

### 4. Planning for progression

Young people will need help with their career planning to take advantage of the flexible progression pathways which are emerging. Some apprenticeships already attract UCAS points. Examples of progression possibilities include being able to move from:

- Apprenticeships to Advanced Apprenticeships
- Apprenticeships or Advanced Apprenticeships to Foundation Degrees
- Diplomas to Apprenticeships/Advanced Apprenticeships and vice versa. (All the component qualifications of an apprenticeship will be included in the Qualification and Credit Framework, enabling easier movement between the new 14-19 Diplomas and Apprenticeships).

### 5. Tackling inequalities arising from the gendered nature of apprenticeships

The expansion of apprenticeships from traditional craft-based programmes to a wider range of occupations has provided more opportunities for women. However, according to a recent TUC report, women often miss out on high quality programmes and are more likely to have poor pay and conditions. As a consequence, the TUC is backing calls for action to break down occupational segregation in apprenticeships particularly in sectors which have been traditionally male dominated and which also tend to be higher paid, e.g. construction, engineering, vehicle maintenance and repair. In 2006/07, women made up 41.7 per cent of Advanced Apprenticeships, and 47.6% of Apprenticeships suggesting that women are more likely to be in lower level apprenticeships.

## The role of careers education and IAG practitioners

Practitioners have a key role in raising awareness of the new opportunities in apprenticeships, protecting young people from inequality and overcoming barriers to choice. Realistically, practitioners cannot achieve all these goals alone but they should be part of a multi-pronged strategy which includes action by parents/carers, unions, employers and Government.

It is important to inform young people about how apprenticeships are changing in group sessions on choices at 13+ and 16+ and to follow this up by offering help to individuals who require additional information and advice.

Key points to mention in group sessions include:

- An apprenticeship offers employment - paid work - with training and a qualification at the end
- They are available in jobs right across the whole economy - from engineering to IT and retail (see Apprenticeship website)
- Apprenticeships are occupationally specific, i.e. a route for people who know where they want to work
- There are no set entry requirements for apprenticeships. Different occupations and employers have their own requirements. A young person aged 16-24 who starts an apprenticeship can continue until they have completed it
- There is no set time to complete an apprenticeship as they vary widely in content and size. Typically, a Level 2 Apprenticeship will usually take between 12-18 months and an Advanced Apprenticeship 1-3 years
- Apprentices get paid. In 2005, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) established a minimum payment of £80 a week for apprentices; but the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills 2007 apprentice pay survey showed that average apprentice net pay was £170 per week. Rates were lowest in sectors such as hairdressing and early years care. National Apprenticeship earnings have been reviewed and an announcement was made at the TUC Conference in September that minimum weekly earnings for apprentices will be increased from £80 to £95 per week from August 2009
- Apprenticeships combine practical work skills developed on the job with structured training. Training may be offered in-house by the employer or by a college or training provider. Apprentices also learn a lot about the job while working alongside experienced staff
- Young people can start a Young Apprenticeship in Year 10 while they are still at school (unpaid)
- Successful apprentices can go on to do higher level qualifications if they wish and rise to high positions in their organisations. UCAS now formally recognises some apprenticeships for entry to Higher Education and more are on the way.

The national Choices publications are a useful general resource:

- Which way now?  
<http://www.connexions-direct.com/whichwaynow/>
- It's your choice  
<http://www.connexions-direct.com/itsyourchoice/>

## Where you can find out more

House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs (2008). *Apprenticeship: Recent Developments*. Third Report of Session 2007-08. London: TSO. [Accessed 26.08.08. Available: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldeconaf/137/13702.htm>].

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Ofsted. (2008). *The Impact of Programme-led Apprenticeships*. London: Ofsted. [Accessed 26.08.08. Available: [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/assets/Internet\\_Content/Shared\\_Content/Files/2008/july/ipla.pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/assets/Internet_Content/Shared_Content/Files/2008/july/ipla.pdf)].

TUC. (2008). *Still more (better paid) jobs for the boys - apprenticeships and gender segregation*. [Accessed 25.08.08. Available: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/genderreport.pdf>]