

APPG Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning

Minutes 17 May 2011

Witnesses:

Graham Hoyle, Chief Executive, Association of Learning Providers
Geraldine McCallum, Curriculum Leader in Engineering, Bradford College
John McCallum, Head of Construction, Bradford College
Cathy Walsh, Principal and Chief Executive, Barking and Dagenham College

Attendees

Robert Halfon MP (Chair)	Toni Pearce, NUS
Kelvin Hopkins MP	Bob Vessey, AMiE
Stephen Lloyd MP	Dan Taubman, UCU
Lord Aberdare	Lisa Johnson, UCU
Teresa Frith, AoC	Helen Taylor, AoC
Shane Chowen, NUS	

Key points from the discussion:

- Witnesses raised the problem of insufficient employer places to keep up with the demand for apprentices. Where possible Colleges are employing the apprentices to mitigate against this and also to take on the risk for the employer.
- Witnesses were concerned that the apprenticeship brand is not being well promoted and the general public has outdated perceptions of what an apprenticeship actually is. This could in part be helped by well known and well respected figureheads.
- The problem of funding for 19+ learners was raised, particularly in the context of realising that the traditional A level route was not for them part way through their studies.
- It was felt that for people over the age of 25, the term 'apprentice' was not right as it implied youth and learner rather than experience and applied learning. Apprenticeships over 25 are also harder to place as employers have to pay 50% of the fee.
- Cynical exploitation of loopholes in local authority contracts to employ apprentices almost ready to complete their training rather than taking on a new apprentice were cited as problems amongst private contractors. Also the problem of large, well known, employers pushing down costs and leaving Colleges with no income from the apprentices they place with them.
- There was widespread support for a Royal Society of Apprentices, but its purpose needs to be clear otherwise it risks being too generic.
- Witnesses suggested that employers need incentives to take on apprentices, perhaps in the form of tax breaks rather than cash.
- Graham Hoyle suggested that apprenticeships should be approached as an employer scheme with some Government support rather than a Government initiative and that

there was strong evidence to support the bottom line arguments in favour of employers taking on apprentices.

- The problem of poor advice and guidance for young people was raised alongside perverse incentives for schools to keep young people in their own sixth forms. The demise of Connexions was cited as a concern and the abolition of EMA, which might result in young people choosing to stay in a local school rather than opting to travel to a College and take an apprenticeship.
- Apprenticeships being seen as an answer to unemployment and graduates taking apprenticeships was raised as a problem. Witnesses were clear that apprenticeships should not be part of a Government back to work programme.
- The group agreed following discussion that a separate meeting would be help to discuss University Technical Colleges.