

The Draft Apprenticeship Bill

TAEN - The Age and Employment Network - is an independent charity established in 1998 and was formerly known as Third Age Employment Network. We are supported by Help the Aged and we are based in their London headquarters at King's Cross. We blend our ethical values with business reality and experience.

TAEN is a network of member organisations and a centre of expertise on everything to do with age and employment. We are informed by good practice, both nationally and internationally. We promote evidence-based solutions.

Reason for TAEN's response to the consultation

We are responding to this consultation because we believe that apprenticeships offer an essential way of passing on skills and knowledge, not just from one generation to another but from those who have knowledge and skill to those who seek to have it, whatever their ages. We are convinced that adult apprenticeships offer a valuable way of transforming the work and career opportunities of people at different stages of their work lives – the

young, those in mid-career and those who have perhaps followed earlier careers but wish or need new skills and knowledge to remain economically active. (See the *Further Observations* section of this paper for further information on our thinking concerning these matters.)

The Bill as a whole

The following points strike us as fundamental flaws in the draft Bill as it stands:

- The Bill as a whole does not address the issue of the older apprentice. This means, in our view, that it is not fit for demographic purpose, bearing in mind the changes that are taking place in the age composition of the workforce.
- Secondly, in undertaking an Impact Assessment for the Bill, there appears to have been no consideration of 'age' issues, other than in relation to young people - only to gender, ethnicity and disability.

In these two important respects the draft Bill fails the basic tests of suitability that must be put forward. There are points of detail in relation to sections it could contain but does not currently conceptualise, but basically our problem with it is that the whole conception of apprenticeships and therefore the shape of the draft Bill, is limited, ageist and directed at only a narrow band of the population: the youngest entrants to the workforce.

The aim of the draft Bill as supporting the expansion and strengthening of apprenticeships as envisaged in *World Class Apprenticeships*

We believe that the vision set out in *World Class Apprenticeships* was limited by its failure to comprehend the scope of the possible *idea* of an apprenticeship, which we outline in comment above.

We believe that this is an omission by default rather than design though it is symptomatic of the degree to which age remains an invisible dimension of inequality in our society.

We do not believe that it is possible to provide a system of apprenticeships that is fit for all people of all ages without recognising the specific qualities and needs of older and mid-life people.

We believe there must be a duty on those devising apprenticeship frameworks to incorporate the necessary range of options and subtle variations in approaches to learning, etc, which would address this area of need.

Issues in relation to adult and older apprentices

The consultation exercise does not invite our comments on this issue but we offer the following in any event. The extension of apprenticeships to adults over 25 was announced in July 2003 in *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential* launched by the Prime Minister and four members of the Cabinet. Five years later this has not happened. Apprenticeships remain essentially for under-25s, not 'for all' people. There have been a few, largely under-subscribed, pilots and £25 million allocated in 2007-08, but no profile, programme or performance indicators for the over-25s who will make up the large majority of the workforce of 2020.

We welcome the strong focus on apprenticeships and the creation of the National Apprenticeship Service, but believe that the role of apprenticeships in relation to the existing workforce, as distinct to young new entrants, must be clarified.

We assert that it is important that apprenticeships should not necessarily be seen as a province reserved for the young. Instead, they should also embrace all who are keen to work and learn a disciplined vocationally oriented body of knowledge and skill with a view to sustaining a successful work role, performing well and meeting exacting standards. This should apply to all sorts of individuals, whether they have missed their chance in earlier life, have fallen victim to changed circumstances and wish to readjust or simply because longer working lives in the population as a whole demand new approaches to careers and people cannot necessarily sustain roles in jobs that wear them out or limit their usefulness in other ways.

On the other hand, we believe that there is a case for considering the use of language in relation to apprenticeship programmes for all categories of adults and older people. TAEN has anecdotal evidence that some adults beyond the age of usual admission to apprenticeship programmes dislike the term 'apprenticeship' in relation to a possible programme of learning and experience to which they may, in all other respects, relate very positively. It would seem that there could be an argument here for popularising other terms for adult or senior apprenticeships, or publicity to try to ensure that the 'just for the young' connotation of an 'apprenticeship' is exchanged for a broader, all-age concept.

Apprenticeship frameworks

The consultative document makes the following statement in relation to clauses 7-10 of the Bill:

"These clauses of the Bill define and set out the procedures for the issue of apprenticeship frameworks. Apprenticeship frameworks are currently developed and approved by Sector Skills Councils on behalf of the Secretary of State according to the apprenticeships blueprint. The frameworks are high level curricula for an apprenticeship in a specified career. As specified in the blueprint, the frameworks typically include an integrated programme which contains a competence element; a knowledge element; transferable or functional skills; and employment rights and responsibilities. Frameworks require a person to obtain a qualification such as an NVQ at Level 2, 3 or 4 in a particular subject to meet the competence and knowledge elements, as well as functional skills in English and maths."

What is not clear from the above is whether there will be sufficient flexibility in the design of apprenticeship frameworks to attract and challenge senior workers. For example, someone in their 40s, 50s or 60s might quite reasonably believe that acquiring a new skill and practising a new trade is perfectly possible, but they might feel that it ought not to be necessary to go through the same training and formal learning processes as a younger person who might be tackling new skills or knowledge areas for the first time.

A 45 or 50-year-old former employee in the financial services sector embarking on an apprenticeship in a manual trade could well argue that they have no need for a curriculum including numeracy or linguistic skills and that they have also acquired practical skills through their hobbies and personal pursuits. How far would apprenticeship frameworks designed for younger apprentices be suitable in a case such as this?

We believe that there is a need for a variety of means to assess competence particularly among older people. For example, if someone can present evidence of existing competence in a given area there should be no need to follow such an element in a formal curriculum.

TAEN believes that there should be a duty for all those devising apprenticeship frameworks to include options to allow for the professional assessment of acquired competence. These should embody sufficient flexibility to permit older people considering apprenticeships to see that it would be possible to completely meet framework requirements in an accelerated time. In many cases, this could be as little as one year, depending on the demands of the occupation in

question and the skills and background of adult 'senior' apprentices.

We believe that this approach should be explicitly and clearly laid out as a 'Senior Apprenticeship Programme' suitable for the older and very experienced worker.

Further observations

TAEN is happy to provide further information about age and employment issues, particularly examples of good practice in relation to the extension of working lives. We believe that there is considerable scope to help and encourage individuals to have enjoyable and satisfying careers beyond the time when many people quit the workforce in their 50s or early 60s. We believe that there is a real need for greater flexibility around careers, both in their planning and evolution, and we observe that where such flexibility is available, it has a beneficial effect both in terms of providing financial reward and a sense of purpose to continue in work. In turn, this can be beneficial in later life, contributing to the alleviation of hardship.

Crucially, demographic change with the decline in numbers of children being born and increasing life expectancy makes it essential that people are encouraged to work longer if they are mentally and physically able to do so and if they have been prepared by skills and experience to adjust to new work

requirements. Re-skilling in later life should be seen as a perfectly normal thing to do. Many people during their main work careers have unrealised ambitions and interests and these may lay the basis for new and exciting departures that will extend their ability to work and earn a living and of course to provide for their families. Training and re-training in any shape or form should be something that is open and available to people of all ages and backgrounds. We believe that new thinking of this kind is needed to tap the potential of our older work force. New opportunities, good work and the sustained provision of stimulus and challenge as well as flexible approaches to working time and work-life balance can all make an impact.

In an era when it is going to be more and more important that our country is able to draw on the full economic potential of its citizens, we believe that properly used, a new approach to apprenticeships as outlined in the (no doubt re-drafted) Apprenticeship Bill, will be capable of playing a major part in securing these outcomes for our people.

TAEN – The Age and Employment Network

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