

**Education Committee: Quality of apprenticeships and skills training inquiry**

**Written evidence submitted by the Royal Society of Chemistry**

1. **Introduction**

We are supportive of apprenticeships and the Government’s ambition to create more, because we recognise the benefits they bring to individuals, employers and the wider economy.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this inquiry as we recognise that if apprenticeships are to be valued they must be of the highest quality and afforded appropriate protection.

1. **The quality of current provision, how this varies by sector, level and region, and the impact of this on learner outcomes**

We value having qualifications within the apprenticeship standards. Qualifications provide a level of assurance and trusted currency within the sector that supports both lateral and upward mobility. We also believe it is important that individuals have the opportunity to achieve a qualification even if they are unsuccessful within their apprenticeship.

There are a number of organisations involved with the delivery and design of new apprenticeship standards. We believe a more thorough analysis of conflicts of interest should be undertaken. For instance, we are aware of some trailblazer groups having End Point Assessment Organisations facilitating the trailblazer group. We believe this potentially creates a serious conflict of interest when decisions are made in respect of assessment plans, integrated degree apprenticeships and External Quality Assurance of the End Point Assessment. Where there are conflicts of interest, the integrity of the apprenticeship system is at risk of being brought into question which could have a detrimental impact upon the perceived quality.

Clear terms of reference should be outlined for all groups who have a role with quality in apprenticeships. Interdependencies should be outlined which clearly detail roles and responsibilities, and the process should conflicts emerge.

1. **The effectiveness of the quality monitoring system, in particular the role and capacity of Ofsted**

We have concerns with the principle of the reforms having more of a focus on the outcome of apprenticeships. By definition this means there will be less of a focus on the learning journey. The outcome is important, but we would also like to see appropriate quality measures and triggers within the learning journey. A focus on outcome creates the risk of poor training programmes being put in place that will not be apparent until the apprentice is assessed at the end of the programme.

Ofsted undoubtedly has an important role to play with inspecting delivery across all providers. There has however been a large increase in the number of apprenticeship providers since the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers was launched and we would therefore question whether Ofsted now has the resource to be able to inspect and monitor delivery of all provision. For the quality of apprenticeship training to be robustly inspected and monitored it is important Ofsted are resourced and funded appropriately.

External Quality Assurance of apprenticeships is an important aspect and we welcome that Professional Bodies are invited to undertake this function and are recognised for their expertise in this area. We do however believe that having several options of EQA available could lead to comparability issues across apprenticeships and question why the statutory body for quality assurance, Ofqual, was not instructed to carry out this function. As the Professional Body for chemical sciences, we intend to form a partnership arrangement with Ofqual to undertake this function, thus utilising our industry expertise in combination with Ofqual’s statutory powers.

Within the Institute for Apprenticeships, we do have some concerns that the route panel for health and science does not appear to have appropriate representation from science employers. We would urge the Institute to rectify this to ensure appropriate scrutiny of science apprenticeship standards and assessment plans can occur.

1. **The role of the Education and Skills Funding Agency in ensuring value for money, and the impact of different funding models**

We believe a clear indication on whether apprenticeships are successful is the impact they have upon the macro economy. We have previously made representations that the levy risks redistributing funds from high value sectors such as STEM into other sectors. We are consequently concerned that little consideration appears to be given on the macro-economic impact, and as such it would be possible for the published measures to indicate success whilst actually working counter to the principles outlined in the industrial strategy.

It is not clear that the published measures identified will realistically enable a judgement to be made on whether apprenticeships meet the skills needs of apprentices and employers. The number of apprenticeship starts and the number of employers engaging is valid data, but this will not necessarily reveal that apprenticeships are providing the right skills and could overlook other variables that may be preventing employers from engaging. It should be noted that apprenticeship numbers were increasing before the reforms and yet apprenticeship frameworks were deemed to not be providing the correct skills.

1. **Quality and oversight of training provided by subcontractors**

We believe that subcontractors should be under the same scrutiny as prime contract holders, and consequently we believe there should not be any differences in approach between overseeing the training delivery of prime and sub-contract holders.

1. **About the Royal Society of Chemistry**

With over 50,000 members and a knowledge business that spans the globe, the Royal Society of Chemistry is the UK’s professional body for chemical scientists, supporting and representing our members and bringing together chemical scientists from all over the world.

A not-for-profit organisation with 175 years of history, we invest in educating future generations of scientists, we raise and maintain standards and work with industry and academia to promote collaboration and innovation. We advise governments on policy and we promote the talent, information and ideas that lead to great advances in science.