

Apprenticeship levy: how to avoid getting ripped off

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The Apprenticeship Levy may be a game changer, but it certainly has its challenges. The major shake-up, designed to create 3m new apprenticeships by 2020, will see employers with a wage bill over £3m pay a 0.5% levy, whilst non-levied employers will pay 10% towards Apprenticeship training. On the supply side, training companies continue to grapple with new contract terms for delivering Apprenticeships and new registration processes to be approved suppliers.

Amidst all the chaos, a new, independent advisory firm has emerged to help employers navigate the potential pitfalls of Apprenticeships. Bally Bhogal, MD of Independent Training and Skills Services (ITSS) knows first-hand the problems experienced by employers stating, "one of the biggest challenges is the lack of knowledge and understanding around Apprenticeships and the subsequent handover of control to a training provider. Being in the driving seat is key to ensuring that employers get a good deal."

The Apprenticeship marketplace has over 1500 registered training companies so 'doing your homework' can really pay off to avoid getting ripped off. As a bare minimum, employers should be asking what training and qualifications they will receive through Apprenticeship programmes, how much it will cost, how long it will take, what the benefits will be and how the training will be delivered. To avoid getting a raw deal, comparison of Apprenticeship programmes and training companies is an absolute must!

"At ITSS, we go a step further by researching the track record of suppliers and checking quality measures such as Ofsted grades where they exist, to help employers make an informed choice." continued Bally Bhogal.

Apprenticeship training has traditionally been dominated by larger training companies, however the levy provides an opportunity for smaller, niche providers to enter and compete in this space. The new approval process to deliver Apprenticeship training has controversially seen some of the bigger players lose out (not least in Birmingham, where three large Colleges failed to qualify for the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP)), whilst new entrants have now been given a voice. The latter may well be competing on niche provision, expertise and agility, whilst the bigger boys have traditionally competed on volume, resources and reach.

Factors that set the competition apart may include pricing, sector specialisms, training methods, quality assurance, staff expertise, track record and previous successes, if any. Employers must assure themselves prior to contract that these elements are thoroughly understood and at what point they will see the return on investment from Apprenticeship training.

"We are all about ensuring that the employer gets value. These reforms have been introduced to raise standards, to put employers back in control of their staff training and to improve the Apprenticeship experience. We are supportive of these principles and look forward to helping levy and non-levy paying employers make informed choices and to facilitate effective competition around Apprenticeship training." commented Bally.

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