

APSCo calls for broader re-scoping of Apprenticeship Levy

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Proposals would support upskilling of self-employed workforce

The Association of Professional Staffing Companies has written to Gillian Keegan, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Skills and Apprenticeships, calling for a broadening of the scope of the Apprenticeship Levy. The trade association's proposals would allow not only a more efficient utilisation of unused levy pots, but also the opportunity for the professional recruitment sector to upskill and retrain large elements of the self-employed labour market which has traditionally been unable to make use of the levy.

"Under the current rules, many of our largest recruitment firm members have enormous levy pots which they are unable to spend on upskilling their own, relatively limited workforces," says Tania Bowers, Legal Counsel and Head of Public Policy at APSCo. "This is because although they don't have a large staff of their own, they maintain large payrolls of self-employed workers who they place with clients operating in the STEM and professional sectors. Enabling these organisations to transfer funding pots to other businesses will enable the delivery of quality apprenticeship and training opportunities."

APSCo's other proposals concern the length and targeting of apprenticeship courses.

"By nature of their duration, apprenticeship schemes are learning enablers for those in permanent employment, not contingent workers, says Tania Bowers. "However, the professional flexible workforce is vital to the UK economy and reducing the length of apprenticeships, making the training more flexible and increasing online learning would certainly bring about a positive economic impact. A number of our members are already transferring their unused levy pots for the benefit of others but this has mainly been focused on 'blue collar' apprenticeships. However, the future success of our economy depends on the development of high-level STEM skills and so employers should be incentivised to create apprenticeships in these areas."

However, APSCo says that one of the main issues is that employers are less invested in a contingent worker's long-term development because the worker is filling a short-term requirement. "We believe that proposals for portable apprenticeships which were included the Lifetime Skills Guarantee announced by the Prime Minister last month, should be applied to self-employed agency workers too. The recruitment sector operates in partnership with STEM sectors where domestic skill shortages are most keenly felt. Enabling the recruitment sector and its contingent workforce to make full use of the Apprenticeship Levy would enable it to play a more active role in supporting Government ambitions to upskill the UK workforce and to equip it with the knowledge and expertise needed for the future."

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