

Trade body calls for changes to Apprenticeships to support the self-employed

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In a response to the Government Consultation, Flexi-Job Apprenticeships: Reshaping the role of Apprenticeship Training Agencies, the Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo) has called for a change in Apprenticeship Levy rules to help fund the professional development of the self-employed workforce.

In its submission to the consultation, APSCo recommended that the proposals be broadened beyond formal apprenticeships so that recruiters can release monies in different ways, including to finance shorter training programmes, fund the professional development of Independent Professionals, provide training for agency workers and prioritise highly skilled technical training.

Tania Bowers, Legal Counsel and Head of Public Policy at APSCo commented:

“APSCo champions the introduction of portable and flexi-apprenticeships. However, we also believe that the vision outlined in the consultation does not address how the recruitment sector can make best use of existing Apprenticeship Levy pots to fund the professional development of the self-employment workforce.

“Under Apprenticeship Levy rules, many of our members currently have enormous levy pots which they are unable to spend. These members typically employ a relatively small number of staff directly, but maintain a very large payroll of self-employed workers who they place into roles on behalf of clients. These agency workers are currently unable to benefit from apprenticeship levy funding – an issue which we would like to see addressed in the consultation recommendations.

“We support the Government ambitions to build upon the work of Apprenticeship Training Agencies (ATAs) and utilise the expertise of organisations embedded in certain sectors, professions or geographies to deliver flexi-work apprenticeship schemes. This is an ambition that the professional recruitment industry is well placed to facilitate. Our members maintain close ties with leading employers eager to access and develop new talent, whilst some of our larger members have previously served as ATAs reflecting our commitment to upskilling young talent throughout the labour market. However, there are issues with existing ATAs across the private sector as they are not commercially viable without the financial support of a large employer. It is our opinion that portable apprenticeships are more practical than flexi-apprenticeships, largely due to Government's view that flexi-apprenticeship programmes must be self-funded.

“We do welcome some of the recommendations outlined in the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill which has a second reading in the House of Lords this week. The Bill calls for a number of opportunities to support skills development for those out of education, however there are some limitations which will likely hinder the success of the recommendations, including the requirement to have a Level 2 qualification to access training under this scheme. We agree that skills improvement plans should be employer led, but it is unrealistic in our view to expect organisations such as local Chamber of Commerce to pick up statutory responsibility and make a significant difference. In our experience from our members, businesses will join a trade or sector specific organisation to get specialist support rather than a general local

business group.

“APSCo also supports the Lifetime Skills Initiative but we are awaiting the full details as we unfortunately fear that, rather like the flexi apprenticeships, there will not be sufficient financial incentive for businesses to actively promote the scheme amongst its workforce.”

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