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**Apprenticeships Evaluation 2015 –
Learner Summary Report**

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RESEARCH

Summary

This summary report presents the findings of the Apprenticeship Evaluation Learner Survey 2015, and is the fourth in an annual series, the first of which was published in 2012.

The evaluation, which sits alongside the Apprenticeship Evaluation Employer Survey, consisted of quantitative interviews with 5,000 Level 2 and 3 apprentices, as well as 800 higher apprentices, to explore their views of their apprenticeship.

The research is intended to help monitor key progress indicators and develop a greater understanding of recent policy reforms that will help shape future development of the programme. Specifically it covered individuals' motivations for undertaking an apprenticeship, their experience of the training they received, their satisfaction with the apprenticeship and the impact this has had on their career.

Profile of apprentices

Level 2 apprenticeships remain the most common form of apprenticeship, although the proportion of apprentices on a Level 3 apprenticeship has been gradually rising over the last few years (these account for 43 per cent in 2015 of all Level 2 and 3 apprentices compared with 37 per cent in 2013).

Around a quarter (26%) of Level 2 and 3 apprentices were undertaking a Business apprenticeship, the most common framework. Health and Engineering apprenticeships have both experienced a sustained period of growth since 2013, accounting for 24 per cent and 19 per cent of all Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships respectively in 2015, up from 21 per cent and 14 per cent in 2013.

By demographics such as age and ethnicity there has been little change compared with recent years¹: two-fifths (41%) of apprentices were aged 25 and above, a third (33%) between 19 and 24 and a quarter (25%) under 19, while White apprentices account for 91 per cent of all Level 2 and 3 apprentices. Over half of all Level 2 and 3 apprentices were female (53%), and the vast majority (93%) did not have a disability.

There has been growth in the number of higher apprentices (those on a Level 4 or above apprenticeship): in 2015 they accounted for four per cent of total current apprentices and two per cent of total completed apprentices, up from two per cent and 0.7 per cent in 2014. This increase has been accompanied by a diversification of frameworks such that

¹ Note that these results were weighted to match Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data (by framework, level and age) filtered on specific dates, and as such will not match annual apprenticeship figures. Rather, they represent a snapshot in time (as apprentices were selected for this research on the basis of whether they were either undertaking an apprenticeship in the 2014/15 ILR, or had completed an apprenticeship between March and October 2014). The profile of apprentices is instead compared to that of the 2014 survey, which covers those on provision at the time of the survey, or who had completed between August 2012 and March 2013.

Accountancy no longer dominates the higher apprenticeship landscape (a fall from 60 per cent of all Level 4 apprentices in 2014 to 28 per cent in 2015). In particular there has been an increase in the proportion of higher apprentices on other Business frameworks, as well as in Health.

Routes into apprenticeships and motivations

Nearly half (48%) of all Level 2 and 3 apprentices were recruited specifically with the intention of doing an apprenticeship. Approaches to recruitment varied considerably by framework, with individuals undertaking more 'traditional' frameworks more likely to be recruited on to their apprenticeship. Only around a third of apprentices on a Health (32%) or Retail (35%) framework were recruited specifically as an apprentice.

Awareness that individuals were undertaking an apprenticeship has continued to increase, with two-thirds of Level 2 and 3 apprentices (67%, rising to 92% of those who had been recruited as apprentices) aware the training they undertook was an apprenticeship, compared with 65 per cent in 2014 and 63 per cent in 2013.

There were three core factors behind Level 2 and 3 apprentices' decision to take up an apprenticeship: for career purposes (cited as a *main* reason by 30%), to gain a qualification (a main reason for 25%) and to develop work-related skills (23%). Motivations varied considerably depending on whether or not the individual had been recruited to the apprenticeship.

Compared to Level 2 and 3 apprentices, higher apprentices were less likely to have been specifically recruited to an apprenticeship (32%) and more likely to have been existing employees (67%), an approach that was most common in the Health framework (88%). Linked to this, fewer than three-fifths of higher apprentices were aware their course was an apprenticeship (57%). The main motivations for undertaking an apprenticeship were similar to those expressed by Level 2 and 3 apprentices.

Satisfaction with apprenticeships

Over the last few years the level of satisfaction with apprenticeships has been consistently high. 2015 showed no change from previous years. Nearly nine in ten (89%) Level 2 and 3 apprentices were satisfied with their apprenticeship, while over seven in ten (72%) were 'very satisfied'. Satisfaction was generally higher for those apprentices on more traditional frameworks, such as Construction (76% very satisfied). ICT (65%) and Arts and Media (61%) returned the lowest levels of satisfaction.

The aspect of the apprenticeship with which Level 2 and 3 apprentices were most satisfied was its relevance (89% satisfied), followed by the quality of training (87%).

Level 2 and 3 apprentices' expectations of apprenticeships were usually met (21%) or exceeded (71%), in line with results from 2014. Younger apprentices were more positive, as were those still working for their employer.

The vast majority of higher (Level 4 and 5) apprentices (89%) were satisfied with their apprenticeship, although the proportion of apprentices who were *very* satisfied (68%) was

slightly lower than that found amongst Level 2 and 3 apprentices. Results were similar to 2014. Once again higher apprentices were most satisfied with the relevance of training they received (92%). Two-thirds (66%) of higher apprentices felt their apprenticeship exceeded expectations.

Quality and content of apprenticeships

Recognised apprenticeships are required to last for a minimum of 12 months, ensuring that they are of high quality and that apprentices receive sufficient training. Positively, only six per cent of Level 2 and 3 apprentices stated that their apprenticeship was intended to last for less than 12 months, rising to eight per cent among apprentices that had been existing employees. This represents a considerable improvement on previous years. In 2013, around half (49%) stated their apprenticeship was supposed to have lasted at least 12 months; by 2014 this had risen to 70 per cent and in 2015 it had reached 94 per cent, showing that the introduction of a minimum 12 month length is beginning to take effect.

Most apprentices reported earning above the Apprenticeship minimum wage of £2.73 an hour at the time of the survey (although this has now increased to £3.30), whilst the average duration of an apprenticeship was 17 months. Learners undertaking Arts and Media frameworks reported shorter apprenticeships (an average of 14 months).

As well as the duration of the course, the type of training received also provides an indication of the quality of the apprenticeship. As in 2014, eight in ten (79%) Level 2 and 3 apprentices received formal training, either at an external provider or in the workplace. Formal training was more common among Level 3 apprentices (81%) and those specifically recruited as apprentices (85%), and this was driven by higher numbers receiving training externally. Nevertheless, one in twenty (5%) reported receiving no training at all, either formal or informal. This was most common for apprentices on an Education framework (11%).

There has been a stronger focus recently on incorporating English and Maths into apprenticeship training should apprentices not have sufficient skills in these areas. The majority (72%) of Level 2 and 3 apprentices already held a Level 2 English qualification, while 67 per cent held a Level 2 Maths qualification. A minority of apprentices did not have these qualifications and were not offered the chance to undertake them as part of their apprenticeship (7% and 8% for English and Maths respectively).

The average duration of higher apprenticeships was longer than those at Level 2 and 3: in line with 2014, they lasted an average of 19 months, while just two per cent of higher apprentices reported that their apprenticeship lasted less than 12 months.

The proportion of higher apprentices receiving formal training had fallen from 84 per cent in 2014 to 79 per cent in 2015. This decrease in formal training was driven by a drop in training at an external training provider (from 64% in 2014 to 54% in 2015).

Apprenticeship Outcomes

Nearly all Level 2 and Level 3 apprentices felt that they acquired or improved their skills as a direct result of their apprenticeship (97%). For the vast majority this included skills and

knowledge related to their current or desired area of work, as well as skills that could be applied to a broad range of jobs and industries.

There has been a slight increase in the proportion of those that had completed apprenticeship who were in work at the point of survey compared to 2014 (from 88% to 92%), but with some variation by framework. There tended to be higher levels of unemployment among completed apprentices who had trained on 'newer' frameworks, such as Arts and Media (11%) and ICT (9%), compared with five per cent overall.

Apprentices cited a number of positive impacts within the workplace, although this did not always translate into pay or promotion benefits: 46 per cent of apprentices had received a pay rise since completing their apprenticeship, while 30 per cent had been promoted. While this compared favourably to 2014, when 38 per cent had received a pay rise and 23 per cent had been promoted, still half (49%) had experienced no such impact. On top of this, around one in four who were promoted or received a pay rise felt the apprenticeship had no impact on this improvement.

While the vast majority of apprentices considered they had developed skills that would benefit them in other jobs or industries, the majority (77%) of completed apprentices who were employed planned to continue working for the same employer for the next two to three years, while 89 per cent planned to continue working in the same sector.

There was also appetite for further training: one in nine (11%) Level 2 and 3 apprentices had undertaken some additional study, and 41% were considering some additional study (rising to 55% among those still undertaking their apprenticeship).

Among those that had completed a higher apprenticeship, nearly all (96%) were in work, with 88 per cent employed full-time. The impacts to pay and promotion for higher apprentices were similar to Level 2 and 3 apprentices: 49 per cent had received a pay rise and 36 per cent were promoted, leaving just under half (47%) who had experienced no such impact.

The vast majority (83%) of employed higher apprentices felt that it was likely that they would remain with the same employer for the next 2-3 years, whilst nearly all (94%) felt it was likely they would continue working in the same sector.

Trailblazers

Trailblazers were launched in October 2013 to encourage employers to develop a new set of apprenticeship standards to replace the existing apprenticeship frameworks. Trailblazers are still in their infancy, and only 19 apprentices who had undertaken a Trailblazer apprenticeship were interviewed in the survey. All findings are unweighted and should be treated indicatively, and with extreme caution, owing to the low base.

The Trailblazer apprentices interviewed tended to have undergone apprenticeships that were of a technical nature, such as automotive engineering or mechatronics maintenance. All had been recruited specifically as apprentices, and there was a broadly even split between Level 3 and Level 4 apprentices. Early signs indicate these tend to be high quality

apprenticeships: the average intended length was 33 months, while all apprentices received some form of training (17 out of 19 received *formal* training).

Satisfaction levels were generally high, although four out of 19 reported that the apprenticeship had not met their expectations. It is too early to assess the outcomes and impacts for individuals on a Trailblazer apprenticeship. However, all agreed that since starting the apprenticeship their job performance had improved, as had their career prospects.



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