

The impact of programme-led apprenticeships

This survey report evaluates programme-led apprenticeships and their impact on improving participation and achievement. Programme-led apprenticeships provide an important alternative to the more traditional employer-led apprenticeship route for young people who have found it difficult to gain employment or for those who require an initial period of planned training before taking up employment. This report looks at the different methods of delivering programme-led apprenticeships and evaluates their success.

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Executive summary

This report is based on a survey of programme-led apprenticeships (PLAs) carried out between August and December 2007. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the impact of these apprenticeships on improving participation and achievement. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) published *A Strategy for programme-led apprenticeships in England for 2007–2010* in July 2007.¹ This report also looks at the implementation of this strategy.

PLAs offer an alternative initial phase before transferring to the more traditional employer-led apprenticeship route. They provide an important opportunity for young people who have found it difficult to gain employment or for those who require an initial period of planned training before employment. All learners on PLAs are non-employed. The role of PLAs is to provide a flexible route through which young people can acquire the underpinning knowledge and skills that will be required for successful completion of the full apprenticeship framework. PLAs are followed by an employed phase in order to demonstrate practical working skills in a real working situation.

PLAs are funded by the LSC. The programme was introduced to work-based learning providers in 2003 and to further education colleges in 2004 under the title 'programme-led pathways'. The programme was later retitled 'programme-led apprenticeships'. In providers of work-based learning, learners on PLAs are either on a period of planned initial training or on work placement with an employer. In further education colleges, learners on PLAs are enrolled on full-time vocational programmes with the intention of progressing to employment, preferably through an employer-led apprenticeship.

Her Majesty's Inspectors and Additional Inspectors carried out visits to, or conducted telephone interviews with, the national LSC, 12 local LSC offices, the National Employer Service, six further education colleges, 19 work-based learning providers and 10 Sector Skills Councils. Evidence from learners and employers was gathered through interviews and from providers' satisfaction surveys and feedback questionnaires. They also reviewed the LSC strategy and policy documents for apprenticeships to gather background information and analysed relevant inspection reports for the period from May 2007 to January 2008.

Participation in PLAs has declined by 58% from 54,536 in 2005 to 22,751 in October 2007.² The greatest decline has been seen in further education colleges, where numbers have fallen from 34,000 in July 2005 to 6,268 in October 2007. This is in

¹ *A strategy for programme-led apprenticeships in England 2007–2010*, Learning and Skills Council, 2007; www.apprenticeships.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/2D284A02-25B6-434F-A5B0-3198DED79A4B/0/ProgrammeLedApprenticeshipStrategy200710.pdf.

² Unpublished apprenticeship data provided by the LSC are used throughout this report.

part due to the enrolment of some learners on other full-time vocational college programmes not designated as PLAs. The lack of nationally published data for PLAs has made it difficult to analyse participation in different geographical areas and occupational sectors.

There are no published national data to track the rate of successful completion of learners who began their apprenticeship route as a programme-led apprentice. However, around 75% of the providers in the survey were able to provide this data. In cases where learners on PLAs had undertaken an initial period of planned training, success rates were higher and the full apprenticeship programme was achieved in a shorter time. Where learners on PLAs were on an extended work placement, with limited prospects of employment, the success rates were mixed. There was little information available from further education colleges on learners' progression to employment.

The introduction of the means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance in April 2006 has led to learners' dissatisfaction, especially where they are in a work placement for a long period of time. The survey found examples of programme-led apprentices on work placements who were working for 30 hours a week and received no payment and no contribution towards their travel expenses.

Employers were positive about PLAs, especially where learners had completed a period of planned initial training. Learners on PLAs were better prepared to meet the expectations of employers and had gained knowledge of the skills area and achieved parts of the apprenticeship framework.

The implementation of the LSC's programme-led strategy has been slow. Only two of the 10 Sector Skills Councils in the survey had started to consider the implications of PLAs for their apprenticeship framework, and only one of these had fully launched their programme following a successful two-year pilot.

There has been slow progress in joint LSC and provider planning for PLAs. In over half of the organisations in the survey poor promotion has resulted in a lack of understanding of their full potential.

There has been some progress in the development of PLAs since the Adult Learning Inspectorate's survey *Which way now for PLPs?* was published in 2006.³ However, many of the areas for improvement identified still remain and the way PLAs are understood, promoted and implemented by local LSC offices, and providers, still varies greatly.

The recently published *World-class apprenticeships: unlocking talent, building skills for all. The government's strategy for the future of apprenticeships in England* has

³ *Which way now for PLPs?*, *Talisman* issue 53 supplement, Adult Learning Inspectorate, August 2006: www.ofsted.gov.uk/assets/Internet_Content/Shared_Content/Migration/ali/tm53_Supplement_FINAL_Bookmkd.pdf.

also identified many of the issues raised in this report, in particular the need to increase participation by employers, to improve data collection and to ensure that learners on PLAs move to an employer-led apprenticeship in order to successfully complete their programme.⁴ The strategy includes reviewing the programme-led full-time further education vocational courses to ensure that there is frequent contact with employers and progression to an employed apprenticeship. It also asks the LSC to create a new name for PLAs to clearly designate the new reformed route.

The development of a successful programme-led route to apprenticeships will make an important contribution to preparing young people for employment and to meeting the challenges implicit in raising the age at which young people will be expected to continue to participate in learning.

Key findings

- Participation in PLAs declined nationally between 2005 and October 2007.
- Learners on PLAs were better prepared for their apprenticeship and were more likely to achieve their full apprenticeship framework in a shorter time period where PLAs were well-designed and provided an initial period of planned training which included elements of the apprenticeship framework.
- Employers were positive about the initial period of planned training that learners on PLAs had undertaken prior to becoming employed. It enabled employed apprentices to settle more quickly into their work roles.
- Too few further education colleges had converted their programme-led full-time vocational courses to ensure there was progression to an employed apprenticeship.
- Work placements, as part of a programme-led apprenticeship, gave a valuable opportunity for young people to start an apprenticeship where there were insufficient employers offering apprenticeships or where they needed work experience prior to being employed. But learners who spent too long on a work placement, without the prospect of securing employment, lost motivation and were more likely to leave their programme.
- Only two of the Sector Skills Councils surveyed had started to look at the implications of PLAs for their apprenticeship frameworks.
- Joint LSC and provider planning for PLAs has been slow. Less than half of local LSC offices in the survey had a structured plan, although a tendering process was underway in over half of the regions in the survey. PLAs had not been widely promoted and their full potential was not well understood.

⁴ *World-class apprenticeships: unlocking talent, building skills for all. The government's strategy for the future of apprenticeships in England* (Ref 285723), Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2008; www.dius.gov.uk/publications/world_class_apprenticeships.pdf.

- The low level of payment available for learners on PLAs is a potential deterrent for those on work placements. There were examples of learners on PLAs working for 30 hours a week and receiving no payment.
- Insufficient use was made of PLAs as a progression route from Entry to Employment.
- Learners' views on PLAs were mixed. Learners on PLAs who were completing an initial period of planned training were generally more positive than those on work placements.
- There has been some progress made on PLAs since the Adult Learning Inspectorate's 2006 survey *Which way now for PLPs?* However, most of the areas for improvement still remain and the way PLAs are understood, promoted and implemented by local LSC offices and providers still varies greatly.

Recommendations

To increase the number of apprenticeship places, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills should:

- take steps to ensure more employers become involved in apprenticeships by promoting the benefits and different routes available
- review the applicability of Education Maintenance Allowance for learners on PLAs, particularly those on non-employed work placements.

To ensure effective implementation of *A Strategy for programme-led apprenticeships in England 2007–2010*, the LSC should:

- use the introduction of the Unique Learner Number to improve collection of national data to disaggregate learners on PLAs from the total numbers of apprentices on programmes and be able to track success rates for apprentices who started their programme as a programme-led apprentice
- promote the importance of further education colleges increasing the number of programme-led full-time vocational courses with progression to an employed apprenticeship
- set a maximum time period for learners on PLAs to be on work placement before they progress to an employer-led apprenticeship
- review the progress made by Sector Skills Councils to ensure that they define how a PLA fits within their sector qualification strategy and that guidelines are issued to providers on the structure of the programme-led phase
- review the progress made by local LSC offices to fully implement PLAs
- raise awareness of PLAs so that training providers, colleges, employers and learners can make informed decisions about this route to an apprenticeship.

To ensure effective implementation of *A Strategy for programme-led apprenticeships in England 2007–2010*, Sector Skills Councils should:

- ensure that they define how a PLA fits within their sector qualification strategy and that guidelines are issued to providers on the structure of the programme-led phase
- set a maximum time period for learners on PLAs to be on work placements before they progress to an employer-led apprenticeship.

To improve the opportunities for their learners, providers should:

- consider the benefits for learners on PLAs, and for employers, of including an initial period of planned training
- aim to achieve employed-status for their learners on PLAs on work placements as soon as possible, ensuring that all employer agreements clearly identify this as a requirement of the placement.

To implement PLAs, colleges of further education should:

- ensure that programme-led full-time vocational courses are designed in line with *A Strategy for programme-led apprenticeships in England 2007–2010*
- designate appropriate full-time vocational courses as suitable for PLAs and identify suitable learners on these courses as learners on PLAs.

Evaluation

Types of programme-led apprenticeships

1. There are two types of PLAs, one delivered through work-based learning and the other through further education. All learners on PLAs are non-employed. In work-based learning, the learners on PLAs are either on a period of planned initial training or on a work placement with an employer. In further education, learners on PLAs are enrolled on full-time vocational programmes at a college with the intention of progressing to employment, preferably through an employer-led apprenticeship.
2. A third of the work-based learning providers in the survey used alternative funding for the period of planned initial training such as work-based learning through Employment to Education (E2E) or European Social Fund projects.

Work-based learning programme-led apprenticeships

Initial period of planned training

3. The survey found the initial period of planned training was delivered through four main routes:

A **vocational course in a further education college** which was either full-time in college or included periods of work experience. This method was usually part of a partnership between the training provider and the further education college. It was normally for a year but could be shorter. Most of the learners on PLAs on the courses surveyed had a planned progression into employment directly from their courses.

Skills Solutions had developed a PLA model that was delivered in partnership with further education colleges and other training providers. In this model, Skills Solutions' learners on PLAs attended college for a full-time block of planned initial training. The courses offered them the opportunity to undertake the technical certificate and key skills before they progressed to employment and completed the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). Job tasters and placement arrangements were encouraged to give them an opportunity to develop employment skills. The emphasis on the courses was progression into employment. Learners on PLAs attended for at least 30 hours a week. They wore personal and protective equipment while at college and money was deducted from their allowance for lateness and non-attendance. Skills Solutions were responsible for arranging full-time employment for them after they completed their course.

A variable-length **planned programme with a work-based learning provider** which normally included some work experience.

Rathbone Training provided an initial period of planned training to enable learners on PLAs to develop skills and qualifications, especially the technical certificate and key skills. This was combined with work experience to enable them to gain employment. It was particularly useful where initial assessment had identified additional support needs in literacy and numeracy. The planned target length of the programme differed according to the skills and qualifications needed before the learner moved into employment. This was 12 weeks for care and early years and 26 weeks for engineering and construction. However, these time periods were flexible depending on individual needs.

Time spent on an **E2E programme**. E2E aims to help those young people who are not yet ready or able to directly enter apprenticeship programmes, further education or employment. It is funded for an average of 22 weeks but learners may spend more or less time on the programme depending on their individual needs. E2E has three core strands: basic and key skills, vocational development and personal and social development. Some E2E programmes are vocationally focused.

In Cumbria, JHP Group Limited developed its E2E programme into three separate routes. The Vocational Pathways route focused on the underpinning knowledge the learners needed for their chosen vocational

route. Learners covered key skills and the relevant underpinning knowledge and skills. They also had a placement with a view to becoming employed. Time spent on the placement increased throughout the programme. JHP also ran a Next Step route which focused on jobsearch, employability skills and self-assessment against requirements for vocational areas.

A **pre-apprenticeship programme** funded by the European Social Fund. These programmes focused on employment skills, jobsearch and key skills. None of the programmes in the survey were vocationally specific.

Landmark Training was part of the European Social Fund funded London East Vocational Entry Routes (LEVER) programme. This was a pre-apprenticeship programme for learners who were not yet work ready. This was usually due to poor interview skills, poor GCSE results or low levels of literacy and numeracy. The additional focus on employment and vocational training prepared learners for progression to apprenticeships and employment.

Work placement with an employer

4. Eleven of the 19 work-based learning providers in the survey used PLAs for learners who had not yet found employment. This gave a valuable opportunity for young people to start an apprenticeship where there were insufficient employers offering apprenticeships or where they needed work experience prior to being employed. The LSC's stated strategy is that the preferred apprenticeship route is through an employer-led apprenticeship and that PLAs should aim to achieve employed status as quickly as possible. However, in the survey, a small number of learners on PLAs remained unemployed for the majority, or all, of their apprenticeship. Learners on PLAs who spent too long in a work placement without the prospect of securing employment lost motivation and were more likely to leave their programme. Exceptions to this were where the employer and training provider had worked closely together to plan a comprehensive and targeted programme that enabled the learners on the PLA to recognise and appreciate their progress. The majority of these learners were still unhappy about not receiving a wage but felt it was worthwhile to continue with their apprenticeship because they could see their progress and that it was likely to lead to employment at some point in the future.

All young people were unemployed when they arrived at Landmark Training. The recruitment and placement team successfully liaised with employers and identified appropriate employment opportunities for their apprentices. Where there were no available opportunities or where the learner needed additional support, work placements were found and they became learners on PLAs. The average length of time on a PLA was three months. If an employer was unwilling to offer an employed

apprenticeship, then the recruitment and placement team looked for another employer. There was no significant difference in the retention and success rates for apprentices who started out on a PLA.

5. Evidence from institutional inspections shows that there are a high number of non-employed apprentices in health and social care. The main reason for this is that there are aspects of care work that cannot be carried out by young people under the age of 18, in particular, personal care. However, there were examples of providers in the survey who had adapted the programme and the learners' work allocation to enable them to be employed under the age of 18.

At Airedale National Health Service Trust, all apprentices were employed and carried out a range of activities on the wards and other settings, such as outpatients, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, that did not involve personal care. They were also involved in serving meals, making beds, organising therapeutic activities, and in a variety of activities of daily living.

At Chamber Training (Humber) Ltd, tutors ensured that all apprentices under the age of 18 were employed and had work roles that enabled them to develop a range of skills and to carry out a range of activities in residential and nursing homes.

Further education programme-led apprenticeships

6. The LSC requires all learners on PLAs on full-time college courses to be identified as having an intention to progress to employment, preferably through an employer-led apprenticeship. Nationally, not all college courses offer the specific qualifications needed to support entry on to an apprenticeship.

Accrington and Rossendale College is a general further education college and is located in East Lancashire. The construction department offered two PLA routes, both further education funded in the first instance.

- A full year in college on a PLA, where the learner attended college but had a work placement.
- An intensive construction craft programme with learners attending college 35 hours a week for six weeks to develop skills before going into the workplace. They then attended college on a day-release basis, and were in placement four days a week. Additional learning was provided in four to five week blocks at times when the industry was quiet, for example, after Christmas.

Participation

7. The total number of learners on PLAs has decreased by 58% since 2005 from 54,536 to 22,751 in October 2007. This is 9% of the total number of programme-led and employer-led apprentices in England in October 2007.

Work-based learning

8. The total number of programme-led apprentices in work-based learning has decreased by 20% since 2005, from 20,536 to 16,483 in October 2007. It was difficult to identify the reasons for this but analysis of the data and information supplied by the organisations in the survey has suggested various contributory factors.
9. When PLAs were first introduced they were mainly used to meet operational needs and to fill gaps in provision. Nationally the LSC, through its local office contracting, converted NVQ-only and non-employed apprentices to PLAs where appropriate. More learners were enrolled on employer-led apprenticeships or moved to employment in a shorter time period. In the survey, some providers had agreements with the employers that they would employ the learner on the PLA within a fixed time period, often three months.
10. A third of the providers in the survey had found that employers were using Train to Gain funding for their employees who were over 19. Train to Gain is a service for employers that helps them improve their productivity by developing the skills of their workforce. Employers who have employed apprentices aged 19 or over contribute towards the costs of the training whereas there is no similar contribution with Train to Gain.

Further education colleges

11. The decrease in learners on PLAs is even greater within further education colleges. In July 2005 the LSC asked all colleges nationally to identify learners who were following full-time programmes that already formed part of the apprenticeship framework. This led to 34,000 learners being designated as learners on PLAs with a requirement that there was a commitment to progress them to an apprenticeship. Although this increased the number of potential apprentices in colleges, it did not necessarily increase the numbers entering apprenticeships unless they subsequently progressed to an employed apprenticeship. The LSC data showed that about 3,000 of the learners did progress.
12. Nationally, many colleges reverted to providing full-time vocational courses which did not necessarily include elements of the apprenticeship framework or have progression routes into employed apprenticeships. In October 2007 the number of designated PLA learners in colleges had dropped to an estimated 6,268. There were no data to accurately identify their progression routes. Some colleges in the survey were fully involved in well-planned PLA courses linked with progression to employer-led apprenticeships.

Achievement

13. There are no national data to track the success rates of those learners who began their apprenticeship through the programme-led route. This is due to the absence of a unique learner number linked to both further education and work-based learning data. Some data collection systems have been set up this year but it is too early to evaluate the outcomes or establish trends in performance. However, around three quarters of providers in the survey were able to identify groups of learners who had begun on this route. These data suggested that where learners on PLAs had undertaken an initial period of planned training before moving to an employer-led apprenticeship, success rates were higher and the full apprenticeship programme was achieved in a shorter time. Learners were better prepared and had increased confidence and motivation, gained vocational and employment skills, and had benefited from additional support in literacy and numeracy where this was identified as a need.
14. Progression rates from PLAs and other pre-apprenticeship routes on to employer-led apprenticeships were mainly between 60% and 100%, although a few were lower. A small number of providers were recruiting learners on to PLAs who did not meet the full criteria for the employer-led apprenticeships. Where the initial period of planned training took account of individual needs, the progression rate was higher, but where learners on PLAs were placed in work placements with no additional support, they were more likely to leave the programme.

ConstructionSkills had a 71% success rate for its apprentices who had started their training on the PLA pilot and an 88% success rate for leavers in the period from January to December 2007. This was a higher success rate than for the ConstructionSkills traditional employer-led apprenticeship programme, and was also higher than the national success rates for construction apprenticeships. In 2006/07, these were 60% for apprenticeships and 56% for advanced apprenticeships.

Carillion Construction Training (Carillion) developed a pre-apprenticeship route to an employer-led apprenticeship in construction which had an average 85% completion and conversion rate. The success rate for apprenticeships has improved from 40% to an average of 70%. Carillion has directly linked this improvement trend to the pre-apprenticeship programme.

15. In the survey, where learners on PLAs were on work placements, the success rates were mixed. Data from providers surveyed showed that there was higher drop-out from this group.

Education Maintenance Allowance

16. In April 2006, the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was introduced for PLAs with a maximum rate of £30 a week. Previously, all unemployed learners

on work-based learning had received a training allowance of £40 per week plus travel expenses. Work-based learning providers were concerned that the low level of payment available for non-employed apprentices was a potential deterrent for those on work placements. Learners on PLAs were able to apply for an EMA as they were unemployed. However, the EMA is means tested so not all learners receive the allowance. In about 20% of the providers in the survey, employers made a contribution towards an allowance. However, there were examples of learners on work placements who were working for 30 hours a week and received no payment and no contribution towards their travel expenses. EMA states that learners on work-based learning are not eligible to apply for the EMA Hardship Fund. The LSC provides a hardship fund for these learners but few providers in the survey were aware of this. Full-time learners on PLAs in colleges can access EMA and also the EMA Hardship Fund.

17. In the survey, learners on PLAs in work-based learning were concerned about the difference between their weekly hours and those of learners on full-time college courses. In work-based learning, attendance is for a minimum of 30 hours a week. Full-time learners at further education colleges attend for a minimum of 16 hours a week and, in the survey, many of them also had part-time work to supplement their allowance. Learners on PLAs in work-based learning were aware of this difference and complained that it was unfair, particularly as they were carrying out the same work roles as other waged employees, including apprentices. For some, the financial pressures contributed to their lack of motivation and reasons for leaving the programme.

Links with Entry to Employment (E2E)

18. Insufficient use was made of PLAs as a progression route from E2E. Evidence from the survey showed that there could be a successful transition to apprenticeships where E2E learners were well supported, but this was not always provided effectively. Evidence from institutional inspections of E2E showed that, nationally, some apprenticeship providers avoid taking E2E learners as they are perceived as being less likely to successfully complete their apprenticeship programme.

Rathbone Training saw PLAs as being particularly useful for E2E learners who needed to develop additional skills and confidence. There was no difference in the retention and success rates of those learners who had progressed from E2E via PLAs into employer-led apprenticeships compared with the rates for other apprentices.

Employers

19. Employers are a key part of the Government's training strategy and their involvement is essential if the targeted increase in apprenticeships is to be achieved. The survey identified that PLAs were particularly successful in

attracting small employers to take apprentices, as they already had many of the work-related skills that were needed. It also took away an element of risk for the small employer in employing a school-leaver. In around three quarters of providers in the survey, the time period before transfer to the employer-led apprenticeship was negotiated individually with each employer.

20. Employers, linked to providers in the survey, were especially positive about the initial period of planned training that learners on PLAs had undertaken prior to becoming employed. It meant that the employed apprentices were able to settle quickly into their work roles, as they had already acquired the underpinning knowledge, understanding and skills required for the job.
21. Providers found that some employers were more willing to become involved if they could initially have a learner on a work placement to see if they would fit into the organisation. There was concern from around half of the providers, LSC local offices and Sector Skills Councils that employers might prefer to use PLAs because they were cheaper than employing someone from the start of their apprenticeship.

Sector Skills Councils

22. Sector Skills Councils are responsible for developing apprenticeship frameworks in consultation with employers within their employment sector. They are a key component in the development of PLAs. The LSC's programme-led apprenticeship strategy requires them to define if and how a programme-led apprenticeship fits within their sector and to issue guidelines to providers on the format of the programme-led phase. The NVO assessment strategies need to specify that final NVO assessments must only take place in an employer setting. The programme-led apprenticeship strategy states that all new apprenticeship frameworks approved after December 2006 must include guidance on programme- and employer-led apprenticeships, and all new or revised assessment and sector qualification strategies should include the new criteria from spring 2007.
23. Sector Skills Councils had made very slow progress in defining how PLAs fitted into their sector. Only two out of the 10 Sector Skills Councils contacted had started to develop their programme-led apprenticeship strategy. ConstructionSkills had made significant progress and Cogent had included guidelines in its new advanced apprenticeship framework. Few of the other Sector Skills Councils had started to look at the implications of PLAs for their apprenticeship frameworks and some were not fully aware of what this involved or of the timescales set out in the LSC's strategy.

ConstructionSkills is the sector skills council for construction and is the largest provider of construction work-based learning in England and Wales. Following a successful pilot, in April 2007 ConstructionSkills introduced two-year PLAs. The scheme starts with a two-year full-time

construction-based college course where learners gain their Intermediate Construction Award and key skills at level 1 before they move to an employer placement for nine to 12 months to complete the NVQ at level 2.

Planning and promotion of programme-led apprenticeships

24. There has been slow progress in joint LSC and provider planning for PLAs. The first offers for all sectors were scheduled to be in place by August 2007, but this has not yet been achieved. Less than half of local LSC offices in the survey had a structured plan, although in over half of the regions in the survey a tendering process was under way with pilots due to run from January 2008.
25. PLAs have not been widely promoted and there was a lack of understanding of their full potential by many representatives of the organisations interviewed in the survey. About a quarter of the local LSC offices and national training providers were of the view that this programme should not be widely publicised because employers might take advantage of the opportunity to have non-employed apprentices at the expense of the preferred employer-led apprentice route.

Programme-led apprentices' views

26. Although learners understood their status as an unemployed apprentice they were not always aware they were on a programme-led apprenticeship. Their views on the programme were very mixed.
27. Learners on PLAs who were completing an initial period of planned training were generally more positive about their programme than those on work placement. They saw the benefit of gaining skills before moving into the workplace and, where work experience was included, they enjoyed the opportunity to try out their chosen work area. 'It gave me the chance to try before committing myself – brilliant.' However, a small number of learners on PLAs found the time spent on training boring and a bit like school. This was particularly true where there was no work experience.
28. Learners on PLAs on work placements recognised that they had an opportunity to start their apprenticeship even though they had not been able to find employment. 'I didn't think I would be able to do this if I didn't have a job.' However, when the work placements became long term, and there was little prospect of employment, many became disillusioned. They did not like working alongside people who were employed and being paid a wage while they were either paid a very small amount or nothing at all. They compared the hours that they worked with their friends at college and complained that they did not have the opportunity for part-time work to earn some money. Exceptions to this were where the provider and the employer worked closely together to help the learner on the PLA recognise and appreciate the progress they were making.

29. Overall, learners on PLAs were positive and comments included:

'I would recommend work-based training to a friend even though the training allowance is small. I have now become employed and I love my job.'

'The best thing I have ever done.'

Overview of progress since the Adult Learning Inspectorate's survey

30. There has been some progress made on PLAs since the Adult Learning Inspectorate survey in July 2006. However, most of the areas for improvement still remain and the way PLAs are understood, promoted and implemented by local LSC offices and training providers still varies greatly.

Full-time courses in further education colleges

31. Learners who completed a full-time course in a further education college often had to repeat work if they subsequently moved into an apprenticeship. This is now improving and over 75% of the local LSC offices in the survey sample had stipulated that the curriculum on these courses must take account of the requirements of the appropriate apprenticeship framework.

Achievement of the full apprenticeship framework with minimal work experience

32. It was possible to achieve a full apprenticeship framework with minimal work experience and an NVQ which had not been assessed in the workplace. This was one of the areas for the Sector Skills Councils to address in the LSC's programme-led apprenticeship strategy. As reported earlier, there has been slow progress in this area.

Not all those on PLAs would progress to an employer-led apprenticeship

33. A small number of providers were recruiting learners on to PLAs who did not meet the full criteria for the employer-led apprenticeships. Where the initial period of planned training took account of individual needs, the progression rate was higher but where learners were placed in work placements with no additional support, many did not progress to the employer-led apprenticeship.

Those who prefer a practical learning style may not respond to the initial period of planned training

34. There was a possibility that those who prefer a practical learning style might not respond to the initial period of planned training and leave early if employers were not involved. The data from providers suggests progression rates from the initial period of planned training to employer-led apprenticeships ranged from 60% to 100% although some were lower. The providers agreed that where

work experience was part of this training, learners were better able to see its relevance and valued the opportunity to practise their newly acquired skills.

The capability of providers to deliver and manage upfront training and the initial costs

35. In work-based learning, the initial period of planned training had a high risk element for providers, with the cost of training being upfront and no guarantee of progress on to an employer-led apprenticeship. Potential low success rates would give financial problems to providers. Around 25% of providers were concerned that they did not have adequate accommodation and sufficient skilled staff within their organisation to deliver the training. Around half of the local LSC offices felt that this meant that the smaller training providers were unlikely to offer this type of programme-led apprenticeship, therefore limiting the range of opportunities available. There were providers initially contacted to be part of the survey who mentioned this as a reason why they did not have any learners on PLAs.

The transition from minimum training allowances to Education Maintenance Allowance might deter potential learners on PLAs

36. There were no data available to support this but there were issues relating to EMAs and allowances. A small number of learners on PLAs were on work placement for 30 hours a week with no payment at all.

Careful marketing of PLAs so they are not seen as second best

37. The survey identified that there was still poor promotion of PLAs and misunderstandings persisted about how they related to the apprenticeship programme. Around 25% of providers initially contacted to be part of the survey were unsure about what a programme-led apprenticeship was.

Case studies

Accrington and Rossendale College: a further education programme-led apprenticeship

38. Accrington and Rossendale College is a general further education college and is located in East Lancashire. The construction department offered two PLA routes, both further education funded in the first instance.
- A full year in college on a PLA, where the learner attended college but had a work placement.
 - An intensive construction craft programme with learners attending college 35 hours a week for six weeks to develop skills before going into the workplace. They then attended college on a day-release basis, and were in placement four days a week. Additional learning was provided in four to five

week blocks at times when the industry was quiet, for example, after Christmas.

39. Progression from PLAs into employment was high at 90%. Employers were very positive about PLAs because they immediately had an employee who had the key underpinning knowledge and practical skills so they could contribute to work from day one. The programme-led apprenticeship year enabled learners to mature, identify skills and ensure they were job ready. Also, many learners needed a driving licence for their work role and the year in college gave them time to achieve this.

Carillion Construction Training: using alternative funding for the initial period of planned training

40. Carillion Construction Training has developed a pre-apprenticeship route to an employer-led apprenticeship which has an average 85% completion and conversion rate. The success rate for apprenticeships has improved from 40% to an average 70%. Carillion links this improvement trend to the pre-apprenticeship programme.
41. Carillion is an employer-based construction training provider. Carillion contracted with the National Employer Service for its apprenticeship programmes. The contract only allowed employed apprentices. Carillion recognised that the general ability levels of young people applying for construction apprenticeships had fallen and some pre-apprenticeship training was required. Carillion, along with most other apprenticeship providers in construction, had delivered a level 1 pre-apprenticeship course to most young people applying for its apprenticeships. About 80% of Carillion's potential apprentices each year were initially assessed as requiring this training. These level 1 programmes had been extremely successful in driving up improvements in retention and achievement on apprenticeship programmes in the sector.
42. Carillion funded most of these courses through franchise contracts with a number of local further education colleges and with a smaller number being funded through work-based learning on local E2E programmes. Learners attended pre-apprenticeship courses either as full-time college learners or E2E learners. Carillion guaranteed an employer-led apprenticeship to all learners who successfully completed the courses. They also offered the employer-led apprenticeship to learners who had successfully completed the two year full-time college courses in construction. These apprentices were expected to complete the full apprenticeship framework in a much shorter time period than a new entrant.
43. Carillion took on the role of 'host employer' on behalf of its supply chain by employing a large number of apprentices that were trained and assessed in all elements of the apprenticeship framework at Carillion training centres. They obtained work experience on Carillion sites with its sub-contractors and a large

number of other small firms that were unable to employ an apprentice directly. The 'host employer' model had the advantage of allowing apprentices to move between sites and different employers to enable them to gain the breadth of experience required to successfully complete construction NVQs.

ConstructionSkills: involvement of a Sector Skills Council in PLAs

44. ConstructionSkills is the Sector Skills Council for construction. It represents every part of the construction industry across the United Kingdom and gives employers a direct input into how training funding and policy are organised. There are 175,000 construction firms in the United Kingdom and 95% of them have less than 10 employees.
45. Following a successful pilot, in April 2007 ConstructionSkills announced the extension of its two-year PLAs. The scheme started with a two-year full-time construction-based college course where learners gained their Intermediate Construction Award and key skills at level 1 before moving to an employer placement for nine to 12 months to complete the NVQ at level 2. The programme-led apprenticeship scheme overcame the current lack of on-site training experience and offered more employers the opportunity to support an apprentice.
46. The scheme has a target of 1,500 places by the end of 2008. The apprenticeship framework completions from the pilot were 71%, which is higher than the national data for 2006/07 at 60% for apprenticeships and 56% for advanced apprenticeships. The apprenticeship completion rate for apprentices who had started on the programme-led apprenticeship route was 88% for the period from January to December 2007. This was a higher success rate than for the ConstructionSkills traditional employer-led apprenticeship programme. However, the percentage of learners transferring from full-time college courses into employed apprenticeships was low. ConstructionSkills found it difficult to contact the learners who had completed this training. They also found that some colleges were slow at sending out certificates for completion of the elements covered on the course and this delayed progression on to an employer-led apprenticeship.

JHP Group Limited (Cumbria): using E2E as the initial period of planned training

47. JHP Group Limited (JHP), is one of the largest national providers of government-funded work-based learning programmes in Britain. In Cumbria, JHP had developed its E2E programme into three separate routes. Following initial assessment, learners were placed into the route most suited to meet their needs and goals. The Vocational Pathways route focused on the underpinning knowledge the learner needed for their chosen vocational route. Learners covered key skills and the relevant underpinning knowledge and skills. They

also had a placement with a view to becoming employed. Time spent on the placement increased throughout the programme.

48. JHP worked in partnership with Carlisle College to offer a construction vocational pathway. This included a specific planned scheme of work for E2E which enabled the learners to progress on to a full-time construction course at college. JHP provided the basic skills and personal and social development elements of the E2E curriculum. Progression on to the full-time construction course was high at 91%. Retail vocational pathways were run to coincide with peak employment periods within the industry such as summer and Christmas. JHP also ran a Next Step route which focused on jobsearch, employability skills and self-assessment against requirements for vocational areas.
49. Most learners who progressed on to apprenticeships were employed and were on the same terms and conditions as direct entry apprentices. Employers found the learners who completed the E2E programmes were often better prepared and more ready to work than direct entry apprentices. An increase in the rate of E2E progression to 73% was attributed to the introduction of the Vocational Pathways and Next Steps routes.

Landmark Training: work placements with an employer and using an ESF funded project

50. Landmark Training is based in Stratford, East London. It offers training and educational courses to young people aged 14 to 25 living in East London. It has a contract with the London East LSC to offer E2E and apprenticeships in administration and customer service.
51. All young people were unemployed when they arrived at Landmark Training. The recruitment and placement team successfully liaised with employers and identified appropriate employment opportunities for their apprentices. Where there were no available opportunities or where the learner needed additional support, work placements were found and the learners became programme-led apprentices. The average length of time as a programme-led apprentice was three months. If an employer was unwilling to employ the PLA, then the recruitment and placement team would look for another employer. A small number of learners on PLAs were on EMA and those who were not eligible received an allowance which was paid by the employer. There was no significant difference in the retention and success rates for apprentices who started out on a programme-led apprenticeship compared with those of direct entry apprentices.
52. Landmark Training was also part of the ESF-funded London East Vocational Entries Route programme. This was a pre-apprenticeship programme for learners who were not yet work ready, often due to poor interview skills, poor GCSE results or low levels of literacy and numeracy. The additional focus on

employment and vocational training led to positive progressions on to apprenticeships, both programme-led and employer-led.

Rathbone Training: an initial period of planned training which includes work experience and links with E2E

53. Rathbone Training is an educational charity and provides work-based learning for young people. It also contracts with Jobcentre Plus for Workstep and a range of programmes for unemployed people. Its main activity is to provide learning and training support to disadvantaged people.
54. In November 2007, Rathbone Training had 321 learners on PLAs in England. They provided an initial period of planned training to enable learners to develop skills and qualifications, especially the technical certificate and key skills. This was combined with work experience to enable them to gain employment. PLAs were particularly useful where initial assessment had identified additional support needs in literacy and numeracy. The target length of the programme was 12 weeks for care and early years and 26 weeks for engineering and construction. However, these time periods were flexible depending on the individual needs of the learners. Of those learners who completed PLAs in 2006, 74% progressed to employer-led apprenticeships.
55. Many employers were supportive of this route and welcomed the opportunity to try out the learner before offering employment. It provided the learner with the opportunity to see if this was the area they wanted to work in. It was particularly useful for E2E learners who needed time to develop additional skills and confidence. E2E learners performed as well as the other apprentices who had progressed from PLAs to employer-led apprenticeships.
56. Employers were positive about the programme-led apprenticeship route as they saw it as a way to ensure the learner matched the job role before employing them. Many employers also identified that as there was only the NVQ left to complete, learners were motivated to achieve this as quickly as possible. Learners were more motivated to learn, enthusiastic about the process and developed confidence.
57. Rathbone Training was very positive about PLAs and recognised the potential of the programme to achieve more sustained progression and improve success rates. However, they found that their E2E learners had difficulty progressing on to college courses in the areas that they did not offer, such as construction. If a learner wanted to progress from E2E to construction in a college, they had less chance of getting on to the programme than a school-leaver. Local colleges appeared to have a negative view of E2E and were particularly concerned about the learners' ability to complete their apprenticeship. In the better areas, there was a supported transition between the provider and the college which helped

the learner to integrate into the programme-led apprenticeship/employer-led apprenticeship prior to completion of E2E.

Skills Solutions: an initial period of planned training in partnership with further education

58. Skills Solutions, a training provider based in Manchester, had developed a programme-led apprenticeship model that was delivered in partnership with further education colleges and other training providers. Learners on PLAs attended a college for a full-time block of planned initial training. The courses offered the opportunity to undertake the technical certificate and key skills relating to the apprenticeship framework before progressing to employment and completing the NVQ. Job tasters and placement arrangements were encouraged to give an opportunity to develop employment skills. Learners on PLAs attended for at least 30 hours a week. They wore personal and protective equipment and money was deducted for lateness and non-attendance.
59. Skills Solutions were responsible for arranging full-time employment for the learners on PLAs after they completed their course. Job trials of up to four weeks were arranged for some learners so that employers could assess their competence. This also enabled the learners to progress from a college environment to employment with support from Skills Solutions and the employer. This was particularly valuable for less confident learners and for employers who were cautious about taking on apprentices.
60. PLA courses increased from two occupational areas in 2002/03 to nine occupational areas in 2006/07. The courses covered engineering, motor vehicle, building services and construction skills. Progression to employment steadily increased from 76% in 2002/03 to 82% in 2004/05. In 2005/06 and 2006/07 it decreased to 60%. The low retention on the scaffolding course in 2004/05 led to a two-week pre-apprenticeship training programme with 20 learners, and 15 of these were selected for a programme-led apprenticeship.
61. Learners on PLAs received a training allowance but in 2006/07, the EMA was introduced and, as it is means tested, not all learners were eligible to receive it. Skills Solutions tried a dual-funded model with two colleges whereby the initial planned training was funded as a further education programme, and after completion of the course learners progressed to an employer-led apprenticeship. Skills Solutions also had discussions with other colleges about re-badging some courses as programme-led apprenticeship courses. Skills Solutions would 'adopt' any suitable learners and help them to progress on to an employer-led apprenticeship. There were strict criteria for these learners which included a 90% minimum attendance; full achievement of the technical certificate and key skills as required by the apprenticeship framework; and a recommendation from the course tutor that the learner was capable of working within the trade area. Unfortunately, many of the learners' attendance records were not at the level expected by employers and many learners were not felt to

be capable of working effectively in their chosen trade area. Also, many learners did not complete their full learning aims such as the technical certificate or key skills.

62. The latest development of the model has been to provide a period of pre-apprenticeship through E2E, followed by a period of planned initial training with progression into employment and the NVQ. All of this was funded through work-based learning. It was hoped that this would improve recruitment by giving support to young people who might not have had the required learning skills for direct entry to an apprenticeship. This was successfully trialled with the scaffolding groups. The 2007 Ofsted inspection report identified that the achievements in scaffolding were 11% above national benchmarks.
63. Despite the success of the Skills Solutions model with over 70% of learners progressing into employment, an increasing number of learners on PLAs were unable to retain sustained employment following progression from their course. Learners on PLAs needed more support as they moved from full-time training to employment.
64. Recently, there have been difficulties in attracting sufficient numbers of learners to the PLA courses despite their successful track record. Many young people were reluctant to attend a 30 hour a week training programme for little or no personal payment when they could attend a further education college for a minimum 16 hours a week and have time for part-time employment.
65. Skills Solutions also raised the issue of minimum performance level calculation by LSCs. They identified that learners on PLAs achieved as well as other learners from other entry routes but there were more potential drop-out points. This posed a potential risk for providers meeting their minimum performance levels.

Triangle Training Limited: an initial period of planned training

66. Triangle Training Limited is a private organisation specialising in the delivery of childcare training. At the time of the survey, there were about 600 learners on PLAs. Most started on a 10-week structured block of learning at one of the provider's training centres. They worked towards the technical certificate and covered employment rights and responsibilities, some knowledge for key skills and first aid training. They also covered extra topics over and above the main curriculum such as information on festivals and celebrations, setting up display boards and practical games to play with children. The programme included six days on placement. Employers were involved in the programme and talked with learners about working with young children.
67. Triangle Training stipulated that a certain number of topics must be completed before learners went into the workplace. However, if a learner was offered

employment before this, then the employer agreed for the learner to complete the remaining topics. Learners usually moved into employment at the end of the 10 weeks. Once learners had completed their 10-week block, there was little reason for them to attend the training centre. Employers could arrange staffing more effectively knowing that the apprentice would not be out of the workplace for one day every week. Success rates for advanced apprentices were good and had improved over the past three years to 79%. Similarly, success rates for apprenticeships had improved to 69%.

Notes

The survey was conducted between August and December 2007. Initial interviews were held with people in the national LSC and 12 local LSC offices, and in the National Employer Service. A sample of work-based learning providers and further education colleges was selected to take account of different delivery methods. Inspectors carried out face-to-face or telephone interviews with 19 work-based learning providers and six further education colleges. The interviews were carried out by five of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) and two Additional Inspectors. Evidence from learners and employers was gathered through interviews and from providers' satisfaction surveys and feedback questionnaires. Link HMIs made contact with 10 Sector Skills Councils. HMIs reviewed relevant inspection reports published from May 2007 to January 2008 and LSC strategy and policy documents for apprenticeships.

Further information

A strategy for programme-led apprenticeships in England 2007–2010 Learning and Skills Council, 2007; www.apprenticeships.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/2D284A02-25B6-434F-A5B0-3198DED79A4B/0/ProgrammeLedApprenticeshipStrategy200710.pdf

Which way now for PLPs? (Talisman issue 53 supplement), Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2006, www.ofsted.gov.uk/assets/Internet_Content/Shared_Content/Migration/ali/tm53_Supplement_FINAL_Bookmkd.pdf

World-class apprenticeships: Unlocking talent, building skills for all. The Government's strategy for the future of apprenticeships in England (Reference 285723), Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills, 2008; www.dius.gov.uk/publications/world_class_apprenticeships.pdf

World class skills: Implementing the Leitch review of skills in England (ID5618938) Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2007; www.dius.gov.uk/publications/leitch.html

The LSC website provides links to additional information on programme-led and employer-led apprenticeships: www.lsc.gov.uk

Annex

Organisations participating in the survey

Learning and Skills Council

National Office, Coventry
Birmingham and Solihull
Coventry and Warwickshire
Cumbria

Dorset and Somerset
Gloucestershire
Greater Manchester
Greater Merseyside
London Central
London East
Bedfordshire and Luton
National Employer Service
Tyne and Wear (Newcastle Partnership)
West Yorkshire

Further education colleges offering PLAs

Accrington & Rossendale College
Bournemouth and Poole College
Blackburn College
City College, Coventry
Stroud College
Weymouth College

Work-based learning providers offering PLAs

Airedale National Health Service Trust, Keighley
Alliance Learning, Bolton
Barking and Dagenham Training Services, Essex
Carillion Construction Training, Brentford
Chamber Training (Humber) Ltd, Hull
Education Business Partnership
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board, Kings Langley
Impact Housing Association Limited, Carlisle
Joint Assessment Centre for Childcare and Education (JACE), Wallington
JHP Group Limited, Cumbria
JHP Group Limited, Gloucestershire
Landmark Training, East London
Midland Group Training Services, Coventry
Quest Training, Ilford
Rapido Training Ltd Gloucester
Rathbone Training, Manchester
Skills Solutions, Manchester
Training 2000 Limited, Blackburn
Triangle Training, Southam

Sector Skills Councils

Automotive Skills
Construction Skills
Creative & Cultural Skills

e-skills UK
Cogent
GoSkills
Lantra
Senta
Skills for Health
Skills for Logistics