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|  | Institute for Apprenticeships |
|  | A response from London Councils |

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|  | London Councils represents London’s 32 borough councils and the City of London. It is a cross-party organisation that works on behalf of all of its member authorities to make the case for powers, freedoms and resources to best serve the needs of London’s residents and businesses. London Councils welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Government’s proposals for the Institute for Apprenticeships.  |  |
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# 1. Introduction

London Councils welcomes the introduction of the Institute of Apprenticeships and the decision to expand its remit to also cover technical education from 2018. The Sainsbury Review highlighted a number of key problems with the current approach to technical education, including that standards and qualifications were not always set by employers, often overlapped and were part of a complex system that young people and adults found difficult to navigate.

The decision to develop a new system underpinned by four key principles of employer engagement, developing fulfilling and attractive technical education, ensuring more people meet the national standards set by employers and closer integration between college-based and employment-based technical education is welcome.

# 2. Putting Employers at the Centre of Apprenticeship Quality

As stated in the consultation document, the Richard Review into apprenticeships highlighted the need for employers to play a major role in improving the quality of apprenticeships. London Councils has called for some time for employers to be placed in the driving seat when it comes to developing apprenticeship standards and technical education routes. We strongly support the greater role employers will have in the new system in developing standards and assessment plans and welcome the work that has been carried out to date with apprenticeship trailblazers. We agree that this is essential to the success of the programme.

It is London Councils view that, as local government is collectively one of the largest employers in England, it is important that there is representation from local government on the Institute’s Board. It will also be important for the Institute to proactively develop strong line of communication with local government, both through relationships with the Local Government Association and London Councils, but also with local authorities themselves to ensure that apprenticeships and technical education in the public sector flourish.

# 3. Role of the Institute for Apprenticeships

The consultation document asserts that the benefits of apprenticeships are well understood. While London Councils agrees that some employers, and many policy makers do understand the benefits that apprenticeships can bring, it is not always true that potential students and their families understand the benefits. Polling commissioned for the 2015 Demos Commission on Apprenticeships found that most parents think that apprenticeships are valuable, but not for their own children; that apprenticeships are more suitable for low achievers than high achievers; and that apprenticeships help produce steady jobs, but are not a route to the top[[1]](#footnote-2). A 2016 study by Nationwide Building Society also found that almost 70% of British parents associated apprenticeships with the construction industry, while two-thirds would prefer their children to go to university[[2]](#footnote-3). London is home to many BAME communities with high proportions of parents valuing academic over technical education routes.

It is important, therefore, that the government also considers what role the Institute for Apprenticeships can play to help promote apprenticeships as a positive and equal alternative to other forms of further and higher education to ensure that these attitudes change and that technical, vocational and academic learning do achieve ‘parity of esteem’.

On the issue of funding, we would welcome more information on how the Institute for Apprenticeships will gather evidence to inform its advice to the government on the funding available for standards. It is important that it consults all sectors widely and also takes into account the differences in training costs between different geographic areas. With the removal of the Area Cost Adjustment that was previously in place for London and the South East there remains a risk that some apprenticeship standards will be placed in a band that may reflect the cost of delivering the training in the rest of England but prove to be too low for the cost of delivering training in London, requiring employers to fund the difference. The Institute should examine this carefully before offering advice to government on funding bands.

# 4. The Strategic Guidance

Operating within a broader context

London Councils welcomes the Sainsbury Review recommendations and the government’s decision to move quickly on implementing them. The decision to distil thousands of qualifications into just 15 routes is clearly a substantial change to the system and it is hoped that this will lead to a much simpler and straightforward process for learners and parents. However, there is a question around whether these 15 routes can realistically cover all job roles. Analysis from the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) has indicated that 57% of jobs in our economy fall outside the scope of the 15 routes[[3]](#footnote-4). There is a need for a regular review of these routes to ensure the number of pathways and the areas they focus on are kept up-to-date and keep up with changing job roles and work practices. The Institute for Apprenticeships should set out clearly how it will do this.

We agree that the Institute should support employers to develop ambitious plans for good quality standards, not least in sectors where there is evidence of skills gaps. It is important that as part of this the Institute offers sufficient support for local government so that its employees have the skills needed to deliver the services the public expect now and in the future. London Councils recently completed a borough survey into preparations for the apprenticeship levy. 29 out of 33 boroughs responded and 75% of those said there were gaps in current standards that prevented them from hiring apprentices in key areas. Key areas highlighted included planning, social work, environmental health, occupational therapy, engineering, and social care. There was also a concern that there was a lack of degree-level apprenticeships.

There is clearly an important role for the Institute for Apprenticeships to play in tackling these problems, including maintaining and updating a directory of all standards and technical qualifications that are completed or in development. We would also like to see the Institute work closely with employers, and particularly local government, to help map the areas where there are gaps in qualifications or where existing qualifications have not kept up with the changing nature of key roles. London Councils would like to be part of this dialogue.

We also strongly agree with the need to support greater social mobility and with the role that apprenticeships can play in helping people from all backgrounds to progress. We welcome the additional funding provided as part of the apprenticeship levy system for both employers and training providers to support apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds, but remain concerned about the removal of the disadvantage uplift. The decision to reintroduce a simplified version of this system for the first year of the Levy is a positive one. However it is vital that if it is to be replaced in the long-term, it is done so with a new system that ensures sufficient support flows to those who need it most.

We are also keen to see the implementation of the recommendations of the Paul Maynard taskforce on improving accessibility to apprenticeships for people with learning disabilities. The Institute should examine both of these issues carefully, particularly when providing advice on funding to the government.

Core principles

We broadly support the core principles and believe that the definition of an apprenticeship included in the strategic guidance is a helpful one. With regards to the bullet points on end point assessment (paragraph 13), it is important to restate that this aspect of the qualification should also be designed in consultation with employers as well as the curriculum for each qualification.

Standards Development and Approval

London Councils remains supportive of the trailblazer model but we have concerns about the gaps that are still evident in apprenticeship standards relevant for local authorities. One of the areas that the Institute should focus on is working with employers in key sectors to ensure that skills gaps are identified quickly. Key areas in each sector should be sufficiently prioritised to ensure those qualifications are developed and approved first. The Institute should also examine the trailblazer process itself to determine if there are ways of speeding up the development and approval of standards without sacrificing the quality of the end product.

The government should consider the case for extending the timescale employers have to spend their Levy funds where gaps in standards exist and the new standards will not be approved within 24 months of the apprenticeship levy starting. While we support the 24 month limit before funds expire, offering greater flexibility in this way would prevent employers losing funds, or being forced to spend it on other qualifications that may be of lower priority or not match the skills needs of the organisation.

Providing support for the development of standards

London Councils welcomes the commitment for the Institute to provide advice and guidance to employers to develop standards and plans quickly. The Institute should provide a dedicated contact for local government to ensure that the sector has the ability to move quickly in developing standards where there are clearly identified gaps and has a clear pathway to information and guidance.

Planning for Technical Education

The recent call for applications to the technical education panels that will develop occupational standards for new technical qualifications is a positive step. As many of the technical routes have direct relevance to local government services, particularly business and administration, protective services, childcare and education, social care and construction, it is important there is local government representation on all of the relevant panels to ensure sufficient input from and consultation with the sector.

Funding

When providing funding advice, in addition to the bullet points listed in the guidance, the Institute should also have regard to affordability within the context of the financial position of the wider public sector and local government in particular. This is vital if local government is to continue to play a key role in apprenticeship generation in a sustainable way.

Engaging Apprentices

London Councils strongly supports the proposal for an Apprenticeship Panel to enable apprentices to have their say about the education and training they receive. It is important that any such panel is geographically and demographically representative, as well as reflecting a wide range of sectors and qualification levels. The Institute should provide more information about how this panel would work, its size and how its members would be selected.

**Response submitted by:**

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1. <https://www.demos.co.uk/files/476_1504_CoA_WEB_2_.pdf?1425489134> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <http://www.nationwide.co.uk/about/media-centre-and-specialist-areas/media-centre/press-releases/archive/2016/3/9-parents-still-prefer-their-children-to-attend-university-despite-benefits-of-apprenticeships> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.aelp.org.uk/file/?id=2808&type=item> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)