

Draft Strategic Guidance for the Institute for Apprenticeships: WorldSkills UK Response

1 WorldSkills UK welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government's consultation for the Draft Strategic Guidance for the Institute for Apprenticeships. WorldSkills UK is all about helping young people go further, faster in their careers; helping them gain the skills that employers need most. Through competitions and careers advice we aim to help young people from all backgrounds get the best start in both work and life. Our extensive interaction with young people, schools, colleges, independent training providers and businesses places us at the centre of the debate on how to ensure apprenticeships policy is developed to deliver the best possible outcomes for young people.

1.1 The Government's commitment to apprenticeships – through for instance the target to have 3m apprenticeship starts in the lifetime of this Parliament, the introduction of the apprenticeship levy later this year and the establishment of the Institute for Apprenticeships – has been a positive and welcome development. Apprenticeships offer young people excellent opportunities to build greater expertise in their chosen careers and learn skills that will benefit them throughout their working lives. WorldSkills UK believes that there are two key areas to focus on that will help ensure that apprenticeships policy achieves the results that everyone wants to see. The first is with respect to driving demand for apprenticeships. There is a long-term challenge around the apprenticeship route not being viewed as prestigious as the university route by both young people and parents. These perceptions can be changed by ensuring that investment is properly targeted in careers advice and programmes that give young people the opportunity to experience the world of work and apprenticeships. Further, it is vitally important that as the volume of apprenticeships starts increases in the years ahead, the quality of apprentices' learning experiences follows the highest possible standards. World-class standards should be the aspiration to match the Government's focus on Global Britain as the nation embarks on the journey of exiting the European Union. In this response we set out how:

- WorldSkills UK strongly supports the establishment of the Institute for Apprenticeships and looks forward to working together
- Our Skills Champions have a key role to play in the Institute's development
- WorldSkills UK expertise in quality and standards can ensure the Institute hits its targets

2 WorldSkills UK strongly supports the establishment of the Institute for Apprenticeships and looks forward to working together

2.1 The Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) will have an important role in guaranteeing the quality of apprenticeship starts. We welcome its establishment as a body that can provide objective assessment of the Government's apprenticeships policy and reliable data that will allow stakeholders to judge its effectiveness. We appreciate that the board of the IfA is yet to be appointed and understand that it will be primarily comprised of employers, business leaders and their representatives. Given the strong interest that business has in the successful operation of the levy, this is important. We also believe that the IfA should take into account the views of a representative range of stakeholders, including apprentices themselves. This will ensure it achieves a rounded view of, for instance, the apprenticeship levy's operation and the quality profile of apprenticeships. As an organisation that works with a wide-range of businesses and the further education sector, WorldSkills UK stands well placed to offer its expertise to the IfA. We are very open to working collaboratively, particularly with respect to apprenticeship quality standards.

2.2 The guidance might usefully include more on this aspect, including identifying some of the other key players, alongside those noted, such as Association of Colleges, AELP and the Education and

Training Foundation. Clarifying roles and links will help minimise duplication and overlaps, as will more information on how approaches to collaboration and partnership will develop.

3 Our Skills Champions have a key role to play in the Institute's development

3.1 WorldSkills UK has developed and supports a network of Skills Champions – former competitors in WorldSkills UK Competitions – who now act as role models for the next generation of young people looking to make the most of their talents and abilities. We strongly believe that Skills Champions, and their experiences, should be utilised more widely as a way of demonstrating the benefits of apprenticeships. Having positive role models who have been through the apprenticeship route, and crucially, who other young people can relate to, is a key way in which more young people can be encouraged to become apprentices. Currently, not enough young people are seeing an apprenticeship as a viable route both post-16 and post-18; this is compounded by the challenge posed by parents often not viewing the degree route and the apprenticeship route in the same way. Skills Champions are especially well placed to act as role models to challenge and change perceptions as they themselves are young people and have a credibility that is difficult to replicate. WorldSkills UK has been commissioned by the Careers & Enterprise Company to offer peer-to-peer guidance, delivered by our Skills Champions, for young people through interactive, experiential presentations and workshops for students from years 8-10 in 100 schools across England.

3.2 We are greatly encouraged by the plans in place for the IfA to establish an apprentice panel, to ensure that the views of apprentices are channelled through to the IfA's board. We are pleased to work with colleagues in the Institute to nominate Skills Champions to sit on the apprentice panel. Given the Government's ambition to raise the prestige of apprenticeships, Skills Champions have a particularly powerful role to play. Many have not only taken part in WorldSkills UK Competitions but have been successful nationally and internationally. They are arguably at the high point of prestige within the system and are therefore uniquely placed to advise how Government can pursue policies which are truly transformative and long lasting.

4 WorldSkills UK expertise in quality and standards can ensure the Institute hits its targets

4.1 Perhaps the most important aspect of apprenticeships policy to get right is to ensure the delivery of high quality standards. Standards matter for the young people starting an apprenticeship as they need to have the confidence that in becoming an apprentice and not going to university they can achieve the same high quality career prospects that the more established university route is shown to deliver. They matter to Government as the acid test of whether policy on apprenticeships has been a success will not be through the total numbers of apprentices in the economy but through the quality of training that those apprentices have received. For employers standards matter as through the apprenticeship levy they will be making a significant financial investment; this can reap important benefits if apprentices are properly equipped to undertake the skilled vacancies that businesses increasingly need to fill.

4.2 Clear, simple and relevant standards will underpin the quality of the apprenticeship system, so we need to ensure that they encourage world-class delivery and performance. WorldSkills UK manages a set of standards that underpin our skills competitions. According to the National Audit Office, 62% of apprenticeships started during the period 2010-2015 were at level 2¹. At WorldSkills UK, we have developed thousands of apprentices to perform their roles at the world-class level by preparing them for the international WorldSkills competition. We believe that the assessment processes that the skills competitions use can also help employers develop their apprenticeship structures. This method is already being used by some of the UK's multinational employers, a prime example of which is Toyota. They are using their apprentices' participation in WorldSkills UK competitions and development programmes to drive up their own training to a world-class standard. The adoption of WorldSkills UK competition standards in apprenticeship programmes can inspire apprentices to develop skills beyond competence. WorldSkills UK believes that our standards can make a significant contribution to the development of high quality apprenticeships.

¹ NAO (2016). Delivering value through the apprenticeships programme.

4.3 Given the IfA's focus on quality, it could be useful for the draft strategic guidance to include more on the international aspects of raising standards and identifying world-class benchmarks. As the UK embarks on the journey of exiting the European Union, an increasingly global focus will be needed. This will be particularly relevant to the many businesses working at a global level. With WorldSkills UK's strong track record and direct experience of working at international level and on global standards, we are ideally placed to advise on how international standards can be used to strengthen and improve apprenticeship standards nationally. Of particular importance here are WorldSkills UK's Experts. These are the volunteer professionals who work at the cutting-edge of their disciplines and train the young people who take part in our competitions to take on – and beat – the world's best. They possess a wealth of knowledge and expertise that is unique within the country. This expertise could be supported further to ensure the continued development of the continuum from Foundation right through to Degree Apprenticeships, ensuring that they keep ahead of their global equivalents. Alongside our Skills Champions, WorldSkills UK Experts stand ready to contribute to the IfA's Route Panels, which will play such an important role in ensuring apprenticeship standards achieve the quality levels necessary to deliver the skills Global Britain needs for the future.

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