



[In] good or outstanding apprenticeship provision, inspectors found that ... employers played a pivotal role in co-designing the curriculum with the provider to meet the specific requirements of their business and the needs of the apprentice

Ofsted

Ofsted's Annual Report identifies the features of good apprenticeships ... and of the weak ones. And the Chief Inspector has joined those voicing concerns about the increasing proportion of higher level apprenticeships, some of them taken by people already established in their jobs.

Ofsted published its [Annual Report for 2018-19](#) on 21st January 2020.

In their observations of apprenticeship provision across the economy in England, Ofsted's inspectors identified a number of problems in weaker provision:

- staff did not use the results of assessments completed at the start of the programme to plan apprentices' learning
- apprentices did not receive their entitlement to off-the-job training, which resulted in many making slow progress on their apprenticeship and not developing the substantial new knowledge and skills that they and their employers needed
- leaders and managers did not have an accurate oversight of the progress that apprentices were making on their apprenticeship, which prevented them from intervening quickly when improvements were required

They also point to the strengths they found in good or outstanding provision:

- employers played a pivotal role in co-designing the curriculum with the provider to meet the specific requirements of their business and the needs of the apprentice
- on- and off-the-job curriculums were well aligned to ensure that classroom learning could quickly be used in the workplace to make a positive contribution to their employers' business
- apprentices received well-planned off-the-job training, developing substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours, and made good progress throughout their programme
- training staff set challenging briefs that motivated and inspired apprentices to produce work of a high quality. Briefs that were created in conjunction with the employers were highly effective, ensuring that apprentices could understand the relevance of their learning compared with their employment.

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Ofsted also addressed some **policy questions** about how apprenticeships are being used.

They draw attention to the shifting nature of the programme, away from entry-level apprenticeships for school-leavers, with many more at higher level and for existing employees:

Over the past three years, there appears to have been a shift away from apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3 (GCSE and A level equivalents) towards levels 4 to 7 (degree and higher degree equivalents). Level 2 starts in 2018/19 were down by 45% from 2016/17. Level 3 starts in 2018/19, despite a small increase this year from last, were still down 12% compared to 2016/17. Over the same period, the number of apprenticeships at levels 4 to 7 increased by 105%, although the number of learners taking these levels is small compared with levels 2 and 3.

They add some direct criticism:

Our apprenticeship survey in 2015 found that too many apprentices were already employed in jobs that converted to apprenticeships, rather than providers seeking out and convincing employers in a skills-shortage area that their business would benefit from an apprentice. This issue was still present in some of the less effective apprenticeship providers we inspected this year. Inspectors found apprentices training for jobs that they had already been doing for a number of years. Some of the apprentices were already qualified at a high level in their field or in a related area and did not consider themselves to be an apprentice.

And in her [speech introducing the report](#), Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman said:

Apprenticeships can be transformational for young people. And yet one in five of all new levy-funded apprenticeships are higher- and degree-level, often aimed at people who are already doing the job, or who don't need the leg up that a great entry-level apprenticeship can provide.

[In the maritime sector the proportion of starts on higher level apprenticeships is low, just 3% for the most recently available period, 2018-19. See the data report on the Apprenticeships page of our website]

Amanda Spielman also raised a concern that “there are more than twice as many apprentices in business and retail as there are in the priority areas of construction and engineering”, offering these conclusions:

The government and providers must look at what can be done to redress the balance across apprenticeships. The critical 16 to 19 age-group needs to be better catered for and decisions must be made about how to reverse the decline in school leavers taking up apprenticeships.

More generally, there is clearly room for greater targeting of government funding in post-16 education of all kinds.

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