

MAKING QUALITY COUNT: THE UNION VIEW

FRED GRINDROD AND IAIN MURRAY

Trade unions have a long tradition of supporting learning and skills at work. One of the key debates at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) founding meeting almost 150 years ago was the need to improve the technical skills of workers. Union support for high-quality apprenticeships has been a constant ever since. This chapter focuses on the TUC's current strategy to drive forward this agenda on two fronts:

- helping unions to build on their acknowledged strengths in supporting and protecting apprentices at work and in negotiating a greater take-up of trainees among a wider pool of employers
- pressing government to introduce measures to tackle some key policy challenges, in particular, to improve quality of training, equality of access and employer demand.

We believe we can learn much from European neighbours with the most successful apprenticeship systems, where judicious regulation and social partnership arrangements combine to make high-quality apprenticeships much more widely available, especially to young people (Steedman, this volume).

Emulating this model would be difficult in the UK. It would require a 'leap of faith' by policymakers, involving a direct challenge to entrenched opposition among some employers to more regulated training. It would also require employers and unions to commit to high-level partnerships governing apprenticeship provision. Unless these two central issues are tackled, it is difficult to see how more and higher-quality apprenticeships can be guaranteed for a much greater number of individuals and especially so for the growing ranks of the young unemployed.

Quality – the policy context

While supporting the rapid expansion of apprenticeships since the late 1990s, the TUC has pressed governments to ensure that all apprenticeships are of a high standard and that pressure to achieve numerical targets does not lead to lower standards of quality. Apprenticeships must be high-quality, holistic career development opportunities and should not be viewed simply as a means of subsidising employers to deliver occupation-specific training, although that form of training is one element of the apprenticeship

framework. Equality and diversity issues have also continued to plague apprenticeships and unions have consistently pressed government and employers to make equality of access to high-quality provision the number one priority.

There continues to be a tension between the aim of recent governments to expand the number of apprenticeship opportunities and evidence showing that expansion in some areas of the economy is being accompanied by practices that undermine quality and equality. Restricting expansion is not an option; demand among young people (and adult employees) for apprenticeship places is outstripping supply (Steedman 2010) and employer engagement in the UK lags behind the rest of Europe. For example, only 30 per cent of companies with more than 500 staff have apprenticeship schemes, compared to virtually all companies of that size in Germany (ibid).

The policy challenge is to sustain plans for expansion while also driving up quality and improving access routes. This is a point well made by Professor Alison Wolf (2011) in her recent report for the government on pre-19 vocational education. While strongly supporting the centrality of the apprenticeship route, Professor Wolf calls into question the quality of the programmes offered by some employers, arguing that it is 'difficult to see why some employees should have their company-specific training paid for [by government], simply because they are designated as apprentices.' She highlights that we have much to learn from the experience of high-quality apprenticeships in other European countries.

Many of the recommendations in the *Wolf Report* pertaining to quality and equality may also resonate for older apprentices and reforms flowing from her recommendations are also likely to have significant implications for changes to working practices relating to apprentices aged 19 and over. Recent criticism by employers¹ of minimum standards relating to time off for training in the existing apprenticeship specification standard suggests the government will have to take a very robust approach if it is going to require all employers with young apprentices to adopt the approach recommended by Professor Wolf.

A greater role for regulation?

The challenge facing policymakers is that it is difficult to impose an apprenticeship quality standard across all sectors due to the wholly voluntaristic nature of the UK skills system and the absence of a social partnership approach. There has been some progress in standardisation with regard to qualifications, skills and time off for training as a result of the introduction of the *Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England* (SASE) in early 2011. However, many employers and training providers have complained about the so-called inflexibilities of this

1 For, example Murray J (2011) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/mar/29/investment-apprenticeships-employers-concerns>

approach, especially on the grounds that it is not appropriate for some of the private services sectors. There is also little evidence that the SASE has the teeth to deal with some major quality issues, such as employers continuing to be subsidised for delivering apprenticeships lasting a matter of months rather than years.

An effective, if flawed, argument used by some employer bodies over the years against regulation of apprenticeships, is that this will dissuade employers from participating in the programme and thereby exacerbate weaknesses in supply. However, this argument is wearing thin as international comparisons show that other countries support higher-quality and greater volume within an apprenticeship framework, underpinned by statutory regulations, including those specifying a minimum duration. The UK also has limited regulatory levers that can positively influence employer demand compared to other countries and there are a number of options for policy reform in this area (TUC 2011).

First, the government should investigate further the potential of public procurement to drive up the number, and quality, of apprenticeships. The Coalition government supports this in principle, saying that it will 'work with public sector bodies to encourage and support them to use public procurement as a lever to raise employers' engagement with Apprenticeships' (BIS 2010: 20). The previous government had begun to do this by requiring employers winning major government construction projects to recruit a certain number of apprentices.

Even during a time of government spending cuts, the public sector spends a colossal amount of money procuring goods and services.² The government should establish 'a task force, comprising of Ministers and Officials from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the Cabinet Office and the Treasury, to consider a procurement policy that increases the UK's levels of skills, sustainability and employability', including specific requirements on apprenticeship recruitment (TUC 2011). For example, in parts of the construction sector where procurement is being used in this way, there is a rule of thumb that one apprentice should be employed for every £1 million of contract value. This approach should be embedded and extended to other sectors.

There is also a need for new regulatory measures at the sector level. The government needs to build on its welcome announcement to promote a social partnership approach through the combined actions of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) and the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). In order to give this traction, employers and union representatives on SSCs could be required, as a condition

2 According to the Financial Times, the annual procurement budget is £191 billion: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/aef14e20-3552-11e0-aa6c-00144feabdc0.html>

of UKCES licensing, to draw up a clear picture of their joint ambition on apprenticeships in particular sub-sectors over a specific time period. These ‘apprenticeship agreements’ should be governed by a regulatory ‘carrot and stick’ framework, developed by UKCES in partnership with employers and unions at national level and drawing on best practice from Europe.

Other incentives could also be considered to encourage employers to invest more – more intelligently and more fairly – in apprenticeships and other training. For example, employers could be required to include a short summary of their training provision in annual reports to better inform customers, employees and shareholders. The government could also review the current arrangements for tax relief for work-related training. A recent policy paper by unionlearn (2011a) estimates that the total cost of this relief to the Exchequer is in the region of £5 billion per annum, with little available data on how it is being used by those employers that qualify for it. This relief could be much more effectively targeted, for example, to give much greater priority to accredited training such as apprenticeships.

What do unions add?

While it is difficult to detail every aspect of a high-quality apprenticeship, the ‘expansive—restrictive apprenticeship’ model developed by Fuller and Unwin (see their chapter in this volume) is helpful in this respect. The authors have previously highlighted the central role for social partnership in this model, saying that ‘the State has a duty to involve the social partners in a genuine alliance to produce a statement of purpose, as exists in some other countries, for apprenticeships [which]... would provide the statutory underpinning needed to formalise apprenticeships in the education and training system’ (Fuller and Unwin 2008). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has also highlighted the need for unions in the UK to operate in a way that replicates the role played by their counterparts in countries where a social partnership involving high-level agreements between employers and unions underpins the way that apprenticeships are administered. For example, the 2008 *Jobs for Youth* study noted that:

‘In countries with a long tradition of apprenticeship training, unions are a key player alongside employers and the institutional actors. In Germany, unions have been instrumental in securing action from employers when apprenticeship places have proved to be insufficient to meet demand. In England, unions should be involved in the design of apprenticeships and other work-based learning initiatives alongside Sector Skills Councils.’

Union involvement in apprenticeships at the institutional level in the UK is largely restricted to the ‘union voice’ on SSCs. While this is important, it is a far cry from the social partnership arrangements and binding sectoral/sub-sectoral collective agreements in other countries.

Nevertheless, governments, past and present, have acknowledged the important role that trade unions can play at the workplace level in promoting take-up, quality and equality through the activities of union representatives. However, less heed has been paid to the influential impact of enterprise-based collective agreements between employers and unions in some sectors, such as in parts of manufacturing, and the degree to which such agreements continue to play a crucial role in maintaining quality apprenticeship provision.

Building the capacity of union representatives is a central feature of a joint project between unionlearn – the TUC’s learning and skills organisation – and the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS). The project aims to equip representatives with the necessary skills to encourage employers to offer more apprenticeship opportunities, to enable all participants to enjoy a high-quality apprenticeship, and to help unions to negotiate collective agreements where possible.³

The Coalition government has also recognised the new dimension to union engagement on apprenticeships resulting from the pioneering role of union learning representatives (ULRs). With the support of the government’s Union Learning Fund and unionlearn, over 28,000 ULRs have been trained since 1999. The government’s skills strategy relies on unionlearn to help ‘enable trade unions and Union Learning Representatives to work more effectively with employers to increase the number of high quality Apprenticeship places available; in particular by promoting the benefits of Apprenticeships to disadvantaged groups in the workforce and to employers who have not previously trained apprentices’ (BIS 2010: 20). Every year unionlearn helps unions to encourage employers to deliver several thousand more, and better quality, apprenticeships.

Case Study – South Tyneside Homes

South Tyneside Homes (STH) is the arms-length management organisation set up by South Tyneside Council to manage, maintain and improve its stock of over 18,000 council homes. STH currently has 24 apprentices across all construction trades including: joiners, electricians, plumbers, plasterers, painter and decorators and gas fitters. All apprentices are given three- or four-year contracts (depending on the discipline) and are paid in line with union negotiated terms and conditions, which rise incrementally as their apprenticeship progresses. Retention after they have qualified is taken on a case-by-case basis, and is primarily dictated by company workload and economic

3 For more details about the Apprenticeships are Union Business project, go to: <http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/apprenticeships>

factors. High-quality training is paramount at STH and all new apprentices are given a full year's programme of work, as well as a comprehensive induction.

Due to the increasing popularity of apprenticeships, STH received over 600 applications for only eight positions in their last intake. Although competition is fierce, accessibility and getting the right person for the job is still a key priority for STH, so as well as literacy and numeracy, the organisation has recently introduced spatial awareness testing during the recruitment process to allow people to demonstrate different skills. Anyone needing help with skills for life or other issues is supported, usually through the union-led learning project and union learning representatives.

The unions at South Tyneside Homes – GMB, Unite, UCATT and Unison – are supportive of the scheme, as highlighted in the following joint statement:

‘The vast number of Apprentice success stories demonstrate that the ultimate goal of apprenticeships should never be seen as cheap labour for organisations, but rather as being integral to their long-term business plans; providing a dedicated and skilled workforce for the future. We feel that in South Tyneside Homes, the continued strong industrial relations between the unions and employer on the apprenticeship framework - and beyond - has been crucial to its continued success and should be seen as a fantastic model for other employers to adapt in their organisations.’

In addition to the direct support of union representatives, apprentices in workplaces such as South Tyneside Homes benefit from the wider advantages associated with a unionised workforce (see above). Research by the TUC (2009) shows that, on average, union members receive better pay and conditions and, tellingly, substantially more training, than non-members and there is little doubt that the ‘union advantage’ translates into a ‘quality boost’ for apprentices in such workplaces. According to research by IPPR, many apprentices choose to leave due to the poor quality of training provision and a lack of employer investment in the apprenticeship programme (Lawton and Norris 2010).

Decent pay and conditions

In the history of the union movement’s support for apprenticeships, a founding principle has been that an apprentice should be paid a wage for doing a job, albeit one involving extensive periods of education and training. Due to significant campaigning and lobbying by trade unions

and others, in October 2010 the Low Pay Commission recommended a new national minimum wage rate for apprentices. Establishing a national minimum wage rate was also welcomed by employer bodies, such as the Federation of Small Businesses, which has since called for the rate to be increased significantly (FSB 2011).⁴

Tracking trends in apprenticeship pay is difficult because of limited availability of data. The last detailed government survey, undertaken in 2007, recorded that 12 per cent of apprentices reported not being paid at all, with this being particularly prevalent in retail, health and social care, and customer services. The same survey showed that an additional 5 per cent of apprentices were receiving below the then-minimum rate of £80 per week.

Recent research published by unionlearn (2011b) has tried to fill the void on pay data. This revealed that the average salary for apprentices is now over £12,000 a year with private sector employers paying, on average, 17 per cent more than public sector employers. According to the survey, those apprenticeship frameworks which attracted the highest pay also had the highest rates of retention and were more likely to be longer and at a higher level. However, the pay-off for employers from apprenticeships that last longer and tend to cost more is still relatively quick. For example, Hasluck et al (2008) found that, even in the case of relatively expensive engineering apprenticeships, 'the employer's investment was, on average, paid back in less than three years'.

Unions also negotiate with employers on a day-to-day basis to ensure that apprentices are covered by all the terms and conditions applicable to the rest of the workforce. As employees, apprentices are entitled to join a trade union, and to benefit from the impact of the union in safeguarding their terms and conditions on both an individual and collective basis. Finally, a major challenge facing many apprentices is whether they will be kept on in a permanent job when they complete their training. While some employers do guarantee a job in such circumstances, for many this is not the case. Many unions prioritise negotiating on this point by ensuring that internal recruitment schemes provide apprentices with additional support in applying for jobs, guaranteeing interviews, helping place apprentices in sister organisations and so forth.

High-quality training

All too often, apprenticeship completion rates are used as a proxy for quality. While completion is an important indicator, this overlooks other crucial aspects of the training experience, including: the duration of the apprenticeship; the amount of time spent training; and the opportunity to progress to further training or employment. Apprenticeship

4 82 per cent of FSB members say that they are in favour of an increase in the minimum wage for apprentices from £95 to £123 for a 35-hour week.

programmes should always identify a clear programme of training with sufficient time off-the-job to attend college or workplace training centres and to engage in private study.

The introduction of the SASE is a welcome development, given that there was previously no national minimum standard for apprenticeship frameworks. However, the standards set by the SASE for minimum Qualification and Credit Framework credits and the minimum time to be spent 'off work station' are very low. The minimum requirement is 30 per cent of 280 guided learning hours per year, which equates to less than two hours per week. There is also currently no minimum duration.

According to Steedman's (2010) international comparison of apprenticeships, time off for training in England is at the bottom end of the scale. She notes that, while most countries require off-the-job training of at least one day per week, 'in Australia and England the minimum is rather less'. In her inquiry, Professor Alison Wolf (2011) highlights similar concerns about young (16–18) apprentices. While acknowledging the benefits of the work-base learning route, she recommends that these young people 'should, nonetheless, be primarily engaged in learning – including, primarily, generalisable and transferable skills [which] is standard practice in other countries with large apprenticeship programmes'.

Steedman's analysis (2010) finds that 'in all apprenticeship countries except Australia and England most apprenticeship programmes take three years to complete or, in the case of Ireland, four years. In Australia, "traditional apprenticeships" last for three years with traineeships lasting on average for one year. In England the average for all apprenticeships is between one and two years.' Even more worrying, a significant number of apprenticeship programmes lasting less than a year in duration continue to receive government subsidy. It is hard to justify any framework of less than at least one year, or in many sectors, two years.

Another major difference between apprenticeships in England and other countries, highlighted by Steedman, is that we have a large proportion of individuals engaged in level 2 training (roughly around two-thirds) and it appears that a large proportion of them (around two-thirds) do not progress to a level 3 apprenticeship. It is, therefore, of little surprise that Wolf (2011) noted in her review that 'the young person who follows first a level 2 course in a vocational area, then a level 3 one, and then goes on to a long-term career in that sector is the exception not the rule.'

Progression goes to the heart of the union view on learning at work and the need for individuals to have the opportunity to continue to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding to support career progression and improve their quality of life. The Coalition government has made a welcome commitment to tackling barriers to progression and to increase opportunities for people to achieve a level 3 apprenticeship and

to progress to higher education. However, the question remains as to what degree this policy objective can be achieved through exhortation and funding incentives, or whether some form of regulation needs to be invoked to empower apprentices to have some form of 'right to progress'. The TUC believes that all apprentices who have the aptitude and desire to progress should be given opportunities to do so.

One problem is that many small and medium-enterprises (SMEs) feel they lack the capacity to take on apprentices. Collaboration is the answer to this and there are two distinct models for supporting the SME sector to employ apprentices:

- Apprenticeship Training Agencies (ATAs) – employ the apprentice and hire them out to member companies
- Group Training Agencies (GTAs) – involve direct employment of the apprentice by the SME but within a 'pooled training' resource.

The TUC has frequently raised concerns about ATAs, particularly those agencies that run low-paid, poor-quality schemes with little progression or career development. Additional concerns about ATAs include limitations on collective bargaining, union organising and recruitment, and the employment status of apprentices who are often employed as agency workers. The GTA model offers a much better vehicle for supporting groups of employers to come together, often with union support, to develop high-quality apprenticeships.

Equality and diversity

Quality and equality are two aspects of the apprenticeship experience that go hand-in-hand and should be given the highest priority. The Coalition government has stressed that it aims to 'make Apprenticeships the primary means for people to gain skills in the workplace' (Hayes 2010). It is imperative that there is an equivalent emphasis on equality and diversity within apprenticeships as for all other major educational and vocational pathways, such as schools, colleges and universities.

The focus on widening access to apprenticeships in the skills strategy is a welcome development and unionlearn is working with a number of the 'diversity pilots' set up to tackle this issue. Unionlearn is also working closely with the union movement to ensure that the widely acknowledged role of ULRs in supporting disadvantaged groups to access training at work is equally applicable to apprenticeship provision. However, the latest picture – especially relating to gender, ethnicity and disability – shows that there is still a mountain to climb.

Gender segregation remains a huge problem with only 3 per cent of engineering apprentices accounted for by female participants compared to 92 per cent of hairdressing apprentices. This is one of the reasons for an overall gender pay gap of 21 per cent, but even within the same sector women are being paid less: for example 61 per cent of

apprentices in the retail sector are female but they are paid 16 per cent less than male retail apprentices (TUC 2008). Recent research by unionlearn (2011) reinforces these earlier findings, showing that occupations with the highest-paid apprenticeships tend to have a much lower ratio of female apprentices.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities also face huge barriers. For example, while 18- to 24-year-olds from BME communities account for 14 per cent of this age group in the overall population, they account for less than 8 per cent of apprenticeship places.⁵ Although different levels of awareness of the apprenticeship programme may play a part in this, the race discrimination affecting black workers more generally in the labour market is also likely to be a key factor.

Disabled people face similar barriers, with trends suggesting a worsening of the situation. Access to apprenticeships for people declaring a learning difficulty and/or disability has fallen from 11.5 per cent in 2005/06 to 8.2 per cent in 2010/11.⁶ A number of organisations have challenged the collection of data on disability and apprenticeships, suggesting that a significant proportion of declarations are people with basic skills needs that would not normally be classified as having a learning difficulty or disability.⁷ As a result, it is very difficult to establish where barriers exist to the progression and retention of apprentices with disabilities and more effective data should be collected on this issue.

While the new diversity pilots are welcome, there is a pressing need for a wider policy approach to tackle equality of access at the general level but also with respect to gender segregation within apprenticeships. There are similar issues for BME and disabled participants, in particular their under-representation in apprenticeships that attract the highest number of applications. The TUC and unionlearn have recommended a number of specific actions to help tackle the challenge of widening access to apprenticeships, including: improving careers advice, promoting best practice in recruitment procedures, publicising positive images of women/BME/disabled apprentices in industry, and improving equality and diversity training in all sectors. There are other targeted policy levers available to government, including the use of procurement policy to require suppliers to recruit a balanced intake of apprentices as a contractual requirement. Publicising apprentice pay rates and prioritising collection of data are also important strategies alongside strengthening monitoring systems to enable NAS and the government to assess how their strategy on increasing diversity in apprenticeships is working.

5 FOI request from TUC to DWP, March 2011

6 The Data Service (2011) Apprenticeship Programme Starts Breakdown by Equality and Diversity (2005/06 to 2010/11 – in-year estimates)

7 See for example, Skill's response to the consultation on the SASE, May 2009, <http://www.skill.org.uk/uploads/Skill%20response%20to%20SASE%2029.05.09.doc>

Unions also play a crucial role in supporting diversity through their negotiations with employers on the recruitment and career progression of apprentices, including the promotion of flexible working and training. The mentoring and support that union representatives provide to individual apprentices in the workplace can also ensure that apprentices facing particular barriers complete their training and, wherever possible, find a permanent post with the employer in question.

Some disabled apprentices will require reasonable adjustments which both employers and education providers have a duty to provide under the Equality Act 2010. Examples of adjustments might be: information available in alternative formats, physical alterations to premises, more time to complete certain tasks or flexible hours in order to make travel arrangements or attend appointments.

Mentoring

The role that mentoring plays in supporting apprentices successfully to complete their training, and to progress further, has been a crucial aspect of a quality apprenticeship experience for centuries. The Institute for Employment Studies (Marangozov et al 2009) found 'persuasive evidence to show that mentoring increases participation and success rates of diverse apprentices ... Mentoring is one factor found, in some cases anecdotally, to improve retention among apprentices, including those from groups not traditionally employed in the sector.'

In addition to providing wise counsel on the problems encountered in everyday working life, mentoring should support a framework of one-to-one advice relating to training and career progression. The independence of the mentor from the apprentice's line manager is fundamental. A common mistake by employers is to combine these roles, thereby creating a conflict of interest and undermining the mentor-apprentice relationship.

Union engagement in apprenticeships at the workplace level has usually involved some form of mentoring of apprentices by union representatives, albeit without it being referred to as such in the past. However, unionlearn is currently engaged in a programme of work to help unions build the mentoring role of union representatives by enabling them to build their skills set in this area. Our experience is that ULRs make excellent mentors and many of them see it as a natural extension of their role.

Health and safety

Safeguarding employees from physical or mental harm is a major priority for unions and the Health and Safety Executive has stated that 'there is strong evidence that unionised workplaces and those with health and safety representatives are safer and healthier as a result' (Health and Safety Executive 2009). Research has shown that apprentices have a significantly greater probability of having an accident at work compared

to the sector average (Miller et al 2005), with youth and inexperience a major factor. Strict adherence to health and safety regulations and close collaboration between learning reps and health and safety reps means that a unionised environment lends itself to protecting apprentices from hazards at work. But there is a wider need for government to ensure that apprentices in non-unionised workplaces are covered by the full force of the law when it comes to health and safety. Where unions are not present there is less opportunity to check that such apprentices are being properly protected and looked after, particularly when the employer is remote, as in the ATA model.

A bar on job substitution

The introduction of apprentices to supposedly displace existing employees is a common concern of the workforce, especially in the current economic climate when redundancy programmes and apprenticeship recruitment can be occurring simultaneously. The TUC and all its affiliated unions are opposed to any circumstances involving apprentices being recruited as a cover for job substitution. Unions have sought to mitigate this threat by developing apprenticeship agreements with employers which prohibit this practice.⁸

Conclusion

Making quality count is not simply a slogan when it comes to apprenticeships. This ambition should be at the heart of what government, employers, unions and other stakeholders aspire to for *all* apprentices, regardless of their individual circumstances or their place of work. There continues to be a wide consensus that revitalising apprenticeships is the 'right thing to do' if society is to develop suitable vocational pathways that best meet the needs of individuals and employers alike, especially in the current context of rapidly increasing youth unemployment. But to achieve this, we need to learn from those European countries (and our own domestic sectors) where the apprenticeship brand is synonymous with quality, otherwise we risk going down the road of discredited and poor-quality youth training schemes from previous decades. Strengthening the regulation of apprenticeships and adopting the European social partnership model are two challenges that need to be tackled in order to achieve a universal quality mark for apprenticeships.

The UKCES is committed to social partnership. Sector bodies such as SSCs, which are licensed by the UKCES, provide an appropriate vehicle to build a new social partnership approach with the aim of boosting the number of high-quality apprenticeships and guaranteeing equality of access. Drawing on best practice from other European countries, the

8 For example, in 2010 the Council of Civil Service Unions negotiated a framework agreement with civil service employers regulating the recruitment of apprentices. In addition to agreeing pay and conditions, it also provided safeguards against apprentices being recruited to posts where there were surplus staff within reasonable travelling distance.

government would need to give these partnerships real teeth in order to ensure that they could genuinely impact on the volume and quality of apprenticeship opportunities offered by employers. However, there would also be a challenge for trade unions to respond in kind and work together with employers, especially at the sector level, to make a reality of these new arrangements.

Regulating the training market is something all governments have shied away from in recent decades, but this is a necessary step if employers and unions are to be given greater ownership of, and responsibility for, the apprenticeship agenda as in most other European countries. Regulation needs to play a role in building a quality apprenticeship brand by setting some minimum national standards that would apply to all provision, including:

- a minimum duration
- a right for participants to progress to a full level 3 apprenticeship if they wish
- greater enforcement of equality of access.

Compared to most other European countries, employer involvement in apprenticeships in the UK remains poor and it is increasingly evident that encouragement and exhortation are not enough to persuade more employers to get engaged in this form of training.

A range of measures needs to be adopted to achieve a breakthrough on this front, including:

- binding sectoral and sub-sectoral agreements by social partners
- more extensive use of procurement
- more effective use of tax relief on training
- human capital reporting requirements in annual reports.

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