



Apprenticeship (Scotland) Bill

The UNISON Scotland response
To John Park MSP
On consultation document about proposed bill
to provide a right to a Modern Apprenticeship
for 16-18 year olds in Scotland

June 2008

Introduction

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Apprentice (Scotland) Bill proposed by John Park MSP, which would establish a right to undertake an apprenticeship for those aged between 16 and 18. UNISON Scotland represents 160,000 workers mainly in the public sector, including workers who are and have been on Modern Apprenticeship training schemes, staff who organise and deliver apprenticeships, and around 90% of staff in the Careers Service (now SDS).

Background

There is a growing demand for Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland. The number of people undertaking apprenticeships has grown threefold in the last ten years. There were 28,028 people on Modern Apprenticeships in October 2007. However, demand for skilled workers is also rising. The proposal identifies a number of important growth sectors, including engineering, construction and public works projects – such as the Commonwealth Games in 2014 – which will sustain and increase this demand. In the absence of a Scottish Government commitment to establish targets for future apprenticeships, the proposed bill seeks to:

- Establish a right to a Modern Apprenticeship (16-18)
- Place a duty on the appropriate enterprise body to fund apprenticeship training
- Place a duty on the Scottish Government to promote apprenticeships
- Place a duty on public bodies to offer apprenticeships

The proposal argues that in order to deliver this entitlement, the number of apprenticeship places will have to increase significantly. This will require the Scottish Government to increase the promotion of apprenticeships in schools through advice and guidance to pupils; and provide additional support for employers in training apprentices. The public sector will also require to increase apprentice training levels to match its overall employment level which stands at 22.4% of the workforce in Scotland.

Issues to consider

The consultation document raises nine specific issues to consider, to which we respond below:

1. In what ways do you think apprenticeships enhance employee skills?

By training apprentices as employees, using a combination of on-the-job learning and structured study, the Modern Apprenticeship provides skills which workers can carry with them through life. Providing a right to Modern Apprenticeships and establishing targets for uptake with provisions for fulfilling these will help to ensure the best skills mix for the future of the Scottish economy.

2. In what ways do you think apprenticeships benefit employers?

Apprenticeships provide employers with skilled workers who have relevant, job-specific skills for their organisation. The training is shaped by the employer to the needs of the enterprise, and the apprentice becomes an important part of the team who can deliver value even before they are finally qualified. That is why employers should support training and skills development in general and Modern Apprenticeships where specifically relevant by providing funding for places.

3. What incentives do you think are required to encourage 16-18 year olds to take on apprenticeship positions?

The opportunity to secure a training which leads to a good job. Options to pursue Modern Apprenticeships should be provided through schools and Careers Scotland and be a meaningful alternative to academic study. Men and women should be supported in taking up Modern Apprenticeships in non-traditional disciplines, and participation from Black and minority ethnic groups should be encouraged. Modern Apprenticeships should provide training which results in qualification at SCQF level 3, with the opportunity to go beyond this level if desired. We have to recognise that not all Modern Apprenticeships have been to a high standard either in terms of training or in terms of positive outcomes and this impacts on take up. It is particularly important to ensure that the work-based training element which the employer provides meets the standard required and that apprentices are not simply used as cheap labour.

4. What incentives do you think are required to encourage employers to take on apprentices?

Employers benefit from the provision of high quality structured training supported by enterprise bodies and the further education sector to complement on-the-job training of apprentices who are their own employees.

5. Are there any disadvantages in stimulating a growth in apprenticeship places?

Given the evident demand for Modern Apprenticeship places and the requirement for skilled workers in the Scottish economy, a planned growth in apprenticeship places will be beneficial.

6. What costs will be involved in delivering an increase in apprenticeship places?

The costs of promoting and supporting the increase in apprenticeship places will fall mainly on government; however there will also be returns from this investment to government as a result of increased economic activity and growth which will offset the costs.

7. Who do you think should bear the cost of creating apprenticeship places?

The costs of creating Modern Apprenticeship places should be borne by employers with support from enterprise bodies; again there will be returns

to employer from the value added by skilled workers which will more than offset any costs.

8. Are there any equal opportunity impacts that may arise from this proposal (either positive or negative ones)?

The establishment of this right and the associated requirement for all partners – government, employers, enterprise bodies – to promote and support Modern Apprenticeships is a chance for putting in place measures which will improve equal opportunities, consistent with the principles and objectives of mainstreaming. In particular, as noted above, we would want to see measures to ensure that women are enabled to take up apprenticeships in non-traditional disciplines; and that participation from Black and minority ethnic groups are encouraged. To the extent that this is done effectively, through establishment and monitoring of equalities targets by government and enterprise bodies, the impact from the proposal could be wholly positive.

9. Do you have any other comments?

As below:

Age limit and Adult Modern Apprenticeships

While fully supporting the objective of increasing the takeup of Modern Apprenticeships by 16-18 year olds, UNISON Scotland believes in the principle of widening access to education and training to all, regardless of age and would support extension of the right to a Modern Apprenticeship beyond the age of 18. Many people who have missed out on appropriate training opportunities at school leaving age would benefit from this right, for example: "disadvantaged" youths with barriers being addressed by social inclusion programmes, who are barred from these opportunities as they are over the age limits set prior to joining; and adults – often women - returning to work who have not the opportunity to gain valuable in-work skills in order to sustain employability.

Pay levels and equality

Women apprentices are more likely to be low paid than men. This is partly because of gender segregation – women are more likely to become apprentices in traditionally lower paid occupations such as hairdressing and early years care, whereas men tend to dominate (relatively) less poorly paid technical trades. Application of National Minimum Wage legislation principles to Modern Apprenticeships – as to all workers regardless of age – would help to reduce such pay inequalities amongst apprentices.

Completion rates

There is evidence that Modern Apprenticeship completion rates have suffered from low pay in some cases. Completion of the full term is not always required for individuals to be effective in some work areas, and participants can be tempted to higher paid but short duration employment. They may then find it hard to return to their Modern Apprenticeship

programme at a later date to complete. Again, application of National Minimum Wage legislation principles would go some way to help individuals complete and thus improve the effectiveness of the proposal to support an increase in apprenticeships.

Careers Scotland and Modern Apprenticeships

UNISON Scotland believes there is an important role for Careers Scotland in promoting Modern Apprenticeships. We opposed the removal of the Vacancy Handling Service from Careers Scotland two years ago, which meant that the agency (now part of Skills Development Scotland) could no longer accept and administer vacancies for jobs, employed status Skillseekers and Modern Apprenticeships. Careers Centres are in regular contact through school and post-school links with the 16–19 year old labour market. Reintroducing the ability of Careers Scotland to accept and advertise Modern Apprenticeships would help to maximise uptake and underpin the success of the proposed legislation.

Conclusion

UNISON Scotland welcomes and supports the Apprentice (Scotland) Bill. We believe that developing skills and increasing access to quality training is crucial to the future success of Scotland's economy and provides routes to employment, and so helps tackle poverty and combats inequalities in society. We support Modern Apprenticeships as a proven method of training in employment which benefits the apprentice and the employer. We support the principle of establishing a right to a Modern Apprenticeship for 16-18 year olds, and the duties on public bodies to fund, promote and provide apprenticeships.

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