

# **ESFA ROUNDTABLE MEETING –** **YORKSHIRE**

## **Purpose of the meeting**

To gain intelligence from the larger provider group within YNY, Leeds, Humber, and Tees Valley to feedback to the ESFA.

## **Review previous issues:**

Alex provided an overview of issues from the mtg in July to ask if these are still ongoing.

The issues raised at the last meeting with regard to apprenticeship take-up and completion of EPA included –

- Employer commitment,
- EPAs – flexibility, access, and availability
- functional skills, attending the workplace, etc.

The ESFA is keen to receive specifics on these issues to provide intelligence back up the food chain.

## **EPA**

Barriers of delayed EPA within Hairdressing and barbering is resulting in learners being behind as they have not had their EPA, and many are hitting 19-year-old and employers have to go to minimum wage which they cannot afford. Employers are therefore letting the staff go at 19 & they are not reaching the EPA.

Many providers raised concerns with the industry in which they work not recognising the whole apprenticeship and just valuing the diploma, this is evident in HSC, Hair, Fitness, Procurement, and many others, and where the industry is not regulated the EPA is not seen as essential and it is impacting on achievement rates.

Many providers confirmed the list from before is still current and in some cases, the EPA situation remains bad or worse. There is a bottleneck in the Textiles sector as there are only 3 people working as EPAOs in textile. Long waiting periods mean the apprentices may result in grade decreases.

Providers in the group agreed that accessing apprentices in industries such as warehousing, hairdressing & retail remain an issue as production & getting back to services is a priority, they cannot risk a covid outbreak as it would shut the business so they are restricting access for tutors & trainers.

## Functional Skills

Functional skills was raised by a few members and the inappropriateness of the mandated levels or completion of these qualifications being a barrier to recruitment. In sectors such as manufacturing, hairdressing, Textiles, HSC and childcare many of the people are foreign and English is their 2nd language and therefore struggle with English and Maths, however these workers are phenomenal workers, and they can do all of the elements of the job and are competent in their role but functional skills L2 is a step too far. Members agreed there needs to be a review into functional skills and allow ESOL to be considered along with E+M or at least let the employer or industry set the level, which may even be E3.

**ESFA Suggestion:** If could do ESOL instead of functional skills this would help. YES!

Another issue facing providers in Functional Skills is the rising concern with the number of learners with additional support needs, especially in sectors like hairdressing and HSC with nearly 50% of learners identifying as dyslexic and employers do not see the value of functional skills, they resent anything over the 20% off the job to do the functional skills. Employees are then resistant as employers are not supportive. Mitigations and relaxations needed, a lot of learners do not have a statement from school identifying this and it is picked up by the ITPs, but funding is not sufficient to support. English is the problem, too complex and hard to focus. Vocational learners struggling with this.

## What are the new issues as we emerge from the pandemic?

Paediatric 1st aid within childcare is a mandatory element however there are challenges around this due to COVID and the use of resuscitation mannequins, no flexibility is provided on this, and it is a barrier. Raised the issue with the Resus Dolls with the trailblazer group and this has not been resolved. Also, in Childcare many delivering are from small training providers and they cannot afford to employ a separate Functional Skills advisor but with a growing need in this area from those coming out of school and the delays in examinations this is causing a backlog and real issue for delivery moving forward.

The mitigation & covid support in Hairdressing took too long to go through, especially with City and Guilds, causing some learners to just take the on program / diploma certificate. This has a negative impact on achievement rates.



**Education & Skills  
Funding Agency**

## **Wage issues is that why people leave apprenticeships?**

Many providers discussed the wages issue currently as we come out of covid and how potential apprentices are not starting or not completing due to completing salaries from entities such as Amazon and Aldi. Apprenticeship positions in the main, pay less than these organisations and as such people would rather work in retail or call centres and earn more money than learn a trade as an apprentice. People are not seeing the future earning potential as they may have done previous (pre-covid) and choosing to work where they can get most money now.

As a sector, most apprenticeship providers work to the general rule that they expect employers to pay national min wage but post-covid many are choosing the apprenticeship wage which is much lower and not at all liveable with the raising costs of living and rates.

In the Hairdressing sector, employers are taking on apprentices for less hours as they can't afford 40 hours plus the ongoing issues with school bubbles and separation / isolation, so they are employing them for 30hrs and not 40hrs. The apprentice often then has to get another part time job to top up the wages, often in retail or hospitality. And often the apprentice leaves for the higher paid part time job. There are massive shortages of apprentices, wages and hours.

With the delays on offering less than the required 35hrs (as per the funding rules) this then impacts on the training provider as they have to be on programme longer and has a commitment and financial impact. This is really impacting on people learning a trade on wage poverty.

The wages issue is generally with SME non levy businesses but there are ones that do pay the levy that also do not pay appropriate wages.

Specialist horticulture is seeing a huge issue in demand. Every butcher, farmer, horticulture business is trying to recruit, and the young people are not there as there are so many jobs available and young people are not taking them up as they would have in previous years.

## **What are the main issues surrounding the recruitment of young people?**

The group discussed & agreed far more young people are continuing in Education than previous and the issues raised included :

Certain sectors perception as “dirty jobs” – farming, agri/horti/ construction. HSC

Mental health and stability of young people – parents are keeping them in education instead of the world of work as it is seen as ‘safer. There is a lot of anxiety and mental health issues with school leavers and a growing epidemic of mental health support needed for this age group.

Many providers said they have had more than 19+ learners applying for apprenticeships this year.

All providers agreed recruitment is very hard now, there are the jobs but not the learners. In general year 11s are struggling and new apprentices are leaving due to anxiety after 3-6weeks. Providers are now bringing in mental health champions and experts to support but many businesses, especially SME's, do not have the finance or resource for this.

Providers shared their responses to supporting young people with mental health & anxiety and its clear it is an issue in every sector, with every provider from Refrigeration, Health and Social Care, Business Admin and engineering it's an issue everywhere. Providers are being extra Conscious of increased safeguarding learner issues & concerns.

The ASK project was discussed which supports apprenticeship interventions in schools and how ASK primes (of which WYLP is 1) can do more to reduce some of the barriers and nervousness about apprenticeships & workplace in a post-covid world – this will be discussed with the ASK primes across the North. But there was recognition by all that further work and interventions are needed with parents and employers.

## **Planned end dates (PED)**

Providers raised their concerns over the position of learners PED and how the ESFA & Ofsted will view this when auditing or inspecting. What will the ESFA position be for these learners past their end date and will there be any funding to support these as this is not an issue that has gone away. Almost every provider in the room agreed they had learners past PED and were supporting them with extra knowledge & practice at their own cost.

## What changes are needed to improve Apprenticeship take up & completion?

Relaxation of functional skills and recording of the 20% off the job. They are doing 20%, shadow and practice. There is too much recording taking place: apprentices can't work, have competent training and learning the whole time and this is being recorded by the provider, then recording the maths and English, then recording whilst at work – it is just too much as they are vocational learners, definite male and female split as males struggle more.

Have a more flexible and differentiated set of metrics such as employer statements, variety of learning, workplace values and progression as additional evidence rather than writing off the job blogs, difficult for a 16-year-old to detail reflection oppose to what they have done. Older learners find this easier.

Standards are harder for learners and for delivery, employers taking on an apprentice don't understand what is involved. More employer engagement from the outset and a support programme for mentors but this costs money out of providers own pocket to support. Make some funding from under-spent levy to develop this proposition.

Delivery across devolved nations, allowing the use of funds to be spent where the employer or candidate is based. E.G the fundraising sector in Scotland is in high demand but can't do the apprenticeship standard.

A big discussion took place regarding the rigidity of Apprenticeships and how even with the introduction of standards they remain an extremely rigid programme, they lack flexibility to meet the needs of industry & the functional Skills compulsory issue is big. Apprentices or their employer should have the choice like the choice in full time FE. Time, duration, all different individuals, obsessed setting a year and a date. Time is not an effective metric of quality, so why insistent on it?

If people can get through quicker, let them. A construction apprentice who finished early now won't get his qualification through. Look at progression routes and standards, with trailblazer groups not being influenced from the educational sector it is having a detrimental effect on recruitment and it needs repairing quickly. Going to end up with less learners.

The EPA's in many cases are open to too many organisations – many standards have several EPAs and they all have a different approach, one has one angle and they fail for different reasons. The group agreed that the whole EPA strategy needs reviewing as it was implemented in a rush and acts as a barrier.

Another EPA issue raised was the trailblazer groups are not truly reflective of the whole industry and just attended by bigger businesses, for example the Lab Technician apprenticeship – the employers in the trail blazer are chemical and pharmaceutical, Astra Zeneca etc. A lab technician in manufacturing does not exist. The trailblazer group does not lend itself to other sectors. The group felt that Provider engagement from IfATE & EPAOs has been poor. The system is overly complex with lots of different EPAO expectations, same standards, but different EPAO expectations, employers not buying into EPA, standards version control, capacity within EPAO, individual challenges, different industry challenges (redundancies/ furlough) it really is a long list on why we have so many barriers.

Provider states that EPAOs not being standard is the biggest bug bare for the same standard, it is so frustrating. If you don't know their processes and procedures, taking an already complex provision and it's created a monster. If there was a barrier to achieve, it is the EPA strategy, it wasn't ready. No fault of many of the EPAOs as it was not ready – how are they supposed to assess them? Ofqual was also discussed in relation to EPA and the group felt that Ofqual are putting barriers up as they want all standards to look the same at EPA, which is not helpful or realistic. Providers are struggling to get apprentices to fit into Ofqual boxes. Once of the meeting delegates sits on a trailblazer group and said this is the biggest frustration when trying to agree and roll out a standard. The group also agreed that the digital apprenticeship account also needs reviewing and there are so many documents to complete unnecessarily that the system could pre-populate or support the sign up all in one place. May employers are put off by the enormity of the documentation and a far simpler sign-up process could be put in place with not much frustration to the system, using the digital account.

**Recommendation** – Victoria to meet with Andrew Black & Martin Jenkins to gain sector specific