**GMLPN Apprenticeship Survey – 2023**

**Introduction**

GMLPN are aware that members who deliver apprenticeships are experiencing several challenges including issues with the Apprenticeship Service, Funding, Transfer of Learners, End Point Assessment, Functional Skills and off the Job training.

To gather an evidence base to influence and inform key decision makers, GMLPN designed a survey which was circulated to members. Additionally, GMLPN’s Advisory Board met to discuss the state of the sector and provide evidence and examples of the impact of DfE policies and practices.

In total GMLPN received responses from c.30 different apprenticeship providers. Responses come from a range of different providers including FE Colleges and Independent Training Providers.

**Apprenticeship Service**

Our survey results indicate that:

* The Apprenticeship Service is complicated and can be difficult for employers, especially SMEs, to navigate without extensive support.
* Providers believe the service can be improved by making it easier for the employer by allowing providers to complete the administrative side. It is noted that very small companies e.g., in the construction sector often don't have access to the computers/admin needed to use the system on site.
* Respondents stress that they have to invest a lot of time due to the perceived overly bureaucratic nature of the process and frequent issues with data errors.
* Responses to issues raised with ESFA can be slow and unclear.
* Several providers suggested that changing the apprenticeship levy system would help to make the service more sustainable.
* The apprenticeship levy system is perceived as to be ‘clunky’ for employers.

**Apprenticeship Funding Rates**

Responses suggest that:

* Some apprenticeship funding rates are not currently sufficient to cover costs and sustainably deliver standards.
* In particular, the following standards were highlighted by members as the most challenging to deliver due to funding rates:
* Health and Social Care – across all levels
* Customer Service – across all levels
* L2 Engineering Operative
* L2 Network Operations
* L2 Passenger Transport Operative
* L2 Water Network Operative
  + L2 Early Years Practitioner
  + L3 Train Driver
  + L3 Early Years Educator
  + L3 Youth Support Worker
  + L3 Business Administrator
  + L3 HR Support
  + L3 Team Leader/Supervisor
  + L3 Bus and Coach Engineering Technician
* Some providers felt that funding rates across all Level 2 apprenticeships are too low, as level 2 learners need extra support.
* The apprenticeship funding review process takes too long and does not always focus on key sectors/standards.
* All respondents agreed that DfE should review the policy/rule around the providers not being paid the 20% completion payment if the employer has not made the full co-investment contribution.
* Providers feel that the current policy causes them financial instability, additional administrative costs, delays and can lead to providers absorbing the cost of the End Point Assessment for learners.

**Transfer of Learners**

In some circumstances it is necessary to transfer apprentices between providers and employers. Providers indicate that they would benefit from further clarification and development of principles of transfer.

Providers seek clarification on the following issues:

* Progress – what progress has the apprentice already made? Providers taking apprentices from other providers who have closed down due to poor performance risk taking apprentices who are not well positioned in their learning and this may negatively impact their own achievement rates if those apprentices do not succeed.
* Funding – establishment of what funding is left available to claim for the incoming apprentice. Providers question why funding cannot be clawed back from previous providers to cover any content the new provider may have to cover to make sure that the apprentices catch up.
* Apprenticeship Service – when apprentices are leaving employers the provider is not able to change records on the apprenticeship service which can cause issues with payments.
* Guidance and support – providers feel that when they ask for support and clarification on transfer of learners it may not always clear.

**End Point Assessment**

The percentage of the percentage of the apprenticeship standard funding paid to End Point Assessment Organisations (EPAO) for some standards is not always perceived to be reasonable and fair.

Providers highlighted the following issues:

* EPA waiting times are widely reported as an issue. Providers indicate that waiting times depend on the standard being assessed and the organisation conducting the EPA. Some providers have experienced waiting times as long as four months. The following standards/subject areas have been identified as problematic:
  + Childcare
  + Transport
  + Construction
  + Logistics
* Providers are being impacted by the rising cost of EPA, which is already when factoring in already difficult when we factor in inflation and cost of living challenges. In this case, one provider noted that EPA costs are the business’ second highest expense after staff salaries.
* Long EPA waiting times negatively impact upon apprentices who become disengaged with their apprenticeship and are delayed in progression. Providers note that they continue to support apprentices throughout these delays, at cost to their own bottom line.
* Employers can become frustrated with the apprenticeship system when they see apprentices’ achievements delayed, and this risks those employers not taking on further apprentices.
* Most providers have experienced EPAOs increasing prices after the contract has already been signed.

In parallel it should be noted that ongoing assessor recruitment challenges are affecting EPAOs’ ability to deliver EPA in a timelier manner

**Functional Skills**

The majority of providers feel that Functional Skills are not fit for purpose and are insufficiently related to the workplace. Providers feel that the extra staff and time required to deliver functional skills is not sufficiently funded.

Negative impacts of Functional Skills include:

* Learners who are fully capable in their job role, and would succeed in their apprenticeship otherwise, are held back by functional skills requirements. This is particularly noted as an issue for learners in front line services such as health and social care.
* Requirements can negatively impact apprentices’ mental health and motivation. This increases the risk of apprentices dropping out, and damages achievement rates.
* The exam model for functional skills is ‘clunky at best’ and causes anxiety for learners who are competent but do not fare well in exam settings.
* Employers are not happy with functional skills requirements as apprentices need to take additional off the job training time to complete them.

GMLPN are aware that there have already been developments with the funding of Functional Skills changed and brought forward to January 2024.

**Off the Job Training**

* Employers struggle to maintain adequate scope for off the job training for their apprentices, this is noted as an issue for small businesses.
* This is highlighted as particular issue in the Health and Social Care sector where the nature of the job makes it very difficult to get employer buy in. Often employers want to give their apprentices the time they need but are unable to due to pressures such as staffing issues.

Respondents worry that the lack of adequate off the job time means that apprentices will fall behind in their apprenticeship, lose motivation and mental health, and may even drop out of their programme.

* Providers feel that they are unfairly judged in terms of achievement rates because of this. Additionally, providers suggest that the administrative time taken to record off the job training is excessive.

Providers made a number of suggestions on how to improve off the job including:

* More flexibility on what counts for off the job
* Change the name to support employer understanding
* Learners need protected time according to individual and employer needs
* When recognition of prior learning is taken into account learners don't need the full minimum off the job as per the calculation
* Rules needs to be standardised across all apprentices irrespective of when they were enrolled

**Other**

Other issues highlighted include:

* Providers suggested that DfE should look at campaigns and incentives to promote apprenticeships and to give parity with the focus on T Levels.
* One provider has noted that the accountability dashboard has a lot of technical problems.