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CBI calls for shake-up of apprenticeship system

31 Jan 2019 By Annie Makoff-Clark

Businesses want regulator to be given greater independence, and more time to spend funds



One of the UK's leading business bodies is backing calls for a shake-up of the skills system to ensure apprenticeships lead to high-skilled, high-paid jobs.

In a report, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) called for reform and regulation of the current system by ensuring the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) is given more independence.

In the report, [Getting Apprenticeships Right: Next Steps](http://www.cbi.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/getting-apprenticeships-right-next-steps/) (<http://www.cbi.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/getting-apprenticeships-right-next-steps/>), the CBI urged the government to ensure the IfA – which officially changed its name today to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) – was the “principal body” for vocational skills and technical education in England and that it had the clout to hold policymakers and the skills sector to account.

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It also called on the government to ensure apprenticeship funding was stable, to allow employers to take medium- to long-term decisions on their apprenticeship programmes, while urging the IfATE to be more transparent over funding decisions.

The report also recommended an appeal system to give employers more time to spend money on existing apprenticeship schemes before the first round of apprenticeship levy funding expires in April this year.

According to [research by People Management](https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/half-businesses-not-spend-apprenticeship-levy) (<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/half-businesses-not-spend-apprenticeship-levy>), half of businesses are not expecting to spend all their first tranche of levy funding.

The CBI said IfATE should also be given an advisory role on any future levy changes.

John Cope, CBI head of education and skills policy, said England's skills system needed to “support, rather than frustrate” employers looking to take on individuals coming out of education.

“This must include giving the Institute for Apprenticeships the independence and clout it needs to create a world class skills system in England.”

Speaking to *People Management*, Lady Cobham, director general of The 5% Club, said the CBI recommendations were a “step in the right direction” in ensuring apprenticeships met the needs of employers – particularly the call to extend the levy deadline while apprenticeship standards were still in development.

“This is vital if we are to make the process as simple as possible for employers, encouraging businesses across sectors to offer as many apprenticeships as possible, providing a skilled workforce and improving British productivity levels,” she said.

Commenting on the report, Lizzie Crowley, skills policy advisor at the CIPD, said there were still far too many standards focused on lower-level skills and there was a “real need” to urgently review the existing apprenticeship standards and remove those that did not deliver on the need for higher-level qualifications.

“We welcome the report and many of its recommendations, but there’s still a long way to go before our apprenticeship system stands up against the best international systems like Germany, Austria and France,” she said.

Crowley added there was also a concern around the CBI’s recommendation for a speeding-up mechanism for approving standards, and said: “We need to address the quality issue that will inevitably come from any speed-up process.”

Gerry Berragon, chief executive of the IfATE, said the report “clearly recognises the integral role” the institute plays at the heart of technical education reform. He said IfATE has already made “great progress” in increasing the number of apprenticeship standards at all levels, with the development of 400 approved standards to date.

The IfATE’s name change comes as the body assumes responsibility for the government’s T-level educational qualification, due to be introduced in 2020 as a vocational equivalent to the ubiquitous A-levels.

“We will build on our experience in apprenticeship standards to develop high-quality T-levels that provide skills our employers need to bolster our economy and allow learners to thrive in their chosen career,” said Berragon.



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