

ECONOMY AND FAIR WORK COMMITTEE

EVIDENCE SESSION ON SKILLS: 2 APRIL 2025 – SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

SCOTTISH TRAINING FEDERATION

Overview

The Scottish Training Federation (STF) welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Committee to discuss skills and apprenticeships on 2 April 2025. Building on some of the discussion at the session, the following supplementary information is provided.

Duration of Modern Apprenticeships

Most Modern Apprenticeships take 12-18 months to complete. Traditional 4-year duration Apprenticeships remain in sectors such as Engineering and Construction. However, many frameworks even within these sectors also deliver valuable Apprenticeships which fall into the norm length of time of 12-24 months.

In addition, many frameworks have fast track options for adult learners who can provide evidence of relevant work experience and industry specific training. Thus, a true asset to enabling apprentices to achieve within a learner led time frame. For example, some Construction Management, Civils, Roads or Estimating frameworks have a mandatory duration of 12 or 18 months depending on level, however, can be completed sooner should the Sector Skills Council (SSC) be provided with sufficient evidence to confirm competence.

This is a vital flexibility in some industries to ensure the learning remains learner led, sharp and focused. This is of course achieved with agile learner support and the hard work of the learner. Of course, some learners might take longer than the time periods above for a huge range of reasons, which again highlights the real strength of the programme in ensuring the learners are getting what they and their employers need from their Modern Apprenticeship journey.

Making sure we don't throw the baby out with the bath water

It is important that existing positive features of the apprenticeship system are retained in the new agency arrangements. These include:

- **Evidence led approach:** Scottish Apprenticeships are developed in response to employer and economic demands. Apprenticeships provide the competency required by real employers with real jobs and have a direct link to economic needs.
- **System agility:** The information collected by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) via the FIPS system provides real time information on the apprenticeship programme. This allows in-year changes to be made in response to changing circumstances. Funding not fully used by some providers can be re-allocated quickly to other providers to ensure the budget is fully used. The reporting via the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is more retrospective and is less able to respond as quickly to in-year changing circumstances.

- **Quick reporting:** The information collected via FIPS also allows the speedy publication of statistical analysis and reports, providing an up-to-date snapshot of activity. For example, MA statistics are published every quarter. The data collected by SFC does not support quick reporting meaning that statistical analysis and reports can only provide an historical snapshot of activity.
- **Knowledge and expertise:** SDS has a high level of knowledge and expertise relating to Scottish Apprenticeships. This has been built up over many years. It is crucial that this is not lost during the reform process. SDS staff have developed strong and positive relationships with stakeholders and employers over the years and ensuring these relationships are preserved is an important priority.
- **Promotion and Marketing:** SDS has an excellent record of promoting Scottish Apprenticeships to employers and learners, via case studies, dedicated web sites and award ceremonies. Apprenticeships are a unique product – quite different from college and university provision – and require bespoke promotion and marketing. The ongoing promotion of apprenticeships by people who understand their importance and value is essential.
- **Employer engagement:** The work of the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) has been instrumental in ensuring that Scottish Apprenticeships are relevant to industry, valued, up to date and fit for purpose. Employer and stakeholder engagement is crucial for the future success of apprenticeships, so reform in this space should ensure that the good practice pioneered by SAAB is not lost.
- **Focus on outcomes:** The current Apprenticeship funding system is based on the achievement of measurable outcomes. Payment is made when apprentices complete units or full qualifications. This ensures there is a direct link between the progress of the apprentice and the use of public funds. However, in some ways this funding system is too rigid and can result in training providers undertaking a lot of work and receiving no payment because apprentices leave early and before achieving a unit. The end loading – where as much as 50% of funding is paid on completion - is also a concern.

Funding for much HE/FE provision is not tied so closely to outcomes and has the flexibility to place more emphasis on promoting learner development and the learner journey.

Whilst it is desirable to link funding to measurable outcomes to ensure the best use of public funds, the current system would benefit from the introduction of flexibilities which reflect the input from training providers and also place more emphasis on promoting the whole learner journey.

- **Procurement:** The current procurement of Modern Apprenticeships is via Public Contracts Scotland (PCS), ensuring the process is open, fair and transparent. These attributes must be retained in the reform process. Less public information is available about the grant system used by SFC making it difficult to make a comparison. Whatever system is chosen, it must be open, fair and transparent.