



The Business Services Association  
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## **The Business Services Association**

### **Response to the Department for Education Consultation**

#### **Flexi-Job Apprenticeships: Reshaping the role of Apprenticeship Training Agencies**

##### **Part One: Overview**

The Business Services Association - BSA - welcomes the publication of this consultation as well as the recent introduction of the Skills and post-16 Education Bill in Parliament. These reflect significant steps forward in the Government's continued efforts to drive the skills agenda and to help people enter or re-enter the workforce, or progress within work - efforts that the BSA and its members have long supported. We look forward to continuing to work with government to further support its work in the crucial policy area.

The BSA is a policy and research organisation. It brings together all those who are interested in delivering efficient, flexible and cost-effective service and infrastructure projects across the private and public sectors. BSA members are interested in both the provision and delivery of apprenticeships, skills and training and our membership includes large and small employers as well as training providers. The BSA is therefore well positioned to offer unique insights and proposals in relation to skills policy and it is from this perspective that we submit this response to the consultation, commenting on the proposals in general rather than to the specific questions.

The Covid-19 economic crisis has re-emphasised the need for a flexible approach to upskilling and reskilling people; in turn reducing the skills gap and supporting the levelling up agenda and Plan for Growth. BSA members are pleased to see the value of apprenticeships in creating jobs and driving economic recovery explicitly acknowledged in this consultation and we urge the Department for Education to continue to work with HM Treasury and BEIS colleagues to consider practical reforms to current skills programmes including the Apprenticeship Levy.

##### **Part Two: The vision for flexi-job apprenticeships**

The introduction of greater flexibility and portability, as outlined in this consultation, is to be welcomed. Reskilling and upskilling will be vital to ensure workers have the skills that the future economy needs and to help those who may have been furloughed or are now unemployed to re-enter the workforce. Employers and providers have long called for increased flexibility within the provision of apprenticeships, including the limitations around the use of Apprenticeship Levy funds, and we hope that these positive steps reflect a shift towards a system that works best for employers, providers and, above all, the learners themselves.

It is positive to see recognition that particular sectors are ill-suited to the twelve-month minimum period for apprenticeships, particularly those such as construction where people may work on a project for several months and then, once the work is complete, the contract will end and they will move to another project with a different employer.

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The BSA has previously highlighted the challenges posed by this and the requirement for the apprentice to be in continuous employment throughout. These conditions have presented barriers for some employers when they look at taking on and supporting an apprentice for the duration of their apprenticeship.

This is also often true in other industries which often operate on a project or contractual basis, as well as construction, including Hard and Soft FM. We would ask that the suitability of expanding the rollout of the proposed flexi-job apprenticeships to these industries is considered. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss this further.

### **Part Three: Operating Framework for Flexi-Job Apprenticeships**

With regards to the proposed use of the Apprenticeship Training Agencies (ATA) model, it is vital that the lessons from previous ATA policies are learnt to ensure that the proposals here support providers as well as employers. Providers have faced considerable challenges throughout the coronavirus pandemic, including those who found themselves ineligible for the initial Provider Relief Scheme to support post-16 training providers during the coronavirus outbreak due to their being funded solely through the Levy.

We therefore ask that the Department considers the needs of these organisations in order to ensure the continuation of the vital services they provide in the provision of skills training across the country both now and in the future. With this in mind, we agree with the proposal to establish a register of approved flexi-job apprenticeship schemes. This will both aid the transparency of the new scheme and help to instil confidence for providers, employers and apprentices themselves as to the quality of the schemes being offered.

### **Part Four: £7m fund for flexi-job apprenticeship schemes**

Whilst we await confirmation of the size of awards and the number of schemes the Department hopes to be able to support with this fund, it would be useful to have clearer definitions around the intended funding conditions. For example, it would be useful to understand how 'activities that will increase the number of apprenticeships starts' and 'activities that will improve and assure quality' will be measured.

In addition to this, inflexibility over the expenditure of Apprenticeship Levy funds is a longstanding issue that the BSA and its members have raised with the Department.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, the BSA supports the positive progress that the proposals outlined in this consultation represent. Introducing greater flexibility and portability to the delivery of apprenticeships will be key to our economic recovery and to ensuring that workers have the skills that the future economy needs. As emphasised above, employers and providers have long called for increased flexibility within the provision of apprenticeships and we hope that these positive steps reflect a shift towards a system that works best for employers, providers and, above all, the learners themselves.



## List of BSA Members, May 2021

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