

Speech: Inspection of apprenticeships from May 2017

Thank you Kirsty, and good afternoon ladies and gentleman. It is a great pleasure to be here and my thanks to Nick and Shane at FE Week for inviting me to talk about the future of inspection.

I was delighted yesterday when Nick started to talk about quality during his opening speech. And indeed quality has been a key theme running through the conference agenda. So, given that Ofsted inspects the quality of education and training I hope you will be supportive of what I am about to say and don't feel the need to ask difficult questions like those that were rightly asked of other speakers earlier today – or if you do, my standard answer is going to be – 'it's to ensure quality!'

Okay, seriously now...

As we have heard throughout the conference, as well as the tremendous opportunities that the apprenticeship reform programme brings, you as providers are facing numerous challenges and a significant amount of change. Inevitably, this creates uncertainty and I certainly do not want to add to that. So I hope that my main messages today will be both welcome and reassuring.

We will soon be slightly revising the further education and skills inspection handbook in readiness for the new world of apprenticeships. However, I am pleased to confirm that the only major change being made is to confirm that we will be inspecting levy-funded apprenticeships just as we inspect SFA-funded apprenticeships in line with the common inspection framework. Other than that, nothing will change substantially for the remainder of the 2016/17 inspection year, or indeed the 2017/18 inspection year, in relation to the inspection of apprenticeship provision. We are providing another year of stability and familiarity in relation to inspection. Our main message is no change: business as usual.

So how can this be?

Well, of course we are aware that new providers will enter the sector, and yes we are expecting to see more employer providers offer apprenticeship provision. But I would like to remind you that we already have a policy for the inspection of new providers: we will inspect them within 3 years of their receiving or drawing down funding. And in relation to employer providers, well of course we already inspect around 70 employer providers, so these considerations are not new to us.

We also know that there will be a continued move from apprenticeship frameworks to standard-based apprenticeships and that we are likely to see new models of delivery evolve. We anticipate new partnerships and contracting arrangements and new end-point assessment methods. But again, I would point

out that we already inspect standard-based apprenticeships alongside apprenticeship frameworks now and we already see many different delivery models including for off-the-job training in the providers we inspect. These issues are not new to us.

Despite all the changes that the reforms and the levy bring, an apprenticeship will still be an apprenticeship and the characteristics of a good or outstanding apprenticeship provider will not change.

So what will inspectors be doing?

Well, they will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of apprenticeship provision by focusing on what really matters – apprentices and employers. Fundamentally, inspection looks at how well apprentices are developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to progress and how these contribute to enhancing the employer's business and productivity.

In short, inspectors will still expect to see leaders and managers in providers working with employers to ensure that apprentices are successful. They will expect apprentices to develop substantial new skills and behaviours that prepare them well for their chosen career. And they will expect employers and providers to have a clear development plan for apprentices that they monitor and evaluate frequently.

Inspectors will continue to expect apprenticeship providers to comply with defined requirements and regulations. They will continue to want to see apprentices improving their skills in English and maths. Inspectors will want to know that, because of their training, apprentices know something new, can do something better or are ready to progress. They will want to know that apprentices are well prepared to achieve end-point assessments successfully and on time.

Of course, we will keep our frameworks and handbooks under review and, should the need arise, we will make any necessary changes. I am sure that as new models of delivery emerge and different providers enter the market, that we will need to adapt our inspection practice and seek new ways of securing evidence. I am grateful to Mark Dawe and AELP and to David Hughes and AoC for enabling constructive dialogue with providers like you to shape our thinking about the ways we will need to work in the future. We will continue this important dialogue and will work with you, seeking your views, piloting new approaches and consulting you when necessary to ensure that our inspections remain fit for purpose.

You will be aware, as we are, that the move from frameworks to standards will be a gradual process. Learners on frameworks still account for the majority of apprentices on programme. Similarly, while we anticipate an increase in the number of apprentices on higher and degree apprenticeships, we know that the majority of apprentices are still on intermediate and advanced level apprenticeships.

We continue to work closely with colleagues at the DfE and with HEFCE to ensure the accountability regime for apprenticeships is clearly defined. We

are expecting the DfE to issue an accountability statement to the sector that will detail the respective roles of Ofsted, HEFCE and the IfA in relation to the quality regime. I can confirm that any Ofsted inspection of apprenticeship provision, regardless of whether apprentices are on frameworks or standards, and irrespective of where provision is delivered and by what type of provider, will follow our normal inspection processes that many of you are familiar with.

We are aware that, for some time to come, you as providers are likely to have apprentices on both frameworks and standards, and that many of you are likely to have different contracting arrangements. We will ensure, with your help, that inspectors take due account of these factors and consider their weighting proportionally when arriving at inspection judgements.

In order to gain a better understanding of the providers that we will be inspecting and the delivery models that are being used, I can announce today that we do intend to write to independent learning providers to seek some information that will enable us to better understand your provision. While we will reserve the right to inspect providers at any reasonable time, we do intend to ask you to identify limited (I say again, limited) periods of time when inspection would be problematic and to seek other information that will be useful to aid our inspection planning and scheduling processes and make inspection as positive an experience for you as possible.

We will continue to ensure that our inspectors are appropriately trained and reflect the diverse provider base that exists. I remain committed to ensuring that, whenever possible, and where required, inspectors with appropriate subject experience and expertise will be deployed on inspection. As you know, we usually achieve this by using our Ofsted Inspector workforce, which consists mainly of serving practitioners like many of you. Should the need arise, we will recruit and train further specialist inspectors to ensure that we have the necessary experience and expertise to carry out our inspections.

In summary, Ofsted is fully supportive of the apprenticeship reform programme and of the government's target to create 3 million apprenticeships. We do however, want these apprenticeships to be of high quality, in the sectors where there are skills shortages and in the age groups where they are needed. We need to ensure that the apprenticeship brand is protected and valued. We must not allow the increase in apprenticeship numbers to come from inappropriate roles and a further rise in the validation of pre-existing skills and competences, rather than the development and accreditation of new skills for apprentices aged 16 to 25.

Ofsted certainly welcomes the increase in funding for apprenticeships and indeed for technical education generally. It is pleasing to see the priority the government has placed on the further education and skills sector. I believe the apprenticeship reforms provide a good opportunity for employers to play an even greater role in training, and for providers, I hope to see the development of even stronger partnerships to ensure that training programmes better equip apprentices with the knowledge, skills and behaviours employers want and need.

That is what we will be looking for during our inspections and I will do all I can to work with you and support you in further raising the quality of apprenticeship provision for the good of employers, the economy and most importantly of all, for the apprentices.

Thank you very much for listening.