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Policy prescriptions in practice: The example of Apprenticeship in England

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Technical & vocational education in fashion (again)

“There is a fashion in education, as in pictures and dress and china. Technical education is the fashion at present; . . . Public fashion in this respect agrees for once with the highest public interests. With the whole world competing for the supply of the universal market, it is vital to Great Britain that its artisans should understand how to march straight to their industrial goal by the shortest and most certain routes. Beyond a doubt the ordinary public appliances of education have not hitherto aided them as a body very efficiently in the race . . . . At last, however, a serious commencement has been made of a national edifice of technical education.” (Times Leader 16/5/1884)

What's the problem? A familiar story

- Productivity
- Weak intermediate skills – hour glass
- Employer underinvestment in training (HM Treasury 2015)
- Negative international comparisons – OECD
- Skills shortages e.g. engineering/STEM
- Ageing workforce
- Job quality – labour market context
- Technological challenges – implications for education/training and workplaces

An old story

The Samuelson Commissioners on their visit to Germany in the early 1880s found that:

"In nearly every instance we were able to trace the success of German firms to the scientific and artistic training of heads of departments, designers and skilled workers and not seldom to the superior commercial knowledge and linguistic attainments of employers themselves. The commissioners were satisfied that this and nothing else explained the growing success of Germany."

Responses and prescriptions

- Repeated enquiries (Select Committees, All Parliamentary Groups, Commissions)
- Policy borrowing
- Technical and vocational education and training reforms
- Creating employer-led system
- Apprenticeship
- Levy
- ‘Rebalancing the economy’ – manufacturing/service, ‘northern powerhouse’

Key tensions/challenges for policy

- Labour market context
- Economic competitiveness – social inclusion
- Quantity and quality in provision - cost
- Education and training for broad occupations or competence-based for narrow job roles
- Qualifications as proxy for learning/skills
- Individual/family decision-making – VET and HE

Education – work transitions: key concepts

- Logics and linkages
- Standardisation
- Stratification

Logics and linkages

- The strength of links between vocational education and employment varies across countries depending on their industrial histories, civic and democratic culture and their associated institutions and arrangements
- Countries where linkages are weak (e.g. Sweden) operate under an education logic, whereas those where linkages are strong have an employment logic
- Employment logic is strong in countries (e.g. Denmark, Germany) where entry to skilled occupations is regulated and restricted to those who've completed an apprenticeship
- It's less strong in countries such as the UK and US which are viewed as having more flexible and open labour markets, with access to most occupations being less regulated

Standardisation

- The extent to which a vocational pathway is standardised has an impact on how well employers (and others) understand and recognize students' learning and achievements
- Standardisation facilitates trust in viewing qualifications as a reliable proxy for the knowledge and competence achieved by participants
- Comparative research suggests that young people experience more straightforward transitions into work in systems with uniform standards (curricula, assessment and certification)
- Countries whose approach to VET is characterized by employment logic are also likely to have standardised provision

Stratification

- Refers to the proportion of young people staying in school (academic pathway) for as long as the system allows
- The more highly stratified the system, the smaller the participation rate in the post-compulsory educational pathway and the higher the participation rate in work-based pathway (apprenticeship)
- In highly stratified systems, a smaller proportion of young people progress to university
- Countries with mass participation in HE such as Korea, UK and Canada tend to have smaller, weaker apprenticeship systems than countries with lower rates of participation in university e.g. Germany

Apprenticeship: what is it?

- Apprenticeship as set of institutional arrangements for providing initial vocational education and training (IVET)

- Apprenticeship as a model of learning for occupational expertise (from and with others)

- Concept crosses vocational – academic divide in education systems and job boundaries and hierarchies in workplaces

- As model of learning it applies e.g. to chefs, electricians, hairdressers, musicians, engineers, doctors, barristers, bankers
- Chief economists?

Apprenticeship in England: a bit of history

- Elizabethan Statute of Artificers set rules for apprenticeships 1563, the statute was repealed in 1814
- 1983 apprenticeships becomes pathway in publicly-funded YTS enabling employers to receive funding
- Modern Apprenticeship introduced in 1994 (Conservative government) to boost technical skills at Level 3 (skilled level)
- By 2004 Apprenticeship a wrapper for all YT schemes (L2 and L3)
- In 2005/6 apprenticeship became an all age programme

Cont.

- The 2009 *Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act* placed apprenticeship on a statutory footing
- In 2010, introduction of higher apprenticeships (sub-bachelor) followed by degree apprenticeships in 2015
- In 2015, policy reform to phase out existing apprenticeship frameworks replacing them with apprenticeship standards designed by employers (Trailblazers)
- Government target 3 million registrations by end of 2020
- Apprenticeship Levy April 2017, £2.6 billion 2017-18 (OBR)

Apprenticeship in Numbers: England

- Starts 2016/17 – 491,300 (18,100 fewer than 15/16)
- 46% aged 25+, 29% aged 19-24, 25% aged under 19 (Switzerland 75% under20)
- 53% at L2, 40% at L3, 7% at L4+
- 86% in service sectors
- 54% female, 46% male
- Average length less than 18 months (OECD 2018) – Austria 3-4 yrs, Netherlands 2-4yrs)

HoC briefing paper no. 06113, 25/1/18

2016/17 starts by level, thousands (%)

- L2 259 (52%)
- L3 196 (40%)
- L4 12
- L5 23
- L6 2
- L7 0 (50 starts)

Higher Level (4-7) starts 7% vast majority on management related frameworks/standards

Sectors: 2015-16

Starts by Sector (% L2)

- Health and Social Care – 86,550 (55% at L2)
- Hospitality and Catering – 31, 670 (71% at L2)
- Customer Service – 26,370 (76% at L2)
- Construction Skills – 20,250 (79% at L2)
- Engineering – 17,160 (22% at L2)

Prescription in practice

- Majority of apprentices are conversions
- Poor returns for the economy if new skills aren't being formed – additionality and deadweight (levy won’t improve quality)
- Ofsted inspections reveal poor quality
- OECD analysis (*Apprenticeship in England, UK, 2018*)
- Segmentation by level, glass ceilings, treading water

Cont.

- Assumption that any job role/workplace provides suitable context for apprenticeship – resulting in considerable inconsistency across sectors and levels.
- Systemic problems exacerbated by weak demand for advanced and higher level skills across the economy, particularly in some low paid service sectors
- This acts as a break on the ability of apprenticeship to lever social mobility (Fuller & Unwin 2017 for Sutton Trust)
- Apprenticeship as a window on ‘health’ of the workplace

Learners as apprentices in expansive environments

- The apprenticeship is embedded within the broader business plan of the organization
- The organisation protects the identity of the apprentice as learner and worker throughout the apprenticeship
- The apprenticeship includes time for disengagement from productive work and for apprentices to cross work boundaries
- Structured and planned on and off the job training
- Expansive apprenticeships stretch apprentices so that they can fully develop potential and demonstrate capabilities
- The apprenticeship has a clear end point signified by a qualification - a recognised level of expertise has been achieved

Getting the most from the prescription

- Apprenticeships on their own cannot be expansive – they need to be located in workplaces and off the job settings that also have expansive features, including training expertise
- A restrictive approach involves apprentices quickly becoming competent in tasks associated with specific/narrow job roles
- Expansive apprenticeship generates occupational expertise, platform for progression and mobility

Apprenticeship: towards a quality system

- Apprenticeship as only policy prescription ‘in town’ – but not suitable for all groups– remedial, adult returners, older workers, management training
- Identifying where public funding can make the most difference - focus on generating additionality and avoiding deadweight
- Effective use of levers – procurement and planning, supply chains
- Developmental inspections
- Investment in developing provider and employer VET capacity and partnership approaches
- ‘Societal approach’ (Maurice, Sellier and Sylvestre 1986)

Societal approach

- ‘emphasizes the holistic interrelationships among different social and economic institutions, including education and training, the labour market and industrial relations systems, the production system, family structures and cultures...’ (Raffe 2008: 278)

Conclusion

To achieve better quality, we need to build capacity within workplaces, vocational education and training organisations, and government and its agencies so they can create and promote the expansive conditions in which quality apprenticeship thrives.