
Preface: Evaluation of the Apprenticeship vacancies system



This evaluation report was commissioned by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) in March 2009. The fieldwork was conducted in two phases between April to July 2009 and November 2009 to February 2010. The report therefore summarises the culmination of primary data collection and secondary data analysis gathered during the first 12 months of the initial operation of the Apprenticeship vacancies (Av) system.

Within the evaluation primary data was collected from providers, learners and employers. It is important to note that some of the views expressed by providers are a reflection of their perceptions regarding the wider NAS service and do not relate exclusively to the Apprenticeship vacancies system. There were also difficulties in finding a suitable sampling frame for employers and a limited amount of data was therefore gathered from this stakeholder group. For instance, not all of the employers that responded to the survey had offered Apprenticeships or used the Apprenticeship vacancies system. However, the evaluation was deliberately based, not only on surveys, but upon in-depth discussions with a small number of employers and whilst these findings cannot be quantified, the responses seem to support the data recorded through the surveys. We have therefore given careful consideration to the degree of emphasis that should be placed upon employers' responses and have drawn conclusions and made what we consider to be legitimate inferences about their views regarding the Av system. Despite this, it is possible that some readers may feel that certain statements go beyond what is revealed by the data.

There have also been considerable changes to the context in which NAS operates since the fieldwork for this evaluation was undertaken. In May 2010 a new UK government took office and as a result government policy and guidance on Apprenticeships has shifted and this will change the context for the report's analysis, and its recommendations for the future. Such changes have already had some impact on NAS' operations; for instance, engagement with Jobcentre Plus has been set back. Furthermore the Comprehensive Spending Review and new Skills Strategy, both due this autumn, will also be important drivers in the development of the new government's policies and will have consequences in this area.

Within this context NAS has begun to act upon some of the recommendations the report set out. In March 2010 there was a launch of Release 4 of the Av system, which included key changes to the functionality. NAS are also considering options regarding the recommendations in this report for increased direct access to the system for employers; although it is recognised that the original specification of the Av system did not envisage employers to be direct users of the system. NAS has commissioned a Business Model Review (BMR) to assess the customer journey for employers and consider the future role of the Av system in contributing to NAS' objectives. In addition, a new deployment release for its Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) is underway, which will also make the system fit for purpose and more focused on the employer journey. Finally, NAS have begun to scope functional changes to the system which will be necessary to facilitate positive practice in e-recruitment of disabled users, including the display of and commitment to the Jobcentre Plus Disability Symbol.

In due course NAS will commission another evaluation to assess various stakeholders' perceptions, use of the Av system. This study will aim to capture the realisation of benefits and impacts from the changes that have been made as a result of the recommendations set out in this report. Further evaluative work will also be undertaken to assess the wider service that NAS offers to employers.