



Higher
Apprenticeship
Fund
Prospectus

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Foreword



Section 1

Foreword

Ministerial Foreword

Apprenticeships are back at their rightful place at the heart of the country's education and training system. Latest provisional data shows that the Government has delivered 326,700 apprenticeship starts in the first nine months of the 2010/11 academic year – this is 114,000 more than the previous year and more than double our ambition. The growth has been across sectors, at all ages and all levels. This is an historic achievement not just for Government but for employers, training providers and learners too.

Our highest priority is of course the task of restoring economic growth. In the rebalanced global economy, productivity, efficiency and innovation will be key to this country's continued ability to be competitive. That applies not just to international markets, but in our domestic economy, too.

Higher skills bring higher productivity and they help businesses to become more efficient and more innovative. So that is why as part of the measures we announced in the 2011 Budget the Government announced that we would provide targeted support focused on SMEs to help them access Advanced Level and Higher Apprenticeships. We hope that this new Higher Apprenticeship Initiative Fund will help to generate 10,000 more Higher Apprenticeship places over this Parliament.

John Hayes MP

Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning
(jointly with the Department for Education)

Our aim in publishing this prospectus is to create well regarded, high profile and sustainable, Higher Apprenticeship programmes that are based on employer demand, involve education and business partnerships and that are accessible to all, including those employed by small employers

With a specific focus on stimulating progression from Advanced Level into Higher Apprenticeships and tackling the barriers and blockages to economic growth caused by skills gaps at these levels. I would encourage innovative proposals seeking funding to put alongside employer investment in projects that will boost provider capacity; be a catalyst for employer engagement particularly for large employers supporting SMEs; accelerating product development including framework or qualification development; enhancing access to the professions; and improving information, advice and guidance (IAG) and recruitment support.

This fund is designed to create new and sustainable programmes beyond this initial funding injection. I'm sure that you will rise to this exciting challenge and I look forward to getting this important work off the ground as quickly as possible.

National Apprenticeship Service Foreword

A strong and growing economy clearly needs a high level of skills to meet employer demand. The Higher Apprenticeship Fund will make a significant contribution to meeting this challenge by creating sustainable Higher Apprenticeship programmes that are based on the needs of employers and which are accessible to all and in particular small and medium sized businesses.

Higher Apprenticeships have much to offer. For apprentices they will give access to exciting, new employment opportunities with great career progression options, a higher earning capacity as well as providing valuable professional skills.

For employers, Higher Apprenticeships will enable them to develop their workforce to a higher nationally recognised standard to attract the very best candidates. For many employers Higher Apprenticeships will change the way they recruit their future technicians, managers and leaders. For smaller businesses the aim of the Fund is to address some of the specific barriers they face in accessing Apprenticeships and higher level skills provision ensuring there are clear routes for progression between Advanced Level and Higher Apprenticeships.

Simon Waugh

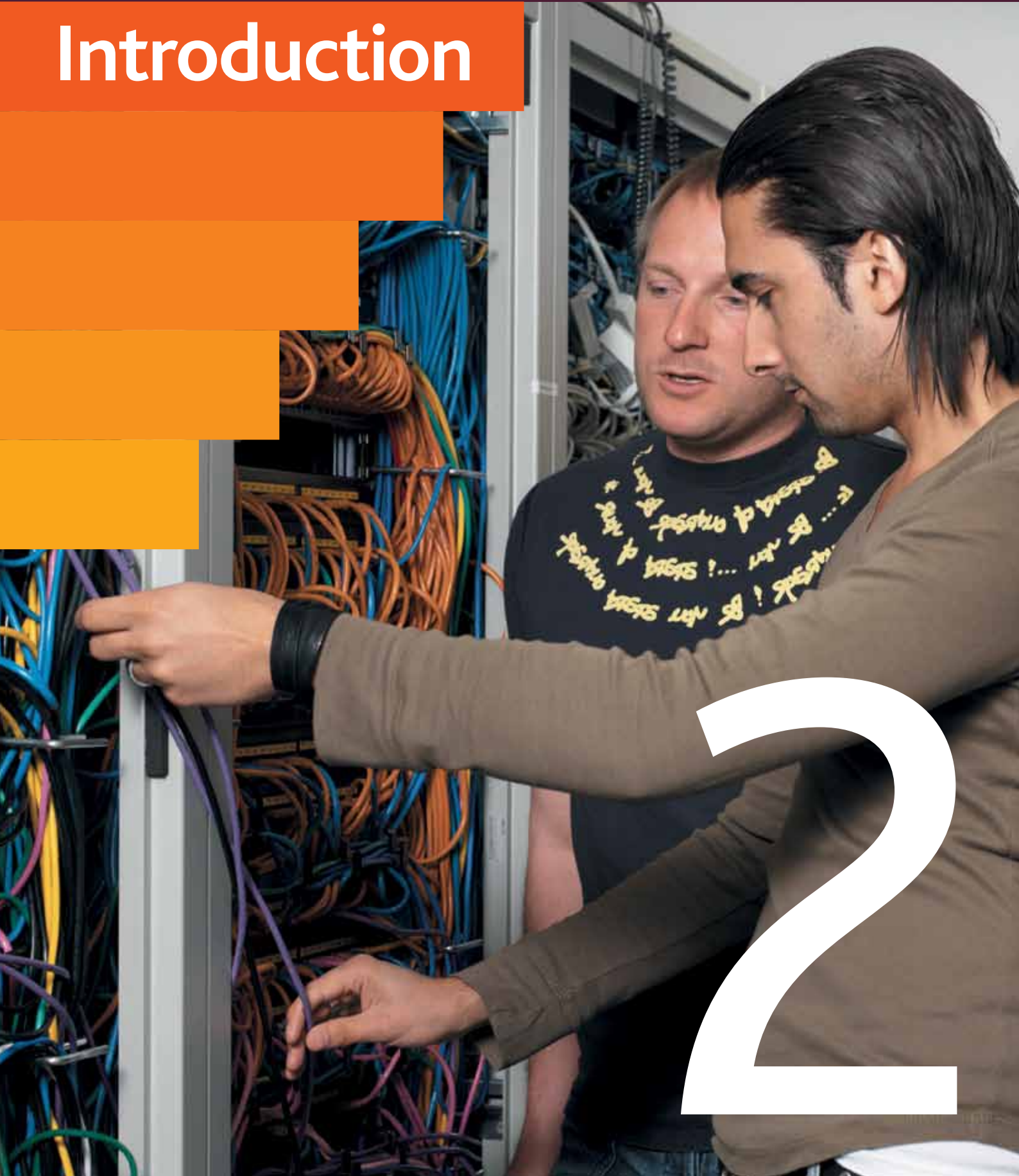
Executive Chair, National Apprenticeship Service

Higher Apprenticeships open up career pathways and with more frameworks being approved all the time there will be more support for career progression than ever before. All Apprenticeships deliver high quality and nationally recognised qualifications relevant to the skill, trade or occupation of the apprentice. The NAS is working closely with employers and providers to ensure that these new Higher Apprenticeship frameworks are fit for purpose, meet clearly defined needs and made available as quickly as possible to potential apprentices and their employers.

The Higher Apprenticeship Fund for employers, key partners, stakeholders and providers is an excellent opportunity to be at the forefront of the development and growth of Higher Apprenticeships. Over the coming weeks we will communicate the aims and objectives of the Higher Apprenticeship Fund to interested parties and explain how the funding process will work.

I'm confident that this initiative will generate innovative and creative proposals which will help us to meet our target of a further 10,000 Higher Apprenticeship places in the next four years and support employers to develop the skills they need for sustainable growth.

Introduction



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Section 2

Introduction

In its Plan for Growth in March 2011, the Government set out its approach to putting the UK on a path to sustainable, long-term economic growth.¹ A key proposal within the plan is for a £25m programme of targeted support to help smaller employers benefit from Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships. The Government's aim is to create at least 10,000 additional Higher Apprenticeship places over four years – improving the skills available to business while widening opportunities for employment and progression. Apprenticeships are enjoying a record year with 360,000 starts forecast in the academic year 2010/11 alone, the highest on record.

The vast majority of apprentices currently follow an Intermediate or Advanced level programme. In recent years the number of people following a Higher Apprenticeship programme has grown steadily.

By investing in the expansion of good quality Higher Apprenticeships we will not only create a viable new career option for many young people but also change the popular perception of Apprenticeships. A vibrant Higher Apprenticeship programme will help to position Apprenticeships as a valued career option for high achieving students as well as an accessible way into work and upskilling in the workforce.

This is a bold ambition. Higher Apprenticeship programmes have a great story to tell, but remain too few in number. Where they operate, Higher Apprenticeship programmes

create a work-based pathway to the highest level of skills, configuring higher education skills and training to meet the needs of the workplace. If we are to develop the technician-level workforce that we need, we must also ensure there are clear and visible progression routes to higher level skills – and Higher Apprenticeships play a significant role here.

Activities the Higher Apprenticeship Fund is looking to support

- **Co investment:** using public investment to kick-start activity which is clearly aimed at generating ongoing employer contributions to support programme costs.
- **Employer leadership:** using public investment to facilitate stronger sector or occupational partnerships to drive development and promotion of the programme.
- **Transformation:** using public investment to achieve a lasting change in employer recruitment and training patterns, creating a significant change in practice.
- **Innovation:** using public investment to develop new models of Apprenticeship learning.

1. BIS/Treasury (2011) *The Plan for Growth*.

We know that there are barriers which have frustrated the development of Higher Apprenticeships, often, we think of the Apprentice workforce as being concerned only with lower and intermediate level skills. Where some employers take a more ambitious approach, expanding Apprenticeships to higher level skills, they often find it difficult to accredit in house programmes or source readily available training provision.

It is to break through some of these barriers that the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) has created the Higher Apprenticeship Fund as a key part of the Government's programme for Apprenticeships. This Prospectus announces the launch of that Fund, and invites all those with ambitious ideas for new Higher Apprenticeship programmes to make an application and seek NAS support.

With the Fund, NAS is looking to invest in the creation of well regarded, high profile and sustainable Higher Apprenticeship programmes, based on employer demand, and involving education and business partnerships. The programmes must be accessible to all, and especially those employed by small employers. We particularly welcome proposals which seek to address gender, disability, ethnicity imbalances in the market..

The Fund will be used as a catalyst to create or accelerate Higher Apprenticeship programme developments and must not be used to remove the obligation of employers to contribute towards their staff development costs.

This Fund can support the creation of new frameworks or the promotion of existing ones, but we do not want to displace existing employer investment.

All programmes must also create opportunities: we want to invest in new opportunities for existing employees or new recruits, not simply create paperwork.

We want to see job opportunities, as well as qualifications, created by Higher Apprenticeship programmes and genuine sustainable growth in opportunity, not the displacement of existing schemes.

As the body managing the Higher Apprenticeship Fund, NAS is also looking to invest where it can form lasting partnerships with those leading the projects it supports. In a time of limited funds, we want to be sure that we achieve the greatest possible return from these investments. For that reason, we intend to collaborate closely with each project, to help learn from their experience and also to ensure that we work with them to remove barriers to their success.

NAS is also keen for the Higher Apprenticeship Fund to provide a valuable complement to the Growth and Innovation Fund (GIF) managed by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES). Many organisations considering an application to this Fund may already have made a proposal to GIF, and we will be working with UKCES to ensure that the investments made from this Fund take the most of opportunities to work with GIF-backed projects. Viewed together they form a major government investment in skills development in England.

We know from the valuable work done by UKCES that many employers already offer higher level vocational programmes to their staff and we will use these as our benchmarks and our aspiration.

In the rest of this Prospectus, we set out why Higher Apprenticeships are important and what we are looking to achieve through our investment programme. We explain the kinds of activities we want to invest in, how we will work with them, how you can make an application and how we will decide which projects to support.

A woman with short grey hair and a man with glasses are looking at a complex electronic device with many wires. The woman is holding a screwdriver. The background is a plain wall.

Higher

Apprenticeships:

A missing link

in our skills

system

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Section 3

Higher Apprenticeships:

A missing link in our skills system

Work-based learning has become an increasingly high priority for employers and Government alike over the past twenty years. The increasing importance of applied technical knowledge in many of our most dynamic industries, together with a need to link them with practical skills and career development have made the Apprenticeship model vital to our prosperity. The rapid growth in the number of Apprenticeship places, with ambitions now in hand to grow much further, are all ample testimony to the role the Apprenticeship model plays in our workplaces.

In these recent years of rapid growth, our Apprenticeship pathway has been centered on intermediate and advanced skill levels. Apprenticeships have not been seen in the UK as a preferred route to a managerial or professional career. Where Apprenticeship employees or their employers wish to go further – to capture fully what they learn through their experience working in some of our most high-knowledge, high-technology workplaces – there is limited opportunity. This programme will change that.

“We want to create a clearer ladder of progression in the Apprenticeships Programme. There should be greater emphasis on progression to Level 3 and beyond. And this is why we are committed to expanding, in particular, the number of Apprenticeships available at more advanced skill levels.”

John Hayes MP, Speech to the Institute of Directors, 29 September 2010

A vital alternative pathway

Instead, having come so far successfully as an apprentice, employees seeking to develop advanced and higher skills, perhaps on the road to playing a leading role in their workplace, often have to switch to less practical, more academic ways to learn. Others simply choose not to progress further.

In many cases, there seems ample reason to believe that the Apprenticeship pathway could be an effective means of developing and demonstrating higher-level skills. In recent research with professional bodies conducted by 'PARN'² some 70% "thought that Higher Apprenticeships would be an appropriate way to gain full professional status in their sectors". The idea of an Apprenticeship as being a route to professional status goes against the grain of universities being the 'gateway to the professions'.

With concerns over the availability of vocational degree routes, Higher Apprenticeships offer a valuable alternative for the recruitment and development of highly-skilled employees. In many of our most dynamic sectors – including advanced manufacturing – the practical, Apprenticeship approach offers a good prospect for developing valued future professional employees, as skills needs rise and the current workforce ages.³ But this potential for Higher Apprenticeships is at present unrealised – and there is much potential for growth.

Unrealised potential

Analysis by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) found that just 6% of those completing an Advanced Level Apprenticeship in 2002/3 had made their way into some form of higher education four years later. In contrast, 90% of those completing A-levels go onto higher education within four years.⁴

The lack of a Higher Apprenticeship route might not just be a problem in terms of ensuring our employees learn the right way – we might also be limiting opportunity and social mobility. NAS research findings are that some 50% of apprentices completing an Advanced Apprenticeship showed interest in pursuing a degree-level equivalent course.⁵

Just as importantly, of that small number who do manage to progress from an Advanced Level Apprenticeship into higher education, fewer than half do so through a work-based, experience-driven route. Of those who did go onto a work-based higher education, 91% did so in the same year they completed their Advanced Level Apprenticeship – a direct progression pathway, but one seemingly open to very few employees.⁶

From our own experience at NAS, we know that although there are signs of growth, there are at present too few Higher Apprenticeship programmes available, creating opportunities for only a few thousand employees each year. If Higher Apprenticeships are to realise their full potential then we must all make a commitment to invest and innovate new models, creating new opportunities along the way.

2. p.20, Williams, C, and Hanson, W (2011) *Higher Apprenticeships and Professional Bodies, PARN/NAS*.

3. Kewin, J, et al (2011) *The Road Less Travelled: Experiences of employers that support the progression of Advanced Apprenticeships to higher education, CFE*.

4. p.9, HEFCE (2009) *Pathways to higher education: Apprenticeships, Issues Paper May 2009/17*.

5. Cited in p.34, UVAC (2010) *Progression from vocational and applied learning to Higher Education across the UK, UKCES*.

6. pp.10-11, HEFCE (2009) *Pathways to higher education: Apprenticeships, Issues Paper May 2009/17*.

What we all need to change

Why haven't Higher Apprenticeships developed further in the past? What are the barriers that have stopped employers and providers of higher education developing successful Higher Apprenticeship programmes already? There are a range of reasons relating to the way we see Apprenticeships – as employers, as learning providers, and as Government.

For some time Apprenticeships have been perceived as being pathways to achieve low or intermediate skill levels and that higher education is an academic preserve. To tackle this, we are working closely with HEFCE to ensure that universities are fully able to support Higher Apprenticeships. The new Specification of Apprenticeship Standards in England, which sets the minimum requirements for all future Apprenticeship frameworks, has been developed to better accommodate higher-skill models but we recognise that learning and development does not stop at academic level five and the PARN research identified level 6 as the key level for professional qualifications.

Those changes are important – but we need to do more than create space for Higher Apprenticeships. We need to break through the barriers in the workplace and education that sees Apprenticeships being bound to intermediate levels, rather than as a practical career framework which can develop employees to the highest levels of knowledge and skills. We'll know when we're succeeding when more, sustainable Higher Apprenticeship programmes begin to operate.

Developing new Higher Apprenticeship programmes

Our immediate objective is therefore to work with employers, learning providers and sector representative bodies to create new Higher Apprenticeship programmes. By making an investment now, we can demonstrate the potential of Higher Apprenticeships, open up new opportunities for employees, and better understand what makes a successful programme – creating valuable best practice which we can share and promote.

Some of this work will be with employers, changing the way that managers and technicians are recruited, positioning Higher Apprenticeships as part of an alternative pathway for high-skilled careers. NAS wants to work with employers ready to invest and take a lead in developing the role of Higher Apprenticeships within their wider plans for workforce recruitment and development. We also want to work with employers and other organisations to reach employees to ensure – with the support of high quality advice and guidance – that they can understand and act upon opportunities to progress through a Higher Apprenticeship.

In addition we want to work with employers and their representative bodies alongside colleges, universities and independent providers to help them come up with innovative new models for delivering and supporting Apprenticeships through to higher skill levels, to gear provision around the needs of high-skill, high-value workplaces. That will mean working through the implications of tailored on and off the job training, as well as ensuring more substantial, sustained dialogue with Apprenticeship employers, and ensuring that provision is up-to-date and delivered effectively.⁷

7. pp.21-24, Kewin, J, et al (2011) *The Road Less Travelled: Experiences of employers that support the progression of Advanced Apprenticeships to higher education*, CFE.

The Higher Apprenticeship Fund

These are often big changes to make, with risks involved in getting it right, but real gains for our workplaces where we do. That is precisely why the Government is making a long-term commitment, through the Higher Apprenticeship Fund, to invest in those willing to face those risks.

Investing in leadership and innovation is the best contribution Government can make. We know from research that Higher Apprenticeship programmes, and progression strategies of which they form a part, only work when they are driven by a sound business case within the workplace.⁸ If Higher Apprenticeships programmes are to succeed, they need to be driven by business benefits, not central targets – the Fund’s approach reflects that.

By making investment in these opportunities, the Government wants to demonstrate the value of Higher Apprenticeships, and also to identify some of the best practices which can lower risk and maximise returns. Through the programmes we invest in, we aim to stimulate directly the creation of new Higher Apprenticeship opportunities – but we also aim to trigger a wider change, creating the conditions for Higher Apprenticeship to become an established part of our skills system.

8. pp.13-16, Kewin, J, et al (2011) *The Road Less Travelled: Experiences of employers that support the progression of Advanced Apprenticeships to higher education*, CFE.

A young man with dark hair, wearing a blue work shirt, is shown in profile, looking down intently at his work in a workshop. The background is blurred, showing various tools and equipment. Overlaid on the left side of the image are four horizontal bars of varying shades of orange and yellow, containing white text. A large white number '4' is positioned on the right side, partially overlapping the man's arm and the workshop background.

What we
want to achieve:
Investing in
innovation and
opportunity

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Section 4

What we want to achieve: Investing in innovation and opportunity

The Higher Apprenticeship Fund is looking to place investments which will create well regarded, high profile and sustainable Higher Apprenticeship programmes, based on employer demand, and involving partnerships between business and education.

Within this framework, there are many potential possibilities. We are careful here not to be prescriptive, because we want the best and most innovative projects to come forward, and because we know that the successful projects will be driven by particular business needs. At the same time however, we want to give a clear sense of what it is that we're willing to invest in, the basis on which we will invest, and the requirements on which projects will proceed if we invest.

What we're looking to invest in

Our investment should be to support and enhance the development of a Higher Apprenticeship programme which you are initiating to address an identified business need. Without prescribing how your own work may develop, we envisage backing projects which will deliver:

- **Co investment:** using public investment to kick-start activity which is clearly aimed at generating ongoing employer contributions to cover programme costs.
- **Employer leadership:** using public investment to facilitate stronger sector or occupational partnerships to drive development and promotion of the programme.
- **Transformation:** using public investment to achieve a lasting change in employer recruitment and training patterns, creating a significant change in practice. Possibly linked to new license to practise arrangements.
- **Innovation:** using public investment to develop new models of Apprenticeship learning at higher skill levels.

The investment we make must be linked to the wider skills development of the sector. They must allow for progression and should work with the sectors existing training culture and incorporate any relevant professional standards.

Skills competitions

We are also particularly keen to invest in projects which can develop a relationship between new Higher Apprenticeship learners, employers and providers and Skills Competitions, such as the major WorldSkills competition in London this year. Skills Competitions showcase and celebrate exceptional talent to inspire and motivate individuals, employers, and training and education providers to aim for, and be able to deliver, truly world-class skills and international competitiveness.

Apprenticeships already play a significant role in progression to these highest levels and Higher Apprenticeships provide an opportunity for apprentices to routinely reach such high standards of competence and enter such competitions; equally, the models of delivery that have developed to achieve excellence can inform the design of Higher Apprenticeships and their delivery. As Skills Minister John Hayes recently put it:

"If we are to build a stronger economy and a fairer society, we must value and celebrate vocational skills as well as academic success. That's why I want to support a record number of apprenticeships, and build the best skills training system we've ever had."

"Worldskills plays a crucial role in this process. This week's events, and the final to be held this Autumn, will demonstrate to thousands of young people what they could achieve by developing their practical talents."

John Hayes MP, to coincide with a visit to the Worldskills London 2011 Team UK Selection Event, 15 June 2011

What our investment will finance

Our investment could be used to support one or more of these different elements in a successful programme development, but must not be used to substitute the employer contribution to Higher Apprenticeship training costs;

- **Engaging employers:** developing relationships with key large employers or SMEs, typically driven by some common identity – around a supply chain or sub-sector.
- **Engaging employees:** offering information, advice and guidance support to recruit new apprentices or encourage existing employees to progress – or to recruit targeted groups to improve workforce diversity.
- **Improving provision:** supporting the development of staff, learning materials, facilities and links to other provision activities – e.g. skills competitions.
- **Product development:** accelerating the development of the Apprenticeship framework, where research has already been undertaken.

In all cases, we will expect to see how the elements you wish to receive investment for fit within a wider project plan, and the business case which demonstrates how they will contribute to the project's objectives. Robust research and analysis will be expected to back significant investments of public funds.

Our expectations as an investor

Within that framework of what we will invest in, we have specific expectations about what our investments will look like:

- **Investments will directly create Higher Apprenticeship opportunities**

Any Higher Apprenticeship programme we invest in through the fund will have a clear plan to create and offer opportunities for individuals to be recruited or to progress. As well as ensuring value for the investment of public funds, we consider the creation of Higher Apprenticeship opportunities a key element in demonstrating the benefit of new programmes. We want to see opportunities, as well as qualifications, created by Higher Apprenticeship programmes.

- **Investments will be made only where there is a path to sustainability**

Those already involved in Apprenticeships will be well aware that from 2013/14, public funds for Advanced Level and Higher Apprenticeships will be limited to student loans for those aged 24 and over. For that reason, the Higher Apprenticeship programmes we invest in here will be those able to demonstrate not only a plan to replace the role our investment has played, but also to generate the revenues to finance the Apprenticeship programme on an ongoing basis. We recognise that the current funding arrangements for Higher Apprenticeships are neither well understood nor easily communicable and so we will expect proposals to explicitly explain who will fund each element of any programme.

- **Investments will be on the basis of partnership and collaboration**

NAS is not interested in passively providing a cash injection in the hope of having an effect. We are looking to work closely and constructively with those leading the projects we invest in, to share learning and also to provide support where we can in tackling the barriers that projects encounter. As an investor, one of our key motivations is to fund projects that will allow us to learn what works, and to better identify and demonstrate the benefits of Higher Apprenticeship programmes.

Guiding principles

To help ensure you have a full understanding of our expectations as an investor, we expect that the projects which we invest in will demonstrate during the applications process that they:

- **Focus on progression:** we expect all programme business cases to be focused on employer demand but also tied to a wider strategy for employee progression. As such, we are open to proposals that include some support for provision outside of Higher Apprenticeships, where this has clear link to the overall progression strategy.
- **Evidenced employer demand:** this may be sectoral, professional or through some other business need. In any case, proposals must demonstrate a clear business case to support the proposed Higher Apprenticeship programme's significance and sustainability, based on labour market intelligence.
- **Add value:** we want to avoid Higher Apprenticeship Fund money being used to replace existing contributions from public funders or employers. Where new frameworks draw on content from existing qualifications, there must be a robust business case focused on employer demand and learning need.
- **Promote accessibility:** the programme must create opportunities which are accessible to all, and especially create opportunities for progression among those employed in small and medium-sized employers.
- **Offer value for money:** we appreciate that different models and business contexts will entail higher and lower costs and will consider cases for significant variations; but as a general rule we would expect every £2,000 of our investment to generate at least one Higher Apprenticeship opportunity.
- **Create sustainable learner profiles:** given the changing funding environment, we expect that new programmes we invest in will have clear plans for the generation of employer contributions, and aim for at least 70% of learners to be aged between 16 and 24.
- **SASE,** The Specification for Apprenticeship Standards in England provides a structure for framework creation but it is not intended to restrict or straight jacket developments which should be based on sound workforce development analysis not funding or technical requirements.

Further guidance is available on the application form.

A photograph of construction workers wearing white hard hats, looking upwards with focused expressions. The image is overlaid with orange text boxes on the left side and a large white number '5' in the bottom right corner.

How we want
to work with
the projects
we invest in

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Section 5

How we want to work with the projects we invest in

The projects we support through the Higher Apprenticeship Fund represent important commitments for NAS. Our hope is not only that these projects will create substantial new opportunities but that they will help us to develop the evidence base which can persuade more and more employers to invest in Higher Apprenticeship programmes. We also want to make the most of the opportunity to learn what are the best practices with which to develop and run a Higher Apprenticeship programme.

For these reasons, we intend to form a close collaboration with all of the projects we invest in. This is very much a two-way process – where projects are encountering barriers that NAS is able to help with, we want to be able to help. Alongside that support role, we will be in regular contact to understand progress made but also to share the lessons of that experience widely.

Measuring achievement

Early on after we invest in each project, we will be working with all organisations to develop a measurement and evaluation framework which will allow us to capture the progress made and the benefits delivered to employers and employees. Partly this is because we do need to account for the effective use of investment funds provided by the taxpayer; but it's also because we want to have a sound basis upon which to compare the results of the different models and approaches we are investing in.

Reflecting the innovative nature of Higher Apprenticeships programmes, we will be measuring qualitatively as well as quantitatively, so we may want to work with the organisations we're investing in to develop case studies of workplaces and employees' progression within them. At all times, we want to work with the organisations we're investing in – to make measurement as open, supportive and helpful as it can be, while ensuring that it still casts a rigorous eye over the results of public investment.

Sharing best practice

Just as important will be to understand the causes – positive and negative – of the different results achieved by the Higher Apprenticeship programmes we are investing in. For that reason, we envisage regular contact with those leading on programmes, and the potential to share experiences between programmes and the wider public.

Successful, sustainable Higher Apprenticeship programmes depend on getting a lot of factors right – through our investments we want to understand what those factors are, and what solutions can be found. For the taxpayer, Higher Apprenticeship Fund support should allow us to distil valuable knowledge on how to make future employer investment in Higher Apprenticeships a low-risk, high-reward proposition.

How to apply and
how we will
decide where
to invest

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Section 6

How to apply and how we will decide where to invest

In this section, we conclude the Prospectus by spelling out what is involved in developing an application; how we will decide which applications to support; and the timetable for the application and investment process.

Who can apply?

The Higher Apprenticeship Fund is seeking collaborative partnership bids and the following organisations, or preferably a consortia of the following organisations, are eligible to apply:

- Employers
- Sector Skills Councils
- Professional Bodies
- National Skills Academies
- Employer groups
- Learning Providers, including independents, FE colleges and HE institutions

At least one organisation in the partnership must be an identified, accountable lead, and they should hold a contract with the Skills Funding Agency or else be a publicly accountable body. This requirement has been applied in order to minimise audit requirements on the use of public funds.

Projects must be based in and applicable to English learners.

We want the Fund to be as flexible as possible, but it cannot be used to provide support for any of the following:

- Direct costs for training activity e.g. consultants' or trainers' fees - these will come from normal FE and HE funding routes and allocations where applicable
- Substitution for existing public or private sources of funding
- Costs already incurred i.e. no retrospective investment can be made
- Fixed asset investments e.g. property or equipment

The Fund is governed by EU State Aid regulations and investments will only be made where compatible with those regulations. Applicants need to consider whether their proposals will be compatible; information is available at:

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/europe/state-aid/advice-on-state-aid>

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/consumer-issues/docs/10-951-state-aid-beginners-guide.pdf>

Applicants are responsible for ensuring their eligibility, and the compatibility of their proposals with the Fund's constraints on what can be supported, and with EU State Aid regulations.

Further guidance is available on the application form

How to apply?

For further information and to access an application form, please visit the BRAVO website at: <https://skillsfundingagency.bravosolution.co.uk> or the National Apprenticeship website at: www.apprenticeships.org.uk/highers. To apply to the Higher Apprenticeship Fund, you should complete and submit one application for your organisation. You are welcome to apply for several different projects within the one application.

We want to receive high quality applications that we can back with confidence. For that reason, we would recommend that you only apply if you have a sound business case and are able to clearly articulate the approach you will take and the benefits it will deliver. In working to develop the core of your proposal, we would recommend that you start by considering the following questions:

- **Who is involved?** Set out your organisation and any partners you are working with, define the roles played by each participating organisation, and how the mix of expertise and capacity adds value.

- **What is the need?** Starting from your organisation's (and your partners') existing delivery, define the baseline position and agree a vision of a changed, better future for Higher Apprenticeships and employee progression, and set out your model for how this can be realised.
- **What is the plan?** With that model for achieving the vision you have set out, define a clear project plan to invest in making that model a reality. Identify the different factors involved, what risks are at work, and how Higher Apprenticeship Fund support can make a difference.
- **What will it achieve?** Starting from the baseline of what you currently deliver, identify the benefits – including Higher Apprenticeship places – that the plan will create, as well as any additional benefits and measurable outcomes the programme development will achieve.

Equality and diversity is a priority for NAS, and we will expect all organisations making an application to highlight issues relevant to their operating content and to their approach. In particular, we will be keen to see all applications explain how the Higher Apprenticeship pathway they are creating will contribute to improved access to opportunity for employees from different backgrounds.

