

## EMPOWERING EMPLOYERS:

### THE UK APPRENTICESHIP REFORMS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY-DRIVEN TRAINING PROVIDERS FOR BUILDING A SKILLED WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW

There were significant reforms applied to apprenticeships in 2017. The main purpose of these changes being to give more control to employers over the training that their apprentices receive. These reforms also led to the phasing out of apprenticeship frameworks by the start of the 2020/2021 academic year in preference for new Apprenticeship Standards. Developed by the employers and industry experts, in conjunction with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education enabling focus more on occupational competency rather than on qualifications.

The change to Standards also saw apprentices assessed at the end of their programme, rather than during it. Apprenticeship standards specify a list of knowledge, skills, and behaviours (KSBs), that an apprentice must

demonstrate that they have achieved over the duration of their apprenticeship. The way in which these KSBs are assessed varies from standard to standard, but typically include:

- A professional discussion underpinned by a portfolio of evidence that has been built up by the apprentice while on the apprenticeship programme
- A project proposal produced by the apprentice in the end point assessment (EPA) period, followed by a presentation and questions
- A case study test

To enter the EPA there may be other criteria that must be demonstrated by the apprentice. This could include the achievement of a specified professional qualification. One recent positive development applied to several of the standards that have been reviewed since the reforms, is that the KSBs specified in the standard are starting to be mapped to one or other of the assessment methods, rather than having to be covered in both the portfolio and the project.

Although the EPA requires that all the KSBs be covered in one or other of the assessment methods, there can be no gaps in the KSBs, and this can cause problems for apprentices that have a focused role within their employment. For example, a Business Analyst might not get involved in data modelling. There is one knowledge competency and two skills competencies that are required for the portfolio in this area. In my experience, this is best addressed in a design workshop between the provider and the employer, but not all training providers do this at the start of an apprenticeship. This begs a question about whether the reforms really have given employers the intended flexibility.

Many employers have informed me that training providers are quite rigid in the delivery of their programmes. The timing, frequency, and duration of the workshops are set in stone; the subject areas that are going to be covered are fixed; the support that apprentices receive from their skills coaches is on a fixed date and may not be the same person every time, or even by a subject matter expert in the standard being delivered. Most training providers do not have the luxury of being able to deliver a bespoke programme, contextualised by the training provider for and in collaboration with the employer's business and therefore, more relevant to the apprentice. The number of new apprenticeships has been declining recently and with costs on the increase, training provider margins are being squeezed. The funding bands for apprenticeships move slowly, and since the reforms most funding bands (the amount of money available to pay for the apprentice's training) have been reduced when reviewed by the government through The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).



Achievement and retention rates are suffering, and flexibility is the last thing that these training providers can offer. The bigger providers typically are not going to offer anything outside of their existing curriculum format.

At Alpha, we pride ourselves on the customised and bespoke curriculums we have in place with our employers within our apprenticeships training programmes.

If a training provider does not offer you a design workshop before your apprenticeship programme(s) start, then this should serve as a red flag! Without this collaborative and bespoke approach to the design of your apprenticeship programme(s), you are going to receive the same cookie cutter curriculum that the training provider deploys for all employers and apprentices on their programmes.

<sup>1</sup>The Apprenticeships Reform Programme was established with quality at its heart, and in line with the best international practice, to put employers in the driving seat, and sought to build the skilled workforce this country needs for its future.

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to explore how  
we can help you  
create a meaningful  
apprenticeship  
journey.