Equality and Human Rights Commission Consultation Response to the introduction of the UK Apprenticeship Levy

Creating a fairer Britain
Equality and Human Rights Commission
Response to the introduction of the UK Apprenticeship Levy

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Contact details:

Chris Oswald
Equality and Human Rights Commission
2nd Floor 151 West George Street
Glasgow
G2 2JJ

0141 228 5910
The Equality and Human Rights Commission is the National Equality Body (NEB) for Scotland, England and Wales. We work to eliminate discrimination and promote equality across the nine protected grounds set out in the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

We are an “A Status” National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) and share our mandate to promote and protect human rights in Scotland with the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC).

Question 1: [paste]

Should the Government’s commitment to 30,000 Modern Apprenticeships starts a year by 2020 a) be maintained or b) be increased?

In 2013 the EHRC published research conducted by Herriot Watt University which highlighted the gendered nature of many apprenticeships and the very low levels of access to the scheme from ethnic minority and disabled people. Whilst some progress has been made on making apprenticeships more accessible to disabled people, significant progress still requires to be made on increasing ethnic minority access and reducing the extent of gender segregation in the current frameworks. This would support the ambition of the Developing the Young Workforce report and provide a broader talent pool from which Scottish employers would draw from. It would also be a means of increasing employment amongst ethnic minority and disabled people who are currently over-represented as being unemployed and economically inactive in Scotland.

We also feel that the apprenticeship scheme could be modified to meet the needs of older workers as there is significant evidence that older people from ethnic minorities are concentrated in low paid service industries, that older disabled people have poor access to employment, and that women returning to work after caring or childcare may benefit from additional skills and training to assist them to compensate for time out of employment.

We believe that the apprenticeship schemes currently available could be of significant benefit to these groups and would welcome the expansion of the programme.

Question 2: [paste]

Should Apprenticeship Levy funding support growth in the number of Graduate Level Apprenticeships in Scotland?
We would particularly welcome a focus on professions where ethnic minorities, disabled people, and particularly women are currently underrepresented in the workforce. Greater access to STEM professions for women is one area where a greater focus on support and workplace focussed skills development would be welcome.

Question 3:

Should Apprenticeship Levy funding be used to establish a flexible skills fund to support wider workforce development?

As with our answer to 1 above, the EHRC believes that using the levy to further develop opportunities from groups who currently have lower access to the frameworks, or who are disproportionately concentrated in particular frameworks, could assist their integration into the workforce. We would however encourage the Government to look beyond the current under 25 focus, recognising that it could provide essential support to women returning to the workforce, for disabled people currently facing long term unemployment, or for ethnic minorities who may experience underemployment.

Question 4:

Should Apprenticeship Levy funding be used to support the expansion of Foundation Apprenticeships?

As with our answers to previous questions we believe that the Levy and the broader approach to apprenticeships could be of significant benefit to women, to disabled people and to ethnic minorities. Current data suggests that unemployment particularly affects ethnic minority and disabled young people and this greater focus on skills and experience acquisition may assist these groups to establish a stronger foothold in work and function as a platform from which to develop. Pre-employment support might also enable young women to gain experience and knowledge in professions that they are currently underpresented in. Foundation apprenticeships could provide a
valuable route into work for such groups.

Question 5:

Should Apprenticeship Levy funding should be used to help unemployed people move into employment, and to help meet the workforce needs of employers?

As above we feel that the additional funds could be used to support those with lowest access to the labour market or groups who are currently experiencing significantly higher levels of unemployment and underemployment, or restricted opportunities related to their gender.