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Creating a 'Modern Apprenticeship': a critique of the UK's multi-sector, social inclusion approach

ALISON FULLER & LORNA UNWIN
Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester, Salisbury Road, Leicester, LE1 7QR, UK.

ABSTRACT *This article critiques the UK's approach to the development of a contemporary apprenticeship programme initially designed to increase the supply of intermediate level skills. Since 1994, when the Modern Apprenticeship programme was introduced, it has struggled to meet expectations and in many occupational sectors, apprentices leave without completing the prescribed qualifications. The programme's performance is worst in sectors which previously had no history of apprenticeship. A key problem for the programme is the lack of employer demand and commitment, yet the government wants the Modern Apprenticeship to expand so that it can provide a pathway for as many young people as possible. The article explores the structure, content and implementation of the Modern Apprenticeship and argues that the government is more concerned with the programme's social inclusion potential than with developing a high quality work-based route.*

Introduction

This article focuses on the UK's effort to revive apprenticeships via the government-supported Modern Apprenticeship programme, first introduced in September 1994. It is timely to reflect on the programme's performance as it has recently been the subject of a major review, undertaken by an advisory committee chaired by Sir John Cassels (see DfES, 2001a). This endorsed earlier government proposals to reform training programmes for young people via the establishment of a 'vocational ladder', the first rung of which would be a 'Learning Gateway', leading to a Foundation Modern Apprenticeship, then Advanced Modern Apprenticeship and culminating in a Foundation Degree. (Blunkett, 2001, p. 21)

The article is organised in five sections. In the first section, we describe the origins and key features of the Modern Apprenticeship programme. The second section describes the generally passive role played by employers in the management of the current system. Section three focuses on the latest Modern Apprenticeship statistics and analyses what they mean in terms of the contemporary characteristics of apprentices, patterns of participation and leaver destinations. In the fourth section we highlight some of the issues that arise when apprenticeship is introduced into a

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non-traditional sector. In the final section, we question whether the UK's Modern Apprenticeship is applicable to all sectors and raise questions about: (a) the value of using the programme as a method for promoting social inclusion for low academic achievers via the new vocational ladder (rather than for producing intermediate and technical skills); (b) whether the participation in the Modern Apprenticeship of so many young people over the age of 18, who may well already be employed, indicates that public money is being used to subsidise work-related training of existing employees rather than new entrants; and (c) whether, if this is the case, it is an 'appropriate' use of public funds.

In 2001, the Modern Apprenticeship was split into two phases: the Foundation Modern Apprenticeship (FMA), leading to NVQ Level 2; and the Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA), leading to NVQ Level 3. The FMA also broke with the philosophy of the original programme in that apprentices did not have to have employed-status. We concentrate here, mainly, on the development and performance of the AMA in England. It is worth nothing, however, that both the FMA and AMA operate in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland where, due to devolved government, the management of the programme is the responsibility of different bodies [1].

The Development of the Modern Apprenticeship

In 1994, the then Conservative government introduced the Modern Apprenticeship for 16 to 24-year-olds as an attempt to increase the stock of young people trained to intermediate (or technician) level. Apprenticeship numbers had been declining since the mid-1960s, when they stood at around 3% of manufacturing employment. By 1990, apprenticeship accounted for just two-thirds of 1% of total employment, and this has continued to drop so that in 2001, apprenticeship stocks stand at between one-sixth and one-ninth of the share of employment (see Ryan & Unwin, 2001). The Modern Apprenticeship currently accounts for around one-fifth of the eligible youth cohort, with the rest either staying in full-time education (about 70%), entering employment, becoming unemployed, or not participating in any 'official' post-compulsory pathway.

The introduction of the Modern Apprenticeship also signalled that the government wanted to build on the belief that 'apprenticeship', as a method of formation training for young people, still held a positive image in the minds of the general public and employers (see Fuller & Unwin, 2001). The term 'Modern' was deliberately chosen to show that, unlike apprenticeships in the past, this new version would be: available in a range of occupational sectors including those that had not offered apprenticeships before (e.g. retailing, health and social care); be equally available to girls and boys; and lead to an NVQ Level 3. The stipulation of the Level 3 qualification is important, for as well as making a break with the time-served element of the old apprenticeships, this indicated that the Modern Apprenticeship employers would select their recruits from those young people who were capable of studying beyond the standard expected at the end of compulsory education (Level 2). It also

distinguished it from the existing Youth Training (YT) programme which led to an NVQ Level 2.

Since the introduction of the first youth training schemes in the early 1980s, successive governments had seen the image of these schemes plummet in the eyes of young people and their parents. Despite the fact that some young people did enter schemes which offered a good standard of training with reputable employers, many were treated as cheap labour, did not achieve any qualifications, and were sacked as soon as their traineeship ended (see Unwin, 1997). In order to separate the Modern Apprenticeship from YT, which, like previous schemes was designed and managed by government, National Training Organisations (NTOs) were made responsible for designing the Modern Apprenticeship 'framework' for their sector. Despite the shift in responsibility from the government to the NTO, employer involvement in the creation of the frameworks has been patchy, particularly in sectors with little or no tradition of apprenticeship provision (Gospel & Fuller, 1998).

The government stipulated that each framework, regardless of sector, would have to include the commitment that apprentices would train to a minimum of NVQ Level 3 and attain Key Skills units. NTOs could, if they wished, include additional non-NVQ qualifications such as the BTEC National Diploma and single certificates covering specific techniques or crafts such as welding. The government also decided to insist that apprentices should, wherever possible, have employed-status from the start of the apprenticeship.

The Modern Apprenticeship was, therefore, presented as a bold attempt to show that the UK could construct a work-based programme on a par with the best in Europe. However, Ryan and Unwin (2001) have concluded that the programme can be best understood as evolving from past youth training schemes. Their analysis contrasts the Modern Apprenticeship with the German apprenticeship system (as well as with YT) and shows that in both quantitative and qualitative terms it falls short of its German counterpart. This is further supported by Steedman (2001, p. 37) who compared the Modern Apprenticeship to programmes in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland and found that it fell 'short of that provided elsewhere in Europe on every important measure of good practice'.

In the first year of the Modern Apprenticeship, programmes were offered in 14 'prototype' occupational sectors, but they quickly expanded to just over 80 sectors, many of which had no previous experience of offering apprenticeships or indeed substantive training to young people. The government pays for all training cost covered by the framework, and the employer pays the apprentice a wage. Given the range of sectors which are allowed to offer the Modern Apprenticeship and the relative freedom of the NTOs to design their own frameworks, it is not surprising that there are enormous variations between apprenticeships in terms of: pay; length of training; provision of on and off-the-job training; and range of qualifications included (for a detailed examination of this variety see Unwin & Wellington, 2001). Whilst some sectoral differences are also present in apprenticeship programmes across Europe, other countries have underpinned their apprenticeships with legislation to ensure that certain core features (such as duration and qualification

attainment) are guaranteed regardless of location. In the UK, the Modern Apprenticeship is governed by what Ryan and Unwin (2001, p. 104) have called 'leaflet law', that is 'ministerial powers, legislated in the 1970s, to modify labour market programmes such as itself'. The social partnership arrangements between government, employers and trade unions, which commonly apply in other European countries, do not exist in the UK, so that the Government department ultimately responsible for the Modern Apprenticeship (currently the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)) can alter the programme as and when it sees fit. The operation and funding of the Modern Apprenticeship in England passed from the DfES to the national Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in April 2002. Day-to-day running of the programme is further devolved to the 47 local LSCs.

Seven years into the Modern Apprenticeship, the government accepted that standards within the programme were variable particularly with regard to the length of time apprentices need to complete the requirements. It was also concerned about the weak level of knowledge and understanding expected by some frameworks, particularly those which require no knowledge-based award to complement the NVQ Level 3. To address this issue, and following its own consultation on ways to improve the Modern Apprenticeship carried out in the summer of 2000, the then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to develop a range of vocationally-related qualifications, to be called 'Technical Certificates'.

These Certificates would:

- deliver the underpinning knowledge and understanding relevant to the NVQ included in the particular Modern Apprenticeship framework;
- be delivered through a taught programme of off-the-job learning;
- permit a structured approach to the teaching and assessment of the underpinning knowledge and understanding of an NVQ (or a related suite of NVQs) (QCA, 2002).

To develop Technical Certificates, QCA asked all NTOs, working in collaboration with awarding bodies, to identify any existing knowledge-based vocational qualifications which might meet the requirements listed above or which could be developed to do so. In some sectors, new qualifications might need to be developed. The name 'Technical Certificate' would be regarded as a classification term so that existing vocational qualifications (e.g. BTEC National) would retain their original name. The first set of approved Technical Certificates became available in May 2002 and the LSC expects all frameworks (Foundation and Advanced) to include Technical Certificates by August 2003. The introduction of Technical Certificates marks a significant step forward for the UK's approach to youth training by acknowledging that NVQs on their own will not provide young people with sufficient knowledge to progress beyond their immediate workplace. It is salutary to remember that as far back as 1986, the then Manpower Services Commission was emphasising the importance of mandatory periods of off-the-job training 'away from the normal workplace' for trainees on the Youth Training Scheme (MSC, 1986, p. 3).

The Passive Role of Employers

Apprenticeships of the past were *demand* rather than *supply-led*. Employers decided when and if they needed apprentices. Today, the agencies of government orchestrate apprenticeship recruitment, supported by local networks of training providers. The key relationship in the Modern Apprenticeship in England is that between the local LSCs (formerly Training and Enterprise Councils), which are set AMA and FMA targets by the national LSC, and their local training providers located in both the public and private sectors[2]. The primacy of this relationship has been reinforced in the latest government reforms through the introduction of an entitlement to a place for all 16 and 17-year-olds with five or more GCSEs at grades A to G. The notion of entitlement, or as it was previously termed 'guarantee', recalls the approach taken for Youth Training Schemes (YTS) and Youth Training (YT) and reinforces the observation that the Modern Apprenticeship is the latest in a long line of government schemes designed to manage youth unemployment and entry into the labour market. The policy produces difficulties when there are more 'entitled' young people than there are employers willing to employ and train them. This gap can lead to the emergence of a sub-group of apprentices who do not have employed-status and are consequently more vulnerable to the sorts of outcomes (e.g. moving around state-sponsored placements) associated with the youth training schemes of the past.

In most sectors, the initial catalyst for apprenticeship recruitment will come from training providers who serve the LSCs by persuading employers to take on apprentices in much the same way as they did for YTS and YT. Ryan and Unwin (2001) calculated that single employers directly sponsor only 5% of apprentices. Clearly employers are unlikely to take on a young person if they have no real need for another employee, but the intervention of the training provider who promises to shoulder the 'burden' of recruitment, selection and official paperwork, can be very persuasive. In many areas of the country, and in stark contrast to past practice in traditional apprenticeship provision, employers have come to rely on these providers for their supply of young workers. To date, the DfES has no accurate data on how many employers in England and Wales are involved in the Modern Apprenticeship, which sectors they represent and the reasons why they are involved (Ryan & Unwin, 2001).

We shall argue that the lack of information about employers is important as, currently, it is impossible to distinguish between those participants who have been recruited to a company as Modern Apprentices and those participants who were already employed but were subsequently invited or obliged to join the programme by their employers. The Cassels' Committee report (DfES, 2001a) appears to have been written without the benefit of this information, but also without close attention to the statistical and research data that is available on patterns of apprenticeship participation. We suggest that the report presents an over-simplified view of how the programme is being used and by whom, and that it tends to reinforce outdated assumptions about current participants. For example, the statistics on AMA characteristics presented later in the article show that around half the sectors providing the programmes have an intake where over 50% of apprentices are aged 19 to 24 when

they start, and 46% of all people starting the programme are in this age bracket. This age profile differs radically from the past when the vast majority of apprentices left school at 15 or 16 to begin an apprenticeship in craft, technical and engineering-related industries (Gospel, 1995). Moreover, the report also depicts the uni-directional flows of young people from full-time college or sixth form into apprenticeship (DfES, 2001a, p. 6). This fails to capture a more complex empirical reality where individuals move in and out of education, employment and Modern Apprenticeship in varied and often erratic ways.

Recent research, which we carried out on the delivery of Key Skills in the workplace, can be used to illustrate some of the issues that arise when existing older employees become modern apprentices (Unwin *et al.*, 2000). One of our case studies was in a large UK-wide insurance company which was involved in the delivery of Key Skills through its participation in the AMA (insurance sector framework). Following an approach by a private training provider, the company had invited employees under 24 years old to join the programme. All the people (17 in number) who took up this offer were already employed in permanent jobs. They were all in their early twenties and had 'good' general educational qualifications including GCSEs at grades A to C, A levels, Advanced GNVQ and in some cases university degrees. Although their attainment of an NVQ Level 3 is counted towards the proportion of apprentices gaining a Level 3 award, it did not increase these individuals' qualification level, nor was it clear that their workplace competence had been enhanced. In such cases, no *new* Level 3 attainment has been produced by participation in the programme. Put another way, if candidates such as these achieve an NVQ Level 3 via their participation in the AMA, their attainment does not contribute towards an overall increase in the proportion of the working population with Level 3 qualifications.

The AMA's performance in relation to the key indicator of attainment at NVQ Level 3 is disappointing. Currently, only around one-fifth of leavers from the programme are gaining this level of award. In this regard, the Cassels' report (DfES, 2001a) is misleading. The report states that around a half of those entering the programme gain the NVQ associated with it. As we have already indicated, in the case of the AMA the associated qualification is a NVQ Level 3. In order to cite a statistic of about 50%, the report has used a figure from a DfES statistical release (DfES, 2001b) which indicates that about half of those participating in the Modern Apprenticeship gain a qualification. However, the Cassels' report fails to distinguish between the proportion of apprentices achieving the standard expected, that is a full NVQ Level 3, and those achieving some form of lower level qualification. Unfortunately, the DfES is unable to provide statistics for successful completion of full AMA frameworks (NVQ Level 3, Key Skills units and any other specified qualifications), as these data have not been systematically collected. Overall, the report lacks an up-to-date statistical picture of AMA and FMA patterns of participation and outcomes. It is to this task that we now turn.

Statistical Picture of Participation in the Advanced Modern Apprenticeship

In this section we investigate patterns of participation in, and outcomes from, the AMA in England. The latest DfES statistics (to end August 2001) show that there have been a total of 453,681 young people starting the programme and 318,202 leavers[3]. This means that there are currently 135,479 participants. It should be noted that the leaver figure is a total which includes those who have successfully completed the programme's qualification requirements, those who have attained part of the requirements and those who have left before achieving any of the specified qualifications. DfES data indicate that 46% of AMA recruits are female, 2.5% have disabilities and 4.3% are from ethnic minorities. We shall use the statistics to highlight a number of further features including:

- the sectors with the highest number of apprentices;
- the sectors with the highest attainment rates;
- the sectors where recruitment is highest at age 16 (the traditional age for apprenticeship recruitment);
- the sectors where those aged over 18 form over 50% of entrants;
- data on leaver destinations.

Largest AMA Sectors

Table I shows the ten sectors with the highest numbers of recruits. These ten sectors account for 71% of apprentices on the AMA. It is interesting to note that the largest sector is Business Administration, a sector without a long tradition of providing apprenticeships. The service sectors, which have little tradition of providing apprenticeships in the UK, are also well represented in the top ten with, for example, Retailing and Customer Service accounting for approximately 62,000 recruits between them. The more traditional industries associated with apprenticeship are represented in the table by sectors such as Engineering Manufacture, Construction and Motor Industry. Broadly speaking, these latter sectors are gaining better qualification outcomes than the service sectors. Hospitality and Retailing show particularly poor levels of attainment at Level 3. The proportion of female apprentices show that apprenticeship intakes remain heavily skewed along stereotypically gendered occupational lines. Finally, the ratio of recruits to leavers indicates that the non-traditional service sectors have the highest turnover of participants and the traditional craft and engineering sectors have the lowest. One reason for this is that the service sectors' frameworks have shorter planned and actual lengths of stay on the programme than the craft and manufacturing sectors.

It should be noted that the database lists data for participants who have not been classified under the sectors provided due to errors when the data is collected from the local LSCs. This 'other sector' has 36,128 recruits which, if included, would place it fourth in the table of largest 'sectors'.

Table I. Advanced Modern Apprenticeship participation (up to 26 August 2001), by age, gender and attainment in the ten largest sectors

Sector	All recruits	All leavers	Female	Aged 16	Aged 17	Aged 18	Aged over 18	Full qual. gained at below Level 3	Full qual. gained at Level 3 & above
			% recruits	% recruits	% recruits	% recruits	% recruits	% leavers	% leavers
Business Administration	54,174	41,267	80.64	15.08	20.86	20.20	43.23	14.70	34.71
Engineering Manufacture	40,041	22,008	2.82	34.54	25.10	18.42	21.18	24.77	41.18
Hospitality	36,761	27,311	48.60	8.85	11.93	14.66	64.28	28.44	13.75
Retailing	33,287	27,694	57.30	3.59	7.94	13.37	74.95	20.55	11.70
Customer Service	30,413	21,579	67.42	2.78	7.04	13.61	76.51	13.10	24.57
Motor Industry	28,491	18,560	1.66	34.30	23.64	20.86	19.42	9.05	42.40
Construction	28,243	19,461	1.12	27.66	28.89	25.16	17.38	16.63	47.01
Hairdressing	26,576	19,451	91.77	26.51	18.51	20.62	32.30	19.09	27.38
Health & Social Care	26,447	20,140	88.81	3.48	8.84	13.99	73.52	13.71	22.62
EIE/Electro-technical Industry	17,737	8,303	0.86	39.47	25.83	16.47	17.85	30.82	22.90
Total number	322,170	225,774							

Table II. Sectors where over 50% of leavers have attained a full Level 3 qualification

Sector	All recruits	All leavers	Full qual. gained at below Level 3	Full qual. gained at Level 3 & above
			% leavers	% leavers
Agriculture & Garden Machinery	2331	1712	11.74	51.81
Agriculture & Commercial Horticulture	560	363	11.29	56.20
Aviation	2035	457	12.04	63.89
Broadcasting	90	66	0.00	51.52
Electricity Supply Industry	587	287	0.00	60.28
Gas Industry	799	360	6.39	58.61
Man-made Fibres	19	10	20.00	70.00
Museums, Gallery and Heritage[1]	17	18	0.00	83.33
Newspapers	265	189	3.17	64.55
Operating Department Practice	163	120	2.50	61.67
Steel Industry	516	383	16.97	53.52
Travel Services	10,218	7057	27.76	50.84
Total	17,600	11022		

[1] The figures are taken from a DfES Modern Apprenticeship database report which in this, and two other sectors shown in later tables, indicate that there were more leavers than recruits.

Level 3 Attainment

Table II shows the sectors where more than 50% of apprentices are gaining a full NVQ Level 3 qualification. The most striking point to note is how few sectors are achieving a 50% or more attainment rate given that the minimum outcome for AMA is supposed to be NVQ Level 3. It is also interesting that the majority of sectors included in the table have relatively small numbers of apprentices. None of the top ten recruiters shown in Table I features in the list and only 4% of all apprentices are in sectors where over 50% of leavers gain a full NVQ Level 3.

Age

Table III shows the 12 sectors where the largest group of apprentices began the programme at age 16, that is in the traditional mode of school leaver. There is a mix of sizes in terms of numbers of participants among the list of sectors but it is interesting to note that most of these sectors are traditional craft/manufacturing

Table III. Sectors where largest group of recruits is those aged 16

Sector	All recruits	All leavers	Aged 16	Aged 17	Aged 18	Aged over 18
			% recruits	% recruits	% recruits	% recruits
Bus & Coach	645	375	46.2	24.50	16.12	12.40
Chemicals Industry	860	530	29.65	18.95	22.44	28.72
Electricity Supply Industry	587	287	34.24	19.59	18.57	27.26
Electrotechnical Industry	17,737	8303	39.47	25.83	16.47	17.85
Engineering Construction	1184	727	29.48	27.11	24.83	18.50
Engineering Manufacture	40,041	22,008	34.54	25.10	18.42	21.18
Furniture Manufacture	709	455	34.13	17.07	18.34	29.48
Health & Beauty Therapy	288	129	34.03	24.31	14.93	26.39
Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning	2957	1410	31.18	25.33	17.45	25.70
Motor Industry	28,491	18,560	34.3	23.64	20.86	19.42
Plumbing	5965	3338	31.30	22.15	19.93	25.62
Travel Services	10,218	7057	35.88	29.02	14.87	18.70
Total numbers	109,727	63,212				

apprentice recruiters. However, even in sectors such as Engineering Manufacture, which have lengthy track records in employing apprentices, the proportion of those aged 16 is relatively small at around one-third. The overall message emanating from these statistics is the extent to which patterns of post-compulsory participation, and particularly the staying-on rate in full-time education, have changed in recent years. The fact that around 70% of the cohort now continues in education beyond 16 means that entry to a government-supported training programme or employment more generally is being delayed. This has profound implications for the design of programmes like the Modern Apprenticeship which need to take account of the greater maturation of young people in terms of their acquisition of qualifications, employment experience and general life skills. Currently, however, the UK's approach to such programmes reflects the world of over a decade ago when the majority of young people still left school at the earliest opportunity.

To reinforce the above points, Table IV shows the 37 sectors where apprentices began the AMA aged over 18 and form over 50% of the total number of apprentices. Overall, 40% of apprentices are in sectors where over 50% of those recruited are aged over 18. With regard to the large recruiting sectors, the frameworks such as Retailing, Customer Service, and Health and Social Care all have over 70% of

Table IV. Sectors where apprentices begin the AMA aged over 18 and form over 50% of the total

	All recruits	All leavers	Aged over 18 more than 50% of sector's recruits
Sectors			% recruits
Accountancy	12,343	8417	57.17
Amenity Horticulture	1361	871	51.8
Arts & Entertainment	1714	1199	66.67
Aviation	2035	457	60.88
Broadcasting	90	66	68.89
Cleaning & Support Services	60	53	83.33
Customer Service	30,413	21,579	76.51
Early Years Care and Education	16,410	10,883	54.36
Electronic System Servicing	486	326	51.44
Emergency Fire Service	185	90	90.27
Financial Services	31	8	54.84
Floristry	344	253	53.20
Food & Drink	185	190	80.54
Gas Industry	799	360	50.69
Glass	503	228	63.02
Health & Social Care	26,447	20,140	73.52
Horse Industry	92	103	66.30
Hospitality	36,761	27,311	64.28
Housing	104	70	55.77
Information Technology	6984	5730	53.21
Insurance	904	731	65.04
International Trade	565	425	68.14
Management	2925	1759	90.77
Meat Industry	409	343	55.26
Newspapers	265	189	85.28
Operating Department Practice	163	120	85.28
Personnel	82	60	85.37
Photography & Photographic Processing Industry	79	69	69.62
Physiological Measurement Technician	178	131	69.10
Procurement	24	10	75.00
Residential Estate Agency	1355	1128	74.61
Retailing	33,287	27,694	74.95
Sports and Recreation	4441	3242	67.21
Textiles	185	107	54.59
Warehousing	1080	727	72.22
Total numbers	183,289	135,069	

apprentices starting the AMA aged over 18. We suspect that the figures for these sectors reflect the fact that many of the older people recruited onto the programme are already employed by the company. In such instances, employers could be using the Modern Apprenticeship as a way of subsidising workforce development as seemed to be the case with the insurance company referred to earlier in the article.

The finding that the age profile of apprentices is changing is confirmed by focusing on the numbers as well as percentages of the youngest starting at aged 16 and the oldest group who are 19 or over when they enter the programme. Fewer than one in five of recruits to the AMA are aged 16. In contrast nearly half of all recruits to the programme are aged 19 to 24.

Leavers/Destinations

In a study of reasons why apprentices were leaving the AMA before completion, a number of factors were identified: some had found new jobs with better pay and prospects; some found their workload made it difficult to study for qualifications; some were dismissed or made redundant; and others had personal problems. (DfEE, 2000) Data collected on the destinations of young people who have left the programme reveal that they can be found in a range of situations (see Tables V and VI). Most strikingly, a large proportion of the leaver group in these (and all sectors) are employed in the same organisation in which they were serving their apprenticeship. This means that the employer, the apprentice or both parties have decided that there is no requirement for the apprenticeship to be completed. If an employer chooses this option there is no statutory duty to 'honour' the original agreement and the apprentice has no alternative but to accept the decision or seek a new position. Although a very high proportion of ex-modern apprentices remain in employment, up to 11% of leavers become unemployed. The highest unemployment figures are for traditional apprenticeship sectors such as the Motor Industry, Construction and Engineering Manufacture. Currently, less than 1% of leavers progresses to full-time higher education. This suggests that demand for taking an immediate next step up the qualifications ladder, at least via the full-time mode, is low, even in sectors such as Engineering Manufacture where over 40% of leavers are gaining NVQ Level 3 and have the opportunity to gain Level 3 and Level 4 knowledge-based awards such ONCs and HNC/Ds.

In the next section we look at the implementation of the AMA in a non-traditional apprenticeship sector.

Advanced Modern Apprenticeship in a Non-traditional Sector

In the past, apprenticeships tended to be provided in trades, crafts and technical disciplines, and employers recruited young people as apprentices to train in defined and codified skill sets for specific jobs or trades. One of the problems with the way that the UK government has implemented and monitored the Modern Apprenticeship lies in the use of sectors (rather than jobs, skills and employers) as the basis for counting apprentice recruits. The statistics provide the total number of recruits

Table V. Destinations of leavers from the top five AMA recruiting sectors

	Business Administration	Engineering Manufacture	Hospitality	Retailing	Customer Service
All leavers	41,267	22,008	27,311	27,694	21,579
			Percentage[1]		
Employed with same business	43.34	42.18	27.10	36.05	46.09
Employed elsewhere (same/related occupation)	9.08	5.90	12.86	6.95	10.53
Employed elsewhere (unrelated)	5.10	4.94	12.11	9.02	8.68
Self-employed	0.09	0.14	0.27	0.35	0.21
Entered further education	1.72	1.52	1.77	1.28	1.33
Entered higher education	0.70	0.93	0.77	0.74	0.74
Unemployed	7.74	9.43	5.67	6.49	6.37
Found voluntary work	0.03	0.02	0.05	0.06	0.04
Conversion/transfer to another course	2.53	2.91	2.97	2.72	2.89
Injury/illness or death	1.22	1.83	1.05	1.00	1.05

[1] The column percentages do not add up to 100. The difference is made up of 'excluded options', the 'not stated' option (form returned, question not completed), and the 'system missing' option (form not returned); authors' enquiry to DfES.

Table VI. Destinations of Leavers from 6th to 10th largest recruiting sectors

	Motor Industry	Construction	Hairdressing	Health & Social Care	EIE/Electro-technical industry
All leavers	18,560	19,461	19,451	20,140	8303
			Percentage		
Employed with same business	40.73	40.66	35.47	35.31	34.51
Employed elsewhere (same/related occupation)	5.15	8.30	6.00	8.78	4.01
Employed elsewhere (unrelated)	8.40	4.55	7.79	6.54	8.88
Self-employed	0.22	0.51	0.60	0.06	0.34
Entered further education	1.42	1.24	2.30	1.36	0.94
Entered higher education	0.31	0.14	0.27	0.99	0.18
Unemployed	10.94	10.34	6.83	5.03	5.65
Found voluntary work	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.00
Conversion/transfer to another course	3.66	1.07	4.18	2.09	7.38
Injury/illness or death	1.99	1.99	2.06	2.72	2.65

under the umbrella of a sectoral heading, but do not offer a more fine-grained picture of employer involvement or the job roles for which apprentices are being prepared.

We would suggest that there are strengths and weaknesses to classifying apprenticeships by sector. It can be argued that under contemporary economic conditions, young people should follow a broad programme of skill formation which provides them with the vocational and educational foundations for progression and that does not confine their options to a narrow range of jobs which may, given employment uncertainties, disappear. Reich (1991) has argued that contemporary economic conditions require a categorisation of skills which is not based on occupations at all but rather on three broad relationships between skills and the labour market (production, service and symbolic analysis). Nevertheless, a major strength of the traditional apprenticeship's strong connection with specified skills and jobs was the opportunity it gave the young person to develop an occupational identity and sense of belonging to a community of practice. Although in recent years there has been a broadening in terms of cross-disciplinary training in sectors such as engineering, there remains agreement that the knowledge and skills required by employers necessitates a substantial and structured programme of skill formation that is still well-served by the apprenticeship model. Given the time, resources and commitment needed to train a young person to craft or technician levels, engineering and manufacturing employers are likely to have clear ideas of the jobs, and the range of career paths, for which the apprentices have been recruited.

In contrast with engineering, until the advent of the Modern Apprenticeship, the Business Administration 'sector' had little experience of apprenticeship. We shall argue that despite its popularity, the following analysis of occupational and pedagogical issues raises questions about how well Business Administration, in the UK context, lends itself to apprenticeship. We suggest that because the sector is not grounded in clearly defined occupational knowledge and skills, this makes it difficult to identify the jobs which Business Administration apprentices are being prepared for, and hinders the development of an appropriate vocational pedagogy. Both these effects remind us of the close relationship between community and apprenticeship and the central importance of occupational identity and effective pedagogy to successful practice (see Fuller & Unwin, 2002).

One way of drawing attention to the occupational rootlessness of Business Administration framework is to look at the structure of the NVQ Level 3 and character of the standards which Level 3 candidates are required to pursue. The qualification is organised into nine units, of which eight are designated 'core', whilst only the ninth is optional. The eight mandatory units are:

- Contribute to the Improvement of Performance
- Contribute to the Maintenance of a Healthy, Safe and Effective Working Environment
- Contribute to the Planning, Organising and Monitoring of Work
- Create, Develop and Maintain Effective Working Relationships
- Research, Prepare and Supply Information

- Enter and Integrate Data and Present Information Using a Computer System
- Draft and Prepare Documents
- Develop, Implement and Maintain Procedures

These headings closely resemble those covered by Key Skills Units in *Communication, Information Technology, Working With Others* and *Improving Own Learning and Performance*. The Business Administration AMA Framework requires these Key Skills (as well as Application of Number), together with the NVQ Level 3 as mandatory minimum outcomes. This specification reinforces the view that an apprenticeship in Business Administration is designed to develop generic, non-context or job-dependent competences which are applicable across sectors and companies. The extent to which employers have been actively involved in developing these standards is questionable.

An apprenticeship that has no fixed occupational point finds itself at odds with conventional understandings about the purpose and nature of apprenticeship. These stress the development of specific skills sets, commitment to and ownership of occupational knowledge and skills, and a strong association between the level of skills and knowledge attained and defined categories of jobs (e.g. in engineering, at craft, technician, and professional levels). Similarly, a traditional secretary was perceived as having a clear occupational identity related to a clear occupational role, and as having learned specific skills such as typing and shorthand which were useful to, and so were demanded by, employers. In contrast, the generic and somewhat ephemeral Business Administration standards do not specify such concrete skills. Instead, they offer a general and normative guide to the broad areas in which someone following the standards should become competent.

The detachment of apprenticeship from its roots in specific occupations and communities of practice has implications for pedagogy. Lave and Wenger (1991) developed their social theory of learning from empirical research into how traditional crafts, skills and occupational identities, such as midwifery and tailoring, are acquired by apprentices through on-going interaction with more experienced members of the community. We have argued elsewhere (Fuller & Unwin 1998, 2001) that Lave and Wenger's theory can be built on to apply to contemporary apprenticeships in sectors such as engineering where many of the traditional aspects of the relationship between community and apprenticeship still pertain. However, it is much less easy to see the theory's relevance to skill formation in a sector such as Business Administration which, in the UK, is not based around the acquisition of specific occupational knowledge and skills, and which does not have a developed community of practice or shared sense of occupational identity and status. Such observations raise questions about what sort of pedagogical approach is relevant to apprenticeship in this sector and, furthermore, whether apprenticeship itself is an appropriate or necessary method of skill formation. Given that the emphasis of the Business Administration standards is on general educational ability or 'key skills', we could argue that the relevant knowledge and 'skill' may be best developed in conventional ways, that is through participation in general and academic courses in educational institutions. Thus a 'good' level of educational achievement could be built on in the

workplace through on-the-job experience of administration. This is in contrast with the situation in Germany where apprenticeship in this and all other areas is strongly embedded in the notion of '*beruf*' (occupation or profession) and the idea that apprentices, through their vocational education and workplace training, are developing occupational identity, skills and customs which they will take into related post-apprenticeship jobs.

The AMA statistics on early leaving, attainment, length of stay, and age for the Business Administration sector further underline the challenge of implementing the programme in this sector. With regard to leaving, 76% of all recruits in Business Administration have left the programme, yet only 35% of these apprentices had achieved a full NVQ Level 3. The average planned length of stay on a Business Administration apprenticeship was 115 weeks. However, the average actual length of stay was only 52 weeks, that is only 46% of the planned stay. The data shows that a high proportion (43%) of recruits in the sector were aged over 18.

A number of inferences can be made from the above data which, taken together, lead us to question whether, in the context of the UK, apprenticeship is an appropriate form of skill formation for Business Administration, despite its apparent popularity. First, the sector has a very high turnover (ratio of leavers to recruits), which suggests that individual and employer commitment to the apprenticeship programme is weak. Second, attainment as measured by the proportion gaining an NVQ Level 3 (the minimum mandatory requirement) is relatively low, at around one-third. This figure reinforces the point about commitment as well as raising the question of how much demand there is from employers (and apprentices) for a full Level 3 qualification. Third, data on the average planned and actual length of stay show that expected and actual participation in apprenticeship is short, suggesting that an apprenticeship in Business Administration offers a less substantial programme of learning than, for example, its counterpart in Engineering Manufacture where apprentices stay, on average, for two years. Finally, Business Administration has attracted a high proportion of older entrants. We would hypothesise that employers are recruiting those aged over 18 to jobs with government support, who are already likely to have good levels of educational attainment. If recruits arrive with A levels or relevant vocational qualifications, and can learn on-the-job, the added value to them or their employers of gaining an NVQ Level 3 in Business Administration is unclear. In such a scenario, employers, and young people (particularly those who were already employed before being offered the opportunity to participate in the Modern Apprenticeship) are likely to be unsure of the purpose that the programme is serving and this may further help explain the high leaver and poor attainment rates.

The somewhat speculative nature of this analysis arises out of the 'black box' characteristics of the Modern Apprenticeship in practice. Very little is really known about how apprenticeship is being used and experienced in different sectors and, particularly, by individual employers. An important implication of this knowledge vacuum is that policymakers, researchers and practitioners remain almost as far from understanding how to conceptualise and construct apprenticeship to fit contempor-

ary economic, occupational and social conditions as they did before the introduction of the Modern Apprenticeship seven years ago.

Conclusion

In our view, the reality behind the figures we have presented in this article reflects the pressure previously felt by the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and, probably, now the LSCs, to meet government imposed quantitative recruitment targets. The government's aim seems to have been to attract young people in to the programme irrespective of employers' demand for intermediate skills. One important target group has been those young people, not proceeding into further and higher education, whom the government perceives to be vulnerable to social and economic exclusion. In this respect, Modern Apprenticeship can be seen as a continuation of the same policy of social inclusion which has governed youth training schemes since the early 1980s. The strategy of the previous Conservative and the current Labour governments has been to concentrate on volume, in terms of apprentice numbers and participating sectors, rather than on skill formation in those sectors which might be said to be important for UK economic growth. The emphasis on quantity has recently been reinforced by the government's announcement (following the Cassels' Committee recommendation) that more than a quarter of 16 to 21-year-olds should start a Modern Apprenticeship (DfES, 2001c).

Currently six of the top ten recruiting sectors for the AMA represent service industries. We would argue that there needs to be a debate about whether significant amounts of public money should be spent supporting employers in these sectors, where the potential for 'dead weight' seems highest, rather than being invested in those sectors which have demonstrated a definite and distributed need for skills at or beyond Level 3. The high proportion of people entering the programme aged over 18, many of whom are already employed, reinforces the need to be clear about why the government is allowing public funds to be deployed in support of this group. In particular, more needs to be known about participating employers in each sector and the pre- and post-apprenticeship educational background and employment status of apprentices. If the aim is to use the Modern Apprenticeship to subsidise and promote workforce development, an issue which is marching up the UK's public policy agenda (see PIU, 2001), then this should be a transparent element of policy.

The Modern Apprenticeship differs from its ancestor in one crucial way: apprenticeships in the past were demand rather than supply-led. Employers decided when and if they needed apprentices. The reality that the livelihood of the intermediary organisations, such as LSCs and training providers, partly depends on take-up of places on government-supported schemes means that the resulting patterns of participation probably reflect a distorted picture of actual demand. The attainment and leaver figures suggest that many employers do not feel any particular 'ownership' of the programme. They also suggest that, in many sectors in the UK, and particularly in those without a tradition of offering apprenticeships, there is not a strong demand for Level 3 skills. The example of Business Administration is illustrative of these points. In some similarity, the service industries such as Retailing

and Hospitality appear to have embraced the Modern Apprenticeship by recruiting many young people. However, the service sectors have so far shown the worst record for achievement, with only around one in ten of leavers (compared with around 40% in engineering) completing a Level 3 qualification.

We would argue that these findings highlight the problem of implementing apprenticeship in contexts where the relationship between occupation and apprenticeship is weak. The analysis presented in this article and research into Modern Apprenticeship more generally indicates that the sectors and organisations which are best placed to provide a context for apprenticeship-style skill formation are those that: (a) have a genuine and distributed requirement for intermediate (Level 3) skills; (b) have inherited a tradition of apprenticeship; and (c) have an accompanying institutional infrastructure (Gospel & Fuller, 1998) and developed community of practice (including in-house trainers and college lecturers). In our view, developing an effective contemporary model of apprenticeship will involve the rebuilding of the relationship between community and apprenticeship within the framework of current economic, occupational and social conditions. Given the constraints evident in some sectors currently offering Modern Apprenticeship, such a rebuilding process may not always be a viable option.

A major problem for apprenticeship in the UK remains the low-skills equilibrium which still stalks the corridors of too many workplaces. Keep and Mayhew (1998, p. 11) argue that, 'Far from seeking an autonomous work-force of polyvalent knowledge workers to whom high levels of discretion have been delegated in order to produce high-spec, customised goods and services, many organisations continue to need workers to perform narrowly specified, closely supervised, repetitive tasks, in an environment where the work has been organised and the job designed in order to allow minimal discretion'. Lauder (2001, p. 191) draws attention to the polarised nature of the UK's 'flexible' labour market with well-educated graduates, 'destined for the internal or core labour market' at one end, and 'a large tail of poorly qualified workers' at the other end. The pattern of skill distribution in much of the UK's economy highlighted by Brown *et al.* (2001) appears to be reflected in employers' limited demand for the sorts of intermediate (Level 3) skills that the Advanced Modern Apprenticeship was supposed to address. In some service sectors in particular, most jobs tend to be clustered around Level 2, with these workers being managed by staff qualified to Level 4 and beyond. Policymakers need, therefore, to consider how to intervene to ensure that all young people have access to as many learning opportunities as possible. On the best Modern Apprenticeship programmes, this will mean access to a range of traditional, knowledge-based qualifications studied off-the-job, as well as access to competence-based NVQs assessed in the workplace. It will also mean being employed by a company with trained trainers and workplace personnel accustomed to passing on their expertise, and with managers keen to encourage young people to make the most of their potential. Many apprentices, and other young workers, do not, however, have immediate access to such opportunities.

In 1994, the then Conservative government chose to re-badge the top end of YT by invoking the positive aura which surrounds the concept of apprenticeship. The

label is now being applied to government-supported youth training as a whole. Any employer, regardless of size or experience of training, can be involved in the FMA and/or the AMA so long as their sector is covered by a Modern Apprenticeship framework. Despite the fact that the majority of apprentices are leaving the programme without completing the prescribed qualification, the current government wants the programme to expand. If it continues to ignore the poor performance of the most populated sectors and continues paying little attention to the reasons why employers are involved at all, the government may find that the term 'apprenticeship' becomes devalued in the minds of young people, their parents, the media, and, even employers. More thought needs to be given to how a range of programmes of vocational education and training can be constructed to suit the needs of contemporary workplaces and sectors, whilst, at the same time, acknowledging that young people enter the workplace with a greater range of skills and knowledge than ever before. For some young people, a work-based route can provide opportunities for them to demonstrate potential which did not emerge at school, whilst for others, the chance to combine work and study is preferable to full-time education. Providing for these disparate needs requires a much more sophisticated approach than the current 'one size fits all' design of the Modern Apprenticeship. Raising Level 3 attainment and encouraging as many young people as possible to continue learning beyond school are both laudable aims, but they cannot be achieved by one undifferentiated training scheme.

Notes

[1] For details of the Modern Apprenticeship in Scotland see www.Scotland.gov.uk, for Wales, see www.elwa.org.uk, and for Northern Ireland, see www.ni-assembly.gov.uk.
[2] The same pattern applies in other parts of the UK though the agencies differ.
[3] Modern Apprenticeship data are available from the DfES Modern Apprenticeship Database administered at the DfES offices in Sheffield.

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