Young Women’s Trust response

Consultation on Apprenticeship Targets for Public Sector Bodies

About Young Women’s Trust

Young Women's Trust supports and represents women aged 16-30 struggling to live on low or no pay in England and Wales and who are at risk of being trapped in poverty. The charity offers free coaching and personalised advice on job applications, conducts research, runs campaigns and works with young women to advocate for fair financial futures.

One million young women aged 16-30 face a lifetime of growing financial, social and emotional disadvantage because they are struggling to live on low or no pay, and are locked out of opportunities that could transform their lives. This is a longstanding problem, which continues to have far reaching consequences not only for the young women themselves but for wider society.

That’s why at Young Women's Trust we want all those with the opportunity to bring about change, including central and local government, employers, training providers and regulatory bodies, to prioritise and report back on action which could transform the lives of young women now and for future generations.

Young Women and Apprenticeships

Young Women’s Trust is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this consultation. In this response we outline the importance of ensuring Public Sector Bodies are effectively monitoring the gender diversity of their apprenticeship programmes, including not only apprenticeship starts but also destinations and pay data.

Apprenticeships can be an important route from education into long term employment by offering the opportunity to develop the skills needed by employers. However, research due to be published by Young Women’s Trust in March shows that young women are not benefitting from apprenticeships to the same extent as young men.

Polling and focus groups show that young women are presented with a limited choice of apprenticeships. They get paid less than male apprentices, are less likely to receive training and are more likely to be out of a job at the end of their apprenticeship.

Young Women’s believes that the potential for apprenticeships to contribute to the economy is dependent on the skills they develop in young people and the opportunity they provide as a route into employment. Young women are almost three times as likely as young men to report that they are out of work after completing their apprenticeship and are twice as likely to report that they receive no training as part of their apprenticeship.
We are concerned that as the number of people starting an apprenticeship increases these trends will become further entrenched unless action is taken now to monitor how this growth is implemented. The public sector targets are a welcome intervention however we believe they must also include a requirement to report on both gender and on progression if they are to be meaningful.

**Organisations in scope (Qs 1-5)**

Young Women’s Trust welcomes the discussion of a target for public sector bodies. The ambition to create 3 million apprenticeships by 2020 is an ambitious one that seeks to build on the 2.4 million apprenticeships created in the last parliament. Public sector bodies have a huge influence both through their procurement power and their status as employers in their own right. It is therefore a positive step that public sector bodies will be required to set targets based on recruitment.

Young Women’s Trust supports keeping the scope as broad as possible in order to ensure that public sector bodies are able to contribute most effectively to the apprenticeship target. For smaller public sector bodies Young Women’s Trust believes that voluntary targets and reporting should be encouraged to support those organisations to continue to recruit apprenticeships effectively.

**The target**

Young Women’s Trust is concerned that there is no intention to include gender targets for any public sector organisations as part of the overall target to create almost half a million apprenticeships in the public sector over the next 5 years. The consultation document discusses the need for an overall target as a way of encouraging recruitment of “talent from diverse backgrounds”. Young Women’s Trust believes that the target should therefore include a mechanism to monitor and increase diversity across a number of different factors including gender, ethnicity, disability and social class. The lack of a target on these aspects is likely to limit the incentive to act and we therefore recommend that the Government use the imposition of targets to compel public sector bodies to increase diversity.

The need to increase diversity is particularly evident in the significant number of public sector bodies in which the workforce has an under-represented. For example just 10% of armed forces personnel is female\(^{ii}\), a number that is even lower in technical occupations and which has changed little in the last five years.\(^{iii}\)

As well as limiting women’s career horizons, this imbalance prevents businesses recruiting from the widest pool of talent. The UK desperately needs more engineers - one in five young people need to enter engineering to fill the gap - a fact felt just as much by the public sector as it is in the private sector. This need will not be met solely by relying on the recruitment of young men.

Young Women’s Trust believes that public sector bodies, particularly those operating in male dominated sectors, will struggle to meet their overall apprenticeship targets unless there is also a gender focussed target. In order for this to be meaningful there should be targets for both technical and non-technical roles to ensure that women are able to access a variety of roles within these organisations.
Reporting requirements

The consultation proposes a number of points that should be included in public sector bodies’ reporting to the Secretary of State. Young Women’s trust welcomes this reporting requirement. The action plan for meeting the target is particularly important in terms of gender focussed targets as it will allow best practice to be identified and shared with other bodies.

In addition to diversity, Young Women’s Trust is concerned that as numbers increase the quality of apprenticeships will be put at risk. Young women get paid less than male apprentices, are twice as likely to say they receive no training and almost three times as likely to say they are out of a job on completing their apprenticeship. The increase in apprenticeship numbers has potential to put further pressure on quality at a time when young women are already likely to be missing out on the best apprenticeships.

If public sector bodies are to play a part in ensuring quality is maintained it will be essential to monitor indicators of quality which may include: the training received by apprentices, apprenticeship pay and destinations data to monitor long term employment progression. Identifying gender differences will be crucial to ensure that the benefits of creating new apprenticeships are available to all.

We therefore advocate that, in the absence of targets, public sector bodies include in their reporting to the Secretary of State:

- A diversity action plan
- Information on apprenticeship pay broken down by gender, age, ethnicity, disability, apprenticeship level and role
- Male to female ratios in both technical and non-technical roles
- Destinations data to monitor progression of apprenticeship into permanent employment
- Details of training offered to apprenticeships to ensure quality is maintained

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1 Young Women’s Trust Poll with ComRes (2015)