

Executive summary

- 1 This interim report presents the findings from the first phase of research for a longitudinal evaluation of the Apprenticeship vacancies system, carried out between April-July 2009. The report draws together findings from primary research with stakeholders and secondary research, and aims to:
 - set the context for how the Apprenticeship vacancies system has been used so far
 - indicate the benefits for early users of the Apprenticeship vacancies system
 - highlight possible improvements and good practice to increase the value of the system to key stakeholders.
- 2 The report also suggests indicative findings on how the Apprenticeship vacancies system may affect overall Apprenticeship engagement, and will be used as a baseline to build fuller findings for the final report, due in March 2010.

Context

- 3 The National Apprenticeship Service, launched in April 2009, delivers an end to end service for Apprenticeships and is responsible for achieving a significant increase in engagement with Apprenticeships over the next decade. A key tool in delivering this service and increasing engagement is a new Apprenticeship vacancies system, which for the first time provides one central web-based location for bringing together learners looking for Apprenticeship places with employers offering them.
- 4 The Apprenticeship vacancies system was launched fully to all users in January 2009, and so the evaluation will cover the first 12 months of the life of the system, with the first phase covering the results from early users of the system.

Key findings

- 5 The following points summarise the key findings of the research across the various user groups:
 - Learners find the site easy to use and useful for finding out and applying for Apprenticeships, and that it serves as a useful introduction to those with limited previous knowledge of this area. However this depends on learners finding desirable and suitable vacancies on the system.
 - Employers that are aware of the Apprenticeship vacancies system are happy with the service offered, particularly as an additional advertising route. They see the system as part of their overall approach to engaging apprentices, but

not the sole route. However overall the Apprenticeship vacancies system has not been widely publicised or brought to the attention of employers.

- Learning Providers on the whole value the Apprenticeship vacancies system as an additional means to recruit apprentices, and have had training and are using the system. Providers are assessing how to integrate it into their own systems and processes and have had mixed success doing so. Initial usability issues have made the experience less positive for some.
- Of the other stakeholders, Connexions are most aware of the Apprenticeship vacancies system and find it a useful source of information to advise learners of Apprenticeship opportunities in their locality. Other stakeholders, including Jobcentre Plus, nextstep, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and schools are much less aware of the Apprenticeship vacancies system.

Conclusions

- 6 Users of the Apprenticeship vacancies system generally agree that the main service benefit of the system is the facility to provide a one-stop-shop for information on Apprenticeship vacancies and facilities to advertise and apply for them. The main issue at present is the lack of Apprenticeship vacancies to meet demand from learners. This creates the risk of disengaging stakeholders, despite the encouraging response to how useful users find the Apprenticeship vacancies system.
- 7 Whilst both learners and employers can see the benefits of a centralised Apprenticeship system, it is not possible at this stage to ascertain whether the introduction of the Apprenticeship vacancies system has increased the amount of Apprenticeship engagement overall. This is due to the existence of other access routes and lack of Management Information from which to benchmark an increase in total numbers applying or being recruited. However this will be understood through the final phase of the project, due to be completed by March 2010.

Recommendations

- 8 The following recommendations are made in the context of the planned improvements to the usability of the Apprenticeship vacancies system and are based on key findings identified through this research. The National Apprenticeship Service should:
 - **Raise employer demand for Apprenticeships and engage employers and providers with the Apprenticeship vacancies system to satisfy the demand for Apprenticeships from learners.** Achieving this may require: a review of the NAS ways of working with Providers and of their contractual obligations, and a commitment to ensure that all NES employers use the system to advertise all Apprenticeship vacancies.

- **Produce targeted marketing to promote Apprenticeships and specifically the Apprenticeship vacancies system aimed firstly at employers, but also at schools, teachers and careers advisory staff.**
- **Secure commitment of SSCs and other employer representative bodies to promote the Apprenticeship vacancies system to their networks.** This could be achieved by providing a high level briefing for SSC partners and other employer representative bodies such as the CBI to promote Apprenticeships and highlight the overall strategy for the system.
- **Provide updates to providers and stakeholders on Apprenticeship vacancies system take up and usage and share Key Performance Indicators.** To provide context that will enable Providers to develop their employer engagement strategies to help increase employers' demand for Apprenticeships.
- **Establish forums for Providers and stakeholders such as Connexions, to review good practice in integrating Apprenticeship vacancies system with existing systems.** Cascade this good practice by producing a good practice guide for providers and other stakeholders.
- **Ensure clear communication between NAS and providers, identifying ways in which providers can provide feedback and input into the ongoing development of the system.** To ensure ongoing provider buy-in to the system.
- **Increase level of NAS engagement with schools, nextstep advisors and youth advisors to both inform them of the Apprenticeship vacancies system and suggest how they can best work to support learners.** Agree ways of working with schools, nextstep advisors and youth advisors.
- **Review and update the content on the Apprenticeship vacancies system.** Consultation suggests that learners require more detailed content on Apprenticeship Frameworks, employers' types and job roles by industry or sector. It would be advisable to involve SSCs in the creation of sector specific information. Providers would also welcome a review of the need for full employer details to be publicised when Apprenticeship vacancies are advertised on the system.
- **Enhance the learner experience of the Apprenticeship vacancies system by making it more personalised and interactive.** Create a discussion forum for learners on the system to share information and answer queries. Explore the potential to expand the Apprenticeship vacancies system text message function.