

Jennifer Coupland
CEO, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

By email only to: Jennifer.coupland@education.gov.uk

16th February 2021

Dear Jennifer,

Request for a route review of legal sector apprenticeships

Legal apprenticeships have been one of the biggest successes of the apprenticeship standards era. Many talented, ambitious apprentices from diverse backgrounds and of all ages have now completed legal apprenticeships and increasing numbers have now used the apprenticeships as a route to qualification as a Chartered Legal Executive or Licensed Conveyancer. Many more are now well on their way to qualification as solicitors. In all cases, this has been achieved without apprentices incurring student debt and is thanks to co-investment by the government, employers within the legal sector and education and training providers.

I write with the support of the employers listed in the appendix to this letter. Together, we want to build on the success of legal apprenticeships so that the sector, which is worth over £30 billion a year to the UK economy and is a significant net exporter, continues to benefit, and benefit from, the deep and diverse pool of talent that exists outside traditional academic pathways.

The rapid evolution in the legal sector is only likely to accelerate post-Brexit, post-pandemic and with technology playing an ever more important part in how legal services are delivered. However, with the exception of the solicitor apprenticeship, legal apprenticeships urgently need review if they are to meet our future needs. Specifically:

- An increasing number of roles now exist for advanced or senior paralegals but there is no apprenticeship that meets their development needs.
- The skills and behaviours required has evolved beyond those covered by the current legal apprenticeship standards. The increasing popularity of concepts such as the “O Shaped Lawyer” bears this out.
- The most commonly used professional pathway used within legal apprenticeships has been redesigned by the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives so that its three stages (foundation, advanced and professional) no longer align with the available apprenticeships.
- Progression between different levels is challenging for some apprentices and employers: in particular, the jump from level 3 to level 6 or 7.
- The breadth of roles at technician level (levels 4 and 5) is growing beyond the purely “legal” into areas such as legal technology, legal operations and legal project management. Yet there are no apprenticeships for such roles or which provide progression routes into them.

- T Levels in Law are being developed but their effectiveness as a route into employment is jeopardised by the absence of a technician-level apprenticeship progression route.
- Structural issues and inconsistencies across funding caps are creating distortions in the market and are reducing take up of some apprenticeships.

We agree with the recent Skills for Jobs white paper that there are “significant skills gaps at higher technical levels”. We also agree that employers need greater freedom and flexibility to design, with providers, programmes that meet their needs. In particular, the flexibility to choose which (if any) professional qualifications are included in apprenticeships, as is the case already with the solicitor apprenticeship.

The fact that the apprenticeship standards for such a dynamic sector need review is no surprise. Nor is the need for review a criticism of the excellent and collaborative work that went into their original development. Indeed, it is precisely because we have witnessed the benefits of legal apprenticeships that we, as employers, are committed to improving the offer.

So that the legal apprenticeship pathway can be developed in a joined-up manner that meets our current and anticipated future needs, we are asking that the IFATE now institutes a review of all legal apprenticeships with the exception of the solicitor standard, and that the legal trailblazer group be closely engaged in the process so that the voices of employers across the sector are heard.

We have copied this letter to the principal professional bodies, to the Education and Skills Funding Agency and to the chair of the trailblazer group. We look forward to working with you and with them to ensure that legal apprenticeships continue to create opportunities for individuals and contribute to the success of one of the UK’s most dynamic and important sectors.

Yours sincerely,



Jonathan Bourne
Managing Director, Damar Training

Cc:

Gun Judge, Chair, Legal Trailblazer Group
Peter Mucklow, Director, Apprenticeships, Education and Skills Funding Agency
Professor Chris Bones, Chair, Chartered Institute of Legal Executives
Sheila Kumar, Chief Executive, Council for Licensed Conveyancers
Victoria Roper, Interim Chair, Education and Training Committee, Law Society
Julie Brannan, Director of Education and Training, Solicitors Regulation Authority



Employers that have expressed their support for this letter:

CMS Cameron McKenna Nabarro Olswang LLP

Clarion Solicitors Limited

Fletchers Solicitors Ltd

Forbes Solicitors

Government Legal Department

Horwich Cohen Coghlan Limited

JB Leitch Limited

Keoghs LLP

Pinsent Masons LLP

Plexus Law

Simpson Millar LLP