A NEW DIRECTION FOR VOCATIONAL LEARNING OR A GREAT TRAINING ROBBERY? INITIAL RESEARCH INTO AND ANALYSIS OF THE REINVENTION OF APPRENTICESHIPS AT THE START OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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Introduction

This contribution is based on some initial research into and analysis of the reintroduction of apprenticeships in the UK. The term 'reintroduction' is an appropriate description because the traditional 'time served' apprenticeship that proved an important avenue in the transition from school to work for young people (if mostly young males) had virtually disappeared by the end of the 1980s. It was replaced first by youth training and then by increased participation in higher education. The new emphasis placed on apprenticeships by the Coalition (achieving 1.5 million starts since coming to office) is a response to the increasing difficulties young people face in entering the labour market, but also the need to provide alternatives to a higher education system fuelled by mountains of unpaid student debt and a generation of graduates who are 'overqualified and underemployed' (Allen and Ainley 2012). It is also a response to a long-standing perceived UK skills crisis at 'intermediate' and 'technical' level (Steadman, Gospel and Ryan 1998), with the CBI arguing that the UK cannot rely on traditional degree courses to meet all the needs of key industries such as manufacturing, construction, IT and engineering.[1]

This contribution argues that, rather than contributing to increased economic prosperity, most of this latest crop of apprenticeships have been low skilled and 'dead end', aimed at regrading existing workers as much as recruiting and upskilling young people. Forty years after Ivar Berg's *Education and Jobs, The Great Training Robbery* noted, 'America fools many of its young by linking job opportunities to diplomas and degrees from schools that provide sometimes pitifully inadequate – indeed appalling – experiences' (1973, 29), the main benefactors of this latest *Great Training Robbery* have been private training agencies.

The second part of the study assesses the future of apprenticeships. It contrasts the system of apprenticeships in the UK with the German 'dual system' – frequently cited as a model the UK could emulate – examining differences in state formation and culture. But it also questions the arguments and assumptions about employment and skills on which the latest expansion of apprenticeships have been based. In conclusion, an alternative approach related to higher vocational pedagogy is suggested.

[1] http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/07/31/university-route-not-enough-more-apprenticeships_n_3680977.html?view=print

The reinvention of apprenticeship

Apprenticeships have a long history in England (Aldrich 1999) with origins in the middle ages when they were integral to the 'guild' system where boys (usually) could be apprenticed to a guild member from twelve or younger for between five and nine years (usually seven).

> 'When historians consider "apprenticeship", they often generalize in terms of three extended periods. These may broadly be characterized as that of "guild apprenticeship", let us say from about the 12th century to 1563, with the state underpinning much practice; the period of statutory apprenticeship, from 1563 to 1814 (with guilds slowly attenuating); and finally a great diversity of forms which might be summarised as "voluntary" apprenticeship, often agreements between employers and unions, from 1814 to the present day.' (Snell 1996, 303)

Sheldrake and Vickerstaff's 1987 *History of Industrial Training in Britain* gives a picture of very variable practice in the latter period but, as Ainley and Rainbird write, 'After a period of decline in the 1970s and its denigration in the 1980s as "mere time serving"' (1999, 1), the idea of apprenticeship as largely 'sitting by Nelly' to gain an entry ticket to practice a particular job or trade dominated much of policy discourse, associated with demarcation disputes and other 'restrictive practices'. This despite the attempted revitalisation of training under the 1964 Industrial Training Act, passed by the Conservatives but under Labour government playing a part in national planning processes. This followed in turn the secondary technical schooling intended by the 1944 Education Act but due to underinvestment never including more than 4% of the total school population. Apprenticeship training thus focussed on school leavers with alternating attendance at FE colleges so that, by 1950, 33% of boy and 8% of girl school leavers entered apprenticeships (Finn 1987, 55) and by the mid-1960s, when apprenticeships were at their peak, up to a quarter of a million apprenticeships were on offer each year for 25% of school leavers, although by then only 6% of women were apprenticed (mainly as hairdressers) (Mizen 2004, 51).

As economic prosperity faltered, industrial apprenticeships collapsed along with the rest of traditional heavy industry to be replaced by 'youth training'. Youth training was not only state organised, but also centralised through the Manpower Services Commission (MSC). (See Ainley and Corney 1990 for what is still the only history of this pioneering quango). The MSC promoted 'generic' competencies rather than narrow craft skills, so as to reflect what were claimed to be new employment requirements in more 'flexible' labour markets, where workers moved across occupational divides during their working lives. But MSC's critics considered that as well as being *Training Without Jobs*, this imposed new types of labour discipline in response to rising youth unemployment (Finn 1987). Officially youth training was 'counter-cyclical' so that trainees would 'hit the ground running when the economy began to recover. However, recovery was never complete and, as Ken Roberts reminds us (2010), there have consistently been around two million 'structurally unemployed' even when the official rate fell below this level in the 'Lawson boom' of the 1980s. These were not it is important to note the same two million continuously unemployed; there was a process of 'churning' at the bottom of the labour market into and out of short-term and insecure employment alternating with periods of unemployment (MacDonald 2013). By the time this new pattern (Ainley 2013) had established itself however, young workers had 'voted with their feet', remaining beyond the statutory leaving age of 16 (since 1972) in full-time education in 'new school sixth forms' or going to FE – even though the influence of the MSC reached into colleges and schools via new full-time 'vocational' and 'pre-vocational education' courses that many of them were enrolled for there (Ainley 1990).

The reinvention of apprenticeships in 1994 as 'Modern Apprenticeships' – a level 3 equivalent to A-level (level 2 being established in 2003) – also involved increased state intervention. By 2000, the Learning and Skills Council, now the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) overseen by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (DBIS), had taken on responsibility for apprenticeship funding. In April 2009, the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) was launched with responsibility for both setting and monitoring standards. Government also provided significant funding. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) which sign up for the scheme are eligible for the Apprenticeship Grant for Employers (AGE), receiving up to £1,500 for ten apprentices. In addition, the SFA pays all training costs for 16-18 year olds and 50% for 19-24 year olds.

To qualify for an apprenticeship an individual should be in employment for 30 hours per week. There are almost 200 specific frameworks related to particular jobs covering ten areas of the economy. Apprenticeships are offered at Intermediate Level where trainees work towards a level 2 National Vocational Qualification (GCSE equivalent) and at Advanced level through level 3 NVQ (considered equivalent to A-level). More recently, Higher Level Apprenticeships have been established and linked to Foundation degrees at level 4 and to full degrees, at level 5 or above.

From October 2012, apprentice frameworks have had to include Functional Skills (previously key skills previously core skills but not to be confused with basic skills!) certification in numeracy, literacy and ICT, if it is considered relevant to the jobs the framework applies to – though apprentices who have achieved a C grade at GCSE are exempt from Functional Skills tests. There should also be coverage of the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTs) recently established in schools and colleges.

Apprenticeships are designed to be delivered in the workplace, DBIS having clamped down on 'programme apprenticeships' where young people are based at a training organisation and complete work placements. Apprentices have to be paid at least the relevant statutory minimum wage. Smaller employers less able to provide the necessary training 'in-house' rely on the growing number of private training providers, who have successfully side-lined FE colleges, being able to visit workplaces more easily. After some serious concerns about quality and standards, training providers are now subject to regular monitoring and inspection through Ofsted. Because training organisations claim back the cost of training apprentices from central government, they play an active role in the recruitment of employers. According to the Richard Review (2012)[2], produced by *Dragons' Den* entrepreneur Doug Richard, commissioned to conduct a review of apprenticeships by the Coalition as a result of concerns about quality, 27% of employers said that the main reason for taking on an apprentice was because of an approach from a training organisation, compared to only 12% who identified a skills need. In fact, the latest UKCES skills survey report shows only 15% of employers reporting skill deficiencies with two-thirds of these the result of employees taking on new or changing roles[3]. Private training organisations have been major financial benefactors in a climate where, as with education in general, governments have chased their own targets.

Smaller employers can also work with Apprenticeship Training Agencies (ATAs). ATAs essentially play a brokering or 'middleman' role and work as recruitment/employment

[2] http://www.schoolforstartups.co.uk/richard-review/richard-review-full.pdf (background evidence p 11)
[3] http://www.ukces.org.uk/ourwork/employer-skills-survey (2013)

agencies. For example, the ATA employs the apprentices and hires them out to host employers. The host employer covers the agreed wage and also pays a management fee. An advantage for the host employer is that if they are unable to retain the apprentice on full-time duties, the ATA as the employer is required to find alternative and appropriate employment for the apprentice so they can continue their apprenticeship.

How many apprenticeships? What sort and for whom?

Approaching 300,000 employees began apprenticeships during 2009/10, up from 160,000 in 2002/3. In 2010/11, there were 442,700 starts, a 58% increase. The Coalition's first budget announced a target of 50,000 more apprenticeships and 250,000 more by 2015. By the summer of 2013 DBIS was claiming 1.5 million starts since 2010 (press release 17/10/13). Figures from the Skills Funding Agency, also showed apprentice participation at 869,000 for 2012/2013 (SFA Statistical Release 21 28/11/2012). There are nowhere near enough apprenticeships compared to the level of demand however. As a result, the role of apprenticeships in reducing youth unemployment has been limited. For example, almost 461,500 applicants submitted online applications through the National Apprenticeship Service between August and October 2013, representing an increase of 46%; but vacancies, despite increasing by 24% only totalled 37,410,[4] approximately 12 applicants per post.

The greatest numbers of both applications and vacancies were in Business, Administration and Law with 165,410 applications made during the period for some 15,550 Apprenticeships, though the sector with the highest ratio of applications to vacancies was Education and Training, which attracted an average of 27 applications per vacancy, followed by Arts, Media and Publishing (26) and Information and Communication Technology (20). The lowest ratio, 10 applications per vacancy, was to be found in Retail and Commercial Enterprise and Science and Mathematics. Engineering apprenticeships with British Gas are in such high demand that suitable applicants have only about a 1 in 15 chance of being accepted In comparison, applicants for engineering at Oxford have a 1in 3 chance of success.[5]

A second issue relates to the level at which apprenticeships are being offered. As Table 1 and Table 2 indicate, over 50% of participation continues to be at Intermediate Level. Meanwhile those at Higher Level (Level 4 and above and considered as alternatives to university) still make up under 2%. The level of participation in Intermediate schemes has to be considered against the overall recorded skill level of the population. According to SFA data (SFR20 17/10/13), 80.6% are already qualified to this level (up from 71.8% in 2006) with 61.6% qualified to at least Level 3 (up from 53.2%) but only 39.5% to Level 4 (up from 33.0%).

More significant however – as can be seen in the tables below, young people still do not comprise a clear majority of those on apprenticeship schemes. In fact, under-19 participation has largely flat-lined since 2008/9 with a fall of almost 15,000 Intermediate Level starts by those under 19 compared with 2011/12.

[4] http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/news-media/latest-news/article398.aspx

[5] (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7071089.stm)

Table 1. Participation in funded apprenticeships (England)

	2008/9	2012/3
Intermediate level	**273, 600**	**501, 700**
Advanced level	170, 900	377, 000
Higher level	200	13, 000

Table 2. Apprenticeships starts (England) 2012/13

Intermediate level	**292 800**
Advanced level	207, 700
Higher level	9,800

Source *Skills Funding Agency Statistical First Release DS/SFR21*

Though there has been an increase in participation at Advanced level – up from 44,000 19 year-olds and 90,000 under-25 year olds in 2008/9, there are still over three times as many over-25 year olds participating as there are under-19 year olds. There is therefore little to suggest that Advanced level apprenticeship is being used as an alternative to A-levels which continue to enrol around 300,000 young people each year. Indeed, SFA data (DS/SFR21 28/11/13) shows a fall from 34,100 to 33,100 in Advanced level starts by under-19 year olds for 2012/13 compared with the previous year.

Given the small uptake, neither is the Higher Level apprenticeship – at least as yet – providing an alternative to university entrance. SFA data record only 300 starts in 2011/12 by those under-19 (up to 600 for 2012/3) and only 2,400 by those 19-24. In comparison, around 400,000 young people in the UK received offers of a university place annually. UCAS application figures for 2014 entry also saw a further 1.4% rise in applications from school/college leavers, with 35 % of the cohort now applying (44% in London). Claims that young people are deserting university for apprenticeships are therefore groundless, as are assertions by Labour MP Frank Field that ONS data shows apprentices earning an average of £11.10 per hour on completion, a figure higher than a quarter of graduates (*The Telegraph* 17/01/14). The DBIS's own survey put average apprenticeship wages at just over £6 per hour with just seven in ten apprentices (71%) receiving the minimum amount they should get based on their year and/or age (DBIS 2013b).

Table 3 Ages of those participating in apprenticeships 2012/13

	Intermediate	Advanced	Higher	Total
Under 19	132,600	54,800	800	188, 200
19-24	167,200	132,500	4,200	303, 900
25-49	167,700	166,000	6,900	340, 600
50+	34,200	23,700	1000	58, 900

Source: Skills Funding Agency Statistical First Release DS/SFR21

The fact that people aged 25-44 accounted for almost 1 in 3 of all starts in 2011/12, also suggests that it is those already in work who are benefitting from apprenticeships rather than new jobs being created. The Richard's evidence shows 70% of apprentices previously

worked for their employer – in other words, creating an apprenticeship essentially involved a changing a job title and claiming a subsidy rather than a new post created by recruitment from outside.[6] According to Cebre (2013), even if all the UK's 36,200 businesses with 50 or more employees provided an apprenticeship to a young person aged 18-24, commencing in 2013, this would only create up to 11,800 new jobs for young people from outside the business – lowering youth unemployment from 19.2% to 18.9%.

The supermarket chain Morrisons can be taken as a notorious example. An investigation for BBC's *Panorama* (02/04/12) found that nearly 4 in 10 of Morrison's entire workforce were classed as 'trainees' and claimed that 1 in 10 of all apprenticeships created in England during the previous year, had been the result of a regrading exercise by this single supermarket chain. Of nearly 18,000 new apprenticeships started in the academic year 2010/11 – mostly level 2 and in retail – only 2,200 were for those below 19 while in the same period Morrisons had started just 290 apprenticeships aged 16-18. *The Telegraph* (28/10/11) also reported that an Asda scheme, accounting for 25,000 roles, was only for staff already employed at the supermarket.

More girls than boys

According to the NAS statistics for August and October 2013, as many women apply for apprenticeships as men. The continued decline of manufacturing means that most apprenticeships are in services (Table 4 below) and also in sectors like Health, Public Services and Care that generate low-grade, badly paid, insecure jobs predominantly undertaken by women. This helps to explain why women already make up 50% of Intermediate Level apprentices.

In relation to young women specifically, the situation is slightly different with TUC research showing that under-19 more men than women start apprenticeships. For 19-24 year-olds, however, women have overtaken men. This rise has been driven by substantial increases in women taking up Advanced level apprenticeships – 210,500 female compared with 166,500 male in total are participating at this level. At Higher level also, women occupy almost two-thirds of the places.

Table 4 Apprenticeship starts by apprenticeship sector* 2011/12

Sector	Total	Change since 2009/10
Business, Amin and Law	164,830	115%
Health, Public Services and Care	109,410	148%
Retail and Commercial Enterprise	108,300	76%
Engineering and Manufacture	21,620	57%
Construction and Built Environment	24,000	-5%
Leisure, Travel and Tourism	19,770	35%
ICT	18,250	47%

*Agriculture, Arts and Media, Education all have less than 10 000

Source: House of Commons Library SN/EP/6113 Apprenticeship statistics

[6] (www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/r/12-915-richard-review-apprenticeships-background-evidence.pdf)

Progression routes
Greenwich University research (DBIS 2013a) shows 53% of Advanced level apprenticeships from a 2009/10 cohort had progressed via Intermediate level (61% for those under-19 and 60% for those under 25) based on a 2009/10 cohort, but with twice as many under-19 year-olds on Intermediate apprenticeships. However, this means that for the majority there is no further progression, though as the number of Advanced level schemes continue to grow, we would assume rates of progression would also.

The findings show low rates of progression from Advanced level to higher education. Rates fell to 8.1% from 10.4% in 2004/05, though they were higher for 17-19 year olds (12.4%). Those who did move on to HE were more likely to enrol on FE/foundation degree courses than first degrees at university. Progression from Advanced to Higher level apprenticeships was particularly low (2.5%) – but this is understandable considering the limited number of these. 29% on higher programmes had been apprentices at Advanced level however.

Another Great Training Robbery?
The 2011 Education Act created a duty on the government to make 'reasonable' efforts to ensure employers provide Apprenticeship training'[7] with NAS publishing a *Statement on Apprenticeship Quality* in May 2012 outlining minimum standards. All apprenticeships should be at least 12 months and all apprentices should spend at least 280 hours a year in 'guided learning' and 100 hours or 30% (whichever is greater) of all guided learning must be delivered 'off-the-job'.

Although all apprenticeships are supposed to provide technical knowledge and some general education, National Vocational Qualifications have retained central significance. NVQs were subject to serious criticism when introduced as the main industrial training standard in the late 1980s but have continued to be a benchmark qualification. According to its proponents (eg. Jessop 1991), NVQs reflected the growth of a new and superior educational paradigm, which sought to demystify assessment and move away from a system that has been 'provider led' to one that is 'learner centred'. Rather than trainees/ apprentices being graded in college classrooms by lecturers, 'verifiers' visit workplaces to observe the carrying out of tasks, or collect witness statements by employers to supplement observations.

For critics, NVQs are based on a 'behaviourist' model (Hyland 1994) with learners reduced to passive performers of prescribed tasks rather than being active agents. The NVQ preoccupation with learning 'outcomes' ignores how learning takes place. For Brockmann, Clarke and Winch (2008), NVQ marginalises theoretical knowledge. For Smithers (1997), it has destroyed the established and respected technical education of the post-war years.

In the DBIS pay survey, though 90% of apprentices said they had an external assessor who came into the workplace to assess their skills, only half of apprentices in England (47%) said they had received off-the job training, though over two thirds (70%) received training on-the-job. 19% of apprentices in England said they did neither of these forms of training. There is no significant difference in these figures compared to 2011. Apprentices who were able to calculate an average said they completed just under five hours (4.9 hours) on off-the-job training per week while 11.5 hours was spent in on-the-job training; both of these figures are

[7] According to House of Commons library Apprenticeship statistics (08/02/13) expected costs would reach £1.55 billion in 2012/13 and constitute almost a third of the entire adult skills budget.

significantly down compared to a 2011 comparison. Those working for an employer prior to enrolment were also more likely to report they received neither on- nor off-the-job training.

Elmfield Training, the private company at the centre of the Morrisons *Panorama* investigation had a government contract worth £37 million. Rather than the planned 56 weeks, Elmfield was taking just 28 weeks and was accused of merely providing accreditation. As a result of continued concerns about the way apprenticeship training is organised, the Coalition have announced consultation on proposals where employers would pay for the cost of an apprentice upfront, then reclaim the money through their tax return. Unveiling the plans, Skills Minister Matthew Hancock said the reforms would encourage employers to take on more apprentices by giving them greater control over training. In response, Steve Radley, director of policy at the EEF manufacturers' organisation, told *Engineering and Technology* magazine (05/12/13):

> 'Businesses have long been calling for a revolution in how apprenticeships are funded, and today their calls have been heard. Placing funding in the hands of the employer will create a truly responsive, relevant skills system that delivers high quality apprenticeships. Employers now need stability and certainty on apprenticeship funding'

According to Richards, as the 'real consumers' of training, 'employers are best placed to judge the quality and relevance of training and demand the highest possible standards from training organisations'. However, providing employers with the initiative may reduce take up. As Chris Jones, chief executive of the City & Guilds Group told the website *Education Investor* (05/12/13), the reforms were 'risky… It's the assumption that employers have the time – and indeed the will – to cope with the additional bureaucracy these reforms will entail', he said. 'Rather than incentivising employers, I fear they'll be put off by what's been announced.' According to one training provider the funding changes could lead to an 80% drop in training numbers.[8]

In response to the criticism of apprenticeship training, the *Something for Something* policy document commissioned from Institute of Education director Chris Husband as part of Labour's Policy Review called for a doubling in the number of apprenticeships, but it also emphasised that under Labour's plans, all apprenticeships would be at level 3 or above, lasting a minimum of two years for level 3 (equivalent to A-level) and 3 years for level 4. All apprenticeships would also include at least a day a week (or the equivalent) off-the-job training, thus ensuring that young people receive a broader theoretical understanding alongside work-based training. The requirement to base apprenticeships on NVQs would also be removed, enabling employers to choose the most relevant qualification for their sector.

Training and Higher Level Apprenticeships

In December 2011 Business Secretary Vince Cable announced details of up to £20m government funding to create 19,000 new degree-level Higher Apprenticeships. In his 2013 Autumn Statement, George Osborne committed another £40m. According to Cable:

> 'Investing in skills is central to our drive to boost business and productivity and make the UK more competitive… By radically expanding the number of degree level apprenticeships for young people, we will put practical learning on a level footing with academic study. This is an essential step that will help rebalance our economy

[8] John Hyde of HIT Training *Guardian* 07/01/2013 http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jan/07/apprenticeship-funding-employers-training-providers

and build a society in which opportunity and reward are fairly and productively distributed.' (DBIS press release 08/12/11)

Examples from the NAS website show that Higher Level Apprenticeships can involve a variety of training programmes – NVQ competence-based assessment, foundation and full degrees at university. The Greenwich University research referred to earlier shows a large proportion of Higher Level apprentices attending HE but is based on a limited number of schemes.

For example, in November 2013 the BBC offered 20 places on a Higher Level Apprenticeship scheme with £11,500 salary and full payment of tuition fees for a B.Eng. provided in conjunction with Salford and Birmingham City Universities and the BBC Academy. Applicants needed 'at least 300 UCAS points' to be considered and were expected to have studied maths and science to A-level. Siemens were offering four places but did not specify the entrance qualifications required. The Siemens scheme was organised through BPP, a private university providing its own degrees (from foundation to post-graduate) and technical qualifications for professionals.[9] The apprentices were offered £135 a week for approximately three years with employment on completion. In January 2014, BSkyB offered two positions on a two-year Technology Programme at its Isleworth HQ in West London at a weekly wage of £300 a week and training to City and Guild level 4, also leading to permanent employment on completion. Jaguar Land Rover were recruiting 10 Higher Level apprentices as part of an intake of 45 and offering NVQ level 4/ Foundation/ Full Engineering degree through Warwickshire College. Applicants required 2 A-level passes at C in maths or a science-related subject/ BTEC level 3. The apprenticeship lasts for up to six years at £307 a week.

Also in January, Stockport Council offered a vacancy for a Business Administration apprentice at the national minimum wage on an 18 month programme. A NVQ level 4 certificate in Business and Administration is promised and no specific entry qualifications are required. As is the case with all competence qualifications, training and assessment will be workplace-based and the certificate is designed to be completed in less than 250 hours. Finally, BT advertised five places on a level 4 finance apprenticeship for those with grade B A-levels at £375 a week for up to 24 months 'with potential for future progression within the company'. Training will be also be carried out by BPP at one of its centres or 'on-line'.

Despite the small number of participants, there are 41 Higher Apprenticeships in place with Bachelor and Master's degree level available for the first time. Schemes range from commercial piloting to fashion and textiles, though development of schemes and employer consultation is still at its early stages. It is too early to predict the eventual outcome of the Higher Level Apprenticeship initiative, though the arguments outlined below raise issues about the future of apprenticeships in general. The success or failure of Higher Level Apprenticeships will, arguably, have significant implications for vocational education within HE.

[9] http://www.bpp.com/

Why can't we do it like the Germans?

For admirers like Andrew Adonis and Will Hutton[10], the UK apprenticeship model remains light years away from the German 'highly organised, mass system' (Green 1997, 88) where apprentices sign a contract lasting for around three years with a company licenced as a provider. 90% of apprenticeship starts in Germany are at level 3 or above with training needs discussed by employer and trade union committees who also oversee apprenticeship content. 25% of employers provide apprenticeships and all employers with more than 500 employees are bound to do so, compared with 305 who volunteer to do so in the UK (Steadman 2010). Apprentices participate in a 'dual system', spending part of the week in work-based training and part of their week (up to two days) completing the *Berufsschule* – classroom-based study of the more theoretical aspects of their vocation. Alternatively, apprentices undertake 'blocks' of classroom learning.

According to the Institute of Public Policy Research (2013), while a smaller proportion of young people in Germany may attend university (only about a third), a much greater proportion – up to 60% – complete apprenticeships of several years and 90% then secure employment. All German apprentices have proper employee status from the day they begin working, though, as in other European countries, apprentices are paid less than in the UK. This reflects more of a 'trainee' or even 'student' status as part of a recognised transition process from youth to adulthood through the development of an occupational identity. In Germany, 40 out of every 1,000 employees are apprentices (in Austria 33), compared to just 11 in the UK (Steadman 2010). Brockmann, Clarke and Winch (2008) contrast the 'holistic' approach of German apprenticeship learning, designed to allow the student to take 'autonomous and responsible' action in the workplace, with the UK model which focusses on particular skills at the expense of any personal or social development and on confirming existing skills rather than encouraging the development of new ones[11].

However, the German apprenticeship system is a product of post-war 'social partnership', a relationship which depends on a strong regulatory framework. Under social partnership, employers and trade unions have both committed to the establishment of a national framework involving both legislation and much higher levels of state involvement and financing than the British 'market state' could possibly allow. Markets are closely regulated with national coordination of research and development. Apprenticeships reach well beyond

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[10] Labour Peer Adonis arguing that this is the reason why youth unemployment in Germany is much lower. (www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jul/01/youth-unemployment-not-age-lack-of-skills) Will Hutton (Observer, 10/03/13) http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/10/alan-sugar-apprenticeships-britain

[11] In this respect, the introduction of functional skills could be seen as a very limited attempt to broaden the knowledge content, with students being required to learn grammatical rules and numeric formula and, in the case of ICT, to understand why particular software programmes should be used instead of others; functional skills being more 'knowledge based' than the previous generically formulated 'core' or 'key skills' that featured in vocational education programmes like the General National Vocational Qualifications (Allen 2000).

the manufacturing sector – although 40% of German apprentice schemes are in industrial production and manufacturing employed 24% of workers at the end of the 20th century, compared with 18% in the UK (Steadman 2010). Providing a 'licence to practice', entrants have only been legally allowed to enter many occupations when they have completed the apprenticeship programme that supports them. According to Green (2001), 'social partnership' also has a strong cultural context; this embodies a commitment to conflict resolution and a greater commitment from workers towards the companies they work for but also a greater emphasis on social welfare and the clearly defined responsibilities of government towards its citizens. There has never been anything like this in the UK. 'Doing it like the Germans' would – if it were to be remotely possible – not just involve major changes to the content of vocational education and training, but, more significantly, major cultural and institutional changes at state level, a number of which were previously outlined by Hutton (1995).

In contrast, even though participation in UK education has increased – particularly at university level, the British 'market state' has followed an American model where education and labour market advancement has been considered largely an individual matter and where educational qualifications are seen as crucial to improving the prospect of 'employability' – to be traded in the jobs market, rather than providing any automatic rite (and right) of passage or any occupational identity. In this respect, increasing the supply of educational credentials has substituted for the sort of 'industrial strategy' that exists in other European countries. We have argued elsewhere that under New Labour, 'education, education, education' substituted for economic strategy (Ainley and Allen 2010).

Classroom, not work-based learning

Rather than developing the sort of integrated system that exists in Germany where workplace training has taken place alongside classroom learning, full-time vocational education in the UK has had little direct input from employers and has been almost entirely classroom-based (qualifications like GNVQ, for example, had no work experience requirement). They were taught almost entirely by school teachers and college lecturers, many of whom had little other experience of employment (see Ecclestone 2002). As significant, rather than forming part of an employment strategy, vocational qualifications in England have played a 'credential' function, invariably being used as 'second chance' qualifications by a new generation of sixth-form students to enter university, or at least new universities rather than older ones.[12] Figures produced by Pearsons (BTEC's private parent company) show admissions to UK universities by BTEC students rising 30% year on year with more than 100,000 students successfully applying to HE after studying a BTEC.[13] Likewise, 60% of full-time students and 40% of part-time students on the vocationally orientated two-year Foundation degrees generally provided through FE colleges have sought to convert them to conventional honours degrees by adding another year at the franchising university.[14]

[12] Allen and Ainley SRHE day event University of Greenwich 27th Jan 2010 http://radicaled.wordpress.com/category/the-business-studies-generation/

[13] Press release http://www.edexcel.com/btec/news-and-policy/future-vocational-education/Pages/he-progression.aspx

[14] Higher Education Funding Council for England (2010) http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2010/201012/

In order to improve the status of vocational courses, the last Labour government rebranded GNVQs as Vocational A-levels. Created in the 1990s to replace established BTEC qualifications and extending NVQ notions of specific competence contradictorily to a general area of application as applied GCSEs and A-levels with more emphasis on academic content and assessment, this resulted in 'the worst of both worlds' as students who had already been alienated from academic learning found these courses no longer appropriate, while those who were always going to follow traditional academic options continued to see applied qualifications as inferior. The result was that participation rates fell and many schools and especially colleges, returned to rejuvenated BTEC courses.

New Labour's 14-19 specialist Diplomas proved to be an expensive disaster (Allen and Ainley 2008). Designed to 'put employers in the driving seat', they ended up being drafted by consultants, repeating the same mistakes as previous vocational qualifications – in other words, being neither 'academic' nor 'vocational'. The special funding for these qualifications was withdrawn by the Coalition and they have become virtually extinct. According to Wolf (2011), the introduction of the Diplomas, which – despite their practical orientation – were not considered by Labour ministers as 'job training', ghettoised apprenticeships further. Neither did the diplomas have any formal links to employment (*Guardian* 25/10/13).

In her 2011 *Review of Vocational Education* for the Coalition, Wolf went further and argued that UK vocational awards (level 1 and 2 in particular) provided low or even negative labour market returns and that 350,000 young people – between a quarter and a third of the post-16 cohort – 'get little or no benefit' (p.7) from post-16 education. With figures showing the number of key stage 4 vocational 'equivalents' achieved approaching 500,000, Wolf argued that vocational learning should only make a 'limited contribution' and comprise no more than 20% of a young person's curriculum offer and that apprenticeships would provide much higher rates of return to young people by giving them workplace experience. She recommended employers be paid to take on 16-18 year olds, providing apprentices also received clearly defined off-the-job training and education.

Wolf's critique of vocational learning has not stopped Lord Kenneth Baker, who as Secretary of State in 1986 created the original ten subject National Curriculum, trying to instigate a German 'different schools for different routes' approach (Baker 2013, 61). Baker and the Edge Foundation have been the driving force behind the establishment of University Technology Colleges (UTCs) which offer technical specialisation alongside main GCSE subjects like maths, English and science, but also of 'Career Colleges' that have a more direct link with particular occupations. There are significant tensions between Baker's calls for more practical learning for some and Michael Gove's emphasis on academic subjects for all school students (Allen 2013). Being sponsored by both universities and employers, Baker hopes will allow UTCs to enjoy 'parity of esteem' – something the post-war secondary technicals were unable to achieve – and enable young people to move into work, apprenticeships or higher-level technical education.

UTCs have similarities with the German *Fachoberschulen* or technical high schools which exist alongside the *Hauptschulen* providing more general education and the *Gymnasium* which resemble post-war English grammar schools. Yet, as noted earlier, because around 60% of young Germans enter apprenticeships, the *Fachoberschulen* are not specifically linked to them. Young people in Germany can begin an apprenticeship at 15 after finishing *Hauptschule*, though this is now much less common with the *Fachoberschulen* providing chances of obtaining apprenticeship training in occupations that offer a high income, job

security and social prestige. Whereas in the 1960s the vast majority (80%) of apprentices came from the *Hauptschulen*, according to Tremblay and Le Bot (2003), they now make up only 40% and the majority come from higher level schools. A more recent phenomenon is that more and more young people are heading toward the dual system after having obtained their university entrance certificate. It also has to be recognised that the three tracks of the German secondary system are now becoming less distinct with the increased popularity of the *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive school). Whereas at the start of the century, 1.6 million youths, or approximately two thirds of the 16-25 age group, still entered the vocational route at the end secondary level 1, according to surveys[15], parents no longer want an early selection of their children after the fourth school year.

The economy we're in: apprenticeships and future economic and occupational trends
For Steadman (2010, 23), 'Apprenticeship in Germany is still the route into work and further career development for nearly 2/3rds of all young people' and the survival of the German dual system has demonstrated both its durability but also its ability to respond to changes in the economy and the occupational structure. The German economy has certainly fared better in its ability to maintain its manufacturing base and its state driven apprenticeship system has clearly been integral to this.

In the UK, the NAS continues to emphasise the huge impact which the increase in apprenticeships – even based on current patterns of delivery – will have on productivity and improved business efficiency. For example, Cebr (2013) predicts that 3.8m. people will complete apprenticeships by 2022, contributing £3.4b. to the UK economy in net productivity gains, the equivalent of 0.2% of the forecast GDP for that year. The report argues that in 2012/13, gaining an Apprenticeship raised an employee's gross productivity by £214 per week on average. But, as Cebre itself recognises (p.5), long-term predictions depend on the 'future development of the economy' and also on assumptions that the successful economies of the future will continue to be 'high skill' and that the current level of youth unemployment can be reduced by higher quality vocational training. Such 'human capital' responses to resolving labour market failures are open to challenge. UKCES (above, p.3) reports that half of UK employers (48%) admit skills under-use, and 4.3m. workers (16% of the total UK workforce) are reported as being over-qualified – i.e. underemployed – for the jobs that they are currently doing.

Rather than a high skills diamond-shaped occupational structure, where the increased demand of the workplace has the effect of pulling up the bottom into the middle, it is now increasingly suggested (eg. by Wolf 2011)[16] that an 'hour-glass' structure is emerging; where the increases in managerial and professional employment have been accompanied by growth in new types of unskilled work. In other words, there has been what Goos and Manning (2003) refer to as a growth in both 'lovely' and 'lousy' jobs. As a result of many intermediate and routine non-manual occupations disappearing with the latest applications of new technology, there has been a 'hollowing out of the middle' with a large number of people now earning well below the median wage (Lansley 2012).

[15] Goethe Institute www.goethe.de/wis/bko/en3610188.htm
[16] And see Schools Minister Elizabeth Truss http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/8848889/Time-is-running-out-for-our-hourglass-economy.html

An 'hour-glass' occupational structure has clear implications for young people seeking to enter the labour market – encouraging them to acquire higher levels of qualifications required for the 'lovely' jobs in order to avoid the 'lousy' ones[17] and, in this respect, the on-going downgrading of 'skill' through bite-sized rationalisation and outsourcing will have major implications for apprenticeships as they are currently constructed. Hour-glass theory moreover, may overestimate the extent to which managerial and professional work has grown. According to Brynin (2013), for example, only 17% of 'scientific technicians' were graduates in 1993 but this figure had risen to 25% by 2008 with a similar pattern for 'health associate professionals'. As we have argued (Ainley and Allen 2010, Allen and Ainley 2013), this proliferation of professions – or para-professions, presented as a professionalization of the proletariat, particularly through widening participation to higher education, has accompanied an actual 'proletarianisation of the professions'. The expansion of 'para-professional' work has coincided with the 'unbundling' and 'bite-sizing' of work roles, designed to increase productivity and cheapen production by allowing 'flexible' labour substitution. As an alternative to the 'hour-glass' model and recognising the significance of para-professionals across the new service economy, we have argued that the occupational structure has instead turned 'pear-shaped' (Ainley and Allen 2013) with absolute downward rather than upward social mobility and only exceptional relative social mobility – up and down (Roberts 2010).

Whatever the exact nature of the occupational structure, what cannot be in doubt is the increased significance 'post-downturn' of low-paid, low-skilled work. ONS statistics show only 137,000 of 500,000 new jobs between September 2012 and 2013 being 'professional scientific and technical' with the TUC also estimating that since the end of the recession, four out of five new jobs have been in low paid sectors[18]. This being the case, the large number of lower level, 'dead end' apprenticeships offering little more than low-paid, insecure jobs, may be highly significant but not entirely inappropriate.

Conclusion: on not rebuilding the vocational route and revocationalising the academic

In these circumstances, given the persistence of the 'low skill equilibrium' (Finegold and Soskice 1988) in the deregulated, post-industrial, largely service-based economy of the UK, repeated efforts to cajole and bribe employers into subscribing to training and apprenticeships they do not want or need, should be recognised as typical of the impression management that substitutes for government in a new market-state. Especially the repeated efforts since the collapse of industrial apprenticeships to rebuild a vocational route with 'parity of esteem' to the long established academic one. From the first raising of the school leaving age in 1972, through the history of Youth Training outlined above, to widening participation to HE, this has functioned to sustain illusions in largely worthless vocational qualifications, warehousing and tightening social control over youth.

At the same time, the limitations of academicism also need to be recognised, instead of being shored up by a new curriculum of 'powerful knowledge' (Young 2013). This can only emphasise the role of cramming for largely literary tests of academic ability as proxies for more or less expensively acquired cultural capital in a competing hierarchy of semi-privatised

[17] http://www.unialliance.ac.uk/site/2012/03/27/the-way-well-work-labour-market-trends-and-preparing-for-the-hourglass/

[18] (www.tuc.org.uk/economic-issues/labour-market/four-five-jobs-created-june-2010-have-been-low-paid-industries). For a European overview on deskilling see Hirtt (2013)

and state-subsidised provision from primary to post-graduate schools. This competition has the effect of sorting out students according to their parental background by the differential discourses they acquire in largely arts and humanities degrees in hopes of entry to what has become a hierarchy of 'graduatised' employment distinguished from non-graduate entry jobs to which the other *Half our Future* (1963) with inferior vocational or no qualifications are relegated. Instead, the vocational nature of higher and further education should be recognised as extending to the most prestigious of subjects at the most elite of institutions, as in the 'original vocations' of law and medicine but also the other STEM subjects and, indeed, the academic vocation itself. This is the way that higher education can recover itself in connection with further training to recognise and build what Silver called 'a thick HE' (2004), one that is both theoretically informed and practically competent.

Raised and differentiated fees increasing commodification of student experience heighten differences amongst students, as well as between students and non-students. Reductions in fees are necessary but there should also be an emphasis upon the contribution to knowledge that students can make in their chosen academic disciplines or vocational fields of practice through independent research, scholarship, creation or application of knowledge so introducing students to an academic community that critically learns from the past to change behaviour in the future. All students can make some contribution to that continuing cultural conversation as the final degree demonstration of higher-level graduateness. Such development will widen the still available critical space afforded by higher education in which a defence of the public university can be conducted (Holmwood 2012). This should bring together staff and students, instead of antagonising them which is the effect of putting customers/ *Students at the heart of the system* as the 2011 White Paper claims to do.

General education in schools should also be informed by the discussion, research and scholarship preserved and developed by post-compulsory further, higher and adult continuing education in a process of critical cultural transmission, creation and recreation.
Fundamentally however, the perception of 'the problem' needs to be changed: from being seen as one where young people have to become much better prepared for 'employability'[19], either by schools, colleges or universities providing 'pre-vocational' general, further or higher education, or through government-backed pseudo-work placements, bogus apprenticeships and endless internships. Instead, the starting point should be one of entitlement. This is not 'the right to work' under which the left continues to operate within a post-war collectivised model of the labour market. Rather, we argue for conditions under which entitlement to work and learn about work – and not just to work – are part of a process of cultural creation and recreation. This involves thinking through what a general schooling leading to graduation as citizen and worker 'fit for a variety of labours', as well as for revocationalised 'thick' FHE, would involve. It means confronting the possibilities of flexibility but avoids the current situation in which there may be more people in the workforce but everybody is paid less for unregulated employment. Above all, there has to be an alternative economic framework of job creation in which Local Authorities and local public/ voluntary sector alliances generate real employment opportunities.

[19] For instance in the latest British Chambers of Commerce Budget submission (23/2/14) asking for government subsidy to hire long-term-unemployed 16-24 year-olds and so allay employers' 'concerns about the work readiness of young people... faced with a deficient education, training and skills system'.

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