

# **British Woodworking Federation Response to inquiry on apprenticeships by Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy**

## **Introduction**

The British Woodworking Federation (BWF) is the trade association for the joinery and woodworking industry in the UK, representing over 700 companies manufacturing timber windows, doors, stairs, architectural joinery and associated companies

Joinery and woodworking sector delivers one third of all apprenticeships in construction, according to the latest CITB figures, but to maintain demand, the woodworking industry needs to recruit 4,260 people each year for the next four.

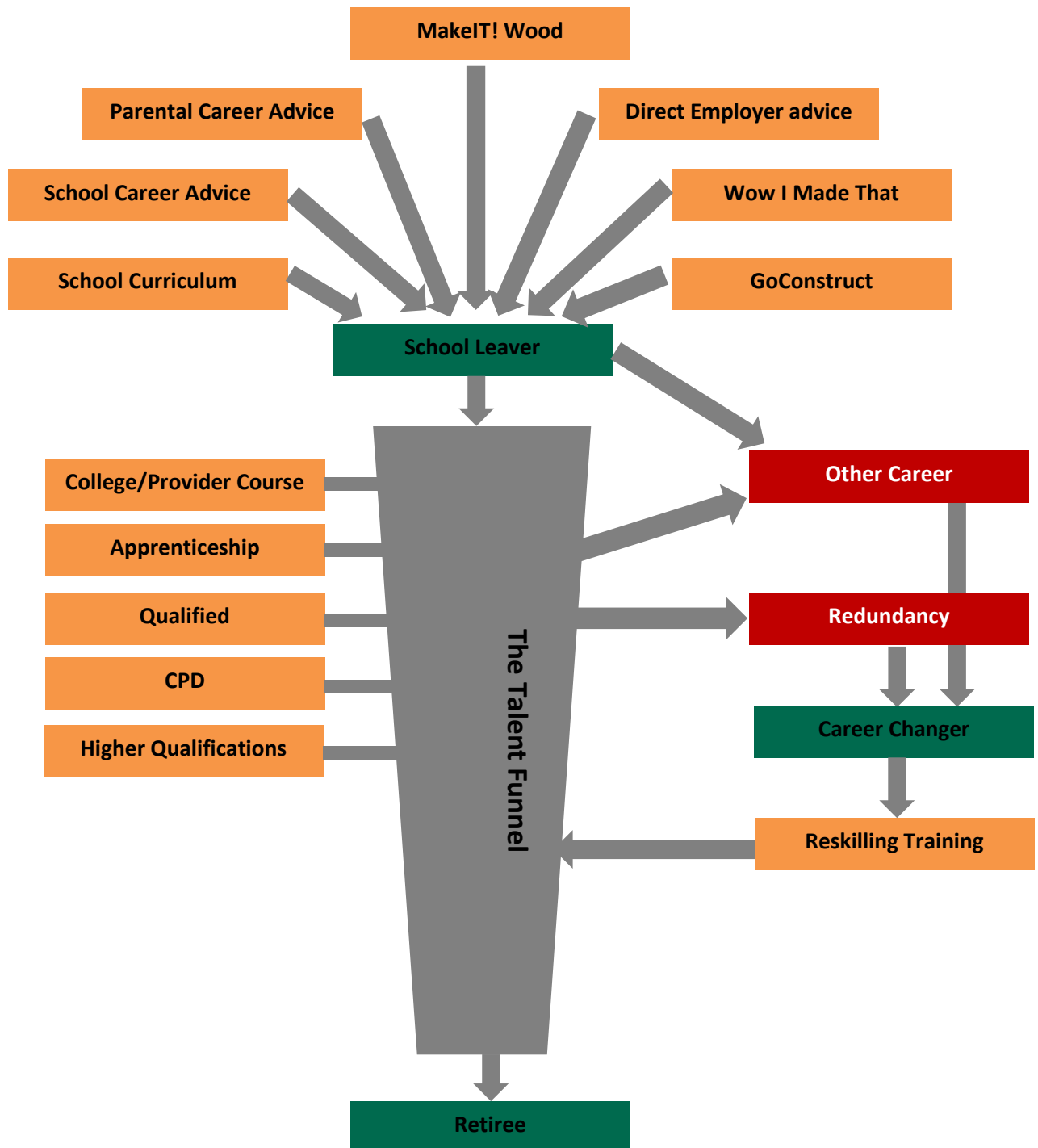
BWF Members are highly committed to the apprentice model – in our latest survey, 60% of our members indicated that they have at least one apprentice and 60% intend to take on apprentices over the next 12 months, this consistent with CITB figures that show there is one apprentice for every two BWF members registered with CITB – this is the highest in the specialist trades.

## **The target of three million apprentices by 2020, how the Government proposes to achieve this and how this may affect the 'skills gap'**

The joinery industry has lead the way through the trailblazer process and the redevelopment of core qualifications in recent years to ensure real market relevance. We remain concerned that cost of running our schemes (e.g. capital cost of equipment) for colleges can divert them away to simpler, cheaper courses.

The BWF's vision is to have a fully trained, qualified and professional workforce for the woodworking industry. In order to achieve this, we must start to think of the 'new entrant' as a customer. Like any sales funnel, our customer take a journey based on activity we do to get them into the funnel, as well as what we do to keep them from exiting it, and indeed get them to re-enter if we lose them. We need to start thinking of our activity in this way to give us the greatest success in attracting new blood, getting them trained keeping them learning, and indeed, keeping them in industry. Our funnel runs from school leavers through to retirees.

Fundamentally lacking in the proposals is a consistent careers advisory service that helps match the candidate with the myriad of possible careers and helps potential employers and learning institutions focus information and resources to deliver information consistently around the country. Without this we are merely herding people into a world where horizons are limited by those around them. Teachers should all be introduced to careers guidance within their training and particularly year 11 to 13 tutors should be trained properly to help lead young people into the next stage of their learning.



### ***Comments from BWF member businesses:***

"With such a skills shortage and difficulty hiring skilled bench joiners the industry needs to train many more people to fulfil demand." *BWF Member, Dorset*

"Although we are desperate to plug the skills shortage we should not be diluting the content of some of the NVQ courses, if it took some great carpenters 5 or 7 years to complete a C & G apprenticeship why then can a young person walk on site with a 2 year NVQ level 2 and demand to be taken seriously as a trades-person! Experience is everything!!! In addition we are finding that large companies are still not taking on trade apprentices and relying on their sub-contractors why? This is resulting in us, as an SME getting numerous requests for placements and finding that many young people are starting in a full time course which only amounts to 2 days a week! the other 3 days they are twiddling their thumbs - what about supportive learning in core skills such as Maths & English, or entrepreneurship or heaven forbid some elements of general construction skills or an ONC perhaps! Our young people are being misled as to the real skills needed on site, its not just 1st and 2nd fixing as they purport to have learnt." *BWF Member, Essex*

### **The proposal for an apprenticeships levy and how this may be implemented**

The woodworking industry predominately falls under the scope of CITB and recognise their responsibility to contribute to the cost of industry training and apprenticeships through the CITB's Levy and Grant Scheme. Around 30% of our larger member firms are considered out of scope of CITB and are categorised in the production sector (as defined by Proskills).

Whilst the apprentice levy may do more to drive larger organisations to utilise the apprentice route, the danger is that the smaller companies will be turned off by additional cost and complex procedures. This mechanism is vital to the industry's ability to recruit, train and retain a skilled workforce – apprentices fundamentally support the competitiveness of small businesses in our sector and help to attract and nurture talent into the sector. In this scenario the financial support is critical, but the wider infrastructure for apprenticeship delivery provided through the CITB managing agency and the work done in developing apprenticeship frameworks is just as important.

Should individual employers currently in-scope to CITB be left to source, fund, manage and deliver their own training and apprenticeships, it has the potential to completely undermine decades of good work in our sector. The timetable for introducing the Apprenticeship levy must take into account any requirement to make up-front cash contributions to providers for apprenticeships. It is essential that government continues to support SMEs if they wish to achieve their 3 million target by 2020.

We support the Build UK and the CBI response to the Levy proposals and believe any new Apprenticeship Levy should meet the following requirements (while reiterating that our out of scope of CITB members do not support the levy):

a. **Employers must have control over how levy funds are spent**

An employer-led Levy Board – independent of Government – should be established to

manage and deliver the new system; with a role for employer-led sectoral bodies to ensure levy funds support sector needs.

b. **The levy must drive quality**

The levy must support high quality apprenticeships that deliver the technical skills and knowledge needed in our sector. Funding remedial training for English and maths should remain Government's responsibility.

c. **The levy must be proportionate**

The levy rate should be set at a level that realistically allows employers to recover funding to support quality apprenticeships. There is a very real concern that apprenticeship quality will be undermined by firms re-branding existing training as apprenticeships.

d. **The system must be simple for employers to understand**

There is insufficient detail on the proposed levy and voucher system at present; however, the system must be easy and cost effective for employers to engage with.

The BWF supports the proposal for a hybrid model for large employers within the construction industry. This model sees these employers paying the government levy which is then channelled back through CITB and ring-fenced for apprenticeships training provision. These employers would continue to pay the remaining CITB levy (i.e. for Labour Only Sub-Contractors at 1.5%) which is distributed in line with the CITB grant scheme rules. SMEs under the government threshold would pay the CITB levy as usual, in accordance with the Levy Order. We also support the idea that CITB and the Levy/Grant system needs radical reform to ensure that the levy functions to support the skills needs of the sector, including achieving more apprenticeships.

In terms of the proposed mechanism for collecting the levy via PAYE, calculating any levy purely on employees is overly simplistic. The modern workforce incorporates sub-contractors, freelancers and sole traders. Some companies make extensive use of sub-contracted labour to deliver projects. This, often fragmented workforce, still requires training to provide the necessary skills, but does not always fall in the traditional employment model. The joinery and woodworking sector specifically tends to employ staff directly, therefore they will be unfairly hit by a calculation in this manner. In the wider context adding additional levies based exclusively on employment (already taxed via PAYE and NICS contributions) may cause companies to revisit the employee balance in their workforce.

The joinery and woodworking sector is a high cost industry due to the machinery used and the rate of innovation – this makes delivery expensive for employers.

In allocating surplus funds, consideration should also be given to the relative costs of delivering apprenticeships across sectors – with preference potentially being given to high cost industries. The net cost to employers of training an apprentice (internal plus external costs, net of productive benefits) is estimated to be £22,043 in construction over three years, compared to £2,305 (*Source: The net benefit to employer investment in apprenticeship training, Warwick Institute for Employment Research 2008*) for a one-year course in retail. Joinery is at the upper end of this due to capital equipment and material costs. Firms across these two sectors could have a similar number of employees – and hence be issued with the same amount of vouchers – but apprenticeship costs would be markedly different.

## **The institutional architecture of current provision and how this may be affected by the proposed Institute for Apprenticeships**

Changes to apprentice infrastructure are also very significant for us – in a recent survey of our members, 60% indicated that they have at least one apprentice and 60% intend to take on apprentices over the next 12 months. As the intricacies of the Apprentice Levy unfold, this success could be jeopardised. There is a vital balance that needs to be fostered between employers, providers and simple funding mechanisms. CITB is a force for good here and we support evolution over revolution and a “rebate” mechanism allowing smooth transition as the two levies align.

Unfortunately, college provision is becoming less and less able to support what we need and the infrastructure is withering on the vine (30% of those employing apprentices finding it unsatisfactory). If funding was even tighter through the new system (or courses that are cheaper to run and easier to fill via a smaller number of employers) then what we already have could be decimated. It would be pushing against an open door to get joinery businesses to take on more apprentices if government was to use this opportunity to support college provision, maintain funding and simplify the process.

Our focus at the moment is working with FE colleges to develop Centres of Excellence across the UK – this should be a starting point for parity of esteem with academia. Our aspiration is to work with these colleges so that they evolve beyond servicing simply the apprentice intake, but become training centres that support upskilling across the industry.

The Institute of Apprentices has a hugely significant task to ensure that chasing numbers does not lead to the erosion of standards. A mirror body is required to talk to and provide voice for the apprentices themselves- they need to be front and centre of this change too and it is all of our responsibilities to make sure that this process works for them.

Serious consideration should be given to a “Clearing System” for apprentice applications similar to that for Universities which would prevent wastage and also help to target interested parties with information and informed choice. It is often cited as a success story that 4,000 people applied for 200 places at Rolls Royce, but 3,800 could have been diverted to such a system to alternative options.

Developing a meaningful and scalable interface with schools is a priority as adequate careers guidance in schools is now non-existent. This is not the fault of schools as they are being pushed towards academic subjects but there is a fundamental failure to help young people to understand the choices they have, let alone prepare them for them. Careers advice should be an intrinsic part of teacher training. It may now be the time to consider vocational routes into teaching to help bolster understanding and respect for the apprentice’s journey.

### ***Comments from BWF member businesses:***

“Colleges seem not to teach much joinery. The focus seems to be on Health and Safety. Important, but so is the joinery” *BWF Member, Derbyshire*

"The NVQ Qualification needs to be abolished and bring back the old City & Guilds. It was much more in-depth and gives the student more knowledge about the things they need to know. My last 2 apprentices read what my apprenticeship consisted of and couldn't believe how much I had to learn at college, and yes I still have all the paperwork that I had to learn albeit nearly 40 years ago, and yes I am angry about the injustice that modern apprentices have to suffer, after all, its not their fault." *BWF Member, South Gloucestershire*

"A few years ago we always worked with CITB and received a great service from them. Over the last couple of years their contact with us diminished significantly, even when we did have apprentices. Truro College are much the same. Although we have suggested that we will be looking to recruit an apprentice in the next 12 months, we are concerned about the support side of that because of previous disappointments." *BWF Member, Cornwall*

"We don't have any local courses for wood machinists." *BWF Member, Dorset*

"Courses need to be better structured in some colleges." *BWF Member, Northamptonshire*  
 "NO specific courses for joinery available just general building construction." *BWF Member, West Midlands*

"Not enough financial help from the government, who still think that academic jobs are more important." *BWF Member, Leicestershire*

"We choose Southampton as it was the only college who had an experienced joiner teaching the course with real enthusiasm for joinery and knowledge. The syllabus is very poor and I only see the college training as useful for H & S, machine training and getting the qualification for my apprentices." *BWF Member, Isle of Wight*

"We have ran several apprentices through Aylesbury college/CITB. We found CITB extremely difficult to deal with, when we look at taking on apprentices in the future we would certainly look at using other providers. Aylesbury college were also slow at issuing us with details of when the apprentices had exams / needed to be in college on their 'not normal' days. This aside, we've ran 3 successful apprentice schemes." *BWF Member, Buckinghamshire*

"The actual college time seems to be a waste of time and would be better with in-house training following guidelines set by CITB." *BWF Member, Kent*

### **Take-up of apprenticeships amongst 16–19 year olds and steps that can be taken to make more young people aware of available opportunities**

The system proposed in the recent trailblazer guidance (July 2015) was for additional Government funded top-ups for 16-18 year old apprentices – and with the raising of the participation age this support should continue. However, it should also be noted that because of Health & Safety restrictions within the woodworking industry, particularly in the use of high-risk machinery, it is more difficult to take on 16-18 year olds – these firms will not benefit from any additional funding.

Apprenticeship levy funding should pay for more than the direct costs of apprenticeship training and assessment. Government should continue to fund English and maths training, and provide additional apprenticeship support for small firms and 16-18 year olds. If vouchers for large firms are covering provider costs, then careful consideration needs to be given to what was funded previously and what will be funded under the new system. For example, SFA currently provides funding for the 'Apprenticeship element' which over an apprentice's recruitment, induction, progress reviews etc. These are essential parts of the programme and should continue to be supported.

Funding also needs to be diverted into schools to help support the careers activities and "sell" the apprentice opportunities. As well as ensuring parity of esteem with academia. careers advice, wider upskilling activities and support for career switching are important in allowing the flexibility to bridge the skills gap.

Getting enough people of the right calibre into the industry is a continuing hurdle for the joinery & Woodworking Industry. If we are to grow, attracting talent is critical to success. This is why the BWF and its WITForum has taken the lead in engaging young people. Recent initiatives include the award-winning 'Wow I Made That' campaign to provide information, advice and guidance to young school leavers interested in a career in woodwork and joinery, and work with ProSkills on the Schools Wood MakeIT! Programme, which provides lesson plans and careers guidance for secondary and sixth-form teachers.

#### ***Comments from BWF member businesses:***

"Not sure what the benefit of having an apprentice is anymore hence not taking on anymore. As the business is expanding rapidly I am struggling to justify having 2 members of staff off 2 days a week and the grants just don't cover it even with CITB. As a company we are probably in the limbo growth area where we are no longer a one man band but not a large company where we have the capacity to cover absences. It may seem petty but with things like the age of driving regulations to take into account etc. I am seriously having to favour more mature candidates and look at options for training them which again is difficult and confusing. Generally the calibre of candidates is poor. The apprentices we have have been employed by myself and then sent to college. I have looked at taking on apprentices from the college but none have been suitable." *BWF Member, Nottinghamshire*

"1.Limited contact hours and too much directed study. 2. Whilst it is very important there is too great an emphasis on H & S, Planning, Supervision etc.... i.e. non craft issues. Also, the production of Portfolios takes up a huge amount of time and effort (I am at something of a loss to understand exactly what a photograph of a student wearing a dust mask in a portfolio of evidence really achieves). 3. We should be 'educating' students to analyse a project and to develop solutions to solve a broad range of construction challenges rather than 'training' them to achieve a narrow range of competencies. 4. In some instances the calibre of teaching staff is poor and motivation is lacking." *BWF Member, North Yorkshire*

#### **The quality of, and minimum standards for, apprenticeships, and how standards can be enforced**

Government must achieve a cross-party consensus on skills and qualification structures to ensure that 're-invention' of qualification content does not become a cyclical staple of the skills landscape, and a burden on employers. In order to best ensure that the sector gets what it needs, government must engage Trade Associations such as us, and Sector Skills Councils/Standard Setting Bodies (For construction CITB, and for wood manufacturing, ProSkills).

It is necessary that all qualification standards have simple, fast, yet rigorous mechanisms for employers to enact changes in the syllabus so that we can react quickly to new skill needs

All training providers delivering apprenticeships should have to meet quality checks and inspection. The SFA are best placed to continue in this role in England, and similar bodies in other nations. This should be coupled with Ofsted inspections. Ofsted inspections, have, however, moved to a single inspection template for all types of education institution from nursery to college, to private training providers. A one size fits all approach does not work and should be separated out. This will ensure that the right inspectors can assess a particular institution in the right way.

While government has withdrawn much support for other Sector Skills Councils, they play (or played where they no longer exist) a crucial role in building bridges with employers on skill issues and are best placed to oversee their industry's apprenticeship quality. Safeguards will also need to be put in place to ensure employers across sectors do not simply reconfigure training to claim Apprenticeship Levy funds. Ministers have taken steps to maintain quality through the trailblazers and by defining then term apprenticeship and these must continue.

Depending on the size of a company, an employer may or may not have the scope and indeed expertise to play this lead provider role. Should employers have the option to work directly with multiple providers and take the lead provider role themselves if they choose to do so? We would suggest that only the extremely large firms would have the capacity to do this, but there should be the option for them to do so. Care should be taken to ensure that there is sufficient oversight through the relevant Training Board to ensure that this does not allow standards to drop and schemes that should be focussed on careers are distorted to support lower level training schemes.

***Comments from BWF member businesses:***

"In my experience the joinery courses are firstly led by H&S on site, not basic carpentry / joinery skills. I understand the tools provided are not very good, or sharp. I have had 1 or 2 lads here for a couple of weeks experience following their first year at college. Neither had any grasp of timber species, names of saws (panel saw / tenon saw) could not cut a straight line by hand or plane to a straight line by hand. These are the very first skills I think should be taught, followed on by jointing and other skills area from there." *BWF Member, Hampshire*