

Response to the Department for Education Consultation on Flexi-job apprenticeships: reshaping the role of apprenticeship training agencies

Written Evidence Submission by The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA)

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About CIMA

The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), founded in 1919, is the world's leading and largest professional body of management accountants. As part of the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants (the Association) its members and students operate in 192 countries, working at the heart of business. CIMA members and students work in industry, commerce, the public sector and not-for-profit organisations. CIMA works closely with employers and sponsors leading-edge research, constantly updating its qualification, professional experience requirements and continuing professional development to ensure it remains the employers' choice when recruiting financially-trained business leaders. Chartered Global Management Accountant (CGMA) is the most widely held management accounting designation in the world. It distinguishes more than 150,000 accounting and finance professionals who have advanced proficiency in finance, operations, strategy, and management.

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Contact

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General Comments:

The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) welcome the Department for Education's focus on changing the apprenticeship system by proposing to introduce new flexi-job apprenticeship schemes to ensure the apprenticeship model is accessible to employers and apprentices across all sectors of the economy.

Some sectors and job roles do face challenges in engaging with the current apprenticeship scheme. This can be for many reasons such as the job role is seasonal, project based, or the scheme is not flexible enough to meet the needs of both the employer and apprentice.

We hope when the government takes forward its proposed flexi-job apprentices it consults on in this consultation this new scheme will help alleviate some of these challenges and will lead to an increased take up of apprenticeships from employers and apprentices alike.

We believe apprenticeships should be for every sector and for businesses big and small. We hope any new flexi-job apprenticeship scheme introduced will help achieve this aim.

While we welcome the proposed introduction of this new apprenticeship scheme there are some considerations that the Department for Education need to deliberate further on to ensure the scheme is successful. We have pointed these out in answer to questions 2,3 and 4 and hope that these are taken on board when further plans for this scheme are developed.

One of the biggest challenges with this proposed new scheme for both employers and apprentices is ensuring there are not too many touch points and it doesn't become burdensome and confusing. Already in the existing apprenticeship scheme there are multiple actors: the employer, the apprentice, the training provider, the exam provider, possibly a professional body and the regulator.

This new scheme could have multiple employers and a proposed supporting agency. Thought needs to be given to ensure both the employers and apprentices in the scheme know who they need to go to with questions and concerns, and to ensure they do not have too much bureaucracy to engage with.

Overall, we support the proposed introduction of flexi-job apprenticeships and think they will be a welcome addition alongside the existing apprenticeship scheme.

Answers to Questions:

1) Do you agree with our vision for flexi-job apprenticeship schemes?

We broadly agree with the vision of creating flexible apprenticeships and welcome the government's focus on this area. There are many sectors and industries where the current model of apprenticeships has difficulty applying as this consultation sets out for example in the creative, media and agricultural sectors where employment can be seasonal, or project based. We hope these new apprenticeships will address this challenge; however, we do think the model proposed still has some questions and further thinking that needs to be considered.

2) How should flexi-job apprenticeships demonstrate that they are meeting the needs of employers?

One challenge this scheme is going to face is there is likely to be multiple different employers involved in these apprenticeships. An apprentice through the life of their apprenticeship could be spending periods of time with different employers. This could create a challenge in assessing whether the needs of employers are being addressed.

Any flexi-job apprenticeship scheme needs to take into account all the employers it interfaces with and not just that of the proposed supporting agency/Apprenticeship Training Agencies (ATA).

The ultimate barometer to its success will be continued and increasing employer and apprentice involvement and take-up of these apprenticeships.

3) What expectations should we set of flexi-job apprenticeship schemes in providing a high-quality experience for apprentices?

The consultation needs greater detail on the expectations it sets for apprentices under the proposed flexi-apprenticeship scheme. We believe these new proposed apprenticeships should keep some of the same expectations as the current apprenticeship scheme that help ensure apprentices get a good and fulfilling experience.

These include:

- Continuing the 20% training commitment to apprentices under this new proposed scheme.

Since these apprenticeship offerings are likely to involve many different employers and potentially training and exam providers these new schemes will need to take into account other considerations to ensure a high-quality apprenticeship experience for the apprentices taking part, including:

- Ensuring the apprentice is not overburdened with too many contact points that make the apprenticeship difficult to engage with for the student.
- Clear plans for how the evidence of the students work and assessments will be gathered so the apprentice does not have extra work in this regard to take on compared to the current schemes.
- There is a possibility without the right systems in place that the apprentice every time they go to a new employer under the scheme will have to submit multiple new forms and information that could become burdensome and an unattractive part of the new flexi-apprenticeship scheme. Government should ensure this is not the case and make transitions to new employers under the scheme as seamless as possible.
- Apprentices under these schemes that are with employers for a short time can fail to have enough time to build a rapport with their colleagues at different workplaces. Often learning in the workplace is through interaction with colleagues and building a good working relationship with them and mentoring. Thought should be given to how to make this is possible under this scheme.
- The wage for apprentices should be considered in this as moving between employers will add more costs for the apprentice and add stress for them – a living wage would seem appropriate.
- In addition, the scheme will need to consider how in a less office-based world the training and networking for apprentices is achieved in this proposal and provide any best practice support for employers and apprentices.
- We need to also consider how mental health support is given to apprentices who will largely be young people starting out in the unfamiliar world of the workplace and ensure that they have robust support in place including some measurement of their mental health.

4) What challenges and opportunities are relevant to flexi-job apprenticeship schemes achieving financial sustainability? How might they balance a fee-based model with other income streams?

One of the biggest challenges we can spot is this scheme could have an over reliance on the supporting organisation/ATA. In the consultation we can see nowhere that says what happens if an ATA fails – what happens in that situation for the apprentice involved and the employers relying on that apprentice to have work placements with them. This question needs to have a solution before the scheme starts.

Another issue is what happens if a business can no longer have the apprentice for whatever reason. What happens to the apprentice then if because of this reason they can no longer meet the requirements of their apprenticeship. Solutions for this need to be thought through too before this new apprenticeship offering starts.

Both of these challenges identified above could have an impact on the financial sustainability, profile and trustworthiness of these apprenticeships.

7) Do you agree that we should create a register of approved flexi-job apprenticeship schemes?

Yes, we do agree with this proposal.

15) Should any additional parameters to the fund be added to encourage employer engagement – for example, pledged levy funds or matched co-funding for set up or expansion costs?

Ease of access to the funding and ensuring minimum bureaucracy will be important. For employers ease of access to information and support when they are unsure of how to best support the apprentices.