

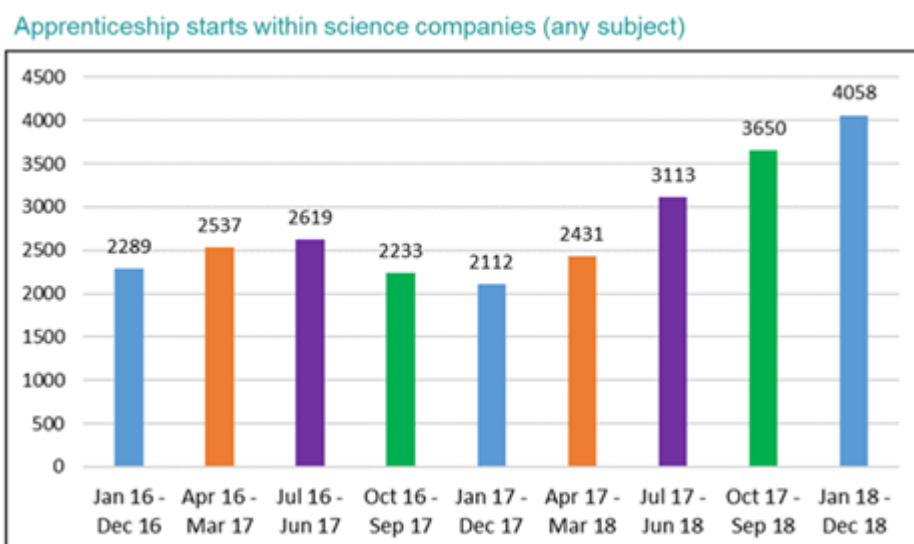


SIP Position Paper: Apprenticeships in the science industries

Introduction

Members of the Science Industry Partnership (SIP) are committed to apprenticeships as having a significant role in boosting skills in the sector and in turn increasing productivity and competitiveness. The SIP recognises that apprenticeships also lead to improved social mobility for individuals.

The SIP has an ambition to significantly increase apprenticeship numbers to provide an alternate pathway into the sector. The activity of the Life Science and Industrial Science Trailblazer (LSIS) has resulted in 12 new Apprenticeship Standards over the last 2 years, with another five in development. This has facilitated an increase in apprenticeship numbers as demonstrated below.



Apprenticeships Standards

Life Science and Industrial Science Trailblazer

The Life Science and Industrial Science Trailblazer Group has developed a number of new Apprenticeship Standards for the science industries. Government recognises the role that this employer group plays in providing oversight to the Apprenticeship Standards across the sector.

Apprenticeship Standards Review

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) will be reviewing the Apprenticeship Standards across Engineering & Manufacturing, starting in October 2019. It is vital that this is not pursued with the objective of reducing the number of standards but ensuring standards are working and meeting employer needs. Many standards developed for the science industries are technically complex and for highly value adding roles which may have relatively small numbers. It would be a backward step if such standards were rationalised out in favour of a more generic approach that no longer met employer requirements.



Apprenticeship Funding

Apprenticeship Standards Funding Bands

Whilst it is recognised that there is Government concern regarding sufficient funding for Apprenticeships, it is important that more highly specialist Apprenticeship Standards are allocated appropriate funding bands, given the additional cost of delivering technically complex standards to smaller cohort sizes.

End-Point Assessment (EPA)

EPA can vary significantly across standards where many of the standards developed through the LSIS Trailblazer specify an in workplace competence assessment for example, which when conducted at an employer's premises with 1 or 2 Apprentices has a significant unit cost. For higher level standards these costs may be significant. The development of the EPA instruments and materials for these science standards are also more costly than for more generic standards and with ongoing maintenance and renewal of EPA materials these costs must also be built in when considering funding for end-point assessment. It is vital that EPA is not viewed as a 1 size fits all with prices driven down. In addition, the current market means that Providers are making choices about EPA and there can be a vested interest here in driving down EPA costs to leave more income for the provider. It is key that costs of EPA properly recognise EPA context and content.

Funding for Level 6 and over

Recommendation 5.3 of the Augar report raises the proposal that apprenticeship levy funding should not be available at level 6 and above unless the Apprentice does not already have a publicly-funded degree. Individuals completing a degree at University alone does not make them work ready, as they have limited experience in industry which in turn means that employers potentially spend up to two years training them after they qualify. It is therefore essential that employers' levy funding is available at all levels, to all employees due to the high level skill needs in our industry in the future.

Levy Funding Transfer to ATAs

It is important to maintain this option, particularly where companies are utilising Apprenticeship Training Agencies (ATAs) and all such transfers should not be restricted to a percentage or by the implementation of state aid regulations. However, companies see the current option to transfer Levy to companies in their supply chain of little value as the bureaucracy, administration and management of the transfer outweigh the value to the recipient of 5% of the cost of the Apprentices training.

Unspent Levy

The SIP would welcome innovative solutions to enable unspent Apprenticeship Levy funds to be used, including pilots for sector-based employers across the economy to utilise some of their unspent levy pot (this is happening already in the film industry). This could see the development of some infrastructure support for smaller highly specialist businesses in the sector, who have common skills needs and could form cohorts around Standards.



Apprenticeship Training Provision

Provision Gaps

In the science-based industries where new standards have been developed, particularly in technical/scientific occupations, there is a lack of provision available that is flexible and innovative across vast areas of England, and insufficient incentive for providers to engage where costs to deliver are higher due to technical delivery and cohort size. More support is required to incentivise providers to invest in new important skill areas for the future such as combining science and data.

Developing Regional Provision

The devolution of skills means that Local Authorities are ideally placed to develop strategies to close provision gaps and the SIP is well placed to help shape and support such efforts in key regions for the sector.

Apprenticeship Promotion

Promotion of apprenticeships in schools

Teachers and Careers Advisers require continued support for promoting apprenticeships, including more practical guidance on the application process and the different types of apprenticeships available, with a focus on parity of esteem with the academic route. The SIP Ambassador Programme, which provides STEM careers outreach focusing on routes into the science industry, includes apprentices who deliver the scheme in schools.

More promotion of Degree Apprenticeships

SIP members have enthusiastically embraced Degree Apprenticeships to boost higher level skills development, with impressive results. This development strongly aligns with the skills dimension of the Industrial Strategy, particularly in areas such as data analytics and AI. The SIP would also like to see a high profile campaign to promote the benefits of this route, so that it is at the forefront when young people are considering their options.