

**Hello** – and welcome to my January newsletter. I was interested to read John Hyde’s (Chairman of HIT Training) article in FE Week recently, “Framework for a turbulent year ahead” focusing on the advent of Trailblazers, end assessments and the apprenticeship levy. Are we all set for ...

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**Yet another year of change?**

**The idea behind Trailblazers is sound** if we accept that we are in a world where apprenticeships are to be driven by the employer, and whilst there is nothing wrong with that principle, it does represent a shift from some other interpretations of what an apprenticeship should be, though they are too wide-ranging to include here. Assuming our acceptance, then the apprenticeship levy will, at least, remove the burden from the tax payer of funding the training the employers should be doing anyway! It will also serve a political purpose of helping the government meet its plucked from the air target of three million apprentices by 2020; if it is something an employer is paying for, then it’s reasonable to assume they will want to make use of it.

Accepting all that, then it seems right that apprenticeship standards are developed by employers. I recall doing some work for the NHS Blood and Transplant Service who were extremely frustrated that they were unable to achieve the qualification intended for them because one of the mandatory units was to manage a crèche; when did you last see a crèche when you went to give blood?

Just as that qualification was written by supposed experts, without thought on its impact, so the notion of employer led qualifications has been taken over by those who don’t recognise or understand the impact of their actions. We moved to a competence based framework of NVQ and then QCF so that learners could be assessed and developed over time. I would be the first to agree that the system had its faults, but that doesn’t mean it wasn’t the right one. We now move, as far as I can tell, to a system of end tests consisting of a flurry of assessments, interviews, observation, projects or skills tests; that seems to me to be a step back to some of the early quality assurance models of the production and manufacturing sector, where quality assurance came at the end of the line. Yes, it meant a substandard product wasn’t released, but such a waste of time and resource for it to get to that point before it was tested.

My own view is that it is a huge mistake to take away any requirement for formal qualifications. Despite what the pre-trailblazer review said, my own experience of over 20 years in the sector tells me that apprentices value their qualifications. I have presented qualifications to men and women who often left school with few or no qualifications of any use (their words) and they have been in tears because, they tell me, it’s the first proper qualification they have had. And, often to my surprise, I am told by 17 year-olds just how much getting their maths or English certificates means because they were “rubbish at school” and never thought they would achieve these fundamental qualifications.

Am I harking back to the past, possibly, but just because something was in the past doesn’t mean it’s wrong. It seems to me the best way forward isn’t to forget the past but to take what was good, fix what was wrong and make it fit for the present and make it as future-proof as we can!

Speaking of the future, it’s an exciting year for me. On a personal level, my son is to be married in August, my daughter is thinking about taking off for Borneo! Exciting indeed, and already sounding expensive! From a work perspective, I am looking forward to working more closely with an organisation called Kapow Learning Solutions (think impact rather than Batman), set up to work with employers, helping them to identify and implement qualifications tailored to their need.

Tired of the poor quality trainer and assessor training I have seen too much of, I have now become an NOCN approved centre for these qualifications and look forward to working with my first cohort of learners in the next few weeks.

It really is back to the top of this newsletter – another year of change.

*Happy New Year everyone!*

*Kevin Dowson*