

**Hello** – and welcome to our fourth and slightly delayed newsletter. Graduations, A-level results and 21<sup>st</sup> birthdays (none of them mine sadly) have put forward a determined and successful effort to thwart my plans for this month. On the positive side, previous copies of this newsletter are now available on our website [www.kevindowson.co.uk](http://www.kevindowson.co.uk) so you can access them at any time. This one will join them over the next few days. I am also delighted to tell you about two new workshops we now offer – **Guidance for Inspection Nominees** and **Planning for Inspection**. Please have a look at the website for further details! Please remember, if you don't want to receive the newsletter, drop me a line by return and I'll remove you from the list, alternatively, if there is a topic you want to see included, let me know.

Issue 4

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**What is an apprentice? and Planning for inspection**

**The best laid plans...** I had intended to devote this issue to planning for inspection, as a number of companies I work with have recently been advised of inspection. I have though, had a few questions about how long a qualification should take to achieve – I think following a few recently published articles. So, looking to that first!

The Guardian (or Grauniad if you're of a certain age and ever read Private Eye) recently published an article dealing with the rise in the number of apprentices, in particular, those over the age of 25, and hinted at some degree of tension over the length of time it takes to complete an apprenticeship. You can see the article in full at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/aug/14/increase-in-apprentices-over-25>.

Before that question can be answered, if indeed it ever can be, we need to think about what exactly do we mean by an apprenticeship. To many, it is a long programme of training entered into at age 16, (hopefully without the old initiation rituals of going for a long stand, buying tartan paint, or worse!). Perhaps it is in engineering or construction trades where there is a lot to learn about the trade itself as well as the other areas that make up the qualification framework. The problem however, lies not with the training, but how we measure it. Every apprenticeship uses as its measure a competence-based assessment – be it an NVQ or its QCF equivalent. And therein is the dilemma! We use a competence-based qualification as a training programme, and forget that these were never designed for that purpose, but were always a measure of competent performance. Although the SASE requirements make some attempt to quantify training, there is still no clarity about who, if anyone, will audit that.

So, we end up with a system that awards an apprenticeship on the achievement of competence and not on what happened to get the learner to that point. Its juxtaposition is that if a learner is already a competent employee, then all that needs to be done is to match their areas of competence to the relevant NVQ/QCF. There may be an argument here over value added, but nonetheless, the learner has achieved the measure needed.

The achievement of an apprenticeship therefore must be seen from the starting point of the learner and not just measured in weeks, months or years. Indeed, from an inspection viewpoint, I have been critical of, for example, a 12-month programme being too long for some learners and too short for others! Nothing new there I hear you say!

**But what of Planning for Inspection?** I mentioned that a number of my customers have recently been notified of inspection, but I was staggered when I discovered that a number of them did not know what type of inspection they were having, or the differences between them, and so were unclear how to prepare. A "light-touch", a first inspection, a monitoring visit, a re-inspection are all very different, needing very different approaches.

The biggest problem for most providers is that they assume that the only notice they have for inspection is the two to three weeks provided by the inspection service provider. That's not the case! Every provider should have an inspection plan that it is ready to be rolled out as soon as "the call" is received. Forget that last minute panic – so much can be ready and waiting. One of the keys to this is the way in which the self-assessment report is written, or at least the process that is followed to achieve the report. What do I mean? Ah well, come along and find out .....