



British International School Riyadh

Increase in Apprenticeships

Research shows apprentices over 25 up from 36,000 to 121,000, but Labour says coalition is failing to focus on key skills

A dramatic increase in [apprenticeships](#) – part of a government drive to tackle massive youth [unemployment](#) – has been fuelled by a surge in apprentices aged over 25, research shows.

The coalition exceeded its target of creating 203,200 apprenticeships for people over 19 in the 2010-11 financial year, creating 257,000 new apprentices, according to figures released in June. Research by the House of Commons library shows that the increase is due to a "striking rise" in apprentices over 25.

[Labour](#) accused the coalition of giving priority to increasing apprenticeships, rather than focusing on skills needed for economic growth.

The analysis reveals a 10% increase in teenage apprentices this year, compared with the academic year which started in September 2009. Teenage apprentices rose from 93,700 to 102,900. There was a 21% rise in apprentices aged 19-24, from 85,100 to 102,800. But the number of apprentices aged over 25 nearly quadrupled, from 36,300 to 121,100. Youth unemployment hit record levels earlier this year, and latest figures show around 917,000 people aged 16-24 are out of work. The research, commissioned by Labour, shows that the biggest increases in apprenticeships are in health and social care and retail.

One of the most dramatic increases was in the "cleaning and support service industry", where 1,930 apprentices were created in the academic year 2010-11, compared with 360 in the previous academic year.

The statistics show a big rise in short-term apprenticeships, but only a small increase in longer-term apprenticeships which create opportunities to specialise and acquire academic qualifications.

Apprentices are paid employees who gain practical skills in the workplace as well as receiving training outside work.

Over the first three-quarters of 2010-11, apprenticeships lasting longer than a year rose by under 2% while those lasting less than a year increased by over 30% on 2009-10. Overall, the proportion of apprenticeships lasting longer than a year dropped from 47% to 41%. Gordon Marsden, shadow further education and skills minister, said: "For all the government's warm words on apprenticeships, these statistics show they haven't got to grips with the task of supporting business and creating an environment in which quality, long-term apprenticeships can flourish and support economic growth."

The opposition claims the growth in older apprentices and the rising number of short apprenticeships conceals the axing of the last government's Train to Gain initiative, which was aimed at improving the skills of existing employees.

Marsden added: "The decline of 6% in the proportion of people doing apprenticeships lasting longer than a year throws real doubt on the government's ability to persuade key sectors such as construction and electrical engineering of the value of apprenticeships – sectors that are vital to our economic recovery and future growth."

Nick Linford, managing director of Lsect, a company which provides advice to colleges and training organisations, said many apprentices over 25 were already in work and enrolled on apprenticeships that last as little as 12 weeks. He said there were doubts about the use of public funding and the quality of apprenticeships and "serious questions about whether the apprenticeship scheme has lost focus and if it's making any impact on our appalling youth unemployment figures".

But a spokesman from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills said apprenticeships were growing across all age groups and were enabling businesses "to gain the skills they need to grow".

"As well as delivering the highest number of apprenticeships this country has ever seen, the government has raised standards and enabled more apprentices to progress to higher levels. We have also set minimum guided learning hours to ensure that every apprenticeship delivers quality training. We are committed to further reducing bureaucracy to enable more firms from an even greater range of sectors to offer more apprenticeships."

The latest statistics, from the National Apprenticeship Service, show almost 90,000 employers offer apprenticeships to 491,300 workers in England. Companies hiring the most include BT, Capita Group, Tesco and McDonald's.