

Consultation on the Scottish Government Response to the UK Apprenticeship Levy

Background

The Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine (IPEM)

IPEM is a professional association and Learned Society with 4,300 members across the UK who are physicists, engineers and technologists working with applications of physics and engineering applied to medicine and biology. Our members work in hospitals, academia and industry, and IPEM has a unique role in linking the three areas.

As a charity, IPEM's aim is to advance the application of physics and engineering to medicine for the public benefit and to advance public education in this field. We do so by supporting and publishing research, and supporting the dissemination of knowledge and innovation through project funding and scientific meetings; and by setting standards for education, training and continuing professional development for healthcare scientists and clinical engineers.

IPEM's Scottish members were circulated with consultation documents and asked to provide their views to IPEM. The responses below are based on the feedback received.

General comments:

Apprenticeships when properly funded and delivered are an important means of training the workforce of tomorrow. The number of centrally funded training places for medical physicists and engineers in Scotland has reduced year on year of late due to budget reductions – this will have the inevitable consequence of leaving us in future years with a significant skills shortage. Use of the apprenticeship levy to fund training across a range of entry points in to the profession would help in reducing this shortage.

Q1. Should the Government's commitment to 30,000 Modern Apprenticeships starts a year by 2020 a) by maintained or b) increased?

There was no consensus on this question. The majority view was that the commitment should be increased, but there are concerns about the delivery and quality of the training. The Scottish government should be aiming to fund as many as can be delivered without compromising on the quality of the training delivered.

Q2. Should Apprenticeship Levy funding support growth in the number of Graduate Level Apprenticeships in Scotland?

Yes. There are recruitment issues and national shortages in the physical sciences (medical physics and engineering) in the NHS at both practitioner and scientist posts and using the apprenticeship levy to support this level could help to address this shortage. IPEM's 2015 Workforce survey identified vacancy rates above 10% in the Scottish Radiotherapy Physics

Workforce, and while Scottish-specific data is not yet available for other workforces, the 2015 Rehabilitation Engineering Workforce survey showed vacancy rates at 12% for Scientists and 9.5% for Practitioners UK-wide. Nuclear Medicine Physics is also listed on the National Shortage Occupation List owing to recruitment difficulties both in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

As an example in Scotland Clinical Technologist training has seen some funding secured from the Modern Apprenticeship scheme for a cohort of supernumerary posts in Nuclear Medicine. This enabled the recruitment of science graduates (Band 5) who were then inducted onto the existing IPEM diploma scheme. This funding, however, has not been renewed. Failure to recruit at Band 6 level is now a chronic issue.

Q3. Should Apprenticeship Levy funding be used to establish a flexibility fund to support wider workforce development?

Yes. Supporting wider workforce development would encourage flexible working, expansion of roles and retention of staff within organisations.

Q4. Should Apprenticeship Levy funding be used to support the expansion of Foundation Apprenticeships?

There was no consensus view on this question. However IPEM would support initiatives that are aimed at increasing awareness of the range of opportunities available in the physical sciences in healthcare and at widening access at all levels to these opportunities.

Q5. Should Apprenticeship Levy funding be used help unemployed people move into employment, and to help meet the workforce needs of employers?

Yes, but this will require engagement with employers (such as the NHS) to identify shortage areas and suitable training.

Q6. Are there any additional suggestions on how Apprenticeship Levy funding might be used?

Investing funds into workplaces providing the apprenticeships to ensure that the workforce delivering the training is suitably trained, or funding dedicated trainers.

Invest more in encouraging women into careers as technologists. This may be by investing in more female STEM Ambassadors to appeal directly to school leavers into apprenticeships or by targeting FE and HE establishments for other entry pathways.

Ends