

Action Research into Apprenticeships in the Vehicle Body Repair Industry, including the role of Vehicle Damage Assessors

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1. Introduction

The primary purpose of this research is to establish if there is a need for an apprenticeship within the vehicle body repair industry for Vehicle Damage Assessors (VDA). At the time of writing this project no such apprenticeship for this role exists, although a National Occupation Standard (NOS) for the role has been written. Again at the time of writing this has not been approved by government. The NOS lists the roles for VDA which range from NVQ Level 2 to NVQ Level 4, including the role of apprentice. A copy of the draft NOS can be obtained at: <http://www.motor.org.uk/standards-and-qualifications/nos-consultation.html>

The research also looked at funding for apprenticeships, and to establish if the present funding arrangements caused difficulties for employers and training providers of the apprenticeship scheme operating in the various countries of the United Kingdom.

The final part of the research looked at school leavers and apprentices already employed in the industry. This again was primarily to look at the VDA role, but aligned to questions asked of employers and training providers. It looked at how young people became involved in the industry and the calibre of school leavers.

2. Executive Summary

Consultation

The following consultations were undertaken with employers, training providers, school pupils in year 11 and apprentices already employed in the retail motor vehicle repair industry.

- Postal survey
- Email survey
- Face to face interviews

Findings

The research demonstrates that:

- Employers feel there is a need for an apprenticeship in the discipline of Vehicle Damage Assessor.
- Employers who have apprentices feel they are investing in the future of the industry.
- The majority of small to medium sized businesses do not know about funding for apprenticeships
- Most apprentices end up in the industry because "It just happened"
- Most apprentices, however, felt that the industry did offer good career prospects
- Of all the apprentices questioned, only one was advised by their career adviser in school to take up a career in the industry.
- The current funding provision for apprenticeships in the UK is not working for the good of the industry, the individual or the UK.

Outcomes

Having established that a need for an apprenticeship for the Vehicle Damage Assessor role exists, the industry and the Skill Sector Council need to seek approval for the National Occupational Standard.

The issue of funding for the nineteen plus age group needs to be addressed, as this is causing difficulties for all the Skill Sectors. Whilst there is only so much limited funding from government, what is available could be better used and targeted for those who want to be trained, as opposed to those who are attending a training provider, with no intention of pursuing a career in the industry.

3. History of the VDA Role

Historically the role of a VDA in a repairing garage was performed by someone who had years of practical experience of repairing vehicles, who then progressed from the workshop environment to an office environment. This involves writing estimates for repairs, dealing with members of the public and insurance engineers who, acting on behalf of insurers, agree repairs and costs with the 'estimator' as the role was then called.

The role of insurance engineer was normally an estimator who had progressed. This role was held in high esteem by the repair/insurance industries for a considerable time, although in recent years the role has become diminished with the use of technology and a misunderstanding of the role by modern insurance companies.

In 2005 the Motor Insurance Repair Research Centre (Thatcham) recognised that vehicle construction was becoming far more complex with the use of new generation steels, alloys and composite materials, and that the repair industry through lack of insight had not invested in the correct equipment and training for staff, and that this was going to have a significant effect on the safety of repairs to modern vehicles.

As a result of this Thatcham, with British Standard Institute (BSI), introduced a 'Publicly Available Specification' for vehicle body repairs, known as PAS125. For a repairer to be accredited with the PAS125 BSI Kitemark, they must achieve certain standards. One of these is that a percentage of the productive staff must be competent in the discipline in which they work. This includes Panel Beaters, Painters, Mechanical, Electrical Trim (MET) technicians, and Vehicle Damage Assessors. For the first three roles the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) had a qualification in place, the Automotive Technician Accreditation (ATA), but for the VDA role the only qualification available was from the Institute of Automotive Engineer Assessors (IAEA). This qualification was at NVQ Level 4, which was deemed to be too high, although it was hoped that this would become the standard in time. Therefore, the IAEA with the IMI worked on a compromise but acceptable level; this was the ATA VDA qualification.

4. Current Situation

The ATA VDA qualification assumes that the person working in this role has sufficient motor industry experience, and this is borne out by the fact that most taking the qualification have started their career in the industry from one of the disciplines listed above, i.e. Panel, Paint or MET, although it is not unknown for a person to come from a 'spare parts' background.

The ATA accreditation for all disciplines lasts for 5 years, at which point the competence has to be proven again.

The roles of Panel Beater, Paint Sprayer and MET Technician still have a traditional apprenticeship available to young people, but the role of VDA does not.

5. Establishing if There is a Need for an Apprenticeship in VDA

In 2008 the IMI met with leading figures within the industry to review all the National Occupational Standards that were offered in the retail motor industry, and to see if there was a need to introduce any new NOS for those roles not already covered. One of these was the role of VDA. The NOS also recognised that an apprenticeship for the role could be offered. The purpose of this action research project is to see if there is sufficient demand from the industry for an apprenticeship in this discipline.

6. Changes to Functional Skills and Apprenticeships 2010

With the transition to Functional Skills from Key Skills in September 2010, all apprentices will be required to gain functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT, if required, by the framework. The functional skills have to be at a minimum of Level 1 for an apprenticeship and Level 2 for Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships.

7. Existing Research in Apprenticeships

Currently there is no existing research in apprenticeships in VDA. However, there is a wealth of research in apprenticeships in general, but very little relating to the motor industry. The most recent research available for apprenticeships is:

- Adult Apprenticeships Business & Administration Draft framework. Kerrie Fuller, March 2006
- Apprenticeship Reform Milestone 1 & 2. Kerrie Fuller, October & November 2006
- Research into Expanding Apprenticeships. Learning and Skills Council, August 2008
- Review of Automotive Young Apprenticeships in England. IMI, March 2009
- The Annual Funded Automotive Apprenticeship Benchmark Report England Summary 2008-2009. IMI, 2009
- Summary of Nations' Employer Skills Survey. IMI, September 2009

8. Methodology

This action research project started in June 2010 and targeted employers in the industry. (including both repairers and insurers), training providers offering apprenticeships in the motor industry, year 11 school pupils and apprentices already employed within the industry in one of the traditional disciplines.

Questionnaires were drawn up asking a series of questions to not only see if there was a need for the role of an apprenticeship in VDA, but to find out the thoughts of these people of the motor industry, school pupils entering the industry and colleges delivering training for the industry. Copies of the questionnaires can be found in the appropriate section of the target groups.

8.1 Target Groups

The target groups were small in comparison to some action research projects, but this is a small niche market in a large industry and the target groups were selected to represent the industry and the learning providers servicing the industry.

8.2 Schools

Four secondary schools were approached to see if they would be willing to participate, but disappointingly, they all declined. This was a blow as the views of this group would have helped discover if the industry was an appealing choice of career and if not, possibly help the industry to improve its image as a career provider.

Questionnaire 1

Please tick your answers. (Question 6 is free text for your own thoughts)

1. Who springs to mind when you think of the motor industry?

Phil Mitchell	
Lewis Hamilton	
Kevin Webster	
Jeremy Clarkson	
All of the above	

2. What type of building do you think of when you think of a garage where cars are repaired?

Lock up/railway arch	
Rundown backstreet building, very low tech	
New, glass fronted, clean and very hi Tech	
None of the above	

3. What type of person do you think runs a vehicle repair garage?

Dodgy type, not to be trusted	
Not well educated	
Honest, hard working, but not very bright	
Intelligent, hard working and well qualified to do the job	

4. What type of person do you think works in a garage and repairs vehicles?

Well qualified	
Well educated	
Not very intelligent	
Average, but not ambitious	

5. What type of jobs do you think are available in a repair garage? (Tick as many as you think appropriate)

Mechanic	
Panel Beater	
Paint Sprayer	
MET Technician	
Service Receptionist	
Vehicle Damage Assessor	
Not sure	

6. Would you consider a career in the motor industry? If so, what type of career would you consider?

7. What do you think the average annual wage is for a skilled worker in the motor industry?

£10,000 - £15,000	£15,00- £20,000	£20,000- £25,000	£25,000- £30,000	£30,000 - £35,000	£35,000 - £40,000	£40,000 - £45,000

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire.

8.3 Employers

The motor vehicle repair industry is small in relative terms of employers (approximately 3,000 in the United Kingdom). The number of companies approached represents a good proportion of these, and the employers ranged from small independents employing 6-10 productive staff to the largest who employ 100 plus. It was also felt that by making the numbers higher the data would take too long to collect and that the sample selected would represent the majority view.

Questionnaire 2

Please tick you answers.

1. How many productive staff does your business employ?

< 10	11-50	51- 100	>100

2. Does your business recruit apprentices?

Yes (please miss question 4)	
No (please only answer to question 4)	

3. How many apprentices have you employed in the last 5 years

< 5	6-10	11- 15	>15

4. If not, is it because you consider them to be:

An expense	
A waste of time	
They only leave after they have been trained	
They cause too much damage to jobs which has to be put right, delaying the job	
The funding is wrong	
Never really considered it	
Other – please state below	

5. Would you consider employing apprentices if the funding was different?

Yes	
No	
How could funding be improved/what is wrong with the system/ what changes to funding would make you consider employing apprentices – please state below	

6. If you employ apprentices is it because they are:

A good investment for the future of the industry	
They are a cheap form of labour	
There is money to be made from the funding	

7. How many apprentices employed in the last 5 years have originated from the following sources

Straight from School	
Employed within our organisation and selected to enter apprenticeship programme.	
Employed elsewhere in a related role before joining us as an apprentice	
Employed elsewhere in a non related role before joining us as an apprentice	

8. Does your company have a working relationship with local schools?

Yes	
No	
Don't know/ handled by a central HR department or elsewhere in the company.	

9. Do you find that you are getting the right calibre of person from school?

Yes	
No	
Yes, but only after a struggle, please feel free to write any comments below	

10. What kind of apprenticeships do you offer (Please indicate all that you offer)

MET	
Panel Beating	
Painting	
Mechanical	
Auto Electrician	
Glazing	
Recovery	

11. Is there any type of apprenticeship within the vehicle repair industry you would like to see introduced?

12. If government funding was available in full for the whole of an apprenticeship, would this make any difference to your thoughts on apprenticeships?

8.4 Training Providers

Ten training providers who supply training for the retail motor industry were approached to participate in the research, including one from Southern Ireland. This was to see if the situation was similar in a country where traditional apprenticeships are still offered, whereas in the United Kingdom the traditional apprenticeships were replaced by the 'Modern Apprenticeship' system in the late 1980s'. It was hoped that a direct comparison between the two systems could be made.

Questionnaire 3

1. As a training provider, do you feel that the present government funding arrangement causes problems for apprenticeships?

Yes	
No	
Please comment on you selection	

2. Do you have a working relationship with local schools?

Yes	
No	

3. Do most of your apprentices come directly from school, or have they been doing another job/training before joining you?

Most straight from school	
Most have done something else before	
About 50/50	
Not sure	

4. Do you find that you are getting the right calibre of person from school?

Yes	
No	
Please comment on your selection:	

5. Do employers support your learners?

Yes, 100%	
Yes, partly	
No	

6. What kind of apprenticeships do you offer? (Please indicate all that you offer)

MET	
Panel Beating	
Painting	
Mechanical	
Auto Electrician	
Glazing	
Recovery	
Motor Cycle	
Other (Please specify)	

7. Is there any type of apprenticeship currently not offered that you would like to see introduced? (Please specify)

8. Do you have any further comments regarding apprenticeships in the motor industry? (Please specify.)

8.5 Apprentices already employed in the Industry

Apprentices were approached with the permission of their employers whilst visiting employers who had also participated in the survey. Others were apprentices attending colleges and, interestingly, all the apprentices who participated were studying either Paint or Panel, with the split of 50/50. This made some of the findings interesting when analysed.

Questionnaire 4

Please tick your answers

1. What made you choose the motor industry as a career?

I always wanted to work on cars	
Following a family tradition	
I can earn good money when I am qualified	
It was all that I could find when I left school	
It just happened	
My careers adviser recommended it	

2. Do you like your job?

Yes	
No	
Could be better	

3. What discipline are you studying?

MET	
Panel	
Paint	
Auto Electrician	
Mechanics	

4. Do you intend to stay in your current role once you have completed your apprenticeship?

Yes	
No	
Not Sure	

5. Do you consider that the motor industry offers a good career path?

Yes	
No	
Not sure	

6. Would you recommend the industry as a good place to work?

Yes, definitely.	
Only as a last resort	
No, never	

7. Have you considered becoming a Vehicle Damage Assessor (VDA)?

Yes	
I might consider it later in my career	
No	
Never heard of the role	

8. If you had been offered an apprenticeship as a VDA, would you have considered this instead of the role you are doing now?

Yes, definitely	
I would have considered it	
No	

9. Data Gathering & Identity Protection of Participants

Questionnaires were distributed by email, post and in person. All were treated in strict confidence. Those that targeted school pupils and apprentices were anonymous as these asked personal questions. The questionnaire for employers and colleges did have provision for the individual participant to identify themselves if they wished. Questionnaires that were collected in person were just added to a file for analysis. Once all the questionnaires were received, those returned by post were treated in the same way. Those received by email were added to a computer file with the email address deleted to ensure the participant could not be identified unless, they had selected the option of being contacted for further information.

Questionnaires were distributed between the 23rd June and the 12th July 2010 with a cut off date for collecting the data of the 16th July 2010. The data was then analysed on the 19th July, the findings of which follow later in this report.

10. Findings of the Research

The questionnaires, with the exception of the school pupils as none were completed, showed that there was a real need for an apprenticeship in the discipline of Vehicle Damage Assessor, although this was not reflected in the questionnaire from the Training Providers. More importantly, the research showed that government funding for apprenticeships was not only causing problems for Training Providers, who understand the funding issues, but was causing problems for small to medium employers who are unaware that funding was available. This is supported by existing research into the apprenticeship scheme.

10.1 Results of the Questionnaires

Results of the questionnaires were analysed and expressed as percentages. Where the participant had the opportunity to use free text, the answers are shown in italics. All the results are listed below, with the exception of the School Pupil questionnaire.

Results in the tables show the number of responses to a question, and then expressed as a percentage.

10.2 Employer results

1. How many productive staff does your business employ?

<10
11-50
51-100
100>

0	0.00%
4	66.67%
0	0.00%
2	33.33%

2. Does your business employ apprentices?

Yes
No

6	100%
0	0.00%

3. How many apprentices have you employed in the last 5 years?

<5
6-10
11-15
15>

3	50%
1	16.67%
0	0.00%
2	33.33%

4. If not, is it because you consider them to be:

None of the participants answered this question

An expense

A waste of time

They only leave after they have been trained

They cause too much damage to jobs, which has to be put right, delaying the job

The funding is wrong

Never really considered it

Other – Please state below

5. Would you consider employing apprentices if the funding was different?

Yes
No

6	100%
0	0.00%

How could funding be improved/what is wrong with the system/what changes to funding would make you consider employing apprentices? Please state below:

Our business model allocates funding to cover our needs.

Funding is OK

6. If you employ apprentices, is it because they are:

A good investment for the industry
 They are a cheap form of labour
 There is money to be made from funding

6	100%
0	0.00%
0	0.00%

7. How many apprentices that you have employed in the last 5 years have originated from the following sources?

One did not answer this question, one ticked all the boxes

Straight from School
 Employed within our organisation and selected to enter apprenticeship programme
 Employed elsewhere in a related role before joining us as an apprentice
 Employed elsewhere in a non related role before joining us as an apprentice

5	83.3%
1	16.67%
1	16.67%
1	16.67%

8. Does your company have a working relationship with local schools?

Yes
 No
 Don't know/ handled by a central HR department or elsewhere in the company.

4	66.67%
2	33.33%
0	0.00%

9. Do you find that you get the right calibre of person from schools

Yes
 No
 Yes, but only after a struggle, please feel free to write your comments below:
Young school leavers are not prepared for the working environment. They need more time in work placement to adjust.

1	16.67%
3	50%
2	33.33%

10. What kind of apprenticeships do you offer?

MET
 Panel Beating
 Painting
 Mechanical
 Auto Electrician
 Glazing
 Recovery

5	83.33%
6	100%
6	100%
6	100%
1	16.67%
0	0.00%
0	0.00%

11. Is there any type of apprenticeship you would like to see introduced?

This was a text box left free for the participants' free thought/text, the results are recorded below:

Vehicle Damage Assessor
Smart Repairs

6	100%
1	16.67%

12. If government funding was available in full for the whole of an apprenticeship, would this a make a difference to your thoughts on apprenticeships?

This was an empty text box for the participants' free thought/text. The results are recorded below:

Yes

Yes, massive

Apprenticeships are needed. A lot of skilled panel beaters and painters are leaving the industry. There are not enough highly skilled people out there to employ in this fast moving industry.

Analysis of the results

Employment of Productive Staff

Of the companies approached, and who completed the questionnaire, the majority employed between 11 and 50 productive personnel. Only two employed more than 100 productive personnel. All of those approached employed apprentices in the disciplines of MET, Panel, Paint and Mechanical. Only one employed apprentices in Auto Electrician, and none offered apprenticeships in Glazing or Recovery.

Employment of Apprentices

Even though two of the largest employers in the industry responded to the questionnaire, it is interesting that 50% of employers have employed less than 5 apprentices in the last 5 years. Not surprising is that of the largest employers, 33% employed more than 15 in the last 5 years. All would employ more apprentices if funding was different. All believe that apprentices are a good investment for the industry. Most of the employers take school leavers as apprentices, although some employ them if they have been employed before, from a learning provider or other sources listed in the questionnaire.

Schools and School Leavers

Whilst 83.33% of employers take apprentices straight from school, only 4, or 66.67% had a working relationship with a local school. The other 2 employers or 33.33% do not have this relationship. This may be partially explained by the fact that 2 of the employers who answered the questionnaire are multi- site employers.

Of the responses to getting the right calibre of person from school, 50% said that they could not get the right calibre, whilst 33.33% said that they only got the right person from school after a struggle. This left only 16.67% who said that gaining the right person was not a problem.

Apprenticeships that Employers would like to see offered

100% of the participants would like to see an apprenticeship in Vehicle Damage Assessor, and 16.67% would like to see an apprenticeship in Smart Repairs.

Funding for the whole of an apprenticeship

50% of the employers answered this question. Of these all agreed that this would make a difference to not only their businesses but to the industry.

10.3 Training Provider Results

Note: One training provider is located in Southern Ireland where the apprenticeship scheme is different from the UK. The results include all responses. Any differences between the UK and Ireland comments are included.

1. As a training provider, do you feel that the present government funding arrangement causes problems for apprenticeships?

Yes

2	50%
2	50%

No

Please comment on your selection

The recent changes to the funding for 19+ Apprentices has caused issues as the Automotive sector in particular has a high number of 19+ applicants.

The funding is not the issue at the moment but more the structure of the apprenticeships and the makeup of the qualifications. We seem to be reducing the standard of the qualifications to reduce costs but eventually this will result in a lack of professionalism in our industry.

The current method of funding the 19+ apprentices is a barrier to employers taking students on. We have had a number of employers who have refused to pay for students once they reach 19, this had a negative effect on the progression from level 2 to level 3, if students have started late.

2. Do you have a working relationship with local schools?

Yes

3	75%
1	25%

No

Note: Due to the differences in apprenticeship schemes, there is no need in Ireland to have a relationship with a school.

3. Do most of your apprentices come directly from school, or have they been doing another job/training before joining you?

Most straight from school

Most have done something else before

About 50/50

Not sure

1	25%
0	0.00%
2	50%
0	0.00%

Note: The provider from Ireland did not answer this question, but their comments are listed below:

Apprentices in Ireland enjoy full employee status. Employers fund the on-the-job phases and the state funds the off-the-job phases. Employers also contribute a special levy of 0.25% of payroll towards training in the construction, motor, electrical and printing sectors. Apprentices are paid a training allowance equivalent to the rate of pay appropriate to the year of apprenticeship whilst on the off-the-job phases. Typically a Phase 4 apprentice receives c.€450 per week and a Phase 6 apprentice receives c.€550 per week during the educational release (based on pay rates as at spring 2005). Apprentices have a statutory entitlement to the off-the-job education and training elements of the SBA.

4. Do you find you are getting the right calibre of person from school?

Yes

No

Yes, but only after a struggle.

Please comment on your selection:

0	0.00%
2	50%
0	0.00%

Due to the above requirement for the apprentice to be employed in a garage before coming to college generally yes we get a good calibre of person.

Schools only seem interested in the high academic achievers the rest appear to be ignored & therefore are completely unprepared for the working world. There is a distinct lack of people skills, & work ethic along with a poor standard of literacy & numeracy. School careers advice also seems to be poor.

Students seem to leaving schools with a lack of basic skills and an understanding of the industry they are trying to enter. I think a greater focus on career paths in schools would prevent money being wasted on half training uncommitted students.

This will vary depending on what the learners back ground is. Learners who have been involved in the industry generally are quite able and keen to work. Such as those who work with parents or relatives or take part in a motorsport related hobby. Students who have come in with no GCSE's and have not attended school tend to be more problematic in the first year. They enjoy the work in industry but do not enjoy the theory or key skills part of the framework and don't always see the point.

We currently run 14-16 programmes and generally find that schools tend to send the students who are not academics and can be problematic in classrooms. A lot of the students don't want to do the subject but have been offered it and at times can see it a day off school. The students who want to be there and have parent support find the programme a great benefit and do progress on to full time or into employment, percent is quite small though.

5. Do employers support your learners?

Yes 100%

Yes, partially

No

1	25%
3	75%
0	0.00%

Yes, while on the job training and government supports the apprentice while attending college.

6. What kind of apprenticeships do you offer? (Please indicate all that you offer)

MET

Panel Beating

Painting

Mechanical

Auto Electrician

Glazing

Recovery

Motor Cycle

Other, Please specify

2	50%
3	75%
3	75%
3	75%
2	50%
0	0.00%
0	0.00%
2	50%
1	25%

HGV

**7. Is there any type of apprenticeship currently not offered that you would like to see introduced?
(Please specify)**

Motor Cycle Mechanic

I think a focus on apprenticeships that are truly nationwide and not different in each nation would help our trainees and industry grow. The divide between each nation is now reaching difficult levels. Meaning transferability of skills promised under QCF will be unachievable.

8. Do you have any further comments regarding apprenticeships in the motor industry? Please specify.

Careers advisers need to be better informed. It is not an industry for under achievers. The modern Automotive Industry is highly technical & complex.

Let's create one assessment process across all awarding bodies.

The apprenticeship scheme is a very good idea and does benefit both employees and employers. The funding and paper work related to apprenticeships needs to be streamlined as much as possible. There should be funding for 19+ apprentices if we are to grow the number of skilled technicians in the industry and therefore not lose the skills we currently have in the industry.

I also believe the sector skills council needs to speak to the smaller SME's rather than just the larger manufacturers and well know businesses. Also the preparation for the change in the framework 5 should start now and not leave it until the last minute, like they have this time. Due to the fact we don't know the structure and what is expected of employers, this make education look poorly organised.

Analysis of the results

Funding

The training providers were split on the question of 'does the present funding arrangement cause problems?' However, one of these is located in Ireland where the funding arrangements are different. If this provider is deleted from the results, 75% of the respondents feel that the present situation is a problem for apprenticeships. The comments from the providers are quoted above, and illustrate their concerns.

Schools

100% of the providers in the UK have a working relationship with local schools; the provider in Ireland does not. When apprentices go to a provider in the UK 25% go straight from school. This differs from the employers' response where 83.33% of employers employ straight from school. 50% of the providers found that their apprentices may have been employed elsewhere before going to college. In Ireland the apprentices are employed before going to college.

50% of the UK providers did not find that schools are providing the right calibre of person for an apprenticeship; interestingly no provider said that schools do provide the right calibre. This compares directly with the feelings of the employers, and most of the providers comments regarding schools, school leavers and careers advisers. Only the Irish provider did not have a problem, reflecting the differences in the two schemes.

Employers support for their Apprentices

All the UK providers stated that the employer of an apprentice only 'partially supported' them. This does appear to be unusual when the employer is 'investing' in the future of the industry. Again, because of the Irish model of apprenticeships, the employers support their apprentice throughout the apprenticeship.

Apprenticeships offered

The traditional apprenticeships of Mechanical, Panel and Paint are the most popular offered by 75% of the providers. MET, Auto Electrician and Motor Cycle are the next most popular, with 50% of the providers offering these. No one offers Glazing or Recovery and only one, or 25%, offers the old apprenticeship in HGV.

Apprenticeships that should be offered

Only one, the Irish provider, answered this question with a discipline, that being Motorcycle Mechanics.

There was a reference to cross nation skills/qualifications. This question was not asked, but in fact opens a new line of enquiry. The quote was:

'I think a focus on apprenticeships that are truly nationwide and not different in each nation would help our trainees and industry grow. The divide between each nation is now reaching difficult levels. Meaning transferability of skills promised under QCF will be unachievable.'

Further comments regarding apprenticeships within the Motor Industry

The participants were given some free space to write whatever they felt about apprenticeship schemes, funding, schools, school leavers or employers. The majority of comments were about schools and their attitude to the industry, funding and the schemes set up and run by government. None of the comments were complimentary, except about the purpose of apprenticeships and the purpose they serve.

10.3 Apprentices already employed in the Industry results

1. What made you choose the motor industry as a career?

5 ticked more than one selection

I always wanted to work on cars
 Following a family tradition
 I can earn good money when I am qualified
 It was all that I could find when I left school
 It just happened
 My careers adviser recommended it

4	33.33%
2	16.67%
5	41.67%
0	0.00%
7	58.33%
1	8.33%

2. Do you like your job?

Yes
 No
 Could be better

5	41.67%
0	
7	58.33%

Interestingly, those who were happy with their Job were Panel Beaters, whilst those who thought it could be better, were Painters.

3. What discipline are you studying?

MET
 Panel
 Paint
 Auto Electrician
 Mechanics

0	0.00%
5	41.67%
7	58.33%
0	0.00%
0	0.00%

4. Do you intend to stay in your current role once you have completed your apprenticeship?

Yes
 No
 Not sure

7	58.33%
1	8.33%
4	33.33%

5. Do you consider that the motor industry offers a good career path?

Yes
 No
 Not sure

10	83.33%
0	0.00%
2	16.67%

6. Would you recommend the industry as a good place to work?

Yes, definitely
No, never
Only as a last resort

11	91.67%
1	8.33%
0	0.00%

7. Have you considered becoming a Vehicle Damage Assessor (VDA)?

Yes
I might consider it later in my career
Never heard of the role
No

1	8.33%
6	50.00%
0	0.00%
5	41.67%

8. If you had been offered an apprenticeship as a VDA, would you have considered this instead of the role you are doing now?

Yes, definitely
I would have considered it
No

2	16.67%
8	66.67%
2	16.67%

Analysis of the results

Choosing the Motor Industry as a career path

Of the twelve apprentices who took part in the survey, more than five selected more than one reason for choosing the industry as a career path. Interestingly, 33.33% had always wanted to work with cars and two, or 16.67%, followed a family tradition of working in the industry. This made up 50% of the responses. 41.67% realised that they could earn a good income from the industry. A more worrying statistic to come from the responses was that 58.33% of those who completed the questionnaire 'just sort of happened' to get a job in the industry. An even more worrying fact is that just one or 8.33% was advised to take a job in the industry by their careers adviser.

Remaining in their chosen discipline

By chance the roles of the apprentices who took part in the research were split into just two of the disciplines, Panel Beating and Paint Sprayers. When asked if the respondents were happy in their role the Panel Beaters were happy, whilst the painters thought their role could be better. When asked if they intended to stay in their current role on completion of their apprenticeship, only one or 8.33% said no, 58.33% said yes and 33.33% said that they were not sure.

Is the Industry a good choice of career and should it be recommended as a career path?

83.33% of those asked said that the industry was a good career path and only 16.67% said that they were not sure. No one said that the industry was not a good choice of career.

When asked if they would recommend the industry as a career path, the results were even more positive with 91.67% saying that they would recommend the industry, and only 8.33% saying they would not recommend the industry as a career path.

The role of Vehicle Damage Assessor (VDA)

The participants were asked two questions regarding the role of VDA. One asked if they had ever considered the role and the second asked if an apprenticeship had been offered in this discipline when they started their apprenticeship, would they have chosen this instead of the one they were now studying.

Only 8.33% had considered the role, but 50% thought that they might consider it later in their career, 41.67% had never considered it, but all knew of the role. When asked if an apprenticeship were offered in the role the results are different, with 16.67% definitely considering the role and 16.67% not considering the role. However 66.67% would have considered the role as a career if it was offered as an apprenticeship.

11. Conclusions

In general

As this is an Action Research Project, it can be criticised as being the opinion of the researcher, but as Ian Bryant¹ says ' Action research is not something that has to be carried out by a special group of people called researchers, but is in fact what any practitioner could do as part of everyday practice, given certain conditions.'

It is fair to conclude that this research project has produced a small snapshot of the apprenticeship scheme in the United Kingdom and has only looked at one segment of the Motor Industry. Comparisons have been made between the Modern Apprenticeship offered in the UK and to the Irish Apprenticeship scheme, which reflects a similar system to the old indentured system that used to be in place in the UK until the late 1970's.

Apprenticeship for the Vehicle Damage Assessor Role

The primary reason for carrying out this research was to establish if there was a need for an apprenticeship in the role of Vehicle Damage Assessor. This has now been proven; 100% of the employers questioned felt that this role needs of an apprenticeship. There is a National Occupational Standard for the role, and it is now down to the Sector Skills Council for the industry (the Institute of the Motor Industry) to take this forward.

Vehicle Damage Assessors are in general held in high esteem, they have to have a working knowledge of all the components and systems used in the modern motor vehicle. If an apprenticeship in the role were available it would help promote the industry to career advisers, thus encouraging young people into the industry. The research shows that apprentices already employed in the industry would have considered the role as the starting point of their careers if an apprenticeship in the role was offered at the time of enrolment, as opposed to the current situation where 50% might consider the role later in their career, and 41.67% who have not considered a career in the role.

The role of the VDA has been in existence for a very long time. In fact almost as long as the motor vehicle but, until the introduction of PAS 125, the role has only been important to insurers to ensure that the cost of repairs are not excessive. These assessors are employed directly by the insurer or work as an independent assessor, working for many insurers.

With the introduction of PAS 125 and the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007, the role has gained importance in the industry. This is due to motor vehicles becoming more technical in their construction, leading to complexity when repairs are carried out that would not have been a problem 5-6 years ago. This is especially so when certain types of construction methods cannot be reproduced after market. One example is 'Laser Welding' which is now common in vehicle production, but cannot be reproduced outside of the factory. The vehicle has to perform the same after repair as it did prior to repair, so it is vital that the VDA produces the correct repair method so technicians in the workshop can carry out the work using the correct processes, tools and materials.

School Leavers and School Career Advisers

The UK faces the problem of an ageing workforce and many of the traditional skills being lost. Scrapping of the traditional apprenticeship scheme in the late 1970's has not helped the situation, although the 'Modern Apprenticeship' scheme has been running for some years and has gone some way to improving the number of young people entering the skilled trade industries. Most of the industrialised countries in the West are facing similar problems. What this small research programme has highlighted is that schools in the United Kingdom are not directing young people of the right calibre into the industry. The focus of mainstream education is on academic studies not commerce. Unfortunately even though more people attend university today than at any other point in time, not everyone is suited to this type of further education.

Consequently this presents the problem with what to do with those who do not go to university, the problem youths and the underachievers. It would appear from comments from two of the training providers that the motor industry is the place for the problem youths and underachievers. But, as they point out, the modern motor vehicle is highly complex. This can be demonstrated by the fact that a 1980s' Austin Metro had more computing power than the Apollo Spacecraft that went to the Moon. A modern vehicle is complex having multiplex fibre optics for wiring, smart systems for braking and steering, and may have between 30-40 different materials used in the construction of the body, an engine that only a few years ago would be considered to be 'Race Tuned' All of these will require working on at some point in the life of the vehicle. Therefore, a person working on vehicles needs to be intelligent to understand the systems of the vehicle, be capable of diagnosing any problems that may occur, and then correct them.

To illustrate the problem, one training provider confided that they were approached by a school careers adviser asking if they would take on a young person who was 'a bit of a problem'. When the careers adviser was asked why the person was a bit of a problem, it was revealed that he was always in trouble, could not read or write properly and was often missing from class. The provider asked why the careers adviser had contacted them and why they thought that the motor industry was a suitable career. The adviser admitted that he thought the industry would be the right place for the person 'as, after all, you don't need to be bright to work on cars.' The provider asked the adviser one more question and, providing the adviser answered positively, then the person would be taken on. The question was 'would you allow this person to work on your car? If not, why do you think they would be suitable for them to work on other peoples cars?' Apparently, the phone went dead!

Funding

The topic of funding was always going to create a great deal of debate and interest, and the findings of this research reflect this. It is clear that the present funding arrangements in the England causes problems for employers, training providers and apprentices. Comments made by training providers illustrate the problems they face when an apprentice reaches the age of nineteen. This arrangement can effectively stop an apprenticeship half way, leaving the apprentice with some stark choices.

The current funding arrangements are as follows:

- Apprenticeship funding is available from the National Apprenticeship Service. The size of the contribution varies depending on your sector and the age of the candidate. If the apprentice is aged 16–18 years old, you will receive 100 per cent of the cost of the training; if they are 19-24 years old, you will receive up to 50 per cent; if they are 25 years old or over you may only get a contribution depending on the sector and area in which you operate.
- This is paid directly to the organisation that provides and supports the Apprenticeship; in most cases this will be a learning provider. Large employers with a direct contract with the National Apprenticeship Service may receive the funding themselves.ⁱⁱ

As the funding goes directly to the training provider most people seeking an apprenticeship take a place with a training provider before gaining employment. Some training providers have a policy of enrolling large numbers of apprentices regardless of places that are available, which can lead to an oversupply of apprentices, or the enrolment of unsuitable candidates for a role in the industry.

The old apprenticeship scheme, and the one currently used in Ireland, worked in a way that a person sought employment as an apprentice with an employer, who then set about training the person both 'on the job' and at a college of further education who specialised in the subject. Employers paid a levy based on the number of people employed, and then claimed back a proportion of the levy for every apprentice employed. In this way it was in an employer's interest to have apprentices.

The Irish apprenticeship model of 'On the Job and Off the Job' training is listed below. This is an extract from: '**Meeting the skills needs of a buoyant economy: apprenticeship—the Irish experience**'ⁱⁱⁱ

The apprenticeship model of a mixture of off-the-job and on-the-job training is recognised in Ireland, and internationally, as providing a very desirable skill development and work-entry route for young persons (FÁS, 2004). The SBA system is a modular standards-based system comprising normally seven alternating phases, work-based and off-the-job training and education (there are two exceptions to the seven-phases model). These alternating phases typically consist of three off-the-job phases and four phases of work-based learning. The duration of the three off-the-job phases is normally 40/42 weeks (20 weeks in a FÁS training centre and two 10/11-week periods in an institute of technology). Time is still an element of apprenticeship and is currently set at four years' duration with the exception of the printing trades, which are now set at three years with the same input of off-the-job training. This was done in an effort to attract more people into these trades by shortening the time necessary to qualify and therefore progress to full pay. In an ideal world apprentices' pay should be tied to successful completion of each phase. Arguably, this would incentivise apprentices at each phase to reach the required standard of competence demanded by the system. However, in practice, this would be unworkable as it would mean that

the off-the-job phases should be available on demand at the point where the apprentice

The Irish experience of apprenticeship 37

has passed the work-based assessment for the appropriate phase. There is also the issue of adequate on-site experiential learning and this is an important aspect of craft development. Whilst the underpinning theory, science and mathematics learned in the FÁS training centres and in the institutes of technology is crucial to the whole learning process, it is the application of these competences in real-life situations on-site that is one of the hallmarks of high-quality craftsmanship.

The 'Modern Apprenticeship Scheme' can therefore create problems as highlighted in the report 'Research into Expanding Apprenticeships'^{iv}

55 Employers reported a significant level of unmet demand: 10 per cent had requested additional apprentices, but were told that this was not possible. This problem was worst in the North East, among medium-sized companies, and in the Education, Health and Public Administration sector. It was not as much of a problem in the Construction sector.

56 There may be a number of barriers here.

- Most often, employers were told that there were no additional funded places available from their college or training provider.
- A few employers were referred on to other colleges or training providers – to see if spare capacity existed elsewhere.
- Those employers that sought new or bespoke Apprenticeships were told not to bother – as it was too difficult to secure approval for qualifications that straddle a number of sectors.

57 Unprompted, participating employers were most likely to cite an upturn in business prospects as a factor that might encourage them to recruit more apprentices in the future (46 per cent). The costs of participation were a concern for around a fifth of participating firms, while a similar proportion indicated that nothing would encourage them to take on additional apprentices.

58 When prompted on which factors would drive increased participation in the future, employers' responses were slightly different.

- Business needs were most often cited (by 71 per cent of employers).
- Some 68 per cent of employers were interested in the prospect of recruiting apprentices aged 25 or over.
- Some 59 per cent of employers were interested in a programme-led approach, where off-the-job training would be completed and the learner would subsequently be recruited by the company.
- A similar proportion of employers (56 per cent) were interested in some form of compensation for staff time spent learning outside work.

The funding issue is a reoccurring theme in most research into apprenticeships, The CFA report *Adult Apprenticeships Business and Administration Draft Framework*^v reports that:

- The adult provision has been developed with the assumption that adult funding will continue to decrease in the future and that employers will be expected to make a greater contribution towards adult learning.

The IMI report in their Review of Automotive Industry Young Apprenticeships in England^{vi} state in the section 'Threats to the programme':

- The research points to a number of threats to the continued success of the programme, in particular the impact of the recession and funding issues.
- In relation to the recession it is clear that many partnerships perceive the recession has already had an adverse impact on the involvement of employers in the automotive young apprenticeship programme. 42% of employers (30 employers out of 71) indicated that the economic climate had impacted on their ability to take on apprentices. This is clearly a matter of concern to the IMI and steps need to be taken to carefully monitor the impact the deepening recession has on the implication of the programme.
- In relation to funding issues, there is a widespread concern raised of a decrease in the level of funding year on year. Unless the issue of adequate levels of funding is addressed this is likely to further limit the implementation of the programme in certain areas or by particular partnerships.

Apprenticeships in General

There is no doubt that all interested parties involved with apprenticeships believe that they are good thing and enable training for future generations. The last government committed to increase spending to £1 billion by 2010/11 to support apprenticeship expansion and quality improvement.

Over the 10 year period from 2002/02 to 2010/11 more than 900,000 young people and adults will have successfully completed their apprenticeship with 130,000 in 2010/11 alone.^{vii}

Number of Learners

Latest statistics for the motor industry regarding apprenticeships^{viii} show that:

The number of learners who began their apprenticeship in 2008/9 was 11,310, as compared to 9,450 in 2005/6, 10,995 in 2007/07. Of those 2008/9 starts 7,485 (66.2%) were level 2 and 3,825 (33.8%) were level 3.

Route of learning:

- 4.7% were vehicle fitting
- 78.7% were vehicle maintenance/repair
- 0.84% were roadside assistance and recover
- 10.6% were vehicle body and paint operations
- 4.1% were vehicle parts operations
- 1.1% were vehicle sales

These figures confirm the findings of this research project where the type of apprenticeships offered by training providers was looked at.

This shows that the Vehicle Body Repair Industry is the second largest provider of apprenticeships in the motor industry, but the motor industry is a small player accounting for around 10% of all apprenticeships.

The Vehicle Body Repair Industry is a very fragmented sector in the motor industry. Where most of the main dealerships selling and carrying out mechanical repairs are now owned by large groups or even the manufacturer, the body repairers are often small, one site operations. As a result of this many do not know how to recruit apprentices, how the funding system works, or that funding is available. Training providers tend to use the larger employers to find places for their apprentices, and many state that they do not have the time or resources to engage with industry to expand the number of places.

12. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The Sector Skill Council implements the NOS for VDA.
- The funding arrangements for apprenticeships are reviewed and amended to take the 19+ into consideration.
- Funding places not people drive the wrong behaviour from training providers.
- Schools need to understand that University is not an option for all, and that society needs a trained workforce.

13. References

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- ⁱ Understanding Educational Research. Ian Bryant 2002
- ⁱⁱ <http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/Employers/Training-and-Funding.aspx>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Len O'Connor* Cork Institute of Technology, Ireland March 2006
- ^{iv} LSC, August 2008
- ^v Kerrie Fuller, March 2009
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