![PARN - Professional Associations Research Network]

Professional Bodies & Apprenticeships

A report for The Gatsby Charitable Foundation

BESPOKE
SERVICES

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this research project was to explore the relationship between professional bodies and the Government's Trailblazer programme, as well as engagement with apprenticeships more generally. In particular, we sought to investigate if professional body registration and/or membership is embedded in the apprenticeship development process.

Stage one of the project consisted of an online survey of English and Northern Irish professional bodies. It was designed to capture their perceptions of Apprenticeships, and their involvement and experience with the Trailblazer initiative. The survey was live for six weeks during September and October 2014, and returned 64 useable responses, attaining a response rate of 11%.

Phase two involved three focus groups made up of representatives from professional bodies to add greater depth and understanding as to the perceptions, procedures and barriers surrounding apprenticeships.

Key findings from the survey are:

- 50% of the professional bodies in the sample currently support apprenticeships as a route to membership.

- *STEM* and *Business* sectors are the most engaged, with 74% and 60% of these sectors respectively supporting apprenticeships as a route to membership.

- 86% of responding professional bodies in the *Medical/Health* sector see apprenticeships as unimportant to their organisation. All noted that this perception had remained relatively unchanged in the past 5 years.

- 70% of professional bodies in the sample claim to be aware of the Trailblazer programme.

- *Medical/Health* and *Other* had less awareness of Trailblazer, with 40% and 29% respectively having heard of it.

- Less than half of the sample (42%) has been involved in setting standards for apprenticeships outside of Trailblazer.

- The majority of the sample (61%) remain *Very Interested* in setting apprenticeship standards.

The survey data, coupled with the thematic analysis of the focus group discussions, led PARN to a series of conclusions and recommendations. We determined that engagement with apprenticeships across the professional body sector varies considerably and is dependent on:

- The size of employers and the strength of the relationship between the professional body and employers.

- The field in which the professional body operates and whether it has a history with vocational learning. As such, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) organisations appear to be the most engaged with apprenticeships and have the greatest involvement with Trailblazer.

Based on the research findings, PARN strongly recommends that professional bodies become more proactive in their approach to apprenticeships, as they are essentially the guardians and custodians of their respective profession. Getting together with employer groups and thinking about how apprenticeship standards can map onto professional membership frameworks are good starting points. PARN also suggests that BIS actively seek to include professional bodies in their discussions about apprenticeships, as per the documentation stating that professional bodies will be invited to input in the process (BIS, 2013, p.5). Some professional bodies in our research had received little or no correspondence from BIS and some commented on their challenging relationship with respect to Trailblazer.

Introduction

In recent years, successive governments have often privileged apprenticeships as the key form of vocational training. The appeal of apprenticeships is clear; not only do they offer to equip young people with marketable skills; they also promise a structured route into employment. The term 'apprenticeship' relates to a form of training which incorporates elements of both on-and-off the job learning opportunities. Apprenticeships are designed to offer participants the opportunity to develop skills in a work setting, as well as a salary, and after a period of training and study, to lead a nationally recognised qualification (currently National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 or above).

However, concerns have been raised about the quality of a number of forms of apprenticeship training as well as the duration of some existing schemes (See Fuller and Unwin, 2013). In this context, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) commissioned a report by the entrepreneur Doug Richard to review how apprenticeship schemes were designed and implemented. Published in November 2012, The Richard Review of Apprenticeships (Richard, 2012) offered wide ranging recommendations for the redevelopment of the apprenticeship system. The Government's response to this review has formed the basis for the current reforms to apprenticeships in England. The resulting policy stance emphasises the need for 'substantial' training to equip apprentices with broad transferable skills to become 'fully competent' in an occupation. This is to be achieved by privileging the role of employers in the development of new standards, by increasing the quality of apprenticeships, by focusing assessment towards the end of the apprenticeship, and by introducing a grading structure.

The redevelopment of existing apprenticeships is to come about through so-called 'Trailblazers' - groups of employer lead consortia clustered around particular occupations tasked with demonstrating how standards and assessments can successfully be developed. Rather than focusing on a particular job role (as has been the case in the past), the new apprenticeship standards and assessment criteria are to be developed around a particular occupation. Importantly, BIS envisages that professional bodies will play a role in these Trailblazers, so that where possible, apprenticeship training schemes can map onto the standards for technical and ethical competence used for professional body membership criteria. The ambition here is that "achieving an Apprenticeship in future ensures that an individual is ready to secure professional accreditation where that is available" (BIS, 2013, p.5). The Trailblazer groups can benefit from the professional knowledge and expertise in assessment provided by professional bodies. Moreover, offering a structured route into professional registration might also help to raise the status of apprentices, a key component of the Richard Review recommendations (Richard, 2012). The Trailblazer programme has progressed as follows:

- Phase 1 Trailblazers began in October 2013 in eight sectors. Eleven apprenticeship standards and assessment plans were produced. The first apprentices began training towards a number of Phase 1 standards in September 2014.

- Phase 2 Trailblazers began in March 2014 in 29 sectors. The first approved standards to be produced by this group were published in August 2014. A number had their assessment plans approved in March 2015.

- Phase 3 Trailblazers were announced in October 2014 initially covering 37 sectors. This involved the development of more than 75 standards.

- Phase 4 Trailblazers were announced in March 2015 covering 26 groups initially developing 35 standards.

Whilst a number of professional bodies have been strongly involved with this programme, in some areas, their involvement has been minimal.

Research Brief

This project was commissioned by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation, an organisation which has an interest to increase the number of people with Level Three and Four STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) skills by promoting the status of science, engineering and IT technicians, and by supporting technician training pathways. Gatsby commissioned PARN to investigate the relationship between the professional bodies, the Government's Trailblazer initiative, and professional bodies' wider perceptions of apprenticeships. Specifically, PARN sought to answer the following questions:

- To what extent is the professional body sector engaged with the apprenticeship Trailblazer process?

- How much account is being taken of professional body registration and/or membership in the apprenticeship development process?

- What is the strength of the links between gaining an appropriate educational level via an apprenticeship, and gaining membership/recognition by a professional body?

- What is the nature of the interaction employers and professional bodies in relation to the Trailblazer process and to what extent have professional bodies been able to deliver what employers need?

Methods

Stage one of the project utilised an online survey of English and Northern Irish Professional Bodies. The questionnaire was designed to capture these organisations' perceptions of Apprenticeships, and their involvement and experience with the Trailblazer initiative. The survey was live for six weeks during September and October 2014, and returned 64 useable responses, attaining a response rate of 11%. The survey operated on a self-selection basis i.e. any professional body on the PARN database who was interested in taking part was able to do so. Whilst this approach tends to achieve the largest response rate, it also means that those organisations with an interest in the subject are most likely to respond.

Phase two of the project involved three focus groups made up of representatives from professional bodies. These were organised around the sectors of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths), the built environment, and a mixed 'other' group comprised of a variety of professional bodies. Whilst a number of health and medical professional bodies were also approached, none were willing to participate in the focus group portion of the research.

Definitions

In the content of this work, professional bodies are defined as those organisations involved in the advancement of the knowledge and practice of professions through developing, supporting, regulating and promoting professional standards for technical and ethical competence. Those we have primarily investigated are a subset of professional bodies, professional associations, which are distinguished by having individual professionals as members. For these, in addition to being membership organisations working in the interests of their members, they are also all concerned with the public benefit as well as the reputation of professionals and their respective professions. They all have objects in their foundation documents establishing their aim to maintain and develop professionalism and thereby securing high quality professional services for society. While different organisations carry out different aspects of this overall mission, together they can be identified as professional bodies.

Three types of organisations make up the umbrella term 'professional body'. These are:

- *Professional associations* that represent professionals and aim to raise professional standards and the reputation of their members, they may be distinguished as *membership* professional bodies;
- *Regulatory bodies* which enforce standards (and may also set them);
- *Learned societies* that are associated with professions and which develop and/or disseminate knowledge which underlies professional practice.

Some occupations combine these organisations into a single professional body, in others they are clearly differentiated organisations, and the picture is complicated further in that many professional bodies combine the functions of two of these types such as the Institute of Physics, one of our case studies. (Friedman, 2013)

Survey Findings

Profile of respondents

The overall sample of 64 organisations was segmented into four broad sectors to facilitate analysis. Figure 1 shows the proportion of respondents that belong to each of these sectors. The largest group in the sample is STEM, with 30% identifying as belonging to this sector. This is closely followed by *Business and Finance* with 24% of the sample identifying in this way. The *Other* group was made up of a range of organisations from a variety of different sectors, but which were not sufficiently represented to warrant their own category. A full list of responding organisations is included as an appendix.
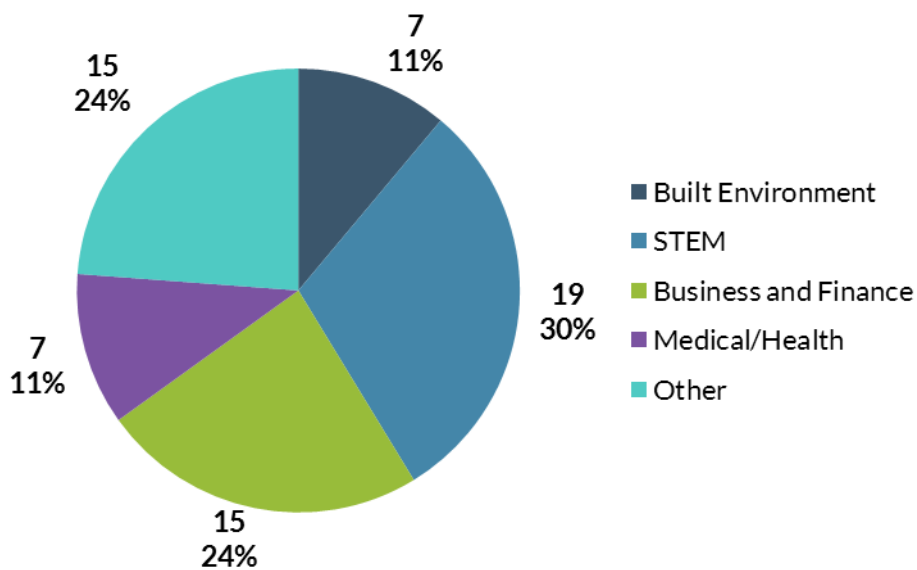
Figure 1: Sample by sector

Figure 2 gives an indication of the size of the responding organisations, by the number of members. The vast majority of the sample has more than twenty thousand members (38%) or between five and twenty thousand members (40%). By contrast, almost a quarter (22%) are relatively small organisations with fewer than five thousand members.
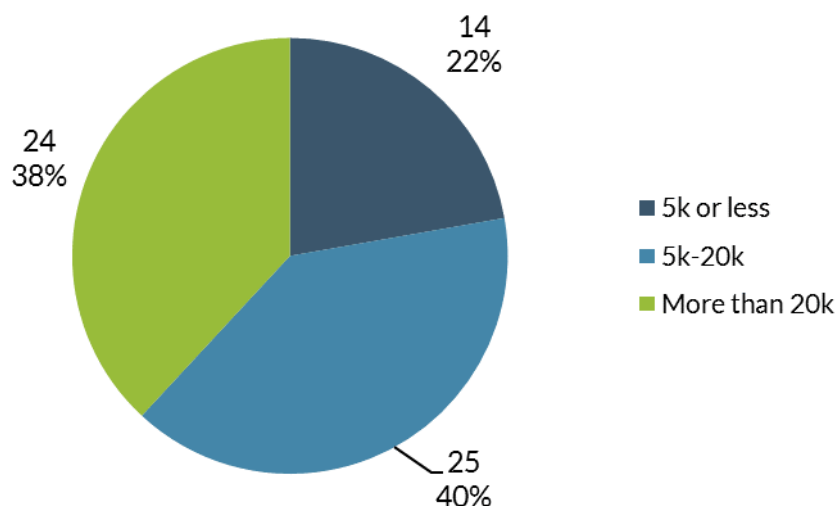
Figure 2: Sample by number of members

We asked responding organisations to indicate the level of qualification required before members were considered to be 'fully qualified' in the profession. Figure 3 shows that a third of the sample requires a degree level qualification for a professional to be fully qualified and 23% require a qualification higher than this.
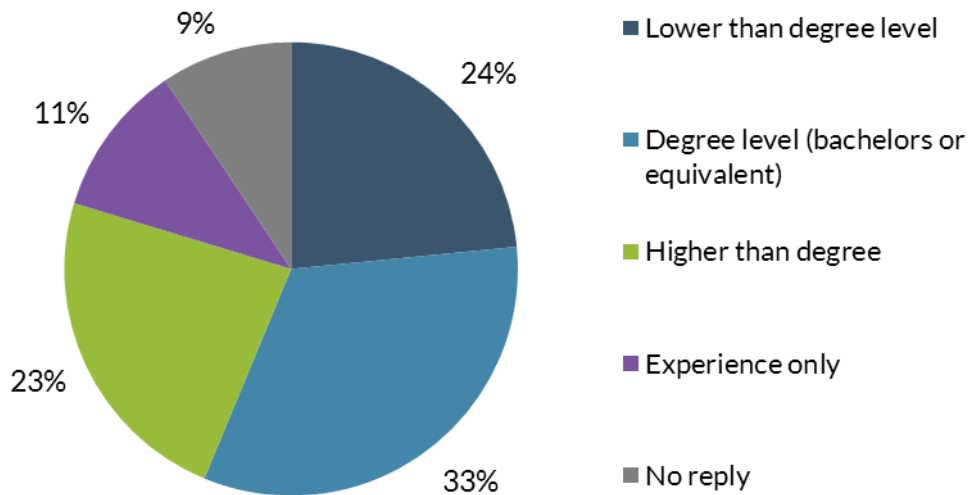
Figure 3: What is the minimum level of qualification in your profession to be fully qualified?

Support for Apprenticeships

The sample is quite evenly split in terms of support for apprenticeships, with 50% of responding professional bodies claiming to support a route into membership for individuals choosing this pathway.
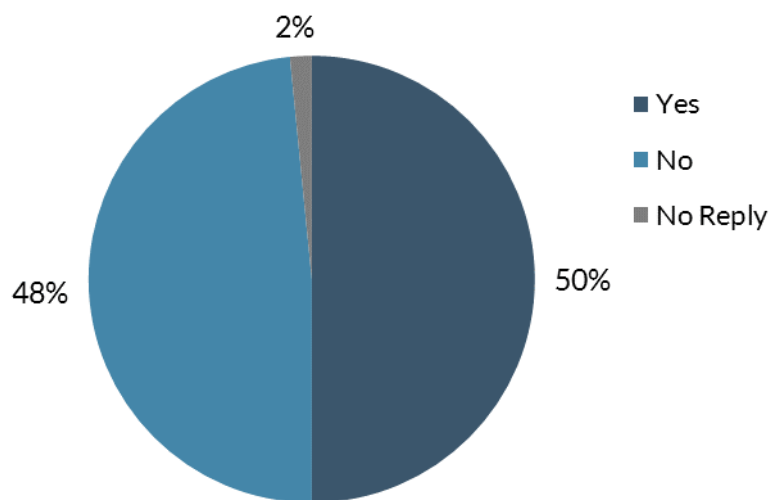
Figure 4: Does your professional body currently support a route to membership via apprenticeship pathway?

Figure 5 takes the same data, but segments it by sector. Respondents from *STEM* and *Business and Finance* widely support apprenticeships as a route to membership, with nearly three quarters of organisations in the *STEM* sector and two thirds in the *Business and Finance* sector doing so. The *Medical/Health* sector, on the other hand, is much less likely to support this route, with only 14% of organisations currently supporting apprenticeships as a route into the profession.
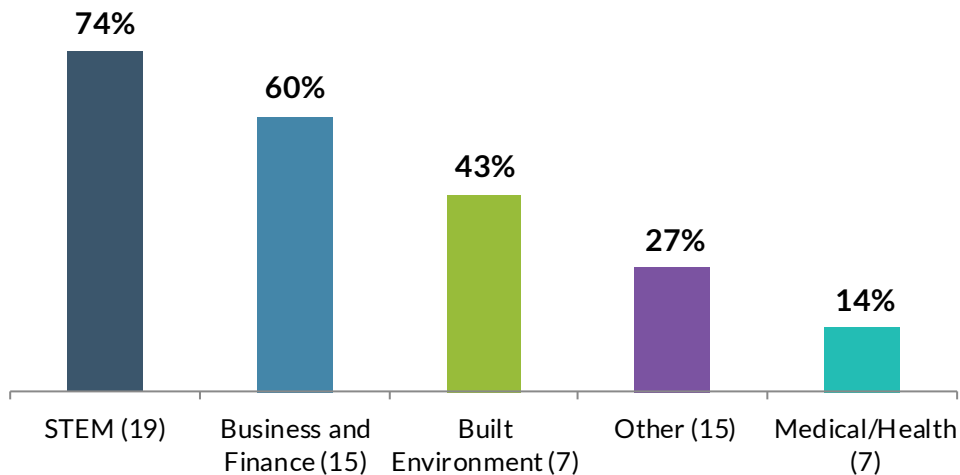
Figure 5: Does your professional body currently support a route to membership via apprenticeship pathway? By Sector

When looking at support for apprenticeships by size of membership, Figure 6 shows that the larger organisations are more likely to offer this route to membership.
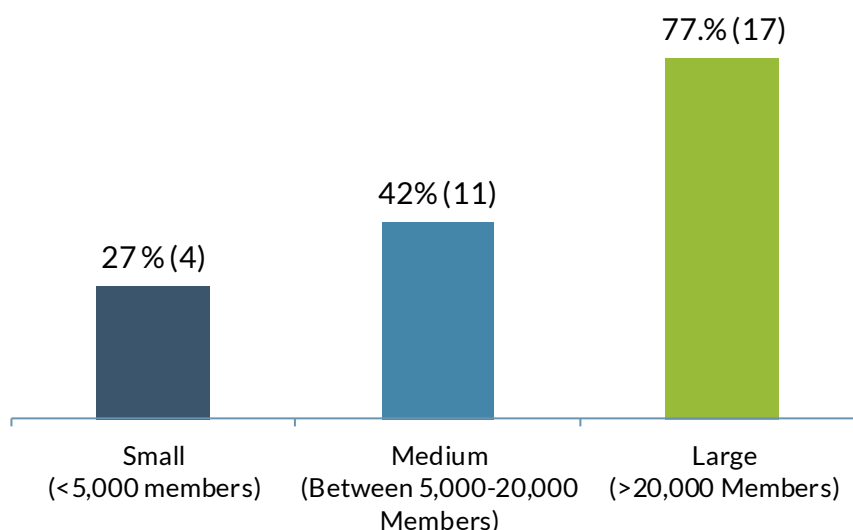
Figure 6: Does your professional body currently support a route to membership via apprenticeship pathway? By size

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The respondents were then asked to rate how important apprenticeships are to their professional body. Figure 7 shows the results as segmented into sectors. Here we can see that respondents from *Medical/Health* professions do not consider apprenticeships to be important to their organisation (86%) whereas 58% of *STEM* respondents view them as important.
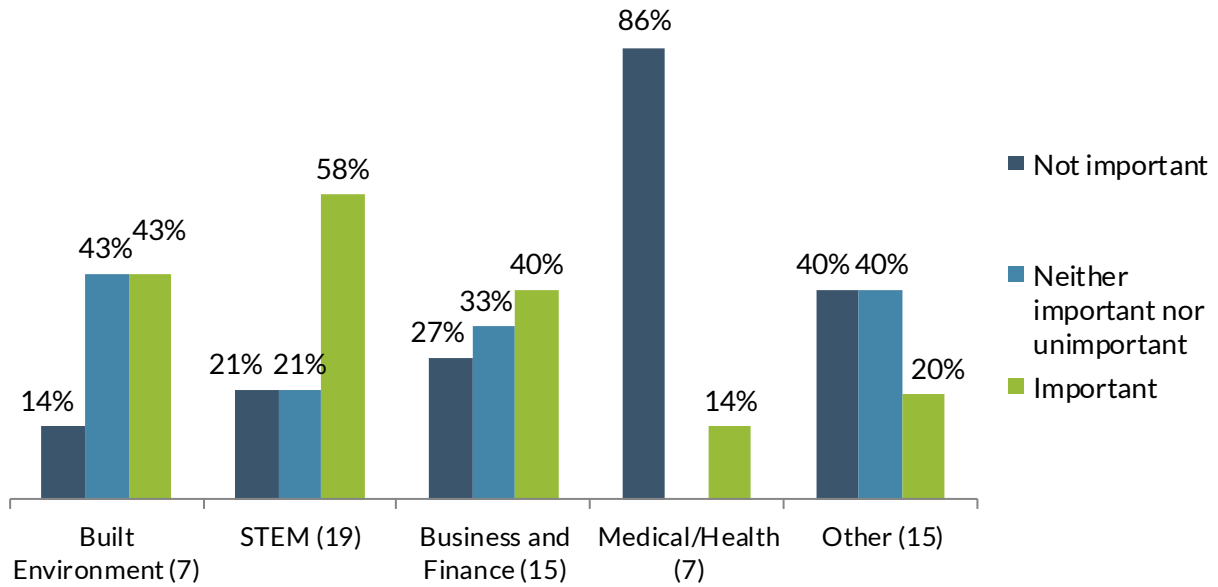
Figure 7: How important are apprenticeships to your professional body?

When asked how this level of importance had changed over the last 5 years, the *STEM* and *Business and Finance* sectors reported the most substantial change, with 42% and 33% of organisations respectively seeing *A lot of change*. These are followed by the *Built Environment* sector, where 57% of organisations report some change. The *Other* and *Medical/Health* sectors report the least change, with 20% and 29% of organisations seeing no change in the importance of apprenticeships.
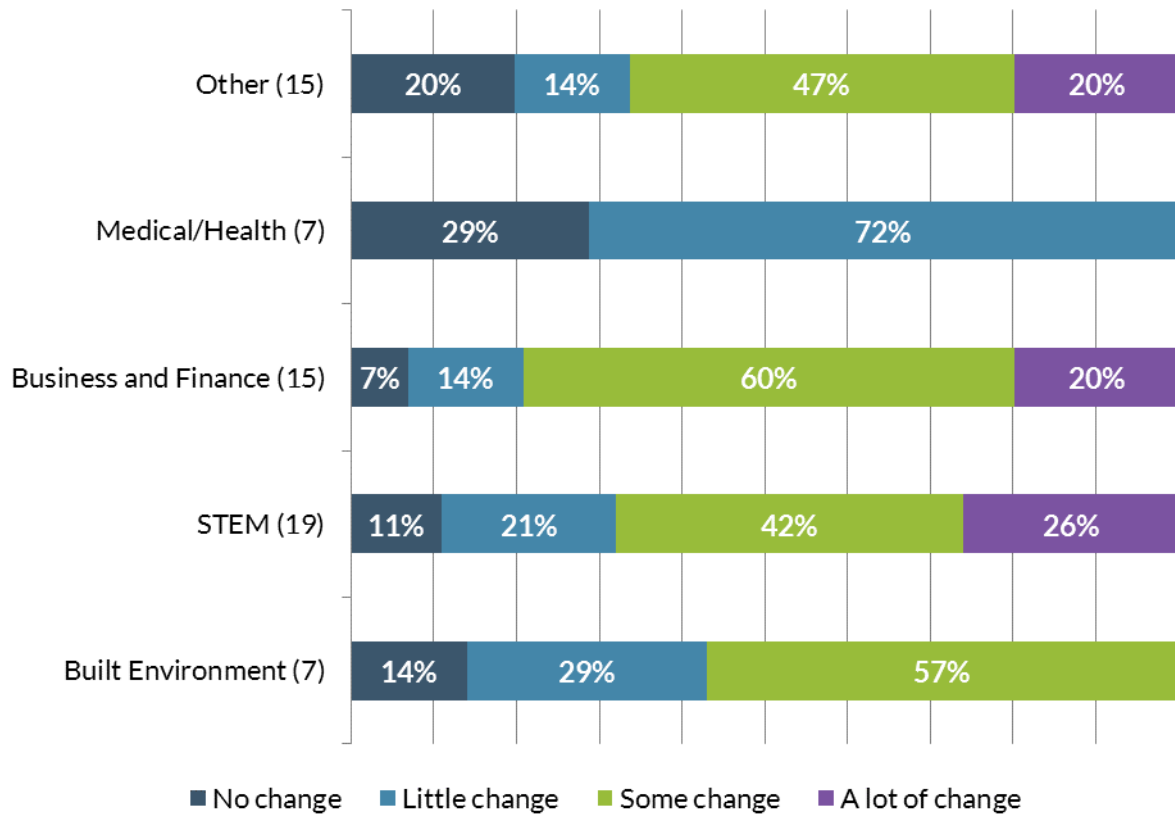
Figure 8: Has this level of importance changed in the last five years?

Figure 9 shows responses to a question that asked those participants who support apprenticeships as a route to membership to compare the decision making process of applications to other routes. Commonly, decision making for apprenticeship based applications takes as long as for applications based on other routes to membership. However, in STEM, this tends not to be the case as 7 (50%) organisations in this sector felt that it took less time to decide on apprenticeship based applications than on applications based on other routes, suggesting that apprenticeships are more closely integrated into the membership registration structure in these organisations.
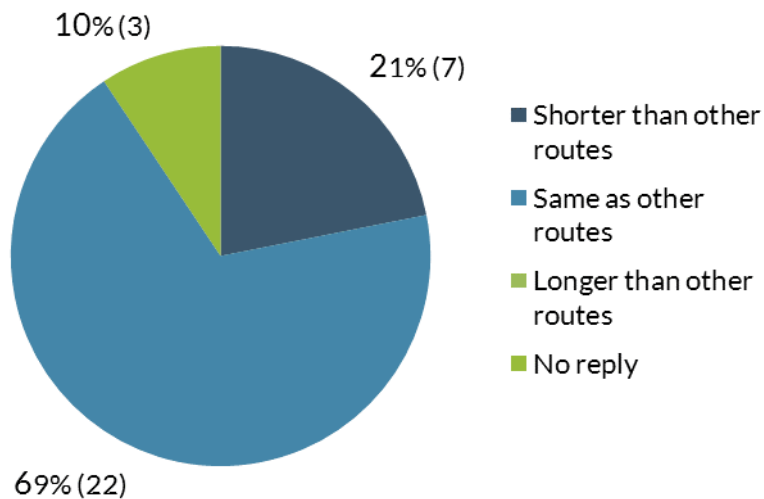
Figure 9: When compared with other routes into the profession, how long does decision making take for apprenticeship applications?

	Built Environment	STEM	Business and Finance	Medical/Health	Other
Shorter that other routes	-	50%	-	-	-
Same as other routes to entry	100%	50%	67%	100%	100%
Longer than other routes to membership	-	-	-	-	-
No reply	-	-	33%	-	-
Base	3	14	9	1	4

Table 1: When compared with other routes into the profession, how long does decision making take for apprenticeship applications? By sector

Barriers

Those professional bodies in the sample that do not support apprenticeships as a route to membership were asked what the main barriers were to doing so. Almost half of the sample (42%) saw the lack of administrative procedures as the greatest barrier, while 32% claim that the apprenticeship scheme does not map onto the organisation's membership criteria.
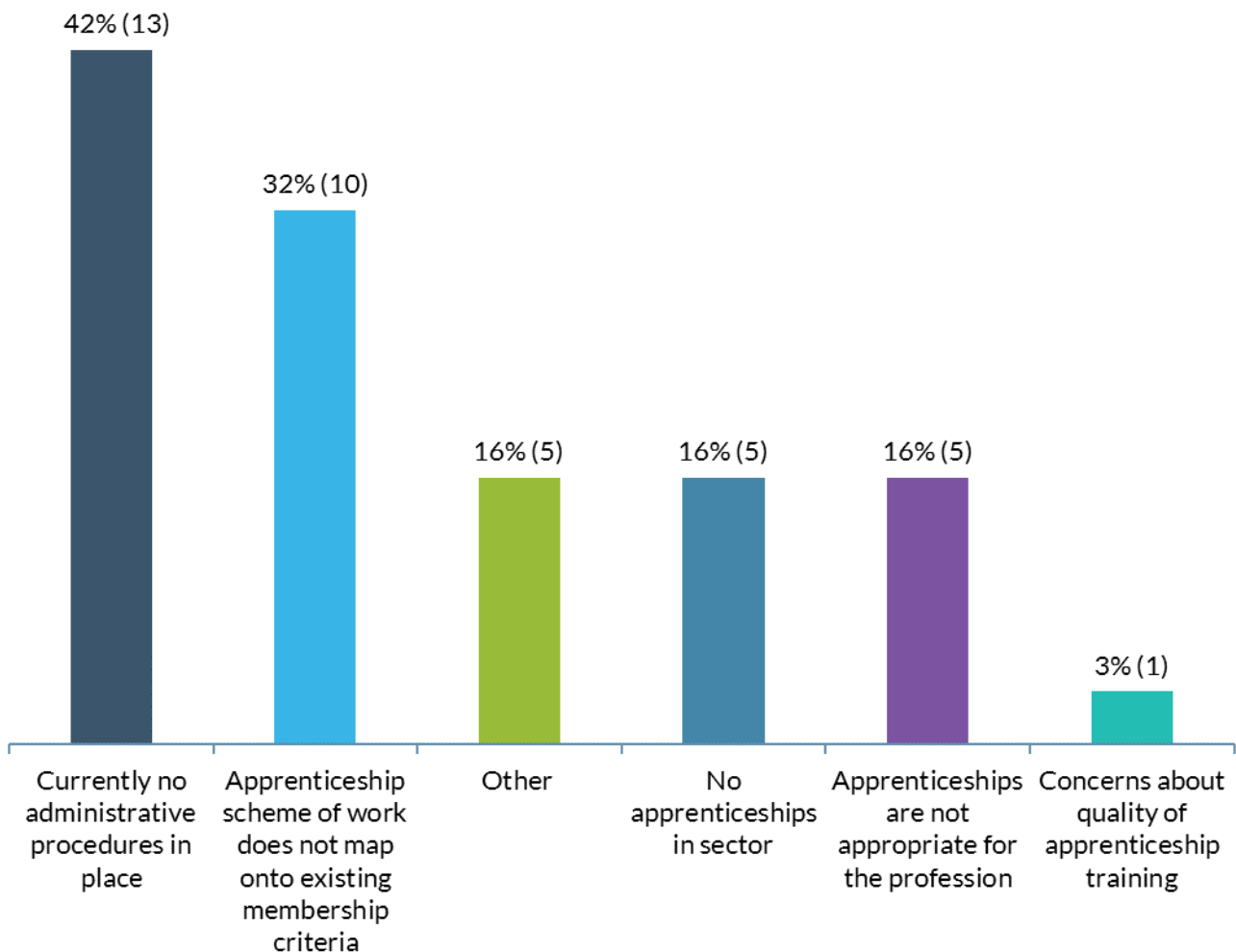
Figure 10: What are the main barriers to supporting a route to membership?

Those that selected 'other' were asked to specify. All five respondents stated that there was not current apprenticeship offering or set of standards in their sector.

These results are also reflected across the sector categories, as shown in Table 2, with the exception of *Medical/Health*. Responding organisations from this sector most commonly cited that the qualification is not high enough for membership and that apprenticeships are not appropriate for the profession as the main barriers to supporting apprenticeship routes to membership. However, these results should be interpreted with caution due to the low number of respondents in this section.

	Built Environment	STEM	Business and Finance	Medical/Health	Other
Qualification not high enough for minimum membership criteria	-	20%	-	60%	-
Currently no administrative procedures in place	50%	40%	33%	-	64%
Apprenticeship scheme of work does not map onto existing membership criteria	50%	20%	50%	-	36%
Concerns about quality of apprenticeship training	-	-	-	20%	-
Apprenticeships are not appropriate for the profession	-	-	-	40%	27%
Other	50%	60%	33%	20%	18%
No reply	-	-	-	-	-
Base	4	5	6	5	11

Table 2: Barriers to supporting apprenticeship routes to membership by sector

Trailblazer

As shown in Figure 11, not all professional bodies in the sample are aware of the Trailblazer programme, yet 70% claimed to have heard of the initiative.
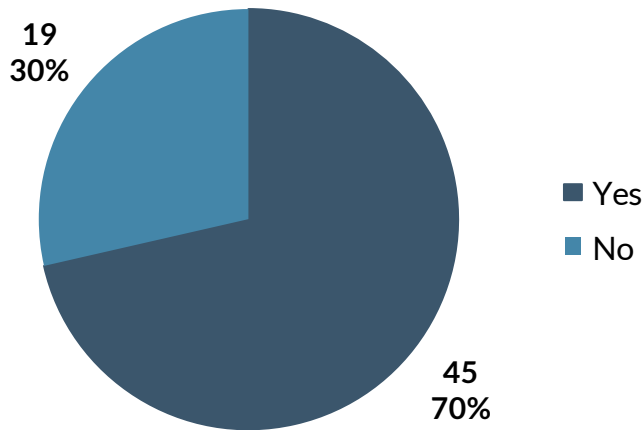
Figure 11: Are you aware of the Trailblazer programme?

Figure 12 shows the same question as segmented by sector. While almost all organisations in the *STEM*, *Business and Finance* and *Built Environment* sectors are aware of the Trailblazer programme (89%, 87% and 86% respectively), the *Other* and *Medical/Health* sectors are much less aware of it (40% and 29% of organisations respectively).
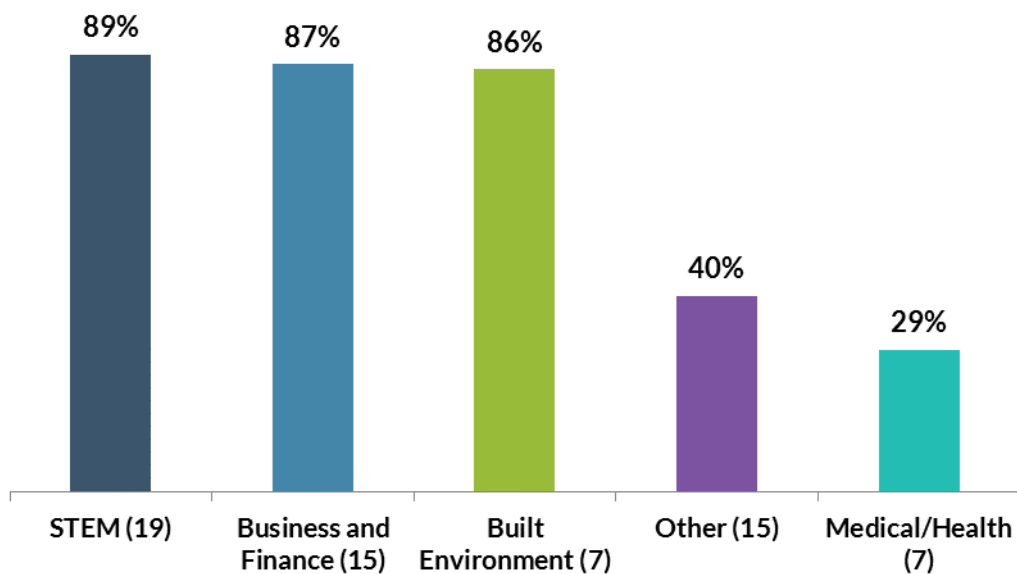
Figure 12: Awareness of Trailblazer programme by sectors

Setting standards

42% of the sample has been involved in setting standards for apprenticeships outside the Trailblazer programme, as is displayed in Figure 13.
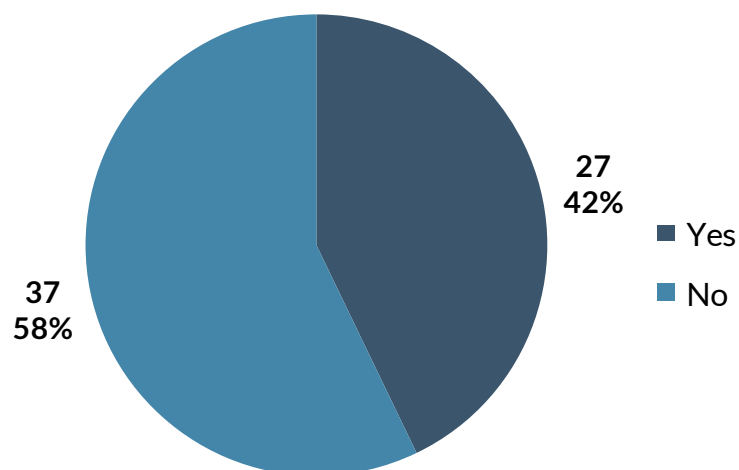
Figure 13: Outside of the Trailblazer programme, have you ever been involved in setting standards for apprenticeships?

We then asked about level of interest in setting standards. The majority (61%) claim to be *Very Interested* in being involved in the development of apprenticeship standards. This suggests that although most of the sample have not participated in the past (57%), there is a great deal of interest in doing so. This disconnect might be explained by the aforementioned barriers to involvement or perhaps a lack of confidence having not yet been active in setting apprenticeship standards.
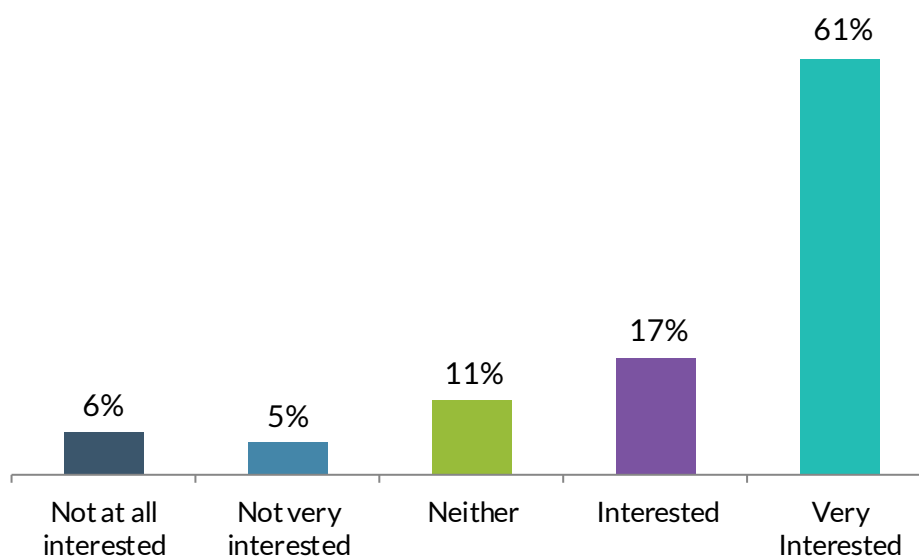
Figure 14: How interested is your organisation in being involved in the development of apprenticeship standards in your sector?

Figure 15 shows that fewer professional bodies in the sample were *Very Interested* in embedding apprenticeship standards in their routes to membership than developing the standards, with 53% answering this way.
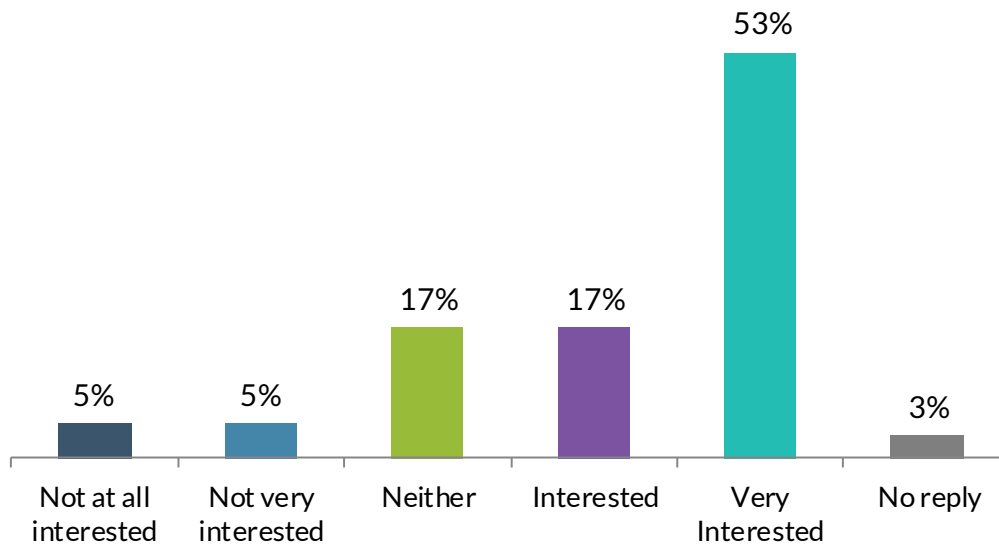
Figure 15: How interested is your organisation in embedding new apprenticeship standards in routes to membership within your profession?

The survey data revealed that around half of responding professional bodies support apprenticeships as a route to membership, and that these organisations are most likely to be either STEM or Business type professional bodies. In addition, it is *STEM* professional bodies which consider apprenticeships to be most important (53%), and where the procedures for dealing with apprentice applications are best integrated into institutional framework of the organisations. On the basis of this small sample, we can therefore suggest that STEM is fairly well engaged in the apprenticeship process. *Business and Finance* are similarly engaged, although to a lesser degree than *STEM*. In sharp contrast, the majority of those organisations which identified as *Medical/Health* professional bodies (86%) in the sample consider apprenticeships to be unimportant.

In terms of barriers, two most commonly cited issues which prevent participating in apprenticeship initiatives were that there are 'no administrative procedures in place' (42%) and the fact that 'apprenticeships do not map neatly onto the membership structure' (32%).

In terms of awareness of the Trailblazer programme, only 40% of *Other* professional bodies in the sample had heard about it. Two issues are worth considering here. Firstly, organisations in the other group tended to be smaller, on average, than the rest of the sample. Secondly, it might also be worth keeping this relative lack of awareness in mind when reading the qualitative analysis of the focus groups. The relatively lower engagement with Trailblazer amongst this group could impact how they conceptualise the current offering of apprenticeships.

Focus Groups

PARN conducted a series of focus groups of representatives from professional bodies within the 'STEM', 'Built Environment' sectors, and then a collection of different sectors we group together under the title of 'Other', to discuss current involvement with apprenticeships and the Trailblazer programme. During the focus groups, we discussed the respective organisations perspective towards setting and maintaining standards, professional registration and the role professional bodies should take in the current system. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed, anonymised, and analysed thematically. Where the name of the organisation does appear, it is because the context of the quotation makes this necessary. The results of this process are shown below.

Group One – STEM

Perceptions of apprenticeships

All the participants thought there are public perceptions of apprenticeships as less desirable qualifications than academic degrees. This is despite the majority of participating professional bodies in this focus group having had long histories of apprentices or technicians within their respective professions. Participants identified a range of different stakeholders who might hold these views, including potential apprentices, their parents, as well as employers.

> *It's very much a poor cousin in how it is thought about and how parents think about it as well. We should be doing more as organisations to promote it.*

> *I just think have given vocational qualifications a bad name and we need a real marketing and PR job to be done.*

> *We are very interested in terms of protecting the apprenticeship brand and representing the employers' views in terms of what should this apprenticeship standard be.*

A number of participants suggested that further developing the EngTech membership offering[1] at their organisation might help to alleviate this negative perception of apprenticeships because candidates would be getting something more than a qualification. Nevertheless, one respondent acknowledged that perhaps they had not expressed this position very clearly to their potential members.

> *What we haven't done so well is to actually have an offering for the Eng Tech level person in terms of what we are beyond the letters after your name and that's the bit that I think we need to work on particularly and if people do see it's not just the qualification that gets them the job, it's getting the professional recognition that will last them a lifetime.*

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[1] The term EngTech is a professional title which can be awarded to engineering technicians. The post nominal 'EngTech' identifies that individuals have demonstrated particular competencies at a sufficient level to be entered onto the national register of professional engineers and technicians. (See http://www.engtechnow.com/engtech)

Relationships with other stakeholders

A number of participants suggested that at times, the relationship between their organisation and BIS could be challenging, which in turn, made the process of engaging with apprenticeship Trailblazers quite difficult. In particular, they pointed to the potential administrative burden and the overly bureaucratic nature of the process. Similarly, several professional bodies noted that the shifting nature of the terms and structuring of engagement, as well as the potential for policy change could at times discourage professional bodies from playing an active role.

> *We were told very clearly when we were talking to BIS about the route that we had to take very much a back seat because it had to be employer driven.*

> *...it's very frustrating for the groups where you put something together all week and then the next week that's not valid.*

> *I think fatigue is setting in and there is a real danger in actually that we completely damage the apprenticeship brand.*

Other organisations, notably those that had already been engaged with the Trailblazer programme, showed themselves to be similarly aware of the balance of power in the relationships between professional bodies, employers and the sponsoring government department. However, in these circumstances, professional bodies were much more likely to frame their involvement in a more positive light. In these examples, the professional bodies note their lack of executive control, yet acknowledge that the balance of power and responsibility within the Trailblazer group was appropriate, given the strategic outcomes to be achieved, i.e. clearly lead by employers, with professional bodies on hand to steer, or to offer helpful comment and advice.

> *There are times when engineering institutions have challenged and have looked to make certain points, but ultimately it is that employer group's Trailblazer so we are still mindful that whatever is created has to be right for that sector.*

> *Actually you're giving them all the information that they can make the decision. My fear about - particularly you worded your question around should we be more assertive - is that actually you get the door shut in your face and then they [employers] go off and do their own merry thing.*

> *The advice on wording [of standards] was adhered to and it became much clearer, but I did get the impression that they weren't very keen to listen to the experiences that we've had in terms of assessment.*

These excerpts show both that the involvement of professional bodies in the development of apprenticeship standards is very much dependent on strong relationships with employers, as well as a recognition and an acceptance that the state of affairs included the appropriate role for the professional body in these relationships. Indeed, those professional bodies with established connections with employer groups, highlight the need to put forward their perspective delicately, or risk being excluded from the process all together if they are seen as too assertive.

Professional Registration

There was a general recognition amongst the participants in this focus group that it would be beneficial for apprenticeship standards and qualifications to clearly map neatly onto the registration frameworks at their organisations. For instance;

> *I think that's the value of mapping what comes out of that apprenticeship with what professional bodies offer because they have that overarching framework and I can only speak in terms of engineering because the CNI and EngTech levels all have the competencies that underpin them.*

However, there were slightly different perspectives as to how individuals who entered membership of a professional body through an apprenticeship route should progress through the membership structure. Some believed the majority should remain at technician level, as this is where the skills gap currently exists;

> *...it maps onto the levels that exist, whether that's environment, engineering or science so I would rather see that we kept it technician level and named the case for what a technician is. That it's a highly valued, important job title*

> *There just aren't that number of roles to go round so, again, it comes back to actually we've just got to be careful that we're not advocating that Level 4 or 5 is the place to be because there just aren't enough roles to go around.*

By contrast, others felt that apprenticeships should be an initial entry point to the profession, but then these individuals would be encouraged to further their career and thus achieve higher membership status; equivalent to those who entered via degree.

> *...we hold the register of chartered [professionals] and we will be looking at a technical technician level qualification in relation to that, possibly to do a so we want to create something that is seen as equally valuable in lieu of the path of a graduate. So they end at a point where they basically coalesce.*

Other participants felt a balance between these two positions was appropriate. It was both necessary to promote apprenticeships, but at the same time, maintain a good distribution of people in the various roles, so that there should not be an expectation that all would progress to higher levels.

> *It is that balance as well of promoting Engineering Technician status as an incredibly valued standard in its own right whilst demonstrating, for those that are looking to progression, how that can potentially be the first rung on the ladder towards incorporated and chartered engineer status later if you wanted it. And it's that fine line of balancing the two.*

> *But it should also be for those people who enjoy the technical aspects, how they can improve other skills that can go deeper rather than broader and I think that's the trick.*

> *Because we could alienate an awful lot of learners who do a very valuable job, and actually might not want to progress any higher than what they're doing, by advocating chartered and higher level programmes.*

The views captured here represent an odd contradiction which comes with the technician grade of membership. By promoting 'technician' as an end in itself, these organisations might be institutionalising a countervailing pressure against the notion of progress to the upper levels of the professional body membership.

Professional Body Role and Motivations

Most participants suggested that professional bodies had a unique role in the development of apprenticeship standards. They saw themselves as being independent organisations that could act for the benefit of their sector and are less motivated by short-term gains implied by a free market for goods and services within which traditional business operates. The view was that if Trailblazers were entirely employer led, they may end up being captured by a small number of large, well-resourced employers that have the capacity to engage in the Trailblazer process, at the cost of the smaller voices of SME's. Moreover, participants were quick to point to their role as centres of knowledge, and their ability to draw on the expertise of their membership in setting standards. As such, they felt particularly well placed to participate.

...professional behaviours are just as important as everything else, they are a key part of it to make them understand that it's not just this skills and knowledge, it's how they do it and making that a part of the apprenticeship is one of the best parts of these Trailblazers.

The public are not necessarily in a position to make that judgement, whereas if you say we're a professional body and we are licensed to do this then it gives it that extra help.

We can really then pull out the competencies on the UK framework and ensuring that the standards then map to that. It is a fine line but it has depended on certain groups.

The further key motivator for most of the professional bodies present was that their respective sectors had major skills gaps and a need for qualified individuals with both knowledge and experience. The group also touched on the incentive for professional bodies in that it would tap into new markets that would in the future become members of the organisation.

Quite a lot of employers find that an academic qualification isn't enough for when they get out into the real world, so apprenticeships are a great way of attracting talent we would otherwise miss.

We think that's going to be essential for drawing in the talent that's required and to accept as widely as possible. I think inclusivity comes into it as well, just to say that realisation that graduates route isn't necessarily giving employers what they are looking for.

Ultimately we are a membership organisation and we are there to support our existing members but with key drivers to grow our membership.

Other organisations, however, understood the potential for apprentice members differently. In one example, the individual explained that because apprenticeships were not seen to be a significant market driver for them, they had not been hugely motivated to participate.

> *Apprenticeships have always been led by the sector skills councils. There hasn't necessarily been the obvious tie in with professional bodies and for us; it wasn't a major market.*

Here we see how the dual and sometimes contradictory role of professional bodies, as promoters of the public good, and as democratic membership organisations, can be seen to influence an organisation's willingness, and perhaps ability, to engage with the development of apprenticeship standards. This might suggest that the fact that professional bodies in particular are also membership organisations has an impact on their level of involvement. Although the organisations remain independent and work in the public interest, the interest of the members and growing membership is always a consideration.

Group Two– 'Other'

Perceptions of apprenticeships

As was the case in Group One, a central component of the discussion about perceptions of apprenticeships was the issue of their not being as highly acclaimed as academic degrees. Some participants suggested that the reputation of apprenticeships as inferior to degrees would pose a challenge in actually getting people to sign up to apprenticeships. There was an agreement within the group that the general public did not hold apprenticeships with much value. Parents were again identified as key to young people's views about apprenticeships. Moreover, the term 'apprentice' was felt to hold negative connotations.

> *Our biggest challenge is, of course, persuading parents because they are the key influencers that I think a lot of us forget about when dealing with younger people.*

> *Maybe perception because I think we would perceive apprentices as being a younger and therefore lower set-up that isn't necessarily going to lead to someone going to get a degree.*

> *I want to find a word that describes people that have got the same level of competence and knowledge as somebody who did it through traditional academic routes, but who did it differently. But terminology that doesn't feel derogatory or doesn't feel- and I can't think of anything.*

In addition, some participants described negative connotations associated with apprenticeships from within their profession specifically, perhaps extending to the professional body itself. For example;

> *At one point, for about two weeks, we were talking about Vocational Qualified [professionals} and everybody say, no, no, can't do that.*

> *It's all Masters [qualifications] because we feel, or get the perception that, we need that higher level of education.*

This creates a barrier that might be more pertinent for these sectors outside of engineering and technology. Here, many professional bodies lack a well-worn route for apprentices to enter the membership grades of the organisation which is equivalent to the role played by the term 'technician'. Nevertheless, almost all participants agreed that their members' views about introducing alternative routes into the profession played a part in their orientation towards apprenticeships. As a result of the existing perception of apprenticeships as being 'lesser' than degree qualifications, as set out above, the participants in this focus group were sensitive to the notion that their 'Full' members, 'Chartered' members and 'Fellows', who have all been to university and achieved at least a first degree, might potentially view the registration of qualified apprentices as 'dumbing down' the profession. Thus, the necessity of maintaining this sensitivity to members' views about sustaining the integrity of the profession appears to play a role for some professional bodies in their hesitance to accept apprentice members. By implication, organisations with this view are unlikely to become involved with the process of the development of standards for new apprenticeships. However there is a conflicting view, given that many professional bodies claim to be seeking greater diversity within their profession.

Relationships with other stakeholders

Many of the participants in this focus group claimed that the difficult relationship with certain gatekeepers in the process of developing apprenticeships had prevented their involvement. This was linked to the potential time and resource spent on producing an apprenticeship scheme, only for it to be rejected. Some participants added that they were cautious due to the continuous change in apprenticeship funding and structure by the government which could leave them having had their time and efforts wasted. This view was particularly keenly felt, given the proximity of the 2015 General Election at the time during which the empirical portion of this research was carried out.

> *We've been involved with an employer which got a coalition of other similar organisations together and professional bodies, and it all looked fine but BIS said no. And I think they were really disappointed and now they feel really disheartened.*

> *My concern is that, will the rules be changing, because we're a small organisation, who find it very difficult to understand what the rules are and that they keep changing.*

> *If this is going to be changed again in two or three years' time, it's the amount of effort that we'll put in, the amount of intelligence we'll spend on it, the amount of integrity in terms of getting our members as individuals but also employers - getting all those people together.*

However, one organisation, although citing some of these challenges, noted that as the process is employer led, it runs fairly efficiently and ultimately is worth doing:

> *You see a government backed process and you expect there to be lots and lots of meetings etc...but because it's driven by business - and in our area, big corporations, they don't want to be messing around with having tens of meetings - they tend to keep it quite brief and quick.*

> *It was all employer-led and thankfully they saw sense and the final rules for Trail Blazers, professional bodies were acknowledged. So, we've been working with the employer group to make sure that what they create fits.*

> *I think, given that both government and employers pick up the tab, then yes, they should certainly have a big say.*

These comments above from the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII) undoubtedly suggest something quite localised about the relationship between this particular professional body and the relevant employers. As the insurance sector has several large employers who are able to engage and fund apprenticeships, and with the very strong relationship between the employer groups and the Institute, it might be said that this professional body has been well supported in becoming involved in developing apprenticeships. The fact that the insurance industry is already 'well invested' in apprenticeships due to a large proportion of professionals arriving to the sector via routes other than traditional academic ones, might also be a reason the CII are less affected by the challenges felt by the other organisations. For instance, where other professional bodies may be cautious due to the possibility of their apprenticeship standard being turned down by BIS having galvanized sometimes reluctant employers, CII

have enthusiastic stakeholders who see the value in pursuing this route even with some rejections. In such cases, the impetus already exists in this sector, and so the process does not require the resource to develop support in the first place. Being turned down is therefore less of an issue, as both the organisations members, and the employers in the sector are already advocates.

Professional Registration

Most of the professional bodies in this focus group did not have well established ideas about how the apprenticeship route would map onto their membership registration framework. This might be attributed to the nature of the sectors represented here. The only science professional body, *The Institute of Physics*, anticipated eventually offering a science or engineering 'technician' grade for people working at a certain level following an apprenticeship.

The other professional bodies were uncertain about the hypothetical issue of how those individuals who complete apprenticeships would register with them as a member, and what they would be working towards. It seems structures are currently absent at some professional bodies to support accepting apprentices into membership or understanding equivalence between experiential training and professional standards. For example:

> *The non-professional roles tend to be either occupied by people who are going to use that as, if you like, what we used to call pre-library school training, which is where the graduate trainee comes in. So, the answer is, I'm not sure once you've been a library apprentice, what you then work towards.*

> *For us, that's where the gap is at the moment because we have no way of dealing with anything if it's not a degree with a certificate at the end of it.*

Ultimately, it appears that there is a divide between organisations that consider there to be a glass ceiling for those who have completed an apprenticeship i.e. they can only reach a certain level of membership that is lower than full members, and those that consider apprenticeships to be a first step on the ladder to working their way through the membership grades at the professional body. The participant from the Chartered Insurance Institute offered the following perspective;

> *...we wouldn't see it as a barrier. It's a way in. You start your professional qualification journey (CII).*

This disparity between views of a 'glass ceiling' by professional bodies relates to the different perceptions of apprenticeships within sectors. Those professions where traditionally the route to membership has always been through academic degrees appear less likely to consider apprenticeships as holding equivalence to higher education qualifications. As such, these professional bodies frame their responses from the perspective that apprenticeships should map neatly onto their current system as opposed to considering how an experiential competency based assessment can be incorporated into the structure. This position is characterised by rigidity, and the priviledgeing of education, which ulitimately fuels the resistence to being involved in setting apprenticeship standards. The following exerpt illustrates this view;

> *We spent a lot of time in the last five years getting to where we are now with the new model ... so at that stage we'd be wanting, if apprenticeships were going to join in, they're going to have to follow what we've done and modify it, rather than try something new.*

Professional Body Role and Motivations

Most of the participants saw a central role for professional bodies in the development of apprenticeships. Some attributed this to the public interest remit of the organisation (which has been discussed earlier), which employer groups involved in Trailblazers might be lacking. As was the case with Group One, this group felt that with professional body involvement, Trailblazer groups are less likely to produce products specifically tailored to accommodate the needs of one or two employers. Instead, standards are much more likely to address the needs of the wider sector. There is also the feeling that as professional bodies are already heavily involved in setting standards for the profession, they should naturally have a role in doing so here.

> *And also you get, by the nature of these Trailblazer committees of employers and they will create something, if left to their own devices that would work for them only, so we need to be there to make sure that SMEs, their needs are looked after.*

> *So, we've been working with the employer group to make sure that what they create fits with everything else around it. So, behaviours, skills etc. So, professional bodies need to be in that room within those discussions.*

> *...employers recognise that they're all sitting in their offices developing standards and learning development assets and they point to us and say 'That's your job, you should be bringing this stuff together'.*

There was also a suggestion that professional bodies could add legitimacy to the process and be a useful mediator between groups.

> *So maybe one of our roles is being the go-between and managing those expectations between government and employers because sometimes they don't necessarily see things from the same perspective.*

Some professional body participants understood their motivation for exploring apprenticeships in light of their organisation's duty to both the profession and society more widely. There was some suggestion of creating greater diversity within the profession as well as a responsibility to highlight the value of apprenticeships in order to bring a high caliber of candidates into the sector:

> *We represent the bits of the community that have a degree and, for us, that's increasingly starting to feel a little bit not right. It's as much about widening participation and widening access as it is about responding to the market. So it is a point of principle, I think.*

> *So it's making sure that we build up that competitive spirit within the sector and also making sure that they understand that apprenticeships aren't just for people who bash metal.*

Some participants also noted the market incentive for involvement, as it would create a sub-set of the profession who would then hopefully go on to be members of the professional body.

> *I don't think there's so much of a societal contribution from them. I mean, as a small organisation, we can't afford to do things like apprenticeships that don't pay for themselves. You mentioned next generation, we're having to be so much more commercial now.*

> *I suppose if I'm honest, there is also a market consideration in the sense that, I think, we are pretty saturated in terms of traditional [professionals] in the UK. So in order to carry on growing and surviving and thriving, we feel we need to start attracting different kinds of members.*

However, this conflicts with the previously mentioned perception that the current membership would be unhappy with too many members without university degrees. Some organisations were unconvinced that apprenticeships offered the same return on investment as degrees. For instance;

> *...certainly any of the undergrad or postgrad students that we offer free membership to - is a loss leader except that the majority of them do stay and therefore they will be contributing later on. I don't think there's quite the certainty in the same way.*

Standards

Most of the participants agreed that professional bodies could offer expertise in the setting of standards with regards to competencies and ethical behaviour;

> *Because, I don't know, say if I'm Aon or Aviva or whoever, I'm not going to want someone to come in who's not going to follow ethical practice because that's going to reflect badly on me, so it's the employer who does that for you as well.*

> *So we've set up a competence framework for quality professionals and I think that is useful because, historically, we've always been about, you've got a Level 6 qualification - it's all been about your knowledge and qualification and not about your ability to apply it.*

However, some professional body representatives were uncertain how they would be able to assure the maintenance of these standards once they were in place. This appeared to be due to the perspective that the existing university accreditation model would have to be employed in order to set and maintain standards for apprenticeships.

> *...it would be difficult for us to actually accredit an apprenticeship. We'd need to do what we actually do with the universities, which is actually go to the awarding body, and accredit their course, rather than being able to accredit the apprenticeship as such.*

This suggests a lack of confidence, perhaps due concerns about high administrative cost, in the ability of some professional bodies to be involved in accreditation. Implied by this kind of response is a view that accreditation not only involves setting initial expectations about the standards to be achieved, or the behaviours to be exhibited, but also a continuing quality assurance process afterwards. This is unsurprising, given that this tends to be the existing

model for professional body engagement with HE courses i.e. longstanding relationships with universities and an established tradition of accrediting courses to lead to professional membership. From this perspective, not having the same structures in place with FE colleges and training providers is understood as a barrier to participation. Alternative frameworks for maintaining standards are not considered.

Group Three - Built Environment

Perceptions of apprenticeships

As with the other focus groups, the consensus from participants in Group Three was that the public perceived apprenticeships as less desirable than other forms of training, particularly HE education. They also felt that apprenticeships were most often associated with lower skilled types of job. Further, there was discussion about the term 'apprentice' and how that it had become damaged. Each of the respondents were, however, quick to distance themselves from the perceptions they identified.

> I think because they see apprenticeships as being, maybe...trade connection. I think they're wrong but that's their perception. At the moment it's a graduate recruitment programme into [the profession] rather than an apprenticeship.

> If you call something an apprenticeship, there's an immediate idea that it's associated with craft skills, sort of front end, that sort of Level 3 area.

> I don't think people regard it as highly maybe. They think, 'University masters, oh that's great' and a grad-scheme sounds quite entrepreneurial but then you have an apprentice, oh you know, it's just a bit of a lower route, which it isn't. You're learning the same things.

Those professional bodies that have no current involvement in Trailblazer were also those where most of their members enter the profession only after having completed a Master's degree. For this reason, these organisations saw higher level apprenticeships as more relevant to them for bringing people into the sector. For instance;

> ...local authorities are looking at the apprenticeships route more closely and I think, because of that, they'll also be interested in the Degree Apprenticeship where they can train and develop their own.

> We've got really high postgraduate numbers; a lot of people are going to masters having found the profession quite late on. And that's quite a nice idea to get the more hands-on experience that way, rather than having to go through the traditional masters route.

This links to the professional bodies' perceptions of apprenticeships being of a lower standard, as here responses have been framed in a way that suggests they fail to see how apprenticeships can be used to recruit people into their profession. There is still a strong indication from some professional bodies that a degree level qualification would have to be part of the structure in order fit with their profession. One of the professional bodies has seen a change in the perception of apprenticeships;

> Well, it's moving a pace because as the apprenticeships have come into vogue, more and more of our older members have come out...to say, 'Actually, well I

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> *started like that'. There are some quite highly qualified people who went along that route all the way up.*

A catalyst for changing negative perception of apprenticeships might therefore be to encourage highly regarded members of the profession who started as apprentices to make this clear. The perception in this professional body may be different to those who do not have members to champion apprenticeships and represent them as a viable route into a career.

Relationships with other stakeholders

Some highlighted that although they have good relationships with employers, many of them are small or local government bodies that would be limited in how much they could commit to apprenticeship schemes.

> *...we've got lots and lots of small employers so it's more difficult for somebody who has two or three in a practice to employ an apprentice, whereas bigger organisations it's easier.*

> *We decided what we needed and then we have a consultant who works with us, one removed from the professional body. We set up this thing called Technician Apprenticeship Consortium, which the employers sort of run, it's chaired by employers.*

As was alluded to earlier in this report, one factor that prevents some professional bodies being involved is the nature of the employers within their sector. Without a group of supportive and enthusiastic employers in the sector, the responses from the participants here suggest that they find it difficult to become involved, as the process of standards setting lacks leadership.

In addition, one participant noted the lack of structures in place at the educational institutions that train candidates for the profession. This highlights that issues stifling apprenticeship take up are perceived to extend further than the professional body and is in fact a sector wide challenge;

> *...we probably see it as a three-way thing. The institute itself encouraging it but then the employers taking people on and the educational institutes adapting, actually to apprenticeships.*

One professional body also drew on previous experience to note that the confusing systems set up by government left them unsure about aspects of the apprenticeship programme. This might add insight as to why some participants present had not been involved in the process, as they were simply uninformed about what was required of them;

> *Yeah the government are a bit... they're very airy fairy about who's going to actually do the end bit assessments. There's a gate where you can just register your*

interest with the Skills Funding Agency to say that you want to be an assessment body but anybody can do that at the moment.

Professional Registration

Most participants in this focus group saw apprenticeships as a possible route into membership that would eventually achieve equivalent status to those entering via academic degree; as opposed to entering the profession and remaining at a lower member grade. However, most had no established structure that allowed for this.

> *At the moment there isn't really a clear pathway from apprentice to charter. I think it is possible but it would be quite a long, convoluted route and I think the Trailblazer scheme provides potential to have a clear pathway which could take someone from apprentice potentially to chartered without the glass ceiling or impediments to the process but, early days in that discussion.*

> *And basically, to be a member, it's based on competencies so as long as you meet those competencies, from whatever route you come through, that's absolutely fine by us.*

These particular excerpts reveal two different perspectives. The first suggests recognition of barriers that prevent apprentices achieving equivalent membership status at the organisation. This implies that the professional body first needs to adapt its membership structures to develop a route from apprenticeships to professional registration. The second shows that this organisation is perhaps more equipped to allow a direct route from apprenticeship to membership because the acceptance criteria are based on competencies.

Professional Body Role and Motivations

Although a couple of participants claimed that apprenticeships were not particularly high on their organisations' agenda, all had some motivation for exploring it as a route into the profession. This was mostly understood in relation to a skills gap and lack of diversity in the respective professions.

> *...what's the push for us to push the apprenticeship route is that the route to Architecture is quite exclusive so just wanted to bring in more broad selection people to consider taking Architecture.*

> *What our issue is, is getting more people up to full membership status.*

> *...currently in the economic climate where some employers are having difficulty recruiting, it's a potential recruitment remedy or solution for them to consider alternative non-graduate entry route into the profession via the technical support role.*

Some participants, notably those already involved in Trailblazer or apprenticeships more generally, had ideas about the role professional bodies should play.

If you're going to do that work for employers and give them a framework in which they can drop in their expertise, then that's certainly something that's a role for a professional body, I would have thought.

You also bring a degree of universality to it because you can steer employers away from doing something that is very one employer specific into something for the good of the apprentices that would have credibility across a whole sector.

These participants are describing the independence of the professional bodies as well as their representativeness of their sectors that would add legitimacy to the development of apprenticeship standards.

Standards

One professional body gave some insight into how developing the standards for apprenticeships works with employers as connected with technician membership grade;

We gave the employers UK spec and said 'This is what the standard as a technician should be like' and then they filled in the knowledge and skills they thought there should be. And then we merged that into the two sides and it goes forward.

There was also discussion about the National Occupational Standards (NOS) and how they frame their understanding of developing apprenticeship standards;

...NOS is so out of date, they just cannot keep it to date quick enough. I think would be great if you could say, this is what you need to be able to do but that's only at one point in time. Very, very quickly what you need to do has changed and the idea of NOS has just had its day, probably.

...NOS was about what a person needs to know and what they need to do and how that's going to be evaluated and assessed. I mean, the whole point is the keyword... national. They were national standards so irrespective of where the training was from, all learners and apprentices are working towards a benchmark.

...and then the NOS- I mean they are sort of unreadable, aren't they?

Discussion of findings

Engagement

The level of engagement of professional bodies in Trailblazer and apprenticeships more generally varies substantially both within and between sectors. Broadly speaking, those sectors that have had vocational routes embedded within them over time tend to have greater involvement. These are often sectors that included a large variety of professionals at different levels. Certain sectors and professions could be said to be even further detached from the process as they were not interested in completing either the survey or the focus group. Sectors that fit in this category include medicine and law, although there will be exceptions to this as well as other potential reasons for not wishing to participate.

Perceptions of apprenticeships

Public perception

The focus groups revealed that in general professional bodies recognise a somewhat negative perception of apprenticeships, feeling that the public believe they are not as valuable as a traditional degree route. For some this was due to the indication that those undertaking an apprenticeship would be younger, perhaps with few qualifications and working at a lower level. Ultimately, our project showed that work needs to be done to promote apprenticeships to young people as a viable route to a career.

Members' perception

Some professional bodies that participated in the research noted a similar negative perception of apprenticeships amongst their members. Some found that members would consider it a 'dumbing down' of the profession more generally if too many were welcomed into the profession via alternative routes to university degrees. This presents a challenge to certain professional bodies in the involvement with apprenticeships for a number of reasons. Although professional bodies should, on the whole, work in the public interest, they also represent their members and in many cases are funded mostly by member subscriptions. Maintaining the balance between 'doing the right thing' for the profession and what the membership are comfortable with is a constant consideration for professional bodies, particularly for those for whom professionals are not required to be a member to practise. In this case, the balance is perhaps between increasing access to the professions and addressing skills gaps and the feeling amongst the members that their membership status is devalued if the bar is lowered for entry.

However, this perception that members will react negatively if professional bodies were to accept apprentice members is somewhat dependent on the profession itself. For example, professions which have a long history of apprenticeships as well as individuals working in the profession under titles such as 'technician' are more likely to see the value in this alternative route into the profession. For other sectors, such as Insurance, there is no fixed route into the field, with many professionals not holding academic qualifications. In turn, employers more readily recognise the calibre of candidates that enter through apprenticeships and individual members can relate to the routes, as either they or many colleagues have entered the profession this way. This, in many ways, removes potential barriers for professional bodies in

becoming involved in apprenticeships as both employers and individual members are in full support.

Ultimately, it appears that the perceived feelings of the members, as well as the perceived reputation of apprenticeships amongst the general public, are factors holding back some professional bodies. This is not completely dependent on sector as some have a more established relationship with apprenticeship route than others.

Relationships with other stakeholders

In general, the professional bodies which participated in this research believe that apprenticeships should be employer led, particularly as they provide the funding and will be taking on the qualified candidates. However, some have found that even providing a supporting role can be quite challenging. For instance, a number of participants felt that employers might not always have the sufficient experience about ethics and behaviours or have a necessary broad perspective of the sector as a whole, but as the process has employers at the heart, professional bodies struggle to get their point across. Some claimed they had been told to take a step back and not be as active in meetings, while others had been informed by BIS that professional bodies should take a back seat. This seems to act as a deterrent for some professional bodies. Although there is agreement that employers should lead, having to fight to be heard can prove difficult for those who do not have longstanding and strong relationships with employers. It might also contribute to professional bodies feeling undervalued and underused in the process, making those not currently engaged with Trailblazer reluctant to become involved.

It should be noted that in the context of this piece of work, those organisations which voiced the greatest degree of frustration with the process of developing apprenticeship standards were the least engaged in the process. By contrast, those organisations which were most engaged still pointed to the lack of ownership and control over the process, but were much more accepting of the balance of responsibility this implied. The direction of causation here is unclear i.e. it is not known if this distinction in acceptance of roles is as a result of being engaged, or if this is what lead certain to professional bodies to decide not to engage.

Professional Registration

Here, professional registration broadly refers to an individual becoming a member of a professional body based on determined set of criteria. Registration may be on a voluntary or compulsory basis. For many professional bodies, membership is segmented into several member grades by which people will enter the organisation depending on qualifications and experience. There are a series of ways that individuals might already meet the criteria for membership set out by professional bodies. For instance, where professional bodies accredit university courses, student membership might be offered to any student on that course. Graduating from that course and attaining a degree may then qualify them to become a full member. A more indirect fit into a membership grade might be if an individual has been working in a particular role for a certain number of years. PARN has noted a trend towards competency-based assessment, whereby the applicant must provide evidence illustrating

how they meet the membership criteria. One way of formalising this process is through 'competency frameworks' that are used to evaluate professional practice, which provides a more flexible approach than a traditional written examination. As such, we might infer that those professional bodies that discuss entry into their profession in relation to a set of competencies might have a registration structure that is more equipped to accept qualified apprentices into membership.

There was a divide in opinion amongst participating professional bodies in terms of how apprenticeships would map onto the membership structure. The first group considered apprenticeships as an initial entry point into the profession and would progress through the grades with the potential for achieving equivalence to those who had entered through other routes. Others saw entry via apprenticeships as, on the whole, resulting in registration of a separate membership grade e.g. technician, with the idea that many would remain at that grade.

The role of professional bodies and their motivations

Motivations

There are several factors motivating professional bodies to develop apprenticeship standards. First, many professions are reporting gaps in skills, knowledge and experience amongst university graduates who are attempting to enter the profession. Second, for some, the need for skilled individuals in certain roles in the profession is desperate, encouraging them to seek qualifications that combined knowledge and experience. Third, there is an acknowledgement that many professions lack class, ethnic and gender diversity and a view that opening up access via an apprenticeship route might address some of these issues.

Fourth, there is also a market incentive in that investing time and resource in developing apprenticeships will in the future result in membership growth of the professional body. However, there is some speculation as to whether this will have the same return on investment as with university students. This point comes back to the balance between members' views and the public good referred to previously. The market motivation to increase membership also comes with a consideration of whether current members will feel the value of membership is diminished and therefore leave the organisation.

Role

There is a general understanding that professional bodies have an important and unique role to play in the development and maintenance of apprenticeship standards. This is partly based on the assumption that if apprenticeships were entirely employer led, the result would be a very narrow offering that only caters to a few larger employers. Thus, professional bodies have two duties here, one to SMEs which make up a large proportion of the profession yet might have little say, and the second to the profession and wider society to ensure that apprenticeships produce quality candidates that suit the sector. The expertise that professional bodies offer in terms of behaviour and ethics is also seen as reason for them to be present at meetings to help shape the nature of apprenticeship outputs.

Professional bodies can also act at the 'go-between' for different employers that might otherwise be competitors as well as BIS or other government bodies. As professional bodies

have a broad perspective that covers various employers, the participants perceive professional bodies as providing valuable insight into the sector that might otherwise be missed. Also, due to the fact that professional bodies should have a code of ethics and other standards underpinned by behaviours, they can offer expertise around what makes a valuable professional aside from knowledge and skills.

Standards

Although many professional bodies develop and maintain the standards of university degrees in the sense that they accredit university courses, some failed to see how the process would be the same for apprenticeships. This is perhaps due to the longstanding relationship between professional bodies and universities that have established this accreditation process over time. A distinction needs to be drawn between setting standards and the maintenance of those standards over time. The issue of the maintenance of standards is particularly pertinent for professional bodies. This is especially the case if the ambition is for apprenticeships to lead to professional body registration. The accreditation model for university degree courses generally operate on the basis of initial standard setting, <u>and</u> continued process of quality assurance, to ensure that standards of teaching and learning are maintained. Some of the professional body participants in this work remained wedded to this model, and are unable to see how this might operate in the context of apprenticeship training, offered by a wide range of FE colleges and private training providers.

Conclusions and Reflections

The engagement of the professional body sector with the apprenticeship Trailblazer process varies enormously. Our data shows that in STEM in particular, many organisations, particularly in engineering, seem well integrated. Processes for accepting apprentices are well developed, and broadly, participating organisations have felt that they are able to make a useful contribution to the development of standards. Elsewhere in the sector, we see a picture of disinterest, driven in part by a perception that apprenticeships are simply not suitable, or else represent too great an investment of resources and a fear of shifts in policy priority undermining expended efforts.

Whilst few of the participating organisations deal with these questions specifically, it is possible to identify a sense that this link between professional body registration and apprenticeship standards has taken somewhat of a back seat. The role adopted by professional bodies that report success in engagement with Trailblazers has been that of third place, being both employers, and the steering hand of the sponsoring government department. This role at times comes through as more of an umpire, rather than as a shaper of outcomes. Several successful participants in Trailblazers spoke of the need to adopt a moderate tone, and to be sensitive of the ultimate veto power of business in these relationships. However, it should also be noted that the composition of the Trailblazers would also seem to have a great deal of impact on the nature of the distribution of responsibilities within it. In turn, these rely on existing relationships between professional bodies and business in their sector. For example, in the insurance industry, where good relations between professional bodies and employers appear to exist, the process of apprenticeship standard development seems to have gone well. Elsewhere, the process has been more challenging.

The discussion around technician grades is illustrative of some of the tensions which might exist with apprenticeship registration with professional bodies. To promote 'technician' as an end in itself creates a challenge. On the one hand, a central ambition of the revamped apprenticeship scheme is to address a skills gap at technician level. Linking this to professional registration and the creation of value around the EngTech post nominal lends some of the professional bodies' credibility to this form of professional recognition. One way to think of this is as a form of membership which exists alongside, rather than within, the traditional hierarchical rungs of professional body membership associated with university qualifications (e.g. Members, Fellows, Chartered, etc.). However, these hierarchical membership grades both implicitly and explicitly structure activity within many professional bodies. As was shown from the survey data, where around half of professional bodies felt that a degree was necessary to be 'fully qualified'. Indeed, in some areas, individuals without degree level qualifications have their own professional bodies. It is not clear how these deeply ingrained ideas of membership hierarchy might play out with respect to technician levels of membership, when it is construed as an end in itself rather than as a rung on the ladder of professional body membership. It might be that in the world of professional bodies, this grade of membership is not valued I the same way as Chartered or Fellow grades of membership, despite the clear needs within industry for individuals with these skills.

A related issues which came out of the STEM focus group was need for 'progress' through membership level for individuals who had entered via an apprenticeship route. Again a tension exists here. Whilst some believed that all individuals should aspire to progress to higher levels of membership, perhaps beyond the technician level, others felt that because of the skills

shortages within industry at this level, the push for progression should be moderated, to equalise out the number of individuals at different skills levels throughout an industry.

Recommendations

Based upon the survey data and the focus group findings, the following are recommended for professional bodies, BIS and employers.

For Professional Bodies

- Engage with employers in your sector to determine the level of interest in apprenticeships and ability to carry them out.
- Communicate with Sector Skills Councils or equivalent organisations to ensure a consistent approach to standard setting.
- Be proactive. Develop a role for your organisation as facilitator and mediator. Approach key employers to create a consortium. Where these already exist, get in touch with those already involved in apprenticeships and Trailblazer.
- Ensure to also include smaller organisations.
- The process need not be very resource intensive, professional bodies already involved have started with a few meetings per year.
- Think flexibly about how apprenticeship standards could map onto your membership structure, or how your existing structure could be better designed or augmented to accommodate those accessing the profession via an apprenticeship route. Is there a need to create or develop competency frameworks for membership?
- Consider the status of the qualifying apprentice at your professional body. Will they have a separate member grade or will they be working towards equivalence of those members who came through degree routes?
- Reach out to the membership for individuals who can champion apprenticeships, either those that have risen to their position having started out as an apprentice or someone who sees the value in their development in the sector.

For BIS

- Ensure professional bodies have been invited to join initiatives by employer leads as stated in the [Guidance for Trailblazer](#) document, as our focus group research shows that has not necessarily been the case.
- Some of the organisations who took part in the research noted how they often felt devalued in the process, being told that should remain reserved. Professional bodies appreciate that the system should be employer-led, but if BIS were to be firmer in the recommendation that professional bodies should be involved, it might encourage them to become more invested in Trailblazer.
- Recognise the significance of professional bodies in Trailblazer for not only expertise in standards, but for acting as a mediator between employers who might otherwise be competitors. Understand that professional bodies can provide an overarching and longer term perspective of the sector.

For Employers

- Understand the importance of behaviours and ethical competence as part of the apprenticeship standards, professional bodies have essential sector-specific expertise in this area.

- Use professional bodies to provide a level of legitimacy and independence, allowing all employers to be involved and to mitigate the risk that the final product will only serve a few groups.

How PARN can help

- We can arrange networking events between professional bodies to share best practice.
- Provide consultancy on developing and advancing competency frameworks so that apprenticeship standards can map onto professional membership.
- We can advise BIS on the existence of professional bodies in areas where their input into apprenticeship development has not yet been sought.

References

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey respondents

Association for Project Management	Chartered Institute of Housing	College Of Occupational Therapists	Institute for Learning	Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine	Royal Society of Chemistry
Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland	Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors	Dyslexia Acton	Institute of Chartered Foresters	Institute of Translation and Interpreting	Royal Town Planning Institute
The Chartered Institute for IT	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals	Energy Institute	Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers	Institution of Civil Engineers	Society and College of Radiographers
British Institute of Inn keeping	Chartered Institute of Linguists	Engineering Council	Institute of Direct and Digital Marketing	Institution of Gas Engineers and Managers	Society of Biology
British Institute of Facilities Management	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development	Institution of Chemical Engineers	Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment	Irish Institute of Training and Development	Society of Operations Engineers
British Occupational Hygiene Society	Chartered Insurance Institute	Institute of Conservation	Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors	Landscape Institute	Resolution
Chartered Institute for Securities & Investment	Chartered Management Institute	Institution of Engineering and Technology	Institute of Financial Planning	Market Research Society	Chartered Institute of Building
Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists	Chartered Society of Physiotherapy	Chartered Institute of Legal Executives	Institute of Hospitality	Nuclear Institute	Chartered Quality Institute
Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management	Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers	Institute and Faculty of Actuaries	Institute of Hospitality Awarding Body	Recruitment and Employment Confederation	College of Podiatry
British Institute of Facilities Management	Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply	Institute for Archaeologists	Institute of Physics	UK Council for Psychotherapy	Institute of the Motor Industry
Institution of Mechanical Engineers	Law Society	Association of Taxation Technicians	Chartered Institute of Taxation		

Appendix B: Focus group participants involvement in apprenticeships

STEM focus group

The Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMeche)

The IMeche have been involved in apprenticeships since 2008. Specifically with Trailblazers, the IMeche is supporting several engineering and digital sectors such as in automotive, aerospace, airworthiness, food and drink, railway. The role of IMeche is to assure that the apprentice standards and the assessment plan can map across to engineering technician status.

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)

CIEEM has explored apprenticeships in 2013, as part of the Trailblazer programme, but were unable to fulfil the timescales at that time. CIEEM remains interested in the potential for apprenticeships due to the skills gaps in the sector.

The Energy Institute (EI)

The Energy Institute currently has little involvement with Trailblazer. As the Energy Institute shares members with other large professional bodies, Trailblazer apprenticeships are currently led by IMeche, IET and others so the Institute has only had minimal involvement with the supply side of energy.

The Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM)

CIWEM has had no involvement in apprenticeships or Trailblazer up to now.

The British Computing Society (BCS)

The representative from BCS sits on the digital industries Trailblazer steering committee. BCS view apprenticeships as vital to encouraging and developing the talent needed to meet the skills gaps within the sector.

The Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI)

Apprenticeships have been embedded in the motor industry since 1920s, particularly as an entry route to those who maintain vehicles. IMI has been involved in Trailblazer activities, particularly around light vehicle, heavy vehicle and motorcycle maintenance.

'Other' focus group

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)

CILIP and the library profession more generally have had little involvement with apprenticeships. Graduate Trainee is the lowest level that can start working towards professional registration at the organisation.

The Chartered Insurance Institute

The Chartered Insurance Institute had the greatest involvement with Trailblazer out of all the participants. The representative speculated that this might be due to the number of large employers driving apprenticeships within the sector and also due to the fact that traditionally insurance has had fewer barriers to entry, with many people working in the sector without formal qualifications.

The Institute of Hospitality

The Institute of Hospitality has had no involvement with the Trailblazer programme, but has had some involvement with previous apprenticeship structures. The Institute plans to comment on the People 1st new apprenticeships for supervisory roles in hospitality.

The Institute of Physics

The Institute of Physics has had fairly limited involvement with Trailblazer, however it has commissioned some market research which revealed a distinct lack of skilled technicians within the sector, which could be remedied by the development of apprenticeships.

The Chartered Quality Institute

The Chartered Quality Institute has had no involvement with apprenticeships or Trailblazer thus far, but remains interested due to the skills gap within quality industries.

Built environment focus group

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)

CIH is involved in several Trailblazers and have helped developed apprenticeships from phase 1 up until now.

The Landscape Institute (LI)

The Landscape Institute does not currently have any involvement with apprenticeships or Trailblazer.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)

RIBA does not currently have any involvement with apprenticeships or Trailblazer.

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

RTPI developed an apprenticeship in Town Planning Technical Support at Level 3. This was set up in 2013 before the Trailblazer programme.

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC)

IHBC currently has no formal apprenticeships set up but is in conversations with National Trust and Historic England who are aiming to develop apprenticeships through Trailblazer.

The Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE)

ICE is involved in three Trailblazers which are Railway Design Technicians, Civil Engineering Level 3 and Built Environment Level 6.