

19 May 2017

Rt Hon Robert Halfon
Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear Rob

ISSUES ARISING IN ROLL-OUT OF APPRENTICESHIP REFORMS

I write regarding the recent decision by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to pause the ITT for apprenticeship training for non-levy paying organisations, and the mechanism for choosing those on the Register of Approved Training Providers (RoATP).

I have received multiple correspondence from accredited Chambers of Commerce on behalf of training providers who have had their funding allocation significantly cut for the 2017/18 financial year due to the pause. This will lead to a reduction in high quality training for staff, and have a significant impact on businesses' access to new apprentices. This outcome would seem to run contrary to the Government's aim to expand the apprenticeship programme, and the needs of businesses, who require new and well trained recruits. The roll out of the new apprenticeship regime is a significant challenge to businesses and training providers, and this level of immediate uncertainty over funding is deeply worrying at this early stage.

I have also received concerns raised by the Chamber Network on the quality of providers on the RoATP. Organisations approved to deliver apprenticeship training include those with no previous apprenticeship delivery experience, some have been rated as "inadequate" by Ofsted, and many require improvement overall. Many RoATP providers have never been inspected by Ofsted, and have never delivered apprenticeship training before. At the same time, many well established apprenticeship training providers have been left off the register, including those who have been graded as "outstanding" by Ofsted. Further, there is little or no scrutiny of providers that have a change in ownership, when they should be required to reapply to join the RoATP. This raises serious concerns about the level of transparency and quality of the RoATP list, and the coordination between Ofsted and the ESFA. Businesses must have confidence that the RoATP will provide the high-quality apprenticeships they desperately need.

The significant cut in funding allocations to training providers and the quality of those providers on the RoATP requires your urgent attention. Failure to act, could put at risk the sustainability of quality and specialist training providers, and the ability of Chamber members to access apprenticeships. I look forward to working with you to resolve these issues as soon as possible and would be happy to convene those impacted in the business community around England if that would be helpful. I also look forward to following up on our recent meeting, which I very much enjoyed.

Yours sincerely, *and with all best wishes -*

Adam Marshall

Dr Adam Marshall, Director General, British Chambers of Commerce