



## **Apprenticeships and COVID19 in the nuclear sector Response to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Apprenticeships**

### **Background**

This paper summarises the experience of employer members of the Nuclear Skills Strategy Group and of NSAN (National Skills Academy Nuclear) regarding apprenticeships, in the light of the COVID19 pandemic.

### **Nuclear sector and COVID19**

The nuclear sector has a strong history of employing apprentices, and employers have all been affected by the COVID19 pandemic and associated restrictions. The sector is varied, including employers from civil and defence nuclear, some very large organisations and many smaller ones, at all points from nuclear licensed sites through the supply chain, including public and private sector employers. The extent and nature of the effect has therefore varied depending on these and other factors.

### **Sector investment**

Employers believe that the most important factor in addressing apprentice-related COVID19 issues will be to enable investment in the nuclear sector. We note that HM Treasury's Summer Statement<sup>1</sup> contains plans for accelerating public investment across the UK, and we urge the government to use this opportunity to offer certainty to the nuclear programme. Alongside investing public funds, government approval for programmes will unlock further private investment.

Such investment in the key programmes for the nuclear sector creates jobs – primarily well-paid and skilled – and a proportion of these are the apprentices that the sector needs to grow its future workforce. The nuclear sector is committed to improving social mobility, diversity and offering quality career pathways through the apprenticeship route. For example, the current new build programme at Hinkley Point C has over 600 apprentices in a wide range of organisations and occupations, with plans to reach 1,000. There is the potential for further new build at Sizewell, Moorside and Wylfa, as well as deployment of Advanced Modular Reactors and Small Modular Reactors. With these and the operation of power generating stations, commissioning of the replacement submarine fleet, decommissioning of civil and defence nuclear assets, safely managing waste, manufacturing, and research and development to underpin them all, there could be recruitment demand of around 10,000 apprentices over the next ten years<sup>2</sup>. The nature of investment in the nuclear sector is typically over several years (or decades), providing long term jobs and further training opportunities.

---

<sup>1</sup> HM Treasury "A Plan for Jobs", July 2020

<sup>2</sup> NSSG "Nuclear Workforce Assessment 2019", Dec 2019

## **APPG Questions**

*1 – How has your organisation responded and adapted to supporting apprenticeships?*

- Most employers have managed to retain apprentices in the pandemic, although some have been furloughed and some recruitment has been postponed.
- There has been widespread implementation of online recruitment, learning delivery and assessment for apprentices where possible. This has been affected by the need for strong cyber-security, and safeguarding for apprentices.

*2 – What recommendations would you have for policy makers to support apprenticeship policy in future?*

(In addition to the prime factor of public investment and certainty for the nuclear programme as above:)

- Recognise the significant extra costs caused by COVID19.
- Suspend the current IfATE review of apprenticeship funding bands, and avoid any further cuts in funding levels.
- Increase investment in pre-apprenticeship programmes, and clarify links and eligibility requirements between apprenticeships and T Levels.
- Invest now in apprenticeship providers and End Point Assessment Organisations (including colleges and universities, Levy-only as well as non-Levy) to re-tool and revise their delivery models, including digital delivery/assessment and reducing face-to-face delivery ratios with social distancing. This is an investment in a sustainable delivery infrastructure, and we as employers need to know that there will be good quality provision for us to rely upon.
- The pandemic has accelerated the moves to digitisation of learning, and many nuclear employers do not intend to return to the previous “normal” even if restrictions are lifted. Real-world experience will always be vital to good quality apprenticeships, but these changes need recognition in the future development of delivery to maintain quality of learning.

*3 – How can we ensure that apprenticeships play an important role in economic recovery beyond the COVID19 crisis?*

- Allow further flexibility in use of the Levy to contribute to salary for apprentices and recognise the extra ancillary costs for employers of apprenticeships.
- Suspend the expiry date for using Apprenticeship Levy, or allow it to be transferred to allow sufficient funds to apply new flexibilities that we are proposing here.
- Improve the ability to transfer between Standards, given the likelihood of significant dislocation, redundancies, etc.
- Reduce the requirement for 20% off-the-job learning, given that the real value of apprenticeships lies in what they learn on the job.
- Consider sustainable programmes that incentivise employers to recruit apprentices either in their own workforce, or that of their supply chain partners. As a sector we would be able to develop and co-ordinate a scheme to improve the number of quality apprenticeships in the sector commensurate with investment in the nuclear programme, potentially for several hundred apprentices given suitable funding or flexibility in application of the Levy.