



Nuclear Skills Strategy Group  
c/o Cogent Skills  
5 Mandarin Court  
Centre Park  
Warrington

Andrew Stephenson MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State,  
Minister for Business and Industry  
BEIS  
1 Victoria Street  
London

7<sup>th</sup> May 2019

Dear Mr Stephenson,

## **Level 8 Apprenticeship Standard – Nuclear Technical Specialist**

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my congratulations to you on your appointment as Minister for Business and Industry. I write as chair of the Nuclear Skills Strategy Group (NSSG) and as such I have had a number of great conversations with your predecessor, Richard Harrington MP, on nuclear skills; in particular addressing the People components of the Nuclear Sector Deal (NSD).

In June 2018, the NSSG were delighted to be given the mandate through the NSD to lead the People elements, and in doing so to ensure that the UK has the skills it requires to support the future ambitions of the nuclear industry. I look forward to working with you to ensure that we optimise the role that the nuclear sector can play for the UK in delivering the Industrial Strategy and meeting the Clean Growth Grand Challenge.

I am writing to draw your attention to some challenges we are having in meeting a commitment outlined in the NSD, specifically:

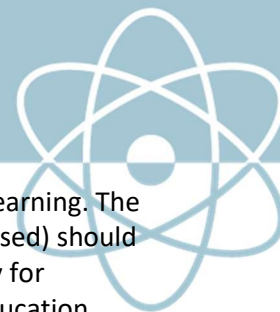
*“The industry’s civil and defence employers will work with the Institute for Apprenticeships to develop a proposal for a Level 8 Subject Matter Expert trailblazer standard for nuclear experts”.*

We understand from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfA) that there is a review being undertaken by Department for Education ministers as to whether apprenticeships should extend to Level 8.

We believe that is vitally important that this Level 8 Trailblazer is progressed, for three main reasons that we outline in this letter. We ask for your support in engaging with Department for Education to ensure that we deliver on the commitment in the NSD to develop a Level 8 apprenticeship standard that will in turn help the UK to replenish its world leading nuclear capabilities. For this reason, I am also copying this letter to the Minister of State for Skills and Apprenticeships, Rt Hon Anne Milton, MP.

### *1) Parity of opportunity*

One of the most exciting elements of the apprenticeship reform programme being progressed by this Government, was to give parity of opportunity for those selecting a work-based, technical routes to education. The reforms for the first time acknowledged that there should



be no occupational level restriction for those who prefer a technical approach to learning. The ambition was that an individual's development pathway (technical or academia based) should be based on personal preference and learning style, rather than their ability to pay for academic education. The original vision was for parallel technical and academic education pathways with equal standing that would allow individuals to transfer from one to the other at any point that their circumstances would dictate. If apprenticeships end up with a ceiling that is lower than the equivalent academic pathway, then it will undoubtedly negatively impact their image and contravene the intention and spirit of the Government's technical education reforms.

## *2) Increase diversity at highest level of our occupations*

There is considerable evidence that apprenticeship routes open up access to occupations for those who are unwilling or unable to commit to full time education, and the financial commitment that this requires. As part of our commitment to the diversification of our workforce, we have set out plans to increase the utilisation of apprenticeships. This will in turn encourage access to the nuclear sector from different socioeconomic backgrounds leading to increased social mobility, and a more diverse future workforce, made up of people from different genders and from different backgrounds. The nuclear sector is committed to challenging diversity statistics, including achieving 40% women in nuclear by 2030, and across all levels of our organisations. If the ability to utilise apprenticeship to achieve this diversity is limited above certain occupational levels, we will find it extremely challenging to achieve the diversity of our workforce at these higher levels. Limiting access to higher level occupations for certain categories of our population is not aligned with our sector's equality values.

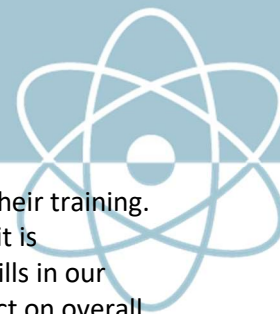
## *3) Dealing with critical skill set shortage areas*

As was outlined in the NSD, the sector faces some significant skills challenges in the higher-level skills and subject matter expertise areas, brought about by an aging workforce, and historic underinvestment in skills. Additionally, skills at this level are required to drive the innovation agenda, increase innovation, increase productivity and to prepare us for the next phase of nuclear energy in the UK.

In the NSD the Government committed to working with industry to increase the number of nuclear related PhDs by looking at route to provide additional funding via Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) or similar approaches. The recent round of funding allocated to CDTs has supported lower numbers of PhDs than the previous round, and therefore any growth in numbers must be achieved via increased CDT allocation or other means. The Level 8 apprenticeship would be one such route. We think it would be an excellent means of ensuring that high level and quality research would be undertaken in areas of interest relevant to and directed to industrial requirements.

We established a Trailblazer Group in May 2018 to develop a Nuclear Technical Specialist Standard, and the group has undertaken considerable work to date. However, it is currently doing so informally and at risk since all Level 8 developments were officially placed on hold in July by the Institute for Apprenticeships while it undertook a review into Standards at this level. We have been told that the issue is currently with the Minister of State for Skills and Apprenticeships for consideration.

To summarise, a range of employers in our sector are very excited about the possibility of this Level 8 Apprenticeship Standard, recognising that we really are 'trailblazing' in this area. They have



identified organisational roles that would be filled by these apprentices at the end of their training. Whilst we appreciate that this type of apprenticeship will attract a high funding band, it is important to recognise that although vital to protect the approximately 1% of niche skills in our sector, the annual demand for roles in this area will be limited and therefore the impact on overall apprenticeship levy spend would be minimised. It is also important to point out that the salary cost to fund these apprentices for the five years of their apprenticeship will require significant investment by employers, and therefore employer demand will only ever be in line with genuine organisational need.

The NSSG have recently commissioned a sector wide survey to monitor apprenticeship use in the sector and will share findings with BEIS and the Department for Education in the autumn. It is worth noting that the nuclear sector currently raises significantly more apprenticeship levy than it is able to spend. In addition, relative to other sectors we employ a greater proportion of higher-level skills and need the ability to use our levy to create highly skilled apprenticeships, including PhD in order to reflect the resourcing needs at this level. Using the levy spend in this way will also contribute to increased research and development investment as a percentage of GDP, recognised as an essential contribution to increased productivity, and an issue that the Government is also seeking to address.

We would appreciate any help that you can offer to expedite this sector deal commitment, and we stand ready to provide any further support or explanation required to support you in this regard.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Fiona Rayment OBE, CChem, FRSC, FNucl  
Chair, Nuclear Skills Strategy Group

cc *Rt Hon Anne Milton MP, Minister of State for Skills and Apprenticeships,  
Department for Education*

