

<b>Institution:</b> University of Southampton
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 25 Education
<b>Title of case study:</b> 25-04 Improving the Quality of Apprenticeships: the Contribution of the Expansive-Restrictive Continuum
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Increasing the number of apprentices has been the goal of successive UK governments. The University of Southampton's sustained research on apprenticeship has critiqued policy-makers' preoccupation with quantity and generated a conceptual framework for evaluating quality. Fuller and Unwin's concept, the 'expansive-restrictive (E/R) continuum', has informed vocational and education training policy at the highest level. The researchers have served as Special Advisers to a Select Committee assessment of the Apprenticeship Bill and their oral and written evidence has been cited in parliamentary inquiries and government commissioned reviews. Their practical guide to creating expansive apprenticeships is published and promoted to providers and employers by the National Apprenticeship Service and Learning and Skills Improvement Service, and the application of the E/R framework has been extended to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and the third sector.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>In 1994 the Conservative government launched the Modern Apprenticeship, the first time apprenticeships had been incorporated into the UK's vocational education and training (VET) policy since 1814. It was designed to replace the youth training schemes that were set up to counter mass youth unemployment in the 1980s but which were widely condemned as failing to provide meaningful professional training. Alison Fuller and Lorna Unwin's critique [3.5] of the Modern Apprenticeship drew attention to the limitations of the government's approach, including the focus on quantity above quality. Since then and supported by the University of Southampton (Fuller appointed as Reader in 2004 and promoted to Professor 2006), Fuller has created a substantial body of internationally leading empirical, practice and policy-oriented research that focuses on the benefits of apprenticeship as a model of learning that can contribute to national productivity, organisational performance and individual career progression.</p> <p>Funding from the ESRC enabled Fuller to research apprenticeships in SMEs in the steel industry (2000-2003). Having concluded that apprentices had hugely variable experiences that led to diverse outcomes, Fuller and Unwin developed a new conceptual framework, the 'expansive-restrictive' E/R continuum, to identify the key pedagogical and organisational features that characterised different approaches to apprenticeship, including the relationship of the apprenticeship to the business and the use of qualifications as a platform for progression [3.4, 3.6]. An expansive apprenticeship offered a detailed model of skill and knowledge acquisition through on/off-the-job training delivered by highly skilled staff, whereas a simplistic conversion of existing employees to apprentices with little discernible change in learning epitomised a restrictive apprenticeship. The continuum was cited as a highlight in the ESRC's end-of-award report, contributing to an 'outstanding' grade. Subsequently, it has underpinned successful grant applications to a range of funders.</p> <p>The E/R continuum formed a central part of the ESRC-funded Learning as Work project (2003-2008) (Fuller was CI and Co-Director). This major mixed-method project investigated workplace learning in 11 public and private sectors through employee interviews and workplace observations. Here Fuller extended her apprenticeship research to the wider workplace environment, where questions about why some workplaces create expansive learning environments and others restrictive were linked to insights about how work is organised and how skills are developed and used. The E/R concept was integral to the core outcome of this project - the Working as Learning Framework (WALF) for employers, policymakers and researchers. The research resulted in an award winning book [3.3], as well as articles e.g. [3.2] discussing the framework's application in</p>

diverse sectors and settings.

The E/R framework has also informed Fuller's ESRC LLAKES research centre funded research, which has investigated the sustainability of innovative apprenticeships offered by public and private sector organisations at city level to local unemployed youth [3.1]. Most recently (2012), Southampton has been commissioned by the Nuffield Foundation to research the quality of apprenticeships for older adults using the E/R continuum as the framework for analysis.

### 3. References to the research

- 3.1 Fuller, A., Rizvi, S. and Unwin, L. (2013) Apprenticeships and Regeneration: The civic struggle to achieve social and economic goals, *British Journal of Educational Studies*
- 3.2 Fuller, A. & Unwin, L. (2011): Vocational education and training in the spotlight: back to the future for the UK's Coalition Government?, *London Review of Education*, 9:2, 191-204
- 3.3 Felstead, A., Fuller, A., Jewson, N. and Unwin, L. (2009) *Improving Working as Learning*, London: Routledge (winner Highly Commended Award, Society for Educational Studies)
- 3.4 Fuller A. and Unwin, L. (2004) Expansive Learning Environments: Integrating Organisational and Personal Development, in H. Rainbird, A. Fuller and A. Munro (eds) *Workplace Learning in Context*, London: Routledge pp. 126-144 (translated into and published in Chinese, 2011)
- 3.5 Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2003a) Creating a 'Modern Apprenticeship': a critique of the UK's multi-sector, social inclusion approach, *Journal of Education and Work*, 16, 1: 5-25
- 3.6 Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2003b) Learning as Apprentices in the Contemporary UK workplace: creating and managing expansive and restrictive participation, *Journal of Education and Work*, 16, 4: 407-426

### Selected Grants awarded

- 1) Fuller, A., Unwin, L., Davey G. and Leonard, P. (2012-2014) Does Apprenticeship Work for Adults? The experiences of adult apprentices in England, Nuffield Foundation, £140,000
- 2) Fuller, A., Unwin, L., Felstead, A. and Ashton, D. (2003-2008) Learning as Work: Teaching and Learning in Contemporary Work Organisations, ESRC, £1,000,000, RES-139-25-0110A
- 3) Fuller, A., Unwin, L. (2009-2010) Creating and Managing Expansive Apprenticeships: A Guide for Providers and Employers, LSC, £29,000
- 4) Fuller, A. Unwin, L. (2009-2010) Workplace Learning in Southampton University Hospitals Trust: creating an expansive learning environment in the Portering Department, Southampton University Hospitals Trust, £21,500
- 5) Fuller, A., Unwin, L. (2000-2003) Project 3: The Workplace as a Site for Learning: Opportunities and Barriers in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (£76,000), within the ESRC TLRP Phase 1 Network, Improving incentives to learning in the workplace, grant number, L139251005 (Rainbird, Evans, Hodkinson and Unwin)

### 4. Details of the impact

Fuller and Unwin **have influenced UK VET policy** at the highest level through their research into apprenticeships and wider workplace learning. In 2008 the Labour government introduced draft legislation to put apprenticeships onto a statutory footing for the first time since 1814. Fuller was Specialist Adviser to the Department for Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills House of Commons Select Committee's scrutiny of the Apprenticeship Bill [5.1]. She discussed with members how to improve the quality of apprenticeships through the use of the E/R continuum and suggested questions that should be posed to witnesses. This led directly to a government admission that conversions – where existing employees were given apprenticeship status to meet employer subsidy quotas – comprised 70% of all apprenticeships in the UK, highlighting the need

for change. In 2012 she was invited by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to inform the Richard Review of Apprenticeship, attending a meeting with Doug Richard and government officials on 26 July 2012, and a further personal meeting with Doug Richard on 6 September 2012, as well as by providing a written note outlining how apprenticeship policy could be taken forward and being invited to comment on the draft report. The final report refers to their analysis of apprenticeship quality and references their papers [5.2].

Fuller's research arguing that the quality of the programme should be prioritised over the quantity has further **stimulated policy debates** on the expansion of government-backed apprenticeships. Written evidence submissions to the BIS Select Committee and the Public Accounts committee inquiries (2012) into Apprenticeship, drawing on the E/R concept, were published in full [5.3, 5.4], as was written evidence submitted to the Department for Education Select Committee inquiry into the 'raising of the participation age' (2011) [5.5]. Fuller was also a witness at the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee on Apprenticeship, whose 2007 report cited her concerns over quality. The UOA has provided sustained support for Fuller's attendance and involvement in these high level policy inquiries.

A chapter on the content of apprenticeship (Fuller and Unwin, 2011) contributes to *Rethinking Apprenticeships*, published by the Institute for Public Policy Research think-tank and including a chapter by John Hayes MP, Minister for State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning. Fuller co-authored *Working to Learn, Learning to Work*, a Praxis paper commissioned by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, detailing measures to support the workplace as a more expansive learning environment. In 2011, she was invited to give evidence to the Skills Commission's inquiry on improving the quality of technician education in the workplace. This led to the Gatsby Charitable Foundation commissioning Southampton to undertake a project on technician roles in the healthcare sector (August 2011 to July 2012) as part of a drive to foster improved public and social recognition of the oft-unnoticed technical roles that underpin the healthcare profession. The research has also fed into diversity and equality policies. For example, the E/R framework has been used by the TUC's UnionLearn to evaluate the quality of employers' apprenticeship programmes and also its own in-house scheme [5.6], as well as by National Institute of Adult of Continuing Education (NIACE) to inform the development of its policy on apprenticeship [5.7]. In 2010 Fuller was commissioned to review the progress on equity and diversity in apprenticeship as part of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) Triennial Review. The review *Equality Groups and Apprenticeship* (Fuller and Davey, May 2010) identifying how awareness and understanding of equity and diversity issues in apprenticeship needs to be improved was published by the EHRC and cited in its final report.

Fuller's research has also **had an impact on practitioners' working methods**. The development of the E/R framework led to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) commissioning a free-to-download employer guide on apprenticeships, *Creating and Supporting Expansive Apprenticeships: A Guide for Employers, Training Providers and Colleges of Further Education*, which was published on the 'excellence gateway' in January 2011 and has been promoted to providers by the National Apprenticeship Service. The guide had over 650 hits and more than 150 downloads by June 2012. The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) guide (2012) links 'expansive apprenticeship' with preparation for skills competitions. Fuller was invited (December 2012) by David Way, Chief Executive of the National Apprenticeship Service to discuss how the Framework can be further promoted to employers and providers as a way of helping them to improve the quality of their apprenticeships, and to judge the National Apprenticeship Awards [5.8]. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development has promoted the use of the expansive – restrictive framework in its government endorsed Guide for Employers: Apprenticeships that Work (pp. 10-11). The Framework's reach is being further extended: for example, in the third sector [5.9] it has been used by Fair Train and the Brathay Trust as a framework for evaluating and enhancing their provision, and by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers who commissioned a workshop

for their members on application of the expansive – restrictive continuum and are basing their approach to CPD on the framework [5.10]. It has also been applied to workplace learning, for example, to provide the principles underpinning the development of the apprenticeship training centre at Siemens in the North East of England and research (2009-10) into creating an expansive learning environment in the portering department of Southampton University Hospitals Trust. According to Trust's Head of Wider Healthcare teams, it has helped develop the Trust's understanding of the contribution of hospital porters to patient care and the importance of creating an expansive workplace learning environment to support their role. Southampton has also supported Fuller **to engage in the public debate** on apprenticeship quality, as expert contributor to BBC Radio 4's *The Real Apprentice*, (2 May 2011) and the public debate on Skills held by the Institute of Ideas in London in October 2011.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

### **Benefits to policy**

- 5.1 Contribution (2008-9) to the scrutiny of the Apprenticeship Bill as Specialist Advisors to the DIUS Select Committee Inquiry, providing advice to members of the Committee on questions for witnesses and the evidence-base on apprenticeship and commenting on the draft report, contact, Select Committee Chair Phil Willis MP (now Lord Willis). The full report is available to download at:  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmdius/1062/1062i.pdf> (Vol.1, p. 52; Vol. 2, pp103-8).
- 5.2 Written and oral contributions (inc personal meeting and request to comment on drafts) to Richard Review – E/R cited in text of Report Nov 2012,  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-richard-review-of-apprenticeships-see-pp-89-90>
- 5.3 Written evidence to HoC Committee of Public Accounts published in full and used by Chair (Margaret Hodge) in oral questioning of Heads of NAS and SfA during witness sessions at HoC <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/TSO-PDF/committee-reports/pubacc.1875.pdf> - see Ev 3, March 7 Q. 14, p. 24 and Ev 19, pp. 41-44
- 5.4 Evidence to BIS Select Committee Report on Apprenticeship (Oct 2012)  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmbis/83/83.pdf> - evidence cited in main report paras 21, 35 and 109 and written evidence published in full Ev W. 132
- 5.5 Written evidence to Education Select Committee 2011 inquiry into Raising of the Participation Age (Jan 2012) published in full, Volume II, Ev 97-102  
<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/pdfs/2011-CESC-16to19-year-olds.pdf>

### **Benefits to Practice**

- 5.6 Written testimony from the Director of Unionlearn, TUC, 28 Nov 2012
- 5.7 Written testimony from the Head of Learning for Work, National Institute of Adult of Continuing Education (NIACE), 9 Nov 2012
- 5.8 Written testimony from the National Apprenticeships Director, National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), 16 Oct 2012
- 5.9 Written testimony from the CEO, Fair Train, Dec 2012
- 5.10 Written testimony from the National Official Post-16 Education, Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), 25 Jan 2013