

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Institute of Education
Unit of Assessment: 25
Title of case study: Apprenticeship and work-related learning: a tool for assessing quality
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Professor Lorna Unwin has helped to produce a remarkably valuable framework for thinking about apprenticeships and workplace learning that has influenced governments, employers and training providers – not only in the UK but around the world. Her research has encouraged closer consideration by both government officials and training providers of the process of developing expertise in work-related education and training and in designing more effective workplace learning environments. Her appointment as a Select Committee specialist adviser led to the first public admission that ‘conversions’ – where existing employees are given apprentice status partly to ratchet up stocks of qualifications in the workforce – comprised 70% of all UK apprenticeships.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)
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Context: Lorna Unwin is Chair in Vocational Education at the IOE. She has been researching apprenticeships for almost 20 years and began working on the highly influential ‘expansive-restrictive framework’ (E&R) about 10 years ago. This conceptual framework was developed with Professor Alison Fuller, formerly of the University of Southampton, who has been Chair in Vocational Education and Work at the IOE since September 2013. The framework identifies the key pedagogical and organisational features that characterise different approaches to apprenticeship and wider workforce development, including the relationship of the apprenticeship to the business and the use of qualifications as a platform for progression. Employers, FE colleges and training providers can use the framework to analyse their apprenticeships and identify potential for improvement.

Key findings: Unwin has shown that instead of concentrating on grand policy and targets for trainee numbers, policy-makers need to focus on the quality of apprentices’ learning experiences. Although the UK can point to some world-class practice, an impoverished version of apprenticeship largely prevails. The ‘expansive’ apprenticeships that she and Fuller have identified offer a detailed process of skill and knowledge acquisition through both workplace and off-the-job training by highly skilled staff. By contrast, a ‘restrictive’ apprenticeship is epitomised by a simplistic conversion of existing employees to apprentices, with the accrediting of pre-existing skills and little discernible change in capabilities.

Underpinning research: The E&R model was initially developed through a three-year ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) project on workplace learning which highlighted the variable experiences of apprentices in the same sector – see reference **R1**. When Unwin joined the IOE in 2006, she was three years into a second four-and-a-half-year TLRP project with colleagues from Cardiff and Leicester universities. E&R became the central plank of the ‘Working as Learning’ framework which emerged from this project (**R2** and book – see Quality Indicator). Since coming to the IOE, Unwin has extended her thinking on E&R learning environments beyond apprenticeship to other workplaces such as an elite university and a software engineering company (**R3**). She has also examined how E&R might be used to analyse the experiences of FE lecturers on in-service teacher training programmes. During her IOE years she has also developed an approach to analysing apprenticeship policy that combines scrutiny of qualitative aspects (e.g. apprentices’ learning experiences and employer experiences) with detailed interrogation of quantitative aspects (e.g. number of apprentices and range of sectors) (**R4**).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1: Fuller, A. & Unwin, L. (2009) Change and continuity in apprenticeship: the resilience of a model of learning, *Journal of Education and Work*, 22(5), 405-416.

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- R2: Unwin, L., Fuller, A., Felstead, A. & Jewson, N. (2009) World within worlds: the relational dance between context and learning in the workplace, in Edwards, R., Giesta, B. and Thorpe, M. (eds) *Rethinking contexts for learning and teaching*, London: Routledge Falmer, 106-118.
- R3: Fuller, A. & Unwin, L. (2010) Knowledge workers as the new apprentices: the influence of organisational autonomy, goals and values on the nurturing of expertise, *Vocations and Learning*, 3(3), 203-222.
- R4: Unwin, L. (2010) Learning and working from the MSC to New Labour: young people, skills and employment, *National Institute Economic Review*, No. 212.
- R5: Fuller, A., Rizvi, S. & Unwin, L. (2013) Apprenticeships and regeneration: the civic struggle to achieve social and economic goals, *British Journal of Education Studies*, 61(1), 63-78.
- Quality indicator:** *Improving Working as Learning* (2009), Routledge – a book co-authored by Unwin that is built on the E&R model – won the Highly Commended prize in the 2010 Society for Educational Studies book awards.

Indicative grants:

- IG1: ESRC (2008-2012) – £4.17 million – first phase of Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES).
- IG2: Learning and Skills Council (2008) £30,000 to produce first version of *Guide to Creating and Managing Expansive Apprenticeships for Employers, Colleges and Training Providers* (grant to Southampton with sub-contract to Unwin).
- IG3: Nuffield Foundation (2013-2014) – £140,000 – ‘Does Apprenticeship work for Adults?’ (grant held at Southampton with sub-contract to Unwin).
- IG4: National Apprenticeship Service (2013) – £44,687 – *Guide to Creating and Managing Expansive Apprenticeships* (grant to Unwin with sub-contract to Fuller).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Principal beneficiaries and dates of impact: Thousands of apprentices and other trainees involved in work-related learning have benefited from the enhanced training experiences that Unwin’s research has promoted. Many employers and apprenticeship providers have also benefited, as they are now evaluating their training programmes by referring to the ideal (expansive) model. This makes it easier to identify the improvements needed. For the state, the E&R model helps to ensure that public money is not squandered. It also provides a catalyst for economic growth. The benefits of Unwin’s work have been particularly evident since 2008.

Reach and significance: Unwin’s research has shaped thinking in training organisations, businesses, unions, hospitals, colleges and the third sector as well as influencing government agencies, Select Committees and Ministers. The value of her research is also internationally recognised. She advises the OECD and the European Training Foundation on vocational education and training (VET). Both of these international organisations have acknowledged the significance of her work and ensured that its reach continues to extend. Unwin’s research has had two important types of impact which can be categorised¹ as ‘instrumental’ (influencing policy and/or practice) and ‘conceptual’ (enhancing general understanding and informing debate).

Instrumental impact:

Select Committees: The reputation that Unwin has established as a result of her research means that her advice is often sought by policy-makers. In 2008, for example, she served as a specialist adviser to the Commons Select Committee for Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills during its scrutiny of the Apprenticeship Bill. This appointment triggered the first public admission that ‘conversions’ made up seven in ten UK apprenticeships – an issue that the coalition government has now agreed to address (see Richard Review below). The Committee Chair asked the Learning and Skills Council for this information at Unwin’s suggestion. The admission exposed the key problem underlying short-duration apprenticeships. Unwin and Fuller also briefed Committee members on their E&R model to help them think through the characteristics of good quality apprenticeships and, hence, the types of questions that should be posed to witnesses. The researchers were also invited to make a written submission to the BIS Select Committee investigation into apprenticeships in 2012. This Committee’s final report noted that Unwin and Fuller had said that while the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) might be justified in claiming success against its objectives, it had been given inappropriate objectives. The Committee then

¹ Using Evidence: How Research can Inform Public Services (Nutley, S., Walter, I., Davis, H. 2007)

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called for an urgent review of the Service's objectives and priorities. Another argument that Unwin put to the Committee – that apprenticeship funding is “diluted through multiple steps” in the cash allocation chain – was also supported in its final report. Significantly, three organisations that gave evidence to the Committee – City & Guilds, the Edge Foundation and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) – quoted her work. Evidence that Unwin and Fuller gave to another parliamentary investigation in 2012 – the Public Accounts Committee review of Adult Apprenticeship – prompted the majority of the Committee's questions to the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the chief executives of the Skills Funding Agency and the NAS.

Influence on Green Paper: In 2008, Unwin was invited to meet John Hayes (then Shadow Minister for Skills) to discuss apprenticeship and VET. David Willetts (then Shadow Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills) also asked to meet her when he visited the IOE in 2008. Following those meetings, Unwin's research fed into the Conservative Party's Green Paper on Apprenticeship (July 2008). Hayes also referred to Unwin's work several times in the House of Commons. On February 7, 2008, during a debate on the Education and Skills Bill, he said: “I recommend her [Unwin's] work ... She is an authority on training and particularly on apprenticeships. She told the [Public Bill] Committee that some apprenticeships contain little or no guided or mentored workplace learning. That is a shocking fact”. A year later he made two references to Unwin and Fuller's work during a debate on apprenticeship – see impact source **S1**.

Other advice to ministers: In July 2010, during the Comprehensive Spending Review, Unwin and Fuller were invited to submit a paper to Willetts (Minister of State for Universities and Science) and Hayes (then Minister of State for FE, Skills and Lifelong Learning). That same year Unwin attended a meeting with Willetts and Vince Cable (Business Secretary) on the coalition government's skills strategy, and took part in a discussion with the BIS team at the Treasury. Unwin, who is a member of the all-parliamentary Skills Commission, was also one of two academics invited to a seminar with George Osborne (Chancellor of the Exchequer) in August 2010.

Commission of inquiry: Unwin was asked to chair the independent Commission of Inquiry into the role of England's Group Training Associations (GTAs) between January and April 2012 (GTAs are not-for-profit, employer-led organisations). The Commission was established by GTA England with the support of the NAS. Unwin wrote the resulting report, published in September 2012. John Hayes (then Skills Minister) publicly thanked her for her “valuable research into the GTA model and for identifying how it might be expanded to benefit other sectors and regions”. The NAS is now working with GTA England to pursue the report's recommendations.

Richard Review of Apprenticeships: Unwin and Fuller's work was also highlighted in this Review, conducted by Doug Richard and published in 2012. Unwin was invited to a BIS seminar for Richard at the start of his Review, and to a follow-up meeting with him. She was also asked to comment in detail on the draft report – and was later told by a National Apprenticeship Service Director that the input that she and Fuller made to the Review had been “crucial” (S2). The Review refers to and endorses their argument that there is a need for more meaningful off-site learning. It also calls for an end to ‘conversions’. “Apprenticeships should be redefined”, the Review concluded. “They should be clearly targeted at those who are new to a job or role that requires sustained and substantial training.” The government accepted this recommendation in March 2013 (**S3**).

Wolf Review: Unwin also gave evidence to the Wolf Review of 14-19 vocational education and was cited in the 2011 report.

Colleges and lecturers: Unwin's thinking on how the E&R framework can be applied in FE colleges has been endorsed by the Institute for Learning (IfL), which advocates the model in many of its publications (IfL represents teachers, tutors and trainers in the FE and skills sector). The model has also been promoted by the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, the 157 Group, which represents 27 regionally influential FE colleges, and the ATL. The national official for post-16 education at the ATL says the [E&R] model “has caught the imagination of those shaping opinion in the sector ... ATL has promoted the model for some years now ... It is so successful because it is based in reality, it is simple, and it is clear as to how colleges and organisations can become better learning environments” (**S4**).

Adult education: The E&R model has featured strongly in the thinking of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning, which appointed Unwin as an academic adviser. Its 2013 report stresses the importance of expansive learning environments. The National Institute of Adult

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Continuing Education also uses the E&R model to inform its deliberations on workplace learning and apprenticeship.

Employers and unions: The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) has promoted the use of the E&R framework in its *Guide for Employers: Apprenticeships that Work*. The CIPD is the world's largest chartered human resource and development professional body, with more than 135,000 members in 120 countries (**S5**). Employers such as Siemens apply the framework, as do public sector organisations, such as hospitals (**S6**). Unionlearn, the TUC's learning and skills arm, also uses the framework to promote high quality apprenticeships (**S7**).

Third sector: Rathbone, a UK-wide youth sector organisation, makes many references to the E&R model in its apprenticeships handbook, published in 2009. It measures the success of its apprenticeship programme against the E&R continuum (**S8**). Rathbone worked with 2,300 apprentices in 2008/9. The Brathay Trust, a charity that helps to develop the motivation and skills of vulnerable young people, and FairTrain, the group training association for the voluntary sector, also acknowledge that their policies have been significantly influenced by Unwin and Fuller.

Worldskills competition: Jenny Shackleton, head of skills development at the NAS, has said that the idea of expansive apprenticeships helped to underpin the UK team's preparations for the 2011 WorldSkills competition in which it came 5th out of 49 nations – its highest-ever placing (**S9**).

Conceptual impact:

Commentary and guide: In 2008, Unwin and Fuller were commissioned by the TLRP to write a commentary on apprenticeship. This brought the E&R framework to a much wider audience. They were then asked to write *Creating and Managing Expansive Apprenticeships: A Guide for Employers, Training Providers and Colleges of Further Education*, published by the NAS in 2011. This proved so popular that the NAS commissioned a new version of the guide from the researchers in February 2013.

Non-academic writing: Unwin has written many articles on apprenticeship for publications aimed at the public, practitioners and policy-makers. These have appeared in the *Guardian*, *TES*, *Adults Learning*, and *The House* magazine, which is delivered to every MP and peer.

Public speaking: Unwin also accepts many speaking engagements. In October 2011, she gave a keynote presentation at an NAS conference held as part of WorldSkills in London, and in June 2012 she spoke at the national conference of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers. She addressed the DEMOS event at the Labour Party Conference in October 2012.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact² (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1: Hansard, Debate, March 10, 2009, c200 and c227 [http://www.theyworkforyou.com/psc/2008-09/Apprenticeships%2C Skills%2C Children and Learning Bill/06-0 2009-03-10a.7.0?s=unwin#g7.24](http://www.theyworkforyou.com/psc/2008-09/Apprenticeships%2C%20Skills%2C%20Children%20and%20Learning%20Bill/06-0%202009-03-10a.7.0?s=unwin#g7.24)
- S2: National Apprenticeships Director - Employer Development and Engagement, NAS. This official said that the NAS has also "drawn heavily" from their research (testimonial provided).
- S3: The Future of Apprenticeships in England: Next Steps from the Richard Review https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190632/bis-13-577-the-future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-next-steps-from-the-richard-review.pdf
- S4: FE News, July 24, 2012 <http://www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/what-professionalism-really-means-expansive-and-restrictive-learning-environments> (testimonial also provided by this ATL official).
- S5: Skills Policy Adviser, CIPD (testimonial provided)
- S6: Head of Wider Healthcare Teams, University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust (testimonial provided)
- S7: Director of Unionlearn (testimonial provided)
- S8: Rathbone Apprenticeships Handbook 2009. See Annex 3. (IOE can provide electronic copy)
- S9: 'Teaching in apprenticeships needs an injection of quality', *The Times*, July 14, 2010 <http://www.educationforengineering.org.uk/news/pdf/BAE%20Sytemes%20focus%202.pdf>

² All web links accessed 7/11/13