

# Postbag

## Apprenticeships work

LIKE many working in the vocational training sector I broadly welcome the Wolf Report.

It makes some very astute observations. In particular, I am pleased to see a recognition of the fact that the popularity of full time Further Education is not just a result of the 'pull' of FE but is also a product of the dearth of good quality employment opportunities for young people.

A concern, though, is that full-time FE, in some cases, delays but does not necessarily stop a young person becoming unemployed. There are still very few quality employment opportunities for 19-year-olds when they leave college.

It is good too to see further acknowledgement that real, employed apprenticeships are sought after and deliver value for all the key stakeholders (learner, employer and the government),

We work with many excellent employers who support apprentices of all ages and recognise that good apprenticeships are worth the investment.

However, we have also come across a number of hybrid employment/training models where young people are paid salaries as low as £75 a week, with few progression opportunities – a consequence, unfortunately, of the lack of jobs for this group.

Vocational and academic models cannot be directly compared. We have examples of graduate and A Level qualified learners who have seen a huge boost to their careers from a Level 2 apprenticeship in team leading. The latter is supposedly equivalent to five GCSEs and so, on a crude 'equivalence' measure, ought to be worthless.

Attempts to increase quality in apprenticeships through, for example the Specification of



➤ **KEEN TO TAKE ON AN APPRENTICE** Kevin Webster (Michael Le Vell) offers Tyrone Dobbs (Alan Halsall) an apprenticeship in the garage during an episode of Coronation Street

Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) are well meaning, but risk swamping providers in a huge amount of additional bureaucracy and making apprenticeships less rather than more relevant for employers. A better (but more controversial) route might be the simpler one of being a bit more robust about letting the market decide.

**Jonathan Bourne, Director,  
Damar Limited, Stockport**

### Unfair debit?

AM I alone in thinking BT are pulling a fast one in charging a process fee of £5.04p when I pay my quarterly bill in cash at my local post office?

As I understand the cash paid goes immediately into BT's account, just the same as when I pay cash into my own bank account. Where's the difference?

I have always refused to pay

any account (other than my council tax which I can check) by direct debit. I belong to a generation which likes to check the invoice before payment.

Are BT trying to force customers into their own system of payment by direct debit which like all systems can make mistakes, which could go unnoticed or take months to rectify?

**John Clarke, Manchester**

### Big thank-you

PLEASE can you print a quick thank-you to the kind soul who handed my lost bank card into customer services at the Morrisons store in Chadderton on Tuesday.

You are very kind and I am stupid and careless. You saved me a lot of hassle and trouble. Thanks again.

**Fiona Corfield,  
New Moston**

### 'Fair' question

LIKE many Levenshulme and Gorton people, I've been part of the community campaign to save Levenshulme swimming pool.

I've seen a number of our local politicians in action. Coun Simon Ashley has been saying that he never said Manchester Council's financial settlement was 'fair', yet I read that he said that in this very paper.

Can I ask whether he's ever demanded an apology, or is he doing the misrepresenting to local people?

**Kate Russell, Levenshulme**

### Donation praise

MAG (Mines Advisory Group) would like to thank Manchester city centre and Didsbury East for raising £357.80 on 12 February through a cash collection.

**Zoe Corden, MAG, Manchester**