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MSA responds to the Institute for Apprenticeships' draft Strategic Guidance – January 2017

This is the full text of our response to the IfA:

I write on behalf of the **Maritime Skills Alliance** in response to your request for comments on your draft Strategic Guidance.

We'd like to comment on the draft 'core principle' which states that **“an apprenticeship ... is a recognised ‘accreditation’ ”**.

We see the merit in your ambition, but worry that it is premature to apply it quite so comprehensively at this early stage. You risk confusing employers and disadvantaging apprentices whose 'accreditation' is still poorly understood in the labour market.

Robert Halfon said in answer to a Parliamentary Question last week:

Qualifications should not generally be needed within an apprenticeship as the end-point assessment will provide definitive evidence of whether the apprentice has acquired full occupational competence.

There's more to providing "definitive evidence" than satisfying the End Point Assessment. The EPA process is designed to ensure that employers have confidence that every apprentice has fully satisfied the requirements of the apprenticeship, but all the effort so far has gone into ensuring the rigour of the process. There has been no work done outside the narrow confines of the Trailblazer process to educate employers so that they understand the difference between an apprenticeship as 'accreditation' and the qualifications that most of them use.

Indeed, it is symptomatic of that confusion that you put the word 'accreditation' in inverted commas. The distinction you are making is *not* well understood in the wider labour market; we doubt if it is at all clear to anyone not close to the Trailblazer process. Until it is well understood all those who rely on it are at a disadvantage.

Apprentices, in particular, are likely to be at a disadvantage if they do not possess a qualification at the end of their apprenticeship which has real currency in the employment market. You seek that status for the apprenticeship certificate itself, but it does not yet have it. You need to build

knowledge and understanding and credibility, and until you do so, you ought not to rely on everyone understanding a distinction which is clear to the Department but not to many others.

Parents, too, matter because they are the most powerful influence over young people's decisions about whether to take up an apprenticeship or not. Will they not be put off when they understand that their child will not get a qualification to show for all their effort?

Your approach also cuts across your commitment to employer leadership. The Government's approach to qualifications has been a particular cause of concern to the Maritime Trailblazer Group, and also to others within the maritime sector. We do not object to the Department pressing its case, but we urge that where employer-led groups have reached a considered view, and despite your prompting stick to it, you should give more weight to those views than you currently do. If the Trailblazer reforms are to make the difference you (and we) seek, you need to show rather more certainly than is the case now that the Government is listening to the views of employers.