The Triquetra and Apprenticeships: Investigating policy relations

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Introduction

This paper considers apprenticeship in England as part of a skills system, involving the Government, industry, training providers and apprentices, in what is termed in this research as the ‘apprenticeship triquetra’. It is suggested that not only must researchers and policy-makers be vigilant and cognisant of policy discourses, but to get a full picture it is also necessary to be aware of the actors involved in operationalising apprenticeship policy.

Background

Profound changes have taken place in recent decades in the education-to-employment transitions of young people. This is especially so in relation to vocational training, which incorporates key elements of both learning and working. Apprenticeships have seemingly weathered the storms of broader social change and cultural expectations, yet in doing so they have also undergone many compositional revisions (Fuller and Unwin, 2009:406). Since the 1960s, and more specifically for this paper the 1990s, the State has shown a renewed interest in apprenticeships, seeking to expand apprenticeship from its long association with the established industries of construction and engineering (Fuller and Unwin, 2003:11). As a result, more recently, high-growth industries such as the creative and cultural and the retail

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sectors have taken on the apprenticeship model of learning, reflecting the contemporary composition of the modern UK labour market. All of this is set against the background of the rise of a “skills system” in the UK and in which apprenticeships play an important role in developing a “modern class of technicians” (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009:2-3). The State, concerned over the nation’s economic performance and skills standing internationally (Raggatt and Williams, 1999:6-7), has assumed a greater management role for education and employment, while simultaneously there have been repeated claims made to a move to greater employer-led system of training (Wolf, 2007:113).

The current state of affairs differs from that existing in England in the mid-twentieth century, when apprenticeship was organised largely by a "modus vivendi" between industry and the unions and it has been suggested that apprenticeship bridged two separate systems: employment and education (Liepmann, 1960:198). This paper suggests that in contemporary England, there have been changes in both of these matters. The Industrial Training Act 1964 saw the State become involved actively in apprenticeship alongside such institutional actors as the unions and employers (Brockmann et al, 2010:114-5) in addition to the young people who became apprentices, beginning with the signing of indentures (Fuller and Unwin, 2009:407) and thereby taking a central role in the apprenticeship triquetra. [Indentures, which once inferred a social status on the apprentice and were perceived by apprentices as a life event, have since been transformed into ‘apprenticeship agreements’ (Unwin, 1996:63-4; Apprentices, Skills, Children and Learning Act (ASCL) 2009:32).]

However, changing political ideologies, the decline of many of the UK’s manufacturing industries in the 1970s (Unwin, 1996:58), and the fracturing of union power in the 1980s all appeared to act to hold apprenticeship in an uncertain stasis. Apprenticeship figures by gender, for example, showed apprenticeship to be dominated by male apprentices (Beck et al, 2006:272), a situation reflecting that of the 1950s when was reported as exclusive and failing to operate in the apprentices’ interests (Liepmann, 1960:198) and stretching back into the late nineteenth century (Webb and Webb, 1897:495-501). So, with the inception of the Modern Apprenticeship programme in 1994, the State became a key actor in the organisation of apprenticeship, with, for better or worse (Gospel and Fuller, 1998), major consequences for the delivery of apprenticeship and changes to the actors involved. More recently, the highly influential Leitch Review (2006) called for a greater
emphasis on employer-led skills (Wolf, 2007; Ahlgren and Tett, 2010), yet claims that the Government is using apprenticeship as a tool of State policy (Fuller and Unwin, 2009; Brockmann et al, 2010) continue to be supported by the evidence (see BIS, June 2010: Letter to the Skills Funding Agency:1, 4). Dominance by first industry, guilds and unions and then more recently by the State has resulted in apprenticeship lurching from one set of principles to another as they move and between private and public control. Over the last four decades, by accident or design, and sometimes both (see Raggatt and Williams, 1999), there has come to exist a more concrete yet complex system of actors involved in the delivery of apprenticeship.

The following section will discuss the purpose of the paper and the research methods. Section two will explain the meaning of the term ‘triquetra’ and define its use in research into apprenticeships. The third part will set out the theoretical framework used to analyse the apprenticeship triquetra through a combination of Actor Network Theory and Foucault’s ‘governmentality’ thesis. The paper will then move on to map out the institutional actors involved in the delivery of apprenticeships, while the final section will bring the paper to its conclusion.

**Purpose and methodology**

The purpose of this paper is to present the ‘triquetra’ as a model of enquiry using the example of my own research into apprenticeships in the creative and cultural and the retail industries. In doing so, apprentices are positioned at the nucleus of a tripartite of institutions consisting of the State, employers and training providers.

The central issues that concern this paper are to use the triquetra model to set out the institutional actors and trace key actor relationships involved in the delivery of apprenticeships, creating a ‘map’ of apprenticeship delivery, in order to show the complexities of modern day apprenticeship delivery.

The paper is part of broader PhD research exploring the policy journeys, their implementation by the various institutions and their relationships with each other and results from the first year of my study. While interviews are yet to be conducted with the actors outlined in this paper, desk-based research including discourse
analysis of available documents and data from many of the institutions permitted the work to be situated in the context of the historical development of English apprenticeship. Actor Network Theory and Foucault’s ‘governmentality’ thesis are applied to show the fluid nature of the relationships.

The triquetra and apprenticeship

This paper discusses apprenticeship operating in terms of a “skills system” (Department for Businesses, Education and Skills, 2009:2-3). For the sake of clarity, ‘system’ as used in this paper refers to an organised structure involving different actors and/or issues, although it is also recognised that such matters may not always be that well, if at all, ‘organised’. It has long been recognised that apprenticeship bridges two separate systems of employment and education:

“The concept of apprenticeship is characterised by the duality of its nature: the apprentice is both learning and earning... Apprenticeship thus forms part of the system of education and part of the economic system, and the adequacy of apprenticeship turns largely upon its success in harmonizing the interests of education and production” (Liepmann, 1960:1)

It seems that more recently, these two functions of society have converged to the point where, arguably, there now operates a single system, functioning concomitantly as both a unified body and as a group of disparate actors, but with the addition of State policy (Fuller and Unwin, 2009). In this modern incarnation, the apprenticeship system is composed of three important institutions, or institutional actors: the State, Industry and Training Providers: the ‘apprenticeship triquetra’.

The image of the triquetra (see Figure 1 below) has long been used in pagan and religious symbolism to demonstrate the importance of three related factors; for instance, the ‘father, son and holy spirit’ of Christianity. The word itself has Latin origins and means simply ‘three cornered’. Yet, the triquetra provides an interesting alternative to the standard triangular, triadic or tripartite depictions of relationships in that it is composed of three identical arcs linked at either end to form one complete flower-like shape, in contrast to the linear lines of the triangle.
Figure 1 shows how the apex of each arc is positioned to face the corner where the other two arcs join: the apex of the arc A-B faces the corner C and so on. Each arc is linked with the others and the three arcs then intersect with each other to form a central nucleus. When used to represent social relationships, the triquetra provides a synergistic symbol demonstrating the gestaltic nature of the three components; that is, from three interconnected arcs emerges a shape consisting of three islands grouped around a central core. The triquetra therefore represents more than simply the three corners suggested by its Latin etymology. Each arc is used to symbolise a relationship, demonstrating a social system in which information and learning can be understood not as uni-directional, but as multi-directional conduits through which relationships are formed and maintained. In this same way, power can also be understood to be multidirectional, rather than impositional. The multidirectional view of power will be explored further in this paper.

As used in this research, the triquetra refers to the interlinked relationship between the three main institutions involved in the system of apprenticeship in the UK – the State, industry (including employers) and training providers – at the centre of which are located the apprentices. Each of these actors can and do operate independently of each other and will have different ‘strengths’ of relationship with each other; some will play more central roles, while others will be more peripheral. For example, Government, employers and training providers each have far wider remits than

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2 With thanks to Professor Alison Fuller for this important point
simply providing apprenticeship, yet they are brought together to form a distinct and self-reinforcing social system embedded in the broader major social issues of employment, education, economy and citizenship. The triquetra thus operates initially at the structural level, but then provides the basis in which to explicate the minutiae of apprenticeship delivery. Drawing on key aspects from Actor Network Theory (ANT), the triquetra sees apprentices as both causes and also “effects of socio-material networks” (Fox, 2009:36). However, the key focus here is on policy operationalisation, where policy is the mediating influence affecting the key ‘actors’ and ‘factors’ (see below), but where apprentices and apprenticeship respectively are the central issues.

As can be seen in Figures 1 to 3, the triquetra is a symmetrical shape. This symmetry provides an appropriate instance of an ‘ideal type’; a way of interrogating “the real world” (Marshall, 1998:293). The ideal type represents a theoretical possibility, “an idea” containing the prerequisite aspects for something to function, but which in reality is most likely a non-reachable state (Benton and Craib, 2001:80). For example, the ideal type triquetra could represent a social system in which equality of power and influence, devoid of any mediating effects such as political ideologies, economic constraints, etc. could exist (Hempel, 1952). The ideal type can, however, provide a valuable working baseline by which to assess a social system and this research uses the triquetra as a baseline for mapping the relations within the apprenticeship system.

In the context of this research, the ideal type apprenticeship triquetra can be explained as a state of equality in which all actors hold parity of and access to power; that is, government, industry, training providers and apprentices each have equal input into the creation of apprenticeship frameworks and the apprenticeship ‘experience’. Its use here is to provide the organising principle for this research. In the ideal, training policies would be created through equal input and agreement by government, training providers, industries (including employers and unions) and apprentice representatives. Considered in this light, the German social partnership model may be closer to the ideal triquetra, for it has been raised time and again by researchers seeking to understand and contrast the UK’s apprenticeship model (Unwin, 1996:59; Brown et al, 2001; Fuller and Unwin, 2008; Brockmann et al, 2010). The German apprenticeship system is itself not without faults, for, by way of
being embedded through legislation, it can be slow to respond to economic and social changes (Roberts, 2009), overly restrictive in preventing worker movement into different industries, and creating inequalities for those young people unable to secure apprenticeships (Heinz, 2009).

The study into apprenticeships raises two related but subtly differing sets of relationships, what are termed ‘actors’ and ‘factors’ (Figures 2 and 3 below). The first set of relationships, the ‘actors’, refers to those institutions that are responsible for delivering apprenticeship: the State (the Government), industry and training providers. The second, referred to as ‘factors’, is in recognition of the main issues at stake: governance; employment; and education. However, as will be explained, the triquetra is a valuable device for the way in which it both illustrates and reveals not only the main actors and factors, but also the core issues; in this case apprentices (actors) or apprenticeship (factor).

In setting out the system in this way, the apprenticeship triquetra reveals a system in which various actors are brought together in pursuit of a common goal. This is not to suggest that the outcomes are those intended at the outset; neither does it suggest that the partners always work together harmoniously. Instead, the triquetra shows that there exists a series of relationships between these actors. The issue then is to trace these relationships in order to understand where they work well and where the problems of apprenticeship lie.
The triquetra therefore has three applications demonstrated through the research. First, it serves a descriptive function, setting out graphically the existence and inter-relationships of the three institutional actors and the apprentices. Secondly, the triquetra becomes an analytical framework, beginning as an ideal type, for understanding how and why relationships between the three institutions exist and between each institution and the apprentice, with the aim of providing a greater understanding of the roles and effects of institutions on the apprentices within the industries. Thirdly, it is a conceptual tool by which it has been possible to observe the point in time at which new social relations were formed between the three institutions, through government policy reactions to the problems of youth unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s, and from which young people became subject to much closer government scrutiny and control, culminating in and expanding since the Modern Apprenticeship in 1994.

The triquetra and governmentality: Theorising knowledge and power

It is not without trepidation that I adopt a Foucauldian approach to understanding apprenticeship; Foucault’s work is open to interpretation by those seeking to use his theories and Foucault himself would often raise more questions than he provided his audience with answers (Crow, 2005:128). I am also conscious of a possible overuse of Foucault’s work, for it has been frequently adopted by educationalists to analyse and explain the relationship between education and society (Gillies, 2008). Additionally, Foucault’s work has been used far more broadly than education alone, covering such various topics as social housing (Cowan and McDermont, 2006), voluntary sector compacts (Morison, 2000) and feminism (Sawicki, 1998), amongst others. Yet despite these misgivings, my research into apprenticeships and the institutions involved in their delivery can present an ideal example of the essence of governmentality and how power exists through the liberty of its actors.

Foucault provides a way of thinking about power in society as a series of interrelated interactions and structures. Such a perspective differs from the more hierarchical understandings of power, although it does not completely reject hierarchical power. The term itself – ‘governmentality’ – is, to use Gillies’ (2008:415) description, a “portmanteau neologism”, uniting Foucault’s ideas on modern government – the ‘art
of government’ (Foucault, 1978) – with those of creating a *mentality* in the general population which simultaneously exerts power through a vast range of institutions and actors, with an assumption of the liberty of this same population to act as free agents.

Power and regulation should be understood more in terms of liberty shaped and guided by “the conduct of conduct” (Gordon, 1991:2). To explain, conduct as used here has at least two meanings: that of leading or directing others and that concerning one’s own, self-regulated behaviour (Gillies, 2008:416). The triquetra shows this well, presenting actors being actively engaged in the interactions, rather than being powerless entities subject to government rule. In terms of the triquetra, representatives from industry (e.g. Sector Skills Councils) and education (e.g. Association of Learning Providers; Association of Colleges) will each seek to make their case known to the Government when changes to the system are made or proposed. Moreover, apprentices are not automatons acting without free will; decisions made to take up apprenticeship will be varied and many young people actively choose apprenticeship as a “preferred mode of learning” (Brockmann, 2010:64). Governmentality, we have seen, requires the presence of liberty, agency and options (although such options may be circumstantial and contextual).

**Mapping the triquetra actors: A brief and initial overview**

This section begins tracing the actors involved in the delivery of apprenticeships. It is not, at this stage of the research, meant to be complete, but provides some detail of the three points of the triquetra. The process will begin with the actors within government, before moving on to the agencies and other relevant institutions. This is not to imply that the State is the most important actor in the provision of apprenticeships; only that it is a convenient place to begin when considering policy operationalisation. The diagrams in Figures 5 and 6 (below) set out the picture as fully as possible (at this stage of the research) as it currently exists.

*Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education*

Apprenticeship comes under the overall control of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The Secretary of State for BIS is currently Vincent Cable
and David Willetts is the Minister of State. It is the Secretary of State for BIS who authorises funding to key organisations such as the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and who has the power to approve or remove licences to Sector Skills Councils. Apprenticeship has some crossover with the Department for Education, where Michael Gove is Secretary of State. John Hayes straddles these two Departments in his joint role as Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (BIS) and, since July 2010, Minister of State at the Department for Education (DfE), responsible for apprenticeships (16–18) and careers advice. Apprenticeship forms part of John Hayes’ work within BIS. Given the duality of apprenticeship mentioned above, a single person representing apprenticeship in the two Departments appears to be logical. At the same, the Minister’s dual identity also means his attention is spread more thinly. However, within the DfE, Nick Gibb, as Minister of State for Schools shares some responsibility for apprenticeships, while Ed Vaizey is the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, the creative and cultural sector being one of those industries considered in this research.

**Skills Funding Agency (SFA)**

The SFA is an agency of BIS, providing regulation and £4 billion of public funding to promote skills and further education for adults in England (SFA website, ‘About Us’). The SFA is headed by Geoff Russell, former Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Council, which the SFA replaced in April 2010. The SFA represents the first stage in operationalising Government policy with regard to skills and training, as they are set targets, budgets and objectives by BIS. The SFA authorises and funds through the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), a third sector organisation which has “end to end responsibility and ultimate accountability for the national delivery of services and targets” in England (NAS Prospectus, May 2009:7 – emphasis added).

**The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and National Employer Service (NES)**

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3 While the emphasis has been added, it is interesting to note the use of the term ‘delivery’ in the NAS literature. The suggestion is very much one which implies apprenticeship is being ‘delivered’ in a top-down, hierarchically structured way and is somewhat at odds with the employer-led rhetoric of the Government.
The NAS is connected to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and is located within the SFA. The NAS has complete responsibility for delivering apprenticeships in England and is charged with raising awareness of apprenticeships with employers and provides an online matching service, connecting interested workers with apprenticeship places. The NAS has both national and regional teams.

Within the NAS is the National Employer Service (NES), which focuses on large employers (5,000+ employees), offering advice on skills and apprenticeships. The NES was, until August 2010, operating separately of, although connected to, the NAS, but has since been reassigned to the NAS. According to the NES, large employers “deliver 20% of all of England’s Apprenticeships” (NES website).

**UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)**

UKCES was established in 2008 following the merger of the Sector Skills Development Agency and the National Employer Panel (UKCES website, ‘About Us’). UKCES has a remit of strengthening the link between employment and skills with the aim of promoting national productivity levels and aiding social cohesion. It therefore has responsibility for overseeing skills and qualifications and is authorised with advising Ministers as to the suitability of licensing Sector Skills Councils, through which apprenticeship frameworks are created and managed (see below). UKCES is also charged with working with the relevant stakeholders, including SSCs, to ensure that apprenticeships meet the requirements of the new Specification for Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE), which comes into effect in April 2011. UKCES receives funding through seven UK Government ‘joint sponsors’, including BIS and DfE (UKCES, Second Revision to the Grant-in-Aid and Priorities Letter, 15 April 2010) and is required “to provide vigorous and independent challenge” (BIS, March 2010), yet claims to be “employer-led” (UKCES website).

**Sector Skills Councils and the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils**

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) represent employers within specific industries in the UK. SSCs were established in 2001 from the previous National Training Organisations (Wolf, 2007:113). Currently, there are 23 SSCs operating. This is down from 25 after the transfer of responsibility for the fashion and textiles sector
formerly held by Skillfast UK to Skillset (see below) and the withdrawal of, interestingly, Government Skills from its operations as a SSC. There are three SSCs relevant to this research: Skillsmart Retail (retail industry), Creative and Cultural (creative and cultural industry) and Skillset (creative media).

SSCs are Issuing Authorities for apprenticeship frameworks relevant to their industry, ensuring the frameworks comply with the latest standards. Frameworks are regulatory agendas which set out the prerequisite components of an apprenticeship within a particular area of employment and are available at different qualification levels: 96 each at Levels 2 and 3 respectively, and 5 at Level 4. As from April 2011, frameworks must contain a knowledge-based element, such as a Level 3 Technical Certificate, a competence-based element such as an NVQ3 and receive training in Functional Skills and Employment Rights and Responsibilities. (Currently Key Skills are the required qualification and will remain in place until April 2011 – NAS website: ‘Key Skills and Functional Skills’.)

SSCs also collect, analyse and publish data within their industry. The collective interests of the SSCs in the UK are represented by the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, although the SSCs are themselves funded and overseen by UKCES. The existence of SSCs provides an interesting tension for, as a result of their collective representation, SSCs potentially hold considerable influence upon training provision in the UK (Alliance of Sector Skills Councils’ website), yet their licences to operate and core funding are subject to regular inspection and approval by UKCES and the Secretary of State (BIS).

*Association of Learning Providers (ALP)*

The ALP is a collective body funded by subscription from its members. The ALP speaks for training providers and lobbies government on behalf of its members, many of whom are greatly involved in the provision of apprenticeship training.

The following two pages portray these relationships diagrammatically. The diagrams are still at an early stage, but do provide an illustration of the range of actors involved.
Government Cabinet Office

Department for Business Innovation and Skills  Treasury  Department for Education
Secretary of State: Rt Hon Dr Vincent Cable, MP
Minister of State: Rt Hon David Willetts, MP

Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (BIS)
John Hayes, MP (Dual Role in BIS & DfE)

House of Lords Select Committees?
House of Commons Select Committees?

Minister of State at the Department for Education

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
BIS/Culture, Communications and Creative Industries
The Hon Ed Vaizey MP

Executive Agencies and Stakeholders (see Figure 6)

Figure 5: Government Departments and Ministers
Executive Agencies and Stakeholders

Skills Funding Agency

National Apprenticeship Service (From August 2010, incorporating the National Employer Service)

Alliance of Sector Skills Councils comprising 23 Sector Skills Councils

Creative and Cultural Skills

Skillset

Skillsmart Retail

National Skills Academy

Creative and Cultural Skills

National Skills Academy (Creative and Cultural Retail)

Employers

(National & Local)

Unions

Training Providers (Public and Private)

Association of Learning Providers (National Association)

ALP South East (Regional)

ALPHI (ALP Hants & IoW) (Local)

Group Training Associations (GTA)

Apprenticeship Training Agencies (ATA)

Qualification awarding bodies

Unions?

Figure 6: Executive Agencies and Stakeholders to Apprentices

4 Until recently, there were 23 SSCs. One (Skillfast UK) has decided not to renew its licence (Skillfast UK’s responsibilities were taken over by Skillset, the creative media SSC); the other had its licence withdrawn.

5 3 examples refer to those relevant to the research.

6 NSAs are employer-led sectoral training centres. There are currently 14 such centres, although the intention is to create NSAs in each sector. NSAs appear to be linked to the relevant SSC.

7 The ALP is Funded by membership subscription.

8 GTAs are not-for-profit organisations focusing on encouraging training amongst employers, especially in the traditional industries.

9 ATAs employ and manage apprentices, but place them with businesses. They may also provide training advice and support.
Discussion and Conclusions

Through the triquetra outlined in this paper, apprenticeship is shown to involve a complex system of actors. It has demonstrated the importance of understanding relationships in terms of how the policy objectives of the State can be operationalised through a succession of stages and actors and as such highlights the way that apprenticeship is not limited to a relationship between the employer and the employee.

Indeed, apprenticeships have been given renewed vigour in recent years by a succession of UK Government administrations concerned with the plight of many young people’s post-compulsory education and qualification outcomes (Brockmann, 2010:65) and form the current Coalition Government’s preferred option for work-based learning (BIS, July 2010:13). Within months of taking Office, the Coalition Government announced £150 million was being redirected from the Train to Gain programme to assist apprenticeship delivery for small and medium-sized companies in England (SFA Update Issue 8, 26th May 2010). While Train to Gain appears to offer a broader definition of learning than apprenticeship, in that the focus is not solely on vocational skills, the latter focuses on skills required of the workplace. (Some apprenticeships, however, will provide greater opportunities for learning than others. See Fuller and Unwin, 2003.) The apprenticeship brand is being portrayed once more as an economically viable option for employers and to connote a higher status of skilled worker (Fuller and Unwin, 2009:408). To further these objectives, the SFA has been granted over half a billion pounds for 2010-11 for “adult apprenticeships” (aged 19+) to expand the apprenticeship programme, particularly at Level 3, the ‘Advanced Apprenticeship’ (BIS, June 2010:3,7; BIS Press Release, 17 June 2010). This renewed dynamism and availability of public funds appears somewhat at odds with the prognosis given more than a century ago by the respected Fabian thinkers and commentators Sidney and Beatrice Webb:

"Undemocratic in its scope, unscientific in its educational methods, and fundamentally unsound in its financial aspects, the apprenticeship system, in spite of all the practical arguments in its favour, is not likely to

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10 This figure includes the additional £150m redirected from Train to Gain
be deliberately revived by a modern democracy” (Webb and Webb, 1897:481; Liepmann, 1960:196-7).

In a footnote to the original statement, it was explained that the reason for this poor prognosis stems from the Webb’s belief that employers would “not necessarily be interested in the future welfare even of their own trades” (Webb and Webb, 1897:48). Further negative observations almost seventy years later saw apprenticeship as a “makeshift, class-ridden, inadequate, anachronistic contract” (Paterson, 1966, in Unwin, 1996:59).

And yet despite such dyer assessments, apprenticeship has indeed proved “remarkably resilient” (Fuller and Unwin, 2009:409). Not only has it survived but is currently being expanded with the additional funding being allocated to provide 50,000 extra apprenticeship places for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (BIS, June 2010:3). Apprenticeship’s suitability to act as the dominant mode for work-based learning in the twenty-first century appears to be taken as a given by policymakers and, despite the gloomy predictions of the Webbs, as a vehicle for delivering broader social welfare objectives with central Government at the helm. So perhaps we need to ask: who benefits the most from an apprenticeship system? When John Denham, then Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, was asked whether in terms of apprenticeship the Government “look[s] favourably on the social side … or on the employment side”, he replied that:

“We do not have to choose between an apprenticeship which is designed for social reasons or one that is designed for the economy. If we get a good apprenticeship it delivers both of those things, and that is why they are so central to our thinking” (House of Lord’s, 2008, Q29, Lord Kingsdown:9).

Similarly, John Hayes, the current Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning, says that:

“… too often in the recent past, the strength of the economic case has been portrayed as the only case for skills, creating an implicit divide between learning that is useful and learning that is useless. We
emphasise the economic and overlook the social and cultural benefits of learning at our peril” (BIS, July 2010:4).

Hayes then went on to say:

“By acknowledging the value of learning we can begin the task of re-evaluating our priorities, rediscovering craft, redefining community learning, rejuvenating apprenticeships, rebalancing the economy and building a big society”

This paper has considered apprenticeship in terms of a triquetra of actors. I also suggested that a similar use of the triquetra might be to think of a triquetra of factors, although primarily the focus has been on the former. Regardless of the political rhetoric, Hayes’ comment highlights that apprenticeship is part of the broader social landscape of the modern UK and, as such, is a tool of modern governance (Fuller and Unwin, 2009; Brockmann et al, 2010). Given these statements from Ministers concerned with education and employment, apprenticeship and the plethora of actors charged with its operations, apprenticeship as a model of learning has a great burden to bear, with both the weight of a long history and the expectations of modern governments. By applying the concept of governmentality, though, it is possible to understand that this burden is spread across the actors, who retain some level of autonomy in their actions. That autonomy is apparent throughout the triquetra, to varying degrees, from Central Government to the apprentice.

But the focus on actors shows the infrastructures of apprenticeship is itself a multi-million pound industry incorporating a multitude of institutions and organisations – public and private institutions (and some that cross the two), businesses and individuals – each engaged in a range of activities in their own right. Added to this mix, and referred to in this paper, is funding. Apprenticeship is the nucleus which brings these actors together and the learning experiences of apprentices are central to their future career prospects and life-chances. Untangling and understanding the system which supports apprenticeship is important in order to comprehend the nature of what it means to be an apprentice in contemporary England. This requires recognition that the system as it exists contains both positive and negative points
(although these terms are open to challenge depending on the epistemological and ontological position taken) and will most likely continue to do so as it evolves. Despite the apparent complexity of the current system and the vast numbers of actors involved, it appears that central Government is directing apprenticeship in England, despite the rhetoric which says otherwise. But in order fully to understand the policy, it is also necessary to consider the actors whose work it is to turn policy into practice as part of a system of apprenticeship\textsuperscript{11}. It will be interesting to follow apprenticeship policy and the roles of the triquetra actors under the new Coalition Government.

\textsuperscript{11} A recent paper by Braun et al (2010) has shown a similar line of thought used to consider the roles of individuals in operationalising secondary school policies
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