

When the Statute of Artificers was passed in 1563, there were many more apprentices in the City of London than there were university students or graduates. London would have to wait another 250 years to have a university, though after this act it did have a regulated system of vocational training with fixed wages and compulsory training periods for the Guilds that oversaw it.

These days there are similar numbers of Livery Companies (110) to the numbers of universities and higher education institutions in London, but you are much more likely to visit one for a university graduation than for anything to do with an apprenticeship.

But that may be about to change. This Government has impressive ambitions and policies for apprenticeships and a Technical and Further Education Bill is currently working its way through Parliament.

Central to plans for boosting technical training is the target for 3 million apprenticeships and the Apprenticeship Levy to help pay for it.

The Levy comes into place in April 2017, taking 0.5 per cent from large employers' pay bills over £3 million each year. The government then applies a 10 per cent top-up to a new digital account from which employers - including most universities and colleges - must take on apprentices and commission training or lose their money...

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