



all party parliamentary group on  
**apprenticeships**



# REPORT

2020 | 2021



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## FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRS

It is our pleasure to present the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Apprenticeships' annual report for 2020-2021.

Over the past 12 months we have explored the potential apprenticeships have to support the economic recovery from Covid-19 and support those back into meaningful employment and training. Apprenticeships are a fantastic way to upskill, diversify and reskill the workforce, ensuring businesses continue to grow as they give essential capabilities to employees. This is particularly important in a post-Covid world. Apprenticeships are essential in supporting people in fulfilling their potential, something which is so important following the disruption faced over the last 18 months.

The APPG's meetings have been well-attended, with a diverse range of speakers, giving constructive and insightful observations which have helped form the basis of this report. We developed a series of policy recommendations, which we believe would increase uptake and improve the delivery of apprenticeships, as well as ensure better access to apprenticeships for both learners and employers. Apprenticeships are an invaluable tool for local economies and individual development and should be a key feature of the UK Government's plans to "*build back better*."

We are excited for the work we have planned for next year, in addition to completing our high level inquiry into apprenticeships in the Ministry of Defence, which will be publishing its report with recommendations to Government in the Autumn.

If you would like more information on the APPG, please contact the secretariat on [ApprenticeshipsAPPG@connectpa.co.uk](mailto:ApprenticeshipsAPPG@connectpa.co.uk) and follow us on Twitter [@ApprenticeAPPG](https://twitter.com/ApprenticeAPPG)



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## INTRODUCTION



The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Apprenticeships is a cross-party group of MPs and Peers which provides a forum for parliamentarians and employers to discuss how to promote the role of high-quality apprenticeships. The Group works to ensure that apprenticeships serve as a pathway to a career and examine how the apprenticeship model can meet the changing skill demands from businesses. The Group has heard from all the top apprenticeship experts, including the Minister and Shadow Minister for Skills, top civil servants, business groups and most importantly from apprentices themselves.

The APPG would like to thank our sponsors for their support of the Group. The APPG's sponsors are: Amazon, BAE Systems, The Co-op, The Federation of Awarding Bodies, KPMG, London South Bank University, Microsoft, the Open University, WMG at the University of Warwick and the University of Salford.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Skills and Post-16 Education Bill should be used as an opportunity to improve overall apprenticeship provision and support the delivery of quality apprenticeships.
- UCAS should continue its expansion of its existing portal to service further education, apprenticeships, and T-levels.
- The Department for Education should continue to promote the work of the Apprenticeship Ambassador Scheme and support the delivery of a mentoring scheme which could be undertaken with each regional network.
- The APPG reiterates its recommendations for IfATE to ensure continued flexibility at all stages of the apprenticeship process, most notably including end point assessments and using online provision, to provide a nuanced approach so that schemes can be tailored to different workplace sectors whilst apprenticeship quality is maintained.
- The Government should mandate statutory training for both employers and providers to safeguard apprentices' mental health as it brings forward an Employment Bill. This should include a mental health toolkit to be provided to new apprentices as part of their induction process, which includes signposts for support.
- The Department for Education should establish a Government-run advice and one-stop-shop for small businesses providing support to take on an apprentice and assisting them with the process.
- The Government should increase the flexibility of what the Apprenticeship Levy can be used for and when. The Levy should sufficiently allow businesses to transfer or pool their resources to improve provision of apprenticeships.
- Businesses and providers must invest in a suitable virtual learning environment, suitable office workspaces and staff training to ensure apprenticeship provision is of the highest quality both online and offline.
- The Department for Work and Pensions should extend Kickstart schemes into 2022 and the Department for Education should provide bespoke guidance to providers and employers on how T-levels, Kickstart and apprenticeships can provide benefits and complement one another.
- To ensure parity of esteem, HM Treasury should raise Apprentices' Minimum Wage to be in line with the National Minimum Wage.
- IfATE's funding band review must ensure sustainable and long-term funding for apprenticeships to ensure that employers have the confidence to invest in their workforces and support the UK's recovery from Covid-19.

## Camila Rey Da Rosa (37)

### Advanced Mechatronics apprentice based at Hemel Hempstead fulfilment centre

Camila previously worked as an occupational health nurse but decided to try something completely different. She joined the Amazon apprenticeship programme because she was impressed by how inclusive the company is. She was offered a place at university prior to receiving the offer to become an Amazon apprentice but thought that the more hands-on approach of the Amazon apprenticeship programme would serve her better for the future. She is also vice chair on the apprentice board at the Women's Engineering Society.

Camila said:

*"The apprenticeship at Amazon has been a brilliant experience and has offered me many opportunities that I couldn't get elsewhere. The skills and knowledge I have gained through the course have completely changed my mind set and challenged me to focus on finding the solution for every problem. I have loved having the opportunity to work alongside so many amazing Amazon engineers and would encourage everyone to sign up and give the apprenticeship a shot, you'll never know what it's like if you don't try."*





## APPRENTICESHIPS AS A TOOL TO BUILD BACK BETTER

It goes without saying that the Coronavirus pandemic has had a huge and detrimental impact on business and economic activity across the UK. From the outset, when lockdown was introduced, there was an immediate pause in the jobs market. Throughout the pandemic, 6 out of 10 employers did not take on new apprentices. This was particularly the case for small businesses, who find it difficult to retain apprentices at the best of times due to a lack of certainty in funding, let alone during a pandemic. The impact has continued to be felt, as recent figures on apprenticeship starts show a significant drop in the number of people beginning apprenticeships, with a 19% fall over the course of one year. The pandemic has also had a severe impact on young people, a significant proportion have lost their jobs or are leaving school with no employment or training to enter the workforce. To improve the number of apprenticeships starts – especially among young people – interventions aimed at connecting them with apprenticeships opportunities are needed. We must also ensure that SMEs have improved access to apprenticeships with reduced bureaucracy and increased support.

Now that the vaccination programme is underway and economic activity is resuming it is time to look forward to see how we can help the UK reskill and rebuild. At this pivotal time in our economy and society, it is more important than ever that people have access to training so that they can transition into viable sectors. Apprenticeships are a great tool to avoid long-term mass unemployment and deliver job creation. A report from The Open University and the 5% Club found that two thirds of employers who embraced apprenticeships during the pandemic found it helped them to recover more quickly<sup>1</sup>.

The Government Plan for Jobs provides a clear strategy for supporting apprenticeships and must play a pivotal role in supporting the UK's economic recovery. As the Federation of Awarding Bodies notes, the Government has made strong progress on improving the quality of apprenticeships in recent years, through innovations such as the introduction of independent end-point assessment and it is essential that quality remains a core part of their strategy if apprenticeships are to be a driving force in the UK's recovery<sup>2</sup>. The Prime Minister has also recently announced a Lifetime Skills Guarantee and brought forward, the Post-16 Education and Skills Bill. Apprenticeships have the potential to drive the UK's recovery from the pandemic, but in order to maximise their impact, the Government's initiatives must be underpinned by sustainable funding, joined-up policies across Government Departments, and meaningful incentives and support for individuals and businesses. We also need substantial and sustained investment in the skills agenda, to ensure that businesses feel certain they will be supported to invest in their workforce. There must be a fundamental change in perceptions towards apprenticeships that encourages greater and views them as an essential part of the workforce.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.open.ac.uk/business/build-the-future>

<sup>2</sup> <https://awarding.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Quality-in-Apprenticeships-QualityEPA.pdf>

## CASE STUDY THE OPEN UNIVERSITY



The Open University is one of the largest providers of Higher and Degree Apprenticeships in England with over 3,100 apprentices on programme, working with over 840 large and small employers in the private, public and third sectors. We also offer higher, degree and graduate apprenticeships in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

Apprenticeships are aligned to the OU's mission of providing education and progression opportunities for learners of all ages and from all backgrounds. The OU's apprenticeships help address skills gaps in key areas including digital, management, social work, policing and nursing – for example, 1 in 4 of all Registered Nurse Degree Apprentices in England study with the OU.

The Open University has an Open Access policy which means prior qualifications are not required for most courses. Our apprenticeship programmes follow the same inclusive approach (although in some cases we may work with apprentices to secure Functional Skills qualifications required by the programme or by a regulator), enabling apprenticeships to be a truly life changing opportunity, at any age.

The pandemic has seen a greater demand for apprenticeships in the public sector. This is due to the rising number of people wanting to reskill

and upskill as nurses, police constables and social workers. It provides a great route to help diversify the workforce and bring in new talent. For example, one of our newest degree apprentices is Fiaz. A former bar manager, Fiaz wanted a change in his career. He applied to be a Police Constable Degree Apprentice at North Yorkshire Police driven by an ambition to make a positive contribution to his local community. He is now retraining in a completely new sector, is 'learning and earning' and is gaining a degree as he develops operational experience in the North Yorkshire Police.

The OU's flexible model supports those who choose to study, work, and live in their local area. Many learners remain in their localities and continue to work in their local hospitals or local authorities and contribute to their communities after their training is complete. This particularly helps recruitment in rural or coastal communities including parts of North Yorkshire, the Isle of Wight, and the South-West.

For more information, please visit <http://www.open.ac.uk/business/apprenticeships> or email [Laura.Burley@open.ac.uk](mailto:Laura.Burley@open.ac.uk)





## HOW CAN APPRENTICESHIPS SUPPORT CAREER PROGRESSION?

For some apprentices, achieving a Level 2 or Level 3 apprenticeship is their route to employment and financial security. Others may study further, completing a higher level or degree apprenticeships as part of their learning journey. There are a number of pathways that apprentices can take before they begin a higher level or degree apprenticeship. Some degree apprentices may join a course following A Levels, whilst others may work up from Level 2 or 3 to degree level. It can be difficult to get apprentices to progress from level 3 to 4, and the APPG heard from apprentices and their employers on how to strengthen the career pathway from the lower levels up to degree or higher-level apprenticeships.

According to Cindy Rampersaud, Senior Vice President, at Pearson BTEC and Apprenticeships, the flexibility of apprenticeships can provide opportunities for older workers to reskill and upskill, as well as providing young people with an entrance into key industries. This could not be more important following the pandemic and there is often an unhelpful dichotomy facing people looking to gain qualifications (whether that be school leaders or mature students looking to reskill), which pits a traditional university degree against an apprenticeship.

Degree apprenticeships are growing in popularity as they allow students to learn both theoretically and vocationally, earn a salary and develop work skills, whilst gaining a high-level qualification. Degree apprenticeships are increasingly being seen as viable options to enter employment or to reskill, with more than 100 universities now offering degree apprenticeships. Sarah Armitage, Senior Recruitment & Development Specialist in Apprenticeships at WSP and Nick Sunderland, Commercial Director at Russell WBHO, both believe that employing higher-level apprentices mean they can draw on the formal education of a graduate with the experience of someone who has worked at the company for several years. This can often mean an individual progresses faster within a company, as they have a strong understanding of its mission and values as well as the hard skills they have gained and can showcase on a daily basis.

Apprentices are incredibly valuable to the organisation they work in, many go on to permanent positions, acting as strong mentors for more junior colleagues. Open University Registered Nurse Degree Apprentice, Anthony Hammond, believes his degree apprenticeship has given him opportunities he would not have otherwise had after leaving school at 16 years old with Level 2 qualifications. Since undertaking his apprenticeship Anthony has inspired more colleagues to embark on apprenticeships and in-work training, and acts as a mentor to many looking to increase their skills. Mentors like Anthony are not only valuable for supporting apprentices, but for making the work a more inclusive place.

### Making use of apprenticeships to grow existing workforces

Upskilling, and re-skilling existing staff using apprenticeships is an excellent way of addressing skills gaps. The immediate application of knowledge, skills and behaviours means the existing workforces can be aligned to help businesses be responsive to change and expand capacity in new areas, which is particularly important in the current climate.

Manoj Vadher, Head of Central Engineering at Royal Mail Group, is currently in his final year of his Master's Level 7 Degree Apprenticeship as part of the WMG Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship programme. He is also the winner of the West Midlands regional Degree Apprentice of the Year National Apprenticeship Awards 2020.

Manoj explains: *"I have applied the learning from my apprenticeship to deliver solutions that had the major positive impact on the ways of working bringing significant financial savings. I delivered engineering maintenance strategies, robotic process automation and machine learning initiatives."*

He adds: *"Balancing work and study can be challenging, especially if you are in a demanding role. The key benefit of studying through apprenticeships is that it allows you to integrate study with your day-to-day role. For me, both areas grew in parallel. You quickly start to understand and manage the priorities in your personal and professional life. My personal productivity improved. I don't think I will ever go back and waste valuable time on some of the activities at both work and home."*

WMG Senior Leader Course Leader, Trudy Spencer, explains: *"It is particularly satisfying to see the programme learning being applied in the workplace and having a positive impact on both the Royal Mail business and the delegates' personal development."*

For more information, please visit our website: [warwick.ac.uk/WMGdegreeapprenticeships](http://warwick.ac.uk/WMGdegreeapprenticeships) or email [WMGapprenticeships@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:WMGapprenticeships@warwick.ac.uk)



# CASE STUDY

## UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD



The University of Salford is one of the largest trainers of nurses and allied health professionals in the north west. The past 12 months have shone an intense spotlight on the NHS workforce and never before has there been so much gratitude and recognition for those individuals that choose a career path in the health and care sector.

Higher and degree apprenticeships have opened up new routes into employment in the NHS and the University of Salford works in partnership with local NHS employers to deliver that talent pipeline straight to the frontline across a range of apprenticeship programmes from level 5 to level 7.

The level 5 nursing associate programme has proven to be a particularly popular route, especially in supporting those already working in the health and care sector but who might not have previously considered further or higher education, to transition to a highly skilled role and bridge the gap between a support worker and registered nurse.

The University of Salford recently named its 'Apprentice of the Year' with the award going to a nursing associate apprentice. Eleanor Mears had been studying for a year when she got the chance to put what she had learnt into practice, ultimately saving the life of a child who had been involved in a road traffic accident.

Eleanor had been out walking her dog when she came across the incident and sprang into action, managing the accident scene until an air ambulance arrived. Police and paramedics that later attended the scene said that if it were not for Eleanor's actions in providing first aid at the scene, the child would not have survived.

You can read more about Eleanor's story here: <https://www.salford.ac.uk/news/life-saving-apprentice-eleanor-recognised-university-award>

More about higher and degree apprenticeships at the University of Salford can be found here: <https://www.salford.ac.uk/degree-apprenticeships>





## COVID-19: HIGH QUALITY APPRENTICESHIPS IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic and consequent national lockdowns made a number of providers more innovative in their provision of apprenticeships. Many providers and employers were able to adapt programmes to ensure that skill development continued. APPG sponsor the WMG at the University of Warwick, moved all of its provision online for its apprentices at Jaguar Land Rover, whilst many employers provided all members of staff with laptops and other equipment to facilitate home working.

According to the AELP at the height of the first wave and initial national lockdown, 81% of apprentices were still learning as providers shifted to online provision - almost overnight<sup>3</sup>. BAE Systems reported that they had not had to furlough any of their apprentices, and that they had taken on record numbers of apprentices both in 2020-21 (750) and for 2021-22 (800).

Moving apprenticeship provision online fostered stronger digital skills and greater flexibility for apprentices, improving accessibility for those who may find an office environment difficult, such as those with caring responsibilities or disabilities. KPMG held a week-long virtual induction event for its 220 new apprentices through Microsoft Teams, which was much more accessible than an in person week-long event. As we look to return to the workplace, organisations will be likely to include elements of the virtual induction week for its new apprentices moving forward.

There are some concerns however that when put in place reactively quickly, online apprenticeship provision lacked quality. In its annual report published in December 2020, Ofsted warned that online education needs to be well integrated into the providers curriculum offer in order to work effectively. According to the report many learners were missing the face-to-face contact of the classroom as well as the opportunity to ask questions and receive

instant feedback<sup>4</sup>. Martin Rimmer, Chief People Officer at Cadent agreed that its programme needed to be adapted, which was particularly challenging given the significant amount of practical training required. Cadent relied on training providers to create Covid-secure environments for practical skills assessments and managed to keep apprentices progressing with a blended style of work. The APPG reiterates its recommendations for flexibility at all stages of the apprenticeship process, including recruitments and end point assessments.

Moving forward the Government should ensure that provision does not return to a one-size-fits-all approach but should instead look at where technology can improve things and provide a nuanced approach so that schemes can be tailored to different sectors.

Unfortunately, not all apprenticeships were able to continue virtually, leaving a number of apprentices furloughed or unable to proceed with parts of their job or course. 37% of employers surveyed by the Sutton Trust in April reported some of their apprentices were unable to work from home either due to a lack of equipment or because their role was not suitable. A quarter of employers reported their learning provider had closed, leaving apprentices without access to resources guidance, networks, or long-term skill development.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aelp.org.uk/news/news/press-releases/training-providers-working-miracles-to-preserve-apprenticeships-and-other-skills-programmes-but-living-on-borrowed-time-latest-aelp-covid-19-impact-survey-shows/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/939834/Ofsted\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2019-2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/939834/Ofsted_Annual_Report_2019-2020.pdf)



Digital poverty is also a key issue to consider. A recent survey by the Association of Colleges found that up to 100,000 further education learners do not have a suitable device or internet connection to enable working from home<sup>5</sup>. This is particularly important for apprentices, who are low paid and more often from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. Employers have been doing fantastic work to ensure that apprentices can all participate and contribute from home. At KPMG, all employees were provided with the equipment required to do their jobs from home. However, many of KPMG's apprentices were affected by space poverty, with many working in bedrooms they were sharing with younger siblings. This is not conducive to productive high-quality work.

The APPG urges the Government to ensure that the right safeguards are in place to ensure all apprentices have the best possible support in place to complete their apprenticeship. This includes ensuring that their employers and training providers are well-equipped to ensure apprenticeships can take place with the right equipment and workspace.

According to Dominic Gill, Co-Founder and Managing Director at Intequal the sector should target training providers offering a virtual or blended solution to be viewed at parity with a local provider. The pandemic has shown that virtual delivery from a national provider could be more appropriate for certain occupations and sectors even if it is not from a local provider. However, as noted by Ofsted and given the limitations outlined above, apprenticeships will in most cases need to shift to a blended style of online and in-person working arrangements.

Mariam Shaikh, Business Administration Apprentice at Troup Bywaters + Anders started her apprenticeship virtually and found that she benefited from a large virtual support network. She believes that a balance must be struck between digital and in-person delivery to give apprentice the benefit of going to work but the flexibility of remote provision. As the Government seeks to focus on using apprenticeships to recover from the pandemic, it will be important to ensure that online and virtual apprenticeship provision by employers and providers is high quality and meaningful.

The APPG echo Ofsted's recommendation that the Department for Education needs to invest in a suitable virtual learning environment. We urge businesses and providers to invest in a suitable virtual learning environment and staff training to ensure apprenticeship provision is of the highest quality both online and offline.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://feweek.co.uk/2020/12/01/ofsteds-2019-20-annual-report-key-findings-for-the-fe-and-skills-sector/>

# CASE STUDY

## LONDON SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY



### A lockdown apprenticeship: getting to grips with the world of planning during a global pandemic

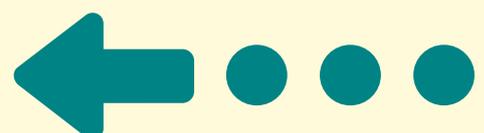
London South Bank University (LSBU) was one of the first universities to offer the Level 7 Chartered Town Planner Degree Apprenticeship. The programme, which has entry points for both school leavers and graduates, has been designed in response to both a need for new planning professionals and to increase diversity in the sector.

Cara Collier is currently working as a planning policy technician at the London Borough of Havering, while also completing the Chartered Town Planner Degree Apprenticeship at LSBU.

*“The chartered town planner apprenticeship route was offered to me at postgraduate entry soon after I started at the London Borough of Havering. I thought this was a great opportunity to accelerate my learning and put me on track to become a Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) accredited town planner. I knew this would support my career in the long term and be a beneficial qualification to allow me to progress into a planner or senior planner role.”*

Throughout the pandemic, the University has worked to minimise any disruption faced by both apprentices and employers. Cara says that the guidance offered by the LSBU apprenticeships team helped her to understand fully what was involved and to feel more confident about what to expect, especially due to the university’s plans to teach online for the foreseeable future.

The team at LSBU have also provided extra support, setting up seminar and working groups to make connections with other students, as well as allowing for more flexible learning arrangements with pre-recorded content and extensive online resources.





## APPRENTICESHIPS, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EMPLOYMENT

Apprenticeships are a fantastic way of getting young people into employment and will play a prominent role as the UK rebuilds from the pandemic. Never has this been more important than now as the UK seeks to recover from the pandemic. The APPG took contributions from BAE Systems, Youth Employment UK, Cloud 9, MultiVerse and the Learning and Work Institute on how to ensure apprenticeships can help young people into employment.

Young people have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and its effects. Under-25s saw the biggest rise in unemployment during lockdown as the youth unemployment rate increased to 13.1% compared to with 4.1% for the rest of the UK. Statistics show these impacts were not felt equally across the UK, with more deprived areas seeing a quicker up take in work-related benefits by young people<sup>6</sup>. Whilst nationally the proportion of young people on the benefits had doubled between March and June, those in the North of England, particularly in areas such as Liverpool and Blackpool, were most affected. Under-25s were the most likely to be furloughed; with more than half of eligible, employed under-25s being furloughed, due to the high proportion of young people employed in sectors where you cannot work from home that were forced to close, such as hospitality and retail.

To combat the expected rise in youth unemployment now that support schemes such as furlough have finished, the APPG recommends increased Government support to incentivise SMEs to take on apprentices, with a particular emphasis on those who are out of employment and younger than 25.

The COVID crisis has exacerbated existing inequalities, and that applies to both geography and age. With this in mind, the APPG recommends increased signposting of apprenticeships in deprived areas, where only 18% of high-paid apprenticeships are available. Multiverse gave insight into how this could be done, stating that they use digital transformation projects to ensure apprenticeships

<sup>6</sup> [Employment: Seven ways the young have been hit by Covid, BBC News](#)

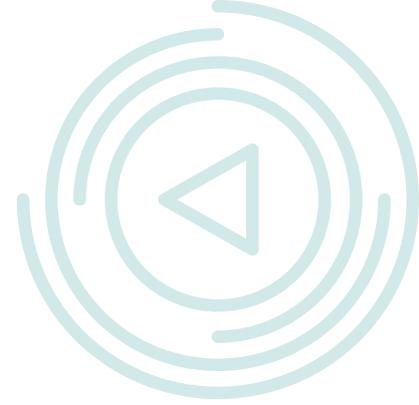
reach young people in demographics and sectors that have been especially hard hit. Secondly, they work on outreach with local community groups to ensure that their apprenticeships reach young people in disadvantaged areas, as well as contextualising young people's profiles to better explain their individual situations to potential employers. Thirdly, they focus on progression and retention, thinking beyond just getting people into work, but ensuring that they stay there, future-proofing their careers and ensuring they build the appropriate skills for career progression.

To narrow the regional skills gaps which exist across the country, the Government must ensure that its national skills policy is bolstering the skills agenda at a local level. The Post-16 Education and Skills Bill does make provisions for local authorities and providers to work with employers on skills and apprenticeships. However, there is little detail about the need for joined up working across a range of agencies and no mention of ensuring that apprenticeships align and complement various other schemes such as Kickstart and traineeships. If the Government wants to "level-up", it needs to ensure there are skills and opportunities for growth in young people's hometowns through active and joined-up networks of skills providers, made up of employers, local authorities, training providers and schools. It is also essential that the Government's renewed enthusiasm for apprenticeships does not simply increase the quantity of available apprenticeships and disregard the quality of these courses. As the Federation of Awarding Bodies notes, the Government has made strong progress on improving the quality of apprenticeships in recent years, and it is essential that this remains a core part of their work if apprenticeships are to be a driving force in the UK's recovery<sup>7</sup>.

The APPG also recommends reviewing the length of apprenticeship courses targeted at young people. This is in line with Cloud 9's research, which has found that apprenticeship courses longer than 18 months are associated with high levels of dropout. It is important that apprentices are not only able to start their courses but are also able to complete them and gain the qualifications they need to progress in the labour market.

<sup>7</sup> <https://awarding.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Quality-in-Apprenticeships-QualityEPA.pdf>

# APPRENTICES' ASKS OF UK GOVERNMENT



The APPG on Apprenticeships celebrated National Apprenticeships Week by hearing from 9 current apprentices about their experiences and the improvements they wish to see from Government.

All the apprentices were highly positive about their experience and were keen to recommend it to anyone who was considering starting one. We had a range of apprentices from school leavers to those who had chosen to re-skill mid-way through their career, but they were virtually unanimous that apprenticeships needed to be better signposted for young people in order to be seen at parity with going to university. They noted the importance of making young people at GCSE and Sixth Form level aware of the potential of an apprenticeship, and felt their peers were potentially missing out on fantastic opportunities with many unaware of the benefits of an apprenticeships. The APPG recommends that apprenticeships are central to the career's advice schools give to students and parents, in order to provide better support and signposting for those considering apprenticeships. Many school-leaver apprentices have relayed the difficulty of convincing their parents that an apprenticeship was an equal alternative to university and provided genuine career options. They said that apprenticeships could bring many more opportunities and give them far more 'real-life experience' than a degree.

APPG Sponsor, BAE Systems suggested that apprenticeships also need to be better advertised for those looking to retrain or upskill, especially for mature students. It is clear that more needs to be done by Government to promote apprenticeships as an option for adults seeking a different career, particularly following the impact of the pandemic.

The apprentices also suggested that the Government should provide support for current apprentices to function as ambassadors to those considering an apprenticeship and went on to recommend a workshops program for current apprentices to utilise in schools and colleges to evangelise about the opportunities offered by an apprenticeship. In keeping with the desire to further educate parents about the viability of apprenticeships, they proposed that some of these workshops be open to parents as well. Other initiatives mooted included increased support for practical elements of the application process such as writing applications and preparing for interviews, as the apprentices expressed concern that this should not be left to parents and should instead be provided in the form of expert guidance. Bilaal Khan, an apprentice from Via East Midlands proposed an Apprenticeship Minimum Wage and a national work experience scheme to assist with post-COVID catch-up for young people's education and employability.

Contributors also urged the Government to work to boost female STEM numbers, by increasing awareness and visibility of STEM apprenticeships. They felt that women were generally under-represented across apprenticeships, and especially so in a traditionally male-dominated sector such as STEM.

# CASE STUDY

## KPMG

Since the introduction of the levy, KPMG developed sector-leading programmes, offering a wide-range of roles.

The introduction of the KPMG Audit Apprenticeship, KPMG 360 Consulting, KPMG360° Digital Degree apprenticeship, our Queen Mary's and Manchester Metropolitan Software Engineering programmes launched from 2018 and 2020, respectively. Plus, our new Law and Data & Analytics Apprenticeship programmes launched recently for our Class of 21, offer pathways beyond traditional graduate routes, while recognising the importance of digital skills to future proofing our workforce. We currently have 9 Apprentice programmes which focus on entry level talent at the school leaver level. Additionally, at this point we have chosen not to convert our existing graduate programmes into apprenticeships in honour of the spirit of the levy. Instead, we are using the levy to reskill and upskill current employees where there is a skills gap identified which cannot be satisfied by traditional internal learning. Since April last year we have launched 7 new apprenticeships ranging from Project Management and Improvement Specialist all the way through to Cyber and Data Science. All are very popular with existing staff.

Our apprenticeship levy contributions fund the training and assessment of apprentices on programmes, however, in our experience, the levy alone is not enough. The true success of our apprenticeship offering is due to additional investments which ensure we attract a diverse applicant pool and provide tailored, wrap-around support for all applicants and learners.

We are passionate about Lifelong Learning and apprenticeships really offer a route to this.

Hear from some of them on why an apprenticeship, how to make this successful and equally how to adapt to the new hybrid world.



Jennifer Page  
Reskill Apprenticeship

What factors led you to choose an apprenticeship over other career/learning paths?

*It was viewed as an unusual choice for a Senior Manager to want to do an apprenticeship – but for me it made perfect sense. I have a number of academic qualifications relevant for my role and what I really wanted was the chance to get hands-on experience of the skills we require for our more technical engagements.*

*I transferred across to the financial crime technology team three years ago but have a focus on programme management and business development. I'm now learning the technical aspects of the products we've developed within the team that allow me to have better client conversations.*



Ayushi Ketani  
New skill Apprenticeship

What's been the biggest challenge to being an apprentice during these unprecedented times and how did you adapt to it?

*The biggest challenge has been staying motivated. A lot of others have probably faced the same challenge too. Being at home in front of a screen all day makes everything seem like one big blur. As time went on, it became harder to separate work, study, and leisure time. I started losing motivation, became less productive, had no routine, and did not know when to take a break.*

*Since the start of the new year, I've created a new workspace and started to manage my time better. I've also started to do university work with other apprentices. Interacting with others remotely has helped make things feel a bit more 'normal'.*



## CASE STUDY FROM FEDERATION OF AWARDING BODIES

Babington are a leading provider who deliver training and apprenticeships across several sectors including accountancy, professional services, and digital/IT. They've been delivering training since 1974 and strongly support the move to the new apprenticeship model.

Jen Bramley, Chief Operating Officer at Babington, described why she favours Standards over the old apprenticeship framework model.

*"Frameworks focused mainly on academic capabilities, grouping a number of separate qualifications with no overall test to prove competency," she said. "Whereas the new Standards offer increased flexibility, are focused on outcomes and recognise that knowledge, skills and behaviours all contribute to the job and make for a well-rounded employee."*

The introduction of EPA with the Standards has brought a significant change for providers who were able to assess their own learners under the old model. However, Jen sees this as a positive development. *"EPA truly gives us that independent check that our apprentices are fully competent and ready to enter the workplace,"* she said.

*"For learners, what's important is constant feedback throughout the programme - they're nervous about being on the right track,"* Jen explained. Collaboration between the employer, EPAO and provider means that everybody understands the competencies that an apprentice must be able to display to pass through gateway. Once EPA has taken place, EPAOs pass on feedback to support providers in iteratively improving their programmes. Jen said, *"working closely with the EPAO gives us peace of mind that we're doing the right thing and are providing apprentices with the support that they need to succeed."*





## T-LEVELS AND APPRENTICESHIPS

There have been many discussions on whether the introduction of T-Levels is a hindrance or benefit to apprenticeships. Most industry stakeholders agreed that T-Levels and apprenticeships have different focuses and appeals, with apprenticeships being more narrowly aimed at a specific vocation and T-Levels having a slightly wider focus.

Evidence from the APPG suggests that there is a broad consensus among stakeholders that having a wide choice of qualifications is positive, David Gallagher, Chief Executive at NCFE and Federation of Awarding Bodies Board Member, emphasised the importance of a mixed balance of provision. He noted that a vocational qualification was critical for professional and economic development, and often apprenticeships can provide specialist training, whereas T-Levels give a more general background, complemented by work placements. When comparing apprenticeships, T-Levels and other vocational qualifications, the sector largely agrees that they could work together harmoniously and overall, academic development in a university environment is not as critical to preparing learners for skilled work as commonly perceived.

However, there are concerns that the fast-paced evolution of industry would continue to outpace curriculum development. The Warwick Manufacturing Group (WVG) has noted that some T-Levels such as the new engineering T-level were already 5 years behind industry development. There are also concerns about the lack of direction post T-Levels, with some believing that they feel like a stopgap, with no clear career path compared to apprenticeships, where an individual typically continues on in their role with their employer after achieving their qualification.

To counter this and put T-Levels on an equal footing with apprenticeships, The Association of Colleges are pushing a reform to allow T-level to be “topped up” with an apprenticeship. They are calling for a universal system of assessing an individual’s success. Meanwhile, research from the University of Salford has proven the importance of having clear pathways from Level 3, whether that be a BTEC qualification, apprenticeship, or T-level.

Some industry stakeholders have also called for the UK to adopt the German model of teaching that emphasises the teaching of practical skills throughout the educational process. It is clear that providers are seeking better guidance from the Government on how T-levels and apprenticeships can work together to complement each other.



BAE Systems is committed to apprenticeships. They are a key part of our UK skills strategy and help ensure we can continue to deliver critical long term national security programmes, such as the Tempest next generation combat air system, the Type 26 frigate and Dreadnought submarine. They help to generate the essential STEM skills required for aerospace, software, and nuclear engineering, which are hard to recruit in the open market.

BAE Systems has over 2,000 apprentices in learning and in 2020 recruited a record 746 apprentices, on over 50 different apprenticeship programmes. Two thirds of these new starts were for advanced and intermediate apprenticeships and one third for higher and degree apprenticeships. 90% were aged 24 or younger. 70% of our 2020 new starts were recruited into vacancies in the north of England, which demonstrates ongoing (and long-standing) commitment to supporting the Government's "levelling up" agenda. We plan to recruit c.850 apprentices in 2021.

BAE Systems have not furloughed any of its apprentices or indeed of its wider UK workforce since the start of the pandemic. The company put in place adjustments to ensure that there were no breaks in learning for its apprentices and all 160 apprentices who were due to have End Point Assessments were able to complete in 2020.

The company also continues to support the young unemployed. It will provide over 100 virtual placements this year as part of its commitment to Movement to Work and 29 young people joined this year on the Kickstart programme.





## THE APPRENTICESHIP LEVY – HOW DO WE GET THE BEST OUT OF THE LEVY

The APPG has examined the perceptions and criticisms of the levy and how they have evolved in the four years since its introduction. Overall, the levy has had a positive impact, most notably in improving expertise around apprenticeships and raising their profile. Evidence suggests that the levy has moved the apprenticeships agenda up to companies' management teams and putting it on their radar. Although the levy has brought in positive changes, its potential is yet to be maximised.

Recognising the potential of the levy, Amazon and The Co-op have called for the 'sunset phase' to be extended from 2 to 4 years, in order to give it more time to succeed as "there is more we can do with it".

There is also agreement from industry that levy funds should be allowed to cover an apprentices' external costs, for example the cost of accommodation and technical equipment required, or could be spent on signposting initiatives, to better flag apprenticeships as an option for school leavers.

Meanwhile the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) believe that greater incentives are needed. They have called on Government to make apprenticeships incentives more generous, with higher incentives for employers hiring apprentices previously made redundant. The FSB also noted that it is likely that incentives have not made as large a difference as would have been hoped, and that pre-pandemic, there had been serious concerns over over-spending on apprenticeships, with large employers using more levy funds than anticipated. Finally, the FSB noted that it was not clear how long-term funding issues will be addressed for SMEs to improve levy accessibility.

Research from the APPG suggests there is a unanimous agreement among industry stakeholders that more is needed to be done to help SMEs navigate the red tape surrounding the levy. SMEs make up 99% of UK businesses and so the levy must work for them if we are to have an effective system where local employers are able to support local people. Representatives from the London Progression Collaboration believing that the government needs to help make small businesses "apprenticeship-ready". Industry stakeholders suggest creating a central government-run advice service, to assist small businesses with red tape and basic preparation for taking on apprentices.

While there have been minor tweaks to the levy, the general consensus is that now is the time for now is the time to assess the fantastic benefits of the return on investment of the levy, but with a focus on ensuring that it works better for SMEs, offers more sustainable support for employers and can be used more flexibly.

The Department for Education should establish a Government-run advice and one-stop-shop for small businesses providing support to take on an apprentice and assist them with the process.



With over 1150 apprentices across its family of businesses, The Co-op has a long-standing commitment to enabling people of all ages to learn, reskill and continue their professional development. Our apprenticeship programmes are award winning and cover all levels from 2 to 7.

In 2019 we began using our surplus levy to fund apprenticeships for Firefighters at Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and Nurse Practitioners and Care workers for the mental health charity, Sunlight. Encouraged by these partnerships, in National Apprenticeship Week 2021 we announced the creation of The Co-op Levy Share Service. The first business-led initiative in England, it enables organisations to pledge their unspent levy funds with the aim of creating a £15 million fund to support the creation of thousands of new apprenticeship opportunities for underrepresented groups. Our ambition is to close the 'opportunity gap' in apprenticeships for individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds by 2023, but the service is intended to address underrepresentation in all groups.

Pledging organisations can specify the sector or geographical location they would like to benefit from the levy and are matched to organisations that are looking for funding to achieve their apprentice ambitions. Funding supports full apprenticeship training and assessment costs and can be used for new recruits or to support the development of existing colleagues. The service is available to organisations who already have apprentices as well as those who are at the start of their journey.

You can learn more at <https://www.cooplevysare.co.uk/>





## THE APPRENTICESHIP LEVY – HOW DO WE GET THE BEST OUT OF THE LEVY

Mental health, and the best ways to safeguard apprentices' mental health have been a major talking point of the group. Industry stakeholders have spoken out on the impact of the pandemic on apprentices' mental health, the lack of financial support available for training providers to cater for an apprentice with a mental disability, and the lack of awareness among employers of what support is available for an apprentice struggling with their mental health. While many employers had increased mental health support for employee during the pandemic and lockdown, it was often still too reactive.

Research from The Open University's 2019 Access to Apprenticeships report highlighted that over a third of employers said that they are seeing a rise in mental health conditions amongst their existing apprentices. This trend can, in part, be attributed to increased disclosure and less of a stigma associated with mental health which is to be welcomed. Employers have also cited other reasons for the rise. These included 41% stating they were worried about financial pressures and 42% said it was due to increased pressure or stress at work. Interestingly, 1 in 3 also said it was challenging adjusting to the workplace for the first time. The report recommended the provision of better support to maintain good mental health such as specific mental health training and resilience support for apprentices. In addition, the report recommended to boost awareness of the support available via Access to Work, especially amongst smaller employers.

Furthermore, research from Amazing Apprenticeships found that apprentices with diagnosed mental health situations, felt like their requests for help were not taken seriously enough, with 84% of apprentices reporting having concerns about their mental health. Gen Healthy Minds have been calling for a more practice preventative model and a partnership with providers. According to Gen Healthy, for a best practice support framework, employers must provide a supportive community around an apprentice and online advice and support and specialist support when required.

There are however examples of good practices. Warner Bros have several measures to safeguard the mental health of their apprentices, including a telephone ban on Fridays, and earlier finishes during summer. Unfortunately, there is often a class-based divide regarding apprentices' mental health, with wealthier providers better able to help cater for an apprentice's mental health than a provider with fewer resources.

Despite the efforts made by some companies there is still far too much of a "nice-to-have" attitude around mental health support for apprentices, where it should be considered an essential part of the apprenticeship toolkit. As a result, mental health issues are rarely dealt with proactively or early on, instead they are left to escalate until they require crisis intervention. To combat this, three key initiatives that should be introduced: signposting to services to ensure timely access of support, increasing "safe space" communities, and equipping providers and employers with better preventative measures. The Government should also mandate statutory training for both employers and providers to safeguard apprentices' mental health in the forthcoming Employment Bill. This should include mental health toolkit to be provided to new apprentices as part of their induction process, which include signposts for support.



We estimate there will be close to 3 million new technology jobs in the UK by 2025. Opening up skills-based routes to more people is vital to a broad and inclusive economic recovery.

This is why Microsoft has launched a global effort to provide access to tools and resources so job seekers can begin pursuing in-demand technology skills for free across LinkedIn, Microsoft Learn and GitHub.

We are playing an active role in the Digital Route Review to ensure apprentice standards are fit for the future. We continue to work with apprentice learning providers and our partners, to support the creation and delivery of high quality digital apprenticeships. We are applying our Levy to help SMEs create new digital opportunities. In July 2020 we opened our next round of apprentice vacancies from level 3 to level 6 in our own business.

Microsoft is also increasing support for the Catch 22 Digital Edge programme over the next two years, supporting people who are facing barriers to employment to build the skills, confidence and capability to move into a digital apprenticeship or entry level digital job.

Talent is everywhere but opportunity is not. Over and over again, we see that when people have access to education and skilling, they create new economic opportunity for themselves, as well as their communities.

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