

MINUTES
APPG on Apprenticeships
Widening Participation and Pathways in Apprenticeships
18 October 2022
Room U, Portcullis House, Palace of Westminster

Chair: Emma Hardy MP, Co-Chair for the APPG for Childcare and Early Education

Parliamentarians in Attendance or Represented:

- Andrew Jones MP
- Lord Aberdare
- Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle
- Lord Baker of Dorking
- Baroness Garden of Frognal

Speakers:

- Carolyn Savage OBE, Head of Youth Engagement and Apprentice Participation, Department for Education
- John Blake, Director for Fair Access and Participation, Office for Students
- Anna Morrison CBE, Director, Amazing Apprenticeships
- Nicola Drury, UK Apprenticeships Lead, Amazon

Emma Hardy MP, Co-Chair of the APPG for Apprenticeships held an EGM to appoint Lord Baker as Vice-Chair of the APPG. This was confirmed by all parliamentarians present.

Emma then move onto the main session and introduced the topic of the meeting, widening participation and pathways in apprenticeships. Emma introduced the first speaker, **Carolyn Savage OBE**, Head of Youth Engagement and Apprentice Participation, Department for Education.

Carolyn introduced her work with the DfE and said they are working to improve completion rights of the programme, improve satisfaction rates, and to increase SMEs coming into the programme. Carolyn spoke about their work supporting young people, outlining four common themes: fewer young people consider apprenticeships than other routes; the apprenticeships recruitment process is difficult for other people; that there is a lack of attractive and accessible apprenticeship vacancies; and that many young people are vocationally undecided where they do not know which occupation or sector they would like to work in.

Carolyn said many young people don't know what they want to do, so searching for an apprenticeship can be difficult. Carolyn said Ministers have made it clear it's a priority to get more 16–18-year-olds into good quality training. Carolyn said they are learning further how to attract young people, working with UCAS and FE Colleges and particularly looking at working with Year 13 on how to take the risk out of waiting until the end of the academic year to find an apprenticeship.

On widening participation, Carolyn said they are working on areas such as improving disability advantage and supporting employers to work with more young people with access issues.

Carolyn spoke about the DfE's ASK programme, a free service for all schools and colleges, offering support to students, teachers, parents, and carers on apprenticeships and traineeships and T Levels. Carolyn said it has expanded since 2015 and reaches over 2,500 schools and colleges annually. Carolyn said in particular they have some diversity and inclusion threads,

including 40 development schools that work on NEET prevention activities, less advantaged learners, and young people in care or carers.

Emma thanked Carolyn and drew attention to the APPG's recommendation on fully funding 16–18-year-olds in apprenticeships. Emma introduced then introduced **John Blake**, Director for Fair Access and Participation, Office for Students (OFS).

John introduced the OFS and their role in monitoring the quality of higher education in England, including for apprenticeships. John spoke about how apprenticeships should be part of the offering, and said he has some concerns about the narrative that sometimes favours apprenticeships because of their financial difference for students. John said the OFS is consulting on a framework that looks at risks for quality of opportunity, including insufficiently diverse provision, including on apprenticeships. John said he anticipates the outcome being some providers are expanding their apprenticeship offer.

John said on lessons learned from the last twenty years, that we don't know enough; the evaluation of the money spent is nowhere near good enough and the OFS is taking steps to ensure that improves considerably over the next 4 years and on how to best ensure students are on the best course for their aspirations.

John said two areas they are looking at for apprenticeships is quality of careers advice and guidance, which remains patchy across the country (John mentioned the OFS's Uni Connect programme), but universities and colleges also need to consider their role in this. The second area is low attainment in prior years which, while not in direct remit of higher education providers, if they don't improve minority and disadvantaged numbers of leavers, John foresees that we will continue to have a problem. John mentioned the danger of treating apprenticeships as only for those with low outcomes.

Emma thanked John and introduced **Anna Morrison CBE**, Director, Amazing Apprenticeships.

Anna introduced Amazing Apprenticeships, founded to tackle some of the misconceptions of apprenticeships, and explained how they run programmes for care leavers and also, recently, prison pathways into apprenticeships. Anna said there are still many young people, families and teachers who think apprenticeships are low-paid and that there aren't many jobs, but Anna said there are a high volume of vacancies that they are struggling to fill. There are also concerns that employers don't value apprenticeships, and they are concerned around pastoral support for themselves as the apprentice, and for employers they are too complex and bureaucratic.

Anna said there are entry requirements unnecessarily placed on some job roles, and functional English and maths skills can become a barrier and put people off. The other issue is pathways into apprenticeships, especially at Level 2 and below, the 'opportunity ladder' and that these are being taken away, such as the removal of the traineeship incentive this summer.

Anna said parents are becoming more aware but there are real issues we need to get to grips with soon to widen access to apprenticeships. Anna said pathway programmes are needed – well funded and well incentivised for employers – and that for underrepresented groups who may not hold English or maths or have had a traumatic childhood, we need to remove the risk of doing an apprenticeship.

Anna finished by saying we need to look at the national minimum wage for apprenticeships, and see a change to child benefit rules, which may currently put 16-18 year olds off from doing an apprenticeship.

Lord Aberdare took over as Chair as MPs in attendance went to vote. Lord Aberdare introduced **Nicola Jury**, UK Apprenticeships Lead, Amazon.

Nicola spoke about how Amazon offers 1500 opportunities across 40 schemes, embracing the Levy which Nicola said has given choice and accessibility. Nicola spoke about the range of opportunities on offer, at every single level. Nicola said their biggest scheme was their Level 2 scheme, which allows people to gain those functional skills, which a more flexible Levy could help. Nicola said around 40% of those who complete their initial level go onto a higher level with them. Nicola said the gap where providers need to engage with students and their influencers, as young people still don't feel they receive the information on how apprenticeships work. Nicola said getting more employers involved might help and Nicola felt the Levy could be more effective in those entry schemes into apprenticeships.

Lord Aberdare thanked all the speakers and opened the floor to Q&A. Lord Aberdare invited Lord Baker to speak.

Lord Baker of Dorking said it has been immensely disappointing that the number of apprenticeships at 16-18 has been falling. He mentioned the House of Lords' Select Committee on Youth Employment had made over 100 recommendations, including 10 on apprenticeships. Lord Baker said two thirds of the money should be spent on 16-24, with the remaining money spent on over 40s. Lord Baker said he was surprised the Baker clause hadn't been mentioned and said every provider should be asking to go into schools.

Lord Baker said if we don't make more skilled workers, we can't grow the economy, and can't depend on large numbers coming from overseas, and apprenticeships should be dedicated to producing skilled workers. Lord Baker said we need to be more inventive and urged attendees to look at the Lords Select Committee on Youth Unemployment's recommendations.

Lord Aberdare turned to Carolyn to respond.

Carolyn said they had seen a big drop in vacancies for young people but there were also so many competing programmes that young people may struggle to make sense of everything on offer. Their new campaign Get The Jump, cross-government, is to help young people to make sense of the options on offer. Carolyn said the Provider Access legislation will strengthen the Baker clause and encourage more providers to go into schools, but someone needs to check the schools not complying – potentially in Ofsted?

Baroness Garden of Frognal raised the point that the unspent Levy goes into the Treasury and should go back into educational programmes. Baroness Garden said schools should celebrate their apprenticeship leavers to give them the same status as other programmes.

Baroness Bennett queried the rethinking maths and English education part of the speakers' presentations.

Anna said certain levels of maths and English aren't always needed, so removing them takes out the risk for the apprenticeship and lowers the cost for the employer. Sometimes they are a requirement of completion and lots of employers say they don't need apprentices to complete the maths and English, just the apprenticeship itself. As it appears to be a barrier to access and completion, changing this could improve success rates.

Nicola added that it can be very disheartening for people to not gain those functional skills and therefore not gain their apprenticeship. Carolyn said they were also looking at it as some providers are not delivering functional skills and it is therefore a barrier to widening participation.

Gwyn March raised if whether Ofsted would be asked to fulfil the Baker clause. Phil Warnock said his advertising organisation benefitted from all the Government support and help and some of the drop in 16-18-year-old apprenticeships has been a lack of engagement with SMEs more recently. Phil drew attention to getting care leavers into apprenticeships and said a grant to top

up the wages of a care leaver, so they can afford to go for the c. £9,000 jobs would make a huge difference to the individual and the return on investment would be great.

Carolyn said she didn't know of anything to strengthen Ofsted and she said it would be great to bring back incentives for SMEs.

Richard Hamer, BAE Systems, spoke about working with the Princes' Trust and taking on work experience students, that had achieved great results. Richard said he'd encourage work experience to employers so they can see what it's like to have an apprentice.

Gabriel Millard-Clothier, from Richard Holden MP's office, said he'd welcome comments on teacher training apprenticeships for ahead of a Westminster Hall Debate tabled by Richard Holden MP as they wondered if more apprenticeships in the sector could in turn attract more into teaching.

Another participant said that one of the challenges is that client fees aren't increasing as quickly as inflation so bringing in individuals who have the skills is a priority. She said that they are very frustrated that the levy goes back to the Treasury when employers are struggling. She closed by saying that there is an ongoing need to help more people with learning difficulties.

Lord Aberdare thanked speakers and participants, and closed the meeting.