



APPG on Apprenticeships: AGM & How do we ensure that apprenticeships help young people into employment as the UK continues its economic recovery?

21 January 2021

Chair: Karin Smyth MP

Speakers:

- Richard Hamer, Education and Skills Director, BAE Systems
- Laura-Jane Rawlings, CEO of Youth Employment UK
- Carlene Jackson, CEO and Founder, Cloud 9
- Siobhan Randell, Inclusion and Diversity Lead, MultiVerse
- Dr Fiona Aldridge, Director for Policy and Research, The Learning and Work Institute

Also in Attendance: Jack Lopresti MP, Theresa Villiers MP, Stephen Timms MP, Kim Johnson MP, James Daly MP, Lord Young of Notting Green, Lord Fox, Lord Aberdare

Karin Smyth MP began the APPG with a short AGM, electing the APPG's Co-Chairs and Officers

Co-Chairs:

- Karin Smyth MP
- Jack Lopresti MP

Officers:

- Jonathan Gullis MP
- Catherine McKinnell MP
- Jim McMahon MP
- Andrew Jones MP
- Theresa Villiers MP
- Richard Holden MP
- James Daly MP
- Kim Johnson MP
- Lord Young of Norwood Green
- Lord Fox
- Baroness Sue Garden
- Lord Aberdare

Karin Smyth MP received approval for the APPG's Income and Expenditure Statement and thanked Connect for their help in facilitating the meeting.

Kim Johnson MP raised the question of diversity and encouraged greater diversity amongst APPG colleagues.

Main meeting:

Karin Smyth MP began by thanking the APPG's sponsors for making this meeting and the work of the APPG possible. She mentioned being able to put out an APPG report as a major recent highlight, before thanking Connect for bringing all present together and helping facilitate the APPG. She noted attendees' mutual concern regarding the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people



and apprenticeships and pledged to work with the Government and relevant sectors to help those affected.

Jack Lopresti MP stated that he looked forward to continuing as Co-Chair of the APPG, and thanked sponsors and echoed Karin Smyth MP's concerns over the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people and apprenticeships. He stated his commitment to an inquiry examining the expanded use of apprenticeships in the armed forces, and expressed hope that sufficient funding for such an inquiry was close at hand.

Karin Smyth MP then introduced the main topic of the session and introduced Richard Hamer, Education and Skills Director of BAE Systems.

Education and Skills Director of BAE Systems, Richard Hamer began by emphasising BAE's commitment to their apprentices, stating that BAE did not need to furlough any of their apprentices when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and that they had taken on record numbers of apprentices this cycle (750) and next (800). Due to the timing of the COVID-19 pandemic, BAE were forced to induct 750 apprentices virtually, though this was eased by their prior investment in a comprehensive virtual learning environment. He stated that academic elements of the apprenticeships were front-loaded so they could be done first, virtually, with placements postponed to maximise the possibility that they could be done in-person. Where necessary, laptops and tablets were also made available for apprentices to facilitate remote learning. As a result, almost all of the 750 apprentices were able to complete their courses despite the effects of coronavirus. BAE is also supporting young people in finding work through the Princes' Trust and have used the Government's Kickstart Scheme to help take on 30 apprentices, 90% of which they are hoping will develop into apprenticeships in September 2021.

CEO of Youth Employment UK (YEUK), Laura-Jane Rawlings began by briefly explaining YEUK's mission, before stating that 1.5 million young people had sought YEUK's skills and advice in 2020 during the pandemic. She mentioned that interest in apprenticeships had grown, and stated her belief that apprenticeships had grown in stature alongside traditional 'academic' placements. She stated that YEUK had been working with employers to improve their practice when it comes to working with young people, including giving employers advice on how to support young people in their communities. She said that SME's have a critical part to play in youth employment, in addition to large corporations. She mentioned that YEUK's research has shown increased interest in apprenticeships among young people as well as increased curiosity about different career pathways. The same research reiterated that a gender and race gap skill existed as it found that white males are by far the most likely to hear about and have access to an apprenticeship. She stated that YEUK recommends focusing apprenticeship policy on young people aged below 25, not older potential apprentices, such is the scale of the youth unemployment crisis. She stated that this is likely to come through Government support for SME's to fund apprenticeships, and Government incentives for employers to create apprenticeships. She concluded by stating that the COVID-19 pandemic has only amplified the geographic disparity in equality of opportunity.

Siobhan Randell, Inclusion and Diversity Lead at MultiVerse began by explaining their mission. Firstly, Multiverse is working closely with clients on digital transformation projects to ensure apprenticeships reach young people in demographics and sectors that have been especially hard hit. Secondly, they are working 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, Multiverse is focusing on progression and retention. She said they are 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.

Director for Policy and Research at the Learning and Work Institute (LWI) Dr Fiona Aldridge, began by explaining the LWI's mission, mentioning that they have recently undertaken a youth commission, which emphasised the importance of building skills for young people, and finding work for young people. She said apprenticeships have their role to play in this work but this is just part of the ambition and apprenticeships should lead to further progression through connections with and wider programs are critical. The LWI's target is for 1 in 3 young people to complete an apprenticeship, but at present only 1 in 4 do so. This is expected to fall further as more recent data becomes available, with fewer apprenticeship opportunities available even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The LWI's recommend providing incentives for employers to take on young apprentices, aged below 25, better guidance to ensure young people make informed choices and taking action to guarantee fair access.

She stated that action should include full funding for apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds. Furthermore, she added the current incentives for SME's to take on apprentices are not working. She explained that Level 4 apprenticeships are heavily skewed towards older people over 25, with under-representation among BAME and people with disabilities. She concluded by stating that geography matters, since only 18% of high-paid apprenticeships are available in deprived areas and emphasised the importance of clear pathways to access support to help young people build careers, not just obtain temporary jobs.

CEO and Founder of Cloud 9, Carlene Jackson began by stating that her business has been a keen supporter of apprentices and views them as an incredible way to attract new talent, in some cases from areas currently with little demand for example hospitality. She stated that with the university experience dampened due to coronavirus restrictions, apprenticeships may offer a compelling alternative. As an employer in an SME, she emphasised the importance of apprenticeships shorter than 18 months, as an apprenticeships longer than that are associated with high levels of dropout. She stated that she would also like to see a government portal for apprenticeship applications set up, where employers could advertise schemes and candidates could apply. She concluded by stating that many employers are genuinely keen to help young people in the current circumstances, and want to give back.

Q&A:

Lord Aberdare asked how well the Kickstart Scheme was integrated with apprenticeships, and should there be a closer link to guarantee progression into an apprenticeship? Richard Hamer answered that BAE were using Kickstart to help them find apprenticeships, though 90% of apprentices were from school instead. He stated the importance of quick progression. There were also questions asked about the difficulty SME's face when taking apprentices on and discussion around ensuring that those on starter schemes such as kickstart go on to find meaningful apprenticeships.

Laura-Jane Rawlings spoke further about concerns over SME's taking on apprentices. She stated that she was encouraged after meeting with Minister for Employment Mims Davies MP about the setting up of 100 Youth Hubs around the UK and stated her hope that this could make a difference. She said that she was encouraged by the increasing integration between the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the issue of youth employment. Siobhan Randell added that a single point of application (a portal) was necessary and lamented the complexity of apprenticeships



applications. She cited UCAS as a possible template, before mentioning that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that work can be done remotely productively and that this could be a possible model for apprenticeships. Fiona Aldridge added that the apprenticeships system was currently driven by employer choice, and that without appropriate incentives for businesses to take on apprenticeships, this does not address historic inequalities. She stated that the apprenticeships system needs reform, to ensure that young people do not miss out because of circumstance or race, emphasising that the system needs to be simplified to encourage employer participation. Carlene Jackson added that more needs to be done to support SME's to offer appropriate apprenticeships, and emphasised the importance of shorter apprenticeships and employer's nurturing apprentices in their professional development.

Karin Smyth MP concluded the meeting by thanking all speakers and participants for attending.