

Apprenticeships in the Third Sector
Wednesday 8 May | 15:00 – 16:00
Room R, Portcullis House, and via Zoom

Chair: Jonathan Gullis MP (Co-Chair)

Speakers:

- Laura Thurlow, JGA
- Caroline Noon, The National Trust

Apologies: Tommy McDade from Barnardos and Lara Thompson from The Prince's Trust.

Jonathan Gullis MP opened the meeting by introducing himself as Co-Chair and welcomed all attendees to the meeting and outlined the session's theme: "Apprenticeships in the Third Sector." He emphasised the significance of apprenticeships as vital for unlocking essential skills for the future. Jonathan Gullis MP highlighted that apprenticeships play a crucial role in skill development and are essential for the future. He noted that the third sector is currently tasked with more responsibilities than ever before.

Jonathan Gullis MP invited Laura Thurlow to introduce herself as the first speaker of the session.

Laura introduced herself and her role at the JGA Group, where for the past three years she has been working as 'Voluntary Sector Engagement Representative', where she supports charities to access all the benefits of apprenticeship training. She explained the JGA Group is an independent training provider with more than a 30-year history of delivering vocational training.

Jonathan Gullis MP thanked Laura and invited Caroline Noon to introduce herself as the second speaker of the session.

Caroline said she is the Apprenticeship Manager at The National Trust.

Jonathan Gullis MP thanked Caroline and asked Laura to speak more about her role and the work of the JGA Group with apprenticeships.

Laura shared her experience, stating that in her previous role as a charity chief executive, apprenticeships were not a priority or a focus in their recruitment strategies.

She highlighted that JGA has been active in the charity sector for 30 years, facilitating diverse learners' development and success. Approximately 100 apprentices from the charity sector, including large international firms subject to the apprenticeship levy, have benefited from their programs.

She explained that in larger charities, there are challenges regarding the uptake of apprenticeships, particularly at senior and middle management levels. Non-levy smaller charities struggle with understanding and managing the apprenticeship route due to financial constraints.

Laura said costs remain a significant challenge, especially for smaller charities, although some assistance in the form of 5% instalments of the levy or other cost-reducing measures could be helpful and a potential solution.

Laura mentioned the collaboration between JGA and Charity People to produce video content aimed at demystifying apprenticeships and supporting companies. She said this has helped make the apprenticeship route more accessible and spread awareness for organisations. She also noted that the Department for Education and GOV.UK provide useful guidance and resources through videos and written materials.

Laura emphasised the importance of consolidating resources into a single accessible pool to facilitate easier access and information retrieval, recognising that many charities are time constrained.

Jonathan Gullis MP thanked Laura for her contribution and asked Caroline to speak more about her role and the work of The National Trust Group with apprenticeships.

Caroline outlined her role in leading, developing, and growing the National Trust's apprenticeship program. Since 2016, she said the programme has expanded significantly from 8 apprentices before the levy to 280, marking a substantial increase.

Caroline said her responsibility includes optimising and utilising the levy effectively, with a focus on reviewing apprenticeships. She said she is actively involved in the development and review of new apprenticeship programs across various areas of the National Trust's work.

To ensure apprentices succeed, she said the apprenticeships are designed to meet the organisation's needs to provide opportunity for growth, and the National Trust has also implemented changes such as introducing the National Living Wage (NLW) for all apprentices.

Caroline reported a low dropout rate of 8.3% for new starters, highlighting the importance of allocated mentors for apprentices to achieve high retention rates.

Furthermore, she noted that typically 60% of apprenticeship roles in the National Trust are funded by donations. She also said the National Trust offers routes for existing staff to upskill and supports over 69 different routes across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, with placements in over 200 locations.

She explained the majority of roles are levels 2-4 which allows the Trust to offer more entry points, and she also noted the importance of exploring the lowest grade for advertising roles to broaden the applicant pool.

Caroline said that being able to use the levy to cover unavoidable costs like college-related expenses would be beneficial for organisations such as the National Trust, and would be a way to maximise participation in the apprenticeships programme / be a way for the National Trust to be able to offer more places.

She suggested reviewing the End-Point Assessment (EPA) method to accommodate different learning styles, particularly for those who struggle with multiple-choice assessments.

Jonathan Gullis MP had to leave the meeting for divisions in the House. His senior researcher, Harry, stepped in to chair the meeting on his behalf.

Harry asked Caroline whether removing the function skills requirement of apprenticeships would be helpful.

Caroline acknowledged that functional skills in apprenticeships can often intimidate apprentices, leading to desires to drop out from the programmes. She suggested running functional skills

alongside apprenticeships as a beneficial approach to address this issue, instead of making them a requirement. Caroline expressed concern over instances where competent apprentices struggle to progress due to difficulties passing functional skills assessments.

Harry asked both Laura and Caroline why their completion rates are so high.

Laura highlighted that line managers are invited to progress meetings to ensure alignment and awareness of the apprentices' progress.

Caroline says they have a rigorous recruitment process to ensure suitable candidates are matched with appropriate roles and training locations. She noted that line managers now conduct regular reviews to monitor apprentices' performance and development.

Harry asked Laura about the apprenticeship levy transfer increasing from 25-50% and asked to what extent this would support SMEs in accessing the unspent levy fund.

Laura says it definitely helps smaller sized businesses and explained that the increased transfer capability provides SMEs with greater flexibility and resources to engage in apprenticeship programmes. She noted the proposition in the chat about the apprenticeships hub and the brokering where those that pledge their levy can be transferred. She said it's great to have the support there to bring the two together and simplify it as much as possible.

Caroline said that the National Trust has never done a levy transfer nor spent all of their levy. She said a levy transfer requires a large, and nearly separate team, and she currently does not have capacity to do this.

She highlighted the difficulties with the levy, specifically surrounding predicted spending. She suggested an online predictive tracker would help organisations to track expenditure with the levy and the costs of running an apprenticeship.

Harry asked Caroline how they are able to offer high numbers of level 2-4 apprenticeships.

Caroline said the National Trust offers a pyramid structure, where they try to map apprenticeships as to where they would fit into the business. She says there should never be more level 7 (manager level) apprentices than level 2. She also explained that setting level 7 salaries can be challenging, so the National Trust only offers up to level 4.

Harry then invited attendees to contribute and ask any questions.

Richard Goodwin introduced himself as a colleague of Laura's from the JGA Group. He explained he wanted to focus on functional skills, and explained the challenge is that there are a lot of 'add ons' to the apprenticeship programmes that are not directly related to the end job or qualification. He said a lot of these extra-curricular requirements are well worth doing, but add a huge amount of complexity that are not relevant for the job. He said the implementation of the 'add ons' makes the delivery of the apprenticeship very difficult.

Rory asked about the proposals to reform the levy spending and questioned if this could potentially devalue apprenticeships by diverting funds away from long-term programmes in favour of workplace training.

Laura says from conversations with charities who are looking to train staff in areas where there isn't currently an apprenticeship route, alternate options to spend the levy would be beneficial. She questioned whether this would devalue apprenticeships, and instead said she hoped there would be a space where both short and full-length apprenticeships can take place.

Richard said in a corporate setting, the shortest length course that is most effective is the priority for employers as it is usually the most efficient and cost-effective way to train their staff. Due to

the levy, he said the way in which apprenticeships work is often a completely different way of training in comparison with the corporate sphere.

Caroline said if an apprenticeship is designed for be 18 months, it should not be tried to be shortened to 6 months. She says those needing to do functional skills should be able to do that alongside their apprenticeship.

Harry asked if anyone had any further questions. As no one had any remaining questions, he thanked all for attending and the meeting closed.