



all party parliamentary group on
apprenticeships

All Party Parliamentary Group on Apprenticeships Report

May 2023 - May 2024

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.

Minutes of the sessions are published on the [APPG on Apprenticeships website](#). Furthermore, recordings of these sessions are readily available on the [APPG on Apprenticeships' YouTube channel](#), ensuring that the insights shared within the sessions are accessible to all.

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If you would like more information on the APPG, please contact the secretariat at: ApprenticeshipsAPPG@connectpa.co.uk and follow us on Twitter @ApprenticeAPPG.

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- Jonathan Gullis MP, Co-Chair of the APPG on Apprenticeships
- Charlotte Nichols MP, Co-Chair of the APPG on Apprenticeships

The Group's current officers are:

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- Lord Aberdare

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November 2023

Session title: APPG for London and APPG on Apprenticeships: Joint Meeting on Apprenticeships and Social Mobility

Date: 13 November 2023

Chaired by: Sir Bob Neill MP and Charlotte Nichols MP

Speakers:

- Doniya Soni-Clark – Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Multiverse
- Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz – Executive Member for Economy and Skills, London Councils
- Tanisha Zaman – Peer Researcher, Partnership for Young London
- Nikkita Gordon – Apprentice Trainee Driver at Go Ahead London
- Tyrique Miller – Sales Executive Apprentice, LSBU
- Alex O'Shea – Estimator Apprentice, Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd
- Zawad Ibrahim – Advanced Business Administrator Apprenticeship, London Borough of Camden

Sir Bob Neill MP opened the meeting outlining how apprenticeships are an important means of social mobility and have advantages in accessibility compared to other forms of education or employment. Sir Bob talked about the situation in London, which has seen a decline in the number of young people starting apprenticeships since the introduction of apprenticeship levy. He expressed his concern for this, given the higher than average youth unemployment levels in the city and the cost of living crisis, where earning whilst learning becomes increasingly important for Londoners on low incomes.

Doniya Soni-Clark, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at Multiverse, emphasised the need to address the disparity between talent distribution and opportunity, especially in the tech sector. Multiverse aims to offer diverse and inclusive opportunities, recognising the business benefits of greater diversity.

Soni-Clark emphasised the importance of apprenticeships as a tool for social mobility, enabling individuals to learn on the job while earning a living. She underscored the role of apprenticeships in building diverse and inclusive teams and creating opportunities for those who may not have access through traditional career paths. Multiverse's mission revolves around diversity, with a focus on providing opportunities to high-potential talent.

Doniya shared statistics, such as the low representation of ethnic minorities and women in senior tech roles, and highlighted Multiverse's efforts to hire from deprived neighbourhoods and support individuals from various backgrounds, including those on free school meals. Soni-Clark concluded by expressing a strong belief in apprenticeships as a source of social mobility, emphasising their effectiveness at multiple points in an individual's career for upskilling and earning opportunities.

Tanisha Zaman, a peer researcher at the Partnership for Young London, provided insights into the challenges faced by young people in apprenticeships and the impact on social mobility. Zaman, drawing from personal experience, highlighted the stigma associated with apprenticeships, particularly in a city like London where university education is highly encouraged. Zaman pointed out that this stigma is not only present in social settings but is deeply rooted in the education system, with teachers often only talking about students going to university over apprenticeships.

Tanisha stressed the lack of awareness and education about apprenticeships, noting that many young people are not adequately informed about the potential and value of apprenticeship programmes.

Zaman also addressed the issue of financial support, stating that there is a lack of understanding among young people regarding how to stabilise themselves financially during an apprenticeship. The misconception that apprenticeships only offer minimum wage was discussed, and Zaman highlighted the need for better education to differentiate between apprenticeships and internships.

An important point raised by Tanisha was the absence of financial support, such as the educational maintenance allowance, for apprenticeships, contrasting it with the financial stability provided to those following traditional educational routes, such as university. Zaman said apprenticeships are seen as a barrier to a social lifestyle, as apprentices miss out on opportunities like Freshers Week and student unions that are commonly associated with university life. Zaman argued that apprenticeships should be more than just work and certification; they should offer a lifestyle that is currently overlooked and neglected.

In conclusion, Zaman called for a more comprehensive approach to tackle the stigma, misinformation, and lack of support associated with apprenticeships, emphasising the need to ensure that young people undergoing apprenticeships have access to financial stability, student unions, and a sense of belonging.

Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz, Executive Member for Employment and Skills at London Councils, provided an overview of the work undertaken by London Councils in relation to apprenticeships.

Mayor Fiaz highlighted the critical role of apprenticeships in offering an accessible avenue for social mobility, enabling individuals to upskill and significantly boost their earnings. However, Fiaz expressed concern about the declining trend in apprenticeship starts, particularly since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy and the transition to apprenticeship standards.

Mayor Fiaz emphasised the financial challenges faced by apprentices, particularly in high-cost living areas like London, where low apprenticeship wages act as a significant barrier. Mayor Fiaz commended London boroughs, with nearly 80% paying apprentices at least the London living wage, surpassing the minimum wage for apprenticeships. Despite these efforts, the decline in apprenticeship starts and completions has persisted.

In response to these challenges, Mayor Fiaz outlined proposals for reforming the apprenticeship levy to better support social mobility. She suggested reforms which included allowing levy-paying employers to use some of their levy for the wage costs of new apprentices from priority groups, supporting intermediate level apprenticeships, making equivalent funding available to non-levy payers, and enabling the use of levy funding for pre-employment training.

Additional proposals included a review of apprenticeship funding bands, particularly in high-cost places like London, and the expedited introduction of new apprenticeship standards to reduce bureaucracy.

Mayor Fiaz concluded by advocating for further devolution, and highlighted that London Councils, working with the Greater London Authority, is proposing greater devolution of employment and skills provision, including the apprenticeship levy.

Charlotte Nichols MP agreed with Tanisha's comments around the social side, and the financial side of apprenticeships, and how that's something that we haven't yet been able to crack yet. She recognised it as important and something that doesn't often get mentioned.

Nichols highlighted that there are a number of sectors that very used to doing apprenticeships, such as engineering and infrastructure for example, where there has always been a very well established path into the sector. But noted it has been very interesting to see the work of apprentices in sectors like the creative sector, which have been less common.

Nichols then handed over to apprentices to share their experiences. Nikkita Gordon, an Apprentice Trainee Driver at Go Ahead London, said her apprenticeship has been very helpful in learning how to become a bus driver. She said her apprenticeship paid a lot more than her last job, and that she really enjoys it.

Alex O'Shea, an Estimator Apprentice at Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd, said apprenticeships often have negative connotations as opposed to degrees, and that it is really important we find away to move away from this. He said apprentices offer incredibly opportunities, including learning, working, getting paid, and networking. He apprenticeships can be hard work, but what you get out of them is incredible. He said apprenticeships can fill the skills gap in certain industries which currently aren't popular among young people.

Tyrique Miller, a Sales Executive Apprentice with London South Bank University, said he believes apprenticeships are the best pathway into work in modern society. He said his apprenticeship has given him amazing professional development opportunities. He said he believes apprenticeships solves the problem that a lot of young people face with finding a job, as they build up your experience, rather than insisting you have experience before you start. He said that given his age, and the fact that he has two young children, his story shows that it is never too late to start an apprenticeship.

Zawad Ibrahim, an Advanced Business Administrator Apprenticeship at the London Borough of Camden, shared his story of being a refugee from Afghanistan and feeling lost and distressed about his future in the UK. He said his apprenticeship has been the best thing which has happened to him since arriving in the UK. Ibrahim said the apprenticeship programme helped him to boost his confidence, development skills and grow both personally and professionally. Zawad said it has also given him the opportunity to work alongside experienced professionals across council and learn from them.

Munira Wilson MP asked the speakers how we start to tackle the stigma around apprenticeships. Tanisha Zaman answered by saying if you change the way apprenticeships are talked about in the education system, everything will follow, including in social circles and in wider society. Mayor Fiaz said that we need to have a look at how apprenticeships are marketed.

December 2023

Session title: APPG on Apprenticeships - AI and Apprenticeships

Date: 11 December 2023

Chaired by: Lord Aberdare

Speakers:

- Erica Farmer, Business Director, Quantum Rise Talent Group
- Mary Amanuel, Multiverse Apprentice in the NHS
- Dean Russell MP

Lord Aberdare, chairing the APPG for Apprenticeships on behalf of co-Chair Jonathan Gullis MP, introduced the theme of the meeting, AI in apprenticeships. Lord Aberdare outlined how AI is already being used, and how the group would be discussing how AI can be further incorporated in apprenticeships, and how employers and providers can make the most of it.

Lord Aberdare ran through housekeeping for questions and then introduced the first speaker, Erica Farmer, Business Director for Quantum Rise Talent Group.

Erica introduced the work of Quantum Rise Talent Group and some of the clients they work with. Erica mentioned some of the apprenticeship programmes she has run and experience she has in the sector particularly around AI.

Erica said she speaks to employers about AI and frequently mentions that AI is the worst it'll ever be right now. She said employers can be super excited by this as AI will only get better but employers are also very unsure, people are worried about their jobs, or how much they know about AI.

Erica said young people looking at apprenticeships will be hearing this same narrative as well, and colleges and providers have a great opportunity to grasp the skills needed and embed them in the design and delivery of training.

Erica noted that 71% of learning organisations are already integrating AI tools into their organisations, and Deloitte report that this was the year we were learning to “trust our AI colleagues”. Erica highlighted, however, that there is a lot of fear around AI, which can be known as the “fear gap” of adoption.

Erica explained the fear gap as concerns about the future of AI – based on films, for example – and not knowing what it will mean for our future.

Erica said people are looking to each other to understand what others are doing in this space. She said some universities are already teaching machine learning and AI in their curriculum, but there are not a huge amount of youth cases where AI is actually being used and delivered as a skillset for young people, or information for education practitioners to introduce it to reduce cost or for content creation.

Erica said we need to win over learning providers, colleges and schools as there isn't an operations manual about how to use generative AI in learning. Erica noted the EU AI legislation that came out in December and the likelihood of more rules and regulations about how to use AI, along with consequences for not using it correctly. Speaking to providers, Erica said AI feels very conceptual, not practical or a “real” tool to enhance learning.

Erica said she's been trying to work with providers on a "plan of action" and she said she uses storytelling to get people onboard with something like AI that is so emotional. Erica said she likes to think of what the people need, the "armour" or infrastructure, and then the AI technology to bring it all together. By "infrastructure" Erica means the digital framework, regulations etc on how to use generative AI in one way, and how not to use it in another way, such as data privacy and data protection.

Erica said the sharing of best practice in AI is really important, so organisations speaking to each other internally, agreeing the terms of reference of AI usage, defining digital ethics and ensuring that behaviours are compliant when using technology, and also identifying distinctive human skills to build such as critical thinking, problem solving etc.

By getting learners to use AI, Erica noted that we can reduce the fear gap but we're not seeing much activity currently in this space. Erica said there's a huge opportunity for providers to shape this space and have a go, rather than waiting for someone else to pick up the reins.

Lord Aberdare thanked Erica and handed over to Mary Amanuel, Multiverse Apprentice in the NHS. Mary introduced her current work as a degree apprentice in data science, currently working in the NHS. Mary said then when she was younger, nobody was really speaking about AI but they weren't speaking about apprenticeships either, even in 2019.

Mary spoke about her background, growing up in a council house, getting free school meals and being on pupil premium. Mary said she knew she needed to do something drastic for social mobility and she recounted doing an internship where she learned a lot more from an engineering company in a week than her time at school.

Mary said this encouraged her to do an apprenticeship to get hard skills, and to help society. Mary mentioned Multiverse's data science scheme, which she is on, and how now she helps organisations understand complex data sets to make evidence-based decisions. These questions might be on A&E waiting lists in the next three weeks.

Mary said all her skills are directly relevant to her job: understanding how data works, how to get data from systems, understanding the bias systems might have, how to build her own models, how to apply this data to an organisation like the NHS, or other employers. Mary said it's a really practical education that focusses on soft skills, but really aren't soft, like communication but of technical issues. And also the "hard" side of getting stuck into practical work.

Mary said she works on the early warning system in the NHS, predicting admissions, troubleshooting, supporting with forecasting, and she also co-founded a Python community learning how to program, share their code, and to learn from each other.

Mary said she has three recommendations:

1. Firstly, forget about AI. Mary said she was teaching data skills to 15-16 year olds in an under-served school where they are social-media savvy but they can't send an email with an attachment. Mary said we need to focus on computer science education first and that foundational learning, rather than AI.
2. Second, AI is the biggest benefit to those with the least experience. Why don't we extend that to education? Mary said we should let AI support those who are the most disadvantaged in our society, and use it to level up.

3. Finally, think about AI not as a replacement but as an augmentation, as an aid, for critical thinking skills. Mary noted that AI has no soul, but humans do, and we need to teach young people to use them mindfully and in their roles.

Lord Aberdare thanked Mary and said he really appreciated the insight of the difference between social media skills and computer skills. Lord Aberdare also noted that Lord Hampton was present, who was a teacher. Lord Aberdare then introduced Dean Russell, MP for Watford, the final speaker.

Dean Russell MP noted that his background was in physics and worked in the digital creative industries. Dean Russell MP said that 15 years ago was Second Life, the “first” Multiverse, and that Dean created a brand for a university around Second Life.

Dean Russell MP said he was of the generation where not just social media happened while he was in work, but he didn’t get his first email until at university. So, when talking about apprentices, there needs to be an understanding that we can’t predict what skills they might need, but we can be creative and flexible in our approach and think about how the world might change.

Dean Russell MP said that social media can be used for great good, but also great bad, in the world, and AI could have a very similar effect. Dean Russell MP asked how we can create jobs and the seeds for careers when we don’t know those careers might turn out in 10-15 years. Dean Russell MP noted the example of technology being introduced into manufacturing, and the effect on jobs in factories.

Dean Russell MP said his “8 Cs” for AI and apprenticeships are:

1. Competitiveness, in one’s career, in businesses, and how AI is applied in the workplace, as well as normalising access to AI.
2. Consistency, ensuring consistent access and consistent usability. Dean noted working with the RNIB on the first accessible game, but that there continue to be barriers.
3. Collaboration – how do we use these tools to develop collaboration in apprenticeships?
4. Copyright, and understanding how it goes with creativity, and that people coming into apprenticeships may not fully understand brand risks, risks to colleagues, to organisations, and their own career.
5. Creativity
6. Communications, and how we use it better to communicate internally, are apprenticeships given wider access to learn, is more than one Department able to access AI in a company?
7. Careers, and looking at what AI means as a partner in the journey of one’s career. How much is it a threat, and how much an opportunity?
8. Correct – is what is being shared through AI correct? Is it being used correctly, and giving accurate information?

Lord Aberdare thanked Dean Russell MP and opened the Q&A with a question of his own. Lord Aberdare asked Erica, what is an AI tool and is there a definition that distinguishes AI from other digital tools?

Erica said that many people would be asking this and that AI has been around for about 30 years, with many of using it through services such as Alexa and Siri, or even having groceries delivered and receiving recommendations about them through websites and apps.

Erica said there are different species and sub-species of AI, and a “large language model” that has been trained on a number of data points to feed the AI. Models like Chat GPT have data points sat within them to respond to in a certain way, as they draw information from the internet.

Erica noted “hallucinations” where the AI presents data but it doesn’t make sense, because it doesn’t understand context or have an agenda; it isn’t self-aware. Erica said that “super AI” can spot minutiae amount of cancer within tissue, for example, or predict if someone in a social care role might need to go in and see a patient because the data is predicting that there might be an issue. Erica summarised by saying that AI is a big term but we’re currently focussing on “generative AI” which is that training data that is responding to you when prompted.

Lord Hampton asked whether speakers thought AI was the fundamental skill, or whether coding or something else was. Could speakers see a time when AI delivered coding? Mary said that coding is already delivered by AI. But if you interact with Chat GPT and start coding, and test some of the outputs out, it doesn’t actually work. It’s not that AI can’t replace code, or write code, it’s that people who know how to code know whether it’s right or not. Which is why digital and coding skills are so important, even if AI is super intelligent/

Dean Russell MP added that Bill Gates had said in 5 or so years, you won’t need lots of different software; relevant use of AI in the workplace will involve using AI for multiple documents and tasks.

Charlotte Nichols MP asked about biases in generative AI and what it uses as its information, particularly around AI’s lack of accuracy when it comes to racial minorities. Charlotte asked what we need to do in terms of digital literacy so people can understand when something is generated by AI and when something is organic, such as people making fake videos and photos.

Dean said he had raised this in Parliament and that his take is it is often the dataset that is the bias. On how to protect people, Dean said that he would like to see a ‘Turing Clause’ within AI so that with anything that purports to be human, there should be a warning of some kind. Dean’s analogy was with anti-virus software when there was mass access to the internet. Dean Russell MP said that UK could be an AI policing force and, through technology, warn people that it some messages or photos are pretending to be something it isn’t.

Charlotte mentioned that all her digital teaching at school was to not put information online and to use trustworthy sources but that her parents haven’t been taught the same kind of skills. So what do we need to do in our education institutions to ready people to have that critical awareness around AI?

Mary said that there is so much AI around, one has to declare that what they are doing is AI, so people can distinguish between real and AI. Mary said she doesn’t use AI unless it can verify its outputs, so she can check and cross-reference. But what about when learning something new? Mary said we need to teach people to verify the outputs, and teach them the actual definition of AI, and how AI works inside.

Lord Aberdare made the comparisons of checking calculators’ outputs by doing maths in your head, but that AI is such a complex level, it can be hard to verify.

Philip Virgo, Lord Lucas’ research assistant, asked how do we set about educating those in the workforce, and young people? Philip said Lord Lucas is looking at micro-modules where you teach an audience how to use an AI model and enable people to assemble these micro-modules bit by bit as a way of educating large numbers of people quickly. Philip asked if this is a good way of approaching it?

Mary was supportive of the approach. She said Multiverse had created an AI jumpstart module for all apprentices which was hugely helpful. Mary said we need to be pragmatic and most people don't have time to fully learn AI, but they need to know enough to help them apply it ethically and intelligently. Mary said micromodules, if compulsory, could be a great idea.

Erica said it's a wonderful idea for those able to study in that manner but that won't be anybody and it won't be as inclusive as we need. Erica noted that for those who need to learn in a different way, such as those who are neuro-diverse, may need other methods such as using large-language models for our personal life and in ways that were useful to them, such as for cooking or buying gifts. People may then learn without realising that they're learning, and it's simple for as many people as possible, alongside the formal education routes.

Lord Aberdare mentioned integrating AI to improve the apprenticeships offer, and asked if AI should be a required element of apprenticeships, or what should we be looking for to make sure apprenticeships include an appropriate element of AI?

Dean Russell MP said a ninth 'C' in his list would be 'convenient'. Dean Russell MP said apprenticeships are tough but brilliant and when Government tries to force things into the curriculum it can be a distraction from what is needed or can be really valuable. So it needs to be convenient for providers, and take in account how quickly technology moves. Dean Russell MP said the approach to be using these needs to be creative, and those skills are more important than teaching Chat GPT itself.

Mary said she agreed with Dean Russell MP and said students are already using AI so they need to know how to use it ethically and intelligently.

Erica said her only addition to that would be the gap with teachers, providers, and organisations in feeling confident in teaching AI and digital skills. Erica said these providers don't always have the time or headspace to go and teach themselves so we need to dial up the "what's in it for me" and incentives for providers. Erica said young people already bring the intellectual curiosity, so we need educators to embrace it too.

Lizzie Gauntlett, Senior Policy Officer, Federation of Awarding Bodies mentioned that the chat was disabled and went onto introduce the work of the Federation. Lizzie was interested in Erica's point around fear of AI or using AI and that some Awarding Bodies are concerned around malpractice with AI while some are looking to embrace new assessment methods and making it clear to apprentices, employers, and providers how they are permitted to use AI. Lizzie asked Mary whether it's appropriate in her assessment to use AI or whether she needs clearer guidance?

Mary said her endpoint assessment for her apprenticeship is not until 2025 so she isn't sure what it looks like, but they do have a clear AI policy and that if you use it, you need to change a significant portion, or you need to reference it, like you would any other source.

Lord Aberdare asked the speakers to each quickly summarise their position.

Erica said research from the World Economic Forum found that 66% of children in school right now, aged 5-11, will go into a job that doesn't exist yet. Erica said we need to backtrack and look at how education is enabling and providing the skills for young people to look into that crystal ball of careers we can't see. Erica said we do know that our foundation of technical knowledge, that gives us power and confidence, we won't be able to rely on this in an AI-centric world, as the AI will hold it for us, and do it for us. Erica said we need to get people embracing the "art of the possible" with their own career, whether it's side-stepping or a role they can't see right now. Erica said her ask was that we think about the skills that sit around any kind of technical adoption and start to map out what our specialisms look like when we know that AI is going to take a certain

amount of those tasks from us. Erica said this is the critical thinking, applying new skills quickly, that we have already mention. We can't rely on a static curriculum, Erica said, we need to be agile and use flexible, creative approaches to learning.

Lord Aberdare said he's been sitting on the Lords Committee for 11-16-year-olds and they're publishing a report touching on many of these issues about the current education system not being fit for purpose.

Mary said she thinks this is a great time to be an apprenticeship. Mary said she thinks apprenticeship curriculums have to be dynamic so apprentices can apply real skills in real settings, and not to forget critical thinking skills, thinking about bias, and using systems ethically, as these are really important skills to still teach.

Dean Russell MP said there's a lot of learning from social media in that we should make decisions rather than letting something run amok. Dean Russell MP said we need to make sure that in the education space, students are at the heart of everything, and AI could help with this, such as identifying the best way for a child with dyslexia to learn. Dean Russell MP said there's been a challenge in building big IT systems and AI means the patient can be centred, it'll be much more simplified, and easier to do. Dean Russell MP said it's not about forcing people to learn new things, but being sceptical enough to be able to questions things while also not being so fearful as to not embrace something. Dean Russell MP said for the UK to be the hub to police AI is a great opportunity and something that will make us world-leading and protect citizens in the UK and around the world.

Lord Aberdare closed by thanking all the speakers in the session and those who joined in person and remotely.

January 2024

Session title: Apprenticeships and the Future: What should apprenticeships look like after the General Election?

Date: 16 January 2024

Chaired by: Baroness Garden of Frognall

Speakers:

- Liz Gorb MBE, Director of Apprenticeships, Manchester Metropolitan University
- Doniya Soni-Clark, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Multiverse
- Lord Shipley OBE, Liberal Democrat Member of the House of Lords

Baroness Garden kindly agreed to chair the meeting at short notice as Jonathan Gullis MP had an urgent parliamentary commitment in the Chamber. She opened the meeting, introduced the theme of the meeting – the future of apprenticeships – and passed over to Liz Gorb, Director of Apprenticeships at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Liz opened by setting out the work being carried out Manchester Metropolitan University as an early adopter of apprenticeships. They currently have more than 2,700 apprentices enrolled on courses at the University. She noted that MMU has a multi-faceted focus on global corporates, public sector organisations and SMEs. Her initial message was that apprenticeships can drive growth and social mobility, but more needs to be done to enhance the ‘brand’ for school leavers considering this educational pathway.

With regard to the Apprenticeships Levy, she – in her view, controversially – thought that it has been “somewhat a success”, with MMU in a better place than seven years ago as a result; however, she noted the strange anomalies in the funding formulas. She argued that the Government needs to ensure that the Levy benefits those areas most in need and called for broader standards for providers that can be updated more rapidly.

She said that, presently, MMU has a huge range of pathways with 759 standards or proposals in development. However, in contrast, she stated that some routes have become unnecessary and there needs to be a focus on those that will deliver economic growth and social mobility.

Liz said that degree apprenticeships respond effectively to demands in the labour market – and they create a “ladder of opportunity”. She called for more Level 2 apprentices. Companies have greater incentives (funding) for Level 3 apprentices, not Level 2 where industry demand lies. She called for an end to the rhetoric around one level being the enemy of another.

Her key recommendation urged government to facilitate greater uptake of apprenticeships in SMEs and amongst those who experienced digital and rural/coastal poverty, particularly during the pandemic.

Her final point related to the updating of apprenticeships standards given the rapid change in our post-pandemic society, especially around digital, data and AI/automation.

Baroness Garden thanked Liz and passed across to Doniya Soni-Clark, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at Multiverse.

Doniya opened by introducing Multiverse’s work on apprenticeships, with 12,000 apprenticeships in a variety of technology/data roles at organisations including Jaguar Land

Rover and the NHS. Crucially, Multiverse has degree-awarding powers. She felt that the overall quality of apprenticeships has been increasing – technology as a sector has been growing and this is important as there is currently a skills gap. Access to apprenticeships is improving due to consistent Ofsted regulation.

As for post-election reforms, she felt that regulation has prevented providers from offering apprenticeships: data returns and reporting to Ofsted, Ofqual, the ESFA and the Office for Students.

She said there needs to be greater flexibility in the Apprenticeships Levy: the opportunity for more flexible courses is not inherently bad but regulation needs to be applied appropriately to short courses to ensure that quality is maintained. There is also the risk of organisations delivering short courses which do not meet the required standard – she wants to see this addressed by the next government.

Finally, Doniya set out the problem in sequencing apprenticeships – a key burden for providers which the Government should address. She notes that Level 2/GCSE English and maths are barriers to entry for people considering an apprenticeship. Her proposal is that alternative English and maths tests are considered, which better apply to prospective technical students' interests.

Baroness Garden posited that the current alternative pathways are not far removed from GCSEs, so they are not encouraging young people into the apprenticeships route. She thanked Doniya and passed across to Lord Shipley, a Liberal Democrat Member of the House of Lords.

Lord Shipley opened his remarks by offering apologies on behalf of Munira Wilson MP, the Liberal Democrat education spokesperson. Following an earlier meeting with Homes England, he stated that (1) the average cost of building a secondary school has risen from £18 million to £30 million over the last five years and (2) the average age of electricians and bricklayers in the UK is 47. The age profile of the UK technical workforce is a huge problem due to the decline in the number of people starting apprenticeships – this needs to change.

He quotes a 2019 National Audit Office report which outlines how a number of employers are supplanting their workplace training with apprenticeships.

He argued that the whole apprenticeship route is seen as secondary to the academic (university) route due to the way that schools are assessed by Ofsted. Not enough support is given to those who do not attend university, hence a £500 million gap in the further education sector.

He said that apprenticeships should be encouraged from 16-24 to ensure lifelong skills and employment – so further incentives are required to ensure take up. He listed a number of recommendations from the NAO report, including a levy cap for SMEs. He referenced the Skills Wallet announced by the Liberal Democrats at the last general election and called for a renaming of the Apprenticeships Levy to a 'Skills and Training Levy, with 25 per cent of the levy funds raised being ringfenced for a social mobility fund to support geographical areas with skills shortages. His key question was: "how do you give extra support to those affected by the pandemic?"

He said that apprenticeship pay should mirror the national living wage – the drop-out rate is extremely high – and the threshold for the levy should be lowered to encourage more SMEs to host apprentices. He also reiterated Liz's view that not enough money is given to Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeships.

Finally, he raised the tax system, calling for training tax credits for employers providing training,

Lord Baker stated that people in their 40s and 50s should not be called apprentices as it affects their social status. He said that 75 per cent of the Levy should be given to young people for

training; small companies (<50 employees) should be given £1000 more to train apprentices; and apprentices' salaries should be covered for the provider. That is a better use of funds than teaching management skills to a 50-year-old.

Liz Gorb interjected to note that whilst there is huge demand for the technical skills delivered by the apprenticeship pathway, apprenticeships that require space and infrastructure, for example in manufacturing businesses, have been shut down or there is no appetite because of the costs involved.

Baroness Garden thanked Lord Shipley and moved on to the Q&A portion of the meeting.

Hayley Pells of the Institute for the Motor Industry commented that her organisation struggled with funding bands, particularly with heavy vehicle technicians which has since been corrected. In her view, the key reason for poor retention of FE lecturers is that they return to industry for better pay. She proposed a military reservist approach, which has been pioneered in conjunction with Warwick Manufacturing Group and offered to circulate their paper to meeting attendees.

Charlotte Nichols commented that there has not been much discussion about how will deliver teaching if there is a sudden uptake in apprenticeships. She also raised an issue with branding apprenticeships as only for 16-24 if the Government is to address the skills shortage, especially in nuclear and engineering sectors.

Rhianwen Roberts from the University and College Union picked up on the FE point and the shortage of resources available. One of her member's colleges received a poor Ofsted report and this was because they could not recruit or retain adequate staff. FE tutors are recruited on a salary of £30,000 which she deemed too low, referencing a number of tutors who have taken second and third jobs to make ends meet.

Brett Amphlett from the Builders Merchants Federation (250,000 employees, 900 companies) asked what attendees most wanted from the Government in advance of the Budget; what message should he be taking back to his members?

In response, Lord Baker stated that HM Treasury will want to claw back as much money as possible from the Levy. He also thought that rising youth employment is highly likely in the coming years, so it is disappointing that HMT are unlikely to change their approach.

Lord Aberdare said that there are not enough apprenticeships in SMEs: money is an obvious barrier, but they need support dealing with bureaucracy.

Baroness Garden said that colleges do try to help SMEs, but it can be a postcode lottery as to the level of support offered.

Jonathan Lawson from Manchester Metropolitan University said that 30 per cent of their employers were SMEs. He added that the funding rules for apprenticeships total 300 pages, which SMEs do not have the capacity to process without support from FE colleagues.

Richard Hamer from BAE Systems said that large employers can train and support the supply chain. His suggestion was that 1st year apprentices could work with large employers such as BAE to alleviate bureaucracy and, once they have the necessary skills, move to SMEs for their second.

Jamie Hall from CMS Strategic noted that the issue facing SMEs is access to the levy fund: some companies have only been able to use 4 per cent of funds. One company is involved in training RAF pilots so is a critical part of national defence. What can be done to widen the scope of the Apprenticeship Levy?

Lynne Bowers asked a question (via Zoom text) on whether there is scope to widen the residency requirements for health and care apprenticeships.

Baroness Garden adds that there is a similar debate to be had on salary thresholds. She referenced her work at City & Guilds and how it was difficult to counter the academic=good/vocational=bad narrative, particularly with parents.

Brett Amphlett called for an end to parental prejudice against apprenticeships and a fixation on university admission to ensure more school leavers choose a technical education. What more can be done to persuade parents?

Lord Baker said that the curriculum needs to change from a grammar school (8+ academic subjects) style approach to something that encourages and set up children to become technicians. Schools are judged too heavily in these subjects and degree apprenticeships are the way forward.

Baroness Garden called for attendees to rise to Brett Amphlett's challenge.

An unknown attendee called for remote degree apprenticeships.

Liz Gorb said that parents are beginning to understand the value of apprenticeships.

Doniya Clark made final remarks calling for a consistent improvement in the quality and delivery of apprenticeships. More parents will promote apprenticeships as they begin to see the long-term benefits. Putting apprenticeships on UCAS would ensure greater take up.

Hayley Pells said the 'There's More to Motor' campaign researched the issue of perception within the motor industry and concluded that the industry needs to change, rather than the perception and highlight what is already happening. She thinks that Level 2 apprenticeships need to be taken more seriously.

Lord Shipley suggested that it is process, but it needs to be done more quickly. Schools and FE providers need to publicise students' successes with apprenticeships more widely.

Baroness Garden closed by thanking all the speakers in the session and those who joined in person and remotely.

February 2024

Event title: Parliamentary Apprenticeships Fair

Date: 6 February 2024

Exhibitors:

- London South Bank University
- Babcock International
- WMG at the University of Warwick
- BAE Systems
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Multiverse
- Go-Ahead Group
- Red Eye
- Affinity FTS
- WorldSkills UK
- Engineering UK
- Aston Martin
- Transport for London

The APPG's programme of work includes the annual Parliamentary Apprenticeship Fair timed to coincide with National Apprenticeships Week. The Fair celebrates apprenticeships and apprentices who are invited to attend to tell their stories. This year, the businesses represented included BAE, Go Ahead, Multiverse, Engineering UK, Aston Martin in addition to giving a platform to SMEs.

The Fair was opened by Rt Hon Gillian Keegan Secretary of State for Education, delivered an engaging speech on the role and importance of apprenticeships within the UK. Minister for Small Businesses, Kevin Hollinrake, also attended the event, offering insightful remarks that underscored the government's commitment to apprenticeship programs and their integral role in shaping the future workforce. In her as Shadow Minister for Skills, Seema Malhotra also attended.

It was an excellent opportunity to hear from those directly involved in delivering England's apprenticeships provision and discuss the successes and challenges of the current system. Co-Chair Jonathan Guillis MP further enriched the Fair with a speech emphasising the importance of collaborative efforts in advancing apprenticeship opportunities across various sectors. Co-Chair Charlotte Nichols also attended. In all, their collective engagement contributed to a vibrant exchange of ideas and perspectives, reinforcing the significance of apprenticeships in driving economic growth and social mobility.



March 2024

Session title: APPG on Apprenticeships – Building Inclusivity into Apprenticeships

Date: 11 March 2024

Chaired by: Charlotte Nichols MP

Speakers:

- Jenny Young, Engineering Construction Industry Training Board
- Kasim Choudry, Multicultural Apprenticeship & Enterprise Ambassador for Pathway Group & Director, Thinkfest
- Beth Armstead, Belonging and Engagement Manager, Institute of the Motor Industry

Charlotte Nichols MP opened the meeting by introducing herself as Co-Chair, and said explained the session's topic, building inclusivity into apprenticeships is very timely.

She introduced the three speakers: Jenny Young, Kasim Choudry, and Beth Armstead.

Jenny opened her remarks by emphasising the critical yet often overlooked role played by the engineering construction board within the economy. She stressed the traditional significance of apprenticeships as the primary entry point into the construction sector.

She identified that the primary challenge within the industry is the insufficient volume of skilled workers. The sector's demanding nature, characterized by long manual hours, presents obstacles to recruiting individuals at entry-level positions.

She highlighted the complexities of recruiting within industrial sectors, specifically noting issues such as localised recruitment practices as barriers to achieving diversity, particularly in terms of ethnic representation.

She noted that familial ties often influence individuals' decisions to pursue careers in construction, with many introduced to the field through friends or family. Concerns were raised regarding the comparatively lower initial salaries for apprenticeships in construction compared to other industries like retail.

The implementation of localised recruitment programs necessitates extensive collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders, including job centres, career transition pathways, the Department of Work and Pensions, and local clients. She acknowledged the significant upfront investment required, particularly in the current economic climate.

Emphasis was placed on the need for comprehensive educational initiatives to raise awareness of the diverse career opportunities within the construction sector, which is often overlooked in mainstream discussions.

She highlighted the importance of recruiting high-quality teaching staff with industry experience to effectively train apprentices. Funding constraints were recognised as a significant obstacle, with low salaries affecting the recruitment and retention of qualified trainers.

Jenny concluded her speech with a consensus on the urgent need to address the industry's workforce challenges through collaborative efforts aimed at diversifying recruitment practices, enhancing educational outreach, and addressing funding issues to attract and retain qualified teaching staff. She said ensuring high quality of teaching staff with experience in that sector is important – issues of funding because salaries are bad. There is a need to increase the number of training staff for there to be an increase in apprentices.

Charlotte Nichols MP thanked Jenny and said that many of the discussions in the APPG are about how the Apprenticeships Levy is applied, but for many industries such as construction, looking at varying skills can be important too. She then welcomed Kasim.

Kasim opened by highlighting that strategies are needed to engage individuals distant from the labour market and facilitate their entry into employment. He spoke of the need to shift focus from simply selling courses to young people to instead emphasising the long-term career opportunities offered by apprenticeships. He said this approach aims to better align apprenticeship programs with the career aspirations of young individuals.

He raised concerns regarding the ineffective utilisation of the levy and emphasised the importance of encouraging more employers to actively engage in workforce development initiatives and utilise their levy contributions effectively. He suggested incentivising employers to invest in their supply chain if they do not spend their levy contributions directly on training programs.

He noted that applicants to top firms offering funded degrees tend to come from middle-class backgrounds, creating barriers for lower socio-economic groups to access high-quality training opportunities. He highlighted the need for strategies to address this disparity and ensure equitable access to training programs.

The Kickstart scheme implemented during the lockdown period was acknowledged for its role in providing valuable workplace experience to young individuals and teaching them essential skills

for engaging with employers. He said more initiatives like this are needed to better prepare young people for career opportunities.

He emphasised the need to shift the perception of apprenticeships from mere training programs to legitimate employment opportunities. This change in perspective aims to highlight the practical, job-focused nature of apprenticeships.

Concerns were raised regarding the perception of university education as the only prestigious path for ethnic minorities. He said many parents continue to prioritise university education for their children, perpetuating a mindset that overlooks the value of vocational training and apprenticeships. He discussed a shift from the previous "education, education" paradigm of the 90s, which emphasised university education as the primary path to success. He highlighted the need to diversify educational pathways and recognise the value of vocational training.

He concluded his speech with a consensus on the need for collaborative efforts to address socio-economic disparities in accessing training opportunities, shift perceptions of apprenticeships as viable career paths, and optimise the utilisation of levy contributions for workforce development.

Charlotte Nichols MP noted the importance ethnic minority groups place on the prestigious element of a degree status. She highlighted the difference between Gen Z constituents and their parents with their opinions towards apprenticeships and the difference in stigmas. She then welcomed Beth to speak.

Beth provided an overview of the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) as an awarding and professional body with over 100,000 members, a number that continues to grow. She addressed the misconception that the motor industry offers only one type of job, typically associated with working in a garage. Beth emphasized that the motor industry encompasses over 218 diverse job roles, with the advent of electric vehicles (EVs) contributing to its expansion.

Beth highlighted the impact of preconceived notions on career choices, particularly from a young age. She noted that societal factors such as gender, race, and socio-economic class often influence individuals' perceptions of suitable career paths. The association of the motor industry with terms like "dirty" and "cold" contributes to negative stereotypes that deter diverse talent from entering the field.

She underscored the importance of using inclusive language to create an environment where all working communities can thrive. Beth noted that higher education is often perceived as more prestigious than further education, contributing to the undervaluation of vocational training.

She acknowledged the need to recognise and accommodate diverse identities beyond the binary concept of gender. She emphasised the importance of creating gender-friendly sectors to attract and retain talent from diverse backgrounds.

Beth emphasised the limitations of tick box exercises in capturing the true diversity of individuals, considering factors such as sexuality, parental background, disabilities, and neurodivergence. She agreed that a more nuanced approach is needed to acknowledge individual strengths and weaknesses.

She highlighted the heightened awareness of privilege among Generation Z individuals and noted the importance of the industry adapting to this awareness and actively promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Beth emphasised the need to broaden the perspective of apprenticeships beyond traditional notions associated with teenagers. She discussed the importance of accommodating career changes and providing opportunities for individuals seeking to retrain while supporting their families.

Beth concluded by noting the importance of challenging stereotypes, using inclusive language, and adopting a holistic approach to diversity and inclusion in the motor industry. She encouraged all to explore strategies to promote diverse career paths and ensure that apprenticeships cater to individuals from various backgrounds and life stages.

Charlotte Nichols MP noted diversity within the Labour Party, which now sits at 50% women, but as a consequence of focusing on only one category, she said the number of black men is specifically low. She said focusing on one attribute can make things worse, as people do not neatly fit into tick boxes. She then moved on to the Q&A portion of the meeting.

Allie Renison from SEC Newgate asked a question regarding the trend of moving construction off site.

Jenny answered by saying that it is important to note the great difference between engineering and construction.

Kasim said construction embodies a variety of roles – there is trade, city planning etc and engineering. He said there is currently huge demand for traders, and that trades are being pushed by parents as sometimes a better choice than long hours in an office job.

Baroness Garden commented that more women received awards at a City & Guilds award ceremony on Monday morning. And while she noted it was not a 50/50 gender split, there was still an increase in women receiving awards. She said that schools are still measured by the amount of university leavers, but we need schools to start valuing and championing apprenticeships as much as university leavers.

Alice Smith from Duke of Edinburgh asked how the education system can influence young people and show apprenticeships are a worthy option.

Katie Drydon from Royal Society of Chemistry said there seems to be emphasis on needs of sectors, as opposed to people having worthy careers. She said we need to think about what's in it for people and not just what's in it for companies and employers. She noted that instead of young people thinking what sectors they want to work in, they should think about what skills they have and what activities they like doing. Sectors and interests change, but skills do not, there is therefore a need to also look at numbers of apprentice leavers, as many leave part way through because they find a higher paying job.

Kasim highlighted that his issue with schools is that teachers have only ever been at school. They went to school, then university then back to school. He said they don't really have the experience, but also don't have the time to give solid career advice. Instead of placing blame on teachers and schools themselves, we need to look at whether the curriculum is correct. He noted that he doesn't think people are leaving apprenticeships because they're getting a higher paid job, but instead he said it's usually because they're not being given good training, often as they're disengaged.

Charlotte Nichols MP closed by thanking all the speakers in the session and those who joined in person and remotely, and encouraged people to continue conversations in the hallway.

May 2024

Session title: APPG on Apprenticeships – AGM & Third Sector Apprenticeships

Date: 8 May 2024

Chaired by: Jonathan Gullis MP

Speakers:

- Tommy McDade, Barnados
- Laura Thurlow, JGA
- Lara Thompson, Prince's Trust
- Caroline Noon, The National Trust

The National Trust The next session will hold both the AGM and a discussion on Third Sector Apprenticeships.

The session will examine the value of apprenticeships in the voluntary sector, especially as a mechanism to increasing entry points and social mobility. Apprenticeships have the potential to transform the culture in third-sector organisations.

The panel discussion will be an opportunity to set out how employers in the third sector, educational providers and Government can increase the take up of apprenticeships in the voluntary sector.