



MINUTES
Apprenticeships APPG meeting
Tuesday 6 March 2018
3.30pm – 4.30pm, Thatcher Room, Portcullis House

Chair: Gillian Keegan MP

Vice-Chair of the APPG, Gillian Keegan MP welcomed the members of the all-apprentice panel, appearing for National Apprenticeships Week. She outlined her background, saying that she thought she was the only MP to have completed a degree apprenticeship. She added that she was very passionate about apprenticeships as it was a practical and structured environment with a progressive career route.

The first speaker was **Curtis Tatner** from the **Industry Apprentice Council (IAC) and an apprentice with Rolls Royce** who spoke about the need for improved and earlier careers advice. He spoke of his own experience of starting at university and finding out about apprenticeships through a careers adviser. He felt that the apprenticeship offered him experience and a style of working that suited him. From his perspective, neither his parents nor friends had heard about the apprenticeship route and he asked why this was the case. He highlighted the face-to-face contact he received as a particular benefit of being an apprentice. Additionally, he called for more stability in apprenticeship programmes.

Starting her apprentice at 24, after working for her family company, **Haley Stedmans, an apprentice from KPMG**, spoke of the need to aim apprenticeships towards an older audience so that they are not seen as just being for school leavers. She said that her apprenticeship at KPMG is rotational, which has been a perfect way to gain experience and discover her passion for tech. She said that her parents thought that apprenticeships were routes for school leavers but that her friends liked the idea and were jealous of her lack of debt from university.

Anthony Ocansey from Battersea Power Station outlined the career moves he undertook to work at Woodlands, the company contracted to electrical, plumbing and security works at Battersea Power Station. He started his career working in the automotive industry but wanted a switch to electronics as this was an issue he is passionate about and has an improved salary. In order to complete his apprenticeship, he studied during the day and worked at night. He highlighted the need for improved funding towards further education colleges.

Max Reid from British Gas outlined how he found his search for an apprenticeship difficult due to the lack of information available. He said that he found that the apprenticeship was a good opportunity for him to voice his own opinion and especially enjoyed meeting customers face to face. He argued that there needed to be an improved balance in most apprenticeships between work and learning.

Karis Francis from Heathrow outlined how she did not want to go to university when she left school as she wanted to gain “*real life experience.*” After working in the creative sector, she has now been an apprentice at Heathrow for three years, during this time she has had the opportunity to line manage two other apprentices and speak at events such as today’s. She highlighted the lack of information schools had on apprenticeships and she found her opportunity through her own research. She called for more integration with schooling,

highlighting that the schools were pushing students to go to universities rather than become apprentices.

Echoing these thoughts, **Ella Richardson from Microsoft** recalled the pressure her school put on her to go to a Russell Group university. She said that apprenticeships were not accessible while she was at school and she only discovered the route through word of mouth. She deferred on university and after working at a small tech firm and six rounds of interviews, she became an apprentice with Microsoft. She remembered her concern with the possibility that her friends might judge her and emphasised the importance of removing this stigma.

She highlighted the opportunity Microsoft had given her to speak to the company's network of businesses and present to other female apprentices about why they should go down the STEM route. She has recently graduated from her degree apprenticeship and became the youngest account executive at Microsoft in the UK.

The Chair said she was very impressed with the panel and was struck by the professionalism demonstrated. She also highlighted the frequent comment that it was important to overcome the stigma related to apprenticeships. She asked whether they had the option to continue their apprenticeship programme.

The speakers from **KPMG, IAC, British Gas and Heathrow** said they had the option to go right up to degree level. The speaker from **Battersea** said he had not been exposed to the option of degree apprenticeships but it is something he is now considering.

Vice-Chair of the APPG, Baroness Garden of Frognal noted that they had all highlighted difficulties with schools and asked what would have been the outcome of receiving careers advice earlier. **Curtis Tatner** suggested phrasing apprentices as a 'free degree' and highlighted the importance of STEM outreach programme. **Ella Richardson** highlighted Microsoft programmes that reach out to schools. She said she found the stereotype of tech careers being focused on coding to be frustrating and her experience of the sector was that it was a fast moving and exciting career path.

Judith Doyle from Gateshead College said that from her experience the issue with the parents' concept of an apprenticeship was the most vexing. **Curtis Tatner** agreed and said schools also needed to be persuaded that apprenticeships were a good career route. He said that the promotion of university meant that "*everyone has a degree, but nobody has any experience.*" **Anthony Ocansey** suggested that a TV programme aimed at young people and parents should be produced to show the benefits of apprenticeships.

Holly Carter from Virgin Media asked what more could be done to encourage more women into STEM. **Ella Richardson** said she felt lucky with the work Microsoft had been doing but agreed that not enough was being done in this area. She said it was frustrating frequently being the only women in the room. She also thought that the name computer science was deterring more girls coming into the sector. **Haley Stedmans** said that this stereotype was very frustrating and said that it was very important that female apprentices working in tech went into schools is to tackle misconceptions.

Shadow House of Lords Spokesperson for Education, Lord Watson asked whether the apprentices' companies were encouraging them to go to talk to schools. **Haley Stedmans** said that KPMG encouraged apprentices to go back to schools and this experience had

been very insightful. She said that students listened to real life experience and someone that they knew. **Anthony Ocansey** said that Battersea Power Station had formed good links with Lambeth College to get more local people to become apprentices. **Karis Francis** outlined that Heathrow had shared community teams that gave experience to people across different age ranges. **Curtis Tatner** said it was mandatory for Rolls Royce apprentices to speak to local schools. He said they made it fun at the same time, which they followed through with other activity including going to events.

Conservative Peer, Lord Flight pointed out the benefits of setting up University Technical Colleges that offer a mixture of vocational education and A-Levels. **Lord Young of Norwood Green** asked if any apprentices had a ceremony when completed their apprenticeships. He also asked whether their organisations did much work through their supply chain. The apprentices from Heathrow and British Gas said they had award ceremonies. The apprentice from Microsoft said she knew work through the supply chain was definitely encouraged.

Tanya Lawes from the Institute for Apprenticeships said that they were in the process of setting up a virtual community for apprenticeships. She asked if this would be something the apprentices would be keen to hear more about. The panel agreed this was a good idea. An audience member from **UBS** asked if they faced stigma from university graduates. **Ella Richardson** said she had found some people looking down on her. She said this was disappointing as early year talent must support each other. **Curtis Tatner** said from his experience that it was the graduates who tended to go to apprentices for help.

Stephen Howse from Semta asked if any of the panel had managed to change young people's minds about apprenticeships. **Ella Richardson** said she had been back to her school to talk about women and STEM, but her school did not want her outlining the benefits of becoming an apprentice.

Shadow Employment Minister, Margaret Greenwood asked a question on the selection process and commented that it seemed a very intensive process. The panellists all said that the application process was intensive and competitive.

Chris Shirley from Network Rail asked a question about the balance between learning and work with employers. There was a mixed response from the panel. The apprentices from **British Gas and Battersea Power Station** said the balance needed to be better, with more time to study. **KPMG and Heathrow's** apprentices said that they had experienced a better balance.

Lynda Whitehorn from the awarding organisation, VTCT asked what could be done to improve careers advice. **The apprentices from KPMG and Microsoft** pointed out that careers fairs were a good way to promote the benefits of apprenticeships.

Concluding the meeting, **the Chair** emphasised the advances made from when she had done her apprenticeship 30 years ago. She said that the conversation was very insightful and exciting and told the apprentices to remember that they have much more experience than their contemporaries. She said that it was important to hear from apprentices themselves as they were so passionate and convincing on the issue.