



all party parliamentary group on
apprenticeships

APPG on Apprenticeships - Diversity, Disability and Apprenticeships – what more needs to be done to support people with disabilities into apprenticeships – Minutes - Tuesday 26 March

Chair – Gillian Keegan MP

Speakers: Head of Employment and Skills at Heathrow Airport, Karima Khandker, Disability and Skills Manager for Disability Rights UK, Rabia Lemahieu, Policy and Campaigns Manager from the Young Women’s Trust, Mark Gale and Annette Warrick from the Department of Work and Pensions.

Parliamentarians present:

Lord Young of Norwood Green

Gillian Keegan MP

Jim Shannon MP

Lord Aberdare

Baroness Garden of Frognal

(Researcher for) Richard Graham MP

First to speak was **Head of Employment and Skills at Heathrow Airport, Karima Khandker**. She began by discussing employment at Heathrow Airport. Heathrow is one of the UK’s largest employment sites with 76,000 employees and 400 businesses operating. Only 6,500 work for Heathrow directly, so it is important for Heathrow itself to take a leadership with these businesses on employment and skills. Especially in terms of the diversity and inclusion agenda. In which she said Heathrow had made great strides in unlocking opportunities for people. She pointed specifically to Heathrow’s diversity and inclusion networks, which are owned and operated by colleagues. As well as Heathrow’s strategy for sustainable growth, launched in 2017.

Within Heathrow’s strategy, there are commitments to deliver 10,000 apprenticeship as well as positively impact on youth unemployment and reflect the diversity of the local community. In doing this Heathrow actively works with local community partners including Project Search and Catch 22, who work with people who face barriers to employment.

She also spoke about Heathrow’s activities in terms of recruitment practices, promoting social mobility, this included encouraging blind CVs and removing experience from CVs in an effort to remove both conscious and unconscious bias from the process. In addition, when posting a job, questioning whether it could be an apprenticeship that could support someone from a more diverse background. She also brought up the importance of paying apprentices a national minimum wage and not an apprenticeship salary. Concluding, she stated that Heathrow wanted to be a leader in responsible employment practices, continually unlocking opportunities for the community.

The next speaker was **Rabia Lemahieu, Disability and Skills Manager for Disability Rights UK**, a national charity for people with disability, leading change as well as providing advice and information on the rights of people with a disability, especially in terms of employment and the right to participate. With core activities in enabling disabled people to undertake education, skills

and employment opportunities and to develop their careers. Current projects include a disability skills student helpline as well as raising awareness and engagement with providers and employers to prevent people with a disability not ending up not in education, employment or training.

She then addressed the biggest worries employers have when interviewing someone with a disability, these included using incorrect terminology, knowing when to offer help, breaking the law by asking questions not permitted under the Equality Act, the ability of the applicant to do the job, concerns about the cost of adaptations and integration with the existing team.

She then moved onto apprenticeships, highlighting several issues the organisation had noted with them in terms of people with a disability, this included a tick box system in applying, a lack of part-time apprenticeships and a lack of support available on guidance and funding. She said the of funding available, there was often a failure on the part of the employer to use the fund available to strategically support disabled apprentices.

The third speaker was **Mark Gale, Policy and Campaigns Manager from the Young Women's Trust**. Young Women's Trust has been active in their current form since 2014, working to support women who are out of work or are on low pay and struggling to make ends meet.

In terms of employment, even though women perform better across all levels of education, this does not translate into work. This included qualifications not providing opportunity for young women, facing low pay when they do get into work and that work being often insecure with fewer opportunities to progress. He said this was due to lack of flexible working and highly segregated working in terms of different sectors' pay and opportunities as well as harassment at work.

In terms of harassment three in four women said they had faced discrimination at work because of gender. In addition 8% of young women have experienced and reported sexual harassment at work and 16% have experienced it but not reported it for fear of losing hours or getting fired.

On the topic of apprenticeships, he noted that they were a great way for young people to build skills, with three out of four young women saying that apprenticeships gave them new skills and 58% saying apprenticeships were better way of getting skills than university. However, the positive views are not entirely translating into good outcomes for young women. With 84% of apprentices struggling financially and six out of ten struggling to make cash last to end of the month. Two in five women who completed an apprenticeship in the last year were unemployed or working in a job unrelated to their apprenticeship.

Similarly, bullying and harassment is commonplace in apprenticeships, with the more than half of apprentices saying they had been bullied by other staff. In addition, 40% of young female apprentices said they had been sexually harassed at work and not reported it. In addition, due to the insecure nature of apprenticeships, having a fixed end date and wanting to be kept on at the end of a programme, it makes it harder to speak out against when apprentices are discriminated against.

His recommendations included, increased choice of candidates with protected characteristics, wider careers advice for young women, part time apprenticeships to ensure people have flexibility and increases to the apprenticeship minimum wage.

The final speaker, offering a governmental perspective, was **Annette Warrick from the Department of Work and Pensions**. She began by speaking about the disability confident scheme, a programme that supports employers to make the most of the talents people with a disability can bring to the workplace. The scheme now has 11,000 employers involved, with three levels of confidence, committed, employer and leader. As a leader, firms support other employers

in becoming disability confident. She noted that half of those firms that make a disability confident commitment will go onto hire a person with a disability.

She also addressed Access to Work, which makes provision for additional requirements for people with a disability, (though it does not replace employer obligations under the equality act to make reasonable adjustments), these provisions for additional requirement could include helping someone physically get to work, specialist equipment, a job coach, or a support worker in certain circumstances as well as British Sign Language interpretation. She noted that all this was available for people with a disability undertaking an apprenticeship.