



**APPG on Apprenticeships – AGM & Careers Post-Apprenticeship– Tuesday 21 January 2020**

**Co-Chairs – Gillian Keegan MP, Karin Smyth MP**

**Speakers: Ruby Bedford, Microsoft, Premier Field Engineer; Luke Hennerley, Sidetrade, Lead Application Engineer; Rachel Parker, Heathrow, Team Administrator**

**Also in attendance: Baroness Garden, Lord Young of Norwood Green, Lord Aberdare, Jack Lopresti MP, Fleur Anderson MP, Taiwo Owatemi MP, Mike Amesbury MP, Ruth Edwards MP, Ian Mearns MP, Wendy Chamberlain MP, Jane Stevenson MP, Nick Fletcher MP, Baron Watson of Invergowrie, Baroness Neville-Rolfe**

Co-Chair Karin Smyth opened the AGM and announced that herself and Gillian Keegan MP would continue to serve as the co-chairs of the APPG for the coming year. The motion was seconded and passed before the following officers were announced for the coming year:

- Andrew Jones MP
- Jim McMahon MP
- Catherine McKinnell MP
- Lord Aberdare
- Baroness Garden of Frognal
- Lord Fox
- Lord Young of Norwood Green
- Lord Lucas

A motion for Jack Lopresti MP to become an Officer on the Group was seconded and passed unanimously.

Karin Smyth thanked the following sponsors for their continued support:

- Amazon
- BAE Systems
- Battersea Power Station
- Heathrow
- KPMG
- London South Bank University
- Microsoft
- Open University
- WMG at the University of Warwick

Karin Smyth then provided introductory remarks and outlined the agenda for the meeting. She outlined that the Group would look to take constructive recommendations from the speakers on how the current system could be improved. Gillian Keegan added that she was looking forward to engaging in productive discussion over the coming year.

First to speak was Premier Field Engineer at Microsoft, Ruby Bedford, who had undertaken a three and a half year apprenticeship under the Technical Stream. Ruby said that she had decided to take the apprenticeship route as she was unsure of attending university and had



been interested in IT throughout school. An apprenticeship scheme seemed the perfect route for Ruby as it provided her with the opportunity to continue learning in a “hands-on” fashion. She joined as a support engineer and found that during the scheme both her technical and personal skills developed significantly. Ruby also said that the apprenticeship scheme allowed her to develop her professional skills, such as time management and public speaking. Following the scheme, Ruby was taken on to a full-time position at Microsoft, and has worked on a range of exciting field projects including installing software at 10 Downing Street.

The next speaker was Lead Application Engineer at Sidetrade, Luke Hennerley, who undertook a Level 3 Software development Apprenticeship. Luke outlined how on completion of his apprenticeship scheme, he was able to establish a start-up in the Artificial Intelligence sector, which has employed 8 staff members in two years. He stated that his apprenticeship not only provided the foundation for his future career but helped him realise what different avenues he could pursue.

Heathrow Team Administrator, Rachel Parker, the third and final speaker, outlined how the apprenticeship scheme allowed her to continue learning whilst on maternity leave. She said that her apprenticeship made her more confident, assured and provided her with the skill set needed to progress. She said that although her scheme was a positive experience, she felt concern as the apprenticeship was coming to an end. Rachel suggested that career-focused workshops towards the end of schemes would be helpful in easing the transition into full-time work.

Following the short speeches from the panellists, Karin Smyth began an open discussion based on the experiences of apprenticeship programmes. She asked whether the speakers felt they would possess the same level of confidence without having completed an apprenticeship. Ruby Bedford said she believed that the label “*apprentice*” gives young people the confidence to ask questions in the early stages of workplace schemes. Luke outlined that in his experience, apprenticeships created an environment conducive to progression and development. Rachel Parker agreed, and stated that the most positive attribute of her apprenticeship was the flexibility.

Karin Smyth then opened the discussion to other attendees. Leigh Powell from UNISON asked whether the panel had received any help from staff at secondary school. Ruby Bedford said that in her experience, school had not been supportive at the application stage, but she had since been invited back to present to students on the benefits of apprenticeships. Luke said that he had a similar experience at school and received little support. He also said that despite offering to talk to students about apprenticeship opportunities, generally schools seem reluctant to the idea. In response to these comments, Mike Amesbury MP suggested that schools should employ a dedicated careers advisers to assist students into working life. Baroness Neville-Rolfe argued that teachers recommending apprenticeships would be essential for improving the uptake of schemes.

Melissa Milner from Catch-22 asked the panel whether they thought the roll-out of a similar application medium to UCAS – adapted for apprenticeships - would make it easier for students



to apply and improve parity of esteem with university applicants. Ruby Bedford said that she thought this would be useful and would help to support teachers who are not familiar with the processes of apprenticeship applications. Mike Amesbury MP outlined how a similar programme had been developed in Liverpool and insisted that a similar platform should be rolled out nationally to increase uptake. Karin Smyth said that the government was working on something similar, and would check in with Ministers to assess its progress.

Sarah Horner from the Learning and Work institute then raised the issue of equality of opportunity in apprenticeships, noting that research into STEM apprenticeship applications found that women and girls applied less than men and boys. Sarah suggested that a change of language in apprenticeship advertisement may be helpful, and asked the female panellists whether they had noticed any non-inclusive language, either in the application stage or during the apprenticeship itself. Ruby Bedford said that more inclusive language was a secondary issue, and that the lack of role models for women acted as more of a barrier. Luke Hennerley noted that whilst he has recruiting for apprenticeships there had been a lack of female applicants, so adapted his recruitment process to be more proactive in encouraging women to apply.

Kirsten Fox from Microsoft asked the panellists what their experience was of working alongside graduates. Rachel Parker stated that it had little effect on her, and that there was an understanding that all new employees were on their own career paths. Ruby Bedford said that at no point did she feel any less capable than a graduate, and that apprentices and graduates required similar levels of support. Luke Hennerley outlined that there was a higher rate of retention amongst apprentices compared to graduates and that this was perhaps attributed to apprentices being content with slower progression.

Karin Smyth then asked the panellists whether they had been encouraged to progress and push for promotions in their roles. Rachel Parker said that her team had always pushed her to progress. Luke Hennerley insisted that although apprenticeships were not a barrier to progression in his company, there were still many firms in which a university degree was a pre-requisite for management level roles.

Karin Smyth closed the meeting by once again thanking the speakers for sharing their experiences, and the other attendees for joining in the discussion. She informed the Group that the next session would cover the relationship between apprenticeships, accessibility and social mobility.



all party parliamentary group on  
apprenticeships