



APPG on Apprenticeships: How do apprenticeships support career progression? - 20 October 2020

Chair: Richard Holden MP (Con, North West Durham)

Speakers:

- Cindy Rampernaud, Senior Vice President, at Pearson BTEC and Apprenticeship (Federation of Awarding Bodies)
- Sarah Armitage, Senior Recruitment & Development Specialist in Apprenticeships at WSP.
- Anthony Hammond, Open University Registered Nurse Degree Apprentice at Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- Nick Sunderland, Commercial Director at Russell WBHO
- Sue Parr, Director of Apprenticeships and Part-time programmes at WMG, University of Warwick

Also in attendance: Lord Aberdare, Lord Young or Norwood Green, Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP, Baroness Newlove.

Richard Holden opened the meeting and introduced attendees to the session. He explained he was chairing this meeting at the request of Vice-Chair Jonathan Gullis, who was unable to join due to a last minute engagement in the House of Commons Chamber.

Richard introduced Cindy, Rampernaud, Senior Vice President, at Pearson BTEC and Apprenticeship who explained three key points: firstly why it is important to ensure that apprenticeships are successful, secondly exploring the challenges that we need to consider to ensure that apprenticeships are sustainable and thirdly challenging what is considered career progression. She said that it is important to ensure that there is a talent pipeline for entry into different sectors, particularly for those that have significant skills gaps such as social care and engineering. She added that the nature of apprenticeships plays well into these sectors and into those that are going to be essential for net zero, such as renewable energy. She explained that many industries are using apprenticeships as an entry point as they are “a brilliant gateway” to support upskilling.

Cindy stressed the need for apprenticeships to be sustainable. In addition to being entry points, apprenticeships must be flexible to ensure retention of talent within industries. She said this means updating content regularly and ensuring adults can still access learning programmes, by allowing them to fit around work and other life commitments. Finally, she explained that career progression can be viewed vertically, and the ladder of progression is present with apprenticeship programmes and is very important for social mobility. However, she emphasised a focus on horizontal progression as people reskill and move into different roles or sectors throughout their careers illustrating the potential apprenticeships have for older workers as well as those entering the labour market for the first time.

Richard commented that it is not just one pathway, but there are a number of pathways open for apprentices at all levels continue to build high quality skills.

Sarah Armitage, Senior Recruitment & Development Specialist in Apprenticeships at WSP explained that WSP are a construction and engineering company and patrons of the 5% Club. She added that over 7% of workforce are in earn and learn positions, half of which are apprenticeships and a majority of these are degree apprenticeships. She added that career progression of apprenticeships is best demonstrated by WSP’s first ever apprentice, who started as level 3 in 2010 and has now moved all the way through a degree apprenticeship, which he recently graduated from and has now been promoted to assistant engineer. She explained there are large benefits of apprenticeships for business. At WSP all opportunities are permanent roles in the business meaning it continues to benefit from its investment in the apprentice’s skills. She



explained that at WSP, conversations about career pathways and professional registration happen from the beginning and continue as the apprentice moves through the business, through structured development programmes which sit alongside and compliment the apprenticeships standards.

Sarah said at WSP there is a belief of “*if you can’t see it you can’t be it*” and there is a lot of buy-in for the programmes from the company’s senior leadership, as many feel that “*today’s apprentices are tomorrow’s CEOs*”. She agreed that apprenticeships are key to delivering on commitments to net zero and added that it is important ensure that career pathways are looking at the bigger picture and providing apprenticeships that are of interest to young people. She added that this is the case for many sustainability-based apprenticeships that WSP are starting offer such as the environmental practitioner apprenticeships. Finally, she noted that apprenticeships bring a more diverse candidate pool, particularly more women into the engineering and construction space. She believes the next step in WSP’s journey is to reach out to key influencers such as parents and guardians to promote the benefits of apprenticeships and reach as many young people as possible.

Anthony Hammond, Open University Registered Nurse Degree Apprentice at Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust explained his background highlighting that he left school with no qualifications after limited opportunities growing up. He had worked in a fashion retailer before applying for a part time role at the Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust as a healthcare assistant. He now works with children on their mental health and during this time, his managers and mentors saw he had a talent and encouraged him to explore an apprenticeship. Anthony explained that because he had experience, a higher level apprenticeship was better suited to him as a lower level one would have felt like a step backwards. As such, after completing his functional skills qualification he started his degree apprenticeship with the Open University. He said the application process for his degree apprenticeship was incredibly robust, but this ensured that there was support in place and his needs were met once he started studying. He explained that the apprenticeship has allowed him to develop skills in a multi-disciplinary scheme and he will become a registered nurse. He added that through his experience, he is able to supervise other nurses and has inspired more junior colleagues to start an apprenticeship.

Nick Sunderland, Commercial Director at Russell WBHO spoke about Russell WBHO’s building student programme, which is a 5-year degree apprenticeship, operating a “day release” structure through a very strong relationship with University of Salford. He said Russell liaises with local schools and colleges to talk about careers in construction and has had over 140 applicant over recent years. He explained that the programme provides entry to careers in construction management and quantity surveying and the programme has seen more women getting involved. The apprentices have a mentor at work, which are assigned based on personality and expertise. Apprentices get rotated around departments so that they get a rounded view of the company and the industry. He explained that at the end of two years of rotation, Russell helps apprentices to decide what to specialise in and they then start a specific degree to support that. He said this way of working ensures the course is kept up to date remains relevant, because local businesses are regularly engaging with it. He added that apprenticeships are also a benefit to more senior staff who are developing through providing mentoring and management roles to the apprentices. This means often those who wouldn’t ordinarily look at the pathway of a degree apprenticeship are supported and mentored through their whole programme.

Sue Parr, Director of Apprenticeships and Part-time programmes at WMG, University of Warwick explained that WMG has a social work apprentice programme which has been instrumental in providing skills for young people but also supporting people who have been in low paid social work jobs to upskill. She said this means that often older generations get the opportunity to build skills in their career, which may not have been an option before. Sue explained that WMG works with industries that are very fast moving and covid-19 has only made that more prominent. She stressed



that the pandemic has illustrated that digital skills are more important in apprenticeship planning. She highlighted that degree apprenticeships have a flexibility and are more current than traditional degrees, meaning that young people can continue to be skilled in the right way and existing workforces can be continually upskilling. She added that degree apprentices grow considerably in confidence and enthusiasm because of their experience at work and in the classroom.

Q&A

Richard highlighted that there is a need to keep pushing skills forward, emphasising the importance of programmes not being static and the need for them to constantly evolve. He said this was particularly important for the idea of progression within apprenticeships.

Lord Aberdare congratulated Anthony on being an excellent example and stated that the best ambassadors for apprenticeships are always apprentices themselves. He asked the panellists for their thoughts on their advice for young people when the jobs market is poor, and there are significant skills gaps. Cindy said we need to ensure that people are not just on one pathway, which is why it is important to have a range of vocational courses, T-Levels, apprenticeships, degrees and degree apprenticeships available. She suggested that if young people are unable to access the course or role that they want, they should look to see what other form of learning they could undertake whilst they wait for those opportunities to come back after the pandemic.

Lord Young asked how the employers that were present are supporting increased diversity in apprenticeship recruitment and career progression. Sarah explained that it is about marketing and advertising on the right forums, but also putting early career professional front and centre of that campaign.