



APPG on Apprenticeships: How organisations have adapted virtually to create quality apprenticeships - 8 December 2020

Chair: Lord Aberdare

Speakers:

- Emma Noble, Apprenticeship Performance Leader, KPMG360°
- Martin Rimmer, Chief People Officer, Cadent
- Mariam Shaikh, Business Administration Apprentice, Troup Bywaters + Anders
- Dominic Gill, Co-Founder and Managing Director, Intequal

Also in attendance: Jane Stevenson MP, Theresa Villiers MP, Lord Young of Norwood Green, Baroness Garden of Frognal.

Lord Aberdare introduced the session, explaining that after the pandemic forced many apprenticeship provisions online, many organisations adapted overnight. He said the session would explore how some organisations reacted and assess which of these practices might be useful to maintain in order to improve apprenticeship provision in the long term.

Emma Noble, Apprenticeship Performance Leader, KPMG360°, explained that KPMG worked to ensure that where apprenticeships were moved online, product quality was not reduced. KPMG ensured that additional support was given to those that required it, such as extra virtual study days and more relaxed exam criteria. KPMG also ensured a dedicated support team was on hand to assist with a range of queries, such as pastoral support or revision planning. On the KPMG360° programme, apprentices are on a rotational programme across several departments, during the first 3 years of their apprenticeship. However due to the disruption caused by the pandemic, KPMG took the decision not to rotate any apprentices this year in order to provide them with more stability and support given many people were working from home. Emma explained that KPMG's Apprenticeship management team also supported the apprentices to set up an apprentice specific mental health network and newsletter in order to remind them of all the support available to them as well as an aide to strengthening the apprentice community, which is more difficult in a virtual setting. Despite the pandemic, KPMG has still managed to induct a whole new cohort of apprentices this year. Emma said KPMG had held a week-long virtual induction event for its 220 new apprentices through Microsoft Teams, which focused on facts, signposting support, and building networks. Whilst conducting it online was a new way of hosting the online event, it was a success and KPMG will be looking to include elements of the virtual induction week for its new apprentices moving forward.

Martin Rimmer, Chief People Officer, Cadent said they operate a smaller programme of apprentices than KPMG but is also pleased to report that Covid-19 has not impacted their ability to recruit. Martin added that the programme did need to be adapted but it was particularly challenging, given a significant element of the apprenticeship requires practical training. He explained that it was easier to adapt some areas of the programme over others. For example, Cadent was able to work with providers to move learning online and ensure there was no break in learning throughout. A key aspect of this was ensuring that all apprentices had the option to be supplied with home equipment laptops, chairs, and keyboards, to create an office of their own. With the practical elements of learning, Cadent relied on training providers to create Covid safe environments for practical skills assessments. He said whilst it would have been much easier to suspend that part of the programme altogether, Cadent sought to innovate and adapt in order to provide apprenticeships to their fullest. He did note that Cadent had to delay recruitment onto the programme in order to prepare better for the new way of working. He said it was positive this was only a delay and not an indefinite pause and reported that Cadent is now back to recruiting local talent into their apprenticeship programme.



Mariam Shaikh, Business Administration Apprentice, Troup Bywaters + Anders explained that she had started her apprenticeship virtually. She said it was strange to meet new colleagues via Teams and Zoom, but frequent video calls with her line manager as well as screen-sharing training meant she felt comfortable quickly. Mariam explained Troup Bywaters + Anders employed a blended approach when she first joined, by attending the office for half the week initially. She said this approach allowed her to feel supported and comfortable at the company. She reflected that keeping connected during the current time of the pandemic is very important. She said whilst her first day was not traditional as there were few people in the office, she benefited from a strong virtual support system and being involved in a number of calls. She explained that she feels a balance should be struck between digital and in-person delivery of apprenticeship provision to get the benefits of going to work but the flexibility of remote provision.

Dominic Gill, Co-Founder and Managing Director, Intequal explained that since 2018 Intequal has utilised virtual apprenticeship delivery in response to a call from employers who wanted more flexible training provision so that apprentices do not even have to leave the office. He said online virtual classrooms can be conducted wherever, led by a live tutor, which facilitates peer to peer learning. He explained that this put Intequal in a strong position when the first lockdown hit as 97% of apprentices were able to continue as before. However, he stressed that what works for one sector may not work for another and this means it is not a case of simply replicating the technology across the whole of the economy. As such, he argued that companies should be pragmatic and realistic, by working to produce results on what works for the sector and the occupation. He said the pandemic should be used as an opportunity to reset learning and develop new methods with support that is unique to learners. He highlighted the need to ensure that blended learners take advantage of good teaching rather than just using the technology. He quoted the recent Ofsted report which recommended that online/virtual learning needs to be well-integrated into curriculums to have a positive impact moving forward. He said the sector should aim to get to the point where training providers offering a virtual or blended solution is viewed in the same way as a local provider. He feels that there needs to be an acknowledgement that virtual delivery from a national provider could be more appropriate for certain occupations and sectors even if it is not from a local provider. He concluded that this should all be viewed on a level playing field.

Q&A

Lord Young congratulated those companies who have continued recruitment in the face of the difficult challenges brought by the pandemic. He said there is a real danger that young people become unemployed and on universal credit as a result of the crisis. He asked what feedback the panel had from their apprentices. Cadent found it difficult to keep those engaged who signed up for more practical work. Dominic explained there was a challenge for people having to work from home and so Intequal ensured that there was support from a mental health perspective, allowing apprentices to gain a distinction between home and work and reflect on what they are learning. Emma said apprentices have enjoyed not having long commutes to training providers and regarding recruitment KPMG thought it was really important to continue as it is building the future talent pool, with many new apprentices being school leavers.

The panel was asked what adaptations brought on by the pandemic they would want to keep. Emma explained KPMG are considering changing their induction weeks so that they are half online and half digital. Martin explained Cadent has just come to terms with the fact that this is the new normal. Dominic added the flexibilities around end point assessments are very important for the digital sector and means more can be facilitated by EPA organisations. The panel agreed a call to Government would be to ensure that provision does not return to a one size fits all approach but should instead look at where technology can improve things and provide a nuanced approach within sectors.

The discussion then turned to digital poverty and whether that was an issue within recruitment. Emma explained all of KPMG's employees are provided with equipment necessary to do their jobs, but space poverty is a problem, with many apprentices working in bedrooms they were sharing with



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younger siblings. Emma explained KPMG had worked hard to make sure, in line with Government guidance all offices were made Covid-secure to ensure any employee who had a specific need to attend the office and be productive in an atmosphere conducive to work, then they could. Dominic said there was a worry that many people will not apply to apprenticeships because they do not have the technology to do so.