

THE BEST OF NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK 2020



FE WEEK

FE Week is the only newspaper dedicated to the further education and skills sector in England.

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WHO WILL GAIN THIS TIME FROM APPRENTICESHIP REFORM?



National Apprenticeships Week is now in its thirteenth year; launched in 2007 by the then Labour government as an "annual week-long celebration of apprenticeships across England".

For our readers, those delivering the training and assessment, the programme has changed considerably since 2007, a time when they were only available to young people at level 2 and 3.

The coalition government lifted limits on the number of apprenticeship starts for those aged over 25 and they now make up the majority of all apprenticeship starts.

Conversely, as we've documented in FE Week over recent years, the number of young people starting apprenticeships has been declining at an alarming rate.

The government also allowed graduates, and even those with an unlimited number of post-graduate qualifications, to be funded as apprentices for the first time in 2017 – at the same time as expanding the level of apprenticeship courses to degree and beyond.

Literally any employee in need of new skills at any level, soon all the way up to PhD, could be eligible for funding for an apprenticeship under the "employer ownership" model.

But the bonanza has come at a much higher cost than mandarins had predicted and last week the government's own apprenticeship quango called for an extra £750 million per year.

Critics, including myself and Ofsted, will have you believe small employers, young people and opportunities at level 2 are all losing out to large employers rushing to cash-in their levy pot on rebadging both management courses for existing employees and their existing graduate schemes.

The message seems to be reaching the incoming government, with prime minister Boris Johnson telling parliament that he plans to "reform the apprenticeship levy" and the "secretary of state for education will updating the house in due course on those proposals".

And writing in this supplement (see page 3), the education secretary Gavin Williamson looks to "reassure" critics that he is "determined to make sure the system works for the people that can benefit the most" as well as work "better for employers and providers too".

With the three million starts manifesto commitment in the last parliament already a distant memory, major reform can be expected before, or as part of, the budget on 11 March.

I have argued before that employer ownership and social mobility are incompatible.

Hopefully the reforms can prove me wrong in time for National Apprenticeship Week 2021.

MARC HOLMES

Product Manager, NCFE

Looking beyond the apprenticeship starts data

NCFE has been a long-time supporter of National Apprenticeship Week. Apprenticeships and the opportunities that they provide for young people and employers cannot be undervalued, which is why we were surprised to learn, with the timely release of the government's apprenticeship starts data for August to November 2019 last week, that there is a renewed downward trend in the UK's apprenticeship market.

Overall, the number of apprenticeship starts year to date is down 15%, with a large proportion of the decline being directly attributed to the reduction of starts from Frameworks (-47%). While this was to be expected with the continued launch of the new apprenticeship Standards, the top line figures, especially for the under 19 market, which has seen the sharpest decline, have still been making pretty damning headlines.

So what else could be to blame for the

decline? Digging deeper into the data revealed that starts being funded by the Apprenticeship Levy are down by 0.7% year on year, but it is the impact from the Non Levy market where the data shows a decline of 33% (approx. 12,200 starts) that has made the biggest difference. These statistics highlight the growing need for SMEs to access the apprenticeship market in some way – a sentiment which is echoed in our recent pamphlet 'No 16-18 year old left behind' which was published in partnership with Campaign For Learning earlier this week.

The good news is that the picture looks set to improve in 2020.

Despite the overall decline, Apprenticeship Standards continue to see slow but steady growth across the board from Level 2 to Level 7, and with the launch of the government's new digital account for SMEs in January 2020, that

Non Levy funded apprenticeship starts should start to pick up too.



There is still a common misconception that apprenticeships are just for 16- to 18-year-olds

In light of these trends, National Apprenticeship Week couldn't have come along at a better time!

For the past 13 years, National Apprenticeship Week has been bringing

together colleges, training providers, employers and apprentices to recognise and celebrate apprenticeship programme success across the UK.

While there is still a common misconception that apprenticeships are just for 16-18 year olds and that they are only employed to make the tea, this year's National Apprenticeship Week theme, "Look Beyond", is aiming to address these stereotypes head-on and help celebrate the diversity of opportunity and value that apprenticeships bring to individuals of all ages, employers and the economy.

Through EPA Plus, our end-point assessment organisation, NCFE will be joining in the celebrations this week, highlighting our apprenticeship offer and in-house expertise which has helped over 1,000 apprentices to successfully pass through Gateway.

GAVIN WILLIAMSON

Education secretary

Changing perceptions, raising aspirations, making improvements

The new secretary of state for education introduces National Apprenticeship Week with his vision for how the sector will change on his watch. His focus will be on challenging misconceptions about apprenticeships, tightening oversight of providers, and encouraging headteachers to promote the apprenticeship concept to their students

I've enjoyed so many great "firsts" since becoming education secretary—my first visit in the role, my first results day — but one of the things I've been most looking forward to is my first ever National Apprenticeship Week. And what a week it's been!

The 13th annual National Apprenticeship Week got off to a flying start on Monday, and was as jam-packed as ever, with – by my last count – an amazing 800 or so events and activities

taking place across the country to celebrate apprenticeships and all the great opportunities that schools, colleges, training providers and employers have to offer.

I kicked off the festivities in Stratford, where I met apprentices working for MACE construction on the UCL East development (pictured below). The 35,000 square metre project shows exactly how exciting and cutting-edge a modern apprenticeship can be: after donning all the traditional construction site gear, including the obligatory hard hat, I was led by apprentices round a virtual reality "cave", a cube made up of projectors that allowed us to virtually walk around the project as it was being built around us.

My visit to MACE construction was just a taste of the opportunities on offer this week. Other events taking place included "have a

go" workshops in Nantwich, an open evening in Sunderland, and an awards ceremony in Somerset to celebrate all the wonderful work apprentices do in all sorts of sectors.

The theme of National Apprenticeship Week 2020 involves looking beyond misconceptions of apprenticeships, including outdated ideas about their range and variety. One great way of celebrating that theme is by checking out grime artist P Money's latest track *The Calling*, released a few weeks before National Apprenticeship Week. The video, which you can watch online, was put together with the help of seven apprentices working across sound and video production, lighting, hair and make-up and even drone engineering.

However, as I know you're all aware, lingering stereotypes about apprenticeships persist – which is why I also marked National Apprenticeship Week by commissioning Mumsnet to survey parents about their attitudes towards apprenticeships. The results were illuminating: some 45 per cent of those parents were unaware that apprenticeships go right up to degree level, for example, while one-third said they still associated them with only manual jobs.

I know that everyone in the sector has been working hard to tackle these types of assumptions and show just how varied modern apprenticeships are, and we'll be doing everything we can to change people's perceptions over the coming years so that they recognise the work which goes into delivering apprenticeships and the opportunities they provide.

I'm aware that many of you have raised questions or concerns about funding for apprenticeships as well as the future direction of the apprenticeships programme. I want to reassure you that I am looking at all of this very carefully. I'm determined to make sure the system works for the people that can benefit the most from the life-changing impact

apprenticeships can have, and that it works better for employers and providers too.

We are making improvements, including moving smaller employers on to our award-winning digital apprenticeship service so they can choose the training provider that works for them, and we are making funding available to support for up to 15,000 additional apprenticeships.

It's also vital that we continue to have high-quality providers to deliver apprenticeship training, both so that people gain the skills they need to get ahead and to give us the workforce our economy needs to grow. I know the vast majority of you are doing a fantastic job – I've seen this first hand – but there are still some areas of concern.

We've put in place new tougher rules for providers and employers applying to get on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers, and they now have to meet strict criteria to become registered training providers. Strengthened oversight and tighter monitoring also means we can take swift and decisive action against poor performance by providers or attempts by them to break, or manipulate the rules.

Finally, we also want to make sure every young person is aware of just how rewarding doing an apprenticeship can be, which is why the Department for Education's own Lord Agnew has just sent out a letter to headteachers across the country reminding them of their duty to make sure they are letting apprenticeship providers into their schools to talk to their pupils about the range of opportunities available, no matter what their skills, interests and aspirations.

All in all, the past seven days have been a testament to all the hard work being done to boost apprenticeships up and down the country. As we mark the closing of the 13th National Apprenticeship Week, here's to another brilliant year!



How to solve a pro

EMMA HARDY

Shadow Further Education and Higher Education Minister



Perverse incentives and tangled pathways

If the new government is serious about its proposals, it must address the many problems with the levy, plus the accessibility of courses for those outside towns and cities, writes Emma Hardy

Apprenticeships should be the perfect vehicle for meeting the challenges of social mobility, bridging the skills gap and raising productivity.

However, the government's rushed implementation of the apprenticeship levy has resulted in unforeseen consequences and perverse incentives, while previous obstacles remain unresolved.

The pathways for post-16 FE, apprenticeships and skills training are confusing and dislocated. There has been no real move to untangle the jumble. To compound the problem there is no guarantee that every child in secondary education will receive full, impartial information and guidance on all their choices post-16.

The Baker Clause was an important step forward, but there are still grave concerns around FE access to secondary schools and the careers advice children are receiving. It is certainly worth considering a national careers

service with a guaranteed offer for each child.

Alternatively, the quality of careers advice could be made an important part of Ofsted's judgment of a school, alongside proper support and funding for schools to provide it.

Should a child decide on following the existing apprentice route the barriers to progression and universal access remain significant. Parents lose child benefit for under-19-year-olds taking on apprenticeships. Combined with the low level of apprentice pay this puts a severe cap on travel costs and associated expenses and therefore limits the choice of placements available. For those living outside of urban centres, with greater distances to travel, the situation is more acute. If you are one of the 4 million children living in poverty your opportunities further diminish. This situation needs addressing through a combination of transport schemes or travel passes, making child benefit available to parents with u-19 apprentices, and an increase in the apprentice wage.

For the majority of apprentices their journey traditionally began at level 2 or 3. However, the number of these apprenticeships has fallen precipitously since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. Small and medium-sized

enterprises (SMEs), which provide the lion's share of new jobs, are now receiving half the funding they were before the introduction of the levy. Current estimates are that 40,000 to 50,000 apprenticeship vacancies are going unfilled because of the lack of funding. The biggest falls are in the north-west and north-east: areas in desperate need of job opportunities and economic growth.

The government needs to take urgent action to solve this crisis of its own making by providing a funded pot for SMEs. Further, its level needs to be guaranteed in order to give certainty to SMEs and to training providers alike, so that both parties can provide the apprenticeships that are needed and at the same time allow effective planning for the future.

In its original estimates, the DfE counted on the large businesses who pay the levy spending around half on their own apprenticeships. However, and some might say predictably, they responded to the levy by increasing spending on training in their own businesses well beyond that. Some of this was accounted for by an increased number of higher-level apprenticeships up to degree level. Currently around 50%

of university graduates leave to take non-graduate jobs and there is no doubt that degree apprenticeships have a role to play in alleviating this skills mismatch, as well as providing a recognisable route to high level qualifications through apprenticeships.

However, there is strong evidence that some companies have "apprenticised" their trainee workforce by simply re-badging or moving over their existing programs. This is clearly not what was intended and has opened a debate on what is and is not an apprenticeship. This important discussion leads to fundamental questions on the way post-16 FE, apprenticeships and skills training should be organised, integrated and funded. We need good answers if we are truly to address the challenges of social mobility, bridging the skills gap and raising productivity. There are no good answers to be found "on the cheap" and gaming the system just creates winners and losers where we need everyone to be a winner.

This sector needs a serious commitment to long-term investment and planning from all parties for the benefit of all.

JOE DROMEY

Deputy director of research and development at the Learning and Work Institute



Bridging the gap: we need action on funding

The government will soon face big decisions on the future of apprenticeship funding, writes Joe Dromey

Big decisions around apprenticeship funding are looming. The levy was introduced three years ago. At a time of tight public finances, the levy was intended to boost employer investment in training, and to create 3 million more apprenticeship opportunities. The levy, which only affected employers with a payroll of £3 million or more, was designed based on the assumption that most would not spend all their funds. Unspent funds would be used to cover most of the cost of apprenticeship training at non-levy paying SMEs.

However, it is increasingly clear that such assumptions were flawed. As recent Learning and Work Institute research showed, levy-paying employers are using a

greater proportion of levy funds than had been predicted. This is due both to the higher cost of the apprenticeship standards than the frameworks they replaced, and to the behaviour change we've seen among levy-paying employers. In an effort to get the most value out of their contributions there has been a surge in demand for higher and degree apprenticeships, with most going to existing employees.

It is welcome that more employers are thinking about how they can use apprenticeships to meet their skills needs. But as a result, the apprenticeship budget is under growing pressure, and there is a very real risk that this will come at the expense of the ability of SMEs to access apprenticeship funding. *FE Week* was the first to warn of this over a year ago. There are signs that the government will act. The Conservative Party manifesto set out

a commitment to look at how they can "improve the working of the apprenticeship levy" and promised a National Skills Fund worth £3 billion over the parliament, which would provide match-funding to SMEs for high-quality training. There are a number of options in plugging the funding gap. First, government could choose to restrict the use of levy funds, whether to younger workers, or to those below a certain level. Second, government could require top-up funding from employers looking to use their levy funds on certain apprenticeships.

Third, the levy could be increased, so that employers pay more than 0.5% of payroll. Fourth, the levy could be expanded, so that more employers pay into it, and fewer are reliant on the unspent funds of levy payers. Finally, government could bail the system out, by providing additional public funding.

None of these options would be

universally popular. Levy paying employers would not be happy about restrictions on how to use levy funds; nor would many be keen to pay more. Small employers, would not be happy about the fourth option. The Chancellor would not be delighted with the final option. But while no option may be hugely attractive, if we fail to act, we will see creeping rationing of apprenticeships at the SMEs that make up the backbone of our economy, with an impact on young people.

Learning and Work Institute has set out a proposal that would involve the DfE funding the cost of apprenticeships for 16-to-18s, a requirement for co-investment from outside of levy funds for higher and degree apprenticeships for older workers, and investing £150m a year extra for apprenticeships at SMEs.

The Chancellor, in his next budget, should seize this opportunity to fix the levy.

blem like the levy?

PAUL JOYCE

Deputy director for further education and skills, Ofsted



At Ofsted we find little evidence apprentices are moving up the levels

The inspectorate for the quality of apprenticeships is concerned that young people “aiming to step on to the career ladder are discovering that the vital bottom rungs simply do not exist”, explains Ofsted’s deputy director for further education and skills, Paul Joyce

The snap general election called late last year resulted in the publication of our annual report being delayed. It was published a fortnight ago on January 21, 2020.

A perhaps serendipitous upshot is that the report came out just before the UK’s departure from the EU, and just before National Apprenticeship Week, which began on February 3.

In our report we urged the government to identify where current skills shortages lie and to set out plans for how the country can best meet this demand.

It is not just the government but also the further education and skills sector that must play a part by offering courses and apprenticeships that give students relevant qualifications in new and expanding industries across England.

Since the funding reforms of 2017 and the

introduction of the apprenticeship levy, there has been a sharp increase in the number of apprenticeship providers. But questions remain over the quality of some courses.

Further, despite the increase in providers, the number of apprentices continues to fall.

In 2019 there were about 1,900 further education and skills providers, an increase of 63 per cent since 2017. Within this total, the number of independent learning providers (ILPs) – who offer the majority of apprenticeships in England – has grown from about 500 to more than 1,200.

However, for the third year in succession the proportion of ILPs judged good or outstanding declined during this period. And one in five new apprenticeship providers monitored during 2018-19 were making insufficient progress in one or more areas.

Worryingly, we have found too many training providers unclear on the purpose of an apprenticeship. In some cases, apprentices did not receive adequate off-the-job training. This resulted in many making slow progress and not developing the new knowledge and skills that they and their employers needed.

In the worst cases, employees did not even know they were on an apprenticeship

programme. An additional concern is that the number of apprentices aged 16 to 18 at levels 2 and 3 is decreasing.

In 2016-17 most apprenticeships were at level 2. Since then, there has been a decline in the number of these apprenticeships each year. At the same time, the number of higher-level apprenticeships has doubled in the past two years.

These higher-level apprenticeships are overwhelmingly in business administration and are often a substitute for a degree. Very few are in areas such as construction, engineering and manufacturing.

There is much to celebrate in a system that values higher-level vocational and occupational achievement, where apprentices can progress from one level to the next and where apprenticeships are a key part of economic regeneration and skills development.

Apprenticeships can be transformational for young people. However, we find little evidence that apprentices are actually moving up the levels.

The trend towards higher level apprenticeships limits the options available for young people who leave school without

a full level 2 qualification. There is a real danger that young people aiming to step on to the career ladder are discovering that the vital bottom rungs simply do not exist.

The mismatch in provision and demand urgently needs to be dealt with while discussions about future national productivity continue. And the apprenticeship funding system needs to target levy money more directly at skills shortage areas.

The government and providers must look at what can be done to redress the balance across apprenticeships.

The critical 16-19 age-group needs to be better catered for, and action must be taken to reverse the decline in school leavers taking up apprenticeships.

Employers play a vital role and apprenticeship reforms have put employers in the driving seat in terms of developing the new standards. It is now time to see if the reforms are doing what the policy intended.

If apprentices are not doing the right courses, we need to look again at the role employers are playing and ask what else we can do to align the system better to the needs of the economy.

JENNIFER COUPLAND

Chief executive, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education



Let’s celebrate the many apprenticeship successes

Jennifer Coupland took over as chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education last November. She reflects on her first National Apprenticeship Week (NAW) in the post

It has been a pleasure to travel across the country during NAW and speak to so many people who deliver and benefit from fantastic apprenticeships.

Memorable moments included talking to business representatives and providers about apprenticeship priorities.

An important focus for us all looking ahead will be quality. We run the Quality Alliance with the Education and Skills Funding Agency, Ofsted, Ofqual, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the Office for Students (OfS). I will make sure we all work closely together to ensure apprenticeships truly deliver for employers and apprentices.

Attending the NAW conference meant I got to meet and hear from those who feel passionate about degree-level apprenticeships.

We now have over 100 of these higher-level apprenticeship standards, a similar number of standards at level four and five, and just under 300 at levels two and three. This all provides for fantastic opportunities for people to progress.

I’m committed to apprenticeships at all levels, and we are hearing encouraging feedback on how they are opening out a huge variety of professions – including accountancy, the law, and nursing – to people from wider backgrounds.

On our website we have revamped our occupational maps, which chart the best routes that apprentices can take across the skills system.

On Wednesday last I also attended the

BAE Systems Apprenticeships Awards, where I had the honour of presenting five awards for ‘outstanding achievement’.

This was a particularly touching category as it focused on apprentices who had overcome some really significant challenges in their lives – including long spells of illness or unemployment.

They were now flying high in their apprenticeships – and being great role models for others, which was fantastic to see.

It was obvious from people’s reactions to being nominated and winning quite how much recognition of their achievements matters. One winner looked quite choked – and my table of engineers started to tear up too!

NAW unfailingly provides a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the many successes of apprenticeships.

But there is always more to do – and other priorities for the Institute in the coming

months will be improving our funding decision making processes and simplifying how external quality assurance works.

However, the outlook is good. I have seen so much impressive progress with the development of the employer-led reforms since I started as Deputy Director of the Apprenticeships Unit eight years ago.

It has been thrilling to see how far things have moved on since I started in my new role. I remember when we set up the first trailblazer employer groups – look how far we’ve come now!

We have thousands of employers on board with developing and delivering apprenticeships and there have now been more than 500,000 starts on standards.

There is so much to be proud of and I would like to thank everyone – employers, providers, awarding organisations and apprentices – who is making this happen.

Events from around the country

Transport for London sets the wheels in motion for a wide variety of careers

FRASER WHIELDON
@FRASERWHIELDON

Earning while learning was on the minds of the young people who came to the Transport for London apprenticeship fair on Monday.

They filled out Kensington Town Hall to speak with organisations like HS2, National Rail and Heathrow Airport about what a future in their companies might look like.

FE Week went along and spoke with a number of attendees to find out what interests them about apprenticeships.

Mustafa Yorgandji, 24, said: "It's just a good opportunity to see what's going around in the jobs market. I think with transport, it's not just that side, there are different aspects. The value of an apprenticeship to me is you learn on the job."

Can Yorgandji, 18, believed the value was that "rather than just going to university and learning what's on paper, you're learning the skills straight away."

"With an apprenticeship you can dive in. I think it is the way forward really. Especially with TfL: there are endless opportunities and it's not just going to drop

soon. It's going to evolve into something bigger."

Daniel Barker, 21, is already doing an apprenticeship because he is "interested in earning money and getting qualifications at the same time" and university is both too expensive and "I wouldn't be much good at studying".

"I like what I do, but I want to do something similar as well as different, at another level," he added.

"So I'll finish this apprenticeship and look at moving on to the next level. That versatility is important for me because there are loads of different areas you can go on to, so once you've done one you can do a bunch of them."

Stallholders at the TfL event also ran a number of activities; for instance, Network Rail allowed attendees to try on virtual reality headsets where they could control signalling systems and repair a collapsed bridge.

As well as stalls, there were also break-out sessions in confidence-building and interview skills so attendees could hone their techniques, as well as CV workshops so they could sharpen up their credentials.

There was also a new Routemaster bus at the event, giving the potential



Attendees at the TfL apprenticeship fair

apprentices a look at its engine and gearbox so they could understand what a bus engineering course would involve.

Amirah Gayle, 18, was interested in civil engineering and thinks apprenticeships are a "really good opportunity" to be able to work in the industry you want to get into, as well as possibly gaining a degree in the subject that interests you.

"And being in a work environment will be useful and give you loads of skills. It's been really interesting here because there is a range of things."

But it was not just jobhunters at the event: Georgia Nield works for

an organisation called Beam, a social enterprise company which uses crowdfunding to help disadvantaged people in London get training and go back into work. She said: "I'm here to build relationships with employers to hopefully get the people we crowdfunded for training on to their apprenticeships."

"The value of events like this is I can make direct contact with employers; I can see Heathrow are hiring carpenters, so I can go up talk to hiring managers so when we train somebody to be a level one or two carpenter, I know the exact hiring manager to call."

Williamson heads for UCL's Olympic Park site

FRASER WHIELDON
@FRASERWHIELDON

Education secretary Gavin Williamson put his shoulder to the wheel on a trip to launch National Apprenticeship Week.

Williamson was seen working with a reinforcing steel bar in a Department for Education social media post about his Monday visit to meet apprentices and learners working for construction company Mace.

Meeting the learners at the site of a new university campus on the Olympic Park was "brilliant," he said, as was seeing first-hand the "exciting" work they are doing in the construction sector.

Quantity surveying apprentice Santini Holmes and trainee Michael Pearson both met with Williamson, who was shown how digital skills were proving useful in construction thanks to tools like the

business information modelling cave: a walk-in 3D modelling device.

"This is a week to celebrate all that is exceptional about apprenticeships and encourage employers, individuals, parents and teachers to find out more and embrace the opportunities they offer," the minister said.

The theme of National Apprenticeship Week this year is Look Beyond, which is meant to highlight diversity in apprenticeship opportunities "as well as the value they bring to the lives of individuals and employers alike," Williamson added.

Mace Group says it directly employs more than 100 apprentices and trainees in the UK across a range of roles, as well as supporting hundreds more through its supply chain.

It is something that Mace Group chief executive Mark Reynolds says he is "extremely proud" of and he added it was "fantastic" to see employees demonstrating

their skills to the secretary of state.

Reynolds said apprenticeships are "vital to the future of the industry" as it cannot deliver the next generation of construction technologies and processes if "we do not have access to a diverse range of talents".

The campus being built by Mace is UCL East, a new state-of-the-art site for UCL.

The university's assistant director of estates Keith Butler said they were "delighted" to host the launch of National Apprenticeship Week.



Gavin Williamson meeting learners at the site

ound the nation

North-East bake off: having their cake and eating it

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
@YASEMIN_CM

Apprentices from across the North East cooked up a storm in a "bake off" style competition to celebrate the programmes this week.

In teams of two, 16 apprentices and four ambassadors from the North East Ambassador Network created two themed bakes, including one that represented North East apprenticeships, in two and a half hours on Monday.

The winners were two apprentices from building and civil engineering company Sir Robert McAlpine.

Will Allen, 21, is training as a quantity surveyor at the firm while Emma Hawkins, 21, is an apprentice design manager.

The duo, who have both been apprentices for almost three and a half years, baked a red velvet cake shaped into a wall to represent how apprenticeships are "the building block for many careers" for one of the challenges.

Hawkins said: "The event was a good opportunity to shout out about apprenticeships and raise the profile of opportunities for young people."

She called the decision to undertake an apprenticeship "a no brainer" due to the ability to gain experience and a degree at the same time.

"I would say to anyone considering an apprenticeship to absolutely go for it. If it's right for you then you've only got everything to gain," Hawkins added.

The other competitors were from organisations including Northumberland Health Trust, Sage Gateshead, Newcastle Building Society, GSK and Cumbria and Northumberland Tyne & Wear Health Trust.

George Ritchie, chair of the North East Ambassador Network, said: "National Apprenticeship Week is a fantastic way of raising awareness of apprentice opportunities and encouraging greater engagement by employers, especially SMEs."

"The apprentice bake off has motivated the apprentices to try something outside of their comfort zone and give them a different

experience.

"We also hope profiling the apprenticeship schemes in the region will show young people that there are great-quality jobs and opportunities out there."

The competition took place at the Sage Gateshead.

A spokesperson said the music

centre delivers a creative apprenticeship programme, offering placements at cultural venues across the region and talks from experts.

It also takes on apprentices to come and train in different departments of the organisation.

Matthew Baldwin, a 19-year-old apprentice from Durham in the finance team, said he chose an apprenticeship rather than



Emma Hawkins (apprentice winner), George Ritchie MBC (Chair of North East Ambassador Network), Abigail Pogson (MD at Sage Gateshead), Allan Wallace (North East Ambassador Network), Will Allen (apprentice winner)

going to university because he felt that it was "better suited" to the route he wanted to take.

"It's given me the opportunity to gain work-place experience while still gaining valuable qualifications that will help me progress in the financial sector.

"I've learnt so much by working in a big organisation like Sage Gateshead and the support has been fantastic," he added.

Hitting the road and spreading the word to hundreds of children across England

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
@YASEMIN_CM

Staff from a college group went on a road trip in an American-style big yellow school bus to speak to young people about their career options as part of National Apprenticeship Week.

WCG (formerly Warwickshire College Group) will have clocked up more than 150 miles to reach up to 1,000 children across Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Worcestershire and Oxfordshire, visiting three schools a day.

The roadshow featured interactive activities which showcase apprenticeship routes in a range of sectors, such as cultivating a plant, operating a microscope and a construction challenge.

Displays also included power tools, hairdressing heads, dental nursing activities and motor vehicle exhibits.

Mark Whittaker, head of marketing at WCG, who joined the bus on the Tuesday leg of its tour, told *FE Week* the reception had been "superb".

He said: "This is the first time we have taken our apprenticeship showcase out on the road like this and we've



From the top - Rossi Fiumefreddo, Danielle Scattergood and Cassie Baxendale, from the WCG marketing team

seen huge interest from schools all across the Midlands.

"The students have engaged well with the information session we staged inside the bus and with the hands-on activities outside which helped them get to grips with just a few of the skills an apprentice might need."

He said staff had provided "very positive feedback" about the information session as it helped students to understand what an apprenticeship is.

"One teacher wrote to us afterwards to say 'the kids were buzzing and the few I

have spoken with today seem more clued up on apprenticeships'.

"And really, that has been our intention with the roadshow, to raise the level of awareness around apprenticeships amongst school students, so that they start to think about it as a viable post-16 pathway," Whittaker added.

Rebecca Thomas-Nye, 37, a mechatronics apprentice with Babcock International, shared her experiences with students on the bus this week.

She said: "We've had a great reception in

schools but it is very much a mixed bag in terms of the knowledge that the young people have about apprenticeships.

"Some of the students weren't aware of the options available, but that is why we have been going out to give them a positive idea of careers they can go into."

Thomas-Nye said talking to the students face-to-face was "effective" because it gave a personal touch and allowed the school children to ask questions in a relaxed environment while the interactive elements had provided them with the opportunity "to get hands-on and learn".

"I spoke with one girl who was really interested in engineering and we were able to give her information about how apprenticeships can help her get into the industry," she added.

The apprentice has worked at Babcock International for 11 years and decided to begin an apprenticeship "to upskill and take the next step in my career".

The WCG Apprenticeship Roadshow started in Guilsborough and Rugby on Monday before heading on to Kineton and Coventry on Tuesday.

It then travelled to Malvern and Worcester on Wednesday. On Thursday the bus visited Hinckley in Leicestershire and finished in Banbury in Oxfordshire.

The final leg of the journey took the bus to Stratford-upon-Avon, Lutterworth and Broughton Astley.

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Finalists for AAC Apprenticeship Awards 2020 celebrated in Parliament

BILLY CAMDEN
@BILLYCAMDEN

The national finalists of the AAC Apprenticeship Awards 2020 were recognised and celebrated at a special reception at the Houses of Parliament on Wednesday.

Around 150 people packed into the Terrace Pavilion for the event, which was sponsored by the chair of the education select committee Robert Halfon, who received the Lifetime Achievement Award two years ago.

Addressing the finalists, he said they were “vital” to “building an apprenticeship and skills nation”.

“You mention the word ‘apprenticeships’ and ‘vocational education’ and you get a cheer in the House of Commons and people know about it, they understand it, they want more vocational and technical education,” Halfon continued.

“I think the politically, we could be in a very good place indeed and a lot of new MPs have come to talk to me about apprentices, that has never happened before in previous parliaments that I’ve been in.”

He urged all attendees to continue to “evangelise and build up the prestige of apprenticeships and skills in our country” to create “the nation that all of us in this room and beyond want”.

More than 350 entries were submitted from colleges, training



AAC Awards 2020 finalists at the Parliamentary reception

providers and employers for the awards, which are in their third year and run by *FE Week* and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers.

There are two types of awards: Route Apprenticeship Provider of the Year and National Awards.

The former will celebrate excellence in 15 individual apprenticeship routes, and winners will be named “apprenticeship provider of the year”.

Awards to recognise employers’ and providers’ work with SEND apprentices and increasing diversity are up for grabs again after being introduced for the first time last year.

During the parliamentary event Paul Cox, principal of Eastleigh College, a finalist for the SEND award, told *FE Week*: “We are delighted to be shortlisted in recognition of the work that our team does and the many successes of our learners.”

“Apprenticeships for us in this category is the evolution of our provision and curriculum and how we go through our classroom-based provision through the supported internship model to apprenticeships. We have an all-through journey for our learners with SEND

which we are very, very proud of.”

Labour’s shadow skills minister Emma Hardy also spoke at the reception and hailed the cross-party consensus on expanding the opportunities an apprenticeship offers young people.

She said apprenticeships are “brilliant” for improving social mobility and giving people “that second chance in education”.

“

We are delighted to be shortlisted in recognition of the work that our team does

“For too long our education system has been if you don’t get it first time then you’ll never get it,” Hardy said.

“People are written off at the age of 16 if they haven’t got the qualifications



Robert Halfon

that they need and the system isn’t designed to help them re-educate and re-get into learning.

“So the brilliant opportunities that apprenticeships give is that chance to take people who may have written off their idea of a pathway in education all together and say ‘here you are, not only as your employer am I going to show that your value that you matter, but I’m going to train you I am going to develop you and I’m going to turn you and help you become all that you can become’.

“What a fantastic story that is.”

Winners of all awards will be announced at a glittering ceremony during the Annual Apprenticeship Conference Gala Dinner on 3 March at the ICC in Birmingham.



Emma Hardy

**Agriculture, Environmental & Animal Care
Apprenticeship provider of the year**

British Racing School
Haddon Training

**Business & Administration Apprenticeship
provider of the year**

Abingdon and Witney College
Derby Business College Limited

**Care Services Apprenticeship
provider of the year**

Educ8 Group
Lifetime Training

**Catering & Hospitality Apprenticeship
provider of the year**

Lifetime Training
Remit Group

**Construction Apprenticeship
provider of the year**

Bournemouth and Poole College
Electrical Department
Skills Group

**Digital Apprenticeship
provider of the year**

Sponsored by



Manchester Metropolitan University
Weston College

**Education & Childcare Apprenticeship
provider of the year**

Aspiration Training Ltd
Educ8 Group

**Engineering & Manufacturing
Apprenticeship provider of the year**

Abingdon and Witney College
Uniper Engineering Academy

**Hair & Beauty Apprenticeship
provider of the year**

Sponsored by



ISA Training
Truro and Penwith College

**Health & Science Apprenticeship
provider of the year**

Performance Through People
West Suffolk Hospital

**Legal, Finance & Accounting
Apprenticeship provider of the year**

Loughborough College
Paragon Skills

**Sales, Marketing, Procurement
Apprenticeship provider of the year**

Encompass Consultancy Ltd
Remit Group

**Transport & Logistics Apprenticeship
provider of the year**

Performance Through People
Seetec Outsource Training and Skills

**Promoting Apprenticeships
campaign of the year**

Newcastle & Stafford Colleges Group
Weston College

**SEND Apprenticeship
Champion Award**

Sponsored by



Eastleigh College
West London College

Apprenticeship Diversity Award

Arvato CRM Solutions UK
WhiteHat

Outstanding contribution to the development of apprenticeships

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Employer	Provider	Individual
Little Inspirations Ltd	Coventry University	Jane Hadfield, Health Education England
TUI Travel Group Plc	Interserve Learning & Employment	Nicola Drury, Amazon
Government Communication Service (HM Gov)	South Devon College	Sharon Blyfield, Coca-Cola European Partners

Apprentice employer of the year

Amazon
Bentley Motors
Coca-Cola European Partners
Defence Munitions (MoD)
Hays Travel

**Apprenticeship provider
of the year**

Sponsored by



Abingdon and Witney College
Gen2 Training
Herefordshire & Worcestershire
Group Training Association
Leeds College of Building
Weston College



The winners
will be
announced
at the
AAC 2020
gala dinner
**3rd March
2020**

THE STIGMA AND INNOVA

Survey says... many still look down on apprenticeships

FRASER WHIELDON
@FRASERWHIELDON

Public scepticism still dogs the apprenticeship programme, with several reports released to coincide with National Apprenticeship Week revealing peoples' conflicting views about the courses and a stigma attached to them.

More adults have said they would go to university rather than become an apprentice, despite believing higher education offers worse value for money and longevity of skills.

In a poll of 2,000 adults in England, 54 per cent of people believed that apprenticeships prepared young people for the workplace best, while just six per cent believed university did.

And 57 per cent said that apprenticeships were good value for money, compared with just five per cent for universities.

However, when asked what they would consider as a route to develop their own workplace skills, 50 per cent said that they would be more likely to go to university, while 30 per cent said they would rather do an apprenticeship.

The research has led its commissioners, the City & Guilds Group, to call for the government to ensure schools deliver robust, impartial careers advice to students.

The education giant's interim chief executive Kirstie Donnelly said the research highlights that "there continues to be a stigma attached to taking an apprenticeship," despite people being aware of the benefits.

There continues to be a stigma attached to taking an apprenticeship

"Significant work" is still outstanding, she said, to make sure everyone understands the array of "well-paid and challenging careers an apprenticeship could unlock" and there ought to be greater collaboration between business, government and schools to promote them to people of all ages.

City & Guilds, which runs apprenticeship provision and assessment, is also calling for schools and colleges to be recognised for the number of young people they direct into all training routes, not just academic routes like A-levels and university.

The research was one of many apprenticeship surveys released to coincide with National Apprenticeship Week.

Another, conducted by Mumsnet on behalf of the Department for Education, revealed almost half of over 1,000 parents thought top UK employers would not value an apprenticeship as much as a degree.

Three in five parents who responded said they were concerned their child would be "stuck doing more menial tasks, such as



making the tea" in an apprenticeship.

And 35 per cent of parents said that they still associated apprenticeships with manual jobs, like plumbing and carpentry, and 45 per cent were unaware that apprenticeships go right up to degree level.

But 71 per cent of over 1,000 managers who spoke to apprenticeships provider Avadoo believed in the value of qualifications like apprenticeships, and 68 per cent of parents believed them to be good career options.

Commenting on the Mumsnet survey, education secretary Gavin Williamson said it showed "outdated views are holding young people back from pursuing their dream career".

When his own children ask for help in choosing qualifications, Williamson promised he would "absolutely" encourage them to consider apprenticeships, and he urged all parents to "look beyond stereotypes and embrace every option".

But other parents told Mumsnet they did not feel as confident. Asked whether they feel they have enough information about apprenticeships to have a conversation with their child about it, the split between those who felt informed and who did not was almost 50-50.

Schools have come under increasing pressure to advertise vocational courses to their students, especially since the inclusion of the so-called Baker Clause in the Technical and Further Education Act 2017: this meant all local authority-maintained schools and academies had to give education and training providers the opportunity to talk to pupils about technical qualifications and apprenticeships.

Outdated views are holding young people back from pursuing their dream career

But research by YouGov and training provider JTL released last week showed just one in ten of 15 to 18-year-olds are being encouraged to take up an apprenticeship by their schoolteachers.



Kirstie Donnelly

ATIVE WAYS TO TACKLE IT

GRIME STARS SING THE PRAISES OF TRAIL-BLAZING

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
@YASEMIN_CM

An unexpected partnership between a YouTube entrepreneur, a rapper and the Department for Education has led to the release of a grime song celebrating apprenticeships.

Jamal Edwards MBE, the founder of online music platform SBTV, collaborated with artist P Money, producer Teddy Music (aka Silencer) and seven apprentices to record, produce and promote the track as part of the next phase of the government's Fire It Up campaign.

The trainees worked on sound and video production, drone engineering, logistics, lighting, hair styling, marketing and social media.

A series of three behind-the-scenes videos and a launch party teased the release of *The Calling*, which was uploaded on to SBTV's channel on January 23 and can also be streamed on Spotify.

In the song P Money encourages would-be apprentices to "blaze your own trail and I bet next year you will have done things when you thought you couldn't".

Director Matthew Walker, who has previously worked with stars including Skepta, Stormzy and JME, shot the music video.

The unique campaign aimed to showcase the talent of apprentices and the range of apprenticeships on offer across the country.

FE Week spoke to Shola West, a level 3 digital marketing apprentice at WhiteHat, about her involvement with the new grime single.

The 19-year-old from Croydon, who is scheduled to finish her apprenticeship at the end of this month, organised the launch party event and promoted it on Twitter and Instagram.

She also recorded a voiceover for the Spotify advert as part of the Fire It Up campaign.

West described it as a "great experience" because it put her "out of my comfort zone" and showed she was able to



Shola West



P Money alongside students at the song's launch party at Wilberforce College in Hull



A still from the music video for *The Calling*

put the skills developed during her apprenticeship into practice.

"It was so cool meeting P Money and Jamal as well. Usually you just wouldn't randomly work with people like that so having the opportunity to show them your skills and show them what you are made of... was really exciting," West added. "Everyone is super proud."

Her involvement in the campaign has made the digital marketing apprentice consider working in creative industries in the future. "It definitely opened up my eyes. It is something that is very transferable."

At WhiteHat, West currently plans and promotes events with a focus on personal and professional development. She said learning how to do this has made her more confident and taught her how to manage budgets and people.

West also runs an Instagram account (@shotech_) to share her experiences as an apprentice and provide careers advice, and has spoken at City Hall about her apprenticeship.

She said: "Because I've now found this route and it's been so beneficial for me, I purposely go out of my way to seek younger people and to try and inspire others."

In addition, West has recently been nominated for a Rising Star Award at the Black Tech Achievement Awards and her "ultimate goal" is to become an expert in digital marketing.

"I'm just excited to see now where it goes after this and what opportunities come out of it."

West added: "It would be so cool if the government put more money behind apprenticeships because I feel like, with what we have at the moment, we've done so much, so imagine putting in more money and having it being embedded into schools."

She would like apprenticeships to be presented as an opportunity in the "same way" as university. "I would love to see how it could grow."

For West, the choice was "a no-brainer" as she could learn on the job, get paid for the hands-on experience and get her foot in the door of an industry she was interested in.

Edwards also said that when he had decided not to go to university "people told me I'd fail".

He continued: "These days, I'm passionate about showing young people that there are many ways to reach their potential."

"There's still an assumption that you can only do apprenticeships in trades like plumbing and construction. That view really needs to be reversed, and I hope this track will help get the message out there."

The SBTV founder's advice to parents is to talk to their children and work with them to figure out how they can achieve their dreams.

"It's been incredible to work with this talented group of apprentices, share my network, and help fire them up for the future," Edwards added.

The Fire It Up campaign was first launched in January last year to promote the benefits of apprenticeships to young people, parents and employers.

BASIC SKILLS TO DEGREES - A

English and Maths don't have to be obstacles

YASEMIN CRAGGS MERSINOGLU
@YASEMIN_CM

A new programme is being piloted to help tutors get around the "stumbling block" of English and maths teaching in apprenticeship delivery.

Under government rules, those undertaking a level 3 apprenticeship or higher are required to hold or achieve a level 2 in the core subjects.

Meanwhile, apprentices undertaking a level 2 apprenticeship must work towards level 2 in maths and English.

Guidance from the Education and Skills Funding Agency states that the core subjects are "essential to supporting longer-term career prospects" and their involvement in apprenticeships is part of government's "ambition for a world-class technical education system".

But it is an area where providers can trip up. Low-graded Ofsted reports for apprenticeship providers often highlight their failure to meet the required standards in English and maths.



For example, it was reported that "too many apprentices" at employer provider Took Us A Long Time Limited, which received a grade three from Ofsted in January, found their studies in English and maths to be "chaotic".

And independent provider Catch22 Charity Limited was also declared a grade three last year, with inspectors citing "too many" apprentices making "slow progress towards developing their literacy and numeracy skills, or towards completion of the GCSE or functional skills English and/or mathematics component of their course" in the key findings.

To tackle the issue, the Education and Training Foundation launched blended professional development training, in partnership with the Department for Education, for embedding maths and English into apprenticeship delivery on January 7.

The learning materials are designed to support teachers and trainers relate

maths and English to working practices to try and get apprentices to see the relevance of the subjects.

Imke Djouadj, the ETF's national head of maths, English and ESOL, told *FE Week*: "Maths and English skills can often be a stumbling block holding back apprentices who are otherwise doing well on their programme."

“**These two core skills can often be a stumbling block holding back apprentices**

"Most apprenticeships are work-based except for the 20 per cent off-the-job element, which means employer engagement in supporting apprentices' maths and English in the workplace is key to enable them to successfully complete their qualification."

The programme consists of four learning packages – embedding strategies, resources, assessment, and inclusivity – each including one online module and a follow-up interactive webinar which will build on the module's content.

It is free of charge during the pilot which ends on March 31, 2020. The pilot will then be evaluated with the aim to roll out further packages on a larger scale later in the year.

The ETF has offered the following top ten tips for English and maths training in apprenticeships:

- 1 Target individual staff or use staff development training days as part of your CPD strategy – using the four online learning modules to do so.
- 2 Create opportunities for better collaboration between your maths and English specialists and vocational training staff. This will help to develop their skills and confidence in designing apprenticeship learning programmes.
- 3 Develop multiple forms of communication with employers such as establishing regular shared planning sessions with employer staff, working together on structural and timetabling issues and sharing responsibilities for initial assessments and progress reviews of individual learners. This is in order to improve collaboration between your staff and employers.
- 4 Identify opportunities for maths and English in workplace practices and adapt your existing learning resources accordingly to ensure apprentices can see the relevance of the core subjects.
- 5 Co-design an 'Individual Learning Plan' with employer partners and use it to drive quality in addition to satisfying audits and inspections.
- 6 Create an assessment framework with employer partners to build a strong evidence base for Ofsted inspections.
- 7 Help your apprentices monitor and evaluate their own progress in maths and English by using an "assessment for learning" approach.
- 8 Consider how to provide an inclusive working environment and a supportive curriculum for those apprentices who require additional support. Question how maths and English can be taught in a methodically inclusive way to support those who are struggling at the same time as making sure the whole group makes progress.
- 9 While some maths and English learning can be embedded, some may need an alternative method for skill development, such as contextualising, integrating or separating.
- 10 Think about how to use digital technologies to support the embedding of maths and English in apprenticeships.



Imke Djouadj



APPRENTICESHIPS OFFER IT ALL

In defence of degree apprenticeships

FRASER WHIELDON
@FRASERWHIELDON

Degree apprenticeships are “bringing higher level education to people who might not have had access to it,” according to one course leader.

Trevor Brown, the lead lecturer of the level 6 chartered manager degree apprenticeship at Manchester Metropolitan University, says around half of the trainees on his first cohort who have now graduated had not “gone through HE” before.

“On the one side, you have the people who might have had a vocational degree. They might have a degree in the thing they do for a living, but they are managers as well.

“But others haven’t had any higher-level education at all. An awful lot of my students are ‘non-standard entry’, which implies they haven’t got a previous degree or higher-level qualification.”

It is a far cry from the model of degree apprenticeships presented by former skills minister Anne Milton during an interview with Association of Colleges boss David Hughes in December 2018, when she said they are just being used for “people doing second degrees”.

Brown’s apprentices are from a wide range of jobs, including both personal assistants – “they are absolutely kingpins of making things happen, so they really are managers” – and radiologists.

“They were in as managers,” Trevor explains, “because the problem they’re having is they have a three-quarters of a billion-pound piece of kit, but the management of the production line getting

patients into this thing is slowing up the turnover of patients.”

They are what the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), which helped develop the standard, calls “accidental managers”: a radiology lead may consider themselves to be a radiologist, but they are managing people, the organisation and patients.

Degree apprenticeships have attracted the ire of the sector partly due to concerns they are draining the apprenticeship levy with expensive funding rates (the chartered manager course has a maximum funding band of £22,000 after originally being £27,000).

“**The course helped me accept I was good at my job and spurred me to make this big career jump**

Research by former Department for Education adviser Tom Richmond last month claimed that over £1 billion of levy funds have been “wasted” largely because employers and HE providers are “abusing” it by “rebadging existing courses” into higher apprenticeships; the rebadging accusation has also been levelled by Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman.



Trevor Brown

Brown argues the apprenticeship is different to a degree, even though students “really value the degree” as it pushes the course to a higher level of critical thinking.

Different because the projects students complete have to be “work-focused”: one involved a system of redirecting ambulances from busy accident and emergency departments, even if they were local, to less busy ones which might be further away.

The CMI, which end-point assesses Manchester Metropolitan’s programme, have commented on how his apprentices’ projects are “not pseudo-dissertations,” says Brown.

And the programme is having results: the first of the university’s chartered manager apprentices, 57 in number, graduated this year and 95 per cent have achieved either a first or 2.1 and merit or distinction in their end-point assessment.

What the apprentices have achieved has already made waves in their careers: one of them, Jenny Hemmings, said the course gave her the confidence to leave her job in the NHS for one at private healthcare provider BMI.

“The course helped me accept I was good at my job and spurred me to make this big career jump two-thirds of the way through.

“I would never have even thought I could have

had the role had I not done the course.”

Jenny, who previously worked in radiography before a spinal injury made her move into management, said: “For clinical staff, interviews have always been competency-based, but not necessarily knowing the vocabulary which goes alongside management.”

The course helped give her the knowledge and the vocabulary she needed to secure her a role as a clinical services manager.

Her course project involved refurbishing a fluoroscopy room – which “takes real-time X-rays” – after she had been told when she started it was high up on her list of priorities to sort out.

She later received an award for achieving the highest overall marks in the EPA from the CMI.

Hemmings says the manager course is valuable for “any professional,” but she says apprentices have to make sure they have the right course, as it is a “big commitment” and otherwise “you’re not only wasting your own time, but your employer’s and the funding as well”.

“And if that’s going to take the opportunity from someone else, that would be a shame.”

Jennifer Hemmings



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Estelle Brewster,

Deputy Head of Health and Care Apprenticeships, Leeds City College

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