



**APPG on Apprenticeships: Ask the Apprentice Panel to mark National Apprenticeships Week – 9 February 2021**

**Chair:** Karin Smyth MP, Co-Chair, APPG on Apprenticeships

**Speakers:**

- Gillian Keegan MP, Minister for Apprenticeships
- Apprentices from: Amazon, BAE Systems, Federation of Awarding Bodies, KPMG, London South Bank University, the University of Salford, the Co-op, Warwick Manufacturing Group at the University of Warwick

**Also in attendance:** Ian Levy MP, James Daly MP, Lord Young of Norwood Green, Baroness Garden of Frognal, Baroness Hollins, Lord Aberdare

Karin Smyth MP welcomed attendees, thanked the Minister for attending and introduced the panel of apprentices. She then introduced Gillian Keegan, the Minister for Apprenticeships.

Gillian Keegan MP remarked that she used to be the co-chair of this APPG, and mentioned that she was the first former apprentice to become Minister for Apprenticeships. She stated that apprenticeships were the world's best kept secret, and remarked at the variety of apprenticeships on offer today. She lamented that this week's National Apprenticeships Week was having to be done virtually. She stated that apprenticeships were the ideal route into work today. She added that the Government wanted to build on the progress made so far with apprentices, and wanted to broaden options for the 50% of young people that do not go to university.

She added that the Government is introducing "*Bootcamp*" and flexible approaches to apprenticeships classes. She said apprenticeships will be at the forefront of the UK's future as it recovers from the pandemic. She stated her confidence that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, and the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson understand the value of apprenticeships. She closed her remarks by stating how delighted she was to be at the event, and looked forward to celebrating the achievements of the attending apprentices, stating that still "*not nearly enough*" people know enough about the value of apprenticeships. Referencing the Further Education White Paper, she said that the Government would make sure employers are consulted and are "*put at the heart of the decision making process*", adding that the Government would make it easier for small and medium sized businesses to hire apprentices.

Karin Smyth MP thanked the Minister for her time and handed over to Ollie Wheatley, Software Engineer Apprentice at Amazon.

Ollie Wheatley began by stating that apprenticeships environment was preferable to university for its flexibility, and added that it has exceeded his expectations. He stated that he was guided to apprenticeships by a college counsellor. He concluded by stating that an apprenticeship helped him find who he was, adding that his peers' "*minds were blown*" when he explained the variety of apprenticeships on offer.

Karin Smyth MP introduced Bilaal Khan, Project Management Apprentice at Via East Midlands.

Bilaal Khan began by briefly running through his background before his apprenticeship. He stated his belief that a national work experience scheme should be integrated into the curriculum to rectify post-COVID issues in young people's education and employability. He also said that the Government needs to establish a support scheme for apprentices to ensure they can comprehensively support their families. He proposed an Apprenticeship Minimum Wage, stating that he was fortunate in his economic circumstances, but many prospective apprentices are not.



Karin Smyth MP then introduced Simren Samra, Digital Degree Apprentice at KPMG.

Simren Samra began by laying out why she wanted to become an apprentice, stating that she had originally intended to go to university but realised an apprenticeship would open up many more doors for her. She stated that attitudes to apprentices needed to change, adding that the Government need to reform how apprentices are progressing after the point of entry. She said the Government needs to work to boost female STEM numbers, by increasing awareness and visibility of STEM apprenticeships.

Karin Smyth MP then introduced Eleana Pieri, Nursing Associate Apprentice at London South Bank University.

Eleana Pieri began by discussing her background, stating that she had actually previously done another apprenticeship. She said that a nursing apprenticeship was the best thing that could have happened to her, as it was the best way for her to get insight into patient experience and how to deal with patients. She said that her apprenticeship offered her the opportunity she had been looking for, and added that she felt that apprenticeships were not made visible enough to young people considering or looking for an alternative career pathway.

Karin Smyth MP then introduced James Allen, Store Manager Apprentice at Co-op.

James Allen began by running through his background at the Co-op. He stated that he felt apprenticeships offered opportunities that university couldn't, offering him the opportunity to progress to the senior position of store manager within 3 to 4 years. He said that networking helped him to develop a lot of skills, and that he was currently on a business management apprenticeship degree with the aim of becoming a Co-op area manager. He said that the Government could do a better job of signposting apprenticeship opportunities.

Karin Smyth MP then introduced Jaymisha Nayee, Software Engineer Apprentice at Thales (WMG).

Jaymisha Nayee stated before her apprenticeships she wasn't aware of the possibilities offered by them until her last year of college. She said that her apprenticeship has been a fantastic experience, though the pandemic has presented challenges. She suggested that apprentices need to be better signposted to students at GCSE and Sixth Form.

Karin Smyth MP then introduced Kym Bales, Higher Project Management Apprentice at BAE Systems.

Kym Bales said she began her apprenticeship 10 years after completing her A-levels. She said that apprenticeships allowed her to be a positive role model for her daughter, and that an apprenticeship is a great decision to make for anyone unsure of where to go in their career. She suggested that apprenticeships need to be better advertised for those looking to retrain or upskill, especially for mature students.

Karin Smyth MP then introduced Elaine Huskinson, Assistant Quantity Surveyor Apprentice at Salford University.

Elaine Huskinson discussed the accelerated apprenticeships process she has undertaken, and that she was concerned working from home during the pandemic could undermine apprentices' training. She added that apprenticeships' merit is that they are open for anyone, not just young people.

Karin Smyth MP summarised contributions and opened the discussion up to questions from the audience.



Baroness Garden of Frognal commented on the lack of popular knowledge about apprenticeships, and asked if any of the apprentices had had opportunities to go back to their schools and discuss apprenticeships.

Kym Bales said she had had opportunities to go to plenty of local schools and sixth form colleges, which she stated was valuable for opening up options regarding apprenticeships.

Ian Levy MP remarked on the inspiring stories of the apprentices and thanked them for their hard work and dedication. He asked for a private meeting with Karin Smyth MP to discuss how they could build on the progress made in this discussion.

Lord Aberdare thanked the apprentices for their inspiring stories. He asked if any of them had any specific ideas to encourage awareness of apprenticeships' viability, either by schools or parliamentarians.

James Allen answered that apprentices should think of themselves as ambassadors for their businesses, but added that this needs Government support to help scale this up. Eleana Pieri said that she felt it was the apprentices' duty to share the word and build on the progress made so far on signposting apprenticeships, especially in health. Elaine Huskinson reiterated that more needs to be done to signpost apprenticeships as legitimate options for mature students thinking of a career change.

Baroness Hollins asked how apprentices were being supported by their parents.

Bilal Khan answered that increased support for tasks such as drafting CV's and preparing for interviews needed to be there for those that needed it. Jaymisha Nayee added that more needed to be done to inform parents of the clear differences between apprenticeships and degrees. Simren Samra added that parents needed to be reassured about apprenticeships' long-term viability career-wise. Ollie Wheatley added that it was important that apprentices continued to be ambassadors.

Karin Smyth MP thanked attendees for their contributions, wished the apprentices well and brought the discussion to a close.