

Skills Commission Third 'Spotlight' Inquiry: Apprenticeships and Social Mobility

About Energy & Utility Skills

Energy & Utility Skills is the sector's skills body, with a UK-wide membership comprising of the major infrastructure companies within water, power, gas and waste management and their top tiers of delivery partners. The sector is collectively responsible for delivery of around 56% of the £500bn National Infrastructure Plan and the supply of essential services to 65 million people and UK industry every day. Our membership brings companies together to collectively identify and address the unique workforce renewal and skills challenges the sector faces, whilst engaging governments, regulators and other senior stakeholders to help them develop an informed and supportive policy and regulatory environment.

In February 2017, a partnership of 29 Chief Executives from these energy and utility-based employers launched the first-ever Energy & Utilities Workforce Renewal Strategy. To read the document visit <http://www.euskills.co.uk/sector-skills-strategy>. For further information on Energy & Utility Skills, please visit <http://www.euskills.co.uk/>.

Introduction

Energy & Utility Skills welcomes the opportunity to respond to this inquiry into promoting social mobility in relation to apprenticeships. In its recently published energy and utilities workforce renewal and skills strategy, the sector identified engagement with and inclusion of 'hard to reach' sections of the community as an essential step in broadening its talent pool. Disadvantaged young people, including those classed as 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEETs) are a key 'hard to reach' group. The energy and utilities sector has been in the vanguard of apprenticeship reforms, and ensuring equality of opportunity in this area is integral to its mission.

We have set out below a summary of the key points and recommendations we would like the Skills Commission to consider, together with a sector picture to provide context for our response to the Call for Evidence.

1. Do you think there are any barriers to disadvantaged young people accessing apprenticeships? Please give examples if you have any.

Improving the availability and accessibility of information about career entry routes, including Apprenticeships, for young people.

The way careers information, advice and guidance are delivered needs improvement. 37% of respondents in a recent survey stated they received 'poor / very poor' advice in respect of engineering and manufacturing, with only 22% of respondents rating their careers advice as good.¹ As well as there being limited information available on progression, future career development and salaries.

¹ Engineering UK (2016), 'Engineering UK 2016: The state of engineering'

Improved access to apprenticeships starts with better information, advice and guidance (IAG)

Employers, education providers and IAG service providers must work collaboratively to develop IAG materials that meet disadvantaged young people's needs and facilitate their understanding, knowledge of apprenticeship availability and progression opportunities in the sector. This must be aimed at the young people themselves as well as at key influencers in their lives.

In the energy and utility sector, over 50% of STEM teachers² have been asked for advice regarding engineering careers but only a third feel confident giving such advice. There is an opportunity to make a significant difference by ensuring that key influencers have the tools to raise the profile of pathways such as apprenticeships – and the rewarding careers in sectors such as energy and utilities that they can lead to. They must be equipped to understand the opportunities available and to communicate these to young people. Equally, the influence of parents, guardians and carers in shaping careers decisions must be recognised. In a recent survey conducted by the Industry Apprenticeship Council, 71% of the respondents said that a parent, guardian or carer had most impact on their decision to enrol on an apprenticeship.

Greater industry exposure throughout education

It is also important for all young people to gain exposure to industry throughout their education. Research shows that young people who have had contact³ with employers at least four times are five times more likely to remain in education, employment or training than those who experience less employer contact. The energy and utility sector prioritises supporting schools with work experience wherever possible, and has made progress. The sector will continue to focus on creating more appropriate work experience opportunities and having meaningful interactions with 14-18 year old students. It also commits to improving early years engagement.

It is therefore important that the technical education routes proposed for the T Levels, which will include up to three months' work experience, represent the skills requirements of all key industries, as these routes may well be the first opportunity disadvantaged learners have of the working world. In the future these will be key feeders into apprenticeship programmes and so we need to make certain that all sectors with skills issues are represented.

Examples of successful employer initiatives to engage with young people include Northern Powergrid's Christmas light workshops and competition to develop a Christmas character with a safety theme and National Grid's high quality, week-long residential engineering experience at its National Training Centre with Year 10 students.

2. How well do you think disadvantaged young people progress in apprenticeships? This can either be to a higher level apprenticeship/qualification or a better paid role within a company.

Early indications that apprenticeships system supports social mobility

The sector supports the overall aims of the apprenticeship reforms and the changes it is making to the system, funding model, standards and assessment plans. Apprenticeships remain a longstanding and pivotal part of the sector's employment approach, and we have been proactive in making a success of

² Engineering UK (2016), 'Engineering UK 2016: The state of engineering'

³ City & Guilds (2012), 'Ways into work: Views of children and young people on education and employment'

the Trailblazer standards, working productively and recognising the need for compromise in the design and development of standards and assessment plan to enable actual starts from 2014. The energy and utilities sector has been in the vanguard of Trailblazer introduction; starting first, developing the most standards and graduating the first ever apprentices.

The apprenticeship changes have raised the overall visibility of apprenticeships, as well as their value among young people. There are indications in our sector that the reforms are supporting social mobility in some areas. We have included in appendix 1 examples of two apprentices from E.ON and UK Power Networks, who have successfully completed the new reformed apprenticeship programme and were one of the first to sit the new end-point assessment and be awarded. The case studies highlight how these apprentices, as a result of completing an apprenticeship, have advanced in their careers, learning and bettered socially.

3. What impact do you think the apprenticeship levy will have? For example on the number of apprenticeships available, the age at which people are employed on to apprenticeships, the levels and regional availability of apprentices. Are these changes positive?

Align with skills shortages

The preliminary findings from our research with the Gatsby Foundation found that the majority of employers' apprenticeship recruitment policy is dependent on business need and workforce strategy. However, the levy has encouraged them to formalise and expand their offering. The widening of apprenticeship programmes in particular by levels and age group is an encouraging and positive change for employers. However, there is more that can be done to facilitate social mobility, including focusing on skills shortage areas – nationally and regionally. This focus will help to meet both societal and employer needs. Therefore, future success measures must include UK and sector skills shortage metrics, along with tailored approaches to facilitate this.

Success measures to encourage social mobility

We welcome the government's additional payments for employers who recruit young apprentices who have either an education or health or care plan; but more is needed to encourage disadvantaged young people to take up apprenticeships and employers to target these groups. The additional success measures introduced by DfE in 'Apprenticeship Reform Programme Benefits Realisation' to widen participation and progression in apprenticeship, is much needed to facilitate social mobility. These must be complemented with additional financial assistance, stakeholder support and flexibility in the apprenticeship programmes (e.g. relaxing Functional Skills requirement or EPA) to enable recruitment and completion of apprenticeships.

4. Is there anything additional you think government/employers/ training providers could do to boost social mobility in apprenticeships?

Employer partnership with third parties helps to target hard to reach groups

Our experience in facilitating partnership working indicates that reaching and attracting hard to reach groups into the sector is a task that requires collaboration among a range of stakeholders and a tailored approach.

A successful example is the 'Bridge to Employment' scheme in Northern Ireland. This is a pre-employment training programme, run by the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland, which helps employers recruit unemployed people regardless of their experience of work. Training is provided according to availability of vacancies and aligned with the requirements of the role. Bridge to Employment has been offered and funded for the past 20 years. Energy & Utility Skills has, in the past 12 years, brokered more than 500 trainees into training and jobs spanning the power, gas and water industries.

In addition, the Energy Training Initiative (Youth) is an example of how the apprenticeship levy can be used to support opportunities for those furthest from the jobs market. This programme was successful on a variety of levels including: enabling employers to access a new and diverse potential workforce; providing access to employability training for young people furthest from the workplace; and building sustainable partnerships between employers, learning providers and those government agencies responsible for transitioning young people into work.

The energy and utility sector is also seeking to reach these 'hard to reach' talent pools by establishing partnerships with key talent providers. The industry talent pool platform, Talent Source Network, developed through the Energy & Utilities Skills Partnership, provides an ideal vehicle for this. Key partners include Career Transition Partnership (to work with service leavers) and the Department for Work and Pensions to work with people currently unemployed.

These approaches could easily be applied to the apprenticeships programme to enable disadvantaged young people to access them.

If you have any questions in relation to this response, please contact
grace.storey@euskills.co.uk.

Appendix – Case Studies

Zoe Finch, Apprentice Smart Metering Engineer, E.ON



What do you do?

"I am now a smart meter engineer with E.ON after an apprenticeship in engineering – I was the first female to do it in England too! I applied for a few apprenticeships before I got this one, which involved me installing gas and electric meters for a year, shadowing experienced installers and engaging with customers."

What did you do before?

"I used to own and run a catering van selling burgers and sandwiches and other food. I wanted to develop my business but I needed to spend £6,000. That's a lot of money and with no guarantee of being any better off or having a stable job afterwards."

"No woman should be put off because an apprenticeship with an energy or utilities company because it could lead to a new career with great prospects."

Why did you choose an engineering apprenticeship?

"Some of my customers said they would prefer to have a woman come to their house to do repairs and installations. This is what made me think a lot of people would welcome to having a female engineer. Also, I thought an apprenticeship scheme would be the best way to start a career in something I knew I'd enjoy."

But you're a woman ...

"To be honest, I wasn't put off because there aren't as many females in jobs like mine, but I think there should be. No woman should be put off because an apprenticeship with an energy or utilities company because it could lead to a new career with great prospects."

Aren't apprenticeships only for school leavers?

"No. I thought I was a bit too old when I started mine at 26. I work with an apprentice now who's 54!"

Alex Sanderson, Apprentice Cable Jointer



What do you do and where do you do it?

"I am based in a depot in Trowse, in Norwich. I connect homes and businesses to the electricity network."

What do you like the most about your role?

"At the moment I'm spending time on building sites and domestic properties extending electricity mains. I really like working on electricity faults because it's so interesting. A fault is like a big puzzle. We have to find and fix the problem to get customers back on supply."

How did you get into it?

"I was training as an electrician before joining **UK Power Networks** in November 2014. It was a good foundation for this role. I was the only female in the first group of **apprentices** in the country to gain the new employer-designed Trailblazer Apprenticeship Standard."

Why did you choose an apprenticeship?

"An apprenticeship is an essential training requirement for the job that I do. A lot of people end up in debt after university and being in a classroom wouldn't have suited me. I'm more of a hands-on person, which is demonstrated in my work."

Why engineering?

"I like the fact this job has great career prospects. If you work hard and prove yourself you can progress. I plan to go into an **engineering** or management role."

"My advice, especially to women, is to never give up. When it gets difficult, just keep going. You will find easier ways of doing things with experience. If it starts off hard it will get easier, but you need to work hard to get to where you want to be."

I'm proud to be the first woman to gain this qualification. I'm dyslexic ... my colleagues couldn't have been more supportive

What challenges did you face?

"I'm proud to be the first woman to gain this qualification. The hard work has paid off. I'm dyslexic, so sometimes needed help writing my reports. My colleagues in Norwich couldn't have been more supportive, they are fantastic."

How does the role match with your expectations: fallen short, equalled or exceeded?

"I didn't come here with fixed expectations because I didn't know much about the role at first. I volunteered to do work experience as a way to see what the work involved, get noticed and as a way to get into the company. My aim is to progress and work my way up."

Why is your role important?

"My role is important because new developments need electricity supplies and if people have a power cut we fix it. Everyone relies on electricity to power mobile phones, tablets and TVs, so it's a crucial job."