



NAW25 Roundtable Report



**SKILLS
FOR LIFE**
APPRENTICESHIPS

**LONDON
SOUTH EAST
COLLEGES** 


**ROYAL borough of
GREENWICH**

11 February 2025

National Apprenticeship Week: Roundtable discussion REPORT

Background:

As part of National Apprenticeship Week 2025, an Apprenticeship Summit was held by the Royal Borough of Greenwich, at Woolwich Works in partnership with London South East Colleges and several other educators and employers.

This annual, all-day event is aimed at promoting apprenticeships as a career pathway for people of all ages, and as a route for employers to develop their existing workforce and address skills shortages.

For the second year running, a roundtable discussion was held as part of the event. Chaired once again by Dr Sam Parrett CBE, Group CEO of London South East Colleges. Attendees included representatives from industry, public services, education and local government.

Theme / focus:

To discuss and explore skills development in England including:

- The newly introduced Growth and Skills Levy
- Foundation apprenticeships
- The Youth Guarantee

To understand what this means for the future of apprenticeship delivery and the post-16 skills landscape in Greenwich and beyond

Context (covered in Chair's Welcome):

Since we all met for last year's roundtable discussion, we have had a change in Government and several new policy announcements.

The *Get Britain Working* White Paper sets out some ambitious reforms, including the commitment to reach 80% employment, introduction of the Youth Guarantee and a more flexible Growth and Skills Levy.

Apprenticeships remain central to this strategy and there is a sense of optimism in the sector, with the establishment of Skills England. However,

while the Royal Borough of Greenwich is doing relatively well in terms of apprenticeship starts, we know there is more to do. Skills gaps are continuing to emerge in many sectors and the need for a robust and effective apprenticeship system is key to addressing these.

Apprenticeships offer an important route into work, supporting people of all ages to develop the skills they need to flourish and lead fulfilling lives. This in turn will support social mobility and economic prosperity across our communities.

However, achieving these goals requires significant collaboration across all sectors. Our now annual roundtable discussion looks at the challenges and opportunities within the apprenticeship landscape, and the commitments/pledges each of our organisations can make to ensure we can develop the next generation of industry experts.

Participants:

Councillors	Local Authority	Education providers	Employers / employer bodies
Cllr Denise Hyland Cllr Adel Kharieh	Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG)	University of Greenwich London South East Colleges (LSEC) Shooters Hill Sixth Form College Dynamic Training JAG Training Charlton Athletic Community Trust (CACT) Flower Skills Greenwich Learns Partnership	The Jobs Foundation Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust Local London London Councils Bromley Healthcare NHS

Summary:

1. Apprenticeship Policy and Funding – Positive steps have been made, such as flexibility in the Apprenticeship Levy and removal of GCSE maths and English barriers for 19+ learners. However, more needs to be done to address the decline in Level 2 apprenticeships and support those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
2. Youth Employment and Skills Gaps – While higher-level apprenticeships are increasing, opportunities at entry levels remain a concern. Youth unemployment is a major challenge, and AI skills are becoming crucial for the future workforce.
3. Collaboration and Workforce Development – Upskilling existing staff, improving employer engagement and better awareness of how to access apprenticeships are critical. Targeted outreach and more flexible eligibility are needed to support underrepresented groups, including SEND learners and refugees.
4. Increasing Apprenticeship Uptake – Employers need greater incentives to offer work experience and take on young apprentices. Changing perceptions around apprenticeships and promoting role models will help drive participation. Stronger collaboration with charities and social enterprises can widen access and improve diversity in apprenticeship recruitment.

Discussion points in detail:

1. Apprenticeship Policy and Funding.

What has changed for you in terms of engagement – and what's NOT changed?
What do you and your organisation want to see from the Government?

Anna McLouglin (Dynamic Training), highlighted the policy announcement that had just been made regarding learners age 19+ no longer needing to have GCSE-level Maths and English to access apprenticeships. This is really positive news for SEND learners, who may not have an EHCP, but for whom an apprenticeship would be an excellent route into work.

There was much discussion last year about the need to make the Apprenticeship Levy more flexible. Michelle Rankin (RGB) highlighted the positive impact of being able to transfer unspent levy money to local SMEs. Over half a million pounds has been made available and kept in the borough, rather than having to return it to the treasury.

It was noted how helpful this levy transfer had been on the ground, supporting smaller employers to engage and take on apprenticeships.

Debbie Warren (RGB), who started her own career as an apprentice, said that the Government is listening, and things are inching forward positively. However, many wider social issues are impacting on apprenticeship participation, including the many young people living in poverty, knife crime and gang issues. These challenges must be recognised and tackled with better wrap-around support for example, travel costs, lunches etc. How can a young person access an apprenticeship if they can't even get to their workplace/college?

The reduction in Level 2 apprenticeships was highlighted as an issue especially with traineeships no longer being run. This is leading to fewer young people getting access to opportunities, but there is hope that the youth guarantee may help improve this.

The popular Level 2 Business Administration apprenticeship was highlighted by LSEC's Neil Coates - which was lost when frameworks were replaced with standards. After five years of campaigning by the sector and employers, a new standard has now been approved - demonstrating that collective action can effect positive change in terms of policy.

2. Youth Unemployment

Despite more people being in work overall, youth unemployment is currently very high, and this is a major risk to achieving the Government's 80% employment target.

In the Royal Borough of Greenwich, there were 6,000 apprenticeships start last year, recovering from 5,000 the previous year. However, it's the higher-level apprenticeships that have driven this rise, accounting for 1,500 of them (up from 500 in 2022/23). This is disguising the fact that have been less opportunities at Levels 2 and 3, which is a concern for younger people wanting to access employment and training.

The rise of AI was noted as being an area of rapid growth, which people need to engage with. Jeremy Floros (Jobs Foundation) highlighted that an understanding of AI and how it will be applied across different industries should be a focus for younger people entering the workforce, and indeed, those already in it as the world of work is changing.

3. Upskilling a workforce

The importance of helping people to progress in their careers was highlighted, with a hope that the transformation of jobcentres into a national jobs and careers service will support this upskilling.

Steve Harris (Greenwich Learning Partnership) raised the issue of people not knowing or understanding what options are available. We need stability to the apprenticeships offer with the right opportunities – and then the right communication to ensure schools, employers, parents and individuals are aware of the benefits.

Sam Parrett (LSEC) provided an example of the successful Teaching Assistant apprenticeship, at Levels 2 and 3. There are currently 56 of these apprentices at LSEC, many of which will go onto a full teaching training programme. This is where Level 7 apprenticeships are so important, particularly at a time when recruitment and retention in teaching is such a challenge.

RGB's Nick Davies agreed that clarity and understanding of what's 'out there' is needed. Training for staff to understand the offer and a look more closely at what we can do for harder to reach groups, like those with SEND and refugees.

A major barrier to this is the current qualifying conditions, which require people to have been residents in the UK for at least three years. We need to look at pragmatic flexibilities, which will support both the individuals wanting to train in an industry, and the employers who have the skills gaps.

4. How can we collaborate better to prepare young people for the workplace?

Supporting people in harder to reach groups

To help people with SEND, we need to ensure that the people helping them understand their needs and ideally, lived experience. For example, Anna Mcloughlin explained that employing trainers who themselves may be autistic, to deliver training to the wider workforce to foster a greater understanding of the challenges and barriers they may face in the workplace.

Better awareness

Denise Hyland highlighted that nearly 400 young people were attending the Apprenticeships Summit today, enabling them to find out more about the routes and opportunities available.

We need more role models and examples of where being an apprentice can take you.

Employers need to be encouraged and perhaps incentivised to take on apprentices with commitments built into procurement processes and contracts. As an example, Sam Parrett highlighted how LSEC is re-building its college campus in Greenwich, and its developer (Kier) will be taking students on for work experience and delivering careers workshops to support social mobility.

5. How can we make sure the number of apprenticeships continues to rise?

Neil Coates highlighted that employers are opting to upskill staff via higher apprenticeships, rather than taking on young people at lower levels – and we need to address this.

From conversations with employers, the main reason they don't want to take on young people at Levels 2 and 3 is due to a lack of softer, employability skills like timekeeping and communications. With the National Insurance burden increasing for employers, they are even more likely to employ people with experience and skills, rather than trainees.

The irony is that employers want people to have work experience – but then aren't always prepared to offer it! And how can we then support progression from work experience to an apprenticeship?

Debbie Warren explained that as an employer, there are no incentives to offer work experience, especially for SMEs. It needs to be an easier for employers to take on young people for work experience, with less bureaucracy.

So, what can we do?

We need to get closer to the young people who need help – many of whom live challenging lives, often without stable family units. Communication about apprenticeships and other training opportunities needs to be much more targeted, rather than a blanket approach. We need to ensure that those who already feel excluded are supported – and that access is widened.

If we continue to collaborate with the same people, we are not going to bring in the wider diversity that is needed to help solve this issue.

We need to widen our networks out, perhaps to include more charities and social enterprises, with a focus on role models and peer support. For example, Looked After Children and many other disadvantaged groups would benefit from this type of mentoring.

Employers may not want to take on young people perceived to be from these groups – but we need to change this perception and talk more about the many benefits of taking on an apprentice.

Apprentices can help solve problems, as they are a way for employers to secure a pipeline of future employees.

David James from Charlton Athletic Community Trust explained how wraparound care for young people is crucial, as well as working with the family of that young person. This helps give them a better understanding of the opportunities, how to access apprenticeships and placements, and in some case, the financial support to help them do this.

Daniel Jones from Bromley Healthcare highlighted the high retention rate of people progressing up through an apprenticeship. Some young people see an apprenticeship as a negative thing, with perceived low pay. This perception must be changed.

Developing your existing workforce is also crucial – which is why Level 7 apprenticeships remain key. We need people to progress to ensure vacancies are created.

Nigel Hogg from Oxleas NHS explained some of the limitations they have with taking on apprentices due to age restrictions. It is a challenging landscape, especially in the harder to recruit professions. People need clear career pathways.

Priorities and actions

The Apprenticeship Steering Group (ASG) set out the following priorities going forward:

1. Redouble efforts to increase the number of young people, particularly NEETs, securing apprenticeship opportunities. Align this activity to support the government's new Youth Guarantee, emerging foundation apprenticeships and Youth Trailblazer. Establish measurable KPIs for this goal, led by RBG and members of the Apprenticeship Steering Group (ASG).
2. Convene a time-limited working group to workshop ideas for the Local London Youth Trailblazer pilot – led by the Local London Director with input from some members of the ASG.
3. Launch a local apprenticeship campaign aimed at recruiting young apprentices. Utilise modern and proven communication channels such as TikTok to raise awareness, with Ravensbourne leading this initiative.
4. Outline progression pathways from T levels, including work experience to foundation apprenticeships, and then onwards to Level 2 and above in key priority sectors. This should be linked to the Local Skills Improvement Plan and based on local labour market intelligence, with LSEC leading and input from Jobcentre, RBG and ASG members.
5. Strengthen links with Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to reach vulnerable young people. Develop wraparound support provision, mentoring opportunities, along with other interventions e.g. support with travel, childcare costs to ensure the most disadvantaged young people are supported to stay on programmes. CACT leading and input from RBG and ASG members.

6. Develop and publish clear information, advice and guidance on how refugees and asylum seekers can access pre-apprenticeship training and apprenticeship jobs. Work closely with Borough of Sanctuary partners and other local anchor organisations to embed and promote the offer – RBG with input from ASG members
7. Support transitional planning towards the Growth and Skills Levy and develop a local post-16 skills plan for the borough which reflects post-16 reforms.
8. Set up a task and finish working group to advance key areas of delivery and report on progress at the quarterly ASG meetings and deliver key updates and present at the next Annual Apprenticeship Summit in 2026.

Appendix:

Attendees

Organisation	Name
Bromley Healthcare NHS	Daniel Jones
Charlton Athletic Community Trust	David James
Dynamic Training	Anna McLoughlin
Flower Skills	Jason Bodimeade
Greenwich Learns Partnership	Steve Harris
JAG Training	Geraldine Julius
Local London	Forogh Rahmani
London Councils	Natasha Dowie
LSEC	Sarah Newman
LSEC	Helen Sharpe
LSEC	Dr Sam Parrett (Chair)
LSEC	Neil Coates
LSEC	Nina Sian

NHS	Nigel Hogg
RBG	Cllr Denise Hyland
RBG	Debbie Warren
RBG	Nick Davies
RBG	Cllr Adel Kharieh
RBG	Michelle Rankin
Shooters Hill 6th Form College	Theresa Bray
The Jobs Foundation	Jerry Floros
UoG	Rachel Brandwood