

## **Education Select Committee Apprenticeships and Skills Training Inquiry: WorldSkills UK Response**

1 WorldSkills UK welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education Select Committee's inquiry into the quality of apprenticeships and skills training. WorldSkills UK is all about helping young people go further, faster in their careers; helping them gain the skills that employers need most. Through skills competitions and experiential careers advice we aim to help young people from all backgrounds get the best start in both work and life. Our extensive interaction with young people, schools, colleges, independent training providers and businesses places us at the centre of the debate on how to ensure policies are developed to deliver the best possible outcomes for young people.

1.1 The Government's increasing focus on apprenticeships and technical education has been a positive development. Apprenticeships offer young people excellent opportunities to build greater expertise in their chosen careers and learn skills that will benefit them throughout their working lives. The Government's target of 3m apprenticeship starts is an important one and is often the focus of debate about the trade-off between quantity and quality.

1.2 There is nothing to suggest that the Government is looking to achieve 3m apprenticeships at the expense of quality. WorldSkills UK believes that it will be possible to deliver the increased numbers at the same time as ensuring quality. The Institute for Apprenticeships has an important role in guaranteeing the quality of apprenticeship starts. We welcome its establishment as a body that can provide objective assessment of the Government's apprenticeships policy and reliable data that will allow stakeholders to judge its effectiveness. It is vitally important that as the volume of apprenticeships starts increases in the years ahead, the quality of apprentices' learning experiences follows the highest possible standards.

Therefore, in this response we set out our thinking on how:

- Achieving world-class apprenticeships and technical skills training starts with world-class careers advice;
- Embedding WorldSkills standards could support world-class apprenticeships; and
- Learning from major businesses already working in partnership with WorldSkills UK could help deliver higher quality apprenticeships.

## **2. Achieving world-class apprenticeships and technical skills training starts with world-class careers advice**

2.1 In the recently published Careers Strategy, the Apprenticeships and Skills Minister sets out the Government's vision for the standards expected of the careers advice that young people are able to access: "Our careers provision must be world class to help people understand the range of opportunities available to them in today's economy and acquire the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in the workplaces of the future"<sup>1</sup>.

2.2 It is widely accepted that the general quality of careers advice across the country has considerable room for improvement. There is a long-term challenge around the apprenticeship route not being viewed as attractive as the university route by both young people and parents. Recent Ipsos Mori research reinforces this trend<sup>2</sup>. Amongst 11-16 year olds, the young people who we need to attract into apprenticeships, there is a worrying deficit. Only one in seven say they would consider pursuing

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<sup>1</sup> DfE (2017). Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents.

<sup>2</sup> Ipsos Mori (2017). Challenges and opportunities [research produced for AoC Conference].

an apprenticeship as opposed to A-levels and the same number – one in seven – say their school has encouraged them to pursue an apprenticeship. These numbers are of concern as they highlight the scale of the task facing society to encourage young people to choose apprenticeships and technical careers. The only way we can reverse these perceptions and stubborn trends is through investing in high quality models of careers advice and guidance. With the recent publication of the Careers Strategy, the Government is demonstrating leadership on this issue. The strategy sets out how we can help young people make the most-informed choices to help realise their full potential. A crucial part of this will be ensuring that more young people are inspired about the benefits of apprenticeships and technical careers. WorldSkills UK is already making a big contribution to this through The Skills Show.

2.3 The Skills Show – the nation’s largest skills and careers event – is the premier UK platform for world-class inspiration. It is a major showcase for skills and hundreds of employers across key sectors of the economy are present to engage young people, parents and educators about the career opportunities available. It has actively engaged thousands of young people every year since 2012 – and it works. We know that over half of young people consider an apprenticeship after attending the Show. There is an equally powerful impact amongst educators. Immediately after the Show 97% planned to engage in some form of follow-up activity; three months later fully 99% had taken part in one follow up action. This includes 90% of educators who had encouraged young people to consider a technical education route. Similarly, parents are influenced by what they see and hear – 80% were likely or highly likely to undertake some follow up activity; 73% cited researching technical careers<sup>3</sup>. The Show’s model, built around ‘have a go’ activities, top class expert advice and featuring the national finals of WorldSkills UK competitions, is unique – there is nowhere else in the UK that engages young people in this way. It is especially powerful for encouraging interest in apprenticeships since it allows young people to envisage their potential ‘career journey’ across a range of industries, including engineering, creative, digital, construction and retail. At The Skills Show, a young person has the opportunity to hear from an apprentice about how their life has changed since taking that route; they can experience, interactively, what an apprenticeship might be like in a workplace in the full range of skills; and they can see those skills being applied to national standards through the skills competitions. This ‘360’ perspective is only possible at an event with the scale and scope to deliver it. It’s why The Skills Show is so successful and why apprenticeships have become an integral part of its offer. Speaking at The Skills Show in November 2017, Apprenticeship and Skills Minister, Rt Hon Anne Milton MP, said: ‘This is absolutely critical for the future of the UK’s economy’; Education Select Committee Chair, Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, said: ‘The Skills Show isn’t just an exhibition; it shows the future of where Britain could be’.

2.4 In partnership with the Careers & Enterprise Company we have piloted a programme called Skills Champions which has helped to raise the prestige of apprenticeships and technical education in careers advice cold spots – reaching nearly 3,000 students, across Tees Valley, Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire, Greater Manchester, London, South East England and Cornwall. It involves young people who have recently completed apprenticeships and have represented the UK at international skills competitions, achieving world-class standards in the process, going into schools to deliver peer-to-peer careers advice. The programme has made a tremendous impact in schools, as evidenced by feedback from students and teachers<sup>4</sup>. For students, 76% said hearing from a Skills Champion has made them feel inspired and motivated, with a further 76% saying they now know more about technical skills-based careers than before. Fully 100% of teachers are either satisfied or very satisfied with their experience of the session, whilst 91% are likely or far more likely to encourage young people to consider pursuing technical skills based careers and education. We are ambitious to roll this programme out across the UK and in a digital format to increase its reach and impact.

### **3. Embedding WorldSkills standards could support world-class apprenticeships**

3.1 Perhaps the most important aspect of apprenticeships policy to get right is to ensure the delivery of world-class standards. Standards matter for the young people starting an apprenticeship as they need to have the confidence that, in becoming an apprentice and not going to university, they can achieve the same high quality career prospects that the more established university route is shown to deliver. They matter to Government as the acid test of whether policy on apprenticeships has been a success

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<sup>3</sup> WorldSkills UK (2017). Independent evaluation of The Skills Show 2016.

<sup>4</sup> WorldSkills UK (2017). Evaluation of Skills Champions project.

will be through the quality of training that those apprentices have received. For employers, standards matter as through the apprenticeship levy they will be making a significant financial investment; this can reap important benefits if apprentices are properly equipped to undertake the skilled vacancies that businesses increasingly need to fill.

3.2 Clear, simple and relevant standards will underpin the quality of the apprenticeship system, so we need to ensure that they encourage world-class delivery and performance. WorldSkills UK manages a set of standards that underpin our skills competitions. According to the National Audit Office, 62% of apprenticeships started during the period 2010-2015 were at level 2<sup>5</sup>. At WorldSkills UK, we have developed thousands of apprentices to perform their roles at levels 4, 5 and above – the vocational equivalent of an honours degree – by preparing them for the international WorldSkills competition. We believe that the assessment processes that the skills competitions use can also help employers develop their apprenticeship structures. The adoption of WorldSkills UK competition standards in apprenticeship programmes and the training to get them to this standard can inspire apprentices to develop skills beyond competence. Our standards are making a significant contribution to the development of world-class apprenticeships.

3.3 For young people, colleges, training providers and employers to see the full benefit of applying WorldSkills UK standards we would like entry into skills competitions being increasingly seen as the natural complement to a higher-quality apprenticeship. Thousands of apprentices have maximised their learning opportunities through competing regionally, nationally and internationally. We know that over 95% of competitors believe that taking part in competitions has improved their technical and employability skills. Competing can provide lasting career benefits including the chance to represent the UK at European and international skills competitions. WorldSkills UK is working with our partners to encourage even greater participation in the competitions.

#### **4 Learning from major businesses already working in partnership with WorldSkills UK could help deliver higher quality apprenticeships**

4.1 There is already a lot of good practice out there. Businesses which have embraced skills competitions to give young people opportunities to flourish in the workplace are reaping rewards through added efficiency and productivity. Through the examples of companies like Toyota, Electroimpact and Briggs & Forrester, we can be confident about the progress of the Government's target of 3m apprenticeship starts and the commitment of UK industry to deliver the high growth, productive economy that the recently published Industrial Strategy envisages over the next decade.

##### **Toyota Manufacturing UK: Using skills competitions to set the highest world-class standards in apprenticeships**

Intense competition in the automotive industry prompted parent company Toyota to challenge Toyota Manufacturing UK to demonstrate premium quality and skill. The premium quality of its product speaks for itself, but demonstrating premium skill was more complex.

In 2013, Toyota started to benchmark the skills of their current workforce against the best in the UK, attending WorldSkills UK Competitions to identify skills gaps. Development plans were put in place to close the gaps, addressing work accuracy, speed and error control. Following this, Toyota was confident that its workforce was as good as the best in the UK and able to successfully compete in WorldSkills UK national competitions, achieving notable success.

The challenge was then to look at the international level of skills competitions. Colleagues at Toyota Japan were involved to ensure the highest global standards were applied, and using the WorldSkills Competition framework, further skills were integrated into apprenticeships. Competitions now run alongside training, and apprentices carry out their skills at Level 6, the required skill base to compete internationally, and three levels higher than the majority of apprenticeship programmes that are run in the UK. Competitions are enhancing standards by setting extra challenges, mirroring what UK businesses need to do in order to be competitive.

<sup>5</sup> NAO (2016). Delivering value through the apprenticeships programme.

By 2015, apprenticeship places were up to 36 from 24, which the company puts down to the success of Robyn Clarke and Andy Smith, apprentices in maintenance engineering, who competed as part of Team UK at WorldSkills São Paulo 2015. Toyota also reached the world-class standard in the Mechatronics Competition and was awarded a Medallion of Excellence. The commitment to competing was highlighted by the Managing Director of Toyota UK's visit to WorldSkills São Paulo. Building on this success, Sam Hillier and Tom Revell won bronze in Mechatronics at EuroSkills Gothenburg 2016 and medallions of excellence at WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017. The new Mechatronics Maintenance Technician apprenticeship includes elements of international competitions to ensure standards are continually being raised.

### **Electroimpact: Driving increased productivity through apprentices' involvement in skills competitions**

Electroimpact designs and manufactures aerospace tooling and automation, and is the largest integrator of aircraft assembly lines in the world. Its customer base includes Airbus; Boeing; Kawasaki; Mitsubishi; Vought; Northrop-Grumman and Bombardier among others.

Electroimpact's headquarters is in Washington USA. It has a significant presence in the UK with over 100 engineers, and employs 600 degree-qualified engineers worldwide. Electroimpact started competing in WorldSkills UK Competitions in 2015 with immediate success. Its apprentices won Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals in the 2016 WorldSkills UK Competitions National Finals. One apprentice, Ethan Davies, went on to represent the UK in Euroskills Gothenburg 2016 and WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017.

In early 2015 one of Electroimpact's apprentices asked if he could enter the WorldSkills UK Competition in CNC Milling after he attended The Skills Show and was inspired by the National Finals. Matt Booth, Electroimpact's UK Manufacturing Lead, decided it was a good idea to enter him: "We knew our apprentices were good at their jobs but we wanted to see how good they were compared with the rest of the country; to use it as an opportunity to benchmark against others – to see how their training's going, how we're doing.

"You're always competing to be the best regardless, but the fact that it is a UK-wide competition and we got a clean sweep of medals in 2016, means we can say that our apprentices are officially the best in the UK at CNC milling. It's also a great chance for a company in rural North Wales to show that we (Electroimpact, Wales and the UK) have a massive influence on skills development in this sector."

In an industry where production time is vital, Matt Booth saw the pressure testing environment of the competitions as a way to push his apprentices to hone their skills and improve efficiency.

"WorldSkills UK Competitions hold [the apprentices'] focus on the job and they get their lead times down. They have learnt to cope with time pressures more efficiently, do machine set ups and programme them, and to complete the jobs in the quickest time."

The skill-specific training the apprentices have received throughout the WorldSkills UK programme has led to innovation and process optimisation internally, saving the company time and money:

"I've always said there's many ways to approach a task; I would machine something different to someone else. Through WorldSkills UK Competitions, the competitors are exposed to different ideas and different ways to do the same job. After attending the Mastercam training course ahead of the National Finals they came back to the job they were working on, applied the training and knocked 20 minutes off a two-hour machine cycle time. This meant savings in production time and manufacturing costs – reducing the cost of our products and getting better quality."

Matt Booth has also noticed that those who have competed increase in confidence and have a greater sense of responsibility:

“You can’t go to the competitions and hold their hand; they have to do it themselves. All our apprentices were surprised with what they could achieve and it gives them such a boost of confidence... the pride that they got that far, that they went somewhere and represented the company and that they got to showcase their skills.”

### **Briggs & Forrester: Using apprentices’ competitive edge to grow the business**

Briggs & Forrester has been at the forefront of the building services engineering market for over 70 years and is one of the industry’s largest independent contractors with an annual turnover of more than £180m.

The company prides itself that each employee has the opportunity to make the most of their skills and abilities, supported through a mentoring scheme and full on-the-job coaching and training. Central to the success of its four-year apprenticeships programme is developing the capacity of apprentices to produce a high standard of work under specified conditions. The business uses skills competitions to develop the mindset of apprentices to meet these challenges and the standards set at national and international competitions to produce high quality work.

For Briggs & Forrester the opportunity to have its apprentices compete in WorldSkills UK Competitions was an exciting proposition: to encourage and support them to be the best in their skills category and increase professional recognition for them as a business. The organisation was experiencing geographical growth and the competitions provided a firm foundation for existing and potential clients to recognise that Briggs & Forrester is an established business, which provides personal development opportunities to its staff and is raising installation standards in the process.

As Briggs & Forrester’s engagement with WorldSkills UK grew, so did its understanding of the level of investment and the excellence in standards that is found in WorldSkills UK. Over time, employee engagement and interest in skills competitions grew, along with the business’s ambitions for how they could be used as tool to support its training and development offer.

As an employer, Briggs & Forrester needs to always make the business case for the investment in skills competitions. One of the strongest factors in doing this is the positive attitudes, behaviours and competencies that apprentices develop through their competition experience and the support it provides their career development.

As Labour Manager, Pete Curtis’s role is to manage the hourly paid resources department, from recruitment and selection to development and supervision of apprentices. Last year, he was able to visit EuroSkills, the major European skills competition, to gain an understanding of the competition experience, standards and assessments that his apprentice Dan Martin was going through in the competition:

“WorldSkills UK Competitions have demonstrated the high levels of commitment and skills required to compete along with an appreciation of pressure the apprentices are under, this is not as daunting as it may seem due to the support of the WorldSkills UK Experts and Performance Coaches. The stress of challenges are effectively turned into positive outcomes”.

Briggs & Forrester is developing a way that it can adopt the behaviour, attitudes and communication skills competitors develop into the business’s training programmes.

Working closely with WorldSkills UK Experts to develop an understanding of the standards and methods of assessment used for national and international competitions is an important factor for Briggs & Forrester which is involved in developing the apprenticeship standards for building services engineering. It has found a noticeable increase in the standard and quality of work developed by apprentices that have participated in national and international competitions:

“Apprentices that have competed in skills competitions have increased their ability to understand the requirements and expectations of management, developed strong business acumen and the

initiative to take action in the right moments. Naturally, through competing in pressured conditions we see an improvement in productivity and quality of their work, which raises the bar among fellow apprentices on what can be achieved. This develops greater employee engagement all around, with a raised level of ambition and enthusiasm among apprentices - resulting in a high performance culture.”

Briggs & Forrester is so convinced of the impact and effectiveness of the competition methodology that they are working with WorldSkills UK to look at ways of embedding the training and development into the wider organisation. In particular how to transfer the conditions undertaken in a competition in terms of time, finite equipment, quality and marking schemes into this system. With the goal being that apprentices are able to complete a task with greater speed and accuracy. Pete Curtis added:

“The environmental (external) pressures drive us to seek competitive advantages over others in order to compete and survive, WorldSkills UK Competitions provide a platform to encourage increased performance within the workforce.”

Briggs & Forrester is involved in developing the apprenticeship standards for building services engineering craftspeople, with several other organisations. They are working with WorldSkills UK to explore using the competition methodology for assessment and standards as an aspirational benchmark for apprentices to work towards. This allows them to develop apprentices who are exceeding the required level of skills needed for the current apprenticeship standards.

Pete Curtis also commented that his involvement in WorldSkills UK has allowed him to enhance his own skills which has helped him in his role with the company:

“I was able to develop my understanding of the coaching methodology used by WorldSkills UK and think about different ways this could be used in the business to support and motivate our apprentices. Also the networking opportunities and exposure to standards across different industries has aided me in my role in developing the apprenticeship standards.”

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