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WEEK
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National Apprenticeship Week

In the months leading up to this year's Apprenticeship Week the media have questioned the rapid growth and quality of the scheme. *FE Week*, among other news outlets, has looked into its fair share of colleges and private training providers brought to the fore by concerned parents, learners or industry professionals. Questions about the quality of the apprenticeship programme have led to an inquiry from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Select Committee, an employer-led review of apprenticeship standards and a new minimum duration for all learners aged between 16 and 18. It's been a turbulent six months.

We shouldn't forget, however, that these case studies are but a small proportion of apprenticeship provision as a whole. There is still a lot to celebrate in the further education sector, with some fantastic schemes offering people of all ages prestigious vocational skills. Employers both large and small are continuing to offer professional opportunities in an economic climate which appears increasingly bleak. Apprenticeships are a government programme which everyone should support.

National Apprenticeship Week is a chance to improve the profile and reputation of vocational training among potential employers and learners, teachers and parents, as well as the media and the wider public. Now in its fifth year, the campaign aims to raise awareness about the apprenticeships brand, as well as the positive impact they have on individuals and businesses.

John Hayes, minister of state for further education, skills and lifelong learning, said: "Thanks to record investment, combined with tough measures to drive up standards, the Government has created the biggest and best Apprenticeships programme in our country's history.

"And we will go further, giving employers new incentives to train young people and creating opportunities for apprentices to develop their talents to degree level and beyond.

"National Apprenticeship Week is the time to celebrate the countless achievements of learners and employers, and to call on more firms to say 'you're hired' to a new apprentice."

Created and overseen by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), the campaign runs from February 6-10 and looks to be the biggest ever, with more than 500 events and activities scheduled across the country.

National Apprenticeship Week has three aims; to engage and persuade employers of the advantages of employing and supporting apprentices in their workplace, to

highlight the talent and skills of apprentices to employers and the wider public and to highlight the range of Apprenticeships available in different sectors, as well as the progression routes available to potential apprentices.

Further education colleges, training providers and employers have been encouraged to create their own National Apprenticeship Week events. The schedule (see p10 and p11) includes a networking event held by apprentices at Channel 4, school visits in Cheshire by apprentices at Bentley Motors', and 'Generation Digital', an event aimed at managing directors, heads of HR and senior managers who want to be involved in the new 'Digital Media Apprenticeships'.

"We will go further, giving employers new incentives to train young people and creating opportunities for apprentices" John Hayes, MP

Simon Waugh, chief executive of the NAS, said: "Apprenticeships provide businesses with a significant return on investment by increasing productivity and introducing fresh new talent and innovation. They are also a sound stepping stone for individuals to build successful careers.

"We are delighted that so many organisations are supporting National Apprenticeship Week by organising events to showcase these

benefits. There are some fantastic activities on offer, which I am certain will inspire more companies and individuals to reap the benefits of Apprenticeships for themselves."

The printed supplement which you're holding right now, produced by *FE Week* in partnership with NCFE, is a celebration of apprenticeships.

Further inside you'll find columns from industry experts such as Lynne Sedgmore, chief executive of the 157 Group, Graham Hoyle, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) and David Hughes, chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

And that's not all, as Nick Linford, managing director of Lsect and managing editor of *FE Week*, has produced a huge technical feature explaining the recent Statistical First Release (SFR) data (see p12 through to p15).

So there's plenty to get stuck into. Throughout the week, make sure you stay up to date with National Apprenticeships Week by following the hash tag #NAW2012 on Twitter (see back page) or by following @feweek online.



FE Week's own Nick Summers tries his hand at a range of vocational skills.

Apprenticeships
National Apprenticeship Week
6 - 10 February 2012

Safeguarding the definition of apprenticeships



select committee to firstly secure a clear, universal definition of an apprenticeship. We set out our proposed definition in our well-received position paper to ministers last autumn, namely:

“An apprenticeship is a competence based skill development programme, designed and endorsed by employers for their employees, which combines independently accredited work based learning, off-the-job training and relevant experience in the job.”

This definition implies an acceptance, as allowed since Modern Apprenticeships were introduced in 1994, that apprenticeships can be for employees of any age in response to employers’ needs although we fully understand current policy prioritising towards young people.

It means therefore that it is incorrect to simply think of apprenticeships as a means of job creation for young people.

Protecting the brand

We support the coalition government’s ambitions to see more apprentices complete at levels 3 and 4.

However, all levels of apprenticeships offer high quality training which brings extensive benefits to both the employer and the apprentice.

Whilst we would encourage progression to level 3 apprenticeships wherever

possible, it must be recognised that in many occupations and sectors a level 2 apprenticeship is the most appropriate level of qualification, offering the right quality, skills, knowledge and benefits to the apprentices and their employers.

Opinion-formers and policymakers in their well-meaning attempts to defend the apprenticeship ‘brand’ would be in our view misguided if they sought to deny a valued qualification that employers ultimately own and protect.

This is not to say that employers have or should have free rein to call any type of workforce training an apprenticeship when public money is involved.

Proper apprenticeships should be subject to the same audit scrutiny, Ofsted inspection regimes and SASE compliance with the sector skills council playing an important role as custodians of standards.

This is very pertinent to the current pilot being proposed for the ‘Employer Ownership of Skills Development’ where apprenticeships may well feature in some of the employer bids.

Our select committee submission refers to previous AELP proposals on how apprenticeships should be funded by the state, employers and learners, bearing in mind that loans are on the horizon.

With the government announcement that

apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds must last a full 12 months and the additional costs of Functional Skills to be added, it is unfortunate that the funding rate for this age group has been cut by 2per cent. Quality provision comes at a cost.

At a time when the government is trying to grow the number of young people starting apprenticeships, this rate cut will surely create a tension between increasing volumes and maintaining quality.

Role of the NAS

National Apprenticeship Week comes under the remit of the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and we support the marketing initiatives that the agency is undertaking to promote the programme to employers, particularly those to raise awareness among SMEs.

The National Careers Service may be coming on stream in April but AELP believes that NAS can play a particularly valuable role in schools, explaining to young people, their teachers and parents that apprenticeships offer a high quality vocational training that will suit many young people better than the traditional academic route after the age of 16.

With success rates at 74 per cent, and rising, our apprenticeships are something we should be proud of and celebrate.

Graham Hoyle, CEO of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers

The debate around apprenticeships over the last few months, which has now prompted a Commons select committee inquiry, was originally sparked by *FE Week*’s coverage of ‘short-course’ apprenticeships and we know that the publication is able to talk knowledgeably about the subject, even if we may not always agree with its opinions.

However I cannot extend the same compliment to some of the other comment which I have seen on the matter.

First and foremost some observers seem to hold a traditional and therefore inaccurate view of what an apprenticeship actually is.

That is why the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), which represents providers who deliver over 70 per cent of apprenticeships in England, is using its submission to the

How do we incentivise the employers?



Apprenticeships we will be emphasising a number of key points.

Firstly we welcome any growth in the numbers of 16 to 18 year old Apprenticeships, particularly in the current climate, but we would like to see as great a focus on the 19 to 24 year olds who are struggling to find employment or training opportunities.

Secondly, we need to see more evidence of recruiting apprentices to ‘real’ jobs. A number of training providers need to show more evidence of job outcomes; it is simply not good enough that in the past some apprentices have been recruited for seasonal work and short employment contracts.

We support the employer ownership agenda; employers need to be taking greater responsibility for investment in training if they want to meet their own skills needs.

However, at the same time, government needs to work harder to push the right messages to employers and to reduce bureaucracy as much as possible to incentivise co-operation.

“We believe a rebate on tax or National Insurance would work better than a cash payment”

There should be a bigger drive and push to convince SMEs of the value and ROI of taking on apprentices but we believe NAS’

Apprenticeship Week will be doing just that and we look forward to the media coverage.

Last but not least there needs to be more clarity on what does and does not constitute a 50 per cent contribution for 19 to 24 year old Apprenticeships as this is being interpreted differently by every provider.

Some financial incentives for employers might help, but in this difficult economic time we believe a rebate on tax or National Insurance would work better than a cash payment.

All in all we feel that NAS was started up with good intentions, but has a stretch to do to improve on quality, position Apprenticeships strongly in the market place and convince employers of the true worth and value of apprentices.

Lynne Sedgmore, Executive Director for the 157 Group

The key word is already in Apprenticeships. We need to be doing more to ‘entice’ SMEs and other employers to take on Apprentices and even more importantly, offer real Apprenticeships that are based on ‘real’ jobs.

In our submission to the BIS Inquiry on

The empowering role of apprenticeships



Despite a lot of media coverage of apprenticeships in the last year, not enough has been heard from the apprentices themselves. We know that the Government and employers invest in the apprenticeship programme and that they get a healthy return on their investment. Apprentices also make an investment so it is worth reflecting on the 'return' for them.

Last year we carried out a survey of 81 people from across the country, aged 17 to 61, who had been nominated for the Adult Learners' Week Adult Apprentice of the Year Award, sponsored by Pearson. The

results were incredible and show just how worthwhile the increased investment in apprenticeships is for all sorts of people at all stages of their lives.

For many, the experience has truly transformed their lives: "Doing the apprenticeship has changed my life. I am much more focussed. I am doing a real job in a real workplace gaining the most brilliant experience." Underlying this is the sense that it has given them a fresh start and has helped them prove to themselves and to others that they are not a failure. "I feel that as a middle-aged woman what I have achieved is remarkable. My journey has not finished – it has only just begun."

Even more than this, the impact reaches forward into future learning, personal development and family life. "I am so sorted now, feeling much more positive about myself and my family are more relaxed around me and are proud of me."

If they are that good then making the case for more investment must be easy and it certainly looks positive with the very welcome and large increase in

Government investment. From 2013, those over the age of 24 will need to take out a loan for their apprenticeship and there is a lot of understandable concern about the impact this will have on fairness and equality (see NIACE Adults' Learning extra January 2012) but perhaps too little thinking about the potential positives.

Our survey of adult apprentices not only gave evidence of the benefits, it also taught us how important it is to listen to the learner experience. Our respondents had ideas about how to improve quality, how to advise potential apprentices, what worked for them and what might work better for others. In the best examples, learners felt empowered at work, at home and in their communities.

With FE Loans, the learner/apprentice will be the purchaser, will feel able to shop around, will look for the best offer. Will this be empowering?

Will people with the right advice and guidance, with better public information, be able to demand a better quality offer? Will this result in a more personalised learning experience, with curriculum and

delivery designed to meet their needs? Will people demand a more blended offer, with more use of technology and distance learning? Any provider of training who can tap into this demand will surely be more successful, just like in any other market-place?

So, here at NIACE we are keen to do more work to capture the apprentice voice, to help empower learners to get more of what they need and to support people to get the best possible information, advice and guidance to be able to be informed customers. It will be fascinating to see if the introduction of FE Loans helps accelerate this.

The final words should go to an apprentice: "If it wasn't for my apprenticeship I would still be stuck in a rut with no direction to walk in. Now I have this qualification I feel a new person with limitless possibilities and it has given me back the drive to learn to further myself in my career. I owe my whole career down to one qualification – thank you!"

David Hughes, CEO of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

In need of innovation



The government's commitment to promoting and funding more Apprenticeships has been welcomed by those who are working hard to tackle youth unemployment.

Skills minister John Hayes set out his vision for Apprenticeships, saying that by increasing routes to learning we could "seed opportunities for thousands of Britons and build the economically successful and socially just nation we crave".

We applaud this vision - but to achieve it, all of us involved in delivering skills and training to young people now need to play our part and think innovatively about how to integrate employment and skills.

Recent reports suggesting that Apprenticeships are not being taken up by the under 25s and those out of work are concerning. And it's self-evident that to optimise the value of Apprenticeships in addressing the unprecedented challenge presented by youth unemployment, training provision must recognise and respond to the needs of young, unemployed people.

Last year, the government implemented the biggest change to the welfare to work sector in ten years, providing a single, personalised structure for all customer groups and superseding the complicated raft of national programmes previously on offer.

As a provider of the government's Work Programme, it is also clear to us at Working Links that organisations such as ourselves are in the perfect position to help the youngest benefit claimants prepare for and secure Apprenticeships, ensuring that coveted apprentice slots are going to those who need them most - young people without jobs.

Just after Work Programme launched, we commissioned and published the results of

research into employer and young person attitudes towards Apprenticeships. Our results showed that the vast majority of young people were worried about their job prospects. The research also revealed four out of five employers believed that Apprenticeships would help reduce youth unemployment and that an overwhelming number of employers felt that an Apprenticeship gave young people the skills they need to find lasting work.

More controversially, traditional views regarding the skills that employers look for when hiring young people were challenged by the report. Of the employers surveyed, 86 per cent said they look for potential rather than experience when hiring young people and cited soft skills such as 'a good attitude' and 'enthusiasm and motivation' as key qualities in a potential work ready candidate.

Careers advice was also called into question. The young people surveyed felt that they are not getting enough advice from schools about vocational qualifications such as Apprenticeships - only 24 per cent of young people were given advice on Apprenticeships, while 70 per cent received information about college courses.

It's clear that both employers and the government see Apprenticeships as crucial to reducing youth unemployment and recognise the positive impact these

schemes have on society. We're working with the government to help realise this vision and help young people into a future of sustainable employment. An integration of the Apprenticeships and the Work Programme will not only help ensure better life chances for the young unemployed, but will further improve the service offered by the Work Programme to young people.

We're already trialling a project in the South West of England to do just that - a pilot programme that is helping young people who are unemployed to gain the valuable pre-employment skills they need to successfully enter into an Apprenticeship. The pilot is up and running in Plymouth and is about to roll out across the region.

Working Links will share the learning from the pilot with government, employers and other key stakeholders to help develop a workable, nationwide programme that successfully integrates Apprenticeships, the Work Programme and the needs of employers, large and small.

As we pause to evaluate the importance of Apprenticeships in National Apprenticeship Week, we must remember that collaborative working really is key to achieving the government's vision of securing a better future for the next generation.

Mike Lee, Director, Skills and Young People at Working Links

A little bit of advice



It's a mess. Anyone who thinks the current or proposed system for providing information advice and guidance (IAG) to young people is fit for purpose is either a fool or a knave.

Ask young people!! Or ask Lord Browne whose report provided the basis of the new tuition fees regime and had a remarkable amount to say on this.

Contrast Alison Wolf who avoided the subject entirely in her report on vocational education, although in conversation did say

“don't take me there” when asked what she would be saying about IAG in her report.

Schools get a real hammering when it comes to advice and guidance. Research by the Sutton Trust shows that half of young people consider the advice and guidance that they received before making choices to be inadequate. Other reports have highlighted that careers professionals have a low status within schools; they lack understanding of the range of options available to pupils and do not have enough time to advise them in depth.

I challenged a large group of advisors at a conference last year to identify which degree subjects had the lowest rate of employment after six months and not one knew the answer.

Back to Browne, he said: “Students need access to high quality information, advice and guidance in order to make the best choices. Improvements are needed.

Providing students with clearer information about employment outcomes will close the gap between the skills taught by the higher education system and what employers need. Institutions have a responsibility to help students make the right choices as well.

“Every school will be required to make individualised careers advice available

to its pupils. The advice will be delivered by certified professionals who are well informed, benefit from continued training and professional development and whose status in schools is respected and valued.”

“Schools make life very hard for those who wish to present their pupils with alternatives to university”

What evidence do we have that this is going to happen? I have direct experience of what is happening across a range of schools and it isn't pretty.

I also see some rather questionable operators seeking a commercial opportunity by offering IAG services into schools.

My particular concern is the way that vocational pathways, and apprenticeships in particular are simply not getting across as schools intensify their obsession with academic league tables, and as we all know, make life very hard for those who wish to present their pupils with alternatives to university.

It is time that the post-16 providers – both FE and private – and accreditation bodies worked together to provide an advisory and guidance service that ensures that young people hear the message about quality vocational pathways.

And if they can't talk to the schools, they should talk over the schools direct to young people, using social media and all the other communications platforms that, for example, the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) seems incapable of exploiting.

We know that talking directly to young people works if you use their channels and their language.

The success of notgoingtouni is directly attributable to this mastery of the media and this approach provides a roadmap for providing IAG.

A sequential combination of online information, moderated guidance through online careers-oriented forums, and direct one-to-one support through mentoring – online or face to face – would undoubtedly be successful.

Is anyone listening?

Peter Cobrin, National Education Director of www.notgoingtouni.co.uk

ADVERTISEMENT

Innovative curriculum helps progression to apprenticeships



The chance to develop vital skills and experience before starting an Apprenticeship can give would-be apprentices a real head start.

The National Apprenticeship's Access to Apprenticeship programme and the Sector Skills Council's Pre Apprenticeship developments highlight the importance of preparing learners for their Apprenticeship.

'NCFE Progression to Apprenticeship'

qualifications can be delivered to support learners and help equip them to make the most of their Apprenticeship right from the start.

By preparing learners before they start a full Apprenticeship, they're more confident and better prepared for their chosen Apprenticeship study route.

The NCFE qualification in Learning to Learn is one of the Progression to Apprenticeship routes we offer. However, becoming skilled in the art of learning is certainly a controversial idea which can divide opinion in the education sector.

Is it truly necessary to acquire a capacity to learn; an ability that is seen as innate and instinctive? Or alternatively, does the skill of learning need cultivating?

Surely equipping people with the personal and study skills they need to get the most out of their learning experience can only be a positive thing?

At NCFE, we believe that an individual's “learning muscles” can indeed be

exercised and expanded to enhance achievement. That's why we worked with Gateshead College to develop the NCFE Level 1 and 2 Awards in Learning to Learn.

Our Learning to Learn qualifications help new students master the essential skills they need for their learner journey; gain confidence by achieving a qualification at an early stage of their studies; experience a high quality standard induction to help them become a more effective and motivated learner and most importantly, reach their full potential.

Learning to Learn also offers an excellent opportunity for would-be apprentices to prepare for learning in the workplace.

The qualifications can also be delivered alongside other Progression to Apprenticeships qualifications such as our Occupational Studies suite, Developing Effective Thinking Skills and Employability Skills, to support young people to get the most out of their chosen study route. Having developed a wide, transferable skills base, apprentices will begin their Apprenticeship more confident

and better prepared.

Overall, we believe that more effective learning really can be taught! Improving a young person's learning prowess promotes engagement, provides individualised support and raises success and achievement.

Learners become prepared for their main course of study and any shortfall in learning can be addressed at an early stage. No learner comes to college as the finished article, so therefore we need to do all we can to ensure their learning experience is a positive one.

Whether it's to support Access to Apprenticeship programmes or any other Apprenticeship pathway offer, we recognise that there's no ‘one size fits all’.

We work flexibly with you to develop your own NCFE Progression to Apprenticeship package so that you can support your learners in the way you feel best.

*David Grailey,
Chief executive, NCFE*

Where there's a will, there's a Way



Picture by Nick Linford

Janet Murray

@jan_murray

The Chief Operating Officer of the National Apprenticeship Service talks to *FE Week*

At 22, David Way found himself at a crossroads. Having recently completed a Masters degree, he had two job offers on the table – a graduate traineeship at the Department for Employment and an industrial relations role at an engineering firm in Peterborough.

He went for the former, he says – somewhat sheepishly - on the basis that he was far more interested in “making a difference to peoples’ lives” than helping turn out diesel engines. While quick to add that engineering can make a difference to peoples’ lives (something he will be sure to stress to the manufacturing summit he’s speaking at later this month, he jokes), he has never regretted his decision.

It started him on a path that has included senior jobs in the Department for Employment, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), where he is Chief Operating Officer.

The common thread running

through his career is about helping people achieve their potential. What continues to drive him, he says, is the “belief that everyone has got some sort of creativity or talent that sometimes needs nurturing...” – something he learned early on in his own education.

Raised in the market town of Bridgwater in Somerset, Way came “top of everything” in primary school and flew through the 11 plus examination.

But grammar school took some getting used to. Conscious of being the first in his family to have any experience of “homework or exams,” (his parents were both factory workers with no formal qualifications), Way’s confidence – and his academic performance – began to wane.

“I just lost my way for a while,” he recalls. “It took me quite a few years to find my feet, and what I remember vividly was that one teacher taking a bit of interest in me...and suddenly I blossomed again.”

Having rediscovered his passion for learning, Way went on to study Economics and Technology at City University, followed by an MA in Industrial Relations at the London School of Economics (LSE).

Within months of joining the Department for Employment, he was running a job centre in Bognor Regis. Five years on, he was strategy director at the Employment Service.

In 1990, following the end of his first marriage, Way decided to relocate to Wales, where he ran the employment service and became involved with a project helping Romania, which was

just emerging from a communist regime - and experiencing high levels of unemployment as a result - to develop a business sector.

Seeing how another country coped with unemployment – and sharing his expertise about how it might be done better, was both fascinating and humbling, he says. “They [the job centre employees] opened the doors at 9am and people formed a queue. And at 6pm they closed the door and people just left.

There was no systematic approach to helping people and so to be able to tell them how they might be able to cope... and sharing that learning with fellow human beings who are in a less fortunate situation that yourselves... that was great.”

In 1998, Way relocated to the West Midlands, as director for the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) where, two years later, he found himself involved in another high profile project.

As part of the Rover taskforce – which had the mission of saving the British car manufacturer from collapse - he found his life “being played out on the Today programme” every morning.

“I would get up, the news was about what we were doing, go to the meeting, eat bacon rolls...discuss and negotiate what the funding package might look like and how that would be spent,” he recalls. “You wouldn’t want to be dealing with the collapse of a big company like that but it was of such importance to the region and to be involved in it was really energising. But just very surreal, dealing with the main item on the news every day.”

“The key to irreversible growth of apprenticeships is quality”

An increasing desire to get closer to “real employers, real people and make a real difference” led him to join the Learning and Skills Council in 2001, as executive director for the Black Country where he faced the challenge of raising education standards and investment in training in an area characterized at the time by “poverty and lack of aspirations.”

Way – who was awarded a CBE for his work with young people last year - admits he is often close to tears at learners’ awards ceremonies.

One memory that sticks in his mind,

is presenting a certificate to a checkout operator – a woman in her 30s - at a local supermarket. “I gave her this certificate for training and it was the first certificate she had ever had in her life and she broke down in tears because she was so proud of what she had achieved.”

The episode took him back to his own experience as a teenager, and the teacher who took him under his wing and helped him find his way again. “If you take an interest in someone, encourage and support them, find the things they are good at...who knows what they are capable of?” he says.

If his 35 years in employment and skills have taught him one thing, it is that “small steps” can lead to big gains. People can feel “overwhelmed and intimidated” by too much learning, especially if it means changes to their lifestyle.

The most effective way of reaching people is to take learning to them “in the local community or village hall” or find role models who can do it for you, he says.

His work with NAS has deepened his belief in the power of passing on knowledge and skills. But the last six months – when The National Apprenticeship Service has repeatedly come under fire for its role in funding and co-ordinating short, low-skill apprenticeships – have not been easy.

While he has felt at times that there was a need to balance the negative media coverage, a need for “another side” to be heard, the experience has taught him not to be too defensive, he says.

He admits that the NAS was not used to facing criticism but says that while “passionate about getting it right,” perfection just isn’t realistic. “I think we have learnt that what we absolutely need to do is to recognise that if you are delivering apprenticeships through 1,000 providers with 400,000 apprentices at any one time, not every single one of those experiences or those transactions is going to be 100%.”

But he is keen to stress that the NAS is keen to listen and that, having been in existence for just three years, there is still a lot to learn.

“What I really think we are trying to achieve is sort of critical mass of high-quality apprenticeships, so that there will be no possibility that in the future people will look back at 2012 and say that was the high water point.

To me, the key to irreversible growth of apprenticeships is quality. If we get half a million young people who had such a great experience of apprenticeships, they want it for their friends and their children, and employers want it for other employees...then we’ll have really achieved something.”

Ross Varnam: around the WorldSkills

Nick Reinis

@fenickr

Autobody repair apprentice and WorldSkills silver medalist, Ross Varnam talks to *FE Week*

Like most youngsters, Ross Varnam was unsure about what to do after his GCSEs. Aged 16 and with 11 A to Cs behind him, his options were wide open.

He had enjoyed his time at Longslade Community College, in Leicester, but would A levels be the right move for him?

As is so often the case, Ross could turn to the wise words of his father Mitch - a former apprentice at British Gas, who is now a fireman.

"I'd done okay at school so there were options for me to stay and do my A levels and then go to university.

"But, for me, I wasn't sure if that was what I wanted to do.

"My dad advised me and said 'go out and learn a trade and learn a skill because you can still go to university afterwards'. I knew if I did it I'd always have that trade and no-one could take that from me."

With an interest in motoring, Ross had already completed work experience at his local body shop, Parkers Accident Repair Centre. So it seems logical that this would be his immediate point of call.

He said: "I'd done two weeks experience when I was 14 at the body shop and volunteered during the summer to get a bit more work experience.

"When I decided I wanted to finish and leave school I went back to the body shop and asked if they wanted to give me a job and put me through an apprenticeship. It was a great opportunity."

Within days of concluding his school days, Ross was into the big wide world of work, before enrolling on an apprenticeship. Over the next three years, he would undertake the Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 NVQ in autobody repair, working four-days-a-week at the body shop with one-day-a-week at Leicester College.

"It's a great mix of learning new skills, working and going to college with a group of people all doing the same thing," he enthused.

"I enjoyed learning new skills and going to the body shop and showing them what I learned.

"The way you are trained keeps changing, so I was bringing new skills in and showing them how to do things.

"I got a bit of stick being the young lad, but they treated me very well."

Although it was "brilliant" to finish his final programme, Ross, then aged 19, was hungry to learn. After a chat with his accommodating boss at the body shop, it was at that point Ross' journey to WorldSkills London 2011 began.

He said: "The second I finished and left college, I missed it.

"I didn't feel like I'd finished. I wanted to keep learning. So I spoke to my boss and he put me forward for the Young Panel Technician of the Year award."

After competing regionally and nationally, Ross made the final six. Despite missing out on the title, he was scouted as one of three competitors to try out for the squad being put together to comprise Team UK at WorldSkills.

"It was fantastic," said Ross, before adding: "It was disappointing that I hadn't won but the fact it opened up the opportunity to other competitions was great."

Ross was selected as part of Team UK in November last year and started "intensive training" to get to the required standard, while also working at the body shop. It meant he had little time for socialising - and he gave up drinking alcohol for a year to concentrate on the competition - dubbed the 'skills Olympics'.

"I stopped drinking for a year which is hard when your mates are going out and having a great time"

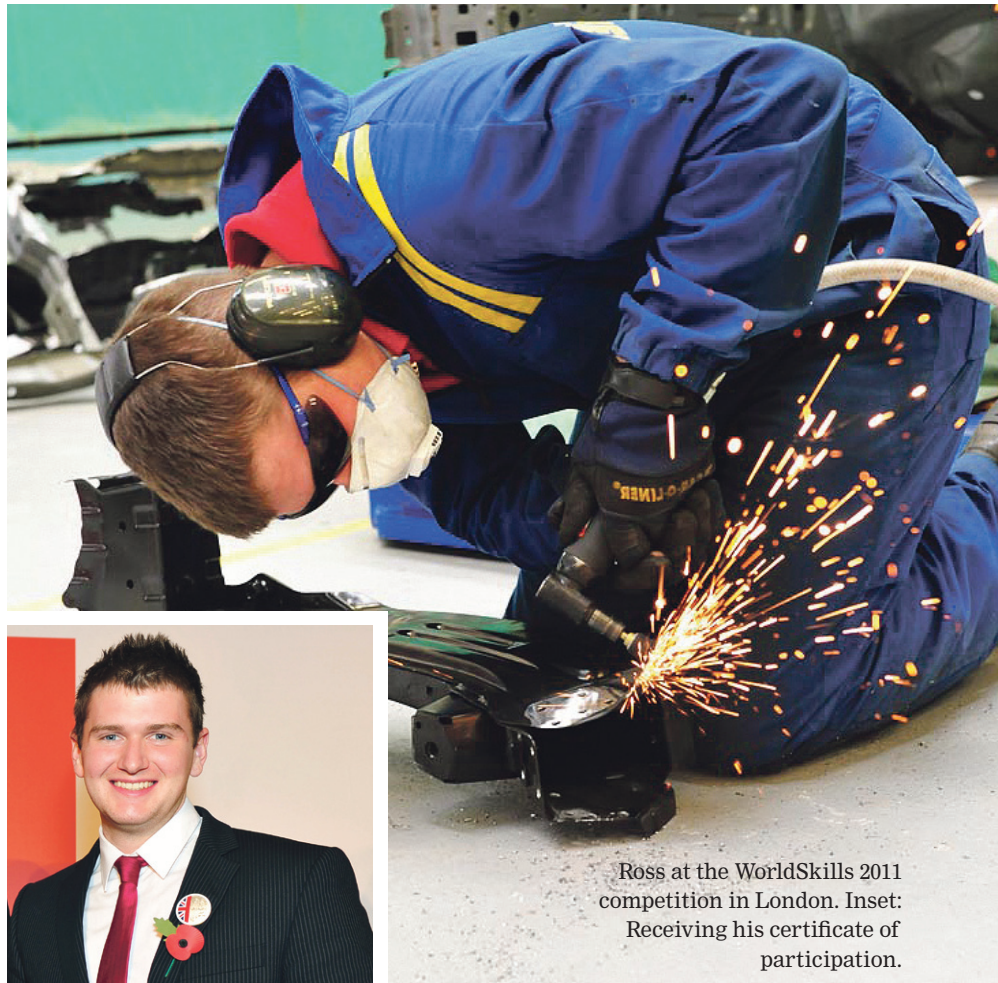
"It was such a relief to get into the team. I'd put so much training and hard work into it. I learned so much about the competition - I just wanted to compete on the World stage.

"My employer was really supportive. It was tough but it meant so much.

"I stopped drinking for a year which is hard when your mates are going out and having a great time.

"I stopped Thai boxing too, because they didn't want me to break any bones."

When competition day finally came around in October last year for



Ross at the WorldSkills 2011 competition in London. Inset: Receiving his certificate of participation.

WorldSkills London 2011, held at the vast ExCeL in London Docklands, Ross came face-to-face for the first time with his task ahead - a damaged Honda Jazz.

It was the same task for 16 other competitors, whose vehicles had dents to "within millimetres" of one another, with five modules to complete in four days.

And although he was nervous, Ross played his part in Team UK's best ever WorldSkills performance by winning the silver medal.

"It was physically and mentally draining. As much as it was tiring, I loved being in that competition and going out there and doing my best.

"At the closing ceremony, I'd reached that point where I was thinking I'd done by absolute best and I'd done it. I didn't know the result until on the night, but when I found out I'd got the silver medal I was over the moon."

It was proud moment for Ross - and also for his family, who attended the closing ceremony, held at the O2 Arena, with t-shirts emblazoned with his name. He admits it was "a bit embarrassing" but "at least they were supportive".

He added: "My dad was emotional because he knew how hard I'd worked. He was really proud of me.

"He couldn't watch me during the competition because he found it too hard. He was pacing up and down the aisle."

As well as leaving his own personal

legacy on Team UK by securing his silver medal, Ross' performance also helped secure an opportunity - of-a-lifetime. In the aftermath of WorldSkills London 2011, Ross - now aged 21 - was approached by a firm in Australia which owns 17 garages Down Under. Later this week, he will fly out for a 12-month tour of the nation to ply his trade and learn new skills - and experience life on the opposite side of the World.

He said: "When you finish WorldSkills you hit a wall. It's a big event and you focus on it and then you think 'what next?'"

"Fortunately, I've been offered a post in Australia for 12 months as a working holiday. I can work two months at different garages and travel around the country.

"It's a great opportunity," he said, adding: "I'll be on my own. I'm really excited, but nervous as well, but there will be lots of people like me out there.

"I felt bad for my employer that I'll be leaving them. But he was good about it. He could see that it's a fantastic opportunity."

Although proud, it's fair to say Ross' mother, Lynn, who works in adult education at her son's former school, will miss him the most.

"My mums upset that she won't see me - but I've set up a Skype account to keep in touch."

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NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK

Events calendar

“We are delighted that so many organisations are supporting National Apprenticeship Week by organising events to showcase these benefits. There are some fantastic activities on offer, which I am certain will inspire more companies and individuals to reap the benefits of Apprenticeships for themselves.”

Simon Waugh, NAS

Here's just a small selection of what's on

6th Monday

Time: 8:30am
Location: London
What: The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) is hoping to stage a photo call event, from 8:30am, at a secret location in London. The NAS will use the event as a platform to explain to employers how they can access some of the financial support announced by the government before Christmas - such as the incentive scheme for small and medium sized employers.

Time: 9am - 5pm
Location: London
What: The London Academy of Apprenticeships will be holding a competition allowing 10 unemployed, work-hungry young people to compete for an apprenticeship with Swiss Post Solutions. Candidates will undertake a rigorous assessment session, watched by Swiss Post Solutions via a live video link, similar to 'The Apprentice' TV show broadcast by the BBC.

Time: 9am - 5pm
Location: Oaklands College, Hertfordshire
What: Oaklands college will be running a competition, starting Monday, for a business to win an apprentice for the next twelve months. Employers will need to call up the local radio station and argue why they deserve to win the apprentice. The winner will be announced by a high profile guest at the end of the week.

Time: 11:30am - 1pm
Location: William Stanier School, Crewe
What: Bentley Motors will be visiting a number of local schools throughout the week in order to promote apprenticeship vacancies to young people. Apprentices currently working at Bentley will be showcasing some of the latest cars produced by the British manufacturer, as well as some of the unique craft skills which they use on a day to day basis.

7th Tuesday

Time: 10am - 2pm
Location: Woodside House Care Home, Norfolk
What: Apprentices employed by Barchesteer Healthcare will be inviting nearby schools to attend a coffee morning at the Woodside House Care Home. The event will be a chance for the apprentices to discuss their experiences with potential learners and explain some of the possible career routes available in the care sector.

Time: 5:30pm - 8:00pm
Location: Derby College, Derbyshire
What: An apprenticeship information evening will be held by Derby College, giving potential learners the chance to find out about the vocational route and each area of training the college offers. The evening will include a 'recruitment station' listing colleges already in partnership with the college, as well as a number of 'have a go' activities.

Time: 6pm - 8pm
Location: Bournville College, Birmingham
What: The college will be holding an event headlined by Mark Linton, Managing Director of the Business Growth Show. It will be an opportunity both for employers and potential learners to hear how Mr Linton started his business and expanded it with the help of young people. The event will be attended by Lucy Matthews, an apprentice now running Business Growth Show events.

Time: 7pm - late
Location: Kirklees College, West Yorkshire
What: The college is offering 40 local employers a place at a special apprenticeship celebration dinner. The event will take place in the college's training restaurant, The Chameleon, and be cooked and served by students on a range of hospitality and catering apprenticeships.



Apprenticeships

National Apprenticeship Week
6 - 10 February 2012

8th Wednesday

Time: 9:30am onwards

Location: Maidenhead Town Hall, Berkshire

What: The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is teaming up with the Grow Our Own scheme to host 'The Alternative University', an event that lets employers, students and job seekers find out more about apprenticeships. Visitors will be able to talk with local employers who are recruiting, join a panel discussion and try interactive Q&A boards.

9th Thursday

Time: 10am - 1pm

Location: Congress House, London

What: Unionlearn's annual conference, "Apprenticeships are Union Business", will be highlighting the role that trade unions should play in supporting apprentices and working with employers to develop more apprenticeship places. Speakers at the conference include Simon Waugh, chief executive of NAS, Frances O'Grady, deputy general secretary of the TUC, and Dr Pete Waterman OBE DL.

10th Friday

Time: 7:30am to 9:30am

Location: The Compleat Anger, Marlow Bucks

What: Skills Centre Bucks, part of Wycombe District Council, will be hosting an 'Apprenticeship Business Breakfast Seminar' at The Compleat Anger. The event, hosted by Steve Baker MP, will promote the benefits of apprenticeships to local businesses and include speeches both from apprentices and their employers. There will be a short debate, workshops and networking opportunities

Time: 10am - 4pm

Location: Central London

What: The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) will be holding its third apprenticeship seminar, titled "Excellence in Apprenticeships: An International Perspective", at the Strand building. Guests include Simon Waugh, chief executive of the NAS and David Way, chief operating officer at the NAS, as well as representatives from 12 countries outside of the UK.

Time: 10am to 4pm

Location: New College Durham, County Durham

What: The apprenticeship team at New College Durham will be hosting a 'skills showcase' demonstrating the skills of apprentices in hairdressing, catering, health and social care, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating, plumbing and electrical. Demonstrations will be given to visitors by apprentices of all skill levels.

Time: 10am to 4pm

Location: Warrington Collegiate, Cheshire

What: The leader of Warrington Borough Council, Councillor Terry O'Neill, will be gaining 'hands on' experience of bricklaying and plumbing apprenticeships at Warrington Collegiate. Mr O'Neill will also have his hair styled by Alisha Cooper, former regional hairdressing apprentice of year 2008. The college will also be hosting an Apprenticeship Recruitment Day for 16 to 24 year-olds.

Time: 11am - 3pm

Location: West Cheshire College, Cheshire

What: An apprenticeships showcase event, based on the theme 'What an Apprenticeship means to me?' will be held by the college at Ellesmere Port Campus. Apprentices in hospitality and catering will be serving canapés; hair and beauty Apprentices are providing manicures and treatments and technical theatre Apprentices will be putting on a light show.

Time: 2:30pm to 4:30pm

Location: O2 Telefonica, Slough

What: An apprenticeship awareness event designed to increase the engagement of employers and local businesses will be held by O2 in Bath Road. The afternoon hopes to raise the profile of apprenticeships and share good practice with other businesses who have "a passion for developing young people". The event will be attended by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS).

Time: 12pm onwards

Location: City College Norwich, Norfolk

What: The 'Apprentices' Challenge and Skills Showcase' is to be held at the StartUp Lounge at City College Norwich. Teams of apprentices will be creating a video presentation, showcasing their skills, talents and utilising their experiences to inform visitors about the apprenticeship route. The 'Skills-Showcase Drop-In Session' will allow employers to explore the range of apprenticeships.

Time: 12pm to 8pm

Location: KMF (Precision Sheet Metal) Limited, Staffordshire

What: Year 11 and Year 13 pupils who are interested in starting an engineering apprenticeship are invited to attend an open at KMF. Training staff and current apprentices will be on site to chat with learners, parents and guardians as well as give tours of the 110,000 square foot manufacturing facility. Visitors will also be able to 'have a go'.

Time: All day

Location: Babcock International, Davenport

What: An engineering challenge is to be held by Babcock, in partnership with the Plymouth Learning Trust, for 20 pupils studying at Key Stage 4. The event is aimed specifically at schools which don't have a history of progressing their pupils into an apprenticeship with Babcock. Students will be placed in teams, led by an apprentice, and asked to create a product which will then be tested.

Time: All day

Location: HMS Collingwood, Fareham

What: The Royal Navy Apprenticeship Programme will be holding an open day for careers advisors from 23 secondary schools and further education colleges in the Portsmouth and Fareham area. A presentation will be given by Commander Winkle, the apprenticeship contract manager, followed by a tour of the apprenticeship work areas. Apprentices currently undergoing training will be present.

Apprenticeship participation summary

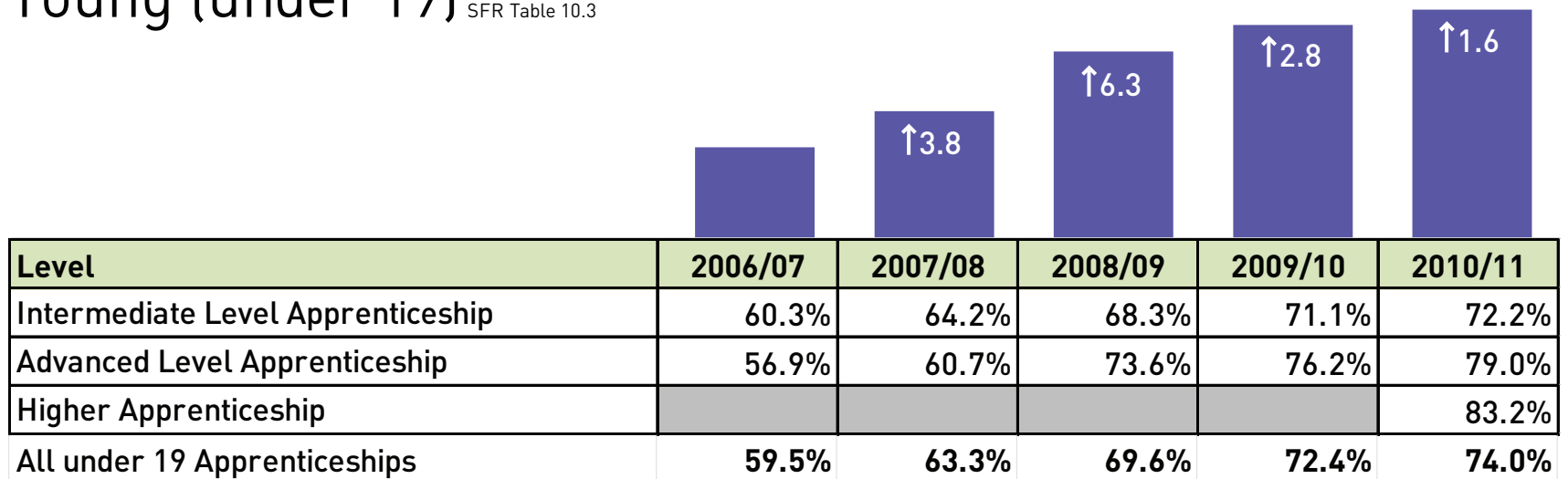
Source: Quarterly Statistical First Release, The Data Service, January 2011 and 2012

2010/11 <small>SFR Jan 2012 Table 1</small>	Intermediate	Advanced	Higher	Total	%	2010/11 less 2009/10	
Total Learners	415,200	247,200	3,500	665,900	100.0%	174,600	+35.5%
Age							
Under 19	150,000	52,900	300	203,100	30.5%	16,700	+9%
19-24	141,300	108,100	2,400	251,900	37.8%	41,000	+19%
25-49	103,300	77,100	800	181,200	27.2%	96,200	+113%
50+	20,700	9,000	-	29,700	4.5%	20,800	+234%
Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gender							
Female	210,600	122,800	2,200	335,500	50.4%	105,200	+46%
Male	204,600	124,400	1,400	330,400	49.6%	69,400	+27%
LLDD							
Learning Difficulty/Disability	38,100	17,700	100	56,000	8.4%	8,400	+18%
No Learning Difficulty/Disability	373,800	227,600	3,400	604,800	90.8%	165,300	+38%
Not Known	3,300	1,800	-	5,200	0.8%	1,100	+27%
Ethnicity							
Asian or Asian British	16,100	7,800	100	24,000	3.6%	9,900	+70%
Black or Black British	11,600	6,300	-	18,000	2.7%	8,000	+80%
Mixed	7,500	3,800	100	11,400	1.7%	3,500	+44%
White	373,600	225,500	3,300	602,400	90.5%	149,700	+33%
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group	3,000	1,600	-	4,700	0.7%	2,000	+74%
Not Known/Not Provided	3,400	2,100	-	5,500	0.8%	1,600	+41%
2009/10 <small>SFR Jan 2011 Table 4</small>							
	Intermediate	Advanced	Higher	Total	%		
Total Learners	304,000	185,500	-	491,300	100.0%		
Age							
Under 19	140,400	45,800	-	186,400	37.9%		
19-24	114,600	94,900	-	210,900	42.9%		
25-49	44,000	40,900	-	85,000	17.3%		
50+	5,000	3,900	-	8,900	1.8%		
Unknown	-	-	-	-	-		
Gender							
Female	148,600	80,800	-	230,300	46.9%		
Male	155,400	104,800	-	261,000	53.1%		
LLDD							
Learning Difficulty/Disability	33,500	14,000	-	47,600	9.7%		
No Learning Difficulty/Disability	267,500	170,300	-	439,500	89.5%		
Not Known	3,000	1,200	-	4,100	0.8%		
Ethnicity							
Asian or Asian British	9,100	4,900	-	14,100	2.9%		
Black or Black British	6,600	3,400	-	10,000	2.0%		
Mixed	5,200	2,600	-	7,900	1.6%		
White	278,500	172,500	-	452,700	92.1%		
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group	1,700	900	-	2,700	0.5%		
Not Known/Not Provided	2,800	1,100	-	3,900	0.8%		

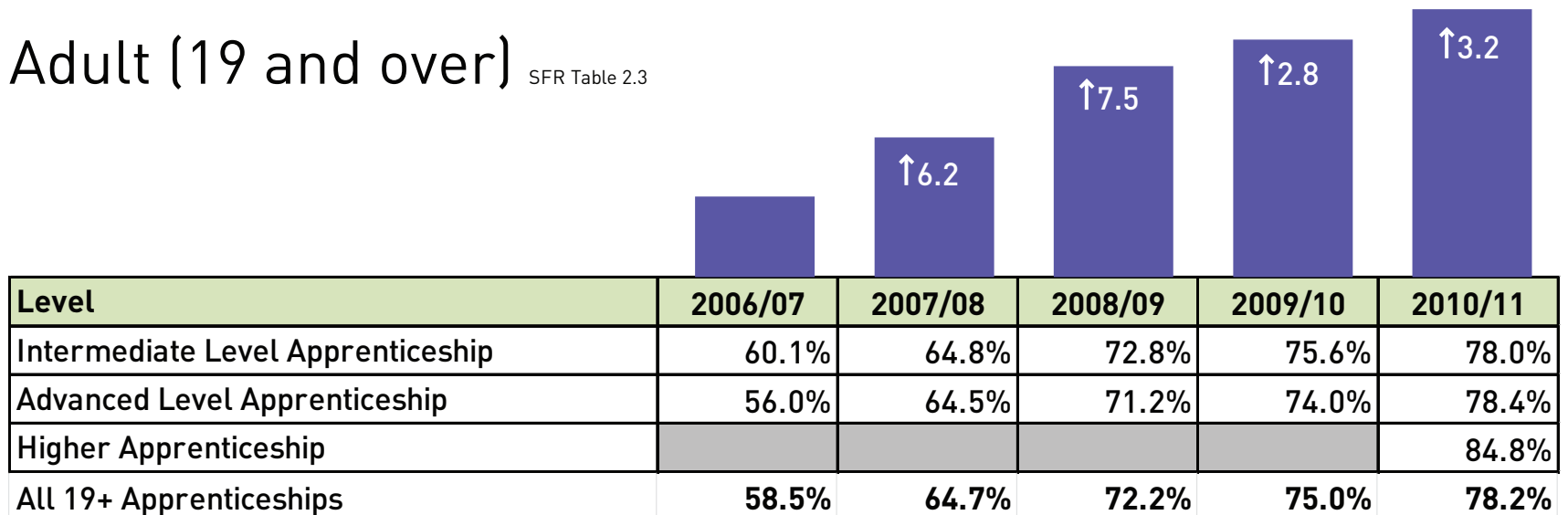
Apprenticeship success rates

Source: Quarterly Statistical First Release, The Data Service, January 2012

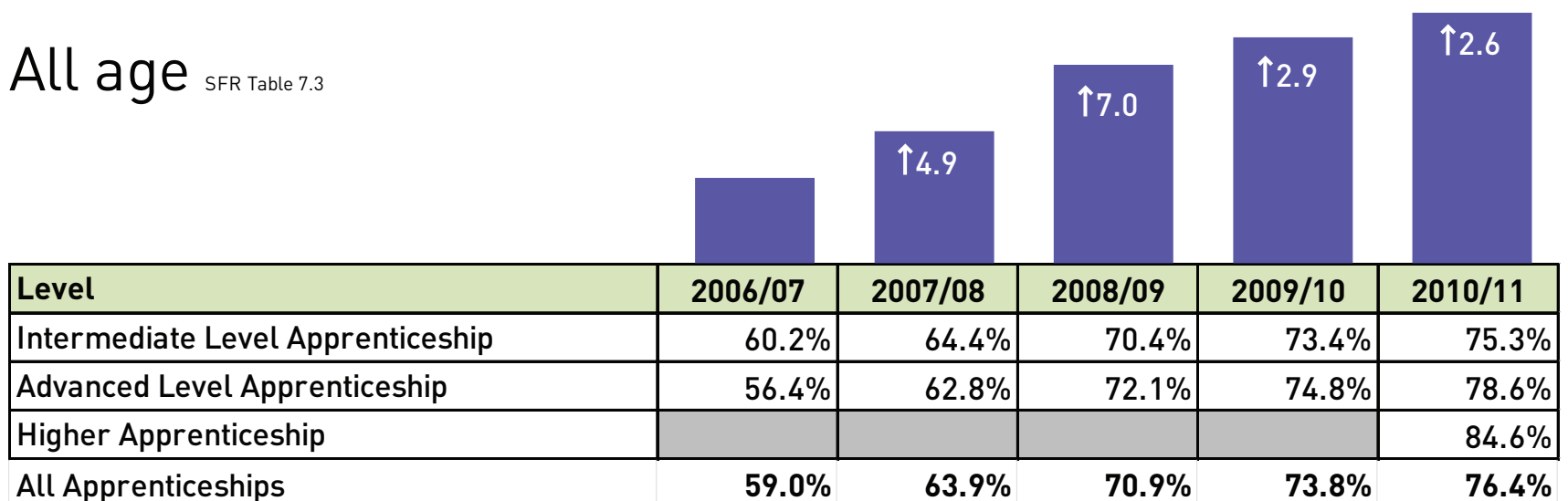
Young (under 19) SFR Table 10.3



Adult (19 and over) SFR Table 2.3



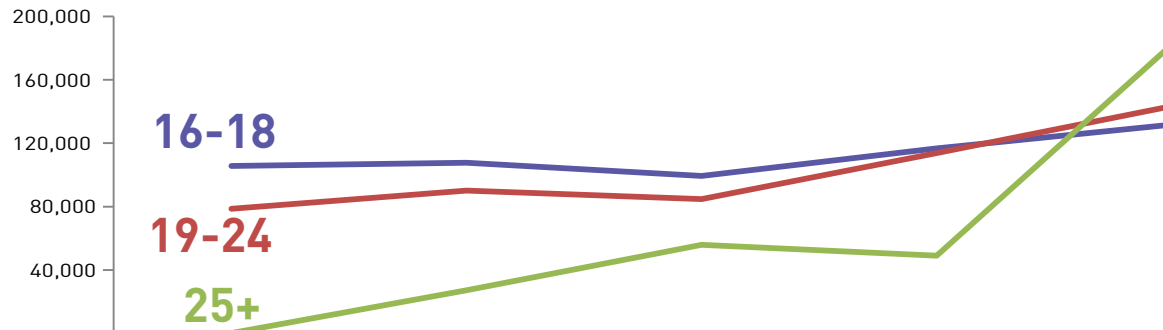
All age SFR Table 7.3



Apprenticeship full year starts (Aug-Jul)

Source: Quarterly Statistical First Release, The Data Service, January 2012, Table 3.1

All levels



16-18 = 13% more

19-24 = 26% more

25+ = 271% more

Age	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2010/11 less 2009/10	
Under 19	105,600	107,600	99,400	116,800	131,700	14,900	+ 13%
19-24	78,600	90,100	84,700	113,800	143,400	29,600	+ 26%
25+	300	27,200	55,900	49,100	182,100	133,000	+ 271%
Total	184,400	224,800	239,900	279,700	457,200	177,500	+ 63%

of which intermediate level

Age	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12 less 2010/11	
Under 19	80,800	82,000	74,200	89,400	97,300	7,900	+ 9%
19-24	46,500	55,200	52,600	72,800	90,400	17,600	+ 24%
25+	100	14,600	31,700	28,400	113,400	85,000	+ 299%
Total	127,400	151,800	158,500	190,500	301,100	110,600	+ 58%

of which advanced level

Age	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12 less 2010/11	
Under 19	24,800	25,500	25,100	27,200	34,200	7,000	+ 26%
19-24	32,000	34,800	32,000	39,800	51,600	11,800	+ 30%
25+	100	12,600	24,200	20,600	68,000	47,400	+ 230%
Total	56,900	72,900	81,300	87,700	153,900	66,200	+ 75%

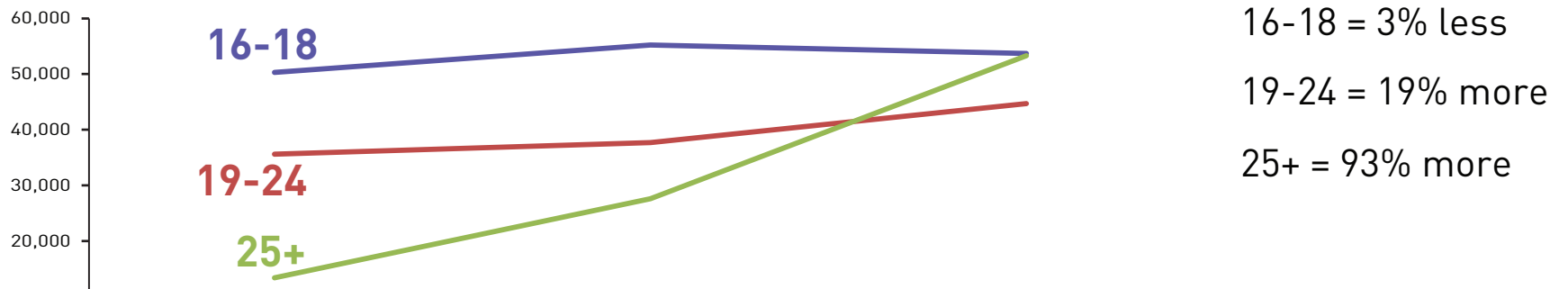
of which higher level

Age	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12 less 2010/11	
Under 19	-	-	-	100	200	100	+ 100%
19-24	100	-	100	1,200	1,300	100	+ 8%
25+	-	-	-	100	700	600	+ 600%
Total	100	100	200	1,500	2,200	700	+ 47%

Apprenticeship quarter 1 starts (Aug-Sept)

Source: Quarterly Statistical First Release, The Data Service, January 2012, Tables 18.1 and 3.1

All levels



Age	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2011/12 less 2010/11	
	Quarter ₁ (final)	Quarter ₂ (final)	Quarter 1 (provisional)		
Under 19	50,300	55,200	53,700	-1,500	-3%
19-24	35,600	37,700	44,700	7,000	+ 19%
25+	13,400	27,600	53,300	25,700	+ 93%
Total	99,300	120,600	151,700	31,100	+ 26%

of which intermediate level

Age	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2011/12 less 2010/11	
	Quarter 1 (final)	Quarter 1 (final)	Quarter 1 (provisional)		
Under 19	35,700	38,100	36,600	-1,500	-4%
19-24	20,100	21,000	27,200	6,200	+ 30%
25+	7,600	16,400	32,700	16,300	+ 99%
Total	63,400	75,500	96,500	21,000	+ 28%

of which advanced level

Age	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2011/12 less 2010/11	
	Quarter 1 (final)	Quarter 1 (final)	Quarter 1 (provisional)		
Under 19	14,600	17,100	16,900	-200	-1%
19-24	14,900	16,000	16,800	800	+ 5%
25+	5,800	10,800	20,100	9,300	+ 86%
Total	35,200	43,800	53,900	10,100	+ 23%

of which higher level

Age	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2011/12 less 2010/11	
	Quarter 1 (final)	Quarter 1 (final)	Quarter 1 (provisional)		
Under 19	100	100	100	0	0%
19-24	600	700	700	0	0%
25+	100	400	500	100	+ 25%
Total	700	1,200	1,300	100	+ 8%

Get involved with National Apprenticeship Week on twitter



#NAW2012

The daily social media themes for National Apprenticeship Week 2012

6 February - We're with @Apprenticeships because ...

NAS wants stories from Apprenticeship employers and apprentices to explain why they are "with Apprenticeships" – describing the benefits and value that Apprenticeships have brought to them. These will be showcased on the Apprenticeships website and social media channels. To submit content tweet your quotes or post them on our Facebook page

7 February - 'I got my dream job through @Apprenticeships'

This is the opportunity for current and former apprentices who attribute pursuing their dream career to their Apprenticeship to Tweet or chat on Facebook about it.

8 February - Say thank you @Apprenticeships

This is the chance for Apprenticeship employers and apprentices to say thank you to someone who has played a vital role in their Apprenticeship journey. Just ask them to Tweet their thanks on the day eg "Thank you ABC PROVIDER for my @APPRENTICESHIPS journey in e.g. plumbing".

9 February - @Apprenticeships Hall of Fame

Do you know an award winning former apprentice whose career has gone on to flourish? Or even a celebrity who started out as an apprentice? If so, they could be ideal candidates for the online Apprenticeships Hall of Fame. Tweet about them or add comments to the Apprenticeship Facebook page.

10 February - Get with @Apprenticeships because...

This is the opportunity for partners to showcase and highlight the success of their Apprenticeship Week activity via Twitter and Facebook and explain why others should get with Apprenticeships.

Not sure how to use Twitter?



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