

Women's Budget Group Commission on a Gender Equal Economy: Examples of Transformative Policies and Practices



About Young Women's Trust

Young Women's Trust supports and represents the 1.5 million women aged 18-30 struggling to live on low or no pay in England and Wales who are at risk of being trapped in poverty. We want to create change through influencing and campaigning, supporting young women and, crucially, involving more young women in addressing the issues that affect them.

Research contributing to this response

Recent reports by Young Women's Trust have framed the challenges facing young women but also sought to propose solutions. In doing so we have tried to be both novel in our recommendations, but we have also sought to identify good practice which could be applied more widely.

In particular on apprenticeships, we developed a good practice guide for employers which contains a number of ways in which employers have demonstrated an impact in gender equality.¹

We have also looked further afield at the gathering policy consensus against previous salary disclosure that has emerged in the United States as a response to the gender pay gap.

Part-time and flexible apprenticeships

Fewer than 1 in 10 apprentices work under 30 hours per week. The lack of part-time opportunities is a particular barrier to women, especially those with caring responsibilities, with many finding the path to training opportunities blocked as a result.

Many young people have told us that they want or need to work part-time but the lack of such opportunities in apprenticeships means they often choose another route which may lack training and future opportunities. In the survey of HR decision makers carried out for Young Women's Trust by YouGov, 54% of employers (including 65% in the public sector) would be willing to offer apprenticeships on a part-time basis but many wrongly believe there is little demand from potential apprentices for working arrangements along these lines.

Increasing the flexibility of apprenticeships would enable more people, including young parents and existing part-time staff, to benefit from the skills and development of an apprenticeship providing a much-needed boost to the economy. For employers in the public sector in particular it would help to ensure that their staff are able to benefit from the apprenticeship levy and support their efforts to meet the public sector apprenticeship targets.

¹ Young Women's Trust, 2017, Making Apprenticeships Work for Young Women: A good practice guide. https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/assets/0000/6209/ywt_GPG_210_x_210_05_AW_low.pdf

However, the latest Government apprenticeship pay survey showed that just 11% of apprentices are contracted for less than 30 hours a week and just 3% work between 16 and 19 hours per week.

There are a number of reasons employers cite for not offering part-time apprenticeships including that there is no demand for them. Of those employers saying they would not offer apprenticeships on a part-time basis, more than half believed that apprentices would not want to work part-time.

Evidence from apprentices suggest otherwise; 70% of male apprentices and 80% of female apprentices agree that companies should offer part-time and flexible working arrangements to their apprentices. This mismatch may be due in part to the inability to filter searches on the Governments Find an Apprenticeship website by the working hours of the positions advertised.

This leads to a Catch-22 situation in which apprentices believe part-time apprenticeships are not on offer and employers believe there is no demand.

Camden council

During our research we found relatively few examples of organisations who had tried to make part-time apprenticeships work in a systematic way. One of those that succeeded was Camden council which trialled flexible apprenticeships as part of their wider programme. The council aimed to create ten flexible apprenticeships for residents. Nine of the apprentices completed their qualifications with six having been offered jobs. The feedback from employers was been extremely positive.

Flexible, part-time apprenticeships were attractive to several groups, including parents. Employers found that the part-time apprentices were highly motivated and committed and that they made valuable contributions to the business. The project has proved the concept that the part-time flexible apprenticeships are viable, and attractive to both employers and people looking to get into work.

There were a number of learnings from the Camden pilot and further research by Learning and Work Institute and Timewise, in partnership with Young Women's Trust and Trust for London² that would support the development of part-time apprenticeships on a wider basis.

a) Wage subsidies

Young Women's Trust's research showed that young women in particular needed apprenticeships to pay well in order for them to be a viable option. The Camden project targeted parents over 25, not currently in employment and with children under the age of 12. Camden is a London Living Wage employer and offered wage subsidies to employers participating in the project who were not already paying the London Living Wage. This helped to provide security for the apprentices and enabled them to remain engaged with the project.

b) In-work support

The transition to work was problematic for some of the apprentices, including the move from benefits to wages. Camden provided in-work support including discretionary payments to

² Learning and Work Institute and Timewise, 2018, Exploring models of part-time and flexible apprenticeships, <https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Part-time-and-flexible-apprenticeships-report.pdf>

some apprentices, to help them manage their finances in the transition period. This was invaluable in helping apprentices to sustain jobs.

- c) **Working with employers to understand their workforce needs**
- d) **Communicating the opportunities and demand for part-time and flexible apprenticeships.**

There is a mismatch between employer, provider, and potential apprentices' understanding of opportunities and respective demand for part-time and flexible apprenticeships. Providers do not perceive a demand from employers, and employers do not think providers offer them and often rely on staff to communicate part-time or flexible needs either at interview or subsequently

- e) **Focusing initially on sectors and occupations where some degree of part-time or flexible working is already established.**

In addition, a focus on areas that have skills gaps and recruitment difficulties could ensure that there is a business case for employers to adopt strategies to attract a wider pool of talent, as well as benefiting learners with flexible work and training needs.

- f) **Managers overseeing the apprentices should be engaged in decisions about how work and study will be organised, with the terms of hours and flexibility agreed upfront**
- g) **Ensuring the level of apprenticeships offered are appropriate**

Concerns exist about the viability of part-time Higher and Degree Level Apprenticeships, which could take up to 8 years when completed part-time. At the same time, concerns also exist about the quality of Intermediate (Level 2) Apprenticeships in some sectors. As such, for those already in work we suggest that Advanced (Level 3) Apprenticeships offer an appropriate balance between concerns about quality and duration. For those entering the workforce we recommend exploring Intermediate Apprenticeship opportunities in sectors and occupations offering better wage returns and how subsequent progression opportunities to Level 3 (and beyond) can be built into the model.

Salary History

The practice of using salary history in the hiring process can have major repercussions in perpetuating gender pay gaps. Relying on salary history to set future salary assumes that prior salaries were fairly established in the first place. Bias faced by women throughout their careers means they are more likely to be underpaid relatively to men with similar levels qualifications and experience. Using salary histories to determine current and future pay offers further entrenches this bias and makes it harder to close the pay gaps.

The United States has seen significant movement to ban employers from asking for previous salary details, with a particular focus on gaining pay equality for women of colour. Beginning in 2016, many states and localities began regulating the use of salary history in the hiring process. In some states this has been applied only to public sector employers, whilst others have moved to ban the practice altogether. Whilst it is still too early to assess the impact these of these policy changes, Young Women's Trust believes that this has a potential to contribute to the necessary step-change that is needed to eliminate the gender pay gaps as quickly as possible.

Positive action

Young Women's Trust's apprenticeships good practice guide contained a number of examples of employers who have taken measures to improve the gender balance of their apprenticeship schemes. Here are just two examples that encapsulate many of the different approaches taken by other employers in the guide.

Balfour Beatty

Balfour Beatty currently trains about 320 apprentices and recruits over 100 new apprentices each year. They are trained predominately in engineering and construction. Both these sectors have found it difficult to appeal to women – only 2% of construction skills apprentices and 5% of engineering apprentices are women. Balfour Beatty has begun to take action to challenge these trends.

Adapting the language used in apprenticeship adverts

Balfour Beatty has plans to adapt the language used in its apprenticeship adverts. To ensure the new language is effective the company will be working with Young Women's Trust and our advisory panel of young women too.

Women's Networks

Balfour Beatty has a 'Gender Affinity Group' in the business and are introducing a Women in Business training programme and Returners' programme. Whilst not exclusive to apprentices, these networks help to create a culture in which women are supported and welcomed into the business.

Setting targets

Balfour Beatty has set targets for the recruitment of women onto its apprenticeship and graduate schemes. The programmes will aim to have an intake that is 20% female in 2017, 30% female in 2020 rising to an equal split in 2025.

Tracking achievement

Young Women's Trust research has shown that it is important not only to monitor the numbers of young women starting an apprenticeship but also to ensure that they are able to access the same opportunities to progress as young men. Tracking apprenticeship achievement is an important part of this, allowing Balfour Beatty to assess how female apprentices are performing and integrating into the business.

BAE systems

BAE Systems recruits around 700 apprentices a year and currently employs more than 2,000 apprentices. 26% of its apprenticeship intake in 2016 was female – up from 12% in 2012. This compares well to an average of just 5% for the engineering sector overall. Throughout the recruitment process, BAE Systems tracks diversity and inclusion statistics and has a range of initiatives and programmes aimed at increasing awareness of STEM subjects and career options with young women.

The company has taken a broad range of positive actions to attract more young women into the organisation. The annual Schools Roadshow is delivered in partnership with the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy to over 90,000 young people across the UK. It not only aims to promote STEM amongst young people, but it also challenges female students' perceptions of STEM subjects and careers in engineering.

Engagement with schools

Engagement with teachers has been a successful way of increasing understanding of the company's apprenticeship scheme and broadening its appeal. The organisation provides two-day placements for teachers to gain a familiarity with the apprenticeship programmes with the aim of increasing awareness of these as career routes for young women as well as men. BAE Systems also sponsors two STEM-based postgraduates (one male and one female) who are working as physics teachers to improve the quality of maths and physics teaching and encourage more girls to study the subjects in sixth-form or college.

Work experience

BAE Systems ensures there is an equal gender split in the scholarships it offers to A-level students and the 600 work experience placements it provides. This includes female-only placements for groups of young women, essential in providing peer support and guarding against the sense of isolation young women say they often feel in male-dominated sectors.

Female role models

Ensuring its female engineers are visible is an important part of encouraging women to join the organisation. Around 35% of the company's STEM Ambassadors are female and regularly support school classroom activities, events and careers fairs across the UK.

Pay and support

BAE Systems has also worked to ensure good levels of pay for apprenticeships and provides discounted travel and support with childcare. Alongside this all staff, including apprentices, are able to apply for flexible working, including part-time and term-time working. As part of this offer some female engineers have been able to undertake their apprenticeship part-time where it has been necessary to meet their needs.