

National Society of Apprentices – Manifesto 2019

NSoA delivers apprentice voice at a local, national and European level. Supporting apprentices to reflect on their apprenticeships and engage with decision makers on the issues that affect them.

Over the summer we brought together apprentices from across the UK to put together this manifesto. It reflects what apprentices would like their education to look like and builds an image of apprenticeship provision that works for Apprentices; Employers; Providers; and Society in general.

We would like to see a future government commit to:
UK wide:

Free prescriptions for all apprentices

Full time students (16-18) in FE get free prescriptions. NUS definition of membership includes apprentices. Many apprentices are on a low income, so cost of living should be kept low. This change would make apprenticeships more accessible to those with disabilities and long-term illnesses.

Gemma – Health Physics Monitor Apprentice

Every apprenticeship to include a measurable aim of creating global citizens

Apprenticeships should be a broad and inclusive education. Choosing to learn whilst in work should not be at the expense of having access to volunteering opportunities, learning modern foreign languages or education about how to participate in civic society and local democracy. We consider an apprenticeship an education for a career not just training for a job.

Amy – Business and Administration Higher Apprentice

Accessible, Appropriate and Inclusive Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) for all apprentices

Apprentices should have access to SRE as part of a broad and inclusive curriculum. A healthy understanding about sexual health, consent and healthy relationships should form part of an apprentice's education.

Amy – Business and Administration Higher Apprentice

Contracts where public money is spent should only go to organisations that employ apprentices

Apprenticeships are a public good and should be supported by public money. This policy ensures that we are both investing in a high skilled workforce and ending the something for nothing culture enjoyed by many outsourcing companies.

Hannah – Early Learning and Childcare Apprentice

Create an anonymous whistleblowing hotline for apprentices to report illegal practice from their employers or training providers

Apprentices should be able to comfortably confidentially report bad apprenticeships and or employers without jeopardising their job, education or reputation. Successive apprenticeship pay surveys show illegal underpayment of apprentices and a failure of employers and training providers to properly provide apprentices with off the job learning.

Apprentices should be able to speak to someone about this misuse of public funds.

Any apprenticeship quality kite mark that had access to this hotline would feel more genuine to apprentices.

Tony – HGV Mechanic Apprentice

All apprenticeships should include a relevant qualification.

Some apprenticeships don't include a qualification. This makes it more difficult for apprentices to move between employers and makes it harder to progress into other forms of education.

Chris – Team Leading Apprentice

The government should work with European and global countries to make sure that apprenticeship qualifications are recognised globally.

Apprentices should be able to have their qualifications recognised internationally to enable them to live abroad and work in their chosen profession.

Raisa – Maintenance Apprentice

Apprentices should be able to take breaks in study in line with what happens for students studying in FE colleges or Universities.

Government should support the setting of sector wide standards for extenuating circumstances and breaks of study. These should reflect the standards enjoyed by full time students.

Sector wide agreements would enable apprentices to make informed choices about the apprenticeships they choose and increase the number of apprentices with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

Charlie – Creative Digital Media Apprentice

Significantly improve, widen and publish the data collected on who undertakes apprenticeships, who succeeds and what they go on to do after completing their apprenticeship.

Without knowing who is undertaking apprenticeships we cannot know how effectively apprenticeship funding is being spent. We can use this information to respond in a timely manner to changes in apprenticeship participation.

Whilst it is welcome news that the best apprenticeships are attracting learners who might otherwise have gone to prestigious universities but there is a worry that access to excellent apprenticeships is not universal.

Paddy – Electrical Engineering Apprentice

Increased funding for apprenticeship providers that undertake and meet equality impact agreements or gender action plans.

Apprenticeships remain heavily segregated by gender. FE providers in Scotland have seen some success in narrowing participation gaps thanks to equality impact agreements and gender action plans. Providers that demonstrate increased apprentice recruitment, retention and success rates should receive increased funding.

Hannah – Early Learning and Childcare Apprentice

Mental Health support services for all apprentices.

We support the Mental Health Support Service delivered by Remploy. We would like to see similar schemes rolled out across the rest of the UK. We would like to see the service better advertised to apprentices.

Amy – Business and Administration Higher Apprentice

Reduced cost public transport for apprentices.

Many apprentices are in low paid work and an apprentice on the Apprentice Minimum Wage can expect to pay 20% of their weekly wage on travel. Apprentices were promised a reduction in travel costs at the last election. We would like to see this manifesto commitment honoured by the Conservative party and adopted by other parties.

Gemma – Health Physics Monitor Apprentice

Anyone providing off the job training for apprentices should hold a relevant professional qualification and at least be working towards a teaching qualification.

Apprentices deserve to be educated by dual qualified professionals.

Charlie – Creative Digital Media Apprentice

We call for more severe consequences for those who mismanage training providers or apprenticeships.

Recent times have seen a number of training providers fail leaving apprentices in the lurch. Directors involved in failed providers have rapidly resurfaced and are back working in the sector whilst the apprentices they were meant to be training are still waiting to complete their apprenticeships.

The most recent apprenticeship pay survey revealed some 20% of level 2 and 3 apprentices had been illegally paid less than the pittance of the apprentice minimum wage. Half of apprentices also reported receiving no off the job training. Although when published there were calls for tougher sanctions we have yet to see this rhetoric put into action.

Raisa – Maintenance Apprentice

Combine level 2 and 3 apprenticeships into a single qualification

NSoA has spoken to thousands of apprentices about what is important to them about their apprenticeship. Developing competency in their chosen profession and becoming a valued member of the workplace rates consistently highly regardless of what level apprenticeship, where in the country or what sector apprentices are working in.

We are proposing that level 2 and 3 apprenticeships are rolled into a single programme lasting 3 years in total. There could be entry points both at level 2 and 3 recognising that apprentices begin their journey at different stages but apprentices would only be able to complete their apprenticeship at level 3.

This combined apprenticeship would reduce the “accidental” underpayment of apprentices being paid the apprentice minimum wage for longer than the first 12 months of their apprenticeship. Combined apprenticeships would also reduce the confusion and overlap between existing level 2 and 3 apprenticeships in the same occupation.

Combined apprenticeships would recognise that full time vocational and academic qualifications are predominantly undertaken over 2 years (A-levels and T-levels) as well as putting UK apprenticeships on the same footing as successful apprenticeship systems in Europe such as the Austrian, German and Swiss Dual system apprenticeships.

Chris – Team Leading Apprentice

Automatic voter registration of all apprentices

Training providers and employers hold the information needed to register their apprentices on the electoral register. They could give apprentices the option to register to vote when they enrol. This currently happens at some universities and leads to significantly higher levels of democratic participation

Shauna – Beauty Therapy Apprentice

Recognise level 4 apprenticeship qualifications as equal to other level four qualifications.

All apprenticeships to be on the UCAS tariff

Apprentices should be able to progress into academic qualification without repeating levels of study they have already completed. Many universities do not count level 3 and 4 apprenticeship qualifications as valid entry requirements.

This leads to apprentices being less likely to access Higher Education. By making sure all apprenticeships have a UCAS tariff this problem can be avoided.

Paddy – Electrical Engineering Apprentice

An independent information, advice and guidance service for apprentices

Having this service means apprentices can access the information, advice and guidance they need to make sure their apprenticeship is of a high quality and that they are accessing all the aspects of their apprenticeship that they are entitled too.

Amy - Business and Administration Higher Apprentice

Apprentices should be paid the Real Living Wage.

The Apprentice minimum wage is too low, is frequently ignored and should be abolished.

Apprentices bring economic value to their employers and this is recognised in their wage. If apprentices are not paid the living wage they are, by definition, not being paid enough to live.

Apprentices are both learners and both workers. The idea that apprentices should have a lower minimum wage than other workers to signify the contribution to the cost of their education is regressive and unfair.

Tony – HGV Mechanic Apprentice

Any new apprenticeship standard should have planned for a good apprentice experience before being approved.

When planning for a new apprenticeship there is too much emphasis on the aspects of apprenticeships that employers and training providers think are important. We would like to see more emphasis on the quality of apprenticeships in terms of how apprentices experience their apprenticeships. Having to plan for this at the design phase means the apprenticeship experience is given more thought and will lead to higher quality apprenticeships for apprentices.

Charlie – Creative Digital Media Apprentice

End the assessor visitor model of apprenticeships

This model of delivering 20% off the job learning has for too long given too many apprentices a lower quality of education. It is a model that rarely provides the full 20% off the job learning and often stretches the definition of "Guided learning" beyond all recognition.

Apprentices whose apprenticeships use the day or block release model tend to have better outcomes and a better experience. If the 20% off the job learning requirement is a serious one, the models that are used to provide this must be fit for purpose. The assessor visitor model is not fit for purpose.

Gemma – Health Physics Monitor Apprentice

Apprentices have access to free childcare

Allows parents and carers to access apprenticeships without the barrier of paying for childcare. This is currently available in most other areas of post 16 education and by introducing this it would improve the gap in parity of experience between apprenticeships and other post 16 education. Improves the social mobility of apprenticeships

Paddy – Electrical Engineering Apprentice

2.3% of all employees at organisations with a workforce of over 50 should be apprentices

The public sector currently has a target of having 2.3% of its personnel being apprentices. This target should be extended to include the private and third sectors. By doing this there would be an increase in apprenticeship numbers and also put emphasis on all employers addressing the skills gap that apprenticeships are working to close.

Chris – Team Leading Apprentice

Put in place real safeguards against sexual harassment in the workplace and in training providers.

This is something that is needed for all workers but specifically for apprentices. There are often power dynamics in the work place for apprentices that mean they are more likely to face sexual harassment but also not feel able to challenge this when it happens.

The recent report by the NUS women's campaign into sexual harassment in Further Education also shows that there needs to be serious work by Colleges and training providers to tackle sexual harassment in educational spaces as well as workplaces.

Tony – HGV Mechanic Apprentice

Nation Specific points

The public sector should be able to spend levy money on backfilling cover for apprentices doing their 20% off the job learning. (England only)

When apprentices are doing vital roles, like nursing, the time they spend doing their off the job learning needs to be covered by other staff. This cost is a barrier to the public sector recruiting as many apprentices as they could be as the cost of recruiting apprentices is higher than it is for roles that do not need cover. By allowing public sector organisation to spend their levy money on back filling these roles the barrier is removed

Gemma – Health Physics Monitor Apprentice

Guaranteed access to apprenticeships in (Welsh/Irish/Gaelic) for apprentices in (Wales/NI/Scotland)

Failing to provide education in a learner's language of choice is discriminatory. Funding and expanding apprenticeship provision in our languages will enable better participation rates and encourage jobs in rural communities. Particular care should be paid to ensure that there are sufficient staff able to deliver numeracy, IT and literacy in these languages.

Hannah – Early Learning and Childcare Apprentice

All apprenticeships should include a relevant qualification.

Some apprenticeships don't include a qualification. This makes it more difficult for apprentices to move between employers and makes it harder to progress into other forms of education.

Chris – Team Leading Apprentice

Introduce a 70/30 ratio for levy paying organisations so they must spend at least 70% of their levy account at levels 2, 3 and 4. (England only)

This will stop levy payers using their whole levy account training existing management staff. It encourages employers to focus on training and upskilling new and existing staff in a way that is more in line with the original stated aims of the apprenticeship levy. We believe this would encourage social mobility and create a more diverse dynamic workforce.

Charlie – Creative Digital Media Apprentice

Apprentice representation on the board of the Institute for Apprenticeships. (England only)
Apprentice representation on the board of every training provider.

An apprenticeship is made up of an employer, a training provider and an apprentice. Currently the first two have representation on the board of the IfA but apprentices do not. They are represented on the apprentice panel but this has not worked as a model of representation. Apprentices on this panel are used to promote apprenticeships and don't have the time or access to the board to properly place the apprentice voice into discussions about decisions the board makes.

All colleges and universities have student representation on their boards but this is not the case for independent training providers. Apprentice voice leads to better decision making and makes sure that the decisions boards make are in the interest of apprentices.

Paddy – Electrical Engineering Apprentice

If you would like more information about this manifesto or the NSoA in general you can email apprentice@nus.org.uk