**Elevate Equity 2024 – Session 2**

**Alwen**

The increasing trend for me is a clear message that we need to think different, differently about how work appeals to young people. When I was 19, I started working full time, and haven't stopped since then, but it was very much,a culture of going into the office. And so when I was 19, I was observing leaders above me. I was learning how to work. I was learning the behaviours, how to deal with people, how to deal with conflict and difficult situations, how to present myself, how to accept and give feedback. So I think a lot of that informal learning has been lost. And I think young people are probably disadvantaged from that.

**Martha**

I was struck recently by an interview I saw with Barack Obama who said someone was asking about advice for young people and what's the best advice to go take forward in your life? And he said, just be good at getting stuff done. That's simple. It's that simple. If you're young and you can get stuff done, you'll get more stuff to do, and then you'll get more stuff done and you'll get more stuff to do. And I really love that.

**Alwen**

And young people make much more values based positions.

**Martha**

Yes. Very important point.

**Alwen**

They want to work, you know, a couple of my team have really questioned, and gone further than, this is a job it will provide me with work and a salary it’s more than that. And I think that's, across young people now that they are looking to make sure that the value they bring to a role is more, it's in line with sustainable development. It's not adding to the problem that we have in terms of climate change and global warming.

**Carla**

I know from the Kainos team that they do actually offer a session, which is what does Kainos do? How do we how do we actually make money? What is our product? What are our services? Who are our customers? And that's fantastic because it means straight off the bat, you're accelerating somebody's commerciality in your organisation. And actually the thing I love about the Kainos training program, which is quite unique, I think, is it's. sort of like a good 12 week program for their apprentices, which is a huge upfront investment. We're here talking today about skills and training and what companies can be doing. And I think, you know, I think there's sometimes, I guess maybe an attitude that says, well, it's quite costly to do this. But what Kainos kind of experienced and developed over time was that actually it wasn't enough to give, for example, school leavers coming into their workforce, the same type of training or onboarding experience that maybe those who were a wee bit older were getting. And actually even when they did that cost benefit analysis, they said yes, it's an upfront cost for us to take people out of the business for you know, a significant amount of time, but that like classroom based environment where they're given a sort of deep dive into the great and the good of what it means to work at somewhere like Kainos actually meant that when they went back into the workplace and they kind of joined their various business units, they were able to be able to run a pace much, much faster than they would have otherwise.

**Martha**

What I see is a group of young people actually concerned about the planet, concerned about the world, concerned about the macro climate, likely to have multiple jobs, likely to be really intent on doing purposeful things in their work.

**Shevaun**

You know, British education is second to none in the world in lots of different ways. But we are not bringing the world of work into our schools, into our education settings. So we have a great shortage of careers advice capacity in most schools. We probably have, I would say, a lack of systemic engagement between workplaces and educational settings.

**Jane**

An understanding between employers and the education system and what those skills are, when they're going to be needed, and make sure that the, you know, the job opportunities that employers are creating are aligned with the training provision and the careers advice and education that young people are getting so that, you know people are moving into those jobs seamlessly, really. And employers don't have these skills shortages. And there's a whole other area that was really uncovered, which is actually more about the softer side of work readiness, getting young people just ready.

**Shevaun**

That's come up a few times.

**Jane**

Would go into business, factory, office, whatever it may be. You know, and the sort of confident communication, critical thinking type skills that are there, they’re there in those young people which needs to be a bit brought

**Shevaun**

out.

**Martha**

Yes. And I feel very lucky that I was given quite specific tasks and actions around that when I first started working. But that is not the case for many people, is it? And you have to, as an employer, spend time and investment, and it might not always be a priority to do those things.

**Ben**

Welcome back. Let's get into part two. Hope you're feeling refreshed. So this panel discussion is going to explore the hybrid working conundrum. Hybrid working has been accelerated since Covid. In 2019, pre-pandemic, 4.7% of jobs will work from home. By 2020 the ONS shared that 46.6% of employees were doing at least part of their job from home. And by 2022, a quarter of UK employees worked from home some of the time and 13% all of the time. While not available for all roles, there are many advantages to hybrid working. However, young people may miss out on learning from more experienced colleagues, informal mentoring and learning from their peers as well. So to explore this topic further I'm joined by our expert panellists to share their insights and thoughts. I'm joined by Viren, John, Kath, and Chris. I wondered if we could just go down the line and just say a bit more about what you do, before we get into the panel discussion, and we can start with you Viren.

**Viren**

Sure. I'm Viren Patel. I work at the OU. I’m the Director of Employers and Partnerships. And really my role is focused around the skills based landscape around all four nations of the UK and international.

**Ben**

Thank you.

**John**

So hi I'm John Griffin, I'm part of the management team responsible for early professionals at IBM, of which we have about 7 to 800. And I'm currently responsible for the learning and development for those early professionals.

**Kath**

Hi. I’m Kath Austin. I'm the Chief Programme Officer at Form the Future and we're one of those organisations that sits between students and the world of work. And we work with students to increase their confidence and show them the variety of work that they can do. And we work with businesses as well to encourage them back into schools and to bring students out into their workplaces.

**Chris**

I am Chris Luck. I'm the CEO of the Shaw Trust Group, which is an employability charity, but using a child to career framework. And what we try to do is help those with life challenges, hurdles, impediments to good work to overcome those and then go into work and then progress within work. And when I say large scale, last year, I think we helped about 300,000 people. So it is quite a large scale.

**Ben**

Amazing Thank you. Kath, I'm going to start with you. So what are young people's needs and expectations around hybrid working and do they actually want the opportunity to come into the office?

**Kath**

For the second question I think there is a resounding yes. There's a lot of research to show that, lots of surveys been done. But I think if we look at it from the young people's perspective, take an empathic approach to that, their context, their view of what they're moving into next is quite limited. And so they're sponges and they're coming into this position where they're like, right, I need to learn everything. I need to, just have my eyes open and be taking in all the information. And the moment you're going to a remote working situation, you cap the ability to take on new information to learn about that working world. And so they do. I think there's a... I struggle with it. I struggle working remotely to understand because non-verbal communication isn't happening readily. And also young people are asking more from their work environment because of this blending between your home life and your work life. And so with that, they're asking for more community work and they're asking for better wellbeing. And I think that when you have a remote working situation, it's harder to build a community. So those are big challenges that they face and it does hamper development through their work.

**Ben**

What are some of the wins though with the hybrid working? Because for the young people I speak to a lot of them saying they do want the online experience. Yes, a lot of them are quite scared even though it's good to challenge them by putting them in the office environment. A lot of them say that actually the online way is the easiest way in, to get into work.

**Kath**

There's two ways of looking at this I think. Initially, I think that they are used to working online in life. This is a tool they're very comfortable with. It can be a bit of a comfort zone as well. And so they're probably likely to say, oh yeah, I’ll just work from home. That sounds great. And I see that myself. And it's quite hard sometimes to get up and drag yourself into an office, but the benefit of when you go in is huge. It's huge. I’ve actually forgotten the other point.

**Ben**

That is like, what are the benefits for them?

**Kath**

Benefits. Yes. So I'm a mother, I'm a working mother. And so benefits for me being able to stay at home or work remotely when I've got extra pressures from being a mother. Awesome. I think when you're younger you may not have the need to be there for somebody else. Maybe you do. But I think as you move through work, that ability to work flexibly becomes even more important. Maybe when you're young, you can use that to your advantage. Maybe you've got more, no commute time. So you've got more time for your own pursuits outside of work.

**Ben**

Yes. John, I'm coming to you next. You're working with a multi-site business with employees based around the country. So I guess you've got experience within this space. What's that like?

**John**

Yeah. So, what I would say, first of all, is IBM has been a hybrid workforce for 20 plus years. So I haven't actually had an office or desk to go to for over 20 years. So it's been quite the norm. Because we're a technology company, we've got some of those tools that facilitate that. But from our perspective, we've got about five, 4 or 5 main locations. So from Manchester, Warwick, London, Winchester in Hampshire and Portsmouth are our main locations. But we hire early professionals from anywhere and everywhere in the country and we will attach them to one of those locations as their kind of base location. What I would say, is early young talent absolutely demand and expect the opportunity for hybrid work. It's an expectation coming into the workforce. My observations are those cohorts that joined during lockdown are probably finding it harder to then come back out of that and come in and be more present in the . Because they were inducted as part of lockdown, they started their training, their program and their work experience, work life remotely. They found it a little bit harder. There's many reasons for that. Whether it be time of travel, cost of travel, anxiety, you know, a number of reasons for that. As we've come out of that and we've gone back to a face to face kind of induction, and the first parts of their learning being face to face predominantly, we're seeing those now being more comfortable with coming into the office. And my observations are also that, those that are more present in the workplace, not every day, it's still a hybrid. It could be 2 or 3 days a week, but those that are more present, I'm observing they are probably developing faster than those that are more reticent to come into the office, and get involved in things. We've actually got some initiatives we're doing. Something happening this week, actually. So for Tuesday to Thursday, something called ‘get in.’ So get into the workplace, get inspired, get involved where we're running three days of education workshops. Things like navigating feedback, building positive habits. We're putting on some sessions and networking things local. We realise we've got to give them a reason and a purpose to come into the office. What's the blockers and what's the barriers to that? And it's our jobs to really facilitate things for them to come into the office for those, especially that are a little bit hesitant, I would say, because we realise that whole learning by osmosis, coming in, shadowing, observing is where people develop the most.

**Ben**

I love that. I want to talk about some of the expectations that people do have around flexibility. I mean, I've been working from home since 2017 now. My role in the BBC is LGBT correspondent. It's entirely home based. Plus, wherever I needed to film, I just grabbed my kit, grabbed my producer, and we went to wherever we needed to go. I've never had a physical desk within an office space, and I think, to be honest, if I was to be given an offer for a role within journalism and I was told I need to be sat at a desk for five days a week, it would probably hinder the work I actually do. It's easier to be mobile and just be everywhere that I need to be. So what have people's expectations been like around flexibility, and how has that changed since Covid?

**John**

Yeah, so I think it's probably increased in terms of the expectation to have time not in the office and time at home. I think that there's, I agree, actually the thought of going into an office every day and sitting at the same desk every day horrifies me.

**Ben**

I can't imagine it.

**John**

I just couldn't do it. So actually having the variety I think is good just for your general health and wellbeing, different changes of environments, but also depending on what you need to do. So again, I think most people have more productive days at home actually, in terms of getting stuff done. You get more stuff done if you're at home without those interruptions and maybe a longer day. I think you need to accept and be prepared if you're going to go into the office, you're going to have those ad hoc conversations, meetings, collaboration and opportunities, which are all good as well. But we've got to find reasons for those to happen and for people to go in. And I find when I do go into the office, I went to the office a couple of weeks ago, didn't open my laptop. So there's lots of stuff backing up emails and oh, I've got to catch up. But actually, I was so energised by that day because I was just meeting people on the stairs, in the corridors, having really meaningful conversations. So actually, the benefit of that day, was probably it was just as much as sitting at home and just doing emails and doing work all day at home. So you've got to find the balance and when are the right times to go in?

**Ben**

Yes. Chris, I'm coming to you next. So the Shaw Trust aims to help people find and keep meaningful jobs and helps younger people navigate key turning points in their lives. How did that mission evolve during and after Covid?

**Chris**

Because the majority of the people that we wish to help or choose to help are those that have complex needs and life challenges, whether through social, you know, socio economic background or geographies, or wellbeing. But what we found actually was kind of counter-intuitive. That during Covid, particularly those young individuals that we helped, who had a natural disinclination to get to centres in order to be, if you like, preached at in the old model of doing things. We found that actually the remote working gave them a lot more confidence and a lot more willingness to engage with the soft skills preparations in particular in being able to cope with understanding what's being put to them because they're in their safe environment, they're in their home environment or in an environment where they are used to. So what we found is actually the success rate in the programs we were running on behalf of DWP and others, actually increased massively. And we reported this to DWP as we were coming out of Covid to say that actually our approach of more remote, and less in presence, created a significant, and I'm using that in the true sense of academic, a significant variance to say these were better outcomes and that we wanted to maintain them. But of course, Covid was over. So we went back to the old contract where we had to start dragging people back in again. And we saw that the youth in particular, their confidence and their success started to drop off again. So in that sense, counterintuitive is what we found.

**Ben**

Wow. Viren I'm coming to you. The OU is a four nations university. How did it work during Covid and what are the current ways of working at the OU?

**Viren**

Okay? So the OU is a four nations university. We have colleagues in all four nations. So we've kind of already had a culture of remote learning collaboration really. What I think Covid did was actually level the playing fields. So in the past when colleagues were remote and people were in the office, they felt slightly isolated, detached from that conversation. Covid, everyone was remote. So therefore they were part of that conversation and it was a level playing field. So I think that's the one thing, from a kind of a university point of view. But for my team, I kind of have a phrase. The phrase is location with a purpose. And what does that mean? Well, actually, if you've got a lot of data to crunch or you've got a report to write, being at home is actually maybe the best place for you because you can concentrate on the work. You can have no sort of outside pressures and outside noise affecting you. But you can also come into the office when you want to collaborate, when you have team meetings. So we do have regular team meetings. They all meet up and they come into the office on a couple of days a week. I have my all hands meetings where I bring everyone in my unit together to talk about what's going on and to collaborate, so it's trying to find that balance. I reckon, you know, that's the important thing. I think also as a training provider, we are a distance education provider. So actually we are ideally placed to deal with the challenge of Covid and being remote. So I think for us we saw an increase in the demand for our services from existing students, but also potentially new students. And not only that, we are actually supporting other institutions and other organisations to actually go online. So in this instance, we were benefiting from Covid in terms of being remote, but actually were helping other partners around the UK to actually go online, you know, with our approach. So it kind of helped in that way.

**Ben**

That makes sense. Katherine, coming back to you, what are you seeing across the different sectors and how is that impacting young people in particular?

**Kath**

So different sectors, I mean, the stats suggest that half of everybody in the workforce are working at least in some way remotely. But of course, that's very different in different sectors. So the service industry, it's almost impossible to do that. And so for young people to be able to move into that sector, for example, is so much easier in some sense, because first of all, they can see it. It’s in their life. Just as ,you know, a child growing up, they can see that sector, they can get..I know that casual work is diminishing, but it's certainly not in that sector. And so there's ease of experience gained. Sectors where we've got a high proportion of the staff working remotely or in a hybrid situation I find are often invisible. to the general public, it's not widely advertised, not widely known. And so the experience of being able to understand what it's like to work when you're in school, still sort of the traditional work experience model is Year 10, that's not necessarily available anymore because there's nowhere for them to go. There's no office that's regularly populated with the workforce. There might be 1 or 2 people kind of sporadically placed around this chasmic office, but there isn't the same buzz anymore. And that's going to and is affecting young people's ability to fully understand the possibilities before them. How I mean that already careers are misunderstood because there's no context but also there's no messaging about it in school, and they don't even have the chance to go and have a look for themselves. So there needs to be, hybrid is something which is going to carry on by the looks of it. Everybody quite favours this way of working. And so we need to find a way as a solution that we can involve students. And there is a model where perhaps people do come in and there is an opportunity for young people to experience life in the office, but also experience at home. That brings all sorts of issues up, like safeguarding.

**Ben**

Yeah.

**Kath**

But it should be part of and I love what Lynne was saying about, tearing up work experience as it stands now and reinventing it, bearing in mind the hybrid working model, because it needs to be addressed, it needs to be embedded, and we need to have more investment from businesses, from the higher level to say, yes, we're on board and we're going to go in, we're going to take part and invest in it.

**Ben**

Keep on that thought. So I've got to hear that you believe that the lack of face to face opportunities for young people has had a knock on effect on talent pipelines. Can you tell me more about that?

**Kath**

Okay. So you can work experience Year 10. Everybody knows it's been going decades and decades. But actually I think it was Lauren who mentioned that limiting beliefs, it might have actually been somebody else, who mentioned limiting beliefs start to set in really, really early on. And so if we don't stop. I'm sorry. Can you just repeat the question?

**Ben**

Yeah. Yeah. So the lack of face to face opportunities for young people is having a knock on effect on talent pipeline.

**Kath**

That's right. Yeah. So if we don't start talking with students in Year 10 and opening the doors for them, then they're not going to ...Sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm really struggling. Really struggling to talk, then the knock on effect of this...

**Ben**

Let me, I’ll come back to you. No, it's all good. Have we got some water? Thank you. Chris, I'm going to come to you. So you also help businesses become better workplaces. Has this area of work become more challenging due to hybrid and remote working?

**Chris**

That's a great question Ben and I can approach this in two ways. One is, by helping others but also we are a large employer ourselves. We have over 3000 staff and we have a very high churn rate because we run effectively a contract portfolio system. So we have contracts coming online and offline all the time. So managing a workforce, is as much a challenge for me as it is for helping others. And it reminds me that when Covid lockdown first started, I had this rather bizarre existentialist moment, when in my inbox at one stage, at one time, I had an email from one of my employees saying that if I made them go into the office, they would sue me. I had another email that said, if I don't allow them to go into the office, they would sue me. So, you know, the bell curve rules, and that is something that we really need to be conscious of. There isn't a right and wrong answer. And the reality is, there is a concentration of demand which I see sitting around the hybrid space. But there is also the extremes, which also organisations have to address. The other thing that I just want to say, that in our observation the evolving world of work is impacting all age groups and the other age group that is particularly impacted as well as youth is also the over 50s. I mean, they are in an extraordinary place of challenge, and they too are exiting the workplace because they don't believe there is a world of work for them. So in our thinking, it's actually again, the two extremes that need to be addressed because, in this country, we can't afford to have children in NEET or youth in NEET, and we can't afford to have competent, experienced, qualified people believing there is no place for them. So that is something that we need to address for the youth themselves. My observation is that they have a preference for distributed, disperse, differentiated work as a norm. They don't like doing the same thing day in, day out. They don't like coming into the office day in, day out. They like to know they can come into the office when they want, at a point of choice. Which then is quite difficult to manage. And the other observation that we had in trying to address the bell curve, we've seen a huge increase in diversity in our own workforce and diversity in every sense. And you mentioned that, you know, working from home is advantageous because of children and caregiving but we've seen a huge increase in diversity because people can now access work because of hybrid. And this plays through into our work streams that we deliver as well. And the other bit about diversity, it means we've got a much higher geographical diversity because people can now work with us and live in what are considered to be remote places to where our efforts are. London, Birmingham and the Midlands predominantly. So we've got people working for us living in Scotland and Wales and the South West, and that gives us diversity in every sense. But the other challenge that we have organisationally in making sure that the hybrid model is about right, is that sometimes you've got to make hard choices. So we have the largest not-for-profit children's home business in the country. I haven't yet worked out how to deliver children's care in homes remotely or even hybridly. So then across the work spectrum, you've got the challenge between those that want some remote and hybrid but can't, and then others that want it but can't because the nature of commission contracts say no, this is hybrid or remote. So we are learning from our own experience and practice and development and trying to help organisations, whether it's, with disability confidence, whether it's with diversity, and also in particularly helping organisations manage and enable youth in particular, because of the high levels and increasing levels of mental health issues. Helping organisations to create handrails for those with mental health challenges, which can be, as you know, expressed in many, many different ways, and also the rise in neurodiversity and the expectation that you must address neurodiversity. You can't just say it's odd and put it aside. So we're sort of seeing all of that play out, and it all needs to be addressed by this community as to how do you bring that all together?

**Ben**

Thanks. Yes. A lot of work to do. Can you actually tell me a bit more about the over 50 challenges? It would be really interesting to know more.

**Chris**

So I can say this as an over 50. So the over 50s, and again, I am sort of caricaturing this, it’s obviously a bell curve within the over 50s as well, is what they're seeing is that the pace of work evolving away from, let's call it traditional blue or near blue work is changing so quickly, that their skill sets and their experience are now also equally not passing the interview hurdle. In fact, they're not even getting to interview. So they can't even say they've got this experience. They too suffer from an inability to take their work experience to date and to put it and to express it in terms that are readily digestible and understandable by employers. So employers can see opportunity rather than risk, a bit like youth, they see risk first, not opportunity. So there's a mindset piece there that needs to be played out. And also I think, you know, the rate of change is so rapid that there is a sense of alienation from the workplace. You know, if you said to a 55, 58, 60 year old, don't worry, I think you'd make a very fine drone pilot, sort of not really know what you're talking about. Or you could be, you know, an avatar assistant. They haven't got a clue what you're talking about. So we have another left behind generation. But it’s at the other end of the spectrum and our youth today will be our 50s. So, you know, at the conversations I've had with Open University, we have to have a culture and an embrace culture of through life education, skilling, upskilling, new skilling, reskilling. At a rate of change that actually our education system doesn't support, our government doesn't support in its incentives to business to actually upskill, new skill, reskill at pace. So there are systemic level problems that ultimately filter down into massive hurdles for youth and massive hurdles for the other end. And those of us that are sort of in between the two, are I'm guessing, we’re the new Golden age, you know, we’re the new golden age at the moment, a bit like they talk about the baby boomers being, we’re the new ones at the moment. And someday someone is going to point out that that is unfair. There's much work to be done.

**Ben**

Really interesting. Thank you. Viren I'm coming to you next. The OU is a major provider for apprenticeships and other forms of learning. Why is it important that L&D continues in the hybrid environment?

**Viren**

So I think, Covid was a major disruptor to education of young people nowadays. And we've got lots of evidence that young people have been negatively impacted by the lack of face to face of education. So for me, learning at work is essential, right? It's the bridge between education and the workplace and being able to build that bridge through the challenges of face is really essential for organisations do that. And, you know, learning to be accessible, it needs to be flexible. It can't be around geographic boundaries anymore. It's got to be able to flex with the way people are working and young people are working. So I think that's really important. So it's got to overcome those barriers. And I think, you know, we heard from Joseph this morning around how apprenticeships kickstarted his career. Well, actually, they're the perfect way for young people to launch their careers at work. They continue to learn in a structured way. They're working. They're learning from the employers, getting all that input in to actually apply that to their education, to their workplace. So that's really important. And I think more and more people, so employers, government learning providers, parents, individual students or employees, are seeing the benefits learning on the job. And I think that's really important. And we've got a great example of an employer that works with their employees in that way. So RDT Ltd, who's going to be on the panel later on today, a great example of how they are using apprenticeships to bridge that gap, to make it more accessible for young people to actually learn and earn at the same time.

**Ben**

Amazing. Kath I’m coming to you next. So outside of formal learning, what do young people need to thrive in the workplace?

**Kath**

Thank you for forgiving me for lack of being able to speak. Thriving in the workplace is something which is continual. The learning to be able to do that is continual. And as I alluded to in my previous question, it starts early. So laying the foundations of understanding, what it is I need to be able to do, to be able to move into these roles and then to move on to my next role and my next role. And I think, one of the major things that we can be doing to encourage young people to thrive in the workplace is, blending and not making this divide between education and work. So young people are moving and making that into a huge leap. And we're expecting them to make that leap and come out of an institution where they have to ask permission to go to the toilet.

**Ben**

Yeah. It’s real.

**Kath**

Into an institution where we're expecting them just to know how to act. And so if, I would say that businesses need to take more responsibility, quite an ask, and use organisations, shameless plug, like Form the Future, to be able to work more in schools. To talk with students about what it’s actually like day to day and what they do is perhaps they have a team meeting. And how do you talk in that team meeting? What are those listening skills? How do you work out together? How do you bring the skill set that you innately have and what's that contribution? And so we start doing that really early on with primary school students. We brought 150 into a luminaire at Granta Park in Cambridge. And they got to understand what it was like to be a scientist. And that was really eye opening for them. It starts to lay down the foundations and that social capital and we can do that at every stage. And when it doesn't happen, the leap into work is too enormous. The other thing I would say, sorry it’s a long question, thriving in the workplace. Ultimately we're humans. We work very well with other humans. There needs to be more mentorship. There needs to be more near peer modelling within the system. And I would say it doesn't just stop in your early career. It should carry on all the way through. And so when a young person comes into a role, they're far more likely to succeed if someone, who's only a few steps ahead of them, can show them how they got there, what they did, how they failed, and how they got up and started again, rather than someone who's 20 years ahead, really succeeds, and everything’s going really well for them. It hasn't. So if we build in a system of mentorship and role models within work, I think we're going to see a lot more success. And that does lend itself to a hybrid working model in lots of ways.

**Ben**

Yes. I wonder if you've got any thoughts on why it is that this generation is struggling and my generation, your generation just didn’t in the same way. I got challenged with this in a recent funding application I did for my organisation and it was difficult because I genuinely didn't really know. Is it that we just have the internet now? So we speak to other people about their struggles, and we can combine and like compare our experiences in work experience and see whether what we're going through is normal. Why is it that people are struggling now and they didn't previously?

**Kath**

I think there's a major shift that our generation, I love the fact you said our generation. These generations have grown alongside the digital world. It's like a whole other universe online. My daughter's 11. She's never known a world without the internet. She doesn't understand that I sat in the hallway on a telephone, hoping my mum didn't have the phone, listening in the other side. And they're not born with the tools to know how to navigate that world.

**Ben**

Yeah.

**Kath**

And I think it can be quite isolating. And then we have Covid and immediately you've got everybody being told just to stay within this little circle of people in their household and not start to stretch out, build confidence, build skill sets, build context.

**Kath**

And so it's almost a perfect storm. This small span of maybe ten years within that generation, from maybe my daughter’s age up to where they're leaving school now. They've really missed out. And I think we're all affected. But someone said earlier, that this formative stage in their life is where they start to do things like build friendship groups, understand those dynamics which are so important, get their first boyfriend or girlfriend, have a Saturday job and all of that was missed. It's my opinion. I think perhaps that’s got something to do with it. But we probably do need to do more research and understand what it is exactly that we can.. what the problem is, so that we can address it more directly.

**Ben**

Yes. John I'm coming to you. So IBM has a ladder of opportunity. Can you tell us more about that, please?

**John**

Yeah. So, our ladder of opportunities. Basically the availability of opportunities to progress. So we have apprenticeships from level three to level seven that we offer for our employees. And really it's giving people we don't see, or we don't expect people to actually come in, complete an apprenticeship and then that's the end of your learning and development and off you go. Good luck. We're really keen to see people, you know, look at what other opportunities are available. So, we're quite proud of the fact that we've seen some people sort of go through that journey, that ladder of opportunity. So I managed an apprentice, at the moment who came in, completed a level four apprenticeship, successfully completed that with distinction. They've since, just on the verge of completing a level six degree apprenticeship. And we're having conversations about level seven and they are on the verge of getting their third promotion. They've just bought their second property. They're 24. Six years ago, they were the people coming out of college. And again, we've talked about the kind of skills and having skills. And again, it might be semantics. We were talking about this before, but I think it's more around the behaviours. So again it's identifying the behaviours that people have which then facilitate them building those skills. It's our job to give them the skills. But when I talk about behaviours and talking about having a growth mindset, being resourceful, a bit of resilience, a bit of creativity and problem solving. If they've got those, which is what we look at in our exploration sessions, we don't call them assessment centres. We call them explorations, so we remove the assessment place. That's what we identify and then that looks for the opportunity to then go on that ladder of opportunity. Really important for us in our sector because digital skills are changing all of the time. So again, we can look at what those opportunities, those qualification and learning opportunities are in the digital space relevant to our strategy and our organisation, and where we need our employees to be kind of building along that ladder of opportunity. So it's been a great success for us.

**Ben**

Can I ask how competitive are those exploration centres?

**John**

Compared, well, competitive in terms of getting through? So we have a lot of demand, we have a lot of interest in our apprenticeships. So when we opened our degree apprenticeships as part of Apprenticeship Week, in February, it closed in... we opened it in the morning. It closed at lunchtime because we were so oversubscribed, literally thousands of applicants. So we had to close it at that point. The actual..once you're in. And interesting we talked about AI and the use of that in recruitment. Now we are a technology company 113 years old AI, GenAI and hybrid cloud is our strategy. Surprisingly we're not really using AI in our recruitment. It's pretty much a very manual process. You'd be surprised at how little we're using AI in our recruitment process, actually. But we go through the application form, kind of a pre online test. And then we have an exploration session which is kind of a couple of group activities. And then a 1 to 1 conversation interview. Now we don't set any quotas. So if we've got an exploration session with 18 people in it we can take all 18. So it's not a competitive environment in that we can only take five of you. We’re just looking at getting people through to that next stage, which then we match them to the relevant roles in the business at that stage. So I'm always very clear to say you're not competing against one another today, because that's a bit that can trip them up. And then we see some of these not so positive behaviours. So I'm always very clear. We're very transparent in terms of that communication. And actually prior to that, things that are being discussed today, we have a pre call. We set them up as a social group as well so they know what to expect in terms of comments. We make it, easy for me to say, but as comfortable as possible coming into that session.

**Ben**

No, I love that because I was just thinking when I first did assessments and it was after universities, it was for internships but for graduate schemes, so it would have been more like 2021. I can't imagine doing that level of high pressure environment, knowing you're walking into something with people you have to be nice to, but at the same time you're competing with them, you like literally want to beat them in every way possible to get the job. But I was thinking, how would I have managed that? Like 16, 17 years ago. I don't think I could have. It's tough. Chris, I'm going to come to you next. How does the Shaw Trust support education and help bridge the jump into the work environment, please?

**Chris**

That's a great question. I just want to comment on what John said, which first of all, your programs are excellent and they are, you know, highly sought after. But just a general comment is that, you know, absent soft skills and traumatic personal hinterlands, physical, mental and metaphysical closes down access to a significant percentage of those that might aspire to the sorts of opportunities that John has. So it is actually quite a narrow choke point to that place. So these individuals, as already commented on, you know, what they do is they actually safely self-select out through deaspiring. So actually what we need to do is how do you create equity in the aspirational space? Aspiration is something that is all too often missed out on as a sort of a motivating factor. So that John is doubly, trebly overwhelmed with applicants for those programs from those hinterlands which are effectively, disincentivized and disadvantaged. Next thing. So back to your question Ben. So we absolutely believe that education learning skills is a critical pathway on the child to career pathway. So we have our own multi-academy trust, the Shaw Education Trust, which we sponsored. Started with two schools.

**Carla**

It's now 35 schools. It's fully grown up and it's doing amazing things. Deliberately set up in an area of socioeconomic deprivation, 10,000 students, 5000 of them are on the school meals scheme. That is part of our using education. We’ve just worked with the Department for Education to get them to change their policy so we could set up a single academy trust, set up a school for children that are in our children’s home in one particular area, because there was no...

**Chris**

So although the children were in-countied whereas before they were scattered around the country, in county, the right thing to do, there was no schooling for them. So the DFE working together with the county council, we changed the policy to set up at Risk to All a single academy trust, to give those children an opportunity and equity for the future. So that's another way we do it. And then of course, for businesses, critical that they offer education, learning and reskilling opportunities for their workforce. So as our normal sort of, competencies into the programs, we develop an offer. We have an education, learning skills. Division. So education, learning and skills is critical now and forevermore.

**Ben**

Thank you. Verin I'm coming to you. How important is flexibility in learning when offered to young people?

**Viren**

I think it's hugely important. I think young people have grown up in this digital world. So I call them the YouTube or TikTok generation. And I know my 24 year old son has not watched you on BBC.

**Ben**

That's it.

**Viren**

Learnt everything from YouTube, right? That's his go to. So I think, you know, having flexibility in your learning to be able to fit in other things that young people want to do, like doing part time or full time work, like caring for friends or relatives, enjoying life for actually having a side hustle, which is a more common thing, is really important. And we can have a great example of working with an employer, to do this. So we work with Uber, Uber Eats and Uber Drive. They give access to their drivers and their couriers short courses from the OU to a point actually to get to a degree as well, so they can have a degree not only for them as a driver, but actually for their family. So it's a learning as a benefit. So they've seen this importance of flexibility. They've seen this as a way of keeping loyal staff engaged, but also it's, you know, face to face learning is not fitting with the modern occupations now. So having that flexibility is really important. I think that's really, really good to see and to hear as well. And I think, you know, we've got some recent surveys we've conducted where 48% of the young people that we've surveyed said actually flexibility was key and that the OU does offer that flexibility as well as other organisations. So it's really important that we are able to deliver that flexibility in that workplace.

**Ben**

Yes. Thank you. John, can you tell us about the IBM and the OU collaboration in the apprenticeship space, please?

**John**

Yeah, I mean, I think it leads on from what Viren said there. Flexibility being a key word actually. So for us, we have a very good relationship with The Open University. We're able to offer apprenticeships with the OU for sometimes again, coming back to that ladder of opportunity, some of those maybe mid-career professionals that perhaps are doing it later on in their career and it might just work better for them in terms of having the remote nature of that. And they tend to be a little bit more disciplined in terms of kind of completing the work. But we're also seeing some of our new joiners from college, you know, having that opportunity as well. OU are able to offer us the apprenticeships that fit our workforce strategy. Very easy to work with, good relationships and actually Open University show curiosity in terms of what we're doing as a business and are in tune with that. So I think there's many reasons for that. But again, I think it comes back to the flexibility, for us as an organisation, but then for us as learners. So one of our learners that changed providers actually towards The Open University, talked about when they were making that decision, they were kind of moving house to a different part of the country. So actually, it's very hard for them to then say, okay, I'm going to choose this university because based on location, the OU really worked very well for them at that time, as well as the quality teaching and coaching and mentorship that they receive as well.

**Ben**

Amazing. We might have some time for questions in the room/online. I think we probably gonna. Yeah, I think we will. We're get the mic to you in just one second. In the meantime, Chris, I'm going to come back to you. What are your views on the role of internships, coaching and mentoring in the new hybrid environment?

**Chris**

I'm glad you asked me this, because I think this is one of the critical change areas, that society and organisations and business really need to get their heads around. So in my own time, pre Covid because of my own previous experience, but also into Covid and subsequently, we have to change how we deliver that. So I now spend approximately 40% of my time mentoring, coaching, prompting, identifying talent within my own organisation. I have spent and invested in Future Leaders programs, Future Leaders Foundation programs, shadow executive boards, you know, coffee with the CEO, drop ins, all of it to invest in our people. So they have those touchpoints. So the next thing, of course, is that the senior leadership must change and believe in that and embrace it if it is to work. So it's fundamental. Mentoring, coaching and creating that new way of learning from the office. The office has to come to the hybrid world. I think what it means is that we need better distributed leadership. It needs to be geographically unanchored. The come to the office or you won't develop is 19th century. It's just unacceptable. And it's not a default we should be defaulting back to. I think leaders need to be brave enough to evolve accordingly. And you have to embrace risk. You have to take risk and embrace risk if youth are to develop in a reduced oversight environment, which is what hybrid working is. But the flip side of reduced oversight and risk, an appetite for it, is that it's a creativity and experimental catalyst for youth, because guess what? They need to get on with it, and they need touch points and guidance and then suddenly they start to do amazing things. I mean, I'll give one example, I'm sorry about the time, one example, you know, we were at one stage about two years ago, we were struggling with rebranding the corporate image because the organisation said they wanted it. And we went externally and expensive organisations were not giving me what my people wanted. And we had this youngster, and he was a youngster who I thought was so talented. So one day I just messaged him, just to say, is there any chance that you can just give me a complete redesign for the organisation? Came back, yes, of course Chris. Two months later, it was signed off as the new approach.

**Kath**

Wow, wow.

**Chris**

Yeah. Now that individual has gone on and on and on, he's extraordinary. So risk, has always saved me a vast amount of money. Now, that should motivate business in and of itself. But it's about. So you've got to take risk and you got to give opportunity and you've got to have light touch. Not, I'll see you at the coffee, sorry at the watercooler at 10:30. Be there or you're done. So we need to understand what we're really talking about. So it needs to be priced in and it needs to be designed in. Now, the other flip side of this I've observed, is that my organisation, is really embracing colleague bottom up development and opportunity and internal cross career pathways. This is really, really exciting for them. So they want to stay. There's another way of getting youth engaged with business. But I also suffer from a huge amount of external poaching. Why? Because I've got young people and middle traders who are hugely invested in, huge confidence and you know, I'm kind of, I grit my teeth when I get emails from my shadow board youngsters saying, Chris, just want to let you know I've got a promotion and a brilliant new opportunity. I could never have got it without the exchanges with you. And I have to write back saying, I'm delighted for you, but I am delighted for them. Now, what should happen is that government needs to incentivise organisations that are willing to invest in their people for their futures and their careers, and the value they can bring to the nation. And at the moment, government does not. So other organisations that don't want to invest, all they'll do is they go down the poaching route and those that spend the money, get effected, robbed of talent. So we need to incentivise good business behaviour to develop people through career and through life. And everybody did it, then everybody moves forward. So, to your question, how important is it internship coaching? Massive. Absolutely massive.

**Ben**

Thank you so much. Let's go into the room now. Who had a question? Did you just have a question? Yes. Going to get the mic to you know.

**Patrick**

Do the panel have any advice on how you manage the two gaps? So you have experienced people with knowledge that need to teach and mentor the young people, because we all had that. But they want to work at home because they're much more productive at home, because they don’t get interrupted so much by the young people who need to ask them questions. And then you've got the young people who you know, in our experience, are quite happy coming in, but do also have that need for hybrid working. How do you manage all of that?

**Ben**

Anyone want to take that?

**Chris**

Yeah, I'm very happy to. I think that is a great question. And the reality is it's a tension and it's a permanent tension. And some of the things that I've already sort of, talked about, some of the examples I've given is an example of that tension from the, I'll see you if you send me in, and I'll see you if you don't, to being able to take risk and have your own leadership team communicate that and demonstrate that same behaviour. So that you create a safe environment for people to exchange. But the other challenges, you know, I've got contracts at 100% in person in place. I've got some that are 100% remote because that's what the commissioners want. So you're always going to have grey areas, points of, you know, points where they just, they touch and people look across the boundaries enviously. And you have to manage that. I think the key thing is to be alive to it, and to be willing to invest in it and see it as an opportunity not a cost. It is a risk, but not a cost. And that means you have to invest in it. And that's the trick really, is how do you get, how do you create the resource and the time and the space for organisations to invest in this space? And I think as a nation, our mindset has to be that we need to develop talent through career, through life, not just for the company. It has to be, if you like, for the individual first, because empowerment through progression is to make sure that we offer vast amounts of, you know, online learning, additional learning, we connect with external organisations, we create the time for them to go and do it and it's not directly work related. It's what they want to pursue. And it's a bit like, I'm not stealing it entirely, it's a bit like Richard Branson, is that his quote of I think, he could, I paraphrase you know, invest in them so much that that they can leave. And the very act of doing so means that they don't leave.

**Question**

It doesn't always work like that.

**Chris**

No it doesn’t always work. There's a bell curve and you have to and again, this is the leadership risk. You've got to accept that there's a bell curve. Some you're going to lose badly. Some of them you're going to completely be surprised by the brilliance. But overall it's that sense of do your people feel that they're invested in? So one of the things we're doing, for example, because of this massive hybrid working and differentiated work going across the group, you know, we're having the, you know, a Shaw Trust connect day where 10% of the workforce is being brought together in one place to do nothing but connect. And they’ve designed it. My people have designed it. It’s not been dictated top down. What is it that you want to connect? What do you want to show? And effectively what they’ve created or designed, is they’ve created a kind of internal show and tell, a job fair and, you know, an expression of pride in what they do to share across the organisation and the day is theirs. But that's our investment back to create touchpoints. But you're going to, so the idea is, win most of it and don't try and win all of it and accept that you're going to lose some.

**Viren**

Can I just add also I think, this is where I think mentoring coaching is really key. And eventually and also reverse mentoring. So get the younger people to mentor the older, more experienced team members. Because actually you learn both ways. And I think it's really important I mentor remotely so you can mentor younger people remotely. You can add value through a remote basis. But actually, I learned a lot more from those younger individuals who are telling me, actually Viren you’re old school, that was like, you know, 1960s mate, you need to be doing this differently. So I think being able to get your teams to be able to immerse themselves in that hopefully will help in building a formal framework to do it and build those basics, build those coaches, build those mentors. Because I think that will help build the bridge, I think, in my opinion. So it's worked for us.

**Ben**

Thank you. I'm going to come here for a question now.

**Patrick**

Ben you were saying earlier weren’t you that some young people are looking for flexibility, which is fantastic. You work at IBM and yeah you work at the Shaw Trust. But of course some occupations, so I've been working a teacher apprenticeship I've been developing for a while and they can't offer that flexibility. So do you think there's going to be some occupations are going to suffer a little bit in this new hybrid world, aren't they? So some people are going to want to work at your IBMs and these areas where you can get that flexibility in that hybrid working because there are going to be those sectors where you just can't get that. And how do you overcome that? Or is that just a challenge that we just gonna have to face? Is it gonna have to be some new, completely radical thinking? Do we need to really change the way we think about things?

**Ben**

Any thoughts on that?

**Kath**

I think there's a wider view of looking at that. So it's not kind of a binary answer as I'm so motivated by this job because it's hybrid or I'm not. I think when we talk to children about careers, we ask them what it is they love doing and what gives them fulfilment. That feedback loop is connected. And so if hybrid working is part of that, it might steer them in that direction. The teaching profession doesn't really lend itself to hybrid working, but I know that it has changed as well. So from the perspective of being able to do more meetings online, perhaps there's a movement towards that as well. I do think we probably do need to look at how we, the whole world, is moving towards this way, and that doesn't mean that that profession shouldn't either. And so I'm all up for that, tearing up of the book and redesigning and looking at it from a different way.

**Chris**

And, just on that, I think that question is a great question, but I think if we just took a greater historical lens, the same question was asked when we moved from the agricultural economy to the industrial economy. And then we did do the deindustrialised economy. And you know, if a society evolves as the world evolves, you're always going to have this question. And I think there is no cookie cutter. So this generation's leadership is responsible for the forward look, that's the key thing. And you know, I remember reading a while ago, an article, saying that when the first telegraph poles were put in the United States, many communities saw it as a threat to society and were busy cutting down the telegraph pole lines today. Now today that's laughable. But at the time it was really serious. So these existential threats and how are we going to move forward, have always been overcome. And I think it's our challenge to overcome it today.

**John**

I think there was a report that just came out. I think it was from Handshake possibly, that said, about 50% of young talent at the moment would let a lack of hybrid working, would stop them from applying for a certain job. So it's kind of fifty-fifty. So I think we've got again, I don't know the answers, but you've got to hope that that passion, the values, that career path drives them more than the flexibility option, I suppose. But it's going to depend on the individual to some extent.

**Viren**

And just finally on that point, I think also, we shouldn't underestimate how savvy these young people are. If they want a career in, you know, in education or want to be in medicine, they probably understand, actually, they're going to have to go to school, they're going to now have to go to hospital. So I think those individual young people, you know, they have a view and sometimes they have that focus. They'll get with it. So I think, you know, it's just managing that perspective, I guess.

**Ben**

Thank you all. Okay. Part two done. So we're going to go for a lunch break. I will be back at 1:45 to hear insights into what Gen Z value and how employers might think about growing their own talent. Until then, I'd like to thank our panellists for joining us now. And thank you as well. Thank you.

**Rachel**

I grew up on the island, and then I went on to working at Red funnel, the ferry company. But I always wanted to work for the NHS, but there weren't many opportunities for studying on the island with it. Unless you wanted to move off and go to university, and I knew that wasn't really for me, so I’ve waited for the opportunity to do it. Doing my learning through The Open University as an apprenticeship was good because it's very hands on-learning and we never had to really travel away, but always work the shifts we needed to type thing and then study after. So it was a good way of learning. There'd be lots of support and the tutors were always great.

**Donna**

Rachel was somebody that hadn't had any formal caring experience. Had cared for a family member with dementia prior to starting the program. She's gone from a shrinking violet into a huge blooming flower, so it's lovely to have seen how much she's grown not just as a professional, but as a person as well.

**Rachel**

I’m currently in the community. I work with Western Central Community Nurses, and I love it out there. I do a lot of my placements in hospital on different wards, and I'm very grateful for getting the experience to work on end of life ward. It really shaped the person I am now.