**Elevate Equity 2024 – Session 4**

**Fiona**

We write software for the insurance sector. We've been established for over 30 years. We've got about 150 people and we're growing. We have people that design the product. We have people that write the code. We have people that test the code. So people in that technology space are integral to our success. We've struggled like everybody with retention because the competition is so fierce. Recruiting these people, the pool is very, very small and we have particular requirements.

**Jane**

Probably the biggest challenge that employers are facing when it comes to digital skills is the shortage of talent. That problem has become even more exacerbated by the pandemic, where we saw so much digital adoption. So if anything, that gap is widening. With RDT right now, we are supporting them with degree apprentices. And so that's all about supporting their new talent to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviour that they need to be successful in their roles.

**Fiona**

Training is essential. Technology changes all the time, so we have to keep up with that. By hiring people on the apprenticeship program, it allows us to structure their learning along with their growth within the business.

**Joe**

I'm 22. I did some work experience at RDT and was given the opportunity to perform a degree apprenticeship. I've now graduated and I'm a Software Engineer. What I liked about Open University learning was the amount of support that was given to you, and you get a lot of feedback from Module Tutors. Now I've completed the apprenticeship I'm a mentor for the new apprentices that are in the company. I give them advice and draw from my own experiences.

**Thomas**

A couple of months before I was supposed to go to a university, I kind of was thinking, I'm not 100% sure if I want to continue doing that. I ended up calling Fiona for a consultation on the phone, then went into an apprenticeship day where we got to speak to the other apprentice Joe at the time. He was quite informative about The Open University. I like the idea of earning and learning that I don't have to worry about travelling somewhere, getting there at a certain time. Really glad I applied for it.

**Jane**

The Open University has several ways to support businesses to develop their digital skills. Everything from short informal courses on our free OpenLearn platform through to full degree programmes. Over the last few years we have launched degree apprenticeships, microcredentials and also Skills Bootcamps which provide a pathway into a new digital job. We’re just launching Higher Technical Qualifications in networking and software development, which have been designed in collaboration with industry. So there's something for everybody.

**Fiona**

It's absolutely integral to our company, and I think it's one of the things that gives me the most pleasure in my job. Seeing people achieving what they want to achieve and growing and developing and moving on within the organisation and taking on new roles.

**Ben**

Awesome. So this next panel, we're going to be having a panel discussion about getting the best from Gen Z and growing your own talent. Learning and development, mentoring and coaching are all vital to harnessing young talent. The Open University survey revealed for the top learning and development opportunities, requested by young people in the past three years, are short courses with certification, mentoring or coaching, informal online courses, vocational qualifications and apprenticeships. So we're going to be exploring how best practice can be implemented in organisations. Let's introduce the panellists joining me for this discussion. Please join me on stage. Fiona, Joe, Mark and Arainu Hello. Amazing. Let me shuffle my... Fab. So the first thing I'd love to do is just go down the panel and if you can just say your name and just tell us a bit more about what you do, please.

**Fiona**

Okay, so I'm Fiona. I do H.R. at RDT.

**Ben**

I love that. Thank you very much.

**Joe**

I'm Joe. I was a degree apprentice, I graduated. I've got a bit more hair than I did in the video. And now I lead a team of ten, 20-somethings. Our average age is about 22, I think. So, yeah.

**Ben**

Thank you. Hiya.

**Mark**

Hi Ben, I’m Mark. I'm the Chief Executive of The 5% Club. We’re an employer movement with about a thousand members representing just over 5% of the UK workforce, and our members have got over 100,000 workplace learners in their employ. And we look and work with employers to inspire their positive action to increase the volume of workplace learning and then make it inclusive and accessible.

**Ben**

Love that. Thank you. Hiya.

**Arainu**

Hi there. My name is Arainu and I work at The Prince's Trust. I'm Senior Head of Corporate Partnerships at The Prince's Trust. Some of you may know The Prince's Trust. We support every young person to succeed and specifically to build the skills and confidence to move on in their lives, whether that's through work, through education, through setting up their own businesses.

**Ben**

Amazing. Thank you so much. So, Mark, I'm going to be coming to you first. You are an employer movement that promotes earning and learning opportunities. Love that. Why is it vital to see learning as a lifelong pursuit?

**Mark**

So I'll start with a sort of an observation. I think we're a nation of great problem admirers. So you pick up the press on a daily basis, and you'll read about a skills task force. It's an in-depth analysis of a problem. And there's 250,000 too few employees with skills in this area or that area or another area. Then someone else commissions a bit more research and we just admire the problem to the nth degree. Actually, I think what we've got to do is look at solutions and I will say, I feel the nation is stuck in, a model of yesterday. So we've got the classic approach of, you go to university, you leave school, you go into employment, you do a short course that then sets you up for a 50 year career, and you don't need to have any more investment in your skills from then on inwards. Whereas we’re now in the information age and in the information age, we know that skills are going to come and go every 5 to 7 years. So over your classic 50 year career, you're going to probably need to retrain 8 to 10 times. So unless you're in a mindset of lifelong learning and development, you won't be able to accommodate. And the classic example is how many C-suite have got to grips with generative AI? Probably thinking about how to ban it from the workplace, when the Gen Zs in the workplace are using it effectively on a daily basis to solve problems. So we need to ensure that people are looking at innovation and learning about it rather than trying to control it. And that point about chaos, I think it's enabling people to understand and manage the chaos as opposed to take the chaos away.

**Ben**

I love that, thank you. I've also got a question for you around overcoming barriers. So what are some of the young people that or some of the members that you're working with, what are they doing to help those young people overcome barriers?

**Mark**

So my point about problem admiration, if you look at the sort of narrative at the moment, so about 20% of people at university today will struggle to get themselves on a graduate scheme when they graduate. So there's a barrier there to a young person. We heard about the increase in volume of economically inactive young people and yet there's a skills gap. And yet when you talk to employers, early careers are oversubscribed. So it would appear that there's a talent pool that's not being tapped into. And that talent pool has got barriers. And I think this morning, we heard a lot about experience and I think that's an awful word with young people because yes, there are young people who will volunteer. They'll get experience, but that's not the norm. So let's think about the mainstream. So rather than insist on experience, employers need to shift and think about how you recruit, not based on experience but based on potential. So what we're starting to see with our employers and the military is, a large member of The 5% Club for years have used aptitude testing. But what we're seeing amongst other employees, they call it gamification, which is don't do the classic star analysis where the people, the young person will struggle to give an experience, look at the raw potential. If it's the raw potential that you want, think about how you can develop that into the worker of tomorrow. Because unless you do that where are the skills gaps going to be filled? So you know, shift from experience to potential and then layer that up.

**Ben**

Love that. Thank you. Arianu, I’m coming to you next. How do you work with businesses to overcome some of the challenges that have been highlighted to create initiatives for young people in work?

**Arainu**

It's a big question.

**Ben**

It is a big question.

**Arainu**

It's a big question because we work with over about 160 different businesses across their organisation, not just in talent, supporting a talent pipeline, but also to support them with how they, kind of brand themselves as an organisation that actually identifies with young people and wants to speak to young people. So there's a number of ways that we work with businesses, to support them in that journey. And, obviously all of our demographic in terms of the young people we support is Gen Z in general.

**Ben**

Yeah.

**Arainu**

And so a lot of our work is with research and both kind of sharing that research in a digestible way with businesses and ideally aligned businesses. I think there already needs to be a mindset within a business that you want to attract and inspire and include this generation of young people. So what can you do differently as an organisation? That’s kind of the starting point. It's not as if you're creating a program that's just specific for this young person or these sets of young people. It's just kind of, as an organisation, how do you help young people to feel included within your business and feel that your business is making significant changes in order to reach that mindset that a younger generation has and future generations will have? They'll have that mindset and they'll have a another mindset in ten years time, but it will fold into that mindset. So that's kind of like, the general kind of baseline that we're working with organisations. And a lot of that is around actually, you know, how do we make people young people feel included? And you mentioned a really good point that, you know, like having really open processes to talent. The idea of what talent is is different. You know, it's not about having great exam results. You know, many of the young people that we work with haven't attained educational results at say an A\* level and have this pathway of university and job, etc.. These are young people that perhaps don't feel, have the confidence, they don't feel that they've got these exam results to fall back on, but they have a number of other interpersonal traits, and they want somebody to believe in them and have that potential. So how do businesses do that? And we help them, kind of support them, with a number of different programs, working with youth workers at The Prince's Trust, for example, to work with individuals and organisations, building mentoring schemes, building kind of like ways to speak to young people from you know, a perspective that feels authentic, that feels emotionally intelligent, that is not just about putting you into a job and that's it, you know? So, yeah, it's quite a holistic way, I think.

**Ben**

I like that. Thank you. Can you also tell me about Kickstart as well please?

**Arainu**

That's a really good question. I headed up our Prince's Trust Kickstart scheme. We supported around 4000 young people, who were at risk of furlough or were furloughed. As many of you know, during the pandemic, Covid pandemic, the government came up with, a scheme to support young people from moving into long term unemployment. And essentially they paid businesses to take on young people for six month opportunities. So, the idea of the scheme was absolutely fantastic. And it worked in very different ways with lots of businesses. And the trust essentially collaborated with businesses to actually support unemployed young people for that six month placement. And we took a lot of learnings from that. For example, we created an online program. So each young person had a Prince’s Trust youth worker, they had specific workshops around their own personal development. You know, for example, like understanding about their personality, what their skills and aspirations are, understanding how to build resilience. If you get a knock back, you know, within that six month period, you know, a conversation doesn't go that well, actually not to give up. You know, actually, it's your mindset on that conversation. It's about growth. It's not telling you off and things like that. And there's many situations, as many of you know I'm sure as employers, within the first six months of a young person's first job in a role, it's when the most precarious situations can happen that can lead a young person just to, you know, throw the towel in and move from job to job. And that can create a real pattern in a young person's life. But actually, what can we do? An employer and an organisation like us help that young person in that six month period, you know, to retain that talent and grow that talent. So, yeah, so Kickstart was, from our perspective, a real success with the businesses that we partnered with like M&S, Boots, Homebase, JD Sports. And, just to give you a bit of a stat, I think there's about 160,000 young people that were on the scheme through the DWP. Through The Prince's Trust we had a smaller amount of young people, around 4000, but still significant because we work with those specific businesses. And of those businesses, the DWP of the whole scheme I understand, only around, I think it was 18%, don't quote me on that, 18% of young people carried on after that six months placement in that same business. So it's quite a shocking statistic. So after the funding ended, the government funding ended, those young people moved elsewhere to other jobs hopefully. Or, you know, it wasn't tracked what happened afterwards. But the 4000 thousand young people that the Prince's Trust supported, collaborated with those businesses, over 67% of those young people continued. So we've used that statistic and we've used that information to create a new program, called it Power Up. It's not just plugging the program at all, but I've worked over the last few years on this program, and we're working with Tesco and Pets at Home, specifically on their entry level apprenticeship schemes, where they've got shocking retention levels in the first six months. And we've used elements of the Kickstart program and developed this program to support retention, support the first three months instead of six months of a young person's journey within a business. So, you know, they feel kind of like the chosen ones in that three months and the businesses is really investing in them and their career and their perception of that business in the first three months. And I think that's really important for retention of talent, to open a young person's eyes to actually how a good start in a career can have many benefits.

**Ben**

I love that, got so many questions about it. We're going to come back to that. Fiona, I'm coming to you next. Can you tell us about RDT please, and some of the skills and challenges you face in the IT industry?

**Fiona**

Okay, so we are a software house. We're about 150 people. We write software for the insurance industry. So that's really exciting. Really exciting. I think with any tech firm, the challenge is the tech. It's always going to change. So once you accept that that is what we do. That is why people join us because it's exciting tech. So, I don't perhaps see that it’s a challenge because it's the way it is. What we don't do is try and hire people with those technology skills. So from what you said, you know, my mantra to everyone that will listen to me is, hire for potential, train for skills.

**Ben**

Okay.

**Fiona**

So we put that knowledge, that experience into people, whatever level they join us at. So I think, getting the right people that can work in our culture, that can work in our ever changing company, that's the bigger challenge rather than the technology.

**Ben**

And how do your graduate schemes and your apprenticeships help you to solve that challenge?

**Fiona**

We don't hire experienced people anymore. Nope. So new strategy is well, I don't think we've hired a software engineer with experience for the last three years. It's only grads, only apprentices that come in. And we just give them to Joe. So, I think on the video, Joe Porter, he was our first apprentice and promoted, promoted, promoted. Now lead software engineer. He's our poster boy.

**Ben**

Love that.

**Joe**

I don't quite look as good as when I...

**Fiona**

I don't think your hair and make-up was so good.

**Joe**

This morning...

**Fiona**

So we funnel them in, they go into Joe's incubator, and then they move out into different roles and get promoted depending on what we now know about those people.

**Ben**

That's amazing. Really, really cool. Joe I’m coming to you next. So as a former Open University Apprentice and now a mentor, well, we've kind of seen what the apprenticeship did for your career, but tell me more about how has that been?

**Joe**

Yeah. So it was, I mean, I had a similar perception of the workplace before I joined it, in that it was a big scary world. And I did a bit of work experience. Thought about between going off to university and going and doing a degree apprenticeship, had a taste of the workplace and then fell for it a little bit. It had a pool table, which helped,

**Fiona**

Oh, it's a big draw.

**Ben**

Love a pool table, love a pool table.

**Joe**

But then in terms of once you’re in the degree apprenticeship, doing it every day, you feel part of the company, you feel ... going back to the sense of belonging in the company. The oddity never made me feel like an apprentice, because they gave me the opportunities to go and give ideas and make mistakes. And then the project side of doing the degree apprenticeship allowed me to go and see parts of the business that I didn't have access to, or wouldn’t have access to before. So going and creating a business case, presenting it to the executives. That was all part of The Open University degree course. And I’m not going to say I wasn’t nervous for it, but couple, half an hour in the toilet of course but it was, it pushed me out of my comfort zone and forced me to go and say yes to things and experience it a bit more rather than sitting there in a chair.

**Fiona**

You brought the OU to us, didn't you? You found the programme.

**Joe**

Yes.

**Fiona**

And then we followed that process. We do a lot of work with work experience. We've hired this year from our work experience week straight before she's even done her A-levels. I don't care about your A-levels. We think you're the right person. So we follow that that pipeline that you dug for us.

**Ben**

And how did you get the work experience initially?

**Joe**

So it was part of me speaking to my computer science teacher at school. There were connections there, I think that.

**Fiona**

A long time ago. Yeah. Probably.

**Joe**

And then it was a week in the summer, so it wasn't... I think I did an early one as well with someone who's now in my team again. So that's seven years that’s come back round.

**Ben**

And so was that you going to a teacher in your school and saying that you needed to do work experience or was this part of like the Year 10?

**Joe**

The initial one was Year 10 and then I wanted an extra bit work experience.

**Ben**

So your teacher changed your life?

**Joe**

Yeah, in some respects yes.

**Ben**

Really a nice good. It's good to hear because obviously when I'm working with a school, a lot of the things they say is that their teachers haven't given them enough contacts for work experience, and they just don't have the things that they want to do. So it's really nice to hear that that's actually worked out for you. And has made a decent career for you so far. It’s amazing. Can you talk about your mentoring as well, your new apprentices, what does it entail and what value does that deliver?

**Joe**

Sure. Yeah. I try to follow steps with apprentices or grads that come in. So first of all confidence, comfort. So I want them to feel comfortable to share their ideas. I want them to, again coming from school, you have to put your hand up. We had a situation a little while ago where someone was at their desk all day and we asked if they were Ok and they needed the loo. That's a learning experience for me. So yeah, again, making sure that they're comfortable and that they can speak their mind and again, share their ideas. Confidence, giving them the opportunity to grow into their role. I think well, this is how I thought as an apprentice anyway, I wanted the support when I was in apprenticeship. But I didn't want to feel like an apprentice, so I wanted my ideas to have as much value as anyone else in the company. And then rewarding that once, if they have a good idea, making sure that they're being seen in they're progressing through the company, if they're having great ideas and they should be, it should be known to everyone really. So Yeah.

**Ben**

Awesome stuff. Thank you. Mark, I’m coming to you next. Can you talk about the differences that apprenticeships can make to businesses?

**Mark**

Yeah. So I think, it was interesting actually, when I was driving here today in the rain, I could just about see the bumper sticker on the car in front, and it was a learner driver and it said, you were once a learner, give me time. And I think, you know, what's the difference apprenticeships make? I think when everybody starts work, even if they're not on a formal, recognised funded apprenticeship, they're being apprenticed. We call it mentoring, we call it whatever. But everybody is brought into the workplace and someone takes care of them and transitions them from education into work. So apprenticeships are there in being. And they’re deep rooted in the psyche of the UK. You’ve only got to look at livery companies, city and guilds, you know, etc., etc. it’s deep rooted in us and we sort of forgot the basics of it over time. You know, we’ve given away to others. But why are they important? Because they’re a structured learning program based on an employer’s needs. And I think sometimes as employers, we’re not that good at looking at what we actually want the person to do versus what the apprenticeship is that’s conveniently available. So you put someone on an apprenticeship and hope that'll work as opposed to it deliver you the skills that you actually need. But going back to my point earlier about this sort of information age and the need for constant learning, apprenticeships or a construct like that where you're looking at a workplace need, you're looking at progression, you know, discussed it earlier about IBM and the ladder of opportunity, about not just one apprenticeship, but layers of apprenticeships across a career. You know, I used to be in the military. My father said to me, stay with it, son, as long as they keep training you. Well, I left 40 years later. So there are organisations for these deep rooted, learning cultures and, you know, apprenticeships and being apprenticed and this constant culture are there. And don't just look at government funding as a means to do it, because I think there's a risk of people looking for external intervention to drive it as opposed to business need, because there are lots of companies out there who are running apprenticeships and the apprentices are generating income for the company. We've got one, SME organisation that specialises in catering and the maintenance of catering equipment. They couldn't get the skills locally. They are a small company of 150. They've got an academy with 50 apprentices and those apprentices are generating revenue. And I suspect that's exactly the same for RDT. Small companies can do it so should big companies. But I particularly like the IBM ladder of opportunity which is that great model, of it's not just one, it's continual learning across a career.

**Ben**

I love that. Thank you. I'd love to make this as interactive as possible please, in these final moments of this afternoon. So please do get some questions in via Slido and maybe we can do some in-person ones as well. I do have one on the Slido at the moment. See if anyone wants to jump into this, how can businesses help to rebuild the confidence of young people who have struggled in traditional education? Anyone like to take that?

**Fiona**

Give them a chance.

**Fiona**

Don't ask about their exams. Don't ask about their grades.

**Ben**

I like what you said earlier about A-levels actually that you didn't really mind about what this young person was doing A-levels wise because they'd already shown you the skills. So what are your thoughts then on these assessments centres where in order to even be seen, you're having to put every single grade you've got in primary school, secondary school, all the way through.

**Fiona**

Yeah I’m not a big fan of formal education. I've got two children. One's doing the formal university, the other one's not. My son is in the process of stuffing as much information into his head so he can regurgitate it onto a piece of paper during two hours, that he'll never use again. And, you know, we've got a couple of examples. So Ebony, who we've hired from work experience, hasn't even taken them yet. We've got another guy Ben who joined us and wanted to do UI/UX stuff. When we looked at the apprenticeship programs, we looked at ones that weren’t Open University...

**Ben**

Oh, interesting.

**Fiona**

because we wanted a specialist and he didn't have the grades. We haven't got there, so what did we do? We went back to The Open University, and he can now follow the path he wants to through the programme that we do with the other people. So, hire for potential, train for skills. You know, don't look at those. Use a pipeline. We always use a pipeline. We work really closely with our partner schools. We go into the schools, we start with careers events. We turn up at the opening of an envelope. We’ll do agile games with year six. We’ll do you know... and really start engaging with them and talking about work. They don't want me. We'll send Joe. We'll send his team because they're like them. They don’t want the crusty HR bird turning up. They want people that look like them, that talk their language, and it works. And then we follow them through. They come and do work experience. They do targeted work experience. And then we offer them. We must remember to ask what Ebony's grades are when she comes, she’s probably done quite well. But it's not important to us.

**Ben**

I love that.

**Mark**

I think I'll add to that Ben as well. I think the lens that's put on those young people is the educator lens and qualifications are a mix of intelligence, understanding, but application. And for some people, lots of young people, you know, to Lauren's point about the number that struggle with numeracy and literacy from a qualification perspective, the light in education just wasn't turned on. Now, what you find is some of these characters, when they get into the workplace, the light really turns on. And whilst through an academic lens, okay, they might have struggled, when it comes to the workplace and the value add, the greatest characters they add significant amount. So if I were a young person, it's not about what did your teachers think of you because your school reports will tell you that, but it's what skills, what knowledge, what potential have you got that you can translate into the workplace? Because that's where you're going to have fun. That's where you are going to, you know, carve a pathway that suits you. Don't let others define that for you. I think the challenge for them, though, is having a chat with someone to understand what they can do and that point about careers advice, it is sadly lacking. So, you know, what could they do with the potential they’ve got? But don’t be that worried about what the education system felt with you, it’s what your future employers think of you that matters.

**Fiona**

And we have a young man that works for us, actually he’s probably not as young anymore, who joined us to go on to an apprenticeship scheme, and he needed to work through his GCSEs, and, so doing his maths and his English, doing the apprenticeship scheme and the exams was just too much. He'd started work, he'd done this, he had to do exams, he hated exams. So we just said, dump the apprenticeship scheme then, dump the exams. These six years later, he's still with us. And still hasn't got those GCSEs, but who cares?

**Ben**

This is very interesting. I'm like Wow, okay. This is different to what I know, but I like it because when I look at my personal experiences with this, so many of my friends struggled in school. I went to a state school, and I saw so many people not get into university and then ultimately not really care. But some of those people are now my richest friends because they've succeeded in a different way. And also some of them were just motivated by money. And that's real. Like I was motivated by beating people academically. I loved that, it was great for me, but actually to see some of them thriving in a working environment where they know that they put in X amount of work, they're going to get paid this, they're going to get promoted, then they make more money then they can buy this. It's like, it's completely different to school, completely different. So it's great to see that people can succeed like that in your organisation. Really well done. Are there any questions in the room? Is there anyone that wants to ask anything in the room? Very aware it’s late on this day, so that's fine. If not, keep thinking. Let's go to Slido. Let's have a look. We've got, oh I like this one. Arainu, maybe this is one for you. How do we identify potential if Gen Z are fearful of assessment-type centres? Is there anything that... these young people are applying for these jobs when they do need to go to assessment centres, some of them will be unemployed until they get through an assessment centre, so what can they do? What can these employers do?

**Arainu**

I think it's about, I mean, going back to the last question, you mentioned about confidence. You know, often it is about confidence in that process. Like what does it look like? What does that feel like? How will I be assessed, what will the questions be like? And I think it's about employers. If they're using these specifics, psychometric testing or assessment centres, it's about like, just speaking the language of those young people to show them that this is what's going to happen. And just giving them the confidence to go through that process. A lot of the young people that we work with just don't think that they'll even, you know, there's no point in them trying because they don't think they're going to be successful. Like something like that is for other people, somebody that's got grades, somebody else that isn't them. And it's about showing them that it's a relatable process and this is what's going to happen. They're not going to be just assessing your intellectual abilities in a certain way, like at school or an exam. It actually could be gamification. It could be assessing your interpersonal skills, teamwork, and just really kind of communicating that to young people. That can be a really hard thing to do, I think, for an employer. And that's why we do speak to a lot of employers that use us as a kind of intermediary, as a way to be able to speak in that way and support them to speak in that way.

**Fiona**

But don't call it an assessment centre. Call it something else. Tell them what's going to happen during the day. We're going to start with a pool competition. Whatever it is you know, make it something they want to come to and make it something that even if they don't get offered, they take something away from it that they've learned that was different. That gave them an experience that they can then draw on next time.

**Ben**

I like that. Thank you. I've actually got a question for you from the Slido. And this kind of goes to something that someone told me, a young person I was speaking to said that they were worried about doing an apprenticeship with a...not to say your company is small, a smaller company,

**Fiona**

we’re a small company.

**Ben**

because they were worried about the fact they didn't have a bigger brand, that they could then go to sell when they wanted to move on from that company. And they said, maybe you do need to go to like, the Dysons of the world for an apprenticeship, because then you've got a brand you can go and sell. So is there value in going to a smaller company for an apprenticeship still?

**Fiona**

It's, I don't know, it's probably a question for you.

**Joe**

I think I see smaller companies as more beneficial because it gives you a wider range of possible roles you could fall into. You're going to be doing a lot of different activities every day and you’re not as specialised in your role. It may not look as good on your CV, but you're going to have a lot more experiences to take away from that, and you're going to get challenged probably a lot more. For example, I probably wouldn't have sat in front of the Dyson executive given my, given my...

**Fiona**

It’s access.

**Joe**

It’s access, you get a wide range, you probably get to talk to more customers. You're probably going to have to try out different things, come up with more ideas because you're going to have more responsibility. Just by the nature of it being a smaller company, I think.

**Fiona**

I think also, you know, in our space, everyone wants to work for a start-up, don't go and work for start-up. It's a nightmare. You know the plugs don’t work. But you know, I want to work for a start-up or I want to work for a big corporate. Those companies start like that and become like that. They become like that because of that. I think it's about how you, not sell it, that's the wrong word, but how you talk about your company and what opportunities that will give. I think we probably do less Instagram, more individual conversations. So we do a lot of pre-work with candidates to explain to them what it's like, what the assessment day might be like, so that they understand that. And they're a bit bought in already.

**Ben**

I like that. Let's keep going with the Slido. So someone's asked what makes a good member of The 5% Club?

**Mark**

So I would say an inquisitive member of The 5% Club. So, in The 5% Club, we've got a thousand members, we've got a number of members that go through our employer audit, which is, a benchmarking process that, benchmarks performance in five key areas around the volume of workplace learning. But the inclusion in social mobility, the breadth of the offering. We include two level placements, the quality of the schemes and plans for future growth. So the members are starting to move from existing as an organisation to looking for insights to see how they can improve. And what we see that when the members get our benchmarking reports, all of a sudden they're starting to go, ooh, well, actually, in this area, compared to others, I could look to improve, or others are doing something different or they've got different volumes. So they start to become inquisitive. And that's what we want because what we have observed, and there's no secret because we publish the outcome of the employer audit every year, there’s a real blind spot in learning and development when it comes to protected characteristics. And understanding the background, neurodiversity, you know, socioeconomic, etc., of the learner. So we look at how can you make an inclusive L&D offering before it becomes diverse? Because what we observe is there's lots of people and lots of organisations in a rush to diversify. But unless you’ve got an inclusive offering, if you diversify ahead of inclusion then,

**John**

Oh my God.

**Mark**

people walk out the door. So it's understanding, and there's a real blind spot in L&D systems around the background and the protected characteristics of learners. But in answer to the question, a good member of The 5% Club, the light goes on. They get very inquisitive, they want to learn, and we create a safe space where they can ask questions of colleagues. Because, you know, H.R. departments generally are quite isolated. Lots of pressure on them from an ESG perspective as well as the employee engagement. And we create a safe space where they can just talk to other HR professionals, and we're free to join. So that's my play.

**Ben**

Love that. Yep, go for it.

**Question**

Thanks. Hi Ben, Hi Joe. it’s a question for you. You come across as a great Gen Z leader. So, I just wanted to ask, what do you think are the qualities a Gen Z leader should have?

**Joe**

The qualities of Gen Z leadership? I think it's a good question. Curiosity. I think an element of emotional intelligence, the ability to be fail fast, be as wrong as possible. I think a lot of the time, we talked a lot, a little bit earlier, about wanting Gen Z to open up and to share ideas, and I as a leader, I try to be as wrong as possible to show that I don't know anything either. So, it then breaks down that barrier and lets people have the conversation and you can they’re coming into a workplace from a starting point, and they're going to be worried about what their opinion is and whether it's right or wrong. But if my opinion is wrong, then let's just talk about the opinion rather than who you are that’s making the opinion.

**Ben**

I like that.

**Joe**

I think that answer’s your question, hopefully.

**Ben**

As you go onto Slido. So how would an employer work with Prince's Trust for support on connecting with Gen Z? Arainu?

**Arainu**

So what was the question again?

**Ben**

How would an employer work with The Prince's Trust in order to support Gen Z?

**Arainu**

So I think it would be just really understanding, you know, what that business wants to achieve. You know, is it to support their talent pipeline? Is it, do they want to connect with young people as their primary consumer, as it were, and really kind of identify and speak to them and sell to them? You know, it’s just in loads of different ways we can work with an organisation, but specifically around talent, because I feel like this is, you know, we're talking about skills and confidence and development and moving into roles. It would really be, we’re co-creating essentially a program together. And we've got set foundational programmes. I mentioned one of them, Power Up, but another one which we've run for about 20 years and we've supported the likes of, Marks and Spencer to onboard at least 15,000 young people over the last decade. That's from all walks of life, you know, supporting young people with the most barriers into moving into a job, from unemployment to move into a job. That's something that's set sector specific program that we run, call our Get Into program. So, get into retail, get into technology, get into engineering, etc. We'd work with an employer to understand exactly what types of opportunities they have, which geographical locations, what type of impact they want to have, you know, retention rates and things like that. And we'll co-create a programme that really works together. That's an element, as you mentioned, a taster day, we call it a taster day instead of an assessment day. You know, it's an opportunity for a group of young people in a particular location to understand what that business is about, understand what their sector is about. So if they don't decide to go on that program to work with that business, they'll still find out about that industry in that sector and take something away from that day. Then there's, you know, for those young people that, you know, it's right for them to move into, work experience opportunity with that business. We will put together a very structured, really kind of, informative, rotating kind of work experience opportunity for that grouping of young people. And then also we'll have mentoring as part of that as well. We’ll support an organisation to set up a buddying scheme to help those young people to collaborate well, because obviously, ultimately workplaces are intergenerational. You know, they're not going to be, if Gen Z or young people, there in a bubble, you know, it's about connecting and communicating with others from different perspectives and different generations. We support them with that through a buddy system. And then we have a really exciting, kind of, we co-create an interview process which is not about face-to-face sitting there. And, you know, the whole process is essentially an interview, but we have a celebration day where a young person presents what they've learned. And, you know, what they've got out of that work experience or what they've learned about that business. And then at least 50% of that cohort of young people, we aim to move into a job with that business. So that's one of our kind of flagship programs of how we would work with employers.

**Ben**

That’s amazing. Thank you. There's a question in fact, I'm going to link the two. So there’s a question on Slido. What would you say to employers who are worried about investment in training and then staff going on to leave as a result of that? I don’t know if any of you have had any experience of that, any of you?

**Fiona**

I think with the apprenticeship program, it. You get what you need out of them as a business during that period. And if you aren't good enough to hold on to them, and if you, haven't given them the opportunities, or you don't have the opportunities for that person and it's the right thing for them to move off, support them in that, make them a good leaver, tell them to boomerang back when they've got some different experience and keep the door open. I think with the apprenticeship scheme, we get value from those people from day one.

**Ben**

Yeah. I like that. I've got a question around what some of your apprentices have actually gone on to achieve. Do you have a list of people.

**Fiona**

Okay, how long have you got?

**Ben**

Reel off everything. Go for it. What have they done?

**Fiona**

Okay, so again, Joe's gone all the way through. He's the lead software engineer now, he’s supporting the CTO with some projects. We have a couple, Phoebe and Tom who are beavering away at their final projects at the moment. I think that's something to, you know, make sure that as an employer, you recognise there are times when The Open University work has to take precedence. There are times when you say you've going to have to do that project at the weekend because this is happening. So be flexible around how much time they've got to spend and when they're doing the final project. You know, as long as you've make that final project relevant, then you're going to get value out of giving them the time for that. So, Phoebe, we're talking about going on to be a people lead within the business. Tom is interested in the architecture root. George, we're in the process of promoting His golf’s improved recently.

**Joe**

Yes. His golf has got really good but he's also starting to mentor the apprentice, coming through the team himself as well. So at some point, I'll be redundant and George will become me because he's ...

**Fiona**

And next year, we'll bring George next year.

**Joe**

Next year. Yeah. And also recruitment. George has got a fantastic eye for spotting people that have that curious initiative and applying themselves.

**Fiona**

Yeah. Actually Ebony he saw at a careers fair. He came in and we said we've got no more work experience slots, we’ve filled them and he badgered us and badgered us and badgered us. But we gave her an extra space and she came in and she was amazing. And we offered her a job at the end of the work experience.

**Ben**

Now this sounds wonderful. I want to get some like, give me some T. What have been some of the barriers in the organisation that you've overcome to make all of this happen? Because even though, I mean, I've tried to hire for my team internally, the level of sign off I had to go to within the BBC and within Vice, I was at the CEO’s door like banging and like, please give us some budget for this extra person. So I think for a lot of people it's just unrealistic to offer another place and another apprenticeship.

**Fiona**

Okay. So we pay the levy, so that's leverage. Look you're paying it anyway. I think getting senior buy in is essential. But take it slowly. You don't have to hire 20 apprentices the first year you do it. In fact don't. That'll be a nightmare. You know, and prove it. Look how well this one's done. Look we've got another one and get those people in front of your C-suite and get them presenting. And then they buy in. Then you get to the point where you don't have to hire experienced people anymore and that then saves the company money. So I think take it slow. And we had to start again after Covid because we stopped because there was just so much else going on. So we had to start again bringing those, so we've got a bit of a gap in ‘the class of’. Just prove it, prove it to the people with the money.

**Ben**

Love it. Thank you. Mark, I'm coming to you because we’ve actually we’ve got a pre-prepared question around earning and learning. Why should that be a central part of an organisation's strategy? And why is senior leading buy in so important. So following on from Fiona’s point.

**Mark**

So I think there's a couple of points in there. I mentioned ESG, you know, I mentioned about you know, we talked about earlier about it's good to do a lot of this activity because of the social impact it can deliver. But then everyone shies away from the, making money for the firm. It's very clear that in the current climate, you know, looking after your internal governance and making sure the systems work, as we can see with certain, high profile organisations, in the media at the moment, probably one being interviewed today, I would suspect. If we look at, the environmental aspects, you know, that makes money if you can prove your green credentials, you can make money out of that. So from a social perspective, people have shied away from that. But actually if you recruit and you can prove that you're recruiting people from different socio economic backgrounds, protected characteristics, those who are neurodiverse, all the people that would have become NEETs, as Lauren said, actually, you should shout about that because that will be a point of difference for you as an organisation and certainly in an era of social value, we talk about the CSR directive and the need to look at how sustainable organisations are. Actually being able to prove that you can have the skills to match your order book is quite important. And if those skills are from talent pools that others aren't looking at, actually you can make profit from that. So earning and learning from a CSR perspective is important, but actually earning and learning in general is important. And we tend to focus solely on apprenticeships. But you know, in England that's about 2.7 billion. Employers spend over 40 billion pounds a year on workplace learning. Unfortunately it's been contracting. And actually what we would advocate and I know, you know, we're here with the OU, there’s lots of courses available, microcredentials you know, this learning culture encouraging people to think about skills gap, think about emerging technologies, and then doing short, sharp courses to upskill as well as the longer sort of degree courses or apprenticeships is there. But that constant learning culture is key. And organisations that get it, keep hold of people. And, you know, I think Viren gave a great example of Uber, you know, the Uber example with the OU, where on average people stayed in the workforce for 2 or 3 years longer than they would of otherwise, is key. So, you know, learning is a benefit, etc..

**Fiona**

But it makes commercial sense, doesn't it, to invest in your people? Because otherwise you've got a revolving door and you've always got people that don't know what your company does. And don't know how to do it and you're always doing that.

**Ben**

Thank you. Yeah. Great points, great points. In fact I wanted to come back on that point actually with our final moments because someone has asked, any advice for how organisations can deliver meaningful training when there's less resource and fewer people than ever i.e. struggling to find anyone to train others, anything about that?

**Mark**

It's a great point. And, I think, you know, the watercooler moment is training. People, you know, showing and telling others how to do things is training, and development doesn't need to be funded all the time. It can just be, you know, go away on a team building day or whatever. There's a way to do it, which doesn't always involve money. But I recognise that, you know, money is tight. Hopefully as we emerge from the gloom of the last few years, things will improve.

**Ben**

Amazing. Thank you so much. I'd like to thank our panellists and we're going to move into a video, please. Thank you.

**Phoebe**

I came to work RDT and on the degree apprenticeship programme as I didn't want to go to a traditional university and I'd be getting vital work experience that's really beneficial in this day and age considering how competitive jobs are. I think there may have been about 10% of women in the I.T. industry, and I wanted to make a change. And obviously I love the way technology is evolving. I want to be a part of that change.

**Jane**

Diversity really brings creativity and in I.T, if you're developing a solution, you want to make sure that it works for everybody that you’re designing it for. So it's really important that we attract more women and other underrepresented groups with a message that tech is a great place to work and can be a really rewarding career.

**Phoebe**

I’m specialising in the software engineering module aspect but on top of that it also covers how I.T. projects work, business organisation, web technologies and how systems are developed. Traditional learning that I've done in the past is structured and more rigid and The Open University gives me more chance to engage and ask more questions. And they've helped me if I don't understand the material.

**Andy**

It's just so brilliant to see someone starting off, basically as a blank sheet and growing into someone who is so well respected in their team. In a very short space of time, she's become what we would call the subject matter expert.

**Phoebe**

Once I’ve completed the apprenticeship it's going to feel brilliant. I'd like to become a Senior Engineer, mentor other apprentices, and I'd also like to speak to younger girls to get into the industry and make it more equal, really.

**Ben**

Okay, I think we're at the end, we’re at the end. What a great day. Before we wrap this up, please, can I get final thoughts in the Slido? So one last time. There’s the code. We would like one action, that you're going to take away from today's event. Please put it into the Slido. Let's see what people say. Evangelise, workplace transition, chaos. Yes, I like that. I like that a lot. Today's actually been really good. It's been so insightful. I've loved understanding more about the things that are being done within this space. I am also very inspired, which is really nice. It's just good to see that great work is being done within this area to actually support young people to come through. And I guess I didn't realise that this problem has been acknowledged because the young people that I speak to do tell me quite often, that they are struggling. So it's great to see that workplaces are looking at this. Dare to dream. Love that. Good job Ben. Thank you. Belonging, to engage with Gen Z. take the risk. work experience revolution. What about scrapping work experience, like ripping it to the floor and starting all over again? Learn more. Reverse mentoring. Empathy, belonging. Yes, I love this. Also no one said it yet but get into schools. Please get into schools. Honestly. And if you can think about I don't know where all of you grew up, but just think about the young person that you were and what you would have needed. And for me, that was the inspiration. I needed to then go back to my first school and just be like, okay a terrible trauma here, hated being here, but actually I needed someone like myself to show up in that space to tell people that it's going to be okay. So think about what you needed, and please be that person for the next generation. With that being said, thank you to everyone for being part of today. Thank you to all of our panellists. Thank you to the organisers. Thank you to The Open University. It's been wonderful and I think that's a wrap. Thank you. Thank you so much.