

# Delivering on diversity

Unions are working to help extend opportunities to Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) young people and adults

Lenford Carroll was in his early 50s and had been out of work for nearly six months when his local Jobcentre in Leeds set him up with an interview for a financial services Apprenticeship with Barclays.

The former dancer and teacher hadn't thought of the financial sector as an option before the opportunity arose. "What really attracted me was the possibility of being an apprentice at the age of 53 and learning something different from what I'd done before," he recalls.

While undertaking his Apprenticeship, Lenford was working in the complaints department as a decision-maker, and completed his NVQ Level 2 with a distinction in customer service.

The study component was delivered on site, with a talent scout coming in once a month to help all five apprentices with their course materials and lead discussions on the subjects they were covering.

Lenford joined Unite when he started the Apprenticeship, and was more than happy when he was asked to speak to Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) sixth-formers at an Apprenticeship Forum in London organised by The Voice newspaper when he was around six months in to his programme.

The event was designed to improve take-up of Apprenticeships among BAME sixth-formers and college students, since only 10.7 per cent of Apprenticeship starts in 2014/15 were by BAME youth, although BAME people make up 21.6 per cent of the working age population in England.

The Voice ran the event in conjunction with the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and global banking firm HSBC, which hosted the day at its global headquarters in London's Docklands during National Apprenticeship Week 2016.

Unionlearn was one of the nine major organisations that gave presentations and led small-group networking opportunities for the participants, which is where Lenford took the chance to speak with the young people about his own experience.

"It was a good experience to go down to London and talk to these young people: I like talking to kids and giving them advice, as I have done in the past when I was teaching dance," he recalls.

"A lot of the young people came up with good questions regarding Apprenticeships and I enjoyed trying to give them an insight into how an Apprenticeship could work for them, finding a good role that would help them find a proper job afterwards."

When a new opportunity arose 15 months into his Apprenticeship, Lenford decided to move into the print sector and was happy to secure a new job with Communisis, the country's largest printer of chequebooks (its clients include Barclays), where he remains a Unite member.

"The union contacted me after the Apprenticeship Forum and I hope I can continue with being a part of the work, because it was good fun working with Unite and those young people," he says.



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# Changing the workplace in partnership

**A high-quality Apprenticeship programme can help change a workplace for the better**

A partnership between road transport union URTU, logistics giant XPO and provider Free2Learn has enabled more than 60 contract, agency and managerial staff at the Weetabix distribution centre in Burton Latimer, Northamptonshire, to improve their skills by enrolling them on a range of Apprenticeships from Level 2 to Level 5.

The programme launched 18 months ago, with close to half the staff at the site currently working on Apprenticeships in warehousing, business administration, team leading and management.

Separate assessors come onsite to oversee the office and the warehouse learners, while a Free2Learn tutor delivers the Functional Skills English and maths components embedded in the frameworks.

"In general, everyone is enjoying the Apprenticeships – they see that they are recognised qualifications for them," explains union learning rep (ULR) Kenny Wignall, who has been

**// Having a recognised qualification can make a massive difference. //**

instrumental in convincing site management of the benefits of investing in the workforce through the Apprenticeship programme.

The only bump in the road comes when time pressures mean lessons have to be postponed. "People do get frustrated when that happens, but I always keep them motivated," he says.

All sides are keen to incorporate feedback from learners in the delivery of the programme, Kenny points out. "We've come a long way and we're learning all the time: we're always thinking about how we can tweak the programme, because there's always room for improvement," he says.

Kenny, who started work as a forklift truck driver in his early 20s, is a passionate advocate for workplace learning.

"When I was at school, I didn't think education was that important, but as my children have grown up and my daughter has gone to university, I've come to recognise how important it is to have an education behind you," he says.

"Having a recognised qualification can make a massive difference, which is why I always tell people that their Apprenticeships don't belong to the company or to the provider, they belong to them and they will help them progress in life."

Since he is co-ordinating the programme on the shopfloor, Kenny himself is currently enrolled on a Level 3 Apprenticeship in management, which is offering him new perspectives on his life at work.

"Before, there were times when I used to get frustrated, but now I'm able to reflect on things and see them from a different angle," he says.

Site Manager Andy Flynn, one of two managers enrolled on a Level 5 Apprenticeship, also credits the qualification with helping him think





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about how the site is working, how he would like it to work and how to help staff get there.

"The process of enrolling on a Level 5 Apprenticeship qualification has provoked considerable self-evaluation, and has helped me to identify that my site is travelling in the opposite direction to the one I want, or thought it was actually going," Andy explains.

"This thinking has helped me to explain to the site team at Burton Latimer how we can all work together to change the site culture and improve the current path we are following – my experience so far has been a real self-awakening."

Free2Learn Head of Business Development John Cusworth says that he has witnessed the way

the Apprenticeships programme is making a palpable difference at the site.

"It's encouraging to see the training making a real difference on site at XPO, whether we are supporting individuals at the onset of their career in logistics, supporting the next generation of managers or offering higher level training to the current senior management team," John says.

"Seeing a change in culture and knowing that managers with over 25 years' experience are changing their attitude and management behaviours is testament to the employer and individuals themselves as they embrace the training being offered."

URTU Project Manager Jeff Latham says that the Apprenticeship programme at XPO shows how union learning can make all the difference in a workplace.

"This is a brilliant example of the critical intervention that the URTU learning project has enabled, which has made a real difference both to people's confidence and abilities but also to the sustainability of their workplace," Jeff says.