

The National Society of Apprentices (UK)

Introduction

The National Society of Apprentices (NSoA) was launched in 2014 and involves more than 300 training providers and employers, representing over 250,000 apprentices from across all sectors and industries, across the whole of the UK.

NSoA's main field of action is apprentice representation. Its objectives are related to the representation of its target group and covers the following topics:

- To capture and promote the voice of apprentices, on a local and national scale, in order to enable better apprenticeship provision and increased participation;
- To research the needs, views and experiences of apprentices in relation to their training and employment experience;
- To involve apprentices in active citizenship and democracy on a local and national scale, including voter registration;
- To promote equality of access to quality apprenticeships.

The NSoA is funded through the Apprentice Extra card that is governed by the National Union of Students (NUS). NSoA has a budget of £120,000 per year which covers 2 full time staff and its activities (mainly events). It also covers the cost of running the 'Apprenticeship Leadership Team (this consists of approximately 30 apprentices).

Consultation and representation of apprentices

The NSoA has a direct line of communication with 50,000 apprentices who hold an 'Apprentice extra card'. Through this line of communication, efforts are made to inform apprentices of new policy development and training opportunities.

The NSoA hold regular events and face-to-face contact is made with approximately 2,000 apprentices per year. Amongst other activities, the NSoA conducts a survey of apprentices to gather feedback on their apprenticeship experience. The outcomes of the feedback are used to inform contribution to policy discussions. In part, the outcomes also guide the activities of the network, for example by offering training opportunities on issues of importance to apprentices. The NSoA consults apprentices on aspects such as:

- Apprenticeship design;
- Apprenticeship quality;
- Apprentice rights and obligations;
- Youth policy;
- Political Engagement;
- Equal access to apprenticeships.

Selected members of the NSoA Apprenticeship Leadership Team are represented on the Apprentice Panel of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. The aim of this panel is to influence and shape policy and

NSoA Travel Research

In 2014 the NSoA conducted a nationwide survey of over 3,000 apprentices asking them about travel issues. The travel report showed that across the UK apprentices were paying an average of £24 per week in travel costs whilst earning as little as £2.73 an hour. The research findings helped set the NSoA's priorities, with a focus on apprentice pay, financial support, teaching and learning and working towards a kite mark for excellent apprenticeships.

ensure the apprentice voice is heard within the decision-making structure of the Institute. This is an important venue for influencing policy as the Institute is a non-department government body reporting directly to the Department of Education.

Strengths

Through its network of 50,000 apprentices, the NSoA is able to reach a large audience through dedicated campaigns (in one go). It also works in close partnership with the NUS and the National Apprentice Service (NAS). The NAS is a government agency responsible for funding and co-ordinates the delivery of apprenticeships throughout England. It has a key role to play in contributing to policy developments in all aspects of apprenticeships.

The NSoA has already produced research related to working conditions and the quality of their apprenticeship experience.

Limitations/barriers

The NSoA has experienced some difficulties in reaching the diversity of the apprenticeship population – particularly adult apprentices due to working/family commitments. Although the NSoA engages with over 2,000 apprentices per year, more efforts (with financial support) is needed to raise the profile of the NSoA further.

Lessons learned and recommendations

Based on the experience of the NSoA, apprentices are motivated to get involved in representation structures for different reasons. Some have experienced injustice in their apprentice experience and seek advice or to share their experiences. Others participate in events offered by the NSoA to support their continued professional development.

The NSoA is keen to increase the number of apprentices it represents. They believe a growing community can help raise awareness about the importance of apprentice representation and ultimately attract more attention from the media and government support.