Apprenticeships on the Rise - Now Considered by Almost Half of School Leavers

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- New study reveals that almost half (41%) of young people awaiting exam results have considered an apprenticeship as an alternative to a university education

- The ability to 'earn while you learn' is the main reason for pursuing this route by almost half of respondents (45%)

- Skills Minister Nick Boles welcomes the new research as evidence that apprenticeships are a serious option for school-leavers deciding their future

- British Gas is training 1,200 apprentices and is investing at least £14m in apprenticeships this year

As students up and down the country await their exam results, new research among 1,000 young people shows that apprenticeships are increasingly being considered as an alternative route by school leavers.

In the independent poll* commissioned by British Gas - one of the UK's leading employers of apprentices - almost half (41%) of those surveyed were considering this vocational route as an alternative to a university education.

Almost two thirds (62%) of 15-19 year-olds planning to go to university had also discussed securing a place on an apprenticeship with their teachers.

Apprenticeships remain high on the agenda for the Government and for business leaders who are vocal on the need to prepare young people better for the world of work. British Gas is increasing its own investment in its apprentice training academies, with at least £14m planned in 2014.

Commenting on the research the Skills Minister, Nick Boles, said: "As this survey shows, school leavers are rightly considering an apprenticeship as a serious option when deciding their future. With over 1.8 million starts since 2010, and our reforms to improve their rigour and quality, apprenticeships are now a respected and rewarding route in to the world of work.

"We are putting employers in the driving seat of the design and delivery of apprenticeships so they can equip learned with the skills their businesses need to grow to compete.

“It is hugely encouraging to see the active role companies like British Gas are playing to develop the workforce of the future.”

Other top reasons for choosing an apprenticeship over going to university were to avoid big student debts (11%), and to increase the chances of getting a job (18%).

About 15% of those surveyed believed they'd be more likely to get a higher-paid job if they followed the apprentice route than through pursuing a university degree.

Susan Hooper, Managing Director at British Gas Residential Services, said: “The fact that so many students are considering an apprenticeship as an alternative to university shows how far vocational training has come. You could call this the age of the apprenticeship.

“Young people and their parents increasingly understand the value of gaining work-based training and getting paid while you learn. Apprenticeships are becoming a more attractive option, and the volume of applications we receive for British Gas apprenticeship schemes shows this clearly.

“Just last year we recruited 900 young people, and received more than 50 applications for every place, with a huge number of people applying -- not just school leavers, but people approaching retirement age too.

“British Gas has been one of the UK's leading employers of apprentices for many years; many of our apprentices have long careers with the company, often moving into management positions.”

The skills requirements of businesses will continue to evolve, but softer skills such as communications,

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along with work ethic and motivation will remain important to employers. Today's research shows that young people are increasingly aware of the softer skills that employers are looking for. Two thirds (65%) of those surveyed believe good communication is what employers want, while 53% cite team work.

Susan Hooper continued: “Businesses are reporting difficulties recruiting young people and an imminent skills crisis[i]. And, for their part, young people often think they need the technical skills in place before they apply, when softer skills, such as communication, are often more important to the employer.

“At British Gas we can teach the technical knowledge. We're looking for people who are natural communicators and who want to give great service to our customers.”

British Gas currently has at least 50 'entry level' jobs on offer for those with a minimum of four GCSEs. Please visitwww.britishgasjobs.co.uk for more information.

Notes to editors

[i] According to a report by the Prince's Trust (August 2014)

Regional case studies are available on request.

For our national case study, Vicky Johnson, please click here.

Contact information

British Gas Press Office

British Gas

0800 107 7015

media@britishgas.co.uk

Company Contact:

British Gas

E. british@pressat.co.uk
W. https://www.britishgas.co.uk/

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