

Government focus on schools to boost apprenticeships

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Thought piece from Steven Campbell and Daniel West, founders of Campbell West

We are calling for a change in approach to how apprenticeships are promoted to school leavers following the Chancellor's pledge to boost apprenticeship training in a £50m pilot scheme in the recent Autumn Statement.

We both left school at the age of 16 to embark on apprenticeships and now run a £10m firm between us, and welcome Jeremy Hunt's announcement that will "stimulate" apprenticeships in engineering and other growth sectors.

But we insist urgent action must address a fundamental lack of awareness among school pupils about how the apprenticeship route can support a career in engineering, so that young people are in a better position to make key decisions when they leave school.

Our company is strongly committed to supporting the development of young people through apprenticeships, so we welcome the Chancellor's £50m training stimulus.

But we are concerned that there is still a lack of awareness of apprenticeships – primarily the learning-on-the-job aspect – as a route to a role in engineering.

Our concern is that students are being directed to desk-based courses which don't equip learners sufficiently for the working world.

As part of this new funding, we want to see a light shone on what apprenticeships can offer school-leavers.

Too many young people opt for courses which are simply not fit for purpose. This is not their fault; they are simply not given the whole range of options when they need it the most.

Mechanical engineering is an increasingly important part of business activity for our business. We became apprentice plumbers on leaving school before launching our company in Bracknell in 2017.

We initially focused on the healthcare sector before working in local government, education settings, data centres, workspaces and industrial buildings, plus residential projects before adding engineering to our specialisms.

We know from personal experience that a good apprenticeship can be a ticket for a bright future for young people.

But it borders on heart-breaking when young people come to us after undertaking college courses with certificates that aren't worth the money they are printed on when they enter the real world.

If the Government wants to get bang for its buck, then it needs to focus on guidance for 15 and 16-year-olds so they're more aware of what apprenticeship can offer so they don't waste their time on inappropriate courses."

We recently strengthened the company's workforce and the company's air-conditioning offer and have shown our continued faith in the apprentice training system with a £10,000 investment in two members of our team.

In a move that underlines our commitment to development of our personnel, two staff members have passed a 15-day course "with flying colours" to qualify as certified F-Gas engineers.

Frank Smith and Tommy Gill have been praised after bolstering their skillset by completing a new starter refrigeration course at Ellis Training in Hertfordshire.

Their double success follows a prestigious triple seal of approval for Campbell West as it strives to enhance quality, environmental and health and safety performance.

The company has earned key ISO (International Standards Organisation) 9001, 14001 and 45001 certification which demonstrate overall commitment to continuous improvement.