

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Beauty, Aesthetics and Wellbeing

Minutes of Meeting

Inquiry session into COVID-19 and Skills

Date: Tuesday 8th June 2021

Time: 15:30 – 16:30

Location: Zoom

Chair: Carolyn Harris MP

Minutes taken by: Sarina Kiayani, Interel UK (Secretariat)

Members present

Carolyn Harris MP, APPG Co-Chair

Judith Cummins MP, APPG Co-Chair

Peter Dowd MP, APPG Treasurer

Witnesses

Jack Tang, Co-Founder and CEO at Urban

Victoria Brownlie, Director of Policy and Public Affairs at the National Hair and Beauty Federation

Judith Hadley, Vice President of the Federation of Holistic Therapies

Helena Grzesk, COO of the British Beauty Council

Lesley Blair, CEO and Chairperson at BABTAC and CIBTAC

Alan Billington, Head of Programme and Wellbeing at City Lit

Diane Hay, Operational Chair of the Beauty Professional Apprenticeship Suite

Audience

Katherine Morgan, APPG Secretariat

Victoria McNish, APPG Secretariat

Sarina Kiayani, APPG Secretariat

Allaster Gair, APPG Secretariat

Jo Lloyd, Office of Carolyn Harris MP

Minutes of the Meeting

Carolyn Harris MP opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. She then asked the attendees to introduce themselves.

Victoria Brownlie said that apprenticeships in the sector declined by around 7,000 prior to the pandemic (2019 – 2020). She added that there has been a move to a more self-employed model in this sector in particular and the sector has not been adapting to that.

In addition, social distancing and capacity issues have now acted as barriers to salons, and this will continue to be the single biggest factor impacting apprenticeships in this sector. There has been a 55% cut in salon apprentices since COVID began, and only 11% of salons said they are likely to take on apprentices in the next 3 – 6 months. This was due to restrictions

from COVID, including the number of people in salons, both clients and staff. Clients are frequently now being serviced by a single member of staff who provides a large monetary value to the business, rather than multiple members of staff.

She also noted that a continued increase in National Minimum Wage rates could also be also detrimental for the sector. Whilst people need a fair wage, we need a careful balance between ensuring businesses can afford wage increases. The NHBF's May 2021 Wages Survey found that 63% of employers will be cutting down on apprentices due to National Minimum Wage increases. She added that this affected older learners in particular, as their higher wages cost almost double those of two younger apprentices.

Victoria Brownlie expressed disappointment at this, believing that people of all ages should be encouraged to come into the industry. She noted how the Government is making efforts with its kickstart scheme, traineeships and T-Levels, but expressed concerns over the latter – if they are too theory-based and will not necessarily be helping people in salons. However, she said that she generally support the intentions behind them.

She did note that these schemes are cumbersome, difficult to administer, built around larger businesses and less accessible to smaller businesses due to the lack of HR needed to administer them. She therefore said that the Government needs to provide incentives to SMEs, microbusinesses and even the self-employed 'one man band' model that is continuing to grow, and make these schemes more accessible to them.

She added that grants and incentive schemes around a new model around self-employed people are needed to bring in apprentices, accounting for the gig economy. There have been on average £4000 - £7000 additional costs from apprentices not being able to train during closure periods and complete their qualifications. Employers need support to ensure that apprentices are not dropped before completing their qualifications, particularly since only brand new apprentices are eligible for the £3,000 Government grant given to employers who hire apprentices.

To conclude her evidence, **Victoria Brownlie** said that support should be tailored to SMEs, more ways to make trainings accessible and attractive to employers, not increasing minimum wage rates at a fragile economic time, and sorting out the issue of some apprenticeships not being eligible for an £3k grant.

Judith Cummins MP thanked **Victoria Brownlie** and expressed support for her concerns.

Jack Tang said that Urban's biggest challenge as an operator is skills shortages. From March 2020 until now, there has been a decline of 14,000 Urban practitioners across the UK (35% drop). He said that nearly 40% of this drop was due to issues including relocation to workers' home countries, with a lack of work during COVID-19 leading to permanent relocations.

He added that there have been greater levels of stress and anxiety during the pandemic – particularly amongst those working from home – including back pain and mobility issues which practitioners can address. There has been an imbalance resulting from this, with services 30% higher than pre-COVID levels, so the platform has been operating at an all-time high, but with a 35% decline in providers (60% supply and demand gap).

Jack Tang expressed concerns that many people are not being serviced due to this gap, which leads to a burden on the NHS and other health systems. He said he hopes to work with

the APPG and educators to encourage more people to train into the industry, undertaking courses on both massage therapies and beauty.

Judith Hadley said that the burden on the NHS will increase as a result of a lack of access to holistic therapies, which act as a popular alternative for GP visits. Level 3 complementary therapy courses have also failed to be included in the National Skills Fund, which will add to this.

She also expressed disappointment that over 50% of those learning used to be older learners, but this has dropped as there is no funding available to them. Apprenticeship programmes for those aged 19+ also place significant financial pressures on employers. The Federation of Holistic Therapists are also seeking more signatories to their letter on skills, with Hadley adding that the industry would be in “dire straits” without the large number of professionals who are struggling right now.

Helena Grzesk agreed largely with the earlier points made, particularly **Victoria Brownlie’s** points on apprenticeships. She said that the shift to self-employment has contributed to the decline in apprenticeships, and a subsequent decline in those training in the sector. She also expressed interest in bringing older therapists back to the beauty sector, in line with comments made at the British Beauty Council’s spa meetings last week, and providing incentives for them to do so.

She also criticised how the sector had been left off the migration list. Many businesses are trading at 50% - 75% of pre-COVID levels and want to recruit, but can’t take on new people as there are not enough applications for roles available. Session hairdressers and makeup artists who travel internationally have particularly struggled due to visa issues and travel restrictions. She offered to share the British Beauty Council’s mental health and wellbeing paper, which included skills and funding recommendations (including qualifications higher than Level 3 that could provide a long-term vision of a career path) that could enable the sector to help ease the burden on the NHS through its services.

Alan Billington said that the skills funding list did not effectively cover the sector, only just physiology. He said that City Lit want to push for funding to enable students to enter into complementary therapies, but COVID has led to a 50% reduction in City Lit programme participants. Due to COVID, there is much uncertainty over participants completing courses.

The funding currently available is the Loans Fund, which is insufficient as City Lit only get students who can take on the additional costs associated with this. What they want instead is to be added to the Learn and Skills Fund, so that potential students and therapists can access its programmes. As restrictions have eased, City Lit has now had NHS and councils contacting them for therapists, and they want to provide the training for this as there is a skills gap here.

Diane Hey said that there are ways to fill skills gaps and future-proof the sector. She is also a member of the National Standards Steering Group, noting that there is a practice standard for workforce entry from Level 2 upwards. Holistic therapy, in particular, has also suffered due to a deficit in foreign workers and employers being less willing to sponsor visas.

The sector has been seen since COVID for the value it brings to people’s lives, but there are concerns over young apprentices coming out of further education this year, qualified on a 70% threshold with teacher-assessed grades and less face-to-face and field contact time. Apprentices going into workplaces may not be not fully confident or equipped due to changes

to their learning from COVID. Thus, although these apprentices succeeded in difficult circumstances, there are challenges of taking these new apprentices in. She also said that already in the system should be encouraged to take higher level qualifications, including Level 2 apprentices being encouraged to Level 3, and both younger and older learners encouraged to train.

Carolyn Harris MP thanked Diane and proposed some questions.

She asked if the issue of a shortage of staff from the industry came from COVID, or was exacerbated by it.

She then asked how we can get the education system to recognise the value of holistic therapies.

Lesley Blair referenced the perceived lack of long-term job security due to COVID, but noted that there had always been a shortage of required skills, and blamed this on industry standards. She referenced the number of unskilled workers affecting the demand for qualifications, and the role of short courses in not being seen as “professional”. She also spoke of the sector’s low pay and lack of progression.

She said that there has been a perception of the industry as “unskilled” – short courses contribute to that. She worries that the 2021 apprenticeship cohort will be viewed as less qualified due to the circumstances in which they gained their qualification.

Carolyn Harris MP responded that we need to encourage the education system to encourage people to go into the industry, and link the role of the industry to the Government’s work, including around mental health.

Lesley Blair also noted how short courses do not discuss issues such as body dysmorphia and mental health.

Carolyn Harris MP responded her view that those in Governments can see the industry through a single lens, as simply “pampering” rather than supporting mental health. Having treatments supports mental health and helps with relaxation. She said that cancelled treatments can affect mental health, so we must encourage more people into training and the industry based on its health, not just cosmetic, benefits.

Diane Hay added that the industry works on palliative care and with cancer patients, along with the link between massages and better health. She suggested that evidence of health benefits from holistic therapies should be sought to emphasise this.

Helena Grzesk noted that massage therapy is not promoted in the UK as it is in other countries, as it is not adequately recognised.

Carolyn Harris MP said that the APPG was planning a launch on this inquiry in Parliament to help parliamentarians understand the impact of treatments.

Jack Tang added that people change their minds on treatments being solely for cosmetic reasons once they receive the benefits of treatments, and suggested that politicians should be given treatments so they can realise the value of the sector for mental wellbeing.

Carolyn Harris MP agreed, and said this would show MPs what the sector offers and that this should not be overlooked. This would subsequently help to find a solution to this long-term problem.

Peter Dowd MP added that regional economies needed to be taken into account when discussing industry support. He said that long-term education reforms are needed to progress in this area.

Carolyn Harris MP asked **Peter Dowd MP** what he suggested.

Peter Dowd MP said that politicians should be prepared to make the case for the sector, and extending it into the health service. This should be inclusive and should account for the needs of local communities. As part of a long to medium-term solution, he said that the structure of the education system should also be examined, from primary and secondary school through to higher education to reflect the needs of the sector and regional economies.

Carolyn Harris MP asked for examples of illnesses treated through holistic therapies, which **Helena Grzesk** promised to share.

Peter Dowd MP said that the case for the sector should be made at a local level, with businesses seeking local MPs and councils to seek champions for help.

Diane Hay said that she was in discussions with the Department for Education about the sector's entry point level and where this can leave people.

Carolyn Harris MP said we should talk about the skills gap, and write a letter to the skills minister to be signed by participants. She also proposed looking for debates and questions we can feed into around the benefits of, and the lack of, educational resources for the sector.

She added that, following the end of social distancing, we need to do showcase events/salon visits with MPs, incorporating something like a hand massage. She also recommended liaising with people in palliative care receiving treatments, such as those with terminal cancer, to discuss the importance of holistic therapies and what these mean to them.

Katherine Morgan said that this will be incorporated in a report into the sector's recovery.

Carolyn Harris MP suggested applying for a Westminster Hall debate on skills and the benefits of holistic therapies on health.