



Colin Barnes, engineering director at Go North East

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## Why I'm living proof that apprenticeships work

To mark the start of National Apprenticeship Week 2019 (4-8 March), former apprentice Colin Barnes - now engineering director at Go North East, shares his views on the value of apprenticeships, from his own experiences to heading up the company's award-winning bus and coach engineering and maintenance scheme.

"I've one very good reason why I'm such a firm supporter of apprenticeships. My own personal career journey has taken me from an enthusiastic, 16-year-old apprentice to engineering director at Go North East – a company that

really does value and invest in its people.

“So, I guess I’m living proof that apprenticeships can lead to a great career! There are dozens of other examples, too, of former apprentices who’ve gone on to make great business leaders in our region.

“What we really need is more companies to invest in this form of training. Of course, there’s a cost implication but statistics show that you’ll get a decent return on the investment.

“I’m fortunate to work for a company that really gets the benefits of having apprentices, and I can honestly say it’s worth making the effort. For a start, they bring new skills and fresh ideas. They also give young people an insight into the world of work and a helping hand onto the career ladder.

“Put simply, that’s why we’ve been investing in apprenticeships for more than a century – developing home-grown talent, providing great careers for young people, plugging skills gaps and giving our business the best chance of being successful.

“Right now, we’re delivering a unique bus and coach engineering and maintenance apprenticeship with Gateshead College. It’s a really innovative scheme that’s helping to tackle skills shortages in our sector. We’ve more than 30 apprentices studying at various levels of the four-year programme, which attracts around 500 applications each year.

“It’s great to work with an organisation like Gateshead College. They really understand us, our business and our sector; without them our apprenticeship programme wouldn’t be the success it is today. It’s got a fantastic reputation in the industry and we’ve not only won regional awards for it, but national acclaim in the routeone Bus and Coach Transport Awards and the Recruiter Awards.

“More importantly, it’s making a difference to our business performance. It’s helping us to put our succession plans in place; if team members retire or get a promotion, we need fresh talent to come in and pick up where they left off and that is fundamental to our long-term sustainability.

“The programme has helped us massively by allowing us to have a team of

highly skilled technicians across the region. By investing in apprenticeships, we'll continue to have new talent coming through, with new trainees mentored by former apprentices who've been there and done it. This will help us become even more efficient and develop new markets for our business, such as electric buses and hybrid technology.

“So, yes, that’s why I support apprenticeships – and I’d strongly encourage other companies to invest in this form of training. It certainly worked for me, it works for the business that employs me and it can work for other ambitious businesses.”

To find out more about how apprenticeships could benefit your business, contact Gateshead College: [employers@gateshead.ac.uk](mailto:employers@gateshead.ac.uk)

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