

# Practical sense

**James Clark**, Secretary-General of the British Industrial Truck Association (BITA), is encouraged to see vocational training receive a royal seal of approval.



“Apprentices’ youth and enthusiasm would reward the companies who committed to putting them through apprenticeships”



It is open to debate how much the Duke of York knows about the materials handling industry but I found myself agreeing with his sentiments on education recently after seeing him quoted in the Evening Standard during a recent trip to London.

The Duke, patron of the of the Evening Standard’s apprenticeship campaign Ladder for London, said it was crucial that Britain gives young people skills as well as education and that the country will benefit if we move away from simply channeling as many students as possible to university.

#### PATHWAYS

“It isn’t obligatory to go to university early”, he said. “We have to encourage those in education to think of other pathways.”

Hear, hear! While the Duke was speaking to an audience of newspaper editors in Birmingham, his words have a wider resonance thanks to his theme of encouraging employers to recruit young people without them first having to go to university with the debt burden that entails nowadays.

#### DESIRE TO LEARN

There are so many talented young people out there. Whenever I’ve been lucky enough to witness young people on forklift engineering

apprenticeships connected with the BITA Academy organisation, I’ve always been hugely impressed by their desire to learn and apply their skills. For someone towards the other end of my working life (compared to an apprentice!) it is hugely gratifying to see the youngsters coming into the industry with such drive and potential – but crucially also being equipped with the skills that will shape their working lives and take them as far as they want to go.

This is something that BITA has a longstanding commitment to and, as we announced in the last issue of SHD Logistics, why we have come together with the FLTA in order to create a single apprenticeship scheme covering the whole of the UK.

#### PRACTICAL MAKES SENSE

It seems common sense that training should prepare people for the workforce. However, recently I had a conversation with a nurse who complained that the three-year degree she’d been required to do as a qualification hadn’t actually addressed any of the practical elements of her work. She had been left frustrated by how far removed it was from the day-to-day reality of her work – and how neither she nor her employer had benefited from her qualification. There is no substitute for practical training and this is where the value of apprenticeships really shines through.

#### APPRENTICE RECRUITMENT

As the economy picks up, it is pleasing to see employers increasingly looking to grow their businesses by taking on apprentices across the economy. The latest annual SME Manufacturing Survey from MHA, the accountancy and business advisory group, paints a picture of increasing optimism and growth among manufacturers – with 64% of companies intending to take on apprentices or trainees in 2014, a 13% rise year-on-year.

The Duke of York, in his speech, argued that apprentices’ youth and enthusiasm would reward the companies who committed to putting them through apprenticeships. My message to those in the materials handling industry is exactly the same.

#### AGM AHoy!

As I write this column, preparations are underway for the BITA annual general meeting in Stratford-Upon-Avon. I always enjoy the AGM as a great opportunity to get together with members and get feedback on the burning issues of the day and I know many attendees will be looking to hear the findings from the latest BITA Economic Survey conducted by Oxford Economics. I look forward to seeing as many of you there as possible. ■

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