



Expert Opinion - Edition 4

Fit for the future: using earn and learn to future proof business

“Earn and learn” is the term for a group of routes into and within employment which combine study with practical experience, enabling individuals to gain the knowledge and skills required to pursue their chosen occupation whilst already starting to earn.

In this edition of Expert Opinion, we speak to Stacey Greenwood, Early Talent Management Specialist at Schneider Electric, a leader in digital transformation of energy management and automation, about their approach to earn and learn.

Q. At Schneider Electric, you have a 5-year plan which ensures sure you are recruiting the people you need. How does earn-and-learn fit in to that strategy?

We want to ensure we achieve the best possible balance between early talent and experienced hires. Earn and learn is a big part of our recruitment strategy. The hands-on, practical experience apprentices gain when they’re immersed in the business – gaining their qualification at the same time – seems to make for really motivated people.

What we’re trying to do is to target the early career population through outreach to schools, universities and so on, using our STEM Ambassadors and others. We also work closely with our targeted universities offering ‘year in industry’ and internships to students to further enhance their studies and employability.

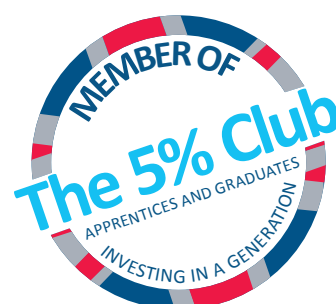
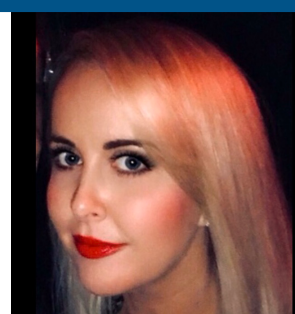
We have an apprentice programme which covers all levels – Advanced, Intermediate and Degree. The programme has driven a big increase in our apprentice recruitment, and it’s also helping us to improve diversity.

We also have a fast track 12-month graduate programme where graduates experience three different four-month placements – choosing their career choice at the end of the programme.

Q. What kind of new skills are you looking for that you might not have considered a decade ago?

Traditionally both our graduate and apprenticeship programmes were focused on electrical engineering, as you would expect. But we now need a whole range of new skills and earn and learn is central to fulfilling that need. For example, we train our electrical engineering apprentices to connect products to building management systems through our smart ‘internet-of-things’ solution, which we wouldn’t have done a decade or more ago. And we now have a cyber security and digital solutions programme to ensure we have the skills we will need for the future.

As well as looking for individuals who can lead the digital transformation, we are looking for our early talent population to demonstrate leadership skills and we have a range of programmes in place to support them in doing so.



Q. Have you changed your approach to recruitment at all, in terms of where you look for talent, the requirements you set out, the process and so on?

We have an apprentice programme which is suitable for all levels and disciplines: from advanced to degree – technical to marketing. The programme is deliberately designed to ensure it attracts a diverse range of candidates, encouraging all school leavers from GCSE, A-Levels, BTECs etc to apply to us.

Then, to make sure we're maximising the number of people coming to us, we've made a number of changes. For example, we've moved the date when we begin our recruitment process earlier, so we're aligned to UCAS and are more likely to catch the attention of students applying for universities and considering apprenticeships. We use more digital job boards specific for both graduate and apprentice recruitment. We're also very proactive in the selection process and find that candidates like to be engaged very quickly after applying. So we've honed our process to make sure it's as agile as possible, and have changed planned assessment centres to rolling assessment centres to allow us to assess candidates as soon as we can as the market is extremely competitive and we don't want to lose talented people because they're having to wait around to be assessed.

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Q. How important is it to set specific targets for your recruitment?

It is essential to set specific targets, to make sure we are anticipating and fulfilling future business needs and to make sure we're delivering a diverse workforce with a wide range of skillsets. Targets ensure we are all aligned and focused on what we need to achieve. If we don't set targets, we can't challenge our leaders and change mindsets and behaviours.

Q. Your strategy doesn't just encompass recruitment – you also apply earn and learn to your existing workforce – what is the strategy behind that and how important is it for your business that you do this?

We believe in 'learning every day'. Given the transformation currently underway in the energy environment, our business is going through a unique revolution connecting energy with digital. For us, upskilling our workforce is essential to enable us to evolve our "traditional" skills to the next set of essential capabilities and to help us maintain our competitive edge.

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Q. Schneider Electric has worked with Lincoln University to design a degree apprenticeship which meets the company's needs and is also covered by the Apprenticeship Levy. Has that been a success?

We have 22 apprentices doing an Integrated Engineering Degree at Lincoln University. All have a minimum of A-Level grade B in Maths and two grade Cs or equivalent. Rather than send them to an off-the-shelf degree course, Schneider Electric have worked with the Head of Engineering at Lincoln University to develop a specific degree which will add value to both the apprentice and organisation. We're really pleased with the calibre of students we've recruited onto this – it's been outstanding.

Q. What advice do you have for other businesses considering degree apprenticeships?

I would say that the most important thing is to make sure you work with the right University or learning provider as they do vary and are obviously central to the quality of education being provided. Also, don't underestimate the ability of school leavers finishing A-levels or equivalent and the value they can add to an organisation. Learning whilst being able to gain experience in a real-life work environment speeds the process up considerably so expect to see these apprentices fast track through the business.

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Q. You seem to be really making the most of the Apprenticeship Levy. What is the key for business to make sure they are doing the same?

We have a workforce plan and strategy in place which looks at how we can use the Levy to recruit apprentices and also to develop existing employees. This is central to our approach. It includes things such as challenging managers not to employ like for like when recruiting, but to employ apprentices and grow and develop talent to address skill shortages in the industry. It's not just seeing apprentices as technical roles but for every role within your business and using the Levy to develop your existing workforce. These are areas that really could change how your Levy is used.

It's also important to make sure you have people in the organisation who manage and drive the use of the Levy and ensure everyone in your organisation understands how it works. Communicating effectively internally is key. People are so busy - they need to understand how it can benefit them in a quick concise communication. For Schneider Electric, the Learning and Development Solutions Manager and Early Talent Manager play a really vital role in this. And other communications tools, for example, holding briefing sessions with managers and HR Business Partners to cascade the information on how the Levy can be used was also important for us.

Thank you so much to Stacey for sharing her insights on this topic.



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