

# Stagecoach joins The 5% Club – and so could you

A free-to-join charity called The 5% Club has recently added Stagecoach to the long list of transport, engineering and infrastructure companies involved. **Richard Sharman** looks at what membership entails and its benefits

**T**he 5% Club is a UK-wide charity that aims to contribute to the alleviation of poverty through increased levels of employment.

The charity invites companies who join to share their ethos and to aspire to have 5% of their workforce in 'earn and learn' positions. Membership of the club is free.

There are over 500 members from a range of businesses, from small and medium enterprises to organisations operating worldwide.

Members benefit from connecting through diverse, regular networking events held virtually and when possible in person across the UK. They also gain access to a kitemark that demonstrates that they are a socially responsible employer. The stamp offers the opportunity to spread the message to your employees that you are committed to the future of the workforce.

Gill Cronin, The 5% Club's Operations Director said: "The transport industry as a whole is a major employer of apprentices and The 5% Club offers a safe space to reach out and talk to other people in a similar situation to you, as we manoeuvre through this difficult economic climate. Our online networking events offer an opportunity to share your experiences, gain clarification that you're on the right track, and even learn some tips from others. The 5% Club is a way of breaking the isolation as part of a group."

By engaging with government on their collective behalf, The 5% Club provides



Stagecoach Apprentices (L-R) Sara Shelley from Stagecoach South, Jemma Wood (now Deputy Engineering Manager at Stagecoach in Cambridge) and Jessica Coombes from Stagecoach Manchester. **STAGECOACH**



members with a unique and credible 'voice of the employer' drawn from multiple sectors and sizes, on all aspects of the skills debate (i.e. not just apprenticeships), identifying issues and addressing failings in the system, including through its surveys.

Current members from the transport, engineering, infrastructure world include: Amey, Airbus Group, Babcock, Exterion Media, GWR, Highways England, HS2, Kier, Laing O'Rourke, Network Rail, Osborne, Skanska, Transport for London, Thales, UK Rail, Volker Wessels UK and now Stagecoach.

## Stagecoach's involvement

Tracey Smyth, Head of Talent Development at Stagecoach UK Bus, explained why the group joined The 5% Club: "Apprenticeship brings huge value to our business in terms of talent and diversity and Stagecoach has for many years been at the forefront of championing apprentices in our workplace. Not only is it important for succession planning, but we also find it's a great way of being able to engage with our local communities and make sure that our workforce represents the people we serve. During National Apprenticeship Week in March 2020, we became members of The 5% Club. It was a natural move for us after realising that the charity stood for many of the same principles as Stagecoach, such as enabling social mobility within our communities. There were also some great benefits to joining the club."

## Benefits of joining the club?

"The 5% Club has a vast and diverse membership providing a great network, allowing businesses big and small to come together to share their learnings. Membership is free, meaning that you can join no matter the size of your company; this helps smaller companies benefit from the experience of larger ones," said Tracey.

"We were excited to see that there is a range of events held throughout the year, helping to provide a platform for employers and apprentices alike. These events encourage all companies to get involved and learn from each other. Opportunities that would otherwise be few and far between.

"We were proud to be able to announce the news of our joining The 5% Club in our 2020 Annual Report, helping to demonstrate our commitment to investing in skills for the future in a sustainable way. Our commitment to corporate and social responsibility in this way sends a clear message that we value and take good care of our young talent."



Yeldho from Stagecoach South West. **STAGECOACH**

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Stagecoach is proud to be the industry leader in delivering bus driver apprenticeships

## Earn and Learn programme

"Stagecoach is proud to be the industry leader in delivering bus driver apprenticeships. We now have 584 employees enrolled on our flagship driver apprenticeship programme and 107 employees have now completed their driver apprenticeship across our English operating companies.

"As well as the new bus driver apprenticeships, we also have an industry-leading engineering apprenticeship programme in our bus businesses in the UK which has benefited hundreds of apprentices over more than a decade," explained Tracey.

"Our Trade-Up apprenticeship programme gives existing employees in a non-skilled role the opportunity to apply to become part of our skilled engineering team. In 2020, we had more than 300 applications from across the country,

showing the popularity of this kind of scheme.

"A number of our engineering apprentices have gone on to develop their careers with Stagecoach, like Tony Vincent, who went through the apprenticeship programme and is now Engineering Director in our South West business.

"There have been some challenges over the past 10 months through the Covid-19 pandemic, and face to face learning opportunities for our apprentices have been limited due to this, but alongside our partners, Realise Training, we've been able to adapt our programme and have continued to train our apprentices via remote learning as we recognise the importance of continuing this development even during the tough times.

"On top of this we have also been looking at other apprenticeships that will help us to develop our pool of talent even further and examples of this are human resources and learning and development, leadership and management and IT apprenticeships. We will also be looking at how we can broaden our functional apprenticeships."

## Why do you think others should join?

"The 5% Club's cross-sector membership provides businesses of all sizes with a unique opportunity to form part of a credible 'employer voice' with which to speak directly to government about pressing aspects of the UK's skills debate. It is sometimes difficult to make a difference alone, and in

an issue of such importance to the future of the country's economy and society the strength in numbers provided by The Club is invaluable. It ensures that our voice is heard in areas that matter most.

"Membership can also benefit recruitment, as potential applicants are made aware of the variety of opportunities and routes available to them within the employer's business. The Club provides advice and helps in attracting new and diverse recruits – especially those who may need to retrain – something which will be crucial as unemployment rises and the economy suffers amid the current pandemic."

### Importance of earn and learn

Tracey explained that: "Succession is such an important issue within our industry and we need to make sure that we have plans in place for the future that ensure we continue to have a workforce that is closely aligned with our customers and represents the people we serve. There used to be a perception that apprenticeships were only possible in jobs in engineering or construction, but that's by no means the case anymore. Our plans involve looking at a whole new area of apprenticeships to make sure we continue to attract new people and continue to develop people."

"By embracing all kinds of earn and learn opportunities, we can both secure the future of our business whilst helping to provide careers and social mobility to those living in the communities we serve."

### How do I become a member?

The 5% Club welcomes employers of all sizes and from all sectors and membership is free and open to any organisation committed to the 'ethos' of earn and learn. Joining is simple, the charity asks new members to:

- Sign its Charter, pledging voluntary commitment to the goals. This includes pledging to work towards having a minimum 5% of your UK workforce enrolled on formalised apprentice, sponsored student and/or graduate development schemes within five years; and
- Provide a breakdown of numbers, including the total number of UK employees and the number of employees on graduate, sponsored student or apprenticeship schemes.

All you have to do to become a member is visit The 5% Club website ([www.5percentclub.org.uk](http://www.5percentclub.org.uk)) and fill out a short application form.

Why earn and learn? Earn and learn (E&L) describes the various routes into



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and within employment which combine study with practical experience, including apprenticeships, graduate training programmes and sponsored students.

E&L supports business growth by improving productivity and competitiveness. Research has shown that 80% of businesses who employ apprentices benefit from increased productivity, with each apprentice bringing a gain in productivity of £10,000 or more per year. 90% of employers also say apprentices have helped improve their products or services, helping them to become more competitive.

E&L supports the economy by filling the skills gap: UK businesses face a shortfall of

£6 billion each year due to the challenges of finding skilled workers. Research by the National Audit Office shows that apprenticeships return around £18 per pound of government funding to the UK economy. Investing in E&L helps organisations to overcome the skills gap, and develop a more loyal, driven and agile workforce.

E&L also supports society by promoting social mobility: A person's family circumstances and where they come from can dictate their employment prospects. 'Earn and learn' training opportunities, such as apprenticeships, offer people from all backgrounds an equal chance to enjoy long-term, fulfilling careers. //