

Northern Gas Networks

Young Innovators Council



Session 5: Northern Gas Networks' Apprenticeship Offering September 2024

Facilitated and written by Solutions for the Planet

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1. Executive Summary

Session 5 of Northern Gas Networks' Young Innovators Council (YIC) took place on Wednesday 25th September 2024. The YIC Session covered the topic of **Northern Gas Networks' Apprenticeship Offering**.

In advance of the Session, the YIC were asked to do some research on apprenticeships; what they are, how and where to apply, and thoughts on Northern Gas Networks' apprenticeship job advertisements. It was clear that the YIC had a **solid understanding of how an apprenticeship works**, and they also had some valid questions around age, qualifications, career progression, and the number of opportunities available.

Two speakers from Northern Gas Networks shared some **contextual detail about the offering at the business**, and some of the questions they are grappling with in terms of how to develop that offer. Claire Allcock (HR Director) started by sharing some high-level statistics on the make-up of the whole business before honing in on some of the challenges and opportunities for their apprenticeship programme. Chris Adair (Training and Apprenticeship Manager) told the Panel more about the practicalities of doing an apprenticeship at Northern Gas Networks and shared the current opportunities available.

With this information, the YIC then entered break out rooms to explore the pros and cons of **different types of apprenticeships**. This was a fascinating discussion that looked at the role-focus of opportunities, the availability of stable jobs at the end of an apprenticeship, and the varying levels that can be offered. The conversations were very **nuanced**, as detailed in this report, but largely the group preferred the idea of programmes that offer **experience across the business**, and they thought that the **number of opportunities** available was more important than having a guaranteed job at the end. They also valued **lower-level roles** (Level 2 or GCSE equivalent and Level 3 or A-Level equivalent).

For the final discussion, we trialled a new '**debate**' approach to tackle the statement: 'NGN should use targeted recruitment / positive action to encourage a more diverse set of candidates to their roles'. The debate format allowed the YIC to fully explore both sides of the argument, before sharing their personal views on the topic. Again, this conversation was full of nuance, but they seemed to be leaning towards agreeing that **these approaches could be beneficial for the business**.

This was the final YIC meeting for 2024, so we finished off with a round of **thankyous** and **goodbyes**. We already have a few of the YIC 2024 group interested in joining again next year.

2. Overview of session

Background

2024 marks the fourth consecutive year of Northern Gas Networks' Young Innovators Council (YIC). The YIC continues to be the voice of young people at Northern Gas Networks (NGN). It provides young people's perspectives and NGN ensures these young peoples' thoughts and opinions are put at the heart of the business' decision making. Each session agenda is co-created by S4TP and NGN, influenced by the YIC's input on what topics they want to talk about. The aim is for meaningful and relevant engagement which provides a real opportunity for the YIC members to influence decision-making at Northern Gas Networks.

Background to the Session

Firstly, the topics clearly connects to and follows on from previous YIC meetings. Sessions 2 and 3 of 2024 covered the future of energy in detail. Some of the YIC's recommendations have included greater awareness raising and education, communication of accurate and useful information, strong partnerships with other relevant organisations, and investing in innovation. For NGN to be able to act upon these points, they need to attract and retain a resilient workforce that is representative of the diversity of the region. Longer ago, in February 2023, the YIC looked at the topic of 'Recruiting Future Talent', where some excellent suggestions regarding incentives and culture were made. However, this topic will look more closely at how we get high quality and diverse employees into the business in the first place, through apprenticeship routes.

From the business perspective, NGN are in the process of reviewing their apprenticeship offering, which is an important topic because it touches on a range of important issues. Whilst **operational** apprenticeships are hugely oversubscribed, other areas of the business struggle to recruit talented individuals into apprentice roles e.g., data, legal, finance. There's also an element of **diversity** to consider here. Firstly, with regards to **age**; NGN's workforce is made up of more people 40+ than under 40, which is of growing concern for the future resilience and sustainability of the organisation. Other elements of diversity e.g., **ethnicity and neurodivergence** are also areas of interest to NGN who are keen to understand how they can attract and retain a more diverse workforce across a range of characteristics.

YIC 2024 Session 5: Northern Gas Networks' Apprenticeship Offering

Total length: 2 hours

People involved: 2 S4TP facilitators, 3 NGN facilitators, 2 NGN speakers, 2 observers

Date and time: Wednesday 25th September 5-7pm

Panel attendance: 17

Apologies: 15

Objectives:

- For the YIC to better understand more about apprenticeships at Northern Gas Networks, the types of opportunities currently available, and the importance of apprenticeships

- For the YIC to better understand the current challenges that Northern Gas Networks is facing with its apprenticeship offering e.g., struggling to recruit for certain roles, lack of diversity
- To get the YIC’s perspective on the kind of apprenticeship offering that they think would attract people into ‘difficult to hire’ areas e.g., data, technology, finance, legal. Specifically, to understand how the YIC feel about:
 - offering more apprenticeship opportunities even if there isn’t a guaranteed job at the end of it
 - focusing on general apprenticeship opportunities rather than specialist ones
 - the types / levels of apprenticeships that NGN should focus on offering
 - using focused recruitment methods to ensure a more diverse set of applicants to their apprenticeships

Prior to the session the YIC were asked to read and complete the following tasks:

- **Read** this summary on what an apprenticeship is, and watch this video on how they work: <https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/influencers/what-is-an-apprenticeship> and <https://youtu.be/kyHi709hjRU>
- **Review** an NGN Apprenticeship Advertisement (see Appendix 1) and reflect on the information provided, the role being advertised, and your interest in the role.
- **Research** at least 3 other apprenticeship opportunities in the Energy Industry and reflect on the ease of searching, patterns or trends in offering, and the information provided about the roles.

Agenda

Time	Activity
5.00	Welcome, introductions and icebreaker
5.10	You said, we are...feedback from NGN regarding the Vulnerability Strategy discussion in Session 4
5.15	Introduction to the topic and warm-up activity on what is an apprenticeship
5.23	Speakers – Claire Allcock and Chris Adair
5.40	Key Apprenticeship Questions: breakout room discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specific vs. general apprenticeship opportunities - Fewer opportunities with a guaranteed job vs. more opportunities but no guaranteed job - Lower vs. higher level apprenticeships
6.10	Debate <i>‘Northern Gas Networks should use targeted recruitment / positive action in order to encourage a more diverse set of candidates to their roles’</i>
6.55	Wrap-up, invitation to YIC 2025 and Survey reminder

3. Attendees

Young Innovators Council

Amiee	Lincoln
Dhanayus	Maddison
Ellie	Neve
Emilia	Orla
Ethan	Ralph
Fran	Sahaj

Georgii
Georgina
Kelly

Thomas M
Wilhelmina

Solutions for the Planet *S4TP facilitators*

Lauren Gupta
Jen Baughan

Youth Insights Coordinator
CEO

Northern Gas Networks *NGN facilitators*

Alex Brightman
Eleanor Glyn-Smith
Jenny Wilkinson

Energy Futures and Net Zero Educator
Asset Risk and Strategy Analyst
Stakeholder Engagement Lead

NGN Witnesses

Claire Allcock
Chris Adair
NGN Observer
Roxanne Allen

HR Director
Training and Apprenticeship Manager

Talent Development Manager

Other

External observer

Alan Lowdon

Independent Stakeholder Group Member

4. Key discussion points

You said...so we have...

Jenny Wilkinson shared some of the actions taken since the previous YIC Session on Northern Gas Networks' Vulnerability Strategy. You can look at NGN's response to the YIC's insights here: <https://together.northerngasnetworks.co.uk/events/young-innovators-council-july24/>

Pre-work reflections: what are apprenticeships, how do they work and what did you think of Northern Gas Network's advertisement?

For pre-work, the Panel had been asked to research apprenticeships and look at an advertisement for one of Northern Gas Network's apprenticeship opportunities (see Appendix 1). We used Menti to capture the YIC's thoughts, which started to show some common themes.

The first question we asked was, 'What is an apprenticeship, and how does it work?'. The Panel clearly had a solid understanding of the mixed work / study nature of an apprenticeship, many of them referenced 'earn while you learn', and some of them were aware of the 80% work and 20% learning split.

Next, we asked them ‘What are your thoughts about the NGN apprenticeship advertisement that you reviewed for prework?’. The below table summarises the reflections shared, and the full Menti comment section can be found in Appendix 2.

Strengths of the advertisement	Areas for development for the advertisement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informative, covered key points - Easy to see requirements - Easy to understand the benefits - Reasonable pay and inclusive hiring process - A good way for someone with SEN needs to find a trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could be more detailed about day-to-day job - Could have a frequently asked questions section - Could highlight some positives or quote past apprentices - Could have a video, timeline or a more visually engaging presentation - Could show the % of people that get a full-time job afterwards - Could include how competitive the position is - Could explain the qualifications and what they might lead to - Could talk about the benefits for someone with SEN - Is there a definitive rule about the drivers’ licenses (from a student who is not yet 18)

The final question that we posed to them was, ‘What did you learn from researching other apprenticeships in the Energy Industry?’. Two common themes were the difficulty in finding opportunities, and limited number of them. Again, the table below summarises the reflections, and a full Menti comments section can be found in Appendix 3.

Positive reflections on researching other apprenticeships...	Suggestions and improvements having researched other apprenticeships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They have reasonable benefits and opportunities - A great opportunity for those who are keen on pursuing a specific career early on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited options available - And, specifically, limited options in ‘my’ area - All require or desire ‘the best’ so they are competitive - Often provided by ‘lesser’ universities - It is difficult to see where an apprenticeship could take you

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many of them start in September, so if you research too late there aren't many opportunities - It possibly seems restricting because the energy industry is changing quickly - A lot of criteria to meet - Only available for 18+
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Northern Gas Networks' Perspective: Internal Speakers Claire Allcock and Chris Adair.

In the next part of the Session, Claire Allcock (HR Director) and Chris Adair (Training and Apprenticeship Manager) brought in more detail about the apprenticeship programme at Northern Gas Networks.

Claire began by providing an overview of the whole workforce, and then shared some of the apprenticeship challenged and opportunities.

NGN's workforce

A snapshot view of our Colleagues (Nov 2023)

- 40** Average age of an employee
- 3.6%** staff working part time
- 18%** of workforce are female
- 98%** of workforce are from the UK

- Claire Allcock – HR Director
- Apprentice in 1996
- Directly employ around 1,700 people and provide regular work to around 800 contractors.
- Colleague turnover <5%
- Average length of service 9.7 years

What are the opportunities?

Examples of our Non-operational teams – predominantly based in Leeds & Sunderland

Regulation, Compliance, Comms & Engagement	Human Resources	Finance	Legal
3iG Innovation, Improvement & Information	Energy Futures	Commercial & Procurement	Internal Audit

Apprenticeship Challenges/Opportunities

- Attractiveness of the sector
- Diversity of applicants
- How we recruit/where we recruit/systems & reporting
- Maximising apprenticeships – degree and graduate link
- Should we go further?

Chris followed up by explaining the current Northern Gas Network apprenticeship offering, the roles on offer, the make-up of the apprenticeship cohort, and the thinking behind succession planning.

After the presentation, we had time for some Questions & Answers from the Panel.

Question: Is the driving lesson scheme for C1 and D1? (normal car and van).

Answer: Yes, it is for both.

Question: How would you choose which type of apprenticeship is best for you?

Answer [summarised]: *If you like digging holes and doing manual labour, the Gas Network Operative is the one for you. It's very hands-on, where you're in the road, digging it up, helping to get to that gas escape. If you want to drive around and interact with customers, then that's the Gas Networks Craftsperson Emergency Response. And if you like taking things apart, working with electrical boards, then that's our Gas Network Maintenance Engineering ones. If you prefer to not get your hands dirty and want to be in an office, then that's the Business Support role. And if you want to be keeping our customers and people safe, then that's the Health and Safety team. It's all about what excites you.*

Key apprenticeship questions: breakout room discussion

In the next part of the Session, we posed 3 'this or that' style questions to the Panel, who then discussed their thoughts in breakout rooms before coming back to vote. The breakout room conversations allowed the YIC to explore the nuance in between the two options, whilst the vote provides a useful sense of the Panel's ultimate preferences.

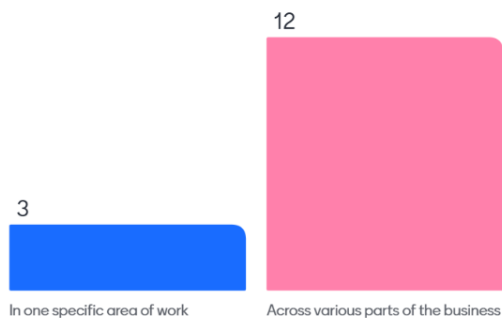
***NB** It is important to highlight the '**middle ground**' nature of the conversations that took place in the breakout rooms. The YIC caveated their insights based on important **context** e.g., *'If I didn't know what I wanted to do, then a broader apprenticeship would be better'* or *'If it's a post-16 / Level 2 apprenticeship then they might still be looking around for jobs so won't necessarily need a guaranteed role'*.

Apprenticeships that focus on one specific area of work	OR	Apprenticeships that offer a broad perspective across various parts of the business
<p>Benefits to the apprentice... If you already know what you want to do, you can focus and won't waste time exploring other areas.</p> <p>You'd still gain valuable transferable skills e.g., time management and planning. So, you don't completely rule out the ability to move roles or companies afterwards.</p>		<p>Benefits to the apprentice... If you aren't yet sure what you want to do, then you can try different things and see what path you might take.</p> <p>If you'd chosen to take a specific pathway, you might change your mind and get stuck in an area of work you don't like. So broader is better.</p>

<p>You'd be more likely to get a higher level or specialist qualification that will increase your employability opportunities.</p> <p>It makes sense for someone who wants to stay at the company long-term.</p> <p>Benefits to Northern Gas Networks...</p> <p>It ensures NGN has qualified specialists.</p>	<p>This is good, especially if it's an industry or business that you don't know much about.</p> <p>This is more of a skill-based approach. It gives them experience, knowledge, and tools that they can carry forward that they could take into other roles or companies.</p> <p>In particular, this would be better for post-16 / Level 2 apprentices because they are more likely to want to gain experience.</p>
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Your vote: Should NGN focus on apprenticeships that offer experience...



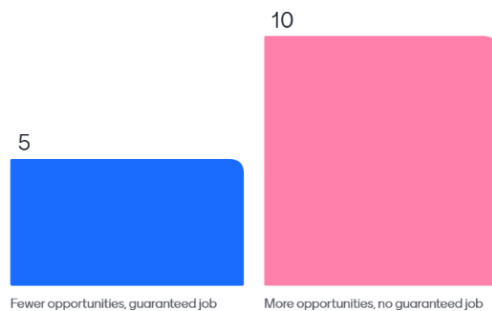
In the vote, you can see there was a clear preference for **broader** apprenticeships that give experience in different parts of the business. This was largely talked about in the context of those who don't yet know exactly what they want to do.

<p>Fewer apprenticeship opportunities that offer a guaranteed job at the end</p>	<p>OR</p>	<p>More apprenticeship opportunities that do NOT offer a guaranteed job at the end</p>
<p>Benefits to the apprentice...</p> <p>It would be a waste to work so hard on your apprenticeship and then not be guaranteed some form of employment at the end.</p> <p>Currently the job market is really competitive, so having a guaranteed job would be helpful and reduce stress.</p> <p>For post-18 roles, a guaranteed job would be more useful because people are looking to start a career.</p>		<p>Benefits to the apprentice...</p> <p>It gives more people hands-on experience in the workplace. Currently the West Yorkshire area has a very low number of opportunities.</p> <p>You can always choose to take that experience somewhere else to find a job.</p>

<p>You've got something to aim for if you have a guaranteed job. You'd be more bothered about getting everything right, rather than spending time looking elsewhere for other opportunities.</p>	<p>If it's post16 / lower level, you are still looking around and deciding where you want to work.</p> <p>Benefits to Northern Gas Networks... The business can choose to retain the best / most productive apprentices.</p>
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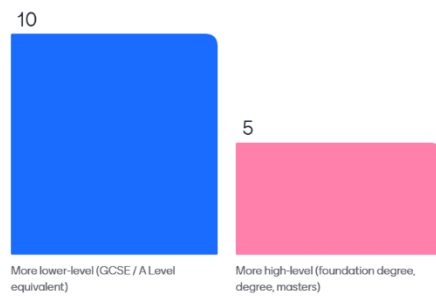
Your vote: When it comes to opportunities and jobs, which option should NGN focus on...?



This vote shows a preference for Northern Gas Networks to provide **more apprenticeship opportunities**, even if there is no guaranteed role at the end. The concern for lack of opportunities available came through strongly in the breakout rooms.

<p>Focus on lower-level apprenticeships e.g., for school leavers</p>	<p>OR</p>	<p>Focus on higher-level apprenticeships e.g., graduate opportunities</p>
<p>Benefits to Northern Gas Networks... The business would be able to find a lot more people who would be open to the idea of an apprenticeship at a lower level.</p> <p>It makes sense to carry on doing what there's already most of at Northern Gas Networks.</p> <p>Northern Gas Networks should focus on getting people involved in the first place, and then specialising later.</p>		<p>Benefits to the apprentice... There should be some more specific apprenticeships for 18+, especially once they've got some experience and an understanding of where they want to go in their career.</p>

Your vote: Which level of apprenticeship should NGN offer...?



The vote and the breakout room discussions showed a preference for **lower-level** opportunities. Interestingly, much of thinking behind this was based on business benefits. It should also be noted that, given this was the third question, slightly less time was spent discussing it.

Aside from the three questions discussed, one YIC member mentioned that he was concerned about not being able to access a more practical / skills-based apprenticeship because of his additional physical needs. Although office-based roles could be a good fit, it would also be useful for the business to consider adaptations to their other roles.

Debate: "Northern Gas Networks should use targeted recruitment / positive action in order to encourage a more diverse set of candidates to their roles"

For our final Session of 2024, we wanted to trial a debate approach to the YIC's discussions because:

- it would allow the YIC to fully explore all sides of an argument objectively, before bringing their personal thoughts to the table
- it removes the 'personal' element from the conversation, which could encourage wider participation from less confident members of the YIC
- it adds a new and interesting approach to our sessions

We structured the debate in the following way:

- Group introduction to the topic
- One breakout room discusses the 'agree' perspective
- The other breakout room discusses the 'disagree' perspective
- Back in the main room S4TP facilitate a back-and-forth debate between the two sides
- We then remove the 'agree' and 'disagree' roles for an open discussion
- We conduct a vote to see where opinions have landed on the topic

NGN should use targeted recruitment / positive action in order to encourage a more diverse set of candidates to their roles

After introducing the debate topic, we explained to the YIC what was meant by targeted recruitment and positive action:



Targeted recruitment: refers to changes made to the recruitment process e.g.,

- Specialist job boards e.g., Mumsnet, LGBT Jobs, BME Jobs
- Partnering with charities or other organisations e.g., Social Mobility Foundation, BME Youth, Women in Stem

Positive action: refers to the measures taken to encourage individuals / groups of people and to reduce barriers they may face e.g.,

- Offering specific training programmes
- Offering mentoring to specific groups
- Offering work experience to specific groups
- Offering school / college outreach to specific groups.

The YIC then separated into two groups, exploring either the 'agree' or 'disagree' side of the debate. The insights below are those that emerged in those breakout rooms and **are not** representative of the personal views of the YIC, but rather the result of the YIC challenging themselves to argue one particular side of the debate.

	
<p>Importance of increasing diversity... Having a diverse workforce can help to avoid 'groupthink' and ensure that you have a range of backgrounds and perspectives. This leads to healthier debate and discussion, and ultimately success for the business.</p> <p>By showing that you are accepting everyone, Northern Gas Networks' reputation would be improved, not only amongst customers, but also current employees. This could have the knock-on benefit of more people wanting to join and / or stay at the business.</p> <p>Statistically more than ¼ of children in Tees valley are living in poverty...and this leads to a lack of aspirations...particularly young girls. So, if Northern</p>	<p>People-related risks... If you let people find the roles themselves, without using these approaches, then they are more likely to be interested and motivated, rather than someone applying just because someone has suggested it to them.</p> <p>You might be missing out on people who are really dedicated and talented if you target recruitment in certain spaces / places.</p> <p>It shouldn't be about filling any kind of quotas. It should be about equity, and equal opportunity.</p> <p>Working in the energy sector is about skill. Northern Gas Networks shouldn't hire people just because they belong to a certain group.</p>

Gas Networks could target them and show them what they could do, then that would be a positive improvement.

Why is this approach (targeted recruitment / positive action) a good way to increase diversity...

There is potentially a historical bias because typically it has been white men applying for roles in the Energy sector. So, something is needed to help overcome that bias.

For women, and for other groups of people such as those who identify as LGBTQ+, they might lack the confidence to apply for a role in the sector. There is still social bias and standards that might prevent these people from applying. Whereas if Northern Gas Networks takes the first step towards them, they might feel more valued and therefore more likely to apply.

And even before the social bias and stigmas describe already, there might just be people who wouldn't hear about the opportunity otherwise. So, the business would be missing out on skills and talent.

It is clear that a lack of diversity is an issue for Northern Gas Networks, so they can't continue to do what they are doing. They need to change something.

Finding balance with this approach...

It could be done subtly to encourage people from various backgrounds to apply. It doesn't mean the jobs should ONLY be targeted at one group of people.

It could just be advertising the types of roles at the business or what the business does...so they would still have to find the job opportunities and apply.

Other thoughts...

A data-driven approach could work well. NGN could use data and AI to figure out where diversity is lacking across the business. They could focus their efforts more precisely.

By bringing someone new into the business based on a specific characteristic, then there is the risk that they will continue to demand a lot more from the business, i.e., 'you wanted me here, now you need to provide x, y, z'.

People who want to do it will look out for it and people who don't, won't.

Reputational risks...

There was an RAF scandal recently, where they were accused of not hiring white men because they were white men. A targeted approach could run the risk of reputation damage.

It could easily become positive *discrimination*. It could easily swing the wrong way and do damage.

Financial risks...

It's more economically viable for NGN to take on people who are actually interested in the sector and the job.

The business has a responsibility to shareholders, so they need to be sure that this was worth the investment or if the money could be better spent elsewhere.

If you are putting more outreach into places where you don't usually get a lot of input from, then will it really do much? It could be a waste.

Would you need to spend more time / money to bring people up to the level that you require?

Other thoughts...

Some of the barriers to applying to these jobs are societal norms, rather than NGN issues. Not sure what NGN could do. And maybe it's a matter of waiting for that societal change.

They capably explored both sides of the debate, and then joined the main room of our Zoom meeting to go head-to-head...The YIC used the points from their breakout rooms during the debate, but the below visuals give an idea of how they got into the debating flow!

It would avoid groupthink. Having more diversity could mean you have people who think differently [...] making it more successful overall.

It costs money to do this engagement. And Northern Gas Networks is first and foremost a private company. [...] Would this provide return on investment?

Yes, I believe it will. There are actually statistics about companies that have more diversity. They tend to be more successful. [...] So, in the end I think it will be beneficial for the companies to spend money and time and effort into doing this.

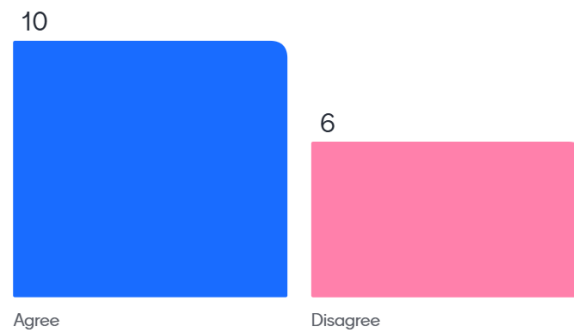
If you never normally get a tonne of applicants from an area, there's never really anyone searching it out. Why would you try and make people apply for jobs if there's never normally any interest?

There might not be any interest because they feel like they won't be able to [...]

Some people due to generalisations and stereotypes [...] they may be intimidated by reaching for such a role.

To finish off the debate, we asked the YIC to vote for whether they ultimately agree or disagree with the statements *“NGN should use targeted recruitment / positive action in order to encourage a more diverse set of candidates to their roles”*.

“NGN should use targeted recruitment / positive action in order to encourage a more diverse set of candidates to their roles”



Although more of the Panel agreed with the statement, there was still a significant portion of the group that disagreed. Based on the insights collected during the debate, **it’s clear that increasing diversity is important to the YIC, and that targeted recruitment / positive action could be a good solution if done fairly, and in a way that would not exclude the non-target groups.**

5. Key Reflections for Northern Gas Networks

Session 5 was full of pros and cons, agreeing and disagreeing, and for and against. The topic really lent itself to asking yes-no questions, and the Menti voting allowed us to capture that quantitative information. Equally, the breakout room discussions ensured that the YIC could also explore the nuances of the topic.

1. **Think about offering more broader apprenticeships**, that offer experience across the business. This is especially beneficial to those who aren’t yet sure what direction they want to take but are keen to gain employability skills and work experience.
2. **There is still great value in the focused apprenticeship roles**, for those who have a clearer idea of their career, because it’s more direct and they won’t be wasting their time and efforts.
3. **Considering offering more apprenticeship opportunities even if there isn’t a guaranteed job at the end of it.** The YIC reference a lack of options available to them, and a role like this would still allow them to gain valuable skills and knowledge that they could take elsewhere.
4. **There is still a place for apprenticeships that guarantee a job at the end.** The YIC also understand the competition for finding full-time roles and feel that a guaranteed job would lead to greater motivation.

5. **Keep focusing on lower-level apprenticeships**, which will allow people to get to the know the business sooner.
6. **Consider how to ensure that apprenticeship roles are accessible to those with additional needs.** The specific conversation at this Session referred to a physical need, but this could be extended into neurodiversity and emotional and mental health needs.
7. **The business should be focusing on increasing diversity**, because it brings benefits in terms of decision-making, reputation amongst customers and employees, and possibly even financial benefits as a result.
8. **Light-touch targeted recruitment could be a solution** that helps underrepresented groups feel more confident in applying to Northern Gas Networks. If they see an opportunity targeted at them, then they'd think 'the business wants me!'
9. **Care should be taken in not moving into positive discrimination** by not recruiting people just because you are trying to increase diversity. The YIC mentioned high profile cases of this and noted the reputation damage it would cause.

6. Conclusion

This report not only concludes this insightful Session on apprenticeships, but also brings the YIC 2024 to an end for the year! The YIC had plenty of thoughts on the topic, and not only thought about it from an applicant's perspective, but also from a business perspective.

On the questions around the types of apprenticeships that Northern Gas Networks should be offering, the YIC's insights suggest that there are some changes or additions that the business should consider. More broad roles and offering apprenticeships even if there's no guaranteed job both came out clearly from their discussions.

The group embraced our new debate-format! By taking on the 'agree' and 'disagree' mindset, the YIC really explored the topic in full before sharing their personal opinions in the main room and via the vote. There definitely seems to be some appetite for trying a more targeted approach to recruitment, but they were clear that the business should be cautious of missing out on talent and of crossing into positive discrimination.

We'd like to finish by thanking our brilliant Young Innovators Council. We can't wait to see what 2025 will bring!

7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Northern Gas Networks Apprenticeship Advertisement shared with the YIC to review as part of their pre-work activities.

Engineer Apprentice

Starting salary of £21,177.00 with increases in line with successful completion of modules

Course Duration will be 4 years

Located in our York depot with a projected start date is 23rd September 2024

During training travel will be required to the Training Centre (with accommodation provided) in York

We now have an amazing opportunity to join us as a **Gas Engineer Apprentice** across our network based at our York depot. In year one and two, you will undertake your Gas Network Operative level 2 (GNO) qualification and following successful completion, in years three and four, you will progress to achieve Gas Network Craftsperson Level 3.

At the end of your apprenticeship, you will be qualified as a Team Leader working across our gas network! The opportunities available may vary and will also depend on the business need in four years' time. Further post-apprenticeship development opportunities may also be available for high performers!

The day to day role as an NGN Gas Engineer Apprentice includes but is not limited to

- Responding to emergency situations
- Working on maintenance and repair works within our gas pipe network
- Using a wide range of tools and specialist equipment
- Using laptops, tablets and mobile phones to update your work progress
- Working in sometimes remote locations, in all weathers
- Working safely and efficiently often in the public eye

You will be great if you are naturally curious, a problem-solver, innovative, calm under pressure, customer-focused and a team player. We want you to embrace who you are and what makes you 'you'. It is our role to build on your own natural qualities and provide you with the tools to succeed!

In order to join us we do ask some essential criteria to be met

- You must be aged 18+ to apply by the start of the programme, this is due to important health and safety considerations for these roles
- You have to be comfortable wearing protective clothing and PPE
- Please note we have a 'clean shaven' policy for all employees and once again this is due to important safety requirements and you must comply with this policy if it applies to you
- You have achieved Maths, English and a Science at GCSE Grades 4-9 as these are essential for course entry. We will request to see copies of your GCSE grades should you be selected for a 1st stage interview

So, who are we? **We are.. Northern Gas Networks.** We deliver gas to 2.7 million homes and businesses in the North East, Northern Cumbria and much of Yorkshire. That's around 6.7million individual customers. We don't generate or sell the gas, but we transport it to homes and businesses in our region through a vast network of underground pipes. In fact, we own and maintain more than 37,000km of gas pipes - enough to stretch from Leeds to Sydney and back again. We cover large cities like Newcastle, Sunderland, Leeds, York, Hull, and Bradford, and our work extends to rural areas like North Yorkshire and Cumbria.

Our **Values** are at the heart of what we do. In addition to your key responsibilities, you will incorporate these into the daily life of your role. We are ... Trailblazing, Empowered, Heartfelt, Community Focused, Intellectually Curious and most of all we are Happy!

Benefits

- 25 days annual leave (plus recognised bank holidays and 2 half days over the Christmas period)
- SSP for first 7 calendar days then occupational sick pay
- A generous stakeholder 5/10 pension scheme
- Flexible benefits and salary sacrifice options... from discounts on a variety of UK attractions, gym membership, restaurant discounts, experience days...and exclusive NGN discounts and much more!
- An array of fantastic family- friendly policies such as 6 weeks' paternity leave (for eligible)

employees) and 6 months' full pay for employees on maternity leave (for eligible employees), as well as shared parental leave and many more

Our **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion culture at NGN** is embedded in everything that we do. We will be delighted to hear from a diverse range of applicants, so we can continue to grow our great team of people. We are proud to support the Armed Forces Covenant, helping ex-services personnel back into employment, as well as being members of WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) and we are committed to delivering our 'Opportunity Action Plan' having signed the Social Mobility Pledge campaign, whereby we will establish our business as a 'force for good' in the communities that we serve.

Next Steps

Please apply via our online process and ensure to include as much information about yourself that you feel relevant to your application. **No need to worry about a CV, instead, please submit a cover letter of no more than 500 words.** Remember this is your opportunity to set yourself apart from all other applications so take your time. You will need to answer the following questions;

1. Why do you believe you would make a great Gas Engineer?
2. Why do you want to work specifically for Northern Gas Networks?
3. Do you have any further qualifications or experience from past roles that may be relevant to this apprenticeship other than the GCSE grades that are essential for course entry? If so, tell us what they are and why they are relevant.

4. If there is anything else that you would like to tell us about yourself now is your opportunity!

Dependant on the volume of applications we may close the advert early however we will keep it open for a minimum of two weeks. If you require adjustments to support you throughout the recruitment process, we want to hear about how we can help. Any applicant that requires reasonable adjustments from initial application through to interview are asked to contact the Recruitment Team at

NGNCareers@northerngas.co.uk

Are you aged 18+ by the required start date? *

Yes No

Do you have right to work in the UK? *

Yes No

Do you have grade 4-9 GCSE qualifications in Maths, English and a Science ? *

Yes No

Are you comfortable wearing protective clothing and PPE? *

Yes No

Are you able to drive or looking to learn to drive in the next 2 years ? *

Yes No

Where did you hear about the apprenticeship? If you were referred by a friend/family member please state their name. *

Indeed.com

Please list any additional qualifications to GCSE's *

BTEC level 3 diploma in sport coaching and development

Appendix 2: Screenshot of the Menti responses to the question ‘What are your thoughts about the NGN apprenticeship advertisement that you reviewed for prework?’.

What are your thoughts about the NGN apprenticeship advertisement that you reviewed for prework? 22 17

Interesting	Quite good, it explained it quite well Might be useful to have a timeline about the apprenticeship or some visible information
Direct and easy to see requirements and benefits of the opportunity	Quite useful. Well structured and clearly explained
Quite informative, covers necessary key points could be more detailed about day to day work and how much education to expect.	It would be very good if I wanted a Career in the industry.
I thought it contained a lot of good information However I would not add more information as it could become information overload	Reasonable pay and more inclusive hiring than others, lots of information
Could have a commonly asked questions section	I thought the NGN apprenticeship was a really good gave all of the information and I was thinking giving the percentage of apprenticeship that get full time job afterwards
Be good to highlight some positives or quote past apprentices	Maybe include how competitive the position is
I thought they had good qualities with multiple advantages, I am not yet 18 however so my question would be is there a definitive rule or regulation about a drivers licence ?	Could explain the qualifications a bit more like what they can lead to
Creating a video or a more visually engaging presentation could help	I believe it's a good way for someone with special needs to find a trade, maybe include benefits for them etc
Not as many routes into more specific degrees as they require a levels	

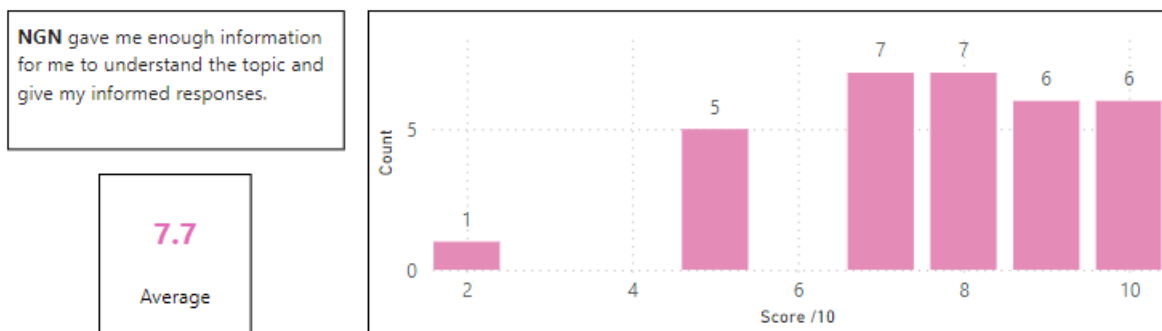
Appendix 3: Screenshot of the Menti responses to the question ‘What did you learn from researching other apprenticeships in the Energy Industry?’.

● What did you learn from researching other apprenticeships in the Energy Industry? 22 19

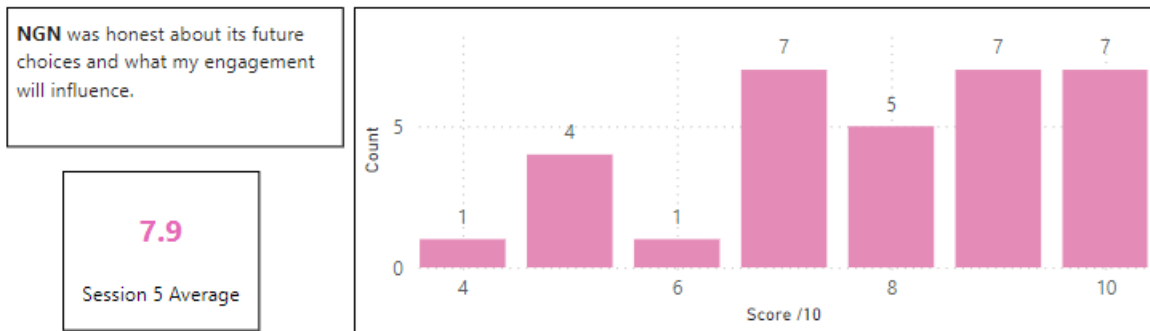
Limited options in my area Searched on gov.uk apprenticeship website for North Yorkshire and there were none for the energy industry advertised on there	Not particularly easy to find info about and requirements for
Most apprenticeships require a degree or include a degree in the apprenticeship.	Went on Google, not as much as you'd expect and a lot of criteria to meet
there are many different aspects in the energy industry but in smaller areas there's limited choices	Apprenticeships weren't too difficult to find, there doesn't seem to be many of them though and they look very competitive.
You need to search for them unlike actual job applications	I found it very difficult to find any information on apprenticeships in the sector I also did not come across NGN through at all
They all have reasonable benefits and opportunities, all require/desire the best so they are all quite contending.	Most apprenticeships were only on offer for those 18+ and were not very accessible.
Often given by "lesser" universities. Hard to find.	Relatively similar across the board. I researched a few places such as National Grid and BP, and both offer many varied opportunities. But, it is difficult to get from the advert to the application.
Difficult to see where an apprenticeship would take you (like a career path afterwards) Quite vague	I feel like it's a great opportunity for those who are keen on pursuing a specific career early on. Quite competitive though
Many apprenticeships start in September so if you start researching about them too late there isn't many opportunities	most apprenticeships require you to be 18 and won't take you on if you turn 18 before the term starts.
Limited apprenticeships, but lots of options like electricians, nuclear engineering, renewable engineer	In fairness all were pretty similar I think I thought the ngn did that many didn't was not telling them about themselves but the ngn one did and I do agree with not many people offering them
Seems maybe restricting in future as renewable energy can change quickly	

Show less

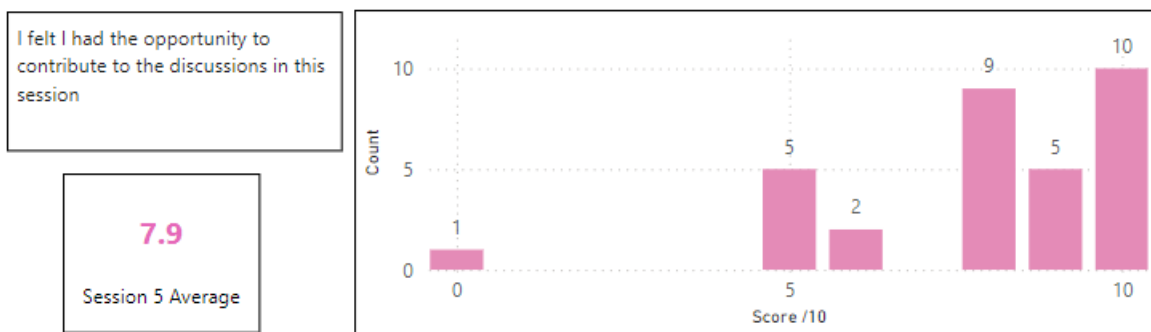
Appendix 4: **Post-Session Survey Feedback.** At time of writing, 32 respondents. This includes 16 participants who did not attend the live session but provided insight via the survey.



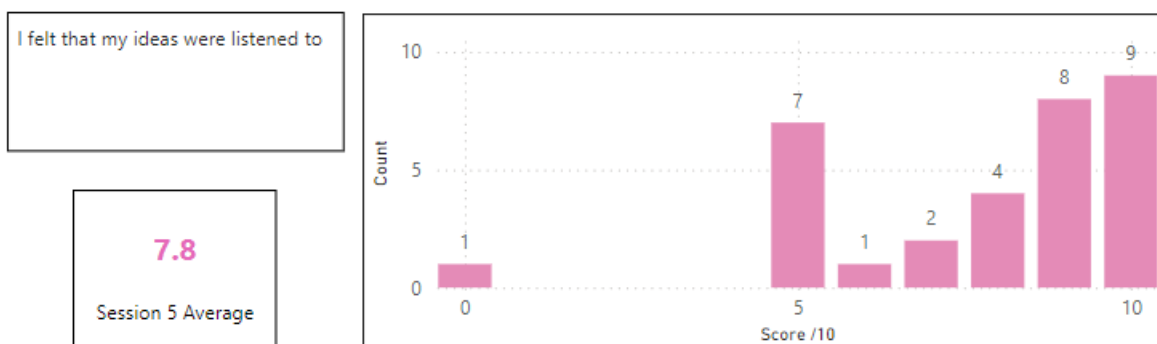
The lower scores on this question were given by YIC members who were not able to attend the session. As such, they will have missed the direct input from NGN, which may have impacted their scores.



Again, here, the scores below 6 for this question were given by YIC members who were not able to attend the session. They will have missed the 'You said...we did' section of the Session, as well as the discussions with Claire Allcock and Chris Adair around the apprenticeship strategy.

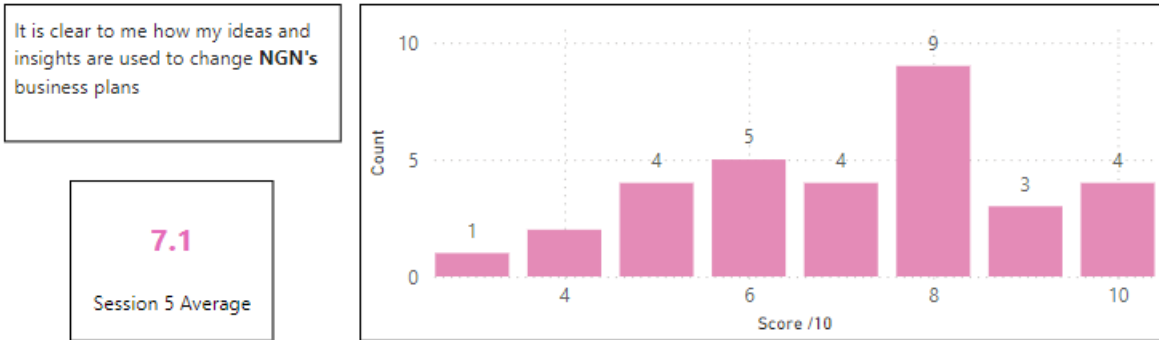


Here, the scores largely lie around 8, 9, or 10 out of 10. The scores of 0 and 5 were again provided by YIC members who could not attend the live Sessions. Whilst we always offer the opportunity for them to share their thoughts via email or our feedback survey, they may not feel that they had the opportunity to be part of the discussion.



In this case, almost all the scores of 0-5 were given by Panel members who were not able to attend in person. Even though they have provided their feedback via the survey, it is unlikely to have the same impact as being listened to in the live Session. One Panel member who did

attend scored 5 out of 10 for this question. We may want to consider how we encourage responding to and building on ideas for future Sessions.



Finally, of the 7 scores of 5 and below for this question, 5 members were not at the live session and 2 were. As mentioned above, not attending the session will mean missing the feedback from NGN. However, these scores should still prompt us to consider how best to feed back to the YIC about the action taken by NGN.