

Don't let Government play politics with young people's future, says ECA

Submitted by: Thinc PR (JBA Public Relations)

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As thousands of students pick up their A-Level results on 16 August, Diane Johnson, Skills Ambassador for the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) says degrees aren't the only option and that Government needs to stop playing politics with the qualifications system.

Johnson says: "A university degree can be a valuable asset to a career, but it's not the only option, or even the best choice for all young people. Not everyone wants or can afford to go to university, where they could rack up thousands of pounds of debt without a guarantee of a job at the end. Apprenticeships offer a bona fide alternative route to employment and have done so for decades."

However, Johnson warns: "All too often, vocational training is seen as the poor relation to academia. If apprenticeships are to remain a credible alternative to a degree, we need to value them and Government needs to stop 'dumbing down' standards for political reasons."

She says: "The Government is placing a renewed focus on apprenticeships to reduce youth unemployment, and more firms are offering this option to school leavers. But without setting firmer standards for training, we face a situation where anything 'non-academic' is badged as an apprenticeship. We can't compare courses that are more like work experience, to quality training programmes that offer a skill for life."

She adds: "Unless the Government establishes a protected apprenticeship 'brand' that defines quality training, the reputation of apprenticeships will be severely damaged. They won't be seen as a credible alternative, leaving young people with fewer choices for their future. It's not fair to school leavers, and it's not fair to industries like construction which have offered quality apprenticeships for decades."

Johnson says: "We are facing a perfect storm: creating a generation of unemployed, indebted young people, living in a country that faces a future skills shortage – all so the Government can claim it has reduced youth unemployment. We need to value our apprentices and protect the quality of their training. This would turn the situation around and leave a lasting skills legacy that our country can be proud of."

She concludes: "Our society needs skilled people, regardless of their qualification route. Today's school and university leavers are tomorrow's taxpayers and industry leaders, and will be those helping support an ever increasing number of pensioners. It is not right that they should be used for short-term political gain. They deserve better from our Government and education system."

-ENDS-

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About The Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA)

The ECA is the UK's largest trade association representing electrical engineering and contracting companies. The electrical contracting industry employs 350,000 operatives and 8,000 apprentices. Our 3,000 members range from local electricians to national companies with several branches employing thousands. Our members carry out a range of work, from domestic heating and lighting to cutting edge temperature control technology.