Katy Dorman | Churchill Fellow 2025

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Making Opportunity Possible:

Building the conditions for employers to create opportunities and young people to access them.



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About the author



Katy Dorman has spent almost 20 years working across the further education & skills sector and is currently Apprenticeship Strategy Manager at Norfolk County Council.

Katy leads the award-winning Apprenticeships Norfolk[1] service and her work focuses particularly on overcoming the barriers that prevent smaller employers from engaging with apprenticeships, through initiatives offering practical and financial support. She also co-chairs the National Apprenticeship Hub Network[2], an organic community of practice bringing together place-based apprenticeship intermediaries across England.

In 2025, Katy was named 'Skills Champion of the Year' at the Department for Education's National Apprenticeships and Skills Awards. A former apprentice herself, she has completed a Level 7 Senior Leader MBA Apprenticeship and is an active member of the East of England Apprenticeship Ambassador Network[3]. Alongside her role, Katy contributes to a number of national advisory groups and serves as a governor of two independent training providers[4].

Being awarded a Churchill Fellowship[5] has enabled Katy to explore how intermediary organisations overseas engage employers, particularly small businesses, in apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships and youth apprenticeship programmes. Her research took her to Australia, Canada and the United States [U.S.] to consider what England might learn from different international approaches.

1 Apprenticeships Norfolk
2 National Apprenticeship Hub Network
3 Apprenticeship Ambassador Network
4 LinkedIn | Katy Dorman
5 Churchill Fellowship | Katy Dorman (2025)

Acknowledgements

My Fellowship has been built on conversations with people who welcomed me into their organisations, shared their experiences honestly, opened doors and helped me see apprenticeship systems through a different lens. It has been a real privilege and I am hugely thankful to the Churchill Fellowship for the incredible opportunity to explore my research questions internationally and bring that learning back to the UK.

Across Australia, Canada and the U.S, I would like to thank the policymakers, educators, intermediaries, employers, apprentices and parents who generously gave their time and shared their experiences with me. I am particularly grateful to those who hosted visits, made introductions and spoke openly about both what was working and where challenges remained. Those exchanges have shaped my thinking about what England can learn about engaging employers, supporting apprentices and connecting people with opportunity. A full acknowledgement of the people and organisations who contributed to my Fellowship can be found at the end of this report.

My thanks also go to the people and organisations in the UK who have supported my learning journey, mentored me whilst I was travelling, challenged my thinking or helped me turn my learning into this report. I am particularly grateful to my employer, Norfolk County Council, for supporting my Fellowship and to colleagues who have encouraged me to make the most of the opportunity.

International travel may be the most visible part of a Fellowship, but behind it are many less visible hours of planning, reflecting, writing and rewriting. A Fellowship asks something of the people around you too.

I am especially grateful to my family, who supported me through several weeks away from home, listened patiently as I talked through everything I was learning and resisted pointing out too often that my Fellowship was taking me to some pretty amazing places! They gave me the time and space to turn those experiences into something meaningful and I am hugely thankful for their support throughout.

Executive summary

Building the conditions for employers to create opportunities and young people to access them.

Apprenticeships depend on two things happening at the same time: employers creating opportunities and people being able to access them. Neither can be taken for granted.

My Fellowship explored what enables an employer, especially a small business, to move from wanting to offer an apprenticeship to creating one, and how young people can be connected to those opportunities earlier and more effectively.

I explored this through fieldwork across three very different apprenticeship systems: in Australia, Canada and the United States. I engaged with more than 215 people across more than 100 organisations, including employers, apprentices, intermediaries, educators and policymakers.

The research was deliberately exploratory: I was looking for principles England could adapt, not an overseas system to copy.

Across the wider Fellowship fieldwork, three consistent findings emerged:

Make the risk viable.

Employers need help carrying the financial and practical risks of creating and sustaining apprenticeship opportunities.

Make the route clearer.

Effective intermediaries do more than explain the system. They listen, translate, connect and coordinate and can help build employer capability, without requiring employers to manage the joins between organisations themselves.

Make the connection earlier.

Stronger pathways connect young people with employers before education ends, creating a managed transition into meaningful employment which can develop over time.

I use **opportunity infrastructure** to describe the combination of these conditions working together.

England is already investing in employer incentives and Local Apprenticeship Services (brokerage). Earlier technical pathways for young people and Local Opportunity Services have started to emerge in the policy landscape too.

There is now an opportunity to test these interventions together, rather than allow them to develop separately.

My central recommendation is to:

Test opportunity infrastructure as a connected pathway

Test whether connecting these functions through place-based demonstrators, with sufficient continuity to build trusted relationships and capability over time, creates additional and more sustainable apprenticeship opportunities than delivering them as separate interventions.

Three practical recommendations sit beneath this:

1. Target financial support at the risks and constraints preventing employers from creating or sustaining apprenticeship opportunities.
2. Ensure every employer can access the core functions of effective apprenticeship brokerage.
3. Pilot progressive school-to-apprenticeship pathways within emerging technical routes.



◀ Afrgi, Western Australia

International learning at a glance:

The examples below highlight some of the strongest international learning from my fieldwork. They are illustrative rather than exhaustive. Their value lies in the design choices they expose and the questions they raise for our system.



	INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLE	WHAT STANDS OUT
01	**Illinois and Australia:** Magenta and Air & Gas Industries (SMEs)	Magenta needed financial support beyond wages. Air & Gas Industries would probably have recruited anyway; support offset lower productivity while the apprentice learned.
02	**Australia** Apprentice Connect Australia Providers [ACAPs]	National intermediary provision embeds navigation, sign-up, incentives, mentoring and employer support into the apprenticeship system.
03	**Australia** Group Training Organisations [GTOs]	GTOs employ apprentices, manage administration, coordinate training and provide support. SMEs host apprentices without carrying full employment responsibilities.
04	**California** Early Care & Education Pathways to Success [ECEPTS]	Apprenticeship expertise and sector knowledge sustain employer–college partnerships and bring smaller employers into viable cohorts.
05	**Michigan** Michigan Works!	A statewide network allows local flexibility. Apprenticeship coordinators and business-services teams connect employers around shared workforce needs and support SMEs, including rural businesses.
06	**Canada** Skilled Trades BC and Sea to Sky Career Education	Pathways connect exploration, technical learning and paid work while at school. School-district staff broker employer relationships and make recruitment manageable.

	INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLE	WHAT STANDS OUT
07	**Victoria** School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships [SBATs] with Head Start support	Secondary education, vocational training and paid work are combined. Coordinators connect the systems as employment increases towards full-time apprenticeship.
08	**Wisconsin** Youth Apprenticeship	Youth Apprenticeship embeds substantial paid work and related learning in the school-to-work system. Schools, consortia and employers share responsibility.
09	**Canada** Support Ontario Youth [SOY] and ApprenticeSearch.com	SOY uses FitFirst behavioural assessments to inform matching. ApprenticeSearch.com connects candidates and vacancies and identifies employers to approach. Technology supports human brokerage rather than replacing it.
10	**Illinois** Illinois Works!	Procurement, pre-apprenticeship, incentives and career services connect demand, preparation, recruitment, retention and entry into apprenticeship.

POTENTIAL LEARNING FOR ENGLAND

01 Target the constraint: support can enable recruitment or sustain learning. Assess its value beyond whether recruitment would have happened anyway.

02 Ensure core brokerage is accessible everywhere, with clear roles and hand-offs so additional support does not add complexity.

03 Review barriers to SMEs' use of Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies and test agency employment where brokerage and incentives are insufficient.

04 Go beyond advice: specialist expertise and continuing coordination help smaller employers participate despite limited scale or capacity.

05 Combine consistent coverage with local knowledge and flexibility. Engage employers collectively around shared needs, not only business by business.

06 Preserve exploration while strengthening progression into employment. Earlier technical pathways need employer-facing brokerage, not just an offer for young people.

07 Replace a single jump into apprenticeship with a managed transition: meaningful paid employment begins earlier and deepens over time.

08 Build meaningful employment into school-based technical pathways, with intermediaries connecting education, employers and progression into full apprenticeship.

09 Use digital tools for matching, outreach and targeted support, while retaining human judgement, persuasion and relationships. Go beyond advertising vacancies.

10 Start with barriers to opportunity, identify the functions needed to overcome them and connect those functions.

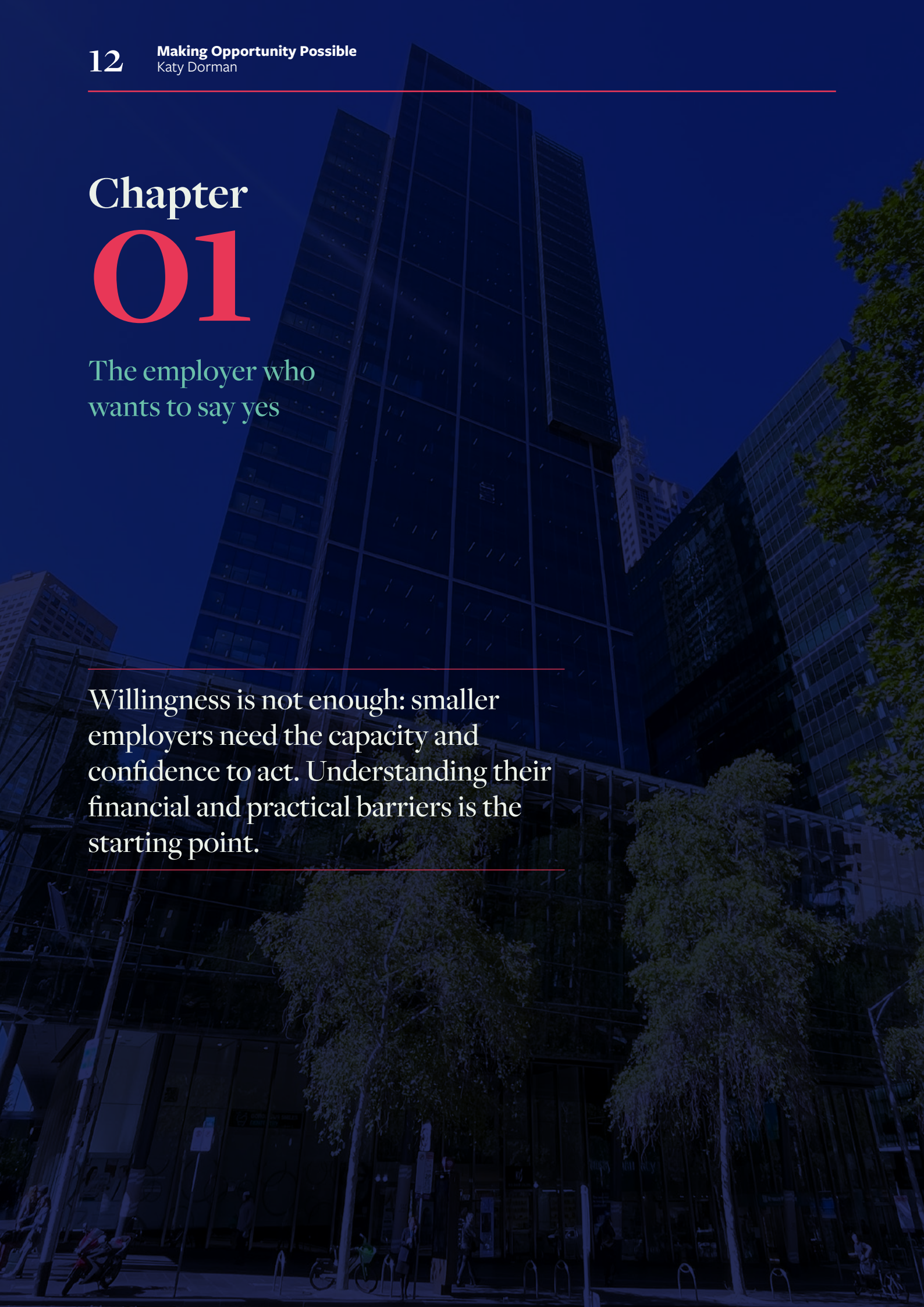
Taken together, these examples show that the strongest approaches did more than provide individual interventions. They connected employer support, intermediary coordination and earlier pathways into work around the barriers preventing opportunities from being created, reached and sustained.



Chapter 01

The employer who wants to say yes

Willingness is not enough: smaller employers need the capacity and confidence to act. Understanding their financial and practical barriers is the starting point.



Through Apprenticeships Norfolk[6], we work with hundreds of small and medium-sized employers [SMEs] each year. Many see the potential value of apprenticeships, and we also help employers identify workforce challenges that an apprentice could help address.

Often the problem is not willingness. It is getting an employer from "I'd like to" to "I'm going to".

The questions that follow are usually practical. Where do I start? What will it cost? Which apprenticeship and training provider are right for my business? How do I find the right candidate? Who will supervise them? What support is available if something goes wrong?

In larger organisations, these questions may be handled by dedicated staff. In an SME, they often fall to the owner or manager alongside everything else required to keep the business running.

Financial risk, limited time, system complexity, recruitment uncertainty and the demands of supervision can all prevent willingness from becoming action[7]. The question becomes whether the employer has the capacity and confidence to navigate it all successfully.

That gap provided the starting point for my Fellowship.

Through leading Apprenticeships Norfolk and co-chairing the National Apprenticeship Hub Network[8], I see first-hand how different apprenticeship brokerage models operate across England[9,10]. This also made me curious about what was happening elsewhere.

My Fellowship explored three questions: What makes taking on an apprentice a viable proposition for an employer? What support helps smaller employers navigate the apprenticeship system? And what enables them to create apprenticeship opportunities for young people?

I took these questions to Australia, Canada and the United States [U.S.].

This report considers what England might adapt to help employers create and sustain apprenticeship opportunities and strengthen the pathways connecting young people to them.

Note: see appendix a for key terms; see appendix b for description of the term intermediaries.

6 Apprenticeships Norfolk

7 Apprenticeships Norfolk | Overcoming Barriers to Apprenticeships (2025)

8 National Apprenticeship Hub Network

9 IPPR | Join the dots: The role of apprenticeship intermediaries in England (2023)

10 Edge Foundation | Agents of Change (2025)

Chapter 02

Learning from three different systems

Learn from principles: Australia, Canada and the U.S. offer lessons England can adapt to strengthen employer participation, not a system to copy.

The choice of Australia, Canada and the U.S. was intentional.

I wanted to explore systems that offered useful comparisons with England. Their apprenticeship systems are structured differently, but all depend on employers choosing to participate. I was particularly interested in countries seeking to grow or broaden apprenticeship participation, where that ambition was creating space for different approaches to employer engagement.

Rather than looking for a single system to replicate, I designed my fieldwork to explore that question from different perspectives: speaking to federal, state and provincial governments, intermediaries, workforce and education organisations, employers, apprentices and parents.



AUSTRALIA

Australia offered the opportunity to examine a mature apprenticeship system with a nationally contracted intermediary model. Apprentice Connect Australia Providers [ACAPs] provide national support for employers and apprentices, aligning closely with my interest in employer engagement and apprenticeship brokerage.

I selected five states to capture both scale and diversity. Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland provided an important focus on the eastern seaboard, where Apprenticeship and School-based Apprenticeship or Traineeship [SBAT] commencements were concentrated at the time of my application[11]. Western Australia offered a different economic context, while South Australia provided insight into its strong Group Training Organisation [GTO] ecosystem.

[11] NCVER | Apprenticeship & Traineeship Commencements (2026)

▼ Riviera, Queensland



UNITED STATES

The U.S. offered even greater variation, with apprenticeship policy, funding and delivery differing between states.

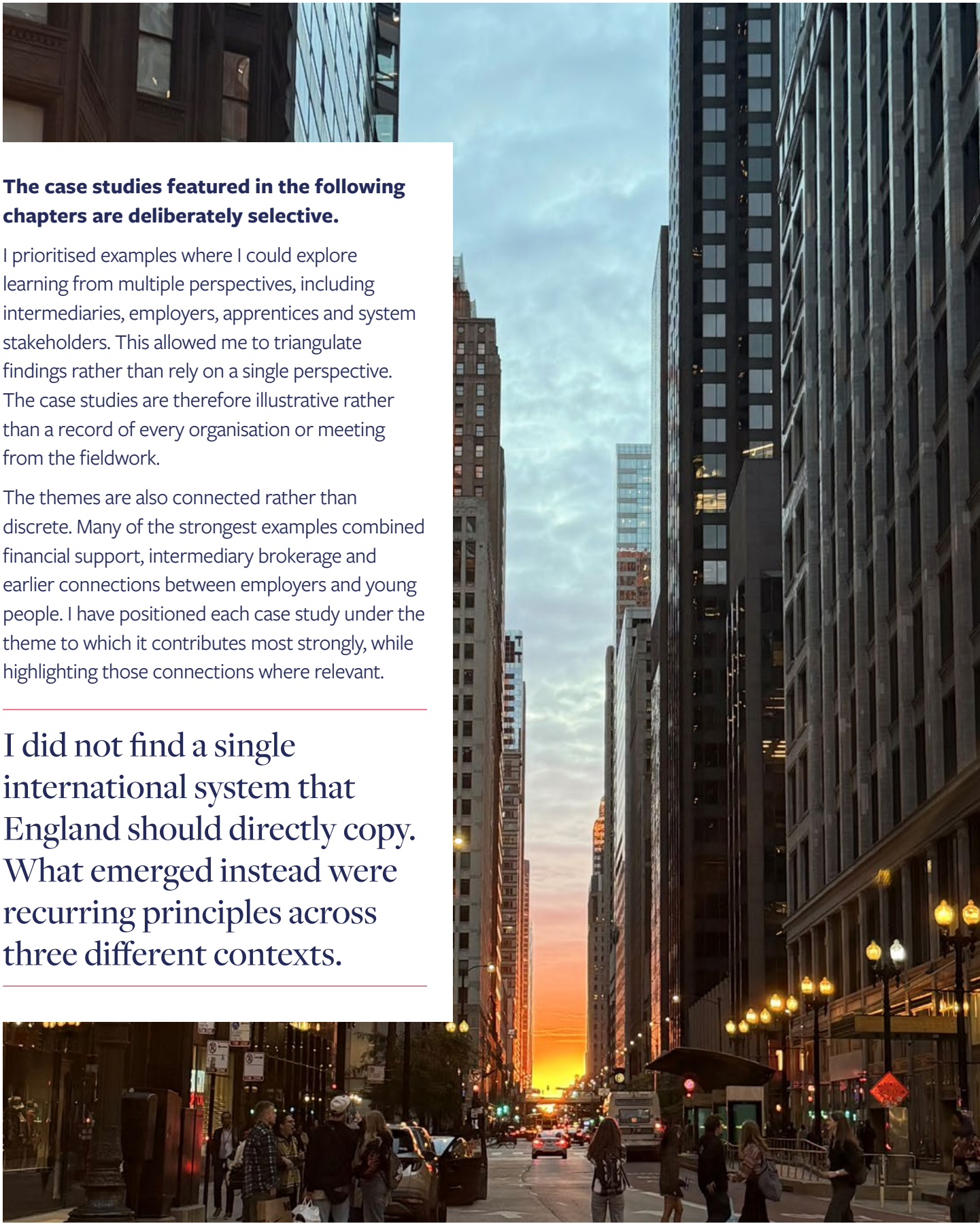
Washington DC provided a national policy perspective through Apprenticeships for America. Michigan offered an established intermediary model through its statewide Michigan Works! network and Apprenticeship Success Coordinator [ASC] roles. Wisconsin offered a long-established Youth Apprenticeship [YA] system connecting employers with young people still in school. Illinois allowed me to explore the connection between procurement, pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship pathways through Illinois Works!, while California provided a contrasting example of state-level autonomy, investment and a diverse intermediary ecosystem.

CANADA

Canada's apprenticeship system is largely shaped at provincial level, meaning there is no single Canadian model. My initial research pointed towards Ontario, where I could explore intermediaries, employer engagement and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program [OYAP]. British Columbia [B.C.] added another perspective: the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum's national conference in Whistler gave me access to stakeholders from across Canada, whilst B.C. provided an opportunity to explore dual credit programmes. Together, these two provinces provided insight into both employer-focused apprenticeship support and earlier pathways from education to employment.

Note: see appendix c for the research methodology, appendix d for the fieldwork itinerary, appendix e for the international system context and appendix f for contributing organisations.

▼ Chicago, Illinois



The case studies featured in the following chapters are deliberately selective.

I prioritised examples where I could explore learning from multiple perspectives, including intermediaries, employers, apprentices and system stakeholders. This allowed me to triangulate findings rather than rely on a single perspective. The case studies are therefore illustrative rather than a record of every organisation or meeting from the fieldwork.

The themes are also connected rather than discrete. Many of the strongest examples combined financial support, intermediary brokerage and earlier connections between employers and young people. I have positioned each case study under the theme to which it contributes most strongly, while highlighting those connections where relevant.

I did not find a single international system that England should directly copy. What emerged instead were recurring principles across three different contexts.

Chapter 03

Finding 1: make the risk viable

Make the risk viable: identify what prevents employers from creating opportunities, then share enough of that risk to make participation possible.



▲ The Q, Queensland

The economic equation

The economic equation for an employer extends into several layers of consideration. Initial decisions about creating an apprenticeship can be shaped by wider employment costs, business conditions and confidence about the future.

Taking on an apprentice is an investment, but employers bear the costs before the return is certain. Wages are only part of the equation. Employers also carry the cost of supervision, reduced productivity while someone learns, administration, tools and equipment, and the risk that the relationship does not work.

Across the three countries, I found different approaches to sharing those costs and risks. Australia and Canada make federal financial support relatively visible to employers; in the U.S., funding flows more through states, workforce boards, sponsors and other intermediaries. Table 1 illustrates some of the financial support available during my fieldwork.

Table 1: Examples of financial support noted during fieldwork

Country, Year	Financial Support	Amount
Australia, 2025	Priority Hiring Incentive[12]	A$5,000
	Key Apprenticeship Program Employer Incentive[13]	A$5,000
	GTO Reimbursement Program[14]	A$5,200
	Western Australia Incentive[15]	A$8,500 (+ equity loadings)
	Queensland Small Business Apprenticeship Pilot Program[16]	A$13,750
Canada, 2026	Apprenticeship Service (previous)	C$5,000 (+ equity loadings)
	Tax Credits[17] (10% of apprentice's salary)	C$2,000 per year, per apprentice
	Build Canada Apprenticeship Service[18] (new)	C$10,000
	Ontario Milestone Achievement Payments[19]	C$17,000
United States, 2026	No national incentive California Apprenticeship Innovation Funding[20]	Support varies by state US$3,500 + US$1,000 completion

Note: illustrative examples of employer-facing support only. Eligibility varied by scheme and location, and amounts and programmes may have changed since my fieldwork.

[12] Australian Apprenticeships | Financial support for employers
[13] Australian Apprenticeships | Financial support for employers
[14] Australian Apprenticeships | GTO Reimbursement Program
[15] Jobs and Skills WA | Employer Incentive
[16] Business Queensland | Small Business Apprenticeship Program
[17] Red Seal | Trades
[18] Government of Canada | Team Canada Strong
[19] Ontario.ca | Financial supports for apprentices and sponsors
[20] Division of Apprenticeship Standards | Apprenticeship Innovation Funding

What mattered was not simply how much money was available, but which risk it absorbed: direct cost, capacity, recruitment risk or the work of navigating the system.

That resonates with my experience in Norfolk. Our 2025 employer survey[21] identified cost, economic uncertainty and a lack of staff capacity to mentor as the three leading barriers to recruiting an apprentice.



AUSTRALIA

Australia showed both the value and complexity of a layered incentive system.

At the time of my visit, the country was debating how financial incentives should be targeted and how they interact with wider factors affecting commencement and completion. Australia's Strategic Review[22] treated incentives alongside employer and apprentice support, training quality, workplace culture and system complexity. It concluded that incentives could be more targeted towards SMEs while recognising that cost is not their only barrier.

Research published around the time of my visit reinforced that debate: MEGT[23] argued for material, broad-based incentives alongside additional support for priority occupations and cohorts, while AI Group[24] emphasised the employer's economic equation of costs, benefits and risks.

The significance was not the individual amounts, but the layering.

Federal support sat alongside multiple state, territory and sector-specific schemes, often targeted at particular occupations, employers or cohorts. This could make an apprenticeship more viable, but also created another risk: employers needed to understand what they were eligible for and how to access it.

My fieldwork suggested that the same financial support could perform very different functions for different employers.

In Western Australia, AFGRI, a large agricultural employer, described incentives as a "nice to have" rather than a reason to recruit; apprentices were already essential to its future workforce.

At Wildflower Studio, a small hair salon in Victoria, the owner described incentives as "essential" because the cost of employing an apprentice was "a lot" for a small business.

Air & Gas Industries, a small engineering employer in Queensland, told me they would probably have recruited anyway, but that financial support helped offset the period when an apprentice was learning and less productive.

[21] Apprenticeships Norfolk | Overcoming Barriers to Apprenticeships (2025)
[22] Department of Employment & Workplace Relations | Strategic Review (2025)
[23] Deloitte & MEGT | Productivity Prospectus (2025)
[24] AI Group | Employer Perspective Report (2025)

For Riviera, a large Queensland boatbuilder with around 100 apprentices, I saw a different effect again: financial headroom helped sustain the infrastructure surrounding the programme, including coordination and school-based pathways.

The same support was therefore doing different jobs. It did not always determine whether an employer recruited; it could affect how many apprentices they could accommodate, the support around them or the risk the business was prepared to carry.

The economic equation is also about perception: employers, particularly those considering an apprentice for the first time, need to see the potential return as well as the upfront cost and risk. Global Apprenticeship Network [GAN] Australia seeks to make that value visible through its Return on Investment calculator[25] to help employers make informed decisions that benefit their business, community and the broader economy.

CANADA

Canada offered a different example of visible employer-facing support, particularly for SMEs.

At the time of my fieldwork, federal support was moving towards incentivising eligible SMEs hiring first-year apprentices in Red Seal trades[26], alongside existing tax credits. Provincial support in Ontario added milestone payments linked to registration, training and certification.

The intermediaries I met, including Support Ontario Youth and Merit Ontario, described these payments as particularly valuable to smaller employers, where cash flow could affect their ability to retain and progress an apprentice.

What interested me was the timing: financial support was not necessarily a single payment for reducing the initial recruitment risk. It could remain connected to the employer as the apprentice progressed through multiple milestones.

Note: see appendix e for description of Red Seal



▲ Muresk Institute, Western Australia

[25] GAN Australia | Return on Investment in Supporting Australian Apprenticeships

[26] Red Seal | Trades



UNITED STATES

The U.S. offered the greatest contrast. Federal investment exists[27], but funding is decentralised. Employers do not encounter one consistent national apprenticeship payment. Instead, intermediaries often described assembling or "braiding" different funding streams around an employer or apprentice.

This made the intermediary important not just as a source of advice, but as the organisation that could find and combine available support without exposing the employer to the complexity underneath.

At Magenta, a small Illinois manufacturer that had recently taken on its first apprentice (with support from Apprenticeships Illinois), indicated that although workforce need drove its decision – financial support was "really crucial". Skilled labour was difficult to find and the company needed to transfer knowledge from an experienced worker nearing retirement. Although profitable, the business had limited spare margin to employ someone not yet able to contribute at the level of an experienced worker.

The employer summed up the economic equation particularly clearly. It could carry the apprentice's wages, but could not comfortably absorb the extra costs on top. Removing these costs helped make the arrangement feasible while the apprentice developed towards full productivity.

Michigan showed me another function: funding as the door-opener.

In Michigan, small grants were sometimes described as a "carrot": enough to bring an employer into a conversation about apprenticeships. The state has also invested in intermediary capacity through Apprenticeship Success Coordinators, recognising that money alone would not convert initial interest into sustained employer participation.

California showed another possibility: funding the infrastructure around an apprenticeship.

From 2022, the state combined a strategy[28] to grow apprenticeships, including encouraging intermediary models, with substantial investment through Apprenticeship Innovation Funding [AIF]. This provided formula funding per active apprentice, with an additional completion payment. Crucially, the pay-for-performance funding could support the costs of running an apprenticeship programme, aggregating employer demand and recruiting, supporting and placing apprentices.

One intermediary, Early Care & Education Pathways to Success [ECEPTS], used AIF grant funding for programme staff, tutoring, stipends and materials. When one large employer struggled to fulfil its role, that capacity helped the partnership bring in three smaller employers instead.

[27] Apprenticeship.gov | Investments, Tax Credits, and Tuition Support

[28] Department for Industrial Relations | Advancing Apprenticeship in California (2022)

Across the three countries, financial support performed different functions: lowering recruitment costs, covering wages, training, tools and equipment, sustaining coordination and mentoring, and rewarding progression or retention.

Its value therefore cannot be judged solely by asking whether an employer would have recruited without it. Even where the answer is yes, funding may affect how many apprentices an employer takes on, protect supervision or mentoring time, offset lower productivity or fund the coordination that helps an apprenticeship succeed.

My experience in England points in the same direction: the risk employers describe is rarely financial alone[29]. Cost sits alongside supervision, mentoring, recruitment and the capacity to navigate the system.

The implication is not simply to offer more financial support. It is to identify the constraint we want to change, then design and evaluate support against it. A payment intended to bring a new SME into apprenticeships is solving a different problem from funding intended to increase apprentice numbers, protect supervision capacity or improve retention.

▼ Whistler, British Columbia



[29] Apprenticeships Norfolk | Building Futures evaluations (2026)

Chapter 04

Finding 2: make the route clearer

Make the route clearer: intermediaries listen, translate, connect and coordinate so employers and apprentices do not have to manage the joins themselves.

The messy middle

Getting an employer interested in apprenticeships is only the beginning.

Between interest and a successful apprenticeship sits a messy middle of decisions, processes, organisations and hand-offs. A simpler employer experience can require somebody to help the employer navigate it.

The employer journey looks something like this:

▼ Skill Up WA Conference, Western Australia



Interest ⋯► Understand ⋯► Decide ⋯► Choose ⋯► Recruit ⋯► Establish ⋯► Support ⋯► Retain

At every stage there are decisions. Is an apprenticeship the right solution? Which apprenticeship and training provider will be the best fit? What will it cost? Is funding available? Where will they recruit? What happens if something goes wrong?

Intermediaries can help employers navigate this complexity, not by owning the whole journey, but by helping the different parts connect. My visits showed organisations taking responsibility for different parts of that journey. Specialisation can be a strength when roles are clear and referrals work. Several described this as "staying in their lane": bringing particular expertise while contributing to a joined-up system.

Across the organisations I visited, three core functions emerged:

- **Listen:** understand the problem the employer is trying to solve, before deciding an apprenticeship is the right solution.
- **Translate:** help employers understand the system, routes, funding and options without expecting them to become apprenticeship experts.
- **Connect and Coordinate:** bring in the right partners, keep things moving and step back when another organisation is better placed to lead.

The models differed, but each addressed a particular friction employers faced.

The following cases show distinct themes: national navigation infrastructure, sector-specific coordination, place-based workforce brokerage and system navigation complemented by technology.

CASE STUDY

Australia

A national infrastructure of intermediary support



Australia provided perhaps the clearest example of intermediary support being designed into the apprenticeship system rather than added around its edges. My visits exposed me to two distinct but complementary models: Apprentice Connect Australia Providers [ACAPs] and Group Training Organisations [GTOs].

ACAPs provide a free national service[30] for employers and apprentices, offering expert, tailored advice, supporting navigation, initial assessment and sign-up, financial incentives, mentoring and employer support. There were also enhanced services for key client groups, including First Nations apprentices, women in male-dominated trades, and clean energy apprentices.

ACAP organisations are placed between government, employers and apprentices. And here's the critical point: in Australia, you cannot start an apprenticeship without going through one.

ACAPs are contracted by the Department of Employment & Workplace Relations [DEWR], operate on a competitive tender basis, are bound to a code of conduct[31] and are represented by a national peak body (an organisation that represents and advocates for the network), the National Australian Apprenticeship Association[32] [NAAA].

[30] Australian Apprenticeships | What is an Apprentice Connect Australia Provider?

[31] Apprentice Connect Australia Provider | Code of Conduct (2024)

[32] National Australian Apprenticeships Association

CASE STUDY

Across the five states I visited, I encountered several providers, including MEGT, BUSY at Work, SYC and Apprenticeship Support Australia. What struck me was their consistency, despite Australia's scale and geography: strong system knowledge, practical employer support and people who could help employers navigate the process.

For some SMEs, the barrier may not be navigating employment responsibilities but carrying them at all.

GTOs provide a much deeper form of intermediation (on a fee-for-service basis). Rather than guiding an employer through the system, the GTO employs the apprentice and places them with a host business, assuming employer responsibilities and providing functions including administration, training coordination, mentoring and pastoral support. For an SME, this substantially changes what they are being asked to manage.

GTOs in Australia must comply with the National Standards[33] and are also represented by a national peak body; the National Apprentice Employment Network[34] [NAEN].

Australia's GTO model has parallels with England's Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies[35], although the systems should not be treated as directly equivalent. Evidence also points to higher completion rates among apprentices employed through GTOs[36],[37].

Importantly, the two models are not alternatives: ACAPs and GTOs can work together, providing complementary layers of support. But even a system designed to simplify apprenticeships can recreate complexity if multiple support organisations overlap.

In Western Australia, I saw specialist organisations such as NUDGE[38] offering much deeper support alongside the "lighter-touch" transactional mentoring support delivered through ACAP contracts.

In Victoria, apprentices could potentially access support through Apprenticeships Victoria (whose wider offer includes a central Apprentice Helpdesk, Apprenticeship Support Officers and targeted support programmes), a GTO and an ACAP.

In South Australia, I heard concerns that parts of ACAP provision overlapped with established GTO support.

33 National Standards for GTOs
34 National Apprentice Employment Network
35 GOV.UK | Register of flexi-job apprenticeship agencies
36 NCVER | Apprentice and trainee completion rates (2025)
37 AEN | The GTO advantage (2022)
38 NUDGE | Empowering Youth Through Employment and Training in WA

CASE STUDY

The lesson was not that any of these services were unnecessary. It was that adding support does not automatically remove complexity.

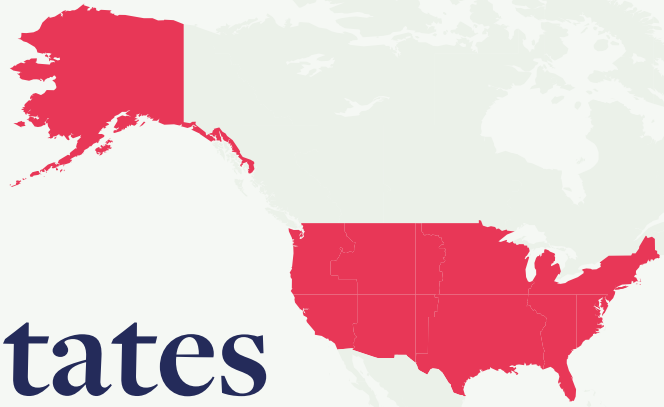
The better test is whether employers and apprentices know who to call, whether that organisation can resolve the problem or make the right referral, and whether specialist support adds rather than duplicates value. Australia showed the value of intermediary infrastructure with consistent "boots on the ground", but also its risk: more support does not necessarily create a clearer route.

Australia's GTO model also raises questions about England's equivalent approach: why it remains relatively small here, and whether barriers prevent it from reaching SMEs for whom advice, brokerage and financial incentives alone aren't enough.

▼ Apprenticeships for Australia, Western Australia



CASE STUDY



United States

Early Care & Education Pathways to Success [ECEPTS] – the specialist intermediary

If Australia showed what happens when intermediation becomes part of national infrastructure, in the U.S., ECEPTS[39] showed the value of sector specialisation.

Rooted in early childhood education, ECEPTS understands both apprenticeship and the workforce it serves. Its partnerships bring employers and colleges together, sometimes aggregating several smaller employers into a viable apprenticeship cohort. A designated programme director supports each partnership, helping employers understand apprenticeship, reporting and implementation, while monitoring how the partnership is working.

At Ducks Nest Pre-School, I saw why that mattered. The employer valued having somebody outside both the business and training provider, who could see the whole partnership and resolve problems between its different parts. Rapid access to expert support contributed to the employer having confidence to expand from one apprentice to twelve within a year.

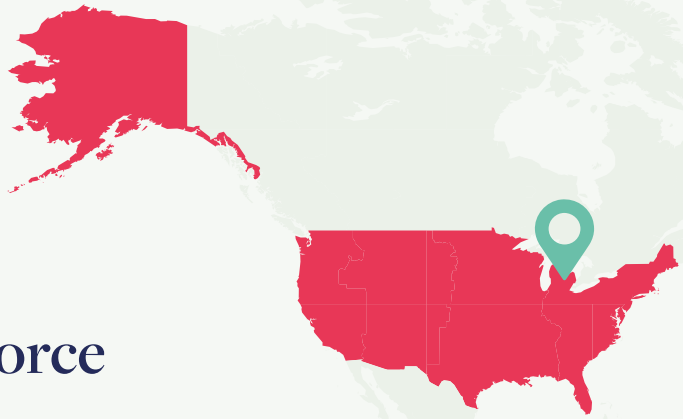
ECEPTS added more than apprenticeship expertise. It understood the sector well enough to translate apprenticeship requirements into something employers and colleges could make work while holding the partnership together when problems arose.



▲ Ducks Nest Pre-School, California

[39] ECEPTS | Early Care & Education Pathways to Success

CASE STUDY



Michigan Works!
A place-based workforce intermediary

Michigan Works![40] offered a third model: rather than organising around an industry, it organises workforce development support around place.

Michigan has invested in a dedicated Apprenticeship Success Coordinator [ASC] in each of its sixteen regional workforce areas, while regional business-services teams provide further employer-facing support. The structure deliberately allows local variation, recognising that the economies being served differ.

West Michigan Works! described bringing employers with shared workforce shortages together to explore apprenticeship collectively rather than business by business. Initial work helped shape industry councils in further sectors.

With Michigan Works! West Central I met Reed City Group, a rural engineering SME. The employer described the experience before ASC support: "It was a long process, and it took several of us. It took a lot of my time. If the ASC would've been in that role at that point, that would've been very helpful for us."

> Michigan showed how a statewide model can retain local capacity and knowledge rather than prescribing the same response everywhere.

[40] Michigan Works! Association

CASE STUDY



Canada

Support Ontario Youth – the group sponsor as system navigator

In Canada, Support Ontario Youth[41] [SOY] addressed a different friction: fragmentation across the apprenticeship journey.

SOY emerged because smaller non-union employers lacked the shared apprenticeship infrastructure available to unionised employers. Its model pools capability across employers, with SOY acting as sponsor and managing navigation and administration while employers employ and train apprentices. Around 90% of the employers it worked with were estimated to be small businesses.

Its support extends beyond registration into awareness, candidate preparation, assessment and matching, mentoring, tutoring and support when apprentices change employer.

I was particularly interested in its emphasis on matching rather than simply vacancy filling. FitFirst[42] behavioural assessments consider working style alongside critical thinking and reasoning to compare an individual's characteristics with apprenticeship profiles, helping inform conversations about suitable trades and workplace environments with young people.

The SOY model suggests that the strongest intermediary offer may be a connected journey rather than an isolated brokerage transaction:

awareness → readiness → matching → registration → progression → completion

[41] Support Ontario Youth
[42] FitFirst Technologies

CASE STUDY

ApprenticeSearch.com Technology with human insight

ApprenticeSearch.com[43] provides perhaps the clearest contrast to the high-touch sponsorship models: a digital platform underpinned by human brokerage.

Employers are vetted before accessing the platform and receive a named contact. The team also works in the opposite direction, using the location and occupational interests of its 15,000+ candidate pool to identify and approach employers likely to offer opportunities.

That includes proactive outreach to employers that may not yet be considering an apprentice. ApprenticeSearch.com therefore sits between a digital matching service and a human brokerage function.

> Technology had not replaced brokerage. It increased reach, while people still did the work requiring judgement, persuasion and relationship-building.



▲ Apprenticesearch.com, Toronto

[43] ApprenticeSearch.com | Connecting employers & apprentices across Canada

There is no single ideal intermediary model. The right model responds to the particular friction in its apprenticeship system.

California reinforced that point:

Bay Area Council in San Francisco uses its position as a large employer-membership and policy organisation to convene businesses, build awareness and make the employer case for apprenticeship, referring employers to specialist organisations such as LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network, which operates as a group sponsor and delivery intermediary.

> The strength was not one organisation doing everything, but different organisations understanding their role and combining their strengths.

Across the cases, the common purpose was the same: make the employer journey easier to navigate without expecting the employer to manage the joins. The purpose of intermediation is not to make decisions for employers. It is to give them enough clarity, confidence and support to make informed decisions themselves.

England already has apprenticeship intermediaries, but coverage is inconsistent. More recent research[44] describes brokerage as patchy and calls for nationally coordinated, locally delivered support that builds on rather than duplicates existing provision. Further recent recommendations[45] suggest that Local Apprenticeship Services go beyond matching, to support apprenticeship completion as well as starts.

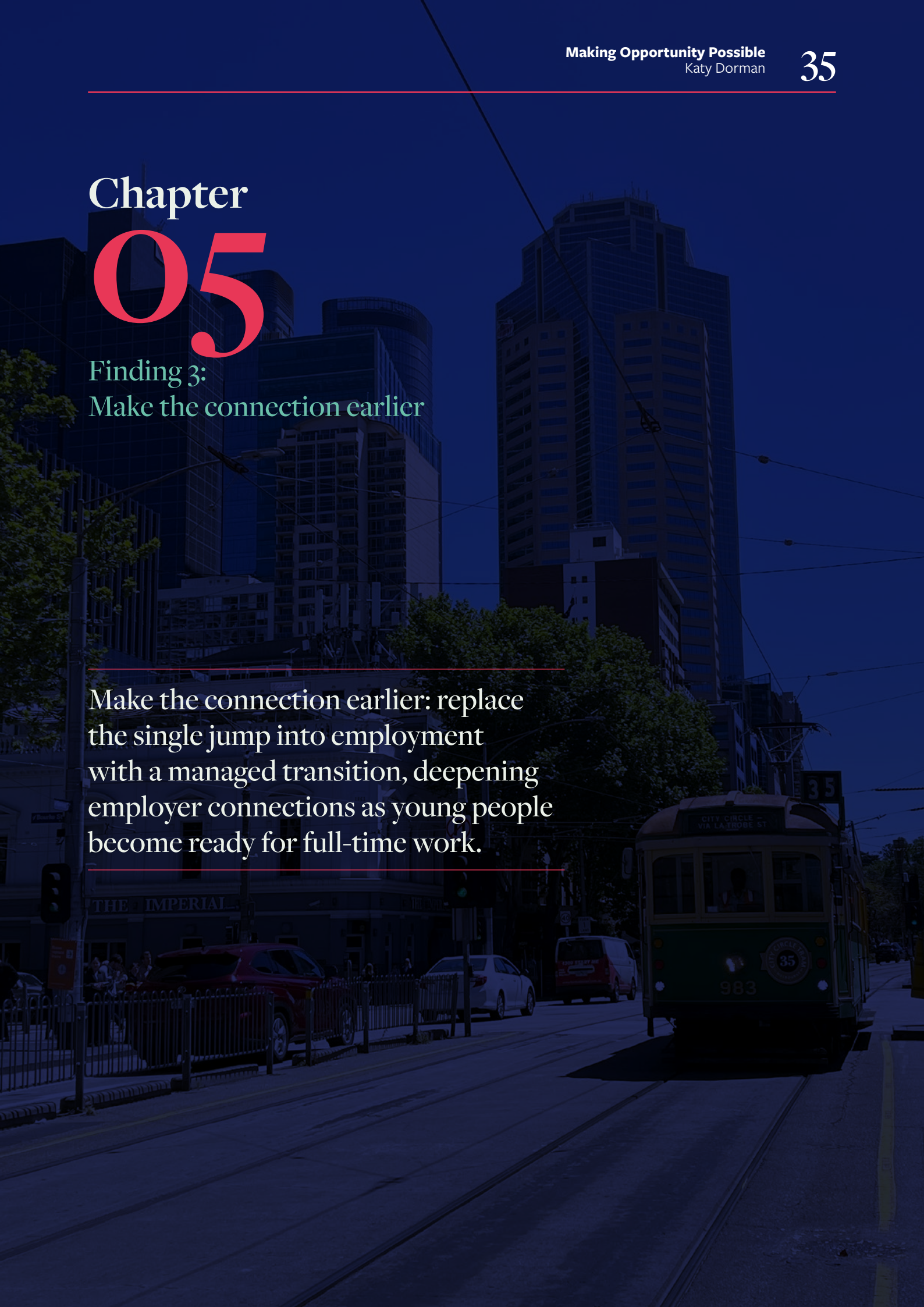
My Fellowship suggests the answer is not simply more brokerage. England needs clearer expectations about what employers should be able to access and how different intermediary functions connect, while retaining impartial expertise that makes brokerage valuable.

[44] Edge Foundation | Agents of Change (2025)

[45] The Sutton Trust | Staying the course (2026)

Chapter 05

Finding 3: Make the connection earlier



Make the connection earlier: replace the single jump into employment with a managed transition, deepening employer connections as young people become ready for full-time work.

School

Building the foundations
Continue secondary education while exploring a vocational pathway.

Year 10

First step into employment
Typically, 1 day a week in employment alongside school.

Year 11

Growing work experience
Typically, 2 days a week in employment alongside school.

Year 12

Increasing time in industry
Typically, 3 days a week in employment alongside school.

Full-time apprenticeship

Making the transition.
Move into a full-time apprenticeship.

The managed transition

We often expect the transition from education to employment to happen at a single moment. A young person finishes school or college and is then expected to choose a direction, find an employer and demonstrate that they are ready for work. Employers, meanwhile, are asked to recruit someone they may never have met, with limited evidence of how they will perform in the workplace.

Across my Fellowship, I saw a different approach.

In parts of Australia, Canada and the U.S., the connection begins before education ends. Young people explore occupations through workplace experience, paid employment and technical learning, while employers build relationships with potential recruits and develop their skills progressively.

> This is not simply about starting apprenticeships at a younger age. It is a managed transition between education and work. And because starting earlier creates more relationships to coordinate, not fewer, intermediary capacity becomes particularly important.

CASE STUDY

Australia



Victoria provides a tangible example of what a school-based apprenticeship can look like for a young person, their family and a small employer.

The Victorian Head Start[46] model supports Years 10–12 students to undertake a School-based Apprenticeship or Traineeship [SBAT] while continuing secondary education. Students receive career planning, an individual pathway plan with one-to-one support, vocational training and paid employment.

> Head Start coordinators provide wraparound support, connecting school, training and employment rather than leaving the young person or employer to navigate the system alone.

I saw this in practice at Wildflower Studio, where Year 10 student Mia (aged 15) was beginning a SBAT hairdressing apprenticeship after completing work experience with the salon. Her sign-up meeting brought Mia, her mum, the employer, Head Start and apprenticeship intermediary MEGT[47] together, making the network of support around the learner visible.

Typically, the SBAT model progressively increases time in employment: one day a week in Year 10, two days in Year 11 and three days in Year 12, creating a gradual transition from education into industry and, ultimately, full-time apprenticeship. In Mia's case, her programme combined paid work (including Saturday mornings) with Technical and Further Education [TAFE] and continued schooling. Progress is shared between TAFE, Head Start and the school, while Head Start maintains the relationship with the employer.

[46] Apprenticeships Victoria | Head Start SBATs

[47] MEGT | Apprentice Connect Australia Provider

▼ Wildflower Studio, Victoria



Head Start helped Mia enter and remain on the pathway; MEGT managed the training contract and financial-support process. She did not face a binary choice between remaining at school and becoming an apprentice. For the employer, the model also depended on the financial commitment remaining viable, connecting this pathway back to finding 1.

This reflects a wider feature I observed in Australia: school, employer, training provider, intermediary and parents form a network around the learner. In Queensland, a parent I met during another sign-up described the SBAT structure as important because, without that "village", a young person can become "lost in the system".

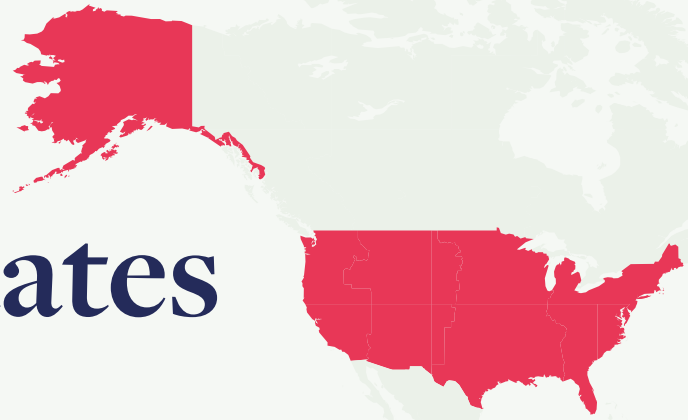
Other Australian examples showed what becomes possible when employment is designed into schooling rather than fitted around it. The Industry School[48] in Queensland alternates five weeks in class and five in industry, with around 95% of students progressing into apprenticeships or traineeships. St Patrick's Technical College[49] in South Australia combines flexible timetabling with dedicated apprenticeship support, and signs more than 100 of its 280 students into apprenticeships each year. Both suggest that participation at scale requires intentional design, rather than asking young people to navigate education and employment as separate systems.

> Australia showed the value of allowing apprenticeships themselves to begin earlier, with the balance between school and paid employment shifting progressively towards full-time work.

[48] The Industry School

[49] St Patrick's Technical College

CASE STUDY



United States

Wisconsin provides perhaps the strongest example from my U.S. learning of YA operating as a recognised part of the school-to-work system.

The architecture matters: Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development[50] [DWD] sets occupational pathways and funds a model delivered through local consortia which must include a school district. Those consortia provide the employer-facing capacity needed to turn the state framework into local opportunities.

Wisconsin's YA programme[51] is specifically school-based, serving high-school juniors and seniors. It combines 450 hours of paid employment with related coursework, giving young people substantial experience of an occupation. Employers interviewed described that scale as important because the young person must become a genuine contributor rather than remain an observer.

The model relies on intermediaries capable of engaging employers. The Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin[52] [WDBSCW], for example, brings employer-facing workforce expertise into a YA structure in which school districts were integral from the start; 99% are now affiliated.

With South West Wisconsin YA Consortium, I met students at Ascension Hospital. I saw how substantial workplace exposure could support career exploration as well as entry. Students experienced different clinical departments within the wider YA, allowing a young person who arrived thinking "nursing" to discover radiology, cancer care or another occupation while already inside the workplace.

> Earlier employer connection can therefore help young people rule occupations in as well as out before making a full career commitment.

[50] Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development
[51] DWD | Youth Apprenticeship
[52] Youth Apprenticeship | WDBSCW

CASE STUDY

UW Health, identified as WDBSCW's largest YA employer with 75 youth apprentices at the time of the visit, showed how the model can operate at scale. I met apprentices alongside school-to-career coordinators, making the employer-school-intermediary relationship visible. The youth apprentices described developing confidence, time-management skills and professional behaviour as well as technical, occupational learning.

Crucially, YAs need not be an endpoint. Wisconsin is working to align YA competencies more closely with Registered Apprenticeship [RA], so that earlier learning could carry forward rather than being restarted.

At Reader Precision Solutions, the same structure operated in manufacturing. The company registered its first YA in 2014 and now deliberately flexes employment around school schedules, utilising intermediary support from Gateway YA Consortium[53]. One former youth apprentice, Will, described working full-time during the summer, then around four hours each morning before returning to school during his senior year. Having entered the business at 16–17, he later became its client relations manager with responsibility for four staff.

Asked about the return on sustained engagement with young people, the employer's response was clear: "we know the return on doing nothing".

Wisconsin showed what happens when YA becomes an ecosystem rather than a standalone programme: responsibility is shared. The state sets occupational pathways, schools make participation possible, consortia connect employers and students, colleges provide teaching, and employers offer paid, meaningful work. The aim is not a weaker apprenticeship for young people, but a substantial school-based experience with progression into full apprenticeships designed from the start.

▼ UW Health, Wisconsin



[53] Gateway Technical College | Youth Apprenticeship Information

CASE STUDY

Canada



Canada demonstrates a different version of the same principle: young people can begin a genuine apprenticeship pathway while still at school, with school-district boards acting as active intermediaries between the learner and employer.

In B.C., at provincial level, SkilledTrades BC manages the system, including examinations and certification, and works with employers, schools, apprentices, industry and training providers. Its local Apprenticeship Advisors focus on building awareness, removing barriers and supporting relationships across the apprenticeship system.

This provincial framework connects directly with education.

SkilledTrades BC funds and offers intentionally structured youth programmes[54] designed to give young people different entry points according to how ready they are to make a career decision:

- **Discover:** hands-on exposure to trades.
- **Explore:** experience of different trades before choosing.
- **Train:** technical training while still at school.
- **Work:** paid employment and workplace training alongside school.

What interested me was the progression: exposure can become exploration, exploration can become occupational training, and training can become paid work without requiring the young person to make one irreversible decision at the beginning.

A Career Coordinator from Vancouver School District Board described helping employers navigate requirements around employing young

[54] SkilledTrades BC | Youth Programmes

people and challenging misconceptions about what a young person could do. That brokerage can unlock substantial employer demand. One electrical contractor relationship subsequently developed into more than 100 students entering employment.

Sea to Sky Career Education in Squamish illustrated how the same principles can operate through a smaller, rural school and employer ecosystem. There, brokerage relied heavily on detailed local knowledge: matching individual students with employers likely to suit them and remaining involved when difficulties arose. A local SME, Corporate Electric Ltd, told me that without the programme it was unlikely to take a young person. The school's involvement reduced some of the uncertainty of recruiting an inexperienced teenager.

Ontario added another dimension: making the learning count in both systems. Through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program [OYAP], workplace learning can earn secondary-school credit while verified hours contribute towards a future apprenticeship. Judith Nyman Secondary School offers a trades-focused OYAP model that makes students' competence visible to industry: employers and unions are invited to observe young people's skills first-hand. In the electrical programme, this helped secure opportunities for an initial small cohort, whose performance then built confidence the employers confidence to take larger groups.

My Canadian visits reinforced something I had seen elsewhere: starting earlier worked well where there was capacity to build the employer relationship. School-based routes were strongest where employers' had a trusted person who could make taking on a young person feel manageable.

Recent English evidence[55],[56], reinforces the importance of meaningful workplace exposure to young people's readiness and transition into work, while highlighting inequalities in access.

Starting earlier is not enough on its own. Taken together, the three countries show that, despite very different policy systems, the strongest YA models share five characteristics:

1. **Employment starts before education ends.** Young people are not forced across a hard boundary between "student" and "worker".
2. **The work is real and paid.** These are not prolonged observation placements.
3. **Intermediaries connect the pathway.** Somebody has capacity to coordinate education, employers and training.
4. **Employers are part of the learning system.** Not simply destinations for people trained elsewhere.
5. **Progression is designed, not assumed.** Earlier learning and employment lead somewhere and, where possible, count towards what follows.

Without these conditions, starting earlier risks creating another disconnected programme rather than a managed transition.

[55] The Sutton Trust | Staying the course (2026)

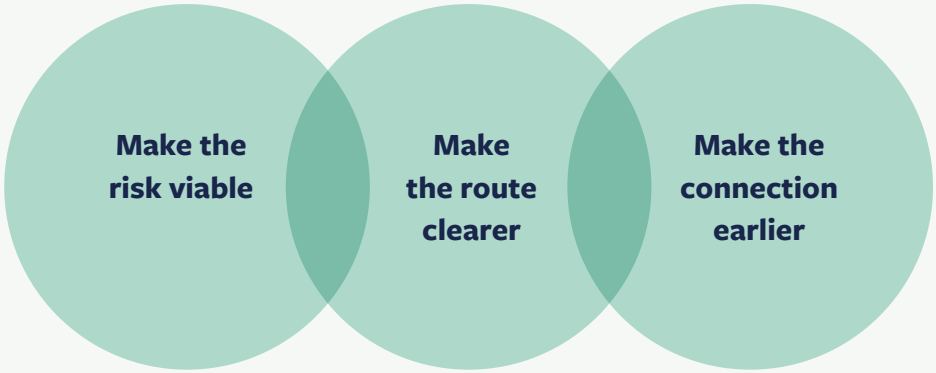
[56] GOV.UK | From a Welfare State to a Working State: a new settlement for the next generation (2026)

Chapter 06

Opportunity infrastructure

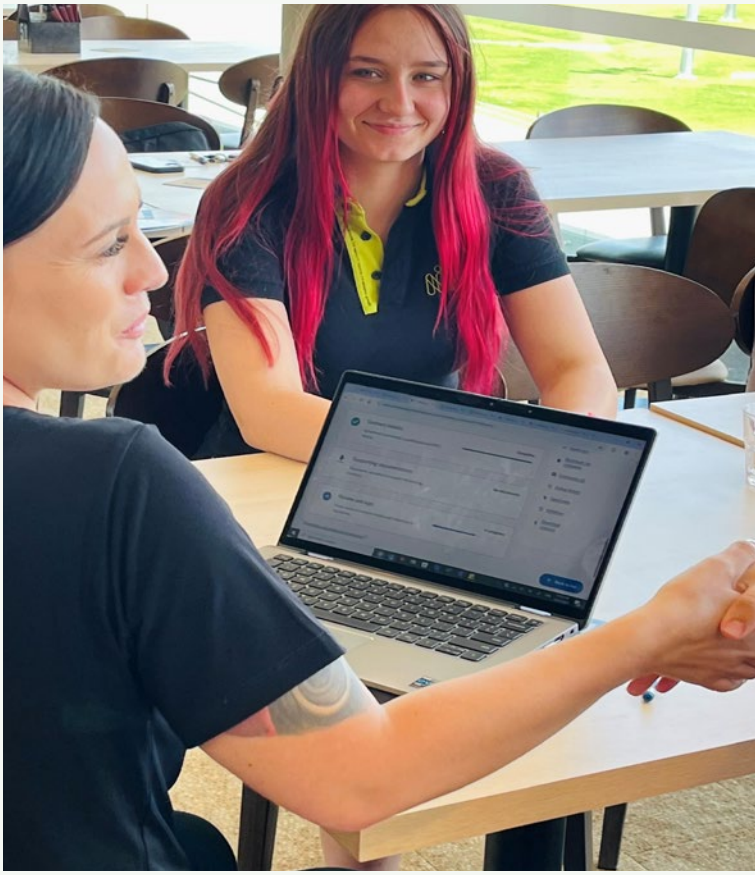
Connect the conditions: bring risk-sharing, brokerage, progressive pathways and continuing support together so opportunities can be created, reached and sustained, rather than adding more programmes.

Taken separately, the previous three chapters point to different ways of increasing apprenticeship opportunity:



The strongest learning from my Fellowship came from seeing how these conditions are connected. Financial support is less effective if an employer cannot navigate the system. A clearer route matters little if there is no opportunity at the end of it. And creating pathways for young people is not enough if employers are unable or unwilling to participate.

I use "opportunity infrastructure" to describe the combination of risk-sharing, navigation, routes into opportunity and continuing support that enables these different parts to work together.



▲ The Q, Queensland

CASE STUDY



Illinois Works!
Seeing the connections

Illinois Works![57] provided perhaps the clearest example I encountered of different policy levers being designed to work together around a shared outcome:

- **Create demand:** public projects funded by the State of Illinois worth at least US$500,000 have a goal of 10% of hours in each trade being worked by apprentices, with half of those apprentice hours worked by graduates of the Illinois Works! pre-apprenticeship programme (which offers a paid stipend).
- **Build the pipeline:** funded pre-apprenticeship programmes prepare people for construction apprenticeships and are performance-managed against stages including enrolment, completion, application and transition.
- **Reward retention:** contractors hiring and retaining apprenticeship graduates can earn bid credits that strengthen their position when competing for future state-funded work.
- **Connect people to opportunity:** career services match pre-apprenticeship graduates with employers and apprenticeship programmes and proactively develop employer opportunities.

[57] Illinois Works! | Illinois Works Program

CASE STUDY

The four components deliberately reinforced one another. Procurement helped create opportunity; pre-apprenticeship helped people reach it; bid credits changed the employer equation; and career services helped navigate the space between preparation and apprenticeship.

My visit to HIRE360[58], one of the Illinois Works! pre-apprenticeship providers, added an important delivery perspective.

Preparation involved much more than technical training. Candidates could need help understanding the range of trades and their different entry routes, preparing for tests, navigating practical barriers such as transport and identifying which occupation suited their circumstances and strengths. HIRE360 was deliberately moving from transactional "case management" towards more individualised advising, while referring needs outside its expertise to community partners.

Preparation also did not end when the course did. HIRE360 required participants in its Illinois Works! cohort to apply to at least three apprenticeship programmes and continued supporting them with test preparation, CVs and job opportunities while applications progressed.

My later conversation with Illinois Works! made the reason clear: entry into some apprenticeship programmes can require repeated applications and considerable persistence. Career services, described to me as 'the glue that keeps the whole system together', can therefore remain available for up to ten years.

For me, the innovation was not any one of these interventions. Procurement, pre-apprenticeships, employer incentives and career support all exist elsewhere. What stood out was the intentional connection between them: creating apprenticeships, preparing applicants, rewarding retention and supporting transition and entry into apprenticeships.

However, connected infrastructure does not remove every barrier. My conversation with Illinois Works! highlighted good progress in increasing proportions of some marginalised groups into the programme, but not all. Creating a pathway and ensuring equitable access through it are not the same thing.

[58] HIRE360



▲ Illinois Works!, Illinois

From programmes to infrastructure

None of this means that every employer needs an incentive, that every young person needs a pre-apprenticeship, or that one organisation should coordinate every part of the system.

Nor does it mean England should recreate the Illinois Works! model. Its construction market, procurement system, apprenticeship structures and institutional context are different. The transferable lesson is not the model, but the design principle: start with the barriers to opportunity, identify the functions needed to overcome them, then make sure those functions connect.

Opportunity infrastructure is therefore not about building more programmes or putting one organisation in charge of everything. The practical test is whether the necessary functions exist and connect:

Can the employer carry the risk?

Can they navigate the route?

Can the young person reach the opportunity?

And is there enough support around the relationship for both to succeed?

The fourth question also exposed something beyond my main research focus. Creating an opportunity is not the end of the employer journey. ECEPTS, Sea to Sky and Head Start showed the value of continuing support and help when problems arose. I also repeatedly heard that employers may need help to supervise and mentor apprentices. Employer capability is therefore part of effective brokerage, not a separate finding.

Several of the strongest examples also depended on continuity. Employers make workforce decisions over time, while intermediary relationships, school-employer partnerships and apprenticeship capability take time to build. Opportunity infrastructure therefore needs to be sufficiently stable for employers and delivery partners to understand it, trust it and plan around it.

Chapter 07

Why this matters for England now

Use the moment to connect: England's investment in incentives, brokerage and earlier technical pathways should support one connected journey for employers and young people, not separate interventions.

The policy landscape in England changed considerably during my Fellowship.

Against a significant increase in the number of young people outside education and the labour market[59], apprenticeship policy and funding have shifted towards a stronger focus on young people[60],[63].

The UK Government has introduced new employer incentives, committed funding to support Local Apprenticeship Services[60] and announced plans[61] for technical education, work experience and employer connections to begin from age 14 alongside new Local Opportunity Services[62].

England is therefore already moving on each of the three issues I explored overseas: employer risk, apprenticeship navigation and earlier connections between young people and employers. That makes the Fellowship learning particularly timely, but also exposes a risk: these reforms could still develop as separate interventions rather than parts of the same employer and young-person journey.

Getting the economic equation right

New financial incentives recognise that employer demand cannot be assumed. Several months after their introduction, the question is whether they are targeted effectively enough to influence employers' recruitment decisions or strengthen their capacity to create and sustain apprenticeship opportunities.

Recent English evidence points in the same direction as my international learning: financial incentives matter, but sit alongside business stability, employers' need for better preparation of young people and capacity to cover training, supervision and mentoring[63].

Making brokerage work for employers

Where brokerage sits matters less than whether employers can access its core functions: trusted advice, translation, connection and continuity. English evidence[64] already supports the value of practical, impartial support for SMEs navigating apprenticeships.

The expansion of the Mayoral Strategic Authority [MSA] Apprenticeship Brokerage Pilots (Local Apprenticeship Services) is welcome, but raises a question also highlighted by recent research[65]: how can employers outside these areas reliably access an equivalent core offer?

[59] GOV.UK | Young people and work: interim report (2026)
[60] GOV.UK | DfE Update further education (2026)
[61] GOV.UK | PM: 'Britain will value the hard hat as much as the graduation cap' (2026)
[62] GOV.UK | From a Welfare State to a Working State: a new settlement for the next generation (2026)
[63] St Martins Group | From appetite to opportunity (2026)
[64] Apprenticeships Norfolk | Building Futures evaluations (2026)
[65] The Sutton Trust | Staying the course (2026)

Creating progressive routes for young people

Plans to introduce technical routes from age 14 create an opportunity to build some of the progressive pathways into apprenticeships I saw overseas. The value of these routes will depend not simply on starting earlier, but on how deliberately they connect young people, employers and onward progression.

Apprenticeships are not the answer for every young person. The opportunity is to make them a visible and achievable progression route within a broader technical pathway, rather than something young people encounter only after leaving education.

Seen separately, each reform responds to part of the problem. Seen together, they begin to resemble the opportunity infrastructure described in the previous chapter.

The opportunity now is to connect them: financial support that helps employers create viable opportunities, effective intermediaries that turn interest into action, and earlier pathways that enable young people to reach those opportunities.

Milburn's Review[66] was published as I was finalising this Fellowship report. Its arguments and recommendations reinforce the three themes I have explored:

- Government has a legitimate role in sharing the cost and risk of hiring young people – and that financial support needs to be targeted to where it changes employer behaviour.
- Goodwill is not enough and SMEs need the most support to navigate complexity.
- the countries with lower NEET rates build the bridge into work deliberately.

and concurs that we don't need to import another country's system but we do need to learn from what works.

[66] GOV.UK | From a Welfare State to a Working State: a new settlement for the next generation (2026)

Chapter 08

Recommendations for England

Test the connected pathway: use place-based demonstrators to test whether connected support creates additional, more sustainable opportunities than separate interventions, with continuity to build trust and capability.

My Fellowship points to a set of conditions that repeatedly made it easier for employers and young people to connect.

▼ Muresk Institute, Western Australia



The central recommendation is to:

Test opportunity infrastructure as a connected pathway

Test a small number of place-based demonstrators (including at least one in a rural or non-mayoral economy) that connect employer brokerage, targeted practical or financial support, and progressive school-to-apprenticeship pathways, with sufficient continuity to build trusted relationships and capability over time.

Evaluate whether connecting these functions creates additional and more sustainable apprenticeship opportunities than delivering them separately. Evaluation should follow the whole pathway, including the barriers employers face, employer engagement and retention, whether opportunities are sustained, apprentice progression, and how effectively responsibility passes between organisations.

The newly funded Local Apprenticeship Services could provide an early opportunity to test elements of this approach, while gathering intelligence about the constraints preventing employers from creating and sustaining opportunities.

Three practical recommendations sit beneath this proposition:

1. **Target financial support at the risks and constraints preventing employers from creating or sustaining apprenticeship opportunities.**
   Specifically design and test financial support against the constraint it is intended to change (e.g. employment cost, initial productivity, supervision capacity, recruitment risk or the additional support required by a less experienced recruit).

   Evaluate whether support changes employer behaviour, including participation, the number of opportunities created, retention and the support surrounding the apprentice, rather than measuring success through starts alone.

2. **Ensure every employer can access the core functions of effective apprenticeship brokerage.**
   Ensure every employer, regardless of postcode, can access trusted support that listens, translates, connects and coordinates, with the intensity of support reflecting employer need and capability, while allowing flexibility in how those functions are organised locally.

   Set clear expectations for the employer experience: support should make the system easier to use, provide effective hand-offs between organisations and avoid duplicating provision or creating another layer for employers to navigate. Include practical help with supervision, mentoring and problem-solving, and test employer-to-employer peer support. Review barriers to SMEs' use of Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agencies and test whether agency employment enables participation where other support is insufficient.

3. **Pilot progressive school-to-apprenticeship pathways within emerging technical routes.**
   Use emerging technical routes to pilot progressive school-to-apprenticeship pathways that deliberately combine education with meaningful employment and provide managed transitions into full apprenticeships, for young people who choose this direction.

   Preserve exploration as well as progression, and test the conditions required for employers, providers and young people to participate successfully (including reviewing youth employment laws and relevant policy requirements).

Chapter 09

making opportunity possible

Make opportunity real: connect the conditions employers and young people need to invest in one another and succeed, then take this learning into policy and practice.

I began this Fellowship asking what enables an employer, particularly a small business, to move from willingness to action. I expected to find different approaches. I did. But the most important learning came from seeing how they worked together.

Across three very different systems, I saw different responses to the same challenge: an apprenticeship opportunity only becomes real when an employer feels able to create it.

Opportunity infrastructure brings those responses together: creating the conditions around employers that give opportunity the best chance of becoming real and lasting.

We cannot remove every barrier or make apprenticeships right for everyone. But we can design the conditions around them more deliberately.

What happens next

I do not want this learning to end with this report. I want to explore with policymakers and practitioners how employer funding, brokerage, earlier workplace connections and continuing support could work better together, rather than as separate interventions.

My next step is to bring this learning into national policy conversations, test and challenge it with practitioners across the sector, and explore where devolution and future investment could create opportunities to put the connected approach into practice locally.

The question that started my Fellowship was what makes it possible for an employer to say yes. My learning has reinforced that there is no single answer.

Employers need different things at different points, but the strongest examples I encountered made sure those forms of support were connected.

Opportunity becomes possible when the conditions around employers and young people enable them to connect, invest in one another and succeed.

Appendices & references

Appendix a

Key terms

Term	Definition
Apprentice Connect Australia Provider [ACAP]	A free, federally funded national service helping employers and apprentices establish and navigate apprenticeships. (Australia)
Apprenticeship brokerage	An activity or service helping employers engage with apprenticeships through signposting, guidance, navigation or coordination responsibilities.
Apprenticeship intermediary	An organisation helping employers engage with apprenticeships through signposting, guidance, navigation, coordination or taking on employment responsibilities.
Apprenticeship vs Traineeship	Apprenticeship is an umbrella term, but usually refers to trades, typically 3-4 years; traineeships cover wider vocational roles, typically 1-2 years. (Australia)
Braided funding	Support assembled from multiple funding streams for an employer or apprentice. (Canada/U.S.)
Dual credit	Learning that counts towards both a school qualification and a post-secondary, vocational or apprenticeship programme. (Canada/U.S.)
Group/Program Sponsor	An employer, organisation or consortium managing apprenticeship administration across employers, who employ and train apprentices. (Canada/U.S.)
Group Training Organisation [GTO]	A fee-for-service organisation that employs apprentices and places them with host employers. (Australia)
Host employer	A business providing a workplace for an apprentice or trainee legally employed by a Group Training Organisation.
Opportunity infrastructure	Report concept: risk-sharing + brokerage + progressive pathways + continuing support.
Peak Body	An organisation that represents and advocates for a sector or network at national or state level. (Australia)
Place-based	Support organised around local economies and employer needs.

Term	Definition
Pre-apprenticeship	A programme preparing someone to enter an apprenticeship.
Red Seal Trades	Common standards in designated skilled trades, supporting labour mobility between jurisdictions. (Canada)
Registered Apprenticeship [RA]	An apprenticeship registered and overseen by the federal Office of Apprenticeship [OA] or a recognised State Apprenticeship Agency [SAA]. (U.S.)
Registered Training Organisation [RTO]	An organisation delivering the training component of an apprenticeship. (Australia)
School-based Apprenticeship or Traineeship [SBAT]	An apprenticeship or traineeship combining secondary education, paid employment and formal/technical training. (Australia)
SME	Small or medium-sized employer.
Youth Apprenticeship [YA]	Models combining secondary education, paid workplace learning and occupational or apprenticeship training. (Canada/ U.S.)

Note: terms describe models encountered during the Fellowship. Their meanings vary between countries and jurisdictions and are not necessarily equivalent across apprenticeship systems.

Appendix b

Defining 'intermediary'

There is no single agreed definition or model for an apprenticeship intermediary in England, Australia, Canada or the U.S[67],[68],[69]. Instead, we could describe intermediaries broadly by the function they perform to 'boost' capacity, in order to help employers participate in apprenticeships. Their role can range from light-touch signposting and guidance, through tailored expert support to navigate the system, to more involved arrangements where they may 'act on behalf of' the employer, including taking on employment responsibilities.

Their form varies considerably too: from national to local or regional services; from civic institutions to industry-specific organisations, non-profits, workforce organisations and specialist apprenticeship services.

My fieldwork reflected this diversity.

- In Australia, Apprentice Connect Australia Providers [ACAPs] are a federally funded free national service (with minimum standards[70]) to help employers and apprentices establish and navigate apprenticeships. Group Training Organisations [GTOs] go further by employing apprentices themselves, placing them with host employers.
- In Canada, intermediary functions included school-district career coordinators, apprenticeship matching services, non-profit brokers and group sponsors.
- In the U.S., I encountered workforce boards, apprenticeship sponsors, YA consortia and specialist intermediaries, often taking on coordination and programme-development functions that employers lacked the capacity to manage themselves.

Given the potential contribution of intermediary organisations[71] to apprenticeship systems , a more useful question is therefore, not 'what is an intermediary organisation?' but 'what intermediary functions do employers need someone to perform?'.

[67] ILO | Intermediary organizations in Apprenticeship Systems (2019)
[68] IPPR | Join the dots: The role of apprenticeship intermediaries in England (2023)
[69] Edge Foundation | Agents of Change (2025)
[70] Australian Govt | Apprentice Connect Australia Provider ~ Code of Conduct (2024)
[71] ILO | Intermediary organizations in Apprenticeship Systems (2019)

Appendix c
Research methodology

Purpose and approach

This Fellowship explored the topic: How do intermediaries overseas engage employers in apprenticeships, and what can we learn from them?

The research focused particularly on SMEs and considered apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, SBAT and YA programmes.

I used a qualitative, exploratory approach based primarily on international fieldwork. Rather than formally comparing national systems, I looked for recurring themes, contrasting approaches and their relevance to England.

As the fieldwork developed, three questions shaped the research:

1. What makes employing an apprentice financially and operationally viable, particularly for smaller employers?
2. What intermediary support helps employers navigate the system and overcome practical barriers?
3. What can be learned from approaches that connect young people and employers earlier?

These reflect the report's three findings: make the risk viable, make the route clearer and make the connection earlier.

Fieldwork methods

Across the Fellowship, I engaged with more than 215 people from more than 100 organisations across Australia, Canada and the U.S.

Note: see appendix d for the fieldwork itinerary and appendix f for those consulted.

The fieldwork research combined:

- review of relevant programme, policy and organisational material;
- semi-structured conversations and interviews;
- site visits and observation;
- discussions with employers and apprentices;
- roundtables, conferences and sector events;
- reflective field notes.

Questions were adapted to participants and settings, allowing emerging themes to be tested in later visits. Where possible, I observed practice directly, including apprenticeship sign-ups in Australia.

Analysis

Analysis was thematic and iterative. I looked for recurring themes, contrasting approaches, evidence that challenged emerging conclusions, and unintended consequences or limitations.

researcher perspective and limitations

I undertook the Fellowship as a practitioner experienced in England's apprenticeship system and intermediary brokerage. This provided professional context but also created a risk of confirmation bias.

I sought to manage this by testing emerging ideas with different perspectives and recording contradictions and challenges (e.g. including employers for whom incentives did not determine recruitment decisions).

The research also has important limitations:

- It deliberately focused on employers (particularly SMEs), although apprentices, training organisations and other stakeholders also influence success.
- Participants were selected for their relevance, not as a representative sample, and participation depended on availability. Innovative or well-regarded practice may therefore be over-represented.
- Systems and contexts differ substantially, limiting direct comparison.
- Participant accounts reflect individual perspectives; where possible, I balanced these through other conversations, observation and documentary material.
- The research identifies patterns and possible mechanisms, but cannot establish causality.
- Policy, funding and programmes may change over time.

Case studies therefore illustrate learning in particular contexts; they are not evidence that the same intervention would produce the same result in England.

Applying the learning

The findings draw primarily on international fieldwork. Recommendations consider what appears to help, its limitations and how the underlying principles might be adapted to England, rather than simply copied directly.

Appendix d
Fieldwork itinerary

The Fellowship was undertaken in two phases: Australia from 15 October to 17 November 2025, followed by Canada and the U.S. from 7 September to 10 October 2026.

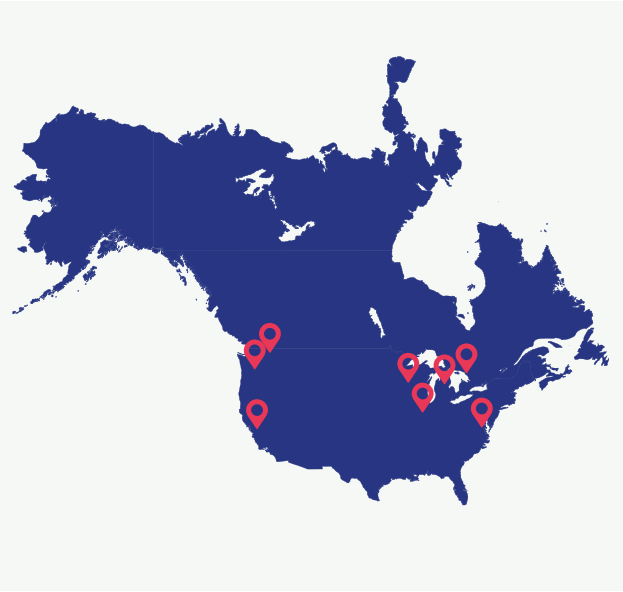
The itinerary combined visits to major cities and regional communities and I engaged with more than 215 people in more than 100 organisations across the respective apprenticeship systems.

This included:

- government and regulatory bodies
- policy and research experts and peak bodies
- intermediaries, group sponsors, group training organisations and workforce development organisations
- school district boards, education and training providers
- employer and industry organisations
- employers, apprentices and parents

The maps below show the geographical reach of the research.





Note: see appendix f for a full list of organisations consulted.

Appendix e

Apprenticeship system comparison

Across Australia, Canada and the U.S., apprenticeships combine paid employment with structured workplace learning and formal or technical training. However, governance, funding and the breadth of occupations covered differ significantly between the three systems.

Australia – operates a national apprenticeship system with responsibility shared between federal, state and territory governments. Training is usually delivered through Registered Training Organisations [RTOs], while training contracts are regulated at state or territory level. Government support includes training subsidies, employer incentives, apprentice payments and contracted support services, with federal incentives increasingly targeted towards priority occupations and skills shortages.

A defining feature is the difference between apprenticeships and traineeships[72] – although both are classed as 'Australian Apprenticeships' the distinction can affect funding. Apprenticeships are generally associated with traditional trades and typically last around four years, while traineeships extend the model into service occupations and are generally shorter, around 1-2 years.

School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships [SBATs] allow young people (typically Year 10+) to combine secondary education with paid apprenticeship or traineeship employment and formal training. Participation is negotiated around the school timetable.

Local Jobs Plans[73] use local labour market intelligence and employer input to coordinate local responses, linking employment, training and economic priorities. Local Skills Improvement Plans[74] in England are similar, perhaps with a stronger focus on shaping local skills provision.

Canada – operates a decentralised system in which apprenticeship training and trade certification are primarily the responsibility of provinces and territories, so arrangements vary across the country. The federal government plays a coordinating and investment role, particularly through the Red Seal Program[75], which establishes common standards in designated skilled trades and supports labour mobility between jurisdictions.

A defining feature is the system's strong concentration on the skilled trades, rather than apprenticeships being widely used across service and professional occupations.

YA models integrate secondary education with apprenticeship participation, allowing students to gain school credits alongside paid workplace learning and industry experience.

[72] Australian Apprenticeships | Types of apprenticeships (2026)
[73] Department of Employment and Workplace Relations | Local Jobs Plans
[74] GOV.UK | Local Skills Improvement Plans
[75] Red Seal Programme (2025)

United States – operates a highly decentralised, employer- and industry-led system. The principal federally recognised model is the Registered Apprenticeship [RA], with programmes registered and overseen either by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship [OA] or, where recognised, a State Apprenticeship Agency[76] [SAA]. Programmes can be sponsored by employers, unions, industry associations, workforce organisations and other organisations, allowing considerable flexibility in their design and delivery.

Although U.S. apprenticeship has strong roots in construction and the skilled trades, RA has expanded into a much broader range of industries. A defining feature is therefore its employer-led flexibility, with programmes developed around workforce needs rather than a single national delivery or funding model. YA programmes enable young people to combine high school study with paid work-based learning and occupational training, creating an earlier connection between employers and potential recruits.

Across all three countries, challenges around employer participation, apprentice recruitment and retention have increased the focus on how employers and apprentices are supported throughout the apprenticeship journey. This provides important context for the intermediary models explored in this report.

[76] Apprenticeship.gov | Apprenticeship System

Appendix f

Contributing organisations

A Fellowship is shaped as much by the people you meet as by the places you visit. Throughout this journey, I have been fortunate to meet people who generously shared their time, experience and perspectives.

There are many more people behind this report than I can name individually, but I would especially like to thank the following organisations who contributed through meetings, site visits, roundtables, introductions and conversations during the course of my fieldwork:

Phase 1 – Australia

Apprentice Employment Network – South Australia

AFGRI

AI Group (Centre for Education & Training)

AI Group (Apprentice & Trainee Centre)

Air & Gas Industries

Apprenticeship Careers Australia

Apprenticeship Support Australia

Apprenticeships Victoria

BUSY at Work

CITB

Department for Education, New South Wales

East Coast Apprenticeships

Global Apprenticeship Network Australia

Harks

HunterNet

Local Jobs (Adelaide South, Barwon, Brisbane SE, Gold Coast, Perth North & South, Sydney SW)

Logan City Council

MEGT

Muresk Institute

National Apprentice Employment Network

National Australian Apprenticeship Association

NUDGE

PEER

Queensland Department of Trade, Employment and Training

Q Racing

Riviera

South Australia Business Chamber

South Australia Skills Commission

Skills Frontier

St Patrick's Technical College

SYC

TAFE Gippsland

TAFE Queensland, Acacia Ridge

Twin Rivers

Wildflower Studio

WPC Group

Zeal Futures

Phase 2 – Canada

British Columbia Ministry of Post-Secondary Education & Future Skills

Canadian Apprenticeship Forum

Corporate Electric Ltd

Employment and Social Development Canada

HIEC / ApprenticeSearch.com

FitFirst Technologies

Judith Nyman Secondary School (Peel District School Board)

Merit Ontario

Sea to Sky Career Education

SkilledTrades BC

SkilledTrades Ontario

Support Ontario Youth

Vancouver School District Board

Phase 2 – United States

Accenture

Apprenticeships Illinois

Apprenticeships for America

Ascension Hospital

Bay Area Community College Consortium

Bay Area Council

Capitol Bank

Chicago Apprenticeship Network

City College of San Francisco

City Colleges of Chicago

CityWorks DC

Department of Industrial Relations, California

Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, Michigan

Ducks Nest Pre-School

ECEPTS

Gateway Technical College

Goodwill of Silicon Valley

GRUNAU

Helmets to Hardhats

HIRE360

Illinois Works!

Joliet Community College

LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network

Magenta

Michigan Works! Association

Michigan Works! West Central

Muskegon Community College

Northern California Apprenticeship Network

Reader Precision Solutions

Reed City Group

South West Wisconsin YA Consortium

Spaulding Marine Center

The Last Mile

Trinity Health

UW Health

West Michigan Works!

Wisconsin DWD (Apprenticeship Office)

Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin

Zurich

Endorsements

As Co-Chair of the National Apprenticeship Hub Network, I'm delighted to endorse Making Opportunity Possible, Katy Dorman's work through her Churchill Fellowship. Her research brings valuable insight and fresh thinking to the apprenticeship landscape, with a clear focus on what we can learn and, more importantly, what we can do differently. It is an important contribution to the continued development of a stronger and more effective apprenticeship system.

Jodi Fair – Regional Growth & Partnerships Manager, Solent Growth Partnership

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With local apprenticeship brokerage increasingly being recognised as a means of connecting employers with apprenticeships and creating opportunities for young people, most notably through the government's Local Apprenticeship Service Pilot, this report comes at a vital moment. Edge has highlighted that the current network of local apprenticeship brokerage services in England, of which Katy is a leading voice, plays a vital role in delivering tailored support to help employers engage with apprenticeships and skills training. By drawing on international case studies, this report is a valuable contribution to the emerging evidence base on what works in apprenticeship brokerage.

Olly Newton – Executive Director, Edge Foundation

When I wrote my review of apprenticeships for small businesses in 2012, the message from SMEs was clear: the will is there, but the time, confidence and capacity often aren't. Katy's work in Norfolk shows that is still the challenge, and her Fellowship shows how other countries are meeting it. Her central insight is that financial support, expert brokerage and earlier connections with young people work best when they are designed together. 'Opportunity infrastructure' is a practical, credible framework that England should test now. I wholeheartedly endorse it.

Jason Holt CBE – Chief Executive, Holts Group, and author of 'Making apprenticeships more accessible to small and medium-sized enterprises' (2012)

Comprehensive, fascinating to read and with clear and powerful recommendations - and most importantly clear and accessible for people at all levels of the system. A real call to arms.

Ben Rowland – Chief Executive Officer, Association of Employment & Learning Providers

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This research and the recommendations presented come at a crucial time for England. The report presents us with a concise and logical set of guiding principles that we should consider and build into the design of any new service, including the proposed new Local Apprenticeship Service and Local Opportunity Services. With the changes coming to apprenticeships, alongside devolution, we have a unique moment to reframe the apprenticeship conversation with employers, particularly SMEs, working with them to understand their challenges, and to design and deliver new roles for young people to take their first steps into employment and apprenticeships. For this to be both effective and sustained, we should utilise this learning and look to apply it in a systematic, yet flexible way to support local communities. I'm genuinely excited to see where this research is going to take us as a country.

Anna Morrison CBE – Director, Amazing Apprenticeships

Katy's report provides a compelling framework for thinking about opportunity creation. By bringing together employer engagement, brokerage, support and pathways under the concept of 'opportunity infrastructure', it moves the conversation beyond individual programmes and towards the systems needed to deliver long-term impact. This is a timely and important contribution to current policy discussions.

Emily Rock – Engagement Director, The St Martin's Group

England is at a pivotal moment. Political attention is rightly focused on young people not in education, employment or training [NEET], while employers face an ageing workforce, changing employment needs and critical skills shortages. Meeting these challenges requires unlocking the potential of England's SMEs. Smaller employers are essential to creating opportunities at scale, but willingness to invest in the next generation does not automatically mean having the capacity to do so. Katy's international research makes an important contribution, challenging us to move beyond isolated interventions and create the conditions for employers to invest confidently in apprenticeships. Her timely, practical insights deserve serious consideration as we build a more connected, responsive and sustainable apprenticeship system.

Lindsay Conroy – Chief Executive, Association of Apprentices

Katy's research makes a compelling and timely contribution to the debate about apprenticeships and youth employment. It challenges us to look beyond preparing young people for work and consider what must change to enable more employers to create meaningful opportunities in the first place. At The 5% Club, we believe employers must be active custodians of opportunity, supported by a system that makes investment in emerging talent both practical and worthwhile. Katy's findings provide valuable international evidence and a persuasive case for connecting policy, employer action and practical support to turn ambition into opportunity.

Mark Cameron OBE – Chief Executive Officer, The 5% Club

Norfolk County Council is proud to have supported Katy's Churchill Fellowship and welcomes the learning she has brought back to Norfolk from international apprenticeship systems. The report highlights the importance of creating the right conditions for employers, particularly smaller businesses, to create apprenticeship opportunities, while building clearer pathways for young people into work. Its recommendations strongly resonate with our ambition to grow apprenticeships across Norfolk and with the practical work already being delivered through Apprenticeships Norfolk. We welcome the report's contribution to the wider national conversation about how employers can be supported to create and sustain more high-quality apprenticeship opportunities.

David Bick – Leader, Norfolk County Council
Dennis Bacon – Chief Executive, Norfolk County Council

Understanding the challenges small businesses face in hiring an apprentice is crucial, with the ability to deliver support and funding that adapts to the business' unique needs. The Apprenticeships Norfolk team's strength lies in their approach of placing the business at the core of their tailored support. So, it's positive to see a report that draws on best practice from overseas and highlights how layered, flexible support can help more small businesses embrace apprenticeships as an effective way to grow their business.

Candy Richards – FSB (East Anglia) - Regional Stakeholder and Business Manager

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Katy's research gets to the heart of a challenge we see every day: opportunity only becomes meaningful when employers feel able to create it and young people are supported to reach it. Her concept of 'opportunity infrastructure' shows how we can join up employer support, trusted brokerage, earlier workplace connections and clear progression pathways. For Jobcentres and our partners, the message is powerful: by working together around employers and young people, we can turn willingness into opportunity and opportunity into lasting employment.

Julia Nix OBE DL – District Manager (Norfolk & Suffolk), Department for Work & Pensions

It's fantastic to read a report that recognises the complicated landscape that will always exist with apprenticeships nationally and internationally, but does not seek to push one solution, rather recognises the need for an effective opportunity infrastructure. As the chair of The Flexi-Job Apprenticeship Agency [FJAA] Network for England, I can see the synergies that exist between the various programmes Katy visited and our own, and how FJAAs can play their part in implementing the infrastructure required in partnership with others in England.

Paul Wright – Chair, FJAA Network

Young people shouldn't have to reach the end of education before meaningful connections with employers begin. Katy's research offers a persuasive case for rethinking how we connect education, employers and opportunity, replacing fragmented pathways with a more progressive and supported transition into work. We particularly endorse the thinking around matching, and the importance of moving beyond traditional qualifications and experience to better understand an individual's behaviours, strengths and potential. At urfuture, we see first-hand the importance of helping young people discover opportunities they may never have considered and enabling employers to recognise potential beyond conventional measures. These findings offer valuable lessons for how we can build a more accessible, connected and effective pathway into employment for the next generation.

Holly Hobbs – Co-Founder & Chief Communications Officer, urfuture

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In light of the Milburn report, Katy's exploration of the conditions needed for employers to create opportunities to work is a welcome call to action. It offers an insightful, detailed discussion of the lessons we could learn from apprenticeship systems across the world. As the report points out, taking on an apprentice is an investment, but one that is becoming increasingly hard to justify for businesses in England. Employers want to invest in the workforce of the future but simply cannot afford to do so. Katy's recommendations provide a sensible and practical approach to tackling these issues. As both Katy and Milburn suggest, Government cannot solve the youth unemployment crisis alone – employers must have their voices heard in the apprenticeship process, and be given sufficient guidance and support to create valuable routes into employment.

Nova Fairbank – Chief Executive of Norfolk Chambers of Commerce

I see a strong connection between Katy's findings and my own Churchill Fellowship, Purposeful Progression. Our two studies reinforce a shared insight. If we want every young person to see a meaningful route into their future, we have to design for that deliberately. That takes purposeful experiences, strong partnerships and shared responsibility across the system. What I particularly value about Katy's report is how it helps us ask better questions about our own system. What can we learn from practice elsewhere? What could we adapt here? And what conditions would allow that practice to take root and benefit more young people?

Nicola Hall – Director of Education, Careers and Enterprise Company, Churchill Fellow and author of 'Purposeful Progression' (2026)

Katy Dorman's research brings valuable international insight into something we have learned through more than a decade of connecting young people with employers: successful transitions from education into employment don't happen by chance. They need to be nurtured, starting early, through meaningful encounters with the world of work that build confidence, broaden horizons and develop into real opportunities. Just as importantly, this report recognises the vital role of the organisations that make those connections possible. Employers need support to engage, schools need trusted partners, and young people need pathways they can navigate. This report reinforces why investing in the infrastructure that connects education and employment is so important, rather than relying on disconnected initiatives. It is a timely and important contribution to the debate about how we prepare young people for their futures.

Anne Bailey – Chief Executive Officer, Form the Future

Apprenticeships are crucial to the Government's skills agenda, and Katy's report provides a clear and compelling case for a collaborative approach to getting people into work. The recommendations outlined in the report align strongly with the objectives of the Norfolk & Suffolk Local Skills Improvement Plan [LSIP], which places a clear focus on supporting employer access to the local skills system and instigating the improvement of local system navigation as a priority theme. Therefore, the recommendations in this report – to create a targeted, streamlined, place-based apprenticeship system with a focus on employer engagement – provide welcome enrichment to both the objectives of the LSIP and the skills agenda as a whole.

Dean Pierpoint – Skills Director, Norfolk & Suffolk LSIP

Significant infrastructure investment presents a substantial opportunity to develop the skills base of the East of England. This report sets out a clear rationale for reducing barriers for employers, strengthening collaboration between employers and training providers and creating clearer pathways into apprenticeships. Realising this opportunity will also depend on ensuring sufficient, high-quality training capacity, supported by investment in specialist facilities, equipment and expertise and aligned with both immediate employer demand and the region's longer-term skills needs.

Phil Stittle – Executive Director of Business & Strategic Growth, Eastern Education Group (East of England Construction Technical Excellence College [CTEC])

It was fascinating to read Katy's analysis of the different approaches to apprenticeship provision, recruitment and incentives to support employers. Being able to understand the approach and impact from a range of employers from around the world is extremely valuable. I hope that the work Katy has undertaken will drive change, and ensure more learners and employers can continue to benefit from the apprenticeship system.

Joe Crossley – Co-Founder and Managing Director

Katy Dorman | Churchill Fellow 2025

Supported by

the CHURCHILL fellowship

Making Opportunity Possible:

Building the conditions for employers to create opportunities and young people to access them.