

Say the word “apprentice” and a certain age group will probably think of Sir Alan Sugar pointing aggressively at some poor hapless soul and firing them from the top floor of his office in Canary Wharf (I’m sure literally if he was allowed). But to an older generation the word is likely to foster an entirely different association.

The UK has a really interesting history of apprenticeships. A quick search on the internet brings up facts reaching back to the 15th century when young craftsmen were given a chance to learn their trade in return for a small wage, lodgings and food. Over the centuries, with employment laws and industries changing so did the nature of apprentices, but the value of the apprenticeship has never really been lost.

Often an apprenticeship can be the start of a lifelong journey into a trade, where on and off the job training is received from experienced craftsmen, helping to develop not just a skill but a work ethic that can influence a journey from the bottom rung to the top. Many a successful craftsman started as apprentices, motor racing legend and friend of Buckmore Park Ross Brawn being one, chef Jamie Oliver being another.

The Government has had a major push on re-energising the apprenticeship scheme turning it into a modern day programme that suits youngsters starting out in the world of employment and the businesses wishing to support them.

This week was National Apprenticeship Week and I’m proud of the impact that the new scheme is having. In the last financial year 900 people started an apprenticeship across my constituency, an increase of 114% since 2010, many of whom I’ve met, excited and enthusiastic about the start of their journey into a trade.

The world has changed since apprenticeships began but the purpose of such schemes remains as valuable as ever.