



All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Professional Sales

Meeting, Tuesday 7 June 2022

Under discussion:

- 1) The ongoing campaign to recognise the vital importance of business-to-business (B2B) sales to the UK economy
- 2) The steps that government can take to support B2B sales education
- 3) Inspiring a new generation of B2B salespeople to join the profession

Attendees:

Mark Pawsey MP, chair, APPG for Professional Sales
Patrick Joiner, MD, Institute of Sales Professionals (ISP)
Guy Lloyd – ISP director, fellow, head of APPG secretariat
Patricia Seabright
Ken Le Meunier-FitzHugh
John Tunstall
Richard Brooks
Martin Hill
Chris Whyatt
Thomas Peach
Jamie Mackay

Discussion items:

1) The vital importance of B2B sales

Guy Lloyd – ISP director, fellow, and head of the APPG secretariat - opened the meeting with an overview of the vital importance of B2B sales saying approximately 30% of GDP is in exporting British goods and services. He said improving standards and qualifications across the sales sector would help to generate more international post-Brexit business.

Mark Pawsey MP, APPG chair, responded by saying his recent Westminster Hall debate had some success in raising awareness of the significance of B2B selling to the UK economy and said the APPG should now come up with “specific asks” for government to keep pushing forward the campaign to improve skills, knowledge and ethical behaviour. He said a government minister would legitimately say to them: “You're the guys who are active in this field, what would you like to see happen?”

Reflecting on the way B2B selling was viewed by MPs, Mark Pawsey said there was a misunderstanding in parliament that doing a trade deal was solving the problem, but it was only the first stage. “The next stage is to have the capable salespeople.” He said it was important “to reinforce that message, that the trade deal was great, but it's a start”. We need salespeople with ability to follow up on trade deals, he said.

2) The steps that government can take to support B2B sales education

Chris Whyatt of business performance consultants, Get To Great, has been speaking to sixth form students about the opportunities in business and selling since 2013 and said he was most interested “in inspiring youngsters at school to actually make a conscious

decision that going into sales is a good thing” and that needs to be backed up sales opportunities in further education.

Patricia Seabright, sales expert, speaker and author, from Archimedes Consulting – which helps organisations optimise their sales operations and processes – said requests from the APPG could include asking the government to support sales roadshows in schools for 15-16 year olds and extending sales apprenticeship and introducing a T-level in sales.

Patricia said the challenge at the moment was that there was not a “clear, end-to-end sales pathway and technical education” so teachers would question the educational value. She said a structured approach to sales education needed to be addressed and fixed.

Thomas Peach, currently doing a university degree in B2B sales, agreed a clear pathway was necessary. He commented that there was no GCSE or A-level in sales that could have prepared him and said “having a full progression from GCSE to degree level into Masters would certainly help to sell the job” because these days young people want qualifications as they embark on a career.

Mark Pawsey MP asked whether a higher sales qualification should be an A level or a T level. Patricia Seabright said a T level would probably be the best qualification because it allowed students to get a broad grounding in a subject in the first year, then specialise in year two. “If you're interested in anything commercial and practical, rather than academic, then the T-level really is good.” She felt that the best solution would be a T level in sales, marketing and procurement.

T levels were launched in September 2020. They are two-year courses designed to follow GCSEs and are equivalent to 3 A levels.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/t-levels-next-steps-for-providers#t-level-subjects>

Ken Le Meunier-FitzHugh, associate professor in sales and marketing, author and keynote speaker said the first challenge would be the need to educate teachers so they would be able to conduct a T level sales course, but recruiting them would be difficult.

A survey by Enterprise M3, part of the Local Enterprise Partnership network, has highlighted that the lack of selling skills is a continual problem for businesses. Jamie Mackay, Skills Strategy Manager at Enterprise M3 said: “Education providers talk about courses. Employers talk about jobs. When you start talking about that common language of skills, you can get both around the table.”

3) Inspiring a new generation of B2B salespeople to join the profession

Mark Pawsey said selling the idea of a career in sales to school students was difficult because the role was somewhat intangible, unlike, for instance, a career in manufacturing where you could take young people to show them how electric cars are made, like at Nissan in Sunderland but “you can't physically show something of that nature in a sales role.” Having a sales professional go to a school to enthuse a bunch of 13-year-olds is a more difficult assignment.

Thomas Peach who left school two years ago has gone back to speak to his sixth form about a career in sales along with offering a week's work experience, and said they had “received great engagement”. He said Stem subjects were promoted when he was at school to encourage young people to consider jobs in manufacturing, but he said: “You're not going to be able to build machines, unless there's someone on the other end to sell them to people.” So, if school students are asking for tangible examples of sales, “look around you because everything has been sold by someone to someone else”.

Chris Whyatt talked about the significance of Gatsby benchmarks which give schools, colleges, universities and employers a common language for career guidance to try to help young people make the best decisions about their future. Chris has had an early conversation with careers teachers about introducing a creative project about B2B sales including coursework and presentations that would be recognised by Gatsby.

Ken Le Meunier-FitzHugh said he would like to see the government putting pressure on research councils to start funding sales PhDs. Mark P asked what happens with sales training around the world and why is the UK lagging behind? Ken Le M-F replied: "Universities in the US fund PhDs in sales. There are plenty of bodies, a lot of private companies who will support research for sales in the US." He said businesses don't fund universities in the UK, "that's the reality, beyond specific areas" but, he commented, a lot of big companies, like Unilever and Procter & Gamble, do very good training programmes for their salespeople and the current chief executive of Unilever came from a marketing and sales background.

Mark Pawsey asked how other businesses in the UK, including SMEs, could adopt similar, good sales practices.

Patricia Seabright replied that there was a vast array of sales education available, but it was "a slightly variable wild west of private provision".

Jamie Mackay said Jaguar Land Rover was another good example. The company helps to develop skills in their supply chains by over-recruiting the number of apprentices they need, then training them up and releasing some of them to work in partner companies.

Mark Pawsey suggested that it may be possible for SMEs to devote the same proportion of their turnover to training sales teams. He said that it didn't need to be the same in absolute terms, but that the training budget could be proportional.