

# Marie Goldman



MP for Chelmsford

POINTS OF VIEW

## Visit opened my eyes to possibilities and opportunities of apprenticeships

**H**AVE two teenage children and neither of them are sure they want to go to university. They are both academically capable but they just aren't convinced that university is for them.

As a parent, I want to make sure they get all the qualifications they need to help them get in with life, but I'm fine with the idea that university isn't always the answer.

Indeed, for many young people, there are far better options. Last week I had the chance to talk with some apprentices about the route they had chosen - and it sounded excellent.

The apprentices I spoke to had joined Teledyne's apprenticeship scheme and are based at Teledyne's 24-acre site in Waterhouse Lane, Chelmsford.

Before I go any further, you may think that's a typo. 24 acres? Surely that can't be right. If you blink as you drive past the sign and entrance to Teledyne, you'd be forgiven for missing it.

But have a look at it on Google Earth - it's vast. In fact, it's one of Chelmsford's largest employers with about 850 people working there. And at any given time, 20 to 30 of them are apprentices.

Teledyne (or Teledyne e2v, to use its full title) does some very cool stuff.

It has two key sides to its business: space and RF (radio frequency) technologies.

Much of the space effort is dedicated to imaging equipment. Mention almost any space mission over the past several decades and the chances are that if it included imaging equipment, it was designed and built by Teledyne somewhere around the world, but quite possibly here in Chelmsford. That's amazing.

I personally find space missions fascinating, so to know that Chelmsford has played a part in so many missions of exploration is pretty exciting.

But when I visited Teledyne, another statistic stood out even more starkly: 95 per cent of the world's MRI scanners used in hospitals and health facilities around the globe contain components made at Teledyne. That's



Marie Goldman MP with four Teledyne apprentices at the company's base in Waterhouse Lane, Chelmsford

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mind-boggling and something to be very proud of as a Chelmsfordian. This is the RF side of Teledyne's business and it's easily the biggest focus of their work.

As I was shown around, I was surprised to learn that the components Teledyne design, produce and package are nearly all made by hand, often in so-called 'clean rooms' where the tiniest speck of dust or single eyelash left on a finished product can mean hundreds of thousands of pounds of work have to be ditched and started again.

The patience and attention to detail required to build such high quality components is second-to-none and I was incredibly impressed with the work I saw as I was given a tour of the sprawling facilities.

The work that is done at Teledyne is extremely varied, which is one of the reasons why the four appren-

tices I met while there were enjoying it so much. Teledyne takes on a handful of new apprentices every year.

They are lucky enough to join a programme that has been running for many, many years, which means it is well developed. Teledyne knows what works and how to give their apprentices the best possible experience and training.

Some of the young people I spoke to were engineers. Some were in business management.

They were all rotating through the many different departments at Teledyne, getting a taste of what each department does and learning the basics before moving on, usually after three months, to the next specialty area.

They told me they enjoyed the variety, especially getting to work alongside skilled employees, many of whom had been there for a long time.

The apprenticeship scheme also provides a mentor system and plenty of team-building activities to help everyone get to know each other and

feel supported. Some of the apprentices were signed up for three years, some much longer.

Some would even come out with a university degree at the end of it, but none of them would finish with any student debt as their courses are paid for and they are earning a salary while they are learning.

No wonder they all said how much they were enjoying their apprenticeship experience.

I was most impressed by their confidence, professionalism and enthusiasm as they talked me through what they were doing.

From an employer's point of view (and I say this from personal experience), the skills they are acquiring aren't just the practical ones about handling tools, they are the transferable skills that all employers are looking for in their workforce, including the ability to talk to other people (such as customers) knowledgeably and with confidence.

These apprentices ably demonstrated those skills, and yet one told me that when she first started, she wouldn't have said boo to a goose.

What a turnaround.

My visit really opened my eyes to the possibilities and opportunities of apprenticeships. We need more and more employers to feel supported in offering them, and we need to be promoting them to more young people as they look at options after school.

It's certainly something I'll be discussing with my teenagers. University isn't for everyone and neither should it be - we need a society that has a mix of skills.

I think apprenticeships are a key part of that and I'd be keen to see more invested into making them more readily available.

Thank you to Teledyne for showing me round and to the apprentices for sharing their experiences with me.

To find out more about apprenticeship opportunities, both for employers and would-be apprentices, visit the Essex Opportunities website here: [www.essexopportunities.co.uk](http://www.essexopportunities.co.uk).

Thanks for reading.

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