

The Debating Group



A Parliamentary forum for Media and Marketing Debate

Do the Government's 'Global Britain' ambitions currently far outstrip the abilities of the UK's talent pool?

“Is our talent keeping pace with the industry,” asked Pete Markey, CMO of Boots UK, “And are we investing enough in the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead?” He was proposing the motion *‘The Government’s ‘Global Britain’ ambitions currently far outstrip the abilities of the UK’s talent pool’* at the Debating Group’s debate held in person in Committee Room 10 at the House of Commons on 24th May 2022.

The debate was sponsored jointly by the Advertising Association and the Chartered Institute of Marketing and chaired by the Debating Group’s President, Tulip Siddiq, Member of Parliament for Hampstead & Kilburn and Shadow Economic Secretary to the Treasury.

Pete Markey highlighted the UK’s reputation for award-winning creative and award-winning marketers, pointing to homegrown campaigns for John Lewis, Guinness, and Boots. However, while UK talent exists and deserves praise, he emphasised that the debate was about whether we have *enough* talent to meet the demands and opportunities ahead. He felt not.

Markey drew attention to the fast pace of radical change in the industry, highlighting the rise of digital as a shopping channel of choice and the explosion of social media in our consumption of media. There were also amazing new technology platforms like Live Ramp and InfoSum that allow brands to connect their first party data with media owners through targeted creative and comms powered by digital and data. However, Markey argued the UK was unable to keep up with all these innovations and opportunities: we were not setting ourselves up to succeed as Global Britain by maintaining a healthy and well-developed talent pool.

Firstly, Markey argued, training and development was not keeping pace with the fast-moving nature of digital commerce and digital marketing. He cited a recent report from the CIM and Target internet that found that between 2020 and 2021 most digital marketing skills had stagnated or declined across almost all sectors, but especially in analytics and data, content marketing and social media. This trend was mirrored among senior marketers, with another recent report from Target and CIM showing that many marketing directors had less understanding of PPC, SEO, ecommerce, and data and analytics than junior executives, rendering them unable to effectively oversee digital marketing campaigns.

Markey went on to say that this issue extended to the crucial theme of sustainability, a recognised business priority for many companies. Despite sustainability’s importance, 40% of marketers admitted to not having the qualifications or relevant skills to market sustainability. Alarming, despite this lack of training a poll revealed that 76% of marketers had been involved in sustainability work and

45% felt under pressure to communicate sustainability credentials. For Markey this revealed a serious critical skills gap for our desire to be Global Britain.

Turning to the Government's Skills Revolution, Markey pointed out that none of its funding was designated to support industry-led training programmes from professional marketing associations like CIM. This was despite a CIM study finding that 71% of 16–24-year-olds felt they had missed out on training opportunities due to Covid with over a third of students feeling less confident in their abilities since the pandemic. The CIM's Impact of Marketing research found that more than three quarters of marketing employers reported a skills shortage which Markey saw as a sign of the UK falling behind in providing marketeers with 21st century skills to succeed and thrive long term.

Markey also felt not enough was being done in the industry on diversity, equality and inclusion. Despite the imperative to close the skills gap and push for greater diversity of thought, he felt that companies were not addressing a lack of socio-economic diversity within marketing. A survey from Marketing Week revealed that just 12.5% of marketeers came from a working-class background, while most (42.1%) identified as middle-class with a further 14% from the upper middle-class and 1.4% from the upper-class. The difference was even more pronounced for marketing directors and vice-presidents with 16.6% from upper middle-class or upper-class backgrounds versus 9.6% from middle-class and 6.7% from working-class backgrounds. Markey stated that to be a truly Global Britain all of Britain needed to be represented - the industry had more to do on diversity, equity and inclusion.

Markey suggested that this was partly due to the industry's failure to embrace marketing apprenticeships that had a painfully slow uptake. Markey noted that 21.2% of marketeers claimed their company did not see value in apprenticeships; a further 10.4% said it was too complicated to develop a programme; and 6.6% couldn't get buy-in at the highest level. Others felt they were too small, too busy, or too financially stretched to offer apprenticeships. Here Markey pointed to a lack of awareness that organisations with an annual payroll over £3m are taxed at 0.5% of their wage bill, money that could be used to fund apprenticeships. He also felt that uptake was hampered by the rigidity of the standards that acted more as barriers than enablers and put off many employers.

Finally, Markey suggested that the industry also faced a challenge in not being known, loved and appreciated enough. He referenced the CIM's 2019 Impact of Marketing report that revealed how 77% of the marketeers polled felt their colleagues were not aware of what they did, with a failure to appreciate the purpose of marketing and a lack of recognition of its value. From this, Markey argued that many businesses continued to perceive marketing as a cost rather than an investment, something that had to change for marketing to develop and grow.

In summary, Markey believed that "The Government's 'Global Britain' ambitions currently far outstrip the abilities of the UK's talent pool". But to end on a positive note, Markey stressed that with the right focus and investment all of this was fixable. He emphasised that the UK has an amazing and talented marketing industry, but it needed to be loved, valued, nurtured and invested in for the vision of Global Britain to succeed.

Opposing the motion, **Michael Moszynski, CEO of London Advertising**, opened with an alternate version of history in which he suggested that if the proposers of the motion had written Winston Churchill's celebrated speech he would have said: "We shall give up on the beaches, we shall throw in the towel on the landing grounds, we shall wave the white flag in the fields and the streets, we shall not fight in the hills; we shall have to surrender." The point was that Churchill believed in the UK's talent pool and by continuing the fight the UK became a beacon of light attracting other talent. He said that as we face another 'Gathering Storm' of global recession, rampant inflation, war in Europe and the climate crisis we can either cry in our soup or again have confidence in the abilities of the UK's talent pool to use its ingenuity to overcome these challenges.

Moszynski quoted the Government's vision for Global Britain that says: "The UK has always taken a leading role in responding to global challenges and in making the most of opportunities for our country." At the heart of this was creativity. He explained that creativity is the process whereby something new and valuable is formed and that this was something the UK excels at and has the widest and deepest pool of talent to draw from, citing a host of famous Brits from the world of arts, fashion, film and music, with countless other world-beaters from areas ranging from design and architecture to photography and publishing. For Moszynski these creatives reflected the richest of talent pools for British advertising to tap into which was why the UK was a world leader.

Here Moszynski affirmed that advertising was the UK's third largest export, having grown 300% in the last decade; on a per capita basis for value, the UK was top of the world league table. He felt that Britain did not just punch above its weight, it was the world heavyweight champion. This was not only due to our ability to write snappy ads promoting soap powder but also our ability to help bring new businesses to life – and that was why he believed we should have confidence in the UK's ability to help solve global problems.

Moszynski based his optimism on his daily experience of seeing the UK's creativity combine with finance and tech that together represented 40% of the UK's GDP – forming the engine of future growth. This was underpinned by the UK's ability to attract the world's best entrepreneurs, investors and creatives to boost our existing talent pool. To illustrate this, Moszynski gave an insight into his week as CEO of a global advertising agency. On Monday he met a Vietnamese company investing in British mobile phone technology and design to create the world's most secure mobile phone handsets, handcrafted in England.

On Tuesday he met with a leading entrepreneur and investor in Blockchain who had moved here from Singapore as he believed the UK offered the best mix of strong financial regulation, tech skills and creativity to build a range of new businesses that sit on top of his layer-one blockchain. One such enterprise was Token Traxx which was set up by leading talent from the UK music industry to enable bands to launch their own NFTs.

On Wednesday he introduced a Nigerian-born British inventor who has created a process for creating near 3D imagery from existing 2D film to the CEO of a Singapore-based company that owns the world's largest video content library. On Thursday he talked with the founder and CEO of a Canadian company that has patented a unique way of pumping carbon dioxide into disused oil wells and extracting pure, emission-free hydrogen. And on Friday he was with the Henley Business School who are looking for an advertising agency to help it attract the best global talent to study here in the UK.

This added up to five businesses in five days who had been attracted to the UK and were seeking to sell the benefits of our country globally - and this from just one small advertising agency so imagine what might be happening across the entire industry. Each of these businesses was very different but all were united in their understanding and appreciation of the benefits of the UK's creativity, diversity, and entrepreneurial energy that would help them compete more successfully. And if anyone was concerned that Brexit may have harmed the UK's ability to attract the best global talent, Markey pointed to the latest Brand Finance Soft Power Index that showed that the UK had grown its ranking from fourth to second in the world, increasing its score by more than any EU nation.

Finally, Moszynski reflected on advice he had been given when starting his business, that too many companies do not fulfill their potential because they are not ambitious enough. His closing contention was not, therefore, that "The Government's ambitions for 'Global Britain' far outstrip our talent pool," but that given the array of talent we have, the Government's ambitions did not go far enough!

Seconding the motion **Kate Burnett, Talent General Manager at DMA**, agreed that the UK had marketing talent but that the needs of marketers were not being addressed. Burnett believed that talent problems existed before 2020, but that the pandemic exacerbated these with a shortage of talent being one of the greatest challenges.

She explained that large numbers of small and medium sized businesses transitioned to communicating and selling via digital channels and they now needed support in managing and growing these customer interactions. She felt that the post-pandemic UK will need business owners to have more marketing knowledge to help businesses recover and thrive - more marketing and marketeers were needed. To successfully develop the necessary talent pipeline, she stressed the need for a much closer partnership between business, government and education: people who live and breathe their subject should be teaching those upskilling, reskilling and entering the industry.

Turning to diversity, equality and inclusion, Burnett stressed that good marketing comes from empathising with and understanding the audience and that to do this the industry needed representation from all groups in society. However, the Advertising Associations All In survey had shown this to be lacking. She felt that the long-term plan needed to be more open minded on how the industry recruited new talent, for example tapping into people on the neurodiverse spectrum that could set the industry on fire with their creative thinking and ability to see things differently.

This led to Burnett seeing apprenticeships as the biggest opportunity for increasing and diversifying the marketing talent pool – putting the industry within reach of many more talented young people. She felt apprenticeship should sit proudly alongside long-term talent plans with graduate and reskilling programmes as they offered a better way to train for some industry roles. Here Burnett referenced JGA Apprenticeships on LI Employers, noting also that if you treat apprentices well, they will stick around making them an even better investment. For Burnett it was time to move apprenticeships off the ‘too difficult pile’ and be seen as a job with training that is paid for by the Apprenticeship Levy and supported by a good training provider.

Indeed, Burnett passionately ‘banged the drum’ for employing more young people in marketing, arguing that we can’t hope to achieve Global Britain if we can’t attract the next generation of talent. She emphasised that the UK had many bright young people who were running their side hustles alongside their education, and that to increase our workforce we should snap them up: wasting time worrying about the challenges of training new marketeers meant the industry was missing out on big opportunities. Burnett painted the picture of teenagers losing two years in lockdown, with schools and colleges putting careers education on the backburner as they focus on exam teaching with the result that school leavers didn’t know what they didn’t know because they had missed out on work interactions and part-time jobs. This meant that school leavers were not equipped to take advantage of marketing’s opportunities – they didn’t realise that they can make a career out of being social-media savvy. While the Careers and Enterprise Company and organisations like Career Ready are trying hard to plug this gap, Burnett felt that more support was needed from the Department of Education for more marketeers to feed into the curriculum.

To conclude, Burnett noted that most marketing jobs were well-paid with strong career prospects, so from the Government’s perspective it was a good investment. Likening marketing training to the golden buzzer of Britain’s Got Talent, she argued that directing more people into well paid jobs that grow businesses sustainably and take advantage of technology - this is what would assist the achievement of Global Britain.

Seconding for the opposition, **Aisling Conlon, International Trade Director at the Advertising Association**, countered that by many global measures, the UK was one of the top-performing advertising sectors. At the heart of this success were the businesses and the people working in our industry right across the country.

She drew attention to the UK’s thriving start-up scene; a vibrant investment community; cloud-first

government policy; a great pool of UK and global talent; and an enduring spirit of innovation. For Conlon, the UK advertising and digital economy were in a better position to lead the digital revolution than any other nation. She presented three points to prove this.

Firstly, the Advertising Association's UK Advertising Export Report revealed international trade in UK advertising and market research services was worth £11.7bn in 2020 and sustained the same level as the pre-pandemic conditions of 2019. The data showed advertising and market research services in third place, behind insurance and pension services and computer services. The US was the largest recipient of UK exports, receiving £1.2 billion worth of our services, followed by Spain then Germany.

The pandemic, Conlon continued, had presented the industry with opportunities to innovate. She explained that we always responded to the demands created by growth, so the UK held its position in 2021 as the largest advertising market in Europe and is now the third largest in the world, behind the USA and China. Three in every four pounds spent on UK advertising today is invested in one of a wide range of online formats – only China had an equivalent online share.

Despite the challenges of the global lockdown faced by exporters in the UK advertising industry, she showed that balance of payments remained steady and brought the UK a healthy £5bn trade surplus - the largest in advertising services across Europe. For Conlon, these figures did not tell a story of a stifled industry but a story of global success, creativity and opportunity.

Secondly, Conlon described the UK as a magnet for international talent. She cited a 2019 survey by the Advertising Association in which eight out of ten businesses said they employed non-British nationals – nine out of ten for businesses in London. She believed these figures would increase as the pandemic had disrupted workplaces so that employees were no longer expected to be in the UK office five days a week. This opened up a world of opportunities for UK businesses.

Finally, Conlon noted that UK advertising valued continuous professional development and has a tradition of developing qualifications and training to encourage knowledge being shared and put into practice. For example, for IPA members it was compulsory for all employees to complete 24 hours of learning a year; it sold its qualifications in markets such as the USA, Australia, Singapore and soon in China. With its pool of diverse skills, global talent and world-class creative capabilities, Conlon argued that the UK advertising market was not just a gateway to Britain, it was a gateway to everywhere. Here, she cited the evidence of global brand Pandora announcing that it was moving to London as part of a strategic move to attract talent in the marketing, digital and technology space, saying that "London was identified as a key location based on the number of key-skilled workers that are based in the city."

In summary, Conlon stated that we have the data that shows how we excel, the international talent we attract, and the culture we create. She saw the debate as a timely reminder of how we excel as an industry – by being open, global and fearless in the face of global competition. The need for the government to be ambitious, champion the sector and take further action towards cementing the UK as the best place for brands to start and grow, was greater than ever.

The chair thanked the speakers and opened the debate to contributions from the floor.

Discussion from the Floor

Anthony Gould from RTR Worldwide, felt that today's pessimism was caused by the pandemic and its disruption of education and training. He reflected on his own post-war experience and how having been told that 'there was no such thing as marketing' his peers set out to change that. He felt today's youngsters would make similar changes, being an incredible pool of globally recognised talent. He

opposed the motion.

Jonathan Fingerhut from Strategic Marketing for Schools emphasised the shameful state of funding for apprenticeships in the UK and stressed that until these were sorted out the bigger picture would not work.

An attending student suggested that apprenticeships were not as bad as made out and that big corporations had very successful schemes that made her optimistic about the valuable role of apprenticeships over the next few years. However, she disagreed that her generation did not understand how social media could be used in marketing while acknowledging that none of her friends were considering marketing apprenticeships.

A contributor raised the question of how diversity can be implemented meaningfully so that people's special skills were utilised, and they didn't just feel like a tick on the diversity list.

A speaker from Microsoft noted how her company had taken on around 30,000 apprentices and they had been some of the best people ever hired. She felt that to make apprenticeships work business needed to work more closely and fully with education. Turning to diversity and inclusion, she was pleased to see the breadth of diversity being considered within marketing employment but called for more consideration of diversity with regards to actual products, their pricing, and advertising to ensure it reaches and touches a more diverse customer base.

Another contributor felt that valuing marketing should start earlier in the education system and that learning should put more emphasis and recognition on creativity to encourage children to aspire to careers in the creative industry. This was echoed by other speakers (including a lawyer) and the idea was mooted that apprenticeships needed an ad campaign. Yet another speaker challenged the view arguing that her generation didn't consider marketing as being a creative career, and this reinforced the call for raising awareness of the value of marketing among the younger generation.

The Chief Executive of the Professional Publishers Association explained that what they were seeing was a talent gap, especially in digital marketing, and that many of their members were moving from being sales-led to marketing-led organisations. While there may not be a lack of talent in the UK, it was not distributed fairly.

Will Nicholson from TVN, accompanied by a peel of thunder, brought up Brexit's impact on attracting foreign talent to the UK, echoed by another speaker who noted that many non-British nationals working in the UK industry were still based abroad. This raised the question of whether more could be done to tap into homegrown talent without losing the benefits of the cultural exchange.

A representative of the Advertising Association opposed the motion believing that Britain has plenty of great talent despite some skill gaps. She pointed to many schemes and organisations working extremely hard to retain, upskill and develop talent in the industry.

Mathew Faulkner, Head of Marketing for Canon Europe's Print Division, noted that you had to have ambition because if you don't aim for the top, you won't get there. More could be done to streamline and inspire talent, and more needed to be done to build UK manufacturing so that UK marketers had more to do in building a strong UK economy.

A final contributor questioned the idea that online working had damaged marketing's creativity and the UK's talent pool. She also felt that the challenges of education through lockdown hadn't damaged the talent pool but showed the resilience and promise of the younger generation coming through.

Summing Up

Summing up for the opposers, **Michael Moszynski** acknowledged that while UK marketing faced challenges, the motion was too extreme and pessimistic in saying "far outstripped." Answering the

comments on Brexit, he cited a survey by Brand Finance that showed that despite Brexit and the pandemic the UK's position had overtaken Germany to become Number Two in the world – increasing more than any other EU country. He referenced one of his overseas clients who declared that they were investing specifically in Britain because of its amazing talent pool – people with the skills to support the businesses of the future. He noted that our existing talent is attracting new talent, including from overseas. This led Moszynski to be positive about the future. He felt people should take responsibility for themselves and embrace the idea that they can do anything they want – or at least try. He finished with some words from the CMO of a prominent UK company who described his marketing team as a centre of excellence and a magnet for new talent that bring with them a sense of energy. And that marketing director was Pete Markey.

Summing up for the proposition, **Pete Markey** described how in the Lego Movie they repeatedly sing the song 'Everything is Awesome' to convince themselves that they are OK. He felt this was what he had heard today. He agreed that marketing is a magnet – it's powerful and amazing. But believed that if we just celebrate the status quo, then it's just 'Everything is Awesome.' He noted how the comments from the floor had attested to the very real skills gap and problems in the industry. He said the opposition's passionate cry to "believe and be optimistic" was not enough. More had to be done to radically improve the industry and make it even better for future generations. He argued that training and development had not kept up with the huge changes of the last 30 years that had seen the emergence of digital and the need for new skill sets that were now in short supply. He noted the number of trade bodies pleading for help and the finance that would enable them to make a real difference. Nor was enough being done for diversity, equality and inclusion which was also apparent within the failure to embrace apprenticeships. He believed that marketing was still not loved enough or respected for the value it brings, stressing that while it was a great industry it would lag behind and not fulfil the global ambition of the motion without serious change.

Result

The motion was carried.

Next Debate

The next debate will take place at the House of Commons on 25th October 2022, sponsored by the Data & Marketing Association. Details from the Debating Group Secretary, Doreen Blythe e-mail: doreen.blythe22@btinternet.com