Rising Star recognised for driving future-focused strategies

Amy Reynolds* recently won the Rising Star Apprentice Award at the Aluminium Federation (ALFED) Business Briefing and Annual Dinner. She discusses the importance of continuous learning, embracing new challenges, and strategic business planning.



From left to right: Emma Swann, Manager Director of Boal, with Amy Reynolds, HR Manager, at the ALFED Business Briefing and Annual Dinner.

On how it felt to win the award, Reynolds said: "Fantastic! It was such a strong group of finalists that I didn't think there was a chance of winning, so when my name was called, it was a lovely surprise. I still can't quite believe that I won."

Having started her career as an HR Apprentice 15 years ago, Reynolds recently returned to education to complete her Level 7 Senior People Professional Degree Apprenticeship at the University of Exeter, England, UK.

She said: "Although I was already working as an HR Manager at Boal Extrusion, I wanted to build on my experience with a formal Level 7 qualification.

"I had such a positive experience with my first apprenticeship that, when I discovered I could take this route again, I jumped at the chance."

The ALFED judges highlighted how Reynolds had applied her learning to address skills shortages, succession planning, and the development of future talent in the aluminium industry.

Judge George Bain, owner of George Bain Consulting, presented the Rising Star Apprentice Award. He said: "Amy has worked with her business to develop career pathways, created training and succession plans, and strengthened relationships with colleagues.

"She has also helped re-design her organisation's approach to apprenticeships, including structured onboarding, mentoring, and clear development pathways.

"More importantly, she has helped develop conversations from simply 'How do we fill today's vacancy?' to asking 'What capability will our business need in the future and how do we start developing it today?' That is a question every organisation in our industry needs to consider."

Career

Reynolds first discovered the aluminium industry when she was searching for a new role. Having always enjoyed working

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During National Manufacturing Day 2026, Boal hosted students from Loughborough College at its UK facility. Amy Reynolds (far right) spoke to them on careers in manufacturing.

in the HR departments of manufacturing companies, such as JELD-WEN and Oadby Plastics, the HR Manager vacancy at Boal caught her attention.

"I researched the company and began learning more about aluminium and the people working within the industry," she said. "Boal's achievements and values aligned closely with my own, and I haven't once second-guessed my decision to join aluminium."

Although she does not have any family working directly within the industry, her father, Tony Pollard, owns engineering company Mayday Maintenance, which serves the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector: "He works predominantly with steel, but also uses aluminium, so there is a small family connection."

On her responsibilities as HR Manager, Reynolds said no two days are the same, although a typical day could involve supporting managers with queries, managing absence, holding wellbeing meetings, or administering an HR system.

"People are at the heart of my role, and the decisions I make can have a real impact on them, so it's important to me that I take the time to get things right."

She particularly enjoys focusing on major projects, such as developing Boal's apprenticeship scheme and implementing its Human Resources Information System (HRIS) alongside Karen Olds, HR & Payroll Adviser at Boal.

Reynolds first had to learn the system inside out, including its configuration and background setup, before preparing employee information, developing internal processes, and delivering training to support the rollout across the business.

"As this was BOAL's first HR system, the rollout was as much about supporting people through the change as it was about the technology.

"I delivered training internally to help employees and managers understand how to use it and feel confident with the new processes.

"Karen and I also worked together on implementing a new Payroll system, and we are now looking at establishing a new Learning Management System."

Reynolds continued that it could be challenging to balance these projects alongside the day-to-day demands of HR, due to the unpredictability of people matters, but remaining flexible and making time for projects allowed her to move them forward.

She added that her manager, Emma Swann, Managing Director at Boal, had also been incredibly supportive.

In addition, although she admitted it might sound like a cliché, she said becoming a mother had been a big influence on her career.

"Since having my son, I have pushed myself outside my comfort zone and taken opportunities that I might previously have talked myself out of.

"I want to show him that you can achieve what you set out to do through hard work and determination, and that learning doesn't have to stop when you leave school.

"There can be an assumption that becoming a mum means your career ambitions take a back seat. For me, it gave me an even greater sense of purpose and determination to achieve my goals.

"Of course, he's also got sporting ambitions of his own that I need to help support, so that gives me another reason to keep progressing!"

Career highlights

Other than winning the award, Reynold's said completing her master's degree as part of the Level 7 Apprenticeship was the proudest achievement of her career.

"I remember feeling overwhelmed during those first two days of induction at university, and there were times along the way when I doubted myself. Overcoming those doubts makes the sense of achievement even greater.

"Having left college early to pursue an apprenticeship, I never thought I would have the opportunity to go to university, which makes this really special. My graduation is on December 11, and I think walking across that stage will be my proudest moment yet."

While balancing the apprenticeship with work and family life could sometimes feel like a juggling act, setting clear boundaries and time for studying helped Reynolds stay on track and avoid unnecessary pressure.

"There were inevitably competing demands, so being organised but realistic about what I could achieve was important. Applying my learning to projects at Boal also helped, because my studies became part of the work I was doing rather than something entirely separate."

She said the programme allowed her to be more strategic in her approach and consider not just where Boal was now, but where it needed to be in the future. This led her to review Boal's workforce profile, identify critical roles, and detect where future skills gaps could arise.

She worked closely with Boal managers to understand their teams and agree practical actions. This included evolving its apprenticeship scheme and introducing

leadership growth opportunities, helping the company move beyond filling immediate vacancies to developing its people and building future capabilities.

She concluded: "I didn't just want to gain a qualification; I wanted what I learnt to make a difference to the work I do."

Next steps

Looking ahead, Reynolds is keen to expand her skills by completing a 'Train the Trainer' course as well as one on mediation. Building on her existing experience as an HR Manager, she believes these qualifications will further strengthen her ability to develop others and support people through challenging situations.

She is also working towards a Fellowship with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

Alongside her own development, she wants to build on the work already underway at Boal by continuing to identify emerging skills gaps and create opportunities for people to learn, develop, and progress.



Boal's manufacturing facility in Shepshed, England, UK.

On what advice she would give to those looking to join the aluminium industry, she said: "Come to Boal! On a more serious note, I would say keep an open mind and don't assume you need a technical background to have a career in aluminium. I joined with HR experience rather than industry knowledge, and there is so much you can learn along the way.

"Be curious, ask questions, and take opportunities to develop. There are so many different roles within the industry, so think about what you could bring and don't be afraid to take that first step."