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Traineeships: First Year Process  
Evaluation

Executive Summary

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RESEARCH

# Executive Summary

## Background and methodology

This executive summary presents the topline findings of the Traineeship Process Evaluation conducted in 2014. The evaluation explored the views and experiences of:

- 1,590 trainees who commenced a traineeship programme between August 2013 and July 2014.
- 200 providers delivering the traineeship programme between August 2013 and July 2014.
- 218 employers participating in the traineeship programme between August 2013 and July 2014.

The aim of the research is to understand learner, provider and employer view points on how the implementation of traineeships is working, risks to successful implementation and barriers to delivery.

Fieldwork took place between September and November 2014.

## Key characteristics

Before they started their traineeship, most **trainees** were either studying (39%) or looking for work (36%), while 9% said they were working (4% full-time, 5% part-time) and 4% were in an unpaid job or volunteering. Other trainees said they were 'doing something else' (7%) or 'not doing anything' (6%). These findings differ by age group, with 16-18 year olds more likely to have been in full-time education prior to the traineeship (43% compared with 18% of those aged 19+), and less likely to have been looking for work (23% compared with 50%). It is important to note that the age of trainees, quoted throughout the summary, reflects trainees' age at the time of the survey. This may not therefore be the same age they joined the programme. Around two in five trainees (42%) said they had previous work experience before starting their traineeship, including 32% who had done paid full-time or part-time work.

Around half of the trainees in the sample (48%) said that they were qualified to Level 2 before the traineeship, and 15% said they were qualified to Level 3 or above. One in four (25%) said they were qualified to Level 1 and 5% to Entry Level. Previous studies exploring qualification levels of respondents have found that qualification levels can be overstated in an interview situation because of issues with recall during the interview and in particular the complexity of identifying which qualifications constitute a full Level 2 or 3. This figure may also include trainees who hold a level 2 qualification but not a maths and/or an English GCSE. Eligibility guidelines for those aged over 18 restrict the

programme to those with less than a full Level 2 qualification<sup>1</sup>, but over half of trainees in this age group (63%) said they had a full Level 2 or higher.

**Providers** were asked about the number of learners they work with in total, across all training provision, to help gauge their size. There is a broad range: the number of learners ranged from under 100 (11% of providers) to 5,000 or more (12%).

Since the programme started in August 2013, providers had worked with an average of 32 trainees. This ranged from fewer than 10 (27%) to 50 or more (19%). Two in five providers (40%) said that the number of trainees that had started with them was in line with their expectations. However, a greater proportion (53%) said that they were expecting more trainees, while just 5% were expecting a smaller number.

Most providers said that they offered, or planned to offer, traineeship provision specifically for particular groups, most commonly young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) (84%) or benefit claimants (81%), as well as young people with learning disabilities (64%), young people with Special Education Needs (SEN) (64%) and Black and minority ethnic young people (62%).

The survey included **employers** that had been involved in providing traineeships at some point since the start of the programme. In 35% of cases, the employer offered at least one of the training elements in addition to work experience, while the remainder offered the work experience element only.

Many of the **employers** that offered work experience placements for traineeships were small<sup>2</sup>: Seven in ten (70%) had fewer than 25 employees at the workplace, and one in six workplaces had fewer than 5 employees. The largest employers - with 50 or more employees on-site - made up 17% of the sample of employers offering traineeships. Overall, the size profile of employers offering traineeships is very similar to the profile of employers offering apprenticeships.

In terms of industry sector, a large proportion of employers were in health and social work activities (29%, including 16% specifically in children's day-care activities), while 15% were in education. According to **trainees**, the actual type of work they did was most commonly in retail (8%), nursery (7%) or other childcare (5%), care home provision or caring (4%), school-age education (3%), car manufacturing (3%) and gym or fitness instruction (3%). One in three **employers** (33%) had hosted one trainee since the start of the programme, while at the other extreme one in six employers (17%) said that 10 or more trainees had started a placement with them since the start of the programme. The average number of trainees per employer was 8, ranging from 13 on average among employers with 25 or more staff on site, compared with an average of 6 among employers with fewer

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<sup>1</sup> This was part of the eligibility requirements at the time of the survey. They were revised in January 2015.

<sup>2</sup> As employer records are not always returned until the end of the academic year the sample may not reflect the entire employer population involved in delivering traineeships between August 2013 and July 2014.

than 25 staff. The average number was also higher among employers who provided training elements as well as work experience (17 compared with an average of 4 trainees among employers who only offered the work experience element).

In the majority of cases (67%), employers said that the number of trainees that had started a placement with them was in line with their expectations. However, 20% said they had expected more trainees, while 6% had not expected as many.

## Referral process

Almost one in three **trainees** (31%) said that they applied directly for a traineeship, without any help. The three main referral routes were through a college or learning provider (25%), Jobcentre Plus (18%) or a careers advisor, Next Step or Connexions service (18%).

Trainees first heard about traineeships through a school, college or learning provider (23%), friends or family (17%), Jobcentre Plus (16%) or a Careers Advisor, Next Step or Connexions Service (12%). Some respondents used online sources, such as the apprenticeship website (8%) or another website (8%). An additional 1% said they found out about the scheme through vacancies on the apprenticeships vacancy system.

Looking in more detail at trainees who said they applied directly, these respondents were most likely to have found out about the scheme either from friends or family (30%) or the Internet: 15% from the apprenticeships website and a further 1% from vacancies on the apprenticeships vacancy system, and 16% from other websites.

Around one in four **providers** (24%) said that none of their trainees had applied directly, while at the other extreme 21% said that all of their trainees had applied directly (the remainder were somewhere in between). Referrals to providers were most commonly from Jobcentre Plus (59% had received referrals from this source) or local government services (47%).

Just under half of all providers (47%) said that they had accepted all of the trainees that had applied or had been referred to them, while 51% said that they had rejected some potential trainees. Among those who had rejected a trainee, rejections were most commonly on the basis of candidate's commitment to or enthusiasm about the traineeship (60%), concerns about their ability to cope with the work experience element (46%) and the perceived likelihood of the candidate being ready for employment or an apprenticeship within 6 months (45%). Providers who said they had rejected some candidates were then asked if they had rejected young people aged 19 or over already qualified to level 2 (66% had) as well as those aged 16-18 and qualified to level 3 (48% had).

The majority of **employers** said that trainees were always referred to them by colleges or training providers (62%). However, 25% of employers said trainees sometimes came to them directly, while 10% said that trainees always came directly. Among employers who also offered at least one of the training elements in addition to work experience, 45% said that trainees always or sometimes came to them directly, compared with 29% of those who offered work experience only.

Around a third of all employers (32%) said that they had expected more referrals than they had actually received, while 6% had expected fewer referrals. The majority (55%) said that the number of referrals matched their expectations.

When asked about the **minimum education level of trainees** who were referred, the majority of employers said this was at level one or below (68%). Around one in four employers (26%) said that GCSEs (level unspecified) were the minimum education level held by referrals and 7% said the minimum education level held was level 2 or above (excluding GCSEs). This is different to the figures reported by trainees themselves as they are on an individual level, rather than employer/provider responses which are averages across all trainees.

## Motivations, information, guidance and advice

When asked what benefits they thought they would gain from the traineeship, **trainees** were most likely to mention good work experience (41%), gaining a qualification (24%) and increasing their chances of getting paid work (15%).

In terms of the different elements of the traineeship, the work experience placement was most frequently seen as the most important in helping trainees to decide to apply (51%), followed by the work preparation training (30%) and English and maths teaching (15%).

The majority of trainees (71%) said that, they had discussed the content of the traineeship with the college or training provider before they started. 52% said their views had been taken into account a great deal, and a further 29% said their views were taken into account 'a little'.

**Providers** are most likely to have received guidance or advice about traineeships from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) website (95%), while 62% said they had contacted the SFA for additional guidance or advice, and 46% had contacted the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS).

The SFA website was also the most common source of guidance or advice for **employers** (38%), while 29% of employers said they had contacted providers for guidance or advice.

The majority of **providers and employers** said that the guidance or advice they received was clear. This applies to the SFA website (83% of providers and 90% of employers said this was very or fairly clear), as well as those who contacted the SFA (82% and 83% respectively found this very or fairly clear) or the NAS (77% and 83% respectively).

## Structure and content

Traineeships are intended to last for a maximum of 6 months. However, as could be expected in a programme which is designed to be tailored, there is considerable variation in length. One in six **trainees** (16%) said that it lasted (or was supposed to last) more than 6 months, while the average duration was 18 weeks. This is however likely to be due to recall issues as a re-contact exercise with a small number of trainees revealed that some had difficulty identifying the length of their traineeship. For example, 5 out of the 7 trainees

re-contacted revealed their traineeship lasted six months, having previously reported the traineeship lasted more than six months. Three of these five trainees reported that their English and maths training lasted beyond the six month traineeship, which is permitted within the delivery guidelines for traineeships, so this may be the case for a number of trainees reporting extended stays. The figures given by **providers** were more in line with expectations: providers mostly said that traineeships normally lasted between 6 and 12 weeks (32%) or between 13 and 26 weeks (65%). Their average reported duration was 17 weeks.

The provider figures are likely to be more reliable than the trainee figures (at least in relation to average durations), because providers deal with a large number of traineeships on an on-going basis. However, the trainee figures reflect individual experiences, and suggest that some trainees may actually have a shorter or longer duration than is intended.

As might be expected, work experience elements were shorter when they were delivered as discrete blocks, rather than for the duration of the whole traineeship. Where they were delivered in discrete blocks, 16% of providers said that they lasted less than 6 weeks and 59% said they lasted (on average) between 6 and 12 weeks. By contrast, where work experience elements ran for the duration of the whole traineeship, most providers said that they lasted between 13 and 26 weeks (66%).

The other main elements of the traineeship are English and maths training and work preparation training. These elements often run for the duration of the whole traineeship (in 77% and 79% of cases respectively according to trainees), and tend to involve a small number of hours per week.

## Programme delivery

The vast majority of **providers** said that they were working in partnership with local employers (87%), while more than half (54%) said they were working with voluntary and community organisations to deliver elements of traineeships, and 45% were working in partnership with local government services. Around one in four (24%) were working with other training providers.

Around half of providers (51%) said that they had fully tailored the design of the traineeship programme to individual trainees, while 41% said they had tailored the programme 'to a certain extent'. Just 8% said that they offered a single package.

The majority of **employers** said they had used mainly existing provision for their traineeships (67%), while 24% said they had developed mainly new provision specifically for traineeships. Employers were more likely to say they had developed new provision (either mainly or equally with existing provision) if they had delivered the training elements, in addition to the work experience element (47% of those who had delivered at least one training element, compared with 20% of those who had only delivered work experience).

The majority of **trainees** (77%) said they were offered additional support as part of their traineeship, involving either careers' guidance (60%), mentoring (55%) or support outside their normal working or teaching hours (49%).

Among **trainees** who completed their time on the traineeship, 39% said that they received a formal reference from the organisation that provided the work experience placement. More than half (63%) said they received feedback from the employer at the end of their traineeship. **Employers** were more likely than trainees to say that these things had been provided: 91% said that they offered trainees written references at the end of the traineeship, and 86% said they offered an exit interview/performance review. This difference may result from employers giving an aggregated response based on all the trainees that had, whereas trainees are reporting on their individual experiences.

## Completing the traineeship

Due to the wide range of dates which trainees commenced their traineeship (Aug 2013 to Jul 2014), the date of completion will also vary across a wide time period. At the time of the survey, the majority of **trainees** in the sample (59%) had completed their traineeship, while 30% left early and 11% were still on the traineeship.

Where trainees left the traineeship early, the reasons can broadly be divided into stopping the traineeship when they found a job (9% of all trainees); withdrawing from the traineeship early e.g. for health or personal reasons, or because they didn't like it (15% of all trainees) and the traineeship being terminated early (6% of all trainees). Elements mentioned by trainees when they said they did not like the traineeship included the work experience placement, English and maths training, the work preparation training, travelling to and from the placement, and the hours they worked.

## Perceptions of traineeship programme

**Trainees** were generally very positive about their time on the traineeship. Four in five (79%) were satisfied overall, and a similar proportion were satisfied with the individual elements (between 73% and 81% were satisfied). Trainees were also likely to say that the traineeship at least matched their expectations (82%), with 54% saying it exceeded their expectations. Attitudes were generally less positive among trainees who did not complete their traineeship.

Views were also positive about the work experience element. At least 80% of trainees were satisfied with different aspects of their work experience.

The majority of trainees thought that the time spent on the training elements was about right and that the level of the training was about right for them. However, 25% thought that the English and maths training was too easy, and 21% said the same about the work preparation training. Providers reported offering a range of English and maths provision, from Entry Level 1 to GCSE/ above Level 2 with the qualitative interviews finding that providers used initial assessment tools to determine the appropriate level of study for trainees.

Most employers had a positive impression of the trainees they had worked with. A quarter of **employers** said that the quality of trainees they received was better than they had expected, while a further 54% said they were in line with expectations; one in six (17%) said they were worse than expected.

The main improvements to the programme that were suggested by **providers and employers** were to offer a financial incentive to participating trainees, and to improve the promotion or advertising of the programme.

## Early outcomes and perceived impact

The **trainees** in the sample had participated in the programme over a timescale dating back to 2013 and others were still on the traineeship at the time of fieldwork. At the time of the survey, half (50%) of the trainees who had left or completed the traineeship were either on an apprenticeship (22%) or in work (28%). A further 17% were in training or education. These activities can be said to represent 'positive' outcomes, and when combined together, they account for two-thirds (67%) of those who had left or completed a traineeship. The remainder were either looking for work (26%) or doing something else (7%).

Of those who were in work or on an apprenticeship, 42% were still with the same organisation where they did their work experience placement, 18% elsewhere in the same industry and 39% in another organisation.

Trainees gave positive feedback on the impact the traineeship had made on their jobsearch activities. Four in five trainees (80%) said that the support they received during the work preparation training had helped to improve their jobsearch. Among trainees who had made applications for a job or an apprenticeship, either during or since the traineeship, 59% said that they were sending out more job applications per week than before the traineeship, and 58% said that they had applied for jobs that they had never considered applying for previously, as a result of attending the traineeship.

Trainees felt they had gained a number of positive benefits from their time on the traineeship: 57% said that the experience they had gained had greatly improved their chances of getting paid work. In addition, trainees felt that the traineeship had made a positive impact on their confidence and readiness for work. For example, 60% felt that it had motivated them a lot to look for work.

Nearly all **providers** (98%) said that they offered trainees an interview at the end of the traineeship. Usually, interviews were for a real position (93%), while 5% offered only a mock or practice interview. Similarly, the majority of **employers** (84%) said that they offered trainees an interview at the end of the traineeship, and most employers offered an interview for a real position (75%) rather than just a mock or practice interview (9%).

**Employers and providers** had very positive views about the impact of traineeships. Almost all respondents (98% of providers and 97% of employers) agreed that traineeships allow young people to develop new skills that will help them find paid jobs and apprenticeships, while almost as many (84% of providers and 94% of employers) agreed that traineeships are an effective way of increasing young people's chances of finding paid jobs and apprenticeships.



## Qualitative case study findings

The specific aim of the qualitative case studies in Year 1 was to conduct a process evaluation to build up an in-depth picture of initial implementation and delivery of traineeships. We used a case study approach to provide a holistic and comprehensive overview of the programme's delivery. We undertook six case studies (March – September 2014) across England to create a full picture of the contexts of provision. Interviews were undertaken with: 12 providers; 20 trainees; 11 employers; and, 12 local referral agencies (including six interviews with local JCP staff).

Seven interviews were also conducted with providers who were eligible to offer the programme but decided not to do so. The interviews explore the reasons why eligible providers do not intend to deliver provision.

Overall the traineeships are perceived as working well by providers, employers, referral agencies and trainees.

**Trainees** valued the opportunity to experience a high quality placement that gave them experience and skills to gain an apprenticeship or employment.

*"Well I will have experience more than anything, so when I go for a job interview and they ask me what experience I have I can say yes I have done this. I had a traineeship."* (Damien<sup>3</sup>, Hospitality/Catering/Healthcare/Retail)

Trainees most valued work preparation and English and maths lessons when they were taught via engaging and diverse activities, which were relevant to the work place and their chosen sector of interest. However, there were barriers to learning when delivered via mixed ability teaching, which led to differences in trainees' levels of competence, skills and engagement within classes.

It was also important for trainees that they were matched to a placement that aligned with their interests and that there was flexibility to change the placement when the trainee and the employer were not perceived as a good match.

Typically, trainees who had completed their work placements went through exit interviews and moved on to apprenticeships and employment. Trainees at the earlier stages of the programme raised concerns about the clarity of communication about the next steps into apprenticeships, and in some cases had expectations of a guaranteed apprenticeship.

*"Obviously the weeks have gone by and I've got offered an apprenticeship. I was so happy, thank you so much. It was life-changing".* (Sophia, Hairdressing)

**Providers** had experienced initial barriers to set up and had been unclear about how to initially deliver the programme. It was felt that more external guidance would have been beneficial to support providers who were first to deliver the programme. Providers wanted

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<sup>3</sup> We have used pseudonyms to maintain participants' anonymity.

further guidance on key aspects of setup and delivery, such as the length and timing of work placements, accreditation and qualification options, and how could they provide evidence of trainee learning in the work placement.

Self-referral was the main pathway into traineeships for providers within the case studies. Providers reported low numbers of referrals via external agencies. Other referrals were through existing links via referral agencies, apprenticeship programmes and wider engagement and marketing activities. There were challenges in building awareness and relationships with **referral agencies**, which led to delayed starts to delivery and lower numbers of young people enrolling on the programme than providers initially expected.

Delivery of the programme was generally regarded as working well with structured and tailored models implemented for each element of the programme - English and maths, work preparation and work placement.

*“If someone came in with GCSE’s at Grade C and was not confident about their skills, we will tailor their course and then look at upskilling, so we have got that there for them as well”. (Provider, Horticultural/Retail)*

Areas for key learning were highlighted around ensuring greater opportunities to build on links with employer and further integrate each element of the programme into the work context.

Providers reported four key elements to providing a good quality placement:

- Quick movement from classroom to work placement to maintain the trainee’s engagement and enable the trainee to put the theory learnt within their work preparation sessions into practice within the work environment.
- Regular contact to oversee that the employer is providing learning and development; these were conducted via informal phone calls, regular face-face visits, and more formal assessments and reviews.

*“We go out and meet all of our employers, they are given a traineeship handbook and we explain about traineeships. Employers are quite vocal as well, so as soon as there are any issues they will always come straight to us.” (Provider, Childcare/ Business Administration)*

- Structured work books and progress diaries filled in by trainees alongside their employers to provide a joint record of aims and achievements.
- Mentoring and supervision provided by the employers (or in some case by existing apprentices) to allow the trainee to reflect on their ‘on the job’ experience and discuss their longer term development of skills or qualities required for employment.

**Employers** valued the opportunity to offer work placements because they provided a mutual opportunity to test and trial the relationship for both the employer and trainee. However, there were concerns about the limited financial reward for young people.

Employers had some confusion about differences between the traineeship and apprenticeship programmes, and wanted greater clarity on the next steps to progress the young person into an apprenticeship.

*"...It is like an interview period and then if you've got a place at the end of their traineeship you could actually put them onto a modern apprenticeship... the younger the person the better for me."* (Employer, Hairdressing)

All the case studies were in the earlier stages of the programme, with their first or second cohorts completing their work placements. Early progression routes were apprenticeships and employment with the employer, full time education and further learning or seeking employment in other sectors. There had also been early movement to apprenticeships (as early as six weeks) when employers were confident in the progress and commitment of the trainee and wanted to secure them as an employee.

**Providers who decided not to participate in** traineeships, did so largely due to their perceptions of the impact of delivering a new and untested programme on their resources and concerns about whether they had the full expertise to roll out all elements of the programme.



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