

Report summary

Apprenticeships for young people

A good practice report

Apprenticeships have a key role in the government's strategy to develop the skills of the workforce and to promote the growth and rebalancing of the nation's economy. Recent government investment has given priority to helping more young people into work and training through apprenticeships. Of the 457,200 people who began an apprenticeship in 2010–11, just over a quarter (131,700) were under the age of 19.

The government's ambition that all young people will participate in learning up to the age of 18 will rely critically on the sector's expertise in designing and delivering high-quality programmes, including pre-apprenticeships and intermediate and advanced apprenticeships, to engage and meet the needs of these learners and prospective employers.

Between September and November 2011, inspectors visited 15 providers to identify the key features of successful apprenticeship provision. These providers had been judged to be either good or outstanding for their overall effectiveness at their most recent inspection and had a recent history of working well with young people taking apprenticeships. Eight of the providers worked particularly effectively with young people who had not achieved well at school and who had not been engaged in education or training subsequently.

Providers and employers felt that the most important attributes of a potential apprentice were the right attitudes and commitment to employment. This was often viewed as more important than good academic qualifications. Employers welcomed work experience as a way of evaluating young people's work ethic. Young people who had undertaken well-organised work experience, or some form of vocational taster courses while still at school, were more successful in making good progress with their apprenticeship framework than those starting straight from school without such experience.

All the training providers surveyed took time to understand fully the needs of their employers. Providers used initial assessment effectively, not only to identify individual needs for learning support early on, but to support the effective matching of learner to employer. Induction to the requirements of the apprenticeship was thorough and often carried out over an extended period. Younger apprentices

appreciated being mentored in the workplace by former or more experienced apprentices as part of their induction.

Good support from the employers in the survey was a common key factor in effectively engaging young people in their training. Employers who had a good understanding of how the apprenticeship programme was being delivered were better placed to help their learners capture a wide range of work-based evidence and link their workplace training to the off-the-job training with the training provider.

Effective training and assessment included teaching young people in small groups; giving them the chance to apply theory to practice quickly; careful planning of assessment in the workplace; and monthly reviews of progress. These approaches engaged young learners fully in learning and assessment. In many cases, online resources encouraged extra study and meant that learners could more easily catch up if they missed training.

Teachers and assessors were fully conversant with contemporary vocational working practices and expected apprentices to work to exacting standards and at commercial speeds in areas such as bricklaying, catering and hairdressing. They were able to demonstrate practical skills at a high level in ways which not only made young learners see just what could be achieved, but which also reinforced the principle that skills development was mainly down to dedication and practice rather than exceptional innate ability or natural talent.

Assessors' regular pre-arranged visits to the workplace kept young learners on task to achieve their targets. Apprentices generally had one key assessor throughout their training. This encouraged a productive relationship with employers who understood their part in supporting training and assessment. The work of providers in coordinating all components of the apprenticeship, both on and off the job, was most effective when reviews occurred frequently, usually monthly, and were planned at the most appropriate time for the learner and employer. Extra support was put in place quickly for young learners who had begun to slip behind in meeting their planned targets.

The framework components of apprenticeships that were additional to the main national vocational qualification (NVQ), such as employment rights and responsibilities, personal, learning and thinking skills, and key or functional skills, were understood and valued by the young people and their employers. Experienced tutors put key skills and functional skills into context. They made them relevant to employment or everyday life, so improving young people's expertise and confidence, particularly in mathematics. Many apprentices also benefited from gaining extra experience, skills and qualifications which were not required by their frameworks, as part of their apprenticeship training.

The providers and employers visited encouraged progression in employment and in further training. Almost all the young people in the survey were motivated by their experience of training to take more advanced qualifications. However, progression

pathways beyond advanced apprenticeships in work-based learning are currently limited, and not all apprentices have a recognised level 4 progression pathway.

Schools, providers and employers have an important role in making sure that young people are well matched to the vocational area and apprenticeship they wish to pursue. Despite the clear benefits of work experience, the employers in the survey said that the number of students they could accommodate on placements was restricted. This was because too many local schools tended to ask for placements during the same short period at the end of the academic year. Although six of the providers in the survey offered work-related learning in vocational areas to 14–16-year-olds through courses such as Young Apprenticeships, funding had largely ceased and fewer schools were taking up the offers of alternative vocational training that the providers were making.

Key findings

- In the providers visited, young people who had previous experience of vocational training were more successful in making good progress with their apprenticeship framework than those starting straight from school without it.
- Work experience in the area that interested the young person was a recurring theme mentioned by providers, young learners and employers as a positive force in equipping young people with an appropriate work ethic and basic employment skills.
- The negative views of employers in the survey about the ability of some young people to apply for jobs, along with their poor punctuality and timekeeping, were forestalled by the providers working to develop these skills in the young people before they applied for apprenticeships. A small number of the employers complained about the apprentices' poor standard of English and mathematics when they arrived from school, even those with grade C at GCSE.
- All the providers in the survey had improved their initial advice and guidance, including work tasters, to recruit young people into the area of learning that matched their interests. Provided during recruitment events, in interviews or online, this had a positive impact on increasing the completion of frameworks and eventual progression into employment and further training.
- When online applications were included as part of the selection process, many of the young people had not been sufficiently well prepared by their schools to make the best possible application.
- Effective initial assessment had a positive impact on the providers' capacity to put appropriate support in place and secure a more successful match between apprentices and employers.
- Educational statements from schools did not always follow students to their training providers who then had to reassess their needs. Where data were available, apprentices who received learning support had overall success rates as good as their peers.

- Well-planned inductions increased young people's understanding of how they would be trained and assessed, and what would be expected of them in their employment. They particularly liked hearing from former apprentices to whom they could relate and who acted as mentors in two thirds of the providers surveyed.
- The most effective teaching was well planned, engaged learners and enabled them quickly to put into practice what they learnt in theory sessions. The strong vocational backgrounds of the providers' staff together with small group sizes ensured good and sometimes outstanding skills development.
- Flexible training and assessment, including additional workshops, group training at a distance using webcams, and ease of access to online resources, met the needs of employers and apprentices well. Apprentices did not always have to miss training and were often keen to do extra work when resources were readily available. Assessment was often available almost 'on demand' by employer staff or, when planned with the employers, by the provider's assessors.
- Almost all the providers in the survey provided good training in key and functional skills that improved young people's English and mathematics and was delivered by appropriately qualified staff. The key skills were contextualised to the areas of learning and therefore seen as relevant by the young people and their employers.
- Young people had a good understanding of their employment rights and responsibilities through studying them as part of their apprenticeship. They valued the personal, learning and thinking skills that they were developing, as did their employers.
- Many of the young people gained additional experience, skills and qualifications outside their apprenticeship framework. This added value to their programmes and improved their work skills. Learners and employers particularly valued customer service training.
- Regular contact between provider staff and the employers in the survey focused on reviewing progress, providing constructive feedback and setting new targets to provide work-based evidence, so that apprentices knew what they had to do to continue making good progress.
- Progression into sustained employment and promotion at work were linked by many employers to gaining qualifications. Almost all the young people in the survey were keen to gain more advanced qualifications. Some of the training delivered by employers to their employees who have completed advanced apprenticeships is of an advanced level but does not lead to recognised accredited qualifications.

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