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Improving outcomes for apprentices by involving employers in programme design: Outsource Vocational Learning Ltd

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Brief description

This example explains how Outsource Vocational Learning Ltd has improved learners' job outcomes by involving employers in the design and delivery of its programmes. As a result, progression to apprenticeships has increased from 42% to 78%. This is one of three case studies about good practice in this provider.

Overview – the provider's message

'Employers used to complain that they couldn't fill their vacancies and that the people they interviewed weren't suitable, didn't know what the job entailed, or didn't have the right attitude. At the same time, our job outcomes were pretty mediocre. So we thought we'd make sure employers got more suitable applicants, by designing a programme which would meet their specific needs. And the best way to do that was to ask the employers to contribute! It's been a tremendous success. Our employers like it so much, they are happy to see it as part of their induction. Our learners love the fact that they are applying for a known, specific job – with a guarantee of an interview and feedback. And we're really happy about our improved job outcomes, and feel confident in taking cohorts of hard-to-reach learners not previously engaged in education or training, because we know we can help them.'



Nichola Hay, Director

The good practice in detail

Background

When providers think about involving employers in their learning programmes, they generally think of work-placements or apprenticeships. But this company has taken a different approach, and designs its foundation learning programmes to meet the needs of individual employers with specific vacancies. In their [report](#), Ofsted inspectors commented favourably on learners' enhanced employability skills and confidence in interviews. So how does Outsource involve its employers so successfully?

Programme design

The starting point for designing [apprenticeship programmes](#) is a detailed match between the employer's job description and the content of the programme. Outsource is skilled at using the language and values of the employer, so that learners assimilate the culture of the employer as well as developing the skills they will need for employment. Once the content for the programme has been established, work can start with the learners.

Matching learners to the right course

On the short foundation programme, trainers work with learners to identify the sort of area in which they wish to work. Having established that they are interested in, for example, retail or baggage handling, they are given tasks to research the local employers who have vacancies. This means that when it comes to interview, the learners are clear about the exact jobs that they are interested in, and know something about the employer and the type of work that is involved. So, for example, they will already know about the physical demands of baggage handling; that it can be uncomfortable because of being outside in all weathers; and that long shifts are sometimes required. Retail applicants will know about the high standards of customer service which are expected; the need to cover early and late shifts; and the need to present themselves well at all times.

Using employers in training roles

Employers are invited to the training centre, to question learners about their knowledge and to encourage them. This gives learners an opportunity to demonstrate their interest to the employer before the interview. It also gives employers an opportunity to see how the learners interact with each other, and to get an idea of how well they work in teams.

Benefits for learners



The main advantage for learners is that they are guaranteed a job interview at the end of the training programme, and know that they have a good chance of success at gaining employment in a job role which they have researched thoroughly, with an employer they have already met. Less confident learners who might not have had the courage to ask questions, feel safer when they see their peers asking, and feel

emboldened to try.

Benefits for employers

Employers are able to use the programme as an extended interview, to give them the best opportunity to select the most suitable learners, and be secure that learners know what they are committing to. In some cases, they see the programme as doing part of their induction for them. One national retail employer sent its own trainer to carry out a two-day addition to the programme, because they were so impressed with the calibre of the group and would have been happy to employ them all.

Benefits for the training provider

Closer working with employers provides a good basis for an ongoing professional relationship, almost as an outsourced specialist addition to their human resources department. For example, the [programme](#) for the induction of apprentices to British Airway's Head Office is fully integrated between the training provider and the employer, to benefit learners.

Provider background

[Outsource Vocational Learning](#) is a large national training provider, with sites at Hayes, Twickenham, Swindon and Heathrow Airport.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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