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Working with partners to increase recruitment to apprenticeships: Outsource Vocational Learning Ltd

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Brief description

This example explains how Outsource Vocational Learning Ltd trains Jobcentre Plus staff about apprenticeships to increase recruitment referrals, and to overcome systemic barriers to recruitment. This is one of three case studies about good practice in this provider.

Overview – the provider’s message



‘We had a problem filling apprenticeship vacancies, so the obvious thing to do was to approach Jobcentre Plus as we were getting surprisingly few referrals from them. We found they weren’t really confident that they understood either apprenticeships or the Apprenticeship Vacancy system. So we provided some training. Then we approached the National Apprenticeship Service, and before long we were running training workshops across London. Now we have 130 identified ‘Apprenticeship Champions’ – one in each Jobcentre Plus office in London.’

Nichola Hay, Director

The good practice in detail

Background

Many providers develop informal links with their local Jobcentre to raise their profile. Outsource took this a step further and developed a programme of training Jobcentre Plus staff which means there is now a cohort of advisers who understands apprenticeships and

their benefits to learners. They have also managed to secure financial benefits for some apprentices through their ongoing work with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the London Mayor's Office. These particularly strong partnerships were cited as a key strength in their most recent Ofsted [report](#).

Training the referral agencies

The work started because of the frustration of not being able to get enough applicants for apprenticeships. Some careful questioning identified that there were some suitable young people, but that Jobcentre advisers were not confident enough in their own knowledge about apprenticeships, or indeed the National Apprenticeship Service's (NAS's) [Apprenticeship Vacancy](#) system to be certain about making referrals. Once this problem had been identified, it was a simple decision to do something about it by offering training to the advisers.

Outsource was so convinced that this intervention would be simple and effective that they volunteered their own staff. However, they made sure the training would be effective by including [Quality Improvement Plans](#) for advisers to reflect on what they had learnt and measure what they had done differently as a result.

Recognising the 'champions'

Outsource wanted the advisers who had been through the programme to have their efforts and increased expertise acknowledged – and also for them to be easily recognisable in their work. So every adviser who completes the training receives a certificate. In some centres they also have an 'Apprenticeship Champion' badge, although it has not been possible to fund this everywhere.

Maintenance work

Many providers have found that training Jobcentre staff works for a short time, but then the people who have been trained move on, taking their specialist knowledge with them. Or if they are still there, other priorities take precedence. Outsource anticipated this problem and runs follow-on workshops for experienced staff alongside the training for new staff. As a result there is someone trained in every office across London. To support this work, at a recent national Apprenticeships Champion [conference](#) Outsource and Jobcentre Plus identified and promoted case studies from 22 local offices.



Next steps

DWP, NAS and Outsource are keen for this programme to be replicated nationally, so that all Jobcentre Plus offices have at least one adviser who is well informed about apprenticeships and the Apprenticeship Vacancy service. They also want to extend the training arrangements, so that advisers understand about new initiatives such as [Traineeships](#) and the [Employer Ownership of Skills Pilot](#).

DWP's and NAS's enthusiastic support for this work is reflected in the effective steering group, which has already influenced changes in the benefit arrangements for the most

disadvantaged young learners, to ensure that their apprenticeship wage is at least sufficient to compensate for their loss of benefit. It has also been able to lobby for a significant concession on travel costs in London: from May 2013, apprentices will be eligible for the same 30% reduction on fares in London that students already enjoy.

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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