

## **Hillingdon Construction Apprenticeship Programme H-CAP**

### **Third Report January 2010**

#### **Introduction**

The H-CAP project started in January 2009 to ensure that companies receiving planning consent were obliged to support skills training in the construction sector. Against a backdrop of severe recession and uncertain prospects for companies operating in the industry, those with a track record of providing apprenticeships have chosen not to recruit until the economic climate is more positive. ConstructionSkills offer 'Levy Paying' employers generous grants to help them pay for apprentice wages and the full cost of the training programme is also met. T Brown and Mulalley are involved in long term contracts with the local social landlord, Hillingdon Homes and have felt able to provide some apprenticeship places for local borough residents. Apollo Group is also working closely with Hillingdon Homes to offer two new apprenticeship places to local residents in social housing in the borough. Cala Homes is the company developing the Ickenham Park ex RAF site in South Ruislip and plans are underway to provide 8 apprenticeships on site over the three year duration of the project. This work is being supported by the H-CAP consultant.

In order to prepare school pupils for employment, sector based work experience (WEX) has become very important and high profile especially as a new construction Diploma is due to be developed in Hillingdon schools from September 2011. The government and the CBI encourage employers in the sector to provide work experience placements, but few employers are prepared to get involved, because of worries about health & safety. Although the insurance companies have become more supportive of work experience, they will insist on a thorough risk assessment, a rigorous induction and supervision of students at all times by a competent person.

There are a group of committed employers who offer placements to support the Young Apprenticeship Programme in the borough and as each student has to complete 50 days in the workplace in their school holidays, the level of commitment from the students on this course is considerable. Many pupils in the schools would love to do a work placement in construction as their main two week placement, but only 2 students were accommodated last year.

## **Aims of the Programme (updated)**

To:-

- Provide work placements for Hillingdon Residents involved in construction training to help them complete qualifications and become skilled workers in the sector
- Develop Apprenticeship opportunities for those seeking to work in the sector and for existing employees

## **These updated aims will be met by providing the following:-**

- Establishing effective working relationships with contractors based in Hillingdon and those engaged in construction projects in the borough
- Providing assistance to help employers recruit apprentices and helping them access any financial support available.
- Offering short term placements to local apprentices to help them complete NVQ assessments
- Providing clear and accurate information to employers about the construction qualifications provided in schools and the skill levels of those wishing to work in the industry

## **How to recruit an apprentice in Hillingdon**

Apprenticeship recruitment arrangements can vary widely and this can make it problematic for a company, particularly those who wish to get involved with apprenticeships for the first time. The following approach is based on good practice from around the UK:-

1. Meet with the H-CAP consultant to specify the apprenticeship positions
  - a. Decide whether there is sufficient work in progress to support the full apprenticeship or a 'part' apprenticeship.
  - b. If a 'part' apprenticeship is required employers may group together to support a particular apprentice, taking it in turns to provide placements. This approach is organised by a 'Group Training Organisation' such as 'The London Apprenticeship Company'.
  - c. Produce a job description and person specification and a draft contract of employment.
  - d. Offer the vacancy between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> June to local residents to ensure education leavers can apply
2. Advertise the vacancy in schools, local colleges and on the national apprenticeship website
  - a. Decide whether a newspaper add is necessary
3. Work closely with Connexions to produce a shortlist of applicants
4. carry out a varied and thorough recruitment process including an assessment of suitability for the work and the training
5. Use the interviewing and contract resources available through H-CAP

6. Give feedback to unsuccessful applicants to help them apply successfully in future
7. Set up an initial trial period so the apprentice can complete a settling period before they start their course.

**NB:** Please find a mini case study on Apprentice recruitment at Apollo Group attached at appendix 1.

**H-CAP activities to support employers**

1. To provide information to locally based employers and organisations operating in the borough about local provision for construction training
2. To support and assist employers to offer ‘full’ or ‘part’ apprenticeships to Hillingdon residents.
3. To encourage employers to support work experience and construction related activities in schools.
4. To maintain contact with local employers and keep them updated concerning the progress made by the H-CAP project.

**Progress towards meeting the H-CAP Targets**

The following figures include identified apprentices from H-CAP partner employers, however some may be unrecorded. The following suggested targets will provide a local benchmark as follows:-

Year	Apprenticeship Target (weeks)	Actual to end Jan 2010	Work Experience Target (weeks)	Actual to end Jan 2010
2008-9	Nil	0	25	24
2009-10	100	72	50	64
2010-11	300		50	
2011-12	500		60	
2012-13	750		70	
2009-10 %		72%		128%

If employers are unable to offer apprenticeships or work experience placements they can offer to give groups of students a tour of their premises or a current site to show them the work they are undertaking. Also employers can visit schools to give talks and work with students to explain about career opportunities in the construction and built environment sector. This will promote their company and the industry as a good career choice.

## Conclusions

1. The new planning process has been shown to work well and the first group of apprentices supported by section 106 funding are about to be employed.
2. The social housing sector has established a group to discuss and plan community investment including apprenticeships and work experience (WEX).
3. The London Apprenticeship Company is available to support groups of contractors to who wish to share an apprentice.
4. There are insufficient offers from employers to:-
  - a. Provide work experience placements for local pupils
  - b. Help teachers improve the knowledge of pupils about the construction and built environment sector
  - c. Recruit 'full' or 'part' apprentices.
5. There is no current construction based forum to discuss construction skills in the local area.

## Recommendations

- To work closely with the planning department and property services to secure as many apprentices as possible.
- To develop links with a Group Training Association such as the London Apprenticeship Company to enable groups of employers or those involved in a particular project to support an apprentice
- To involve local construction employers in promoting the industry in schools
- To promote the apprenticeship recruitment service offered by the H-CAP consultant
- To ensure that employers understand the grants available to help employers pay wages costs

Please find 2 case studies attached:

- Apollo Group – Apprentice Recruitment
- T Brown – Apprentice case study

## H-CAP Case Study

T Brown has been providing Gas installation, servicing and maintenance for over 30 years. The company employs 325 permanent staff in addition to 22 apprentices. The headquarters of the company is in Ewell, Surrey and in addition to providing services in Hillingdon the company undertakes work in Elmbridge, Southwark, Croydon, Lewisham, Kensington & Chelsea, Hounslow and many other areas.



Colin Child is the Quality, Health & Safety and Environmental Manager and believes that the investment the company makes in young people is one of the company's key strengths:-

“We prefer to take on apprentices straight out of school at 16 as they are least likely to have developed bad habits. They are still in ‘learning mode’ and have not been adversely affected by the current labour market. We treat the apprentices like adults from day one and they respond positively to the confidence we show in them”.

The company has always had a policy to ‘grow’ its own staff by taking on apprentices every year, even when times are hard. They study as gas fitters, plumbers and heating and ventilation engineers and the company uses colleges that have a track record of providing high quality apprenticeship training. Colin explained “My advice to companies getting involved with apprenticeships is to choose your training providers with care. Make sure there is good communication between the training staff, the company and apprentice so the feedback on progress is well organised and regular”



David DeJesus lives in Hillingdon and is training as an apprentice gas fitter with his supervisor Robert Unwin. He is doing his training at the College of North West London. David is 23 and it took him 18 months to find the apprenticeship place at T Brown.

“There was no information in school about apprenticeships so I did the first year of A levels but dropped out. I completed a computer programme to help me choose a career but this did not get me anywhere. I worked in retail which was useful to develop my communication skills, but when I was 21 I decided to get a trade under my belt. Everywhere I went there were no vacancies, so I enrolled in college and paid for the course myself. I was desperate to get into this line of work and felt that I was wasting my life. I looked at the government apprenticeship website but this was not very useful. You just have to be persistent! Eventually, T Brown offered me this opportunity and it has made all the difference to my life”

Robert Unwin has supervised many apprentices for T Brown.

“Having apprentices has been a very positive experience for me, although they are inexperienced to start with, it is very useful to have them on the job with you, to help out and come up with ideas. I have had 7 apprentices over the years and there are just no negatives from my point of view. If the apprentices are hungry and want to do the work they will become successful”.

*This case study has been produced by H-CAP. Colin, David and Robert have all offered to give talks in schools to help pupils gain an understanding of apprenticeships in the Construction and Built Environment sector. H-CAP December 2009*

### **Mini Case study – H-CAP - Apprentice Recruitment at Apollo Group**

Nicola Gooding is Apprenticeship Manager at Apollo Group and the company operates an efficient and socially inclusive apprenticeship programme. As a ConstructionSkills (CS) levy payer, the company finds the quality of the training offered at the CS centres very good. The qualification is the Maintenance Operative Diploma, which takes 2 years to complete. After completing this course the apprentices can then specialise in a trade area and undertake a further level 2 qualification followed by an option to take a level 3 to gain the advanced apprenticeship award. The company also operates what they call a 'PLA' route which combines on site work with work based learning for apprentices who have been recruited whilst they were on a construction course with a college or training provider.

The National Vacancy Matching Service is not being used currently as vacancies are targeted to local people and particularly those in social housing, who benefit most from apprenticeship opportunities and are often under-represented on the programme. The company also works closely with local colleges and providers, and uses its own website to attract apprenticeship applicants. Links are developed with local Connexions Centres and local social landlords.

Nicola explained the current apprenticeship recruitment methodology as follows:-

- CVs are requested from all applicants and interviews are offered to all those who meet the basic criteria. This ensures that the process is inclusive and allows applications from as broader a group as possible.
- The interview is set at a particular time and is quite informal as many of the applicants will have little experience of interviews.
- Following this stage there is a formal interview based on a more detailed set of criteria to establish the suitability of applicants for the training course and the work.
- The training programme is explained fully and it is made clear that it is a short term contract for 2 years with no promise of a job at the end.
- There is a shortlist of applicants who then undertake the CSkills entry test.
- The remaining group of applicants are then interviewed by a site team who decide which are suitable for the programme. This gives the qualified staff input into the process and ensures that all the employees support the apprenticeship programme.
- The Apollo Apprentices are closely managed and a weekly reporting process enables training staff to monitor progress. There is also an enrichment programme of additional training elements which add value to the apprenticeship training experience.

The programme has been included in a Demonstration Project for Construction Excellence and the company also contributes to Construction Diploma development and is keen to contribute to work related learning activities in local schools.