

Apprenticeships: a guide for managers



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We're with
Apprenticeships
because we're
passionate about
attracting and
developing the
best new talent //
Steve Banks,
Director of People
Strategy and
Services, Boots

Introduction

If you are new to managing apprentices, you might not be sure what to expect. Of course, in many respects managing an apprentice is no different to managing any other member of staff – everyone needs regular feedback, support and clear targets.

However, in some cases your apprentice might not have had a job before, so they might need help with settling into their new role, and getting to know your workplace culture.

This guide is designed to give you some pointers about what to expect when you decide to take on an apprentice, and it includes examples and tips from real line managers to help you get the best from your apprentice. It is designed for managers working in both the public and private sector.

You should find that your apprentice brings a number of great benefits to your team as well – from enthusiasm and energy to a new perspective and fresh ideas.

What is an Apprenticeship?

Structure

An apprentice must be employed and have a contract of employment. Currently the apprentice minimum wage is £2.65/hour (£2.68 from October 2013), although many employers pay above this, with the average being around £170 per week.

Apprenticeships are a work based training programme, designed around the needs of employers, and are structured to deliver nationally recognised qualifications.

The training combines on-the-job learning with additional training. On-the-job learning is working alongside experienced staff to gain job-specific skills. Additional training must be carried out away from the workstation. Depending on the needs of your business and the type of Apprenticeship, this can take place at a college or training provider (typically for one day a week, or fortnight). Alternatively the training provider may send tutors to the workplace so most of the learning takes place at work.

More than 200 different Apprenticeships now exist in sectors as diverse as: IT, Business and Finance, Health and Social Care, Retail and many more. Apprenticeships are available at:

- Intermediate Level (Level 2 – equivalent of 5 GCSEs)
- Advanced (Level 3 – equivalent to 2 A Levels)
- Higher Level (Levels 4 through to 7)
 - Level 4 and 5 (Equivalent to HNC, HND or Foundation Degree)
 - Levels 6 and 7 (Equivalent to a Degree and Masters Degree).

This means that an apprentice can continue their training to a high level if their role requires it. Apprenticeships are a genuine alternative to Higher Education to gain high level skills and professional qualifications, or can be used as a pathway to Higher Education.

What employers say:

"Supporting Apprenticeships has enabled us to raise the skill levels of our employees, meaning we are better placed to meet the short and long-term needs of the business. Our apprentices have grown in confidence and have noticed a big shift in attitudes, with increased motivation and improvements in staff morale."

Frameworks

An Apprenticeship framework consists of a number of elements, normally including a vocational qualification which assesses the apprentice's competency in their role, together with a technical qualification that provides the underpinning knowledge. If the apprentice does not have recent GCSEs in Maths and English (or the equivalent) they will also take Functional Skills in these subjects.

All Intermediate and Advanced apprentices will learn about Employee Rights and Responsibilities, and Personal Learning and Thinking Skills, such as communication and team work.

For a full list of Apprenticeship frameworks, visit the National Apprenticeship Service website www.apprenticeships.org.uk



Case study: London Borough of Sutton

"I currently manage three apprentices studying Level 2 Business Administration. One is an insurance officer and two are income officers.

"They are some of the best recruits I've had. The idea of apprentices always appealed to me, but I had reservations about the applicant quality. This proved unfounded, with applicant quality exceeding expectations.

"Seeing the apprentices grasp a difficult concept, or seeing their confidence grow to deliver first class presentations at big events – there are so many highlights and reasons to be proud of the apprentices.

"I had a vacancy in my team and thought that Apprenticeships would be an excellent vehicle to keep the team fresh and energised. Having apprentices has affected the whole team and service very positively – we now have an age diverse workforce.

"I'd recommend apprentices to any manager thinking of taking an apprentice on. They will work and learn and will soon contribute in ways you will not have foreseen."

Ray Chitty, Head of Exchequer Services



To stay ahead of our game we need to keep pace with an ever changing communications sector. By taking our very first group of apprentices, we aim to remain competitive by integrating people into our organisation from a grass roots level and developing them to suit our way of working //

Roy Fraser,
HR Manager
MAP Group (UK)

Why would I want to recruit an apprentice?

Business benefits

There are clear benefits to employers from taking on apprentices:

- Training apprentices is cost effective, leading to lower training and recruitment costs
- Apprenticeships can fill skills gaps, bringing trained staff into hard to fill roles
- Businesses report that Apprenticeships make them more competitive and productive
- Apprenticeships can reduce staff turnover
- Apprentices can move on to more senior and management positions within the same company.

A survey carried out with managers of apprentices working in London boroughs showed a number of key benefits:

- Apprenticeships are an effective way to pass on skills and knowledge within the organisation, particularly useful where there is a risk that expertise will be lost
- Apprentices can bring new ways of looking at things and fresh ideas
- Apprentices are enthusiastic and keen to succeed in their jobs
- Apprenticeships are an effective way to recruit staff
- Staff in non-managerial roles can gain experience of managing and mentoring.

What line managers say:

"Our apprentice has been able to pick things up quickly and is a huge support to the team"

"Staff without managerial experience have mentored apprentices, helping them to increase their own skill set."

"[Our apprentice has] enthusiasm and willingness to learn and try new things to improve herself and gain her qualifications"

"My apprentice has brought a fresh approach to problem solving and has challenged established ways of working in a positive manner."



Recruitment – getting involved

The National Apprenticeship Service is able to support employers to set up an Apprenticeship programme and can be contacted on: 08000 150 600 or via the website www.apprenticeships.org.uk



In the same way as recruiting any new member of staff, the more involved you are in the process of recruiting your apprentice, the more likely you are to find the best candidate for the role, and for your team.

You can discuss your requirements with the National Apprenticeship Service, who will help you to identify suitable job roles within your organisation, map them to an Apprenticeship framework and assist you in finding the best training provider for your business.

You should work with your training provider to develop the job description, and to agree which training modules are most appropriate for the needs of the job. Your relationship with the training provider is crucial to ensure the success of the programme. It is important that you have effective communication and that they understand the needs of your business, what you expect from them and what you expect from your apprentice.

Through Apprenticeship Vacancies, the official on-line recruitment tool for apprentices in England, the training provider will advertise your vacancies free of charge. This will enable your vacancy to be accessed by thousands of people looking for an Apprenticeship. You can access Apprenticeship Vacancies here.



You should check with your training provider what additional support they may offer in the recruitment process. Many will offer services such as support in sifting and selecting the best applicants. But don't forget that, for the apprentice, it may be the first job they have ever applied for.

Many employers hold open days for potential candidates to find out about Apprenticeships in a more informal environment, before they actually apply for a role. This allows both the applicants and you as an employer to ask plenty of questions and find out if an Apprenticeship is the right thing for them.

If you are interested in attracting young people to your Apprenticeships, think about how to reach young people in your area – can you work with schools, 6th forms, community groups and youth services to make sure that lots of young people see your advertisement?

And do consider whether you will use the same recruitment process as you do for non-Apprenticeship roles. Completing a long and in-depth application form may be difficult for applicants without much experience. Consider looking for potential rather than extensive examples of previous performance.

However you should try to give potential apprentices the experience of a 'real' recruitment process as much as possible, to prepare them for the future. Can your organisation give applicants advice and support as to how to put together a successful application?

// Since starting my Apprenticeship with BT I feel I have developed a lot as a person. My confidence has grown rapidly and I will now happily present to a large group of people. I have also learnt how to manage expectations and different situations in the workplace //
Laura Johnson,
British Telecom

What line managers say:

"My apprentice has been recruited corporately, and the job descriptions were devised for a mass recruitment and are generic. It would have been helpful to construct a job description that reflected the duties [of the role]."

Training

Your apprentice's training will be arranged by the college or training provider. Your apprentice will generally work with them to complete the off the job training, when they will be away from their normal workstation. Don't forget to factor this in when you are planning your apprentice's workload.

As well as the study your apprentice does with their provider, they will also be assessed while at work, to test their competency against the standards set out in their Apprenticeship framework.

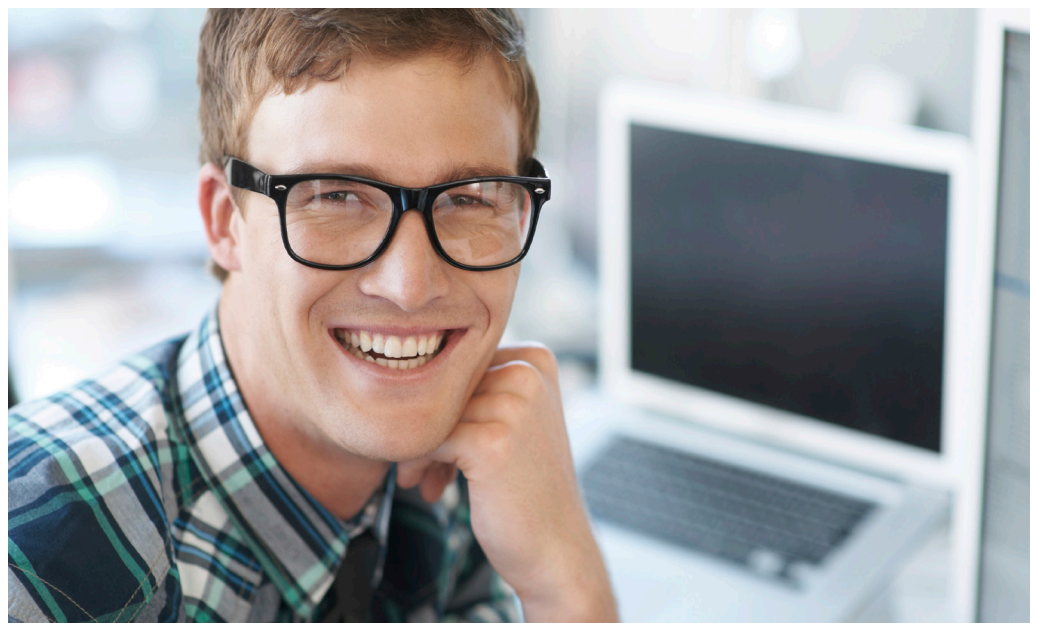
The Apprenticeship qualification will be made up of a number of units, and you will have agreed with the provider which units are most suited to the role your apprentice will be doing. You will need to make sure that the apprentice carries out the right kind of tasks and projects in order to pass all the units they are taking – the provider can help you to make sure that this is all planned to suit the job role and any seasonal variations to work patterns.

Good communication between you and the provider is key. They will need to arrange assessment for your apprentice whilst at work. They should give you regular updates on your apprentice's progress, and will work with you to tackle any problems that might occur along the way.

You may wish to have a service level agreement with your provider that sets out what each side is committed to and what you can expect in terms of support and information from the provider.

They should also be able to help if your apprentice has any additional learning requirements, for example they might need to brush up on their IT skills, or may have additional support needs due to a learning difficulty, or other factors.

Agree with your provider any key dates over the course of the Apprenticeship e.g. when will they be assessed, when is any coursework due.



What line managers say:

“Ensuring a strong direct relationship between the apprentice’s line manager and tutors and learning support staff at the learning provider is important – much more successful than communication via an intermediary. Planning for work which meets all the requirements of the Apprenticeship framework is key.”

What to expect

Managing an apprentice

Remember that an apprentice may not have held a full-time, or any, job before they start work with you. They will have demonstrated potential and enthusiasm for the role you recruit them to, but they might need more support than you are used to giving when they first start.

Remember to show the apprentice how everything works, and don’t take anything for granted – we all struggle with the photocopier sometimes, so imagine if you’ve never used one before!

Induction

Organise a thorough induction for the apprentice, both to their role and their immediate team, and also your wider organisation to ensure they understand where they fit in and what their contribution will be, and vice versa.

It is also important for the apprentice’s team and the wider organisation to be briefed on your new apprentice, for example what role they are performing, who they will be working with and who they can approach if they have any questions about the Apprenticeship programme.

If you have a company intranet this would be a good place to share information.

If the apprentice will be working across or moving between teams make sure all team members are properly briefed before the apprentice starts work.

Expectations and monitoring progress

Be really clear about what is expected of your apprentice, both in terms of their work but also the office culture and behaviour. Give your apprentice clear targets, which match up with the units they are taking and being assessed on.

Have regular meetings and discussions to check-in and monitor your apprentice’s progress. This can form part of your usual performance management processes and can be done in a variety of ways, both formal and informal. You might want to start with a weekly one-to-one to give them a chance to raise any issues, ask questions and give them feedback on how things are going. Keep track of how they are doing against their targets, and also the evidence they need to put together to pass their qualifications.

As part of your apprentice’s training you should also have a joint meeting with your training provider and your apprentice about their progress and any issues which you need to work on together. This should happen once every three months.

More formal appraisals should be planned once or twice a year, or in line with your other employees.

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**Our apprentices
have contributed
to over £500,000
worth of business
in 10 months - I'm
very pleased! The
project is going so
well we have just
employed three
more apprentices to
start next week //**
Stuart Britton, CEO
SEC Recruitment

If your apprentice is going to work for more than one team or department, make sure that this is coordinated well so that line managers are aware of the apprentice's coursework requirements, targets and the contact at the training provider.

What line managers say:

"Assume nothing and don't make hasty judgments."

"Have regular one-to-one supervisions so they are clear on what their expectations and objectives are."

"Our apprentice knew nothing of our work and its key objectives and role...I needed to regularly remind myself and other staff [of this]."

"Positive feedback, setting challenging targets and explaining the corporate culture are all key communication tools in managing an apprentice."

"It's important for the apprentice to feel an equal part of the team."

"Don't assume you know everything!"

How to get support

It's not just your apprentice that might need support – particularly if this is your first experience of managing an apprentice or someone new to the workplace.

Make the most of your network of peers – other people in your organisation that have experience of managing apprentices. In a recent survey, managers with previous experience of working with apprentices felt much more positive about their experience, and their ability to deal with any issues that might arise. You could think about setting up a regular managers' forum or network.

If your organisation has an Apprenticeship scheme coordinator or manager, seek advice and information from them as well. They will know about how Apprenticeships work, and can advise on finding suitable frameworks and providers. They may or may not be based in your HR / Organisational Development Team – if they are based elsewhere, make sure you are linked in with your HR team as well.

It is well worth ensuring that your apprentice has a network of support. This could include a buddy, a mentor and a peer network – these all provide a different function.

Buddying – a buddy is an existing employee that is not in a line management role and is generally not working in the same team as the apprentice. They will help the apprentice to get to know the organisation and the area they are working in, for example showing them where to get lunch. This is an informal set-up and may be used quite a lot to begin with and reduce as time goes on.

Mentoring – this is a more formal role, but again involves another employee who is not involved in managing the apprentice and is probably not a direct team member. The mentor will support the apprentice with work-related issues, providing feedback, advice and support, and this should be a confidential relationship. It may be helpful to have joint meetings with the apprentice, mentor and line manager from time to time.

Peer network – if you have other apprentices working in your organisation, or apprentices that have completed their training and are now permanent employees, they will have invaluable experience and advice to pass on to new apprentices. You could have an informal or formal network for existing and former apprentices to meet and support each other.

Other sources of support – as with any employee, your apprentice may have issues outside of work that they need help with. Check what pastoral support is offered by your training provider, as they often have lots of experience dealing with all types of issues and have access to a network of external sources of support, or this may be something that your own HR team can provide. And don't forget, the training provider may also offer support to the line manager too.

At the end of the Apprenticeship

Start planning for the end of the Apprenticeship well in advance.

Hopefully your apprentice has performed well and is making a valuable contribution to your organisation – in which case you will want to hold onto them and make sure you continue to benefit from their new skills and growing experience.

If your apprentice is keen to keep learning, and they can be given more responsibility, a further Apprenticeship at Advanced or Higher Level is a good option. Apprenticeships are now available up to degree level, allowing staff to develop high level skills and in some cases take an alternative route to professional qualifications. More information on Higher Apprenticeships is available at www.apprenticeships.org.uk



// I started my Apprenticeship at Bexley council, working for the web team. Working in a developing area of the council allowed me to develop my IT skills in a business environment where no two days were ever the same. I have been given the opportunity to learn and develop my skills while assisting in major projects where my abilities have proven to be of great value //

Josh Harris,
LB Bexley

If your apprentice is on a permanent contract and there is no further training required, then they simply continue as an employee. You may wish to review their pay, in recognition of the completion of the Apprenticeship and to reflect their contribution to the team.

If your apprentice is on a fixed term contract and there is no further training required, can you offer your apprentice a permanent contract, or support them to apply for internal vacancies?

If there are no opportunities for your apprentice with your organisation, or they wish to move on, is there any support you can give them to find a new role? This may include:

- identifying other organisations in your sector they could work for
- identifying the level and types of roles suitable for them
- advice on making applications and interview skills.



What to do if things go wrong

Most apprentices will work out well and will become productive and valuable members of your team. However, as with any new member of staff things might not quite work out. Try to pre-empt problems by having regular meetings and reviews with your apprentice, and your training provider. Don't forget that your apprentice may be new to full-time employment and they may need more guidance and advice than you are used to giving to a new employee.

If your apprentice isn't performing as well as you would hope or expect, try to find out why this is the case. Speak to your apprentice and also the training provider to identify any issues which you can help to address, for example more support with literacy, more experience at particular tasks or more supervision and help whilst they gain confidence. There may also be problems outside of work – your training provider should have staff experienced in giving pastoral support and should be able to help with personal issues.

Employers of apprentices should support an apprentice's learning and development. While it is recommended that apprentices adhere to the same rules and regulations at work as other employees you may need to explain how they work and why they are important.

If additional support has been provided and all avenues have been explored to improve an apprentice's conduct or performance, you may seek to dismiss them. When considering dismissal for any member of staff you should take independent legal advice. An apprentice has the same rights as any other employee. If early dismissal (before the end of the apprentice's training period) can be justified and there is sufficient evidence that their conduct or capability is unsatisfactory, then they can be dismissed as long as this is carried out in accordance with the HR procedures of your workplace.

NB: This is not a substitute for independent legal advice and you should always seek legal advice before making any employment decisions.

All apprentices must have a contract of employment, and (since 6 April 2012) must be employed under an Apprenticeship Agreement, which must state that the apprentice will be undertaking an Apprenticeship in a particular skill, trade or occupation.

The Apprenticeship Agreement is a contract of service and not a contract of Apprenticeship. This reflects the fact that an Apprenticeship is primarily a job rather than training. It also means the apprentice does not have any additional rights over those of other employees. Full details about Apprenticeship Agreements, and a template for employers to use, are available on the National Apprenticeship Service website www.apprenticeships.org.uk



With some simple processes and management in place, Apprenticeships can bring numerous benefits to organisations and individuals, we hope this guide will help managers in both private and public sector organisations to unlock their full potential.

Further sources of information



National Apprenticeship Service
www.apprenticeships.org.uk



Types of Apprenticeship
www.apprenticeships.org.uk/types-of-apprenticeships



**Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development:
guide to Apprenticeships**
www.cipd.co.uk



Grant funding for employers
www.apprenticeships.org.uk/employers

This guidance was compiled by London Councils and the National Apprenticeship Service

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