



E R S

Research and Consultancy

**LSIS World Class Skills Peer
Group: Apprenticeship Research**

Final Report

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 ERS was appointed in December 2009 to undertake research to help develop an understanding of the perception employers hold in relation to the role and value of apprenticeships.
- 1.2 The research aims to inform a wider programme to investigate misconceptions about the value and contribution of apprentices (particularly 16-18) amongst North East businesses. Whilst this is not the case in all circumstances, there is a shared view amongst the peer group that an opportunity exists to improve the quality of the apprentice experience for both employer and learner.
- 1.3 The objectives of the study are summarised as informing a clear understanding of the perception employers hold in relation to the role and value of apprentices (and particularly young apprentices) including an analysis of the following issues:
- What are the benefits of taking on an apprentice in both the short and long term?
 - What are the key issues faced by employers in taking on an apprentice in the first instance?
 - Why would employers choose not to take on an apprentice?
 - What are the main incentives for doing so?
 - What do employers consider to be the role of the training provider? and
 - Is there recognition of the financial investment by the government in apprenticeship provision?
- 1.4 The qualitative aspect of this study is necessarily based on the views of those interviewed and as such is subjective. Every care has been taken to conduct this research openly, thoroughly and professionally, to retain an objective stance and to provide a consensus view based on the opinions expressed.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 The study was predominantly based on a survey of employers supported by desk research which helped to provide an understanding of the context of the study and inform the design and delivery of the primary research tool – in this case a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was informed by a review of regional and national documents of relevance to apprentice provision including Sector Skills Councils and the LSC.

Employer Consultation

2.2 Given the tight timescale and geographic/sector focus provided for the study, it was proposed that the qualitative information requested from North East employers would be derived from 52 employers selected evenly across the four target sectors (hair dressing, motor vehicle, health and social care and retail) as follows:

- 16 face to face interviews (4 in each sub-region)
- 36 telephone interviews (including 12 with employers not currently utilising apprentices)

2.3 The combination of face to face and telephone interviewing was the preferred consultation method for this element of the research as it represented the most flexible, time efficient and productive method of engagement through which to gather in depth qualitative information.

2.4 Discussions with employers were based on a semi-structured pro-forma agreed with the Peer Group (Appendix 1) incorporating a core set of questions based on the issues outlined in the research brief and discussion points emanating from the desk research process.

2.5 Contact details for active employers were to be provided by the peer group members with each provider asked to highlight a small selection of employers most open to an approach to arrange a face to face meeting in lieu of the time constraints associated with the study.

Analysis and Reporting

- 2.6 Consultation responses were inputted into Microsoft Excel, cleansed, i.e. checked for factual accuracy of responses and subsequently analysed in order to quantitatively analyse key trends whilst adding value by recognising the strength of individual comment.
- 2.7 Qualitative responses were grouped by significance and frequency which offers the opportunity to also assess these variables quantitatively should common themes emerge. Qualitative responses also enabled anonymised verbatim quotations to be used to highlight or stress key points to add to the quantitative analysis.
- 2.8 The analysis was used to inform an overall analysis of employer opinions on apprentices and the perceived benefits/costs of employing them and inform the remainder of the research programme and specifically the long term aims of delivering more effective engagement with employers.

3.0 ANALYSIS – SUMMARY OF INITIAL FINDINGS

3.1 The following analysis is based on the findings from 50 employer interviews including 12 face to face interviews. The sector split of interviews included 13 from each of hair and health and social care, 12 from motor vehicle / engineering and 11 from retail / business and enterprise.

Background

3.2 The employers surveyed to inform the following analysis have a varied background and experience of apprenticeships from those currently employing 18 apprentices to employers for whom apprenticeships are something of an unknown quantity.

3.3 Employer understanding of what is included in an apprenticeship again varied considerably from those with indepth knowledge of apprenticeships based on current/previous training or involvement in the delivery/assessment of training in former occupations.

3.4 When rating responses by sector in terms of knowledge of what is included in an apprenticeship (rated good, moderate or limited), employers from the hairdressing sector appeared to have the most complete understanding with 46% rated as either good or moderate and just 8% limited.

3.5 The employers within Health and Social Care had the highest proportion of 'limited' ratings at 54% followed by Motor Vehicle with 50% although 33% of motor vehicle employers were also rated as 'good'. Just 18% of retail / enterprise employers were rated as good with 45% 'limited' and 36% as 'moderate'.

3.6 Amongst those employers with an incomplete knowledge of the composition of an apprenticeship, the following represent a representative sample of comments and perceptions:

- I'm less aware of the training undertaken on the theory side as BL Hairdressing deals with all the paper work and NVQ aspects;
- Tyneside Training Services put apprentices through various modules (cars, HGV) and they get practical experience from us;
- I just know that they go to the training provider once a week;
- The apprentices get basic training encompassing theory and practical work;
- Haven't a clue really other than way to learn skills on the job;
- Very limited - thought only suitable for 16-18 yrs;
- Apprenticeships provide a basic grounding with most experience gained at the employer;
- How does it differ to NVQs? and
- Not sure – I think of it as grounding in a trade rather than a service orientated occupation.

3.7 In general, employers without a detailed knowledge of apprenticeships (including the overwhelming majority of those not currently employing trainees) exhibited a range of gaps in their understanding with the following areas cited most frequently:

- Misunderstandings linked to age parameters and apprenticeships (entirely within the health and social care sector);
- The added value of apprenticeships relative to NVQs;
- The existence and requirements of key skills;
- The balance of on the job and off the job training; and
- The contractual obligations at the end of the apprenticeship.

3.8 Less than 10% of employers in motor vehicle and retail / enterprise were aware of any recent reforms linked to apprenticeships. The comparative figures for health and social care and hairdressing were 23% and 46% respectively. 31% of employers from the hairdressing sector highlighted the increase in wages to the national minimum wage – some thing not mentioned by employers from other sectors.

Recruitment

3.9 The key issues faced by employers in taking on an apprentice in the first instance were characterised by a wide range of variables. The most frequently cited issues were the need to guarantee the quality of the candidate and assurances of the individual characteristics of particularly younger apprentices, e.g. levels of maturity, work ethic, common sense etc.

3.10 Particular issues highlighted by employers included:

- Ensuring that the candidate has a desire to work within a sector and/or business;
- Ensuring that the candidate is of a minimum quality with basic literacy and numeracy key determinants;
- Ensuring that the business has sufficient demand for its services in order to justify the investment in the apprentice;
- Ensuring that adequate supervisory staff are in place;
- Recognising the additional investment to be made in training outside of the apprenticeship framework, e.g. specific product training;
- Ensuring that the individual is keen, hard working, reliable and has a degree of common sense or life skills;
- Whether the specifics of the framework will be suitable or crucially sufficiently specialised to meet their business needs; and
- Not having a 100% idea of what an apprenticeship means for their business.

3.11 The main reasons offered by employers for not wanting to take on an apprentice typically highlighted either a lack of understanding of the apprenticeship model or the influence of current and/or previous trends in company training.

3.12 Overall, the costs perceived to be associated with an apprentice were highlighted by 34% of employers as a possible reason for not taking on an apprentice. The sector figure for this particular barrier to employing an apprentice stretches from 23% in health and social care to 55% in hairdressing.

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- 3.13 The second most frequently cited barrier to employing an apprentice was doubts over the suitability of younger trainees as stated by 16% of employers overall but 27% in terms of hairdressing. 14% of employers overall stated that a lack of capacity to supervise or manage an apprentice was a potential barrier to taking on an apprentice – an issue most frequently cited within the retail / business sector (25%).
- 3.14 Though most issues thought to be pertinent in decisions not to employ an apprentice crossed sector boundaries, three employers from the health and social care highlighted a lack of knowledge of the entry age guidance for apprenticeships in relation to the relatively high average age within their typical workforce. Within motor vehicle and retail / business, a lack of supervisory capacity was most frequently highlighted though this wasn't detailed as an issue with the hairdressing sector.
- 3.15 The key issues most frequently highlighted throughout the research included:
- The cost of paying an apprentice National Minimum Wage – particularly to those aged over 18;
 - Previous bad experiences in terms of the quality and impact of apprentices;
 - Not recognising the benefits because they haven't been through the process before;
 - The risks involved with a failed apprenticeship given the relative lack of maturity with most people aged 16-18;
 - Doubts over the motivation and commitment of the apprentices;
 - Having other apprentices already employed given the recent increase in the payment;
 - The relative age of a business and the need to maintain quality standards on a tight budget or staffing roster;
 - A lack of common sense or life skills in demanding occupations;
 - A preference for time served, experience workers; and
 - A lack of supervisory capacity.

3.16 The main incentive for taking on an apprentice was overwhelmingly (across all four sectors) a desire to mould, shape or directly influence the training and development of a predominantly young person to work in the style and up to the quality standards expected by the employer. Other reasons offered as the incentive for taking on an apprentice included:

- A belief in staff development cycle with individuals at different skills levels able to support more senior staff and provide a full service to a client or customer;
- A desire to work with young people and investing in young talent;
- Revenue generation derived from the support provided
- Providing recognition of the existing skills of a (older) workforce; and
- An alternative recruitment method which is typically less expensive and stressful than dealing with candidates provided via JobCentre Plus.

3.17 The overwhelming majority of thoughts in relation to the role of the training provider in the recruitment process were centred on the effective screening and selection of candidates for employers. Employers, and especially those with concerns over quality of cost of an apprenticeship, were very keen that the training provider effectively screens the candidates in order to maximise the chances of a successful placement.

3.18 Although employers are aware of the size of the step into the world of work, particularly for 16 year old apprentices, a larger proportion are very weary of a potential change of heart several weeks or months into an apprenticeship.

3.19 Potential improvements to the recruitment process were largely linked to the quality of this initial screening and selection process with employers from the hairdressing sector most frequently highlighting issues in this area.

3.20 A selection of comments from the hairdressing sector include:

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- Schools don't seem to be pushing the apprenticeships as much as they used to. Now we only get to see the troublesome kids;
 - It is important to ensure the person has talent and is committed;
 - One issue is that a lot of career advisors (not BL) paint hairdressing in a negative light and it is often suggested as a last resort option for those "low achieving" young people;
 - At the interview stage they could be more robust in ascertaining the applicants level of commitment, e.g. finding out if they have researched the salon or the course and ensure that they understand what is involved in hairdressing (to counter unrealistic expectations);
 - Need to ensure real world awareness.
- 3.21 The impact of the recession on potential apprenticeship recruitment had had a detrimental affect in approximately 1 in 4 cases where the economic downturn had impacted on overall training and investment decisions with the business. The implications of this included the cancellation of an apprentice in one instance, a reduction in the number of apprentices employed in a number of cases and a withdrawal from the process in favour of fully trained staff or even redundancies.

Costs / Pay

- 3.22 Employer understanding of the costs of an apprentice was mixed at best with only a small proportion of those interviewed immediately recognising the added costs of supervisory support and productivity implications over and above the more readily foreseen costs associated with the wages of the apprentice.
- 3.23 Understanding of all issues surrounding the costs and payment of apprentices was lowest within the health and social care sector with just 10-15% having a base level of knowledge. Hairdressing employers followed by motor vehicle exhibited the most knowledge in these areas.
- 3.24 Employers had very little recognition of the financial investment made by the government in supporting apprenticeship provision many intimating that this was expected given the economic downturn and the government's perceived role in creating difficult trading conditions for many businesses.

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- 3.25 Whilst few employers highlighted a potential scaling of subsidies to training costs, a larger proportion highlighted the further investment required to complete or further develop the skillset of the apprentice. This could take the form of product training, e.g. L'Oreal Colour Tones or Citroen fuel injection systems and represent a significant investment in a young person running in to thousands of pounds.
- 3.26 Employer understanding of the rules with regards to the payment of apprentices was found to be mixed. Approximately half of those interviewed were aware of the terms and conditions in this area whilst the remainder were guessing that this would be the case but were by no means certain.
- 3.27 The majority of those interviewed were happy to follow their own strategy in terms of apprentice pay without the need for support from a training provider although opinions varied widely in terms of the frequency and scale of potential increments paid to trainees.

Dealings with the Training Provider

- 3.28 The role of the training provider was primarily described as a combination of providing the theory and off the job training to the apprentice whilst providing support and updates on progress to both the employer and trainee through the assessment or mentor process.
- 3.29 The majority of employers were happy with this arrangement with only a small number of issues related to the quality of the assessment / mentor arrangements, e.g. arranging these visits at the most appropriate time for the employer such as early in the week for hairdressing salons.
- 3.30 Employers were generally very happy with the off the job training provided for apprentices with any issues in terms of the coordination of staff to cover day release quickly sorted in all cases. There were however some isolated instances of queries as to the relevance and/quality of the NVQ although most stated that the frameworks were relatively up to date and matched their requirements. Examples of some of the issues raised include:

- Hairdressing - lack of demand for cap highlighting in the sector;
- Hairdressing - the need for younger staff to recognise the need for 'unfashionable' techniques such as perming (employer input in module choice key here)
- Motor Vehicle – relevance of fuel injection training;
- Motor Vehicle – the completeness of the training to investigate faults and look at problems in depth, e.g. completely build and strip an engine, rather than tackle prescribed problems; and
- Motor Vehicle – the inclusion of enough specialist work in terms of hydraulics, electric and pneumatics.

On the Job Training

3.31 Issues faced by employers in terms of the planning and coordination of on the job training for apprentices were largely solved by the timely planning of supervisory capacity or opportunities to provide one-to-one support to an apprentice. For example, most stylists would allocate an evening or quiet afternoon to go through particular techniques with a hairdressing apprentice.

Retention

3.32 The main reasons for apprentices not completing their apprenticeship were mainly centred on the characteristics and personality of the individual apprentice with the greatest risk of non-completion thought to be in the first six months.

3.33 There appear to be some broad patterns linked to the sector of the employer with hairdressers and care professionals highlighting the desire and commitment of younger apprentices alongside issues with pregnancy whilst motor vehicle retention was thought to be determined as much by attitude and/or work ethic of a young person.

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- 3.34 The most frequently cited issues in terms of non-completion included:
- A lack of knowledge and/or understanding of the requirements of the ‘world of work’ amongst apprentices;
 - A lack of maturity;
 - Personal reasons including pregnancy or parents moving out of the area;
 - A realisation that that this wasn’t the career for them;
 - Peer pressure from friends with higher paid jobs (mostly with less potential);
 - An inability to recognise the bigger picture in terms of the potential earnings and job role two years in the future relative to the mundane tasks such as cleaning which many apprentices have to undertake;
 - A lack of work ethic or employer support/motivation; and
 - The lack of career aspiration in that job role.
- 3.35 Employers were keen to stress the role of the training provider in both the recruitment process, e.g. screening, and the mentoring arrangements in identifying and alleviating any issues which could lead to non-completion or indeed ‘waste the time and investment’ of an employer by prolonging an apprenticeship for longer than necessary.
- 3.36 The employer role in maximising retention rates was thought to lay primarily in the provision of informal support to the apprentice in order to generate motivation, interest and acknowledgement of future prospects.

The Apprentices

- 3.37 Where employers had formerly employed or currently were employing an apprentice, the overwhelming majority were entirely satisfied with the training and end product in terms of the qualified apprentice with most choosing to employ the individual subject to continued business requirements.

3.38 Amongst those employers who had not employed an apprentice to date, many opinions were seemingly clouded by misinterpretations of current arrangements, e.g. age restrictions or out dated perceptions of what is meant by an apprentice, e.g. limited to a trade profession such as bricklaying or plumbing primarily for young males. Some were also guided by perceptions of a drop in quality from the standards and way of training that had been in place 20-30 years ago.

3.39 In this regard there is a clear information gap which is hindering the take up and understanding of apprenticeships. Employers would benefit from concise, clear and neutral guidance in the following areas:

- An introduction to the composition of an apprenticeship;
- The potential benefit to their business of employing an apprentice;
- The added value of an apprenticeship relative to individual NVQ training;
- The support that would be offered through the training provider;
- What would be expected from all parties, e.g. apprentice, employer and training provider;
- Clarity of obligations at the end of the apprentice; and
- Reassurance of the quality of recruitment and screen processes.

Overall

3.40 Most employers were quick to recognise the longer term benefits of employing an apprentice with the development a skilled individual training to the standard and style demanded by an employer the key outcome. Employers saw few short term benefits other than providing existing staff with an opportunity to instigate supervisory or management skills or improvements to productivity through an 'extra pair of hands'.

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- 3.41 Amongst the longer term benefits identified by employers, the following were the most frequently cited:
- An opportunity to assess an individual before employing them full time on a permanent basis;
 - Having an apprentice programme is good for staff motivation because they can see a structured development programme and can engage with the apprentices;
 - The generation of a loyal employee;
 - The satisfaction of skills development in young people; and
 - Staff morale generated from the recognition of existing skills.
- 3.42 Future plans for apprenticeships were largely guided by economic prospects although two employers were currently looking (to varying intensities) for apprentices at the moment. A large proportion of the employers not currently utilising apprentices stated that they were open to the idea of employing an apprentice subject to the provision of further information to provide a business case for the decision.
- 3.43 Encouragement to take on more apprentices in the future would be largely influenced by financial assistance as stated by almost half (47%) of employers interviewed although hairdressing and health and social care provided the bulk of the employers requiring funding to support apprenticeships. Whilst 16% of employers stated that further recruitment would be determined by business growth, the same proportion also stated that nothing would change the number of apprentices they currently employ.
- 3.44 Each of the employers surveyed as part of the research was asked to give an overall satisfaction rating (positive, neutral, negative) by the Study Team related to their experiences, thoughts and perceptions of apprenticeships. The results reveal that overall 61% of those consulted are viewed by the Study Team to a positive reflection of apprenticeships and 14% a negative viewpoint. 24% are seen a neutral.

3.45 The results by sector are displayed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Employer Perceptions of Apprenticeships				
	% of Employers			
	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
Hair	7.7	15.4	76.9	100.0
Health and Social Care	7.7	53.8	38.5	100.0
Motor Vehicle / Engineering	8.3	16.7	75.0	100.0
Retail / Business	36.4	9.1	54.5	100.0
Total	14.3	24.5	61.2	100.0

3.46 The negative results in terms of health and social care and retail / business are thought, to a degree, to reflect relationships between employers and the training providers on the peer group which are likely to be better given their business relationship.

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE PRO FORMA

Apprentice Research Questionnaire Pro Forma

Introduction

Hello, my name is xxx and I'm calling from ERS – a research company based in Newcastle. We have been asked by a group of training providers (including << *insert relevant provider to match sector* >>) on behalf of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service to explore employer thoughts and perceptions on the value and contribution of apprentices amongst North East businesses.

The research will try to help improve the quality of the apprentice experience for both the employer and the apprentice based on your opinions on apprentices. As such I was wondering if you could spare 20 minutes or so to answer a few quick questions. << *if busy try to arrange a convenient time to call back* <<

Background

1. First of all, what is the company's recent history in terms of employing apprentices?

(Discuss how many per year, over what period of time, what programmes and levels, ages of apprentices, whether currently employing an apprentice)

2. What is your understanding of what is included in an apprenticeship?

(A minimum of 16 hours per week paid employment, a knowledge based element, a competency based element, Transferable or "key skills", a module on employment rights and responsibilities, induction) ('Apprenticeships' equivalent to Level 2 (or GCSE level), 'Advanced Apprenticeships' equivalent to Level 3 (or A-levels), 'Higher Apprenticeships' – the equivalent to a foundation degree)

3. Are you aware of any recent reforms linked to apprenticeships?

(National Apprenticeship Service (NAS))

Recruitment

4. What are the key issues faced by employers in taking on an apprentice in the first instance?

(Discuss issues and perceptions relating to relevance of training/apprenticeship, understanding of apprenticeships, knowledge of which provider to approach – link to Apprenticeship Vacancies, levels of bureaucracy, amount of time spent on apprentices, cost, quality concerns re apprentices, clashes with employer's own training scheme, lack of in-house capacity to coordinate, employers do not receive a direct monetary incentive to take on apprentices but off-job training costs are subsidised in full, or in part, by the National Apprenticeship Service)

5. Why would employers choose not to take on an apprentice?

6. What are the main incentives for taking on an apprentice?

(Discuss relevance to business - skills shortages, recruitment, bespoke training, minimise staff turnover, increase productivity, learning while on the job, government contribution to the costs of learning)

7. What are your thoughts on the role of the training provider in the recruitment process?

8. What needs to be improved in terms of recruitment?

9. How has the recession influenced your thoughts on recruiting apprentices?

Costs / Pay

10. What is your understanding of the costs of an apprentice? Is there recognition of the financial investment by the government in apprenticeship provision?

The National Apprenticeship Service covers the training of apprentices depending on their age – 16-18 = 100%, 19-24 = 50%, 25+ = contribution. If employers or providers choose to deliver additional qualifications or courses as part of the delivery of the overall framework then these courses will not be funded and will need to be paid for by the provider or employer. There is also the cost of the supervision, support and mentoring to support the apprentice.

Programme-Led Apprenticeships are unpaid although the learner may be eligible for EMA. Programme-Led Apprenticeships are a way for people start their apprenticeship qualification without being in full-time employment. They also enable employers who may not be able to support apprentices through a whole apprenticeship framework to offer training opportunities. With Programme-Led Apprenticeships, apprentices can begin studying parts of the Apprenticeship framework at a learning provider until a suitable employer is found where they can move to a full Apprenticeship framework. Apprentices on this scheme can undertake study towards their Apprenticeship at a learning provider or they can undergo training in the workplace.

11. What do you understand to be the rules with regards to the payment of apprentices?

Apprentices must still receive a wage with the minimum wage for apprentices being £95 a week. As skills develop, many employers tend to increase wages – average of £170 net pay per week in recent research. Like most other employees, apprentices must be given at least 20 days' paid holiday per year as well as bank holidays.

12. Could training providers provide greater clarity or support in relation to apprentices pay?

Dealings with the Training Provider

13. What do you consider to be the role of the training provider?

(Training provider usually responsible for an apprentice's off-the-job training, appointing a mentor to work with the employer to plan the training, assess progress and deal with any issues that may arise – explore knowledge and rating of these elements)

14. What are your thoughts on the off the job training undertaken by apprentices?

(Discuss hours, disruption to employer, day vs. block release, communications, relevance/rating of NVQ, relevance/rating of technical qualification/certificate and transferable skills)

On the Job Training

15. What issues do you face in terms of planning and coordinating on the job training for apprentices?

Retention

16. What are the main reasons for apprentices not completing their apprenticeship?

(Discuss pay levels and increments, learners finding jobs before they complete, apprentices not being suited to a programme, work environment, apprentice characteristics, e.g. commitment, ability, maturity)

17. What are the responsibilities of the employer and the provider in ensuring that more apprentices complete their training?

18. How could this process be improved?

The Apprentices

19. In general, how would you rate the performance of your apprentices?

20. How could this be improved?

(Discuss role of and potential improvements from providers, apprentices and employer perspectives)

Overall

21. What are the benefits of taking on an apprentice in both the short and long term?

(Discuss opportunity to train staff to employer's standards and range/depth of skills required; financial support for training, recruitment process for young workers; helps to retain young workers)

22. A recent national survey of employers produced the following results. Can you tell me how much you agree with the following, providing reasons for any disagreement or just general thoughts on the results?

- **81% said that employing apprentices generated higher overall productivity for their company.**
- **66% said that their Apprenticeship programme made them more competitive in their industry.**
- **92% said that their Apprenticeship programme better motivated staff and increased job satisfaction.**
- **74% said that apprentices tended to be more loyal, remaining at their company longer than non-apprentices.**

23. What are your future plans in terms of apprentices?

24. What would encourage you to take on more apprentices in the future?

25. Any further thoughts?

Questions for Employers not utilising Apprentices

Background

- 1. First of all, what is the company's recent history in terms of employing apprentices or trainees more widely?**

(Discuss how many per year, over what period of time, what programmes and levels, ages of apprentices, whether currently employing an apprentice)

- 2. Are there specific reasons why you do not currently employ apprentices?**

- 3. What is your understanding of what is included in an apprenticeship?**

(A minimum of 16 hours per week paid employment, a knowledge based element, a competency based element, Transferable or "key skills", a module on employment rights and responsibilities, induction) ('Apprenticeships' equivalent to Level 2 (or GCSE level), 'Advanced Apprenticeships' equivalent to Level 3 (or A-levels), 'Higher Apprenticeships' – the equivalent to a foundation degree)

- 4. Are you aware of any recent reforms linked to apprenticeships?**

(National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) etc. – made any difference to company policy or thoughts on apprenticeships)

Recruitment

5. Why would employers choose not to take on an apprentice?

(Discuss issues and perceptions relating to relevance of training/apprenticeship, understanding of apprenticeships, knowledge of which provider to approach – link to Apprenticeship Vacancies, levels of bureaucracy, amount of time spent on apprentices, cost, quality concerns re apprentices, clashes with employer’s own training scheme, lack of in-house capacity to coordinate, employers do not receive a direct monetary incentive to take on apprentices but off-job training costs are subsidised in full, or in part, by the National Apprenticeship Service)

6. What are the main incentives for taking on an apprentice?

(Discuss relevance to business - skills shortages, recruitment, bespoke training, minimise staff turnover, increase productivity, learning while on the job, government contribution to the costs of learning) (If ignorant of the potential benefits ask if these would be sufficient to change mind)

7. What are your thoughts on the role of the training provider in the recruitment process?

(Have they had a bad experience, what support would they need etc.)

8. How has the recession influenced your thoughts on recruiting apprentices?

Costs / Pay

9. What is your understanding of the costs of an apprentice? Is there recognition of the financial investment by the government in apprenticeship provision?

The National Apprenticeship Service covers the training of apprentices depending on their age – 16-18 = 100%, 19-24 = 50%, 25+ = contribution. If employers or providers choose to deliver additional qualifications or courses as part of the delivery of the overall framework then these courses will not be funded and will need to be paid for by the provider or employer. There is also the cost of the supervision, support and mentoring to support the apprentice.

Programme-Led Apprenticeships are unpaid although the learner may be eligible for EMA. Programme-Led Apprenticeships are a way for people start their apprenticeship qualification without being in full-time employment. They also enable employers who may not be able to support apprentices through a whole apprenticeship framework to offer training opportunities. With Programme-Led Apprenticeships, apprentices can begin studying parts of the Apprenticeship framework at a learning provider until a suitable employer is found where they can move to a full Apprenticeship framework. Apprentices on this scheme can undertake study towards their Apprenticeship at a learning provider or they can undergo training in the workplace.

10. What do you understand to be the rules with regards to the payment of apprentices?

Apprentices must still receive a wage with the minimum wage for apprentices being £95 a week. As skills develop, many employers tend to increase wages – average of £170 net pay per week in recent research. Like most other employees, apprentices must be given at least 20 days' paid holiday per year as well as bank holidays.

Dealings with the Training Provider

11. Do you use the services of a training provider at all?

(Which one? Why? Have they discussed apprentices?)

12. What do you consider to be the role of the training provider in terms of apprentices or more generally?

(Training provider usually responsible for an apprentice's off-the-job training, appointing a mentor to work with the employer to plan the training, assess progress and deal with any issues that may arise – explore knowledge and rating of these elements)

13. What are your thoughts on the off the job training undertaken by apprentices?

(Discuss hours, disruption to employer, day vs. block release, communications, relevance/rating of NVQ, relevance/rating of technical qualification/certificate and transferable skills)

On the Job Training

14. What are your thoughts in terms of on the job training for apprentices?

(Cost benefit questions linked to time/cost vs. perceived benefit to learner/company)

Retention

15. Is the potential for an apprentice not completing their training or moving to another employer a reason for your non-employment of apprentices?

The Apprentices

16. In general, how would you rate the performance of apprentices?

(What is this based on?)

17. How could this be improved?

(Discuss role of and potential improvements from providers, apprentices and employer perspectives)

Overall

18. Can you see any benefits in taking on an apprentice in both the short and long term?

(Discuss opportunity to train staff to employer's standards and range/depth of skills required; financial support for training, recruitment process for young workers; helps to retain young workers)

19. A recent national survey of employers produced the following results. Can you tell me how much you agree with the following, providing reasons for any disagreement or just general thoughts on the results?

- *81% said that employing apprentices generated higher overall productivity for their company.*
- *66% said that their Apprenticeship programme made them more competitive in their industry.*
- *92% said that their Apprenticeship programme better motivated staff and increased job satisfaction.*
- *74% said that apprentices tended to be more loyal, remaining at their company longer than non-apprentices.*

20. What are your future plans in terms of training and or apprentices?

21. What would encourage you to take on apprentices in the future?

22. Any further thoughts?