Traineeships – maximising progressions into apprenticeships and employment:

Executive Summary
July 2017
Learning and Work Institute (L&W) was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to identify effective practice that enables young people to progress from a traineeship to an apprenticeship or employment. This executive summary accompanies a full report, which presents the findings of research undertaken between January 2017 and March 2017, a summary of the key findings and a series of case studies.

This executive summary will be of interest to providers who are currently delivering traineeships or planning to deliver the programme.

For more information about L&W’s work on traineeships please contact Nicola Aylward at nicola.aylward@learningandwork.org.uk.
KEY FINDINGS

Traineeships are delivered using a range of different models. The key message is that no one size fits all – young people have different barriers to employment, and employers have different needs and demands upon their time. Providers with the highest rates of progression are able to adapt their models to meet the needs of individual trainees and employers.

Recruitment

Recruitment is the first stage of a young person’s traineeship journey. Providers interviewed for this research emphasised the importance of effective recruitment processes in enabling them to engage young people who are likely to be able to progress to employment or an apprenticeship. The recruitment process is also important in terms of setting clear objectives around outcomes, from the initial stage of contact with a young person.

Recommendations for practice – Providers should:

- Consider linking with local information, advice and guidance hubs. Staff at such hubs have specialist skills and knowledge of local vacancies, and are able to refer young people who can progress into local employment opportunities.
- Develop links with specialist third sector and local authority services. These organisations can refer young people and provide continuity of support throughout their traineeship, which helps to secure a good progression outcome.
- Be proactive in developing strong partnerships with Jobcentre Plus. Running sessions for JCP staff and claimants, placing promotional material in offices, and inviting staff to see traineeship delivery in action are all effective ways of building relationships.
- Ensure that apprenticeship recruitment teams are actively referring young people who aren’t ready to apply for an apprenticeship, or who have been unsuccessful in securing an apprenticeship, to their traineeship programme.
- Ensure that young people, parents and employers clearly understand that progression to employment is the expected outcome of a traineeship. This helps to keep all parties focussed.
- Focus on securing work experience with employers who are committed to having a real apprenticeship or job vacancy available for a young person at the end of the placement. This approach is more likely to lead to a quick employment outcome.
- Develop and widely disseminate clear promotional materials which focus upon the employment outcome that a young person can achieve through a traineeship. Case studies are an effective way of doing this.
- Build a strong local reputation for high quality traineeship delivery that leads to employment. This helps to boost referrals and ensures that young people and employers clearly perceive traineeships as a direct pathway to employment.
Initial Assessment

All the providers interviewed said that strong initial assessment is crucial in ensuring good progression outcomes for trainees. Trainees should be impartially assessed and referred to the most suitable programme that meets their individual needs and aspirations. This could be onto a study programme, an apprenticeship, traineeship or in some instances referral to a specific college course. Effective initial assessment will help to ensure that a traineeship is the most appropriate option for an individual young person. This in turn reduces the likelihood of early dropout, non-completion or lack of progression to employment or an apprenticeship.

Recommendations for practice – providers should:

- Impartially assess young people and refer them to the most appropriate programme to meet their needs. This reduces the likelihood of early dropout from a traineeship, non-completion or lack of progression to employment or an apprenticeship.
- Consider recruiting staff with IAG qualifications, or upskilling existing staff. This approach enables providers to offer effective information, advice and guidance and to offer strong support to work experience employers, which contributes to good progression outcomes.
- Ensure that initial assessment is comprehensive and focussed around identifying specific barriers to employment. This enables staff to develop tailored programmes designed to support individual young people to overcome barriers and make sustained transitions into employment.
- Use tried and tested tools for assessing a young person’s English and maths skills level, and consider an e-portfolio system, as this helps to prepare a young person for an apprenticeship.
● Ensure that young people clearly understand that English and maths is a core part of a traineeship because these skills are essential and relevant to their employment goals, and highly valued by employers.

● Consider how functional skills delivery can be embedded into all aspects of a traineeship. Integrating English and maths staff and traineeship staff can be an effective way of doing this.

Model of delivery

Providers emphasise the critical importance of flexible models of delivery in meeting the needs of local young people and employers, in securing good rates of progression.

Recommendations for practice – providers should:

● Ensure that their delivery models are flexible and can meet the needs of individual young people and employers. Young people have individual barriers to employment; developing flexible and tailored programmes to address specific barriers will increase progression rates.

● Consider the use of sector specific units, awards or qualifications. This approach is likely to boost the employment prospects of young people who are applying for jobs or apprenticeships in specific sectors.

● Consider running mixed programmes, for young people across the 16-24 age range, with different start dates. This enables new trainees to interact and learn from more established trainees. In addition, seeing their peers progressing into employment reinforces a trainee’s expectation that they will be able to achieve this too.

● Ensure that their delivery model involves regular progress reviews, clear goal setting and opportunities for reflection. This enables trainees to remain focussed on their employment goals and see the progress they are making towards a job or apprenticeship.

● Involve employers in developing and delivering traineeships at an early stage. This ensures that employers are committed to the process, understand their responsibilities and the expectation that they will actively support a young person to bridge the gap to employment.

● Consider working with specific employers to develop bespoke traineeship programmes. This can be particularly effective in providing a pipeline of ‘apprenticeship-ready’ young people for employers who are recruiting for a number of roles.

● Engage local organisations that provide access to a range of employers, for example local Chambers of Commerce, employer federations or Rotary Club. This increases access to work experience placements and other forms of engagement with employers.
The aim of a traineeship is to help young people gain the skills and experience they need to get an apprenticeship or job. L&W interviewed a range of providers and asked them to identify key factors that they think are critical to good rates of progression into apprenticeship and employment. Their top ten tips are:

1. Where possible, delivery of traineeship programmes should be undertaken by the same team who deliver apprenticeships - this enables consistency; learners are familiar with tutors who may also become their apprenticeship assessor/tutor. This approach also explicitly positions traineeships as a clear and linear pathway to apprenticeships. Employers and young people are aware of this from their first point of contact/engagement and therefore perceive traineeships as a natural progression pathway directly to an apprenticeship.

2. Ensure you have a clear communications strategy in place. This is crucial in recruiting young people who are ready for a traineeship. It also ensures that referral agencies, employers and parents have an accurate understanding of the gap to sustainable employment. Consider holding briefing sessions, publishing newsletters and promoting successful outcomes through case studies and testimonies. Also ensure that your website is up to date and easy to navigate. Employers who benefit from offering traineeships may be willing to be ambassadors, promoting the programme to other employers through business networks, open days and events.

3. Take a holistic approach to initial assessment. Having a comprehensive process in place for all young people will ensure that only young people who have a reasonable chance of progressing to an apprenticeship or employment undertake a traineeship. Ensure that young people who are not suitable for a traineeship are referred to other pathways that are appropriate for them.

4. Identify a single point of contact for learners, e.g. traineeship tutor, as this ensures a consistent approach and support for that young person. Trainees will be able to discuss any concerns and build up trust and confidence, enabling them to believe that they can achieve and progress into an apprenticeship or job with the help and support of their tutor.
5. Ensure programmes are flexible and supportive. Assessing trainees’ needs carefully and tailoring support to address specific individual barriers to employment will maximise progression outcomes, particularly for trainees who require additional support.

6. Set clear expectations about progression outcomes from the beginning. The purpose of a traineeship is to enable a young person to get a job or apprenticeship - consistently deliver clear messaging about this, with both trainees and employers, throughout the duration of the traineeship. Trainees need to fully understand what they are aiming for and how they can achieve it, and employers need to be aware of their responsibilities and their role in supporting young people to develop the skills and experience they need for employment.

7. Set clear goals and monitor progress towards these goals on a regular basis, with at least weekly contact. Capture progress through the use of placement plans, diaries, log books, project work and handbooks. Employers often find it beneficial to view their trainee’s progress online, and can then be supported to offer further development and training as required. This evidence of progress can be used to show a trainee’s aptitude and potential to achieve a positive progression outcome.

8. Recruit employers who can commit to offering an apprenticeship or job, or are willing to create such opportunities. If they are matched with the right trainee who is successful on their placement. Promoting traineeships as an efficient process for recruiting the right young people for roles in employers’ companies is often effective as it’s likely to reduce early drop out and high turnover of staff, which is costly for businesses.

9. Ensure a good match between trainees and employers. It is important that an employer can support a young person’s career goals and that a young person is interested in and motivated by their experience placement. Matching trainees and employers as early as possible helps to develop a good relationship, immediately. Building this relationship early gives the young person confidence and the employer assurance that they have been matched with the right young person, who is interested in their business.

10. Review your traineeship programme after each cohort has finished, to identify what worked well and what needs to be improved. Feedback from trainees and employers is crucial in ensuring that the programme meets the needs of all involved and that young people are effectively supported at each stage of their traineeship to progress into employment.