

Into Apprenticeships

Barton Peveril College (Wessex Group)



Project Synopsis

In the early stages of our Apprenticeship delivery, S&DA identified two main barriers to the delivery of successful Apprenticeship programmes.

- 1) few long-term employment opportunities for 16-24yrs in certain sectors/industries
- 2) learners aged 16-24 needed additional learning/employability support prior to moving into an Apprenticeship to help meet employer needs

To address these barriers, we established a hybrid pilot 'GTA-ATA' to offer short-term work placements and pre-Apprenticeship support, with a view to creating a self-sustaining model.

Project Aims

Our pilot scheme set out to:

- establish an industry and provider-led Apprenticeship Training Agency
- recruit (employ) a pool of NEET young people aged 16-24 and provide them with an Apprenticeship programme in sector specific areas (20 in 2010 and thereafter 20 quarterly on an ongoing basis - 80 in total)
- Identify a wide range of employers able to offer short and longer term work opportunities for these Apprentices
- 'Supply' the Apprentices to the relevant employers on short term/temporary contracts in order to enable the Apprentices to complete their Apprenticeship in a modular fashion by completing a number of placements/short term contracts or longer term contracts.
- Support the Apprentices as they progress and offer them ongoing job skills support and mentoring to aid retention and completion
- Establish a model that is self financing, with Employers paying the Agency at rates that cover management costs Apprentice salaries and additional mentoring/learning support, with SFA funding covering the costs of learning provision (technical certificate and NVQ qualification)
- Produce a toolkit to be made available to other similar organisations, to use and adapt as a guide to creating a similar model for their own Apprenticeship programmes.

The project was considered innovative, as at the time of launching, ATA's had just been launched, but were largely operating training organisations brokering Apprentices into long term work placements. Our proposal was innovative as it offered a way of equipping Apprentices with employability skills prior to accessing employment, and of undertaking long term placements OR a series of short and longer term employment opportunities with employers in key sectors that together would help them complete their Apprenticeship Framework.

Project delivery

The key outputs and outcomes of the project were:

- 3) Setting up a General Training Agency. This started operating informally in September 2010 and was officially incorporated as a not for profit company with industry and training provider Membership in early 2011.
- 4) Identifying a first sector in which to work, (Railway Engineering) engaging employers and recruiting (through links with Connexions, local community organisations, youth workers etc) our first pool of 10 Apprentices by October 2010. Helping this initial group access short term employment opportunities and work towards their qualification. Producing marketing opportunities to promote the opportunity more widely following the first pilot cohort and attracting applications from over 40 further learners wanting to move into Apprentices in this sector.
- 5) Holding a dissemination event about the model in November 2011 at the Institute Directors, which was attended by industry experts, key employers (Health and Social Care, Engineering, Construction Industries), NAS, SFA, LDA, University of Herts, National Prison Service, Barnados, London Brokerage Services, Sector Skills Councils, a range of training providers from all sectors (Colleges. The event was hosted by Kate Bellingham (BBC) and supported by Tim Campbell (Sir Alan Sugar's first 'Apprentice') and praised by John Hayes (BIS).
- 6) Recruiting an additional 19 young people to the programme to move specifically into Railway Engineering Apprenticeships during 2011.
- 7) Developing an Apprenticeship Agency Toolkit in July 2011, and disseminating this via our Moodle, our Website and via our existing partnerships with organisations working in the field of Apprenticeships.
- 8) Identifying a second sector for our ATA provision, (Creative Industries), identifying an appropriate framework and setting up the infrastructure (staffing, equipment etc) to enable us to deliver the new Apprenticeship Framework in Creative & Digital Media (which includes Edexcel BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Creative & Digital Media (QCF), Edexcel BTEC Level 3 Certificate in Creative & Digital Media (QCF), Functional Skills in Maths, English and ICT at level 2) recruiting and employing a pool of 12 learners, with further demand from an additional 126 learners who we hope to roll the programme out to, once trialled, to undertake the pre-Apprenticeship programme and starting to work with a number of industry employers and a large Creative Industries recruitment agency who we hope to make a member of the GTA in due course.

Key partners and stakeholders were involved in the process at all stages in order to ensure that the project was creative and innovative and met the needs of both Apprentices and Employers.

In the first year, we realised that we needed to spend more time on developing the infrastructure than we had originally anticipated, and because of this focused our delivery on one sector (Railway Engineering) for the first stage of the pilot. We worked closely with Employers, Training organisations for the sector and with a recruitment agency to the sector (Morson's) to develop the initial pre-Apprenticeship pilot and to establish the programme for the first cohort of learners to be supported through the programme. This close working has operated throughout the project, to ensure that any issues are quickly identified and addressed. This has meant that we have been able to learn and adapt on an ongoing basis.

In the second year of the project and in the latter months (from July 2011) we were able to apply lessons learned from our first cohorts of Apprentices employed via the GTA, and through the overall delivery, to the creation of our GTA toolkit. We were also able to apply this to the development of our second sectoral programme (Creative Industries). This has meant that our

new cohort of Apprentices are benefiting from a tighter level of management and from improved provision through the agency.

What did you learn from the project?

We discovered that the project was wrought with legislative complications, and the set up of a new hybrid GTA-ATA model was more demanding than anticipated. This is the main unforeseen issue in terms of project delivery. This delayed direct delivery in year one, but spending more time on this element of the project has meant that a more robust structure with appropriate systems was developed prior to delivering. In the longer term this will be a worthwhile investment of time.

The model that we had anticipated creating (an Apprenticeship Agency) from scratch is complex and involves a great deal of legal processing. We have learned that it is important to adopt a creative approach to solving problems in the arena of Apprenticeship provision and that creative solutions can be delivered by identifying ways of building and combining the skills of a range of partners from different sectors. Our new model (a hybrid GTA-ATA with a GTA constitution) is the result of collaboration between industry employers, recruitment companies with links to those employers, training providers and input from NAS and London Brokerage Service. It is proving an effective model and as a result of the collaboration, we are confident that we will (post LSIS funding) be able to provide a self-sustaining model that other providers could create through similar collaborations. If rolled out this could significantly help providers achieve Government goals in terms of Apprenticeship targets.

Through Apprenticeships in Action (AiA) our Hybrid GTA we now have three options for supporting Apprentices into employment:

- 1) **Direct Employment.** This is the most common option which involves a GTA Member (an employer) directly employing the Apprentice through a Contract of Employment for the duration of the Apprenticeship.
- 2) **Agency Employment.** Apprenticeships in Action (AiA) employs the Apprentice directly, and contracts with a Member or with an external employer to supply the Apprentice to deliver specific services. This option is often suitable for very small employers who may not wish to employ an Apprentice directly or on a permanent/full time basis due to related costs. Under this option, AiA operates payroll and HR and invoices the Member monthly at an agreed rate for the Apprentice's time and costs. This option is also suitable for small businesses that are interested in sharing one or more Apprentices with another employer.
- 3) **Sponsored Employment.** This option involves a GTA Member committing to place an Apprentice with another employer(s). This might involve for example, a Member placing an Apprentice with a company in their supply chain, or a subsidiary/related company, and/or a business contact or similar.

From learner feedback from our initial cohorts, we learned that they young people that we were recruiting to the Agency, needed a wider range of pre-employment support than originally anticipated. We applied for additional funding from the LDA to develop an even broader pre-employment skills programme and this has proven very effective at equipping the young people with the skills and confidence that they need in order to access employment. We have recently been successful as a partner in accessing additional SFA funding to roll this pre-Apprenticeship provision forward over the next few years.

Learners on our pre-Apprenticeship programmes feedback that they received good support from their tutors as they had their needs assessed at the start of the programme. They also felt the training course suited their needs and the majority felt what they had learnt whilst on the programme helped them to move onto work. They had opportunity to improve their Maths and English Skills and gain their Functional Skills whilst on the pre-Apprenticeship programme.

One of the other main areas where we have learned lessons is in the area of employer engagement. This is a very intensive process, and even when an employer does commit to offering one or several work placements, external circumstances (for example the withdrawal of Government funding for large railway infrastructure projects, or the volume of unemployed graduates competing with Apprentices for work placements) can prevent the commitment coming to fruition. Understanding the demands of this area of work, we would certainly commit a lot more resources to this aspect of the Agency in future, and our forward financial modelling spreadsheet in our toolkit reflects this lesson.

Although we are happy with what the project has achieved, were we to start the project now, with all that we have learned we would have undertaken certain aspects differently for example:

- 1) We would have allocated the whole of the first year to setting up the Agency
- 2) We would have created the toolkit during this first year as a tool for ourselves to use and implement rather than purely as a dissemination vehicle and would have revised it latterly
- 3) We would have allocated significantly more time to Employer Engagement activity, as this is the largest challenge that we have faced
- 4) We would have allocated more time to developing the first pre-Apprenticeship programme and set less challenging recruitment targets to enable us to focus on getting the model right first.

Project Outcomes

As can be seen in the 'Project Delivery' section above, we have achieved most of our objectives but to a slightly different timescale than originally anticipated.

As we looked at the potential delivery models, we realised that a deadline of three months to establish the mechanisms and processes for setting up the pilot Apprenticeship Training Agency by June 2010 was unrealistic. We took guidance from the National Apprenticeship Service, who suggested a range of options for us and opted instead to create a GTA. This took almost 9 months to complete, delaying our direct delivery of Apprenticeships and supply of Apprenticeships.

We had envisaged working with 80 young people over the course of the project, but worked with 41 instead. This was because we discovered that the cohorts of young people needed more input than originally anticipated though the pre-Apprenticeship activities, and we also discovered that employer engagement was more demanding an activity for this cohort via the agency than expected. This was also affected by the economic recession which has made competition for work placements (short and long) even more competitive for this group of young people, who in today's climate, are competing with graduates for starter placements.

We also decided to delay moving into new sectors until we felt that we had learned all that we could from the first sector experience. We recruited our initial cohort of 10 learners in October 2010 (one month behind programme) to trial the programme. Having identified the Railway Engineering sector as an area where permanent (three year) Apprenticeships were hard to locate, but where short term placements were possible, we worked in partnership with Recruiter 'Metropolitan and Maine' to supply the Apprentices to TfL, Morson, Cross Rail etc for work placements in engineering and railway signalling that would enable the modular approach to Apprenticeships. In line with our proposal, the young people were offered a range of support on an ongoing basis throughout the provision and this is ongoing.

We started our GTA programme focusing on the Creative industries in October 2011 and have a cohort of 12 young people in place currently on our pre-Apprenticeship programme and are in

discussion with employers and a recruitment Agency so that we are ready to place these learners on their modular Apprenticeship programme. Some of our learners are already undertaking Apprenticeship placements and are designing logos and promotional materials for a new Free School, the first of many short term work placements that will help them achieve their full Apprenticeship Framework.

Project impact

The main impact of our project has been:

- Young people have acquired employability skills, increased confidence and the majority are now in work placements which will lead to them achieving a full Apprenticeship qualification.
- The Employers that we work with have the opportunity to offer short term work placements to young people as opposed to long term full Apprenticeship placements to which they could not commit
- Employers are now more aware of Apprenticeship programmes and what they entail
- Recruitment Agencies involved in the project who work with specific sectors have a pool of work ready, sectorally aware young people that they can place with employers and are able to influence the pre-placement training to ensure that the young people will be able to meet employer needs
- We have developed a new way of working that will be rolled out in our organisation across different sectors over the next years. We have developed a new GTA-ATA framework within which to operate.
- We have developed a financial planning model that will enable us to roll out a self sustaining GTA in order to sustain the programme and make it available to young people and employers in other sectors.
- We have learned lessons and implemented change in our delivery methods as a result. We have been able to share these lessons and our framework through the creation of the Apprenticeship Agency toolkit that we have developed with LSIS support.

Sharing of Project Findings

We have held one large dissemination event and created a toolkit that is shared via our Moodle, Website and wider networks.

We work in numerous partnerships, with a wide range of training and employment partners from the not for profit, private, voluntary and public sectors. We have shared our toolkit with these providers and some are now actively participating in our GTA (for example City of Westminster College, Renaissance Skills). We shall continue to encourage new partners to join our GTA as members, and will specifically aim to engage specialist providers in the new areas in which we are delivering (e.g. creative sector) and in areas in which we intend to deliver (health and social care).