

Higher Apprenticeships Support Service

Case Study: Developing a Higher Apprenticeship marketing strategy – City of Bristol College

City of Bristol College was successful in round one of the National Apprenticeship Service Higher Apprenticeship Development Fund with a unique bid that supported the West of England area through collaboration with five other Colleges (Weston College, City of Bath College, Norton Radstock College, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College) and University of the West of England. As the lead provider, City of Bristol College set up a steering group for the partner Colleges to manage and deliver the outcomes for the development of Higher Apprenticeships – the College Partnership Steering Group.

Across the partnership Higher Apprenticeships are offered in Accounting, Business and Administration, Engineering, IT, Software, Web and Telecoms Professional and Leadership and Management. New Higher Apprenticeship frameworks will also be offered for Creative and Construction Technical and Professional roles. The University of the West of England has been responsible for the development of the Engineering Level six and Healthcare Science Associates Higher Apprenticeship frameworks. To date 70 higher apprentices have been recruited across the Colleges. In addition to utilising the Higher Apprenticeship offer with professionals already established within work, nearly 30 Higher Apprenticeship vacancies have been generated for Engineering with Airbus and GKN Aerospace.

The College Partnership Steering Group took the decision to jointly market and promote Higher Apprenticeships so as not to further confuse the sector and marketplace. Feedback through Apprenticeship focus groups demonstrated that employers remain confused about what an Apprenticeship is how to access one and are sceptical about the confused messages from a range of training providers. To jointly promote the offer, City of Bristol College as the lead, appointed a design and communications agency to support the execution of the Higher Apprenticeship marketing strategy and work on behalf of all College partners.

Monthly meetings between Apprenticeship managers - represented on the College Partnership Steering Group - ensure fair representation of each College within the Higher Apprenticeship project, and agree and action the marketing and promotional activity for Higher Apprenticeships. The appointed agency attends all meetings to manage the deliverable outcomes of the Higher Apprenticeship marketing strategy.

As part of developing its approach to the delivery of Higher Apprenticeships, City of Bristol College has developed a comprehensive marketing strategy, successfully utilising a range of media to promote Higher Apprenticeships as a brand and to promote the offer to employers and potential apprentices. Some of these are identified below. In September 2012 the Higher Apprenticeship marketing won 'Silver' in the Apprenticeship category at the FE First Awards.

■ **A range of marketing brochures and information leaflets**

An employer and employee facing Higher Apprenticeship marketing brochure, presented as a Z-fold brochure, provides an overview of Higher Apprenticeships aimed at both the employer and the employee. The creative team took the decision to produce it in this way to ensure that the benefits for the employer and the employee are clearly communicated, as the two audiences are mutually exclusive within the Apprenticeship offer. The brochure details the benefits of Higher Apprenticeships and gives a comprehensive overview of each framework, qualifications included and the mode of delivery. At the back of each section each College has listed their Higher Apprenticeship framework offer and their relevant contact details.

A smaller Higher Apprenticeship promotional leaflet for employers and potential apprentices, presented in a concertina style, has aimed to outline only the headline benefits of Higher Apprenticeships and direct people to visit the website to find out more. It has been distributed at promotional open events across the West of England that the College partnership has supported, including careers events, Bristol Balloon Fiesta and T4 On The Beach.

Working in partnership with the Western Vocational Programme Career Pilot, the Higher Apprenticeship project has funded the development of an information leaflet for school-aged children to inform them of the Apprenticeship options post-16 and the introduction of Higher Apprenticeships. Since October 2012 this has been distributed to over 20,000 school students with the specific aim of demonstrating how to access an Apprenticeship and how these can now facilitate progression up to degree level.

■ **Sponsorship activities**

In June 2012 the Higher Apprenticeship project sponsored the annual Bristol Business Awards event which was attended by 300 business leaders, award winners and guests. To ensure parity across the West of England, it also sponsored the Bath Business Awards in September 2012. Both events enabled promotion of the Higher Apprenticeship brand through a key note address to the audience and distribution of promotional goody bags containing Higher Apprenticeship branded marketing collateral - including pens, USB, torch, sewing kit, mints and key rings. The event proved valuable in relationship building and raised awareness of the Higher Apprenticeship offer in the West of England to employers.

■ **Employer Events**

A number of employer breakfast and lunch events have been held for employers across the region in order to promote Higher Apprenticeship opportunities. These have proved very beneficial in that they have also allowed intelligence to be gathered from employers about their particular needs - in relation to the delivery of Higher Apprenticeships and their willingness to invest financially in order to inform an overall pricing strategy. Where events have incorporated a presentation from an employer with experience of Apprenticeships, these have further helped with the selling of associated benefits.

Other types of employer events which have proved beneficial include the running of 'case conferences' with key employers. These have involved: examination of their overall Apprenticeship strategy; identifying a talent pool of current level three advanced apprentices with the potential to progress to a Higher Apprenticeship; and

discussion on the potential for a Higher Apprenticeship programme to be run alongside a graduate recruitment programme.

■ **Participating in trade shows**

Attending engineering specific trade shows in Fairford and Farnborough, provided the opportunity to demonstrate to employers and potential apprentices the Higher Apprenticeship Engineering offer and allowed curriculum staff to explain the specific pathways on offer. This proved to be a positive experience in terms of promoting Higher Apprenticeships to industry, allowing the College to demonstrate to key employers how Higher Apprenticeships will meet their business needs.

■ **Using Social Media**

A 'show reel' has been developed to promote the features of Higher Apprenticeships, and publicise the benefits of undertaking this programme for both employers and apprentices. In conjunction with this and the support of local employers, several talking heads of employers talking about Higher Apprenticeships have been produced, to encourage other employers to consider the benefits of Higher Apprenticeships. All the Higher Apprenticeship show reels and talking heads produced are available to each partner College to use in collaboration with their own marketing strategies. Colleges have used them on their reception digital display screens, their websites and at employer and apprentice facing engagement events.

A Higher Apprenticeship website has also been developed for employers and potential apprentices at www.justgohigher.co.uk. This site not only provides an introduction to Higher Apprenticeships, an overview of each framework on offer and College contact details, but also updates on events supported by each College to promote Higher Apprenticeships.

The Higher Apprenticeship Facebook page is regularly updated with events and news items to further publicise the promotional work, and demonstrate the development activity undertaken by the college partners.

Twitter has also been used (@justgohigher) to further promote Higher Apprenticeships. It has given updates on anything from Higher Apprenticeships

starts at Bristol City Council and where learners have progressed from Advanced Apprenticeships, vacancies with Airbus and GKN Aerospace, to events and meetings attended. In the 2013 National Apprenticeship Week, the use of social media for Higher Apprenticeship marketing will continue to play a major role in the partnership strategy.

■ **Advertising**

Advertisements have been placed in a range of media including trade press, local newspapers, billboards and digital screens at regional shopping centres, with the aim of raising awareness of the Higher Apprenticeship brand and benefits in order to encourage recruitment. This has included South West Business magazine, Agenda Engineering Careers, Bath Chronicle, Western Mercury and The Post in Bristol. All advertising promotes the Higher Apprenticeship website, www.justgohigher.co.uk, to drive interested parties to this site.

■ **Radio campaigns**

A local radio campaign with Heart radio station in the West Country has been used to drive awareness of Higher Apprenticeships and encourage enrolments using the theme – ‘some people are just meant to go higher’. The airtime purchased as part of the agreement has allowed messages to promote vacancies, or events to be adapted as required.

■ **Community events**

Hosting stands at major community events including a major music event for young people (T4 on the Beach) and the Bristol Balloon Fiesta has provided opportunity to promote the Higher Apprenticeship brand to potentially thousands of employers and apprentices in short time periods. The College Partnership is also planning to attend Apprenticeship careers events across the region during 2013. As part of National Apprenticeship Week in March 2013 @ Bristol provides a central location for over 24 local Colleges and training providers to promote their Apprenticeship opportunities. These events are very well attended by schools and the general public with over 1000 people attending each event. A traditional careers stand will promote Higher Apprenticeships and give advice on the raising of the participation age. It will also

incorporate a simple 'Have a Go' activity in the form of a graduation style photo, complete with cap, gown and a scroll.

For further information contact

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