



Apprenticeships: 'invested' partnerships as a vehicle for co-producing high quality apprenticeships

Michaela Brockmann, Vanessa Cui & Rob Smith

The Context and aims

Context

- Apprenticeship as an enhanced vocational route for young people and a key vehicle for the production of skills.
- Featuring on-the-job training complemented by an off-the-job element that must constitute a minimum of 20% of the apprentice's working hours.
- Little in the current regulations in terms of employer responsibility
- Mixed messages of apprenticeship as 'a job with training' and on-the-job training as 'the opportunity to practise new skills'.

Aims

- To gain insight into the extent, content and nature of on-the-job and off-the-job training received by apprentices at Levels 2 and 3.

The Case Study research approach

On-the-job training

Interviews with 13 national stakeholders and sector-level organisations
Twenty-one interviews with 10 employers across 5 sectors (construction, engineering, IT, retail and social care) between May and August 2019. A total of 38 participants were interviewed, including managers, supervisors, trainers and apprentices.

Off-the-job training

Two case study organisations – in depth interviews
Additional interviews across a range of providers between Sept 2018 and August 2019;
30 interviews in total with employers, training managers, apprentices, teachers, apprenticeship administrators, local authority reps across thirteen organisations.

OnJT: Findings

Quality on-the-job training: Engineering, Construction, IT

- Comprehensive on-the-job training, designed to develop future workforce.
- Employers took a central role in co-ordinating, delivering and monitoring apprenticeships.
- Close collaboration with training providers; close alignment of on- and off-the-job elements, supported by training plans.
- Primary concern was with occupational competence and the apprentice becoming a full member of the team.
- On-the-job training aimed to gradually initiate apprentices into what were highly technical skill areas through mentoring and shadowing.
- A culture of workplace training in which apprentices' status as learners was fully acknowledged.

Quality on-the-job training: Engineering, Construction, IT

...we will try and make sure that during the course of those two years, we have ticked each box. But, generally in terms of general learning, it is trying to make him part of the team [...] and just being involved in all elements throughout the day-to-day running of the site.

(Manager, Large Construction Employer)

...they would spend [their time on site] when they are with their line manager basically shadowing them, so everything that they are doing on site they are observing, they are learning, they are picking up and at the same time they are referring back to their training plan to make sure that they are completing all the elements that will one day make them a fully-fledged site manager or surveyor.

(Manager, Construction SME)

Limited on-the-job training: Retail, Social Care

- Apprentices were first and foremost fully productive workers rather than learners.
- The apprenticeship was understood to refer to the off-the-job element only (the 20% of an apprentice's contracted hours) and separate from the job.
- Little training and support in workplaces with limited awareness of apprenticeship.
- The 'apprenticeship' (the off-the-job element) was the responsibility of the training provider.
- The onus for seeking out learning opportunities and for integrating theory and practice was on the apprentices.
- Social care: Training is front-loaded (based on Social Care Certificate)

Limited on-the-job training: Retail, Social Care

...they're on a normal full contract with a full salary and therefore they operate in those four days as a full employee. The difference is that they've got the opportunity of having that learning on the fifth day, and then putting that learning into practice...

(Apprenticeship Manager, National Retailer)

I had a tutor who came every six weeks-ish, but other than that it was pretty much, 'Here's your workbooks, off you go'. It was very much: you need to find out about this? Go and talk to them. You want to find something about head office? Go and talk to them. Which to start with was a bit like, 'Really, can I just do that?'...

(Apprentice, Regional Retailer)

OffJT: findings

A range of different models. Front-loaded – good but financially problematic; day/ block release functions well & imposes structure. Other models open to abuse.

Case Study 1: Advanced Technical Training

- Training arm of a specialist hi-tech engineering company
- Front-loaded two year OffJT covering foundational knowledge
- This model is subsidised by parent company: not financially sustainable.

Case Study 2: Realtime Training

- Large provider of OffJT 000s of apprentices each year
 - 20 training centres across the UK at the time of the research.
 - Specialising in L1 & 2 courses for school leavers at risk of becoming 'NEET' (not in education employment or training)
 - V 'flexible' delivery... Nursery workers and hospitality – sometimes as little as an hour every few weeks.
-

The administrative & brokerage burden

There is a huge bureaucracy around it.... from a provider perspective, the paperwork, the bureaucracy is huge.... It is really off-putting. (Douglas CEO training provider)

Apprenticeship as an income stream

The big boys... look at it as income stream... All they're interested in is that financial vehicle... We've done the school fairs and we've got spaces for two apprentices... We've got companies alongside us who are looking for 90... I've said, "90 places? You must have a lot of work on". 'No, we just train them but we expect x amount to fall by the wayside.' What an incredibly selfish attitude! (Simon Construction employer)

Partnership & shared investment

Apprenticeships are a tripartite agreement between the provider, the employer and the apprentice, so it's an agreement between all parties. So it's not just the training provider who has the risk, it's also the employer as well. (Karen: Apprenticeship Manager, Private Training Provider)

Partnership & civic perspectives

We've got a really strong relationship with (the regional authority)... supporting their strategies, running programmes, a whole host of activity that we're aligned to in terms of their skills strategy.... we are doing a lot of work with a lot of stakeholders including schools, including teachers, to look at the misconceptions of apprenticeships and vocational learning...(Shelley: college employer liaison manager)

Apprenticeship as 'catch-all': the need for other flexibly funded quals

Beth: Working in a Subway, is it an apprenticeship? No. It's learning how to make sandwiches. Managing a Subway? Yes: trainee management, definitely. Entry level: that's a part time job.

Int: Are some people running it as an apprenticeship?

Beth: Yes.

Int: What? Making sandwiches in Subway?

Beth: Yes: Hospitality Team Member.

Int: How much is that worth?

Beth: That's £5000. That annoys me: an Adult Care worker is worth £3000, but Customer Service Practitioner is £5000 (Beth = apprenticeship manager, further ed college)

Conclusions and recommendations

- Current regulations and the notion of 'putting employers in the driving seat' leave considerable flexibility in the ways in which employers provide on-the-job training: Understanding and awareness of apprenticeship differed considerably across sectors and employers (all employers felt they were supportive).
- We need a quality assurance mechanism that enhances understanding of quality apprenticeships and encourages employers to provide comprehensive training (e.g. an apprenticeship should cover 100% of an apprentice's contracted working hours).
- In the best examples, positive employer / provider partnerships were at the heart of successful apprenticeships; these examples most obvious in OffJT Case Study 1 and colleges.
- An ethic of care is a quality of 'invested' employers. These employers take on apprentices as a function of their company's growth. They are invested in their apprentices' progression.
- Other technical and vocational programmes should have comparative levels of funding, otherwise apprenticeship becomes a 'catch-all' option.