

**Community of Practice for Modern Apprenticeship Providers**

**Topic: Employers’ role in supporting apprentices**​

**A Community of Practice meeting for Modern Apprenticeship Providers**​

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Date: 28 October 2021



**Introduction**

Employers play a crucial role in supporting apprentices so that every apprentice enjoys a high-quality learning experience.

We have lots of evidence from surveys and monitoring activities that point to a fundamental truth - the extent to which employers are actively supporting apprentices from the start to the end of their apprenticeship journey is a key determinant in how well apprentices engage, learn, progress, and succeed. We know there are many great examples of employers supporting apprentices – the Modern Apprenticeship Awards and Scottish Apprenticeship Week gives us opportunities to showcase this really well, but we also know some apprentices would welcome more support from their employer.

SDS has developed a resource [guide for employers](https://rise.articulate.com/share/Yb8iW6beuD_i_aDmf8kCkZZfIW9EZCPD#/) which is available on [apprenticeships.scot](https://www.apprenticeships.scot/for-employers/modern-apprenticeships/). The guide gives pointers on everything from recruitment, planning their apprenticeship programme and selecting a provider, to ways they can support apprentices in the workplace. Providers and the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) employer group were consulted during the development of the resource, and we are pleased that SAAB employers have endorsed its use.

**Presentations from providers**

At the CoP event, short presentations from Shetland UHI and MGT Training Limited helped to facilitate wider discussion in break out groups.

Kevin Briggs from **Shetland UHI** used three case study examples across different employers and sectors highlighting some attributes of apprentice-centred, supportive employers.

Michelle Batt from **MGT Training Ltd** used a case study from a small employer in the hospitality sector. Her talk focussed on pastoral care and employers recognising they have a role to play by taking proactive, practical steps to ensure the physical and emotional welfare of apprentices, which is seen as the essential foundation upon which learning can take place.

In summary, employers are effective at supporting apprentices when they:

* Are experienced at looking after apprentices – protecting learning time, making themselves available, allowing the apprentice to shine, listening to ideas from the apprentice.
* Devolve responsibility thereby allowing apprentice to take ownership, to experiment and learn first-hand through making mistakes.
* Provide supplementary training – allowing apprentices to deepen their knowledge.
* Share knowledge – allowing apprentices to benefit from managers/owners who have gone through the process before.
* Are proactive – they take an interest in what is required and seek information to tie workplace (on-the-job) learning in with the college (off-the-job) learning; are keen to receive progress reports, and they check in regularly with foreman/supervisor.
* Create a positive culture where mental health and wellbeing is supported – some employers provide an employee assistance programme, and others have introduced walking clubs to support their team to make sure they don’t feel isolated.
* Have clear plans and procedures to support people who are struggling with their wellbeing.
* Dedicate mentor resource to support apprentices and provide training for the mentor.
* Access CPD workshops to educate managers about mental health conditions and physical conditions.

**Summary of Breakout Group Discussion**

Providers in the break-out groups were asked to reflect on the presentations. There was broad consensus among providers on the importance of:

* Building relationships with employers before recruitment as this helps set and agree clear expectations.
* Supporting employers with recruitment as this helps to ensure a good fit with apprenticeship requirements.
* Induction for employers which helps to set out expectations, roles and responsibilities.
* Securing protected time for learning. However, recognising that staff shortages may make it difficult for employers to dedicate protected learning time.

Changes to the world of work during and post pandemic has resulted in:

* Another layer of challenge for providers to get full employer engagement. Smaller employers are hardest hit therefore it is sometimes more difficult to engage them in apprenticeship delivery.
* Pastoral care and wellbeing being an increasing feature of support required for apprentices.
* Face to face meetings returning in some sectors but there are still ongoing challenges in other sectors for example, the care sector.

In the following pages, we have summarised five actions providers can take to support employers, along with their tips and examples of how this support may be given.

**Tips from providers on how to support employer involvement in apprenticeships**

**Set out clear expectations**

for employers and their key staff who will have an active role in supporting the apprentice to secure commitment.

**Have a “contract” or service agreement with employers.** This can be used to make expectations clear at the outset and to define roles between the provider, and the employer and the apprentice’s supervisor(s).

**Provide an employer induction at the start of the programme**. This should be appropriately tailored for those involved in mentoring the apprentice as well as the more strategic expectation. Be aware that sometimes, although strategic employer engagement is good, information on expectations does not always filter down to the mentors, which is a vital part. Provide detailed information on the qualification, as well as guidance on what will be required from the manager/workplace supervisor.

**Agree protected time for learning**. Important to get the message across to encourage employers to embrace this, for example, make it very clear to the employer that if time is not protected there could be adverse effects on the completion of their apprenticeship and the quality of their learning experience.

**Mentoring and pastoral support**

Help employers to better support their apprentices in the workplace and helps apprentices to flourish and sustain their apprenticeship.

**Train work-place mentors**. Many employers may not have experience of working with apprenticeships or being a mentor. Supplementing mentor training with a handbook has been well received by work-place mentors.

**Support mentors**. Ensure mentors are involved and engaged in the whole process from induction, selecting of units, attending all sessions with learners, and contributing to reviews.

**Encourage mentors to get apprentices involved in business tasks/challenges, f**or example, sustainability/net zero challenges.  This helps get mentors involved in planning learning opportunities which in turn provides opportunities for apprentices to deepen their understanding of the business. Therefore evidence for the qualification naturally falls out of their involvement in various activities across the business.

**Provide practical support for apprentices experiencing mental health issues**. for example, daily phone calls to see how they are, make sure they can get to work, and offer a lift to work if required. For more serious cases, to support the apprentice, the mentor might need to liaise with the apprentice’s parents and agree to reduce their working hours.

**Encourage employers to put Fair Work principles into practice**, for example, agreeing a fair wage to support an apprentice who is facing financial difficulties and may be at risk of homelessness. This may mean affected apprentices can continue their apprenticeship and add value to the business rather than leaving.

**Encourage employers to use the SDS employer resource guide.** Sign-post employers to the information in advance of initial meetings.

**Provide employers with handbooks and/or guides** which focus on learning styles and support for learning.

**Sign-post employers to local authority funding for their apprentices,** for example to support individuals from a care experienced background, or to pay for an apprentice’s driving lessons and test.

**Communication**

Make good use of ICT and digital platforms to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of communications and to optimise employer involvement.

**Provide remote support to employers via video calls.** This is a more efficient way to reach employers as video calls can be made anywhere and engagement can take place more regularly.

**Use Webinars** as an efficient way to reach many employers. A working title might be ‘How to recruit apprentices’; employers can hear directly from apprentices, assessors, and college partners. This helps to set expectations and improve understanding of how apprenticeships work in practice in their sector, and encourages the employer to consider the process from the apprentice’s/assessor’s perspective.

******Give employers full access to their apprentices’ E-portfolios**. This allows them to check the progress of their apprentice(s), see copies of completed Apprentice Progress Reviews and view the contact diary.

**Use of video guides** **and YouTube Channel** to explain the learner journey and to provide resources for employers.

**Use of Email** to provide employers with regular update reports and/or scorecards. Keep employers in the loop by regularly copying them into email discussions with apprentices.

**Proactive phone calls and meetings**. Make a point of making regular phone calls or arranging meetings with employers and checking in to see that things are going smoothly. Discuss any issues and support the employer to resolve these. Don’t over-rely on email communication.

**Use of surveys** as a chance to gather direct feedback from employers as to how they can be better involved.

**Networking and relationship management**

Help employers to understand what is involved in apprenticeships, and their role and influence in delivering successful apprenticeships.

**Participate in employer and apprentice networks** and use employer “alumni” to highlight the programme benefits and best practice to other areas of their business, or to other employers.

**Set up an advisory board(s)** where employers can regularly share feedback on what went well and what could be improved. Larger employers are often keen to be involved with these, others sometimes need a bit more coaxing.

**Ensure that communication channels allow you to effectively manage your relationships with employers.** Hold regular general catch-up meetings or calls on their business. Identify any issues you can potentially support or help with, for example staffing or HR issues.

**Consult with employers** for example, on any new resources you are developing which supports their engagement with the programme.

**Partner with local agencies to gain the benefits of their experience of working with employers**. For example, work with the employer and a local charity to run ‘boot camps’ for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds which include work experience and the opportunity to be interviewed for an apprenticeship for those who otherwise may not have applied

**Actions for SDS in relation to the Employer Resource Guide**

1. Marketing to raise awareness amongst providers who can in turn promote it to their employers.
2. Reinforce the message that the employer resource can be dipped into for small pieces of relevant information when required.
3. Update to include information on meta skills.
4. Consider alternative formats for the guide such as byte sized sections or fact sheets.

[**Employer Resource Guide**](https://rise.articulate.com/share/Yb8iW6beuD_i_aDmf8kCkZZfIW9EZCPD#/)

**Feedback from the evaluation survey**

Providers who attended the CoP were given the opportunity to complete an evaluation survey after the event. 47 providers attended and 32 **(68 per cent)** completed the survey. Providers of all sizes from 0 - 250+ employees attended and there were representatives from independent training providers, public sector bodies, third sector organisations and employers.

Over **94 per cent** found the presentations ‘moderately to extremely useful’ with several saying that allowing more time for presentations would have been better. The breakout sessions were thought by **62 per cent** to be a ‘very useful’ way of allowing for discussion and sharing good practice.

All who completed the survey said they would attend future Community of Practice events and there was a wide range of suggestions and ideas for topics to cover.

**Community of Practice**

*“The presentations were extremely informative.”*

*“The breakout rooms were great.”*

**Employer Resource Guide**

*“The document is good, well laid out. Like the fact that you can skip to the relevant parts. It is mainly aimed at those new to apprenticeships, so a development to this theme could be more in-depth modules on some of these such as quarterly review.”*