

APPRENTICESHIPS....WHAT'S IN IT FOR EMPLOYERS?

An Employer's Perspective of Apprenticeships by Chris Boynton, Apprentice & Technical Training Manager at Wirral Partnership Homes Building Services



WPH are one of the largest employers of construction apprentices in the Wirral area and currently employ a total of 20 construction apprentices. In the past 5 years, WPH's apprentice section has received 25 awards. Most recently with Glass Apprentice Paul Harvey taking top honour at the Proskills Annual Apprenticeship Awards 2009 as winner of the Proskills UK Advanced Apprentice of the Year award. This is a second major success for WPH at the Proskills UK Awards, after Andrew Ghader was announced as the winner of the Apprentice of the Year award at the first Proskills Apprenticeship Awards in 2007.

Here Chris Boynton looks at apprenticeships and what's in it for employers

What's in it for employers? The short but simple view from this employer's perspective is an awful lot actually!

For the past 20 years I have been involved with the training of apprentices, both within a Managing Agency as well as from the perspective of an employer. Naturally, it has not always been plain sailing in that time – life rarely is – but certainly the positives have far outweighed the negatives...massively so.

Very often, when questions are posed to employers as to why there has not been a larger uptake of apprentices, one common view cited is that there can be a fair amount of bureaucracy involved...and to a degree this is true...but the perceived level is certainly nothing too excessive and it most definitely would not outweigh any potential advantages that are to be gained. Moreover, it is also thought that young people may not always be the easiest people in the world to work with – but this premise could also equally apply to a whole host of other client groups for whom such a stigma does not exist!

The fact is that apprentices are, on the whole, young...and inexperienced...and therefore by the very nature of these factors...they can still be a bit raw and in need of some moulding and a guiding hand. The flip side of this however is that they are also hugely enthusiastic...and creative...and energetic...and talented...and expressive...and can bring a fresh and dynamic approach and new ideas to a business!

If you take the time and the trouble to look beyond what might initially appear to be an imposing set of obstacles, you might just find that the potential rewards to be gained from investing in the employment of apprentices can be immense! And let us not forget that apprenticeships are no longer solely the domain of the young. The window of opportunity has now expanded to encompass what, in some circumstances, can be an all embracing open-age recruitment process.

At Wirral Partnership Homes, we employ 20 apprentices, predominantly in the Construction trades, Window Fabrication/Installation, Glazing and Administration. When our company was established 5 years ago, we inherited an apprenticeship programme from our predecessors at Wirral Council and we have chosen to continue with what has been a hugely successful legacy that benefits the employer as much as the individual.

In many respects, it would seem to be self-evident to consider the rewards that an individual might derive from undertaking an apprenticeship. By so doing, they stand to gain qualifications and experience, a sense of self-belief and increased confidence in their own abilities and also a chance of obtaining suitable employment and enhancing career prospects.

Similarly, an employer would also receive all of the above benefits, plus a whole host more from investing in apprenticeship training. For their part, employers would stand to benefit because they would receive qualified employees who are highly skilled and competent at their job roles and who are trained to the most recent industry standards. From our experience, high proportions of those apprentices whom we have trained have subsequently gone on to be employed by our organisation, many of whom are still in our employ some considerable years later. Indeed, a good number of WPH's supervisors and managers of today have reached their current designations as a result of commencing their working lives as apprentices.

And to think that such careers could have been aspired to from commencing the first rung of the working ladder as a new apprentice, possibly in their first job straight from school. Within that process however, one thing is common to most apprenticeships and that is that they provide an excellent route for individuals to develop skills and knowledge from first-hand experience.

More particularly, I have also witnessed from first-hand experience, the remarkable and positive difference that such a process can have on an individual employee, not to mention the benefits that it can provide for the standing and reputation of the employer, as well as for the wider community.

The overwhelming effect of apprenticeship programmes, along with the provision of good quality training for other staff, young and old, is that employees generally return to the workplace feeling inspired and empowered. Morale is also often much improved as a result of this. A key aspect to achieving any such positive outcomes however is that the training undertaken must be relevant and appropriate for that person. I would not necessarily subscribe to the approach of doing training for training's sake. It has to be something meaningful, achievable and beneficial both for the individual as well as the organisation.

Given that apprenticeships are currently a key part of the post-16 education offer and are enjoying a high profile role in the Government's plans for growing skills in the economy, there has probably never been a better time in recent years to invest in the apprenticeship initiative than right now!

And so on such a note, I would heartily encourage other employers to engage in the process of employing apprentices. There is a considerable amount of assistance that is available to assist you in this process, both from the financial aspect as well as from the logistical point of view. Take advantage of the help that is there for you and do become involved...it might just be the best decision you ever made!

For further information, please contact Chris Boynton, Apprentice & Technical Training Manager at Wirral Partnership Homes Building Services on 0151 666 6919 or email at chrisboynton@wphomes.org.uk

Apprenticeships are also one of the key aspects of Proskills careers website. For more information on apprenticeships please visit: www.prospect4u.co.uk or contact Proskills on 01235 833 844 or email us at info@proskills.co.uk