OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT TECHNICAL SKILLS NATIONAL PROGRAMME

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Date: January 2019

Managed by: Association of Colleges
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EMPLOYER APPRENTICESHIP MENTOR AND ADVISOR PROGRAMME

Project Description

Our project recognises the opportunity and challenge faced by training providers and employers alike regarding the government target of 3 million apprentices by 2020 (Apprenticeships in England for 2020) and the creation of the new apprenticeship 'standards'. Our project was established and designed to explore that transition. In addition to this, the project’s purpose was also to identify opportunities to upskill training providers and employers in order to ensure that apprentices are fully supported on their journey towards successful completion of their apprenticeships; in collaboration with their training provider and their employer.

Sectors chosen included: Business & Administration, Legal, Finance and Accounting.

In the past, the Professional Services sector has relied on graduates for entry level positions. The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy and Reforms have encouraged larger employers working in this sector to consider apprenticeships more widely in the future.

This project has enabled City College Plymouth to engage with new clients in this sector for the first time.

Our Partners

Achievement Training
Focus Training
Plymouth Community Homes
Citizens Advice Plymouth
Portcullis Legal
Gill Akaster Solicitors
Talem Recruitment Services
Synergy Accountants
Mission Enterprise and Employability
Plymouth Raiders

“It’s all about the difference we can make in upskilling the workforce.”

Danni Houston
Learning and Development Manager
Plymouth Community Homes
**Project participants**

**Target:** To engage with 27 direct staff, impact 288 students, 3 education and training providers and 10 employers.

**Achieved:**

- 3 training providers
  - City College Plymouth
  - Achievement Training
  - Focus Training. (did not fully engage)

- 8 employers were engaged via City College Plymouth and Achievement Training.

- 114 practitioners (assessors and tutors).

- 132 learners (direct engagement).

- 700+ apprentices (indirectly via engagement with the assessors and tutors).

- 3000+ students (although not included or evidenced they will have been engaged with or received disseminated information related to this project via the training providers who participated).

**Project Aims**

To collaboratively develop a model to support training providers, assessor teams and employer-based mentors to enable them to fully support their apprentices on the journey towards successful completion of their apprenticeships.

To upskill the existing Training Provider assessor teams to better equip them for supporting their apprentices under Apprenticeship “standards”.

To upskill partner employers, including coaching and mentoring skills to better equip them to recruit, select and support apprentices who are working under the Apprenticeship Standards.

With this improved knowledge and closer collaborative working, we aim to increase the number of apprenticeships within the project partner employers.
Methods employed

Research was conducted with all project partners to understand current levels of knowledge regarding Apprenticeship “standards” and to identify the most appropriate forms of support required.

The project facilitated collaborative working between training providers and employers.

The project developed a range of resources for training providers, assessor teams and employers to ‘upskill’ them.

The project trialled the model and resources using the professional services sector as a possible model for further sectors, which would train providers and employers in the future.

The project facilitated access to “standards” masterclasses for the partner training providers, assessors and employers working under apprenticeship standards. Conducted by City and Guilds and Pearson, the open forum workshops included the use of Smart Screen.

The project masterclasses facilitated shared learning and collaborative understanding regarding apprenticeship “standards” by the partner training providers and employers.

The project facilitated standardisation meetings conducted with assessor teams focusing on developing skills and capability to support apprentices under the “standards”. This included recognition of the changing shape of the assessor’s role to facilitate self-directed learning by the apprentice for on-programme learning to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours. Supporting the apprentice and employer during the Assessment Gateway and the End Point Assessment. The benefits of mock End Point Assessments (EPA’s), developing coaching and mentoring skills, and understanding and overcoming unconscious bias.

The project enabled the employers to gain access to CMI Level 5 in Management and Leadership to upskill line managers or mentors with responsibility for apprentices.

The project also trialled a mentoring and coaching training workshop for employers that can be delivered at an employer’s premises.

The project trialled supporting documentation that simplified and summarised the apprentice’s journey. Designed for collaborative use by the apprentice, assessor and employer, the Apprenticeship Standard Knowledge document (ASK) ensures everyone is clear about their respective roles and responsibilities from the outset.

The project trialled a series of checklists to help all parties address key milestones during the apprentice’s journey, assessment gateway and

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"the project that we have been part of has been invaluable in increasing our understanding of apprenticeships and how they will benefit new and existing staff in the future. With the knowledge that we have gained, we will ensure that apprenticeships, at all levels, will become an integral part of our recruitment and staff development plans for the future”.

Suzi Cumberland
Business Manager
Citizens Advice
final End Point Assessment.

The project provided upskilling support for employers regarding the recruitment and selection and induction process of apprentices. This was designed to ensure better candidates were selected in the first instance.

**Project Achievements**

- Apprenticeship “Standards” Masterclasses were delivered to 114 practitioners (assessors and tutors) via a series of workshops and masterclasses which were delivered in house. Individuals could choose to attend one, or all, of the following sessions:
  - Drop in session on a 1 to 1 basis
  - Knowledge and standards
  - Preparing for EPA
  - Using OneFile and standards
  - Generating evidence for Standards

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![City & Guilds workshop](image1)

(% of delegates that rated the workshop as excellent)

![Onefile workshop](image2)

(% of delegates that rated the workshop as excellent)
- Coaching and mentoring workshop were designed and delivered to 20 internal staff and 45 staff from employers.

- 3000+ students, although not included or evidenced, as part of this project will have been engaged with or received disseminated information by attending courses with the training providers who participated in this project.

- Resources were created to support assessors, employers and apprentices to prepare, track and provide clarity regarding the apprenticeship journey.

- A closer working partnership has been developed between City College Plymouth and Achievement Training. This has been due to both organisations sharing best practice and attending training sessions alongside each other. There is now a structure in place to ensure that this relationship will continue beyond the term of this project.

**Project Impacts and Outcomes**

14 new apprenticeship opportunities have been created by the 8 employer partners: 8 filled with the other and 6 currently being advertised.

This project has supported 8 local businesses to become better prepared for taking on apprentices in the future.

The project chose to work with Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) and, as part of this project, delivered coaching and mentoring workshops to their line managers, who have apprentices in their teams. These workshops have not only upskilled their staff but have also enabled PCH to invest more significantly in apprenticeships in the future.

PCH also won a regional award in recognition of their investment in training and apprenticeships and are committed to the increasing the number of apprentices in the future.

We also engaged with the Plymouth branch of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and following the support made available because of this OTLA Project. Suzi Cumberland, Business Manager at CAB commented:

“the project that we have been part of has been valuable in increasing our understanding of apprenticeships and how they will benefit new and existing staff in the future. With the knowledge that we have
Assessors involved in the project are now aware of the need to "coach" apprentices in the future rather than merely assess.

As a result of the workshops and masterclasses, assessors have a much clearer understanding of how best to now "coach" and support apprentices, including the significant role they can play in helping the apprentice prepare for and pass the Assessment Gateway and End Point Assessment.

They recognised that their personal capability needed to adapt and that differing skills were required to support and "coach" the apprentices. In particular, when facilitating the apprentice to develop the "behaviours" element of the "knowledge, skills and behaviours on-learning" component of the apprenticeship.

It is now also recognised by the assessors and employers that this will more appropriately support the apprentices in preparation for the End Point Assessment.

Employers now fully understand the support they also need to provide to apprentices to ensure that their apprentices successfully pass the Assessment Gateway and End Point Assessment.

This project has brought assessors, tutors and employers together for the first time. The collaborative workshops and masterclasses have strengthened the relationship between college assessors and the local business community. This has resulted in an increased sharing of best practice and allowed the partner providers to gain a better understanding of the needs, requirements and challenges faced by local business recognising the changing demographic of our apprentices (e.g. 8% growth in 16 – 18-year olds over the past 3 years)

The coaching and mentoring workshops develop soft skills knowledge that better prepared the assessors to support this younger demographic and those from other backgrounds and characteristics. Albeit too early to evaluate, the upskilling around unconscious bias will enable a fairer and consistent approach in the future.

As a result of this project, City College Plymouth has introduced new apprenticeships in Human Resources at both Level 3 and 5 and has also increased the number of apprenticeship opportunities with the Legal and Professional Services sector.

Plans are underway for employees from this sector to join the new Level 5 Apprenticeship in Management, which is scheduled to commence in February 2019.

The College staff member responsible for the apprenticeship vacancy
now interviews applicants to assess the individual’s suitability. This was previously completed by another person unfamiliar with the employer. This new process ensures that both the applicant and the employer receive an improved service and that the applicants (potential apprentices) receive the required level of information and guidance relating to the position they have applied for and the opportunities that exist with the employer.

The workshops and masterclasses included an introduction to City & Guilds Smart Screen which many of assessors were previously not familiar with. Assessors and lecturers are now better able to make use of these resources to support apprentices in:
- Preparing for End Point Assessment
- Developing their employability skills
- Enabling them to contribute to their workplace
- Being more aware of their progression options once they complete their apprenticeship.

Project Outputs and Resources

Apprenticeship Standards Knowledge document

A trial Apprenticeship Standard Knowledge (ASK) document has been developed (Customer Service Practitioner Level 2). The purpose of the resource is to document the Standards apprenticeship journey as concisely as possible. It is designed so that the apprentice and employer have a full understanding of the journey and the process which apprentices will take. Improving the information that apprentices and employers have will in turn make the role of the assessor easier. It is intended that this document is used as a template for all apprenticeship standards.

Apprenticeship “Standards” Checklists

A series of trial checklists have been developed and provided to
- The apprentices
- The employers
- The assessors

These checklists are not sector specific and will help all parties to address key milestones during the apprenticeship, Gateway and EPA. These documents should ensure that everyone recognises their responsibilities regarding successful completion of the apprenticeship.
Coaching and Mentoring Workshop

To support the apprentice with the introduction of behaviours within the on-programme learning element, a coaching and mentoring workshop was developed for assessors and employers.

Quality – collaboration

As a result of this, project mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that the respective quality teams from the College and Achievement Training review current practices and performance.

Contribution Towards Skills Plan

With the introduction of the Apprenticeship Standards, there will be an increasing move towards apprentices demonstrating soft skills and behaviours. Our project focused on these changes and the requirement for assessors and tutors to become better coaches in the future.

To address this, the project developed workshops for assessors covering:

- coaching skills and questioning techniques including the use of coaching style powerful questions;
- recognising and avoiding unconscious bias
- developing their understanding of the behaviour employers expect of apprentices;

From the feedback received from assessors and tutors, those who attended the workshops now have a better understanding of the shifting shape of their role and responsibilities under the apprenticeship standards and feel better prepared to undertake their job roles.

By using this learning approach, it has been possible to challenge the way we are currently working and this has resulted in the creation of a series of resources which will support apprentices and employers.

By sharing best practice with other educational organisations and local employers, the project has allowed the assessor teams to reflect on the way in which they have worked in the past and to have an awareness of the skills that will be required in the future.

The project workshops and masterclasses also provided development opportunities regarding the use of digital technologies and software such as Smart Assessor and on-line resources such as
Smart Screen and the use of electronic portfolios. This has enabled them to support apprentices and employers with using these resources to manage their own learning. They have also proven to be invaluable in aiding the training providers with the implementation of periodic reviews using a digital platform.

The staff training also enabled assessors to gain additional knowledge and resources to initiate their own research on the apprenticeship standards that are specific to their industry sector.

Assessors are now better equipped to articulate the virtues of the new standards against those of the frameworks.

This new confidence is clearly inspiring and motivating assessors, employers and their apprentices. All parties have provided feedback demonstrating that they are more confident with the prospect of EPA.

**Key Lessons Learnt**

- It is recognised that assessors require new skills as apprenticeships move from frameworks to standards. Our project has focused on supporting both assessors and businesses to be better coaches both now and in the future. For any training provider or employer to fully support their apprentices in the future, this transition must be embraced with urgency.
- Sharing of best practice: whether through awarding bodies or local forums should be encouraged. As apprentice standards are developed, proposed and approved for delivery it will be imperative to ensure that assessors and employers are part of the learning and best practice culture.
- Don’t assume that all project partners will fully engage with your project. Stakeholder engagement also means making difficult decisions and moving on rapidly.
- A full stakeholder meeting at the commencement of the project would have perhaps increased clarity, built engagement and ownership regarding the full depth and scope of the project. For this project delays would have potentially been avoided by fully engaging with assessor teams.
- Support from the OTLA workshops and sharing of best practice between our peer colleges during the round table discussions was invaluable.
- Input and support from the OTLA Peer Adviser and the College Quality Team were invaluable and should have been sought at the earliest opportunities.

- The College has learnt that OTLA owners should be able to build upon the experiences of previous OTLA projects.

- With the recent changes in the structure of the apprenticeship team at the college, there has been a significant review of the processes that are used when receiving applications from new potential apprentices.

- Unknown at the inception of this project, the college underwent a re-structure that significantly impacted upon the Apprenticeship and Business Engagement Teams. A serious debate was held regarding the continuation of the project. However, with the introduction of the apprenticeship standards, the clearly recognised opportunity to upskill assessors and the considerable support provided by our OTLA Peer Mentor, the decision was taken to continue. It is a testament to our OTLA Peer that this decision was made.

Potential ongoing work and development

- Consideration should be given to continuing the development and rollout of further Apprenticeship Standards Knowledge documents for other apprenticeship schemes.

- Consideration should be given to a review of the assessor job descriptions to align the roles, responsibilities and skills required with the introduction of the new standards. It is felt that the role will need to move towards an ‘Apprentice Learning Coach’ perspective.

- Consideration should be given to developing a Continuous Professional Development framework for assessors to equip them with the skills required to support apprentices under “standards”. This will significantly include a shift towards coaching and mentoring skills. Suggested training may include:
  - Coaching and Mentoring.
  - Communication skills, Social and Emotional intelligence.
  - Interview skills and Presentation skills.
  - Understanding of employability skills.
  - IT skills.
  - Mental Health First Aid.
  - Role modelling behaviour and Dignity in the workplace.
  - Handling difficult conversations and giving feedback.

** these are being considered for the addition to the QIP.

“**I now better understand the process that apprentices will be following”

“I feel more confident when advising apprentices on the process”

“I didn’t realise the level of support that was available from the awarding bodies to help me”

“I have learnt from the experiences of others”

‘Why was this training and support not available sooner?’

*Attendees to the Masterclass*
- Consideration should be given to enhancing the college website to include:
  - For the apprentice - more guidance on employability skills, standards and expectations.
  - For the employer – more detailed guidance to fully support apprentices in relation to standards and end point assessments. This would also need to include their responsibility in becoming a ‘responsible employer’.

- Consideration should be given to conducting a review of the impact on End Point Assessment results at 6- and 12-month intervals after the project ends to evaluate the ongoing impact.

- Although this project focused on the professional services sector, as new standards are rolled out, there will be an requirement for all sectors, their respective training providers and assessor teams to go through this transformation. Consideration should be given to a wider review of all sectors and their respective assessor teams and the associated employers.

Our Key Message

As of January 2019, 398 apprenticeship standards had been approved for delivery. Every day, the Institute of Apprenticeships work with employers to develop new apprenticeship standards. There is an expectation that by 2022, there will be approximately 2000 apprenticeship standards in existence. Moving beyond the old apprenticeship frameworks will undoubtedly raise the quality of apprenticeships.

The apprenticeship standards are occupation focused and based around the skills, knowledge and behaviours that apprentices need to succeed in their roles. They are assessed at the end of the apprenticeship.

Therefore, there is a significant requirement for the role of the current assessor position to be re-evaluated to align it to the requirements of the new apprenticeship standards. This could potentially be towards an “Apprentice Learning Coach” model.

These reshaped positions will also require investment to upskill the workforce to ensure the skills they have compliment those required to support the requirements of the apprenticeship standards. This will ultimately ensure that assessors are fully equipped to support their apprentices towards successful completion of their apprenticeships. This opportunity must be seized now.

"As an Internal Verifier and Assessor, I now understand how the move to standards will affect the way in which I need to work”

“I understand the importance of providing advice & guidance to support apprentices”

City College Assessors