

Government Enshrines Apprenticeships In Law

Contributed by ORC
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There is no doubt: apprenticeships are a hot topic on the Government's education and skills agenda. Â

In December 2008 the Prime Minister announced a scheme to create 35,000 apprenticeship places; whilst in February 2009 a new piece of legislation, the first related to apprenticeships in 200 years, was published "guaranteeing an apprenticeship place for all suitably qualified young people.

The Government target is that one in five young people are to take up apprenticeship training by 2020.Â But how are organisations preparing to meet these new targets?

The Government is promoting apprenticeships as a vital cog in the economic recovery for UK businesses.Â One industry with a strong tradition of apprenticeship training is construction; however the industry is haemorrhaging jobs and struggling to find enough employers willing and able to take on apprentices.

In 2007, there were 30,000 aspiring apprentices applying for 5,500 vacancies.Â These figures highlight the problem faced within the new legislation "aside from additional funding, how can employers be encouraged and supported to take on apprentices?

This issue falls within the remit of Sector Skills Councils such as ConstructionSkills. Construction was one of the industries first hit by the economic downturn in 2008, making it even more of a challenge to find apprenticeship places.Â With important projects such as the infrastructure for London Olympics 2012, there is still a need to bring newly skilled workers into the industry. Â

Getting employers on board and supporting them throughout the process is key to the success of current and future apprenticeships. To formulate a way to support employersÂ interested in taking on an apprentice, ConstructionSkills commissioned ORC International to undertake research into the customer journey.

The aims of the research were to find out how best to communicate with trade people, often out on site and rarely in the office or on a computer, and also to uncover the enhancers and inhibitors of communication faced by ConstructionSkills when encouraging the taking-on of apprentices.

Fifty-four in-depth interviews were conducted with employers who had contacted ConstructionSkills about their apprenticeship programme in 2007/08. The research highlighted the importance of personalised and ongoing support, personal contact with ConstructionSkills representatives and fast responses to requests for information.

As part of the research design, two consultative elements were carried out with ConstructionSkills representatives from the marketing, research and apprenticeship teams.

One was a round-table discussion about the interim results, from which we formulated the next steps for the research.

The second was a presentation and action planning session with the same group at the end of the project to discuss recommended courses of action based on the research findings.

The Education and Skills research team at ORC International have also carried out research with apprentices for ConstructionSkills in order to fully understand the process from both sides of the relationship. Â

Our apprenticeship research projects have included work for SEMTA (Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies), Automotive Skills and QIA (now LSIS), demonstrating our understanding of apprenticeship training in other sectors.

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