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Apprentices: attract, select, develop

Apprenticeship programmes help develop a more diverse workforce and bring talent into the business earlier



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The growth of apprenticeships and their role in creating a more diverse workforce

Historically in the UK, progression through the education system and on to employment has been through formal public examinations at 16 and 18 years (GCSE and A level) and then at a university for a degree and, for some afterwards, a post-graduate degree. An alternative have always been apprenticeships but in the past the positions offered have focussed heavily on manufacturing-type roles.

There has though been a recent shift in the UK with some employers recognising that broad university-based education is not always the most appropriate or beneficial learning ground for the very specific skills or knowledge needed within their organisation – and they're seeking to create a more diverse workforce.

They're turning to apprenticeship programmes to bring more diverse talent into the business earlier, and to train and upskill them. Consequently, there is now a wider range of apprenticeships on offer expanding into the areas of business administration, logistics and project management.

The three key challenges for organisations wanting to employ apprentices:

- How to make young talented people from all backgrounds aware of, interested in and engaged with these newer types of roles;
- How to assess and identify those with the 'best fit' with your organisation;
- Once on board, how to develop and retain this talent.

Attracting applicants to apprenticeship roles

There are a number of considerations that need to be thought through as part of the attraction strategy. Potential apprentices need to be aware of the range of schemes on offer and the breadth of what is available. They need to gain an insight into and understand their own interests, skills and motivations and how these 'fit' with the different apprentice roles. They will look to engage with a prospective employer that is fair and objective in its assessment and selection approach and seeks to develop and get the very best from its employees.

A case study – Siemens

The apprenticeship market in Germany is advanced and has seen great investment from employers, and it is widely established as a training and development option. With 200 apprenticeship roles in place and with 7,000 working either as an apprentice or a year or two into their roles, Siemens is one of the biggest providers of apprenticeship schemes in Europe and has invested in the design and creation of an award-winning apprenticeship attraction and assessment process.

Addressing a lack of awareness and promoting self-insight

One of the greatest hurdles for potential applicants is that they are simply not aware of the sort of apprentice role that might suit their own skills and preferences. To help develop this awareness, begin the engagement conversation and manage expectations, Siemens designed and developed a Job Navigator tool in conjunction with *cut-e*.

This is a short online, pre-application website tool, promoted widely to men and women and to those with different ethnic and educational backgrounds. The breadth of promotion is very important to Siemens to ensure that it draws from the best talent available.

A case study – Siemens (continuation)

The website is mobile and tablet friendly and gives those thinking about apprenticeships the opportunity to complete an assessment anonymously that looks at:

- the type of role they would enjoy (their interests or preferences),
- an insight into their abilities and skills,
- how they like to learn, and
- the match between all of this and the competencies or behaviours needed for the apprenticeships on offer.

Completing this also gives potential applicants an understanding of what such tests and assessments are like so as to prepare them for the actual test should they wish to apply. The assessments are quick and fun to do, draw on gamification design and style and the site provides instant, easy-to-understand feedback signposting specific roles.

Developing a more diverse workforce

Part of the interaction in this tool includes gathering data about the individual. This is valuable data which helps Siemens understand who it is attracting and engaging. But gathering this information is done anonymously and there is no link between visiting the Job Navigator site and any subsequent application. From analysing the data, Siemens has learnt the gender split of those accessing the site, the different educational levels, the age bands of visitors and the popular times and days of the site. This then informs its own tailored promotional activity to ensure that the site is reaching those in less well covered segments and that Siemens is accessing, engaging with and encouraging the best talent to apply.

Its aim is to create a more diverse workforce recognising that the best fit people have the skills and competencies and they need to reach all feasible audiences and draw from as broad a pool as possible. It is well documented that a more diverse workforce brings greater innovation, stronger engagement and higher productivity.

Assessing candidates at application stage

To get the best apprentices for your organisation, you need to select those with the best fit between individual skills and the requirements of the specific role. Psychometric assessment can play a part in that.

Drawing from the wide range of *cut-e* assessments, organisations are able to assess numerical, verbal and spatial reasoning, specific abilities such as multi-tasking and creativity, and look at personality characteristics as well as offering situational judgement questionnaires to see how a person may approach or react in a given situation. The test and questionnaire items themselves can in some cases draw on the type of role being recruited and can be wrapped within a corporate-branded site.

Fair and objective

Selecting from a broad talent pool requires fairness and objectivity; fairness as the capabilities of those selected match the requirements of the job, and objectivity in that the scoring and benchmarking is without bias. Psychometric assessments will help in this but policies and practices deliver this. Organisations need to make selection processes defined, transparent and objective, and unconscious bias acknowledged and mitigated.

On-going development of apprentices

Engaging with and assessing employees at recruitment and selection sets the tone for continued development making use of the assessment information to progress. Managers and Learning & Development or HR teams acquire a deeper understanding of the individual and the apprentices the opportunity of further learning beyond the classroom. They can make use of specific assessment reports which flag areas of strength and development need. Development and growth will make for a happier and more engaged workforce.

A summary: the blockers and enablers to creating a more diverse workforce through apprenticeships

Blockers to creating a more diverse workforce:

- **Too narrow a focus on one area** – for example, stipulating that a candidate must have a specific skill or specific grades
- **Unconscious bias** influencing selection decisions

Enablers:

- **A range of attraction activities** pushed out to a broad range of applicants and targeting under-represented groups
- **Objective assessment** methods based on ability and potential to do the role
- Looking at **trends in application data** and taking appropriate action when needed

For more information and related documents about how to select talent and create a diverse workforce, please refer to www.cut-e.com

cut-e is a world leader in the design and implementation of innovative online tests and questionnaires for recruitment, selection and development. *cut-e* helps companies identify people with the right capabilities and cultural fit to deliver optimal business results. *cut-e* carries out over 7 million assessments per year in over 70 countries and 40 languages.