Recruitment  
getting the right learners

What?
- know who you're recruiting
- . . . and how recruitment works
- provide the right information
- build important relationships.

Why?
Employers and providers actively recruit learners to Modern Apprenticeships (MA) and other work-based learning programmes. For employers, recruitment of modern apprentices is likely to be part of their overall recruitment strategy and determined by the needs of the organisation.

Normal recruitment processes are likely to work well for recruiting apprentices. But there are special factors to bear in mind when recruiting to a learning programme such as a Modern Apprenticeship.

MA recruitment should target people who:
- want to learn in the relevant occupational area – an MA is a learning programme and the people who are recruited have to be committed to learning across the whole MA framework
- are likely to stay in learning and not leave early because of the demands of the programme
- have a good chance of succeeding in their learning goals
- are eligible for funding from the Learning and Skills Council.

MA frameworks
The content of MAs is specified in frameworks. All MA frameworks include:
- A National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) – showing that someone has got the practical skills needed for a job.
- A technical certificate – showing that they have a good knowledge of the area of work.
- Key skills – showing that they have the general skills needed for work.
- Employment rights and responsibilities – showing that they are aware of employment issues in their industry.

Some MA frameworks include additional qualifications as well.
The learning programme individuals join has to be right for their goals and right for their ability and aptitude. One of the main reasons why learners leave training (and sometimes employment) early is that they were on the wrong programme in the first place. On the other hand, learners who feel good about what they are doing are far more likely to stay until they have achieved what they set out to do.

“Students on the wrong course are more likely to drop out and appropriate selection … is of crucial important to retention.”

Martinez, P and Munday, F (1998) 9000 voices: student persistence and drop-out in further education

Key message
- Provide potential recruits with full information so they know what is required to achieve the full MA framework.

How?

Know who you’re recruiting

In any business, people are recruited to fit the opportunities available. It’s the same when recruiting learners to work-based learning programmes. Employers and providers aim to recruit potential learners who fit:

- the programmes they run – Modern Apprenticeships, NVQ training etc.
- the areas of learning they offer – there’s a list on the Adult Learning Inspectorate website (see ‘Resources’ on the back page of this factsheet).

And they want to recruit the right number. Employers know what they need for their business, and this is reflected in the learner numbers predicted in the three-year development plan. Providers also have targets for learner numbers, and may in addition have separate targets for:

- learners in a particular age range – the three age ranges used in LSC contracts are 16-18, 19-24 and over 24
- specific types of learner, such as people from minority ethnic groups, or those who live in a particular geographical area.

There’s no shortage of people who want to earn and learn, but getting the right people into the business may mean looking beyond the normal boundaries. ‘Inclusion’ is a reminder to think differently about recruitment. All potential learners need to be reached, and some need ‘outreach’ – an active approach to going out and forming links with local communities to bring people into the learning orbit.
Groups of potential learners who might be recruited onto MAs include:

- young people at school who will benefit from continued learning when they leave
- people leaving care or prison
- people starting to come back into learning, e.g. through neighbourhood learning centres
- employees who could benefit from being on structured programmes for learning at work.

“What we need now are imagination, creativity and an understanding of how to motivate adults to take part in learning as a route to improving their life chances.”


... and how recruitment works

Knowing how to recruit is as important as knowing who is wanted. The recruitment process starts well before any enquiries come through – in the ground-building work employers and providers do with partners such as schools, in the marketing literature they produce, and so on.

But the personal touch always makes the difference. Recruitment is about making relationships with the people who refer learners and the recruits themselves. Employers and providers that recruit successfully value the time taken in building up their networks of referrals and in talking to potential learners at these early stages.

When recruiting from outside the normal boundaries, it may help to link both employment and learning to personal or social benefits. People on pre-employment programmes such as Entry to Employment say that they benefit from working and learning with others, in groups. The social aspect of working life can be harnessed to a recruitment strategy aimed at ‘inclusive learning’.

Provide the right information

Potential learners need to know what the opportunities are and what the employer or provider can do for them.

They want information about:

- different options open to them within the organisation or industry
- what the organisation is like to work in, and the career prospects
- the qualifications they need in order to succeed.

They also need to know practical things like:

- how long the MA programme takes
- what sort of training they’ll get and where it will take place
- who will support them in their learning while they are at work.
At the recruitment stage, it’s important to give the right amount of information – enough to be useful but not too much to put people off. Recruitment literature needs to look good. A well written, professionally designed leaflet is going to make a much stronger impression than a photocopied document.

No amount of literature, however good it is, has as much impact as the personal contacts made with potential learners. Wherever possible, make the opportunity to explain things in person. The quality of the working and learning environment can be a good selling point. Making the environment for potential recruits attractive and inviting is a good investment.

**Build important relationships**

Word of mouth is probably the best recruiting tool. Employers and providers should ask the question: ‘Who’s doing our recruitment for us?’ All these people are potential ambassadors and suppliers for the employer or provider. The answer might include:

- existing employees and learners already on the programme, their families and friends
- staff and their networks of friends and relations
- other employers
- schools
- Connexions and career services
- the LSC
- learning providers, including those delivering pre-employment programmes.

Local Connexions and careers advice centres in schools and colleges are often the first point of reference for young people thinking about their futures. It helps to get to know the particular people who deal with potential learners and make sure that they know enough to be able to give the right information to potential recruits.

It’s important to keep getting the message across. For example, a lot of potential recruits know that Modern Apprenticeships exist, but they don’t always know enough about them to make a positive decision. Some industries suffer from a poor perception among potential learners, and positive messages are needed to change people’s views.

**Where and when?**

The whole process of recruitment has three main stages:

- Work done throughout the year to build links, establish relationships and create a presence in the community.
- Focused, targeted efforts – recruitment drives – at particular times of year or in specific target areas.
- Regular, continuous recruitment of new employees and learners at any time.
Case studies and examples

**Beyond ‘natural selection’**

One employer traditionally recruited learners from four main sources:

- Connexions
- its own marketing activities
- colleges
- links with schools.

The training department had no selection criteria of its own, but operated a process of ‘natural selection’ by only taking on learners who successfully gained a job in one of the branches. Each year, around twenty percent of learners who applied were successful.

There were three main reasons why learners were unsuccessful at getting a job:

- Some had applied without understanding the demands of the job and with no realistic chances of success.
- Some were judged during the selection interview to be not yet ready for work.
- Others were ready for work but there were no suitable vacancies at the time they applied.

When a new manager was appointed to build up the apprenticeship programme, she quickly realised that the eighty percent of potential learners who failed to join the programme represented an unacceptably high level of ‘wastage’.

Several steps have since been taken to improve the situation. The company’s marketing literature has been revised so that it states more clearly what the organisation is looking for in recruits to the MA programme. This has reduced the number of learners applying without much chance of being accepted. At the same time, the selection process has been completely revised to be more objective and fair. Results to date suggest that more learners are being taken on as apprentices in the branches, without any negative impact on performance.

**Tasters**

An independently owned day nursery employs 22 modern apprentices, working towards Foundation and Advanced Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. All the learners are fully employed and trained by staff at the nursery.

Potential apprentices are invited into the nursery for a minimum of three taster days whilst they are still at school. This allows the young person and also the employer to decide whether this type of occupation is suited to the individual. The young people are asked to evaluate their experience – many rate it highly.
Resources

- Sadler, J (2002) First impressions count: How effective recruitment and admissions can encourage students to stay at college. (LSDA)

Stay in touch

- www.ali.gov.uk
- www.lsda.org.uk

Checklist

- What are your recruitment targets for MAs?
- Which particular groups of potential learners are being targeted?
- What is the organisation doing to recruit beyond its normal boundaries?

- How do you reach potential learners?
- In what form is the information provided to them?
- How effective is it?

- What is your organisation doing to build up relationships with referral agencies and partners?
- How do you make the most of the ‘personal touch’ with potential learners?