

Mentoring for Work Based Training

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Executive Summary

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Introduction

This study was based upon an earlier project in which seven companies within one TEC area helped to explore the role of the mentor for Modern Apprentices (MA), and to develop ways in which mentoring could be promoted to secure the active support of employers.

While the findings of that work were positive in terms of the contribution the mentor could make to the process for the apprentice, the sample involved was small. The DfEE therefore agreed to provide funds to develop the project further by providing the opportunity to further test and develop this earlier work with additional TECs¹ while continuing to work with the original TEC. The result is this study report on the details of the project and a Good Practice guide **"Workforce Development - Mentoring for Workbased Training"** which was published in April 1999.

When the work started the major focus was the MA programme, but since then National Traineeship (NT) and New Deal have been established and this report will look briefly at the extent to which the model is appropriate for NT and at the similarities between mentoring for these programmes and for New Deal.

The Study took place before the publication of the White Paper **"Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning"** (Cm 4392, June 1999). The findings and recommendations will be of interest to TECs and also to the new Learning and Skills Council and its local arms when it succeeds TECs in April 2001.

Aims and Objectives

The overall purposes of the study were to:

- provide further evidence of the value of the mentoring relationship for apprentices;
- confirm the training and development needs of potential mentors;
- explore the extent to which networking between mentors is an effective mechanism for sharing and developing employer good practice in work-based training;
- attempt to describe/define the most appropriate model of mentoring for the Modern Apprenticeship context;
- develop a diagnostic tool that would help providers, TECs and employers define the role of the mentor in each mentoring relationship; and
- explore the extent to which supporting a mentor encourages more active employer involvement in the process of developing apprentices.

Methodology

The views of the 52 mentors were gathered and recorded through meetings and surveys. Mentors variously attended initial briefings, a training session and three or four review/progress meetings. At these meetings they discussed their views on the project, as well as their individual development. About 25% of them completed an additional questionnaire at the end of the project.

A group of apprentices in each TEC area met together at the beginning of the project to find out more about mentoring. These meetings also provided an opportunity for the project team to find out how the apprentices currently viewed their apprenticeship, and any concerns that they had. A further group of apprentices (21) responded to a tele-survey at the end of the project (this group had about a 50% overlap with the group that had attended the initial meetings.)

Relevant literature on mentoring, and the experiences of other projects that were attempting to develop mentoring for workbased learning (usually by specific employers) were also used to provide a wider perspective on the potential of mentoring, and to discover whether any of the findings of this project were replicated elsewhere.

Main Findings

1. The value of the mentoring relationship for apprentices.

Making a Difference: All of the 21 apprentices interviewed at the end of the project were positive about the benefits to them of having a mentor.

Retention and Achievement: Many of the mentors said that the attention they had been paying their apprentice had resulted in improved performance or progress through their qualification, sometimes in the context of their having expressed earlier concern at the lack of progress being made.

A positive contribution to all stages of the apprenticeship. Apprentices benefited from the support their mentor could give them at all stages in their development. Mentors can make a significant contribution to helping apprentices negotiate major transition points in their careers as apprentices, and progressing between them.

2. The training and development needs of potential mentors

All of the mentors responded positively to the opportunity to explore or review the skills needed for effective mentoring such as listening, questioning, giving feedback, and being non-judgemental.

1. Throughout this report the term TEC or TECs is used to represent both Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and/or Chambers of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTEs).

Providing opportunities for mentors to learn the range of skills and knowledge involved requires both initial and ongoing training and development. However, this provision must be tailored to the needs of busy working people, for whom mentoring is a subsidiary activity within their overall job role. Training therefore must be provided at times and places which provide choice, and in sessions which are short enough to attract support.

3. Networking between mentors is an effective mechanism for sharing and developing employer good practice in work-based training.

Many of the mentors valued the opportunity to meet each other at the training or progress meetings yet, currently, there are few mechanisms in place to allow this networking to take place. Where they do exist they are generally sector specific (e.g. Engineering) or focus mainly on NVQs and assessment. The meetings need to have a clear programme and focus, including perhaps a specific topic, to maintain their usefulness.

4. The most appropriate model of mentoring for the Modern Apprenticeship context.

Defining this model is not straightforward. Every apprentice has a variety of people who are responsible for some aspect of their training or supervision – tutors, assessors, line managers, training advisers. What makes true mentoring distinctive in this context is its ability to take into account all aspects of the apprentice as an individual, to take a long term view of the needs and potential of the apprentice, and to be independent of the requirements to impose discipline or make judgements (which are key components of the other roles).

There were a couple of key points that arose in this area:

- **Avoid role conflict** - the individual appointed as mentor should not, wherever possible, be the line manager or assessor of the apprentice. This view was supported strongly by the evaluation of the apprentices. At the beginning of the project the individuals recruited as potential mentors did include a significant number of line managers and assessors (about one third) but a number of these had decided by the end of the project that they were not in the best position to be independent and to fully explore the potential of mentoring, as they had become aware that it could inhibit the scope of the relationship.
- **Coaching and Mentoring** - many models of mentoring link it closely to coaching. Within the workbased training context, many of the individuals who would make appropriate mentors for trainees are also vocationally knowledgeable and experienced. Individuals who can provide coaching to a trainee should therefore be offered training to help them develop their own understanding of the additional requirements of the mentoring relationship

5. Helping providers, TECs and employers define the role of the mentor in each mentoring relationship.

The project confirmed the fact that Modern Apprenticeships are being pursued in a variety of more or less supportive contexts and within quite different delivery models. It is therefore necessary to try to take account of this variety and acknowledge that the range of support necessary for any apprentice will be made available to them in different ways and by different people, depending on their local circumstances. A diagnostic grid was developed which lists all of the types of support necessary, and allows organisations then to consider which of the usual key players in the training of the apprentice is currently, or could, undertake each one.

6. Supporting a mentor encourages more active employer involvement in the process of developing apprentices.

The mentors involved in this project clearly learned much from it, and used it as a resource to find out about the areas of workbased training which they were still unable to understand. In some cases resulting changes of practice within the employing organisation were reported. Many of the mentors said that they had developed a better understanding of the needs of trainees, of how the system worked and the qualifications. Companies which employed more than one apprentice/trainee, or recruited additional trainees (including New Deal and National Trainees) during the course of the project, generally went on to provide mentoring support for all of them.

Other Findings

The concept of mentoring appeared to be poorly understood in the majority of the companies approached, and an appreciation of the potential of the relationship developed slowly (with experience) for most of the mentors on the programme. Not surprisingly, therefore, the most difficult stage in Mentor Development Programmes is the initial recruitment. The main reasons given by companies who decide not to participate were the time requirements and the lack of perceived benefit to their trainees.

Employer reluctance to provide mentors for workbased trainees may be related to lack of employer awareness about the intended nature of the Modern Apprenticeship (and now National Traineeship) as developmental programmes. This lack of awareness emerged as a theme within the project. Despite the fact that each TEC was strongly promoting the Modern Apprenticeship programme, none of the mentors or apprentices within the project groups identified strongly with the Modern Apprenticeship “brand”, and tended to refer to the programme as NVQ2 and then NVQ3 (in their occupational area), with Key Skills still only on the horizon.

Recommendations

Training and Enterprise Councils should

- Consider carefully the potential to develop mentors within the companies which employ Modern Apprentices and National Trainees, and recognise the benefits that can bring to all aspects of and parties to workbased training programmes.
- Commit resources to encouraging the development of mentors for as many workbased trainees as possible. This should provide both for the training and continued support of mentors, in a format (such as a network) which allows for flexible access and roll-on roll-off involvement.
- Clarify their own understanding and that of their contract managers and advisers the difference between mentoring, assessing, coaching and supervising.

- Ensure that companies which employ MAs and NTs are aware that mentoring has a significant contribution to make to other business development initiatives, such as the learning organisation and Investors in People.

National Training Organisations should

- Ensure that they give clear and consistent messages about the responsibilities of mentors within their frameworks and guidance documents.
- Consider, where they have access to groups of employers, supporting the development of mentors within a sector focused network.

Careers Services Offices should

- Promote the value of mentoring to employees and providers.

Government Offices should

- Encourage TECs and training providers to develop ways of integrating support and training for mentors within the package of services they offer employers who employ work based trainees.

What apprentices thought of having a mentor

"Without one I wouldn't have got anywhere".

"She looks out for me all the time."

"It's nice to know there's someone there."

"Yes, he sorts out things (training) more quickly and efficiently than I could."

"If I'd had a mentor in my last job I wouldn't have left."

How mentors felt they had helped their apprentices

"I've watched him grow in confidence and competence. He has become a happy effective member of the team."

"Gave them confidence to work with others and on their own. Found them suitable work placements to suit their preference and aims for the future."

"Provided more stability. Induction is not as traumatic. Before apprentices just went from one site to another. When they went to college they were "gone for the day". Now someone is interested in what they are doing."

"I've been a listening ear – helping her to take her own decisions and actions."

Further Information

This study is one of a series of national studies commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE) Quality and Performance Improvement Division (QPID). Further copies of this Summary and copies of the Full Study Report are available from:

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