

National Employer Service

Case Study: BMW (UK) Limited

The NES Case Study Series

This series of case studies is about employers who contract with the National Employer Service (NES) at the LSC. Researchers at York Consulting LLP gathered the information for the case studies by speaking to senior staff in each company and trainers, tutors, assessors and employees involved with NES funded programmes.

Each case study briefly describes the company and the training programme funded. The focus is on the key challenges the company has faced in relation to the programme and how the company overcame these. In some instances, the programme itself is a response to challenges facing the company as a whole.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors and contributors and do not necessarily represent QIA's views.

About BMW

BMW is "one of the world's leading manufacturers of luxury cars and motorcycles". The BMW Group's investment in the UK economy since 2000–2007 was in the region of £900 million. The Group employs approximately 8,000 people in the UK motor industry across three main production plants, component suppliers, sales and marketing, and an additional 11,000 employees through its dealership network.

It offers all employees the practical support, advice and training opportunities to encourage personal development, aligned to the achievement of corporate objectives. BMW is the only UK car company to deliver an in-house Apprenticeship programme. There are two Advanced Apprenticeship programmes run from its bespoke BMW Academy, near Reading:

- **Service Apprenticeship** – NVQ2 and an NVQ Level 3 in Vehicle Maintenance and Repair;
- **Parts Apprenticeship** – NVQ2 and an NVQ3 in Parts Operation.

Challenge: Ensuring the Quality of Service through Training

BMW is a very image conscious company and recognises that the quality of the service delivered by its dealerships is integral to maintaining and enhancing the BMW brand.

BMW wants to ensure that it delivers the highest quality training to meet the needs of the business and provide a more rounded learning experience for employees.

Response: In-house delivery of Apprenticeship programme

BMW moved from programme delivery by colleges to in-house delivery. This ensured that BMW could control the delivery of the training to ensure it was of the quality it required. The rationale for developing the in-house programme was the ability to embed the company culture, and ensure that trainees were trained in the most up-to-date technologies and practices. Feedback from dealerships indicated that colleges were good at delivering qualifications, but were not able to embed the company culture and were not flexible enough to keep up-to-date with technology and changes in practice.

The Academy is a £17 million investment and includes thirty-two workshop bays and ten training rooms all with IT and audiovisual equipment. In addition, there are a further 12 training rooms and ten syndicate rooms all with projectors, DVD/CD and wireless LAN connections. The Apprenticeship programme is not the only training delivered at the Academy – over 200 courses are delivered on site.

“I much preferred the intense learning at the Academy, rather than day release to go to College.” Apprentice

“The knowledge of the trainers is phenomenal and we’re always working with the very latest technology.” Apprentice

Challenge: Maximising Take-Up by Minimising Application Stress

Many of the apprentices participating on the scheme are not direct BMW employees; rather they are employees of franchise BMW dealerships. These dealerships are independent operations and are not obliged to send their service engineers on the BMW programme.

Therefore, it is important that the process of application is accessible to potential candidates and that participation is made as uncomplicated as possible.

Response: Online Recruitment

The first stage of recruitment involves the completion of a short online application form that takes around 15 minutes to complete. During the initial application process prospective employees select a dealership in their locality where they would like to undertake the Apprenticeship. BMW is keen that apprentices choose local dealerships, assuming the dealership requires more staff, to minimise travel stress.

Challenge: Meeting Changing Needs

BMW acknowledged that dealerships have constantly changing requirements for new recruits and an annual recruitment programme would not be flexible enough to meet the needs of dealerships.

Response: Rolling Apprenticeship programme

The development of a rolling programme with multiple admissions points provides the flexibility required by dealerships whose staff needs may change on a month-to-month basis. For the Service Apprenticeship, there are seven entry points during the year and three entry points for the Parts Apprenticeship.

Challenge: Effective Use of the Requirements of Government Programmes

Government funded programmes often require significant amounts of monitoring and paperwork. This can place a considerable burden on commercial businesses.

Response: Aligning requirements of government programmes with business needs

Some of the data collection can be turned to the benefit of the business. For example, there is crossover between the data required by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and data BMW needs for its own internal European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) programme.

Government funding has prompted BMW to tackle some of the wider issues such as gender and minority participation that they would not otherwise have addressed, but for which there are potentially positive business outcomes. For example, it is recognised that participation levels in the motor trade among British Asians is low. As a result, BMW is looking at actively engaging with such groups to improve recruitment and retention.

Challenge: Developing Accessible Resources

In addition to the need for minimising the stress of application for potential learners, BMW also recognised the need for accessible resources.

Response: Use of Online Learning Resources

To provide a tailored learning experience for apprentices a bespoke online learning tool has been developed.

All employees use an online Learning Management System (LMS) from the BMW intranet that provides learning resources, technical manuals and support resources. The LMS system allows BMW to provide bespoke learning according to the course and stage of the Apprenticeship.

Challenge: Balancing Online and Face-To-Face Learning

The BMW Apprenticeship programme is not run as a profit centre, although there is an objective to make the Academy an efficient centre that provides training in an efficient and effective manner. A recent British Educational Communication and Technology Agency (BECTA) report noted that the Return on Investment for BMW is measured in part by the *“reduced contact time in the training centre”*.

However, BMW acknowledges that distance learning is not necessarily the most cost effective way of training apprentices and it recognises that sometimes “people float away from distance learning”.

Response: Increasing Contact Time

BMW has re-launched its Parts Apprenticeship so that each online module is now accompanied by a face-to-face learning module at the BMW academy.

BMW recognised that its Parts apprentices required more face-to-face learning time, so the contact time was increased from 21 days per annum to 40 days per annum.

Challenge: Maintaining Quality Across a Diverse Group

Delivering an Apprenticeship programme across a diverse range of 156 dealerships is challenging. In particular there is a need for a mechanism to assess mentors as well as apprentices. The need to resolve such issues is regarded as “pivotal” to the delivery of BMW’s Apprenticeship programme.

Response: Use of Field Based Career Programmes Advisors

BMW uses a team of five field advisors to monitor and assess the delivery of the workplace elements of the NVQ. All field advisors are trained NVQ assessors and are responsible for the delivery of NVQ targets.

Career Programme Advisors visit each dealership on a 12 weekly basis, where they assess the mentors’ and apprentices’ progress and resolve any issues raised by the dealership management.