

Mentoring for Success

Skillnet



Project Synopsis

The aim of this project was to introduce an innovative model of mentoring that is targeted at parents and employers.

The impact that the project has had on parents and mentors has been considerable, it has resulted in them feeling more informed and better placed to support learners. Mentor guides provide a reference for mentors that are easily accessible and can be reviewed and referred too at times that are convenient to the mentor.

Introduction

The overall aim of the project was to continue with Skillnet's drive towards being the first programme that has 100% success as its goal. The only way we can improve our first class results to make them world class is to improve and enrich the apprenticeship programme in new and innovative ways and to control, manage and reduce our learner at risks and to encourage learner completion. We believed that we could make a significant step forward in achieving 100% success by introducing and embedding an innovative model of mentoring that is targeted at parents and employers and is designed to engage them in supporting their son or daughter in achieving skills and recognised awards.

We believed that the influence and impact of the levels of motivation and support from parents and employers is underrated in the delivery of the programme. Prior to the project commencing we did engage with employers and parents and tried to keep them apprised of changes and developments. However the Mentoring for Success projects aimed to take things further. We wanted to truly engage the parents and employers and create an environment where they could support the apprentices and genuinely contribute to the delivery of the programme.

Project Aims

The specific aims of the project were:

- Create a mentoring scheme for parents and employers to support the apprenticeship
- Develop a range of materials to support the mentoring process
- To use mentoring as another way of supporting apprentices at risk of dropping out
- Create a mentoring scheme that fully engages the line manager in a supportive and motivational way
- Create an on-line support platform to support the mentoring process including access from mobile devices

These aims we believed would lead to:

- Improved retention and achievement rates

- Increased motivation of the apprentices
- Greater understanding of the learning process for the parents and employers
- Develop mentoring skills for parents, employers and apprentices that can be applied as life skills in a wider context

Project Methodology

The project was split in to several Key stages that included the following key activities:

Research Stage: This involved speaking to our learners, parents and employers about what they believed would be the key attributes that an effective mentoring package would need to have. We carried out this research in 1-2-1 discussions and we also held a number of group learner and employer forums. Research was also undertaken to look at existing mentoring materials and the successes and difficulties that previous materials had encountered.

Development Stage: As a result of evaluating previous mentoring materials and discussions with key stakeholders about the contents and design of the mentoring support package we embarked on our development stage. A suite of mentoring and parent guides were produced in draft format and an electronic learning module produced. .

Pilot and evaluation: The mentoring materials were introduced through learner and employer forums and piloted with mentors and parents. Feedback was gathered on the appropriateness of the material along with recommendations for improvements.

Revision of materials: Mentoring materials were reviewed in line with the feedback received from key stakeholders.

Roll out of materials to all mentors and parents: All parents and mentors on all our programmes are now able to benefit from the mentor and parent guides we have produced and mentors are able to enroll on our electronic learning programme. In addition we have posted the materials onto our website as downloadable materials that can be accessed and used by a wide range of users and interested parties.

Continued dissemination, feedback and development: The main stages of the project have been completed; we now however continue to encourage parents and mentors to take part in the programme and continue to encourage feedback to shape the continued development and investment that we plan to put in to the project. We do not see this project as having come to an end as it will be something that we will continue to develop and use in our organisation and also share with others for the foreseeable future.

Our materials have been developed with employers feedback and we will continue to seek improvement contributions through governors panels and dealer forums

Project Outcomes

A successful research and development phase led to the creation of a mentoring scheme for parents and employers, as part of this we developed a range of materials to support the mentoring process, these included:

- Electronic Maximum Mentoring module produced.
- Parent guides
- Mentor guides

Our original project aims have been achieved in that we have created the materials that we have set out to. Soft measures in terms of mentor and parent feedback has been positive and

indicates project success. The hard measures that would ultimately determine the success of the programme are retention, achievement and timely success rates. We believe that it is too early to have definitive evidence as to whether this has made a significant impact; all our programmes are 12-18 months in length so the learners that are currently achieving may not have been influenced by this programme. However our P6 QSR rates are showing year on year improvements. Achievement rates were 82.5% in 2009/2010 and increased to 84.6% at P6 2010/2011, this indicating some early signs of success.

The main difficulty that we encountered with the project was the uptake on our electronic mentoring module. We requested volunteers to take part in the pilot. At the start of the pilot we had very willing and enthusiastic mentors involved, who understood the value of mentoring and had a desire to be involved. However as the pilot progressed and other work pressures arose the mentors were not all able to provide the time and commitment to either complete the electronic mentoring module or to complete it within the initial timeframes that had been set for the pilot. Due to the difficulties that we encountered with mentors time and commitment during the pilot we decided not to fully establish an on line e platform. We felt that we wanted to continue with the way we ran it in the pilot, by having an electronic module issued by a Skillnet member of staff direct to a mentor with instruction that was then fully administered and supported until we could better evaluate barriers to uptake. We ensure support and administration of the module, mark the tests, provide help and advice and provide individual feedback, we felt that this was essential if mentors were going to have a positive experience with useful and productive feedback. The obvious drawback to this approach is that long term administering this module will be more costly than if it was carried out on a standalone e learning platform however the benefits to mentors in having personalized feedback and involvement we believed outweighed this cost. We felt due to the limited uptake in the pilot stage the electronic learning programme would only succeed if it was fully supported and administered.

The participation, engagement and enthusiasm for the parents and mentor guides have been excellent.

The impact that the project has had on parents and mentors has been considerable, it has resulted in them feeling more informed and better placed to support learners. Mentor guides provide a reference for mentors that are easily accessible and can be reviewed and referred too at times that are convenient to the mentor.

Manufacturing clients feel like they are supporting both their learners and the people that they are expecting to mentor learners, who have no previous knowledge and information about what this role involves.

The project has successfully reinforced to all parties involved the importance of the role of the mentor and parents.

We are satisfied that the focus on mentoring and parent guides has added value to the programme and created an information guide that increases the awareness of the stakeholders that are involved in creating successful apprenticeship training programmes

The downloadable shared guides that can be accessed from our websites offer the opportunity for all visitors to our website to use the guides and the content for their own programmes, information or use.

For future improvement programmes we will more thoroughly research the use of e solutions and the uptake of e solutions by the user.

Sharing of Project Findings

The learning from this project is extremely transferrable and has already been transferred to other organisations as part of the work that a number of our Senior Management Team carry out as LSIS Sector Coaches, through the work that we do supporting other providers as part of the LSIS 'Learning from the Best project' and also as part of the support role we play to other providers as a holder of Beacon Status.

The materials offer though tailored to our organisations, with slight adaptation have been useful to other organisation. The materials can easily and cost effectively be transferred to another provider in the sector so that they can start experiencing the benefits of having mentoring and parent support materials without having the initial costly expenses that are involved in the research and development phases of such as scheme.

Skillnet will work with 2 of the partners in ensuring that the results of the project are disseminated to the sector. The IMI will ensure that the automotive sector will be kept informed of progress and we will use The Talent Foundation to disseminate results to the wider training and talent management network. We believe that the integration of mentoring into a vocational programme for the first time will be of major interest to both work based learning providers as well as the wider training and development community.

Mentor and Parent guides are downloadable from Skillnet's website and on the websites that we host for our manufacturing clients, such as Ford, DAF and Scania. These are accessible to all and we regularly sign post other providers to them to support them with the creation of their own mentor programmes.

We will provide the mentor and parent materials that have been created as part of the project to be used on the excellence gateway.