

Toolkit for Selling Apprenticeships

The ability to successfully place apprentices in business is a vital skill that will benefit both the business and the young people involved.

This toolkit will help people to achieve this.

1. Introduction

This document provides a guide on how to place apprentices with businesses in the most effective manner. It has been drawn up as a result of the experience gained during the programmes “100 new employers in 100 days” and “Apprentices – effective employer engagement in a rural area”.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the document is to guide all those involved in placing apprentices in business. It provides a set of tools and techniques on how to prepare, approach, engage and deliver to industry. It will help providers increase the placement and retention rate of apprentices.

3. How to use this document

The document should be read and understood before any engagement with industry. In particular:

- follow the steps outlined in section four;
- use a consistent process as described in section five, Overcoming the barriers;
- see the tips given in section six;
- if you have any questions, see if they have already been raised in section seven – FAQs; and
- use the Other Resources in section eight to help prepare before you go.

4. Steps to follow when visiting a rural SME/micro business

4.1) Research the business before you go.

Review the company website. This will enable you to understand the company better. People appreciate this, and often a little praise on their company will go a long way and help you to build the relationship quicker.

In particular, look for the products they produce, the people involved and any recent news stories.

Also, do a “Google” search on the company name for further information, which may be useful.

Success lies in matching both the company and the apprentice together.

4.2) Know the apprenticeship offer of your college and the group

Spend some time making yourself aware of the range of apprentices in your college and the skills they offer.

Also, take time to understand what apprentices are available in other nearby colleges.

Remember – you are the bridge between the business and the apprentice, and you have to match the needs of both to make a successful placement

Often the internal sale is as difficult as the external placement. Take time to build internal relationships with key points of contacts in the college including:

- tutors;
- staff;
- managers; and
- the apprentices themselves.

4.3) Discover the customer's problem

The majority of businesses are there to make profits and generate income. There must be good business reasons for them to consider taking on an apprentice. If the business does not see these reasons, then there is every chance it will fall into the “all too difficult” area. They will raise objections such as “the paperwork is too difficult”, or “there is no-one appropriate”. These are often polite ways of saying “I can’t see what is in it for me”.

In order to minimise or avoid this situation, use a consistent approach to discover the customer’s problems and how an apprentice could benefit them. This process is described in section five.

4.4) Identify the apprenticeship solution

Once you fully understand the customer’s need, then you can find a suitable solution. Matching the solution is almost as important as finding the need – spend time ensuring there is a good match – and do not rely on others to find the solution.

Do not

- Pass the requirement back into the college tutor and expect an answer.

Understand the situation from the business owners’ point of view.

Take time to work out how an apprentice will benefit their business

- Find multiple apprentice CV's and expect the business to sort through them.
- Do**
- Act swiftly, as business owners and managers have many different issues to deal with on a daily basis, and your good work will soon fade away as time goes on.
 - Take time to carefully preselect suitable apprentices.
 - Meet with the business owner to go through the CV.
 - Prepare the apprentice before the meeting.
 - Attend the meeting with the business owner and the apprentice.

4.5) Back this up with examples of how this has worked in the past

As part of your preparation, make sure you have:

- good case studies to refer to – short, easily read and emotionally strong stories are very compelling;
- testimonials and referrals from previous employers who they can call; and
- a good website to back you up.

4.6) Outline next steps

Make it as easy as possible for the placement to occur.

- Explain the steps in clear and straight forward terms.
- Describe what they need to do and obtain their agreement to do so.
- Tell them what you will do and when you will do it.
- NO MUTUAL MYSTIFICATION!

Barriers and objections are often the result of poor technique and preparation.

5. How to Overcome the Barriers

All too often, we end up with barriers put up by companies, which are all the reasons why they will not take an apprentice. Typical barriers include:

- too much paperwork;
- unsuitable candidates;
- bad attitude; and
- no transport.

In reality, this generally means that the business owner is stalling and raising objections to fend you off. He does not see how an apprentice can answer some of the employment issues which he may be facing. It is often a result of trying to close the deal too soon – using a features and benefits based sales approach.

To overcome this, change your approach to one of building the desire to buy. Take time to understand their company, to learn about their employment issues and qualify whether they are a suitable business for an apprentice. Once you have qualified them, then find the right solutions.

Here are the steps to “build the desire to buy”.

5.1) Follow a consistent process

We use processes in many aspects of life – and using a process introduces consistency and repeatable success. This is the recommended process to follow:



Figure 1 - Use a process in every engagement with the customer to achieve consistent success

Using a process ensures a consistent approach each time, and a higher success rate as a result.

Each of these steps is now explained in more detail.

People like to work with people who they know and trust.

Take time to build a relationship as this will lead to success

5.2) Take time to build the relationship

People buy from people they know and trust. Building this trust takes time and effort. Without this trust, people will not open up, and will find reasons to end the conversation. Use these techniques to help build that relationship:

Adapt to their personality style - when talking on the phone, or in a meeting, or during any communication, aim to adapt your communication style to match the person you are talking to. For example, if they are a person who wants many facts and figures, respect that. If they are someone who wants the bare details, quickly and succinctly, do so. If they want to spend a lot of time talking and going over the details, do not rush them.

Listen, rather than talk – salespeople make the mistake of thinking they have to talk their customers into the sale. This has the opposite effect and often drives the customer away. Actively listen to conversations, show you are listening and maintain a 30% you:70 business owner ratio of speaking.

Take time to understand their business – build trust and respect, every business owner thinks they are unique!

Watch your body language and your tonality – the words we use are the smallest factor in communicating our message. Your body language and your tonality say it all.

5.3) Agree mutual objectives and outcomes

We often let the business owner drive the agenda and direction of a meeting. This leaves us out of control and in react mode. To balance this out, you can maintain control of the direction of the meeting early on by:

- stating your purpose for the meeting;
- explaining your agenda;
- confirming their agenda;
- describing the potential outcomes as you see them; and
- make sure you have an agreed duration for the meeting.

This form of agenda setting ensures that the meeting maintains direction, and has a purpose.

People make decisions for their reasons, not ours.

Use questioning techniques to discover these reasons

5.4) Discover PAIN - What are the real needs of the business

People buy for two reasons, to solve a pain/problem or for pleasure. Businesses take on apprentices for a reason. In the majority of cases this is not an altruistic reason, but to solve a genuine business issue.

Traditionally, when selling, people extol the features and benefits of a service or product. However, a far stronger buying motive is for the business owner to understand what PAINS or problems this solves for them.

Table 1 below gives some examples of how features and benefits can be turned into problem solving statements.

PAIN Solved for the business	Feature/Benefit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of a bad employment? • Cost of advertising and recruiting. • Time taken to advertise. 	Zero recruitment cost
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No preconceived ideas on how things should be done. • Succession planning. 	Ability to grow and develop your own staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not have to spend time sifting through CVs. • Solves problem of inappropriate person employed who is then difficult to remove. 	Easy to recruit and easy to release
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solves problem of having to write job specifications. • No adverts to write and standards to conform to. 	Minimum contract work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce becoming stale and set in their ways. • Workforce seems to be running at tick over rather than at pace. 	Brings youth and enthusiasm to the workplace

Table 1: turning features and benefits into problems this solves for the business

To discover whether these apply, it is important to ask questions and yet more questions. Find out if they have had problems recruiting the right person, is succession planning an issue, do they want to refresh their workforce, and so forth.

There are a number of techniques which can be used for asking

Build the desire to buy by asking questions around business issues – PAINS rather than features and benefits

The questions we ask are more important than the answers we give

questions. These include:

- answer questions with a question;
- soften the question with a leading phrase such as, “that’s a good question”, or “I’m glad you asked that”;
- use a menu approach, giving “either” “or” options;
- use third party stories to bring an element of past experience to the situation. For example “when xxx company took on an apprentice, they found it really helped the whole team. How do you think your team would respond? and
- avoid giving the answer straight away, even if you know it. Ask more questions to further clarify the position.

Sometime you may already know the answers to a question, but it will pay to keep that knowledge to yourself while you fully clarify the issue. For example, you may be faced with the question, “How long does it take to place an apprentice” which under any other circumstance you would probably give your best answer to. An alternative technique is to answer with another question such as, “I would need to double check, but can you tell me why you asked that question, it sounds important to you?”

This helps us to find out the true issue behind the question.

So, in summary, look out for "what problems can I solve for the business owner", rather than extolling the features and benefits of the apprentice.

Make sure you are speaking to the decision makers in the business

5.5) Understand the financial position and decision making process

It is important that both parties understand the financial position, and the viability of the business taking on an apprentice.

Much time could be wasted on finding a suitable apprentice, and then discovering there is no money available.

Research shows that recruiting apprentices is both a low cost and low risk approach for a business.

It is also important to make sure that you are speaking to the decision maker, and that you understand the decision-making process. If you are not speaking to the decision maker, ask if it is possible to do so.

5.6) Offer a matched solution

Having qualified the business as suitable for an apprentice, and created the desire to buy, it is important to find the right solution quickly. Building internal relations are critical to success, and the same techniques of following a process and taking time to build a relationship internally apply as described above.

6. 10 tips for effective engagement

6.1) Prepare before you go

- Research the company website.
- Develop pain solving questions as shown in Table 1 above.

6.2) Do your homework on suitable candidates

Know who you have to offer and their range of skills and capabilities.

6.3) Take time to build a relationship with the business owner

People buy from people they know and trust. Take time to build this trust and engage with the business owner throughout.

6.4) Build the desire, rather than overcome the objections

People buy for their reasons, based on emotion, and then justify their decisions rationally. Help to build that desire.

6.5) Make sure you listen 70% and talk 30% of the time

It's the amount of information you gather that is important, rather than the amount of information you give out.

6.6) Work on the "internal sale" as well as the external sale

You are the bridge between the external world and the internal world. The bridge has two supports, make sure you focus on both ends.

6.7) Make sure the candidate is fully prepared and support him/her through the whole process

Practice interview questions, make sure they are appropriately dressed, on time and know the company and its business at least at the top level.

6.8) Minimise the paperwork load on the business

Make it as easy as possible for the business to take on the apprentice. Offer to do all the paperwork wherever possible.

6.9) Capture your thoughts and actions immediately after the meeting

Do it straight away - it's easy to forget later on.

6.10) Don't be afraid to ask for referrals

Your best sales person is the one who recommend you to others. Ask the business owner if he would recommend another business owner. Ask for the referral even if he does not take on an apprentice. If he has had a good experience, make sure he tells his friends!

7. Frequently Asked Questions

Why should I take on an apprentice?

When answering this question, try initially responding with another question such as, “good question, what is your perception of an apprentice and how this might or might not work in your business”

Ultimately, the business owner should see that apprenticeships can make their organisation more effective, competent, productive and competitive by addressing their skills gaps directly. They are designed to help young employees reach a level of competency and performance.

How much extra time will I need to spend with an Apprentice?

A responding question could be, “yes, that is often a concern that people have, do you feel that this could be rather time consuming for you?” Consider also asking how much time does it take to recruit and develop an employee?

Experience shows that the amount of paperwork and intrusion into the workplace is not significant.

Is there an Apprentice relevant to my business?

It is a common trait that apprenticeships are associated with vocational subjects. So perhaps respond with a question along the lines of, “by relevant to your business, can you just explain a bit more about what you mean?”

Apprenticeships are available in a very broad range of career paths, and it is worth taking some time to understand the requirements of the business to see if there is a suitable match.

Why can't we have better financial support for the time and effort we put in?

This is a concern of many employers. However, question exactly what is their perception of the time and effort required? Then compare this with other forms of recruitment. If possible, use a third party story e.g. illustrate how another company was initially concerned about this, and then found six months later that they had a low cost and highly productive recruit.

What are my responsibilities as an employer?

Ask them how much do they think this varies from a regular employee?

Their support as an employer is vital; Apprenticeship programmes rely on good on the job training supported by off the job training in order to achieve their target qualifications such as NVQ's. You must be prepared to release your Apprentice for planned off the job training.

8. Other Resources

Interesting facts

- 77% of employers believe Apprenticeships make them more competitive.
- 76% say that Apprenticeships provide higher overall productivity.
- 80% feel that Apprenticeships reduce staff turnover.
- 83% of employers rely on their Apprenticeships programme to provide the skilled workers that they need for the future.
- Two-thirds of respondents believe that their Apprenticeship programme helps them fill vacancies more quickly, whilst
- 88% believe that Apprenticeships lead to a more motivated and satisfied workforce.
- 59% report that training apprentices is more cost-effective than hiring skilled staff, with 59% believing that Apprenticeships lead to lower overall training costs and 53% feeling that they reduce recruitment costs.
- In terms of the return on investment linked to Apprenticeships, 41% say that their apprentices make a valuable contribution to the business during their training period, while a further third (33%) report that apprentices add value within their first few weeks (or even from day one).
- 57% report a high proportion of their apprentices going on to management positions within the company.

Websites

<http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/>

<http://www.lsis.org.uk/Pages/default.aspx>

College Websites

<http://www.huish.ac.uk/employers/apprenticeships>

http://www.strode-college.ac.uk/school_leavers/apprenticeships/258

<http://www.bridgwater.ac.uk/apprenticeships.php>

<http://www.somersetenterprise.co.uk/training-and-development/apprenticeships.html>

<http://www.yeovil.ac.uk/apprenticeships>