

Teach Too

Retail skills swap and support for trainees, apprentices and other staff



Fareport Training Organisation

LEAD CONTACT

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EMPLOYER

Theo Paphitis Retail Group

Commissioned and funded by

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Introduction to Teach Too

Teach Too is an ETF-funded project delivered in partnership by UCL Institute of Education and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP). Deriving from a key recommendation of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) Report in 2013, it sets out to explore and evaluate different models of collaborative activity between employers and providers at practitioner level, in the co-design, delivery and assessment of vocational education and training programmes. Project findings show that these collaborative partnerships have produced significant short and medium-term benefits for employers, providers and learners, and enrich and strengthen local economies and communities.

Jay Derrick Director of Teacher Education (post-compulsory),
UCL, Institute of Education

Project aims

- To train existing employees to become coaches/mentors to support the skills and knowledge development of less experienced colleagues, including apprentices
- To increase knowledge and skills level through the skills swap between employees
- To identify planned progression routes for trainees and apprentices with signposting to the support required as they progress through this route
- To identify how mentoring/coaching improved employees' knowledge and skills base
- To identify potential "rising stars" so they can be signposted onto the employer's Leadership and Management programme
- To identify further collaborative work opportunities with the partner employer.

Project description

The assessing team at Fareport training organisation worked collaboratively with the employer's store managers to identify appropriate employees to take part in the project.

Using an agreed skills identification sheet, experienced and less experienced employees, including apprentices, were interviewed and their skills/knowledge documented. The sheet was designed to re-cap and review the skills that each employee felt was either a strength or required further development. The skills listed were based on job descriptions for sales staff within the organisation. Through this skills identification process, it quickly became clear that, while long serving employees were extremely confident to approach customers and give advice, they were less confident in receiving deliveries and maintaining stock records. This issue was picked up as a future focus for their in-house training programme. Following the initial skills identification, employees were paired up with "buddies" for skills swapping opportunities using a coaching/mentoring approach.

To ensure that longer serving employees felt confident to undertake a coaching/mentoring role, a programme of training was planned. This proved more difficult than anticipated due to time constraints for employees being released from the shop floor. An alternative approach was therefore developed using a combination of materials from the employer's Human Resources section and some ICT based resources. Throughout this process, the Fareport assessing team continued to meet with employees and document progress (using the skills identification sheet) as skills and knowledge was exchanged.

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The progression of trainees was another important aspect to this project: the training and development team from the employer worked with Fareport to identify how these novice employees could best be supported through an identified progression route. It was agreed that each trainee would have a named contact from the Fareport assessing team as well as the named “buddy” from the skills swap programme. Whilst the member of the assessing team was responsible for the “formal programme” of study including English and Maths, the buddy took responsibility for supporting the trainee with store and company knowledge. The additional layer of support was aimed at increasing the likelihood of a trainee progressing onto an apprenticeship programme. The buddy also benefited from this relationship in terms of their own self development and potential identification for the new Leadership and Management programme that the employer was implementing across their stores.

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Positive impacts

- Long serving employees had increased self-esteem, many of whom had previously felt that they did not have much to contribute to the training process
- There was increased understanding across the employer organisation of the standards required for the apprenticeship programme and what is required for trainees and apprentices to succeed on their programme
- Both the employer and the training organisation had greater understanding of the knowledge and skills that trainees already had
- Assessing staff improved their occupational knowledge and understanding of current practice with this particular employer which will support on-programme activities with trainees and apprentices
- A bank of mentoring/coaching resources was developed which can now be used by others within the sector
- The relationship with the employer was enhanced, in particular between assessing teams and store managers, which is likely to lead to increased trainees and apprentices and further collaboration opportunities

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Key learning points

- Ensure activities such as skills swap are beneficial for both employees involved. This was achieved through the careful matching of colleagues from the initial skills identification
- Be aware that within an organisation's existing workforce there is a untapped resource of occupational knowledge and personnel who are able (with the right training) to provide really useful support to trainees and apprentices
- Consider carefully how best to deliver any aspects of the project which involve employees "being taken away from the shop floor". In this project the way coaching and mentoring training was delivered had to be amended due to difficulties with staff release from their day-to-day duties.

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Recommendations for developing employer partnerships

- Taking time with all parties at the beginning of any project/ collaboration to establish named contacts with identified roles and responsibilities. Ensure that employers at an appropriate level (i.e the decision makers) are involved and have agreed to the project/collaboration
- For a particular project within a partnership, develop a detailed project plan which allows both parties to agree key milestones, action points etc. This can then be revisited throughout the lifetime of the project
- Try to identify “low cost” solutions to support a particular project, such as the use of existing resources and ICT resources for coaching/mentoring training without the need for staff to be taken away from day-to-day activities
- Ensure that relevant dissemination activities are planned, which if possible involve other employers and providers.

Links and contact details

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