

Employer Case Study: Vanita Nicholls, Apprenticeship Programme Manager

How have apprenticeship programmes impacted your organisation?

Ealing Council has run an apprenticeship programme since 2007 that has had buy in from our senior leadership team and politicians from the start. The council apprenticeship scheme has dedicated co-ordination and important pastoral support for participants. As a mature scheme the council has benefited by 'growing our own'.

Managers nurture new starters and by the end of the first year the apprentices understand how the organisation runs, have learned new skills, knowledge and behaviours, and have become valuable members of staff. There are managers who approach the apprenticeship team and ask if there are any people coming close to the end of their apprenticeships that can apply for their forthcoming vacancies, such is the reputation of the learners.

The organisation has also benefited by the number of people who apply for council roles at the end of their apprenticeship, with around 70% of people successful in getting roles at the council. Those who completed apprenticeships also seem to have a better ability to move through the organisation and have better success rates when applying for roles that lead to promotion. Ealing Council also has examples of people who were apprentices on the scheme who are now managers themselves and recruit apprentices to their teams.

Apprentices are valued by the organisation with an apprentice priority recruitment policy. After redeployees, roles of a certain grade and lower are open to apprentices on the scheme for one week before going to general advert.

Ealing Council runs an annual graduation and awards ceremony to recognise the good work of apprentices, their managers as well as their training providers.

I would like to thank Hawk Training for their years of dedicated service to Ealing Council learners and support to the apprenticeship team. Where other organisations find difficulty with their training providers, Hawk have been exceptional in delivery, worked with great collaboration, and supported our events. Whatever the highest accolade is, then they deserve it!



“The apprenticeship programme at Ealing Council is an exemplary partnership between provider and employer. We always appreciate the open, honest and constructive communication to continuously improve the programme and lives of the apprentices at the council.”

Oliver Hill, Head of Business Development at Hawk Training



What apprenticeship challenges have you faced (particularly over the past year)?

The past pandemic year has devastated the ability of managers to generate apprenticeship roles. Nationally vacancies dropped by 72% and this is reflective of what happened at Ealing Council as well. Of those who were recruited, our pastoral support worker would report back that it was particularly difficult for those new starters to work from home, be part of a new organisation, and start out in the world of work. All the apprentices found lockdown difficult, some vulnerable apprentices had to shield, some have children and found working and supporting them at the same time tricky to manage. All the apprentices were supported by our pastoral support worker, but also by the training provider who would assign and check work.

What are the main benefits of hiring an apprentice?

Apart from giving someone an opportunity who might not otherwise get an opportunity, the main benefits are:

- Training the future workforce
- Well-rounded training
- Loyalty
- Value for money
- Bringing new energy and ideas to the organisation.

Who has supported you during your apprenticeship programmes?

Hawk Training provide a range of support including their business development manager who works to develop the model that will work for our organisation; the account manager who meets on a monthly basis to give updates on the progress of the apprentices and any action plans put in place; there are the very important tutors who deal with the different learners and are very skilled in supporting them through their apprenticeships by the planned completion dates.

What would you say to someone who was deciding whether they should do an apprenticeship?

I would ask them what they want to do; I would ask them if they need qualifications to do it. If they were speaking about being interested in a vocational route then I would have no hesitation in putting forward the idea of doing an apprenticeship. Having seen so many young people (actually people of different ages) go through the experience and seeing how well they do and how quickly they start earning a really decent salary, then I would hope they would explore apprenticeships and give serious consideration to doing one...or more. How fantastic that now you can do a degree as an apprenticeship – you work, you get paid, you study, you don't pay any fees for the study! Oh and you get 20% of your paid working time to do your study. That alone is amazing.

How did you find the advice and guidance given throughout the apprenticeship duration?

Hawk Training are experts in their field. With a number of apprentices on our scheme from diverse backgrounds and abilities, we sometimes find that their journeys are not always 'straightforward'. Hawk are skilled at supporting and suggesting action plans that are appropriate for the learner and that also work with the employer.

Would you recommend Hawk Training as a training provider to others looking to do an apprenticeship?

Hawk Training are a first-class training provider and Ealing Council has worked with them for many years. Our account manager and the tutors are excellent. The tutors know how to work with each person to get the best from them, even though there are a diverse group of learners with different abilities, personalities and styles, and they do this with great respect. If Hawk make a promise then they always fulfil that promise.

If you had to use one word to describe Hawk Training's apprenticeship programme what would it be?

Excellence.

