How to… design and run a successful digital apprenticeship programme

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This 'How to HackITx LOTI' guide helps people who work in Digital and IT teams in local authorities know how to set up and run a digital apprenticeship programme so that we extend the number of opportunities for people to start their careers in this sector. If you'd like a general overview of apprenticeships and what they entail, please see the GOV.UK apprenticeships page.

Context

The London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI) was created to help London boroughs work together, bringing the best of digital, technology and data to improve public services for Londoners.

LOTI has a programme of work, each with specific projects led by one of its member boroughs. This project is about increasing opportunity in the digital technology sector and has a target of 100 apprentices across London boroughs by 2020.

This guide has been developed by HackIT and LOTI, using insight from our initial discovery into what would be of most use to ICT colleagues thinking about, or in the process of setting up, a digital apprenticeship programme.

1. Making the case - what's the rationale?

Why have a digital apprenticeship programme?
Technology and data are increasingly important to our lives, including the delivery of local public services. Demand for digital skills is growing rapidly across all sectors. This and other changes in the employment market make it increasingly challenging for local authorities to hire the people needed to shape and deliver digital services that meet our residents' expectations.

A digital apprenticeship programme can be an important component of addressing this skills gap. Designing apprenticeships into the structure of an ICT and digital

team can help to bring in new talent, use apprenticeship levy funding to develop their skills and contribute to building a sustainable workforce for the longer term.

Building apprenticeship roles into your structure
The benefits of a digital apprenticeship programme can be maximised by designing apprentice roles into the overall service structure. Using a common foundation for job descriptions, which link in with the skills for other roles, supports apprentices in growing their skills and experience and developing their career objectives.

Apprenticeship standards show what an apprentice will be doing and the skills required of them, by job role.

There are, however, some disciplines within digital, where apprenticeship standards are relatively immature and there might not be an existing standard available. In these cases it is useful to see whether other standards might be sufficiently similar to a planned apprentice role or whether there are opportunities to be part of a 'trailblazer' group to define a new standard. However, it might also be necessary to defer an apprenticeship until a suitable standard exists. More advice on choosing a standard is outlined in Section 2.

Case study: the structure for the Hackney ICT service includes apprenticeships as part of many of the 'job families' providing a pathway to progression (see this summary of role levels and organisation structure charts).

What should I include in my business case?
Apprenticeship levy funding can only be used towards the cost of training provision and cannot fund the salary costs of apprentices. It's therefore useful to consider where there might be opportunities to redesign teams to build apprenticeships into their structure and create entry points for areas where posts are hard to fill or where apprenticeships can help provide a pipeline of future talent.

Case study: Hackney has created a digital apprenticeship programme of more than 20 roles by reviewing the service structure and replacing vacant hard-to-fill roles with apprenticeships. These apprenticeships are distributed across service areas and designed into each team's structure.

Managers' perceptions - risks and rewards
There are many preconceptions about the contribution that apprentices will make to a team's work and the challenges of managing people who have limited (or no) experience of a workplace. These are, however, easily surmountable with effective preparation and support for apprentices and their managers. The guidance in this document sets how to ensure that apprenticeships are successful.

<u>Case study:</u> a key planning assumption for Hackney's programme has been that managers of new apprentices will require focused support throughout the process of recruitment, selection and ongoing management of the apprentices. This has been provided by senior leaders in the service and the council's employment and skills service. The result of this has been that the programme launched successfully and apprentices have been able to make a significant contribution to the ICT service's performance. This blog post provides more insight into a line manager's experience of working with digital apprentices at Hackney: https://blogs.hackney.gov.uk/hackit/hackit-apprenticeship-programme-hows-it-going-as-a-line-manager.

2. Designing the roles

Finding the right apprenticeship standards
We are working on gathering data on which LOTI boroughs are using which standards so far so that we have a source of information for you to use to decide what standards you might want to use. This is the Institute of Apprenticeships standards checker which has all of the current and in development standards https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/?keywords=digital

<u>Case study:</u> Hackney's apprentice job roles and matching standards

Creating job descriptions
Like all job descriptions (JDs), those targeted at apprenticeship roles need to be accessible to candidates who are thinking of applying and comprehensive enough to form the contract with the individual. Things to think about when creating apprenticeship JDs:
- remove requirements for experience and qualifications unless they are absolutely necessary
- use plain english - that involves being jargon-free (it's amazing how much creeps in even when you think it hasn't!)
- make sure the training element is properly explained
- check what the appropriate entry requirements are for the qualification
- check all JDs and adverts for gender specific language to ensure they don't discourage applications. See more here: https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/WISE_-_Gender_Decoding_Your_Job_Adverts.pdf

Involving managers in co-creating job roles

Line managers/team leaders are often best placed to know how a trainee member of staff would fit into their team. You can use this handy [template](#) as a starting point for the conversation.

Length of role
You need to include enough time for the apprentice to complete their qualification, allowing some room for any problems along the way. As a general rule of thumb for a year long qualification, an 18 months contract should be enough; for an 18 month qualification, you might allow 2 years. Other key points to consider:
- Your training provider(s) should be able to advise on contract length
- Add in some wriggle room for the end point assessment (EPA) to ensure apprentices can complete the qualification during their contract with you.
- It's also good to build in 1-2 months at the start of an apprenticeship for induction/bedding in before training starts in earnest

Pay
There is a [minimum wage](#) for apprentices. Your organisation may also have a set policy about paying the Living Wage, or London Living Wage.

Case Studies (currently being drafted): Hackney and Camden.

3. Recruiting

Advertising the roles
As with the job descriptions, it's important to make sure the language used in adverts for apprenticeships is accessible for young people and other applicants who may not have experience in the field. Avoid jargon, and write in plain English.

It's worth considering recruitment channels outside of a standard approach, again with the aim of widening accessibility. If you are targeting young people, bear in mind that parents are often key influences in terms of how apprenticeships are perceived. It's good practice for publicity to include voices of apprentices from diverse backgrounds, and focus on counteracting preconceptions about apprenticeships, e.g. by demonstrating that:
- apprenticeships are available in almost all professional areas including at higher and degree level
- apprenticeships are not only a good option for less academic people who prefer to learn on the job. These days they are often also a positive choice made by high academic achievers who want to benefit from getting qualified and gaining an onward job, while getting paid and avoiding university debt.

Case study: Hackney's apprenticeships are promoted through a range of channels and platforms, including targeted digital marketing, school visits, local media, open days and posters. We have also worked closely with council and external partners like Employment and Youth services to reach a range of under-represented groups. Have a look at [examples of publicity material used](#) and you can view a programme video on [Hackney's apprenticeships webpage](#). Hackney's apprenticeships receive over 21 applicants per post, 50% of whom are aged 16-24, 80% are from BAME backgrounds, and 11% have a disability.

Shortlisting and assessment
Apprenticeship and/or HR teams can provide guidance on how to shortlist and assess candidates; individual boroughs may have their own approach to apprenticeship recruitment.

It's good practice to ensure your recruitment process puts the focus on potential and aptitude over experience and qualifications, particularly for apprenticeships at Levels 2 and 3. This can be achieved by:
- Removing requirements for experience and qualifications where appropriate from job descriptions. Instead consider assessing literacy and numeracy (or other relevant aptitudes) as part of the assessment process.
- Designing an application form which is short and simple to use.
- Holding screening days (sometimes called 'Assessment Centres') which will give you a better sense of candidates' potential, as opposed to shortlisting only from application forms, which tends to bias applicants with prior experience and higher levels of academic attainment. Have a look at a [sample assessment day plan from Hackney](#).
- Use interview questions which look for a genuine interest in and understanding of the role, testing research done rather than prior experience, and which allow the candidate to use examples from non-professional settings (e.g. education, volunteering, personal life). Have a look at some [sample interview questions from Hackney](#).

4. Selecting training partners

Procurement
Different boroughs will have different ways of managing procurement, however you will need to prepare some form of tender document and invite training providers to bid for the work.

Here's an example of an [invitation to tender](#) that might be useful. In it you'll find useful criteria to use when thinking about the quality of the provision:

- Published material - Ofsted rating, achievement rates and employer and learner satisfaction rates
- Knowledge and skills apprentices will acquire with the qualification being provided
- Outline of the learner journey and the scheme of work
- Explanation of the delivery model options. What model do you recommend and why?
- How progress reviews and workplace assessments are conducted and communicated
- Level of pastoral support

Joining forces
LOTI may be able to help you find another borough who is also looking to procure a provider for the same apprenticeship. It's worth asking on local gov digital slack channel (join the #LOTI channel) as you may be able to join forces and create a specific cohort of students between you.

Do your research
As well as designing your quality criteria for your procurement speak to other boroughs about their experience. Use the local gov digital slack channel (join the #LOTI channel) to ask questions and join the conversation.

Lessons learnt - case study?
In the future we'd like to include examples of where boroughs have worked together to procure and manage a provider together.

5. Induction

Support for line managers
Line managers are usually the first to welcome apprentices to their team, oversee the induction process and manage the relationship with the training provider.

Examples of how you could actively support your line managers:
1. Create a consistent induction programme but then ask line managers to personalise it for each apprentice
2. Run a session for line managers about what to think about when managing young people (not all apprentices are in their first job but many are).
3. Provide guidance for line managers, including pastoral support
4. Run regular sessions with line managers that encourage them to work together on problem solving any issues

6. In post

Managing the relationship with the provider

An apprenticeship is essentially a three way relationship between work (line manager), student (apprentice) and study (provider). This can be tricky and not all providers are very good at communicating consistently.

Key things to have in place are:
- A forward study plan so that you can plan work that aligns with study commitments where possible
- Clarity about assessment - especially exams/deadlines/portfolio
- Regular meetings with the tutor/provider (and document follow up actions)

Setting clear performance framework (goals, milestones) that align with study
We've found that the apprenticeship standards themselves aren't a perfect fit for the job roles we have, so we've had to be flexible and creative about how we make sure that the apprentice is supported to complete their studies.

Case study - creating opportunities for putting learning into practice
Using Prince 2 to deliver a small project -

Working across boroughs
Line managers often find that they're the only person working with one provider, or with one apprenticeship standard. LOTI is looking at how we can support both line managers and apprentices to develop wider networks so that we can:
- Build networks of line managers who are using the same provider, enabling us to share experiences and best practice
- Build cohorts of apprentices who are taking the same qualification, and encourage them to work together and share their learning

Line managers of digital apprentices who work in LOTI boroughs can join our dedicated local gov digital slack channel (join the #LOTI channel):

Wider work support
Apprentices are often (but not always) in their first job. So there's often need for soft skills development in areas such as communication, writing, budgeting and timekeeping. There can be Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) needs as well.

Things you could do to provide wider work support:

- Have a buddy system where the apprentice has someone outside their team to talk to
- Make use of any general training that HR/OD have in place for staff
- Ask the providers what support/training they offer in work skills

Case study:
https://blogs.hackney.gov.uk/hackit/delivering-digital-change-for-the-long-term-with-apprenticeships

7. *Moving on (this section is currently under development)*

Succession planning

Setting expectations for your apprentices

Success criteria

Case study: HackIT success criteria are around the successful completion of apprenticeship qualifications and the next steps in people's careers.
- Successfully recruited to 100% of our apprenticeship vacancies
- 90% successfully complete their apprenticeship qualification
- 90% go on to employment in their field or a professionally related field (either with Hackney or somewhere else)