ATTRACTING UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS TO DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIPS

Good practice guide #3 for training providers

Part of the Mayor's Digital Talent Programme

TECH PARTNERSHIP
skills for the digital economy

About digital apprenticeship good practice guides

The Tech Partnership is delighted to be working with the Greater London Authority (GLA) to support the Mayor's Digital Talent Programme, which aims to increase the number of women and young people from Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) and disadvantaged backgrounds in jobs that require digital skills, to better prepare young Londoners for digitally-skilled occupations, and to improve the pool of talent available to employers.

This is one of a suite of three guides commissioned from the Tech Partnership by the GLA to provide training providers with good practice guidance in relation to digital apprenticeships:

1. **Introductory guide to the new digital apprenticeship standards**
2. **Guide to engaging SMEs in digital apprenticeships**
3. **Guide to attracting under-represented groups to digital apprenticeships**

The guides include both generic best practice and best practice specific to digital pathways. They draw on published research, case studies and employer feedback. Links are provided for further reading. Most of the evidence relates to digital apprenticeships, but the good practice points are equally relevant to short digital courses at level 3 or above.

Barriers that deter people from under-represented groups

Digital employers are increasingly looking to find new ways to attract fresh talent to their business given the skills shortages facing the sector. At the same time there are groups of people who are significantly under-represented in the digital workforce. These skills shortages offer providers a fantastic opportunity to help employers attract talent from untapped groups of young people.

There are, however, a variety of different barriers that can deter people from under-represented groups from applying for digital roles. These include:

- *Lack of knowledge and understanding* about what is involved in working in digital roles.
- *Perceptions* of what the roles involve and therefore whether or not it could be right for them.
- *Lack of knowledge of entry routes* in to digital careers.
- *Job advertisements and marketing materials* that put off would-be applicants.
- *Confusion* given the wide variety of job titles used for similar roles.
- A belief that an application from them would not be welcomed and a feeling that there is *"no-one like me"* at the workplace.
- *Recruitment and selection techniques* that disadvantage certain groups.

- *Entry requirements*, such as five GCSEs at grades A*- C. Evidence from the June 2015 Department for Education report, 'Ethnicity, Deprivation and Educational Achievement at Age 16'*,* showed that only 50% of pupils from Black and Pakistani backgrounds achieved this, and only 14% of pupils from Bangladeshi backgrounds.

- *Personal circumstances* which make non-flexible working difficult, whether due to family carer responsibilities, family expectations, care leavers or housing difficulties.

- *Social and cultural barriers* - expectations of family, peers and community groups.

- *Practical considerations*, such as affordable travel, access to technology and finance

- *Lack of confidence.*

There are a number of useful reports describing the issues in greater detail:

The DfE 2015 report, 'Ethnicity, Deprivation and Educational Achievement at Age 16' in England summarises the trends in achievement of young people from ethnic minorities:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/439867/RR439BEthnic_minorities_and_attainment_the_effects_of_poverty_annex.pdf.pdf

The TUC's research, 'Under-representation by Gender and Race in Apprenticeships' provides a useful overview of the key barriers:

https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/UnderRepresentationInApprenticeships.pdf

Reed in Partnership research examines barriers young people face in finding work and makes practical recommendations:

http://www.reedinpartnership.co.uk/media/174597/young%20people%20and%20employment%20-%20reed%20in%20partnership.pdf

Prince's Trust research shows how the most disadvantaged young people are getting digitally left behind

https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/slipping-through-the-net

This research and call to action highlights the need to engage more women in digital careers:

Tech Partnership report into girls' attitudes to technology, and the interventions that will make a difference to their future careers:

https://www.thetechpartnership.com/news-events/news/new-research-my-tech-future-girls-and-technology/

Tech Partnership research that women make up only 17% of the UK's tech workforce:

https://www.thetechpartnership.com/news-events/news/tech-partnership-research-shows-the-digital-economy-is-booming/

BCS & Tech Partnership research showing that numbers of women in IT has remained static:

https://www.thetechpartnership.com/news-events/

This article summarises 10 key areas to examine to recruit more women into the workplace:

http://theundercoverrecruiter.com/tech-companies-recruit-retain-women/

This website gives some practical examples of what attracts girls to digital roles:

http://dotdiva.org/educators/messages.html

There is also a range of practical guides on best practice for recruiting young people:

From the SFA: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-recruitment-employers-and-training-organisations

From the CIPD: www.bitc.org.uk/sites/default/files/recruiting_young_people_top_tips.pdf

Ten good practice tips for attracting people from under-represented groups to digital apprenticeships

1. Review your current practices and performance

Review your past recruitment campaigns to establish the baseline: which groups applied by gender and ethnic background? Who progressed, who dropped out, and at what stage? If you don't have this historical data, start collecting it as it is only by understanding your current performance that you can identify where you can improve.

2. Review your literature and marketing materials

Illustrate the range and breadth of the roles

- Many young people do not understand the range of different digital roles nor the variety of entry routes, progression opportunities and salaries available. Ensure your materials excite, enthuse and educate young people about their options.

- Illustrate the various benefits that a career in digital can offer – whether it is working as part of a team, travel or problem solving – rather than just the technology aspects.

- Illustrate the different sectors, sizes and types of organisations that employ people in digital roles - whether small tech businesses, creative businesses, large hospitality groups or charities etc.

- Illustrate the non-tech skills that careers in digital require – business skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills or project management skills.

- Ensure your images reflect the broader nature of the roles and illustrate the non-tech aspects of the role – as well as ensuring a good gender mix and spread of people from different ethnic backgrounds.

- Avoid tech jargon as far as possible when explaining what the job involves. High levels of tech jargon seem to have a negative effect on potential applicants' first impressions of a job, disproportionately so for females.

- Describe the role in terms of the personal characteristics required not just what the role involves, so that young people can self-identify that a digital career might suit them.

- Illustrate what a typical day in the role would be like.

- Show pathways to careers and what the careers entail rather than just job titles.

- Use your apprentices to develop, draft or review your materials.

- Remember that it is important to appeal to parents as well as students, and information about salaries, progression opportunities and the digital jobs market can help to sell the benefits of a digital career.

> These websites provide some good examples of how to describe roles:
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> http://www.bubble-jobs.co.uk/career_portal/digital-career-guides/
> https://www.fastcodesign.com/3032719/ui-ux-who-does-what-a-designers-guide-to-the-tech-industry

Use appropriate language

Use accessible language – and language that appeals to young people. Research that asked young people to review the language in job advertisements found that the most attractive words were seen to be *flexible, develop, skills, opportunity, exciting, work, challenging, training.* Three of the most unattractive phrases encountered were '*you will be expected'*, '*you will be capable of'*, and '*can do attitude*'.

> Full details of the research can be found at:
>
> http://www.hestem.ac.uk/sites/default/files/
> stem_language_in_job_adverts_final_report_july_2011.pdf

Use gender-neutral language - and be conscious of gender themed words and phrases. Female candidates are often attracted to different things in a job advert than their male counterparts. Many of these words are synonyms and can be interchanged. Using a mixture of both creates a balanced culture open to both genders. Women are more likely to respond to gender-neutral or gender-balanced job advertisements.

A recent study of 4,000 job descriptions and potential applicants found that only using masculine-themed words made job descriptions less appealing to women, compared to descriptions that also used feminine-themed words.

- Masculine-themed words include: active, competitive, dominate, decisive, and objective.

- Feminine-themed words include: community, dependable, responsible, and committed.

> More on the findings of the study of masculine and feminine themed words:
>
> https://www.govloop.com/job-description-female-friendly/
>
> Practical advice on how to make your job adverts and job descriptions female friendly:
>
> http://www.eremedia.com/ere/you-dont-know-it-but-women-see-gender-bias-in-your-job-postings
>
> https://www.govloop.com/job-description-female-friendly/
>
> https://www.thetechpartnership.com/news-events/news/new-research-my-tech-future-girls-and-technology/

The power of language – employers take a lead

A group of employers including Accenture, Atos, Capgemini, CSC, Fujitsu, HP and Sopra-Steria has drawn together examples of good and bad practice in the use of language in job advertisements.

They identified the following as an example of moving from the bad to good, particularly with a view to attracting more female applicants for apprenticeship vacancies:

> FROM: "We are a **dominant** engineering firm that **boasts** many **leading** clients. We are **determined** to **stand** apart from the **competition**."

> TO**: "**We are a **community** of engineers who have effective **relationships** with many **satisfied** clients. We are **committed** to **understanding** the sector **intimately.**"

And in terms of skills requirements:

> FROM**: "Strong** communication and influencing skills. Ability to **perform individually** in a **competitive** environment. **Superior** ability to **satisfy** customers and **manage** the company's association with them."

> TO**: "Proficient** oral and written communications skills. **Collaborates** well in a **team** environment. **Sensitive** to clients' needs, can **develop warm** client **relationships**."

3. Use the appropriate channels

- Reach out to your potential audiences through the media they use (social media, magazines aimed at young women and BAME communities, local radio, social networking sites).

- Augment your usual recruiting methods by using online forums and communities that cater specifically to your audience. Many of these sites, including the Anita Borg Institute and Girls in Tech, have career boards and job postings are likely to increase the number of female candidates applying to open positions.

- Advertise your opportunities through local community and faith groups and develop regular community engagement activities, reaching out to young people, parents and other key influencers. Engage with community leaders or prominent local business people who can act as ambassadors.

- Partner with organisations who are actively helping disadvantaged young people improve their employability skills and find employment, such as the Prince's Trust, City Gateway, Catch 22, Resurgo, 2nd Chance, Street League and Think Forward.

- Role models are great for promoting real life experiences from their communities/ culture/ gender. By using 'people like them' under-represented groups feel that they will not be alone in the workplace. It can often help if the role models are similar in age to them so that they appear relevant. Use your existing apprentices or recent alumni to engage in local outreach activities and to act as ambassadors.

- Hold open days or informal events, hosted by your apprentices, to encourage young people to come and find out more.

4. Review your entry requirements

Research has shown that 96% of employers prefer mind-set to skill set when recruiting.

Review your entry requirements: do your employers really want them to have GCSEs, or is it more important they have the right aptitude and attitude?

The majority of young people are digital natives and use technology in their day to day lives, so select entry requirements that focus on their digital abilities and interests, their motivations and their aspirations rather than their qualifications.

5. Use strengths based approaches to assessing and selecting candidates

The UKCES *What Do Employers Want* report shows that the critical attributes employers look for in recruits is not qualifications but good personality and attitude.

Review your selection and assessment process to reflect what your employers are really looking for. Relying on qualifications, CVs and traditional application forms and tests may not identify what employers really want, and may also be inadvertently disadvantaging some young people.

Consider using strength-based assessment processes which focus on whether the applicant has the natural strengths needed for the job. Strengths-based interviews seek to discover whether the candidate would be naturally good at the role, love doing it and be energised by it.

Explore other influences and information that is not based on work experience or qualifications. Delve into their interests, hobbies and motivators to understand who they are as a person, what attributes and transferable skills they could bring to the business. Give young people

opportunities to tell you what they want to achieve and to illustrate positive capabilities such as resourcefulness, commitment and self-belief that they have demonstrated in other contexts.

Common questions include "what do you enjoy doing?", "what is it you enjoy about x?", "what do you like doing most", "what would you do even if you did not get paid", "what gives you the biggest buzz?" and "what excites you?"

Tips for strength-based assessment include:

- Gather data on the role, and the company values, to help you set the strengths -based selection criteria.

- Use the criteria to design job descriptions, person specifications and marketing materials – as well as the interview questions and assessment processes.

- Try out the assessment processes and interview questions with people who are in the role, assessing both high and low performers, to ensure the processes and questions are testing what they are supposed to be testing.

- Use realistic assessment exercises that reflect what the role typically requires.

- Note how the applicants answer the questions as well as what they say.

These articles give practical overviews of strengths based recruitment:

http://www.hrzone.com/engage/customers/the-emerging-practice-of-strengths-based-recruitment

https://jobs.theguardian.com/article/strengths-based-job-interviews-what-are-they-and-how-do-they-work-/

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6. Help applicants do their very best at interviews

- Provide as much information in advance as possible, including the practicalities such as who they should ask for at reception and what form the interview will take.

- Be open about the recruitment process, what the stages are and the expectations during those stages. Be clear about the selection criteria.

- Ensure that the atmosphere, culture and venue for their interview makes them feel comfortable and could see themselves as 'belonging'.

- Ask existing young employees and apprentices to act as ushers during the interview process to encourage young people to ask questions they may not feel confident enough to ask the interviewer.

- Give them a tour of the office and introduce them to colleagues they'd be working with.

- Begin the interview with an informal chat to put them at ease and encourage them to be more open.

- Take time to provide honest and constructive feedback – to help them build on what they did well, and learn from those areas where improvement is needed.

7. Provide support

For those employers recruiting using apprenticeships, it is worth noting that retention rates for digital apprenticeships are higher than for most apprenticeships. However, retention rates of young people from under-represented groups can be improved by a number of practical actions:

- Give new apprentices a buddy or a mentor, ideally someone only slightly older or slightly more experienced than them so that they feel they can ask advice freely.

- Ensure you can bring in or signpost to specialist support agencies as appropriate – whether to help with benefits, housing or personal counselling, to make it as easy as possible for the apprentice to deal effectively with any problems, while not jeopardising their employment or training.

- Offer one-to-one coaching and peer networking so that apprentices can get extra help if they are struggling.

- Build in early opportunities for the new apprentice to succeed, perhaps with a short course or specific project. Short term achievements are a great way to get under represented and disengaged young people starting their digital careers. Short courses, with clear entry and exit points, can help a young person test something out without feeling that they are putting all their eggs into one basket.

- Build in opportunities to review, recognise and reward key steps on the journey so that the apprentice builds confidence and feels they are progressing.

- Provide opportunities for would-be apprentices to try things out before committing – whether by offering short work experience, short courses, work shadowing, engaging with existing apprentices, or through webinars and talks.

- Offer blended and flexible delivery so that apprentices can undertake training regardless of any personal circumstances which would otherwise make it difficult for them to commit.

- Embed employability support throughout the programme, so that the apprentice is increasingly confident.

- Offer opportunities to develop entrepreneurial skills – not just as valuable life skills, but recognising that a lot of young people are attracted to running their own business at some stage in the future.

- Develop a learning community allowing your apprentices to meet regularly to learn from each other and to support each other.

- Build peer networks, including creating or signposting to online networks. Young women in particular may benefit from an online tool, such as huddle.net, where female apprentices can communicate with each other confidentially during their

apprenticeship. Collaborate with other local companies and training providers to link female apprentices together. Look for forums in your area / sector that support a diverse membership and make information available to all new apprentices.

- If a young person does drop out or withdraw from their employment or training, keep in touch, and make it easy for them to reengage when they are ready.

Further reading

The following references provide more general background:

Outstanding support for disadvantaged learners, Roots and Shoots Limited, Ofsted 2012 - this report is over three years old, but still has useful content:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/outstanding-support-for-disadvantaged-learners.

Helping the Inbetweeners: ensuring careers advice improves the options for all young people, Barnardos, 2013:

https://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/ Careers_guidance_services_are_failing_young_people/latest-news.htm?ref=91825

Breaking Down Barriers to Learning and Work for Young Adult Careers, Learning and Work Institute 2016:

http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-thinking/news/breaking-down-barriers-learning-and-work-young-adult-carers-carers-week-2016

Using behavioural insights to address the under-representation of apprentices from BAME backgrounds. May 2015. Learning and Work Institute:

http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/

The Skills Crunch, The Princes Trust 2014:

https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/research

Abandoned Ambitions, The Princes Trust 2103:

https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/research

Exploring the engagement of STEM SMEs with education: Key Findings Research Summary, NFER STEMNET 2012:

https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/SMES01

Employers and the recruitment of unemployed people: an evidence review, UKCES 2011:

http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/13251/1/evidence-review-employers-recruitment-unemployed.pdf