

Skills for Care Apprenticeship Ambition Programme Evaluation

Department of Health Summary Report
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The five year Apprenticeship Ambition Programme (Ambition) was launched in 2012/13 to further promote Apprenticeships in adult social care to meet the needs of an expanding sector. In 2016/17 Skills for Care's Evidence and Impact (E&I) team evaluated the programme to assess the impact of the Ambition on employers, learning providers and Apprentices in terms of:

1. **Engagement and promotion:** has the Ambition increased employer and learning provider engagement, promoted Apprenticeships, promoted funding opportunities, and developed resources to support this?
2. **Recruitment and retention:** has the Ambition increased the numbers of Apprenticeships, improved retention, identified and promoted entry routes into the sector, bridged identified skills gaps and found solutions to challenges to Apprenticeship engagement?
3. **Careers and progression:** has the Ambition expanded the Apprenticeship offer across frameworks, pathways and levels and identified and promoted career pathways?

1.2 Overview of methods

The following methods were used to evaluate the five year Ambition Programme:

- A scoping exercise was undertaken to collate evidence in Skills for Care's electronic files for each of the thirteen implementation objectives.
- Consultations were held with internal Skills for Care staff from SLQA, Marketing, Workforce Intelligence, and Careers and Core Skills Teams to ensure the identification of all sources of evaluation evidence.
- The data collected was reviewed to assess the quality and volume of evaluation data and map each source to each objective.
- An external evidence review was conducted to systematically gather a comprehensive, transparent and replicable review of the available evidence on Apprenticeships to give context to the Ambition evaluation.
- An evaluation plan was developed to outline how the evaluation of the thirteen Ambition objectives would be achieved.
- Additional evaluation data was collected from stakeholders involved in each of the projects funded under the ambition in impact evaluation surveys and in depth interviews.
- Evidence was inputted into a data analysis system, analysed and synthesised.

2. Key findings from the evaluation

Based on Apprentice experience as well as feedback from employers and learning providers, the Ambition programme has contributed to creating a capable, competent and skilled workforce. Longer term impacts of the last two years of the Ambition cannot be measured at this point as time is required for these impacts to fully emerge.

2.1 Engagement and promotion

The Apprenticeship Ambition Programme has played an essential role in increasing the volume of Apprenticeships in the adult social care sector:

- Generated over 4,500 direct Apprenticeship starts
- Higher Apprenticeship framework generated 14,800 starts in the first three years after Skills for Care developed the framework
- Played an integral role in increasing the market share of the health and social care Apprenticeships at all levels
- Helped to stimulate a massive expansion in starts and completions which, at 88,000 in 2016/17 comprises around 17% of all Apprenticeships in the English economy and will be a significant contributor to the Government's three million Apprenticeship starts goal between 2015 and 2020.

Skills for Care engages with the sector to promote Apprenticeships as a method of improving workforce development practices. The evidence shows Skills for Care has:

- Engaged with over 240,000 contacts and has provided support regarding Apprenticeships for over 25,000 stakeholders
- This includes working with 232 employers and learning providers through the Innovation Projects. Skills for Care Locality Managers have engaged with 7,300 employers to promote the benefits of Apprenticeships as part of the Ambition
- Effective relationships have been established with Trailblazer employers through the co-creation of the new Apprenticeship Standards.

The findings from the surveys of employers, learning providers and Apprentices show that the vast majority of employers and learning providers rated Skills for Care highly in terms of the support they received. Most employers felt their Skills for Care-funded Apprenticeships met their organisational needs and the same percentage of Apprentices were satisfied with their Apprenticeship (92%); this has increased since 2011/12, when 85% were satisfied. Some Apprentices did however highlight dissatisfaction with their workplace mentors and some mature Apprentices found it difficult to engage with learning.

Throughout the Ambition programme, Skills for Care have developed marketing materials and communication plans to support the promotion of Apprenticeships:

- Reached 18,000 contacts through 281 events
- Apprenticeship pages of the website have been viewed 221,800 times, 12,600 printable resources have been downloaded and 7,600 video case studies have been seen
- Although there is a vast amount of evidence to demonstrate the reach of Skills for Care's marketing and communications activities, there is limited data available on the impact of the resources and promotional work undertaken to showcase Apprenticeships.

Skills for Care has supported employers to develop sustainable Apprenticeship models and helped learning providers to promote and deliver Apprenticeship programmes by disseminating Innovation Project funding. The findings from the surveys and in depth interviews show that the majority of employers and learning providers would not have been able to develop or pilot their Apprenticeship project without Skills for Care funding.

2.2 Recruitment and retention

Skills for Care's wider programme of work involves activity to encourage people into the sector, through initiatives such as Care Careers and *I Care...Ambassadors*. The Ambition programme specifically encouraged new people to enter the sector through running Innovation Projects specifically targeted at school age children and young people.

- There is evidence to suggest that Apprenticeships are attracting new workers into the sector, who have the right values to work in social care but not necessarily the experience of a social care work.
- A third of Apprentices who responded to the survey had not previously worked in the sector compared to 7% in 2011/12, although this is based on a smaller sample size.
- Although there is plenty of output and outcome data, the evidence base is limited on the impact of Skills for Care's activity on promoting entry routes into the sector. The innovation projects and promotional activities may have attracted new people into the sector, but more research is required to confirm this.

The Ambition funded Apprenticeships have supported new emerging roles to fill skills gaps, which is evidenced by the Innovation Projects and Career Pathway in Care (CPC) projects.

- New Personal Assistant roles, integrated health and social care roles and specialist roles, such as dementia experts, have all been created and piloted

through the Ambition programme and the impact of the new roles on employers has been measured.

- Employers see Apprentices as a valuable resource for filling skills gaps, in particular Apprenticeships are considered valuable for providing organisations with a highly skilled and qualified workforce.
- Apprenticeships provide the opportunity to develop care workers to support people with more complex care and health needs and are contributing to the integration of other services with social care agenda by combining health and housing services training with social care training.

There is a wealth of evidence to suggest the Ambition programme has enabled employers, learning providers and potential learners to overcome challenges to Apprenticeship engagement specifically and general sector challenges including promotion, recruitment and growing the sector. However, both specific and general challenges remain in terms of:

- recruiting and retaining suitable candidates
- recruitment of young people
- engaging employers and line managers
- learners' negative perceptions of the care sector
- employers' negative perceptions of Apprentices and young people
- perceived lack of progression routes
- the lack of funding opportunities.

Challenges faced once Apprentices are in place include learners not feeling supported in their role. All of the projects commissioned to support the Ambition agenda provided practical solutions to these common challenges.

The Ambition has supported employers to grow their own workforce and retain their Apprentices and staff. Interviews with employers involved in Innovation Projects and CPC projects, and with Employer Champions and Apprentices provides evidence to confirm the Ambition has improved retention on Apprenticeship programmes and also in the sector once Apprentices have complete their learning. Values based recruitment, mentoring for Apprentices, support for line managers and developing and promoting career pathways to new and existing staff all improve retention. However, the CPC study also highlighted that retention still remains an issue for some employers and they need continued support to tackle this biggest issue which continues to face the social care sector.

2.3 Care career pathways

Skills for Care has developed new frameworks and pathways and promoted existing routes, including the Advanced Apprenticeship, Higher Apprenticeship and the new Apprenticeship Standards, to meet the needs of an ever expanding and changing sector. The work undertaken by Skills for Care to develop new pathways is contributing to professionalising the adult social care workforce. Although the Higher Apprenticeship was a success and the general pathway take up is growing significantly year on year, the specialist pathway did not prove popular within the sector. However, the mechanisms are in place if the demand arises in the future. It is too early to measure the impact of the new frameworks and pathways, but this can be considered in future Apprenticeship programme evaluations.

The Ambition has encouraged employers to create clear career pathways within their organisations which in turn improves staff satisfaction, improves retention and challenges the perception of the care sector as 'just a job', promoting it as an attractive career route. This is evidenced through interviews with apprentices involved in the Innovation Projects and undertaking the Higher Apprenticeship.

2.4 Sustainability

Skills for Care has supported and encouraged employers and learning providers to generate examples of good practice that they can share with other employers. Employers have considered the sustainability of their projects to ensure that Apprenticeship engagement continues beyond the life of their Innovation Projects. It is reassuring that over half of employers surveyed are already in the process of recruiting new Apprentices and a further third are likely to do so in the future. Employers and learning providers cited continuing partnership working, sharing best practice and utilising guidance and promotional material already developed by themselves and Skills for Care to continue the work commenced in the projects.

The Ambition has demonstrated how to raise the quality of staffing in the unregulated workforce and why employers have been so keen to engage. In some cases this helped them attain CQC standards and in all cases gain a substantive set of qualifications through work-based learning.

The evaluation has highlighted the flexibility and responsiveness of Apprenticeships to meeting the changing needs of employers and the services in which Apprentices operate. Based on Apprentice experience as well as feedback from employers and learning providers, the Ambition programme has contributed to creating a capable, competent and skilled workforce.

2.5 Recommendations

1. Continue the Apprenticeship programme due to the success of the Ambition

There is sufficient evaluation evidence to recommend the continuation of the Apprenticeship Ambition programme. Positive outcomes and impacts demonstrated by employees, learning providers and Apprentices demonstrate the value of this approach to learning and progression. Work should continue to support learning providers to promote Apprenticeships and encourage employers to integrate the Apprenticeship model into their workforce development strategies. This is particularly pertinent at a time of change for the sector, in terms of development to standards and funding. Employers and learning providers will require continued support whilst the sector demands continue to grow.

2. Further work to embed Apprenticeships as method of addressing recruitment and retention issues

The evidence in this evaluation suggests that incorporating the Apprenticeships model into workforce development strategies is an effective method of improving recruitment and retention practices for employers. Future projects should use the evidence base to promote Apprenticeships as a solution to recruitment and retention issues facing the sector. New Innovation Projects commissioned in November 2016 which involve SMEs working with Skills for Care to embed the use of Apprenticeships to explore strategic workforce development approaches to address skills gaps and recruitment and retention challenges, will contribute to satisfying this recommendation. As Apprentices have communicated dissatisfaction with their workplace mentors, this is something that could be included in work placement guidance.

3. Develop Apprenticeship challenges and solutions resources for employers and learning providers

This study has highlighted the need to continue to provide practical solutions to some of the common challenges faced by employers and learning providers when engaging with Apprentices. The resource could outline the potential challenges for employers and learning providers and could be supported by best practice case studies showcasing successful solutions and how they can be applied in different services and settings.

4. Continue work with Trailblazers to map the new standards and offer further support to employers

The effective relationships that have been established with Trailblazer employers through the co-creation of the new Apprenticeship Standards should continue. Their expertise could be used to offer advice to other employers about how to map the new Apprenticeship Standards to address skills gaps and create progression pathways for their workforce. The seven Trailblazer Innovation Projects that have been

commissioned to look at creating workforce profiles, identifying skills gaps and mapping them to the new standards will contribute to this recommendation. Work can continue with this group to share their best practice with the sector.

5. Continue to evaluate and use this evaluation as a benchmark

It is vital that any forthcoming Apprenticeship programmes are monitored and evaluated to measure the impact of Skills for Care's work on the sector. This will ensure that any new programmes will be evidence-led and that the impact for stakeholders, in an Apprenticeship landscape and social care sector that are both ever changing and growing, will be captured and used to shape the future of Apprenticeship programmes.

6. Improve data collection and monitoring systems

Access to robust evaluation data has proved problematic. Data collection and monitoring systems should be reviewed at the start of the next Apprenticeship programme to ensure evaluation and monitoring data capture mechanisms are in place at the outset.

7. Conduct an impact evaluation of resources and promotional activity

The evaluation highlighted that there was very limited data on the impact of resources and promotional activity undertaken to champion Apprenticeships. It is recommended that an impact evaluation is conducted to measure the success of promotional activity and resources in encouraging employers, learning providers and Apprentices to engage with Apprenticeships. The findings will then influence future promotional activity to ensure the effectiveness of marketing and communications plans.

8. Measure impact of Skills for Care activity on creating and promoting entry routes into the sector

Further work could be done to measure the impact of Skills for Care activity on creating and promoting entry routes into the sector. Although there was some outcome evidence available from the Innovation Projects and the *I Care...Ambassadors* impact tool, there is no evidence of the longer term impact of this work to encourage people into the sector.

9. Conduct further research into why older Apprentices sometimes struggle to engage with learning and development

There is insufficient evidence from this evaluation to draw any firm conclusions, but anecdotally and from other studies there is evidence to suggest older Apprentices sometimes struggle to engage with learning and development. It is recommended that further research is conducted in this area to investigate this, to ascertain the reasons why and to establish how best to support older Apprentices in their learning.