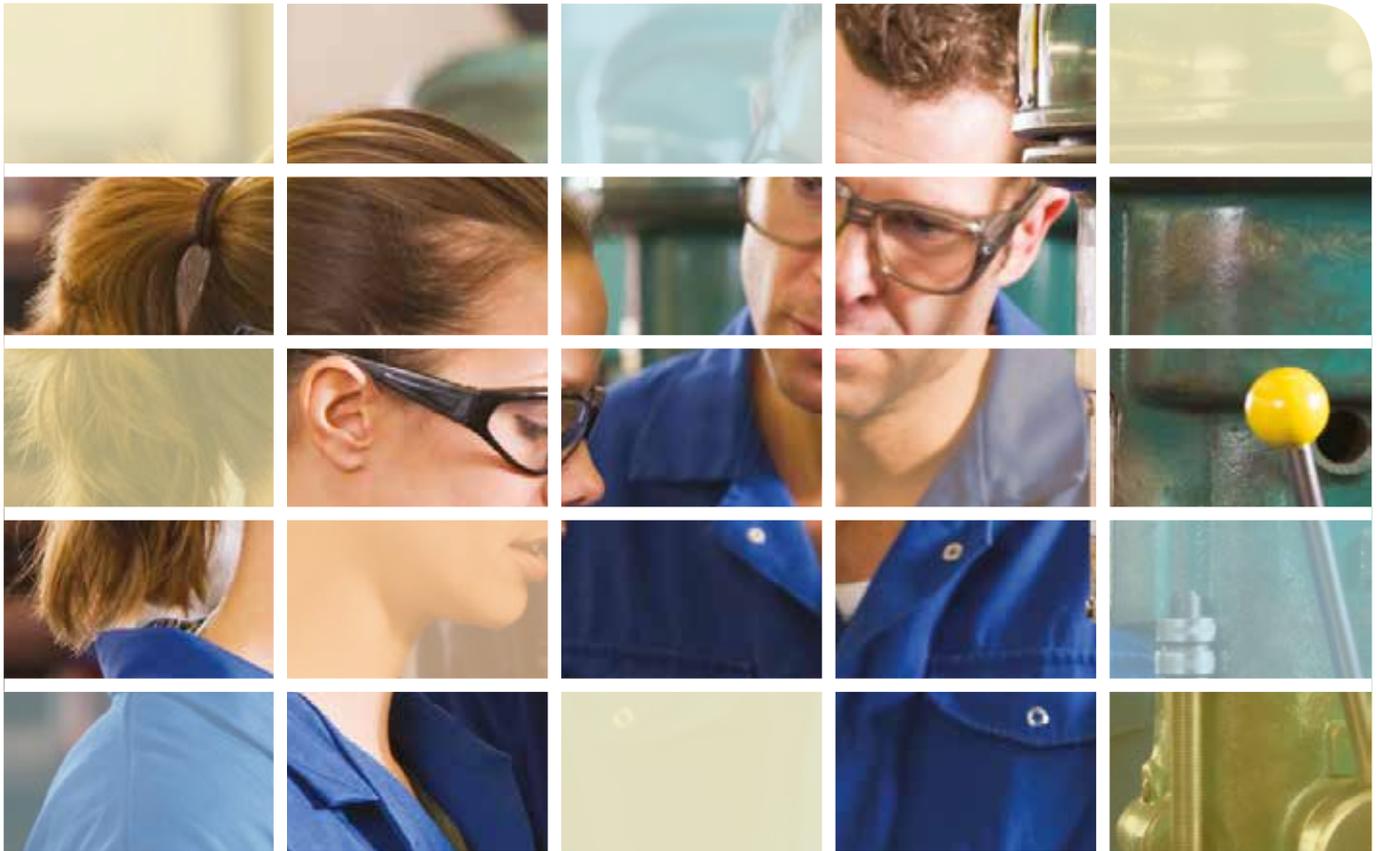# union**learn**

# The role of mentoring in supporting Apprenticeships

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## Commissioning this project

This research was commissioned by the TUC for the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The objective is to provide a thorough understanding of the role that mentoring can play in supporting Apprenticeship programmes and make recommendations as to how mentoring can be promoted and used more effectively.

The approach comprised a range of methodologies in order to fully understand the issues and canvas the views and opinions of a wide range of stakeholders:

- a review of previous research on the benefits of mentoring approaches to Apprenticeships

- interviews with stakeholders from the SFA, the TUC, Apprenticeship training providers, Apprenticeship Training Agencies and Sector Skills Councils

- case studies that illustrate examples of best practice by employers, training providers and other organisations involved in setting up and supporting mentoring programmes.

## About the authors

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# Abstract

The value of mentoring in supporting a high-quality Apprenticeship programme is increasingly being recognised for its value in supporting the transition of young people into the workplace and in passing on skills and experience.

Despite the increasing recognition of the value of mentoring there is a lack of clarity over what is meant by mentoring and how it differs from the support typically offered by the apprentice's line manager, training provider and/or assessor. Indeed mentoring has frequently been compared to other processes including managing, supervising and coaching.

In the specific context of Apprenticeships, mentoring (as opposed to other support processes) is more heavily focused on supporting *individual career development* as well as *providing trusted support*. It can, however, also encompass many of the components of managing, supervising and coaching, for example, by passing on technical expertise and skills.

The research identified a range of delivery models that could be led by employers, learning providers or other external organisations.

# Executive summary

## Introduction

The value of mentoring in supporting a high-quality Apprenticeship programme is increasingly being recognised for its value in supporting the transition of young people into the workplace and in passing on skills and experience.

There is currently no requirement for mentoring to be part of an Apprenticeship but the Richards Review[1] has recommended that the employer and apprentice come together at the beginning of the Apprenticeship and sign an agreement which should include clarity over "*who is available to mentor and support the apprentice – in the training organisation and the firm*".

## What is mentoring?

Despite the increasing recognition of the value of mentoring there is a lack of clarity over what is meant by mentoring and how it differs from the support typically offered by the apprentice's line manager, training provider and/or assessor. Indeed mentoring has frequently been compared to other processes including managing, supervising and coaching.

Academics, authors and practitioners have similarly defined mentoring in many ways, often reflecting the different types and application of mentoring.

In the specific context of Apprenticeships, mentoring (as opposed to other support processes) is more heavily focused on supporting *individual career development* as well as *providing trusted support*. It can, however, also encompass many of the components of managing, supervising and coaching, for example, by passing on technical expertise and skills.

The research identified a range of delivery models that could be led by employers, learning providers or other external organisations:

- employer-led models: mentoring by a dedicated mentor, work colleague, senior manager, union learning representative (ULR) or buddying/ peer mentoring

- provider-led models: provided directly by Apprenticeship tutors or assessors or indirectly where the provider encourages, trains and supports the employer to introduce a mentoring programme

- specific mentoring initiatives: provider-led projects to improve access by under-represented groups or employer/sector skills initiatives to engage and retain apprentices.

## Why is mentoring used?

The majority of case studies were examples where the employer instigated the mentoring support. This was most often initiated by a particular individual – managing director, HR manager or ULR – who believed mentoring would bring benefits to their organisation or who had personally benefited from mentoring themselves. Mentoring arrangements had typically evolved from informal processes, gradually becoming more structured – this often ensured that support was codified and all parties were clear what was being offered.

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[1]  Richards, D (2012) *The Richards Review of Apprenticeships*, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, page 91

Employers highlighted a range of rationales for the introduction of mentoring:

| Rationale | | Impacts |
|---|---|---|
| Embedding employer's organisational culture and adopting positive behaviours (88 per cent) | ➡️ | Improved quality of service |
| Supporting communication between the apprentice and the employer (65 per cent) | ➡️ | Retention of apprentices and improved completion rates |
| Improving skill and knowledge transfer (65 per cent) <br> Improving communication with training provider (35 per cent)/quality of training (29 per cent) <br> Supporting mentors to develop | ➡️ | Improved quality of service/product <br> Improved productivity |
| Supporting apprentices' career development | ➡️ | Retention of apprentices and succession planning |

Pastoral care and learning support were more often a focus of provider mentoring. Training providers tended to focus more directly on the benefits mentoring brings to improving retention and completion rates and most reported that completion rates had improved after the introduction of their mentoring support.

## What benefits have been identified?

Employers and providers do not typically measure the difference that mentoring makes and were unable to provide any quantitative evidence of impact, although they reported a number of perceived benefits:

- **Embedding the employer's organisational culture and adoption of positive behaviours**
  Often mentoring had been introduced to help the apprentices adopt soft employment skills (for example time keeping and prioritisation) and help manage the transition from school environment to the workplace.

  *'We discovered that because this was usually the first role out of school for young people, there were often a few issues with timekeeping, sickness and aptitude, so we felt it was important to have someone to support and guide our new apprentices by someone who knows the organisation but is not their line manager… [The] mentor's role is to provide a reflective voice, advice on how to avoid pitfalls, discuss issues that apprentices would not discuss with their line manager, provide an experienced voice'.*
  **(Employer, finance sector, 700 employees)**

- **Improving communication between the apprentice and employer**
  Improving communication, particularly with younger apprentices, was reported by two-thirds of employers as a key benefit. Getting the young person to put forward their view was seen as vital in dealing with issues before they escalate. Employers reported that apprentice retention rates had improved. One training provider explicitly addressed the communication process by providing dedicated training for employers on 'how to communicate with young people' – recognising that many employers in their sector have never recruited anyone of this age.

  *'If you are between the ages of 16 and 21, speaking up about certain issues to management can be a daunting task. If you have a mentor you feel comfortable with, you could express your worries with them and in turn they could discuss it with management on your behalf'.*
  **(Mentee, manufacturing sector, 700 employees)**

- **Supporting skills and knowledge transfer**
  Around two thirds of employers saw mentoring as a way of passing on skills and knowledge – going beyond just completing but securing an understanding of the knowledge experienced colleagues have gained.

  *'The role of the mentor is much more hands-on than that of the manager. Our managers are very experienced in travel and customer service, however [they] may not have an in-depth understanding of the Apprenticeship framework. It is really important that the mentor has knowledge*

*of the framework, as supporting the apprentice between assessor visits is vital to progression'.*
**(Employer, leisure sector, 27,000 employees)**

- **Improving the quality and relevance of the training**
Mentors can also play a role in fine-tuning the learning process to better suit the employer as they fully understand the business needs and the Apprenticeship process. This can also mean that they can ensure the tasks given to apprentices while at work fit with and support the learning they are currently doing with the provider.

*'I (the mentor) make sure I sit in the meetings with the training provider. It is very important that they understand and take on board the ethos of the company and are not instilling their ethics on us'.*
**(Apprentice scheme coordinator, engineering and construction sector, 700 employees)**

- **Supporting the apprentice's career development**
A similar proportion of employers felt mentoring was a good way to support the young person's career development. In larger organisations, the mentor played a key networking role and in some organisations senior management felt that the insight offered by the mentor was of benefit to succession planning.

- **Supporting mentors' personal development**
Mentoring is also commonly used as way of supporting mentors' personal development, for example by equipping newly qualified apprentices with supervisory skills.

Over three-quarters of case study employers considered that mentoring had led to an improved quality of service/product quality or productivity improvements. This was linked to higher quality training, improved communications with the training provider and knowledge transfer from the mentor to mentee and vice versa. Employers also spoke of the positive impact on the mentors' work from having an apprentice to act as a positive challenge, questioning their current work practices.

*'The apprentices act as a fresh pair of eyes for the mentor. We have found that it is often the apprentices that come up with new ideas to reduce waste and increase the efficiency of what we do'.*
**(Employer, food manufacturing sector, 7,000 employees)**

## What are the lessons for delivery?

Employers use mentoring for a wide range of reasons and as a result there is no single 'best practice' model. The effective transfer of knowledge is central to the rationale for mentoring and employers have developed these approaches incrementally to suit their needs.

Despite the wide range of approaches there are clear lessons for delivery that can be applicable in all or the vast majority of situations:

- **Select the most appropriate model of support for individual circumstances**
Some companies used multiple mentors, for example to pass on skills/knowledge when apprentices moved around different departments. Others used a mentor/buddying model whereby a buddy would provide the opportunity for an informal chat as a complement to the support provided by the mentor. Most have developed their approach incrementally, improving as they go.

- **Select a mentor based on personal attributes**
The mentor's personal attributes are central to their suitability to the role – openness, confidentiality, neutrality, trust, and the ability to guide rather than to direct were all mentioned as being key to success. Mentors need to be enthusiastic and volunteer for the role.

- **Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the mentor**
The evidence from the case studies reinforces the need for a relatively formal structure with regular contact scheduled between the mentor and mentee. Some flexibility is required to allow the mentoring style to develop to meet the needs of individual apprentices but setting out the ground rules for all parties at the outset is essential.

- **Provide mentors with both initial training and on-going support**
An initial one-day workshop was felt to be sufficient to cover both the role of the mentor and the practical skills required to support the apprentice. Where companies had introduced on-going support (for example through mentor network meetings) this was welcomed and felt to be of benefit.

- **Ensure buy-in to the scheme from senior management**
The most effective programmes were those in which senior managers fully backed the support. This was important in ensuring that mentors were allowed sufficient time to

mentor, for example by accepting that their productivity may decrease in the short term while they are working with their mentee.

- **Measure the difference mentoring makes**
A key message from the case studies was the lack of any quantitative evidence on the difference that mentoring makes. While it is recognised that it may be difficult to disentangle the impact of mentoring from other types of intervention, the collation of basic data on changes to completion rates would be some improvement on the current lack of any data.

## *How can mentoring be best promoted?*

There is no accepted definition of what mentoring involves. While many interviewees recognised the term, a number of employers did not feel comfortable labelling their actions as 'mentoring'. There is a wariness of creating another 'initiative' when each employer has developed their approach through trial and error based on what works for them. This suggests that the promotion of 'mentoring' needs careful handling.

Both employers and providers reported that they have secured clear benefits from introducing mentoring to support their apprentices but there is very limited measurement of this impact. All those involved in our discussions felt the additional costs were outweighed by the benefits they produced. In many cases, employers were willing to build on informal arrangements that demonstrated benefits and invest in a more formalised scheme.

Discussions, particularly with employers, highlight the importance of a senior champion in the business – someone who sees the value of mentoring-type arrangements and is willing to push for their introduction. This would suggest that the SFA, TUC (ULRs) and partners should endorse the value of mentoring arrangements and promote case studies of good practice to encourage others who might be considering such an approach.

It may also be possible to provide specific advice and support on how to get the most from Apprenticeships through existing and new support structures such as 'Apprenticemakers', where it may be possible to establish specific fora on mentoring approaches and "what works" for employers to share experience.

# Introduction

## Background

The value of mentoring in supporting a high-quality Apprenticeship programme is increasingly being recognised for its value in supporting the transition of young people into the workplace and in passing on skills and experience. In addition, research has consistently found that good communications between employer, training provider and apprentice are at the heart of successful completion and the role of mentoring in improving communications is important.

Although there is currently no requirement for any form of mentoring to be included as part of an Apprenticeship, the Richards Review[2] has recommended that the employer and apprentice come together at the beginning of the Apprenticeship and sign an agreement which should include clarity over *'who is available to mentor and support the apprentice – in the training organisation and the firm'*.

The current requirement, as outlined in the Specification of Standards for Apprenticeships (SASE) is for *'Guided Learning'* defined by the Data Service as *'all times when a member of staff is present to give specific guidance towards the learning aim being studied on a programme'*. The SASE includes a minimum requirement of 280 guided learning hours per year, of which 100 hours (or 30 per cent) must be delivered "off-the-job". These hours include lectures, tutorials and supervised study as well as time spent by staff assessing a learner's achievements. The off-the-job component may or may not include a coaching and/or mentoring component.

## Research aims and objectives

This research was commissioned by the TUC for the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The overall aim of this research is to provide a clear and accurate picture of the role that mentoring can play in supporting Apprenticeship programmes and produce a series of recommendations as to how mentoring can be promoted and used more effectively throughout all Apprenticeship programmes that the SFA support.

The approach comprised a range of methodologies in order to fully understand the issues and canvas the views and opinions of a wide range of stakeholders. These comprised:

▪ a literature review to understand and collate prior research and other relevant work carried out on the subject of mentoring and Apprenticeships

▪ scoping interviews to include the SFA, the TUC, Apprenticeship training providers, Apprenticeship Training Agencies and Sector Skills Councils

▪ twenty-seven case studies to illustrate examples of best practice by employers, training providers and other organisations involved in setting up and supporting mentoring programmes.

The case studies were identified through a mixture of methods:

▪ a web search aimed at identifying examples of good practice for further investigation – any potentially interesting examples were followed up with an initial phone call to find out further details

▪ following up on leads provided through the stakeholder interviews

▪ following up on any leads generated through the literature review.

The case studies were selected to reflect a wide variety of mentoring models including:

▪ internal mentoring arrangements, either by an existing line manager/supervisor or by another member of staff

▪ external mentoring arrangements, for example this could include online programmes such as the Horsesmouth website

▪ mentoring arrangements provided by Group Training Associations or training providers

▪ mentoring arrangement provided by ULRs

▪ use of different models in different organisations – for example mentoring models in micro-businesses with only one apprentice.

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[2]    Ibid

For each delivery model the evaluation has sought to explore:

∎ the identification and role of the mentor

∎ the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship over the duration of the Apprenticeship

∎ the distribution of responsibilities and support available for mentors

∎ the measures of success at organisational, individual mentor and mentee levels.

The following chapter seeks to provide a definition of mentoring and outlines the main delivery models. The subsequent chapters then discuss each of the delivery models in turn using examples from the case studies and the literature to highlight the factors that can contribute to successful delivery and impacts.

# Defining mentoring

## How does mentoring fit with other work practices?

Despite the increasing recognition of the value of mentoring there is a lack of clarity over what is meant by mentoring and how it differs from the support typically offered by the apprentice's line manager, training provider and/or assessor. Indeed mentoring has frequently been compared to other processes including managing, supervising and coaching. Academics, authors and practitioners have similarly defined mentoring in many ways, often reflecting the different types and application of mentoring.

Table 1 below details four key developmental processes commonly found in the workplace.

This analysis indicates that mentoring (as opposed to other support processes) is more heavily focused on supporting *individual career development* as well as *providing trusted support*. This support process has been detailed by Turner[3], who has developed a 'mentoring wheel' identifying what he considers to be the four key elements of mentoring:

■ **Freeing up**
   Helping the mentee to develop the autonomy, responsibility and confidence to be able to choose freely. The mentor's stance is nurturing and supportive, aiming to help the mentee develop a strong, positive self-image. The mentor's role to help them answer the question 'Who am I?

■ **Envisioning**
   Helping the mentee to connect with a sense of purpose, identifying and choosing personal value priorities, creating a compelling and stretching

## Table 1: Mentoring and other developmental processes

|  | *Mentoring* | *Managing* | *Supervising* | *Coaching* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Core focus** | Career development and psychological support | Meet policies and procedures of the organisation | Support skill and knowledge acquisition | Learning specific skills and issues |
| **Relationship** | Mutual learning | Hierarchical | Hierarchical | Hierarchical |
| **Timescale** | On-going | On-going | On-going | Generally short duration |
| **Delivery** | Can be formal or informal with an internal or external mentor | Formal relationship with clear job descriptions | Clear contract – can be internal or external supervision | Clear contract usually with outside expert |
| **Target group** | Primarily on an individual level | Individual level | Can be done on an individual or group basis | Learning and progression for individual or team around issue |
| **Outcomes** | Guidance on developing career path and making career choices | Against agreed performance standard | Improved and current practice, increased knowledge insight | Improvement in specific skills required for role |

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3   Turner (2004) *Mentoring: An Overview*

vision, and committing to realising it. The mentor's role is to inspire the mentee and to help them answer the question 'Where am I going?'

■ **Implementing**
Identifying the goals that will lead towards the vision, deciding on strategies, plans and actions to achieve these goals, and taking action. The mentor's role is to help them answer the question 'How will I get there?'

■ **Attracting**
To challenge the mentee to see clearly the impact of what they are doing through measurement/feedback and supporting them to sustain new habits. The mentor's role is to help them answer the question 'Am I getting there?'

Mentoring can, however, also encompass many of the components of managing, supervising and coaching, for example, by passing on technical expertise and skills.

## What are the main delivery models?

The research identified a range of delivery models that could be led by employers, learning providers or other external organisations. Table 2 summarises the key models used by the case study organisations:

## Table 2: Delivery models

### Employer-led models

| Model | Details | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Mentoring by a dedicated mentor** | The mentor based in learning and development, HR or an equivalent department aims to support the settling in process and sometimes to also provide on-going pastoral care. | Barlows UK |
| **Mentoring by a work colleague** | This model utilises a mentor who is not a line manager but is generally based in the same department as the mentee. The rationale, especially for the more traditional frameworks, is often linked to the desire to pass on skills and knowledge. However, it can also be driven by the need to encourage appropriate behaviours in the apprentice. | Walker Electrical, Wärtsilä Messier Services Thomas Cook D&D |
| **Mentoring by a senior manager** | This model predominately aims to pass on knowledge, provide networking opportunities and support succession planning. | Muller Wiseman Dairies |
| **Mentoring by a line manager** | This model was typically used by smaller organisations, and is often focused on skills transfer but can also include pastoral support. There is some evidence to suggest that this can in some cases impact negatively on the level of communication between the mentor and the mentee, if the apprentice is more reluctant to raise sensitive issues or those of a personal nature. | EPOSability Tideswell Surgery |
| **Mentoring by a ULR** | This was often initiated by the ULR after noticing a gap in support. | Brush Electrical Systems Network Rail |

## Employer-led models (continued)

| Model | Details | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Mixed models including buddying / peer mentoring** | It is relatively common for a number of people to provide different aspects of mentoring.<br><br>For example, Cambridge University Hospital NHS Trust provided pastoral care by their work opportunities team and skills transfer support by colleague mentors; in addition counselling is available in-house.<br><br>Telefonica provided mentoring by task manager as well as peer buddy support.<br><br>'Buddies' tend to be a more informal arrangement often between an apprentice in a later year and a new recruit.<br><br>Buddies may or may not have received any training in mentoring and their role tends to be limited to providing friendly support. The rationale is to speed up the process of settling in and gaining skills, and to increase the quality of skills, a mixture of learning the organisational culture and 'tricks of the trade'. | Telefonica<br><br>Cambridge University Hospital NHS Trust<br><br>Forth Engineering |

## Provider-led models

| Model | Details | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Direct provision of mentoring support** | Provided by the provider's assessors or training consultants. This includes models where the mentoring is provided by an Apprenticeship Training Agency (for example South Western Apprenticeship Company) from pre-Apprenticeship stage onwards to improve retention. | Gower Swansea College<br><br>Hospitality Training Partnership |
| **Indirect provision** | Whereby the provider encourages, trains and supports the employer to introduce a mentoring programme. | Outsource Training and Development, Fundeon |

## Specific projects to support mentoring

| Project | Examples |
|---|---|
| **Those aimed at increasing access to and sustainability of Apprenticeships for specific groups** | London Apprenticeship Project |
| *Sector specific projects* **aimed at supporting apprentice retention** | The Marine Sector Skills to Support Innovation and Recruitment Project<br><br>The Semta-led Supporting Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to Engage in Apprenticeships |

# Evidence of the impact of employer-led models

## What is the rationale for employers' use of mentoring?

Seventeen of the twenty-seven case study examples involved a model where the employer instigated the mentoring support. The concept of mentoring support was most often initiated by a particular individual, such as an HR manager, owner manager (if a smaller organisation), apprentice scheme coordinator or ULR, who either had some experience of the potential benefits from mentoring or who had personally benefited from mentoring type of support themselves and want to '*put something back*'.

Mentoring support had typically evolved over time, where it had initially been introduced as an informal scheme and then developed to an increasingly formalised mentoring scheme through the specification of roles and responsibilities, external support outside the direct line management function and clarification over the minimum standards for support (e.g. set meeting times and the recording of actions). In cases where support has become more formalised the rationale tends to be recognition of benefits and the desire to ensure that these are derived on a more consistent basis.

The case study examples revealed a wide range of motivations for the introduction of mentoring with some degree of overlap between them (Table 3).

## Embedding the employer's organisational culture and adoption of positive behaviours

For almost 90 per cent of employers there was a strong focus on utilising mentoring to encourage the apprentice to adopt positive behaviours. In many cases, the mentor is perceived as a role model whose task is to support apprentices in adopting company standards (for example 'teaching respect and morals') and the 'house rules' of that particular employer (for example the tea-making rota or how to greet customers). As one employer explained:

> '*Our apprentices go through a significant journey as part of their Apprenticeship. Six months into their Apprenticeship, apprentices are generally significantly more mature, and better equipped for the working world. The change can be quite startling*'.
> **(Employer, IT sector, 10 employees)**

In many cases this support had arisen from the need to improve apprentice retention by helping the apprentice to manage the transition from school to the workplace. Often mentoring had been introduced to help the apprentice adopt soft employment skills (for example, time keeping and prioritisation) and thus improve retention rates.

## Table 3: Initial rationale for using mentoring and identified impacts

| Rationale | | Impacts |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Embedding employer's organisational culture and adopting positive behaviours (88 per cent) | → | Improved quality of service |
| Supporting communication between the apprentice and the employer (65 per cent) | → | Retention of apprentices and improved completion rates |
| Improving skill and knowledge transfer (65 per cent) Improving communication with training provider (35 per cent)/quality of training (29 per cent) Supporting mentors to develop | → | Improved quality of service/product Improved productivity |
| Supporting apprentices' career development | → | Retention of apprentices and succession planning |

*'Managing the transition from school to work can sometimes be a challenge. In addition to the wealth of travel and customer service knowledge, mentors can demonstrate how to work in a professional manner. They can also offer advice around time management and company policies and procedures. Having a mentor as the apprentice's day-to-day contact means that any queries can be addressed immediately'.*
**(Employer leisure sector, 27,000 employees)**

The importance of the mentor in helping the apprentice to develop appropriate behaviours is also identified in the literature. For example, a review of mentoring support for apprentices in Group Training[4] asked Group Training Organisations (GTOs) to rank which issues they considered important for non-completion for their apprentices and trainees. This aimed to give a sense of areas that should be targeted in terms of support provided to apprentices. The single most important factor identified by GTOs for non-completion was the apprentice's attitude to work and almost three-quarters of GTOs considered this an important factor for non-completion. Personal issues, lack of apprentice/trainee awareness of job requirements and lack of effective workplace supervision were also considered by almost 70 per cent of all GTOs as important factors leading to non-completion.

## Improving communication between the apprentice and employer

Around two thirds of case study employers considered that mentoring was a good way of supporting communication between the employer and the apprentice. Several noted how mentoring support has given apprentices 'a voice'. In one example the apprentice's request to change their line manager was approved after their mentor confirmed that the line manager was not supportive enough for a new apprentice. They also accepted that this would probably not have happened without mentor intervention. In another case, the employer noted how mentoring support allows any issues to be sorted early before they escalate.

**Leeds Building Society** first started their Apprenticeship programme in 2012 when they recruited an initial group of five higher level apprentices in Business Administration. Apprentices are supported by a mentor in the Society's learning and development team and a colleague in the department to facilitate knowledge transfer. As explained by Emma Wilkinson, Leadership and Development Manager:

*We discovered that because this was usually their first role out of school, there were often a few issues with timekeeping, sickness and aptitude, so we felt it was important to have someone to support and guide our new apprentices by someone who knows the organisation but is not their line manager. This person can then guide and perhaps give another, external, perspective. The mentor's role is to provide a reflective voice, advice on how to avoid pitfalls, discuss issues that they would not discuss with their line manager and provide an experienced voice'.*

*'We felt that it was really important to provide the apprentice with a point of contact especially in the early days when they are still building confidence and uncertain about how to deal with more senior members of staff'.*
**(Employer, food manufacturing sector, 7,000 employees)**

*'If you are between 16 and 21, speaking up about certain issues to management can be a daunting task. If you have a mentor you feel comfortable with, you could express your worries with them and in turn they could discuss it with management on your behalf'.*
**(Mentee, manufacturing sector, 700 employees)**

A number of employers highlighted the role of mentoring support in improving internal communications and thus retention and completion rate of apprentices. These organisations felt that mentoring provision has been a crucial element in apprentice retention and one organisation suggested that without a support from a member of staff who

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4  Fattore, T., Raffaele, C (2012) *Effective Mentoring, Pastoral Care and Support for Apprentices and Trainees in Group Training*, Group Training Australia

apprentices can go and talk in confidence, about half would not get through their training; *'things always happen on the way and these young people need extra support to get through'*. Anecdotal evidence from case studies strongly indicates that as a direct result of this support, apprentice retention rates have improved to close to 100 per cent and apprentices tend to stay employed in the company post training. There is also some limited evidence to suggest that mentoring prevents apprentices moving to a competitor as it helps them to 'settle in' to the host organisation.

One training provider explicitly addressed the communication process by providing dedicated training for employers on 'how to communicate with young people' – recognising that many employers in their sector have never recruited anyone of this age. This was backed up by explicit guidance to employers on who they might appoint as a 'line manager'. This was usually another member of staff who may not yet have had any supervisory experience and typically not a line manager who rarely has the time necessary to devote to the new apprentice. The provider expects that the line manager will be available to supervise the new apprentice for the first two weeks of their Apprenticeship, recognising that

the young person will need regular meetings to help structure their work and offer frequent support:

> *'When you think about it, having a task to do for a morning may well be the longest period the young person has been asked to concentrate on just one thing and this takes some time to get used to'.*
> **(Training provider, web-based and IT Apprenticeships)**

A number of mentees considered that the mentoring support had made them more motivated and in one case the mentee felt the support received had made the difference in their decision to remain with the company:

> *'As regards to "do I feel he helped me achieve my Apprenticeship?" yes he did. If it wasn't for Nigel, due to several different contributing factors I was thoroughly disheartened and was debating leaving the company. It was the second year of my Apprenticeship and in my head I was either going to continue my Apprenticeship elsewhere or try a different career path. Nigel found out about how I was feeling, by this time I was in a different department. He found me, discussed*

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**Telefonica UK** is a multi-national company providing mobile and fixed services, and has offered Apprenticeships for the past 10 years. The number of apprentices has grown steadily year on year, and in 2013 Telefonica UK took on approximately 70 apprentices across different frameworks, including in ICT, sales and administration.

The company has always provided mentoring as part of their Apprenticeship programme, delivered through a number of job roles including a peer buddy, who can be a second year apprentice or graduate. Peer buddy provides additional support for new recruits, help them settle in and interact with new apprentices so that if they have any worries, these can be discussed and so they can avoid things escalating. Sarah Garnett, Talentum Community Manager has observed a number of benefits from introducing the mentoring support:

> *'The buddy system prevents any escalation of issues as there is someone responding to the apprentice's queries. It greatly improves communications as issues are solved more*

*quickly. For example, it stops calls to our helpdesk as buddies are able to support new recruits with expenses and wage inquiries. I think that it has lead to a happier workforce, as there have been no complaints in general and feedback from line managers has been positive.'*

Amber Hayward, a second year apprentice and a peer buddy started as an apprentice in September 2012. She had already studied business management at the university but wanted to move to marketing roles and work for a big organisation. When starting her Apprenticeship in Telefonica, Amber was paired with a buddy who regularly emailed her and made sure she was okay.

> *'It was great to have someone I can go to and able to ask any questions. My buddy was a person who you were telling your insecurities or questions about work that you felt you could not ask your line manager, for example when it is okay to leave at the end of the day or where to go for lunch – someone to whom I was able to admit that was feeling a bit out of my depth at the start'.*

**Barlows UK** are a family run business, which has steadily grown from a small company to having branches across the north-west and over 250 directly employed staff. The company offers installation and repair of access control, fire alarm installations and electrical boiler systems.

Mentoring completes the training for new recruits. Most young people are 16- or 17-years-old and may experience issues in their personal life, such as relationship breakdowns or getting in too much debt, which can have a detrimental impact on their standard of work and retention in general. Mentoring support is provided by the Head of Training and Development and the apprentice's line manager. As explained by the Head of Training and Development, David Barlow:

> *'The role of mentor is to be a friend and a confidant. It is a team game where apprentice mentees need to find it easy to talk to their mentor. The mentor is someone they can talk to and who can provide advice. Someone who is external from home'.*

Mentoring support is provided in a very informal way as the organisation prefers not to call this support mentoring: *'if it was more rigid or called mentoring, young people might think twice whether to approach their mentor'.*

The mentor and mentee meet regularly, typically a few times a month although some relationships can become more intensive if there are issues to solve. Mentoring support is provided to work on the apprentice's attitude, in particular to teach respect. In some extreme cases mentoring can get more formal, for example in a recent case where an apprentice was suspended due to poor timekeeping and where the parents were involved to try to solve these issues.

The key impacts have been happy staff and good retention. David estimates that without being able to have a member of staff who they can go and talk in confidence, around half of the apprentices would not get through their training: *'things always happen on the way and these young people need extra support to get through'.* All apprentices that complete their training are offered a job in the company.

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*what was wrong and arranged an immediate meeting with three managers to resolve the problem. The next day I was transferred to a department where I was working on the job within the first hour of being in there. Since then I haven't looked back and I have actually had heavy involvement with promoting the company's Apprenticeships, and Apprenticeships in general'.*
**(Mentee, manufacturing sector, 700 employees)**

The evidence linking mentoring and improved retention seemed to be strongest with case study organisations dealing with more disadvantaged or non-traditional groups. Research evidence, for example by Marangozov et al[5] similarly points to the fact that mentoring increases success rates of diverse apprentices stating that *'mentoring is one factor found, in some cases anecdotally, to improve retention among apprentices, including*

*those from groups not traditionally employed in the sector'.* Miller et al[6] highlights how mentoring has been used by CITB-Construction Skills to support females and those from ethnic minorities who are under-represented in the industry.

At the programme level a number of studies have found a link between mentoring and apprentice retention rates. In Australia, the introduction of the Kickstart Mentoring Initiative[7], was linked to an increase in apprentice retention rates of 14.6 per cent on the previous year.

A qualitative assessment of apprentices in the motor vehicle industry by Colley and Jarvis[8] concluded that *'mentoring plays an important role*

5   Marangozov R, Bates P, Martin R, Oakley J, Sigala M and Cox A (2009) *Research to Shape Critical Mass Pilots to Address Under-Representation in Apprenticeships*, Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies

6   Miller L, Pollard E, Neathey F, Hill D, Ritchie H (2005), *Gender Segregation in Apprenticeships*, Institute for Employment Studies, EOC Working Paper Series No. 25

7   Quantum Consulting (2011) *Review of the Kickstart Mentoring Initiative, Final Report*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

8   Colley H, Jarvis, J (2007), 'Formality and Informality in the summative assessment of motor vehicle Apprentices: a case study', *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 14:3, pp 295-314

**Tideswell Surgery** is a rural GP surgery located in Derbyshire and employs 12 members of staff, most of which are part-time. The surgery hosts a total team of 30 medical practitioners, and is one of the learning practices.

After a departure of a very experienced member of the team, it was felt by surgery management that they needed to diversify their workforce to have some young members in a team and at the same time offer a local young person an opportunity to train locally. The surgery had their first apprentice in 2010 to train in business administration (Level 2) and have recently taken on their third apprentice starting in September 2013. Jayne Wharton, Practice Manager, points to a number of benefits from mentoring;

*'Having mentoring support in place means that our existing staff feel more valued and involved. There is certain pride that they have supported that young person, shaped their knowledge, by passing information on. It is very rewarding to see*

*people progress; it makes staff feel more satisfied with their job. At the same time, mentoring provides apprentices with that immediate assistance when there is a need as they work alongside more experienced staff. There is that reassurance that someone is there if they need to ask a question or are unsure about something'.*

Due to the mentoring activity, the surgery staff have developed a closer relationship with their apprentices, and the apprentice has felt confident to provide new ideas and creative suggestions:

*'One apprentice set up a buddy scheme where those living in rural areas were able to help each other – she sent out letters to all patients living in remote areas asking whether they struggle to get to the practice during winter to pick up their medicine or whether they would be able to collect and deliver medicine to those who cannot come. This scheme proved very successful during winter months – a great idea and we would have never thought of that!'*

*in motivating candidates to persevere with their training through to achievement of the qualification'.*

## Supporting skills and knowledge transfer

Mentors can play an important role in passing on skills and knowledge. Around two thirds of case study employers highlighted this as a core rationale for use and in a number of companies the mentor was viewed as critical in supporting the 'learning through doing' process. This appeared to be particularly important for the more 'traditional' Apprenticeship frameworks such as engineering or construction where 'learning by doing' is a traditional way to learn skills. This was usually done by pairing an apprentice with a skilled member of staff who they would shadow and support and gradually take over tasks. As one mentee explains:

*'If you have several mentors within each department, then apprentices can spend time with each, learning the different techniques each mentor applies within his practice. From this the apprentices can pick up the methods they find work best for them and use those within their trade. Also through doing this you may discover certain strengths mentors have which in turn could help develop them through their company. In addition to this you could tailor what the business*

*could identify as "perfect" matches. This way if the mentor and apprentice are happy working together and the outcomes are good, keep that partnership for a longer duration, if possible for the whole of that candidate's Apprenticeship'.*
**(Mentee, manufacturing sector, 700 employees)**

This was very much seen as a two-way process where the mentoring experience would also provide the more experienced member of staff with 'fresh insight' and 'up-to-date knowledge' on the industry and ways of working. Employers also recognised that in some cases there was also an additional benefit for the mentor in relation to their personal development and skills. Pastoral support, in these companies, was less likely to be formalised and was simply taken as a natural part of the mentor/mentee relationship. In several cases, mentoring had a historical grounding and was introduced as an integral part of the Apprenticeship programme from the outset.

Over three-quarters of the case study employers considered that the introduction of a mentoring programme had led to an increase in both the quality of work and productivity:

*'I get positive feedback on the quality of the apprentices both from suppliers and customers*

*and none have fallen behind with their training; my presence is sufficient to keep them on track. We have also seen productivity and product quality improvements, as the apprentices are clearer about what is expected from them'.*
**(Employer, engineering sector, 18,900 employees)**

In another organisation this was linked to the role of the mentor in supporting a more in-depth review process:

*'Instead of having a college provider and a manager do your review, you would involve the mentor. You could either have him sit in with or review the apprentice separately afterward. This would be a benefit as the mentor would be able to discuss with you and management how you are developing with your skill set and what areas may need more attention. This is better than just having the manager do it as in some cases you may not have any involvement with your manager in between reviews at all'.*
**(Mentee, manufacturing sector, 700 employees)**

In another example, this was linked to mentors' more in-depth knowledge of the Apprenticeship framework:

*'The role of the mentor is much more hands-on than that of the manager. Our managers are very experienced in travel and customer service; however, they may not have an in-depth understanding of the Apprenticeship framework. It is really important that the mentor has knowledge of the framework, as supporting the apprentice between assessor visits is vital to progression'.*
**(Employer, leisure sector, 27,000 employees)**

Mentees generally agreed with employers that the mentoring support had led to improvements in skills and the ability to complete tasks on time:

*'It is important to have a go and then get advice afterwards on how to improve. The key of mentoring support has been to learn how to do any tasks well and particularly how to prioritise tasks. Mentoring definitely motivates people, and gets them to complete training without being forceful'.*
**(Mentee, IT sector, 10 employees)**

## Improving the quality and relevance of the training

For a third of case study employers mentoring was seen as a way of improving the communication with the training provider:

*'I (the mentor) make sure I sit in the meetings with the training provider. It is very important that they understand and take on board the ethos of the company and are not instilling their ethics in us'.*
**(Apprentice Scheme Coordinator, engineering and construction sector, 700 employees)**

Evidence from case studies suggests that mentoring can also improve the overall training programme. One employer had developed a mentoring scheme after realising apprentices lacked basic skills and needed additional support to understand tasks. Another pointed to the mentor's role in addressing the conflict between the need to increase production and the need to ensure that the apprentices receive the relevant training and experience:

*'In the past when I was an apprentice there was an apprentice supervisor in every department who would effectively act as a mentor and help the apprentice with any problems and ensure he got the correct training. Departments are now solely under the control of a foreman whose primary responsibility is to increase production. As a result apprentices can sometimes miss out on the training they need and get put on menial tasks'.*
**(Mentor, manufacturing sector, 700 employees)**

In some cases this improvement tended to be related to the introduction of a more structured apprentice training programme with clearer targets for the training. The mentor role was seen as instrumental in ensuring that any difficulties are picked up at an early stage:

*'We now have a very structured internal apprentice training programme consisting of eight stages over four years. Now every two months I have to record the progress of the apprentice and every six months they have to demonstrate that they have reached the required level of theory and practice'.*
**(Employer, engineering sector, 18,900 employees)**

## Supporting mentors to develop

In a number of cases the mentoring experience was used as a way of equipping newly qualified apprentices with management skills to support their career development. For example, one leisure sector employer found that it was really beneficial to the company to enable their more experienced sales staff to gain coaching experience, which will benefit them when they are progressing into first level management roles.

Anecdotal evidence from case studies suggests that mentoring can be a very rewarding experience for the mentor; all the mentors interviewed found assisting and guiding the apprentices to be a rewarding experience. Those undertaking mentor training felt that it had improved their skills and confidence by enabling them to network with their peers from other companies, building and formalising on their previous experience and demonstrating the need to develop the workforce as a team.

In general, the mentors interviewed felt enthused by their experience and some had chosen to take on additional responsibilities or training as a result.

Employers' also spoke of the positive impact on the mentors' work from having an apprentice to act as a positive challenge, questioning their current work practices:

> *'The apprentices act as a fresh pair of eyes for the mentor. We have found that it is often the apprentices that come up with new ideas to reduce waste and increase the efficiency of what we do'.* **(Employer, food manufacturing sector, 7,000 employees)**

**Walker Electrical Services** provides a service, from design to completion, in all fields of electrical contracting and associated fields of work in Portsmouth and Hampshire. The company has been offering Apprenticeships for 12 years to 'grow their own' and tend to recruit two apprentices every year.

Walker Electrical Services introduced mentoring about six years ago when it was noted that a number of their apprentices were struggling to follow (written) instructions because they lacked basic skills and were starting to lose confidence because they were unable to complete tasks. The company's managing director developed in-house mentor training for all their senior staff to ensure that they gave time and support to the new apprentices. As explained by Julie Quintin, HR Manager:

> *'The role of the mentor is to hold the apprentice's hand through every aspect of working life, to ensure the apprentices understand work ethics, appropriate behaviour and so on. This means that mentees feel more valued and that they are seen as the future workforce. At the same time, senior staff feel more valued as they are able to share and pass on their knowledge and expertise. They have also generated a better understanding on what it is like to be an apprentice and developed closer relationships with them, which boosts confidence'.*

**Thomas Cook** has a long history of employing apprentices across a variety of roles. Apprentices are a vital part of the company's approach to succession planning and it recruits around 200–250 each year for its four main frameworks: travel services, contact centre, customer service and business administration. The majority of apprentices work across the company's UK retail network of 1,089 stores. Mentors are typically experienced sale consultants who work in the same store as their apprentices. They play an important coaching role, as well as supporting the apprentices in their technical certificate assignments. The relationship between mentor and apprentice is relatively informal, with the level of support tailored to the requirements of the individual. Overall, Thomas Cook considers that mentoring has been extremely beneficial to its business:

> *'Mentoring is a win-win situation. It provides the apprentice with a more positive experience and supports them in their transition from school to the workplace. Thomas Cook has also found that it is really beneficial to the company to enable experienced sales staff to gain coaching experience, which will benefit them when they are progressing into first-level management roles.'*

There is also some evidence of the benefits derived by the mentors in the literature. A study by the Quality and Performance Improvement Dissemination (QPID) Unit for the DfEE[9] used action research, which involved implementing a mentor development programme and monitoring and evaluating its outcomes. Impacts were based on the views of the apprentices and mentors interviewed at the end of the project. Mentors reported that the attention they had been paying their apprentice had resulted in improved performance or progress through their qualification, sometimes in the context of earlier concern at the lack of progress made. The study concluded that the mentors involved in the project learned much from it, and used it as a resource to find out more about the areas of work-based training which they were still unable to understand. In some cases resulting changes of practice within the employing organisation were reported. Many of the mentors said they had developed a better understanding of the needs of apprentices, of how the system worked and their qualifications.

## Supporting the apprentice's career development

For around two thirds of employers, mentoring was used to support the young person on issues relating to career development. As a business administration apprentice at a health sector employer explains:

> 'Discussions with my mentor have helped me to think about my future career options, given me suggestions as what to do next and guiding me to a right direction. This support has really helped with my confidence. I am now in process of applying for a health care assistant post in the hospital'.
> **(Mentee, health sector, 7,000 employees)**

A number of the mentees spoke of the impact of the mentoring in helping them to plan for their future:

> 'I don't think I would be in the position I am now without mentoring support. It has allowed me to understand the business and helped with my own growth and career progression'.
> **(Mentee, IT sector, 10 employees)**

The impact of the mentoring on the mentees' confidence was a commonly cited benefit by employers, mentees and mentors.

> 'I have seen the increase in confidence and motivation of the third year mentees. For the mentees it is clear they benefit from having someone 'who has been there' providing advice and support'
> **(Apprentice Scheme Coordinator, engineering and construction sector, 700 employees)**

In some cases, this confidence was further strengthened by the networking opportunities brought about by their mentor. In large organisations in particular the mentor played an important role in introducing a new apprentice to various opportunities available in-house (e.g. internal training courses, or key people in different departments or specific expertise):

> 'My mentor organised additional internal personal development training for me to progress further and took me to work dos where I had an opportunity to meet some of the higher management and network with colleagues from other departments and locations. I think that without the additional support I would be less developed as a person, I would not be that confident'.
> **(Mentee, financial sector)**

Another organisation pointed to the added value of mentor support in acting as a 'bridge' between an apprentice who wanted to specialise and specialist staff in other departments with particular expertise who they could go and talk to.

One company highlighted the role of mentoring in highlighting individual talents and in helping to support the succession planning process:

> 'I think that an important benefit that is sometimes overlooked is the greater awareness it brings of the individuals' talents and development. The mentoring relationship provides direct linkages into senior management and can help with succession planning and help managers to harness their skills'.
> **(Employer, food manufacturing sector, 4,500 employees)**

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[9]   QPID (2000) *Mentoring for Work-Based Training*, Department for Education and Employment at *http://scottishmentoringnetwork.co.uk/assets/downloads/resources/ MentoringforWorkbasedTrainingStudyReport.pdf*

**EPOSability** is an expanding micro company with 10 members of staff, specialising in wireless technology for the retail and hospitality industries.

The company has been involved in Apprenticeships for the past six years and employs three who have already completed and three current apprentices in ICT, business administration and marketing. The introduction of Apprenticeships has allowed the company to move away from a sub-contracting model by carving roles for apprentices in-house. During their 12-month Apprenticeship, EPOSability management are able to better understand the skill sets and characteristics of the apprentices, and thus able to best provide a suitable position for them within the company. Michael Ayers, Company Director, explains:

*'Our apprentices go through a significant journey as part of their Apprenticeship. Six months into their Apprenticeship, they are significantly more mature, and better equipped for the working world within EPOSability. The change can be quite startling. We like to engage our apprentices in work of significant value sooner rather than later. Apprentices are engaged in works that provide real value to both the company and our clients. In this way, significant training is provided during an individual's Apprenticeship, with the knock-on effect of them being more employable within EPOSability following the completion of their Apprenticeship'.*

The approach has been viewed as very beneficial also by a second year ICT apprentice, Nathan Moorhouse:

*'I don't think I would be in the position I am now without mentoring support. It has allowed me to understand the business and helped with my own growth and career progression. The key benefit of mentoring support has been to learn how to do any tasks well and particularly how to prioritise tasks. Mentoring definitely motivates people, gets them to complete training without being forceful'.*

## Summary points on employer-led models

Employers highlighted a range of rationales for the introduction of mentoring:

- For the vast majority (90 per cent) there was a strong focus on wanting to embed the employer's organisational culture and encourage the apprentice to adopt behaviours appropriate to the workplace.

- For around two thirds of employers, mentoring was seen as a good way of supporting internal communication with the apprentice.

- Around two thirds of employers saw mentoring as a way of passing on skills and knowledge – going beyond just completing but securing an understanding of the knowledge experienced colleagues have gained. This appeared to be more important for the more 'traditional' frameworks such as engineering and construction.

- A similar proportion of employers felt mentoring was a good way to support the young person's career development. In larger organisations the mentor played a key networking role and in some organisations senior management felt that the insight offered by the mentor was of benefit to succession planning.

- A third of employers utilised mentoring to improve communications with the training provider.

- Mentoring is also commonly used as way of supporting mentors' personal development, for example by equipping newly qualified apprentices with supervisory skills.

Employers do not tend to measure the difference that mentoring makes and were unable to provide any quantitative evidence of impact, although there was evidence of benefits:

- Employers considered that there was a clear link between improved communication with the apprentice and improved completion rates.

- The evidence linking mentoring and improved retention seemed to be strongest with case study organisations dealing with more disadvantaged or non-traditional groups.

- Over three quarters of case study employers considered that mentoring had led to an improved quality of service/product quality or productivity improvements. This was linked to higher quality training, improved communications with the training provider and knowledge transfer from the mentor to mentee and vice versa.

- The majority of employers considered that supporting the apprentice's career development helped to increase retention post completion.

# Evidence of the impact of provider-led models

## What is the rationale for training providers' use of mentoring?

Through the case studies we spoke to six providers and four projects regarding their rationale for the introduction of mentoring, and the factors that they considered led to a successful mentoring relationship and impacts.

Three main mentoring models were highlighted in the case studies (Table 4). In the vast majority of cases the core rationale for introducing mentoring support was to help apprentices manage their transition into the workplace, iron out any issues and in doing so improve completion rates and employer satisfaction with their services.

## Provision of mentoring support by training providers

We found a number of examples where the provider was involved in the direct provision of 'mentoring' support. A clear definition of mentoring is required here as in many cases it was hard to identify any added value over and above what is considered to be good practice in provision; the majority of providers with good apprentice completion rates do tend to provide some form of additional support to their apprentices.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognise how wide the range of provider-led support can be. The table below outlines what we consider to be the two main dimensions of provider-led support: practical support to overcome immediate problems and support aimed at building self reliance. The majority

## Table 4: Provider-led mentoring models

| Models | Details | Case study examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Apprentice mentoring models where the provider or apprentice training agency provides the 'mentoring' support themselves** | To improve completion rates<br><br>To improve employer satisfaction | Hospitality Training Partnership<br><br>South Western Apprenticeship Company<br><br>Gower Swansea College |
| **Apprentice mentoring models where the provider encourages and supports the employer to set up their own internal mentoring arrangements, often through providing the mentoring training for staff members** | To improve completion rates<br><br>To improve communication between the employer and provider<br><br>To improve employer satisfaction | Outsource Training and Development<br><br>Fundeon<br><br>Agilysys Arch<br><br>Marine Sector Skills to Support Innovation & Recruitment Project |
| **Pre-Apprenticeship mentoring models** | To address inequality in Apprenticeships and to support minority or disadvantaged groups into Apprenticeships | London Apprenticeship Project |

**HTP Training** was founded in 2000 and operates from four locations across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight but delivers training, predominantly work-based, across the South East.

The company provides Apprenticeships in the service sector including hospitality and catering, retail, customer service, business administration, sales, ICT, health and social care. In the last year overall completion rates were at around 86 per cent and HTP was named as one of the top 12 providers in the country by Ofsted. Over 95 per cent of those who complete an Apprenticeship remain with their employer. Learners' progression to higher level qualifications or at work is good. Many learners gain promotion at work and the rate of progression from Level 2 to Level 3 courses has been between 55 per cent and 65 per cent.

The company's managing director Rachael Fidler attributes this high level of completion to the mentoring support offered by the company's training consultants. The consultants visit learners every four to six weeks and more often if needed. The training consultants also provide holistic support outside their normal visits. This includes support with personal issues as Rachael explains:

*'Our consultants have helped apprentices with a wide range of issues from the purchase of pregnancy testing kits, to lending money and negotiating with the local bus company for reduced travel. We keep a separate record in the learner file of non-academic issues, for example where one individual had problems with self-harm we helped with a referral for psychiatric support. She then went on to successfully complete her Apprenticeship'.*

The provider transports learners to interviews and work placements. Learners are helped to find accommodation if they need it. Training consultants also liaise with parents and guardians where possible to ensure they are involved in the learners' programmes and provide good support. Learners who arrive early for morning training sessions are provided with a continental breakfast to ensure they have a good start to the day. Learners' success is celebrated frequently and very well. Presentations of certificates for qualifications and achievements, displays and features in HTP's newsletter are highly effective in motivating learners to succeed.

of providers provide the former, to varying degrees, however the latter is much less common and would be what we would typically associate with mentoring.

We did come across one example[10] in the literature where a provider had focused on supporting self-reliance. In this example the provider of hairdressing Apprenticeships had been motivated to act due to low success rates due to the apprentices' complex personal problems. The provider decided to employ an 'independent life coach' to work with apprentices. Key aspects of the support included:

- ■ **Referral**
  potential apprentices were altered to the life coach by the trainers/assessors. Formal referral is made by a manager who is also the designated person for safeguarding issues.

- ■ **Meeting**
  the initial meeting between the life coach and the learner is generally held off the work premises

to provide privacy and focus. It is also generally in the learner's own time to demonstrate commitment by the learner. Meetings follow at monthly intervals, until the learner feels confident to move on. The programme is evaluated every three months, and is only continued if the learner feels that they are benefiting.

- ■ **Content**
  The meeting can include specific advice but generally learners are encouraged to seek advice themselves. Discussions of learners' problems result in identification of possible options. There may be exercises, such as goal-setting, and every session ends with targets in the form of an agreement.

- ■ **Impacts**
  The provider reports that the 'life coach' has been a contributory factor in success rates rising by around 10 percentage points in two years.

There are some examples in the literature where the assessor/trainer has provided some form of mentoring:

10    Ofsted (2012) *Using a Life Coach to Support Apprentices*. Online at *www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-using-life-coach-support-apprentices-inter-training-services*

**Table 5: Attributes of provider-led support**

| | SUPPORTING MENTORING &rarr; | |
|---|---|---|
| | Practical support to overcome immediate problems | Support to build self-reliance |
| **Addressing issues** | The opportunity to chat through personal issues | Support to think through issues and develop solutions |
| | (Referral for) specific advice on issues such as benefits, budgeting or housing | Goal-setting exercises |
| | Practical support with transportation or healthy eating | Ongoing evaluation of the support |
| **Career development** | Additional support with learning where needed for example literacy, numeracy and basic skills | Guidance on career development and making choices |

- James and Diment[11] in their examination of the role of the activities of an NVQ assessor revealed that many of the assessors' activities regularly included aspects of mentoring. These included close 'counselling' relationships with candidates, some teaching, negotiating learning opportunities in the workplace, unconditional individual support, advocacy on candidates' behalf with employers, and guidance on future career development.

- Colley and Jarvis' study of apprentice assessment in the automotive sector[12] found examples of mentoring on the part of assessors. The research highlighted how apprentices often displayed resistance to the more academic requirements of their qualification, and assessors would use their relationships with trainees to counsel them to persevere. There was evidence of significant variations in the level of 'mentoring' support provided and the research provided evidence that this supplementary mentoring played an important role in motivating candidates to persevere with their training through to achievement of the qualification with higher levels of retention found where support was provided.

Nevertheless, many argue that there is *'a world of difference between being a mentor and being an assessor since the role of a mentor should be fundamentally non-judgmental'*. Colley and Jarvis highlight the risk that the incorporation of mentoring

in the assessor's role potentially undermines the judgement required in assessment activities. The QPID study[13] raises the concern that suggesting that assessors could also be mentors runs the risk of adding additional requirements to the role of assessor which are difficult to fulfil, while missing the opportunity to recruit and train other members of a company who would make effective mentors, but do not want or have the skills to assess.

*Evidence on impact*
Evidence on the impact of this type of support is typically weak. Although providers commonly report introducing mentoring support in order to improve completion rates we did not come across any providers that could attribute any change in completion rates directly to mentoring. Part of the issue is that many providers introduce mentoring as a package of support and it is impossible to disaggregate the impact from other factors.

In Australia, there is some evaluation evidence from a large scale programme, the Kickstart Mentoring Initiative[14]. This programme provided funding to Australian Apprenticeship Centres to deliver additional mentoring and support services to Australian apprentices within their areas. A total of eighteen Australian Apprenticeship Centres (AACs) were contracted to deliver the initiative. AACs applied for additional funding within the scope of their current contracts so as to deliver

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[11] James, D, Diment, K. (2003) "Going Underground? Learning and assessment in an ambiguous space", *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 55 (4) 407-422

[12] Colley, Helen and Jarvis, Janis (2007) "Formality and Informality in the Summative Assessment of Motor Vehicle Apprentices: a case study." *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 14 (3)

[13] Op. cit

[14] Quantum Consulting, Op. cit

additional mentoring and support services to Australian apprentices within their areas.

The support that was provided included intervention or mediation with employers to resolve issues at work; referral to other support programs or information on assistance should a personal issue arise; helping with paperwork/forms; establishing a relationship with/involvement of other stakeholders to the Apprenticeship such as parents or guardians, and pastoral care/holistic approach (i.e. being actively involved with the apprentice, teaching them a skill for work, working on better communication with others, etc.).

The Initiative was reviewed in 2011 and included an online survey of 1,600 Kickstart apprentices and 170 mentors. The evaluation reported an impact on apprentice retention rates: compared with previous years' retention rates for non-mentored apprentices, there was an average retention rate improvement of 14.6 per cent across all AACs. The reported rates of improvement for individual AACs ranged from 2 per cent to 60 per cent. Eighty-two per cent of apprentice respondents agreed that advice and support from a mentor would increase the chances of completing their Apprenticeship. Despite these seemingly positive findings it is difficult to separate out the impact of this form of 'mentoring' from the impact that arises from improved communications between the training provider and the employer.

## Indirect provision of mentoring support by training providers

Indirect provision of mentoring support where the training provider supports the employer to introduce mentoring appears to be less common than direct provision. In these models the rationale for introduction is often wider than simply the motivation to increase completion rates. For example, one provider, Outsource Training and Development (OTD), was motivated to introduce mentoring because they felt that initial issues with apprentices were escalating because the staff in day-to-day contact with the apprentices did not understand their training programme. The provider reported that although they had buy-in to the programme at the senior level the information did not always cascade down to the apprentice's supervisors and colleagues.

**Outsource Training and Development** (OTD) is a training and recruitment organisation that provides Apprenticeships in a range of business areas including business administration, finance, IT, customer service, retail, warehousing and marketing.

Two years ago the provider introduced manager awareness sessions to support employers to provide effective mentoring support for their apprentices. These sessions are provided to employers as part of the package of Apprenticeship provision and OTD insists that all staff who will be involved in the Apprenticeship programme attend this two-hour training session. As Nicola Hay, the director, explains:

*'In the past we used to have a lot more issues with our apprentices. We have found that making sure that everyone in the business understands their roles and responsibilities in relation to the apprentices has made a huge difference'.*

The manager awareness sessions aim to support employers in identifying the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the Apprenticeship. For example, OTD suggests that all employers identify one or more apprentice 'role models'. This person(s) will act as their champion and will be the key person from whom they will learn.

*'The young people have spent the last 12 years or so at school being told what to do so entering employment can be something of a shock. We support the employers in encouraging the apprentices to be responsible for themselves'.*

Outsource provides an initial training sessions for the mentors, which focuses on building listening skills and encouraging the apprentices to reflect their experiences:

*'Our training focuses on developing mentors' listening skills and supporting them to act as guides to the young people. For example we encourage them to turn back questions on the apprentice and help them to work through issues and potential solutions. We find that they only need this mentoring support for the first six months after which they have the confidence to resolve issues on their own'.*

In another example, a programme of mentoring support was instigated by a business-led consortium Marine South East[15]. The consortium became aware of a company that had taken action to increase the support available to its apprentices. The firm reported that by the use of mentoring they had found a significant improvement in the performance and retention rate of their trainees. Marine South East believed that this example showed the benefits that could be achieved by SMEs if they were encouraged to employ apprentices and use mentoring. IBP Training and Employment and Eastleigh College developed a marine-orientated 'apprentice mentoring' course and training was offered for 20 people from companies based in Hampshire. This enabled staff from SMEs to network with those from large companies to develop methods of supporting apprentices in their transition to the workplace.

### Evidence of impact

Both of these interventions showed clear evidence of impact. OTD considered that the mentoring has brought considerable benefits to the companies participating and in their recent Ofsted review[16] reports that since introduction they have seen dramatic improvements in retention from about 68 per cent to 94 per cent.

The Marine South East Sector Skills programme evaluation[17] concluded that the mentors had found the training to be of use in supporting not just their apprentices but all trainees. They had learnt more of their trainees needs and were tailoring their training to be more effective. One company with young and adult apprentices had also commenced working with a training provider to enable its longer serving employees to gain NVQ qualifications. Having trained mentors had given companies the confidence to employ apprentices and some had already commenced with others hoping to do so in the near future. Two companies reported that they had managed to retain trainees and felt this would probably not have occurred without mentor guidance.

## Pre-Apprenticeship mentoring programmes

Pre-Apprenticeship mentoring programmes have used both to address inequality in Apprenticeships and to encourage minority or disadvantaged groups to enter Apprenticeships. Learner focus groups undertaken by ECOTEC Research and Consulting for the LSC[18] which aimed to explore views on addressing inequality in Apprenticeships highlighted the potential for mentors to challenge assumptions. For example, participants considered that the ability to identify with successful role models enabled people to break into atypical subject areas. Fuller, Beck and Unwin[19] cite research that pre-Apprenticeship mentoring programmes can help increase diversity by helping young people to think more broadly about career options.

One example is provided by the Diversity in Apprenticeship Pilots that were established in 2010 with the aim of increasing demand for, and supply of, Apprenticeships among under-represented groups. Through these pilots providers were funded to undertake activities, including mentoring, which would aim to increase the demand for, and supply of, Apprenticeships among under-represented groups. A number of the pilots made available an additional support worker post who could act as a mentor and coach, for example:

- **15 Billion**, a youth support organisation, introduced a pilot which employed apprentices, trained them in IAG, and these apprentices offered peer mentoring to other young people in their target groups. This provided experience for their own training while also allowing them to share their growing knowledge of Apprenticeships and work. Using a peer mentor was seen as a key success of the pilot since potential apprentices benefited from someone of their own age to talk to and involved in doing something to which they aspired. The mentors worked with the young people to improve their employability including improving their CV, assisting them to register on the Apprenticeship vacancy system and put them forward for suitable positions. The mentors could also provide support about interview preparation and employers' expectations of time-keeping and motivation.

15  Marine South East (2008) *Marine Sector Skills to Support Innovation and Recruitment* – SEEDA Contract SE22108, SEEDA

16  Ofsted (2013) *Working with Employers to Support Apprentices Through Mentoring*. Online at *www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-working-employers-support-apprentices-through-mentoring-outsource-vocational*

17  Op. cit

18  ECOTEC (2009) *Addressing Inequality in Apprenticeships: Learners Views*, LSC

19  Fuller A, Beck V, Unwin L (2005), "The Gendered Nature of Apprenticeship Employers' and Young People's Perspectives", *Education And Training*, Vol. 47 No. 4/5, 2005, pp. 298-311

**The London Apprenticeship Project** is a pilot programme funded by Trust for London and run by Disability Rights UK. From January 2014 Disability Rights UK plans to utilise its existing networks and developing partnerships with key stakeholders to promote Apprenticeships more widely to disabled people and to generate vacancies through links with London employers.

The pilot aims to support 30 individuals into Apprenticeships over the next 18 months by providing the services of a dedicated mentor and employability skills coach and a holistic approach to individual support. As well as supporting the individual the mentor will liaise with employers on disability-related issues that may arise and assist with applications for Access to Work funding towards workplace support costs if appropriate.

Danny Estrada has recently been appointed as project coordinator and Danny's role will include the provision of mentoring and employability skills coaching. He has identified the strategic rationale of the project as follows:

*'The overall rationale is to increase the number of those with a disability, learning difficulty, health condition or impairment accessing Apprenticeships. Although the number of Apprenticeships has increased the number of people accessing them with a disability or impairment has decreased'.*

The support is based on the social model of disability, focusing on ability and identifying attitudinal and social barriers and how they can be removed barriers. As such the role of the mentor is essential in providing a good appreciation of the needs of the business and the individual and in setting up the appropriate support to meet these needs.

- **New College Stamford** focused on the Nottingham area and aimed to provide support to prepare young people for an Apprenticeship. The pilot targeted vulnerable young people, often with complex or multiple barriers to employment. Once a young person was 'Apprenticeship-ready' the aim was to match them with a provider, who would assist them into an Apprenticeship vacancy. The pilot aimed to find employers who were sympathetic to the support needs of the young people and who would be willing to provide additional support and would allow pilot staff to visit the workplace to provide mentoring support. Each young person placed with an employer was assigned a named adviser who would provide regular mentoring (in and out of work) and act as an advocate with the employer, should this be needed.

- **Newcastle UXL**, a partnership of 11 training providers, ran a pilot focused on detailed work with the local BME communities with an aim to address the barriers they faced to Apprenticeships. UXL recruited mentors from a range of backgrounds and faiths. This proved to be a success and allowed it to gain access to areas such as the mosques to promote Apprenticeships, which non-Muslims would not have been able to do. The UXL mentors led face-to-face engagement with parents to promote Apprenticeships and to reassure them about allowing their children,

particularly females, to enter into the workplace. On many occasions the mentors accompanied parents on a visit to potential employers before they allowed their child to work there. While this was time-consuming it was a successful technique when attempting to alter the views of parents. Employing the right members of staff for the mentor roles was highlighted as one of the most important factors for success. The qualities UXL looked for were sales ability and marketing skills, a personable communications style and the ability to talk to SMEs and large employers. It was important that learner mentors had experience of youth work and an ability to engage with young people to make them feel at ease.

*Evidence of impact*
There is little quantitative evidence on the impact of pre-Apprenticeship mentoring on improving transitions to Apprenticeships for minority and disadvantaged groups.

The good practice evaluation of the Diversity in Apprenticeship Pilots[20] focused on qualitative outputs and concluded that coaching and mentoring potential apprentices is beneficial in providing supported pathways to

20  Newton, B, Miller, L, Oakley, J, Hicks, B (2012) *Report for: Good Practice Evaluation of the Diversity in Apprenticeship Pilots*

Apprenticeships for young people with disabilities, learning disabilities and/or difficulties.

The only evidence that exists tends to be outside the Apprenticeship context where a number of studies have sought to examine the effect of mentoring on young peoples' employment prospects. For example, drawing on data taken from the third wave of the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health 5,740 respondents aged 23–28 from all over the United States were questioned about the role of non-parental mentors in their path from school to employment[21]. The research found evidence that informal mentoring plays an 'important role' in transitions to employment and those who had an informal mentor during their teenage years were 25 per cent more likely to be in full-time employment by their mid to late twenties. Other key findings from the research showed that:

▊ Timing plays an important role. The greatest impact of mentoring, it was noted, is experienced during mid-adolescence (ages 15–17), when young people start to actively shape their future career paths.

▊ Young people with weak ties to a larger number of mentors are shown to have benefited more because such relationships are likely to widen the social networks of young people and provide 'non-redundant' knowledge of the labour market.

Another study[22] reviewed a work-based mentoring programme sponsored and administered by the Philadelphia school district (USA), in which volunteer mentors from local participating companies are trained to undertake work-related activities and tutoring as well as establishing a personal relationship with young people. The study took place over the 1997–8 school year and included 202 African-American students at four comprehensive high schools. While no significant result was noted for students mentored for less than six months, a positive relationship was noted

between student performance and mentoring that lasted longer than six months. Compared to the control group, these students earned an average extra 0.17 points on the GPA scale. A number of possible explanations for the results were suggested, including increased student motivation.

A separate study[23] found evidence on the compensatory role of teacher mentoring for educational attainment of disadvantaged youths. Children with parents whose education is limited were found to only have a 35 per cent probability of attending university, but if they have a teacher as a mentor, their chances increase to 65 per cent. Children with highly educated parents, were found to be very likely to go on to university, regardless of whether they have a teacher as mentor (75 per cent) or not (67 per cent).

21   McDonald, S., Erickson, L.D., Kirkpatrick Johnson, M. and Elder (2007) "Informal Mentoring and Young Adult Employment". *Social Science Research* 36: 1328–47

22   Linnehan, F (2001) "The Relation of a Work-Based Mentoring Program to the Academic Performance and Behaviour of African American Students" (2001) *Journal of Vocational Behaviour* no.59, pp.310–325

23   Lance D. Erickson, Steve McDonald and Glen H. Elder (2009) "Informal Mentors and Education: Complementary or Compensatory Resources?" *Sociology of Education* 82, 344-67

## Summary points on provider-led models

### Direct provision of mentoring by providers

▮ The core rationale for introducing mentoring by providers is to help improve completion rates and employer satisfaction.

▮ This model can be useful in small companies where there is a lack of capacity to directly provide the mentoring support.

▮ In the main, this support is being provided by a member of the existing assessment/training team although there is some evidence of a small number of providers recruiting a specialist into the role.

▮ In a large number of cases providers are providing a wide range of practical support to help apprentices to overcome any immediate problems and settle quickly into their new role, however, it is debatable as to whether this can be considered to be mentoring.

▮ Far fewer providers are providing support that is aimed at building self reliance through encouraging apprentices to think through any issues and develop solutions to these.

▮ Quantitative evidence on the impact of provider-led mentoring is typically weak. The majority of providers do report improvements in completion rates but are unwilling to wholly attribute this to mentoring as this has typically been introduced alongside other changes.

### Supporting the employer to introduce mentoring

▮ This appears to be less common than direct provision of mentoring by the employer themselves.

▮ The motivation for introduction can also be linked to the desire to improve communication with the employer and ensure greater employer-buy in to the training programme at all levels of the company.

▮ The benefits reported from the small number of case studies that have employed this approach have been highly positive. One provider reported improvements in retention from 68 per cent to 94 per cent.

### Pre-Apprenticeship mentoring programmes

▮ These have been used to address inequality (for example to encourage females into male orientated occupations) and to support disadvantaged groups into Apprenticeships.

▮ There is a distinct lack of evidence on the effectiveness of pre-Apprenticeship mentoring on improving transitions into Apprenticeships. However, outside the Apprenticeship context there is evidence to suggest that mentoring can play an important role in helping young people to manage their transition to employment through broadening social networks, providing knowledge of the labour market and helping young people to think through and overcome any difficulties and issues.

# What are the lessons for delivery?

## What are the characteristics of effective mentors?

Clarity over who is available to mentor and support the apprentices is particularly necessary given the wide variety of delivery models ranging from complete in-house support and assessment to models where support is divided between a wide range of individuals across multiple sites.

Although there is some evidence in the literature that the preferred model is for the mentor to be someone from outside the apprentice's reporting hierarchy, due to the potential for conflicts of role[24][25], in six of the case studies the mentor was the apprentice's line manager or supervisor. Employers that utilised this model often did so for reasons of size and capacity as one micro company explains:

*'We are a small company and have close relationships within the team, so there is no one dedicated mentor. As a company we have always used mentoring although we are not necessarily calling it that. As we grow, it may make sense to consider introducing peer-to-peer mentoring as opposed to mentoring through line managers'.*
**(IT sector, 10 employees)**

The evaluation of the Marine South East programme[26] concluded that there was no single style of mentoring suitable in all circumstances and that the role has to be developed to suit, particularly as apprentices have a wide variety of people who are responsible for their training. Although the overall aims and objectives of the mentor were unchanged, the evaluation concluded that there were different methods to achieve them depending on company size. An apprentice in a small firm could have a mentor who was their tutor, line manager and company director, whereas a larger company could have a mentor who was not directly supervising the trainee.

Many of the larger employers that had utilised the line manager/mentor model had mentoring programmes that had a stronger focus on the acquisition of skills and knowledge than on pastoral care. Their mentors were typically older staff with many years of experience:

*'I see the mentors as the font of all knowledge. As well as passing on their knowledge and skills they also play an important networking role, providing advice on who to go to for specific information'.*
**(Employer, food manufacturing sector, 4,500 employees)**

In the other eleven companies, the mentor was someone outside the apprentice's reporting hierarchy. A number of these companies had utilised younger staff who were also ex-apprentices as mentors. Other companies used a peer mentoring/buddying system as a complement to a more formal mentoring programme. Buddies tended to be either young ex-apprentices or apprentices in their final year and for many companies this is a good way o f building their own confidence and providing them with new skills as well as supporting the new apprentices:

*'I have seen the increase in confidence and motivation of the third year mentees. For the mentees it is clear they benefit from having someone 'who has been there', providing advice*

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[24] For example the European Mentoring Centre defines mentoring as 'offline help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking'. In this context, 'offline' relates to the relationship between mentor and mentee – mentoring usually takes place where there are no lines of authority, or line management relationship, to avoid any potential conflict of roles.

[25] QPID (2000) Op. cit., Department for Education and Employment, *http://scottishmentoringnetwork.co.uk/assets/downloads/resources/MentoringforWorkbasedTrainingStudyReport.pdf* concluded that the *'individual appointed as mentor should not, wherever possible, be the line manager or assessor of the apprentice'.* At the beginning of the project the individuals recruited as mentors did include a significant number of line managers and assessors but a number of these had decided by the end of the project that they were not in the best position to be independent: *'the scope of the discussion and support was narrower when the mentor was an immediate line manager'.* The report identified that apprentices in this situation disclosed that there were some areas in particular that they felt inhibited from raising with their mentor, such as relationships with their boss, colleagues or areas of personal weakness.

[26] Op. cit

*and support. It has also helped to build rapport between employees and helped to increase morale'.* **(Apprentice scheme coordinator, engineering and construction sector, 700 employees)**

There was also some evidence in the literature to suggest that the utilisation of peer role models as mentors was beneficial in the initial engagement of atypical learners. For example with regard to one of the Diversity in Apprenticeship Pilot projects, Newcastle UXL, the pilot's evaluation[27] concluded: *'recruiting young project staff from ethnic minority backgrounds has served to ensure the Project's credibility with target learners, and facilitated its access to previously excluded groups'.*

In a number of the case study companies unions had a strong involvement in supporting the apprentices. This ranged from involvement in the initial interviewing and inducting process to an active role in mentoring undertaken by some union learning representatives (ULRs). There is evidence of the importance of the role of the ULRs in both filling a gap in support and in getting a formal mentoring scheme adopted. For example, in one company, the ULR has played a role in mentoring apprentices for the last six to seven years and in that time has supported around 20–30 apprentices. The company is now in the early stages of setting up a formal mentoring programme following recognition of the benefits from informal mentoring support.

In another, the ULRs identified *a gap* in support when learners moved to practical learning in depots in their second year. Although year two apprentices do receive mentoring support from their immediate line managers, it was recognised that there was potential for a conflict of interest. It was also felt that as apprentices need a lot of practical experience, they could benefit from additional peer support complementing the structured programme of learning. ULRs were identified as 'ideal peer mentors', providing a natural fit.

There is some evidence in the literature on the qualities of the mentor that provide for an effective mentoring relationship. For example, research[28] has shown these to be based upon: confidentiality; independence/

neutrality; trust; openness; voluntarism; and the ability to guide rather than to direct.

A review of best practices for workplace mentoring[29] highlighted several features common to effective mentors:

*'The cardinal rule seems to be that effective mentors listen to young people, taking the time to understand what they are trying to derive from the relationship and waiting for them "to lower their defences and to determine when and how trust would be established." These mentors allow the relationship to be "youth driven." As the bond develops, they seem also to be able to provide a balance of challenge and support — both nurturing youth and pushing them toward their goals. And they are patient, working with young people toward achievable goals and appreciating that changes in the young person's performance are often very subtle over the short-term'.*

## How should mentors/mentees be matched?

There was very limited evidence from the case studies of any concerted attempt to match mentors and mentees by personality, skills or experience. Pairings tended to be made on the basis of convenience, e.g. a willing and able mentor based in the same location as the mentee with the available time for the role. Employers tended to take the view that if issues arose it would be relatively easy to attempt another pairing. Employers did not highlight any examples of where relationships had failed. In only one of the case study companies was there some effort made to pair mentors and mentees:

*'I interviewed all of the apprentices and most of the managers, so I have an idea of who will get along. I make the pairing based partially on personalities but also on experience and background'.* **(Employer, hospitality sector, 1,001–5,000 employees)**

In a few cases, line managers have gone to their staff to *'tap on their shoulder'* and ask if they could become a mentor and in other cases have matched them according to tasks involved and/ or personalities.

27   Reay, L, O'Donnell, A, Shanks, C (2012) *Evaluation of the Newcastle UXL Diversity in Apprenticeship Project Final Report*

28   QPID (2000) Op. cit

29   Freedman, M., Baker, R (1995) *Workplace Mentoring for Youth: Context, Issues, Strategies*

Employers agreed that the most important factor was the importance of identifying a mentor who was enthusiastic about supporting an apprentice. For this reason the vast majority of mentors were asked to volunteer for the role.

> *'It is really important that mentors volunteer for their role and show enthusiasm for it. We typically look for someone who is nurturing and approachable. Often mentors are former apprentices and are keen to support new apprentices through the programme. In some smaller stores the apprentice's line manager can also be their mentor, the most important thing is that the individual has the right personal characteristics to provide the support'.*
> **(Employer, leisure sector, 27,000 employees)**

The literature provides mixed evidence on the issue of matching mentors with mentees. As Bennetts[30] comments in relation to mentoring projects for unemployed youth in the UK: *'those schemes whose mentors had shared similar experiences and were now employed provided mentees with a credible role model and a sense of hope for the future. However, mentors with differing life experiences were also viewed positively, as they were able to provide insider information into areas of work which previously might not have been considered'.*

### What is the level of formality?

Much of the literature in this area[31] has argued that at the outset of any mentoring relationship there needs to be an 'agreement' between the organisation, mentor and mentee clarifying the purpose and objectives of the relationship and also what it will not cover (for example not a substitute for line management, employee performance and responsibilities and so on).

The QPID study[32] reported considerable variations in the degree of formality in the mentor/ mentee relationship. The overall conclusion was that, although the form and content of the discussion could be formal or informal, it was useful to have some structure to organise the relationship. It also suggested that some record should be kept of the meeting. The study also concluded that the apprentices within mentoring partnerships which operated on an informal basis with no record keeping or recording of actions were the ones who struggled most to identify any changes or personal benefits from their manager or assessor becoming their mentor.

The evidence from the case studies reinforces the need for a relatively formal structure with formal mentor roles supported by guidance, job description and training and regular contact scheduled between the mentor and mentee. This was considered to be essential in order to ensure that any initial concerns were raised by the mentee at an early stage before they became more significant issues. In some cases it was felt that if formal meetings were not scheduled some younger apprentices may lack the confidence to come forward with any issues:

> *'Many young people have trouble coming forward and discussing problems. If we had a regular meeting every month or so it would be easier to identify any issues and provide advice'.*
> **(Employer, manufacturing sector, 700 employees)**

The use of a formal agreement was more commonly utilised in larger companies although some smaller organisations had developed mentoring schemes with clear roles and responsibilities. For example, one owner-manager developed in-house mentor training for all their senior staff to ensure that they gave time and support for new apprentices. Some employers introduced agreements after commencing a mentoring programme due to issues around the clarity of roles:

> *'We had feedback that some of the mentors were unclear of their exact role. The mentoring contact is individual to each pairing and is jointly agreed at the start of the relationship. It is important in setting boundaries and identifying what is off-limits'.*
> **(Employer, food manufacturing sector, 7,000 employees)**

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30  Bennetts, C. (1999) A pilot enquiry into current mentoring projects and programmes for unemployed youth in England, Scotland and Wales. Herts: European Mentoring Centre; Hertfordshire TEC

31  See for example Fowler, A., (1998) 'Guidelines' in *People Management*, 15 October 1998, p.48 online at *www.cipd.co.uk*

32  Op. cit.,

Others had formalised the structure of the mentoring support over time in order to ensure it was better focused on meeting specific goals:

> *'Initially, there was no structure to the mentor support – it was too fluffy and was all about how everyone was rather than focusing on specific goals'.*
> **(Employer, hospitality sector, 1,001–5,000 employees)**

Despite the use of a formal agreement there is evidence to demonstrate that the mentoring style has to develop to meet the needs of individual apprentices and trainees and to be to responsive to needs as they arise. As one mentee commented: *'It is quite laid back but nice to know the support is there if I need it'*. Those that also operated a buddying system still recognised the importance of the more formal mentoring relationship. The buddy was considered to be a supplement to this and provided the apprentice with the opportunity for a friendly chat.

## What is the nature and frequency of contact?

It is difficult to specify how frequent formal contact between mentors and apprentices should be with examples in the case studies varying from weekly to monthly. In a large proportion of the case studies a lot of support was needed at the beginning (during the first few months from starting) to help apprentices to settle in and get accustomed to the organisation and its way of working as well their role. This then tended to reduce, with less frequent formal contact (typically once a month).

In many of the case studies the mentor and mentee had a close working relationship and were often on neighbouring desks or in the same office or workshop. The informal nature of the actual day-to-day relationship meant that they could be in regular contact.

The modes and frequency of contact between apprentices and mentors regarded as most effective or beneficial in the evaluation of the Kickstart Mentoring Initiative[33] were SMS, face-to-face and telephone contact on at a minimum basis of once a month. The same evaluation found that apprentices from the AACs with up to 150 Australian apprentices per mentor had a significantly higher positive perception towards the mentoring Initiative than those from AACs with more than 300 apprentices. In general, the evaluation concluded that the level of positive perception tends to diminish with increasing ratios of apprentices to mentors.

## What training and support do the mentors require?

The majority of the employer-led mentoring schemes provided some form of training for the mentors. In most cases this consisted of a workshop held in the workplace over one or two days. The content of the training tends to vary but in general covers:

- definitional issues, the identification of the role of the mentor and how this fits with other roles such as coaching, managing, training and counselling

- practical skills required by the mentor to listen, build trust and support the young person.

On the whole, this level of training was felt to be sufficient by the mentors. Companies with more formal schemes also introduced on-going support through monthly or quarterly mentor meeting where the mentors had the opportunity to network with other mentors and discuss any issues on a one-to-one basis with the programme manager. This was felt to be of great benefit. One company (Go-Ape) had also introduced an annual thank the mentor day, which was felt to be good for morale.

A minority of employers supported external programmes such as the ILM Level 3 qualification in Coaching and Mentoring. Semta is currently planning to accredit a mentoring and coaching programme with the awarding organisation, EAL. This programme was developed in conjunction with GTA England to support small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to engage in Apprenticeships.

There is only limited evidence in the literature on the effectiveness of mentor training. One example is provided by apprentice mentor training organised by Marine South East[34]. The course, which led to an Institute of Leadership and Management Level 2 qualification, consisted of formal sessions delivered at Eastleigh College with further self-study undertaken in the student's own time. In

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[33]  Quantum Consulting (2011) Op. cit

[34]  Op. cit

addition to the college-based sessions, participants were also assessed in their workplace on their performance. All twenty participants reflected that they gained considerably from their participation and valued the opportunity to network with other mentors. Two of the participants who had considerable experience of working with apprentices considered that hearing about the experience of other mentors was very useful and had given them new ideas to assist their trainees.

During the course of the Mentoring for Work-Based Training project[35], fifty-two potential mentors were trained. The first training session took a full day, but subsequent training was confined to three-hour sessions as employer feedback indicated that a full day was too time-consuming. There were a number of learning points:

▍ The shorter training sessions meant that a large amount of information had to be absorbed in a short period of time. A partial remedy was to give all mentors a pack of training materials to take away. Mentors were also offered telephone contact with the trainers although this was rarely taken up.

▍ It was evident from discussions with the mentors that many needed more support than the training alone would provide. Review meetings with the mentors were already planned and a decision was made to include additional training and development for mentors within these meetings as well as using them for mentors to feedback their experiences and views on the progress of their mentoring relationships.

▍ Attendance at review meetings tended to decline through the programme. This was linked to several factors: for some two or three meetings were felt to be sufficient to enable them to carry on alone; and some had difficulty justifying time away from the workplace.

The QPID study[36] reported that most successful mentors were those who were actively supported and endorsed by their organisations. The organisation's support was found to both legitimise and recognise mentoring activities, making it possible for sufficient time and privacy to be made available to the relationship.

A review of best practice in workplace mentoring[37] highlighted the importance of the presence of a member of staff responsible for making sure the mentoring programme stays on track. This staff member would remain in close touch with participating mentors and mentees to monitor their progress:

*'These staff assume many critical functions, from making sure partners show up, to brokering relationships between school, family, and work to serving as mentors to the mentors and often as additional mentors to young people'.*

The evaluation of the Kickstart Mentoring Initiative[38] revealed that mentors also felt strongly about the need to engage with the employer from the outset of the Apprenticeship in order to encourage buy-in. It was also important to encourage more on-going communication with the employer, including regular meetings with the employer, providing support to the employer, involving the employer in meetings with the apprentice where appropriate to identify and mediate issues.

## To what extent should providers and programmes target mentoring support?

The Australian review of effective mentoring support in the Group Training context[39] identified that GTOs tend to cater to three groups of apprentices: a group of independent learners who need infrequent monitoring and only general support; supported learners who require on-going and possibly quite intensive support and who are possibly at the greatest risk of non-completion; and a third who are 'average' learners who do not require intensive support but do require regular follow-up to ensure their learning and working needs are being met. The review recommended greater differentiation/ specialisation in the mentoring model applied to these groups with the apprentices and trainees deemed as being at high risk of attrition contacted more frequently and provided with more intensive support.

At programme level there is evidence to support the targeting of mentoring support. For example, in Australia evidence that some groups of apprentices are more at risk than others of not completing their Apprenticeships has in part influenced government

35 QPID (2000) Op. cit
36 Ibid
37 Freedman, M., Baker, R (1995) Op. cit
38 Quantum Consulting (2011) Op. cit
39 Fattore, T., Raffaele, C (2012) Op. cit

policy to target priority groups identified as disadvantaged in participating in Apprenticeships and traineeships. In addition, government focus in on the targeting occupations in skill shortage, although the strategies to target areas of labour shortage are related, but different to those required to engage disadvantaged groups. The evaluation of the Kickstart Mentoring Initiative[40] found that the use of a risk assessment strategy for identifying those apprentices that are more at risk of leaving their Apprenticeship was more effective in raising retention rates than applying a blanket approach to support.

## Summary points on success factors

There core message is that there is no single style of mentoring suitable in all circumstances.

▌ Where possible the message is that it is preferable to have a mentor that is not the apprentice's line manager. However, this may not be feasible in smaller companies.

▌ The enthusiasm of the mentor for the role and personal characteristics of the mentor are the most important factor in the pairing and key qualities include confidentiality; independence/ neutrality; trust; openness; voluntarism; and the ability to guide rather than to direct.

▌ There are wide variations in the formality of the mentor/mentee relationship. The evidence from the case studies and literature support the need for a relatively formal structure with regular contact scheduled. However the form and content of the discussion could be formal or informal, and often supplemented with regular day-to-day contact between meetings.

▌ It is highly recommended that some form of training for the mentors is provided. This does not need to be intensive but should cover details of what the role involves, how it fits with other roles in the organisation and the practical skills required. On-going support was also welcomed by many mentors to discuss issues.

▌ There is some evidence to support the targeting of mentoring support at those that most need it. This includes providing greater support for those at the start of their Apprenticeship as well as targeting support at groups at greater risk of dropping out.

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[40]    Quantum Consulting (2011) Op. cit

# Conclusions and recommendations

## *Should apprentice mentoring be supported?*

Employers use mentoring for a wide range of reasons. They differ widely on how they define mentoring and very few employers adopt a model that is centred on supporting the individual career development of the apprentice. For some employers the core focus is on supporting the apprentice's transition into employment, for others the focus is on ensuring the knowledge and skills in their business are fully passed on to the next generation of workers. For the majority, there is no one clear focus and mentoring is utilised simply because it seems to be *'the right thing to do'* or because an individual benefitted from the support and *'wants to put something back'* by supporting the next generation of young workers.

As a result, there is no single 'best practice' model. For others, the primary issue is to ensure that apprentices do more than merely qualify and gain a real understanding based on the skills and knowledge of experienced workers. This transfer of knowledge is central to the future success of their business. Employers have developed these approaches incrementally and the overwhelming lesson is that it needs to be tailored to the needs of the individual employer, mentee and mentor.

Providers typically introduce mentoring in response to issues with apprentice completion rates or to support specific target groups. However, the range of provider-led 'mentoring' is wide and the majority appear to focus on providing practical support to overcome immediate problems rather than the deeper support to build self-reliance that mentoring implies.

Both employers and providers were reluctant to provide any quantitative evidence of impact and the added value of mentoring compared to other approaches is seldom measured. This is a core issue, especially given the wide range of different rationales and approaches discussed under the mentoring heading. For example, mentoring plays a key role in supporting communication between the employer, provider and apprentice and many of the benefits linked to mentoring may be down to this improved communication. Mentoring arrangements with apprentices also provide an opportunity for existing staff and ex-apprentices to benefit from personal development opportunities, where their supervisory skills are being used at an early stage to mentor new apprentices. What we do not know is whether other methods could be used to improve communications and whether they would impart the same benefits as mentoring.

Employers report (but are unable to quantify) a range of impacts including: improved retention; improvements in the quality of service or product; improvements in productivity; and support for succession planning. Providers point to improvements in completion rates but are reluctant to quantify due to difficulties disentangling the impact of mentoring from that of other interventions.

All of the above pose a key challenge when considering whether 'mentoring' should be a recommended tool for employers and Apprenticeship providers. It is perhaps telling that we did not find any examples where the support was not felt to be of any benefit and the scalable nature of the support and the wide range of models means that it can be easily applied to all types and sizes of organisation.

## *How can mentoring be used to optimum effectiveness?*

Despite the wide range of approaches there are clear lessons for delivery that can be applicable in all or the vast majority of situations.

▌ **Select a mentor based on personal attributes**
For all companies the most important factor when selecting a mentor was their personal attributes rather than their position within the company. Characteristics of effective mentors were thought to include openness, confidentiality, neutrality, trust, and the ability to guide rather than to direct. All companies emphasised the need to ensure that the mentor is enthusiastic and volunteer for the role rather than are pushed into doing it.

- **Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the mentor**
  The evidence from the case studies reinforces the need for a relatively formal structure with regular contact scheduled between the mentor and mentee. Some flexibility is required to allow the mentoring style to develop to meet the needs of individual apprentices but setting out the ground rules for all parties at the outset is essential.

- **Select the most appropriate model of support for individual circumstances**
  Some companies used multiple mentors, for example to pass on skills/knowledge when apprentices moved around different departments. Others used a mentor/buddying model whereby a buddy would provide the opportunity for an informal chat as a complement to the support provided by the mentor.

- **Provide mentors with both initial training and on-going support**
  An initial one-day workshop was felt to be sufficient to cover both the role of the mentor and the practical skills required to support the apprentice. Where companies had introduced on-going support (for example through mentor network meetings) this was welcomed and felt to be of benefit.

- **Ensure buy-in to the scheme from senior management**
  The most effective programmes were those where senior managers fully backed the support. This was important in ensuring that mentors were allowed sufficient time to mentor, for example by accepting that their productivity may decrease in the short term while they are working with their mentee.

- **Measure the difference mentoring makes**
  A key message from the case studies was the lack of any quantitative evidence on the difference that mentoring makes. While it is recognised that it may be difficult to disentangle the impact of mentoring from other types of intervention, the collation of basic data on changes to completion rates would be some improvement on the current lack of any data.

## How can mentoring be best promoted?

There are three main ways in which employers tend to get involved with introducing mentoring support for apprentices:

- Mentoring was often initiated by a particular individual. In larger organisations this was often the HR manager, apprentice scheme coordinator or ULR. In smaller organisations this was more likely to be the owner manager.

- In another group of organisations (typically those offering the 'traditional' frameworks, e.g. engineering and construction) the mentoring support had been in place from the outset of the Apprenticeship but had evolved over time with increasing formality in part due to a recognition of benefits and a desire to achieve them on a more consistent basis.

- In a third group of organisations the mentoring had been introduced through a contact with a third party, usually a training provider but in some cases through a specific programme aimed at supporting mentoring.

This poses a number of questions with regard to strategies to promote mentoring of apprentices:

### Supporting individuals within companies to introduce mentoring

There are a number of key individuals within companies who are in a position to become the instigators of apprentice mentoring.

In some workplaces the ULRs have supported the introduction of mentoring, usually on an informal basis, where they themselves provide the mentoring support. The rationale for this support is often to address a 'gap in support' or 'give something back' by supporting the young people. There is evidence to suggest that if the benefits from this informal support can be demonstrated, employers are more willing to put additional support behind them and invest in a more formalised scheme. This can be important as it ensures the ULRs have sufficient time and resources to carry out their role as well as supporting the wider adoption of apprentice mentoring support across the company.

In companies where the HR manager is the instigator of the mentoring, the rationale is often most strongly linked to the desire to better manage the apprentice's school-workplace transition; to help them to adopt appropriate behaviours and to improve completion and retention rates. In contrast Apprentice Scheme Coordinators are more often motivated by a desire to improve the quality of the training provision, for example by improving the communication with an external training provider or by setting clearer milestones for training and utilising a mentor to ensure that these are met and the apprentice is receiving the appropriate experience and training.

Discussions, particularly with employers, highlight the importance of a senior champion in the business – someone who sees the value of mentoring-type arrangements and is willing to push for their introduction. This would suggest that the SFA, the TUC (ULRs) and partners should endorse the value of mentoring arrangements and promote case studies of good practice to encourage others who might be considering such an approach.

It may also be possible to provide specific advice and support on how to get the most from Apprenticeships through existing and new support structures such as Apprenticemakers, where it may be possible to establish specific fora on mentoring approaches and "what works" for employers to share experience.

### *Supporting and encouraging providers to lead on provision*
Although a large number of providers were involved in the direct provision of mentoring support, this tended to be delivered by the assessors who lacked both the independence and time to provide a detailed focus on the apprentice's career development. Nonetheless this is sometimes necessary where the employer lacks the capacity to introduce internal mentoring support, for example in the case of some micro-businesses. We would not suggest that providers need to be incentivised to provide this support as it is a function of good practice in provision and any resultant increase in completion rates acts as an incentive in itself.

There do not appear to be many examples of where providers have encouraged and supported the employer to set up their own internal mentoring support. We would suggest that providers should be encouraged to use this model, as where it has been utilised it has been highly beneficial to the companies participating (and also to the providers through improved completion rates). There is evidence to suggest that an employer-led model is very important to the realisation of benefits, for example by:

- allowing the employer to utilise mentoring to instil in the apprentice appropriate behaviours to fit with the culture of the workplace and manage the transition from school

- ensuring that buy-in is at senior level and mentors are supported in their role, for example allowing them the necessary time to support the apprentice

- ensuring that the apprentices have a champion within (rather than external to) the organisation from which they can learn and also access networking and career development activities.

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