

Creating Good Jobs in the Catering Sector research project

CASE STUDIES

All the names in the case studies below are pseudonyms, and some details have been changed to protect the real identity of participants.

Case study 1 – motivation: using an apprenticeship to build confidence

Now in her late 50s, Christine has worked at the university's student halls for more than 20 years. She left school at 16 with some GCSE-equivalent qualifications, but has not done any formal learning for almost 40 years. She dropped out of her further education course when she became pregnant with her first child.

Christine almost didn't sign up for the apprenticeship training since she wasn't sure how it would benefit her at her age. She explained, 'My kids were saying, "What are you doing it for at your age, mum?" but I said to them, "You know what, I'm doing it for me. I don't want it for my job or my CV, I want it for me".'

The training has made her realise that she can do things she never thought she could. She said, 'It's given me confidence to use the computer more. I'm learning new things... correcting your English when you're writing... using centimetres rather than inches ... different things like that. I'm enjoying it!'

Christine found the apprenticeship learning to be not quite what she expected, since she thought it would be more closely related to the daily demands of her job in student residences. Nevertheless it has given her a general overview of hospitality and events work, and she has put some of her learning into practice. 'Sometimes I can see someone on the server saying something or doing something that is not quite right. I feel more knowledgeable so now I can approach people and make sure things are done right. It's given me a bit more confidence.'

Case study 2 – motivation: using an apprenticeship to build a future career

Lila's motivation for signing up for the apprenticeship was very different from Christine's (case study 1). While Christine wanted to study to prove something to herself, Lila wanted to study to prove something to future employers.

While Lila enjoys the day-to-day work at student halls, she has stayed working here for far longer than she originally thought she would. Even though she is only in her early 30s, Lila has already worked at the university for nearly 10 years. While she has always felt ambitious, she did not know exactly what she wanted to do after college and she drifted

into the job after finishing her education with the idea that it would be a temporary way to earn a bit of money.

One of the effects of signing up to the apprenticeship programme has been to encourage her to think more seriously about the next steps in her career progression now. Her key motivation to complete her apprenticeship is to be able to demonstrate to a new employer that she has the skills needed when she starts applying for new jobs elsewhere.

She says, 'Before I started the apprenticeship, I was just doing my job and then going home, I didn't realise there is actually a career path in hospitality. Now I'm really motivated'. She is thinking seriously about where her skills and abilities might take her and what her next steps should be.

In some ways the actual experience of learning has been a bit disappointing: 'I only learnt about two per cent new stuff, most of the course is stuff I know already,' she explained, 'However, I've been doing the course to put an up-to-date, relevant qualification on my CV'.

Currently she fits her part-time work in the halls of residence around the care of her young children. The hardest aspect she found was fitting the learning around her childcare: 'Most of the learning has been easy, the hardest thing was finding the time. By the time I get home I'm knackered so I make sure I do the learning at work.'

A lesson learnt for the organisation is to think more about how line managers and mentors could better understand the desired career pathways of staff and what they could contribute in terms of activities such as work shadowing or offering new hands-on skills that could help staff like Lila to progress.

Case study 3 – challenge: making the apprenticeship work for staff with family care duties

In some ways apprenticeship training is built around an outdated model of employment which assumes that everyone works a standard number of full-time hours per week, in continuous daily shifts, in the same location as their colleagues and line manager. In this model of employment it would be easy for line managers and mentors to keep track of progress and to intervene to help with any issues and queries that arise.

However, we know that many people in the hospitality and catering sector work split shifts and in different locations to their line managers. This applies also to the case study of employees in student residences. This means there are some extra issues to sort out so that the university as employer can comply with legal and moral duties around staff wellbeing, work-life balance, and equality and diversity. It requires thinking about how the

apprenticeship might impact upon people's lives outside of work, including upon the family care duties that they have.

Some of the issues faced by supervisors studying for the Level 3 apprenticeship provide a good illustration. Most of the supervisors in the student halls of residence work the breakfast shift and then come back five or six hours later to cover the evening dinner shift. In theory it seems like the time in between these two shifts might be a good time to study, paid as overtime. However, staff often used this time to relax and to do important household chores related to family care.

For instance, one of the supervisors, Ben, had to care for his young children as well as older parents in between the morning and evening shifts. He said that he had often felt like quitting the apprenticeship due to the time it was taking outside of his working hours. Eventually Ben found a way to study that suited him: by doing the apprenticeship work at the weekends. The halls of residence were a bit quieter on the weekend shifts, and so he could do some of his learning during the shift. It also meant that his partner, who did not work at weekends, could look after the children.

Another supervisor, Nicky, told a similar story. Her children were now grown up and had left home but she was responsible for caring for her elderly mother who needed frequent trips to the hospital. Organising her mother's care had taken up much of the time she had put aside to complete her apprenticeship tasks.

At one point half-way through the course, Nicky commented, 'I should have completed an assignment a couple of months ago, but with my mum in hospital I couldn't finish it.'

Nicky was helped to complete the apprenticeship by the flexibility of the task deadlines along with some additional support from her training provider.

Case study 4 – challenge: overcoming initial reluctance to develop new skills and an appetite for learning that benefits the employee and the employer

Apprenticeships are meant to offer in-depth learning over at least 12 months. They can offer learning that becomes relevant later even though it does not feel relevant at the time, and sometimes the benefits of the learning are unexpected - for both the apprentice and the organisation - as we illustrate with the case of Sally.

Sally, now in her early 50s, already had a lot of background experience in the hospitality industry from other catering jobs before she came to work at the university. When the apprenticeships were first introduced, she was not sure about signing up since she could not see what benefit it offered: 'I've already done the NVQ for leadership and supervision,

so what am I going to get out of this? But the training provider said NVQs have changed over the years, and this one is more informative.'

At the beginning of the course, Sally felt like she was struggling and out of her depth. The first task was to design a restaurant floor plan, and was largely focused on maths and English skills. Sally asked her daughter for some help since she was not even sure how to tackle the task. She could not see that the task to design a floor plan had any relevance to her, and there were times when she did not want to continue with the apprenticeship. It felt a hard slog to keep going.

However, by the end of the apprenticeship she was feeling different. She realised that the first study task had actually come in handy when she argued in her job for a different way of setting up the buffet service. She used her new skills to calculate the number of people that could use the various serverly spaces and to redesign how to set out the buffet locations, so that diners did not have to wait for their food for so long. The apprenticeship had given her some confidence that her suggested change would work; and it did!

At the end of the course Sally noted, 'There's so many different things within the course. You're not just looking at one thing, you're looking at everything that has a knock-on effect on everything else. So if you're not prepared then your staff aren't prepared; if your staff aren't prepared then the customers aren't getting the service they need. Rather than thinking days ahead I'm thinking weeks ahead now; at one time I was just thinking about tomorrow and what I had going on then. Now it's a different way of looking at things. My last NVQ didn't go into as much detail as this one does. The trainer was right that this one is more informative.'

Now that the course is over, Sally is feeling ready for her next challenge. She says, 'I'm looking at doing a business management course now. I've asked for an IT course, with Excel and PowerPoint and things like that, because I can use them but I'm not great, so I want that.' Moreover, she has been proactive in her learning: 'They have these little things online that you can read about, diversity in the workplace, and how to work with it, and grievance in the workplace, and how to do deal with grievance in the workplace. That was just something that I decided to do off my own back, but I've used some of that as well.'

The outcome of doing the apprenticeship has unexpectedly been to make her more open to, and more excited about, new learning and new ideas for her role. As well as this new appetite for learning, she is also thinking more strategically about her own role, showing the ways the apprenticeship learning is beneficial to both the apprentice and the employer.