

Factors Driving Achievement and Retention Rates of Apprentices in the Casual Dining Sector.

Introduction

This research focuses on a case study of a large, limited company in the casual dining sector. As a registered employer provider, the company delivers intermediate, advanced, and higher-level apprenticeships across 150 sites, offering valuable opportunities to a diverse cohort of 60 apprentices through its 0.5% annual pay contribution.

The organisation aspires to become a registered training provider and extend its training services across the hospitality industry. To achieve this, it must sustain a strong Qualification Achievement Rate (QAR) in line with the national target.

This study investigates the factors driving achievement and retention rates of apprentices in the case study organisation and, with this knowledge and understanding, informed recommendations around the overall structure, content and quality of the programme are made to improve its achievement and retention rates and support its growth and expansion.

Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered through a mixed method research approach.

The aim of the secondary research was to identify characteristics of leavers and achievers using pre-existing company data. This included the apprenticeship standard, age, gender, employment method, functional skills completion and destination of all level 2, 3 and 4 apprentices across educational years' 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Primary research was then carried out to find out why learners chose to embark on their apprenticeship and how they feel about their apprenticeship experience. A 17-question anonymous online survey was created using a range of open, category and Likert scale questions. The sample for this included all learners currently on programme and those who had completed an apprenticeship in the past six months whereby a 47% response rate was achieved.

Findings

This research emphasised the complexity of the challenges within the hospitality industry and further education sector and how these are materialising in the case study organisation. The findings of this research highlighted four key factors driving achievement and retention rates of apprentices in the case study organisation and a total of six recommendations were made based on this.

Workplace Support

Learners who felt well-supported by their managers and teams reported higher satisfaction and were more likely to complete their programme. In contrast, a lack of support often contributed to early withdrawal.

Recommendation 1: Further investigate workplace support through learner and line manager surveys

Recommendation 2: Review licensing process which allows restaurants to employ an apprentice

Completion of Functional Skills

Learners required to complete functional have an increased chance of leaving / not achieving their programme.

- Recommendation 3:* Complete additional research to investigate:
- Is there enough time available for teaching and learning?
 - Are the teaching, learning, resources and assessment methods effective?
 - Are the right candidates being recruited for the right programme?

Method of Employment

Learners who were recruited into the company on an apprenticeship (as opposed to an existing employee) have an increased chance of leaving / not achieving their programme.

Recommendation 4: Review recruitment process. Update pre-screen interview questions to gain more information on the candidate (prior experience, behaviours, skills, aspirations) and gain a better judgement on their suitability.

Off the Job Training

Learners across all programmes highlighted challenges with the time available to complete apprenticeship work and the technology provided for this.

Recommendation 5: Provide study skills (managing workload / time management and IT)

Recommendation 6: Escalate technology issues with IT

Implementation

After completing this research, the findings and recommendations were disseminated to key stakeholders in the case study organisation including the Education Programme Manager, Chief People and Marketing Officer and an Apprenticeship Trainer.

Systematic feedback was obtained from the audience members through a Microsoft Form which asked questions relating to the quality of the project, findings and recommendations and presentation. The recommendations were subsequently implemented over a six-month period following the dissemination event. This included:

- Development of an 'Apprentice Induction Pack' to serve as a 'one-stop shop' throughout their programme including study skills tips, troubleshooting guides and programme information.
- Development of a 'Manager Induction Pack' to provide information on their apprentice's programme, what to expect and guidance on 'how to best support your apprentice'.
- Managers given access to the Learning Management System.
- Updated recruitment process to gain more information on the candidate and a better judgement on their suitability.
- Partnering with IT to trial a new device for apprentices.

Impact

The impact of this research was evaluated 12 months after the recommendations were implemented and is reflected in the following results:

- **Qualification Achievement Rate** = 75% (+14% versus last year)
- **Distinction Rate** = 45% (+9% versus last year)
- **Learners' 'workplace support' rating** = 9.2/10 (versus 7.9/10 six months prior)
- **Number of Early Leavers** = 1 (versus 6 in the previous year)
- **Progression Rate** = 45% (+9% versus last year)