

Quality framework model

The quality framework apprenticeship model, published by The City & Guilds Group and the Industry Skills Board (ISB), was put together following a series of interviews with businesses and training providers about what constitutes a quality apprenticeship and how they ensure the best experience for apprentices and employers.

Planning



Recruitment and induction



Putting learning at the heart of apprenticeships: Real experience, practice and problem solving to achieve productivity and autonomy



Validation of learning outcomes and mastery



Independent end-point assessment



Career progression

To read the full report click here

Making Apprenticeships Work: A reflection on practice

Established in 1984, Xtrac is the world's leading supplier of high performance transmissions for top level Motorsport and High Performance Automotive applications. In the UK it employs 348 people and currently has 16 apprentices. It recruited its first apprentice in 1991 and since 2003 it has taken on four engineering apprentices every year and recently increased this to five.

Planning

Xtrac is still expanding and, as a new business need emerges, it is considering how the levy can be used to address skills challenges in areas apprenticeships haven't been used before such as facilities management and IT. It is also using the programme to train up new employees to replace existing staff due to retire within the next 10 years. The industry is suffering from a serious skills shortage and the numbers coming into it are not as high as the number retiring. The apprenticeship programme has the buy-in from the President, Chairman and CEO downwards who all understand from personal experience the benefits of apprenticeships for both the business and the individual employee. It offers the Advanced Level 3 Engineering/ Manufacturing apprenticeship and

also has two employees on degree apprenticeships who have progressed within the company from Level 3. It is currently running the old frameworks but will switch to the new standards the new degree apprenticeship new standard later this year and is therefore preparing for new elements such as 20%-off-the-job and end-point assessment (EPA).



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Recruitment and induction

Xtrac's apprenticeship recruitment campaign spans six to seven months. It advertises on the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) website, the local press, social media and its own website. It also contacts schools and colleges within a 25-mile radius. It offers work experience for school students and some of these have returned as apprentices. The company has built its reputation locally as an apprenticeship employer. Traditionally, its applicants have been in the 16-21 age group but more recently it is also attracting a wider age demographic from career changers interested in an Xtrac apprenticeship.

Applicants take an aptitude test and, if successful, are called for interview. The first interview focuses on technical ability and a second interview seeks to assess how well an individual can retain information and understand mechanical concepts. It also includes a factory tour. Those offered a position must also pass a maths and English functional skills assessment.



Six-month reviews are linked to pay, which is a major motivator for the apprentice

Xtrac's induction programme involves a welcome evening for apprentices and their parents, who are also given a tour of the factory. On day one, apprentices are familiarised with who's who and the induction also covers regulations, rights, responsibilities and protective equipment. They can expect to start work in the factory in the first month but will also attend health and safety presentations and NVQ workshops. Learning provider Newbury College also runs an induction morning that covers the qualification and study aspects of the apprenticeship.

Training and learning programmes

On-the-job training is delivered in two parts during a three-to-four-year period. During the first 16 months, the apprentice completes qualifications such as BTEC Level 3 National Diploma and NVQ Level 2 Performing Engineering Operations as well as functional skills qualifications in English and maths and they also gain work experience across 11 departments so they fully understand how Xtrac works. The Xtrac apprenticeship manager is responsible for them during this period.

The second part provides the apprenticeship with the opportunity to specialise in one of a number of roles such as machinist, design engineer or assembly technician. Choice is based on the apprentice's interest and business need. Once they move to their department, they are supported by a line manager and departmental mentor. Here the Apprentice completes their NVQ Level 3 qualification.



Mentoring, reviews and feedback are conducted by in-house assessors and mentors and supported by the Apprenticeship Manager and Head of HR. Activities include regular group and one-to-one sessions, review meetings with assessors every 12 weeks, formal review meetings with assessors and head of HR every six months and ongoing one-to-one tuition with mentors in each department.

Six-month reviews are linked to pay, which is a major motivator for the apprentice. If they meet the set criteria they earn a pay rise and can achieve eight incremental rises within four years. Xtrac also runs an apprentice of the year programme in which individuals can win £250 vouchers.

Apprentices attend college one day a week for 36 weeks to undertake qualifications, which are supplemented where necessary with supplier-led training, internal workshops on topics such as health and safety and off-site training courses. This element is tailored to the needs of the specialism. Given this practice and mindset is already in place, it doesn't foresee 20% off-the-job posing a challenge.



Learning outcomes and mastery

Performance expectations are clearly defined for all apprentices and productivity measured in terms of time taken to complete a task. Xtrac believes that apprentices should be able to complete tasks within an allotted time at Level 3 but, in reality, many do better than this. The company uses specialist and complex machinery which they are expected to use by this stage. Apprentices are also encouraged to use their ingenuity and think about how productivity and processes can be improved. Departments each have a skills matrix which managers and team leaders use to record and monitor the development of the skill level of all staff including apprentices (a numerical rating is given for each function). This is updated every four months and contributes to the apprentice's portfolio of evidence to demonstrate their progress.

End-point assessment

Xtrac apprentices haven't passed through the EPA yet but the company is already working closely with the training provider to understand what it entails. It has chosen its EPAO and is working backwards to determine whether it needs to change training methods to prepare for it.

Career progression

Apprentices can continue studying up to Level 5 and degree apprenticeship or Master's level. There are currently two employees who have progressed from Level 3 to a degree apprenticeship. Apprentices can also progress up the career ladder into roles such as quality engineers, team leaders or project managers while others have themselves become trainers and mentors. The fierce competition for top talent that exists in the sector means that high-achieving apprentices have been poached. Xtrac's proud boast is that every apprentice it has recruited and trained is either still with the company or has secured a good job elsewhere with companies such as Formula One and other Motorsport teams.

Business benefits

- **talent pipeline:** apprenticeships are helping Xtrac to build a pipeline of talent to address the skills challenge arising from a high percentage of personnel in key positions retiring within 10 years.
- **valuable training:** programmes allow Xtrac to take a company-wide approach to training which it says means individuals are more likely to remain at the organisation.



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