APPRENTICESHIP WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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An introduction to integrated learning in apprenticeships

Introduction

'Integration' is a theme that is often mentioned as good practice in apprenticeships, for instance by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), Ofsted and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). However, there isn't a lot of guidance on what integration involves, or how to achieve it. This resource provides a helpful contrast between a lack of integration in programme design with a fully integrated pathway.

Purpose

This resource is designed to complement the content of the AWD course 'Integration of on-the-job and off-the-job learning/training' and 'Planning the integration of on and off-the-job training'. It can, however, also be used as a stand-alone resource if you haven't yet attended either course.

How to use

This resources gives a short introduction to integrated learning and some of the principles and practices involved. There are more resources on ETF's Apprenticeship Workforce Development (AWD) programme site to help with different aspects of integration.

Use as an exercise to check how far your apprenticeship programmes reflect the integrated approach bearing in mind that a programme may not demonstrate every aspect of full integration but consider what is possible and potentially achievable.

Parallel or integrated?

Preparing for an occupation, job role or profession can be done in several ways. The oldest is the traditional apprenticeship, where the apprentice is indentured to a 'master' and does all the learning on the job. In many occupations this evolved into the 'parallel' model, which includes off-the-job study in the form of evening classes, day-release or block-release. This has become the standard pattern for apprenticeships from the 1990s onwards. An alternative is the 'sequential' model, consisting of a full-time course, usually in a college or university, followed by workplace training; this became the most common way of preparing for professional careers towards the end of the twentieth century, while the parallel model has remained popular for craft, trade, and some administrative and care occupations.

In an integrated route, academic or theoretical learning is packaged together with practical training in the same programme. Nurse and teacher education can be described as integrated in principle, as

the course includes a substantial amount of practice and aims to bring trainees up to a reasonably competent standard by the time they qualify. In reality there is still often a failure to connect practice and theory adequately, and there can be a disconnect between periods in the classroom and work attachments and placements. The same principle applies to apprenticeships. In a parallel-model apprenticeship the off-the-job part can just be run as a course without any reference to what is going on in the workplace. In an integrated model the two strands are brought together as a single programme. There are different degrees of integration; few apprenticeships are likely to be perfectly integrated, but while some are well-integrated others may initially have just a few integrated features. This can be used positively to build integration into the programme step-by-step, rather than designing from scratch.

Degrees of integration

The table shows **a continuum** from a traditional parallel programme through to a well-integrated one. Three areas are considered:

1. the provider/employer partnership
2. the workplace
3. the programme and pedagogy

Unintegrated	...	Integrated

Employer – provider partnership

There is only a minimum level of interaction between the provider and employers of apprentices, e.g. to agree the contract and review progress	Provider and employers work in partnership at all levels, including future strategy, programme design and delivery
Employer and provider staff roles do not overlap	There is extensive crossover between employer and provider staff roles, e.g. joint appointments, tutors as practitioners or consultants, employer staff as tutors and assessors
There is no involvement from employers in programme design or delivery	Programme design, delivery, learner recruitment, support and assessment are all carried out jointly

The workplace

The learner is treated as a subordinate trainee, expected to defer unquestioningly to senior personnel	The learner is treated as a member of a community of practice, and encouraged to think critically, ask questions and contribute ideas
Workplace training is focussed on developing basic competence and becoming a productive worker as quickly as possible	The workplace supports learning for wider practice, with space for the learner to consolidate, reflect and investigate or explore
Training is task-based and uses a limited range of techniques	Work-based learning follows a developed workplace pedagogy that uses the most appropriate techniques to aid learners to develop from novice to proficient
Digital technology is only used where it forms part of the normal course of work	Digital technology is used innovatively and accessibly as part of the workplace pedagogy
Practice follows established ways of doing things without reference to principles or evidence	Practice is informed by principles, theory and evidence, and is open to new learning

Programme and pedagogy

Learners are treated as passive, directed by instruction and teaching	Learners are treated as (becoming) active and self-directing, supported by resources, facilitation, dialogue and mentoring
The programme consists of separate, uncoordinated on- and off-job strands, with practice and theory largely learned separately	The programme is designed and experienced by learners as a co-ordinated whole, with practice and theory interrelated throughout
Off-job sessions, or the digital equivalent, do not reference or draw on workplace experience	Off-job sessions make extensive use of techniques that link to workplace learning (e.g. reflection, critical incident analysis and action learning)
There is a standard curriculum with no recognition of individual learners' contexts, credit for previous learning or formal recognition of workplace learning	The programme recognises the starting point of each learner, is tailored to individual contexts, and gives credit for relevant learning regardless of source
Digital technology is used if at all to produce written work and as a substitute for face-to-face sessions and printed materials	Digital technology is used to aid learning in multiple ways using appropriate pedagogies, including in the work environment and through linking learners in digital communities
Formal assessment does not take account of context and is separate from any workplace evaluations	Formal assessment integrates theory and practice, uses methods that are accessible and authentic in relation to practice, and respects differences in context
Learners experience more than one assessment regime, with different requirements for (for instance) the apprenticeship, the employer, professional recognition and academic qualification	Learners experience a single set of assessment requirements, even if these lead to different forms of recognition

Improving integration

Strategies to improve integration can be put in place at the level of the organisation, the department or programme, and the individual tutor or trainer. The following are examples of approaches that can be used from the provider perspective:

Working with employers

- Develop partnerships with employers/specific workplaces, whether at a strategic level or to support specific aspects such as programme design, recruitment, teaching and training, support for individual apprentices, and assessment.

- Set up crossover between staff – for instance provider staff having a role in the workplace, and employer staff being involved in off-job training and assessment.

- Support, develop and maintain regular dialogues with workplace mentors – these need not be managers and supervisors, but could be staff in the roles that apprentices are training for.

- Review work practices, processes and cultures, and work with employers to improve the way that the workplace supports learning.

- Work with employers to introduce digital technology and applications that improve workplace learning and link it to theory (a separate resource is available on **digital learning in the workplace**).

Teaching, learning and assessment

- Use three-way learning agreements to agree credit for previous learning and shape the 'curriculum' to the needs of the individual and the workplace.

- Use techniques such as learning conversations, reflective practice, episode review and action learning to develop apprentices' abilities to learn from work, and to link practice with principles and theory (separate resources are available on **learning from doing** and **learning conversations**).

- Use a 'flipped' or 'inverted' approach, so that content learning is done in the workplace or through digital tools, and live (face-to-face or online) sessions are used to discuss, reinforce and deepen what has been learned.

- Use digital resources to simulate, practise and discuss aspects of work activity off-job, for instance by creating a digital 'practicum', or using virtual reality or serious games (a separate resource is available on creating a **digital practicum**).

- Use work-linked activities that require learners to be explicit about the thinking behind what they are doing at work – such as short projects, investigations, and records with explanations.

These don't have to be in written form – videos, diagrams and multimedia presentations can work just as well.

- Set assessments that are authentic and meaningful in terms of apprentices' work. In particular, avoid separating out the assessment of knowledge and practice – they should be looked at together wherever possible.

- Wherever possible, link assessed activities to the end-point assessment so that learners aren't faced with a major amount of additional work at the end of the apprenticeship.

For higher-level apprenticeships there is a longer (and more academic) paper on this theme, *Beyond Degree Apprenticeships: conceptualising integrated professional development*, on the UVAC web site.