



**SME employer toolkit:  
A supportive approach  
to recruiting apprentices**

## Why the need for this?

Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO) have partnered with Salford City Council to produce a resource offering easy-to-implement hints and tips on how to recruit and induct young apprentices to your business.

The emphasis is on putting young people at ease and understanding a young apprentice's perspective so that they can achieve their potential.

This toolkit will empower you to:

- write job adverts, descriptions and role specifications that attract rather than alienate candidates
- host interviews and assessments that allow young people to shine
- induct and mentor apprentice starters in a way that helps young people to settle quickly

Although the focus is on the recruitment of young people, the advice can be universally applied to recruiting older apprentices and staff members more widely.

Salford City Council offers a free personalised matching service (recruitment pool), helping residents connect with apprenticeship opportunities in the city.

For more information contact:  
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## GMCVO and youth employment

GMCVO have led youth employment programmes in GM since 2013.

Between 2013 and 2018 they led the **Greater Manchester Talent Match** programme, supporting some of the hardest to reach young people on their journeys into and towards employment.

They currently lead **Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent**: a two-year programme helping hidden young people (young people not in education, employment or training and not claiming benefits) aged 18-25 progress towards and into employment.

We have listened to the 2,200 young people we've supported in that time (as of January 2020), taking on board what it is they find difficult about recruitment processes and which approaches enable them to give of their best.

Want young people's opinions?

The Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent Youth Panel are young volunteers. They offer a free service whereby they work with employers to reflect on and make changes to their recruitment practices.

To find out more contact  
ben.reese@gmcvo.org.uk  
0161 277 1046

## Before recruiting, establish the correct mindset

Make sure your workforce development plan / succession planning accounts for the fact your apprentice is with you to learn. Have realistic expectations. It will take time to see a return on your input into an apprentice's development. Communicate clearly. You are there to build an apprentice's competencies and skill set - convey this to the apprentice: "You are building a knowledge foundation for your career."

Beyond the obvious need to plug a skills gap, there are wide-ranging advantages to taking on a young staff member...

### Wider workforce development

Existing staff members may want to develop their leadership and management skills. The opportunity to mentor an apprentice offers an ideal means of achieving this.

Consider also that Generation Z (loosely, people born from 1995 to 2010) are 'digital natives': from an early age they have been exposed to the internet, social networks, and mobile systems. Their tech skills offer a great opportunity to implement a reverse-mentoring system and upskill members of your team. It may not necessarily sit within their job description but social media savvy young apprentices could boost your online profile. Also, do not underestimate the speed with which young people can complete IT-oriented tasks!

### Mould in your image...and let them mould yours

Young people have not accrued the bad habits that come with 30 years on the job! They can be schooled in the cultural practices of your workplace and quickly inherit and reflect your values.

At the same time, a fresh pair of eyes from outside the business can spot ways to renew your existing systems or processes. As you induct / train the apprentice you may realise that some of your processes could do with a tweak.

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## Loyalty

If you get the recruitment side of things right you will go a long way to fostering loyalty in an apprentice.

This toolkit will help you recruit young people who will prove a good fit with your company / organisation values.

If you show interest in your apprentice's development, challenge them and support them with difficulties, you will foster loyalty – important if you aspire to retain the apprentice beyond their training.

## Writing ads, job descriptions and specs

Your job advert is first point of contact with candidates - be sure to sell yourself but equally, do not inadvertently put young people off at a first glance.

### Making the most of the 'Find an apprenticeship' service

All apprenticeship vacancies must be listed on the Government 'Find an apprenticeship' website.

The screenshot shows the 'Find an apprenticeship' search page on the GOV.UK website. The page title is 'Find an apprenticeship' with the subtitle 'Search and apply for an apprenticeship in England'. The search form includes a search bar with a 'Browse' link, a 'Keywords (optional)' section with a text input field containing 'All', a 'Your location' section with a text input field containing 'OL5 9GF', a 'Within' section with a dropdown menu set to '5 miles', and an 'Apprenticeship level' section with a dropdown menu set to 'All levels'.

- If you are not a levy paying employer your training provider will manage the 'Find an apprenticeship' recruitment system on your behalf.
- Your training organisation will supply you with a template to complete so that your vacancy can be advertised.

To help you complete this template we've produced a step-by-step guide to completing each section in a way that maximises your appeal to candidates.

## Where to advertise apprenticeships

All apprenticeship vacancies should be advertised on the Government's 'Find an apprenticeship' website.

Some training providers will advertise on your behalf on sites including GetMyFirstJob, Not Going to Uni and CareerMap.

If you have the capacity, recruiting through your own website has benefits. You can control what applicants submit (rather than the apprentice using the fixed answer fields on 'Find an apprenticeship'). See p.7 for alternative application methods.

**Do, do, do** use social media channels to advertise your vacancies. You may need to grow your own audience first however - to create an engaged and active online community.

Salford City Council's Skills and Work team also offers a free personalised matching service, helping residents connect with apprenticeship opportunities. Email [skillsandwork@salford.gov.uk](mailto:skillsandwork@salford.gov.uk) to find out more.

## 'Apprenticeship summary'

This section has two purposes: employers outline the role and the responsibilities it entails. They also use it to sell themselves ('why work for us')

Sell yourself first by doing the following:

- Address the applicants. Don't just open with a responsibility checklist. Show how you'll invest in the apprentice(s) and support them
- Talk about the team dynamic they'll be joining. This could be a young person's first job – let them know they'll be welcomed and looked after
- Pique young people's interest by talking about perks. Be explicit about what these are: what does your healthcare package include? What is flexible working?

Outline the role clearly by:

- Not assuming a young person will understand technical terms and workplace jargon (be careful with acronyms)
- If you employ them, ask current young employees to sense-check job descriptions
- Convey the realities of the role: don't over glamorise!
- If the role requires a DBS check, explain what one is – young people may not know



The Apprenticeship Summary section also includes fields for key information like salary, hours, the apprenticeship duration.

Be clear if you will pay the National Minimum Wage / National Living Wage rather than the Apprentice Wage.

Try to be upfront about working hours and shift patterns (many young people will be dependent on public transport).



Do your best to communicate your team spirit. The move from education to work is one of life's great transition points. Young people want to know that they will be entering a welcoming and supportive environment.

## 'Requirements and prospects'

This section is broken down into five subsections. Here's our tips on how to tackle each one:

### i) Desired skills

- Avoid generic asks such as 'must have excellent communication skills'. What is it you are after specifically? The confidence to coolly handle a complaint? The ability to talk to people from a range of different backgrounds?
- Be realistic. For an entry level role, will someone really have experience of a given task?

### ii) Personal qualities

- Use words like 'exceptional', 'dynamic' and 'passionate' with caution. Such vocabulary can create the impression you are only looking for someone exceptional. This can be off-putting. Ask yourself, 'how many of us are actually exceptional at what we do'? Instead, ask (and look for) enthusiasm and a willingness to learn.

### iii) Desired qualifications

This will be determined by the level of your apprenticeship but there are still important considerations:

- Do you really need to list 'A-Level desired'? Does the role demand this? The same applies for the 'GCSEs preferred but not essential'
- Let applicants know if the apprenticeship will support them to achieve functional skills (if they don't already possess a 9-4/A\*-C grades in GCSE). Be clear if predicted grades are accepted.

### iv) Future prospects

- If there will be a permanent role at the end of the apprenticeship, say so! If vacancy opportunities are undetermined, explain how you are committed to nurturing talent and how the apprentice's training will prepare them for their professional life.

### v) Things to consider

- This is an opportunity to expand upon details on hours and salary (already listed in the 'Apprenticeship Summary') e.g. if Bank Holiday working might be necessary
- Include a statement about your commitment to equal opportunities. Where relevant, stress your commitment to providing reasonable support to disabled applicants throughout the recruitment process. Your application form can ask applicants if they need any support at the interview (however, the applicant is not required to disclose this).
- Include information about public transport links to your premises.

## 'About the employer'

Try not to copy and paste a jargon-filled 'About' section from your company website. Frame in simple terms, what it is you do, why you do it and how you value your staff.

## Offering alternative application methods

Asking applicants to apply through your own channels has benefits. You can control what applicants submit (on 'Find an apprenticeship' applicants respond to three fixed answers: 'What are your strengths?', 'What skills would you like to improve?', 'What are your hobbies and interests?').

The traditional way of accepting applications is through either a CV or generic application form. These can be very daunting for a young person - they may never have completed one before, may be unsure how to answer certain questions or not feel they have much to relative experience to put down

Likewise, CVs can often be an intimidating prospect for young people who have recently left education, and do not have any specific work-related experience. This can even lead to them not submitting an application at all for fear of rejection.

### 'Digital CV'

Salford City Council are piloting a new 'Digital CV' format to help young people showcase their wider skills and experience which are likely to be of interest to employers. These include sporting achievements, volunteering and caring responsibilities. This format can give employers a more visual representation of the young person and a better understanding of the applicant and their general suitability for the apprenticeship position.



I am a keen **sportswoman**; playing cricket for Ashton On Mersey Men's 2<sup>nd</sup> XI and Women's 1<sup>st</sup> XI and **captaining** England rounders. Playing in teams has taught me how to **give and receive respect**, increase my **leadership** and **interpersonal abilities** and has given me **confidence to work with other people effectively**. Throughout my time playing cricket and rounders, I have had articles written about me to promote my success, such as The Cricketer and Messenger News:

<https://www.roundersengland.co.uk/jordi-matthews-from-university-student-to-england-rounders-captain/> and <https://www.messengernewspapers.co.uk/sport/17688048.jordi-sure-shows-her-class-with-hat-tricks-double/>



WHO GAVE YOU  
**YOUR CHANCE?**

**Skills and  
Interests:**

WHO GAVE YOU  
**YOUR CHANCE?**



Salford City Council

**A** APPRENTICESHIPS  
AT SALFORD CITY COLLEGE

## Notifying

It is good practice to notify candidates who were unsuccessful at the written application stage.

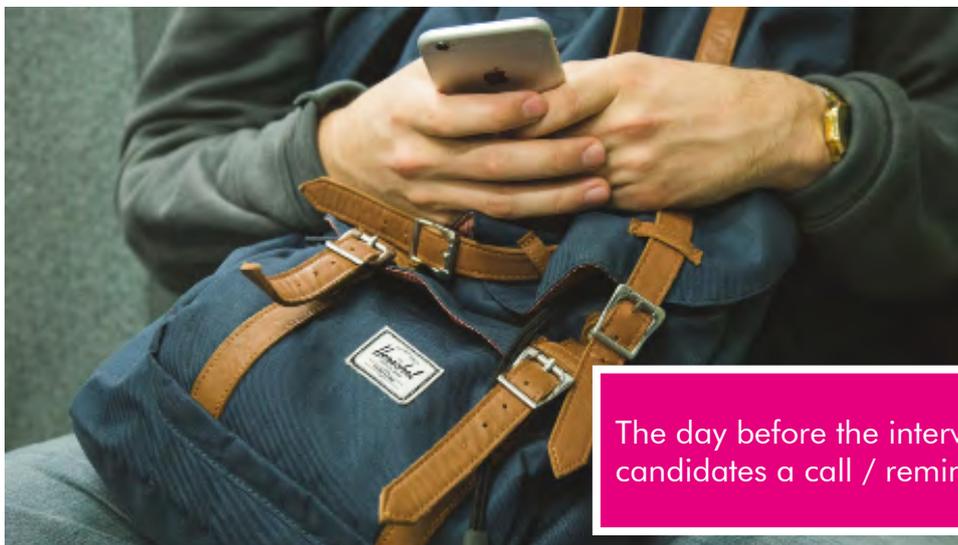
It will benefit the candidate to know how they could improve future applications. It will also help cement in your mind what it is you're looking for – or if you see a common stumbling block, you may need to amend your asks of applicants.

Always take time to provide 1:1 feedback for candidates that made it to interview or assessment centre stage. Consider that those unsuccessful at this stage may fit other opportunities in your supply chain.

In feedback, try to praise where you can, but don't raise false hope. Don't be too pointed though. For example, if a candidate's body language suggested they were overly nervous, don't say, 'we thought you were overly anxious on the day'! Instead, you could say something like, 'You're clearly a very bright and capable person, keep trying to put yourself in new situations and practice being assertive.'

### When inviting candidates to face-to-face selection:

- Ask again if the applicant needs reasonable adjustments making at the selection stage.
- Offer guidance on what to wear.
- Be clear where and when the interview will be taking place (provide public transport information).
- Be specific on what additional information you would like them to bring along (e.g. forms of ID).
- The day / weekend before the interview, send young people a friendly reminder text. You could call - but consider that young people may not pick up an unfamiliar number.
- Outline what the structure of the day will be. If you'd like them to do a practical test don't be mysterious – give an idea as to what the task will be .
- BE PERSONABLE:** list the name and job titles of the interview panel members and say how much you are looking forward to meeting the candidate.



The day before the interview send candidates a call / reminder text

## Selection Processes

### Interview questioning style

- Flip the question around: instead of asking young people where they displayed something (for example, good customer service), ask them to recall a time when they experienced it.
- Encourage young people to draw on experiences from school / college / family.
- Change from competency-based interview techniques to strength or scenario based: 'what would you do' (as opposed to 'what have you done').
- DO ask leading questions if young people are struggling to flesh-out a response.



### Making interview experiences comfortable

- Consider giving the candidates time to look at the interview questions before you interview them.
- Find out about the young person: start the interview by asking about them and their interests.
- Consider asking the young person (in advance) to bring a favourite photo or item to discuss
- Get a young person you currently employ to sit on the interview panel.
- Rather than have an interviewee sit waiting nervously to be called, have a friendly colleague sit with them and chat / show them around the office.
- Interviews are two-way processes. Let the young people ask you questions. Stress that candidates can ask if further clarification is needed at any point.

### Alternative selection processes

- Young people may perform better outside of an interview. Practical activities and work trials can allow candidates to demonstrate that which they may have trouble explaining. Unpaid trial shifts should never constitute more than a few hours work and ideally should be paid. Be sure that tasks performed by young people are related to those they can be expected to perform on the job. Candidates are not there to be exploited for employers' gains.

- If assessing candidates teamwork in a practical group activity like bridge building, consider deliberately withholding briefing instructions. This means the young people have to ask questions (e.g. 'What does the bridge have to support?', 'How big-a-gap must it span?'). After the activity, be sure to ask quieter members what they would have done - they may have been talked over by

## Inductions and mentoring

Apprentices may have very limited experience of the workplace. They may not be aware of expected behaviours that many of us accept as given. The quicker young people find their feet, the quicker they can start displaying their worth and merits.

<b>Before the first day</b>	Ensure the young person knows where to report to on the first day. Be clear on how to get into the building and who they need to ask for. Also, if you have any car parking or parking restrictions make sure these are communicated.
	Clarify the start time. To ease the apprentice in consider a later start / shorter day.
	Provide info on what to wear. Smart / smart-casual mean different things to different people. To avoid confusion and unnecessary stress, provide several dress code examples in pictures.
	Provide a timetable of what the first day will look like.
	Text or call the young person the day before they start – tell them how much you are looking forward to them starting.

<b>On the first day</b>	Be clear on hours and any breaks allowed throughout the day
	Make time to discuss all of the implicit 'unwritten rules' of the workplace. What are the arrangements for personal mobile use? Should the young person answer a colleague's phone? Worried about making a good impression, young people may not realise they can get a hot drink or go to the toilet at any time. Make sure the wider team model the behaviours you want to instil.
	Make introductions to the apprentice's immediate team and give them a tour of the premises.
	Don't expect an apprentice to read all of your policies: the key ones (health and safety, email protocol, internet/mobile usage) should be covered in the induction. Make sure pay and annual leave are explained.
	Include all of the above in an induction pack. This could include a timetable for the first few weeks.

## As you go

Assign a young person a dedicated mentor who is NOT the line manager. This person should exhibit characteristics like openness, confidentiality and trust.

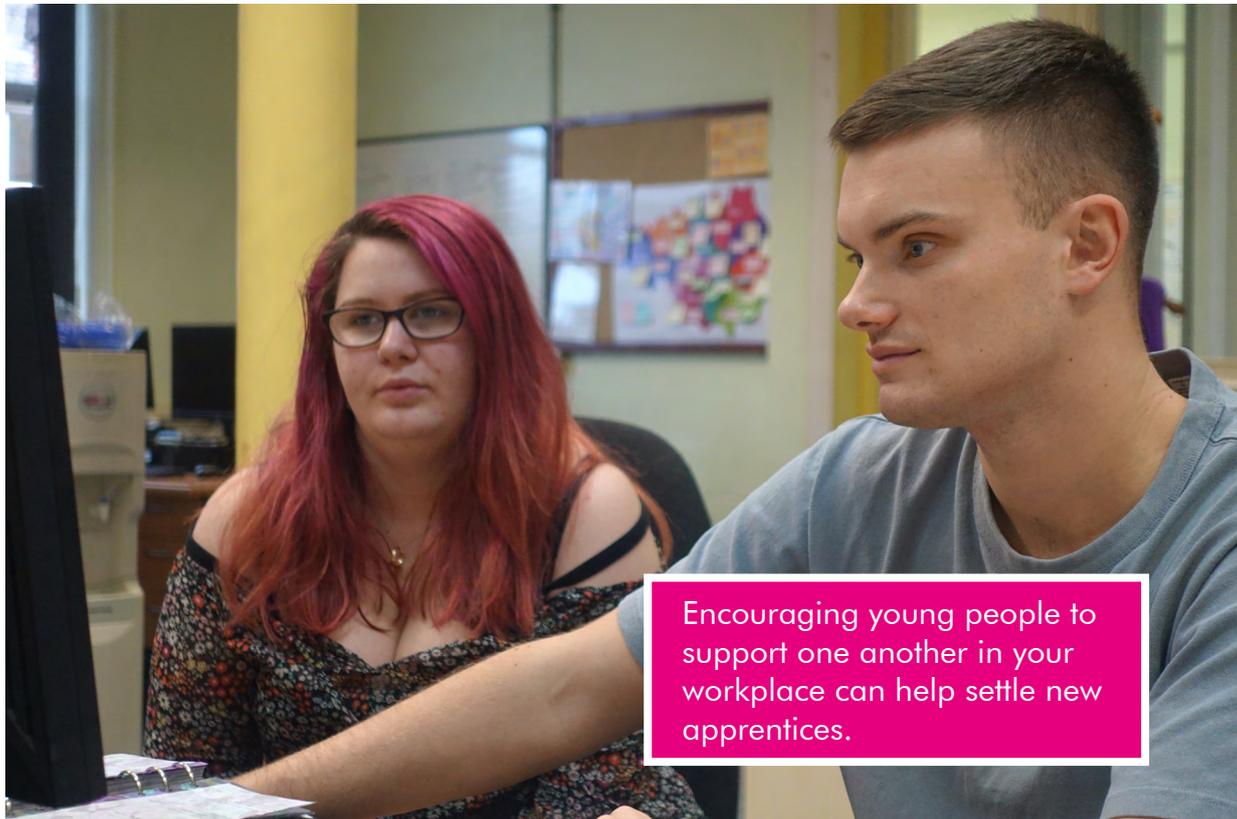
Consider whether or not the young person has done a task before – ask how well they understand what has been asked of them

Find out (ask and observe) where a young person's emerging interests lie – this can have huge future benefit for the business / organisation. Work with your training provider to arrange training around emerging challenges / interests.

Mentor in informal situations (have a brew, step outside the office). Take an interest in the apprentice's individual learning plan and progress.

Don't assume that because a young person is progressing well, there will not be hiccups. Remember, if this is a first job there will be bumps in the road.

Approach any concerning behaviours in private (don't reproach apprentices in front of colleagues, this can be very damaging for self-esteem). Also don't label negative behaviours with statements such as "you're too chatty." The employee won't listen if they feel personally attacked. Instead, focus on discussing why the behaviour is an issue.



Encouraging young people to support one another in your workplace can help settle new apprentices.

GREATER MANCHESTER CENTRE FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION

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