



Apprenticeships

at Group Training Associations

An interview was conducted for this case study with Mark Maudsley, CEO at GTA England and Keith Davies, HR Manager at Silcoms Ltd

Group Training Associations (GTAs) deliver a unique experience to learners and employers alike, developing and delivering outstanding training for industry by industry.

GTAs are characterised by being: employer governed co-operatives (the employers being served make up the board of trustees); limited by guarantee, not-for-profit organisations; often registered charities; born out of the 1960's Industrial Training Act.

GTA England represents a network of 28 member groups in key industrial areas, comprising 24,000 employers (90% of which are SMEs) and 12,000 apprentices. It operates across many sectors although engineering is a common theme throughout the majority of members.

The apprenticeship described here has been developed in partnership with the GTA Alliance Learning and the employer Silcoms Ltd and is typical of GTA programmes designed to meet the needs of the engineering sector.

Recruitment, initial assessment and induction

Often working with the company across its entire workforce development needs, at the outset of the apprenticeship GTA liaises closely with the employer to identify the specific and additional units required of the apprenticeship in order to meet business requirements.

GTA's dedicated recruitment team works with the member company seeking to recruit, train and employ young people. Recruitment methods used include advertising, open days, careers fairs and Saturday engineering clubs.

Potential learners are assessed in maths and English prior to starting an apprenticeship to ensure that any additional support needs are identified and supported to enable achievement. At the start of the programme a Learner Agreement is signed by the employer and the apprentice to ensure that both parties are aware of the requirements of the apprenticeship.

Employed status is the norm with the host company at the start of the programme and each apprentice participates in a one-week induction at the GTA training centre. This ensures that all learners understand the requirements of their chosen apprenticeship and how they will be supported throughout their training. Following induction, a period of sheltered off-the-job training, lasting between eight and 12 months, is undertaken at the GTA training centre.

On-the-job training

In all company placements for apprentices, GTA ensures that dedicated in-house mentors and supervisors are allocated to support apprentices in the workplace and provide guidance on aspects of the learning programme including work procedures, health and safety, equipment and machinery. It is imperative that apprentices have this support available to them to ensure they fully develop into their role and become part of the staff team.

Although apprentices undertake initial training in the GTA learning centre, they are ultimately tasked with understanding their employer's specific products and/or services, and the mentor is there to support them in this challenge. GTA England is developing a training programme to support workplace mentors in this important role.

GTA encourages employers to rotate jobs across teams in the company so that the apprentice gains a broad appreciation and develops competence organisation-wide

Coaching, mentoring, assessment, review and feedback

A blended approach to teaching and coaching is used to enable learners to develop a rounded approach to their specific area. This is conducted through targeted workshop training and classroom delivery by GTA's team of qualified tutors, all of whom have several years of industry experience.

In addition to each company's in-house mentors and supervisors, GTA's Learning and Development Officers (LDO) also conduct one-to-one coaching sessions with learners in the workplace. This supports the completion of the apprentice's NVQ and, in partnership with employers, ensures that training is current and relevant.

Assessment is carried out both in the learner's workplace and at GTA's Engineering Training Centre using the latest technologies. All GTA staff are issued with kitbags, including laptops, mobile phones, iPads and dictaphones. This allows them to capture a variety of authentic evidence of the apprentice's learning and progress which can then be uploaded to a dedicated e-portfolio system.

All learners are reviewed by their dedicated LDO every six weeks. This is triangulated with the employer to generate a complete review of both on- and off-the-job training. At the GTA centre, learners' progress is reviewed weekly to ensure that they are on target and on track with tasks.

Robust feedback is provided each time a learner submits a piece of evidence and actions on how to improve as well as areas of strength and weakness are identified. During this process learners are encouraged to write reflective feedback to help develop their analytical skills.



Off-the-job education and training

Engineering apprenticeships are work-based programmes that combine on-the-job training with study. They take approximately four years to complete and lead to nationally recognised qualifications.

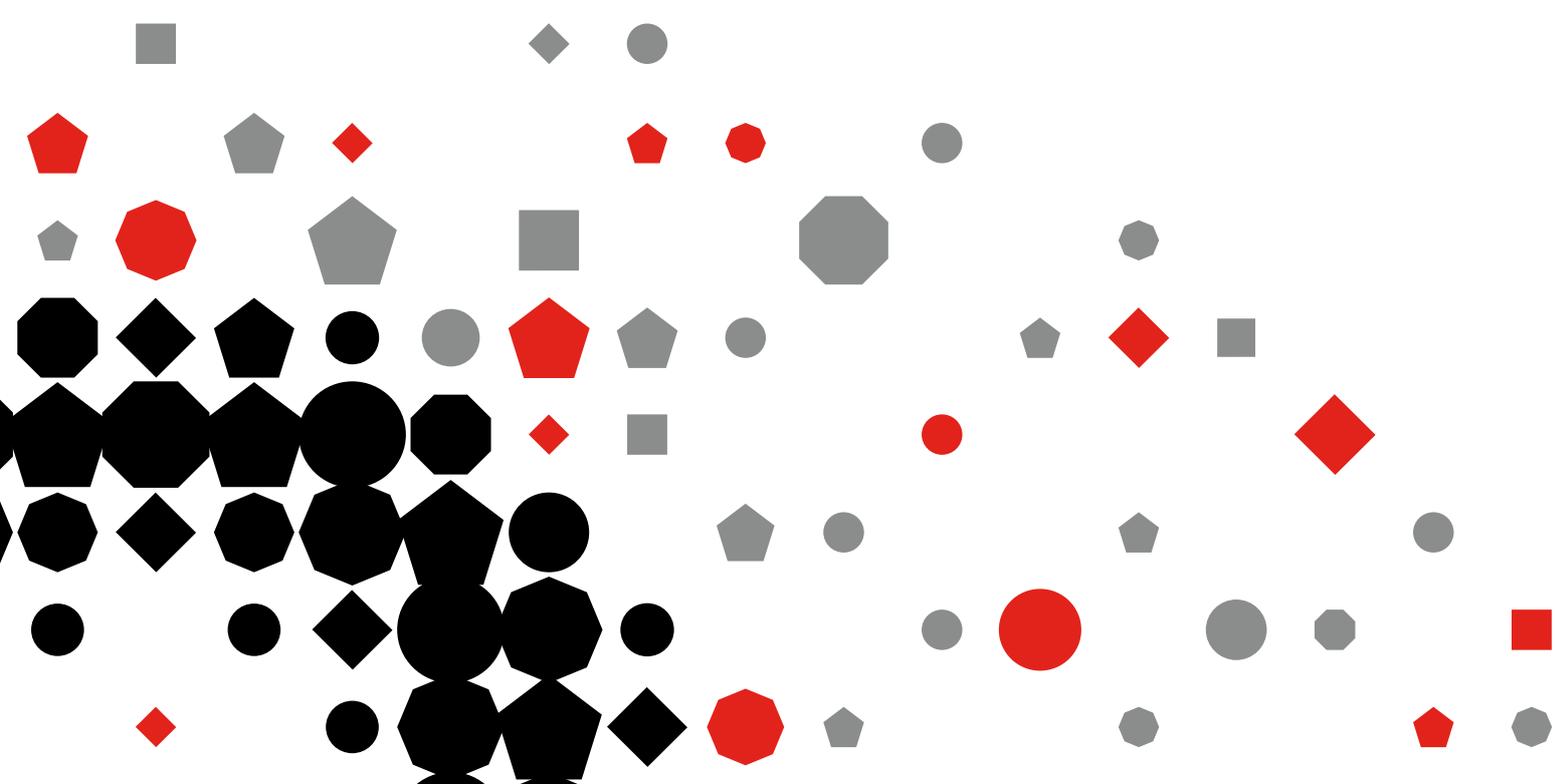
The Alliance Learning Engineering Apprenticeship scheme was set up to meet the needs of the employer. At the GTA training centre, delivery reflects the rigours of the workplace in terms of both attendance patterns and expectations of behaviour. GTA staff are selected for their occupational competence and knowledge and are often recruited directly from industry. The apprenticeship can be tailored to business needs to ensure maximum return. Delivery arrangements are flexible and include an initial period of up to eight months of off-the-job training and block release. This enables the development of occupational competence and is particularly welcomed by companies. The benefit to an employer of block release is twofold. Firstly, the apprentice gets one-to-one training in the basic skills of engineering and secondly, they are made aware and learn the importance of health and safety requirements prior to entering the workplace. Alternative modes of attendance are offered, particularly to cater for the needs of SMEs, and these can include one week's attendance in every six at the GTA training centre.

In later years, apprentices attend the centre on a day release basis throughout their programme to acquire underpinning technical knowledge. This is supplemented by GTA's on-line learning system which can be accessed from the workplace.

Communication is both rigorous and essential throughout the apprenticeship programme and employers visit the centre regularly to ensure that progress is made within the defined period.

Mastery

Mastery is achieved through successful completion of each of the learning processes: individual programme design; off-the-job foundation training at the GTA centre in both technical and academic areas; and on-line delivery. Together these processes enable the apprentice to become competent, safe and productive in the workplace. Vital throughout is the knowledge of industrial and technical business practices inherent in GTA's staff. This ensures that communication with the employer is relevant, timely and focused on business needs and can aid the identification of additional training requirements beyond the defined framework.



Employer sign-off

Throughout the apprenticeship training programme the employer is intrinsically involved in reviewing and signing off progress. At the GTA centre learners are initially coached by experienced tutors within each unit. Once a degree of competence is achieved, they are then required to complete tasks that demonstrate their ability in the specific unit specification. Within their employer company, each apprentice is monitored via corporate quality procedures. For example, at Silcoms apprentices must manufacture components that comply with customers' drawings and quality requirements (such as tolerances and surface finish).

The end point assessment is carried out by the employer on completion of the apprenticeship framework in conjunction with GTA. Each apprentice is reviewed for overall competence in the skill sets required for the manufacturing area in which they are to be based.

Progression

On completion of their training programme all apprentices are further integrated into the workforce with Contracts of Employment and begin shift working at the appropriate level of skilled pay.

Apprentices who have the ability, work ethic and desire to progress are identified and offered the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills via further education. It is not untypical in GTAs that at least sixty percent of apprentices progress and have either completed or are currently undertaking BTEC or HNC qualifications. These qualifications are usually taken over two years and if the apprentice is required to attend the GTA training centre or college, they are classed as skilled and receive their salary for attendance.

According to Alliance Learning's statistical data, 96% of all learners who achieved their apprenticeships in 2013/2014 stayed on as full time members of staff within the company. In the majority of cases an apprentice is paid in line with skilled staff once they have completed their training.

Business benefits

Silcoms Ltd recognises and appreciates the tangible benefits that the GTA apprenticeship programme brings to the business of skilled pay.

'The apprenticeship programme provides the company with a young workforce capable of meeting future demands and the growth requirements of the business. Ultimately, this type of training provides the highly qualified engineers of the future to ensure both the aerospace sector's and the country's economic future.'

Keith Davies, HR Manager Silcoms Ltd

More information about GTA England can be found at:

www.gta-england.co.uk

