



THE PILOT

A centre's perspective

In May 2013, OCR launched a pilot traineeship designed to help young people in areas of high unemployment in Kent gain skills and experience to secure places on Apprenticeships or other sustainable employment.

The Kent pilot, titled Step2Work and run by OCR and the Kent Association of Training Organisations (KATO), was set up to offer young people in Thanet and Gravesend an opportunity to improve their employability and readiness for work. It was also designed as a precursor for the launch of OCR's Cambridge Traineeships in August 2013, which will have input from the pilot scheme fed in.

One of two companies selected to run Step2Work was Profile Development and Training Ltd. The company, established in 2008 and based in Broadstairs in Kent, delivers vocational training throughout the county and the South East of England.

"We have been working with OCR for five years and we are also members of KATO," explains Profile's Managing Director, Andrea Webb. "When we became aware of the launch of Cambridge Traineeships, we were keen to see if we could assist with the trial. As a vocational training provider, Profile focuses equally on the needs of employers as well as the needs of learners and we felt that we could provide a bespoke solution to suit both."

"Local businesses really took to the idea, including solicitors, an estate agency, insurance company, cafe and an accountancy firm, all of whom signed up," explains Andrea.

Meanwhile, the recruitment of potential young learners was proving to be a tougher task.

"Reaching out to young unemployed people is not easy because it's quite difficult to make contact with them," says Niki. "We went out to the local Job Centres to find and interview young people, but many of the Centres didn't really understand it and even said that unemployed people risked losing their benefits because they would be working more than two days a week."

"The individuals we spoke with were all largely saying the same thing – they couldn't progress into an Apprenticeship or employment because they lacked real work experience, even if they did have good quality qualifications in place," explains Niki.

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"The companies understandably wanted a say in who they might take on, so we set up a 'speed dating' day at the Kent Innovation Centre," explains Andrea. "We had eight employers and each candidate had five minutes to come in and present themselves. It gave the employers an opportunity to assess the candidates that we had selected."

The traineeship programme has been delivered to the learners by Profile using a combination of classroom work on employability, plus 15 hours each week in a working environment with each of their employers.

A focal point for the group of learners has been a charity event.

"We proposed to the students that they should focus some of their time on organising a charity event, half expecting that it would be a relatively low key affair, such as a walk or cake baking," says Andrea. "Instead, they opted to put on a Family Fun Day for CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young) because several of them were familiar with the charity and wanted to help."

"They used their individual skills and knowledge, as well as their new learning during the course, to do things such as design leaflets, produce costings, encourage local businesses to get involved, sell stand space, and promote the event locally."

"From our experience, traineeships are a really good way of preparing young people for Apprenticeships and employment," concludes Andrea.

"The employers have provided valid opportunities for the learners to get real world work experience, and in fact some of them will progress into employment at the end of the course or go on to do an Apprenticeship. It has given them options they didn't have previously."

"Equally, the OCR qualifications that we're using are very good indeed. The employability skills provide us with a great framework within which to teach. For traineeships, you don't have to do anything other than maths and English, but taking a technical unit, such as Customer Service or IT, benefits them and offers more purpose."