

Apprentice army helping



It is well documented that the growing skills gap in the workforce has the potential to slow the UK's recovery post Covid-19.

With competition for candidates at an all-time high and employers penning contracts that will keep their valuable skilled workers in place for the foreseeable future, recruiters cannot rely on the luxury of hiring the complete package.

The channel must instead look to a young workforce that is showing an increasing interest in the technology sector.

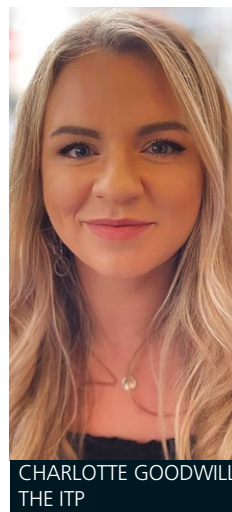
To build a framework for success we asked our industry experts how they are getting the right people through the door, what strategies they are employing to skill up apprentices and how they are setting young people up for long careers in the industry.

Photo by Mizuno K



JAMES BUTLER
CLOUD BUSINESS

"Our apprentice scheme gives ambitious people of all ages an opportunity to begin their career in IT –that's something that really excites us. The real reward for us is that we get to spot and nurture emerging skills in the digital and data space. Our apprentices are here to learn from us, but we know we can learn a lot from them too. We provide training and hands-on experience to develop talent. We give our apprentices meaningful work with a real focus on the human aspect of technology; that's something that's difficult to learn until you're in the right environment. It's no secret that the job market is becoming much more competitive for employers. We manage all our recruitment in-house, to help us attract people who fit our culture. Supporting existing team members to upskill and fulfil their ambitions has always been important to us."



CHARLOTTE GOODWILL
THE ITP

"The Institute of Telecoms Professionals apprenticeship scheme was set up in 2013 specifically to tackle the skills shortage which was an issue as far back as then. Since then, we have refined our recruitment strategy, and in recent years have focused on challenging perceptions around careers in our sector. We've found that hiring based on personality, rather than skills is a great way to get the right people through the door. IT and tech jobs shouldn't be pigeon-holed. We're recruiting young people into roles without entry requirements, which we have found has encouraged diversity. 36% of our apprentice intake this year has been female, and we are determined to increase this stat. We've supported our apprentices in many ways, but one which works well is setting them up with a mentor to support and guide them as they work their way up the career ladder."



MICHAEL J THORNTON
KSM TELECOM

"Taking on an apprentice is not about adding an employee to your team at a cheaper cost and then getting them to be the office gopher. An apprentice is an investment in youth, their education, their future and the development of you and your business, and it must be viewed in a professional way. Picking the right apprenticeship provider is vital. Make sure they have a pathway planner who will work closely with your apprentice throughout their time with you. This is critical and means they have external support. Also, invest in external training for your apprentice. Our IT and Infrastructure Technician completed training programmes with Microsoft, WebEx, Hosted Voice, network infrastructure and much more. KSM Telecom's apprentice, Bailey Odling-Thomas, gained a distinction and was nominated for Apprentice of the Year nationally and his efforts were recognised when KSM Telecom won the Channel Champions award for its apprenticeship programme."



CAMILLA KARM
REDSQUID

"Last summer we restarted our apprentice programme at Redsquid, because we wanted to make a difference to young adults and help them start a career in tech in a difficult job market. We have since hired seven across four different departments, and now develop them so they can continue their careers within Redsquid and make sure we have the workforce we will need in the future. To make sure they become successful we have launched personalised development programmes based on their personal interest. As they develop and become more equipped, we review the plan to make sure that they, and Redsquid, can continue to grow together. Finally, it is important for us that they all feel like they have a valued voice, and they can contribute as we grow. To make sure they do, we hold 'Apprentice Days' where they can utilise their creativity and work together as a team."



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CHRIS MORRISEY
LILY COMMS

"Apprentices have always played a vital part in the recruitment process at Lily; however, it is more important now than ever as finding younger employees can be extremely challenging in a saturated high-tech area like Leeds. Offering apprenticeship schemes helps combat this as it opens a door into the industry, whilst also providing training and personal career development. We concentrate on a 'what's in it for them' approach, showing potential candidates the benefits they will receive when joining our company, including access to our in-house training portal, which we find appeals strongly to the Gen Z and Millennial target audience. Developing people in all levels of their career is important to us and apprentices are no exception and something that has proved successful for us, with many of our past apprentices now working in higher-level, full-time roles."



CHRISTINA PENDLETON
INTERCITY

"In response to the skills shortage, Intercity is committed to nurturing the workforce of tomorrow, with apprentices now making up 6% of our team. Our apprenticeship scheme has a multifaceted approach, with on-the-job training, specialist training from learning providers, and sessions with other businesses, such as Jaguar Land Rover, to offer insight into other industries. Apprentices are also invited to sit in on Operational Board Meetings to gain exposure to senior leaders and are given the opportunity to present key learnings to our Board. Wherever possible, we try to promote internally. Our apprenticeship programme has transformed our recruitment processes, as we now have a fantastic talent pool who are ready for promotion upon course completion. Offering an excellent work life helps maintain our staff and attract fresh talent, and we were delighted to be recognised as one of the Best Telecoms Company to Work for in Q1 and Q2."



ROB STEVENS
JOLA

"Jola has offered several apprenticeships within our Technical Support and Development teams. The apprenticeship scheme enables us to identify talent looking to start their careers in IT. We can recruit and train these employees on Jola-specific technologies along with general IT skills whilst enabling the apprentice to obtain additional qualifications to further their careers. Within my department, we have successfully developed four apprentices who have passed their apprenticeship and are now in full-time employment within the business. The combination of encouraging staff to grow their educational qualifications alongside their practical skillset has worked really well for both Jola and its employees."



KEVIN BOYLE
CLOUDCELL

"Cloudcell Technologies launched our first apprenticeship scheme in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, recruiting two young apprentices into the business at a time of increased demand for resource. Since then, we've recruited an additional apprentice, making a total of three apprentices in our business at present. We've found the support from the government around apprentice training to be a valuable tool for structuring the recruitment and training process, as well as skills development. We focus on circulating our apprentices through the different sections of our business to ensure they understand all the key functions, including time in the field, working hands-on with our engineering team, to really understand the connectivity products and services we offer. We're really proud of the progress our apprentices have made, and they are a valued part of our business."



DARREN GARLAND
PROVU

"We began our apprenticeship scheme in early 2015 to support our growing business and develop a new generation of specialist staff. When recruiting, we take a person-first approach. It is important to us that our staff suit our company ethos and are hungry for knowledge. If they get on with the team and want to learn we will provide everything they need in terms of training and mentoring. Our apprentices are encouraged to develop skills that are outside their core apprenticeship. Being a relatively small company, they gain exposure into areas that would not normally be part of an apprenticeship. Depending on the individual's capabilities, we will quickly help our apprentices to advance by giving them responsibility, helping them to develop key skills which go beyond the remit of their course. There is no doubt an overhead to training an apprentice, but it is well worth the time invested."



OLLIE BENN
NEOCI

"As a recruitment business, Neoci has hired a mix of experienced and non-experienced people to take the business forward. We haven't considered an apprentice scheme before, but it is something we would look at in future. Although the cost of apprenticeships is relatively small, I think it's important that a company can invest the time and effort in training and supporting an apprentice to allow them to fully develop and add value to the business. I have heard of some companies using apprentices as a cheaper hiring option, without being prepared or able to support their growth. Not every business is in the position to offer this, especially if they are a start-up, however if used correctly, the apprenticeship scheme can be hugely beneficial for both employer and employee, offering development and experience to the apprentice and the opportunity for the employer to nurture their own talent."

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