Tips for Interviewing Apprentices

How should you select the candidate?
How you select your apprentices will depend on the age and previous experience of the candidates. If you are recruiting 16–18-year-olds straight out of school or college, they might have some part-time work experience but that will be different from full-time work. They might not have the same confidence and ability to communicate their skills as more experienced workers. In this case, conventional interview techniques are not really appropriate. Instead, we recommend using more informal approaches assessing their enthusiasm rather than academic credentials and technical skills (please see below for some examples of more informal methods).

If you are dealing with older candidates or candidates who have experience of the workplace, you may want to ask some more job-relevant questions. Essentially, you don’t need to redevelop your recruitment from scratch, but look at what you are doing already and adapt it to apprentices. In some cases you might already be recruiting 16-year-olds into other roles in your organisation, so you can take those recruitment methods and apply them to your apprenticeship programme. Even if you currently don’t recruit young people, you can adapt your adult recruitment methods to your apprenticeship scheme as it will be key that these are right for your organisation.

One option would be to hold assessment centres where candidates can demonstrate their potential through group exercises that are observed by their potential managers. The activities could be designed to measure their potential, aptitude and/or skills depending on your organisation’s requirements, and scored against outcome-based criteria. This will enable you to make a fair selection and choose the right candidate for your organisation without relying entirely on conventional interview techniques.
Case Study: Recruiting Apprentices with no prior work experience

The property company Ringley Group, recently short-listed for a national training award, is an SME working with the London Apprenticeship Company (LAC) to offer apprenticeships for people aged 16–23. They have taken a different approach to recruiting apprentices:

‘There is nothing worse than interviewing a person with no work experience as they have nothing to tell,’ says Ringley’s Managing Director MaryAnne Bowring, ‘so we have developed a speed interviewing technique whereby we invite up to eight candidates and get them talk to our staff about their holidays. This helps to establish their relationship and communication skills, which will help differentiate between candidates with similar qualifications.’

What should you look for when you recruit Apprentices?

What you should look for when recruiting a young person will need to be, as for the recruitment of any other member of staff, connected to the core activity of your organisation. For example, Siemens look for good engineering skills, so they do aptitude tests that will tell them if somebody has the right cognitive skills. They also send their candidates up a tower to test their ability to cope with heights if they would be working on wind farms.

‘Most 16-year-olds have the same CV,’ says Martin Hottass, UK Skills Business Partner at Siemens, ‘so we ask them to bring in something they made in school. This gives them something to talk about and can also demonstrate their engineering skills.’

‘We look for passion and commitment in a young person,’ says Andrew Moreton, Apprenticeships Manager at Capgemini UK. ‘The rest we can teach them when they are with us.’

This is confirmed by Graham Schumacher, Head of Development Services, Rolls-Royce plc: ‘We recruit for attitude and train for skills and knowledge’
Sample apprenticeship interview questions

Below are some sample questions that you may want to use when interviewing an apprentice.

It is important to remember that this may be the young person’s first job interview, so they may need guidance and support through the interview. It is best if you ask no more than 8-10 questions.

- Tell us why you have applied for this apprenticeship
- What do you think we are looking for in an apprentice?
- The training for the apprenticeship includes undertaking qualifications while working full-time, and may at times be demanding. How would you organise yourself to balance your study and job, and ensure you complete your work on time?
- How would you rate your organisational skills on a level of 1-5 (1 being the lowest)? Can you give us an example to illustrate this?
- Can you give an example of when you have had to work independently and use your initiative either through study or work?
- Can you tell us how you cope under pressure and in stressful situations?
- Can you give an example of when you have had to deal with a difficult situation either in work, life or school, and how you managed it?
- Can you tell us about something new that you have learned in the last 6 months and what you have gained from it?
- What do you understand by a customer-focussed service, and how do you think it will apply to this job?
- What do you understand by working in a team, and what are 3 important attributes of a good team player?
- Where do you see yourself in 3/5 years time?
- Is there anything we haven’t asked you that you would like to tell us about yourself to support your application?