



Co-funding of technology based equipment with employers

Sector area:
Engineering



Commissioned and funded by

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1: CONTACT DETAILS

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2: WHAT DID YOU SET OUT TO DEVELOP AND WHY?

We aimed to develop and deliver highly skilled technical apprentices for the rail sector. We had identified that there was a skills gap in this area and with large projects such as Crossrail the demand for appropriately trained staff, particularly at Levels 3 and Level 4 was high.

3: THE PROCESS - WHAT DID YOU ACTUALLY DO?

We developed a rail academy which was launched in September 2014 and which houses a station environment complete with platform, track, customer information system, CCTV and trackside equipment.

The concept of the rail academy was used to attract and forge partnerships with some of the biggest employers in the rail sector including Thales, Bombardier, Eurostar, Atkins, Docklands Light Railway (DLR) and Telent. Some employers such as Thales, DLR and Telent agreed to co-fund specific equipment that they wanted their apprentices to be trained on how to use, install and maintain. For example we are training 40 Level 3 and Level 4 apprentices for Thales who funded the installation of a specific railway signalling system that they wanted their apprentices to understand and to be able to carry out practical tasks on.



The equipment provided by Thales was match funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and these funds were used to build the network infrastructure around the telecommunication systems, along with additional elements such as cabling, the track and the station.

Similarly Telent wanted their apprentices to be trained on a specific telecommunications system and co-funded the system itself and the supporting network equipment. Using SFA funding allowed us then to purchase racks, cabling and equipment to connect to the PA systems and CCTV.

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4: WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS THIS MADE?

For learners having access to equipment that they will use in the workplace puts what they are doing in college into a purposeful context. They are motivated by the fact that they are developing the skills and knowledge that will enable them to do better in their job roles and remain fully engaged.

For employers the purchasing of specific technical equipment ensures that they receive a pipeline of apprentices who fully understand and are confident in using systems, procedures and equipment that are relevant to their job roles. The process ensures that the employer influences and 'buys into' flexible and tailored packages of training that meet their needs and which ultimately saves them time and money by reducing the need for additional on-the-job training back in the workplace.

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‘Thales and PROCAT have worked closely and collaboratively to provide an engaging and exciting learning opportunity for young people with aspirations to work in engineering in the rail sector. A variety of skills are needed in the industry for the future and it was important for us to invest in an apprenticeship scheme that is attractive to the next generation of high-calibre engineers and offers real opportunity for them to learn. Working with PROCAT has enabled us to do exactly that.’ Gayna Hall, Head of Communications at Thales.

As an organisation the co-funding process has opened up an essential dialogue between the college and employers which has resulted in enhanced course content and the development of staff skills. The employers concerned support the installation of the equipment and provide targeted training on its use. Occasionally some will come on site and deliver a training session directly to their apprentices modelling useful CPD for our staff.

5: LESSONS LEARNT

- We are working in a demand-led environment which will only increase with the introduction of the levy. As a college we have recognised that employers are discerning and will not fund ‘off the shelf’ training. By listening to their needs and developing a flexible, ‘gold standard’ training offer we have secured their confidence and belief that we can offer high value programmes at a competitive cost – which is key to any sustainable business model.
- Co-funding of equipment ensures longer term ‘buy-in’ and commitment from an employer.
- Employer links can be a challenge especially if two employers want their apprentices training on specific systems that are completely different. We have learnt to take the time to understand and ask why from the employer perspective a particular technical requirement is needed and then see if any common ground can be established.



- We spent a great deal of time considering how the technical equipment that was purchased would be embedded within teaching to secure better outcomes for our learners. It is no good purchasing equipment that will be accessible to only one or two students at a time or that remains in the corner of a workshop because no one knows how to use it.
 - We committed to a programme of staff training – it is a challenge to release staff but we set up a rolling programme of training and built into this development time for tutors to come back and experiment with what they had learnt. The development time is essential as it enables staff to exchange ideas with each other and become confident with the technology themselves before they go ahead and use it with learners. In our experience it takes a year to embed the use of new technology based equipment fully into the curriculum.
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