

DURHAM CONSTABULARY

The organisation

Since 2012, Durham Constabulary has offered a highly successful apprenticeship programme attracting new entrants to the organisation, and more recently offering apprenticeships to existing staff. HR decided with the support of their training provider, to establish their own apprenticeship scheme. In the last five years this has gone from strength to strength, largely due to the excellent partnership arrangements in place.

From an initial cohort of ten apprentices in 2012, regular recruitment of individuals has led to a steady increase in apprentices since the scheme began.

The approach

Durham Constabulary worked closely with Derwentside College for several months to develop the now successful programme. Vacancies are open to all and the college supports the constabulary in attracting new recruits through hosting events, specific police career evenings, engagement with local projects and an annual awards evening where apprenticeship success is celebrated. This recruitment strategy saves the constabulary both time and money.

A flexible approach to training is taken to meet the requirements of the apprenticeship, the needs of the apprentice and the team they are working in. Apprentices receive on-site training on a protected time basis, which the college delivers. All apprentices follow the same occupational apprenticeship and therefore can come together to share experiences, directed learning and gain support from others working in different teams and locations in the constabulary.

All apprentices are treated exactly as other members of staff in a 'one employee' culture where apprentices work alongside staff of all levels including senior ranking and uniformed officers and managers. This helps apprentices to see the wider picture and recognise the value of the job they are doing.

Line managers are informed about the support and guidance needed for each apprentice, what to expect from assessor and apprentice, including how the apprentice will increasingly contribute to the team. Apprentices are encouraged to apply for permanent vacancies, ensuring that the talent they develop is kept within the organisation.

Existing staff - including new managers, police constables and even detective inspectors - have been offered and accepted opportunities to upskill via apprenticeship training which helps meet workforce needs and fills skills gaps. For example, many have taken up leadership and management apprenticeships.

The challenges

In the early stages some managers were nervous about having young people in the organisation, as well as unsure of the level of support and guidance they would be expected to provide. To overcome this, the HR team worked with managers to raise their understanding of apprenticeships and what their responsibilities would be. The benefits were soon reinforced by the on-going positive experience of managing and working with apprentices.

The constabulary faced a further challenge where apprentices could not be exposed to certain aspects of the role, resulting in there not being sufficient work to do. This situation was quickly resolved by moving the apprentice to another department to ensure that they were able to cover all elements of their apprenticeship.

The benefits

One of the key benefits has been the increase of young people coming into the police force, bringing in new talent and helping to shift the existing age profile of employees. Apprenticeships are also providing a structured learning programme for both new and existing staff at all levels.

Apprenticeships provide excellent opportunities for young people to work in a diverse range of roles from Safer Neighbourhood Units to Scientific Support, which attracts a 'steady stream' of applicants. Time invested in training is soon repaid as the apprentice increases their skills, knowledge and understanding of their role.