

APPRENTICESHIP WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: FINAL PROJECT OVERVIEW

**Sector Specific Barriers: Mental Wellbeing in the Health Sector – A
Collaborative Project**

Dynamic Training (UK) Limited

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Sector Specific Barriers: Mental Wellbeing in the Health Sector

Please note your project overview should highlight the benefits of your Apprenticeship Workforce Development (AWD) project to others, who are working to improve the quality of their apprenticeship delivery. It should include the impact on others which may include your organisation/s, employer partners, stakeholders, and apprentices.

Project Overview: The problem and why this project is important

Briefly describe what your project is all about. Please include why you felt it was important to do an AWD Collaborative Project. What key issues or challenges were you aiming to address that would support quality improvement in your apprenticeship delivery? Tell the reader about the specific objectives and why they mattered. Use simple, relatable terms.

Problem Statement

Our project focused on addressing a critical challenge in the healthcare sector: improving apprenticeship completion rates by effectively supporting learners with mental health issues. The question guiding our efforts were, "How can interventions, strategies, and techniques be effectively implemented to support learners with mental health issues in the healthcare sector to improve apprenticeship completion rates?" In the aftermath of the pandemic, mental health challenges have become more prevalent, significantly impacting staff retention and apprenticeship success. This project sought to mitigate these issues by providing targeted support throughout the apprenticeship journey.

Importance of the AWD Collaborative Project

The decision to undertake an AWD Collaborative Project was driven by the urgent need for a coordinated approach to tackle mental health challenges affecting apprentices. By collaborating with NHS Trusts and other stakeholders, we aimed to harness diverse expertise and resources, creating a robust framework that addresses mental health issues comprehensively. This collaborative effort is crucial for ensuring that our interventions are both effective and scalable, ultimately enhancing the quality of apprenticeship delivery across the healthcare sector (and other sectors) via detailed, structured templated toolkits to support replication of delivery.

Key Issues and Challenges

The initiative aims to tackle high apprenticeship withdrawal rates due to mental health issues, affecting 15% of non-completers. Objectives include creating a reusable

toolkit for mental health support across sectors, addressing mental wellbeing beyond healthcare, and improving apprenticeship completion rates. These efforts focus on enhancing individual outcomes and ensuring a resilient healthcare workforce by directly addressing mental health challenges.

Project Activities: Making it Happen

Walk the reader through the steps taken in your project. What were the key activities? How did the partner organisations work together to deliver the project?

Our project focused on addressing mental health challenges among healthcare apprentices, particularly those in Level 2 and 3 clinical programmes. Initial data showed these apprentices were disproportionately affected, with 93% citing mental health as a reason for dropping out. We targeted Band 2 and 3 NHS workforce members, who typically start at these apprenticeship levels, leveraging Dynamic Training's relationships with over 80 NHS Trusts.

Key Activities and Strategies:

1. **Target Audience and Sector Focus:** We identified Level 2 and 3 clinical apprentices as our primary audience due to their vulnerability to mental health issues. The healthcare sector was chosen for its significance and existing NHS connections, ensuring relevant interventions.
2. **Collaboration with Partners:** Partner organisations provided insights and resources, crucial for designing effective strategies. This included sharing best practices and co-developing training materials tailored to healthcare apprentices' needs.
3. **Employer Engagement:** Effective communication with partners was vital. We used MS Teams for real-time discussions, scheduled regular meetings, and shared information via email to maintain alignment. A comprehensive implementation plan and terms of reference established clear collaboration frameworks.
4. **Development of a Mental Health Strategy:** The project catalysed the creation of Dynamic Training's mental health strategy, refined through focus group insights and employer engagement.
5. **Focus Groups:** Conducted with current apprentices and those who withdrew, these groups provided insights into mental health challenges and support needs. Feedback helped adapt our Learner Mental Health Strategy, emphasising early identification and tailored interventions.
6. **Thematic Study and Data Analysis:** A thematic study analysed focus group transcripts, ensuring participants' experiences were accurately captured. This informed our understanding of mental health challenges.
7. **Pre-Enrolment Screening:** We developed a mental well-being screening tool using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) to establish baseline mental well-being levels and identify risk factors.
8. **Workshop Content Development:** Workshops addressed issues like stress management and resilience, tailored to apprentices' and employers' needs based on focus group feedback.

9. **Internal Practice Changes:** We developed a comprehensive Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, fostering open conversations about staff mental wellbeing and balancing workloads to prevent stress.
10. **Adjustments to Planned Activities:** We shifted from Mental Health First Aid workshops to focus on compassion fatigue and crisis recognition, addressing evolving staff and apprentice needs.

Collaboration and Partnership: Partnerships with NHS Trusts like Great Ormond Street Hospital and Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust were crucial. Partners provided continuous feedback, shared views, promoted activities, and engaged in shaping strategies, enhancing our understanding of mental health issues.

Completion and Rationale for Unmet Activities: All planned activities were completed, with necessary adjustments to ensure relevance. The pivot from internal Mental Health First Aid workshops to compassion fatigue and crisis recognition programmes addressed pressing issues effectively.

Through these efforts, we laid the groundwork for improved mental health support for apprentices, setting a precedent for future initiatives. Our collaborative approach ensured alignment and commitment to project success.

Overcoming challenges

Share challenges faced along the way. What unexpected hurdles arose? How did the team adapt?

Key Challenges Faced

Scope Creep: The project targeted a specific group of apprentices, but employer partners requested the inclusion of line managers and learners from various sectors. Although this expansion would have revealed barriers to mental health support, particularly from managers lacking awareness of mental health crises we stayed focus on the project brief that excluded line managers, seeing this as potential for a future project or research.

Employer Engagement and Time Constraints: Scheduling conflicts arose due to rigid rosters set 12 weeks in advance (health sector), limiting learner participation in focus groups and workshops. These constraints were beyond the control of senior apprenticeship leads, impacting engagement. To adapt, we expanded the audience beyond the four NHS Trust partners to include all employers with Level 2 and 3 clinical health apprentices engaged with Dynamic Training, doubling participant numbers in focus groups. Doubling the number of workshops allowed greater flexibility and reach, mitigating scheduling conflicts and ensuring broader participation

Project Timeline Management: To maintain the timeline, content was developed in advance, allowing for necessary adaptations without starting from scratch. Workshops increased from one to five to accommodate the broader audience. We recommend extending future projects to a 9-month duration, considering reporting structures and potential leader absences during July-August. By planning content ahead, we swiftly incorporated feedback and adjusted, increasing workshops from one to five. This ensured responsiveness to evolving needs.

Monitoring and Reporting: Reporting was conducted both internally and externally. Externally, we reported to project partners monthly and directly to the ETF via an experienced mentor. Internally, a senior manager managed the project, reporting monthly on objectives, outcomes, challenges, and mitigation strategies.

Understanding the Term “Mental Health”: Focus groups revealed that "mental health" often carries negative connotations, impeding open communication. As one participant noted, "I think if people don't understand what mental health needs are, they don't have any idea how to support people." Through discussions, we shifted focus to "mental well-being," offering a broader, positive perspective on emotional, psychological, and social health. This shift aimed to create a supportive environment where learners feel comfortable discussing experiences without fear of judgment.

Project Outputs/Resources

Please list your project outputs/resources and the purpose of each one, i.e. how they can be used by other providers.

Introduction

Understanding the vital role of mental well-being in apprenticeship programmes, our project created a series of adaptable toolkits and resources to improve mental health support for apprentices. Although initially tailored for the health and care sector, these resources can be applied across different industries to address common mental well-being challenges. Here is a summary of the project's outputs and resources, highlighting their purposes and potential benefits for other providers across sectors. These resources offer a comprehensive framework for enhancing mental health support for apprentices, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for learners, employers, and training organisations in various fields.

Project Outputs/Resources

1. Toolkit for Developing a Comprehensive Mental Health Strategy for Apprenticeship Training Providers

- **Purpose:** Guides providers in creating a supportive learning environment that addresses apprentices' mental health challenges.
- **Benefits:**
 - *Learners:* Improved well-being and completion rates.
 - *Employers:* Enhanced apprentice performance and reduced turnover.
 - *Training Providers:* Increased learner satisfaction and retention.
 - *Staff:* Better equipped to support learners.

2. Toolkit for Implementing Mental Health and Wellbeing Focus Groups

- **Purpose:** Offers structures and templates for focus groups to identify apprentices' mental health needs.
- **Benefits:**
 - *Learners:* Platform for sharing experiences, fostering community.
 - *Employers:* Insights for enhancing apprentice well-being.
 - *Training Providers:* Improved programme responsiveness and retention.
 - *Staff:* Understanding of apprentice needs for targeted support.

3. Toolkit for Planning and Communicating Mental Health Wellbeing Workshops

- **Purpose:** Guides in planning workshops on mindfulness, resilience, and more.
- **Benefits:**
 - *Learners:* Stress management strategies and resilience.
 - *Employers:* Healthier, more productive workforce.
 - *Training Providers:* Commitment to learner well-being.
 - *Staff:* Tools for facilitating meaningful workshops.

4. Employer Engagement and Support Toolkit for Enhancing Apprentice Mental Wellbeing

- **Purpose:** Establishes communication and support structures with employers.
- **Benefits:**
 - *Learners:* Tailored support for individual needs.
 - *Employers:* Quick response to learner needs.
 - *Training Providers:* Seamless support integration.

- *Staff*: Stronger employer relationships.
5. **Toolkit for Development of a Health and Wellbeing Assessment**
- **Purpose**: Screening tool for identifying mental health changes.
 - **Benefits**:
 - *Learners*: Early detection of mental well-being issues.
 - *Employers*: Supportive mental health environment.
 - *Training Providers*: Proactive interventions and adjustments.
 - *Staff*: Structured approach to supporting learner well-being.

Impact and Reusability

- **Reusability Across Sectors**: Though focused on health and care, these toolkits are adaptable to other sectors, addressing universal mental well-being issues.
- **Metrics of Impact**: The toolkits enhance retention and achievement rates, supporting quality assurance audits and improving programme viability.

The Results: Impact on Real Lives

Tell the story of the project's success. Who was impacted, and how? Include reference to positive impact on your organisation/s, employer partners, stakeholders, and apprentices.

Include measurable outcomes (e.g. quantitative data), testimonials and quotes from people who were positively impacted by the work. Use this as an opportunity to highlight area/s of the project which have gone really well, something that wouldn't have happened without this funding.

Transformative Project Impact

Our project has been a transformative journey, significantly impacting apprentices, our organisation, employer partners, and stakeholders by focusing on mental well-being. It highlights the importance of targeted support and collaboration between employers and providers in apprenticeship programmes.

Success Stories

Improved Mental Well-Being Support:

Developed comprehensive toolkits and resources to enhance mental well-being support for apprentices, adaptable across sectors, including the NHS. This led to targeted interventions addressing specific challenges, particularly in health and care, improving apprentices' sense of support and understanding.

Higher Apprenticeship Completion Rates:

Success rates at Dynamic Training increased by 18% over the academic year. While it's unclear how much is directly attributable to the project, improved support systems help apprentices overcome barriers and reduce dropout risks.

Reduction in Breaks in Learning:

Although analysis of workshop impacts will take time, future evaluations will compare current data with pre-project data to assess reductions in learning breaks.

Enhanced Organisational Resilience:

Prioritising mental well-being fosters a resilient workforce. Supported apprentices are more engaged and committed, strengthening our organisation. Future data will measure impacts on achievement rates and meeting Department for Education targets.

Informed Policy and Strategy Development:

Project insights have informed organisational policy and strategy, with potential to

influence industry-wide practices towards a holistic approach to apprentice support.

Strengthened Stakeholder Relationships:

Commitment to mental well-being has strengthened relationships with stakeholders, fostering a collaborative environment invested in apprentice success.

Testimonials and Quotes

“There was more to mindfulness than I realised. I would like to try some of the methods talked about to help me better cope with the stress inside and outside of work.”

“Thank you I found the session very informative. I have wanted to use the 54321 method in the past, but always forgot which order to do the sense in. Hopefully this will now stick. Having other options to refocus me will also come in handy.”

“.... this session's been really useful, given me good techniques and a lot to think about.”

“I am keen to get dates of other workshops to my manager so he can let me come on them, thank you so much. This has been really helpful. Thank you.”

Impact Without the Funding

Without the funding, implementing these critical support systems would have been impossible. Previously, delays in support due to reliance on external referrals risked increasing withdrawal rates. Initial data indicated that without timely intervention, many apprentices would have discontinued their programmes. The financial investment was crucial to achieving these outcomes.

In summary, the project has been a resounding success, leading to improved mental well-being support, higher completion rates, enhanced organisational resilience, informed policy development, and strengthened stakeholder relationships. These achievements underscore the profound impact of targeted mental health interventions in apprenticeship programmes.

Looking Forward: What's Next?

How will you sustain any positive impact, or what will you do differently and in the future because of your learning and insights from the project. How will you continue to collaborate as a group following the end of this project?

Sustaining Positive Impact and Future Directions

We are committed to continuing the positive impact of our project by integrating innovative strategies and expanding our support for apprentices. Key initiatives include:

1. **AI Integration:** We plan to use AI in workshops for personalised support, making sessions available on-demand and continuing them monthly.
2. **Focus Groups:** These will become a permanent part of our strategy to gather insights into apprentices' mental health needs and will be adapted for employer feedback as well.
3. **Strengthening Partnerships:** We aim to maintain and enhance relationships with partners to foster open dialogue and mutual support for mental well-being.
4. **Continued Use of Tools:** "Getting to Know You" and health and safety tools will remain integral, ensuring prompt addressing of concerns and feeding into

safeguarding efforts.

5. **Data Analysis:** Over the next 24 months, we will collect and review data to assess the ongoing impact of our workshops on retention and achievement rates.

Future Directions:

1. **Collaboration:** We will continue regular meetings and workshops with partners to share best practices and develop new strategies.
2. **Continuous Improvement:** Our approach to mental health support will be refined based on insights, exploring new technologies and methodologies.
3. **Expanding Reach:** Successful strategies will be adapted to support a wider range of apprentices across different industries.
4. **Future Engagement:** We'll seek funding to enhance the understanding of mental health needs among line managers, complementing learner support.

These efforts aim to sustain the project's momentum, ensuring comprehensive support for apprentices and fostering ongoing innovation in our programmes.

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