

## **Diversity in Apprenticeships**

### **Case Study Number Two: Best Practice in Attracting Atypical Applicants to Apprenticeships.**

Funded by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), the UKRC developed and ran a 'Diversity in Apprenticeships' pilot project in 2010/11, working with the UK's leading energy providers to increase the number of female and BAME apprentices in this sector.

#### **Driving Force**

*'We'll recruit anybody – they just don't apply'*

This is the most commonly cited factor in the low recruitment of non-traditional apprentices. Historically, the numbers of women and BAME's applying for apprenticeships in the engineering sector are very low. But why is this? It is easy to think that because these groups choose not to work in this sector, nothing can be done to improve this. However, there are many reasons these groups choose not to apply for non-traditional roles. They range from peer and parental pressure and self-stereotyping, to lack of knowledge and/or an unclear message as to what is involved in working in the engineering sector, or that applications from atypical apprentices are welcome.

In the UKRC's experience, when practical action is taken to tackle these barriers, then applications from non-traditional groups do increase.

#### **Action**

Looking at ways to attract non-traditional applicants was a key focus of the NAS Project. Our partner organisations (see acknowledgements below for details) all agreed that attracting applications from atypical candidates was an issue. Crucially, they agreed to share their own good practice, and take on board advice from the UKRC and the NAS project advisory board.

The majority of the organisations involved in this project, attended the UKRC's Gender Equality Training as a basis for understanding the issues surrounding self-stereotyping, parental pressure and other factors influencing people's decisions about their careers.

The training, although challenging, allows participants to explore issues in a 'safe' environment. The vast majority of those who attended the training state that it has increased their awareness of equality issues. Also, they found that having time to discuss the issues and potential solutions relevant to their organisations, with their colleagues, was of great value. Everyone left the training with an action plan to help them to make changes in their own workplace.

#### **Impact**

Sharing knowledge and experiences, whether good or not so good, in the same industry sector and being able to take practical ideas back to their own organisations, was particularly helpful to the project partners. One partner commented that it was good to find out about the issues their competitors were experiencing, often the same issues they themselves faced, in a confidential and safe environment; a forum not generally available to them. It was also beneficial for those organisations linked to the energy sector but not direct employers of apprentices e.g. the sector skills councils and skills academies, to learn more about what employers are doing to make their apprenticeships attractive to atypical groups.

“Working in partnership with the UKRC has been fantastic for E.ON. We had some ideas on how to increase diversity but being part of this project, which included some of our competitors, was really helpful because we were able to get some good ideas. We used the partner meetings for network opportunities and to share best practice examples, and to pick up on learning points.”  
(Sue Treharne, Diversity Manager, E.ON)

The sharing of good practice between organisations in partner meetings has been particularly useful to both the project and the partners. It has produced the following summary of current best practice and advice, from across the energy sector:

- Make sure that your recruitment literature is attractive to the groups you are targeting i.e. women and BAME. If you are using photographic images, make sure there is a good mix of gender and race, and use real people, not staged models.
- If the budget allows, make some of the advertisements specific to women and BAME.
- Advertise in places that your intended audience will look. It sounds obvious, but if a female hasn't considered engineering as a career choice yet, then she isn't going to be looking in the engineering section of a careers brochure. E.ON advertises its apprenticeships in Glamour magazine (a fashion magazine for women) which has proved successful.
- Use the power of the internet to direct 'passive' candidates to your careers site. Shopping and dating sites have been used with some success. Social networking sites are an obvious place to advertise.
- Target schools with high BAME populations or local girls' schools.
- Hold some taster days for girls and women only, to give them an insight into your industry and your organisation. Experience shows that if a general mixed gender open day is advertised, then the numbers of women and girls attending will be a small; but advertise events as women only then they will be well attended, if not over-subscribed. British Gas holds 'Ladies Days' in its training centres across the UK, and E.ON has recently started 'Women Only Engineering Days' at its power stations. Again, it is important that these events are advertised in places that are accessed by your intended audience. Local radio advertising, for example, has proved successful.
- If you work for a training organisation or Sector Skills Council, get your industry involved in taster days. Also, bring on board other like-minded organisations. SummitSkills has run several successful taster days for women only, utilising local industry, colleges and universities as well as organisations such as the YWCA.
- Get some information for parents on why engineering is such a fantastic career for their children. For parents advising daughters, mention the likely rates of pay in comparison to more traditional careers chosen by girls. This project has produced an informative leaflet aimed at parents advising them why their daughters should consider an engineering apprenticeship in the energy sector, with tips on how to support them in finding out more: [http://theukrc.org/files/useruploads/files/ukrc\\_apprenticeship\\_parents\\_guide\\_for\\_daughters-web.pdf](http://theukrc.org/files/useruploads/files/ukrc_apprenticeship_parents_guide_for_daughters-web.pdf)
- Make sure your website has images of all genders and ethnicities, and make sure women are not just shown in traditional roles e.g. administration. If your website has case studies then make sure that atypical engineers are represented.

#### **Further information and acknowledgements**

There are four case studies in this series. This is number two in the series, 'Best Practice in Attracting Atypical Applicants to Apprenticeships'. It looks at how an employer can increase the number of applications to their apprentice programmes from non-traditional groups. The others in the series are: The Business Case for Increasing the Diversity of Apprentices in the Energy Sector; Best Practice in the Recruitment Process for Atypical Apprentices; Best Practice in Running Women Only Days.

There is also a Good Practice Guide to complement these case studies.

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