

The National Housing Federation and the National Apprenticeship Service present

**NATIONAL  
HOUSING  
FEDERATION**



# Apprenticeships within the Housing Sector

A diagnosis of the current apprenticeship programmes being delivered  
in housing associations and recommendations for development



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# Foreword

I am delighted to be able to bring this report to your attention. The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) was set up in 2009, to provide an end-to-end apprenticeship service for both employers and the apprentice. Over a quarter of a million people started an Apprenticeship in 2008/9 and the Government is dedicated to growing that number significantly.

Apprenticeships provide real, measurable business benefits for employers. Research has shown that they bring productive, enthusiastic and loyal people into organisations - 80% of those who employ apprentices agree that they make the workplace more productive.

Very early in our existence we observed some of the excellent work being carried out by housing associations and their staff in relation to training, the delivery of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's) and in particular the delivery of Apprenticeships.

It is for this reason that the NAS commissioned the National Housing Federation to produce a report to identify the appetite and opportunities for Apprenticeships within the housing association sector. The report has captured the overall level of activity that exists and some specific case studies of good or even excellent practice.

I am delighted with the results and we will be able to use these findings extensively to promote and inspire future action and to set an example to other employers both within and outside the housing association sector.

It is clear from the case studies that staff and apprentices within the sector are truly proud of what they have achieved. We should all use the outcomes recorded here to build on the work and to encourage colleagues and employers to invest in an increased number of housing-related Apprenticeships in the future.



Jaime Clarke  
**National Apprenticeship Director – Business Development**  
**National Apprenticeship Service**

# Apprenticeship programmes in the housing sector

## Introduction

Over the past year, it became apparent - through the partnership work that the National Housing Federation has undertaken with its members - that housing associations across the country were embarking on the set-up and delivery of apprenticeships. However, it also became clear that there wasn't a national picture of the impact that the housing sector was making when supporting apprentices, if the sector was setting up robust programmes, or if the apprentices valued their experiences.

This report sets out to provide a national picture of the strengths of apprenticeships in the sector, identify areas of development, and provide best practice for the housing sector. It also brings together a range of recommendations in order to develop the apprenticeship movement in the housing sector in a more co-ordinated way.

## Background

Apprenticeships have been established in Britain since the Middle Ages, as an effective tool to train the workforce by "learning on the job". Traditionally apprenticeships were more common in trades, but more recently they have been also been used to train the technical workforce (e.g. engineers and accountants). While the popularity and validity of apprenticeships has fluctuated over time, today they are again being increasingly used to recruit young people into the workforces of a vast range of organisations. The number of people starting an apprenticeship is also on the increase: in 1997, 50,000 people started an apprenticeship, while in 2009 this figure had risen to 200,000.

In the current economic climate there is growing concern that young people will find it increasingly difficult to enter the labour market, when competing with more experienced adults. Skills development and apprenticeships have recently been identified as key priorities for Government. Numerous employment programmes have created job opportunities for young unemployed people, and while the impacts are proving to be positive, sustained employment remains an issue. Apprenticeships have been highlighted as a key route into employment for young people and the NAS and the National Housing Federation are both keen to ensure that the housing sector supports this national ambition.

## Why should housing associations support apprenticeship programmes?

### Strategic benefits

Apprentices can bring a number of benefits to housing associations. They support the wider social and economic objectives that all housing associations strive for, and also support the diversity and equal opportunity objectives that have been set out for housing associations to deliver. Apprenticeships offer a practical solution to reducing unemployment, particularly by supporting individuals who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and by improving the life chances, both socially and economically, of the local community. Apprenticeships have been shown to facilitate the often difficult transition between full-time learning and work (*World-class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All, Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills, 2008*). It is also proven that individuals with a Level 2 Apprenticeship earn on average around £65,000 more over their lifetime than those with a Level 2 qualification or below, while people with an Level 3 (Advanced Apprenticeship) earn around £100,000 more (National Apprenticeship Service website).

### Organisational benefits

As well as the wider social responsibility and mobility that apprenticeship programmes bring, there are several benefits for the housing association as an employer. Training apprentices is more cost-effective, than hiring skilled staff – leading to lower overall training costs and reduced recruitment costs. Apprentices have also been proven to improve productivity, diversify the workforce, increase capacity for innovation, create more motivated staff, and reduce absenteeism (*Populus Survey 2008*).

### Financial benefits

Over the next two years, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) expects to create an additional 2,800 apprenticeships and job opportunities, by making skills and employment outcomes a condition of funding. In short, apprenticeships are here to stay, so it's important to understand the benefits for housing associations, and how to embed apprenticeships into the organisation.



# The National Apprenticeship Service

The NAS was set up in April 2009 in order to provide an improved, end-to-end apprenticeship service for the employer and the apprentice. The NAS aims to increase the number of apprenticeship opportunities in England, and to provide a dedicated service to employers and learners. Their 2010-11 priorities include:

- To expand the number of apprenticeship places offered by employers, including those in the public sector
- To increase the number and variety of places available, so that by 2013 an apprenticeship place will be available to all suitably qualified young people
- To increase the diversity of those applying for apprenticeships
- To make it easier for employers and individuals to search and apply for vacancies through the online apprenticeship vacancies system
- To ensure that the funding for apprenticeship places is available, responsive to needs, and delivers value for money
- To increase the number of advanced apprenticeships and Level 4 higher Apprenticeships

The NAS has funded this research project, with the aim of meeting many of its organisational objectives and improving its partnership working with the housing sector.

# Aims and methodology of the research

In December 2009 Kate Chester and Terry Molloy were commissioned by the NAS and the National Housing Federation to analyse the level of engagement that housing associations have with apprentices. As a result of previous employment programmes, it was becoming clear that housing associations were taking on some apprentices but the extent was largely unknown. This research project aimed to:

- Identify the appetite and opportunities for apprentices within housing associations
- Highlight areas of best practice which could be shared within the housing sector
- Identify barriers and limitations to offering apprenticeship programmes
- Provide additional information for housing associations which have not yet started apprenticeships, to ensure that new programmes are set up using the best practice and resources available
- Make recommendations for future development, report the findings, and disseminate key messages to the housing sector

The research involved the delivery of:

- An online survey sent to members of the National Housing Federation, to gather national baseline data
- Case study visits to 15 housing associations across England that were currently delivering apprenticeship programmes of varying sizes and using different models, and could share lessons learned and best practice with other housing associations
- Focus groups and interviews with apprentices to learn from their experiences within the housing sector
- Consultation with key stakeholders including the NAS, the National Housing Federation, HCA, colleges and training providers, and Asset Skills, the Sector Skills Council for housing



# Definition of apprentice

Many housing associations and employers have different definitions and interpretations of the term “apprentice”. Some organisations think they are supporting apprentices when their employees are only undertaking a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), or if an unskilled employee is working alongside an experienced worker and “learning on the job”, but not working towards an accredited qualification delivered by a college or training provider. These learning and development styles are very valuable and worthwhile for the employee and the employer, but they do not fit the NAS definition of an apprenticeship, and are not eligible for government funding.

An apprenticeship is a job that combines on and off the job training. The apprentice is employed and gains a nationally recognised qualification while the employer gets a work-ready employee with job specific skills. For the purposes of this research project, and in order to ensure housing associations meet the new HCA apprenticeship requirements - which will be linked to future funding - an apprentice needs to be working towards one of the 180+ approved apprenticeship frameworks that are available. These are work-based training programmes designed by employers, and consist of an NVQ Level 2 or Level 3, the acquisition of key skills and, in most cases, a relevant knowledge-based qualification (such as a BTEC).

All apprentices who were interviewed for this report met this definition and would therefore also meet the HCA and NAS definitions of apprentices.



# Findings of the research

In January 2010 an online survey about apprenticeships was sent to 958 housing associations in England. In total 111 (12%) of housing associations completed the survey. The main findings, along with the trends identified from the 15 case studies conducted, are detailed in the following section.

## 1. Levels of engagement and apprenticeship structures

There was a high level of engagement from the housing associations that completed the survey: 71% were already delivering an apprenticeship programme. The programmes varied in size for various reasons, including:

- Size of the housing association
- Level of priority the housing association placed on apprenticeships
- Confidence of the housing association in delivering apprenticeships
- Length of time the apprenticeship programme had been running
- Level of knowledge and understanding of apprenticeship systems and frameworks

Housing associations also felt their programmes were better structured and organised when the NAS had worked in partnership with them. However, not all housing associations knew about the NAS or what support the service could offer when setting up an apprenticeship programme.

Also, when the apprenticeship programme sat within human resources (HR) departments, there were a number of benefits, which included:

- Apprenticeship positions were more closely linked to staff turnover, so rather than being seen as additional staff, apprentices had a genuine place in the organisation that was not surplus to requirement
- The recruitment and selection processes were open and fair, and in line with organisational policies and procedures
- New job descriptions, which are often needed to take on an apprentice, were properly evaluated and scored
- The correct management and learning and development processes were in place for the apprentices, resulting in a more positive experience for the apprentice and the organisation
- Liaison with the colleges and training providers worked well because HR employees were already used to working with them, and knew how to monitor and evaluate the partnerships

## 2. Construction vs non-construction

Most housing associations were offering either construction related or non-construction related apprenticeships, but not both. Slightly more (58% against 42%) construction related apprenticeships were being delivered. If all housing associations were delivering equal levels of construction and non-construction related apprenticeships, the total number of apprentices could be doubled.

Three of the case study housing associations (Accent Group, Circle Anglia and Walsall Housing Group) were offering construction related apprenticeships and had set up their own in-house accredited construction training centres. They employed their own construction tutors and were offering pre-apprenticeship training for their residents and the wider community. The construction related apprenticeship programmes were also linked into the housing association’s supply chains, so apprentices

were not directly employed by the housing association, but rather by the sub-contractors. Only where a housing association had its own direct labour organisation (DLO) were apprentices employed directly: 62% of housing associations did not have a contractual agreement with their framework partners to take on apprentices.

Construction related apprenticeship programmes were usually set up outside the HR department, because the apprentices became employees of sub-contractors, rather than the housing association.

#### **Procurement clubs**

Procurement clubs are used by groups of housing associations to make savings on bulk purchases of materials and services: 49% of survey respondents belong to a procurement club. Some procurement groups use these savings to reinvest in employment and training opportunities. For example a procurement organisation will secure agreements from contractors to employ a certain number of association nominees (typically one or two trainees per £million of labour contract value) on the work they win; 15% of survey respondents said their savings were being reinvested in this way.

Procurement organisations (e.g. Procure Plus and Fusion 21) have been very successful in training harder-to-reach individuals in a range of construction skills, so they are job ready for the housing association contractor. However, individuals are usually taken on as trainees, rather than apprentices working towards a recognised apprenticeship framework consisting of NVQ Level 2 or Level 3, Key Skills and a technical certificate. This is to allow for more flexibility in the timescale: programmes of work sometimes run for between 6-18 months, depending on the job, rather than the duration of an apprenticeship, which is usually 2 years.

### **3. Areas for growth**

When asked about new areas in which to offer apprenticeships, three subject areas stood out: housing (21%); customer services (12%); and business & administration (11%). This is a timely discovery because Asset Skills is currently updating the Level 2 Apprenticeship in housing and it is due to be launched in August 2010.

### **4. The apprentices**

In total 26 apprentices were interviewed for this research project. Of these only two were tenants of the housing association: the rest were members of the wider community. All housing associations recognised their social responsibility as large employers, and were pleased to be supporting local people. However, there was recognition that more could be done to help their own tenants to access apprenticeships.

Most staff members interviewed for the case studies acknowledged that their own tenants were harder to reach than college students, who are the most common candidates for apprenticeships, and would benefit from pre-apprenticeship programmes (e.g., literacy, numeracy, ICT, communication, personal development and work placements).

It was also acknowledged that the housing association tenants who would benefit from apprenticeships were often over 25 years old and therefore very often did not attract any funding for training. This put them at a disadvantage.

### **5. The apprentices – funding, salaries and financial costs**

The vast majority of apprentices who were interviewed and reported on in the online survey were under 25 years old. This was because of funding allocations in place, which are weighted towards attracting younger people. The youngest apprentices (16 to 18 years old) attract the most funding for the college or training provider. For example, if an apprentice is 16 to 18 years old, an employer will not have to pay any training costs to the college or training provider. If the apprentice is 19 to 24 years old, the employer has to pay up to 50% of the training costs. And if the apprentice is over 25 years old, it is likely that the employer will have to pay 60-100% of the training costs since there is limited Government funding available for apprentices over this age.

The majority of housing associations (61%) were accessing funding (indirectly) to support their apprentices. This enabled employers to take on apprentices, with the training partly or fully funded. Unless the housing association had a direct contract with the Skills Funding Agency (previously the Learning Skills Council) they did not receive this funding: instead it goes to the colleges or training providers.

All housing associations or sub-contractors were paying the salary costs of the apprentices. These were reduced salaries which reflected the inexperience and lower skills levels of the apprentices. However, financial incentives were in place as they progressed through their qualifications, which was a clear motivator for the apprentices.

The salaries varied across the different case studies according to what the housing association felt was an appropriate amount for the age and skills levels of their apprentices. The lowest salary was £95 per week (which is the minimum recommended salary by the NAS) and the highest was £16,000 per year (for health and social care apprentices who were over 18 years old). Note: from 1 October 2010, a

new National Minimum Wage for apprentices will be introduced. This is £2.50 per hour for those who are 16 to 18 years old, and those who are 19 years and older, and are in the first year of their Apprenticeship.

The younger apprentices who were receiving £95 per week were all living at home, not paying rent, but beginning to pay their own transport costs to work. This was all they could afford on £95 per week. However, many of the young apprentices were grateful for the small salary and recognised that, if they were at college full-time, they would be earning nothing at all.

The older apprentices who were receiving £16,000 per year were all living independently and had financial commitments (rent, childcare, bills etc). Had the salary been less, many would not have been able to apply for the programme.

Despite being signed up as students through their college/training provider, apprentices are not eligible for student travel discounts, which was seen as unfair by some of the apprentices (particularly those who were only receiving £95 per week). Single-parent apprentices are also not eligible for childcare support, which creates a significant barrier for young parents hoping to join the workforce as apprentices.

Apprentices are currently eligible to apply for Working Family tax credits and other benefits dependent on circumstances.

## 6. Barriers to apprenticeships

Four main barriers were identified as preventing housing associations from setting up and/or developing apprenticeship programmes. These were a lack of:

- **Knowledge and understanding** Those setting up apprenticeship programmes saw the task as being very time-consuming and daunting, particularly if there was just one person assigned to the job, and it was one of many work objectives. Employees of housing associations often felt out of touch with current apprenticeship practice and were unsure where to start. While they knew that apprenticeships are a “good thing”, they didn’t know the detailed business cases that were needed to secure buy-in from their senior management teams. Some housing associations were unaware of the support they could receive from the NAS.
- **Funding** Some housing associations were not clear about funding that could be used to support apprentices or the large funding pots available for training providers and colleges, which then make the training for young apprentices free for the employer. Other housing associations were keen to find out how they could draw down funding directly, to support the training costs, salary costs and pre-apprenticeship training for older apprentices. This was more likely to be of benefit to their own tenants.
- **Staff resources and capacity** It was felt by some housing associations that they were already working long hours and taking on additional work as a result of cutbacks and restructures. As a result, they felt that they did not have sufficient capacity to set up a well structured apprenticeship programme on top of an already challenging workload.
- **Internal structure to support apprentices** Some housing association employees commented that the lack of a mentoring scheme, lack of time available from more experienced staff members to support apprentices, lack of relevant tasks that met the NVQ framework and a lack of understanding of the role of the college/training provider could all lead to apprentices feeling frustrated and undervalued, which would defeat the whole objective of taking on apprentices.

## 7. Case studies

Fifteen case studies were conducted across England for this research project. The following case studies of apprenticeship programmes were nominated by housing associations that had existing programmes up and running, and which felt they could offer support, guidance and best practice to other associations.

# Case Studies

# Accent Group



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
19,000 homes, 669 employees

**Geography:**  
Northeast, Northwest, Yorkshire,  
Humberside, East Midlands, Southeast

**Number of apprentices  
currently employed:**  
Six directly with Accent 38  
through Accent's supply chain

**Main contact:**  
Will Jennings, Director  
of Regeneration

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Will.Jennings@AccentGroup.org

**Phone:**  
01274 767820

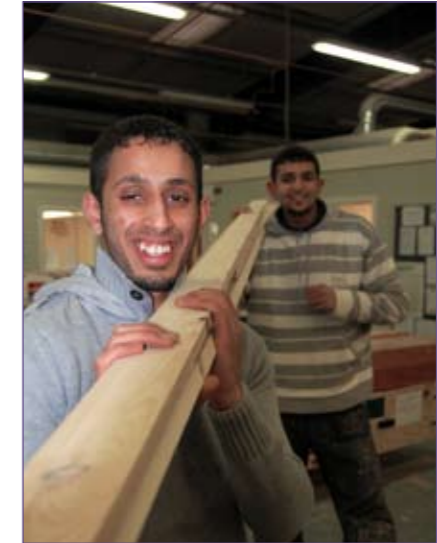
The Accent Group started its apprenticeship programme in June 1997 and offers the majority of the apprenticeships in the construction trades, via the supply chain. Accent has embedded contractual apprenticeship obligations into its supply chain, which has created significant leverage and boosted the number of opportunities for young people to become apprentices.

The Group has also set up Accent Regeneration and Community Partnerships, an accredited training organisation working with over 500 learners a year from four training centres. It offers a range of job-entry courses (including skills for life, First Aid and Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) Card training) to help those who want to go on to become apprentices but who aren't quite ready to start. In 2008, Accent won the Housing Corporation Gold Award for their Youthbuild apprenticeship programme. Youthbuild has also established a small social enterprise, which is inscope through ConstructionSkills, so it can draw down ConstructionSkills funding for some of its apprentices.

Will Jennings is clear about the Group's motives for setting up such a large and successful programme: "We wanted to provide work tasters, so that local people have more choice and opportunity to become apprentices, and we wanted to offer meaningful, longer-term, higher skills career opportunities too. If you're in work you can pay the rent and that fits with our values around supporting residents into financial independence."

Apprenticeship funding is only available for the 16 to 25 year olds, so the programme has to be selective about who can progress on to an apprenticeship. "We would take on older apprentices if there was funding available. Mixed age groups are great for peer mentoring, and there tends to be a better balanced group," says Nawaz Khan, Operations Manager. Stephen, an Accent resident who's 36 years old, is currently doing an ILM Level 1 in basic construction and says: "I know I won't be able to do an apprenticeship because I'm too old, but I also know I won't have enough skills or qualifications to get a job at the end of this course."

But for those who do meet the age criteria, the apprenticeships are proving a huge success.



Mohammed and Kamran



Stephen with his tutor

**Mohammed and Kamran, are both Level 2 maintenance apprentices with Lovells, an Accent contractor. Mohammed says:**

*"Doing an apprenticeship gives you a good chance to further yourself. I've got a lot of confidence in the proper world of work and now I've got experience of different trades." Kamran adds: "I can do my own jobs in my own house and my friends ask for advice. I've also met lots of new friends who are also apprentices. We play snooker together after work and look out for each other."*

# Calico Homes



Calico housing, working in partnerships with others delivers a substantial programme of training and apprenticeship opportunities through its subsidiary company, Calico Enterprises, at the heart of which is the “Building Foundations” programme. This is an initiative targeted at hard-to-reach young people in the Calico communities who, under normal circumstances, would be highly unlikely even to consider applying for an apprenticeship, and who would be at a serious competitive disadvantage with other candidates if they did apply.

Ed Barber, Deputy Managing Director, Calico Enterprises, says that the programme has been a tremendous success. Since its formation in 2007, it has seen over 90 candidates successfully complete the six-month pre-apprenticeship programme of construction training, with six weeks’ basic construction training followed by 20 weeks’ placement. Those who complete the programme are then able to compete effectively for the employment and apprenticeship opportunities on offer with Calico, its contractors and the wider construction industry. Of the 90 people who completed the programme, 70 have obtained employment in the industry and 15 have gone on to further training. Phil Jones, Head of Regeneration, Calico Enterprises, is keen to point out the role and importance of their partner Vendas in the success of the initiative. “Vendas,” says Phil, “have been excellent in providing the coaching support and mentoring resources necessary from time to time for this cohort of youngsters to successfully achieve their goals. We are delighted to have them as a partner and fully appreciative of their efforts in helping us to ensure that these high quality opportunities are open to our residents, to the extent that now over 50% of our apprenticeships are secured by Calico Homes residents.”

Calico is part of Procure Plus (formerly GMProcure), a body which specialises in securing savings for its housing association partners, through bulk purchase of materials and through negotiating commercial contracts with construction companies

for housing association work. As part of the contract the consortium will secure agreements from the companies to employ a certain number of association nominees – typically two per £1,000,000 contract value – on the work they win. This has been an important route for Calico in securing employment opportunities for its Building Foundations candidates, but recently it has established another highly significant vehicle for delivering its burgeoning apprenticeship programme. In 2008 Calico Interiors was set up within Calico Enterprise. First and foremost Calico Interiors is a training business that provides a painting and decoration service to Calico Homes and Preston Community Gateway Association. The aim is to recruit candidates who have completed the Building Foundations pre-apprenticeship programme. Currently there are 16 painting and decorating apprentices pursuing NVQ Level 2 in their craft, and Calico is confident there will be up to 20 apprentices by the autumn. The scheme has been so successful that Calico is using the model in partner housing associations in Preston and Cumbria, and selling the service to private contractors.

Ed Barber is very positive about the future for the company’s apprenticeship programme and is in discussion with Blackburn College for the delivery of a housing administration NVQ for a staff-side apprenticeship programme. “We have exciting plans for the future of the programme,” says Ed. “In particular the green agenda and the Government’s Warm Homes Standard offer real opportunities to expand apprenticeships into areas such as energy saving and conservation, and Calico wants to be at the forefront of that development.”

Calico’s funding for the wide range of training and apprenticeship opportunities it offers to local communities is drawn from a variety of sources, including the European Social Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, and the Lancashire Housing Partnership, among others.

Through the support he has received from Calico, Dave has gone from being unemployed, homeless and grappling with a serious drug habit to being a house proud Calico tenant with his own flat and winning a place as a Calico Apprentice.



Dave Smith, apprentice painter and decorator

**Speaking about the Calico Building Foundations Project Dave says:**

*“The project has completely turned my life around. I have enjoyed the training, I’ve made new friends and I am enjoying being independent! Not having to sign on is great.”*

## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
4,500 homes, 320 employees

**Geography:**  
Pennines, Lancashire

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
20 directly with Calico

**Main contact:**  
Phil Jones, Head of Regeneration

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01282 686495

# Circle Anglia



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
60,000 homes, 2,200 employees

**Geography:**  
London, Norfolk, Essex, Birmingham, Cambridgeshire, Kent

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
Four directly with Circle Anglia.  
28 through supply chain

**Main contact:**  
Leanne Baxter, Head of Sustainable Communities

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One of Circle Anglia's group partners, Old Ford Housing Association, based in East London, has set up a large construction training programme, which includes pre-apprenticeship support as well as an apprenticeship programme for the local community, many of whom are Old Ford residents. The construction training initiative started in 2001, and aims to support local residents to gain valuable skills that help them into employment. Leanne Baxter, Head of Sustainable Communities, says: "This area has a high level of deprivation so we wanted to support residents to become more employable with our sub-contractors. Our main focus was linking jobs to our development programme through the supply chain. The qualifications were developed after this priority was met."

Old Ford has converted two unused buildings into construction training centres, employed its own tutor, become an accredited training centre and now supports over 40 students a year through construction training programmes. Many of the students are school children (and Circle Anglia residents) who are at risk of becoming excluded. They have responded well to practical construction training programmes away from the traditional learning environment, and have gone on to become apprentices.

Steve is an Old Ford resident and a Level 2 painting and decorating apprentice with property services company Apollo, who says: "I was born and bred on the estate so it's easy for me to get to work and I know the people round here. This has been a great programme. You have the benefit of getting the work experience and then getting the qualification too, plus you get two references at the end of it all, one from your employer and one from the college."

Hira is a Level 2 maintenance apprentice with Apollo, and he says: "The programme has given me more confidence on site now; I've got good communication skills and know I can get on with anyone."

Steve and Hira are both paid the agreed union rate for their trade and age, but admitted that if they weren't living at home it would be pretty difficult to live on the wages and to pay all the bills.

Old Ford used one per cent of a stock transfer finance package to fund the majority of the construction training. This is now being built into all stock transfers and framework agreements, so the programme can remain financially viable without a heavy dependence on external funding.

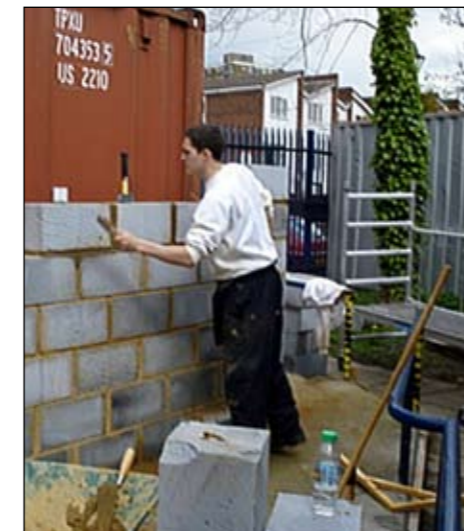
Circle Anglia is now rolling out the Old Ford model to the rest of the Group and another two training centres are being refurbished to provide more local construction opportunities in London and Cambridgeshire.



Hira, Level 2 maintenance apprentice with Apollo

**Leanne Baxter says:**

*"The construction training centres are based in the community, which residents really like. They can see their children and neighbours on work experience, wearing the contractors' uniforms, and this creates a real sense of community. The programme has significantly reduced the levels of vandalism and anti-social behaviour on the estates, because there is a added sense of ownership, which makes the estate a better place to live. This is an additional benefit for the housing association."*



Steve, Level 2 painting and decorating apprentice with Apollo

# Great Places



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
15,000 homes, 600 employees

**Geography:**  
North

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
10 including through partner organisation

**Main contact:**  
David Sedman, Head of Social Enterprise

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David.Sedman@greatplaces.org.uk

**Phone:**  
07718 5213120

David Sedman, Great Places' Head of Social Enterprise, is excited about the future plans his company has for employing apprentices. While Great Places has had success with establishing apprenticeship places with its contractor client base, opportunities to support apprentices in the company itself have been limited. However Great Places is now to embark on a major initiative to address that anomaly. It will shift the emphasis for recruitment to its professional and office teams from a wholly graduate focus to a, mainly, apprenticeship non-graduate cohort.

This is a very significant step for the company and David is quick to point out that its graduate recruitment programme has been an excellent initiative, producing great benefits for the company and its graduate recruits. This programme will continue, but will now be supplemented by this additional offering of apprenticeships for younger people in the human resources, finance, asset management, information technology and housing services departments across the company. Every effort will be made to ensure that the young people recruited are successful in their chosen careers, and the company are securing the professional guidance, support and mentoring resources of Nord Anglia through its "Young Britons" programme to assist in achieving positive outcomes.

David comments: "We are really pleased that as part of our overall workforce planning and diversity strategy, we are actively opening up opportunities for school leavers and young people, in the communities where Great Places is active and has influence, to get the chance to come and work for us. It's a friendly environment, with supportive colleagues to make this a long term success."

Great Places is currently supporting its construction apprenticeship programme through participation in the Salford Council Shared Apprenticeship Scheme. It is also, in partnership with Contour Housing, responsible for the management of STEP 1, a Salford Council funded construction training and employment programme for Salford residents. To date 65 Salford residents have accessed training offered by the programme and 21 are now in employment and training with a number of local construction companies. A further 31 have gone on to further education to help them progress their careers. Great Places is particularly pleased that in the recent Northwest Women in Construction Awards, two of their supported apprentices, who came through the STEP 1 route, reached the finals of their respective categories.

All of the company's contracts with its construction services providers contain Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) identifying the contractor's commitment to and responsibility for employing apprentices, and David is very positive about securing additional apprenticeship places through the company's forthcoming Great Places Development Programme.



Sarah Hall, NVQ Level 2 apprentice maintenance operations

### Sarah says:

*"I'd always loved doing DIY at home. I built a shed and really enjoyed putting it together. That gave me the idea of going into construction and the opportunity to train with STEP 1 came at just the right time."*

*"I've learned skills such as plastering and plumbing and my daughter thinks it's really cool that her mum does this sort of thing."*

# Helena Homes



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
13,000 Homes, 630 employees

**Geography:**  
St Helens, Merseyside

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
30+ directly with Helena Homes

**Main contact:**  
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Rachel Molyneux, the company's Learning and Development Officer, says that Helena Homes is highly appreciative of the financial support it receives from the Coalfield Regeneration Trust (CRT) for its apprenticeship programme. CRT directly funds places for four trainees in administration, environmental services and information technology. This income, combined with the CITB/ConstructionSkills payment it receives for its construction apprentices, helps to support what is, for the size of the association, a major programme of apprenticeship delivery. There is also an office-based apprentice programme, with five members of staff pursuing NVQs in business administration.

Currently 22 of the company's 230-strong Propertycare maintenance division are apprentices working towards Level 3 in their respective trade areas, with six of them being the 2009/10 intake. Helena Homes' experience in delivering this type and scale of apprenticeship programme was to prove invaluable when a local company fell victim to the financial difficulties facing the house building sector, and was forced to make redundant all of its apprentices. At the request of the local CITB office, Helena Homes was able to offer the displaced apprentices the opportunity to complete the qualification process working on the company's properties. Rachel says that the company is particularly proud of the fact that almost all apprentices choose to stay with the company after completing their training: "We feel this clearly benefits the company in being able to develop our workforce skills and qualifications, and in building employee commitment to our tenants and the homes we have responsibility to manage."

As well as the day-release training they receive at the local college, Helena Homes trade apprentices are also able to access the resources of the company's own newly opened Skills Academy, a facility run with the support of Helena's procurement partner Fusion 21. Through the Skills Academy, the company is also providing a programme of work with local schools for young people from across St Helens who exhibit challenging behaviour and who often do not perform well in mainstream settings. As part of this programme a simulated recruitment process is held with the youngsters. The successful candidates will experience a number of different trades in a real-life working environment. If they have the ability, they can complete the Multi-skill Foundation Certificate in Building Craft Occupations Level 1. This process will help them decide whether construction is the career choice for them, and give them experience to draw upon at future interviews. The company has committed to taking at least one of its annual intake of apprentices from this Skills Academy cohort, recruiting the remainder of its apprentices through the normal local media and Job Centre routes. Helena Homes ensures that its residents are made aware of these opportunities, and informs tenants through employment events and newsletters.



Danny Dale, apprentice tiler, working towards Level 3 NVQ

**Danny Dale says:**

*"Everyone here is so helpful and I've built up some good relationships with my colleagues."*

*"My most recent achievement was winning the Airport Group's Young Apprentice of the Year Award. I don't like the limelight, but I went to the awards ceremony and I was really proud of myself - my mum and gran were chuffed."*

*"I would recommend apprenticeships to other young people; as long as you try hard you can do well."*

# Liverpool Housing Trust



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
10,000 homes, 220 employees

**Geography:**  
Merseyside

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
Five through the supply chain

**Main contact:**  
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It is clear in conversation with Alan Rogers and Simon Brown that they place great emphasis on establishing positive relationships with the companies contracted to refurbish and maintain Liverpool Housing Trust (LHT) housing stock. In this process they have given particular attention to supporting small and medium sized (SME) contractors. For instance, LHT helps firms to create training and development plans and resources, assisting in building up their technical expertise, and even offering efficiency audits. The LHT team has been instrumental in almost all its contractors achieving Investors In People status, and has secured for the Trust the CITB/ConstructionSkills Gold Award after ensuring that 80% plus of their contractors' workforce has achieved NVQ Level 2 or above.

Alan and Simon believe that such close working relationships have produced a continuously improving contractor workforce and performance, much to the benefit of LHT's tenants and residents. Throughout the period, they have urged and encouraged the companies to utilise apprenticeships and are convinced that their collaborative approach has resulted in an increase in apprenticeship numbers.

They are also firmly of the view that the very positive role they have established with their contractors will be of huge significance in making a success of the company's latest venture into the apprenticeship field. Along with CITB/ConstructionSkills, LHT is creating a Group Training Association (GTA). The GTA concept is modelled on highly successful programmes that have been running for a number of years in Australia. Essentially a GTA is an instrument designed to minimise the barriers that contractors, particularly SMEs, face in employing an apprentice. By becoming the direct employer of the apprentice, the GTA takes responsibility for all employment related issues (except for onsite health and safety): salaries, NI, tax and other administrative and bureaucratic burdens will all be taken up by the GTA. The contractor does

not have to worry about not having enough work to keep the candidate busy. When work slackens, the apprentice returns to the GTA, which then places the individual with another contractor who is committed to the process. In addition to these substantial benefits, the apprentice's wage is heavily subsidised, with wage costs to the contractor being approximately £50 per week per apprentice.

The Merseyside GTA will be a subsidiary of LHT, bearing the name "Constructing the Future" (CTF), and will directly employ 78 apprentices between April 2010 and August 2011. It is a result of 12 months of discussions between LHT and CITB/ConstructionSkills and has involved both organisations drawing support and commitments from local colleges, housing associations, local councils and major contractors. Over 30 contractors have committed to the scheme so far, and Alan and Simon are working hard to secure another 20 companies. Significant funding for the project is being provided by the Learning and Skills Council, through CITB/ConstructionSkills. Other, smaller, sources of financial support are LHT itself, The Riverside Partnership (a neighbouring housing association), and the local housing renewal body New Heartlands Partnership.

Alan is concerned to point out the already considerable contribution LHT makes in addressing the employment and training needs of its tenants. The company is heavily involved with a number of local social enterprises in providing courses and work opportunities for long-term unemployed adults and young people who fall into the not in employment, education or training (NEET) category. "We need to ensure that our LHT communities benefit directly from our considerable investment in and commitment to the GTA project," says Alan, "and this will certainly be our priority in the coming months and years."

Initially CTF will choose its first apprentices from candidates whose apprenticeship has been cut short as a result of redundancy. Next will come those college students currently on a Programme Led Apprenticeship (PLA) but without an employer, and finally candidates will be drawn from those attending training provision supported by the GTA partners.



Thomas Croft, apprentice plasterer

## Thomas Says:

*"The GTA project was the light at the end of the tunnel for me. It will give me the skills and qualifications I need to secure long term employment. I am really enjoying my placement and looking forward to completing my apprenticeship and gaining the qualification."*

# Look Ahead



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
1,892 homes, 720 employees

**Geography:**  
London and the Southeast

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
Nine, growing to 25 in 2010

**Main contact:**  
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Look Ahead Housing and Care provides housing, care and support to vulnerable individuals across London and the Southeast. The organisation recently set up its health and social care apprenticeship programme and has quickly realised the benefits. Samantha Mwedekeli, Vocational Learning and PSA Manager says: "We wanted a better way of recruiting a new pool of talent, people who had a clean slate and weren't jaded by negative experiences, so we could teach our new apprentices the Look Ahead values and show them best practice in the sector."

They have also had support from the NAS. Samantha says: "NAS has been great. They came to speak to our senior management team to help me secure buy-in at the top, and they also matched us with our training provider, Kensington & Chelsea College, as well as offering a lot of advice on setting up a good apprenticeship programme."

The recruitment and selection process has been an important tool for finding the right candidates. Samantha continues: "We advertised in Metro and via the NAS web-based matching service and the Jobcentre. We also set up a website to provide more information on the positions available. We invited applicants to an assessment centre to check literacy and numeracy levels, and we conducted a speed-dating-type interview process, which the candidates really enjoyed as it helped them to relax and be themselves. The speed-dating system also gave more managers and service users a chance to be involved in the recruitment process, which was important to us." A total of 185 people applied for nine places on the 12-month apprenticeship.

When it was set up in September 2009, nine apprentices started at Look Ahead and are enjoying the benefits of learning while earning.



**Alison, who is 40 years old, says:**

*"It was fantastic when I spotted this opportunity and realised there wasn't an age restriction, so I was able to apply. I'd done lots of customer-facing jobs over the years and really enjoyed them, but I wanted to have more*

*of an impact on the people I work with. At the same time my mum became ill, and I got involved with Social Services and other care providers and realised that I would like to do something similar. Volunteering wasn't an option for me because I had things to pay for, so the apprenticeship scheme gave me the opportunity to gain the knowledge and experience while getting paid."*



**Sian, 27, is also enjoying the experience. She says:**

*"I have learned and done so many things – how the business runs, how to support customers, and the importance of planning. There's more paperwork but this has helped me to*

*become organised. I've got a great manager and the staff are always working together."*



**Hanan, 28, says:**

*"I'm enjoying learning and developing new knowledge, understanding why people behave the way they do, and I like gathering evidence for the NVQ to prove that I am learning things." She also*

*comments: "The apprenticeship has given me the opportunity to work and study in a sector I am very passionate about. It has enabled me to apply my new found knowledge and to gain experience in supporting customers every day."*

Look Ahead would also like to set up pre-apprenticeship training to support people in their search for work, providing interview preparation, CV development, and guidance on successfully completing application forms.

# Midland Heart



Midland Heart is a significant housing association with homes across the Midlands. They have major programmes of training and employment support for the local communities in the towns and cities where they have a presence. The company spends up to £500,000 per year to assist over 400 people into training and/or employment across the nine different projects addressing the worklessness agenda. Prominent among these is the Broad Horizons Enterprise Centre in Coventry offering Live/Work accommodation to young entrepreneurs, and the Birmingham-based North Lozells project which specialises in identifying and providing advice on employment and training opportunities to local residents.

It was only last July, however, that Midland Heart began their first apprenticeship programme with support from the NAS.

The programme employs 21 apprentices in three disciplines: 19 in social care, and one each in regeneration and marketing. Although only intending to recruit an initial ten apprentices, the quality of candidates was so high it was decided to offer a further 11 places. All receive a wage of at least £95 a week, plus benefits such as travel pass and membership of the company pension scheme. All candidates attend Sutton Coldfield College for one day per week, studying Level 1 and Level 2 NVQ and are allocated a workplace mentor to oversee their development. The social care apprentices will work across Midland Heart Supported Housing schemes spending three months in each of the following areas: homelessness, youth, mental health services, and learning disability services. All those recruited were over 18 years old.

Elaine Le Montais, Head of Worklessness at Midland Heart, is delighted at the success of the programme and feels it has benefitted the organisation enormously. The company was aware that its age profile was of an aging workforce, and was keen to begin to address this anomaly through the apprenticeship programme. However in addition to this, Elaine feels that Midland Heart has also gained through the “breath of fresh air” that the process has introduced to the company. The programme has been closely observed by all areas and its success has resulted in other sections of the association requesting an apprenticeship programme. Another key benefit has been the constructive publicity generated for the organisation by being able to promote such a positive initiative to its tenants and the wider community.

Midland Heart has its own in-house procurement resource but as yet has not imposed any obligations on contractors either to employ apprentices or indeed to participate in any kind of training initiatives. It is a situation that the company is keen to address and Elaine is confident that all future contracts will contain the requirement to establish apprenticeship programmes.



Mary Mainwaring, communications and marketing apprentice

**Mary says:**

*“My year as an apprentice in the marketing team was brilliant. I have gained so much experience and I really appreciate everything they have done for me. I know now that I am prepared for future jobs in marketing.”*

## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
32,000 homes, 1350 employees

**Geography:**  
Central Midlands, Coventry,  
Birmingham, Wolverhampton

**Number of apprentices  
currently employed:**  
12 directly with Midland Heart

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# Riverside



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
50,000 homes, 2,400 employees

**Geography:**  
National

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
30+

**Main contact:**  
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Riverside is a housing association with nationwide coverage, managing over 50,000 properties in communities from Carlisle to Kent. Stephen Chapman, Regeneration Officer at Riverside, is particularly keen to stress that the engagement of residents in employment and training opportunities is a clear and specific objective of the organisation and forms a key part of its corporate plan to help residents become more prosperous. As a result of this commitment, Riverside has made major investments in the structures and resources necessary to achieve its objectives. Currently it has a target of assisting 250 residents into employment each year through the initiatives it has established, often in partnership. Stephen and Regeneration Manager Paul Booth see their recruitment of approximately 30 apprentices a year as a significant part of the overarching commitment the organisation has towards addressing worklessness and skills gaps in local communities.

Riverside has a number of key partners it works with to deliver its ambitious employment and apprenticeship schemes. For example, social enterprises in London and on Merseyside play a valuable role in providing the pre-employment support, training and placement opportunities with contractors in their localities. Riverside's joint venture with house builders Lovell (the Compendium Group) generates high quality apprenticeships through Lovell's Craft Academy, with above-average completion rates of 86%. Lovell's well regarded programme often brings added value to regeneration programmes, engaging with hard-to-reach or disaffected individuals through employability schemes. For example, a Compendium Group development in Stoke-on-Trent delivered six apprenticeships in recent years, with some progressing to Level 3 and management standard during 2009.

Riverside is also a partner in the Fusion 21 Procurement framework that delivers employment to local residents as a result of contracts secured. Although Fusion 21 does not refer to trainees as "apprentices" since there is no age limit on the

programme, the two-year training programme mirrors the concept of an apprenticeship.

Riverside is aware that although it has always sought to secure contractor commitment to the employment of apprentices, this commitment has not always been honoured. This was particularly apparent when Riverside was using several contractors over different time scales to provide the maintenance to its housing stock. Such a complex and varied scenario made it difficult for the organisation to properly ascertain whether or not the contractors were keeping to agreements on the numbers of apprentices to be employed. A major step forward in addressing this difficulty was Riverside's decision to move to single-company, long-term contracts (in some cases five years) for its responsive repairs and maintenance provision.

The new arrangement offers much greater clarity to the contractor/apprenticeship process, and Riverside staff are better able to monitor new apprenticeships being established as a direct result of the value of spend. The two areas of the organisation to adopt this strategy are its Mersey North and South East divisions, resulting in the employment of an additional three apprentices with Morrison Plc, with further places planned over the life of both contracts. The contractor has also opened up opportunities for under-represented groups, which has enabled trainees such as Clare Van, a female plumbing student, to gain valuable work experience.



Apprentices Gary Lamont, Jack Earle and Alex Archer

## Stephen Chapman says:

*"Employment and skills, particularly apprenticeships, are high on the agenda nationally. At Riverside we recognise the real opportunities that can be created through the value of our contracts, and our business activities as a whole. The relationships we've nurtured with partners across the public, private and third sector demonstrates our commitment to engaging with residents to help link them to an array of employment and apprenticeship opportunities."*

Most recently, Riverside has utilised Future Jobs Funding via the Groundwork/National Housing Federation consortium to plan a number of horticultural apprenticeships within its environmental Clean Team based in Liverpool, with plans to develop similar opportunities in other parts of the country. The fund has also enabled Riverside to create routes into customer service, administration, community engagement and IT.

## Gary Lamont has been with the Clean Team as an apprentice since May 2009 and says:

*"Since starting my apprenticeship with the Clean Team, I've learnt a range of new skills including working towards an NVQ Level 2 in horticulture, and I'm part of a really good team of people. The training on offer from Riverside since day one has been great. As we do such a varied job, everything we learn is put into practice and I'm now looking forward to building on my career as a team supervisor."*

# Sanctuary Group



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
76,000 homes, 5,800 employees

**Geography:**  
National

**Number of apprentices directly employed:**  
27, increasing to 57 by the end of 2010

**Main contact:**  
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Sanctuary Group started its apprenticeship programme in 2007, and in August 2009 it rolled out the programme nationally. It recognised that there was a pool of young and enthusiastic talent that, with the appropriate training and support, could be great assets to the organisation. By offering apprenticeships, Sanctuary has created another "choice route" for potential employees who may not otherwise have applied to the organisation.

Sanctuary Group now employs 27 apprentices in a range of disciplines from accountancy and business administration to construction and social care, and plans to take on a further 30 by the end of 2010. "Colleagues are really enthusiastic about the programme because they like to see people being given new opportunities," says Mike Smith, HR Improvement Manager. "We're attracting new employees and providing development opportunities for people who want a different route into work."

Marketing the apprenticeship programme has been important to get the right young people interested. The Sanctuary Group attends career fairs nationally to market the programme, as well as advertising through their local training providers. They are in the process of developing a web-based microsite especially to promote the apprenticeship programme. Jay and Sam, who are both business administration apprentices, say: "It's been great to give our feedback on the website, because we know what young people want. We've also been to some of the career fairs to talk about our experiences, and we'd really like to start visiting schools in the area to get more schoolkids to realise that you can learn and earn at the same time."

**Laura, Clare, Charlotte and Lucy, who have all followed the accountancy apprenticeship scheme, felt that learning while working was much better than continuing to study and get into debt. They said:**

*"Getting work experience as well as qualifications, and getting paid, has been great! We're all at different stages so we can support each other when there's lots of new work to do, and nothing is too overwhelming. We can see that there's a real career path here for us."*

NAS has played an important role in supporting Sanctuary to develop partnerships with approved training providers. The housing association is currently working with local colleges to develop a bespoke apprenticeship scheme in maintenance operations and a second in horticulture, which will be launched during 2010.

Sanctuary Group also uses the NVQ process to develop its existing staff, as part of an employee's continuous development. The Group is an accredited NVQ centre and is currently supporting 132 employees to achieve NVQs in a range of subjects from health and social care to leadership and management.



Laura, Clare, Charlotte and Lucy, accountancy apprentices



Jay and Sam, business administration apprentices

# Shoreline Housing Partnership



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
7,900 homes, 280 employees

**Geography:**  
North East Lincolnshire

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
12 through the supply chain

**Main contact:**  
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At the start of its Decent Homes Standard programme, Shoreline Housing Partnership was delighted to secure commitments from the successful contractors, Mears & Bullock, to establish apprenticeship programmes, particularly as both companies agreed these would be new starts, selected from a recruitment process established by Shoreline. This process involved open days, direct mailing and press advertisements, and resulted in over a hundred applicants (50 of them Shoreline residents) being interviewed. When only one post out of an initial 15 appointments went to a Shoreline resident, the company was determined to do all it could to address what was a significant issue for its residents and families. Clearly additional support resources were needed, to ensure that families from Shoreline properties were in a position to compete effectively for these kinds of high earning, high quality employment opportunities.

Firstly the company established a "Project Horizon" programme, where it recruited and employed young people, some of them homeless, on the refurbishment of a block of 26 previously boarded up one-bedroom flats. The candidates were trained in the various skills needed to complete the work schedule, and working under the guidance of a team of mentors and advisors successfully brought the block back into re-lettable condition: it has generated over £100,000 of rental income per year since then. Project Horizon also saw 17 trainees completing their training and placement, with 14 moving into permanent employment, and 12 previously homeless young people moving into the flats they had themselves refurbished. Phillip Thames, the Neighbourhood Investment Manager, says that as well as providing life changing opportunities to young people, the programme has also "totally regenerated an area previously blighted by vandalism and fly tipping."

Building on the success of Project Horizon, the company next established a major programme of garden-wall building, utilising the same client group of homeless and long-term unemployed

residents. Over 70 applicants completed the training and placement programmes, gaining an NVQ Level 2 in bricklaying, and 30 progressed into full-time employment, 20 of them as apprentices with Shoreline and/or its contractors. Central to the success of both initiatives were the mentoring and coaching resources brought in to support the trainees throughout their employment on the projects.

These programmes have now culminated in a major new Building Skills 4 Life project, drawing down over £1million of Neighbourhood Renewal Funds. The programme will be supporting the employment of residents to work on the refurbishment of Shoreline properties, enabling them to gain the experience, skills and work-ready attitude they need to effectively compete for jobs and employment. Philip expects that over the 2.5 year life of the project, over 160 trainees will gain training and qualifications in construction related skills, with over 50 Shoreline residents gaining apprenticeship opportunities as a result

Philip Thames is keen to point out that the projects could not have been the success they were without a multi-agency approach. Intensive support was available, and used, for those candidates grappling with drug, debt, alcohol, health and other critical challenges that were preventing them from reaching their full potential.

As well as the clear benefits to the tenants of improved employability, there are significant returns for the company in the transformation of previously run-down areas, and the rental income from the letting of previously boarded up properties.



Nathan Smith, 19, apprentice bricklayer

**Nathan says:**

*"Project Horizon had enabled me to get on with my life and work towards some qualifications that helped me to get this job as a bricklayer. I would say to others that are thinking about taking up something like this – do it! It will really help you, but don't think you can mess about or turn up when you want. You have to be really committed and want to be successful and work hard."*

Nathan says the Project has helped him to believe in himself and to be a role model to others – even his Dad! His family and friends are really proud of him and they can see the difference in him.

# Sovereign South+West



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
16,000 homes, 350 employees

**Geography:**  
West Berkshire, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset & Devon.

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
38 via supply chain, main contractor Leadbitter

Eight directly with Sovereign South+West, growing to 11 in 2010

**Main contact:**  
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Sovereign South+West has had great successes with its supply chain, which has taken on 38 apprentices on projects in its Construction Links programme, which started in 2006.

To complement this, Sovereign South+West has been keen to offer more apprenticeships directly within the organisation. "Securing buy-in from senior management has been an important part of the process," says Gez Bentley, Employment and Training Links Co-ordinator. "We have developed an employment and training strategy, which has just been signed off by our management team. This sets out how we link into the wider worklessness agenda, and how the whole business can help tackle this area, which has such deep implications. Apprenticeships are one route that we want to expand, and start to support our own residents to access these opportunities."

Helping managers to understand the apprenticeship process has also been important. "Some managers don't know much about the apprenticeship process, so I've developed a guide for managers, so they know what to expect from their apprentices, and also how to best support their new recruits. I hope this will help to standardise the apprenticeship process and give it more structure."

Sovereign South+West started its apprenticeship programme in September 2006 and has been slowly building up its capacity. Aimee was the first recruit, who joined as a business administration apprentice. She has gone on to complete Level 3 in administration and has now also completed her customer service NVQ Level 2, and is currently doing Level 3. She says: "I've had a great start to my career here and I think doing my NVQs has really helped me to progress. I started off as a Property Team Assistant, then I moved up to Contracts Administrator and now I'm just about to start a secondment as an Estate Surveyor, which is where I want to end up."

Sovereign Response, the property and maintenance service for the Group also takes on construction apprentices.

**Jason, an apprentice manager and mentor, says:**  
*"I started as an apprentice myself so I was keen to push the programme. The lads have been really good. We get to train them to just how we need them, and they also come back from college with information on new products that we haven't always heard about yet."*

**Two plumbing apprentices, both called James, are enjoying the independence they get now that they are both in their second year: They say:**

*"We love having our own vans, we get to do jobs on our own now, which is great. But we also know that if we need help there's always another plumber nearby who will help us out with a problem. It's a great feeling getting through the apprenticeship – the experience we're gaining and also getting the qualification."*

Lisa Denison, Head of Neighbourhood Investment for Sovereign South+West, is enthusiastic about the project: "We have always been keen to support young people looking for training opportunities, but it has been fairly ad hoc in the past. Now we have a dedicated resource, we can guide managers, support more apprentices, and make sure everyone gets the most out of it. We can also look at more areas in the business rather than just the traditional crafts. This makes good business sense for us, and supports our vision to create thriving neighbourhoods."



Aimee, business and administration apprentice



James and James, plumbing apprentices

# Wakefield and District Housing



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
31,000 homes, 1400 employees

**Geography:**  
Yorkshire

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
40 directly with WDH

**Main contact:**  
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Kevin Dodd, the Chief Executive of Wakefield and District Housing Association (WDH), is quite clear about the case for creating an apprenticeship programme: "This housing association has a total commitment to providing high quality training, skills and employment opportunities to the communities in our geographical areas of operations. Our apprenticeship programme, with its size and an offering that takes apprentices through to minimum Level 3 NVQ proficiency, is at the core of delivering that commitment."

Since the establishment of the programme in 2006, the company has recruited up to 20 apprentices each year. All recruits are taken through to an NVQ Level 3 standard, with a significant number going on to complete Level 4. These positions are split between its technical side comprising joiners, plumbers, electricians, bricklayers etc and its professional team. It has a total of 40 employees currently serving an apprenticeship to Level 3 and a further 15 who have completed an apprenticeship of up to four years, depending on the type of programme followed. The company has its own purpose-built training centre complete with a team of assessors and trainers.

All apprentices who have completed the scheme have secured permanent full-time jobs with WDH.

Recruitment for the programme is through local media, and the Wakefield Jobcentre Plus team. Important potential additional recruitment routes that WDH has are the Wakefield Homebuilder programme and, in a less direct way, the Community Leadership initiative. Wakefield Homebuilder is a resource that delivers training and employment opportunities in construction to the long term unemployed of the area. WDH are working in partnership with Wakefield Groundwork for delivery of this award winning project, which is supported by the European Social Fund. It has placed over 220 people in employment since its establishment in 2006, a significant number with WDH Technical Services Department. Kevin Dodd says: "By encouraging unemployed people, many of them WDH tenants, into meaningful training, we are building more confident communities."

The Community Leadership initiative is WDH's programme of work with schools, and is designed to help the students' personal development, self confidence and awareness of the world of work. WDH provides volunteer mentors, work experience opportunities, and for students who are WDH residents, a week-long stay at an Outward Bound centre.

The apprenticeship programme does require a significant investment from WDH. In 2009/2010 it invested £520,000 in its trades apprenticeships and £172,000 on its range of office-based apprenticeships. It has attracted funding to support some of the training delivered. The company's status as inscope to CITB/ConstructionSkills allows it to draw down funding for its construction apprentices.



Daniel and Sasha, apprentices

**Sasha Timson, an office-based apprentice working in the communications team, has been spending the first few months of the programme working in marketing and events. Sasha says:**

*"I've really been enjoying it, everyone's been friendly and welcomed me into the team. I've settled in well and have already learned a lot."*

**Daniel Withington is a year two bricklayer apprentice studying to Level 3. He is based at the company's Castleford depot and says:**

*"I've been learning a lot. I have been re-building walls and making them look neater. I have also been working on ramps and re-building steps. Hopefully I'll soon be involved in newbuilds."*

# Walsall Housing Group



## Factfile

**Size of Housing Association:**  
19,000 Homes, 930 employees

**Geography:**  
Walsall area.

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
40 + (split between WHG and contractors)

**Main contact:**  
Audrey Clarkson, Work Based Learning Mentor

**Email:**  
Audrey.clarkson@whgrp.co.uk

**Phone:**  
01922 425916

Walsall Housing Group is extremely proud of its re-located and newly re-furbished Skills Centre. With £1.4 million spent on it, it is able to offer not only high quality joinery, bricklaying and plastering training facilities but also state of the art plumbing, gas and electrical resources too. Candidates are able to undertake training up to NVQ Level 3 in each of these skill areas. The Centre is currently developing a facility to deliver training for the installation of renewable energy sources, this will also support future retro fit programmes the organisation may offer.

The funding was won as a result of the excellent partnership arrangements the group has with its local council and the New Deal For Communities Company. This alliance secured the funding from a variety of sources including European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Walsall College, Performance through People and Protocol Skills.

All of the training for the groups annual intake of 30-40 apprentices is carried on at the Centre. Unusually for a housing association the Centre is an accredited provider recognised by a number of awarding bodies and, crucially, by the Skills Funding Agency. As a result WHG are able to draw down substantial funding to support their extensive apprenticeship programme.

Recruitment for the apprenticeship programme is done through local media and also through the groups strong links with its supply chain of contractors. As the Skills Centre is located in the heart of one of the group's largest estates it has a high visibility with local tenants and residents. This physical presence and a targeted recruitment programme have helped ensure that at least 50% of apprentices come from housing association homes. This desire to provide quality training, employment and apprenticeship opportunities to their communities was one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the WHG Skill Centre.

Half of the apprentices recruited for the programme will be employed by WHG contractors while the remainder will carry out their apprenticeship with the

companies own direct labour workforce. WHG has major programmes of refurbishment work, (Decent Homes Standard etc.) where Wates is the main contractor and Bovis fulfill the New Build activity role. In addition it has numerous smaller companies carrying out a variety of construction related contracts. WHG has secured an agreement with each of its contractors to collaborate and support its apprentice training.

A significant feature of these arrangements is the support it has secured from Bovis, who currently employ five WHG apprentices. The significance lies in the fact that during this research, while a number of housing associations have clear commitments from contractors doing refurbishment and sometimes, maintenance contracts to take on apprentices, there are very few instances of this in the new build sector. Given the governments, and the HCAs stipulation that future funding from these sources will require the presence of an apprenticeship programme to go with this spend it may well be that WHG has some important templates and models for other housing associations to examine.

The Skills Centre also runs a significant Entry to Employment (e2e) provision for those hard to reach youngsters in NEET (not in education employment or training) group. During the 16-20 weeks programme the candidates are given an introduction to the different skills in construction and an opportunity to achieve improved levels of literacy and numeracy. Around 10% of the WHG apprentice intake is drawn from the e2e cohort and says Audrey Clarkson, Work Based Learning Mentor "the e2e route provides a lifeline for young people who may otherwise have slipped through the net completely"

Claire Fellows, WHG Learning & Development manager says "the group are keen to explore the opportunities that exist to establish a staff side apprenticeship programme in the future and is very interested in the developments taking place with regard to qualifications for housing staff." The group are making every effort in the meantime to ensure that those staff in a position to gain a qualification

are able to do so. During the past year over 75 colleagues have used, or are using, an OSAT (On-Site Assessment and Training) process to work towards an NVQ at Level 2/3 in subjects such as customer service, business administration, management, health and social care and information, advice and guidance. The whole process is conducted on site through the use of assessors and the developments portfolios of evidence in achievement and generally takes between 6 and 9 months.

Tim Rymond the newly appointed Skills Centre Manager says he needs to ensure the Skills Centre continues to do what it does best, our aim being to ensure all learners achieve their full potential, while preparing them to meet current and future business needs. He is looking forward to developing their facility to enable the delivery of low carbon technologies and meet the organisations business requirement in this area



Sammy Earley,  
apprentice plumber

### Sammy says:

*"Whilst on site I've worked with different mentors and they have all given me great advice and tips about things such as pipe bending so that it's no longer a problem for me. It was strange how some of the lads on site would come to my aid as if they saw me as a damsel in distress' and I used to stand back and watch them complete the task, but now I wouldn't allow that, as I realise I'm not gaining any experience. Overall I enjoy being the minority in a male dominated industry!"*

# Westward Group



## Factfile

**Size of housing association:**  
6,200 homes, 440 employees

**Geography:**  
South West

**Number of apprentices currently employed:**  
Six directly with Westward Group

**Main contact:**  
Kirstey Steer, Human Resources Co-ordinator

**Email:**  
kirstey.steer@westwardhousing.org.uk

**Phone:**  
01803 217507

Westward Housing Group took on its first apprentice, Jenny, in 1994. Sixteen years later, she's now an experienced and qualified management accountant in the finance department, currently managing two members of staff. Jenny says: "I feel proud to be the first apprentice in the organisation, and it's great to see others coming in and starting down the same route. I know my career wouldn't have been the same without doing an apprenticeship."

Mike Sennitt, Group Director of Corporate Services, who helped to set the programme up says: "We had an aging workforce, so we wanted to get more young people into the organisation. We realised we were missing good talent and now in today's climate we want to be supporting more young people through a difficult economic climate."

Julian Tuck, CEO of Westward Group, says: "We are committed to training the local community and I want the Group to have a wider social remit - we're not just about providing housing. And apprentices are great for the Group: they're inspirational for the organisation and very productive staff members, so we see the apprenticeship programme as a win-win."

Kirstey Steer, who is responsible for the recruitment and mentoring of the apprentices, says: "The apprentices were invited to join the working group for the staff conference. As a result of their input, the conference had much more vitality, because the apprentices had fresh ideas in the planning stages and were really enthusiastic on the day."

The Group invites all potential apprentices to an informal interview, as well as for a week of work experience, to assess their ability to learn a range of tasks. Kirstey continues: "This helps us to see how the apprentices get on with other members of the team, how willing they are to learn, and where their learning and development needs lie." Kirstey adds that providing mentoring support for the apprentices is an important part of her role: "I spend 25-50% of my working week co-ordinating the apprenticeship programme, catching up with the apprentices and liaising with the colleges and the managers about individual progress."

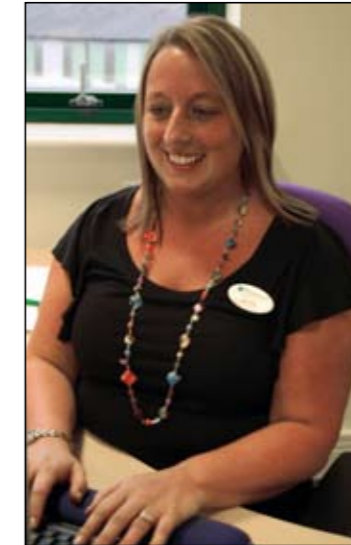
**Sam, a previous apprentice in business and administration says:**

*"My lack of confidence was the big thing for me, and Kirstey helped me to build my confidence up. The whole programme has helped me to build up myself much more. And now I've helped Jo to answer the telephones confidently and can teach her new ways of dealing with work situations."*

**Jo and Sam would both recommend doing an apprenticeship. They say:**

*"You hear on the news about students coming out of Uni and not getting a job, and we're not in that situation. We're lucky to be learning and earning at the same time." Jo adds: "It's great to be able to pay for my own driving lessons now; I can take responsibility for myself."*

Westward Group are planning to grow their programme by taking on 2-3 new apprentices every year, but are also keen to start apprenticeships in the construction industry, and engage with other housing associations to set up joint programmes.



Jenny, the first apprentice to be taken on by the Westward Group. She is now a qualified management accountant.



Sam has completed Level 2 and Level 3 in business and administration.



Jo has just completed Level 2 in business and administration

# Recommendations and conclusion

Based on the research that has been conducted, several recommendations have been suggested below, in order to develop and grow the number of apprenticeships being offered in the housing sector.

## 1. Contractual obligations to be written into all framework/contractor agreements

Housing associations should ensure that there is a contractual obligation written into framework agreements which sets out the employment and training responsibilities of contractors and sub-contractors. This would create significant leverage with contractors, developing new capacity to take on apprentices in the construction industry, within the housing association's supply chain. Without contractual obligations, housing associations are reliant on good will, which often runs out when projects starting running out of time and money.

HCA launched a procurement toolkit in February 2010 which has been written in partnership with the law firm Trowers and Hamblins. The toolkit includes guidance and templates for setting up employment and training requirements that are EU compliant. It also contains the correct wording which can be used in Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) notices, pre-qualification questionnaires and invitations to tender. To access the free toolkit, click on the links below.

<http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/public/documents/Registered-Provider-Guidance.pdf>

<http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/public/documents/Developer-Contractor-Guidance.pdf>

## 2. Improving the partnership with and raising the profile of the NAS

The NAS has a range of resources and support for housing associations wishing to develop existing apprenticeship programmes or set up new ones. However these services are not known to all housing associations. Closer partnerships with the NAS would ensure that housing associations:

- Gain a better understanding of the apprenticeship process for all staff members
- Work with an approved college or training provider, sourced by the NAS
- Set up tried and tested apprenticeship programmes which were more likely to succeed, and which are less time-consuming to establish
- Have a better understanding of the wide range of apprenticeship frameworks available and how they could be used to improve the skills of new and existing staff

Housing associations not already working in partnership with the NAS, should contact their regional lead, who can provide more detail about the type of support that can be offered. Email addresses are as follows:

| Region        | Name and email address   |
|---------------|--|
| South West    | jane.bodimeade@apprenticeships.gov.uk or rob.sly@apprenticeships.gov.uk          |
| West Midlands | charlotte.bloor@apprenticeships.gov.uk   |
| South East    | tracey.grant@apprenticeships.gov.uk or zeena.cala@apprenticeships.gov.uk         |
| London        | anna.byers@apprenticeships.gov.uk or jessie.buscombe@apprenticeships.gov.uk      |
| East England  | catherine.henry@apprenticeships.gov.uk or teresa.logan@apprenticeships.gov.uk    |
| North West    | mark.donnelly@apprenticeships.gov.uk   |
| North East    | albert.leaf@apprenticeships.gov.uk or alan.wallace@apprenticeships.gov.uk        |
| East Midlands | henry.inman@apprenticeships.gov.uk   |
| York & Humber | kay.butterfield@apprenticeships.gov.uk or anthony.knowles@apprenticeships.gov.uk |

Alternatively, the NAS has a national helpline 08000 150 600 and a website at [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk).

## 3. Development of pre-apprenticeship programmes

In order to better support their own tenants, housing associations need to expand their pre-apprenticeship offer. Funding is becoming harder to acquire for housing association-led employment and training programmes, so partnerships with local training providers and councils need to be strengthened. This will ensure that tenants can be appropriately guided to relevant courses such as literacy, numeracy, information and communication technologies, CV-writing, interview techniques, personal development and communication workshops. When they successfully complete pre-apprenticeship courses, tenants can be offered work experience within the housing association, to give them much needed familiarity with the world of work. This will make them more skilled and experienced and therefore more likely to succeed when applying for an apprenticeship.

## 4. Securing funding through the National Housing Federation

The National Housing Federation has been instrumental in drawing down funding through the Worklessness programme, to deliver the first joint national employment programme, supporting 1,700 young people into work in the housing sector. Over a hundred housing associations participate in the project, receiving funding secured by the Federation and Groundwork UK on behalf of the national consortium. A similar model could be used to draw

down funding for apprenticeships. The National Housing Federation could play a significant role in:

- Securing funding to help housing associations to deliver more Apprenticeships
- Lobbying central government to recognise that pre-apprenticeship support is needed for housing association tenants, as well as funding for those 25 years old who currently miss out on this opportunity due to the limited available support
- Supporting smaller housing associations to set up successful apprenticeship programmes in partnership with the NAS and Asset Skills
- Working in partnership with the NAS and Asset Skills to raise the profile of both organisations within the sector, and to ensure that any apprenticeship developments within the housing sector meet the needs of industry

Over the period of this research study, it has become clear that there is a genuine commitment and motivation from housing associations to deliver apprenticeship programmes. Those housing associations that are already supporting apprentices want to do more to benefit their tenants and the wider community. Those who haven't yet set up apprenticeship programmes are keen to learn from those that have. All want to continue to help more unemployed individuals to succeed in their organisations and to improve their social and economic circumstances.

# Notes

## **National Housing Federation**

The National Housing Federation represents 1,200 independent, not-for-profit housing associations in England and is the voice of affordable housing. Our members provide two and a half million affordable homes for more than five million people.

[www.housing.org.uk](http://www.housing.org.uk)  
[www.inbiz.org](http://www.inbiz.org)

Lion Court, 25 Procter Street,  
London WC1V 6NY  
Tel: 020 7067 1010  
Email: [info@housing.org.uk](mailto:info@housing.org.uk)

## **National Apprenticeship Service**

The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) has end to end responsibility for Apprenticeships in England. The NAS has been designed to increase the number of Apprenticeship opportunities and provide a dedicated, responsive service for both employers and learners. We are simplifying the process of recruiting an Apprentice through Apprenticeship vacancies, an online web-based matching service.

[www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)

Tel: 08000 150 600