

How schools can use apprenticeships to improve teaching and learning

Plymouth Cast - January 2021



Plymouth CAST, a multi academy trust of 35 schools and one nursery, have secured more than £100k in apprenticeship levy transfer funding to support their workforce development.

It is a common thought that promoting apprenticeships in school is all about inspiring students about the wide range of opportunities that apprenticeships can offer, however, there is a growing movement of schools across England who are accessing apprenticeship funding to boost their training and development budgets and unlock an exciting range of programmes for both their teaching and support staff.

Schools may sometimes feel like there is not enough time to look at anything outside of the daily priorities, especially with the challenges that 2020 has brought. However, there remains huge, untapped opportunity for schools to be utilising apprenticeship funding to boost the motivation, retention and overall skills of their workforce.

Anna Morrison CBE recently spoke to Plymouth CAST to find out how they are managing to navigate the world of CPD with great agility and creativity, utilising apprenticeships to upskill and grow their workforce, help staff feel valued and offer what looks to be an unrivalled CPD strategy with little to no CPD budget!

[Plymouth CAST](#) consists of 35 schools and one nursery across the 3 counties of Cornwall, Devon and Dorset, stretching from Poole to Penzance, with over 7,000 students and 1,300 staff.

In this interview we are joined by Zoe Batten, CEO and Diana Taylor, Staff Development and Safeguarding Officer, to explore the incredible and inspiring ways they have utilised the apprenticeship levy, navigated the world of training providers and Standards, harnessed local business sponsorship through levy-transfer and have worked collaboratively across their schools to offer a supportive CPD training strategy that includes

a rich mixture of Level 3 Supporting Teaching and Learning and Early Years apprenticeships, Level 4 Peer Coaching apprenticeships, Level 5 and Level 6 Teaching and Learning apprenticeships, and the Level 7 Senior Leader Master's Degree Apprenticeship programme, incorporating either a Masters in Inclusion and SEND or a Masters in Values Led Leadership.

Welcome. Please tell us about your roles.

ZB - I'm the CEO of Plymouth CAST and joined the trust in September 2020. We have a fantastic and skilled central team and a very clear focus on school improvement and ensuring that our children have the very best opportunities. We really do believe in investing in staff and ensuring that we have a very strong and skilled workforce, which will in turn impact positively on pupil outcomes.

DT - My role is Staff Development and Safeguarding Officer. I've been with the trust since October 2016, just before the apprenticeship levy started being rolled out. My role involves, amongst other things, development of a varied CPD offer to all staff across the Trust.

What made you initially look at apprenticeships, Diana?

DT - At first it was a realisation that if we didn't use the apprenticeship levy, we would lose it. I looked at the apprenticeships available in education to see what we could utilise.

In the early stages, we mainly used our apprenticeship levy to support staff through the [Teaching and Learning \(Level 3\)](#), and [Early Years Educator \(Level 3\)](#). Of our 1300 staff, only 24% are teaching staff, so support staff comprise a considerable proportion of our workforce. We identified that we could use apprenticeships to upskill existing support staff and take on new staff in support positions, embedding an apprenticeship where possible.

We then focussed on our business support staff, and recognised that we could use the apprenticeship levy to upskill staff in [business administration](#) Level 2 & 3, [finance](#) and [school business professional](#) Level 4.

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Keen to enable experienced non-teaching classroom based staff find routes into teaching, we recently enrolled 3 non-teaching staff based in our secondary schools onto the Level 5 Learning and Skills Teacher apprenticeship. This is the equivalent of a diploma in education and would enable them to progress to train as teachers, on completion of a third year of degree-standard study.

We have also offered class-based support staff with an honours degree the opportunity to do a [Level 6 teacher](#) apprenticeship and gain QTS. To date, two support staff have successfully qualified as teachers, and schools throughout the trust have benefited from retaining and developing staff who are dedicated to working in their specific context.

“At first, it was a realisation that if we didn’t use the apprenticeship levy, we would lose it”

How has it developed since you came on board this September, Zoe?

ZB - We were focussing a large percentage of our apprenticeship levy on supporting CPD for non-teaching roles, but we were not offering sustained CPD through apprenticeships to our teachers. We wanted to start a cultural shift across the trust that really focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning, with a focus on core pedagogy. To continue to improve the quality of teaching, we needed a robust strategy so that our teachers could have access to the same level of sustained training, creating an equitable offer across the Trust. Using our Apprenticeship Levy in this way, we aim to develop a large proportion of our staff, providing them with the same language for learning, the same high quality experience and to achieve a connected approach to professional development across our schools.

So, you are using apprenticeships across your whole workforce?

DT - Yes, between April 2017 and January 2021, 114 apprenticeships will have been started by CAST staff. Apprenticeships have accounted for 71% of nationally accredited training, (benefitting 9% of the workforce).

We have also supported 46 NPQ qualifications (funded entirely through DfE bursaries) that have accounted for 29% of nationally accredited training, (benefitting 3.5% of the workforce).

“By January 2021, 114 apprenticeships will have been started by Cast staff”

Since June 2020, we have started three people on the [Learning and Skills Teacher Level 5](#), a further three staff on the [Teaching Assistant Level 3](#) and another on the [Early Years Educator Level 3](#).

From January 2021, we plan to start six staff on the Masters in Inclusion and SEND (with SENCO award) which is the [Level 7 Senior Leader](#) apprenticeship, contextualised for education professionals. We will also start a further four staff on the Masters in Values Led Leadership and we are enrolling nineteen teaching staff on the [Level 4 Assessor Coach](#) apprenticeship, for a 15 month programme starting in February 2021.

In 2021 we will be partnering with BD, one of the largest global medical technology companies in the world (www.BD.com) who happens to have one of its manufacturing plants in Plymouth. BD is organising a [levy transfer](#) to specifically fund peer coaching apprenticeship training for some of our teachers across the trust. BD had already run several STEM learning days for pupils at Notre Dame, one of our secondary schools, and despite being from different sectors, during discussion we realised that our core values were very similar. BD’s offer to transfer a proportion of their apprenticeship levy to our MAT fits with their Corporate Social Responsibility strategy, and enables us to offer a greater number of staff to undertake impactful CPD.

ZB – Our next steps are about creating a sustainable legacy through a supportive and achievable framework. Our trainees will be taught to coach, collaborate and support each other, reflecting on, and refining their own practice and that of their colleagues.

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This must feel like quite a culture shift for your entire trust. How have you presented the idea of apprenticeships as part of the teaching CPD programme and how have you got such a high level of take up and interest from your workforce?

ZB - We ensure that all staff see CPD as an investment, the opportunity to develop themselves professionally and that access to apprenticeships is an important part of that. We have developed a clear professional development map identifying the wide range of opportunities our staff teams can access at different point in their career, this is shared with colleagues and promoted through appraisal.

DT - It's all about relationships, collaboration, a core offering and ensuring staff see, and understand, the opportunities. It's also addressing key myths and hurdles, making sure leadership teams know the full story. For example, apprenticeships are not just for young people or new employees, they are for ongoing career development, up to Head Teacher and Senior Leader.

"It's all about relationships, collaboration, a core offering and ensuring staff see, and understand, the opportunities"

How do you approach the 20% 'off the job training'?

ZB - We're very mindful of the legal duties as employers, and offering 20% 'off the job' training is a legal requirement. The Level 4 Assessor/Coach apprenticeship for instance focusses on peer coaching and developing these skills in a teaching context. This means that part of the learning people will be doing naturally feeds into giving them the opportunity to practice those new skills and initiate coaching sessions. It's about making sure that 'off the job' training happens in a clear and robust way.

DT - For full-time class teachers, 20% 'off the job' training equates to 6.5 hours per week. Facilitating this 20% OTJ training does present a challenge for schools, because we simply don't have the budget to release teachers from teaching commitments for one day per week.

But 6.5 hours of OTJ training can be achieved in a number of creative and incremental ways. A staff meeting or a professional conversation with a colleague can all be logged as time spent 'off the job'. Achieving 20% OTJ training is all about piecing together sections of time across a working week where staff are engaged in activities not directly linked to their core function. Every school, workforce and team is different. There is no 'one' way of doing this, but having an honest and open conversation will identify the best way to approach the 20%.

Budgets and funding are always a hot topic for schools, can you tell us a little more info about your approach?

DT - Schools are under a lot of pressure at the moment due to COVID and staffing. It is a fine line between providing opportunities for people, but also being realistic regarding available budget and time. As a trust, we haven't historically had a centralised dedicated CPD budget.

All the externally accredited CPD that has been described in this conversation has been funded entirely by the Apprenticeship Levy or by DfE bursary funding. Much of what's been achieved has been on the basis of making the most of opportunities that have arisen at specific times (DfE bursary funding due to one of our schools being in a 'category 6' Opportunity Area) or by doing the best with what we've got (apprenticeship levy).

It is amazing how things unfold. BD, the company who will be partnering with us, has offered to sponsor nineteen peer coaching apprenticeships, and it's middle leaders and curriculum leads who will benefit from this opportunity. The transfer of levy funds is something we never expected, and didn't realise was possible until recently.

I'm delighted that we can enable people to develop personally, it builds capacity in our trust and it also demonstrates that we value our staff and want to invest in them.

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Have you accessed any of the government apprenticeship incentives and additional payments available to support the costs of the apprenticeship?

DT – We've always made use of government apprenticeship grants. Prior to COVID, several schools took on apprentices aged 16-24, and so benefitted from the AGE Grant of £1500 which helped towards the cost of their salary. Since the additional government incentive of £2000 was offered from August 2020 to take on new apprentices aged 16-24, schools have taken on at least five apprentices of this type, most of whom are Early Years or Supporting Teaching and Learning apprentices. These members of staff have been especially valuable during the past few months when staffing levels in schools have been stretched.

How have you selected your training providers?

DT - Because we are so geographically spread, many of our schools are in remote locations and many of our staff wear a number of different hats. The choice of training provider has often been limited as training practically needs to be 'at location'.

Our planned peer-to-peer coaching has also enabled us to approach training provider selection differently and we have actually gone out to tender and have chosen a provider based on identified success criteria.

What works in one school might not necessarily be a model that you can transfer to every school. Each school has its individual pressures, it's about inspiring the workforce to look at capacity, what they need and then look at the opportunities and the training providers that offer them and trying to find the best match.

What would you say are the main benefits for you in being able to offer apprenticeships to your workforce?

DT - Many of our team members have worked in education for several years without much in the way of quality CPD. The benefit is that, not only are we equipping our teams with the skills, experience and learning to make them more effective, but we are also demonstrating that we value them.

ZB – It's also a way of ensuring that CAST is seen as an 'employer of choice'. With apprenticeships being offered by the Trust, we are developing leaders for the future, investing in people and ensuring that they are supported throughout their career from the point of being a newly qualified teacher (NQT) right up to a systems leader. We now have a clear strategy with a sustainable legacy.

The other benefits of offering apprenticeships means that colleagues are upskilled within the workplace, which is far easier for Headteachers to accommodate in busy schools and more manageable for the apprentices to engage with, whilst still being able to undertake their day to day roles.

What would your advice be to schools who might be considering whether an apprenticeship programme could be right for their workforce?

DT - This is not just our challenge; it is the challenge of every school or trust that wants to upskill their workforce. If you do have an apprenticeship levy fund, how do you put it to good use? How can you use your levy funds to create a legacy? The apprenticeship levy is a really valuable resource that schools need to be making full access of because it can benefit the individuals and the schools. Use it to develop and upskill your existing workforce and invest in your people. Explore how you can use it when taking on new members of staff, utilise apprenticeships. With a background in teaching, and an awareness of just how challenging school funding is at present, I recognise that very often, schools feel they have little access to funds for CPD.

The key is to start with what you have. Be a good steward of whatever money you have and make it work for you. Make a start, identify one area where improvement is possible, manage it so it is not overwhelming and then look to scale-up.

Further information for schools

If you would like to explore how apprenticeships could support your workforce, please visit amazingapprenticeships.com/school-workforce. Here, you will find further information about apprenticeship funding, links to useful guidance and resources and additional case studies.