

Apprentice Academy is finding stars of tomorrow

The government recently announced a £60m scheme to create an extra 100,000 apprenticeships by 2014. **Shelina Begum** visited one Greater Manchester organisation already supplying firms with young talent

ALISON Bagnall is aiming to make a real difference to local businesses and the lives of young people in the north west.

The director of the Apprentice Academy in Manchester has been a strong advocate for placing young people in apprenticeships and is urging businesses to come forward and take advantage of the benefits they bring to a company.

Since last year, the organisation, which employs 25 staff, has already placed 330 teenagers aged 16 to 18 with 100 employers, including the Trafford Centre, Bruntwood, Stagecoach, Expedia and Fingershield.

The success rate of those apprentices in getting permanent jobs is 97%, which Bagnall says speaks volumes for the benefit and added-value

an apprentice brings to a business.

With one in five young people unemployed, news that the government is also committing £60m to an apprenticeship and work placement scheme aimed at boosting work prospects for the younger generation couldn't have come at a better time, she adds.

"Office apprentices can add a huge amount of value to businesses very quickly, whilst freeing up the existing workforce to focus on more higher value tasks," says Bagnall.

"Some of our clients had previously outsourced work overseas because it was more efficient to do it that way. For example, the digital sector often relied on the skills of people based abroad, but now they are starting to bring the work back to the UK and use apprentices instead.

"Also a lot of businesses in Manchester have ageing workforces and they recognise that this is an

issue. Young apprentices help to bring more energy and life into a business which can have a real impact on the motivation and productivity of the existing staff.

"At the Apprentice Academy we employ five apprentices – a quarter of our workforce – and they have made a real contribution with their exuberance and fresh ideas. In my opinion every business should employ apprentices."

The Apprentice Academy was created three years ago by Bagnall and managing director James Clarke, who have invested £500,000 to develop their service.

It was born out of their existing recruitment and retention business the Phoenix Way Group, which was set up 10 years ago and is based on Oxford Street.

"We were looking for new ways to add value to the service we currently offered," says Bagnall.

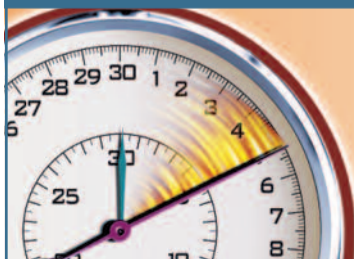
"Around the same time there was a lot of funding and grants around apprenticeship schemes, so we decided to set up a service to help businesses become more aware of the scheme, employ young people whilst delivering apprenticeship qualifications, mainly at NVQ level.

"We work with different partners including Oldham College. An apprentice can't do the programme unless they are employed and that's a big part of what we do: connect young people with the right employer.

"We also want to raise awareness about office apprentices. Previously very few 16 to 18-year-olds were employed by offices, they were mainly taken on in trades such as hair-dressing, engineering or construction. The office is a very new area for apprenticeships."

As well as connecting young people with employers, the Apprentice

SHORT TERM FUNDING FOR CLIENTS OF THE PROFESSIONAL SECTOR



**FAST FUNDING
SOLUTIONS FOR
YOUR CLIENTS**

bridgingfinance limited
SERVING THE PROFESSIONAL SECTOR

Call 0845 337 7403 | www.bridgingfinance.co.uk

Academy also runs a week-long boot camp which helps make sure they only put forward young people who are committed to doing apprenticeships.

If the academy feels the young person is ready and will be able to give the company a good experience, they are then matched with an employer.

They are taken-on over a 12-month period and paid £95 a week.

Bagnall says: "We are one of the few organisations that do charge a fee for the service, but what we do is add a lot of other elements to make it really work."

"With our recruitment and retention expertise we do a lot of assessments and, as well as running a boot-camp, we provide ongoing mentoring, training and development over a 12-month period adding as much value to the employers as we can."

The company is running a series of 10-second ads on a large digital screen at the southern gateway to the city in Albion Street, opposite the Hacienda building.

Each of the 10 different clips features one or more of their apprentices transforming from college or school leaver into young professionals.

The stars of the ads are all aged 16 to 18 and from across Greater Manchester. It is hoped that the ads will also inform youngsters who will be leaving school in the summer there is an alternative to college or university that helps them to gain work experience, earn while they learn and get a qualification at the end.

Bagnall adds: "Research indicates that the majority of school leavers are not made aware that there is an alternative to going to college and that they can start work straight from school and continue to gain qualifications whilst starting to earn a salary."

"Many of the apprentices who appear in the campaign started college and said that if they had known earlier that there was another option they would have definitely taken up an apprenticeship sooner."

"Apprenticeships are also a welcome alternative for parents who are not in a position to provide additional funds to cover the increased costs in university places that have been announced this year."

CASE STUDIES

MANCHESTER-based Bite Digital was encouraged to take on apprentices after working with work experience students.

The company is based in the Northern Quarter and was established in 1996 by internet entrepreneurs Declan Cosgrove and Jason Cozens. It offers a range of digital marketing services, including search engine optimisation, mobile marketing and web design – with specialist expertise for companies looking to expand into China.

They recently took on four apprentices: Laura Chapman, Jordon Southern, Jacob Halland and Mitchell Thomas, all from the Greater Manchester area.

Cosgrove says in the past, the business, which employs 30 staff, had taken on young work experience students who showed enthusiasm for the job.

"We often get calls for work experience and recently hired two people who came to us for a few weeks. We were so impressed by them we were keen to take them on straightaway."

The £2.5m turnover firm has so far had a 'very positive experience'

SIXTEEN-year-old Jordon Southern is already half-way through his six-month placement as a digital marketing apprentice and he feels he has already learnt much more in a few months than he would have done at college.

Having spent five years in Spain, by the time the teenager and his family returned home to Urmston, he was only able to complete the last year of school and didn't get the GCSEs he wanted for a course in public services.

After seeing an advert about an apprentice scheme run at the Apprentice Academy, he applied. He says: "There was a lot to learn in the beginning but I've picked up so much. I find what I'm doing is interesting and exciting. It's a great opportunity to be working in a fast-growing company."

He adds: "My friends who are at college are now also looking into apprenticeships after my own experience."



working with apprentices who are learning through a structured system all the different aspects of the business over a six-month period.

Cosgrove says: "They have enhanced the team mix as we have a lot of experienced team members and the apprentices bring a new perspective, with bags of enthusiasm."

"They have been a good way to rapidly increase our resources – we have doubled our workforce in six

months and by taking on four apprentices we are able to add value to the company from day one."

Cosgrove add: "They have been able to see direct results of the team's efforts, for example, gaining top search rankings in Google for All Saints and launching the National Union Students (NUS) iPhone app which was an instant hit, with 45,000 downloads within just two days."

COBDEN House Chambers in Manchester has recently been working with two apprentices.

Jackie Morton, the barristers' chamber's administrator, said young people often faced 'significant chal-

lenges' as they make the progression from student to working life.

The two apprentices are Michaela Johnson from Moston and Lauren Kennelly from Denton, who have

both taken on roles in legal clerical work.

Morton said: "Many firms and people are struggling in the current economic climate but I see many opportunities for youngsters who are prepared to work hard and demonstrate a commitment to the trust you place in them."

"Companies still need to invest in business otherwise they are static and, in effect, going backwards. Recruiting through the Apprentice Academy allows an opportunity for someone to show what they are capable of."

"The cost is very modest and firms should not be put off if the purse strings are tight. We have two excellent recent recruits and their youth can have a positive effect on the morale of the other staff and provide impetus to the organisation."

She added: "The general rule is the apprentice can get as much out of a job as they are willing to put in to it."

MICHAELA Johnson, 18, and Lauren Kennelly, 19, are both enjoying their time at Cobdens. Michaela left Oldham College after her first year where she completed an AS level in health and social care and psychology. "College wasn't for me," she says. "I thought I will get better value by trying to get a job first and decided to go through the apprenticeship scheme."

"It's been really good so far. I mainly do basic admin work, but it's exciting to be working in a law firm and everyone is so helpful and nice. I'm glad I made the choice to do this and not go to university."

Lauren decided to take the apprentice route after struggling to get a job when she finished her A-levels at Xaverian College in Rusholme. She says: "I've learnt so much at Cobden from when I first started, but I'm keen to learn and the staff are really helpful."

"It's also really exciting to work in a barristers' chambers and I've loved my experience so far."



Looking for insight^o



dwf
Go further