

The Walcot Foundation Apprenticeship Scheme

What we did, how it turned out

In 2008 our thinking about new ways of realising our charitable purposes led us to consider something the Foundation had never done before. We had already identified Lambeth NEETS as a priority group. Now we wanted to weave together a programme which would generously fund work with a small number of them. Not only a small number, but a small number of those most in need, whose prospects were the least certain and whose histories and circumstances were the most challenging

What we sought to achieve

Our aim was to completely turn around a small number of Lambeth lives, allowing ten young people from Lambeth who had faced and continued to face many challenges to become skilled and employable and, over the course of their lives, stand an improved chance of being financially independent. We set out to select candidates whose circumstances made them less likely to be chosen by, or to succeed on, the broad range of government-funded apprenticeships then on offer.

The broad shape of the programme

The design of the scheme provided a comprehensive programme of support over its three year duration which was to be delivered by an external and appropriately competent body following tender. The Foundation paid apprentices' salaries and any additional expenses such as travelling, equipment, training and childcare. The programme delivered a range of support including a two day residential, an intensive 16 week programme of personal learning and development, advice with debt, group literacy support, help with job search, training in cognitive behavioural therapy and one-to-one coaching. From the outset we were aware of breaking new ground so far as our own work was concerned. We factored in external evaluation, and looked forward to making what we discovered available for others planning similar projects.

The scheme ran from 2009 to 2012. We had set aside £685,000 and in the end spent £585,000.

Did it go as planned?

No. We were not entirely surprised by this since we knew that our apprentices faced complex challenges, psychological, cognitive and emotional. This became even more apparent as we came to know them better. Foundation staff soon had to assume a more direct role in managing the programme than had been planned. Governors (the Foundation's trustees) took a close interest throughout the scheme. This was especially so of those serving on the Grant Committee. We adapted the scheme as we went along, responding to new developments and needs.

What impact did the programme have?

We understand the thirst to know what impact interventions and expense might have, and of how this is now a standard activity across many organisations and sectors. We ourselves had put significant effort into mainstreaming outcome and impact-assessment across all our grants programmes. Yet there are limits to what we can know. If our work is truly beneficial for our grantees then the results can only be played out over their lifetime of economic activity. We are very curious, and truly hopeful, that the young Lambeth NEETS we had the privilege of getting to know will benefit from the Apprenticeship Scheme over the course of their lives. That cannot yet be known and, given the complexities and happenstance of our human lives is unlikely to be ever accurately known. Much of the Foundation's work is about sowing seed. Even so, we believe that the Scheme has helped move our Walcot Apprentices in the right direction by allowing them to reflect, gain skills and confidence and learn the habits needed to succeed in paid work.

“The Walcot has really changed my life. Even when I dropped off, they were still trying to get me back on. I found my senses and I needed to get back here. They didn't have to take me back.” Walcot Apprentice

“For the first time I enjoy work. It makes me feel good about myself because I have found the right place to work.” Walcot Apprentice

“When I am at work I feel that is where I am supposed to be. I don't want to be at home doing nothing. Working is enjoyable. You are building for your future.” Walcot Apprentice

The external evaluator found that ‘There is clear evidence of benefit to the apprentices. Seven of the nine apprentices we interviewed did not know what work they wanted to do when they joined the Scheme and all now have an intended direction. All described to us strong motivation to work although this is not always translated into attendance and punctuality. All but one (who was already well motivated) said they were more motivated to find a job than when they joined. Eight of the nine said the Scheme has taught them how to find information on jobs that would suit them. All except one respondent (who is leaving the Scheme) said that it had made their lives better, generally much better. All respondents said that they are now confident about finding or keeping a job.’

“The Scheme has given me the patience. Before if I didn't find a job in a couple of days, I would feel I would never find one. I would give up.” Walcot Apprentice

“The opportunity I was given on the Scheme was the perfect opportunity. I messed it up for a bit, but I have turned it around.” Walcot Apprentice

Some of what we learnt

After the programme ended, Governors and staff naturally asked, ‘would we do it again?’. Reactions varied, but a common element was ‘not for a while’. The extra demands had required much additional work. As things developed we assumed a degree of operational responsibility. This is quite different from our other work, where operational matters and the associated risks and demands are the responsibility of the school, project or organisation we fund. Much of the extra ‘hands-on’ contact with the apprentices we valued, and for some Governors the more direct contact and knowledge of beneficiaries was a welcome contrast to the more usual and distanced relationships they have with grantees.

Were we to run a similar scheme again we would apply what we have learnt and handle certain aspects differently. The tender exercise for an organisation to manage the scheme did not attract enough interest and therefore provided us with too small a choice. We should have cast the net wider. We had underestimated the need the apprentices had for very basic preparation: a pre-apprenticeship programme was hastily put together. We would have done more to assess the potential of the candidates and have made that selection process more robust.

It became very clear to us that early experiences have a profound impact upon our development. All our apprentices had experienced material deprivation. Many had also experienced deprivation in the quality of relationships. Many internal conflicts gave rise to external problems, whether in simply turning up on time or handling the hierarchal relationship typical of the workplace.

We want to share what we have learnt with other bodies that may be considering similar work. When we designed the scheme we found nothing in the public domain which was of much use. Here are what we believe are the most important lessons.¹

- Intended outcomes, including intermediate outcomes, should be specified from the beginning. Support should be related to the intended intermediate outcomes.
- Targets should be balanced and should include intermediate indicators such as increases in confidence, job search skills and motivation, as well as outputs such as qualifications gained and indicators of employment and training.
- Schemes should compile regular and accurate monitoring data on apprentices. This should include a systematic way of recording the courses attended by apprentices and validating the qualifications gained.
- The recruitment process should look at potential as well as need. The cohort should include a mix of abilities, since this gives role models and peer leaders.
- The recruitment process should manage expectations. It is important that trainees understand the work that they will have to put in to be successful.
- The structure should make progress manifest. For example it could be based on the different stages of finding long term employment. All diagnostic work should be carried out in the first year.
- The programme should manage motivation and aspiration. Motivational effects include: peer pressure, role models, inspirational speakers, involvement in arts projects, helping others, certificates, celebrations, competitions and financial incentives.
- There should be clear policies around discipline established from the beginning. This should include strict rules about treating delivery and partner staff with respect.
- The programme should be designed with a clear understanding of the local economic structure and the sectors most likely to have skill gaps relevant to apprentices.
- The scheme should be accommodated with a partner or venue that has a visibly professional style and culture.
- Scheme staff should ensure that they establish a professional relationship with apprentices so that apprentices do not rebel against guidance as if against a substitute parent.

- Employers should be chosen to ensure that they can provide the right support to apprenticeship. This will follow naturally if the scheme has a sector approach.
- The relationship with employers should be formalised so as to increase sustainability.

“The Walcot Apprenticeship Scheme was ambitious and commendable; it has benefitted the participants but not in the clear-cut measurable way that might have been wished for.”

John Hepburn, Educational Psychologist

Conclusion

This was a bold scheme which took us beyond our usual experience and certainly beyond the kind of grantmaking we had become comfortable with and had gained skill in. It was a specific response to a priority group the Governors had identified. We set out to target a particular group and a challenging element within that group. The external evaluator has noted that ‘this breadth and depth of support is rare’. Throughout the scheme, from design to delivery, we were certain that we were aiming for *quality* rather than quantity. We had wanted to take a small number of those likely to be overlooked or not adequately supported by mainstream apprenticeship schemes, and offer them a unique opportunity. And that is what we did. It may be argued that we should have been more careful in the choice of participants, so as to minimise the difficulties they presented and so that the final outcome would be more obviously a ‘success’. But that would have been a different scheme.

Hugh Valentine

The external evaluation concludes in the autumn of 2013 after being updated with further tracking and outcomes data.

We shall be glad to share more of our experience of this scheme with other funders and interested parties. Please get in touch. Enquiries to Hugh Valentine, Director or Daniel Chapman, Grants Manager 020 7735 1925

ABOUT THE WALCOT FOUNDATION

We are an independent grant-making foundation, established in the 17th century and operating exclusively in Lambeth. We fund activity that helps improve the future prospects of those on the lowest incomes. Our approach is to offer a **hand-up rather than hand-outs**. Our aim is to break cycles of deprivation and to **tackle poverty by creating opportunity** through education, training and employment.

walcotfoundation.org.uk

WAS Summary Report for Web v1 3.6.2013.docx

¹ These are taken directly from part of the external evaluation and are presented without any editing by the Foundation. Annabel Jackson of Annabel Jackson Associates Ltd annabeljacksonassociates.com