

Understanding Employer Experiences in Supporting Apprentices

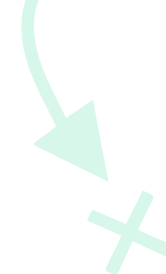
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**Research commissioned by
Coach Core Foundation**

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Executive summary

Researchers from the Centre for Social Justice in Sport and Society, Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University were commissioned to undertake research for the Coach Core Foundation (CCF) between January and April 2025. The research sought to understand how the current apprenticeship system supports or hinders micro and small employers' efforts to recruit and retain young people on apprenticeships.

This was underpinned by three research questions:

- 01 What challenges do small employers face in recruiting and retaining apprentices?**
- 02 What enables small employers to overcome these challenges?**
- 03 What resources are needed to support under-represented or high-need groups?**

Before addressing the research questions, it is worth noting the reasons employers highlight for participating in the CCF apprenticeship programme:



Supporting marginalised young people to enter the workforce



Helping to break down barriers to entering employment



Accessing an asset that has potential to grow



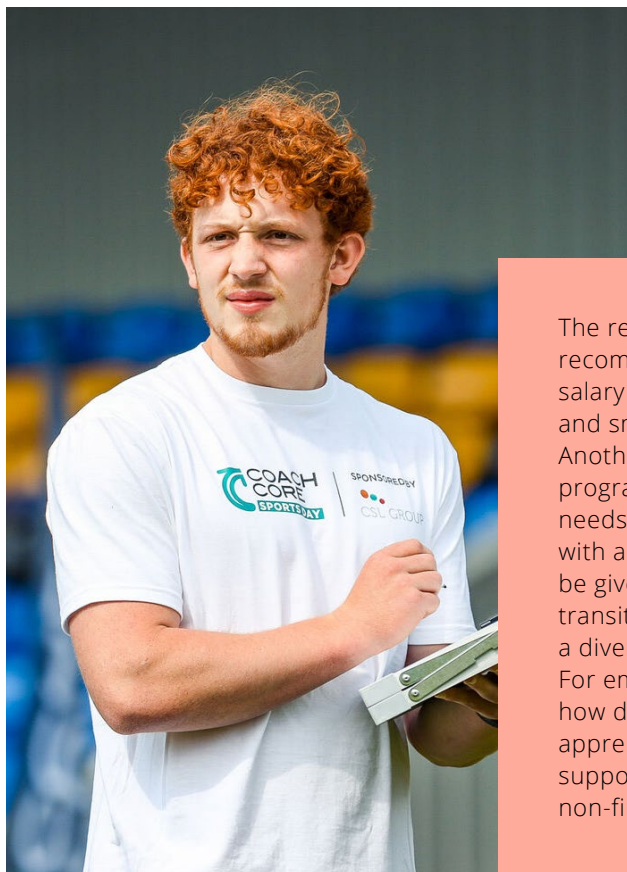
Bringing new skills, energy, different perspectives and ideas to the workforce.

What key factors challenge small employers from recruiting and retaining apprentices?

- Low pay and the cost-of-living crisis
- Unrealistic expectations of employers and apprentices
- The lack of 'work readiness' of apprentices which often requires employers to provide additional support as the apprentice transitions from education into employment
- Travel and transport issues linked to the job and education
- Challenging work demands
- Attracting a diversity of apprentices in some areas
- Changing line management
- No job available with the employer when the apprenticeship ends

What enables small employers to navigate apprenticeship recruitment and retention challenges?

- Placing new apprentices with experienced mentors who act as role models to support and guide the apprentice
- Taking a 'young person first' approach and understanding apprentices beyond work
- Myth busting some common misconceptions about apprentices and what an apprenticeship involves
- Regular and planned check-ins
- Setting clear and realistic expectations and targets appropriate to individual needs
- Making apprentices feel 'part of the team'
- Providing opportunities for the development of personal and transferable skills
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Incremental pay increases
- Keeping work varied and fun
- A shared vision and understanding about the apprenticeship programme
- Good relationships between all parties
- Support to find employment elsewhere if no job is available with the employer at the end of the apprenticeship



What resource considerations need to be taken into account when recruiting and retaining those from under-represented groups or those with additional learning and support needs?

- Apprentices with lived experiences of being a marginalised group are an invaluable resource for any employer wishing to engage with underrepresented populations
- Consider adaptations that support young people into your workforce - these are likely to create a more inclusive and welcoming working environment for everyone
- Guidance and training on work readiness and managing expectations
- Time commitment needed by employees (e.g. colleagues and mentor) may increase when working with apprentices who cross-cut different marginalised groups to help them navigate multiple barriers
- The low apprentice salary for some potential apprentices/existing apprentices means the apprenticeship programme can be an unviable employment option, particularly for those in the south. Action should be taken to support micro and small employers to elevate the wage of all apprentices
- Offer a budget for apprentice travel
- Carefully select a mentor (beyond pragmatic choices) that is well acquainted with different marginalised groups
- Offer structured mentor support and training
- Ensure sufficient time to recruit appropriately
- Think more creatively about recruitment strategies including where to target recruitment efforts and the process of recruitment

The report ends by providing a series of evidence-based recommendations. At a strategic level, the low apprenticeship salary should be addressed by taking action to support micro and small employers to elevate the wage for all apprentices. Another systemic issue that impedes the S&PA apprenticeship programme is travel cost and availability of public transport; this needs to be reviewed. For the CCF and other S&PA organisations with a training and development remit, more attention needs to be given to the guidance and training offered around mentoring, transition from education into apprenticeships, and recruiting a diversity of apprenticeships with relevant lived experience. For employers, reviewing the current workforce to establish how diverse it is, offers a useful starting point to begin targeted apprentice recruitment. Employers should also consider how to support apprentices holistically including through financial and non-financial incentives.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Who is Coach Core?

Coach Core Foundation was established in 2012 and is an employment and education charity that supports under-represented young people to access sport and physical activity (S&PA) apprenticeships. Since 2012, Coach Core (CCF) has supported over 1,000 apprenticeships. In 2024, 74% of their apprentices graduated from the programme and 79% went directly into employment, training or education. CCF has a longstanding record of supporting Level 2 apprenticeships and recently developed a Level 3 and 4 apprenticeship offer via their training providers. CCF has a UK wide remit, with relationships in Scotland and Wales, and currently working in 18 locations in England, mainly with small and micro employers (Coach Core, 2024a). The CCF 2024-2027 strategy 'Project 1500' sets out a three-year mission with six aspirations including "enable greater accessibility, enhance our offer, advocate and influence, elevate our evidence, remain insight led and gain more supporters" (Coach Core, 2024b: 5).

1.2 Overview of the research

Researchers from the Centre for Social Justice in Sport and Society, Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University were commissioned to undertake an independent piece of research between January and April 2025 for CCF. CCF commissioned this research as they wish to understand the challenges that micro and small employers are facing when recruiting and retaining apprentices. In total, 31 people were interviewed including apprentice employers, Learning Coaches (LCs) employed by Lifetime Training and CCF staff.

1.3 What will this report do?

This report begins by offering a brief review of key literature focusing on apprenticeships and S&PA. Next, CCF made available a range of data to the research team and the most relevant is reported. After this, the research methodology is outlined and a profile of the 16 employers who participated in this research presented. This is followed by the findings, first employers' experiences of recruiting and retaining apprentices are discussed. Insights from CCF staff and LCs are then shared which support the employers' perspectives. The report concludes by providing a series of evidence-based recommendations that can be presented to Government and other stakeholders to guide future apprenticeship system, policy and practice.



2.0 Setting the scene

2.1 Apprenticeships, sport and physical activity

Government supported apprenticeships emerged in the mid-1990s and offer a route into employment with on and off the job training. Apprentices usually study for a nationally recognised qualification. As Roberts (2024) outlines, apprenticeships have continued to evolve in terms of their nature, the breadth of sectors involved, and changes to the profile of apprentices. According to Murray (2025), the 2023/24 apprenticeship statistics evidence that:

- Most apprentice starts were aged 25 or over (48.4%), 23.2% were aged under 19 and 28.3% were between 19 and 24 years old
- The proportion of learners who have a learning difficulty or disability (LLDD) beginning apprenticeships has increased to 15.6%
- 82.7% of learners beginning an apprenticeship were White
- Apprenticeship starts reflect a 52.2% female and 47.8% male split
- The proportion of intermediate apprenticeships has declined (53% in 2016/17 to 21% in 2023/24) whilst the higher apprenticeships have increased (7% in 2016/17 to 36% in 2023/24).

It is notable that the S&PA workforce broadly reflects the apprentice profile in relation to being less culturally diverse. Interestingly, over 56% of the S&PA workforce are male and 28% of workers are in lower socio-economic groups (CIMSPA, 2023). Battiston et al. (2020) highlight that apprenticeships can offer a means of social mobility with disadvantaged young people with an apprenticeship qualification earning over 10% more by the age of 28 in comparison to those with the same-level qualification. Moreover, disadvantaged women achieving an intermediate apprenticeship mobilise a 16% earning boost compared to 10% for non-disadvantaged women. Battiston et al. (2020: 71) conclude that "... apprenticeships are an engine for social mobility if – and only if – a disadvantaged learner can persevere throughout the system to complete their qualification". With regards to persevering and completing, research commissioned by CCF offers insight about what S&PA apprentices value; that is, the importance of real-world work experiences and how this develops personal skills. All of this though needs to be couched within the availability of effective

mentoring and support to navigate the job market and employment after graduation (Morgan & Roberts, 2022).

Whilst there is opportunity for apprenticeships to contribute to social mobility, it is also widely recognised that for potential apprentices there continues to be an 'attractiveness' issue relating to their status and confusion about recruitment approaches (Smith, 2023). Additionally, disadvantaged apprentices find travel costs and pay problematic, and this can lead to attrition (Battiston et al., 2020). In relation to employers, a recent review by Winnard (2023) found that the time needed to offer apprenticeships can limit employer engagement. Moreover, whilst small and medium employers operating in deprived areas are receptive to supporting apprenticeships, they are more likely to encounter opportunity and capacity barriers (Winnard, 2023).

The apprenticeship profiles and experiences outlined above are couched within wider societal conditions that also contribute to the prospects and possibilities for young people, including apprentices. The King's Trust Youth Index (2025) points to increases in youth unemployment, high levels of NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) young people, a cost-of-living crisis and a dramatic rise in youth mental health issues. In part, COVID-19 has contributed to these precarious conditions, significantly impacting the S&PA sector (ECORYS and SportsEconAustria, 2020). Moreover, apprentices experienced additional financial difficulties during and following COVID-19 (Roberts, 2022). McCurdy and Murphy (2024) highlight the links between young people's mental health, education and employment. Specifically, non-graduates are more likely to have poor mental health and be either out of work or experience low pay. Economic insecurity is pronounced for those aged 16 to 24, with two-thirds indicating they do not earn enough to maintain a reasonable standard of living. One in five young people feel their current financial situation has a 'mostly negative' impact on their confidence about the future (Strong & Webster, 2022). Having outlined some of the wider insight and issues concerning apprenticeships, specific consideration will now be given to CCF S&PA apprenticeships.

2.2 Coach Core apprenticeship data

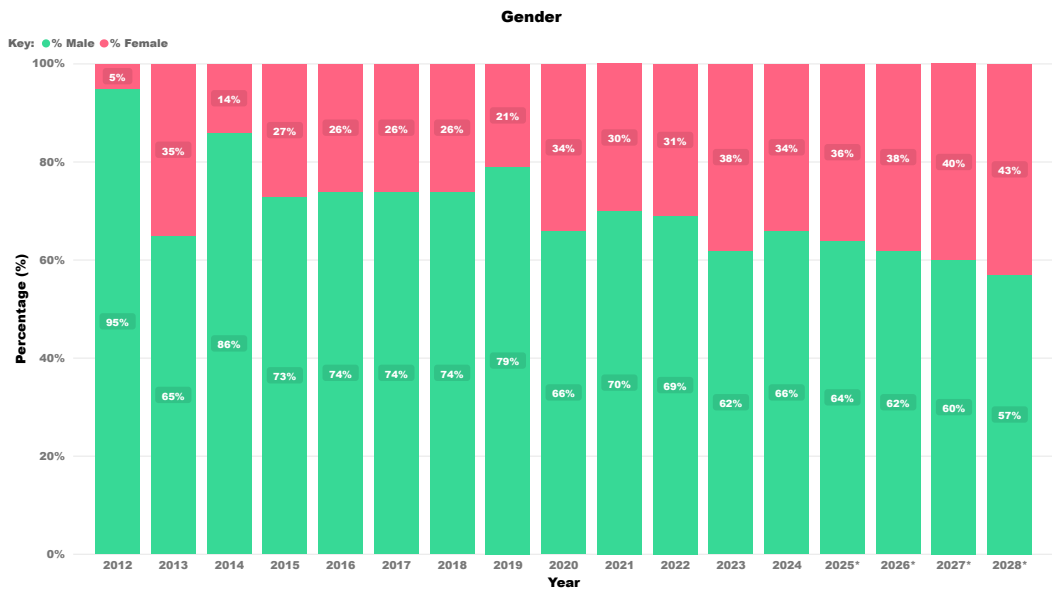
A range of data were made available from CCF, the most relevant are presented in Table 1 and Figures 1-4.

Table 1 – Apprentice characteristics

APPRENTICE CHARACTERISTICS	2012–2014	2015–2017	2018–2020	2021–2023	2024
Female	18%	26%	27%	33%	34%
Ethnic minority	N/A	21%	24%	21%	22%
Level 2 apprenticeships	49%	67%	81%	78%	70%
Indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) – Top 30%	N/A	38%	38%	43%	43%
Leavers	22%	15%	37%	30%	26%
Achievers	78%	85%	63%	70%	74%

Figures 1 to 4 provide a year-by-year overview using 100% stacked bar charts.

Figure 1 - Apprentice gender 2012-2024 (with 2025-2028 predictions)



In relation to gender, Figure 1 shows the percentage of male and female CCF apprentices. Since 2020, there has been over 30% females in CCF apprenticeships, with the greatest percentage in 2023 (38%). It is perhaps not surprising that there is a higher proportion of male CCF apprentices given the higher number of men who work in the S&PA sector (CIMSPA, 2023).

Figure 2 - Apprentice ethnicity 2015-2024 (with 2025-2028 predictions)

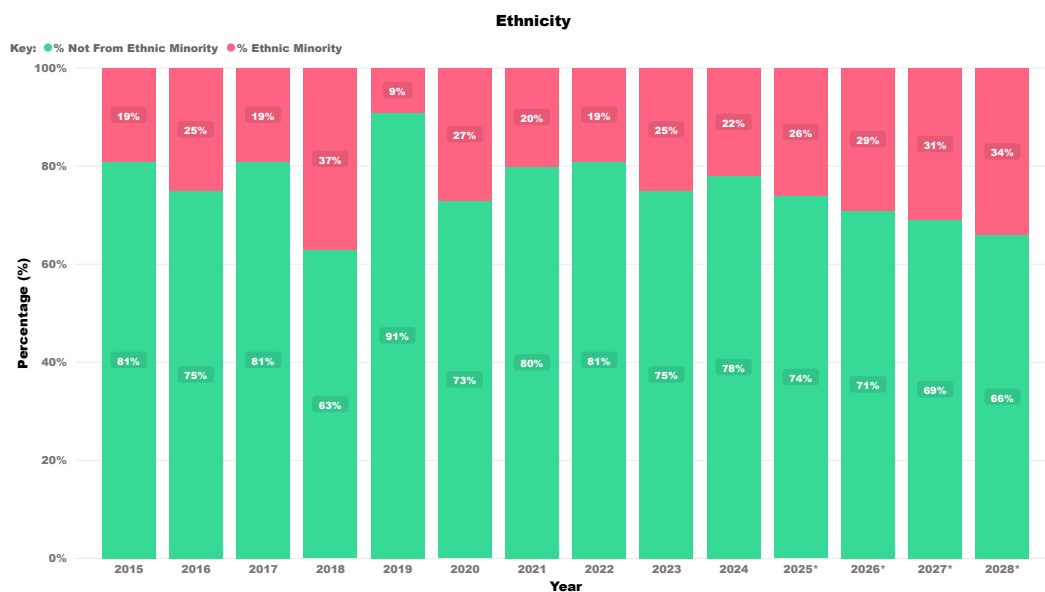


Figure 2 displays the percentage of CCF apprentices who are either from an ethnic minority background or not. In recent years (2023 and 2024), there has been an increase in the percentage of CCF ethnic minority apprentices. As such, when compared with recent national apprentice data (Murray, 2025), CCF apprentices represent a higher proportion from an ethnic minority group. The predictions (2025–2028) show that the percentage of apprentices from an ethnic minority background is expected to grow (34% in 2028).

Figure 3 - Apprentice Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015-2024

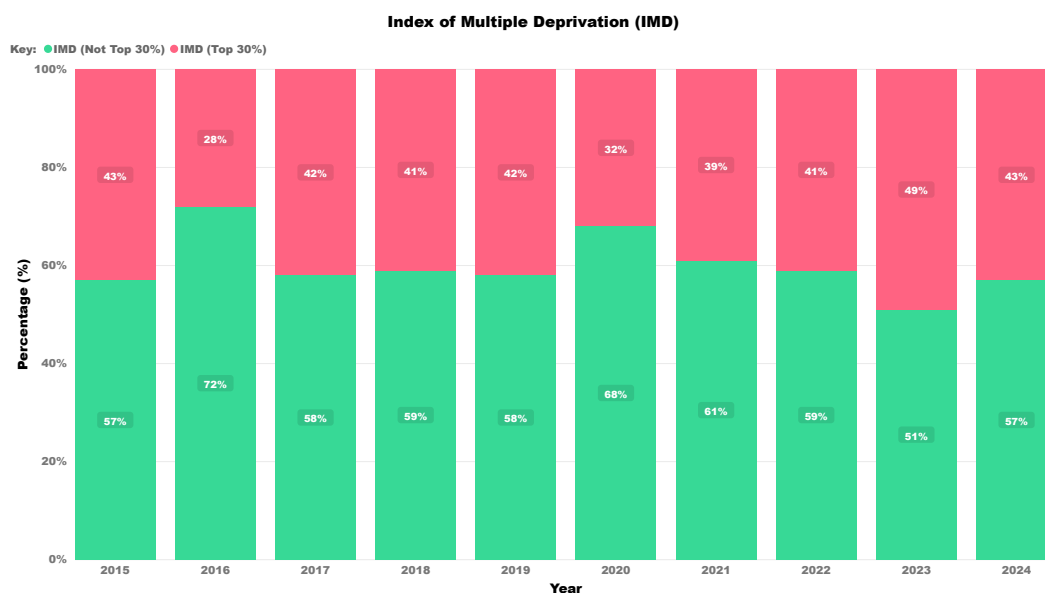


Figure 3 exhibits the percentage of CCF apprentices who reside in the top 30% IMD areas. In recent years (2022 – 2024), CCF have had a greater number of apprentices from the top 30% IMD areas, with the largest percentage in 2023 (49%).

Figure 4 - Percentage of achievers and leavers 2012-2024

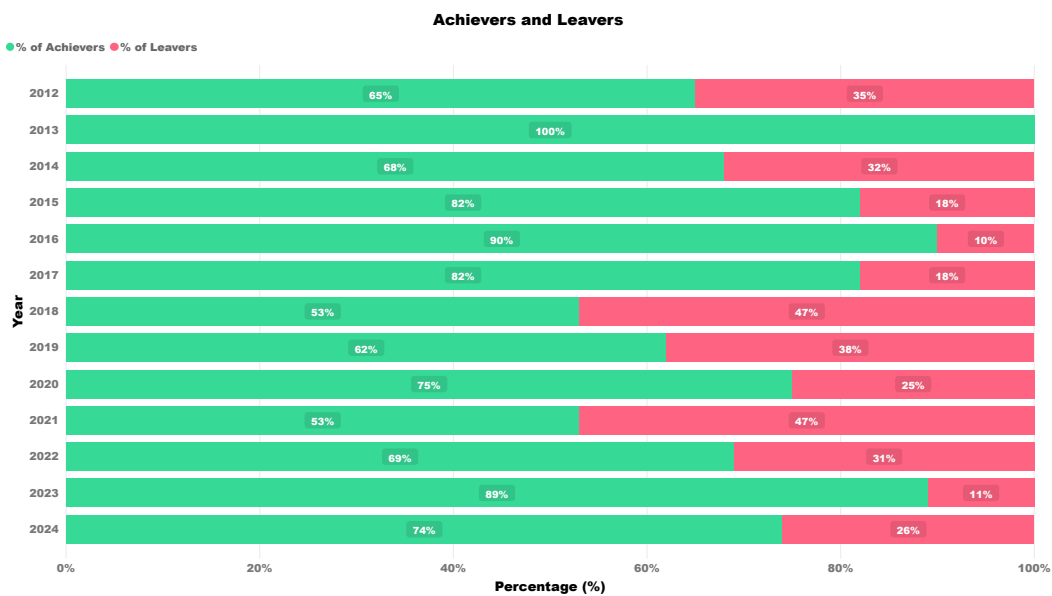


Figure 4 displays the percentage of CCF apprentices who have left their apprenticeship or been an ‘achiever’. Over the past 12 years, the rate in achievers/leavers has fluctuated. Most notably, the years with the greatest number of achievers were 2013 (100%), 2016 (90%), and most recently, 2023 (89%).



3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research questions

This research sought to understand how the current system supports or hinders micro and small employers' (referred to as 'small' hereafter) efforts to recruit and retain young people on apprenticeships through addressing the following research questions:

1. What key factors challenge small employers from recruiting and retaining apprentices?
2. What enables small employers to navigate apprenticeship recruitment and retention challenges?
3. What resource considerations need to be taken into account when recruiting and retaining those from under-represented groups or those with additional learning and support needs?

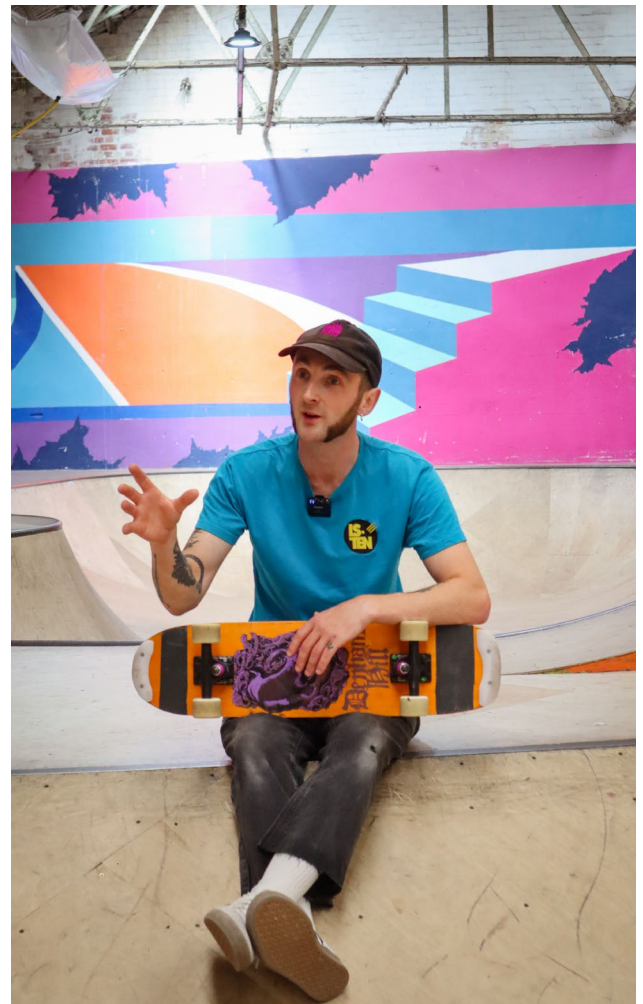
3.2 Data collection and research participants

To address these three research questions 31 people were interviewed with 16 CCF apprenticeship employers across England (24 staff members), three LCs (employed by Lifetime Training) and four CCF employees. A range of people were interviewed including those: working with apprentices on a daily basis; responsible for recruitment; managing apprentices; and acting as mentors. For some employers one member of staff had a combination of these roles.

The interviews explored apprenticeship successes and challenges in relation to recruitment, retention and the work readiness of apprentices. Consideration was also given to broader apprentice demographics and issues associated with supporting apprentices with additional learning and support needs. Insights were also gathered about apprentice, employer and CCF relations. In accordance with Leeds Beckett University procedures ethical approval was gained for this research.

3.3 Profile of Coach Core employers

A profile of each of the 16 employers who participated in this research can be found in Appendix 1. These employers represent some who are new to the CCF programme and others who have been involved for a number of years. There are employers from a range of geographical locations. A combination of employers who currently have CCF apprentices 'in learning' and those who do not were interviewed.



4.0 Findings - Employers

Employers discussed a range of issues relating to the recruitment and retention of apprentices. Regarding recruitment, employers talked about 'why' work with apprentices, 'who' is recruited, and recruitment strategies including 'how' they are recruited, and 'why' recruitment happens like this. Next, discussions focus on retention, what employers feel they do well and what they could do better. Relatedly, consideration is also given to employers' thoughts on the work readiness of apprentices. Finally, support from CCF staff and LCs is considered.

4.1 Why work with apprentices

Employers offered a range of reasons for wanting to support apprenticeships including: supporting marginalised young people to enter the workforce; accessing an asset that has potential to grow; and one that brings new ideas and innovations. Regarding vulnerable or marginalised young people, many employers believe apprenticeships can break down barriers to entering employment:

“ Provide an opportunity for development, for young people who've got lived experience of some of the trauma or challenges and vulnerabilities that our young people experience, so it can be a route to employment for young people who have been participants prior, or for young people who want to get back into the community by doing sort of youth work based activities, so that's been one of the significant drivers. (Employer 3)

“ Sport is a door opener for breaking down barriers ... I think it's so important being able to give somebody the opportunity and chance to take a step onto the career ladder, you know. There's a lot that they're not quite sure, they've gone to college and dropped out. (Employer 7)

A number of employers noted how having apprentices can bolster the energy, breadth of ideas and skills within the workforce:

“ That diversity of thought really is one of the biggest examples ... We've had apprentices that have started off with us, like literally 16th birthday, started with us, and then we've got older participants, so I think they're early 40s ... you get the real diversity of thought. (Employer 6)

“ They bring a fresh perspective ... particularly around things like social media and things ... That is a really key performance area for us now to bring a new perspective and new ideas and I think that's really helpful. (Employer 5)

“ We've found out that he's got many more skills to him. He loves his photography, he loves doing the IT bits of stuff ... so if we need anything we'll go right to Y. He'll do all of that ... So, we've found out he's got lots more skills than what the apprenticeship gives him, but we can use them. (Employer 13)

Some employers also recognised the merit of recruiting apprentices that they could develop and become part of the workforce following the apprenticeship:

“ We want to, not only I suppose support and educate these young people, we want to keep them in the business as well ... we want to offer that sustainability of employment at the end of the provision. (Employer 9)

It should be recognised though, for some employers the prospect of continuing employment was beyond the financial possibilities of the organisation.

Whilst employers articulated a range of motives for supporting an apprenticeship, it was also evident that there was an awareness that apprentices are 'not cheap labour' and apprenticeships are 'not particularly sexy', 'can be seen as old fashioned', 'won't get you anywhere', and 'are for the trades not sport'. According to employers, these factors combined with the low salary apprentices receive mean some young people do not see apprenticeships as a viable option.

“ Look, a lot of kids are looking at their options, especially 16 to 18 because they have to stay in some form of education ... It's not particularly sexy in an apprenticeship when they can stay in school or go to college and go and work in McDonalds or Pizza Hut and earn more money. I mean we top up their wage, but it's still a low wage for me for what we ask and I think that's ... I don't think it's as sexy as it used to be or as it could be. (Employer 4)

This of course influences who is recruited on apprenticeships, and this is discussed next.

4.2 Who is recruited

The range of apprentices recruited varied between employers, with some attracting a 'huge mixed bag':

“We've had a huge mixed bag ... four of the apprentices from EDI backgrounds, minority community backgrounds, and the other three were girls. Four were boys. There was a young lad that we've got, who is from the LGBTQ* community as well ... young people that have spent time in prison, we've had young people that are at risk of going to prison. Young people who you know, coming from a single parent household where that single parent is an alcoholic and unable to hold down a job and young people who are homeless. (Employer 16)

Across the 16 employers, apprentices were diverse including mixed genders, resettled refugees, those who have experienced trauma and adverse childhood experiences, those in areas of high deprivation, care experienced, LGBTQ*, different ethnic groups, different disabilities (including those diagnosed with Autism or ADHD), those experiencing homelessness, older apprentices, and those at risk of prison/ been in prison. Indeed, some employers recognised that there is less diversity in their apprentice profiles and talked about those they would like to recruit:

“White working class and White middle class. Our demographic is not that mixed. We have work experience and quite a lot of interest from girls. Yeah, I would say we have as many girls on the work experience as we do boys, but so far, it's not transferring into girls doing an apprenticeship with us. (Employer 12)

“Definitely would like to have more females ... Lack of disability within ORGANISATION Z, for sure, and something that we'd like to improve on with the programme. (Employer 1)

A few employers aired frustration at not been able to pinpoint why apprentice recruitment was less diverse, 'I can't quite put my finger on it' and 'it's less than straightforward and I don't have the answer'.

Interestingly, a number of employers advocated the need and benefits of a diverse workforce that is representative of the communities they are working within.

“We want our workforce to be representative of the communities that we're serving and you know, we had a long, hard look at ourselves ... we have a session in REGION X and probably 85% of the young people in that ward will be South Asian descent and practicing Muslims ... So, if we have a young person or a responsible adult who is from South Asian descent who is also a practising Muslim, they understand that community far better than we will. (Employer 14)

The ability to attract specific groups was sometimes enhanced through an employer's location, reach and the locality's demographics:

“Lots of people from different ethnic backgrounds, young people from those harder to reach areas where, because again locally we've got quite high wards of deprivation around a lot of our leisure centres. (Employer 9)

“I think naturally in terms of REGION X, we have a pretty diverse group of young people that come on the programme - South Asian, Afro Caribbean tends to be quite probably above average. (Employer 1)

In a few instances, wider roles within the workforce were attributed to increasing the number of apprentices from specific groups. For example, one employer (8) had a 'Women and Girls Lead' and it was felt this role and visibility helped to increase the number of female apprentices in recent years.



4.3 Recruitment strategies

Across all employers a range of recruitment strategies were adopted. These included: working with CCF directly, the local Active Partnership, and the job centre; attending mass recruitment events; using networks with other agencies, schools, colleges and universities; targeted recruitment of people that are known to them; word of mouth and personal recommendations; practical experience and trial days for potential apprentices; and use of social media platforms including Facebook, LinkedIn and the organisation website. Some employers utilised a range of these strategies:

“ We regularly go in and we deliver presentations to students who are maybe coming towards the end of their educational programme ... we go to a lot of recruitment events as well ... All of our vacancies are advertised on our website and we regularly are supported by, as I say, our local job centre plus and hub organisations who will actively promote those opportunities on our behalf ... We do give them the opportunity to come and do a little bit of shadowing so it puts them in the best place to attend the interview ... we've got word of mouth as well, we have lots of apprentices who've been on our journey and they'll tell their friends. (Employer 9)

Others favoured a more targeted approach linked to already knowing the apprentice:

“ We don't take the risk of not knowing our apprentices already. We're a small business and we don't have all the time and money in the world to expand how we recruit. So, we're very picky, in the small pool of young people. But it works for us. (Employer 12)

“ It sounds selfish, but we can handpick, and we know them from the volunteering and other links with us, they know us and want to work here. (Employer 13)

For employer 6 who are well known in their locality, a more targeted approach ensured they were not deluged with applicants:

“ It's almost a personal recommendation through the organisation ... Otherwise ... we'd get hundreds. (Employer 6)

Employer 1 offered further reasoning for the shift from a broad recruitment strategy to a more targeted approach. This included: 'unearthing hidden gems' who may not be the most confident to put themselves forward; aftercare issues for unsuccessful applicants; and ensuring the 'right' apprentice is recruited.

“ I think the challenge of mass recruitment in those early days was yes, you get lots of young people there, but ... I think that approach didn't unearth hidden gems, so people who maybe had some ability, had something about them, but maybe wouldn't stand out in a space where there's lots of young people through confidence, through just being quiet. (Employer 1)

“ I'll talk about aftercare, again, you have 12 spots, 15 spots, if you've got 40 young people, what are those 35/30 odd young people doing after this? They've turned up giving up a day of their lives and then they've had nothing. (Employer 1)

There seems not to be one specific strategy which is more effective for recruitment but rather a combination of factors including local circumstances, access to networks and the capacity of employers to commit a resource to recruitment activities, that contribute to the strategy taken by each employer.

A number of employers noted how innovations associated with the selection process were offering some applicants an alternative platform to showcase their potential:

“ We had a recruitment day where it was open recruitment from school, college, neighbouring organisations, whether that be grassroots sports clubs, a real sort of melting pot. They would come to us for the day, and we designed the day where we would get to know them as people. (Employer 11)

“ We offered the opportunity for apprentices to apply via a video ... we gave them some loose questions where we wanted to know about them and who they are ... rather than having to write something and that was to try and be as flexible as possible to young people who perhaps wouldn't have ... IT literacy, or reading or writing as their primary skill set, but might have, yeah, the confidence to be able to put themselves behind a camera. (Employer 16)

Whilst this process may not appeal to all applicants, the employer noted:

“ We did get a genuine perspective of who they are as a young person and whether they would fit in, gel, and whether they were really, truly passionate about it and some of them went all out like developing amazing video technology that I would never know how to start with. (Employer 16)

Whilst getting the recruitment strategy right is important, retaining apprentices on the programme is critical, and this is discussed next.

4.4 Factors enabling apprentice retention

All 16 employers identified a range of factors contributing to apprentice retention including placing new apprentices with experienced mentors, making apprentices feel 'part of the team', valuing their contribution, keeping work varied and fun, providing opportunities for the development of personal and transferable skills, and offering the possibility of a job after the apprenticeship.

A number of the employers highlighted how they often placed apprentices with experienced mentors within their organisation, who provided support, guidance, and were role models:

“ The aim is to kind of get them with a good mentor ... Fortunately, you know, there's a lot of experienced staff who manage our apprentices and mentor them now ... I think the mentoring and the management is really important. (Employer 8)

“ I think it is down to the level of mentoring, guidance and support ... It's nice to buddy them up with new apprentices that come into the business ... it just helps them on that mentoring side of things as well. So, we were very much an advocate of that. (Employer 9)

In terms of mentors, there was some caution noted about not assuming that mentors understand what this role entails.

“ I found that mentors just had an apprentice bestowed on them, whether they wanted to mentor or not, whether they had the skill set and or experience to mentor. What did we want an apprentice to look like at the end of that experience? What skills would we expect them to have after 15 months? ... A good mentor needs to understand all of this. And put a layer of wrap around support with those guys in terms of upskilling them on emotional intelligence, active listening, those softer skills. (Employer 11)

Many employers spoke of the importance of valuing apprentices and making them feel 'part of the team'. Indeed, having a 'strong support system', 'strong bond', and not just 'seeing them as an apprentice' were key ingredients identified to aid retention:

“ They're part of the team ... and a valued part of the team ... we don't exclude them ... They're in the meetings that we have. We go to the schools when we have planning meetings, they go with me at a sales meeting when I go to varying places. (Employer 4)

“ ... we have a really, really strong support system. We have a really, really good bond with our team. (Employer 15)

Another key factor supporting retention involved keeping the job 'varied', 'mixed', and 'fun':

“ We're keeping the job as mixed and varied as possible ... something for them to do and be interested and engaged in ... that's helped a lot. And we noticed when we don't have that, people get bored and drift off to other things. (Employer 16)

Employers recognised that these varied activities offered apprentices the opportunity to develop their personal, employability, and transferable skills:

“ They've gained so many like personal skills, employability skills. Like some of them have had the opportunity to deliver their story in front of [SPECIAL GUEST] ... It's not just you gain the qualification. You really, really, like, get to experience amazing things. (Employer 15)

“ There's so many transferable skills from being a coach that they can take with them, and I think that, like I said, goes into that aftercare retention. (Employer 1)



Several employers outlined how it was important for apprentices to see the possibility of a future role within the organisation. This not only helped to retain apprentices, but also enabled employers in decision-making about future apprenticeships:

“ We’ve gone into this apprenticeship model with the intention of retaining the staff we’ve got and that’s a very big part of our decision-making process as to whether we’ll recruit year on year ... If we know there’s not a role for them in 18 months’ time, then I don’t think we would go down the apprenticeship route to start with because it feels disingenuous for kind of what it’s supposed to be for. (Employer 6)

“ One reason why they do stay as well ... when the apprentices finished it’s never just, like, right it’s finished. There’s an exit strategy ... they’re not just out of the job. (Employer 5)

There was also a recognition that when employment opportunities were not available within the organisation that employers and LCs needed to support apprentices to find employment elsewhere: ‘we just couldn’t afford to take them on’, ‘with the support of the LC we were really proactive and helped the apprentice to find a new job, they deserved that’, ‘sad to see them go, but with our help, they’re going to blossom’.

A range of other strategies for retaining apprentices were reported by employers including: setting clear and realistic expectations and targets for apprentices; ensuring these expectations and targets are appropriate to individual needs; providing support and guidance with education; having planned check-ins (sometimes monthly, if not weekly) with apprentices; offer or signpost mental health support (such as counselling services); offer wellbeing support (such as gym membership); incremental pay increases; providing apprentices with uniforms and/or kit to help with feeling part of the organisation; and providing apprentices with continued professional development opportunities (e.g. first aid training, safeguarding, Fire Marshal). Interestingly, a few employers also talked about taking on a smaller number of apprentices to ensure they can offer better, focused support to their apprentices. Despite efforts to retain apprentices, several challenges were also highlighted.

4.5 Work readiness of apprentices

There were a range of ‘apprentice work readiness’ issues highlighted by all employers including punctuality and attendance issues, educating apprentices to understand and use human resource processes, appropriate language (including email exchanges). For some employers educating apprentices around these issues involved considerably more work. For instance, employer 16

noted that apprentices are typically ‘30–40% more intense’ in comparison to other members of staff:

“ Other people who were taking a very laid back, lazy approach to being able to be involved in the apprenticeship programme just needed a little bit of management and support and additional hand holding all of that ... it’s probably a little bit more I’d say, say probably 30 to 40% more intense, maybe within apprenticeships if you’re really genuinely wanting to target those kids that are going to benefit from it the most. (Employer 16)

Several of the employers discussed how the ‘world of work’ was an ‘alien world’ and a ‘wake up call’ for many apprentices:

“ Often there’s problems with them not understanding, knowing the real world of work because they’ve never had any work experience. (Employer 7)

“ Because of the industry that we’re in we attract a lot of young people who maybe aren’t quite as prepared for the world of work. (Employer 5)

Two of the most commonly reported issues related to punctuality and attendance. Indeed, some of the employers noted the often ‘taken-for-granted’ expectations associated with the workplace and how they sometimes have to get the apprentices ‘out of bed’:

“ You’re probably going to be ringing them every other day to get out of bed or knocking on the door to remind them they’re supposed to be on a college course ... yeah, you need to invest in the people. (Employer 6)

“ So, we have quite a lot of issues around time keeping and certainly issues around, sometimes no shows as well and sickness. You know we have some apprentices who were off quite often. (Employer 5)

Similarly, many of the employers discussed the additional support to educate their apprentices with company human resource processes, such as taking holiday and recording sickness and absence:

“ If you’ve never been in a world of work, you know, how would you know that? You need to, you know, formally request a holiday ... how do you know what to do if you are sick and how to inform your employer in an inappropriate way? (Employer 3)

“ I think it’s that change from being in school and having time off and not having responsibilities to then coming into a job and understanding that you can’t just have time off. We have a sick, you know, we have an absence leave policy where you can only have so many days off and then you get called in by HR for formal, informal discussions. (Employer 8)

Another practical issue related to work readiness concerned work emails. Frustrated with this situation one employer set up a WhatsApp group to streamline communications with their apprentices:

“Emails as well, you know, 16-year-olds from school ... to get them to start checking their emails all the time, I've had to, I've actually had to set up a WhatsApp group with them all, which is fine. (Employer 8)

Similarly, employer 16 discussed how they were having to educate their apprentices on the use of appropriate language when sending work emails:

“The young people that we're dealing with, really important to remember that this is their first experience in the world of work and they don't know the social norms of work. So they will e-mail the CEO saying, all right bruv, can you send me XYZ and they'll basically try to get really senior staff members to do bits of work for them or whatever and not really understand the dynamic that you need to have in an organisation. That's not a problem, it's perfectly fine and it's part of the journey. (Employer 16)

Whilst work readiness was a common challenge reported, employers also highlighted other retention factors impacting upon apprenticeship programmes.



4.6 Challenges of retaining apprentices

Other common challenges regarding retention included: travel and transport issues; low pay and other expenses; the need for 'right line management' and 'matching personalities' between mentors and apprentices; no job available with the employer when the apprenticeship ends; and an employer taking on too many apprentices. Notably, many of the factors detailed next, also featured earlier when discussing issues that enable retention.

A number of employers talked about travel and transport difficulties encountered by apprentices. Specifically, travel and transport could be an issue on-the-job (e.g. travelling to deliver coaching sessions): 'you can't assume the apprentice has a car', 'you wouldn't believe the travel logistics we have to think about for Y', 'travel is quite a big one for us ... you do have to kind of be, you know, able to get on buses, public transport, get there on time', 'sometimes he gets the bus but then you can't be sure he's going to get there on time' and 'we try to help out as much as we can but sometimes it's easier to not include Y'. In terms of the education days of apprentices this could also present travel and transport challenges: 'it takes so much time to get there' and 'it's so time consuming'. Both of these issues concerning the job and education related travel are highlighted by these employers:

“Travels a bit of an issue ... the last six months ... It's just been a nightmare really ... Some of them are sort of saying when they first start, they don't have any money, they don't get paid for the first month because obviously you've got to work a month in advance ... We've just had a bit of an issue with how far away the college is.” (Employer 8)

“Realistically, we don't want to set them up to fail ... is it realistic to ask them to travel an hour to get to a setting you know, is that fair on them? Is it going to work? (Employer 7)

Interestingly, employer 8 offered a potential solution, suggesting the need for a 'pot of money or kitty' given to new apprentices at the start to help cover possible travel and transport expenses before they receive their first month's pay:

“I think we should really be offering them some sort of pot of money or kitty to help them get to work for that first month. Really an upfront payment would be nice for them to sort of start and get around public transport. (Employer 8)

Related to the financial challenges of travel and transport, concerns were raised about other living costs:

“ Being able to afford to buy clothes to wear to be a coach, being able to afford to wash clothes, afford lunches. (Employer 1)

It was acknowledged by many employers that because apprentices receive a low salary they may not progress to the end of their apprenticeship. Employer 4 provides a particular example of an apprentice that had recently left their programme due to ‘better paid jobs’ elsewhere:

“ If I was looking as a 16-year-old, what am I going to do? Y was a painter and decorator on the side and he made a lot more money, so made the decision to leave ... It's a shame because he was an absolute star. But he's 17, you've got another job on the side, and you earn more money and you're about to have a baby. (Employer 4)

Although mentors have already been highlighted as a key factor to apprentice retention, there was also a view that they needed to be the ‘right’ mentors and line manager. Here ‘matching personalities’ was seen as essential:

“ Ensuring that we get the right line management ... sometimes it comes down to personalities as well. So, making sure that we find the right person to work with the apprentices and that they can work collectively together. (Employer 3)

A further retention challenge suggested by employer 3 was again linked to one of the positive supporting factors to retention highlighted previously - ensuring there is a future role in the company post-apprenticeship:

“ Some of the problems with it has been that there hasn't been a job at the end of it and so that's, you know, that could be it, could be difficult really for both parties. (Employer 3)

Employer 15 also discussed the challenges of juggling responsibilities throughout the apprenticeship (i.e. keeping up to date with their learning):

“ So, trying to juggle doing all the online apprenticeship work as well as juggle trying to relearn Maths and English, they can find that quite hard actually. (Employer 15)

Importantly, employer 5 alluded to the impact of apprentices’ broader lives and how this can lead to issues regarding retention:

“ They've got home lives that are quite complicated as well. They might have other issues around, you know, engaging in sort of high-risk behaviours outside of work or school or the home too. (Employer 5)

Finally, employer 2 outlined a specific challenge that they had experienced in retaining apprentices. In their first year of taking on apprentices they had recruited a high number, leading to four out of five leaving before the end of the programme:

“ I think we learned a lot on the first year and it was a massive learning curve for us as an organisation. I think we maybe took on too much all at once, and you know, obviously you've only got one through the door. (Employer 2)

In summary, retention is a complex process and there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach evident from employers.

4.7 Support from Coach Core Staff and Learning Coaches (employed by Lifetime Training)

In the main, employers were positive about the support they received from CCF in relation to recruitment guidance and support - ‘I'd tell anyone to go with it’, ‘I think if you are looking at apprenticeship in sport then Coach Core is the company that I'd tell people to go with’, ‘I'm a really big advocate of the Coach Core programme and how it works’, ‘they've always been flexible in looking at locally what works for us’, and ‘I'd say Coach Core, keep doing what you're doing’.

“ They have been agile and adaptive to whatever my needs are. I've been able to go to them and go look, this is the way we've worked in the past, these are the challenges that we've had, this is what I would like to do moving forwards, this is what it's going to look like and then, through honest and open discussion, we've been able to work it out together. (Employer 11)

Some employers had worked with other apprenticeship providers in the past and noted a very different experience - ‘they weren't bothered about the apprentices’, ‘they never came and did anything with them’, ‘wasn't very supportive’ and ‘not a great experience for us or the apprentice’.

However, there were a few employers who noted concerns with CCF regarding the short timeframes between the recruitment process and the start of the apprenticeship. On this issue, employer 4 felt that this can lead to a lack of clarity for apprentices about what the apprenticeship entails, which can affect retention:

“Timelines always seem very tight, especially for the recruitment events ... we're turning it around within three weeks from starting. For me, that's not long enough ... The apprentices need a lot clearer picture of what the apprenticeship is before they start or before they even go through the process. I'm not sure they do ... I don't think we get enough time to have that conversation with people ... it just makes things a little bit clearer I think. (Employer 4)

There were also a few employers wanting more engagement from CCF staff. For example, employer 8 felt that having CCF running more events and being present at these would benefit employers and apprentices:

“I think more fun events and activities and just being involved a little bit more might be good. Because I'm not sure the apprentice really understands who Coach Core are fully. But I think just a bit more involvement, yeah. And maybe make it a bit more fun and seeing what's at the end of it ... I don't think this year they're doing as many fun activities as what they did last year. We did some really good stuff last year. So I'm not sure. I'm not sure why that is. (Employer 8)

Likewise, a few employers commented that in more recent years they felt CCF staff had not been as engaged with them as they had been in the past, for instance, supporting them with recruitment events and being very 'hands on':

“Particularly in those early days, they were really hands on and really supported us and guided us in terms of what a recruitment day could and should look like and how those are formulated. So that was really, really helpful having that support and they would be on site normally and you know, give a bit of an overview of the programme, and really be heavily engaged with that. (Employer 1)

Similar to the positive feedback provided by employers about CCF, employers were also complementary about the LCs. Indeed, employers reported that these 'go above and beyond':

“W [LC] always keeps me updated ... constantly emails me, letting me know what's going on, if they're behind, or if they're not attending. She's been great. She goes above and beyond. (Employer 8)

“That he [LC] is willing to drive an hour and a half kind of thing to come here to meet with them, you know, for the day sometimes, and actually do the work with them, no other organisation will do that. (Employer 5)

While the majority of employers had positive feedback about the LC, employer 1 provided caution with some of the more recent (online) provision offered:

“Then in the most recent iteration of the programme, sort of a remote tutor, which I guess is a more traditional model where they have time dedicated to young people online, and then maybe once a month face-to-face ... But I think I would be cautious of not losing that face-to-face touch point with the young people, particularly as I say with the challenging nature of some of the young people we take on. (Employer 1)

In recognising the importance of CCF and LCs to the success of apprenticeship programmes, it is timely to next consider how CCF staff and LCs themselves perceive recruitment and retention issues and challenges.



5.0 Findings - Coach Core staff and Learning Coaches

The CCF staff and LCs (employed by Lifetime Training) discussed a range of issues concerning the recruitment and retention of apprentices, these are considered next.

5.1 Recruitment of apprentices

CCF staff and LCs identified a range of issues relating to recruiting apprentices including: recruitment strategies, diversity of apprentices, economic circumstances of employers and potential apprentices, young people being more particular about work and working patterns, and April apprentice starts.

In terms of recruitment, three overarching strategies were discussed by CCF staff and LCs including 'pre-identified', open apprenticeship job adverts, and working with referral partners. A few CCF staff and LCs suggested pre-identified apprentices offered more certainty for employers as they have already developed a relationship - 'employers feel very safe because they know that apprentice', 'a trusted person', 'the employer knows them, and they know the employer', and 'that's the cleanest and simplest way of recruiting'. All the CCF staff and LCs talked about how open apprenticeship job adverts have mixed success depending on the type of employer, activity and location. For instance, they highlighted how some sports are more attractive to potential apprentices than others.

“... if you were a professional football club, you would have so many applications. You know we're talking towards 100 whereas then in REGION X we had a role which was basically running walking groups. We barely got any applications for it because it just wasn't attracting young people. (CCF staff)

More broadly, there was a sense from some CCF staff and LCs that the nature of the recruitment approach is less important in comparison to developing rapport between the LCs, apprentices and employers which influences retention.

CCF staff and LCs highlighted how the CCF apprenticeship programmes support a diverse range of apprentices. One LC described this as the 'magic of Coach Core'. This includes people from deprived

communities, people 'newly arrived' to the country, people with disabilities, different ages, and religions. Another LC described apprentices as a 'complete mixed bag of backgrounds'. Relatedly, CCF staff and LCs talked about the value of recruiting apprentices from marginalised groups. They recognised some employers are keen to support this strategy:

“One of our employers is trying to connect with more diverse communities, but they have quite a White middle-class workforce. So it's actually, oh, can we use the apprenticeship programme to employ a younger, more diverse apprentice. (CCF staff)

There was a consensus that in some circumstances using a pre-identified approach and referral partners supports the recruitment of those from marginalised groups. In both instances it is felt the localised insight and community connections can facilitate targeting recruitment. There was also a view that targeting specific employers who are relatable to particular marginalised groups may improve recruitment. Here consideration is given to women:

“Let's say, for example, females are underrepresented. Well, actually, how are we going to engage with females? Is it that we need to look at female employers? So without kind of stereotyping, do we need to look at netball more? Do we need to look at cheerleading or whatever? (CCF staff)

CCF staff and LCs acknowledged that this kind of localised targeting recruitment was present in some areas but could be further developed in others. One CCF staff member also suggested working more strategically with governing bodies who have initiatives focusing on specific marginalised groups and developing apprenticeship opportunities within these.

The overriding recruitment challenge highlighted by CCF staff and LCs concerns the financial status of employers, and the economic conditions potential apprentices find themselves in. According to CCF staff and LCs, for small employers the financial

expectations of having an apprentice can limit this as a possibility. CCF staff highlighted that this has resulted in some very suitable employers not being able to engage with an apprenticeship programme:

“ ... some great employers miss out working with us because actually, either structurally or financially, they can't pay that. (CCF staff)

The economic conditions associated with the cost-of-living crisis were also referred to as limiting potential apprentice starters. CCF staff and LCs all spoke of the specific impact this is having on CCF southern programmes indicating 'its exaggerated in the south', 'it's brutal in the south', 'it is crazy', 'it is definitely amplified in the south', and 'everywhere it all boils down to money but it is harder for apprentices in the south'. It was also noted by a number of CCF staff and LCs that older apprentices may have additional needs associated with caring responsibilities for children and this may impact on them considering an apprenticeship programme.

There was a recognition that in some cases the diversity of apprentices was more limited, 'it's tricky attracting women' and 'we struggle with disabled apprentices'. This was sometimes the case even in areas where particular groups were more prominent:

“ I think we've really struggled to get more Black and ethnic minorities on programme even though we've got quite a lot of areas with high populations of South Asian and Black people around the area. So, we can't quite put a finger on why that is. (LC)

A number of other recruitment challenges were identified by CCF staff and LCs regarding recruitment, including young people being more particular about work:

“ ... I think young people are more particular on the jobs that they want. So, it's kind of like the hours that they work, how much they get paid. (CCF staff)

The timeframe of April apprenticeship starts were considered problematic and have 'notoriously lower numbers':

“ At the minute I'm going through a recruitment for an April start, and it's always hard to recruit during this time because, if they've got young volunteers, they're still in school until June, July time. (LC)

According to CCF staff and LCs a range of issues influence how and why employers recruit apprentices, this is also the case for retention, and this is discussed next.

5.2 Retaining apprentices

CCF staff and LCs identified a range of issues relating to retaining apprentices including cost of living and apprentice pay, having realistic expectations, taking a 'young person first' outlook, understanding the apprentice beyond work, experiencing challenging work demands, and relationships with others.

In terms of apprentice pay, this has already been discussed as an issue impacting on recruitment, but according to staff this low level of pay also affects retention, 'it's so hard for apprentices to survive on minimum wage', 'the wage is so low', 'it's hard to make ends meet', 'even the Living Wage can be a struggle', and 'it's the biggest reason that apprentices leave'. Some staff highlight how the recent cost of living crisis has exacerbated this situation for many apprentices. CCF staff explained that apprentices living with family still face financial challenges that can result in them leaving the apprenticeship programme.

CCF staff and LCs all talked about the importance of ensuring employers have realistic expectations of an apprentice, 'they are not the finished product', 'they need time to grow and develop', 'they can't deliver the best sessions from the off', and 'employers need to be realistic':

“ They're not going to be the finished article from the off. It's about helping the employers understand that once they're taken, they're kind of taking this person through a journey. (LC)

CCF staff also recognised that employers have opportunities to shape apprentices in ways that align with the organisational culture and ethos:

“ I think some organisations could see them as a burden rather than an asset, see them as a drain on resources and time. So, it's really working with organisations to help them understand the value in apprenticeships ... these young people will have other skills ... there's a lot of value in moulding someone into your organisation ethos and morals and actually having someone that hasn't already got preconceived ideas. (CCF staff)



Whilst CCF staff and LCs talked about employers needing to have realistic expectations there was also an acknowledgement that apprentices also need to understand their role and be realistic about what this entails, 'setting out realistic expectations from the start is really important', 'what your role is going to look like', 'what is your bread and butter', 'what does a full-time job look like'. On this issue a few CCF staff felt improvements could be made pre-employment and at the early stages of the apprenticeship programme:

“ You're going into the workforce, it's even things like turning up on time, like the amount of them that don't turn up on time is crazy. How do you dress for work? How do you speak? How do you send text messages? How do you send emails? All the employers are having to do that individually, so why not bring them together, and let's do that and help create a better environment for employers. (CCF staff)

When discussing apprenticeship retention, a number of CCF staff highlighted the benefits of employers taking a 'young person first', 'young person supportive lens', and 'never give up on them' approach. This outlook recognises many apprentices may be new to the world of work and not familiar with work related cultures and practices. CCF staff are cognisant that they need to support employers to embrace this kind of outlook.

A key feature of retention that CCF staff and LCs mentioned concerns the need for employers to be attentive, and responsive, to the personal circumstances and possible challenges apprentices may experience beyond work, 'just get to understand the person in front of you', 'they have a life outside work', and appreciate 'any barriers and try to bring those down'. CCF staff and LCs highlighted that apprentices can sometimes have challenges relating to caring responsibilities, accommodation/living arrangements, family difficulties, mental health issues and other complex needs and this will require employers to be sensitised to these. It was also acknowledged that even when employers recognise these kinds of personal circumstances and offer additional support, apprentices may still leave the programme.

CCF staff and LCs emphasised how several work-related challenges can impact on apprentice retention, including work overload:

“ I think I've had apprentices leave who are kind of given their work schedule, especially when there's travel to lots of different locations and where it's ... quite a harsh environment and they haven't maybe got enough support to start with and continue with this. (CCF staff)

Similarly, if a manager/mentor is not supportive of the education day, and/or there are multiple changes to apprentice line-managers, these issues can be unsettling for apprentices. In part, CCF staff and LCs emphasised the importance of developing relationships with employers to minimise these kinds of issues and in doing this promote a shared vision and understanding about the apprenticeship programme. They highlighted the need to work with employers who 'have the right intent', 'be on the same page as Coach Core', 'value growing apprentices because they are the future of our workforce', and 'we want like-minded employers to be able to check-challenge each other'. One CCF staff summarised the need for a nurturing, engaging, developmental culture:

“ We want to make sure that we place them in environments that are going to be safe and nurturing, given the right development, so there's an element of building relationships with the right organisations ... It needs to be an engaging environment so that the apprentice is getting lots of development. They can see themselves growing, they're getting to a point where they can start leading on sessions, they can take ownership, they feel a sense of purpose. (CCF staff)

LCs also talked about the importance of them developing relationships with apprentices and reported various factors that enhance these including: being a relatable role model, having the apprentice's back and being a friendly face.

In bringing the discussion of the findings from the various stakeholders involved in the apprenticeship programme to a close, the next section returns to the original three research questions and ends by offering a series of recommendations.

6.0 Conclusions and key recommendations

This research sought to understand how the current system supports or hinders micro and small employers' efforts to recruit and retain young people on apprenticeships. As part of this research, 31 people were interviewed (employers, CCF staff and LCs). Our research complements earlier CCF research which centralised insights from CCF apprentices (Morgan & Roberts 2022), and taken together offers a comprehensive picture of all stakeholders involved in CCF apprenticeships. This report concludes by revisiting the research questions of the project and summarises the key findings relating to each of these (see Table 2). After this, a series of evidence-based recommendations are offered that can be presented to Government and other stakeholders to guide future apprenticeship system, policy and practices (see Table 3).

Table 2 – Key findings

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

What key factors challenge small employers from recruiting and retaining apprentices?

- Economic circumstances of the employers to be able to leverage sufficient finances for an apprentice
- The low apprentice salary can be off putting to potential apprentices and those on an apprenticeship programme – this is particularly pronounced in the south, where the cost of living is higher
- Job opportunities with the apprentice employer at the end of the apprenticeship programme
- Travel and transport pose an added challenge both in terms of accessibility and cost (this can be particularly challenging at the beginning of the apprenticeship)
- Work readiness of apprentices to move from education into employment
- Attracting a diversity of apprentices into the S&PA sector that is typically not diverse
- Outdated view of what apprenticeships entail and what sectors they service



RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

What enables small employers to navigate apprenticeship recruitment and retention challenges?

- Aspirational employers with the desire to develop apprentices and to learn with them
- Employers willing to support a smooth transition between full-time education and apprenticeship employment to ensure they are work ready
- Valuing apprentices for the different skills, ideas and experiences they bring to the workforce
- Recognising the value of apprentices having lived experiences within the communities they are working
- Getting to know the apprentice beyond the boundaries of work – what motivates them, what are their aspirations (during and beyond the apprenticeship), what responsibilities do they have (family, caring), what are their needs (education, religion)?
- Apprentices feeling that they are part of the workforce through positive relationships with colleagues
- Varied roles and a diversity of experiences to make work interesting and enjoyable
- Using mentors that are carefully matched in terms of personality to the apprentice
- Mentors who are sensitised to the individual needs and circumstances of the apprentice
- Having strong relationships between the apprentice, employer, Coach Core and Learning Coaches (employed by Lifetime Training) that enables open and honest dialogue
- Trying out different recruitment strategies to establish what works for the employer
- Use of innovative approaches to recruitment activities that consider the different needs, and skills of potential apprentices e.g. use of videos as an alternative to a written application

RESEARCH QUESTION 3:

What resource considerations need to be taken into account when recruiting and retaining those from under-represented groups or those with additional learning and support needs?

- Reflect on own assumptions and stereotypes in relation to particular demographics. Get to know the individual to identify specific adaptations that may need to be made to help them thrive
- Adaptations for one individual are likely to create a more inclusive and welcoming working environment for everyone in the workforce
- Time commitment needed by employees (e.g. colleagues and mentor) may increase when working with apprentices who cross-cut different marginalised groups to help them navigate multiple barriers
- The low apprentice salary for some potential apprentices/existing apprentices means the apprenticeship programme can be an unviable employment option, particularly for those in the south. Action should be taken to support micro and small employers to elevate the wage of all apprentices
- Carefully select a mentor (beyond pragmatic choices) that is well acquainted with different marginalised groups and has an enhanced sensitivity to all differences
- Apprentices with lived experiences of being a marginalised group are an invaluable resource for any employer wishing to engage with underrepresented populations
- Thinking more creatively about recruitment strategies including where to target recruitment efforts and the process of recruitment

Table 3 – Recommendations

Strategic apprenticeship stakeholders

- The low apprentice salary for some potential apprentices/existing apprentices means the apprenticeship programme can be an unviable employment option, particularly for those in the south. Action should be taken to support micro and small employers to elevate the wage of all apprentices
- Employer resources and support may be greater for apprentices with disabilities and additional support needs. Support employers to better understand how they can access additional guidance and resources
- Travel costs and availability of public transport needs to be reviewed as it currently limits the work that employers can give apprentices
- Support employers to better understand how they can contribute to a smooth transition from full-time education into apprenticeships by offering guidance and training about how to get apprentices 'work ready' around expectations and behaviours at work
- Continue to debunk the myths surrounding apprenticeships including what they entail, and promote the organisational benefits and strengths apprentices can bring to the workforce

Coach Core Foundation and other Sport & PA organisations with a training and development remit

- Mentors require time and support to develop as mentors and may benefit from specific guidance and training to more fully understand their role and how to develop positive relationships and help apprentices to progress
- Be more explicit during initial, and on-going, engagement with employers about having realistic expectations of apprentices
- Offer employers guidance and training to better understand how they can support apprentices to have a smooth transition from full-time education into apprenticeships
- Work with employers to develop a 'start up' package for apprentices. This could include money to buy appropriate work clothing and to cover travel costs, particularly in the first few weeks of an apprenticeship
- The workforce in the S&PA sector is not as diverse as the UK-wide workforce, NGBs and other S&PA organisations ideally should come together to tackle this workforce imbalance
- Work more closely with NGBs and other S&PA organisations who have a remit to promote participation in underrepresented groups and/or have a history of unsuccessfully targeting these groups. Help them to appreciate that recruiting apprentices with relevant lived experiences can support their wider programme/initiative goals
- Continue to celebrate the journeys of apprentices, particularly those from marginalised communities and those with additional learning and support needs

Employers

- Review the workforce to establish how diverse it is and use this insight to support apprentice recruitment
- Be realistic about the number of apprentices appointed to ensure all are sufficiently supported
- Recognise how those with lived experiences of belonging to an underrepresented group are an invaluable resource for any employer seeking to engage with underrepresented populations
- Extend networks including with other apprentice/non-apprentice employers, job centres, Active Partnerships, educational institutions to share good practice relating to pre, during and post the apprenticeship
- Employers need to understand the range of recruitment strategies available -as local circumstances, access to wider networks and the capacity of employers to commit a resource to recruitment activities, all contribute to the strategy favoured by each employer
- For potential employers debunk the myths surrounding apprenticeships and apprentices including what they entail, the organisational benefits and strengths apprentices can bring to the workforce
- Develop an apprenticeship package that supports the apprentice holistically. For example, free kit, access to counselling services, educational support, additional mentoring

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Appendix 1 – Profile of Coach Core employers

Employer (no.)	No. of cohorts	Total no. of apprentices	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Apprentice Status
1	3	7	Female = 2 Male = 5	20 – 28 (avg. 23.7)	Ethnic minority = 5 White = 2	Achiever = 5 Leaver = 2
2	2	9	Female = 0 Male = 9	18 – 24 (avg. 19.7)	Ethnic minority = 1 White = 8	Achiever = 1 In learning = 3 Leaver = 5
3	New to Coach Core					
4	3	4	Female = 3 Male = 1	19 – 40 (avg. 25.8)	Ethnic minority = 1 White = 3	Achiever = 3 Leaver = 1
5	3	5	Female = 0 Male = 5	17 – 22 (avg. 19.2)	Ethnic minority = 0 White = 5	Achiever = 2 In learning = 2 Leaver = 1
6	4	9	Female = 7 Male = 2	18 – 47 (avg. 25.1)	Ethnic minority = 2 White = 7	Achiever = 3 In learning = 4 Leaver = 2
7	1	2	Female = 0 Male = 2	17 – 18 (avg. 17.5)	Ethnic minority = 2 White = 0	In learning = 2
8	2	10	Female = 5 Male = 5	16 – 33 (avg. 20.7)	Ethnic minority = 1 White = 9	Achiever = 3 In learning = 6 Leaver = 1
9	5	39	Female = 3 Male = 36	19 – 30 (avg. 22.4)	Ethnic minority = 0 White = 39	Achiever = 14 In learning = 6 Leaver = 19
10	4	15	Female = 9 Male = 6	19 – 43 (avg. 26.9)	Ethnic minority = 0 White = 15	Achiever = 10 In learning = 4 Leaver = 1
11	6	24	Female = 5 Male = 19	18 – 31 (avg. 23.8)	Ethnic minority = 1 White = 23	Achiever = 18 In learning = 2 Leaver = 4
12	1	2	Female = 0 Male = 2	18 – 19 (avg. 18.5)	Ethnic minority = 0 White = 2	In learning = 2
13	1	4	Female = 1 Male = 3	20 – 22 (avg. 20.7)	Ethnic minority = 0 White = 4	In learning = 4
14	1	2	Female = 0 Male = 2	19 (avg. 19)	Ethnic minority = 0 White = 2	In learning = 2
15	2	4	Female = 0 Male = 4	17 – 28 (avg. 23)	Ethnic minority = 2 White = 2	Achiever = 2 Leaver = 2
16	2	16	Female = 8 Male = 8	18 – 33 (avg. 22.2)	Ethnic minority = 7 White = 9	Achiever = 7 In learning = 8 Leaver = 1

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