



Pearson

# Apprenticeships Case Study #1 British Telecom

**In July 2017, Pearson TQ (PTQ) was awarded the contract to deliver a new Apprenticeship qualification through BT's Future Leaders programme. The first cohort of learners is nearing the End-Point Assessments, so we spoke to four learners about their experience...**

BT is an organisation that hardly needs an introduction. Employing 105,800 people in 180 countries, it is one of the largest flagship British-owned businesses around, and is one of the world's leading communications services companies.

The Future Leaders programme is part of a forward-thinking in-house management development programme for BT's first line leaders and managers. Until last year, it had been managed and delivered internally. It has now been upgraded to include the new Level 3 Team Leader/Supervisor Apprenticeship Standard (incorporating a Level 3 BTEC Diploma in Management); so the first cohort were the first of BT's future leaders who would complete the course and receive training from a specialist company – PTQ – and a recognised, formal qualification.

The programme requires that all learners on the apprenticeship element of the programme to hold or attain Functional Skills Maths and English at level 2. A cross-section of BT employees around the world were identified

as potential 'Future Leaders' and invited to apply for 320 places on the 15-month, 16-module course, which began in November 2017. It's a global programme with learners from all over the world, many of them in England.

Every learner has benefited from PTQ's blended learning solution, which allows for peer learning sets and discussion and provides a bespoke, tailored learning experience, individualised for each learner - including face-to-face 1-1 sessions, classroom-based group training, webinars and remote, distance learning. Holistic assessment and observations have also been conducted throughout the programme to ensure progression. Each of BT's future leaders has been assigned a dedicated Skills Coach, who acts as their facilitator and mentor throughout the programme.

PTQ's interactions with BT have been collaborative, positive, responsive and timely. PTQ is a single point of contact for BT and the two organisations have developed a close working relationship to identify and resolve issues quickly and effectively. Through daily engagement, as well as weekly and monthly performance meetings, PTQ gains real-time feedback from BT in relation to programme delivery (including materials), which allows PTQ to tailor the programme to meet the specific needs of both BT and its learners, and provide proactive and appropriate delivery solutions exactly when they are needed.

As might be expected, there have been a few operational challenges transferring the responsibility for the delivery of the Future Leaders programme to an external organisation for the first time. However, BT has conducted a number of surveys with both learners and their line managers over the duration of the programme, which have recorded extremely positive feedback. A 94% learner satisfaction speaks volumes for the learner experience. ►

## So, what has created that level of satisfaction?

First, we asked four learners why they had decided to take the course.



Helen Darcy

**Helen Darcy** has worked for BT for 21 years and is currently Voice Data Configuration Manager at BT Wholesale, managing a team of 17 engineers in Reading. She says: "I first applied to go on the course four years ago, as I'd been promoted to manager and a course like that provides a great toolkit," she recalls. "A lot of promotions don't come with any formal training and this been a fantastic course for equipping me with the skills that are relevant to the role I do."



Neale Richards

**Neale Richards**, a Customer Service Engineer at Openreach, based in Sketty on the outskirts of Swansea, was looking for a new challenge after 20 years working for the company. "I had been looking to do a course externally, maybe a college course in business at the end of my working day, then this opportunity came up, so I went for it," he says. "Due to my experience and confidence on the job, I felt I could take the step up and I also wanted to give something back to the company that has been so good to me. Moving into management would be an ideal opportunity to pass on my experience and knowledge to other people in my company."

In Ipswich, Content Processing Design Consultant at BT Technology, **Ryan Merrin** had been working for BT for four years and already successfully completed a BT Apprenticeship. "I had already had a good experience with an Apprenticeship and knew that this was a chance to learn on the job and gain more skills that I might not be able to get elsewhere," he says. "I think the earn-while-you-learn element is very attractive and to come into a big company at the bottom and have the opportunity to network, develop and grow in your area and beyond has been great."



Ryan Merrin

**Steve English** is a Repayments Project Engineer at Openreach, based in Liverpool. He has worked for BT for 19 years and had previously completed a Level 2 Advanced Apprenticeship in Telecoms and IT in 2012. "I had been in the same job for 11 years and when the opportunity to go on the Future Leaders Programme came up, I thought it would be a good way to encourage me to commit to a change of career," Steve says. "My kids are late teens now, so I haven't got the same time commitments to them that I did, and I was ready for a change."

"I'd already done a Level 2 Advanced Apprenticeship and like this one, you had to apply for it and get accepted, so I'd had a positive experience."

## Next, we asked them how they have managed to dovetail the course with their working lives.

**Ryan** is given a couple of sponsor hours a week to focus on his Apprenticeship work. "I've managed to fit it all into my working hours," he says. "The key for me has been getting on with it when that spare moment arises and don't procrastinate."

"My managers have been really good; anytime I've needed them to join a call or answer any questions, they have been there. They don't micro-manage at all, and they don't necessarily know when I am doing the course work and not. I just tend to fit it into my work."

Although sponsor time is available to **Helen**, she has found it difficult to fit in. "It was a big change when the programme went external, and my line manager was surprised how much more work was immediately involved, but he has been very supportive," she explains. "It's not that BT wouldn't allow me to work on the Apprenticeship during working hours, but there really isn't time when you're managing 17 people and you have so many conference calls and meetings, you're dealing with problems and you're also dealing with the customers. I have never been able to put the two hours a week aside while at work; I've had to do all of my coursework in the evenings or at weekends." ▶



Steve English

It's been fairly intense at times, admits **Steve**, but he's overcome the challenges. "I'm in my 40s so I've been out of full-time education for a long time, so just getting back into the swing of things was a challenge. The Level 2 Apprenticeship was easier as it was more work-related, whereas this is more involved and there are more essays to write. I've enjoyed it, it's been really interesting reading up on things. I've probably done 60% of it at work, but it was my choice to do the rest at home – my wife has been studying for a Masters and my daughter was doing her GCSEs, in the summer so it's become the norm in our house!"

**Neale** was fast-tracked into an Acting Manager role due to the fact he was on the Future Leaders Programme. "At first, I was given time to get the coursework done while at work, but now I'm a manager, all that time has gone," he says. "It is a very in-depth course, but I wouldn't have expected anything less. It's a BTEC course at the end of the day, which isn't meant to be a walk in the park. I was prepared for that and willing to do it."



## So, how has the course been and how have PTQ performed as the training provider?

**Helen** knew lots of people at BT who'd been on the Future Leaders programme before her and believes the new structure is an improvement. "The course is so much meatier and we get a proper qualification at the end, so it's more like doing a college course alongside your day job," she says. "I have progress review calls with my Skills Coach. From Pearson's side, it is extremely well structured, well communicated and I get regular contact and feedback. She's been amazing and has worked with me in a really structured way, keeping to deadlines and responding to emails on the same day or the next."

There are four classroom sessions, as part of the course, including an introductory session. Each focuses on different units, and **Ryan** says they were a good opportunity to learn about leadership styles and methods, and what type of leader you might be. "They were very interactive and discussion-driven, so offered a good chance to get involved in conversations with people from different areas of the business to hear their thoughts on different subjects."

"There is so much to leadership that you just wouldn't think about. It's not just about telling people they are doing a good job, but being a coach and a mentor to deal with people's personal needs and wants. You need to understand what motivates them."

**Steve** has particularly enjoyed the classroom sessions since Cathy, his Skills Coach from Pearson, sent work to do in advance. "It's really enjoyable knowing what we are going to be getting involved in and being able to bring something to the table. We've all developed a good relationship with Cathy and also as a group of learners, we've built a relationship as the year's gone on. I'm in a seven-storey building, so there are a lot of people working here and it's been nice to get to know a few of them, both from Openreach and different parts of BT."

"I touch base with Cathy every couple of weeks with a call and can email her with anything at all I'm worried about or stuck with. Everything gets uploaded to BT Achieve, so I can always see how close I am to completing each module."

The support of the Skills Coaches has been invaluable, **Neale** adds. "The assessors have been brilliant with me personally and my Skills Coach from Pearson, Perran, has been there whenever I've needed him. I had an email off him today and we're in touch regularly for telephone interviews. He's been tremendous; helping me with anything and getting back quickly with advice." ►



Finally, we asked the four learners what they have gained from the course already, what benefits the Future Leaders programme has for their employer, and whether they would encourage colleagues to take the same direction as themselves.

The programme has delivered what Neale was looking for. "For me personally," he says, "the main benefit is that I've gained a lot of confidence and a lot of knowledge and insight on management. It's a lot harder to be a manager than I first imagined and I've been using a lot of the stuff that's covered on the course already. People management skills and knowing the type of manager I'd like to be, how I relay my decisions to people and how to try and get the most out of them – these are all things that are covered on the course and it's been really interesting to use them in practice.

"To anyone else considering doing this course, or any Apprenticeship, I'd say go for it. I have given my number to the new people being introduced into the course, to tell them to give me a bell if they have any doubts. The fact that it's hard work is not a negative thing; if you want to get anywhere in this world, you need to work hard. But I'd also tell them to go into it with their eyes wide open, as they need to commit to the time and effort needed.

"As long as you are committed, it's a win-win."

Steve has also seen positive progress since enrolling on the programme. He says: "The fact that I was doing the Apprenticeship really helped me to get a promotion. I'd been acting manager a lot of the time in the last 12 months and now obviously I've moved into my new role, so I've definitely been using a lot of the stuff I've been learning already. One of the guys in my office is starting in November. I encouraged him to do that and just said embrace it and enjoy it.

"For me, the Future Leaders Programme was about changing my career aspirations and getting an external qualification that's recognised by all of the industry. From BT's perspective, they are training people to be well-versed in management skills."

For her part, Helen has already discovered how well the training is equipping her for her role. "Recently I was the investigation officer on a disciplinary and I can assure you that without doing this course, I would not have known what I was doing. I had the common sense to know what I should or shouldn't say, but it's a sensitive area and I wouldn't have known the procedure if I'd not covered topics such as grievance, disciplinaries, bullying and harassment during the course. That's only one example of where the things I've been studying have come up – all of the things I'm doing in my job, I'm also learning about on the course and I feel I've been able to do a much better job having been on Future Leaders.



Helen's progress has already begun to take shape, as she has just embarked on the prestigious TechWomen programme, selected by a Director to take part in a course that aims to promote the progression of women within BT. "It's a real platform to progression," she says. "It encourages you to 'sell your brand' and I will network and get to know senior managers. It places your name in higher circles and we are encouraged to take these courses and move around the business.

"It has given me great confidence and BT will be getting strong managers through Future Leaders – it's such an in-depth course that it's a shame that all line managers go on it by default. Everyone tries their best in management roles, but this programme definitely prepares you to be better in all sorts of situations."

Ryan is "very positive about the future", adding: "I've been coaching a couple of the Apprentices in our team over the last year. That has helped me apply some of the learning from the Future Leaders Programme and it has also been really good to get a feel for management without having all the admin that comes with it!"

In the same BT internal surveys, 96% of line managers agreed with the statement – 'The Future Leaders programme benefits my team member' – and 92% agreed that 'My team member on the Future Leaders programme is developing into a leader/manager'. Until the programme ends, it is too early for success rates, but the large majority of learners are on track to successfully complete their course, which means BT will have developed a large group of potential new managers for itself.

Ryan finds the words to sum up the rationale behind BT's investment in the programme and its people nicely. "BT is providing people with training and developing the skills they can bring back into the workplace. I think it will improve the way people work, the way they think and the way they talk and interact with each other.

"We might not all go straight into management, but you don't have to be managing people to be a leader, at the end of the day." ■