

Developing traineeships with a cross government team Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills



Colleagues at the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills successfully built a cross government team to develop and implement traineeships for young people aged 16 to 24. They involved delivery agencies from the start in order to develop a policy that would be practical for its users, and exchanged regularly with stakeholders.

Working as a virtual team

“This was not one person’s job – but it was a part of the work of lots of people”

A new Minister that had responsibilities for both DfE and BIS, wanted to rapidly address the gap in support for young people struggling to gain an apprenticeship or employment. Responsibility for the 16-24 age group was split across two departments, and four delivery bodies. It was essential for all six parties to collaborate if the policy was to have a chance of success.

The six parties formed a virtual team, as it was not possible for them to colocate during the duration of the project due to the additional responsibilities that they had within their own organisations. A number of work strands were agreed and led by named individuals from the virtual team. The strand leaders identified the expertise that they needed to complete their task and proceeded with it, reporting back to the team through a fortnightly Project Group meeting. Some of these were face-to-face meetings, but the team also made extensive use of videoconferencing and teleconferencing facilities. The face-to-face time was essential for building productive relationships, facilitate quick problem solving and plan for next steps. The team therefore tried to meet physically whenever possible, but they did not let this slow down their progress.

As the project progressed, the team also involved colleagues from the Department for Work and Pensions, given their shared interest in supporting young people into work. In the end, approximately 30 people from the departments and delivery agencies made up the virtual team.

“It feels like I’m working with someone from my own Department”

The team decided that key project staff should brief the Minister, no matter which organisation they come from. This was an exceptional opportunity for the delivery agencies to voice their own experience and expertise, and it was highly welcomed by the Minister and his Private Office.

Bringing stakeholders in early through ministerial roundtables or discussion papers
The team did not want to create the policy on traineeships in isolation. They recognised that stakeholders from the education sector as well as training providers and employers had insights that were essential to designing a policy that could be successfully implemented.

Less than three months into the project, the team published a short discussion paper

setting out their initial ideas for the design and delivery of the traineeships. They asked stakeholders a series of focused questions: over a four week period, the project team received more than 450 written responses.

The team organised a series of ministerial roundtables in parallel, to give stakeholders a chance to express their ideas and concerns directly with ministers. These roundtable were well attended. The feedback not only informed the next stage of policy development, it also gave ministers a chance to develop a more concrete understanding of the situation.

The team was able to return to key stakeholders throughout the project to get feedback on their thinking and specific elements of the policy. This helped to successfully launch the policy as major issues, likely confusions and presentational problems had already been identified and dealt .

Outcome

Co-producing the policy with delivery organisations and involving major stakeholders throughout the process helped to deliver and implement the policy in a short space of time (eight and two months respectively!), as there were no stumbling blocks in the later stages that obliged the team to start its work from the beginning again.

Lessons

For others trying this approach, the team suggest you:

- Formally secure people's time: set up agreements about the amount of time that people can give to the project and ensure that they are being recognised for their efforts in their 'home' organisation
- Make time to establish relationships and build a strong team, whether this is face-to-face or virtually. This will help you work through issues constructively, as and when they come up.
- Ensure that you have a core team that represents all partner organisations and can make decisions. To keep things moving in a large project involving new partners, it can be helpful for project leads to make decisions on behalf of the full team, feedback back to the wider team about the discussions.
- Don't overuse email. When working in a big, dispersed team it's essential not to copy everyone in to every email. Instead, think who really needs to see it, pick up the phone when you can, and avoid "reply all" unless you have to.
- Don't wait to involve your stakeholders. Using the discussion paper and ministerial roundtables to gather responses to early thinking saved time, effort and ultimately resulted in a better policy.

Find out more

You can see the early Discussion Paper [here](#), and the final Policy [here](#)