

## RETENTION OF NEW ENTRANTS WITHIN CONSTRUCTION: THE BREAKFAST CLUB – BEST PRACTICE

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Having delivered the pilot programme of the Breakfast Club we have used our learnings from the project to identify best practice going forward.

The results from these first cohorts show the potential that these types of interventions can have in retaining talent within the industry. However there are a number of ways in which we believe the course can be adapted to increase the impact on participants further while retaining the elements which are crucial to its success.

### OVERALL

The project has indicated the power soft skills training can have in overcoming barriers for new entrants and ultimately tackling the issue of retention of workers within construction. However, moving forward we would recommend a more blended approach incorporating an element of more practical training alongside the core soft skills training. There are elements of the initial programme which we believe are critical but others can be replaced or altered while ensuring the individual feels invested in and recognises the commitment from employer and employee in building their career.

One of the challenges we faced was lower attendance rates than we initially hoped due to a variety of reasons but predominately contractor buy-in and to a lesser extent buy-in from the individuals themselves. Going forward greater commitment upfront is needed from contractors so there are no issues with candidates being pulled from the course or work conflicts which affect attendance. The strong results delivered by this pilot should make it easier to demonstrate to contractors the impact this type of programme can have on their workforce.

In order to maintain high levels of commitment from the candidates themselves we think it is key to show them that they are being invested in and crucial to communicate this effectively. Behavioural issues are often exacerbated by lack of training or employer engagement and increased awareness about their prospects and various roles within the industry will help keep workers engaged and ambitious. Therefore, emphasis in this area must be maintained as well as condensing the schedule of the programme so that individuals don't lose interest.

From a practical perspective, we would also recommend increasing the number of participants in any additional programmes, statistically speaking this will reinforce our initial findings and we have found that the community participants built within their cohorts was valuable in promoting retention.

### CONTENT

Soft skills will remain at the core of the programme but we suggest including trade-specific training as well. This would deepen candidates' understanding of the industry as well as helping achieve invaluable 'buy-in' from their employers. Sessions such as 'Positive Conflict' and 'Choices' (which addresses a candidate's strengths and weaknesses, the consequences of their choices, and helps them set themselves positive goals for their future), or equivalent sessions focused on these areas, we deem as essential. In addition, Financial Literacy was extremely well received and is another area of focus that offers crucial life skills to participants. Even though we were lucky enough to partner with Lloyds Bank among other successful organisations, not all courses need to be delivered in the same way or include the same scope of material. However, a course providing fundamental financial information and

awareness for candidates gives them a foundation essential for navigating what is largely a self-employed industry. Moreover in all sessions, the subject matter needs to be tailored to the cohort that we are targeting and towards the construction industry itself. We spent considerable time creating content for the programme that was easily digestible, easily transferable and ultimately, highly effective for candidates.

However, in terms of the remaining five courses we would suggest three trade-specific/practical courses, and any other two soft skills training sessions (creating an overall split of 5-3 soft skills training - practical training). Most importantly giving participants additional life skills enables new entrants to make better decisions for themselves in many aspects of their lives not just in the workplace and showing new entrants that the employer is investing in them will help grow their talent and assist in retention of their new workforce.

## **TIMINGS**

In order to make the course accessible, as well as reinforcing the conviction that the employer is investing in the individual, the sessions need to be conducted during the working day. However, we feel participants would profit from a more condensed schedule of interventions to ensure that individuals can benefit from the training in time to affect their retention in the industry.

We found that there is a real risk that suitable workers start a role but leave the industry before they are able to ascertain if this is the career for them. Therefore an important feature of the skills training the programme provides is giving candidates the tools they need to 'survive' the initial period and obtain the exposure to the work they need to make an informed decision, which is what the Breakfast Club provides. Candidates who leave the programme after only a couple of sessions, don't have the same opportunity to be impacted. One potential solution would be if interventions could occur earlier and if sessions could be condensed into a shorter time frame, they would likely capture more of this cohort.

We would suggest running the course over the first three months of a new entrant's employment which is the time during which the majority of individuals who are not retained within the industry leave their roles. Practically speaking this requires 2-3 sessions per month for the first three months because when the course is stretched over a number of months it can reduce the programme's ability to affect participant thinking and skill set in time to retain them. While we appreciate this is not an insignificant investment by employers and candidates during their early employment, however as we are suggesting the inclusion of some more construction-specific training, this time will not be at the expense of the practical exposure within construction.