

AAT gives those on low incomes high hopes for the future

Finance apprentice Babatunde Mateola loves his job. He is full of excitement as he talks about it: "I love to wake up and know that there will be something

different going on today at work."

For Mateola, this job has been hard-won. After leaving university with a degree in accounting and management, he found breaking into the profession practically impossible: "I would get email after email saying: 'Unfortunately, we can't take you on.' Just imagine receiving tonnes of emails like that. But I didn't give up."

Mateola decided to volunteer at accounting firm Paul Victoria, to try to get experience. His parents were pressuring him to take a retail job, but he stuck to his guns: "I always wanted to go into accounting."

His breakthrough came during a visit to his local Jobcentre Plus. The adviser put him in touch with All Inclusive, a training provider that uses government funding to provide training for people who can't afford to pay for it themselves.

All Inclusive put Mateola on the AAT Computerised Accounting course, where he showed great aptitude. All Inclusive's Julie Agbowu says that he

really stood out: "It's really rewarding to have a candidate who is that driven, and who really grasps an opportunity, performs and delivers. This sort of opportunity doesn't come to everybody, so it's important that they realise that it's potentially life-changing."

Training for free

All Inclusive uses the Flexible Support Fund, provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and administered by Jobcentre Plus, to offer the Computerised Accounting course. This short course is used to identify candidates who could thrive on an AAT apprenticeship.

The DWP fund also allows All Inclusive to provide the AAT Foundation Certificate at no cost to the apprentice or employer.

"Via that pathway, we're able to absorb the training fees, while the employer pays the apprenticeship wage," Agbowu explains. "This is really attractive to employers, and the student doesn't have to pay for their training at all. It's a win-win situation."

There are limited places on the apprenticeship scheme. All Inclusive likes to mentor its apprentices throughout their studies, to make sure they fulfil their potential.

"Through that and the tutor feedback, we can get a feel for how well they're talking to the learning. Are they



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committing to the course? Are they doing their homework? I want to see them performing in the course, so I know they will perform for the employer," says Agbowu.

This 'employability support' is a crucial part of the process, Agbowu explains. Candidates, all of whom are on low-to-no incomes, will previously have found that level of financial support and career advice hard to come by.

"A lot of them don't have the money to pay for training," Agbowu says. "They're unemployed, and they have no way to raise those kinds of funds. Through our apprenticeship programme, we can enable young people to get the funding for their training."

The employer's view

Mateola was placed at Integrity, which provides consulting and programme-management services to governments, charities and businesses in developing regions.

Integrity has taken on two AAT apprentices via the scheme, including Mateola, whose manager is Agatha Ogbu. "It's been amazing having the two of them, as they really try to get practical experience of everything," she says. "They are so keen – they really want to learn and they're very focused on it. They are never complacent. They are always asking what new areas they can work in."

That willingness to try new tasks is essential for the work at Integrity, which changes from project to project. Ogbu says that her apprentices have exceeded her expectations – so much so that, when they completed the AAT Foundation Certificate, Integrity Diplomas for both of them.

"We only pay for training when we know we want to keep someone for a long time. We're planning on developing their skills to the point where they can become finance officers. From there, we want them to progress to management level," says Ogbu.

Integrity also wants Mateola to become a mentor for future apprentices. After the success of the programme so far, the company has decided to regularly take on apprentices and gradually expand the team. "It gives people an opportunity who would not otherwise have a chance to break through," notes Ogbu.

"This fits in well with Mateola's plans to study ACCA after completing the AAT qualifications: "I find it really interesting, so I'd like to stick with it and see where it takes me."

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