

Systems Thinking Practitioner Apprenticeship Induction Information

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Induction Introduction

We are recording this as a form of 'Induction' to the apprenticeship specifically for learners and their managers, in order to ensure everyone understands what can be expected over the next 18 months of learning.

This is important for Line Managers (LMs) as well as the learners to know, as LMs are vital to ensuring our learners are able to progress through the training provided.

This Induction covers what can be expected for LMs and learners, how LMs can support the learners and some of the common pitfalls we've witnessed along the way. We hope this will help clarify your expectations and be fully prepared for the journey ahead.

Learning Systems Thinking (ST) is an iterative process of discovery and can sometimes seem like not much useful stuff is happening to start with. But we promise, it's worth the wait!

All the information in this Induction is useful to both LMs and learners, but we'll focus first on what's most relevant to LMs and what's required from them. This helps manage LM expectations as well as help learners understand what support they can expect from their manager. We'll then look at what's required from the learner. For LMs this is also important to be aware of to be prepared for the impact on learners time and workload.

First, we'll quickly look at what is required to successfully progress through the apprenticeship program.

An Overview of the Apprenticeship Process

The Systems Thinking Practitioner Apprenticeship is designed to be completed in 18 months. In this time, there will be taught sessions called Seminars with a Tutor and support sessions with Skills Coaches and Learning Progress Advisors.

There will be related assignments and tasks the apprentice will be expected to complete, and their progress will be monitored through demonstration of how they are achieving each of the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) set out in the Apprenticeship Standard.

Once they have achieved the necessary KSBs, they will be at a stage called 'Gateway' and at this point, will begin preparing for their final assessment. The assessment is done by an independent organisation and we facilitate arranging this with them.

Over the apprenticeship, learners will be gathering evidence of where they have been putting the learned skills into practice in their workstreams and this will form part of the assessment material. They will be writing a report once they're through Gateway, documenting their journey as a Systems Thinking Practitioner

(STP) and how they have put their ST skills into use. They will also prepare a presentation that they will present to the assessors alongside a Q&A session, and finally they'll participate in an assessed Professional Discussion with the assessors. The bank of gathered evidence will support the final report, presentation, Q&A and Professional Discussion assessments. Details of the two Assessment Methods are given in the AdvanceHE Handbook included.

So you know what to expect, taught materials are delivered over the first 14-15 months and the final 3-4 months are dedicated to preparing our learners for Gateway. We also have non-teaching weeks on Bank Holiday weeks, all of August and all of December.

For Line Managers

Support and Mentorship

LMs are required to provide support and guidance to the learner along the way. Unlike most of our apprenticeships where managers tend to be more skilled in the subject the apprentice is learning (such as Marketing or Policy Writing), Systems Thinking is not a subject area that the majority of LMs are familiar with. This makes things a bit trickier to manage when it comes to how to support learners on their learning journey. And this is why we felt the need for this Induction process.

You will need to ensure their learning time is protected. Learners are expected to put 20% of their working week towards what we call 'off the job' training (you'll probably see this as the acronym OTJH - off the job hours). This is normally around 6 - 8 hours per week, and most learners will take this as one day dedicated to studying per week.

Workplace Opportunities

Systems Thinking is a skillset that crosses the normal boundaries of departments and teams, policies and structures. It is designed to look at the bigger picture in situations, seeing the complexity that comes when you begin to take into account the interconnectedness that we normally take for granted in our organisational and social systems.

It is the responsibility of LMs to ensure the learner can apply the skills they're learning in their workstreams. This means you need to make it possible for learners to get their hands dirty in what we call complex or messy problems. These are situations or problem areas that are not easy fixes or have too many interconnected parts to be addressed in the regular ways. There may be many stakeholders involved, with conflicting opinions and needs, or many different systems contradicting one another. These may be problems that are hard to even define let alone address, or ones that require fundamental culture shifts. These are not just complicated problems, but messy and swamp-like ones - maybe even appearing 'insurmountable'!

The learner needs to be able to address the kinds of issues that cross established boundaries and your support is needed to facilitate this.

You **might** need to:

- give them a high level of autonomy if they don't have it already, enabling them to engage widely with individuals and groups around the system they operate in
- grant them permission to attend the meetings of other teams,
- be given time to interview other staff members, including more senior ones,
- request permission for them to have access to certain data to analyse.

Learners **may** need to interact with the following groups of people, which you **may** need to help facilitate:

- decision-makers, strategists and policy-makers
- individuals and groups (internal and external) with a stake in the defined system, currently or in the future
- peers, change agents and consultants working on similar challenges or in similar fields

Attend Quarterly Progress Reviews

We'll be asking you to provide feedback on the apprentice's development as a STP in their role. This meeting is usually an hour long. By being involved in the review, the LM ensures that any developmental areas identified during the review process are addressed and followed up on in the workplace. They can also ensure the training aligns with the apprentice's current job tasks, improving its relevance and effectiveness.

You'll be asked to comment on:

- strengths and examples of good performance in the workplace
- areas needing improvement and action
- reviewing the OTJH and any problems managing this
- potential opportunities to apply learning to the workplace
- supporting setting realistic and meaningful goals for the apprentice that align with both their learning objectives and the company's needs

Where learners are not making progress you may be asked to attend an occasional Skills Coaching session to look at areas you can help with.

What kinds of things does an STP do once qualified?

Once your staff member has completed the apprenticeship, the following is a list of the kinds of activities that a STP could be doing in their role:

- Delivering expert problem-solving and solutions for multi-layer/multi-organisation/multi-government problems.
- Engaging with colleagues, peers, stakeholders and decision-makers, to facilitate the creation of shared methods of defining, interpreting and understanding the system of interest (e.g. models, pictures, stories, maps).
- Identifying patterns, dynamics, power and inter-relationships within and affecting the system, using systems thinking methodologies; applying appropriate tools, techniques and drawing on relevant theory to get new insights and alternative perspectives.
- Engaging with key actors to co-design suitable experiments and interventions to address challenges - these might be activities, policies, new products or services, new governance, structures, or processes.
- Exploring outcomes, consequences and facilitating learning with others.
- Ensuring intervention and engagement methods are ethical and legal.

Apprentices bring fresh perspectives, often bringing in new ideas, technologies, or approaches learned during their training. Their learning may expose them to the latest industry trends, which can benefit the team's innovation and efficiency.

Some Examples of Systems Thinking in the Workplace

The following are some examples of ST in the workplace that we've come across:

1. ST was used to look at the 4 measures of weight, under to obese, and the associated stakeholders who could be involved in shifting people from one category to another and the stakeholders influence on action. This enabled working groups to be formed around the intersections of each category, and activity could be focused on the action required. This reduced the size of the stakeholder meeting and allowed all attendees to be engaged.
2. ST busted assumptions around how health was managed in schools. The initial assumption being that all schools operated in a similar way and support for health activities could be flowed down from the head or nominated health professional. Initial poor engagement was modelled using ST tools, where it was revealed that a range of communications

were required to engage schools in the project, and this change enabled greater success and targeting of health support.

3. ST was used to frame a discussion around inclusivity within datasets for a health programme. Testing and treatment was being based around the dominant UK population, which resulted in more vulnerable populations, homeless people and ethnic minorities not being tested at a point where they needed to be.

For Learners

What Kind of Workload can Learners Expect?

Apprentices are required to work on one or more projects and deliver a final project report as part of their assessment. The overall Project report is of their system thinking journey in the workplace. This will describe the various projects they have been able to apply Systems Thinking KSBs to as they have progressed in their learning.

Learners will have many demands on their time and will need to manage this carefully. There are meetings and seminars to attend, as well as using their dedicated study time effectively to understand the materials being taught.

Activities requiring attendance

- Three hour Weekly Taught Seminars
- Monthly coaching session with a Skills Coach
- Quarterly reviews with the coach or LPA in addition to coaching and manager

Time Demands

In the 20% of their working week dedicated to study time, they will be involved in the following:

- Attending the Weekly Seminar - 3 hours
- 3-5 hours on elements similar to the following:
 - assignments and tasks set by the Tutor and Skills Coach
 - writing reflective accounts on their learning journey
 - building a bank of evidence showing the application of the skills learnt
 - planning interventions

- building models
- analysing data and information
- conducting workshops and interviews
- research and reading, finding new material

Learners will be then applying ST in their workstream and recording evidence of this as they go.

Common Pain Points

Our apprentices have communicated to us that there are some common areas they have found difficult during their learning journey. A few are included here:

- It can be hard to balance the demands of full-time work with study requirements. The need to manage both can be stressful.
- Employers sometimes don't accommodate for apprentices needing to spend 20% of their time in off-the-job training, and learners can become overwhelmed.
- Apprentices may feel isolated, especially if it's been a long time since they were in a learning environment or they working in environments where apprenticeships aren't common.
- It's not always easy to apply what's been learned in the workplace and it can be hard to find suitable opportunities. LMs need to help with this.
- Apprentices have told us of difficulties with managing their time, planning study sessions, intervention planning and working on assignments whilst also managing their workload. Their advice to new learners is to delegate work more, ask for more support from their manager to protect their study time, and take the time in the early stages to plan out a study schedule for the time they have.

How We Help

We have a lot of support systems in place to help ease our learners through the peaks and troughs they face along the way. We assist with ST related difficulties as well as workplace related issues. Our team is here to help with anything that is a blocker to your successful completion of the course.

Our Skills Coaches and Learning Progress Advisors can assist our learners with:

- examples of applying ST in other areas
- advice on workplace development planning and gathering evidence

- interpretation of ST learning to the workplace
- How to meet KSBs
- Preparing for gateway and assessment
- Finding out what works well and what may be challenging - finding the right problem and the right tools
- Coaching and life skills
- Wellbeing and neurodiversity issues

We try our best to assist our learners and LMs with anything that is posing a problem on the learning journey, and sometimes that might involve taking a break in learning. Although we try to keep learners in the same cohort they started with, if the break is too long, we may need to move them to a later cohort.

We help LMs as well:

- We can help LMs align work with what needs to be achieved in the apprenticeship
- we support the LM by ensuring the apprentice's progress aligns with both training objectives and the needs of the business
- If an apprentice is falling behind for some reason, we can support the LM in managing this through reviews, extra coaching, or formal interventions like a Break in Learning if necessary

In Summary

We're here for you - both for the apprentice and for Line Managers. We have scheduled meetings to keep on track generally, but can be available to help and advise at any time.

We hope this Induction has explained a bit about what to expect from the process, what role the Line Manager needs to play and what is expected from our apprentices.

Mostly we hope you're looking forward to joining us on this journey of learning, excited to reap the rewards of bringing Systems Thinking to your workplace.