

Through a secondment enabled by HTI Leadership, an experienced secondary school head of department makes a key contribution to a government department's mission to engage with young people in school.

Introduction.

Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC) collects and administers direct and indirect government taxes. Because it is directly involved in the lives of all citizens, HMRC makes a continuing effort to ensure that it is responsive and clear in all aspects of its communication.

An important mission is to engage with future taxpayers – boys and girls still in school -- making sure that they understand the role that tax and national insurance play both in their own lives and in the life of the nation. Hence HMRC's decision to bring a serving teacher on board for a project intended to improve this area of work.

Securing the best candidate called for expertise and experience and so HMRC approached HTI.

The Secondment.

The HMRC requirement was for a teacher to spend six months with the Individuals Customer Directorate (ICD) Customer Engagement Team, helping to develop financial education teaching materials for secondary schools.

"Starting from the customer is what we do. So we asked ourselves 'what do we know about teachers?' The answer was 'not a lot', so we needed to recruit a teacher."



The successful candidate, Linda Trinder, is Head of Business Studies and Economics at Mill Hill County High School in Barnet. She worked at HMRC for six months, September 2008 to February 2009, playing a major role in the development of a multi-media resource which was launched in May 2009 as

www.taxmatters.hmrc.gov.uk

Doing the Job, Two points of view.

Linda Trinder worked at HMRC as part of a small team led by Frances Pickering, Customer Engagement Consultant, in the Individuals Customer Directorate. Both greatly valued the secondment, and here are their thoughts:

“...it's good for teachers to have life experiences outside teaching.”

Frances Pickering's view of the secondment.

Frances wanted to build on existing work such as the “DirectgovKids” website -- kids.direct.gov.uk – by providing a resource to support secondary school teachers. It was an entirely new venture.

“Starting from the customer is what we do. So we asked ourselves ‘what do we know about teachers?’ The answer was ‘not a lot’, so we needed to recruit a teacher.”

It was, she says, a big learning curve for Linda – learning about tax, settling into the working environment. Then she produced a set of teaching resources in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.

“I looked at it,” says Frances, “And I thought it was very good, just the kind of material we need.”

She made the decision to recruit a specialist organisation and use Linda's material and supporting ideas as the basis for a multi-media presentation.

The quality of the final product had to be above question, not least because, as Frances says,

“We had to think about marketing to teachers and because we knew they wouldn't come to the HMRC website looking for materials, we had to build it so it could be embedded in other websites that catered to teachers.

It was important to get recognition too, so we were thrilled when “Tax Matters” got the Quality Mark of the Personal Finance Education Group (pfeg).”

There's no doubt that Frances believes Linda's involvement to have been essential to the project. She was constantly able to say what would work in the classroom and what wouldn't, and she knew how teachers would be able to use the material. But there was more to it than that.

“It wasn't just what she did it was the fact that she was there at all. She had total authority. She came from education and none of us knew anything about it at all. She definitely had the last word.”

She speaks highly of the work she did on National Insurance in Newcastle, helping the office to interpret the information they had from the local school.

There was a bonus, too, says Frances, in the way that Linda was able to try things out at Mill Hill.

“We were able to keep testing “Tax Matters” with the target market. We did three different focus groups in Linda's school, whereby pupils tested things out and made suggestions. Then when we came to the launch we got ten of them to come and talk about it. This was important in winning over an audience of education professionals.”

Linda Trinder's view of her secondment.

After settling in Linda produced some teaching resources.

“When Frances saw my first draft, she realized that we could develop something in terms of a multimedia resource.”

At that point, a specialist software developer came on board and the process of growing “Tax Matters” got under way.

By that point, Linda was a highly valued member of the team. She traveled to Newcastle, where the National Insurance Contributions Office is based, to see a project that they were working on with a local school on students' awareness of the purpose of NI and their NI number.

Following this, when the National Insurance element of “Tax Matters” was being developed, Linda went to Newcastle again to make a presentation to the National Insurance Management Board. Most of the work on “Tax Matters” was done by the end of February and Linda returned to school in March.

Her students, she feels, will benefit from the fact that she has had this recent experience of the world of work, given the importance she places on teachers of her subject having relevant experience.

“For example, when I talk to them about ‘hot-desking’, it's something I've directly and recently experienced.”

In Summary

When asked how the secondment helped her Linda says:

“I've always believed that it's good for teachers to have life experiences outside teaching. Students respect that. And now my business studies and economics students directly benefit because I can relate my teaching to my secondment experience. There are topics I've taught for years which I can bring to life for them because I've now moved through them myself.”

To learn more about HTI's Stretch programme please contact Lisa Roots at l.roots@hti.org.uk or call 024 7669 8516.