

Apprenticeships Review Education, Skills and Growth Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Reason for review

In January 2020 Government data showed the number of people starting an apprenticeship in England fell to 125,800 between August and October, down 4.7% from 132,000 in the same quarter a year earlier. That number was up by 15.4% year-on-year.¹ One reason for this appears to be the Apprenticeship Levy, introduced in 2017, which requires businesses with annual payrolls of over £3m to pay 0.5% of their wage bill into a pot each month. Last year a total of £96m of unused funds expired in July and August 2019 due to the complexities of this system.

Bracknell Forest Council employs several apprentices and promotes apprenticeships across the borough but apprenticeship participation in Berkshire is lower than the national average. Only 6% of workplaces in Berkshire have an apprentice, compared to 12% nationally.² Also, in July 2020 the Government announced a range of new incentives for companies to hire apprentices as part of its response to the Covid-19 pandemic which include additional funding and a six month 'Kickstart' program.

Objectives/scope

The review is looking to identify how to:

- increase in the number of young people taking up apprenticeships in the borough
- increase in the diversity **range** of apprenticeships in the borough
- reduce the barriers locally which prevent young people taking up apprenticeships **with focus on the impact of Coronavirus.**
- **Identify and assess barriers to local businesses employing apprentices and reduce those barriers.**

The review will do this by:

- Undertaking a desk top analysis of apprenticeship opportunities in the borough for young people aged 16+.
- Benchmarking against comparator authorities.
- Consulting young people about what apprenticeship opportunities they would like in the borough and, specifically, apprentices from a disadvantaged background.
- Reviewing current barriers/incentives.
- Analysing the uptake of 'Degree' apprenticeships for current employees versus new apprenticeships.
- Reviewing uptake of the 'Kickstart' program in the borough and considering options for how this might be promoted to increase take up further.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/861944/Apprenticeships-and-traineeships-commentary.pdf

² in Berkshire, October 2017:

<http://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/getfile/Public%20Documents/Data/Skills%20Education%20and%20Employment/Apprenticeships%20in%20Berkshire%202017%20-%20Final.pdf?inline-view=true>

At the conclusion of this work the Panel will produce a report highlighting its findings and propose recommendations to the Executive about how the Council, its partners and private companies in the borough can increase the number and diversity of apprenticeships in the borough.

Delivery methods: Challenge sessions; interviewing young people and providers of apprenticeships; desktop analysis of local and national apprenticeship data.

Council theme: Education and Skills

Council team: Education and Learning

Review due: January 2021

Proposed by: Cllr Mrs Birch, Chair
Education, Skills and Growth Panel

Equalities Impact Assessment

The Social Mobility Commission published a report in June 2020³ which noted disadvantage gaps existed at “every stage” of the apprenticeship journey, from initial selection of candidates by employers to the quality of training available. Their analysis found there was a 36% decline in starts by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds between 2015/16 and 2017/18 – the year the levy was introduced – in comparison to a 23 per cent decline for more privileged apprentices. At the same time only 13% of degree-level apprenticeships – the “fastest growing and most expensive apprenticeship option” – were taken by disadvantaged apprentices. During this review the Panel will ensure they consult specifically with apprentices from a disadvantaged background.

Financial and legal implications

There are potentially legal and financial implications of any recommendations arising from this review which will be fully addressed in the review report.

Climate Change implications

Offering apprenticeships to school leavers who would like to train in fields which support climate change e.g. growth of renewable energy, would not only support young people into gainful employment but also ensure skills meet new industry needs and could benefit the borough in terms of meeting its climate change targets. Potential opportunities and recommendations between apprenticeships and climate change will be fed into the O&S Commission’s work on climate change.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/apprenticeships-and-social-mobility>