

Overview and Scrutiny Panel Recommendations Report

REVIEW TITLE	O&S PANEL	DATE
Apprenticeships Review	Education, Skills and Growth	17 February 2021

“This review follows directly on from the Care Leavers Review, as Post 16 apprenticeship opportunities for our Care leavers and young people in the Borough are extremely important, especially with the current challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic. 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%. Bracknell Forest Council employs apprentices in several departments and promotes apprenticeships but participation in Berkshire is lower than the national average. This review looks at the new government incentives, barriers to undertaking an apprenticeship, employing apprentices and the range of apprenticeship opportunities.”



**Councillor Mrs Birch, Chair:
Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Recommendations

1. That the Executive works with Apprenticeship pathway providers to ensure our young people aged between 16-21 have the best opportunities and outcomes.
2. That the Executive adopts an Apprenticeship policy which sets out expectations around pay, terms and conditions and that the Education, Skills and Growth Panel is consulted on the draft policy and for this to be completed by December 2021 to coronavirus capacity limitations.
3. That the Executive promotes Apprenticeships externally and internally by producing a promotional video which highlights the benefit of becoming an apprentice, growing businesses, and supporting the economy by March 2022 to coronavirus capacity limitations.
4. That the Executive reviews the current Apprenticeship webpages and updates the content to include more information, links to job vacancy websites and information about what to expect from an apprenticeship by December 2021 to coronavirus capacity limitations.
5. That the Executive investigates whether it would be possible to facilitate a mentoring scheme between large businesses and small/medium businesses to encourage more apprenticeship opportunities by March 2022 to coronavirus capacity limitations.
6. That the Executive develops ongoing partnerships across Berkshire to provide a united gateway of support and guidance to businesses enabling them to take better advantage of the apprenticeship levy.

Good Practice

The Panel recognised the existing good work promoting apprenticeships externally and the support given to internal apprentices working at the Council. The apprenticeships event held annually was a useful resource and a positive way to facilitate bringing together businesses and prospective apprentices. It is hoped that once pandemic restrictions are lifted, that this event would continue. The promotion of apprenticeships to existing Council staff was also considered good practice in developing skills and aiding staff retention and the panel were pleased that there were 55 employees currently undertaking them.

FOUR LEVELS OF APPRENTICESHIPS



INTERMEDIATE

Equivalent to GCSEs



ADVANCED

Equivalent to A levels



HIGHER

Equivalent to a foundation year or degree year 1.



DEGREE

Apprentices receive a university degree

BRACKNELL APPRENTICESHIP DATA



*Data until October 2020

The number of apprenticeships being undertaken in Bracknell Forest has steadily increased from 23 in 2017 to 45 in 2019. This is expected to drop in 2020 as Coronavirus impacts businesses and recruitment.



Study Time

Apprentices spend one day per week or 20% of their time on studying.



Priority Sectors

Apprenticeship priority sectors for recruitment in Berkshire are in Business and Finance, digital technology, health and care and life sciences.



Did you know?

Apprenticeship vacancies have gone down by 25% during the pandemic

Review findings

“I was delighted to find out that the borough employs 55 apprentices. So many of them took part in our survey showing how much they valued the opportunity and I thank them for their honest replies.”

Cllr Mrs Birch

Introduction

In conducting the review, the panel were keen to speak to witnesses from across the sector who were involved in the employment of apprentices; education providers, employers, Secondary schools, and the apprentices themselves. This was achieved by conducting a survey and speaking to a number of key stakeholders including: a Bracknell Forest Council Apprentice, The Royal Berkshire Fire Service, Activate Learning, a senior apprenticeship lecturer and Thames Valley Business Hub as well as the Head of Children’s Support Services and the assistant Director of Adult Social Care.

Throughout the review it became apparent that for Berkshire to increase numbers taking apprenticeships to the national average¹, apprenticeship opportunities need to be promoted to existing staff and those looking for a career change. Apprenticeships are a valuable tool to develop skills in all age groups and should be a way to encourage lifelong learning. The apprenticeships

are available at varying levels and to suit a range of occupations.

What are the barriers which need to be overcome to employ more apprentices and what impact has coronavirus had?

It was acknowledged by several witnesses that there was a knowledge gap around apprenticeships as the subjects had broadened from the traditional trade occupations. Activate Learning and Lydia Selby from Northampton University detailed the broad range of courses they had available from beauty to business management.

Survey results from local secondary schools acknowledged that a perception gap existed for parents and carers who did not always know about what apprenticeship opportunities were available and that school culture had historically encouraged young people towards university.

Schools and Activate Learning both acknowledged that another barrier was that the prospective apprentices had to find their own employer and although support was given by educational institutions, it could be a challenge finding one with a suitable vacancy and which was either close to their home or had access to public transport. Coronavirus had really increased this challenge as it was explained by the Head of Children’s Support Services, that the annual apprenticeship event had not been able to go ahead due to social distancing restrictions and this was a key

way for prospective apprentices to get access to businesses and further information.

Thames Valley Business Partnership recognised that some businesses were under the misconception that the process and paperwork were complicated. It was clarified that small to medium sized enterprises were able to access Apprenticeship Levy funding from larger companies, although it was acknowledged that this was not widely known. Time pressures were a particular challenge for small to medium sized businesses who may need additional support and guidance to employ their first apprentice.

It was also acknowledged that there was a cost to businesses and organisations in terms of staff time as 20% of their time was spent studying. The Royal Berkshire Fire Service particularly highlighted the benefits to business of having apprenticeships which far outweighed the additional administration work.



¹ Only 6% of workplaces in Berkshire have an apprentice, Page 3

compared to 12% nationally [October 2017]

“I was surprised at the age diversity of apprentices, from Post 16 to late 50’s.”

Cllr Mrs Birch

For Internal staff working for the Council who may be interested in taking an apprenticeship, internal promotion of opportunities was positive and had secured a lot of interest. The Assistant Director for Adult Social Care, advised there had been a lot of applicants to the social care apprenticeships scheme and that the council would look to continue the scheme as it also helped fill a skills gap.

Feedback from Apprentices was that information about apprenticeships were scattered and that information was not readily available in one place which could make applications confusing.

How can these barriers, including the barriers presented by the Coronavirus pandemic, be reduced?

The Council already runs a successful annual apprenticeships fair which advertises opportunities to prospective apprentices and allows them to speak directly to businesses about what is involved and was currently postponed. Young people are

therefore missing a key opportunity to gather information and understand the opportunities and benefits. Making young people aware of the options was considered particularly important in the current job climate as the Head of Children’s support services detailed, young people faced competition from experienced professionals looking to retrain.

In response to this, the panel thought updated information on the Council website along with an information video detailing the benefits and what to expect would be beneficial. Thames Valley Business Hub agreed that a central location for information would be useful as well as signposting to other organisations. It was acknowledged

Vacancies for apprenticeship opportunities had reduced by around 25%² in 2020 and The Royal Berkshire Fire Service acknowledged that changes in ways of working brought about by the pandemic meant it was not appropriate to bring new apprentices into the organisation at that time. However, their current apprentices had adapted, and they would be employing more apprentices in the future.

The panel heard consistently from witnesses that an increase in joined up working and communication was key to success. Feedback from

Activate Learning was that there was a high level of engagement from employers as apprenticeships fitted into their staff development models and had government funding. Their ‘Business Engagement Specialists’ would speak to any businesses interested and it was thought that more opportunities to speak to businesses directly would be beneficial.

Thames Valley Business partnership echoed this view and suggested hosting an apprenticeship talk or a working group to bring together all parties, education providers, businesses and local authorities from the Berkshire area. The response from one business who completed our survey also suggested they would be happy to speak to other businesses and provide a mentor to help them get started.

“The level of enthusiasm demonstrated to us by the apprentices showed a genuine commitment to advance their careers and they have a bright future ahead.”

Cllr Brossard



Did you know?

Apprenticeship vacancies can be found on the Berkshire Opportunities webpage:

[Berkshireopportunities.co.uk](https://www.berkshireopportunities.co.uk)

I would like to thank the Vice Chair of the Education, Skills and Growth O&S Panel, Cllr Brossard, for all his support during this review and also thank all the councillors who contributed their thoughts and ideas. I particularly appreciated all the businesses, partners, apprentices, Post 16 providers and officers who contributed to this review. Without their knowledge and help, we would not have been able to produce such an excellent recommendation. My specific thanks to Emma Young who so ably organised all the virtual meetings and kept us on track to produce this informative document.

Councillor Mrs Birch, Chair: Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

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