



LCR Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Apprenticeship Review

Final report – April 2021

1. Introduction by Councillor, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

It is with great pleasure that I present the findings and recommendations of the Committee's review into assessing the impact Covid-19 has had on apprenticeships in the Liverpool City Region (LCR).

Members chose to undertake this review to understand the experiences apprentices had gone through when made redundant and also why businesses were choosing not to create an apprenticeship programme and to identify what was required to have apprenticeship programmes which would deliver the skills required for future employment opportunities.

Through the three evidence gathering sessions we had an opportunity to speak directly with training providers, employers who had apprenticeships, and LCR Combined Authority, Local Authority and Growth Platform officers.

In making our recommendations, we recognise the essential role the Apprenticeship programme will continue to have to support the City Region's recovery from the pandemic. By ensuring that the programme provides the right skills and employment opportunities for our residents.

We have agreed xx recommendations which are grouped as follows:

Communication

- Ensure a streamlined approach to communications from the Combined Authority across all constituent authorities and ensure that residents are reached across different communications streams;
- Develop a bespoke and targeted campaign regarding apprenticeships for older groups including those who had experienced redundancy or were seeking a career change;
- Produce differentiated communications approaches to apprentices and employers.
- Create defined routes to communicate to those who are harder to reach such as school refusers, digitally excluded people and those with SEN;
- Help create discussions between local authorities and employers regarding routes from the Kickstart programme into apprenticeships; and
- Promote earlier engagement between local employers such as Unilever and Santander and school-aged children, in order to inspire young people and ensure that girls are able to develop stem career aspirations.

Data and Monitoring

- The need for monitoring and evaluation of events and activities to ensure that they were directly contributing to the employment of apprentices;
- The incentivising of apprenticeships completions in addition to the encouragement of new starts, and increased monitoring and evaluation of data relating to starts and completions;
- The requirement of a mechanism to provide disclosure of a care leavers status to employers to ensure that specific needs were met, and to bring agencies together to provide support to both the apprentice and the employer; and
- Monitoring and improving gender equality within the digital sector.

Before I finish, I would like to thank:

- Members of the Task and Finish Group for their active contributions to the Review.
- The various witnesses who attended our evidence gathering sessions and gave up their time to share their experience and insight. From the information they shared we have been able to develop recommendations which are evidence based.
- The LCR Combined Authority officers, who have directly supported the review, organised our activity, responded to our requests for information and provided the evidence upon which we have based our recommendations.

Membership of the Task and Finish Review

Councillor Tom Crone (Chair)	Councillor Edna Finneran
Councillor Christine Howard	Councillor John Morgan
Councillor Michelle Sweeney	Councillor Carran Waterfield
Councillor Louise Whitley	Councillor Bill Woolfall
	Councillor Trish O'Brien

2. Background to the Review

The economic impacts of the pandemic were of great concern to the Committee and at their first meeting on 9 September 2020, agreed to the establishment of a task and finish group to consider the impact Covid-19 has had on apprenticeships in the City Region.

However, as a consequence of the covid-19 pandemic the Committee had a slightly later start in the municipal year, which resulted in this being the only review conducted during the 2020-21 municipal year

In identifying this review, Members wanted to understand how the apprenticeship programme had been impacted by the pandemic and suggest measures which the LCR Combined Authority could implement to support the City Region's economic recovery. Particularly as pre pandemic the City Region had a strong retail and hospitality sector and as young people were a large cohort employed in this sector they were being particularly affected by the economic crisis and were 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed as a consequence of working in the hospitality and leisure sector.

3. Developing the scoping document

At a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 November 2020, Members considered a report which provided an overview of youth unemployment in the City Region together with examples of key initiatives being delivered and managed locally to support young people to be successful in the labour market. As part of the consideration of this item, the Committee reviewed the initial scoping document for the Task and Finish Review.

Members agreed that the Task and Finish Groups evidence sessions would focus on the following themes:

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- focus on the experience of apprentices who had been made redundant, what support they had received and any additional support which they would have found helpful.
- To understand the benefits and barriers employers had experienced with recruiting apprenticeships, in particular to understand whether employers found the process too complicated or had concerns regarding cost.

It was agreed that the aim of the review would be as follows:

The aim of the review is to examine the impact COVID-19 has had on the apprenticeship programme across the City Region and identify what future actions are required.

4. Who did we speak to?

As set out in the scoping document, the review involved three evidence sessions.

Evidence Session One

The aim of this session was to understand the experiences of apprentices who had been made redundant during the pandemic. This considered how they had been supported by training providers and what other support had been available to them.

The Group heard evidence from:

- Brian Quinn, Director, Training Plus Merseyside
- Melissa Gresswell, Team Leader, Skills and Apprenticeship Hub, LCRCA
- Rob Tabb, Policy Lead Officer,

Evidence Session Two

This session sought to understand what factors influenced a business to create apprenticeships and what more could be done to encourage those businesses who did not.

The Group heard evidence from:

- Helen Ward, Group Organisation Development Director, Torus
- Christine Vaudrey, Torus
- Gill Mason, Head of Training and Development, Kids Planet Training Academy
- Craig Shaw, Operations Director, Shaw Solutions
- Joe Keegan, Skills Brokerage Team Leader, Growth Platform
- Jacqueline Burns, Planning Manager, Post-16 Planning for Adulthood, St Helens Council

Evidence Session Three

The final evidence session sought to identify what activities were being undertaken to ensure future apprenticeships could adapt and be responsive to future skills and employment opportunities in the City Region.

The Group heard evidence from:

- Chris Eriksen and Samantha Metcalfe, LCR Apprenticeship Support Team

What did we hear and from whom?

Evidence Session One

In advance of the evidence session, Members received a briefing note which provided an overview of apprenticeship performance for the 2019/20 academic year. The briefing note explained that young people were particularly vulnerable to suffering disproportionately negative effects of Covid-19 due to their greater likelihood of being on skills programmes, including Apprenticeship programmes.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Liverpool City Region had 10,040 starts in 2019/20, compared to 12,190 in 2019/19 which represented an 18% drop in apprenticeship start numbers, This was in comparison of 67,130 fewer starts nationally (17% drop) and the North West region having 11,220 fewer apprenticeship starts (19% drop).

Brian Quinn, Director, Training Plus Merseyside provided Members with a summary of the impacts the pandemic had had on the current cohort of apprentices within his organisation.

He reported that since March 2020 to March 2021, TPM had dealt with 7 redundancies, which was as a consequence of their employer either closing or uncertainty about the Furlough Scheme. 6 had been supported, coached and prepared for interviews and had found employment withing 3 months.

Lockdown and the ongoing pandemic had required training to be delivered online and several factors had affected this method of training. Firstly, digital poverty and the other being the practical nature of having somewhere to study. TPM had loaned all of its laptops to its city-based trainees, to counteract the effects of digital poverty.

Brian also explained that from his experience care leavers had little support when they left care and as a consequence were often overrepresented in unemployment and homelessness.

From the evidence provided, Members were concerned that there appeared to be no mechanisms to identify care leavers and ensure that they received the same opportunities and support. As such, they requested to speak with a Local Authority Leaving Care Team to understand the current provision.

Members discussed the issues of how to engage young people in an Apprenticeship, particularly ensuring the inclusion of care leavers. Members recognised that the provision for older apprentices needed to be part of a broader communication strategy, as this demographic maybe unaware that they could access relevant qualifications. It was suggested that case studies could be provided to prospective learners which gave examples of apprenticeships for 21-23year olds, and case studies could also be promoted through social media and the 'Be More' website.

Melissa Gresswell, Team Leader, Skills and Apprenticeship Hub explained the actions the hub had undertaken during lockdown. It was reported that a total of 9 service users had registered with the 'Be More' website and of these six had been made redundant from

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engineering and hair and beauty apprenticeships. Two of the service users had been successfully supported either into a new apprenticeship or secured a place at college, the others had not responded to support offered by the Hub.

During the pandemic, the Hub had acted as a conduit between the apprentice and the provider and as such was acting as a safety net for apprentices. The small uptake in those seeking support from the hub indicated that most apprentices were receiving support from their training providers.

In considering the evidence presented to them, Members recognised the Hub provided a responsive resource to people who were seeking support, however, they suggested that the Hub should also undertake a proactive approach to those who were at risk of redundancy. This could be through a strengthened promotion and engagement campaign, coinciding with the end of the furlough scheme. The strategy could also be directed at employers through the Growth Hub.

Members identified that training providers required the correct and contemporary equipment to ensure apprentices would be able to enter a modern workplace. Members welcomed the evidence from Rob Tabb who advised that the Combined Authority had received £50m of skills capital funding and a significant proportion had been invested into premises and infrastructure improvements and equipment. Noting that this funding was accessible to colleges but not independent providers

Evidence Session Two

During this evidence session, Members heard from Helen Ward, Gill Mason and Craig Shaw about their experience of operating an apprenticeship programme and how this had been impacted during the pandemic.

Helen Ward, Torus, explained that their apprentices were predominately within the construction sector but there was an intention to expand this further. The apprentices tended to be aged between 16-21 years old. She provided a helpful insight too Members regarding the potential barrier's businesses may face in creating apprenticeships. Helen explained that it was important to consider what would make an apprenticeship attractive to applicants and businesses may not be aware of how to creatively use apprentices, such as graduate apprenticeships or for senior officers using the apprenticeship levy. Furthermore, in a saturated market there was a need to ensure flexibility in what was provided and to tailor this provision. There was also a need to develop specific qualification standards in specialist areas such as the environment and renewable energies.

Helen also suggested that some businesses may lack an understanding of what was involved in offering an apprenticeship, such as relationship building, transparency with providers and the size of the commitment. It was suggested that the language and semantics surrounding apprenticeships could be improved and made more accessible.

Members heard evidence from Craig Shaw, Operations Director at Shaw Solutions. Craig explained that Shaw Solutions employed 32 staff members and of those 85% had started their careers as apprentices, including himself. He advised Members that the Company's ethos was to grow from within and when advertising vacancies to consider whether they could be as an apprenticeship in the first instance. It was the Company's ambition to create more business administrative apprenticeships, including procurement and they

were in the process of creating three five-year apprenticeships to include two at Level 3 and one at Level 4.

Craig suggested that shorter courses should be offered, and the End Point Assessment should also be incentivised to ensure that equal emphasis was placed on maintaining a high standard of continued learning and successful pass rates. Craig also reflected on those businesses who may have not had a positive experience with the apprenticeship programme and were now reluctant to

Evidence Session Three

The final evidence session saw input from Chris Eriksen and Sam Metcalfe from the LCR Apprenticeship Support Team. Members heard that the team had continued to engage with school and jobcentres during the various lockdowns and restrictions, moving to virtual events and recorded presentations. The theatre productions had to adapt to live presentations rather than physical engagement and activities. Support had been provided to all jobcentre plus offices in the City Region, with 642 residents engaged through 61 sessions.

Apprenticeship vacancies were advertised on the Be More website, with over 7,000 advertised to date. The team also organised the Apprentice Graduations, with another event planned for November 2021 at Grand Central Hall, Liverpool. These were seen as important in promoting apprenticeships as an equal option to academic study.

Members were keen to understand which events and activities were the most effective in converting contacting to apprenticeship applications. Chris and Sam replied that the team did not record this information in detail, noting that it can take many years between young people hearing about apprenticeships and them applying for one. There are opportunities to use apprenticeships to address some of the historic imbalances in skills and engagement in the City Region (e.g. in digital where a minority of roles are occupied by women) and in creating new jobs and skills (e.g. renewable energy, construction and retrofit).

In responding to questions about support for SEND pupils, Sam and Chris reported that engagement took place with SEN settings and Referral Units, informed by an expert steering group. Additional support could be provided to young people after they had made decisions to reinforce their decision or provide additional information in case they thought they had made the wrong decision.

5. What conclusions did we reach?

- The provision of advice, guidance and support on apprenticeships must be available for all young people, with specific targeted activity for those who are at risk of exclusion, care leavers or in non mainstream settings;
- The equipment and facilities used to train apprenticeships needs to be of the highest quality, and colleges and training providers need to be able to access funding to support them with this;
- Despite the best efforts of many people over many years, there were still a section of employers and residents who were not aware of the scope and benefits of apprenticeships;

- The metrics used to measure the effectiveness of apprenticeship outreach and engagement needs are not clear and focus on activities rather than outcomes; and
- There were further opportunities for Local Authorities to promote and use apprenticeships as part of their own management and demonstration of social value.

6. What recommendations are we making?

Communication

- Ensure a streamlined approach to communications from the Combined Authority across all constituent authorities and ensure that residents are reached across different communications streams;
- Develop a bespoke and targeted campaign regarding apprenticeships for older groups including those who had experienced redundancy or were seeking a career change;
- Produce differentiated communications approaches to apprentices and employers.
- Create defined routes to communicate to those who are harder to reach such as school refusers, digitally excluded people and those with SEN;
- Support colleges and training providers to be able to access funding to enable them to have up to date equipment and facilities where apprentice can learn;
- Help create discussions between local authorities and employers regarding routes from the Kickstart programme into apprenticeships; and
- Promote earlier engagement between local employers such as Unilever and Santander and school-aged children, in order to inspire young people and ensure that girls are able to develop stem career aspirations.

Data and Monitoring

- The need for monitoring and evaluation of events and activities to ensure that they were directly contributing to the employment of apprentices;
- The incentivising of apprenticeships completions in addition to the encouragement of new starts, and increased monitoring and evaluation of data relating to starts and completions;
- The requirement of a mechanism to provide disclosure of a care leavers status to employers to ensure that specific needs were met, and to bring agencies together to provide support to both the apprentice and the employer; and
- Monitoring and improving gender equality within the digital sector.

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Recommendation	Action	Responsible	Time
Communications and promotion			
Ensure a streamlined approach to communications from the Combined Authority across all constituent authorities and ensure that residents are reached across different communications streams.	Develop coherent communications programme, working with Government and national agencies	Combined Authority	February 2023
Develop a bespoke and targeted campaign regarding apprenticeships for older groups including those who had experienced redundancy or were seeking a career change.	Develop coherent communications programme, working with Government and national agencies	Combined Authority	February 2023
Produce differentiated communications approaches to apprentices and employers.	Develop coherent communications programme, working with Government and national agencies	Combined Authority	February 2023
Create defined routes to communicate to those who are harder to reach such as school refusers, digitally excluded people and those with SEN.	Develop coherent communications programme, working with Government and national agencies	Combined Authority	February 2023
Support colleges and training providers to be able to access funding to enable them to have up to date equipment and facilities where apprentice can learn.	Work with colleges and training providers to understand their needs and support access to funding.	Combined Authority	Ongoing
Help create discussions between local authorities and employers regarding routes from the Kickstart programme into apprenticeships;	Facilitate discussions with local authorities, employers and Jobcentre Plus as to how apprenticeships can be used as an outcome from training programmes.	Combined Authority	December 2022
Promote earlier engagement between local employers such as Unilever and Santander and school-aged children, in order to inspire young people and ensure that girls are able to develop STEM career aspirations.	Ensure that this type of engagement is included within employer outreach programmes and schools careers plans.	Combined Authority Schools Careers Hub	Ongoing

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Recommendation	Action	Responsible	Time
Data and monitoring			
The need for monitoring and evaluation of events and activities to ensure that they were directly contributing to the employment of apprentices.	Ensure that all events have a dimension whereby follow up and longitudinal outcomes can be captured.	Combined Authority	February 2023
The incentivising of apprenticeships completions in addition to the encouragement of new starts, and increased monitoring and evaluation of data relating to starts and completions.	Work with Government and national agencies to consider how incentives can be balanced between apprenticeship starts and completions.	Combined Authority	February 2023
The requirement of a mechanism to provide disclosure of a care leavers status to employers to ensure that specific needs were met, and to bring agencies together to provide support to both the apprentice and the employer	Engagement with care leavers, training providers and employers to understand what might be possible and the best way to implement this.	Combined Authority	February 2023
Monitoring and improving gender equality within the digital sector.	Embed reporting on gender metrics in the digital sector within the regular sectoral labour market information.	Combined Authority	Ongoing