

ISLINGTON COUNCIL

Introduction

Islington Council has provided a local apprenticeship offer since 2012; brokering external apprenticeship opportunities and offering their own apprenticeships within the council. A total of 222 apprentices have completed an apprenticeship within the council since 2012, with 99 still in post, 44 of which are currently on programme and 45 are continuing their employment in the council after successfully applying for a job.

More widely, the council promotes apprenticeships through workshops and assemblies in schools, job fairs and Aspire events where young people meet employers. The council makes use of many of their teams in promoting apprenticeships, including their iWork Youth Employment team, Progression team, Care Leavers team, Youth Offending Service and Youth

Employment Network. These outreach activities are part of the council's strategy to ensure that apprenticeships are understood and identified as a viable pathway into work and are part of their strategy to recruit a diverse cohort of apprentices to the council.

The council has pledged to reach 200 apprenticeships within the period 2014-2018, and currently offers them across directorates and up to Level 4. With the new levy and target they plan to further embed apprenticeships into the organisation: developing a more flexible approach of workforce development opportunities, alongside new starts, in response to business need.

Ensuring quality, not just quantity

The council has adopted a business-led approach, which ensures that the apprenticeships on offer respond to genuine business needs.

"It's important that we try to meet our target, of course, but also that the quality of our programme is intact, and that we're also meeting the needs of those in our community that need it the most." Strategic Lead

This will continue when the levy is implemented: each directorate has been informed of the potential levy credit they have and, in collaboration with the apprenticeship team, are planning how this can be best used in terms of strategic need. This planning takes into consideration skills

needs, agency spend, workforce diversity, retention and then looking at how an apprenticeship offer may fit within this. The emphasis is on the quality of the offer, and not just quantity.

Apprenticeships Offered

- Business Administration; Levels 2&3
- Facilities Services; Level 2
- Finance – AAT; Level 2
- Horticulture; Level 2
- Trade Apprenticeships Levels; 2&3
- Youth Work; Level 2&3
- Data Analyst; Level 4
- Legal Services; Level 4

In addition to taking on new apprentices the council will use apprenticeships to upskill existing staff in the different council areas, and individuals will be able to apply for opportunities in a similar way as when applying for other continuing professional development training.

Training and support

The council offers support to both apprentices and their line managers, particularly when this is an individual's first experience of work. Managers of new starter apprentices are spoken to individually to ensure that they are aware of challenges that they may face and equipped with the tools they may need to effectively support their apprentice to succeed. Islington Council's Corporate Learning and Workforce Development team also run 'Managing an Apprentice' training which is offered prior to the apprentices starting. In the future, they are hoping to develop a series of these training events, inviting the same managers back, to provide more continuous group support.

Managers are only one part of a holistic package of support, which at a minimum also includes mentors and pastoral support from the Apprenticeship Coordinator.

The council also offers a mentoring service for apprentices. Mentors offer more holistic support outside of the apprentice's direct line manager, adapting the content of their meetings to respond to the apprentice's needs. For example, pastoral support can be offered to someone who may be struggling with full-time employment. For those who are career focused, support in planning what they need to do to succeed and progress can be offered, including helping them with writing their CV or prepare for an interview at the end of their apprenticeship. Frequency of meetings is flexible according to the apprentice's needs – although these take place at least once a month.

"No-one would ever be alone. They've got their team leader's support...the team leader's manager, they've got [the Apprenticeship Coordinator], they've got [the Training Manager], they've got the college, their mentor. They are very well-supported. If there's a problem, we will respond very quickly." Training Centre Manager

Mentors participate in a training day and are given a mentoring booklet to support in developing the skills needed for this role.

The council also has an Apprenticeship Coordinator who provides pastoral care during the apprenticeship and for three months after, if they've not progressed into a permanent role.

Inclusivity and diversity

The council is committed to making its workforce more diverse, embodying the belief that the council should reflect its residents.

“The good thing about Islington is there is a strong commitment from the managers that they want the workforce to be diverse. That’s a message for other local authorities, it has come from the management. They’ve got to feel that that they really want to do this. They’re committed to it... You have to have that coming from the top, to get it and keep everybody with you.” Training Centre Manager

The council has organised several initiatives to increase diversity among their apprentices. This includes a programme of work to increase the number of women in the council’s Repairs team, involving workshops in schools (to both a mixed group of students and an all-female group) and offering DIY tasters for unemployed women. The latter has now become embedded in the local adult education offer.

These approaches led to the conclusion that there needed to be a more holistic and structured pathway to support women from their initial interest in DIY to applying for an apprenticeship. Consequently, a programme of automatic referrals to job support has been put in place for those women who attend DIY courses. This consists of being passed on to the “iWork” team, who offer support for people to get into work, and being signposted to other training courses, including Kings Cross Construction who do Level 1 multi-skills courses. The aim is that this longer-term strategy will lead to a pool of women who would be interested in the trade apprenticeship and have the skills to submit a competitive application.

“The council was committed to try and make the workforce more diverse, and it’s good for residents, as well. They see [trades] women coming in. It’s just a good balance, and it reflects society.” Training Centre Manager

The Council also offer construction traineeships and to date it has had 5 trainees complete, with two progressing on to apprenticeships. This year ten new trainees will be starting on the programme. The traineeships support the effectiveness of the apprenticeship programme as, although initially more resource intensive, in the long run it means apprentices do not need as much resource to succeed.

As part of its ongoing efforts to promote diversity, the Apprenticeships team is also looking to develop a process for recruiting British Sign Language (BSL) users. This is something which they feel is particularly important due to high representation of BSL speakers in the Islington Borough.

Benefits to the organisation and the individual

Loyalty, retention and increasing the available skills in the organisation were identified by council staff as benefits of having apprentices. In return they offer apprentices support to develop. This results in an apprentice who understands the

“I just think it’s amazing what the borough does. It makes me proud to work for Islington...When I speak [to friends] about what different departments do, I often make a reference to our apprenticeship team.” Apprentice Mentor

expectations of the organisation and its values, and an organisation who supports them to thrive within that environment.

Several staff members noted the importance of the council reflecting its community in Islington, and the apprenticeship scheme was seen as a core way of helping to facilitate this.

The Apprenticeship team are working hard to instigate a cultural shift away from managers defaulting to agency workers and instead helping them to think about whether an apprentice would suit the vacancy. In addition, apprenticeships are promoted through internal marketing and team meetings. This focus on apprenticeships has led to positive perceptions of the council from its staff.

Apprentice views

For Max* the apprenticeship offered a pathway to work that he hadn't previously considered, but which he now believes to be invaluable to his career. Although Max initially enrolled into sixth form, he decided not to continue and was subsequently unsure how to enter employment in a sector that would interest him. Max's doubts as to whether an apprenticeship was the right thing for him were eased when he attended the council's job fair and met the apprenticeship team and learnt more about what was involved. Max was most excited about the opportunity to develop and apply his knowledge and skills in a real-world context.

"I prefer to learn something and then practice it, and so when I went to the jobs fair, and people started talking to me about apprenticeships, ...I thought, 'Yes, that's what I want to do. I want to learn and do. I don't want to just learn and then ten years down the line, or five years down the line, then potentially do; or not do, because a lot of people don't use their degrees'." Apprentice

"The whole apprenticeship was a surprise to me at how useful it was, and how it aided me, because the situation I'm in now is just...incredible, and I never thought that I would have been able to go from not having a job, to an apprenticeship, to a full-time job...I wouldn't be where I am without that apprenticeship." Apprentice

Doing the apprenticeship enabled Max to gain a qualification by learning on the job. He also benefited by developing additional skills through shadowing other teams. Max felt that the skills learnt during his apprenticeship were invaluable – from work practices and knowledge of the organisation, to advice on how to get things done in the workplace. He is

currently employed in the team he shadowed and considering doing a Level 4 apprenticeship in the council in the future.

Challenges

Rolling out the apprenticeship programme and continuing to develop it is not without its challenges. The Council recognise that there is still a perception of apprenticeships as

being for younger adults, who are entering the world of work for the first time, and in addition many people don't understand what's involved in an apprenticeship. To respond to this, the team has developed internal communications about apprenticeships, in order to help people develop a better understanding of what an apprentice does. As former apprentices continue their career trajectory through the council, they can be examples to others.

In the context of the levy there are also operational challenges: procurement for maintained schools is one such aspect. Currently apprenticeships within schools in Islington are limited and there is a need to increase these. The team is therefore engaging with schools, updating them on apprenticeships, and working on a procurement strategy. The ambition is to work with individual schools and deliver the same support that is offered within the council.

The council cites procurement as an important area to plan, ahead of the introduction of the levy. Mindful of the move from frameworks to standards and the varying rates of pace that these are being developed, the council intends to use a type of purchasing system as this will allow them to engage with new providers as new training is developed.

Replicability

Islington Council offers a successful and holistic approach to apprenticeships. Key to their approach are the following:

- **Buy-in from the top down:** The administration is completely committed to apprenticeships and diversity and the apprenticeships team promotes apprentices across directorates. There are top-down discussions on the future strategic direction of apprenticeships – with regards to the levy the Apprenticeship Manager has been engaged with the council and updated them throughout the process and there is now agreement on a strategic direction.
- **Apprenticeships are about quality and not just quantity; based on business need:** Apprenticeship vacancies are related to business need. This ensures that the council benefits from the apprenticeship and that the apprentice feels valued, as they are aware that the position is a credible one and that their work is of importance to the council.
- **Holistic support for the apprentice:** Retention of apprentices is considered just as much as recruitment. Apprentices are offered support from professionals across the council with different expertise and responsibility towards them, from their line manager to a mentor and the Apprenticeship Coordinator.