

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

The organisation

Kirklees Council has offered apprenticeships for over ten years, within the Council and also supporting local businesses. In recognition of its achievements, the Council recently received the Highly Recommended Award in the larger employer category from Apprenticeships4England.

The apprenticeship programme, which originated in individual service areas, has grown into a Council-wide offer, with opportunities for apprenticeships in several different occupational areas. To date, the Council has directly employed nearly 400 apprentices - with 85% of them going on to secure permanent employment. Currently there are around 90 apprentices employed in the organisation.

The introduction of the apprenticeship levy and public sector target, in line with other Council changes, is seen as an opportunity to have an increased strategic approach to apprenticeships in terms of workforce planning, managing resources, staff development and identification of skills shortages.

The approach

Kirklees Council holds twice-yearly events for young people and parents to showcase the opportunities available within the Council and other local employers. Momentum and interest for apprenticeships are driven by service areas where managers consider the age profile of their staff, turnover and service delivery issues to inform workforce planning for the following year. This identifies where apprenticeships - for existing staff or new entrants - may be used to fill skills gaps and enable the Council to maximise a return on its apprenticeship levy investment and to meet the public sector target. The levy is supportive of the changes Kirklees is implementing in terms of how resources are managed, existing staff are developed - including the offering of apprenticeships - and skills gaps identified.

This is supported by a consistent approach in recruiting, supporting apprentices and their managers, and working with external organisations to grow apprenticeships. A range of programmes are offered to local employers to increase awareness of apprenticeships and encourage recruitment, including The Apprenticeship Hub, which offers free help and support to businesses. In fact, the number of businesses wanting to recruit an apprentice exceeds the number of young people coming forward for roles, even though those leaving school at 16 or 18 who progress onto an apprenticeship is above the national average.

Council managers attend a workshop to learn how to support the apprentice and both managerial and apprentice expectations are explored. Apprentices receive a corporate and team induction, and have on-going support from line managers, HR staff, a mentor, college tutors and other apprentices. Several months before they

complete all apprentices receive training on interview skills and applying for jobs to ensure they are ready for their next stage.

The challenges

A potential future challenge could be the lack of local employers taking on young apprentices, as they wait to see how the introduction of the levy will directly impact their businesses. Research, carried out with the local college - to establish future intentions of over 200 businesses across the district - identified concerns over support with recruiting and retaining young people. This research has been shared with training providers so issues can be addressed.

As the Council takes on an increasing number of apprentices, it's essential that staff understand how they benefit the organisation. Managers who are currently under pressure may feel they do not have enough time to supervise an apprentice. To address this, the Council is increasing training to reach a wider range of managers and staff.

The benefits

Kirklees Council 'grows its own staff' through apprenticeships, resulting in motivated and committed employees with the right skill set, who are meeting workforce needs, while reducing recruitment costs. The Young Employees Network provides new ideas, thoughts and suggestions from apprentices on how to improve processes and services, meaning apprentices can make further contributions beyond their role.

Managers cite increased staff moral and motivation resulting from having responsibility for an apprentice and being able to support them in their role to learn new skills and develop their expertise.