

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

Introduction

As one of the larger employers in West Yorkshire, Kirklees Council has offered apprenticeships for over ten years, not only within the Council but also supporting local businesses with their apprenticeship needs. In recognition of its apprenticeship achievements, the Council has recently received the Highly Recommended Award in the larger employer category from Apprenticeships4England.

The apprenticeship programme originated in individual service areas and with support from the human resources team, has grown into a Council wide offer that ensures a consistent approach in terms of recruiting, supporting apprentices and their managers, and working with external organisations to grow apprenticeships.

With approximately 5,500 employees working in a range of local authority service areas and an additional 5,500 staff based across schools there are opportunities identified 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. There are currently around 90 apprentices on programme, with new recruitment taking place on an annual basis and additionally, when ad-hoc vacancies are identified.

The Council is committed to increasing understanding and raising awareness of apprenticeships with both employers and local people. Twice a year it holds events aimed at young people and their parents to showcase apprenticeship opportunities which are available within the Council and with other employers in the district.

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.

Apprenticeships Offered

- Construction (Electrical; Domestic and Commercial Heating; General Trades)
- School Caretaking
- Information Technology
- Customer Service
- Education Teaching Assistant
- ICT Audio and Media Technician in schools
- Business Administration across the council and in local schools
- Horticulture
- Highway Maintenance
- Warehousing and Storage
- Vehicle Maintenance
- Digital Marketing

Approach to apprenticeships

In the main, the Council has adopted a 'bottom up' approach to apprenticeships, with momentum and interest being driven by service areas who clearly see the benefits of having apprentices amongst

their teams. In areas where there is an established process, managers will look at the age profile of their staff, at staff turnover and service delivery issues – all of these factors are used to inform workforce planning for the following year.

"The annual cycle of apprenticeship recruitment is well established and service areas genuinely buy into that." Deputy Assistant Director for Skills

In the future, the Council is planning to implement a more strategic approach with the development of corporate workforce planning. This will be used to inform where apprenticeships, whether for existing staff or new entrants, may be used to fill skills gaps

across the organisation and in turn enable the Council to maximise a return on its apprenticeship levy investment and to meet the public sector target.

"We need to use apprenticeships to address the real challenges faced in recruitment/retention in adult and children's social care roles." Deputy Assistant Director for Skills

"If staff can see that we're willing to develop in their future and train them up, that is a really good part of our retention strategy." HR Manager

The introduction of the levy is seen as supportive of the fundamental changes that the Council is implementing in terms of how resources are managed, staff developed and skills gaps identified. For example, considerable investment is currently made to

develop existing staff and the Council are looking at ways that this development may now take place through apprenticeship training.

Progression opportunities through apprenticeships are seen as a positive aid in motivating and retaining staff and the Council are keen to have career development packs available for employees. In addition, the Council will ensure that external messaging aimed at young people and parents, clearly demonstrates the career pathways available via apprenticeship routes.

Close working relationships with the local college is key to the Council's apprenticeship strategy, not only as a provider of quality training but as an employer of local people. The Council is working with several training providers to ensure that they are well placed to deliver against the new standard apprenticeships and to meet the Council's needs in terms of the range of apprenticeships which may be required.

"The amount of apprenticeship levy being generated in the region creates the opportunity for training providers to either capitalise upon or lose out." Deputy Assistant Director for Skills

Ultimately the focus is very much on the quality of apprenticeship delivery, over and above quantity. Alongside this the Council is keen to ensure that levy contributions are spent wisely and best value is obtained.

Apprenticeship support for local employers, young people and recruiting managers

The Council supports local employers to increase awareness of apprenticeships and encourage the recruitment of young people as apprentices. One highly successful programme delivered by the Council, The Apprenticeship Hub, offered free help and support to businesses to grow and develop their workforce by introducing apprentices into their organisations. Interestingly, the number of businesses that wanted to recruit an

apprentice exceeded the number of young people coming forward for the roles.

“Almost against all the odds, when there are few other local large employers, we are still getting lots of young people into, essentially, a lot of small businesses.” Deputy Assistant Director for Skills

Close working arrangements with Calderdale and Kirklees Careers ensure that apprenticeships are promoted as a positive option for young people in the area. The Council is proud of the above national average number

of local young people leaving school at sixteen or eighteen who progress onto an apprenticeship.

The Council’s recruitment process for apprentices starts in April, though interest for apprenticeship opportunities is generated before through events and promotional material. Potential candidates are then invited to attend an assessment workshop where individual recruiting managers offer information and guidance related to a range of apprenticeship vacancies and assess candidate’s skills. Offering details of all the different opportunities helps to ensure that the right candidate is matched with the right apprenticeship.

“Having a chance to speak to recruiting managers and look at different opportunities helps to ensure that the right apprenticeship is chosen. Creating a win-win situation for all.” HR Adviser

“People come to us straight from school and we have a responsibility in terms of nurturing and developing their talent, which goes well beyond the qualification.” HR Partner

Council managers attend a workshop to learn how to support the apprentice when they start and throughout the apprenticeship. Both managerial and apprentice expectations are explored so managers are clear on their role, including appointing a mentor for the apprentice and working closely with the training provider.

Attending the workshop and having on-going support and training has improved the confidence of managers ensuring that apprentices settle in quickly and add value to the service areas they are working in.

The apprentice benefits from a corporate and team induction, and has on-going support from line managers, HR staff, a mentor, college tutors and other apprentices. Apprentices are also enrolled on a personal development programme run by the training arm of Kirklees Local TV

(KLTV), which involves a number of one-day wider development modules which apprentices attend in groups. Several months before the end of the apprenticeship all apprentices receive help and guidance with interview skills, mock interviews and applying for jobs to ensure they are confident and job ready by the time they complete. Some apprentices will remain in the Council, in the job they have been trained to do especially if this is a trade occupation, whilst others are supported and encouraged to apply for vacancies within the Council, local schools or other employers.

“Our aim is to ensure all apprentices are job ready whether they are applying for an internal or external job.” HR Adviser

Benefits to the organisation and the individual

The benefits of having apprentices in the Council are numerous and include ‘growing its own staff’ through apprenticeships, resulting in employees with the right skill set to meet workforce needs, and a reduction in recruitment costs. Bringing an increasing number of young people into the organisation (95% of current apprentices are under the age of 25 years) has resulted in motivated apprentices who are committed to working in the Council across a range of roles. The Young Employees Network gives apprentices a collective voice which benefits both the organisation and the apprentice as new ideas, thoughts and suggestions contribute to improved processes and services, and the apprentice, in turn, feels valued for the contributions they make.

For the individual apprentice increased confidence is paramount, resulting in them either securing a permanent position within the Council or with another local employer.

Improved social skills and employability skills were also cited as positive benefits alongside the achievement of successfully completing the apprenticeship.

“To see apprentices who were very shy and quiet at the beginning of the apprenticeship stand up and confidently share their experiences is invaluable.” HR Partner

“My confidence sky-rocketed whilst completing my apprenticeship. It taught me so many things which I’d never thought possible. The apprenticeship has opened a door to a new world.” Former Apprentice Stores Technician

Managers of apprentices cited increased staff morale and motivation resulting from having responsibility for an apprentice and being able to support an individual to learn new skills and develop in their role. In addition, they recognise that young apprentices are eager to question and constructively challenge which can lead to service improvements and ways of working.

Challenges

A potential future challenge for the Council is the lack of local employers coming forward to take on young apprentices, as they wait to see how the introduction of the levy will directly impact on 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. The Council has shared this research with training providers so they can position themselves to help to address these issues.

“At a time when we want to grow our programme, when there are really good opportunities for both businesses and young people, when the quality of apprenticeships is improving and standards are more rigorous, we don’t want small businesses to be put off from taking apprentices.” Deputy Assistant Director for Skills

As the Council takes on increasing numbers of apprentices there is a need to ensure that knowledge of apprenticeships and how they benefit the organisation is made known to all. Managers working under pressure may feel they do not have enough time to supervise an apprentice and it is only when the apprentice starts contributing to the team that attitudes change. To address this issue, the Council is increasing their training to reach a wider range of managers and staff who may not previously have considered taking on an apprentice.

Replicability

Kirklees Council has an established successful apprenticeship programme. Key factors that contribute to this include:

- **Robust recruitment processes:** The recruitment process for new apprentices is thorough and inclusive, starting with individual managers identifying apprenticeship vacancies and candidates being called in to attend a workshop. Face to face engagement with prospective apprentices sets out exactly what the apprenticeship consists of, what the Council expectations are and what an apprentice can expect. Managers and candidates meet early in the process allowing both parties to establish a rapport and individual managers to have ownership for recruitment including shortlisting, interviews and checks. The process is crucial to ensure both the organisation and the apprentice maximise the benefits from the apprenticeship.
- **Holistic support for apprentices:** Young apprentices come from a range of backgrounds, communities and geographical areas and in recognition of this the Council provide a range of training and support over and above the apprenticeship programme. Whether this is the personal development programme run by KLTV, internal diversity courses or one-to-one coaching, training and support is designed to ensure apprentices are equipped with the life skills, confidence and qualifications needed to embark on their working career.