

Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Strategy and Action Plan

Introduction

The Liverpool City Region Employment and Skills Strategy identified the development of an Apprenticeship Strategy for the City Region as a priority. Partners in the City Region regard Apprenticeships as providing a high quality route through which:-

- Young employees can secure the skills they need to succeed in their working lives; and
- Employers can ensure that they have the highly trained staff they need to secure their business success.

It is for these reasons that the Liverpool City Region Employment and Skills Board is ambitious to secure high levels of employer adoption of, and young people's participation in, Apprenticeships. This ambition is reflected in this Strategy and Action Plan and in the levels of commitment of the private and public sectors in the City Region to realise this. We invite Government, the National Apprenticeship Service and the Skills Funding Agency to join us in that ambition.

The Policy Context

World-class apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All (July 2008) set out the previous Government's plans for the expansion and strengthening of the apprenticeship programme. It also indicated a Government aspiration that by 2020 at least one in five young people will access apprenticeship provision on leaving school. The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (November 2009) stated clearly the Government's proposals to support these targets. It included the requirement for all young people to be in education or training until the age of 18 by 2015, and an entitlement to an apprenticeship place for each suitably qualified young person who wants one from 2013.

Apprenticeships are at the heart of the Government's recently published Skills Strategy '*Skills for Growth*'. Government see Apprenticeships as bringing together individuals, who are motivated and working hard to develop themselves; with employers, investing in their own success but supporting a programme with wider social, environmental and economic value; and with Government, providing public funding and building prestige and reputation of the programme.

By 2014/15 the number of adult Apprenticeships available will expand by up to 75000, leading to more than 200,000 people starting an Apprenticeship each year. To meet this Government will increase investment in Apprenticeships by up to £250 million over the spending review period. There will be investment of £650 million in 2011/12 and an indicative budget of £648 million in 2012/13.

It is expected that not only will the numbers of Apprentices increase, but that the programme too will change in line with the need for advanced skills required to meet future economic needs. Apprenticeships will be reshaped so that technician Level 3 will become the level to which learners and employers aspire. To widen access there will be clear progression routes from level 3 apprenticeships to higher level skills, including Level 4 Apprenticeships or higher education. As this approach works the lifetime earnings that flow from a Level 3 Apprenticeship will be comparable to those flowing from a degree and employers will typically recoup their investment within two to three years. Sitting alongside apprenticeships will be a wider, more flexible system of vocational qualifications that also meets the needs of the economy.

Apprenticeships are a highly successful and respected programme and nationally participation has increased threefold over the last decade. Apprenticeships are a key component in the drive to increase economic prosperity, and a main route to increasing participation in education and training.

Liverpool City Region Strategic Priorities for Apprenticeships

The Liverpool City Region Strategic Priorities for Apprenticeships are as follows:-

- 1. To stimulate increased employer adoption of Apprenticeships*
- 2. To ensure that Apprenticeships meet the needs of the Liverpool City Region economy, including in the Transformational Sectors*
- 3. To promote Apprenticeships as a quality route to young people and to support their increased participation in Apprenticeships*
- 4. To ensure that Apprenticeships delivered in the Liverpool City Region are of the highest possible quality.*

Each of the Strategic Priorities will be supported by Key Actions. Partners will want to undertake a range of activity to support the Apprenticeship agenda. In addition to this activity, the Key Actions are those things that can and should be done together at the level of the City region or across the City region. The Strategic Priorities and the 20 Key Actions we will take to deliver them are set out below. These key actions will form the basis of a detailed implementation plan to be developed.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: TO STIMULATE INCREASED EMPLOYER ADOPTION OF APPRENTICESHIPS

The success of the apprenticeship programme is dependent on demand from employers and an effective employer engagement plan is a critical success factor in ensuring that the Liverpool City Region ambition for Apprenticeships is delivered. There are currently a large number of employers in the Liverpool City Region using the apprenticeship programme as an effective means of developing and capacity building their workforce; however, there is still some work to do to ensure that all employers in the Liverpool City Region are aware of the business benefits of the apprenticeship programme.

The drive to increase employer engagement in the apprenticeship programme will be achieved by the taking forward the following Key Actions:

Key Action 1: The development and implementation of a City Region campaign to promote Apprenticeships to employers

The Liverpool City Region 16-19 Sub-regional Group (SRG) will oversee the development of an LCR-branded campaign to promote Apprenticeships. At the core of this campaign will be the key message that Apprenticeships provide a high quality route through which:-

- Young employees can secure the skills they need to succeed in their working lives; and
- Employers can ensure that they have the highly trained staff they need to secure their business success.

The campaign will generate and support a range of resources (sector information packs, the LCR Apprenticeship Ambassador network, employer case studies etc) and be delivered through a range of media utilising a variety of marketing techniques. The primary focus of the campaign will be to promote the business benefits of Apprenticeships to employers.

The campaign will draw on and further develop existing arrangements, resources and networks already in place. In particular, it will seek to build on the work and resources developed by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and NAS will be a key partner in taking the campaign forward.

Arrangements will be put in place to ensure that the employer interest stimulated across the City Region is referred to the most appropriate business support arrangements and apprenticeship providers in the relevant Local Authority.

Key Action 2: Embedding the Apprenticeship 'offer' into the broader business support and recruitment offer.

There is a broad range of employer support activity across the City Region. This activity is variable in relation to the emphasis on, understanding, and promotion of apprenticeships. Therefore we will capacity build staff with an employer facing role - NAS have a key role to play in this.

Learning from previous national best practice developed during the integration of Skills Brokerage with the wider Business Link Service, we will seek to pilot apprenticeship specialists who will work with and, where possible, be co-located with broader business support and recruitment practitioners. These specialist staff will:-

- Act as a resource that can be drawn on in work with individual employers where specialist knowledge of apprenticeships is required in the development of a recruitment process or a workforce development strategy;

- Work with other generic recruitment and business support practitioners to develop the knowledge and capacity of these staff.

Key Action 3: Systematically embedding apprenticeship requirements in public/private procurement.

It is proposed to promote the building of Apprenticeship recruitment requirements into public/private procurement processes. Work will take place within the major public, third sector and private sector employers in the Liverpool City Region. We will seek to promote best practice in public/private procurement with a view to increasing the volume of Apprenticeship starts.

As part of this we will look to pilot a procurement framework for jobs and skills aimed at ensuring that local people benefit directly from region-wide strategy that places specific requirements on contracts to provide more training and job opportunities, as part of their contractual commitments. Through the use of a toolkit, to be developed, the pilot framework will be aimed at placing jobs and skills at the core of fair and open procurement and contracting procedures, not just for capital and construction projects, but for goods and services too. Doing so offers the prospect of significantly reducing the high level of worklessness in the Liverpool City region, ensuring a far greater proportion of employment and training provision is linked directly to sustainable job opportunities, including apprenticeships, and is designed to deliver the skills that employers demand.

Key Action 4: Promote the conversion of existing staff to Apprenticeships.

Very significant growth in Apprenticeships can be secured if we are able to persuade employers that an Apprenticeship is the right workforce development solution for their existing staff. The approach taken will be determined by the individual's age. Where there are young people aged 16-18 in employment without training, the relevant Local Authority will work with Connexions to target these young people and their employers to convert to apprenticeships. As part of this, we will explore the extent to which there may be unmet demand for work-based provision that delivers a Foundation Learning curriculum for young people with low levels of prior attainment who are in low skilled jobs. For older employees, conversions to apprenticeships will be promoted as part of the LCR campaign. Apprenticeship conversions by older workers will be promoted as a key opportunity for employers to secure co-investment from the Government in the development of their workforce.

Key Action 5: Targeting employers engaged with Education Business Partnerships/Work-related Learning to secure new Apprenticeship Opportunities.

The approach proposed for the City Region seeks to build upon a project that has been developed through partnership working between Sefton Education Business Partnership, Sefton Provider Network and the National Apprenticeship Service. Partner organisations will have training and development to ensure all employer facing staff are knowledgeable and understand the apprenticeship programme and offer.

Employer interfaces by partners, where appropriate, will include information and detail on the apprenticeship offer in an appropriate medium and format (developed by the LCR-branded Apprenticeship Campaign as described above). Employer events and employer forums that are being organised by partners will be used to raise awareness on apprenticeships focusing on priority sectors. One to one interventions with employers are the most effective and the employer conversation will be maximised to include reference to the apprenticeship offer.

The development of this key action will need to be informed by the outcome of the Wolfe review which will inform the future development of vocational provision and of organisations who are currently delivering this activity.

Key Action 6: Mitigating the financial risk of employers by offering subsidies and financial incentives as available resources allow.

A range of different financial incentives currently exist for employers to start Apprentices in the City Region. These initiatives have been, and are, very effective in driving up the level of take up of apprenticeships by employers. They have been instrumental in helping to maintain levels of Apprenticeship participation through the labour market downturn. Over time, however, the resources available to Local Authorities to promote Apprenticeships are likely to come under pressure. Despite this, our ambition is to maintain the current levels of impact that we have been successful in securing in the past. To do this Local Authorities will seek to work together to secure greater synergies and coherence in their offer to employers and in the customer journey.

It is also likely that there will be further national initiatives to provide financial incentives to promote employer take up of Apprenticeships. When these are launched, partners will be mobilised to maximise employer take up and impact in the City Region.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: TO ENSURE THAT APPRENTICESHIPS MEET THE NEEDS OF THE LIVERPOOL CITY REGION ECONOMY, INCLUDING IN THE TRANSFORMATIONAL SECTORS

Skills are one of the key drivers of competitiveness. Increasingly the forces of globalisation mean that employers need to continuously update skills if they are to retain market share. This is of importance in all parts of the city region economy and is of particular importance in the four transformational sectors that have been identified as the key drivers of growth and prosperity in the Liverpool City Region. The Apprenticeship programme provides employers with a means of developing both their existing workforce and new staff, ensuring they develop the skills that underpin competitive performance. Apprenticeships are therefore central to growing the Liverpool City Region Economy.

To ensure that apprenticeships meet the needs of the Liverpool City Region economy, including the transformational sectors the following Key Actions will be progressed:

Key Action 7: Drive up the volume and share of Level 3 Apprenticeship programmes

It is proposed to work with providers to ensure that:-

- Where an apprentice is able to undertake and benefit from a Level 3 programme, they do so; and,
- Where Apprentices start on a Level 2 Apprenticeship, there is a well-defined progression route to Level 3 at the outset.

Key Action 8: Link Apprenticeships to Higher Education

Further work will be undertaken to develop the promotion of apprenticeships linked to Higher Education, including:-

- Work with local HEIs to agree Apprenticeship pathways into specified HE qualifications with the development of linked admission policies;
- fast track routes;
- L4/L5 into teaching and routes that allow specific sectors to 'grow' their own teaching staff.

Key Action 9: Development of high quality flagship initiatives to support the development of Apprenticeships in the LCR Transformational Sectors

We will support the National Apprenticeship Service in developing flagship initiatives that respond to and lead to sustainable progression pathways and employment in the Transformational Sectors. In particular:-

Super Port

Exploring links with Peel Ports and Cunard, Langton Cruise Terminal.

Knowledge Economy

Development of links into University, Universities as a deliverer of Higher Apprenticeships.

Low Carbon

Potential to develop a Sustainable Construction Academy with Balfour Beatty.

The development of a Renewable Energy academy with EON. EON are proposing to establish an energy efficiency academy which will train up to 1000 apprentices as energy efficiency advisors and pv installers over the next few years.

Visitor economy

Work with Devere/Alternative Hotel Group to launch 'The Devere Academy of Hospitality'.

The Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Campaign described above will have, at its focal point, the key transformational sectors with the action, and the resources produced, targeting these sectors. It is also proposed to work with NAS to identify the range of apprenticeships on offer to ensure employer demand is being met particularly in new and non traditional occupational areas and the transformational sectors by focusing any future procurement on specific sectors. In addition a programme of work will be agreed with the Greater Merseyside Learning Providers Federation to support providers in exploiting and responding to any new growth opportunities.

Key Action 10: Grow the volume of Level 4 Apprenticeship Frameworks being delivered in the City Region

The number of Level 4 frameworks is currently quite limited. However work will be undertaken with the Greater Merseyside Providers Federation and National Apprenticeship Service to identify opportunities to grow this area of work. The position will be kept under active review as further Level 4 Apprenticeship Frameworks are rolled out.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: TO PROMOTE APPRENTICESHIPS AS A QUALITY ROUTE TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND TO SUPPORT THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN APPRENTICESHIPS

The government continues to see the apprenticeship programme as an important offer to young people as well as a key mechanism to delivering full participation by 2015. During 2009/10 there was a growth in apprenticeship starts compared to 2008/9 (based on period 9 trend data), with the volume of starts returning to pre-downturn levels. It is important that the indicative trend in 2009/10 continues if the Liverpool City Region ambition is to be achieved. Central to this will be ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to access the programme and that any barriers that may prevent this are removed, including awareness of the programme by both young people and their parents or carers. It is also important that young people with significant barriers that may prevent them from retaining on an apprenticeship programme are supported to overcome these barriers.

To promote Apprenticeships as a quality route to young people and to support the participation of young people in Apprenticeships the following Key Actions will be progressed:

Key Action 11: The development of a City Region programme of support to help young people (including vulnerable young people) in accessing Apprenticeships, and to help employers recruit young people.

The key support that appropriately qualified vulnerable learners require to help them access, and remain on, apprenticeships, is as follows:-

- Coaching and personal development support to enable young people to prepare for, and present at, interviews for Apprenticeships with confidence;
- Mentoring and coaching for vulnerable learners to support their continued participation in apprenticeships;
- Additional support for LLDD Apprentices and learners from under-represented groups (e.g. BME); and,
- Support to remove any financial barriers associated with starting in employment.

It is proposed that, in each Local Authority, arrangements are put in place to ensure that young people are supported in the process of applying for apprenticeship opportunities and in preparing for interviews, and where necessary can participate in structured programmes designed to boost personal confidence. If resources allow, mentors will support the most vulnerable Apprentices.

Support arrangements for young people and employers are configured differently in each Local Authority area. However, where an Apprenticeship opportunity has been generated as a result of workforce development/recruitment support, or as a result of financial incentives, or in response to the LCR-branded Apprenticeship campaign, we hope to be able to offer a menu of support to employers. Typically such support to an employer could include:-

- Advertising the opportunity;
- Pre-sifting of applicants;
- Organisation and servicing of the interview process; and
- Support with induction where required.

Key Action 12: Develop curriculum pathways from schools to apprenticeships

Local authorities will look to work with schools to map the current vocational qualification offer being delivered by schools at Key Stage 4 (i.e. 14-16) and identify links and progression opportunities to an Apprenticeship Framework with a mechanism to link those learners to relevant Apprenticeship Providers. This approach will be particularly important where schools are offering parts of an Apprenticeship Framework as qualifications delivered in the Key Stage 4 phase.

For post 16 students we will seek to implement progression pathways into apprenticeships from 'learner responsive' provision.

Key Action 13: Employers to be encouraged to engage with union learning reps to provide support for apprentices and agree named mentors in the workplace.

One of the strengths of the Liverpool City Region is the existence of a strong network of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs). The Government, in its recent skills strategy, has signalled its intent to support the development of ULRs through continued support for Union Learn from BIS. Work will be undertaken with Union Learn/TUC to help mobilise ULRs to promote Apprenticeships to employers and to act as mentors to Apprentices in the workplace.

Key Action 14: Deliver pre-apprenticeship pathways in every Local Authority from YPLA-funded 16-19 provision into Apprenticeship programmes.

Every Local Authority in the Liverpool City Region has identified the need to commission learner responsive provision that either ensures progression into an apprenticeship programme where a young person is not 'apprenticeship ready' or alternatively delivers part of an Apprenticeship Framework (often the Technical Certificate) as a routeway into an Apprenticeship with an employer. The current accelerated pre-apprenticeship provides the young person with the underpinning knowledge required to achieve an apprenticeship prior to them being employed by the employer. This approach provides the young person with a recognised vocational qualification and provides assurance to the employer that the young person is capable of understanding their business. Local authorities will work with colleges and other providers to ensure delivery of such provision.

It is understood that government and NAS are currently considering the introduction of a new access to apprenticeship programme. Once introduced, LCR partners will work to ensure rapid implementation.

Key Action 15: To support schools in discharging their responsibility for independent and impartial careers advice and guidance.

All LCR schools will receive a copy of the (NAS) Apprenticeship Resource Pack and teachers will be made aware of how to use it to deliver and support IAG to young people. Building on work undertaken in St Helens and Sefton, resources such as lesson plans will be provided to teachers to support them in their work. Work will be undertaken with the Greater Merseyside Learning Providers Federation to help develop work-related learning opportunities that prefigure Apprenticeships. Local authorities will seek to raise parents and carers' awareness of apprenticeship programmes by ensuring they form a part of all communication to parents about the choices and entitlements on offer to young people.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: TO ENSURE THAT APPRENTICESHIPS DELIVERED IN THE LIVERPOOL CITY REGION ARE OF THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE QUALITY

Apprenticeships have developed credibility with employers and the public. This credibility is hard earned but easily lost. With the unit rate paid for Apprenticeships due to decrease and the Liverpool City Region labour market expected to be depressed for the foreseeable future, the context for Apprenticeship delivery will become increasingly more challenging. There have been year on year increases to the success rates secured by providers of Apprenticeships, but these increases have been secured alongside year on year increases to unit rates paid. That context has now changed.

The ongoing labour market downturn may create an environment which makes opportunist and exploitative practice by some providers and some employers more likely. It is important that the Liverpool City Region partners celebrate and promote quality in the delivery of Apprenticeships. We will seek to build a coalition of employers, providers and other partners in the City Region committed to the continued delivery of a quality Apprenticeship offer. This coalition will challenge poor and unacceptable practice, should it arise. A quality Apprenticeship offer will support and endorse that the programme is vital in the development of the skills and economy base within the Liverpool City Region.

These ambitions will be achieved by the following Key Actions:-

Key Action 17: Launch a Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Academy.

The LCR Apprenticeship Academy will act as an umbrella for the development and delivery of quality services to employers and learners in the City Region. In the first instance the academy will be virtual and will build on the strength of existing partnerships and Apprenticeship Sector Networks in the City Region. The Academy will bring providers, employers, unions and other partners together to:-

- Promote the adoption of best practice;
- In particular, promote the LCR Apprenticeship Charter (see below);
- Work with employers to address barriers to starting Apprentices;
- Work to support existing, and establish new, Sector Networks;
- Work with Sector networks to develop sector-based apprenticeship delivery models where these are appropriate (e.g. GTAs);
- Support the development of accelerated pre-apprenticeship and access to apprenticeship programmes; and,
- Celebrate the achievements of Apprentices and their employers (e.g. Apprenticeship graduation events).

Key Action 18: The development of a Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Charter

The development of a City Region Apprenticeship Charter will be central to our work on Apprenticeships. The Charter will be a collective statement of the partnership's commitment to high quality Apprenticeship provision in the Liverpool City Region.

The Charter is likely to encompass a number of areas: - e.g. rates of pay, employment rights, access to pastoral/mentoring support for apprentices, the quality of the training on offer, the expected duration of the apprenticeship, post-Framework achievement sustained employment outcomes etc

The Charter will require a wide ranging consultation prior to sign off.

Key Action 19: Promoting Quality Provision

In their capacity as strategic commissioners of all 16-19 learning, LCR Local authorities will wish to ensure that where provision is withdrawn by the SFA because of failure to meet Minimum Levels of performance, that broadly the same volumes of provision in broadly the same occupational areas (but of higher quality) are subsequently negotiated by NAS/SFA for delivery in LCR. Provision will need to be in place that reflects and meets employer demand.

Key Action 20: Protecting Quality Niche Provision

We will seek to work with providers to ensure that high quality/niche provision is not lost to the City Region as a consequence of the SFA introducing a Minimum Contract Value regime.