

Apprenticeship Strategy



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Foreword

Our ambition for Gateshead is to help it be a great place to live, work and visit. We want our communities to flourish, prosper and succeed.

Helping to grow apprenticeships and routes into apprenticeships is an important part of our wider economic development strategy, which also aims to raise skill levels and aspirations.

As one of the largest employers in the borough, Gateshead Council aspires to be an employer of choice, that attracts, develops and retains the most diverse, creative and innovative individuals with the required skills and abilities in the short-term and for the future.

We value apprenticeships within the Council; as well as being high-quality pathways to successful careers, they also provide opportunities for new and existing employees to develop and progress, which assists the Council in meeting our current and future skills needs.

A major theme of the Council's Workforce Strategy is Skills & Behaviours. Apprenticeships have a key role to play in this, as we will support the development of key skills including leadership and development of existing staff and encourage new talent into the workforce.

1. Introduction

This document sets out the Apprenticeship Strategy for Gateshead Council as an employer, and the positive action that the Council will take in its approach to apprenticeships as part of the wider Workforce Strategy. It is aligned with the Council's strategic approach 'Making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives' which sets out the ambition for Gateshead to be a place where people flourish, prosper and succeed.

The strategy is intended to be dynamic and will be regularly reviewed, developed and updated in response to local and national changes. The key actions for the delivery of the strategy are set out in detail in the underpinning Delivery Action Plan which will be overseen by SMG Services & Performance.

The strategy will also be used to inform service business plans to help identify the actions that individual service areas will take in support of this strategy and in meeting the specific skills challenges they face. The Apprentice Strategy also supports and works alongside other talent and entry to work initiatives such as work experience and traineeships.

2. Vision

Apprenticeships within the Council are seen and valued as high-quality pathways to successful careers, providing opportunities for new and existing employees to develop and which assist the Council in meeting its current and future skills needs.

The Council faces future challenges which can only be met with the right people with the right skills at the right time to meet changing demands. Apprenticeships will form an integral part of the Workforce Strategy to provide the Council with a talent pipeline that supports current and future skill needs.

3. Context

3.1 Government Reforms

Driven by an ambition to address the shortage in skills and invest in the UK's future workforce, the UK Government has introduced significant changes to the way in which apprenticeships are funded and delivered. Since April 2017 an Apprenticeship Levy is payable by any employer with a wage bill in excess of £3m per annum who employs 250 staff or more. This is paid as a 0.5% tax on the monthly pay bill which can only be used for apprenticeship training. The Council's levy is approximately £670k per annum.

In addition, the Public Sector Target aims to ensure that 2.3% of the workforce are engaged in apprenticeships. The Council's performance against the target is shown in the table below.

Year	Percentage of the workforce enrolled on an apprenticeship
2017 /18	1.7%
2018 /19	2.02%

The levy puts employers at the centre of identifying the skills, knowledge and behaviours that are required of the workforce now and into the future. It is, however, important that the increase in apprenticeships within the Council is aligned to our future skills needs and organisational priorities and not just to meet a Government target.

3.2 Supporting our strategic ambitions

Providing apprenticeships and routes into apprenticeships are an important part of Gateshead's strategic ambitions to create opportunities for employment and economic growth. Gateshead currently has a lower proportion of the population with higher level qualifications (21.5%) than the national average (27.4%)¹. Providing opportunities for staff to undertake apprenticeships and developing a pro-apprenticeship culture at all levels within the Council will not only help to raise skills within our workforce in support of our skills needs and assist in meeting the Government's apprentice targets; but also support the Council's wider strategic ambitions.

As a leader of public services and one of the largest employers in the area, it is also important that our workforce is representative of the communities we serve. Within the Council (excluding schools), currently less than 4.3% of our workforce is aged under 25. The challenges of finding work are particularly acute for young people aged 18-24, as well as for care leavers, long term unemployed, returners to the labour market and those with disabilities, as they try to compete against more experienced candidates. Gateshead Council, as an employer and as a strategic leader, has a responsibility in helping to create opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

3.3 Meeting current and future skills needs

Some areas within the Council, particularly Adult Social Care are experiencing skills shortages as competition for skilled workers increases. Adopting a more strategic approach to 'growing our own' future workforce will become increasingly important.

In addition to identifying apprenticeship opportunities for new employees, a 'grow our own' approach will also need to apply to our existing workforce if we are to ensure

¹ Gateshead JSNA

we have the capacity and capabilities we need. Providing opportunities for existing staff to utilise apprenticeships, particularly higher-level apprenticeships, to gain skills and progress their career will further help to develop talent pipelines within the organisation.

4. Aims

Set against this wider context, it is therefore essential that the Council determines its approach to apprenticeships. In particular, how we attract, develop and retain apprentices and develop apprenticeship opportunities that:

- Support our workforce skills needs
- Support Gateshead Council's strategic ambitions relating to Thrive
- Meet the challenges of the Government's apprenticeship reforms.

Our Apprenticeship Strategy aims to:

4.1 Embed a positive apprenticeship culture

We will actively promote apprenticeships within the Council as valuable recruitment and talent pipeline opportunities and develop a positive apprenticeship culture amongst managers and employees. Developing a greater awareness of the types of apprenticeships available and the benefits they offer for both new and existing employees will be essential to increasing the number of employees undertaking an apprenticeship.

4.2 Maximise workforce capability

Maximising the use of apprenticeships is critical in helping to build the capabilities we require. We will work with services to identify apprenticeship opportunities as part of service workforce planning activity to support current and future skills needs. This will include:

- Mapping apprenticeships to critical skills needs
- Developing new entry-level apprenticeship opportunities
- Developing career pathways to support succession planning and talent management
- Considering all vacant posts for re-designation as apprenticeships

4.3 Support the Continuous Professional Development of existing employees

Apprenticeships provide real opportunities for existing staff to gain skills and progress their career and supports talent management within the Council. One of the Council's priorities under the Workforce Strategy and Plan is to develop and strengthen leadership and management capability across the workforce. We will work with services to develop a greater awareness and understanding of the types of apprenticeships available and the benefits they can bring, particularly in relation to leadership and management.

4.4 Develop workforce diversity and inclusivity

The Council will support the social mobility of citizens and support them to take a step onto a professional career path, opening up jobs with realistic requirements for prior educational attainment.

One of the Council's strategic indicators is to ensure that young people leaving care are supported to have an opportunity of an apprenticeship within the Council. Acting in its capacity as corporate parent, the Council will offer apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers and looked after children who find it difficult to navigate the complexities of finding and sustaining work. This approach will help more disadvantaged young people in the borough get a foot on the ladder of employment and begin their journey to independence.

The Council will also identify opportunities for those with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) creating effective ways to support people to access apprenticeships and secure sustainable employment.

Additional support will be offered to apprentices and managers as required to ensure that placements succeed with emphasis on the importance of potential and training provided by good quality training providers.

We will consider options to expand opportunities to other vulnerable groups, for example long-term unemployed, women returners and ex-armed forces personnel.

4.5 Engage with maintained schools to maximise benefits from the levy

We will work with our maintained schools to raise awareness of the Apprenticeship Standards for Teachers, Teaching Assistants and School Business Managers, as well as a range of other broader standards that could be used by the wider schools' workforce in helping to create apprentice opportunities.

4.6 Engage with training providers and other local authorities and employers to maximise apprenticeship provision within the region

We will work with training providers and other local authorities and employers to identify gaps in apprenticeship training provision and establish viable cohorts particularly for niche areas.

5. Passporting levy funds to other organisations

Since April 2019, levy-paying employers have been able to transfer a maximum of 25% of their annual funds. This can be transferred from their levy fund to as many employers as they chose to fund apprenticeship training and assessment costs. Transfers can only be used for new starts.

The Council will work with organisations in its supply chain, partners, and community and voluntary organisations within the borough to identify opportunities to passport

levy funds to support apprenticeships. Priority will be given to allocating funds to those organisations who are working closely with the Council to deliver the Thrive Agenda.

6. Performance Monitoring

This Apprenticeship Strategy is underpinned by an Apprenticeship Delivery Action Plan which sets out how the priorities will be delivered and progress against this reviewed each year. The delivery plan will be regularly reviewed and reported on at SMG Services and Performance.

In accordance with the public sector duty requirements the Council will also publish annually, data relating to progress towards the 2.3% apprenticeship target set by the Government.

HR Advice will work closely with colleagues in Economic Development and LearningSkills to ensure that the Council's response to apprenticeships as an employer is closely aligned with the Council's wider strategic priorities relating to supporting local people into sustainable employment.