

# Apprenticeships

**Cabinet**

**Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021**

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Author:	Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills. Head of Skills and Education Partnerships.
Wards:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

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## **1. Purpose and Reasons**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is outline the role that Apprenticeships play in the Inclusion Early Years, Education and Skills Strategy to provide an alternative pathway to skills, qualifications and career progression for Employers and our residents. The report provides an overview of the work overseen by the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify the key opportunities and challenges to increase Apprenticeship numbers and to set out the key recommended activity to achieve an increase in Apprenticeships offered and taken up in Swindon.
- 1.2 Apprenticeships play a key role in ensuring there is a skilled workforce to meet the needs of business to enable growth and ensuring young people and residents are able to gain the skills and qualifications for work through a vocational work based learning approach. It has been identified that further work is required to support businesses and raise the profile of Apprenticeships as an inclusive and alternative pathway for young people and adults in Swindon.
- 1.3 This report links directly to Priority 2 of the Council’s vision to 2030 “To offer educational opportunities that lead to the right skills and the right jobs in the right places”.

## **2. Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the recommendation that Apprenticeships specifically and vocational and technical pathways more broadly are firmly positioned in the Inclusion, Early Years, Education and Skills Strategy as a clear alternative to academic pathways to enable young people and residents to gain the skills and qualifications to achieve their potential in education, employment and training.
- 2.2 Approve the priority activity to increase the number of Apprenticeships outlined in the paper and in the Apprenticeship Action Plan (attached at Appendix One).
- 2.3 Acknowledge the progress that has been made by the work of the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee, led by Councillors Kevin and Barbara Parry, and thank them for their significant contribution.

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- 2.4 Authorise the Head of Skills and Education Partnerships in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills to implement the measures set out in the paper.

## **3. Detail**

### Apprenticeships as an important element of the Inclusion, Early Years, Education and Skill Strategy

- 3.1 The focus on Apprenticeships should be seen in the context of National Policy on vocational, technical and work based career pathways which are set out in the national Post 16 Skills Plan. The plan outlines an academic and technical pathway where qualifications and skills can be gained in sixth forms, colleges or the work place but both routes can lead to qualifications to a high level (up to Master's Degree level). The policy includes the introduction of 'T' Levels, as an alternative to 'A' levels which are being delivered at New College, Swindon from 2021.
- 3.2 Locally and nationally, vocational and technical pathways including Apprenticeships, do not have the same profile and are not as well understood as academic pathways (GCSE and A levels). In order to achieve our ambition to raise aspirations and achievement in Swindon and enable more young people and residents to be successful to gain qualifications and skills for sustained employment and their chosen career path, it is recommended that the Council's Inclusion Early Years, Education and Skills Strategy includes a priority to raise the profile and value of different learning options including Apprenticeships to improve outcomes.
- 3.3 The priority to raise the profile and value of learning and the different opportunities and pathways, reinforces the ambition for Swindon to be a 'Learning Town', where all our children, young people and residents have access to inclusive learning and skills provision that meets their needs as part of a lifelong learning approach. Apprenticeships offer a different way to learn new skills and supports the need for diverse provision that enables all our young people and residents to gain skills and qualifications.

### Apprenticeship Reforms and the role of the Council

- 3.4 In December 2015, the Government set out its vision to put employers at the heart of the delivery of Apprenticeships to address skills shortages, raise the nations productively and to ensure that Apprenticeships provide a high quality and prestigious path to successful careers across all sectors of the economy and at all levels. The reforms highlighted that England has low numbers of apprenticeships compared to other countries. The national reforms included the introduction of an Apprenticeship 'levy' to increase investment in Apprenticeships, improving the quality and availability of apprenticeships across employment sectors and increasing apprenticeships at the

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higher levels, resulting in apprenticeships being available from GCSE equivalent (level 2) to Masters equivalent (level 7). The reforms set a target of 3 million additional Apprenticeships by 2020.

3.5 The Council has two key roles in relation to Apprenticeships.

3.5.1 The first is the delivery of Pledge 9: Increase the number of people starting an apprenticeship. This is a strategic role to champion the needs of employers and residents and work with key stakeholders including training providers, schools and colleges, the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Department for Education (DfE) to maximise opportunities to increase Apprenticeships in the area.

3.5.2 The second is the role of the Council as an employer. The Public Sector Apprenticeships Target was introduced in 2017 with a requirement to employ an average of at least 2.3% of staff as apprentices as new recruits or as part of career development of existing staff.

3.6 Nationally and locally there has been significant progress with the development of Apprenticeships available at all levels and across a wide range of sectors but there has also been some significant challenges with achieving the target set. The latest data is summarised at Appendix 2. The data shows that since the Apprenticeship reforms in 2017, there has been a decline in the number of Apprenticeship starts. There has been the highest increases in Higher and Degree Apprenticeships and a significant reduction at level 2 (GCSE level). Business, Admin & Law along with Health, Public Service and Care Sectors represent largest number of apprenticeship starts followed by Engineering and Manufacturing.

The work of the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Apprenticeship Action Plan.

3.7 At the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 30th September, the Terms of Reference for an Apprenticeship Task Group was agreed with the aim of reviewing the key challenges to apprenticeship growth and working with stakeholders to agree an updated plan of action. The Task Group has been set up in the form of a local Apprenticeship Ambassador Network with representation from employers, employer representative groups, schools, and other stakeholders. The chairs of the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Children's Health, Education and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee have agreed to be champions for this work.

3.8 The group has explored the key opportunities and challenges that Apprenticeships present. The opportunities can be summarised as the following:

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- 3.9 An approach to enable employers to upskill and re-skill current employees and new recruits, to address skills shortages and provide employers with the workforce of the future.
  - 3.10 A key route for residents to continue learning and gaining additional qualifications while working and an alternative to academic study; provides the skills and knowledge for individuals to succeed and progress in a chosen career.
  - 3.11 Apprenticeships present a key opportunity to make a considerable contribution to the draft Inclusion Early Years, Education and Skills Strategy to raise aspirations of your young people and residents and provide inclusive and alternative pathways to gain skills to support sustained employment.
  - 3.12 Government has recently invested heavily in additional funding for Apprenticeships. Until the end of March 2021, businesses that hire apprentices will benefit from a new payment of £2,000 per apprentice for those under the age of 25; and £1,500 for those aged 25 and over. This money is in addition to the existing £1,000 payment for new 16 to 18 year old apprentices and those aged under 25 with an Education, Health and Care plan.
  - 3.13 There have also been incentives and enhancements to schemes, which provide more opportunities that could lead to an Apprenticeship; for example, Traineeships is a skills development programme helping 16-24 year olds, without appropriate skills or experience, to get ready for an apprenticeship or job. They include a work placement which can last from 6 weeks to 1 year, and employers who offer work placements as part of the traineeship scheme may also receive an incentive payment of £1,000 per learner, for up to 10 learners, up to the end of July 2021.
  - 3.14 In addition, the Kickstart Scheme also provides a route into apprenticeships, and includes funding to employers to create high quality 6 month work placements for 16 to 24 year olds covering 100% of the relevant National Minimum Wage for 25 hours a week, plus the associated employer National Insurance contributions and pension contributions. Employers will also receive up to £1,500 additional funding to cover associated costs for set up, support and training.
  - 3.15 Many employers have used Apprenticeships to fill roles that are more difficult to fill or to address skills shortage areas. Training providers are now also focusing on areas where there are significant opportunities in the future, for example Digitech.
  - 3.16 Apprenticeships are now available to Degree and post graduate level. Residents can gain higher level skills through this route and as an alternative to a traditional university route. The Institute of Technology (IOT) due to open in Swindon in 2021 will offer increased opportunities locally at higher levels.

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- 3.17 The Plan of Action addresses the main challenges identified, which are as follows:
- 3.18 Many Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) have difficulty in navigating the apprenticeship landscape, due to the limitations of resource, time and consequently expertise within their organisations. The support available is not always meeting needs and the information available is not easy to access.
- 3.19 Complexity of apprenticeship funding and guidance, and commitment to the requirement to provide 20% off-the-job training presents a particular challenge for all businesses.
- 3.20 The awareness of the benefits of Apprenticeships amongst employers and within the wider community has improved recently. However the profile of Apprenticeships needs to continue to be raised so they are regarded as a key means of developing skills, and subsequently a pathway to acquiring new skills as well as upskilling, reskilling and ultimately a route into specific careers and sustained employment.
- 3.21 There has been increased activity within the school setting through the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge (ASK) Program and the Young Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (YAAN). However, we need to build on this so that awareness of apprenticeships is consistent across all schools, 6<sup>th</sup> Forms, colleges and training providers and residents, ensuring that opportunities in the Swindon area are promoted. There is also a need for greater awareness of Higher Level and Degree Apprenticeships as an alternative route into Higher Education and acquiring the skills required by employers.
- 3.22 Provision of apprenticeships locally will be enhanced with the Swindon and Wiltshire Institute of Technology opening in Swindon in September 2021, which will offer a range of apprenticeships in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) areas where we currently have skills gaps. However, the range and quality of courses need to continue to meet demand from local employers, from entry level through to Higher Level apprenticeships ensuring we have an inclusive range of options, providing pathways for all residents to progress in their chosen career.
- 3.23 There is evidence that the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy had a considerable impact on the number of Apprenticeship starts from 2017 when it was introduced, as has Covid-19 more recently, both at a local and national level, with slightly higher % of Apprenticeship starts in Swindon over the 5 years from 2015 to 2020. We have also seen a drop in Level 2 (GCSE level) apprenticeships, but a steady increase in Higher Level and Degree apprenticeships over this timeframe, again reflecting the national picture.

## Achievements to date

- 3.24 A summary of the key activity and achievements to date are outlined below.

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- 3.24.1 Swindon hosted the sixth JobFest at the Steam Museum, during National Apprenticeship Week in February 2020. This event has become an important platform for Swindon employers to reach out to local young people and meet their future workforce. The event brought together nearly 60 local employers offering apprenticeships and employment opportunities to almost 1,000 young people and residents.
- 3.24.2 Extracts from the JobFest 2020 video featured on the South West Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (SWAAN) 'Celebrating Success' video at the annual conference, raising the profile of Swindon across the South West area in the realms of apprenticeships.
- 3.24.3 An employer- led Swindon Apprenticeship Network Group has been established, with the main aim being for businesses to support each other in navigating the complexities of the apprenticeship landscape, and working on a collaborative approach to solutions.
- 3.24.4 A series of Redundancy events were led by SBC, with one of the events focusing on apprenticeships as a route to upskilling and reskilling all residents.
- 3.24.5 A programme of Apprenticeship Awareness sessions have taken place throughout the year for internal teams and stakeholders, raising the profile of apprenticeships within SBC.
- 3.24.6 The introduction of the Careers Hub has resulted in all schools and college working towards achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks which represent the 8 key elements of an effective Careers Education and Guidance Programme and improving understanding and awareness of post 16 options.
- 3.24.7 With the conclusion of the merger of Swindon College and New College, Swindon, the Institute of Technology (IOT) has progressed through 2020 and will open in September 2021. 50% of the IOT's provision will be focusing on apprenticeships, and will enhance the offer across the town and county, particularly around STEM subjects.
- 3.24.8 Higher Level and Degree Level apprenticeships have increased as a % of all apprenticeships, rising from 4% in 2015/16 to 23% in 2019/20.
- 3.24.9 Swindon (at 73%) has achieved more of our 5 year target for apprenticeship starts than England overall (at 70%)
- 3.25 The Council currently has 77 Apprentices employed by Swindon Borough Council and this represents 2.5% of our workforce. There have been some interruptions to some studies due to Covid-19 but officers have been very successful in ensuring that

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Apprentices continue to be well supported and have been able to make progress and adapt to the changing ways of working necessary at this time.

The Apprenticeship Action Plan objectives.

- 3.26 The four objectives and a summary of the activity for each objective is included below. The approach is for the Council to ensure the resources across the system from all key stakeholders are maximised to address the specific challenges that have been identified.
- 3.27 Objective 1. Enable all businesses, and in particular SMEs, to access the expertise and resources to navigate the apprenticeship landscape.
  - 3.27.1 Set up a Swindon Ambassador Network Group to inform the action plan and monitor progress.
  - 3.27.2 Ensure employers have easy access to fit for purpose information and support with sign posting of all support from one on-line central point.
  - 3.27.3 Identify a group of partners and local employers who have experience of employing apprentices and can provide mentoring and support to small businesses.
- 3.28 Objective 2. Increase awareness of apprenticeships as a pathway to careers, new skills, upskilling and reskilling (for employers and young people/residents).
  - 3.28.1 Deliver a marketing campaign to raise awareness of apprenticeships across employers and young people/residents.
  - 3.28.2 Ensure there are a number of local case studies that promote the range of Apprenticeships that are available across the area.
  - 3.28.3 Increase the number of young people who are Apprenticeship Ambassadors and are able to inspire other young people to take up apprenticeships.
  - 3.28.4 Ensure all schools and colleges are providing specific opportunities to promote Apprenticeships as part of Careers Education, information Advice and Guidance Programmes with an increase in young people applying for Apprenticeships.
- 3.29 Objective 3. Ensure that we have an inclusive range of options from entry level through to higher apprenticeships across the area, providing pathways for all residents to progress to/in their chosen career.
  - 3.29.1 Further develop the information on Apprenticeships available to young people, parents and residents on the Local Offer Website.



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- 3.29.2 Clearly outline the pathways to enter an Apprenticeships for young people and residents who need additional steps to gain the experience and qualifications to enter an Apprenticeship.
- 3.29.3 Increase the number of Traineeships, supported internships and other pre Apprenticeship opportunities for young people
- 3.29.4 Work with New College Swindon to promote the opportunities available from September 2021 through the Institute of Technology.
- 3.30 Objective 4. Pioneer the role of apprenticeships within SBC so that we can facilitate and lead the way in encouraging other stakeholder groups to support the action plan.
  - 3.30.1 Outline the SBC preparation for work and apprenticeships offer for young people in 2021/22 to support being an inclusive Council. This includes experiences of the work place, traineeships, supported internships, Kickstart and Apprenticeships.
  - 3.30.2 Recruit 10 Kickstart posts during 2021 (fully funded 6 month work placements) for young people claiming Universal Credit and where appropriate, support these roles to access progression to Apprenticeship Opportunities.
  - 3.30.3 Put in place a process to ensure that managers consider Apprenticeship opportunities for all new vacancies.
  - 3.30.4 Identify skills and resourcing gaps and opportunities for 2021/22 across the organisation as part of workforce planning and talent management.
  - 3.30.5 Ensure we continue to support partner organisation who will benefit from accessing Apprenticeship Levy transfers to who are supporting SBC priorities as per current policy and process.
  - 3.30.6 Where it is considered appropriate, embed social value requirements into tendering and contract processes, ensuring the Councils priorities, including to increase apprenticeships is reflected in the supply chain and contracting process.

## Monitoring and Accountability of the Apprenticeship Plan Outcomes.

- 3.31 The Apprenticeship Plan and the outcomes outlined in the plan will be monitored twice yearly by the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **4. Alternative Options**

- 4.1 A number of options and approaches have been considered to increase the number of Apprenticeships offered in Swindon and the actions summarised in this paper is a result



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of work with a wide range of stakeholders. The Council could decide not to progress the activity outlined in the paper at this time.

## **5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management**

### Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report. The activity outlined will take place within existing resources and by maximising the resources of stakeholders. The Head of Finance for Children Services was consulted in relation to this report.

### Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 There are no direct legal or human rights implications arising from this report.

### Climate Change Impact

- 5.3 The proposals would not bring a change in service delivery and Officers believe that there is no expected effect on the Council's carbon footprint

### All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.4 There are no other direct implications arising from this report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendation made by the Scrutiny Committee.

### Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.5 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been completed. No adverse or other significant issues were found. A copy of the DIA can be obtained from the report author.

### Risk Management

- 5.6 Risk management is integrated into all service planning across the directorate and the key risks in relation to Education are incorporated into the Children Services risk register.

## **6. Consultees**

- 6.1 The Corporate Director of Finance and Assets (s151 officer) and Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

## **7. Background Papers**

- 7.1 None

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## **8. Appendices**

8.1 Appendix 1 - Apprenticeship Action Plan.

8.2 Appendix 2 – Apprenticeship Data.

## **9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan**

9.1 This is a key decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan for February 2021.