

Lancashire County Council Beacon Case Study – Addressing Skills Needs linking into Apprenticeships

Lancashire County Council identified a structural weakness of a demographically imbalanced workforce that is often propped up by costly agency staff. Following analysis a strategy was adopted to address the age imbalance and make efficiency savings by replacing the agency staff with apprenticeships. This apprenticeship programme aims to provide an affordable, stable, high quality workforce which can be developed to the long term benefit of the County Council. This "grow your own" culture that is slowly being embedded in to the council now recruits 20 apprentices at a time which produces a saving of £120,000 a year.

Background

As a key priority of Lancashire's LAA it was recognised that as a county we must address skills shortages, graduate retention issues and the potential "lost generation" of young men and women whom policymakers fear will have limited opportunity.

To tackle these issues a number of innovative programmes were established. The County Council has significantly extended its apprentice scheme, devised and implemented a pre apprenticeship programme called Future Horizons aimed at NEET and Looked after Children and has developed the first UK public-sector work trial (WorkStart) in partnership with Jobcentre Plus.

These solutions aim to meet the economic and regeneration priorities within Lancashire: to give people who live in Lancashire a genuine, supported chance to gain employment with the county council, and to secure and develop a talented and skilled workforce for the future to serve the residents of Lancashire. In addition, we also intend to:

- Reduce social and financial costs of unemployment.
- Cut agency costs funded by council taxpayers.
- Transform future demographic profile of the organisation.
- Embed good practice across the organisation.

Key learning's

- Priority theme of the Regional Economic Strategy and Lancashire LAA.
- Engage senior heads and managers – they need to be encouraged to use apprentices and placements wherever possible. Get commitment from the top.
- There is a business case to this work. It is not just about achieving targets. Share the approach at local, regional and national level.
- Create a 'grow your own' culture.

Who was involved?

The Partnerships Development team has three key areas of focus:

- commercial partnerships
- non-commercial partnership development and
- skills and employability

Key aspects of the team's focus include communicating the vision and demonstrating how workforce solutions would significantly contribute to the LAA, economic development, regeneration, locality, social inclusion, community cohesion and partnership-working aims.

Outcomes

As part of the commitment to helping young people access opportunities it was decided to re-engineer the recruitment process and share this good practice with Districts, NHS and Police HR Managers.

- The apprenticeship scheme is a corporate priority, not a token effort leading to recruitment of apprentices increasing from 16 to 300+ over two ½ years.
- The vacancy management process has been redesigned which allows us to offer front-line entry jobs (on merit) to those completing an apprenticeship. This helps to retain a highly motivated workforce, enables career progression and talent management, and saves money in recruitment costs.
- A 'grow your own' culture has been developed. We centrally recruit up to 20 apprentices at a time, saving £31,000 for each quarterly intake - £120,000 per year.
- As a result the county council has a very high retention and completion rate and is pleased that over 90% of all apprentices appointed choose to stay with the council as they attain level 2 and 3 NVQs and continue with their careers.

Next steps

We recognised that we have a high benchmark at interview for our apprentices and some young people were not reaching this. We designed and implemented a new pre-apprenticeship programme called Future Horizons to support NEET (not in education, employment or training) and Looked After Children in partnership with the young people's service and North Lancs Training Group. The programme has been successful and more information can be found in Lancashire County Council Beacon Case Study – Future Horizons.

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