



Wokingham Borough Council Annual Apprenticeship Report 2020-2021

Purpose

This annual report demonstrates the Council's compliance with The Public Sector Apprenticeship Targets Regulations 2017. It captures data about Wokingham Borough Council employees (including schools).

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Introduction

Under the 2017 The Public Sector Apprenticeship Targets Regulations, 2017 Wokingham Borough Council has a legal duty to publish annually specific data requested by central government.

It is widely acknowledged that 2020-2021 has been a challenging year for Apprenticeships in the context of a global pandemic and this is reflected nationally in reviewing apprenticeship participation rates against nationally set targets. As one would expect, a key focus of 2020-21 from a local authority perspective was responding to and supporting our residents, customers, and employees through three national lockdowns and transitioning to new ways of service delivery. This, coupled with the uncertain economic climate has impacted apprenticeship participation rate during this period however despite this, we have seen pockets of success as we continue to strive for improvement and higher engagement rates as we move towards recovery from the global pandemic.

Apprenticeships are for both new and existing employees at Wokingham Borough Council and the key points of an apprenticeship are:

- They are for anyone aged 16 or over
- The apprenticeship standards are designed for someone working at least 30 hours a week – if someone is part-time, they can still complete an apprenticeship the duration will just be extended to allow them sufficient time to complete it.
- There is a requirement that 20% of an apprentice's paid time at work is for off the job training – this could be attendance to college/university, attending online webinars or workshops, work shadowing and other learning and development opportunities
- There is no cost to the apprentices for completing an apprenticeship, the training costs are fully funded by the Wokingham Borough Council Apprenticeship Levy

The apprenticeship target set for Wokingham Borough Council includes our maintained schools between 1st April 2020 and the 31st of March 2021, was 86.

Employees

Number of employees who were working for Wokingham Borough Council and our maintained schools on 31 March 2020 was 4042.

Number of employees who were working for Wokingham Borough Council and our maintained schools England on 31 March 2021 was 3768.

Number of new employees who started working for Wokingham Borough Council and our maintained schools between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 was 597.

Apprentices

Number of apprentices who were working for Wokingham Borough Council and our maintained schools on 31 March 2020 was 62.

Number of apprentices who were working for Wokingham Borough Council and our maintained schools on 31 March 2021 was 73

Number of new apprentices in who were working for Wokingham Borough Council whose apprenticeship agreements started between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 was 19.

Actions taken to help meet the public sector target

The following actions have been undertaken in the last year:

- The government apprenticeship incentives have been widely promoted to all staff across Wokingham Borough Council including Schools via Education News and the School Bursar meetings.
- As part of the recruitment business case, recruiting managers are required to consider the suitability of an apprenticeship prior to filling the role with an experienced hire.
- Virtual activities and webinars were offered for National Apprenticeship week including ACT (Apprentices Connect Together) and an Ignite masterclass with George Anderson.
- Wokingham Borough Council developed and hosted the “Apprenticeship Big Chat”— this was an opportunity for apprentices across the local authorities to meet and discuss their experiences and share the benefits of being an apprentice. The week concluded with the Apprenticeship Ambassador National Network meeting which was informative and had key speakers including Gillian Keegan MP, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills.
- Wokingham organised and chaired network meetings with other Local Authorities to share good practice and problem-solving initiatives.
- Apprenticeships were detailed as continuous professional development opportunities as part of the staff annual review process and are incorporated into new starter induction information to increase awareness at all levels across the Council.
- Continued promotion of the success stories of apprentices through weekly news publications including external marketing through our social media forums to demonstrate how apprentices can help to develop and enhance the skills within teams and allow for succession planning.
- Procurement via competitive tendering process for two new training providers to deliver group cohorts of business administration and associate project management apprenticeships to help to develop our internal talent and succession plan.

Challenges faced in efforts to meet the target

As outlined in the introduction, 2020-2021 has been a challenging year nationally for the apprenticeship scheme and has impacted on our ability to meet our target.

Schools in particular have struggled over the last year, heavily impacted by remote teaching during the national lockdowns, prioritising key worker placements and a high number of part time roles that prove more challenging to provide the number of learning hours required for an apprenticeship.

Schools make up approximately 64% of the target for the local authority and with the challenges around part-time roles and durations needing to be extended to meet the requirements of the apprenticeship this does put people off applying.

Providing the right level of support for apprentices has also been challenging over the year as the vast majority of roles moved to remote working and a high proportion of Wokingham colleagues were redeployed to essential and critical roles to support the pandemic response. This resulted in fewer suitable roles for apprenticeship development during this time.

We also saw a lower application and response rate to those roles that were considered suitable for apprenticeships. Anecdotally, apprentices reported that they were not receiving full support due to the challenges managers were facing the Covid pandemic.

Changes to Apprenticeship Frameworks and gaps in career pathways

During this period, at a national level, changes were made to the apprenticeship frameworks – new standards have been introduced and existing ones amended to make apprenticeships more robust. Apprentices are now required to demonstrate apprentice competency and capability in their chosen apprenticeship area and because of this, the entry level has been affected with some learners feeding back that the entry level standard is too high to start on the apprenticeship journey.

There also some challenges with the existing apprenticeship pathways that are acting as a deterrent for new applicants and also for those sectors considering apprenticeships as part of their development and succession planning strategies. For example, there is a level 3 Teaching Assistant and Level 6 Teacher apprenticeship but nothing in-between to bridge the gap and allow Teaching Assistants to progress. Until these gaps are addressed, and clear career pathways developed for specific careers/industries, apprenticeships are not fulfilling their desired outcomes and we are unable to maximise the benefit of the entire levy.

Plans to ensure we meet the target in the future

- We shall continue to promote and publicise apprenticeships and share updates to the workforce and schools as beneficial opportunities to attract, retain and develop talent. as a key part of their recruitment and workforce development strategies.
- We will work with internal WBC management teams to ensure that apprenticeships form part of their recruitment and workforce development strategies.
- We shall continue to utilise the opportunities to develop and enhance our understanding of the apprenticeship programmes available and how these will benefit Wokingham Borough Council.
- We shall continue to work with other local authorities and engage with national programmes to help design and promote maximum engagement and opportunities for apprenticeship programmes.