

Agenda Item 32.

TITLE	Wokingham Borough Graduate Academy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Personnel Board on 15 March 2022
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICERS	Sally Watkins, Assistant Director Digital & Change Lewis Borges, Head of Change

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Development of future talent within the organisation.

RECOMMENDATION

That Personnel Board supports the future direction of the Graduate Academy.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Graduate Academy is led by the Business Change service. The Academy approach includes placements within each directorate, with the Graduates rotating on a 6-monthly basis. Each placement focusses on transformational project activity, with the benefit of getting hands-on experience in a raft of different directorates.

In addition, the Graduates are given carefully crafted support, development, and mentoring. Each graduate has a dedicated line manager within Business Change, a placement lead for day-to-day support and a designated mentor from the Extended Corporate Leadership Team.

The commitment to the Graduates is to give them access and exposure to a wide variety of Local Government services, which allows them to gain a wealth experience in this sector. Wokingham is also committed to help them develop in a personal and professional capacity. In return, Wokingham receives enthusiastic, hard-working, and high achieving graduates who bring a fresh perspective and help the organisation deliver on its corporate objectives.

BACKGROUND

The National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) is a two-year scheme, led by the Local Government Association (LGA). There is a vigorous national recruitment campaign and selection process run by the LGA annually to bring on board high calibre graduates. Following an initial written application, situational judgement testing and an assessment centre, councils can shortlist prospective candidates and conduct competency-based interviews before offering roles.

Alongside employment with WBC, the LGA provide the National Management Trainees' (graduates) with a structured learning and development offer, including a masters level qualification in leadership and management. This is carried out in parallel with, and compliments, their placement at WBC enabling them to implement their learning on real life projects & work life scenarios.

Historically, WBC recruited one graduate every 2 years, however through the creation of the Graduate Academy the Council has harnessed the value graduates add and seized the opportunity to bring new talent into the organisation.

The Graduate Academy was created in 2019 and has grown exponentially over the last 3.5 years, with a cohort of 6 welcomed onto the programme in 2020 and a further 2 added in 2021.

Year	Number of Graduates on intake	Total number of graduates at any one time
2015	1	1
2017	1	1
2019	1	1
2020	6	6
2021	2	8

The structure of the programme has evolved and improved significantly since Wokingham first participated in the scheme.

CURRENT POSITION

WBC has the largest Graduate cohort in Berkshire and is considered an exemplar authority for the placement and programme structure provided. The following table illustrates the comparative intake across other Berkshire Local Authorities:

Year	Wokingham	RBWM	Slough	Bracknell Forest
2019	1	0	1	2
2020	6	1	3	0
2021	8	1	0	2

The Academy includes placements within each directorate, with the Graduates rotating on a 6-monthly basis. Each placement focusses on transformational project activity, with the benefit of getting hands-on experience in a raft of different directorates. In addition, the Graduates are given carefully crafted support, development and mentoring. Each graduate has a dedicated line manager within Business Change, a placement lead for day-to-day support and a designated mentor from the Extended Corporate Leadership Team.

The Graduate Academy placements currently includes a wide variety of activity, including:

Chief Exec Office	Adult Social Care	Place & Growth	Resources & Assets
Anti-Poverty Strategy	ASC Pathway	Public Protection & Anti-Social Behaviour Service	Net Carbon Zero Project
Equalities Strategy	ASC Market Position Statement	Temporary Accommodation	
Recovery Strategy	Public Health Improvement Plan	Young People & Homelessness Project	
Digital Inclusion		Domestic Abuse Strategy	

Benefits

- Attracts a diversity of candidates to councils & Graduates have links with a wide network of peers nationally which provides them with learning opportunities across the sector. This not only enriches their experience but also brings a wealth of knowledge and best practice back to the council
- The Graduate Academy is a value for money way to deliver high calibre recruitment & provides WBC with a unique opportunity to grow its own future leaders by developing talent within the existing workforce
- Graduates are skilled, experienced, and resourceful employees who will support in the delivery of corporate priorities as well as embrace and effect change
- On the programme, graduates complete a masters level qualification in leadership and management. They put this theory into practice which opens doors for trainees to explore their own interests but also contribute significantly to internal learning and development with WBC

Funding Model

All graduates are employed on a 2-year fixed term contract and paid a minimum salary of SJT spinal column point 20 (£25,991), which is £34,461 per annum per graduate including oncosts.

The programme is partly funded through Special item and through vacancies held within the Business Change service.

PLACEMENT CYCLES

Previous WBC graduates have gone on to secure permanent positions within the Public Sector at the end of their placement cycles. For example, a former graduate from cohort 21 (2019) has recently obtained a full-time permanent position at the council as a Business Change specialist and is able to continue to flourish within WBC.

As part of the development of the Graduate Academy, Business Change are actively working with senior managers across the organisation to establish upcoming vacancy opportunities for those graduates that are due to finish their placement in September 2022, to ensure we retain the best talent within the organisation. There are high expectations that a significant percentage of the current cohort will secure employment with WBC when their placements complete.

FUTURE PLANS & AMBITION

The Council recognises the impact the Graduate Academy has on the organisation, bringing in new talent, from varying background has enabled fresh ideas, innovation opportunities and skills to grow. There is an opportunity through vacancy management to further increase the graduate academy in size, scope & success.

The aim is for Wokingham to be known as a centre of excellence for Graduates within the LGA's NGDP. In addition, it is envisioned that the Academy can become part of the pipeline for high-achieving, ambitious new resource within the Council that supports a Future Leader initiative.

APPENDIX ONE: GRADUATE FEEDBACK

'Javeria worked for me on the Council's Recovery Strategy whilst she was a graduate trainee. She immediately impressed me with her enthusiasm and ability to seek out best practice from around the country, and beyond and proactively bringing forward proposals for the formulation and implementation of a Council Wide Strategy. Following this she played a pivotal role in skilfully shaping the strategy through discussions with key stakeholders including the Corporate Leadership Team and senior Councillors. This included the creation of the Governance needed across the organisation to take our Recovery ambition forward. All of which was well received by the Council's Executive and given their full support. Her eagerness to learn from and adopt various practices across the country, her ability to mould and shape to meet the needs of our particular authority, and her ability to manage purposeful discussions with senior stakeholders really stood out. Not to mention the technical skills to create an extremely aesthetically pleasing and user friendly document bringing it all together.'

Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive

'Jenny Jones has been a valuable asset during her time with the Place & Growth directorate. She has made a real difference with her skills in project management and organisational. Jenny has used her initiative to progress high profile projects which have helped front line services and in turn made a difference to both

operational delivery and strategic objectives. It has been a real pleasure to work with such a motivated and organised individual'

Zulfiqar Mulak, AD Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities

'I have found Sophia's approach to be professional, courteous, empathic and friendly. She is open to new ideas and will reflect on issues she has faced and learned from the experience. It has been an absolute pleasure working with Sophia and I would recommend her to any future employers.'

Simon Broad, AD ASC

'Thank you for your hard work on compiling the reports. Love the charts. Perfect. In your short time with us you have such a good understanding of the strengths and issues involved. So every good wish for Wokingham. You are an asset to them and the service you move into is about to get stronger'

Phil, ImPower Consultancy

'Katie is very willing to take on tasks, nothing is too much trouble, she is professional, helpful and any work that she does is of a high standard. I will be really sorry to see her leaving her ASC placement and would want to wish her every success in the future, she certainly has a very bright career ahead of her.'

Helen Spokes, ASC Head of Service

'Freya's quality of work was outstanding and that she's a real testament to the graduate programme'

Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive

'Kieran's work within the commercial property team has been of enormous value. The ability to have a high-level graduate candidate to work on priority issues has been invaluable. Our team consider having a graduate through the programme within our service to be a very worthwhile experience'

James Wilson, Service Manager Resources & Assets

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	n/a	n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	n/a	n/a
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	n/a	n/a

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

N/A

Cross-Council Implications

N/A

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

None

List of Background Papers

None

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