

As part of the consultation process for the completion of the Regional Employment and Skills Plan the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP) has engaged with learners aged between 11 and 19 in a number of careers fairs across the region. The over-arching finding is that there is a general lack of awareness amongst young people of what apprenticeships are, what they entail and what opportunities are available.

Quantified, these findings indicate that;

- 30% had no idea what an apprenticeship was
- 58% didn't fully understand what an apprenticeship is (especially not the benefits)
- 15% understood what an apprenticeship was
- 8% wanted to study an apprenticeship

Anecdotal evidence gathered suggests that if a family member is or had been engaged with apprenticeships they were more likely to understand apprenticeships and want to undertake an apprenticeship.

Furthermore, some learners indicated that schools were keen to promote higher education as a route rather than a vocational apprenticeship route.

How can employer engagement with Apprenticeships be improved?

- A number of employers currently engaged with the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership have concern over the impacts of the apprenticeship levy, particularly for those who have cross border operations and where apprentices operate across multiple sites in the UK.
- Changes to apprenticeships across the UK creates a risk for employers with different standards and different definitions of apprenticeships.
- Large employers with established apprenticeship schemes do not have recruitment concerns and typically recruitment is undertaken via established routes and not through the apprenticeship matching service.
- Smaller companies have more difficulty in recruitment than large.

To investigate the main barriers to taking up Apprenticeships?

There are concerns within the care sector in particular that the basic skills assessments are off putting to some entrants, particularly those who may be returning to the labour market after a period of absence, or those who had a poor academic experience.

Further barriers relate to the aforementioned learner survey findings; one of the main barriers is the fact that many learners are not fully informed on apprenticeships and their benefits. The majority of the 88% that didn't fully understand what an apprenticeship is had a negative understanding. This is substantiated by employers believing that careers advice regarding apprenticeships is not provided early enough in schools which is affecting the understanding of learners.

The lack of information about apprenticeships is also a barrier for employers, further clarity is required by businesses on how to access apprentices.

To scrutinise the development of higher level Apprenticeships, with the support of further and higher education institutions?

- High levels of demand from both employers and providers for higher level and degree apprenticeships, however funding prevents the development and delivery of some activity. These are also seen as important to developing a greater parity of esteem between the academic and vocational routes.
- Employers are concerned that apprenticeships are still viewed by many, including some teachers, as not a route for high academic achievers. This is of particular concern for the Engineering sector which is a significant recruiter of apprenticeships.
- Apprenticeships are seen as a good way of 'growing the workforce' and many companies find that it helps retention and to develop relationships.

What good practice exists and what more can be done to address gender stereotyping?

There are a number of examples of good practice within the region, the Cyfle construction shared apprenticeship scheme has been highly successful (winning a Queen's award recently), additionally there are examples of apprentices being developed and progressed through higher education at a number of large regional employers.

How effective is progression between other work-based learning and Apprenticeships and between Levels 2, 3, 4 and above Apprenticeships?

Employer engagement with the Construction sector indicates that a particular concern is what is termed as 'pre-apprenticeship drop-off'. Although many people are training within the sector, a large proportion are not progressing with many studying at level 1 and becoming dis-engaged and therefore not pursuing their studies further.

Higher Level Apprenticeships

There is very little information available about the Higher level apprenticeships for businesses and how these apprenticeships are going to work with the educational establishments. This is a source of concern for businesses who are paying the levy and are keen to engage with the higher level qualifications.