

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR (HR), ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES

Work Related Learning Opportunities at Nottinghamshire County Council

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Personnel Committee with an overview of the work that the County Council is doing to enable young people to access a variety of work related learning opportunities at Nottinghamshire County Council.

Information and Advice

2. The unemployment figure for young people aged 16-24 exceeded one million nationally in the autumn of 2011. In Nottinghamshire between July 2006 and July 2011 unemployment amongst 16-19 year olds rose from 1255 to 1720 and amongst 16-24 year olds from 3055 to 5530.
3. Early work has begun with Futures (formerly Connexions) regarding a Youth Employment and Employability strategy which will focus on increasing employment opportunities for the 16-24 age group and developing the skills and employability of this age range across the County. The key areas of activity to drive improvement will include:
 - Raising the participation age in education/training to 18
 - Apprenticeships
 - Youth employability and work readiness skills
 - "NEET" support and engagement (16-24 year olds)
 - Bridging the skills gap

Discussions are currently ongoing with key stakeholders in order to gain their engagement in the development of this approach and to ensure better co-ordination of activity.

4. Each year the County Council has a statutory requirement to produce its overall workforce monitoring information. The latest figures for the 12 months up to September 2011 showed that the proportion of young people under 25 employed by the County Council is now less than 5% of the total workforce.
5. It is against this backdrop that the County Council has been developing three key strategies to offer more young people the opportunity to gain valuable learning and work experience at the County Council which will at the same time promote the many

and varied career opportunities at the County Council. These 3 key routes are as follows:

- Short term work experience
- Apprenticeships
- Graduate traineeships

Short term work experience:

6. This is intended to give young people from the start of year 10 an experience of working life and the key skills needed in the workplace and is generally unpaid. The County Council offers a wide variety of these placements generally for a week to a month. It is proposed to develop further opportunities across the County Council and monitor their take up on a corporate basis thus providing information across the whole organisation which can be used to help plan and target activity in the future.

Apprentices:

7. The County Council has a long history of supporting and employing small numbers of apprentices but in the light of the recent trend for rising youth unemployment has recently developed and extended this scheme.
8. The County Council is working in partnership with 'Futures' Apprenticeship Agency who act as an 'employment brokerage service' between employers, young people and training companies. This model is known as an Apprenticeship Agency (ATA). Although other agencies also offer this model, Futures are well placed to provide this service because of their close liaison with schools through their personal advisors. The benefit of this approach is:
 - The ATA recruits and employs the apprentice, charging the host employer a weekly fee. This means that they are responsible for all the on going employment issues
 - The weekly fee is used to cover the apprentice's wage and an administration charge
 - The apprentice is placed with a host employer to provide both the practical and work experience necessary to gain the appropriate qualification
 - Provision of pastoral and other support to young people on the programme
9. The apprenticeship scheme provides opportunities in a range of areas across the County Council on a rolling programme and was initially set up to provide 25 placements with the intention of growing the scheme on an annual basis. It is now proposed to increase the number of placements to 50.
10. The County Council is under no obligation to offer employment to the apprentice at the end of the placement. However clearly this would be the desired outcome if a suitable vacancy was available at the time and the apprentice met the appropriate requirements. Even if a job was not available there would still be a benefit to the apprentice from:

- the opportunity to work in a large diverse organisation and gain valuable work experience which would stand them in good stead for future job applications either within or outside the County Council.
 - the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification whilst receiving some remuneration
 - other targeted support in terms of letter and CV writing, interviewing skills etc
11. The cost of this scheme is £95 per week per apprentice plus an ATA fee for the placement making a total cost of £6210 per apprentice per annum. The placement usually lasts for 52 weeks. The amount payable increases for 19 – 24 year olds.
 12. Initially the scheme targeted the younger age range but has been flexible and taken from the older age group where appropriate and where the person had the appropriate skills mix. This increases the cost of the placement slightly. It is now intended to build on this and extend the application of the scheme to include the development of adult apprenticeships and re-training opportunities for staff at risk of redundancy.

Graduate Trainees:

13. Over recent years the County Council has supported the national graduate development programme and as part of its support for offering work opportunities to young people the proposal is intending to continue supporting this programme.
14. The programme is a two year fast track management development programme for high calibre graduates with the potential to become senior managerial leaders. It is led by the Local Government Association (LGA) which provides the infrastructure for the programme.
15. Over 135 local authorities have already participated in the scheme which is firmly placed within the Times Top 100 Graduate Employers and the Guardian UK300 survey. This year the LGA has received 2250 applications for the programme starting in October.
16. To attract the best, the scheme has to compete with the private sector and other high performing public sector schemes, such as the NHS Management Scheme and the Civil Service Fast Stream; which both rank in the Top 10 of the Times Top 100 graduate employers.
17. The benefits for Councils and the sector in general, include:
 - a key route into the sector for the best young talent, across the country. Recruitment and investment in the development of a graduate will incur a far lower cost than future recruitment into a senior role from outside of the sector.
 - graduates tend to act as internal change agents, providing constructive challenge and fresh thinking to the development of council strategies.

- building internal capacity and enabling the transfer of knowledge from experienced members of staff. Growing talent within the Council is cost effective and provides in-house capability and skills thus reducing the need to buy in external resources.
18. The LGA market the programme to high calibre graduates across the UK and assess their suitability through an established recruitment process, involving sifting of applications, telephone screening and full day assessment centres. The final selection process takes place locally with panel interviews chaired by the Corporate Director, Environment and Resources Department.
 19. The LGA also run the national induction programme as well as funding the national learning element of the programme where the management trainees can achieve a post graduate qualification in public sector management.
 20. The proposal is to recruit 3 graduates, known as National Management Trainees, on a two year fixed term contract. The trainees will be employed to help deliver a range of projects across strategic, support and front line services over the two years. This will involve substantial placements across all departments.
 21. Between 2010 and 2012 the current graduate trainees made significant contributions to the following projects and areas of activity:
 - co-ordinating and communicating corporate policy including providing support to the Senior Executive Officer (Office of the Chief Executive)
 - project work on the Big Society including a presentation to Corporate Leadership Team
 - Libraries - maximising potential by developing community based solutions
 - reviewing and implementation of residential intermediate care services
 - services sold to schools - developing a marketing strategy and service offer.
 22. The recruitment of the candidates and service placement planning is managed by a programme co-ordinator and an internal mentor is offered for each graduate. An external mentor is also offered where appropriate.
 23. Despite the current financial situation it is felt that this scheme offers considerable benefits to the authority, as well as to the individuals. Results from appointees over the last 3 years have been extremely positive with the management trainees making significant contributions to the initiatives and projects within which they have been placed. They have provided good value for money and have received positive commendations.
 24. There is no commitment given to the graduates that they will be found work within the council at the end of their placement with us; however, in the last year two of the trainees have achieved employment within our council. Current work being undertaken by those involved in the programme includes social care

transformation projects, Looked After Children and The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub.

Financial Implications

Work experience – no additional direct costs to the Authority.

Apprentices – as indicated the cost is £6210 per apprentice per annum. This will be financed through existing budgets.

Graduate trainees – the cost per trainee is £31,638 per annum which includes a fee to the LGA. The total cost is £94, 914 per annum for the 3 trainees which will be met from existing budgets.

Other Options Considered

Increasing the take up of apprenticeships is a key aspect of strategy both locally and nationally and benefits both young people and employers. The County Council has a key role to play in this. Improved access to work experience opportunities can further support young people in gaining valuable experience and enhancing employability.

The Council participated in the national graduate development programme for two consecutive years, appointing trainees in 2010 and 2011. In 2012 the Council did not recruit trainees and paused its involvement to review the benefits of the scheme. The review found that the programme offered the Council the opportunity to recruit and develop possible future managers who would be One Council ambassadors with experience of working across the organisation which offered them valuable insight and understanding and a method of providing a degree of independent challenge in a range of areas.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

The benefits to the Council are outlined in the report.

In summary, the apprenticeship scheme is a good opportunity for young people to gain valuable work experience, could potentially contribute to improving the age profile of the workforce with the associated benefits this brings and is a key plank in the developing Youth Employment and Employability Strategy.

The national graduate development programme is the leading management development programme for local government. The Council will have the benefit of additional independent support to key areas of activity in a cost effective way which will help the Authority plan for the future.

Statutory and Policy Implications

This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and those using the service. Where such implications are material, they have been described in the text of the report. Consultation with staff and unions has been undertaken as part of the preparation of this report and the proposals within it.

RECOMMENDATION/S

It is recommended that:

- a) The County Council continues to offer work experience opportunities to young people across the Council and that a corporate overview of this activity is provided.
- b) The County Council continues to operate an apprenticeship scheme and extends this as outlined in the report.
- c) The County Council participate in the national graduate development programme as outlined in the report.

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Human Resources Comments (CD 11/05/12)

The personnel issues are identified within the report with the final recruitment stage following normal corporate processes.

The trades unions have received a copy of the draft report and been consulted on the proposals.

Constitutional Comments (NAB 11/05/12)

The Personnel Committee has authority to approve the recommendation set out in this report.

Financial Comments (MB 08/05/12)

The financial implications are set out in the report.

Background Papers

None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All

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