

SKILLS AND TRAINING REVIEW – ROUND UP

The excerpts below give a historic record of discussions leading up to the meeting of a Scrutiny Working Group on 30 July 2013.

SKILLS PROVISION (From 4 February 2013 Minutes)

Members received a report that set the scene prior to the meeting of 25 March on the subject of Skills Provision following reports that local businesses were finding it difficult to recruit staff with suitable skills. Some had reported that many applicants lacked even the basic literacy skills.

To determine the exact position it was proposed to conduct a review that encompassed the skills needs of Aylesbury businesses whilst scrutinising the level of education, training and skills that were available through local education facilities and training organisations with the overall aim to understand the biggest barriers to future employment growth.

The format of the meeting was to cover the following issues:-

- Current skills trends and issues as applied to Buckinghamshire economy
- What are biggest barriers to growth of Buckinghamshire employers?
- What are providers/trainers currently doing to address any of the issues and how could we do better?
- What are providers doing to up skill the workforce which will lead to further job creation?
- What are the immediate to medium term opportunities and challenges?
- Where might we work alone or across LEP boundaries with others and why?
- What could be done differently?
- What do we do next and what will be achieved in the short term?

Members considered the above proposals and were supportive with the inclusion of the following:-

- There would need to be a company in attendance that was currently experiencing recruitment problems
- Consideration to be given to expanding the scrutiny to include basic education provision
- The attendance of BCC's Cabinet Member responsible for Education
- Information on the National Apprentice Association should be included
- The meeting must establish the facts, proposals to remedy the situation would follow at the next meeting

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted
2. That the comments of Members, as shown above, be considered as part of the scoping requirements for the next meeting.

BUSINESS SKILLS AND TRAINING REVIEW. (From 25 March 2013 Minutes)

Following on from the meeting on 4 February 2013, Members received a report that set out the current position on the subject of Skills Provision following reports that local businesses were finding it difficult to recruit staff with suitable skills or training.

To determine the exact position it had been proposed to conduct a review that encompassed the skills needs of Aylesbury Vale businesses whilst scrutinising the level of education, training and skills that were available through local education facilities and training organisations with the overall aim to understand the biggest barriers to future employment growth.

To enable Members to fully appraise the situation the following people attended to give presentations which clarified the present situation within each of their respective organisations:-

Heather Dean – Bucks Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (BTVLEP)

Jane Mason – Bucks Business First (BBF)

Christopher Edwards – ARLA

Tim Keighley – Aylesbury College

Bev Flanagan – University Technical Centre (UTC)

Ian Harper – Aylesbury Training Group (ATG)

- a)** The BTVLEP, working in partnership with BBF, explained that a skills group had been formed to analyse the evidence received from researching 700 employers. Various skills gaps and the need to gather more information had been identified.

Phase 2 of work had been agreed as,

- Consultation with specific employment sectors: learning networks
- ‘Skills and Recruitment’ portal in development
- Opportunities for local employers to provide work experience
- Improve the supply chain of suitably skilled people for specific sectors
- Opportunities for local employers to work with graduates inside and outside the county

The short term aim was to establish a “1 stop shop” as a single point of contact for employers looking for skills supply.

Long term the aims were to promote Apprenticeships, enhance work experience opportunities and to improve graduate retention in Bucks.

- b)** Similarly, BBF had collaborated to research on a skills study. An aging workforce had been identified which made raising the awareness of the work possibilities, via training and apprenticeships, open to young potential workers, most important. A major consideration would be changing the mind-set of young people to encourage them into engineering related jobs via apprenticeships.

Events aimed at raising work readiness were planned via a “Work Wise Week”, promotion of work experience and establishment of a recruitment and skills portal.

Grants up to £4,000 had also been put in place for employers that recruited an apprentice.

- c)** The presentation from ARLA showed the frustration suffered by a major employer in trying to recruit educated people that had been trained to a reasonable standard.

Criticism was placed on the present education system that targeted scholars for university but placed no priority on the education of those that either were not capable of obtaining the requirements of university or wanted to obtain more “hands on” skills to work in engineering or associated trades.

In the short term ARLA required people with key skills in engineering disciplines and dairy competence. Engineers had been impossible to find in the Aylesbury Vale area.

In order that their new venture opened on time, with staff that had the basic skills required for the dairy industry, ARLA had instigated their own operational plan whereby potential workers would be given the required skills to a basic level of competence.

Also, in partnership with Aylesbury College and Aylesbury Training Group, ARLA would be putting in place a series of three month training sessions and had introduced the Eden Engineering Apprenticeship scheme. Eden Engineering is a ground-breaking apprenticeship driven by the whole dairy industry to provide an Advanced Apprenticeship for maintenance technicians and engineers with the aim of producing world class staff for tomorrow's dairy industry. Bids for funding had been placed with Central Government.

- d) Aylesbury College was the number one provider of apprenticeships in Buckinghamshire in partnership with business to develop skills and to build and grow the workforce. After approaches from Taylor Wimpey and ARLA, partnerships had been formed to put in place specific training schemes that would produce young workers with the dedicated skills required.
- e) UTC was a new venture, built within the grounds of the Aylesbury College that would take students at 14 – 16 years old. Training was technically focused and shaped by employers to meet their specific needs. Specialisation of this nature gave students a very high employability within their technical environment.

Major employers in the construction and ICT industries had approached UTC with their specific needs and training was being tailored to satisfy those shortcomings.

- f) ATG was a 22,000 sq. ft. training facility specialising in Levels 2 – 4, advanced apprenticeships, work experience and young apprenticeships (Diplomas). One of its speciality courses was to train cycle engineers. It considered itself to be an independent employment agency.

Members expressed a general disappointment and concern that there was such a wide disconnect between education and employment and welcomed any initiative that would redress the balance whilst recognising that training organisations should not shoulder all the blame as funding issues had often dictated which training they were able to offer. However, there were a number of issues concerning which Members expressed a view on or commented generally, including the following:-

- Members expressed an interest in knowing more about what can be done to tackle the 30% of young people that had no interest in participating in any training and what schools could do, at a lower level to encourage participation.
- It had been reported that Buckinghamshire had a record of only retaining one in five of the graduates that passed through the counties universities. Members were interested to know if this had been investigated and if it had what the reasons were.
- Schools that pushed pupils towards university rather than promoting an equal route towards NVQ training were producing a lot students that graduated with a degree in a diverse subject that did little to enhance their work ready skills or attractiveness to potential employers. Members were of the opinion that Bucks County Council Education should be asked to give their opinions/reasons as to why the education system was working in this way.
- Schools and employers should also be encouraged to spread the message to parents that young people can benefit from NVQ/Diploma or apprenticeship training.

- Availability of apprenticeships needed to be made more accessible and better exposure given to encourage young people to take up the training being offered. Although the hourly rate of £2.65 per hour for an apprentice was recognised as a major obstacle to achieving progress.
- Some Members advocated that AVDC should fund a number of apprentice placements and that AVDC should also compel its suppliers to take on apprentices.

RESOLVED –

1. That the disconnect between education and employment be recognised.
2. That Bucks County Council Education be asked to explain the workings of an education system that did not produce young people that had the necessary work readiness skills and had not been encouraged to participate in training by raising awareness of the training on offer to pupils.
3. That the education system better involve parents to further raise awareness.
4. That AVDC continued to work in partnership with organisations that were likeminded to encourage a change in mind-set so that, in the near future, employers were able to take advantage of a ready supply of young, potential engineers that already possessed a basic level of training and were mindful of progression.

BUSINESS SKILLS AND TRAINING REVIEW. (From 4 June 2013 Minutes)

Following the meeting on 25 March 2013 the Chairman had sent a letter to the Buckinghamshire County Council Cabinet Member for Education and Skills (Councillor Mike Appleyard) inviting him to address the Committee on the issues identified by businesses.

At that meeting it had become evident that businesses felt that some school leavers were not suitably “work ready” and that some also lacked basic skills. Members also expressed an interest on knowing more about what could be done to tackle the 30% of young people that had no interest in participating in training, why some schools pushed pupils towards university rather than promoting alternative and equal routes through NVQ training or alternatives, and why schools and employers were not encouraged to spread the message to parents that there were other qualifications that young people could benefit from.

Members had expressed a general disappointment and concern that there was such a wide disconnect between education and employment and asked the County Councillor to explain the workings of an education system that did not produce young people that had the necessary work readiness skills and had not been encouraged to participate in training by raising awareness of the training on offer to pupils.

Councillor Appleyard began by stating that there had been a general focus on an age group up to 18 years when pupils were then expected to leave school to a job or continue in training. The majority of this focus had been on those 70% of pupils in the 5A* to C grades which were destined to go to university. Little focus had been placed on encouraging lower grade pupils to obtain any form of alternative training although schools were beginning to realise that they should be asking pupils “what job and training do you want?” as an alternative to “what university do you want?”

A new initiative to encourage pupils to obtain a Duke of Edinburgh award had recently been put to schools but had, in the main, been taken up by Grammar

Schools with very little participation in Upper Schools. It had been now been recognised that there were particular difficulties towards these schemes in the rural areas due to isolation and travel problems and the lack of funding for social groups such as youth clubs or scout groups.

One thriving example of social groups was given as the Sure Start Centres, set up to engage families that needed the most help. Unfortunately most were now frequented by “middle class” families, in effect, restricting the usage away from the original concept. Furthermore, Bucks County Council had now realised that professional staff were required to run the centres so had started to transfer the running of some of the urban centres to Barnardos.

There were also moves to try and engage with parents of pre-school children to try and make the parents more aware of the need to impart social skills to their children.

Councillor Appleyard refuted the reported statistics that 30% of pupils did not participate in some form of training as BCC statistics showed that there were only 2% of pupils in the 16 – 24 year old bracket that were not either employed or in training.

Members were of the opinion that there was more that could be done to achieve the literacy skills required by business and industry. As a result it was

RESOLVED:-

That a group of Committee Members, consisting of Councillors Lambert, Monger, Mordue, Strachan, Stuchbury and led by Miss Lewis, form a task group to discuss the most appropriate way forward that could be recommended to the AVDC Cabinet Member for Economic Development and to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills at Bucks County Council.

The results of the Group’s discussions to be brought back to the Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee at their meeting of 3 September 2013 for further debate.