



Fire and Rescue Service Apprenticeships – update 10 April 2018

The Fire and Rescue Service is embracing the government reform agenda on apprenticeships to continue to upskill its workforce; to improve diversity; and ensure it is best placed to continue to attract and retain talent for the future. The apprenticeships agenda is a positive opportunity to support delivery of the key elements of the FRS People Strategy 2017 to 2022.

The main challenges facing the sector

Overall, Year 1 of the apprenticeships reform agenda 2017-18 has delivered a significant number of new start apprenticeships across the FRS. The FRS has faced a series of challenges which has impacted on the full delivery of national and individual services' apprenticeships plans. With collaborative working across the FRS, with Police, Home Office and partner agencies such as National Apprenticeships Service (NAS), the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) and the Apprenticeships Diversity Champions Network (ADCN) some challenges have been resolved and others continue. Currently, the main challenges are: -

Training provision

Current limitations on options to deliver trailblazer standards, particularly sector-specific ones such as firefighting, is a significant barrier to the FRS optimising the significant contribution it can make to apprenticeships. The initial FRS plans assumed that the Register of Apprenticeships Training Providers (RoATP) would be opened quarterly. Approximately 40 per cent of FRSs expressed interest in applying. The RoATP did open Sept/October 2017 at short notice and, even with the excellent support of the NAS Head of Large Employers in arranging short notice workshops, only a smaller number were in a position to submit RoATP applications.

It is understood, but yet to be confirmed, that it could be September 2018 before the RoATP opens again. Clarity on the position would be helpful, as would consideration of opening earlier - which could, if necessary, be limited to sectors such as Fire and Rescue for which there are a very limited number of external suppliers who offer Fire Fighter training. There are many providers who offer management and general apprenticeships. With lengthy procurement tendering processes, if the RoATP doesn't open for another 6 months, FRSs may have to recruit operational staff using non-apprenticeship routes only.

Workforce Diversity

Improving the diversity of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) workforce remains a key challenge. However, the FRS apprenticeships programme and the fire fighter predicted retirement profile over the next three years provides opportunity to promote diversity and demonstrate continual improvement on the current position. The challenge is to ensure appropriate diverse community education of what careers FRSs can offer, supported by specific candidate attraction processes which are in place.

Options for FRSs with a high proportion of On Call (part time) Firefighters

Some FRSs employ a high proportion of On Call (part time) fire fighters where the FRS is not the primary employer. Whilst the guidance on part time apprenticeships allows for some to embark on apprenticeships over a longer time period, for many the extended time period would be unrealistic. The impact on these services includes difficulties in achieving the targets, and reduced scope to optimise levy investment to upskill the workforce.

Funding and resourcing

The FRS has accepted lower than required funding bands for the Fire Fighter and Business Fire Safety Advisor trailblazer standards, so that standards are in place for the start of the 2018-19 FRS financial year and the start of Year 2 of the apprentice levy year. The challenge is to do everything as reasonably as possible through collaborative working, joint procurement, and finding ways to increase the numbers of FRSs on the RoATP register, as referred to earlier.

The funding band issues have elongated the time taken to develop trailblazer standards, which has impacted on operational apprenticeship new starts in 2017-18. With the withdrawal of the Fire Fighter apprenticeship framework on 1 October 2017, the FRSs were left with no option but to recruit fire fighter apprenticeships for five months of the year until March 2018.

Apprenticeships trailblazer standards development rely on significant FRS resources to deliver. This has been challenging throughout 2017-18 and what has been achieved to date is commendable, despite delays at most stages of the process. FRS workforce planning and organisational needs require new sector-specific apprenticeships standards as described in the trailblazer development update section of this update). External resources were approved to project manage each trailblazer development, with all FRSs contributing.

Whilst these challenges are described individually; there are interdependencies which amplify the overall impact on FRS apprenticeships delivery to date.

Actions being taken by departments directly and other organisations on your patch (and relevant stakeholders) to overcome these challenges and meet the target

Resolving the challenges outlined earlier to enable implementation of the Year 2 programme (2018-19) is critical to the success of the FRS apprenticeships programme. Whilst driven by organisational requirements, not simply levy, it is important that FRSs are able to draw down the levy to meet their needs this year to invest before they start to lose it after two years.

The main actions to resolve challenges and pursue opportunities are: -

i) Ensuring FRSs have options for training provision soonest

- Collaborative procurement tender process has commenced
- NFCC Workforce Committee is setting up an Apprenticeships Board from late April 2018 and actions will be agreed to facilitate this process
- Determine possibilities to open RoATP register before September 2018

ii) Workforce Diversity

- Home Office are supporting, for example, the promoting of careers in the FRS, community education and materials for candidate attraction
- NAS arranged Joint Police /Fire Widening Participation apprenticeships event, 5 March 2018, during National Apprenticeships Week has already increased networking and collaboration opportunities and will continue
- Membership of the Apprenticeships Diversity Champions Network – early days to increase knowledge and share learning
- NFCC Workforce Committee Equalities Group – supporting apprenticeships diversity agenda
- LGA Inclusive Group has set improvement strategies, some of which relate to apprenticeships

These support mechanisms will be prioritised as part of the 2018 19 plan.

iii) On Call Fire Fighter/Part time apprenticeships

- NFCC National On Call Group is reviewing current employment models, and outcomes of this work may help with this challenge
- In-depth local analysis planned for Summer 2018 with one FRS to determine barriers and potential ways forward to what is a 'not one size fits all' issue
- Discussions planned initially with NAS to determine if there is any potential to adapt the guidelines for specific cases such as On Call FFs
- Second half 2018-19 - one FRS to scope a pilot with primary employers to determine possibilities.

iv) Funding and Resourcing

- Each FRS to be asked to monitor spend on Fire Fighter and Business Fire Safety Advisor trailblazer apprenticeships
- Review learns from trailblazer development to date with Employer leads and relevant agencies, and build into live and future developments
- NFCC have set up Central Programme Office to support major projects - Apprenticeships is included

Specific actions to support organisations to achieve the target

- Continue to work with NAS to identify and progress a range of actions which fit with FRS plans. These include events, workshops, training and specific guidance and communications to share across the FRS
- NFCC Workforce Committee has set up an Apprenticeships Board to reinforce profile, and to optimise resources to best support FRSs deliver their plans
- Continue to collaborate with Police, Ambulance and Health to deliver joint trailblazers and seek opportunities
- Workshops on specific topics
- Joint procurement
- Developing career pathways based on the FRS leadership framework, which is currently being finalised. The career pathway includes apprenticeship levels.
- Ongoing development of sector-specific trailblazers, e.g. Fire Engineering pathway, following identification of difficulties to attract and retain skills in this high profile and important areas.

The current position on the development of standards (and frameworks) that will help you achieve this target, including who is developing them, latest status, expected completion and projected volumes (in collaboration with Institute for Apprenticeships)

- Firefighter (Level 3) standard approved for use – end February 2018
- Business Fire Safety Advisor (Level 3) approved for use – early March 2018
- Emergency Contact Handler (Police/Fire/ Ambulance/Health) approved and funding band now approved.
- Community Safety Advisor (Level 3) – currently scheduled for completion is autumn 2018 – assumes no delays as per earlier trailblazers. NB: The Community Safety Advisor existing framework was scheduled for removal October 2018. However, it would be very helpful to the FRS if this could wait until the new trailblazer standard is ready, so as not to have a gap.
- Fire Engineering/Fire Safety – a Level 4 Fire Inspector/Auditor standard is under development with a Level 6 Fire Engineer currently at the launch stage (late April 2018). With the Level 3 Business Fire Safety Advisor recently approved, the aim is to build a career pathway.
- The Leadership and Management pathway is at the design stage to incorporate the FRS Leadership framework and include management apprenticeships levels 3 to 7. These apprenticeships standards are already in place. The group are scoping out this work and expect to have an outline for autumn 2018.
- The FRS is utilising a range of non-sector specific apprenticeship standards to upskill the workforce and meet its targets. These include management, business administration and project management.

Overview and analysis of latest MI from the Apprenticeship Service, including implications for future programme of work (e.g. How do your plans change? How are you using data to inform activity?)

The FRS are involved in piloting and testing reporting systems with the Digital Apprenticeships Service and continue to work with NAS to ensure reporting and management information provision systems minimise administration for all agencies.

Beyond the focus on achieving the target, please also include other strategic objectives, and planned actions and measures to achieve them (e.g. quality, social mobility)

As per the previous update; in addition to achieving the targets of over 4000 new start apprenticeships in England's 45 FRSs over 4 years, the FRS has identified related strategic objectives for which the apprenticeships programme supports delivery. The main strategic objectives are: -

- Improve workforce diversity across the Fire and Rescue Service
- Refresh the workforce using apprenticeships as part of a blended approach to resourcing, against a national position of up to one third of fire fighters (which make up 80 per cent of the workforces) set to retire in the next 3 to 5 years.
- Develop or revise career pathways which are fit for purpose to meet challenges of FRS service diversification, which include attracting and retaining talent.
- Optimise effective and efficient use of resources – finances, procurement, policy development
- Building the Fire and Rescue Service Brand to promote Fire/Emergency Services
- Supporting ongoing professionalisation of the FRS as the Professional Standards Body is developed
- Promoting and evidencing collaborative working, including the 'duty to collaborate'
- Align youth engagement, cadet and apprenticeships strategies, and optimise the future technical skills development programmes within the Protective Services Employer Group to attract and upskill talent.

Quantitative breakdown of the target, including projections over the coming years as well as progress to date and expected trajectory. We understand that you have limited levers and visibility. However, we would like to see a systematic attempt to understand the scale of the challenge, and what progress we can realistically expect to see as the programme develops (i.e. organisations adjust to the levy and new standards come on stream).

Achievements of the apprenticeships targets across the FRS will, in the main, be 'back loaded' due to Year 1 having to set up sector specific trailblazer standards, and the challenges identified earlier.

For the 45 FRSs in England 40,180 staff (FTE) were employed by FRSs on 31 March 2017. This was a five per cent decrease compared with the previous year (42,347 in 2016). Of this total, 33,049 staff (FTE) were employed as firefighters on 31 March 2017.

The outline plans from FRSs for 2018-19, on updates received to date, indicate that achieving the aggregated target of 1000 for the year could be exceeded, and could go some way to offsetting the shortfall for the 2017-18 year. This assumes that the key challenges regarding training provision, etc., are resolved.

For 2017-18 the actual position is yet to be confirmed. However, based on actuals received to date, 360 are reported which will, of course, increase as the outstanding returns are received throughout April 2018.

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