

The Background and Current Position

In July 2015 the Authority approved its apprenticeship programme with its first cohort of Firefighter Apprentices starting in 2016. Apprentice recruitment is now fully embedded as part of the Authority's workforce and succession planning process and contributes to the delivery of the Authority's People Strategy, by building capacity and capabilities agenda, supporting ongoing professionalisation of the Service and continuing to raise standards.

The Authority has been working hard to evolve and transform its apprenticeship proposition. As an organisation the Authority has moved away from the previous Apprenticeship Training Agency (ATA) delivery option and now directly employs all apprentices and appoints a training provider to deliver the skills and knowledge element, alongside workplace assessing and coaching.

In addition to this, the Authority has demonstrated its commitment to apprenticeships by investing in and appointing a dedicated Employee Development Officer to provide the necessary learning support to all its apprentices. The Employee Development Officer supports all staff within the Authority who are developing themselves whether this be through an apprenticeship, or an internal development programme linked to promotion.

With current and previous apprentices now embedded across support staff and operational roles, the Authority is proud of its progress in employing new apprentices and upskilling existing employees.

Over the last 5 years, our staff have been enrolled on a wide range of apprenticeships:

- Firefighter – level 3
- Business Administration – level 3 & 4
- ICT Helpdesk – level 3
- Digital Marketing – level 3
- Vehicle Technician – level 3
- Cyber Security Technologist – level 4
- Assistant Accountant – level 3
- Human Resources level 3 & 5
- Information Communication Technology – level 3
- Coaching Professional – level 5
- Marketing Manager – level 6
- Operations / Department Manager – level 5
- Senior Leaders Masters Degree – Level 7
- Fire Safety – Level 6

In January 2022, a paper was presented to the Strategic Management Board, analysing the delivery options available for the Authority's Firefighter apprenticeship programme.

Appendix 1

The recommended option was the continuation of the acquisition training (Firefighter Delivery Programme – FFDP) to be delivered externally by a training provider (Capita) at the Fire Service College (FSC). This allows the Authority to work in partnership with a registered Training Provider to deliver the Firefighter apprenticeship programme. The Training Provider conducts learner reviews and monitors the progress of the apprentice to provide feedback and training to support the apprentice with off-the-job learning and the knowledge elements of the programme. The Training Provider holds the apprenticeship delivery contract, which is managed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

The acquisition training is funded through the apprenticeship levy utilising the full funding band of £14,000 and there is a top up fee of £3,900 per learner, which the Authority pays directly to the Training Provider (costed based on current provision by FSC).

The recommended option is now fully embedded for delivery of the Authority's Firefighter apprenticeship programme.

Department for Education Apprenticeship Reform Programme

In 2015 the Government set a national target of generating 3 million high quality apprenticeship starts in England and the Authority has been a leading force in promoting apprenticeships across the sector nationally and within the workplace.

The Apprenticeships Reform Programme was established in May 2015 and was scheduled to be delivered by the end of the financial year 2020/21 and was extended for a further year, beginning with 1 April 2021 and ending with 31 March 2022.

As part of the Government's apprenticeships Reform agenda, a public sector target was introduced whereby organisations in England must meet a minimum of 2.3% apprenticeship new starts each year, based on employee headcount.

To help ensure the public sector led the way in apprenticeship delivery, large public sector organisations were required to report against the public sector apprenticeship target.

For the reporting periods ending on 31 March 2021, the Overview and Audit Committee received annual reports on how the Authority was performing against the public sector target; and received a draft annual return for approval before being published on the Authority's website.

The annual reporting met and exceeded the requirements of the statutory guidance. The Authority is no longer required to provide an annual return on these figures.

The figures for the last 5 years are provided below.

Financial Year	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023*
New Apprentice Starts	14	42	4	21	16	19
% New Apprentice Starts of Establishment	3.1%	9.5%	0.9%**	4.4%	3.4%	3.8%

* 2022-2023 numbers are subject to change with further planned recruitment campaigns for Firefighter apprentices and a Learning & Development Administrator apprentice in 2023. Although it is no longer a requirement, this showcases that the Authority has already exceeded the target of 2.3% apprentice starts for this period.

** During 2019-2020 reporting period, we recruited Firefighter apprentices in March 2019 and April 2021 and therefore fell outside of the reporting cut off dates.

The Apprenticeship Levy

The Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in April 2017 for all employers that have an annual PAYE bill of £3 million per annum and employ over 250 staff. The employer's payment is set at 0.5% of their annual payroll and includes a £14,000 annual allowance. The Government tops up The Authority's contributions by 10% making a total current allowance of approximately £78,241 (December 2022).

Summary of Levy payments made by the Authority:

Levy Payments	£ (Includes 10% Top Up)
2022/23	-44,613*
2021/22	-77,107
2020/21	-74,259
2019/20	-64,419
2018/19	-64,725
2017/18	-58,756
Total	-383,879

* Payments made up to November 2022

The Authority draws down on this levy for those employees who are currently undertaking apprenticeships to assist with their own development and to also enhance the skills within the organisation.

Breakdown of Levy investment by apprentice type:

Apprenticeship	£
Firefighter	275,826
Other Apprentices	131,481
Total	407,307

The Authority has fully invested the funds available through the levy - £383,879 - and has now entered into co-investment funding arrangements with the Government. This means that the Authority pays 5% towards the cost of apprenticeship training and the Government pays the remaining 95%.

The tables below, detail the amount the Levy has been topped up by, by both the Authority and the Government through the co-investment funding arrangement:

Authority Contributions	£
2022/23	-1,171
Total	-1,171

Government Contributions	£
2022/23	-22,254
Total	-22,254

Alternative Funding Options

Levy paying employers can transfer a percentage of their levy funds, which were declared for the previous tax year, to other employers. Employers receiving transferred funds will only be able to use them to pay for training and assessment for new apprenticeship starts.

The Organisational Development department are currently exploring other potential funding options, including utilising local businesses unused levy funds – as detailed above. The team have reached out to local colleges within Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, who we deliver our apprenticeship programmes through, as well as other Fire Services, to determine if this would be a viable option for the Authority.

Next Steps

The Authority continues to look for ways to effectively utilise and improve its apprenticeship programme. Whether that be through different delivery models, collaboration with other emergency services or local businesses, or options to increase the funding available to invest in apprenticeships for all staff.

The apprenticeship programme is fully embedded within the Authority's culture and ways of working. It enables new starters and enhances the Authority's strategy for the retention and upskilling of existing staff.