

Helping people through change:

One-year plan - Skills for employment in York

Foreword

City of York Council recognises the role of skills for employment in helping residents and businesses to fully experience the benefits of York's enterprising, resilient and inclusive city.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted individuals and businesses, with an increased need to support people of all ages into work, to progress or change careers, and to ensure that businesses can access the skills and talent they need to diversify or grow.

This plan has been developed in partnership and sets out how, over the next 12 months, we will continue to *help people through change*, respond to the impact of the pandemic on skills and employment and build the foundations upon which York's 10-year Skills and Employment Strategy will be delivered.

Key to this is York's *Skills and Employment Board* - a city-wide partnership approach to addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities of the next 2-10 years including enabling businesses to influence curriculum planning. Work is already underway and the 10-year strategy will be published later in 2021.

[Quote and Picture - Lee Probert]

[Quote and Picture - Cllr Waller]

York's Skills and Employment Board is a partnership body, bringing together education and skills providers, local employers and representatives, employee representatives, the Local Enterprise Partnership and the City Council.

Through its work, the Board seeks to facilitate a deep and long lasting partnership between skills providers, employers and partners to support the development of key sectors in the York economy and enable York residents to get well-paid and rewarding work.

One-year plan to address immediate Post COVID-19 Impact

Not all residents and businesses have been affected by the pandemic in the same way. This plan builds on the existing work of the Board, council and partners to support those with immediate skills and retraining needs.

The people and businesses that make up some of York's largest employment sectors are feeling the economic impact, resulting from multiple lockdowns, more than others. The loss of customer-facing activities in non-grocery retail, creative arts, tourism and hospitality sectors has led to a significant reduction in the number of employees needed to work during this time.

Conversely, as the health and social care sector continues to respond to the public-health impact of COVID-19, we have seen a large increase in the number of job adverts for both full and part-time roles. The construction industry is also recruiting locally and offering immediate starts.

Other sectors such as financial services, IT and digital, seen as important and growing sectors for the city, have been particularly resilient and in some cases have seen increased demand related to e-commerce and digital technologies.

High numbers of part time, low paid workers make up our most economically impacted sectors, with a high proportion of roles being fulfilled by young people and women. The Government's Job Retention Scheme is helping to keep many workers employed in the retail, creative arts, tourism and hospitality sectors but this is not the case for everyone. There has been an increase in local job losses and it's not yet clear what the impact will be on employment in these sectors in the coming months.

At the same time, the pandemic is continuing to disrupt the education of and transition to employment for young people.

As York's employment landscape changes it is essential that individuals who are entering the workforce or who have been displaced from one sector are able to identify and gain the skills needed to enter a different sector or start their own business.

This one year plan aims to help address the most immediate impacts of COVID-19 on the economy and the workforce by developing a series of training and education interventions aimed at those most affected.

Shared commitments

- **York works – skills support for individuals**
Support those entering, re-entering or displaced from the workforce to re-train or upskill and connect them with good jobs in sustainable and growth sectors.
- **Empowered employers – skills support for businesses**
Support businesses of all sizes to access national, regional and local skills provision to help them plan, diversify and grow.
- **Pioneering provision – productive partnerships**
Work in partnership to make the most of national, regional and local initiatives and adapt local skills provision in response to emerging needs.
- **Education to employment and self-employment – York's pipeline**
Support positive progressions for all by preparing those transitioning from education or re-entering the world of work for a culture of lifelong learning and entrepreneurship.

Underpinning enabler

- **York shares - communicating the offer**
Develop a coherent and effective marketing and communications strategy to ensure information advice and guidance is provided at the point of need in a timely and effective way.

Pages 8 to 11 provide more detail about these commitments and importantly, how we will work together over the next 12 months to deliver them.

How York is changing – the economic context

The scale of the economic impact of the pandemic is not yet fully understood but its effect on the labour market and unemployment is significant. Redundancy rates have increased, there are fewer full time job vacancies available and it is predicted that unemployment rates will increase further and remain above pre-COVID-19 levels until 2024.

The Job Centre Plus claimant count shows the largest increase in our city for at least 35 years – around 5,000 in April 2019 (the first full month following lockdown) compared to 1,800 pre-pandemic. In the months that followed, this number has remained stable, suggesting Government initiatives such as the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) and Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), local distribution of grant funding and the resilience of particular sectors in the city have helped to keep more local people employed.

However, we know that not everyone who is out of work is eligible to claim unemployment benefits and data from the Government’s Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), in April 2020 indicated there were 14,000 fewer workers in York than before the pandemic - with significant reductions in the number of full-time male and part-time female workers. These figures account for both York residents and those who travel to York for work.

Latest figures (January 2021) for the JRS and SEISS show a total of 11,500 people furloughed by York employers and a further 4,700 claiming self-employed support at the end of December 2020. The furlough figures have dropped substantially from the 24,000 reported in June 2020 and the self-employed figures have fallen slightly from 6,500. Although local figures have not yet been updated, ONS suggests that furloughing has increased again in the first quarter of 2021 and is now back at levels seen in July 2020, which would mean perhaps 20,000 in York on furlough.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) is set to continue until September 2021, and it’s likely that those furloughed on the scheme remain at high risk of losing their jobs in the coming months. The peak of unemployment is expected in summer/autumn 2021 and current estimates for York suggest a potential rise in the benefit claimant count to around 10,000 at that time.

However, in counterbalance to the picture outlined above, in many ways York has come through the early economic challenges of the pandemic in a comparatively strong position. Unemployment has risen and some businesses have closed, particularly in high-street retail and hospitality chains but nationally, York is the UK city with the lowest percentage increase in unemployment.

Infographic of economic statistics

The ‘York Works’ commitment in this plan sets out how we will continue to support affected workers, whether they are able to claim benefits or not.

How York is changing – the impact on Post 16 education and training

This plan focuses on post 16 education and training but we recognise that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the whole education and skills sector including early years education.

Post 16 Education

As many of us know first-hand, one of the most significant changes to Post 16 education has been the switch to remote learning delivered through online and blended learning. Educators have pulled out all the stops to ensure that young people can continue with their education despite the challenges of the pandemic. This radical change has meant that young people are learning in the home environment bringing advantages for some, but severe challenges for others.

For some, this new way of learning has had great benefits as it offers flexibility, opportunities for self-management of learning and can benefit mental health. However, for others these changes have had a significant negative impact on their engagement and progress. Some do not have the IT equipment or connectivity needed to access remote learning platforms, an issue that providers are trying to solve. Others have struggled with a lack of support and encouragement at home and an environment and space where they can easily engage with online learning.

The pandemic has also complicated the transition into the world of work or further and higher education pathways. Many young people have been unable to undergo work experience placements or visit their next education settings, placing increased importance on the role of quality careers education information, advice and guidance - linked the local labour market.

Apprenticeships

The pandemic has had a negative impact on the availability of apprenticeships nationally, with a key factor being the effect of lockdowns on organisations of all sizes. Rapid change, layers of uncertainty and financial pressures have dominated across all industry sectors and for many small and micro businesses their focus has been simply on survival. When times are tough, businesses focus less on training and more on core business which has a negative effect on apprenticeships.

In York, there were 27% fewer starts from August 2019-July 2020 when compared to the previous year. Key to this has been the dramatic reduction in new apprenticeship opportunities in the city's retail, hospitality and tourism sectors which, prior to the pandemic, had accounted for around 30% of advertised vacancies each year.

However, York's large employers in other sectors have continued to recruit apprentices, as have SMEs that have sustained or increased demand and this is most evident in pharmacy, dental, early years and care sector roles. It has become more common for recruitment and induction of apprentices to take place online, making digital skills, equipment and fast broadband speeds key to accessing opportunities.

As national lockdown restrictions begin to ease, it's important that employers are supported to make the most of the local talent pipeline and create apprenticeship roles that will help their business to recover and grow.

Higher Education

The impact on Higher Education has also been significant. The majority of courses have moved to being fully online for the majority of the previous 12 months and although universities have supported students in accessing the equipment and resources needed, these changes are disproportionately impacting students from lower income families.

In addition, it has been well documented that mental health issues amongst students have significantly increased since the start of COVID-19, in part due to the disruption of their studies and social isolation.

Alongside issues of access, students have also been exposed to greater financial insecurity due to the impact of COVID-19. Many students in York rely on part-time work in the retail and hospitality sectors to supplement their income during their time at university. With businesses in these sectors closing or scaling back their operations, part-time positions have been severely impacted resulting in financial hardship for some students.

Furthermore the opportunities for students to undertake work placements and internships have been reduced. This, along with an overall reduction in graduate jobs means that future graduates may be both less prepared for the world of work and have reduced opportunity to gain graduate level employment.

It is therefore important that Higher Education programmes are accessible by all, informed by businesses needs and provide the transferable skills, work experience and lifelong learning competencies that will be needed by graduates of the future.

Adult Learning

There is a strong offer of adult and community learning delivered by providers in the city and, just like mainstream schools and colleges, this has rapidly adapted to a remote-learning offer. Even some practical courses can be offered online using the right equipment although certain vocational or leisure courses cannot be offered without some physical component.

However, for people who have additional learning needs, low skills attainment and from disadvantaged backgrounds, remote learning may be more difficult to access and therefore disadvantage them further. It is clear that once the pandemic is over, there will be a need to return to face to face learning for many learners. In the short to medium term, there is still good online provision for basic skills needed for employment, such as English, maths, ICT and employability skills but face to face provision is still essential for some learners.

For people who are in work but on low incomes, the prospect of reskilling can be challenging for a number of reasons. Issues include lack of funding (either directly to pay for qualifications or for childcare), lack of confidence to embark on new training without clarity regarding what the benefits may be, and dealing with competing responsibilities that are more important than gaining new skills (e.g. paying the rent).

It's therefore important that information, advice and guidance can be accessed in community settings and helps people (at any age or with any level of experience) to understand the funded and flexible training that will help them progress in employment or self-employment.

Community Hubs

During the pandemic community hubs have been critical in delivering support to vulnerable people in the city. As we move into recovery, we will look to build on this extremely effective model to brigade voluntary and community organisations with other support mechanisms to reach residents, particularly those experiencing hardship.

Self-employment

In 2020 there was a rise in self-employment as people, displaced from other types of employment, opted to set up in business for themselves. Start-ups, given the right support to nurture talent and ambition, can be the growing SMEs of tomorrow. It is critical that people, of any age, embarking on self-employment or starting a business for the first time get the help they need, to maximise their chances of success in the longer term.

Developing “an enterprise for all” culture with the appropriate facilities, advice and training will be essential to ensure our new and existing start-ups not only survive but thrive and hopefully, in the long term, provide new jobs across the city.

The ‘education to employment and self-employment’ commitment in this plan sets out how we will support those young people who have had a disrupted experience of their formal education and support people of all ages to re-engage with education and training to develop the skills needed for the new world of work.

How York is changing – the new world of work

The full effect of the pandemic on business and the economy is not yet known, but we do know that many of the changes to our working lives will remain, for better or worse. What is clear is that the supply and demand for skills will be significantly impacted over the next few years. Some skills will see a spike in demand in the immediate future but will even out in years to come as the effects of the pandemic dissipate.

COVID-19 has accelerated trends that were evident to a lesser extent prior to the pandemic. The use of technology to enable safe, remote working in sectors that can accommodate it has become the norm rather than the exception. Business models have swiftly altered to offer accessible online access to goods and services, requiring new skills and resources to support the changes.

In April 2020 around 37% of adults in employment in our region were working from home as a result of the pandemic and data from businesses suggest that this trend is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. York has a comparatively high proportion of highly-skilled workers, in non-manual sectors, many of whom have worked from home since the first lockdown.

Whilst the benefits of remote working for businesses and individuals (cost savings, higher productivity and reduction in travel time) are becoming clear. These rapid changes inevitably have a knock on effect in terms of skills requirements both in the short and long term. Employees not only need the digital skills to utilise technology but leaders need to develop their management and communication skills to sustain performance and support mental wellbeing in remote teams.

Not all sectors are in decline and some have even seen a surge during the COVID-19 pandemic. Construction businesses, for example, have reported that after the first lockdown order books had returned to pre-COVID-19 levels. Currently, this sector can be considered buoyant in York and with large investment projects, such as York Central, in the pipeline, it looks set to grow further. Construction training provision in the city is high quality and offers a breadth of provision at a range of levels including apprenticeship provision. There is also a growing, responsive part-time offer that enables people mid-career to re-train or gain higher level skills in the sector.

As businesses have adapted, there has been high demand for entry level digital skills in all sectors right through to higher level, technical skills in the IT and digital sector, such as coding, programming and software engineering. Businesses providing tech services to help others to digitise or improve online working practices have also reported growth creating opportunities for people with the right skills. Strategic partnerships between businesses and education providers in the city are therefore vital in helping develop a pipeline of people with the skills needed to meet the increasing and evolving demands of this growth sector.

For adults in low skilled sectors which have been badly impacted by COVID-19 such as retail and hospitality, digital skills have become as important as maths and English to enable people to take on new roles or access jobs in new sectors. A challenge for the city is to ensure that people displaced from low skilled, and often low paid, sectors are supported to gain skills in sectors with job vacancies such as the care sector.

The top four occupations featured in job vacancies* in the last year are nurses, care givers, administrators and software developers. There are around 16,000 people employed in the health sector in York which is 14% of the entire workforce and is therefore incredibly important that the education providers in the city work in partnership to provide joined up provision pathways and raise awareness of opportunities in this sector. Provision must reflect that people may be entering the sector for the first time; some may be seeking full-time work, others part-time whilst those already within the sector might have distinct upskilling needs.

Businesses have told us that they value human skills such as resilience, adaptability and team work as much as the technical skills required in their sectors. This has been particularly apparent in dealing with COVID-19 when workers have had to deal with unparalleled change and ongoing personal and economic challenges. Employers have also become much more aware of the importance of mental health and are committed to their responsibilities to ensure mental wellbeing in the workplace as well as knowing how to support their employees in times of mental ill health.

The increased acceptance of flexible working and relaxation of the standard working week has been accelerated by COVID-19 as employers acknowledge that home working has not negatively impacted productivity, as they may have feared in the past. The benefits of decoupling physical proximity with work are having far reaching effects as business leaders and individuals explore the freedoms that it gives them.

The 'Empowered employers' commitment in this plan sets out how we will continue to support businesses of all sizes to access the skills and talent they need.

The world of work and education are both changing and we need new ways to ensure we have a workforce who can respond to change, and who can develop the skills and competencies that address the ever changing needs of business, through effective reskilling and upskilling programmes. Individual providers cannot do this in isolation and it is important that we develop sustainable but agile partnerships between local providers, employers and funders to develop employer informed innovative provision.

The 'pioneering provision' commitment in this plan sets out how we will continue to work together to align and adapt existing public-funded support; shape local implementation of new national initiatives and develop employer-informed skills and training packages .

How York is adapting – our skills and employment response

1. York works – skills support for individuals

Support those entering, re-entering or displaced from the workforce to re-train or upskill and connect them with good jobs in sustainable and growth sectors.

- Careers education, information, advice and guidance is available to people of all ages and reflects local labour market intelligence
- Support residents to access the equipment and digital skills they need to compete in the new world of work
- Support residents to access targeted skills packages and relevant funding to reskill and upskill
- Promote public-funded and private sector support for those who are unemployed, underemployed or facing redundancy ensuring that people new to unemployment gain modern job search skills, awareness of transferable skills, how to apply and be interviewed online etc.
- Support individuals back into employment who have been displaced from the sectors most affected by COVID-19 e.g. retail, tourism and hospitality
- A continued commitment to target and support those who are hardest to reach and may be further from the labour market as a result of the pandemic.

We will achieve this by

- Undertaking regular monitoring and analysis of labour market intelligence using data more intelligently to better understand people's destinations, supply and demand for labour in various sectors, identify gaps in training provision and ensure interventions to address gaps
- Working in partnership with local training and education providers to ensure there is a comprehensive directory of skills provision available for residents and business leaders that meets future skills needs
- Reviewing the current provision of funded Entry Level to Level 6+ training available in the city and developing initiatives to address the gaps and ensure clear progression routes for individuals
- Working in partnership to develop nationally-funded digital and technical bootcamps that meet local needs
- Ensuring a greater focus on training in communities where there are high numbers of low skilled residents and offering courses to help parents and carers develop their own skills while supporting their children's English and maths education
- Increasing the access to and building on the support available via the community hubs ensuring volunteers have the necessary skills to provide effective IAG
- Ensuring residents can access IT equipment to assist in retraining and gaining employment

2. Empowered employers – skills support for businesses

Support businesses of all sizes to access national, regional and local skills provision to help them plan, diversify and grow.

- Promote existing and future public-funded and private sector support to help businesses develop the skills of their employees.
- Make it easier for businesses to identify and access the skills and training they need
- Give businesses a voice to shape and inform future skills provision

- Support and engage with peer-to-peer business support mechanisms

We will achieve this by

- The establishment of York Skills and Employment Board with business representation to direct future skills needs and to explore and promote skills funding initiatives
- Supporting businesses to ensure they have access to the skilled workforce or training opportunities required to address technological and economic change prioritising those in the key growth sectors and those greatly affected by COVID-19
- Strengthening the business voice through strategic partnerships with education and training providers
- Supporting a growing number of businesses to develop skills plans and identify training needs, informing the curriculum to enable more employees to be supported to upskill
- Supporting local Apprenticeship Levy transfers in partnership with larger levy paying businesses, to encourage the take up of apprenticeships among SMEs

3. Pioneering provision – productive partnerships

Work in partnership to make the most of national, regional and local initiatives and adapt local skills provision in response to emerging needs.

- Align and, where possible, adapt existing provision to meet local needs
- Shape local implementation of new national initiatives
- Support the development of employer informed provision addressing new and innovative modes of delivery
- Embed a city-wide partnership approach to addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities of the next 2-10 years

We will achieve this by

- Supporting a growing number of businesses to develop skills plans and identify training needs, informing the curriculum to enable more employees to be supported to upskill (including digital needs).
- Working with businesses, Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and other training providers to improve the skills of both the existing workforce and the future labour market, ensuring a better matching of skills to business needs to sustain economic growth.
- Encouraging greater investment in higher skills development to meet skills gaps in key sector areas such as Health and Social Care, Creative and Digital and Bioscience
- Providing sector specific skills pathways and innovative programmes to support recruitment into growth sectors and prepare people for the jobs of the future
- Work with Higher York partners to assess the potential of new progression routes to attain “Undergraduate and Postgraduate Qualifications in Professional Practice” through the development of modularised provision with an initial focus on big data, green skills, bioscience, leadership, project management and digital heritage
- Coordinate adult and community learning providers to build entry level and lower level skills for those furthest away from the job market with clear progression routes to higher level skills provision across the city.
- Developing a 10-year skills and employment strategy which responds to the local labour and skills market and the Local Skills Improvement Plan (FE Whitepaper)

4. Education to employment and self-employment– York’s pipeline

Support positive progressions for all by preparing those transitioning from education or re-entering the world of work for a culture of lifelong learning and entrepreneurship.

- Support young people who have had a disrupted experience of their formal education to re-engage with education, employment and training
- Support sustainable relationships between local employers and providers to help businesses develop their future workforce including initiatives to take on graduates
- Promote lifelong education, training and career pathways to attract and retain talent in key sectors
- Promote entrepreneurship and the support available to people looking to start a business for the first time or scale up an existing business.

we will achieve this by

- Facilitating sustainable relationships between employers and providers to ensure the city has the skilled workforce to support capital projects such as York Central, the Guildhall redevelopment and BioYorkshire
- Providing sector specific skills pathways to support recruitment into growth sectors and prepare people for the jobs of the future including the creation of more pathways from intermediate to higher level apprenticeships
- Engaging with local businesses and partners to provide transferable skills sessions, skills appraisements, paid internships and virtual work experience opportunities for all ages. Increase businesses involved in offering work placements for T levels.
- Exploring a ‘buddy’ system of links between existing employees and individuals interested in moving to a new sector.
- Providing new start and business mentoring and support for business owners
- Supporting people looking to become self-employed through the development and promotion of relevant training and advice, developing a culture of “Enterprise for All”
- Upskilling of staff in community hubs so they can provide IAG and signposting to those looking for work and those becoming self-employed
- Proactively supporting the development of The York Accelerator, developing links with professional services firms who can provide support to individuals engaging with the accelerator.
- Implement initiatives aimed at increasing graduate start-ups spaces and incubator labs such as the Venture Creation Lab which will also act as a feeder into the York Accelerator.

5. York Shares - Communicating the Offer

Developing a coherent and effective marketing and communications strategy to ensure information advice and guidance is provided at the point of need in a timely and effective way.

Individuals

- Developing a comprehensive communication plan to ensure information on training and funding is accessible and relevant for those seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce and for those who wish to retrain or upskill
- Communicating to individuals without L1-L3 qualifications how they can access the necessary training and relevant funding streams
- Using city wide partners to signpost individuals to IAG resources

- Improving communication with businesses to help them assist employees facing redundancy.

Employers

- The development of shared business engagement resources with effective signposting between partners to ensure enquiries are triaged efficiently and referred to right provision.
- The establishment of the York Skills Hub which will inform and signpost people to available skills provision, initiatives and support.
- Raising awareness of business networks and support available for peer learning

Provision

- Raising awareness of local and national initiatives including Youth Hub, Digital Bootcamps, Kickstart and the Lifetime Skills Guarantee and other funded provision.
- Sharing analysis of labour market intelligence to support a gap analysis of training provision and progression in key sectors

Employment

- Developing effective communication channels to raise awareness of education and training opportunities to young people who have disengaged with formal education soft skills they have missed out on
- Co-ordinating and promoting the support available across the city for those aged 14+ at risk of disengaging from education, to raise aspirations and support those from disadvantaged groups to access employability skills and training.