

ESBC Apprenticeship reporting narrative 2019-20

Q: What actions have you taken this year to meet the target? How do these compare to the challenges experienced in the previous year?

A: Our approach to recruiting new apprentices has been to consider every vacancy as it arises. This has achieved success in achieving 5 brand new apprentice starts, which is an improvement on the previous year. We investigated the potential of two new apprentice qualifications with new providers and tailored vacancies to accommodate these new apprenticeships i.e. Construction Technical Professional Building Consultancy Level 3 (Building Consultancy); and Revenues, Welfare & Benefits Practitioner Level 4 (Revenues, Benefits & Customer Contacts). This contributed to us achieving our annual target number of apprentices for this particular year (although not the cumulative target).

Q: What challenges have you faced this year in your efforts to meet the target? How do these compare to the challenges experienced in the previous year?

A: We have an ongoing commitment to apprentices already in progress in year 2 of their apprenticeship, and also we were able to convert two existing employees into further apprenticeships during this particular year, to meet the target. The availability of suitable courses is a continued challenge, and this is compounded by the disappearance of the Business Administration Level 2 for the future.

The profile of our workforce contains a proportion of part time workers. At 31st March 2019 our headcount was 270, which is 244 FTE. If the target were to be based on FTE then we would fall outside the public sector target requirement. We have the challenge of a significantly diminished workforce since 2018/19 and a carried forward balance of an unfulfilled apprentice target from 2017/18 and 2018/19, coupled with the availability of suitable apprentice recruitment opportunities. All vacancies that were potentially suitable for apprentices were recruited as such. A significant proportion of our vacancies were not suitable for new apprenticeships due to them being part time, 18.42% of vacancies arising were posts of less than 30 hours per week. A further 7.9% of vacancies were temporary for less than 12 month duration. The remaining vacancies where an apprentice was not recruited were unsuitable for apprenticeships due to the nature of the job role either requiring: an already qualified professional (e.g. Environmental Health Officer, Building Control Officer, Senior Planner, Planning Manager, Principal Accountant), no apprenticeship standard in place (e.g. Community & Civil Enforcement Officer; Environmental Protection Officer) ; or manual work that does not require any qualification (e.g. 5x Refuse & Recycling Loaders & Mobile Toilet Cleaner) or lengthy training (e.g. 4 x HGV drivers).

Q: How are you planning to meet the target in the future? What will you continue to do or do differently? Do you have anything else you want to tell us? (Optional).

A: We will continue to review every vacancy as it arises, assuming that a number of new starts will arise from these during each year within our establishment, and the remaining new starts to be achieved via staff development as suitable standards arise. We have also made a commitment to further training and long term career development for some of our existing apprentices. These apprenticeships are of high quality, and for a duration of more than a year, unfortunately we are unable to count them except in year 1. At 31st March 2020, 3.70% of our workforce were apprentices, which is the highest number of apprentices we have had for many years. However

realistically it will be more difficult to meet in 2020/21 with the additional challenge presented during the early part of the year with the Covid-19 pandemic. This has resulted in fewer vacancies arising for recruitment and potential apprenticeship opportunities, alongside the total vacation of our office environment to homeworking; stifling the ability to properly train and support brand new apprentice starters in the workplace.