



Subject:	Employability and Skills – update and workplan
Date:	6 April 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to advise members of a range of activity undertaken in 2021/22 to support skills development, economic engagement and job outcomes for key target groups and to set out the proposed workplan for the 2022/23 financial year.
1.2	The work programme supports the inclusive growth ambitions of the Council by targeting interventions on key cohorts, including:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents out of work and experiencing barriers to employment/self-employment, including those who are long-term unemployed and economically inactive</li> <li>• Residents with low skills levels</li> <li>• Young people who do not have a baseline Level 2 equivalent qualification and/or at risk of dropping out of (or not in) education, employment or training</li> <li>• In work, low earning residents</li> <li>• Those living in areas of highest multiple deprivation.</li> </ul>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the work undertaken in the financial year to date and the positive employability and jobs outcomes associated with the work</li> <li>• Approve the priority interventions for the 2022/2023 financial year.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><u>Labour market context</u></p> <p>As we have emerged from a series of lockdowns and restrictions throughout 2020 and 2021, there is significant volatility within the labour market – albeit that furlough has, to some extent, protected against the predicted jump in unemployment. Demand is hugely outstripping supply in a number of sectors (tech and digital, logistics and health and social care) while others (hospitality in particular) have shed significant roles and are now trying to rebuild – but are finding that many staff have taken the opportunity to retrain or move into a new area of work. This has created a new dynamic among both employers and job seekers, with increased demand and appetite for new inclusive pathways, particularly in strong growth sectors.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Employment Academies</u></p> <p>One of our key instruments for delivering on the council's ambitions in this space is the suite of Employment Academies that we deliver. These interventions are designed in conjunction with employers to address existing job vacancies or emerging openings. This work has meant that, since April 2021, we have been able to bring 816 people on to our Employment Academies (with an into-work rate of 75% for those successfully completing) both through utilising our own resources and through additional capacity created through the Labour Market Partnership. This level of demand – both from employers as well as those looking for a job or a better job – represents a significant increase on figures from previous years. By way of example, in 2019/20, we supported around 550 people through Employment Academies. A number of recent changes including an expansion of the Employability and Skills team and</p>

the introduction of a new, more flexible commissioning framework, means that we have been much better placed to respond to opportunities, meeting employer demand and bringing forward solutions that benefit local businesses and residents.

3.3 Of the 816 people who participated on an Employment Academy since April 2021, 454 people have successfully completed and 342 have secured employment so far, representing an into-work rate of 75%. Of the 307 people still going through a programme, 110 are already in work and are receiving support, qualifications or licences needed to access a better job. These include Level 3-5 qualifications (e.g. in childcare sector, allowing staff to move to supervisory and management roles) and lorry vehicle licences for Council staff to progress to better-paid driving roles.

3.4 In terms of volume, the LMP Action Plan provided capacity for an additional 330 places on Employment Academies for 2021/22 which substantially increased the number of people we could support. The most popular Employment Academies are within logistics, leisure, construction and social care sectors, although childcare and playwork feature strongly, particularly for those wanting a better job. New Employment Academies have also been created for sectors such as utilities – with higher paid jobs – for example in fibre optics and streetworks. Average starting salaries in these sectors are in excess of £30,000 per annum.

<b>Employment Academy 2021/22</b>	<b>No. participants</b>
Logistics (Haulage)	179
Construction	115
Social Care	101
Leisure	88
Childcare/Playwork Upskilling: Level 3 & Level 5	72
Fibre Splicing	45
Bus Driving	36
Business	32
Customer Service	31
Childcare/Playwork	29
Taxi Driving	27
BCC Transport Upskilling	20
Health & Social Care Upskilling: Level 3 & Level 5	18
Plant Operator/Streetworks	15
Driving Instructor	8
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>816</b>

3.5	<p>While LMP provided capacity for an additional 330 participants in 2021/22, this will reduce to 100 additional places in 2022/23 as the LMP begins to implement other interventions outlined in this report such as the Gateway service and Bridges to Progression for Young People. Across 2022/23 we expect that the Employment Academies will engage around 540 participants with at least 70% expected to gain employment/self-employment in sectors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction, manufacturing and utilities: fibre, street works, plant operator, welding etc.</li> <li>• Professional services such as administration, business and digital</li> <li>• Care sectors including health and social care, childcare and playwork</li> <li>• Customer service sectors such as leisure.</li> </ul>
3.6	<p>We will also continue to work with public sector bodies such as the council, NIHE, Education Authority, Translink and Belfast HSC Trust to design and deliver Employment Academies for identified jobs. For example, in April 2022, we will be delivering Belfast City Council Employment Academies for 25% ringfenced OSS vacancies for those who are long-term unemployed through a General Operative Employment Academy – which will have 16 places for 9 ringfenced posts - and will be delivering a further Upskilling Academy for 20 Council staff to gain a better job through gaining a lorry licence.</p>
3.7	<p>Officers will also build on the significant development work underway to scope out new interventions that can contribute to the inclusive growth commitments. One key area of work at present is focusing on creating new pathways into the tech and digital sectors. While this sector has remained largely resilient throughout the pandemic, our research shows that there are limited pathways into the sector for those that do not have a degree. This challenge was identified through the work of the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission and the relevant government departments have committed to work with the council and with employers in the city to explore potential solutions. Work is about to get under way with two major employers on a pilot programme and, if successful we will seek to expand this in the coming year, bringing on additional employers and expanding the job roles. In expanding this activity, we propose to work with the Learning and Work Institute through their New Futures programme. This intervention focuses on those who need to or wish to re-skill as a result of their employment experiences during the pandemic.</p>
3.8	<p>Skills pathways are also being delivered for emerging sectors, including the green tech sector. Work is now underway – resourced through the LMP and the Community Renewal Fund – to</p>

	<p>deliver retrofitting qualifications for 150 people from Level 2 up to Level 5. This presents significant reskilling opportunities for companies in the housing and construction sectors, helping them to future-proof their business and look towards new opportunities for future growth.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Youth Initiatives</u></p>
	<p>While a significant proportion of the work that we have been engaged in to date has focused on those already in the labour market or trying to find a job or move to a better job, we have a number of interventions in place for young people, both in the formal education setting and outside of the school environment. These focus on improving educational attainment and helping young people at risk to find positive employment and training outcomes.</p>
3.10	<p>Our GCSE support programme was significantly disrupted over the last two years given the challenges faced by schools during the pandemic. However delivery within the current academic year has been back to expected engagement and participation rates, with learning workshops/classes and revision support being delivered in both school-based and community-based settings. Since September 2021, 362 young people have engaged on the programme. These young people have been identified as being unlikely to achieve at least Grade C in English and Maths GCSE, with the objective of helping them achieve a pass. In 2022/23 academic year, this programme is expected to ensure that 365 young people have access to the learning and revision support on offer.</p>
3.11	<p>We are also supporting 166 young people who either already have or are at risk of dropping out of the education system, employment or training through our Youth Support Programme which exceeds the annual target of 160. Officers have ensured that this programme operates in tandem with the Education Welfare Service which are the primary referral source for the Youth Support Programme. Of those young people who complete the Youth Support Programme in 2021, 55% have progressed into positive outcomes such as employment and further education/training. In 2022/23 academic year, this programme is expected to ensure that a further 160 young people are supported to either stay in or re-engage with formal education – have access to the wrap-around supports on offer.</p>
3.12	<p>Officers are also currently designing a new approach to improving the employability and programme-readiness of young people, based on the Boston Summer Scheme model and implemented in pilot form in summer 2022. While co-designed with youth training providers</p>

in the city, this is designed to sit within the wider 'Bridges to Progression' offer within the LMP outlined below and will:

- Target young people 16-17 years old who have disengaged from or have not engaged on youth training – TfS/Skills for Life & Work, with initial referral from providers.
- Provide intensive personal support – wrapped around individual need/circumstances (from housing to counselling to training).
- Incorporate employability skills – self-esteem, team building, communication skills, self-efficacy.
- Offer paid work experience with options being scoped include 'taster' work placements leading to an 'anchor' placement over the summer months as well as vocational skills development as needed.

3.13 A dynamic policy environment in this space – in particular, taking account of the Fair Start initiative – will lead to us re-visiting our work in the field, in conjunction with our partners in the community and voluntary sector as well as local schools, Department for Education and the Education Authority.

3.14 Labour Market Partnership

Members have recently received a number of reports on Employability NI and the emerging work of the Belfast Labour Market Partnership. At the August 2021 meeting of this committee, it was noted that the LMP action plan would be submitted to DfC in the coming months. Since that time, the letter of offer has been received and work is under way on delivery of priority interventions. The action plan is for an initial period of 18 months from September 2021 until March 2023 with a subsequent 3-year action plan to be submitted for the period from April 2023 onwards. Priority areas of focus are:

- Quickly back to work: Ensuring a co-ordinated response to the substantial number of people in the city who have been or are risk of being made unemployed, especially as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on helping people to move quickly back into employment and/or training (with a view to future employment)
- Increasing Opportunities: Empowering those furthest from the labour market to succeed through quality support, especially those who will be considered long-term unemployed as a consequence of COVID-19, as well as the economically inactive
- No-one Left Behind: Targeting of those disadvantaged groups through the delivery of an integrated, comprehensive, inclusive, holistic and local employability approach; and

- Catching Up: Supporting access to careers pathways, re-skilling and upskilling for those unemployed as well as those on low incomes.

3.15

Resources from the Labour Market Partnership enabled the council to significantly increase the volume of activity (and consequently job outcomes). The Partnership has also created a platform for engagement with government departments as a means of refocusing regional programmes more effectively within the Belfast area. The LMP action plan recognises that, while there are definite gaps that have been identified that will necessitate the creation of new interventions, not all activity need be new 'provision' or 'programmes'; sometimes it is equally important to profile and/or promote existing interventions. The headline programme of work within the action plan includes the following:

- Gateway Service: a key issue that emerged in our engagement with the LMP partners was the need for independent advice and guidance outside of mainstream JBO support for those who are out of work and non-job ready such as long-term unemployed and the economically inactive. In our engagement with LMP members, they considered that these groups required enhanced support to navigate the existing provision and identify the right support, at the right time, to help move them towards positive job, skills and qualification outcomes. It is proposed that the Gateway will support 1,000 people in the coming year. Participants will engage on a voluntary basis and the delivery model is being co-designed with key stakeholders such as the JBO Network, Careers Service, VCSE sector etc. with a view to procuring the service following intensive pre-market engagement in early 2022/23
- Labour Market Observatory: officers are currently working with both UU and QUB as well as key stakeholders such as the Institute of Public Policy Observatory, to establish a LM Observatory that will provide the intelligence, data and evidence-base needed to underpin decision-making in the city and takes account of demand, supply, provision and policy
- Digital Badges project: the number of people in Belfast with no or low formally-recognised skills is significantly above the NI and UK average. Officers have been working with the RSA to explore how a Digital Badges scheme could help recognise the non-accredited skills of these individuals. The project also looks at supporting employers to think about how some current practices are limiting their access to a broader talent pool by excluding those that may not have the formal qualifications but

that have aptitudes and strengths that could make a valuable contribution to the workforce. The RSA Belfast pilot will start by focusing on our Employment Academies in logistics, social care and childcare and then moving to other sectors. These badges will be used to recognise and validate the work undertaken through our programmes as an alternative to the standard practice of asking for qualifications/experience

- Bridges to Progression: over the coming years, the training environment for level 1 and level 2 skills is changing. At present, up to 1,000 young people in Belfast are entering these training interventions but employability outcomes are variable across sectors and in different parts of the city. We are currently working with existing providers to look at how the positive outcomes for these young people can be enhanced, through additional support and more structured exposure to the world of work – particularly in new growth sectors and utilising delivery models such as the Boston Summer Scheme as outline above.
- Scoping place-based and people-based targeted interventions: the strategic assessment identified a number of key groups that were under-represented in the labour market or that faced significant barriers to finding work. These groups include (among others) those with a disability, justice system leavers, older people, lone parents, those living with health issues (including mental health), ethnic minorities. Likewise, the research identified that there are specific parts of the city where levels of LTU and economic inactivity are more than twice the city average. Government programmes over many years have tried different approaches to support these groups. We propose to explore some new models that are either target group-based and/or location-based in order to support incremental improvements in employment outcomes among the target populations.

3.16 European Social Fund (ESF) Match Funding

Members will be aware that, at the October 2021 meeting of this committee, it was agreed that match funding totalling £240,000 would be allocated to four ESF projects. These are:

- Belfast Works project – city-wide project led by Upper Springfield Development Trust
- Path to Employment – delivered by Workforce
- Get Connected project – delivered by Workforce
- Jobmatch – delivered by Springboard Opportunities.



3.17	<p>While there has been a high level of uncertainty with regards to match funding providing by the Department for the Economy (DfE), officers note that this department has now allocated 90% of the requested match funding for ESF projects, with the intention of releasing the remaining 10% within the 2022/23 financial year. This decision will not affect the outcomes originally set out in the match funding requests to Belfast City Council given that projects have committed to self match funding if required, should the additional 10% not be allocated.</p>
3.18	<p><u>Policy influence and guidance</u></p> <p>In addition to direct delivery, officers will also continue to work with internal and external partners to use all tools at our disposal to address the key employability and skills challenges and to lever resources to support additional delivery, focusing on the council’s inclusive growth ambitions. There are a number of key mechanisms through which this can be achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developer Contributions: on a practical level, officers are supporting the Planning team in the development of the Developer Contributions Framework and are actively engaged with a number of emerging development schemes to ensure that relevant employability and skills interventions are incorporated and that compliance is ensured. Additional detail on the framework will be presented to relevant committees in the coming period</li> <li>• Social Value Procurement Policy: pending council agreement on the final version of the policy, officers are working closely with Corporate Procurement Services to support the implementation, focusing on the employability and skills measures.</li> </ul>
3.19	<p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2022/23 budget for the Employability &amp; Skills section of the Place and Economy departmental budget that was included as part of the estimates that were approved by this Committee on 12 January 2022.</p>
3.20	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>Each of the proposed projects referenced in this report is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. New projects or service areas are equality screened and a rural needs assessment completed. Considerations given to equality and good relation impacts at the initial stages of project development. Officers will work closely with the Equality and Good Relations Team on this activity. A new CRM system has been established to enable officers to regularly review participant engagement and address any equality or good relations issues arising.</p>

<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents attached</b>
	None