

Agenda item 8

For information - Update on Vocational Training Group

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Summary

This paper provides an update on the work of the Vocational Training Group which focuses on upskilling and training opportunities in and around Frome.

Background

The Vocational Training Group was established in September 2019 to identify what training opportunities were available in Frome and to consider how this provision could be improved.

One of the key goals was to bring training providers together to share what they currently offer. The group is formed of representatives from Somerset Skills & Learning (SS&L), ASK/SkillUp Somerset, Edventure, Frome Community Education, Bath College, Strode College, and Wiltshire College. Also active in the group are representatives from Frome College and Critchill School who represent the needs of the young people preparing to leave school and enter the workforce, and Jobcentre Plus to report on labour market needs and initiatives to help people back into employment.

Latest Training Initiatives

- On 9 September, FTC ran an **Apprenticeship Webinar** with the SkillUp Somerset and SS&L to talk through the new financial incentives available to businesses in taking on an apprentice and trainee, including new financial support for up to £3000 to businesses taking on a new apprentice before 31 January 2021.
- The group now has a representative from **Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge for Schools and Colleges programme (ASK)** which is helping connect the programme with local schools.
- The **Kickstart Scheme** provides funding to employers to create new 6-month job placements for young people who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. The programme will start in November and FTC is currently promoting the scheme to local businesses.
- Through engaging **Jobcentre Plus** in the group, we have been able to hear about current labour market needs and work with them to promote campaigns they are running, such as the **Jobs Hour** that allows employers to promote local job opportunities. Jobcentre Plus also launching the **Jets initiative** on 5 October which will provide support for people who have been out of work for 13 weeks; in particular, those who need refresher support for CV writing and job seeking.

- Through having a representative from the World of Work programme on the group we learn about the work the College is doing to help Yr12 students to gain experience in the workplace, improve their employability skills and enhance their English and Maths qualification. During lockdown, the College was able to still offer some of its World of Work programme online, including virtual mock-interviews and fortnightly careers bulletins.
- The group have been sharing their experiences with blended learning. SS&L have recently introduced virtual 3-hour taster course and are continuing to do blend of online and classroom teaching.

Edventure were doing online training during lockdown and have started up their short courses face-to-face now, including their 10-week Start Up courses where 10 young people (aged 18 – 35) work together on a project which started on 7 September. FTC is continuing to promote Edventure's short courses, which includes fundraising skills, start-up tools for community and social enterprise projects.

Frome Community Education have not able to offer face-to-face courses due to restrictions; however, they have collaborated with Edventure to upskill their course trainers so that they could deliver their courses online using digital software such as Zoom.

Spring Forward

The Vocational Training Group had been working towards putting on an event in March to showcase all the different training and upskilling opportunities the group members offered. Unfortunately, the event was cancelled due to covid-19. However, we are launching a new area on the FTC website to promote the group members and link through to their training initiatives. This training section will be part of the new accessible FTC website being launched later in October.

Training Needs of Businesses

FTC has been working with SS&L to identify key employers in the town to approach about training and skill development needs. Around 30 businesses (with over 50 employees) were identified and SS&L have been contacting them to gauge training needs and requirements.

In August, Somerset County Council distributed a business survey to local businesses to monitor the impact of covid-19 on their business. Included in the survey was a section about training needs, skills development, changes to the workforce, and apprenticeships. We are still awaiting the findings from the survey and will share with the Vocational Training group when available.

Next steps

- Jobcentre Plus are looking to set-up local Employment Hubs and are currently working with Mendip about locations. FTC is keen to establish a hub in Frome and has offered to help identify locations. The hub will include regular drop-ins, including youth drop-ins,

along with the opportunity to offer digital devices (on loan for up to a month) and digital training.

- Review and share findings from the county business survey, and re-visit local large employers about their training needs in the new year.
- Continue to promote the Kickstart programme to local businesses, and other Government initiatives regarding apprenticeships and traineeships.
- Launch the Spring Forward section on the website and drive visits to the page through social media campaigns.
- Continue to hold regular Vocational Training Group meetings to keep the group's motivation and focus on improving opportunities going, and to encourage the group members to share their experiences and collaborate further.
- Continue to work closely with Jobcentre Plus to learn more about the impact of covid-19 on the labour market, especially as the furlough scheme comes to an end.