

Meeting: Economic Prosperity Sub-committee

Date: 23 February 2021

Title: Employment and Skills Update

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Service: Health, Education, Care
and Safeguarding

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of Report

This report provides an update on the most recent employment and skills data, policy announcements, progress and challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Recommendations

The sub-committee members are requested to:

- note and comment on the content of the report;
- consider if any further information is required; and
- make recommendations to the Senior Manager - Employment and Skills for consideration.

3. Background

3.1 The Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown that commenced in March 2020 had an immediate impact on the national, regional and local economy with businesses suspending activity, large numbers of workers being furloughed or reducing productivity dramatically and an immediate impact on the numbers of people claiming out of work benefits.

3.2 For providers of education, employment and skills services there was also a challenge of responding to these impacts and doing so whilst being hugely restricted in being able to do so in classrooms and other settings that provide face to face interaction.

3.3 The use of digital technologies to deliver services was, and continues to be, a big challenge in terms of connectivity, access to devices and the skills and

knowledge for both service providers and service users to be able to respond. However, this also presents all areas of the economy with a real opportunity going forward to diversify and maximise engagement with residents and businesses in a more productive way, but also in a way that promotes choice and inclusivity for service users.

- 3.4 This report provides an update on the key issues, progress and challenges faced over the last 12 months and moving forward into the recovery phase from the Covid-19 pandemic. The focus of the report is on residents aged 16+ and businesses, but many of the points covered also relate to pre-16 education.

4. Employment and Skills Policy Announcements

- 4.1 The Chancellor of the Exchequer presented his [‘Plan for Jobs’](#) to Parliament on Wednesday 8 July 2020 to outline how the government will boost job creation in the UK. The relevant measures include:

- Kickstart Scheme – a £2 billion fund to create 6-month work placements aimed at those aged 16-24 who are on Universal Credit and are deemed to be at risk of long-term unemployment. Funding available for each job will cover 100% of the relevant National Minimum Wage for 25 hours a week, plus the associated employer National Insurance contributions and employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions
- New funding for National Careers Service – £32 million funding over the next 2 years for the National Careers Service
- Traineeships for young people – £111 million this year for traineeships in England, to fund work placements and training for 16-24-year olds. This funding will fund employers who provide trainees with work experience at a rate of £1,000 per trainee
- Payments for employers who hire new apprentices – a new payment of £2,000 to employers in England for each new apprentice they hire aged under 25, and a £1,500 payment for each new apprentice they hire aged 25 and over, from 1st August 2020 to 31st March 2021. These payments will be in addition to the existing £1,000 payment the government already provides for new 16-18-year-old apprentices, and those aged under 25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan
- High value courses for school and college leavers – £101 million for the 2020-21 academic year to give all 18-19-year olds in England the opportunity to study targeted high value Level 2 and 3 courses when there are not employment opportunities available to them
- Expanded Youth Offer – expand and increase the intensive support offered by DWP in Great Britain to young jobseekers, to include all those aged 18-24 in the Intensive Work Search group in Universal Credit

- Enhanced work search support – £895 million to enhance work search support by doubling the number of work coaches in Jobcentre Plus before the end of the financial year across Great Britain
- Expansion of the Work and Health Programme – up to £95 million this year to expand the scope of the Work and Health Programme in Great Britain to introduce additional voluntary support in the autumn for those on benefits that have been unemployed for more than 3 months
- Job finding support service – £40 million to fund private sector capacity to introduce a job finding support service in Great Britain in the autumn. This online, one-to-one service will help those who have been unemployed for less than three months increase their chances of finding employment
- Flexible Support Fund – increase the funding for the Flexible Support Fund by £150 million in Great Britain, including to increase the capacity of the Rapid Response Service. It will also provide local support to claimants by removing barriers to work such as travel expenses for attending interviews
- New funding for sector-based work academies – £17 million this year to triple the number of sector-based work academy placements in England in order to provide vocational training and guaranteed interviews for more people
- Construction Talent Retention Scheme – to support the redeployment of workers at risk of redundancy.

4.2 The Government published its [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth White Paper](#) on 21 January 2021. The key measures announced under some key themes were:

- 4.3 Putting employers at the heart of post-16 skills:
- Give employers a central role working with further education colleges, other providers and local stakeholders to develop new Local Skills Improvement Plans which shape technical skills provision so that it meets local labour market skills needs
 - Pilot Local Skills Improvement Plans in Trailblazer local areas, exploring an approach where they are led by accredited Chambers of Commerce and other business representative organisations in collaboration with local providers; and engage employer and provider groups to ensure we create the most effective models of employer representation before wider rollout
 - Make Strategic Development Funding available in 2021/22 in a number of pilot areas to support colleges to reshape their provision to address local priorities that have been agreed with local employers

- Ensure government has up-to-date and expert advice on the labour market and national skills gaps from the Skills and Productivity Board
- Align the substantial majority of post-16 technical and higher technical education and training to employer-led standards set by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, so skills provision meets skills need
- Continue to improve and grow apprenticeships, so more employers and individuals can benefit from them as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee
- Improve the quality of traineeships, to better support young people to transition to apprenticeships and other occupations
- Continue to support participation in English, maths, and digital training to meet employers' needs and support people to progress in employment or further study
- Invite proposals through the Strategic Development Fund to establish College Business Centres within further education colleges to work with employers in a designated sector on business development and innovation.

4.4 Providing the advanced technical and higher technical skills the nation needs:

- Use the new £2.5 billion National Skills Fund to enhance the funding to support adults to upskill and reskill. This will include an offer, backed by £95 million in 2021-22, for all adults to achieve their first full advanced (level 3) qualification as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee
- Expand our flagship Institutes of Technology programme to every part of the country by the end of this Parliament, to spearhead the increase in higher-level technical skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
- Continue to roll out T Levels, to prepare students for entry into skilled employment or higher levels of technical study, including apprenticeships
- Reform higher technical education (levels 4 and 5) with a new approval system based on employer-led standards
- Create clear progression routes for students towards the higher-level technical qualifications that employers need.

4.5 A flexible Lifetime Skills Guarantee:

- Implement the flexible Lifelong Loan Entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education from 2025
- As a pathway towards the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, stimulate the provision of high-quality higher technical education (levels 4 and 5), working towards making it as easy to get a student finance loan for an approved Higher Technical Qualification as it is for a full-length degree

- Introduce pilots to stimulate higher technical education and incentivise more flexible and modular provision
- Determine how best to stimulate credit transfer between institutions and courses
- Consult on the detail and scope of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement in 2021
- Improve how teaching is delivered so that it is more accessible, with the use of digital and blended learning
- Provide clear information about career outcomes through occupational maps, wage returns data and ensuring providers give pupils information about all options.

4.6 Responsive providers supported by effective accountability, governance, and intervention:

- Consult on the following proposals to reform funding and accountability system:
 - Simplification and streamlining of funding for further education to support high-value provision relevant to the labour market, with elements of simplified and streamlined funding to be tested ahead of consultation
 - Give more certainty to providers over their funding, including considering how to move to a multi-year funding regime
 - Reform the accountability approach, relaxing ringfences and reporting; instead focusing on outcomes
 - Introduce new accountability structures to underpin the delivery of Local Skills Improvement Plans
- Continue to invest in the college estate, to transform facilities and enable high-quality provision
- Introduce new powers for the Secretary of State for Education, so the government can intervene quickly and decisively in cases where there are persistent problems that cannot otherwise be addressed, either with colleges not delivering effectively or where local providers are unable to deliver the skills priorities for that area
- Strengthen the governance of colleges, by taking a clearer position on what good governance and leadership looks like and placing specific requirements on colleges and other provider types
- Ensure that subcontracting practices improve educational outcomes.

4.7 Supporting outstanding teaching:

- Launch a national recruitment campaign for teachers in further education settings
- Base Initial Teacher Education on employer-led standards
- Improve the provision of high-quality professional development and support progression for teachers

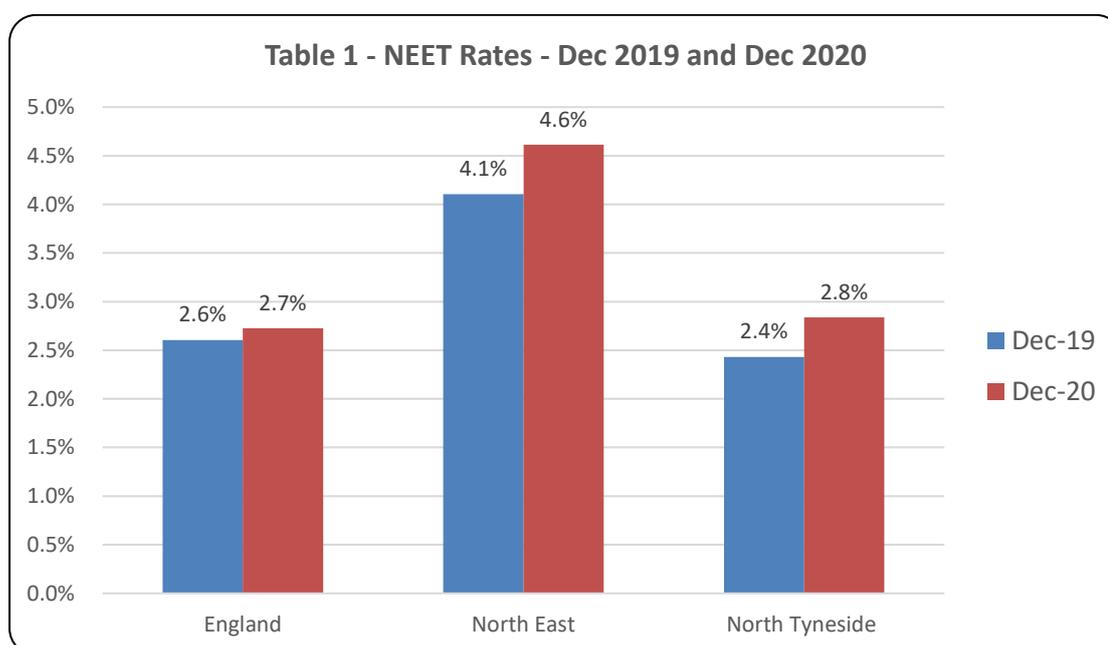
- Facilitate a strong relationship between industry and providers
- Support apprenticeships teachers and lecturers with a tailored professional development offer
- Introduce comprehensive workforce data collection.

5. Sustaining Opportunities for Young People

- 5.1 The Authority continues to lead on the delivery of key elements of Our North Tyneside Plan related to employment, skills and business growth including the key priorities set out in the Authority's Employment and Skills Strategy and the emerging priorities which will inform the Education Strategy and Inclusive Economy Strategy.
- 5.2 We will support the 'Achievement for All' ambition in the Education Strategy by ensuring that young people across all ages receive a good quality offer of careers education and information, advice and guidance (CEIAG). Schools across North Tyneside are supported to embed careers guidance and experiences of the world of work into their curriculum through our funded programmes that link education and business as well as strategic work to achieve the [Gatsby Good Career Guidance Benchmarks](#) and [Quality in Careers standards](#). The Authority's work with the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) and North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) maximises access to resources with participation in Primary, Secondary and College Careers Hubs and Careers Leaders Networks to share learning and best practice.
- 5.3 The result of this focus and investment contributes to the 'Ambition and Employability Skills' priority with an aim to continue to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET, including minimising the impact of Covid-19 on these statistics.
- 5.4 Achieving this means ensuring that there are an appropriate range and quality of progression pathways for young people leaving school and further education and work continues to maximise the availability and use of post-16 funding to provide these pathways including specialist provision for vulnerable groups of young people.
- 5.5 The Employment and Skills Service's 'Ignite your Potential' SEND Study Programme is an excellent example of provision that has been developed into a three-year progression pathway covering independent living skills and increasing vocational focus and work experience. The programme aims to ensure that young people with SEND are able to access employment to live full independent and enriched lives once they leave full time education. We will continue to pursue funding to expand these successful programmes for other groups of young people including care leavers and those 'at risk of

NEET' and further learning and priorities will be developed in our Post 16 Review of progression pathways in consultation with schools, young people, parents and post-16 providers.

- 5.6 Apprenticeship Reforms and the economic impact of Covid-19 present us with a significant challenge in ensuring that businesses are able to respond with apprenticeship opportunities that remain relevant to their needs and that are available to young people and adults. We will work with businesses to identify and respond to their skills needs and will maximise the use of marketing and funding incentives to deliver apprenticeship opportunities. The Authority's partnership work with the NTCA and other Local Authorities to develop an Apprenticeship Hub model will aim to simplify the information and access to Apprenticeships across the North of Tyne.
- 5.7 A key focus in the spring and summer of 2020, taking on board the experience of previous economic recessions, was the impact on young people and in particular on young people due to leave school in July 2020.
- 5.8 Table 1 shows the rates of young people aged 16-17 years who are Not in Education to Employment (NEET) comparing the months of December 2019 and December 2020 for England, the North East and North Tyneside.



- 5.9 Whilst North Tyneside traditionally compares favourably with the North East and National figures, a particular challenge for 2020 was in ensuring that Year 11 school leavers were able to secure and sustain their chosen progression routes in September 2020.
- 5.10 From the outset, Careers leaders in secondary schools worked closely with the [North Tyneside Connexions Service](#) to help Year 11 (2019-20 cohort)

pupils secure their next steps. Schools were focused primarily on those pupils who intended to enter post-16 education or training in a different institution, such as a college or different sixth form and those seeking an apprenticeship.

- 5.11 We anticipated there would be fewer apprenticeships available, so pupils who intended to follow this route needed more help to secure their next step. Connexions Advisers supported young people and their parents remotely to help them make informed choices and support applications. Working with their link adviser, schools were asked to:
- identify those young people at risk of becoming NEET
 - refer young people to Connexions Advisers
 - share destination data with their link adviser
 - meet regularly to review data and agree priorities
 - let young people and parents know about the Connexions offer.
- 5.12 Connexions Service Advisers contacted over 200 young people each week to check on progress and confirmed early destinations for more than 2000 Year 11 pupils for September 2020. Feedback from Advisers was positive with additional discussions taking place with pupils, parents and careers leads in schools being hugely beneficial. However, concerns over destinations being available, particularly Apprenticeships and employment with training, were real and in these cases young people were supported to have second options in place. We also received feedback that offers of learning were being delayed due to the practicalities of completing assessments or in some cases being no longer available.
- 5.13 Support was targeted with specific contact and interventions taking place through dedicated Advisers for vulnerable young people, Looked after Children, Care Leavers, young people in Alternative Provision and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to prevent and reduce NEET. Advisers worked closely with and signposted to additional support with schools, Social Workers, Leaving Care, SEND Support Team and other professionals and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations. Additional support was also in place, for example those young people aged from 14 years open to Whole Life Disability have an allocated Transitions Worker linked to work with young people and professionals on effective transitions planning.
- 5.14 In addition to one to one support, young people were also signposted to additional online resources and support including virtual jobs fairs (National Careers Service), online work experience (Oak Academy), virtual open days (FE Colleges and Universities) and distance learning courses via local providers and the Open University.

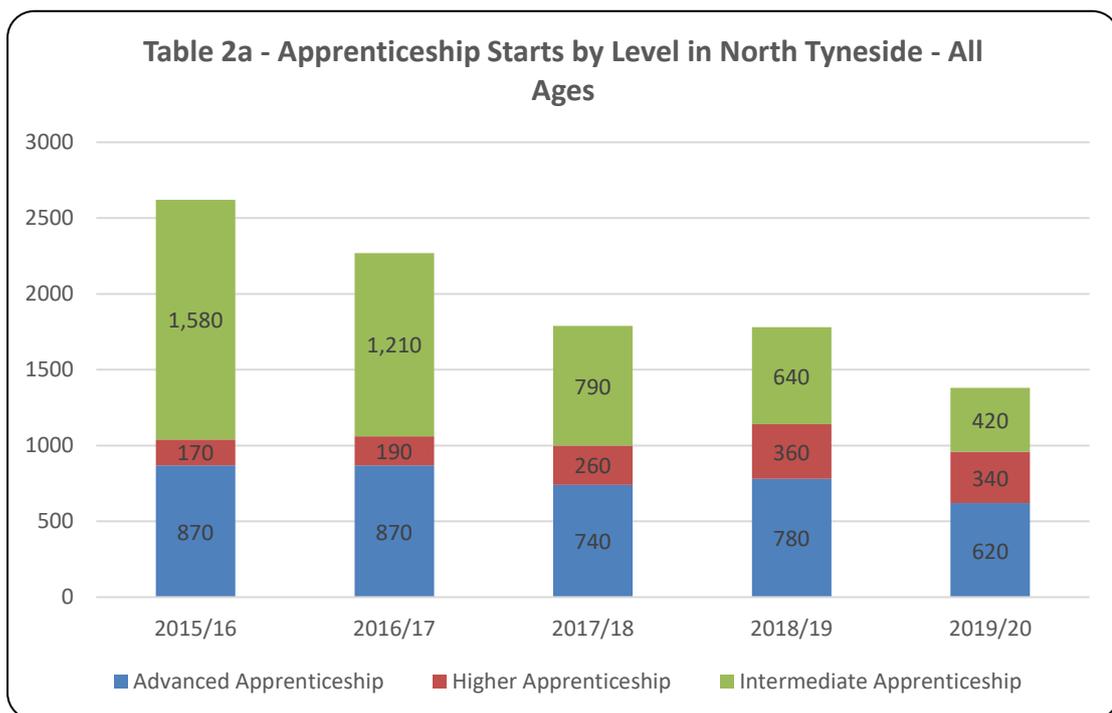
- 5.15 In terms of education and training provision, providers all followed Government Guidance closely in relation to a phased and safe return to classroom learning, prioritising those identified as being in vulnerable groups.
- 5.16 The majority of providers, including the main post 16 providers for North Tyneside ([Tyne Met](#) and [Newcastle College](#)) were able to continue learning through a blended learning approach including online classes and distance learning and reported good levels of participation and attendance. They progressed their plans further for a blended learning approach from September 2020 and the Authority is continuing to engage in discussions with these providers to ensure additional support is in place for schools leavers and those who might miss out on Apprenticeships and employment opportunities during 2021. A further challenge in 2021 is that we anticipate young people in post 16 programmes involving work placements may need a further year on programme to complete accreditations (and there will be related cost implications for those with high needs).
- 5.17 We have also continued to raise concerns with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) regarding limited skills funding for 16-18 year olds, and in particular for Independent Training Providers (ITPs), such as [Northumbria Youth Action \(NYA\)](#) and [Employment, Training and Skills NE \(Barnardos\)](#) who support our most vulnerable young people. We are continuing these discussions with funders as the current situation further exacerbates this issue.
- 5.18 Connexions Advisers returned to working in schools in September 2020 but have reverted to telephone and online delivery quickly when school cases have increased and it is no longer possible to attend, and when lockdown restrictions dictate remote delivery as being necessary.
- 5.19 Google Classroom is being used to provide virtual careers guidance sessions and interventions with NEETs and those young people at risk of becoming NEET are a key priority including young people with SEND. Work is continuing with Social Workers, Leaving Care and other professionals to support Looked after Children and Care Leavers via telephone and online support. Virtual Helping Hands groups have also been established to support vulnerable young people with social, emotional and mental health issues.
- 5.20 [National Apprenticeship Week \(Feb 2021\)](#) and [National Careers Week \(Mar 2021\)](#) are two annual events that provide businesses and young people with a real opportunity to engage with each other, ensuring that teachers, young people and parents are aware of the range of apprenticeship, training and employment opportunities that are available to them in the local economy.
- 5.21 Whilst our usual schedule of events taking place in schools and businesses across North Tyneside was not possible this year, in partnership with a wide

range of businesses, schools and providers we did run a range of [online virtual events](#) between 8th and 13th February 2021. As usual, the week culminated in our [Get Up and Go Annual Apprenticeship Event](#), which took place on Saturday 13th February 2021 between 10am and 12pm. The online event hosted employer videos and webinars and live chat to enable young people and parents to engage virtually with over 25 employers offering Apprenticeship opportunities locally.

6. Apprenticeships

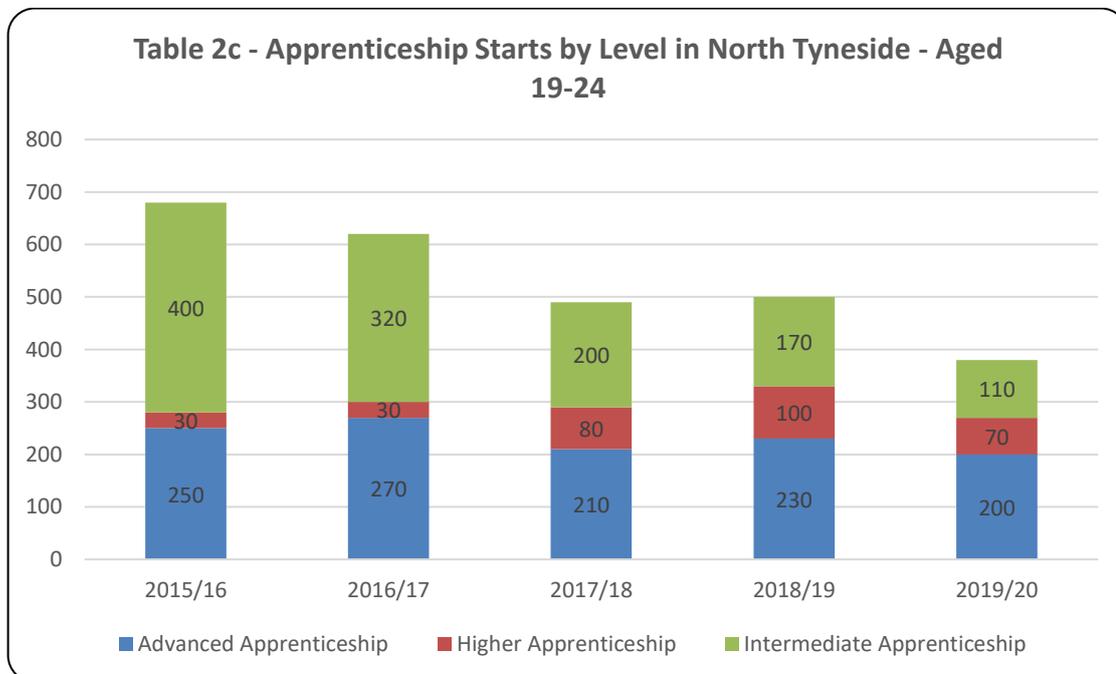
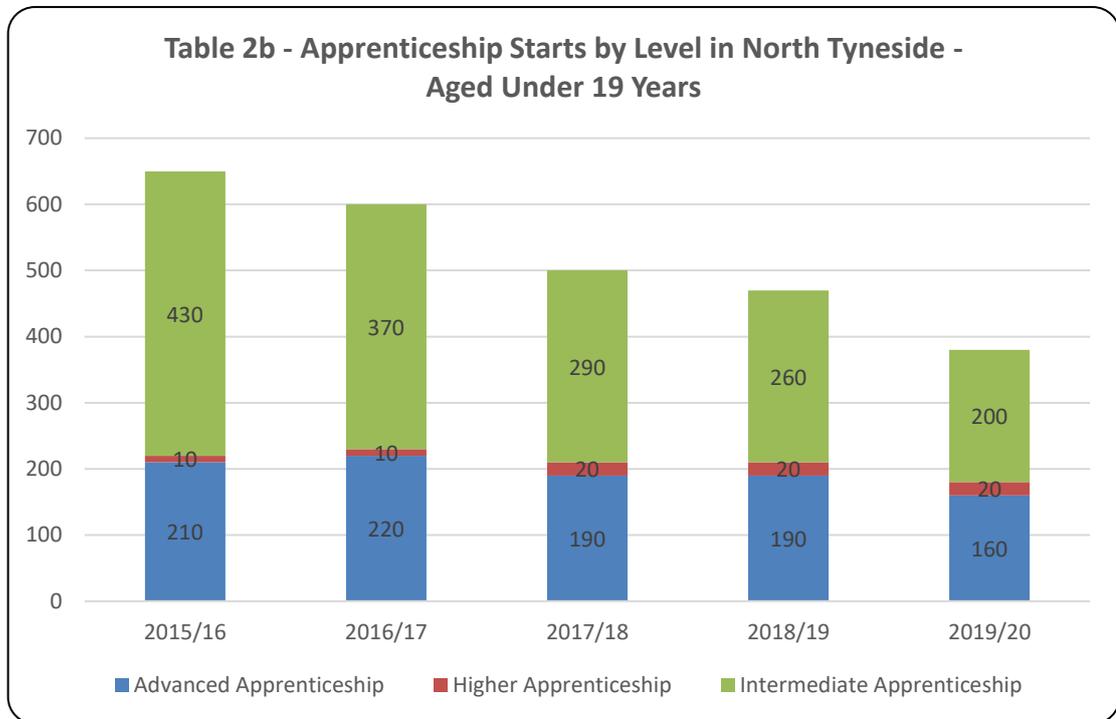
6.1 For apprentices, businesses and providers the past 12 months has been particularly difficult in trying to maintain the employment, training and progression of [Apprenticeships](#).

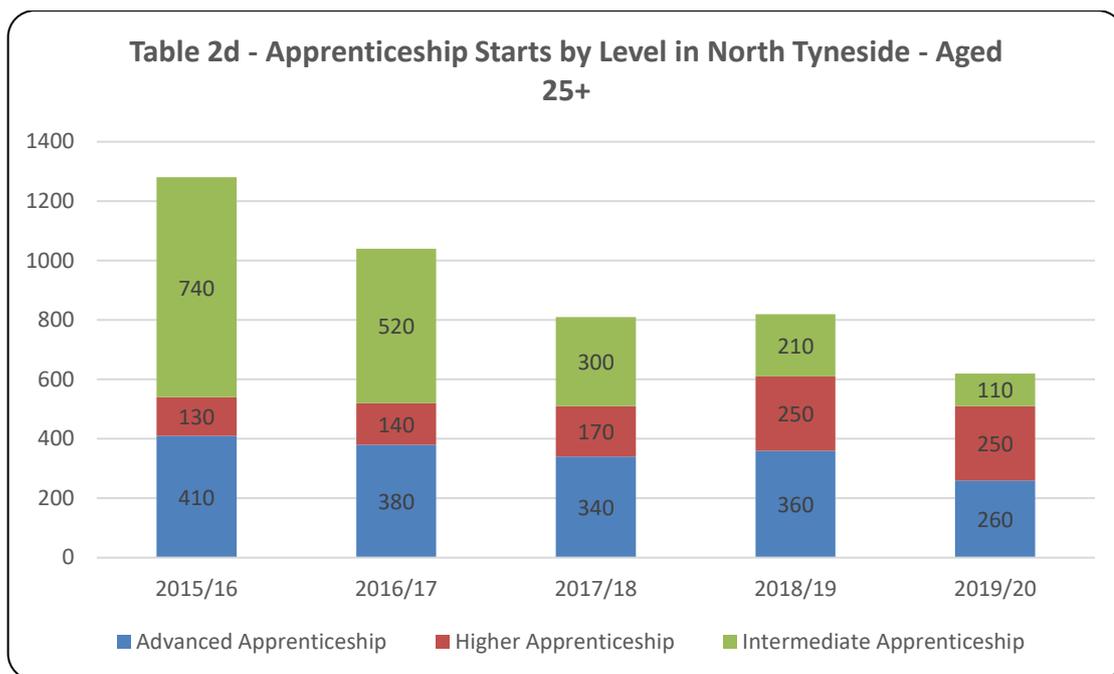
6.2 Tables 2a-d demonstrate that since 2017 and the introduction of [Apprenticeship Reforms including the Apprenticeship Levy](#) and move from Apprenticeship Frameworks to Standards, apprenticeship starts for all age groups have been in decline in North Tyneside and this reflects both the regional and national trends.



6.3 A further trend as the Government aims to address the quality of Apprenticeships available is the move from Intermediate Apprenticeships to higher numbers of Higher Apprenticeships. The result of this is that there are now higher numbers of people aged 25+ undertaking apprenticeships in North Tyneside than those aged 19 and under with relatively few young people accessing the higher-level Apprenticeships that are available. In addition, the

move from frameworks to standards has considerably reduced the availability of Level 2 (or intermediate equivalent) apprenticeships and raised the entrance point for a wide range of sectors and apprenticeship roles, for example Business Administration, Horticulture, Teaching Assistants etc.





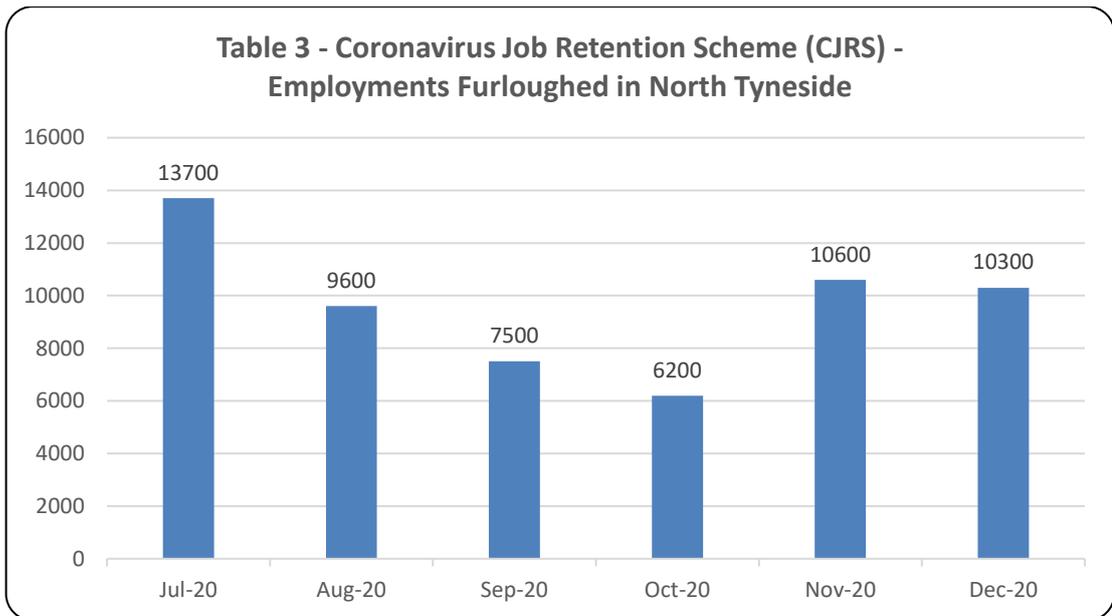
6.4 Whilst we await publication of the most recent data for 2020, anecdotal reports would suggest that a further decline in Apprenticeship starts can be expected due to Covid-19 restrictions. However, the picture is more nuanced locally and we are receiving reports of employers continuing to recruit apprentices and requiring training through our own Apprenticeship training. This includes the Authority’s own annual recruitment of Apprentices, which will continue in 2021.

6.5 During 2020, the Adult Learning Service retained 55 apprentices on training programmes, only losing one due to redundancy. Recruitment also picked up in the final two quarters of 2020 with many employers, including schools, continuing with long standing recruitment plans. Feedback on the Government’s [Apprenticeship subsidies](#) introduced in summer 2020 also suggested that these have provided a useful incentive and support to recruitment. At the time of writing we are awaiting a decision on the possible extension of this scheme beyond March 2021.

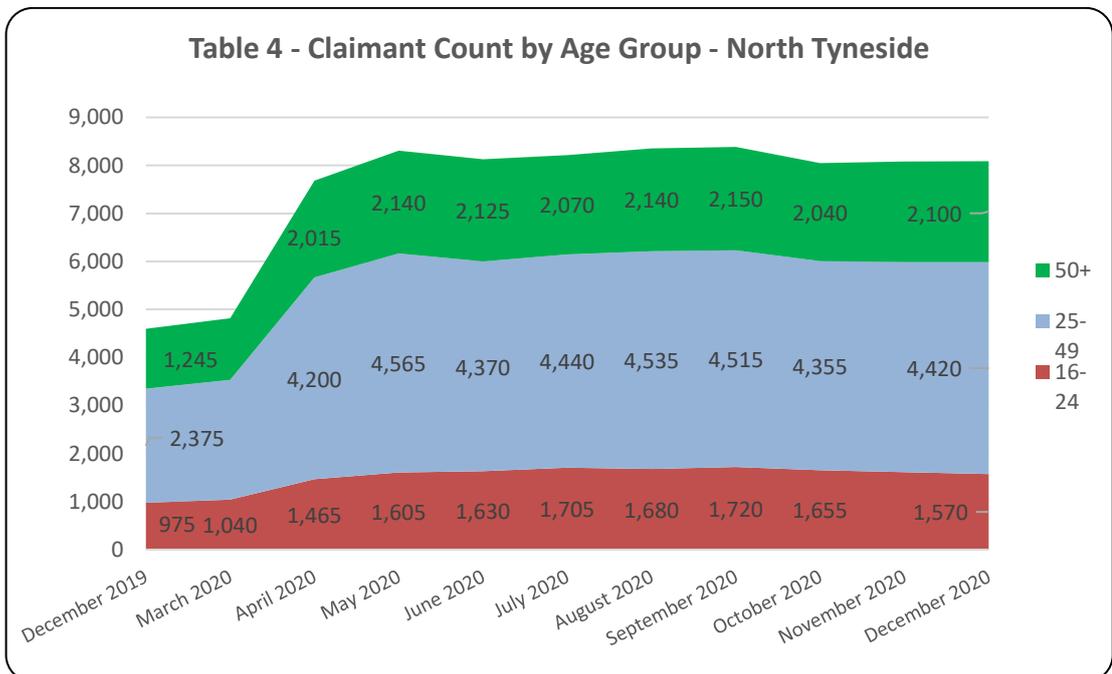
7. Employment Support

7.1 Table 3 shows the numbers of workers who were furloughed as part of the [Government’s Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme \(CJRS\)](#) during 2020. After a peak in July 2020 at 14% of the workforce in North Tyneside, which was slightly lower than national and regional averages, numbers started to drop as businesses started to reopen over the summer.

7.2 The reintroduction of restrictions between September 2020 and January 2021 and the extension of the CJRS meant numbers rose again.



7.3 In April 2020, we also saw a large increase in the numbers of people claiming Universal Credit as businesses were forced to close due to the first Lockdown. The Claimant Count, a measure of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed, increased by 60% on average across all age groups in April 2020.



7.4 Since April 2020, the introduction of CJRS has had the impact of maintaining a similar level of worklessness which whilst high has meant that services providing support to the unemployed have not been overwhelmed and managed to continue to support residents.

- 7.5 This support includes the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) recruitment of additional Work Coaches for Jobcentre Plus (JCP) offices. JCP has maintained service delivery remotely with the processing of benefit claims and Work Coaches maintaining contact with Jobseekers by telephone. Jobseeker conditionality was suspended in April 2020 and has only been reintroduced in a limited capacity since.
- 7.6 For other services, including the Authority's own [Employability Projects](#), there is a mixed picture, but most have managed to maintain a good level of service delivery utilising telephone and online contact with unemployed participants. The projects funded mainly through the European Social Fund (ESF) have continued to engage and support unemployed clients in North Tyneside and maintained good levels of performance.
- 7.7 In April 2020, the Authority submitted a bid to the NTCA through the Covid-19 Recovery Fund for £250k to deliver a [Back to Work Service](#). The project commenced on 1st July 2020 with four Back to Work Advisers supporting businesses affected by Covid-19 with recruitment, retention and retraining and supporting newly unemployed residents.
- 7.8 The team continues to provide a triage service to deal with immediate needs using referrals and signposting for additional intensive support. The project includes a flexible fund for travel, clothing, equipment etc. for individuals and businesses to address any immediate barriers to recruitment and employment.
- 7.9 The aim of the project is also to support and promote the quality of work, including addressing the key issues of casual, temporary and contract workers, and supporting businesses to apply the principles of the [North of Tyne Good Work Pledge](#).
- 7.10 The Project's performance to 31 Dec 2020:
- Engaged 252 residents (overall target 240 to March 2021)
 - Supported 74 residents into work (overall target 44)
 - Engaged with 105 businesses (overall target 60)
- 7.11 The team has had some notable achievements including recruitment and training support for the [NHS Integrated COVID Hub North East in Gateshead](#) and due to its success and the extended impact of the pandemic the project and staffing has been extended to September 2021. The triage model approach piloted is now identified as best practice and will inform our approach to providing employability support going forward.
- 7.12 As part of the increased online support we have developed a suite of marketing materials, a web presence and a dramatic increase in the use of social media to communicate with businesses and residents:

- Web: <https://skillsnorthtyneside.org.uk/support/employment-support/>
- Twitter: [@NTEmployment](https://twitter.com/NTEmployment) - a dedicated Employment Twitter feed established to share employment information and guidance in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and other partners
- A dedicated 'Back to Work' Helpline established (0191 643 2111)

7.13 The Authority is supporting the implementation of the [Government's Kickstart scheme](#) which is providing funding to employers to create six-month job placements for 16 to 24 year olds who are on Universal Credit and are deemed to be at risk of long term unemployment. Funding available for each job covers 100% of the relevant National Minimum Wage for 25 hours a week, plus the associated employer National Insurance contributions and employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions.

7.14 Funding is available following a successful application process. Initially, applications had to be for a minimum of 30 job placements, with companies who were unable to offer this many job placements then being able to partner with other organisations to reach the minimum number. This requirement to engage with a Gateway Provider was removed in January 2021.

Kickstart in North of Tyne and North Tyneside

7.15 For businesses unable to reach the threshold of creating 30 work placements to make a direct application to the scheme the NTCA decided to act as an Employer Gateway acting on behalf of companies in Newcastle, Northumberland and North Tyneside to receive and distribute the relevant funding. Despite the Government's change, this support is continuing with companies able to apply through an Expression of Interest Form available here - <https://www.northoftyne-ca.gov.uk/projects/kickstart-programme/>.

7.16 North Tyneside Council and the [North Tyneside Business Forum](#) along with other partners are taking a proactive role to promote the scheme to employers and young people in the Borough, assisting them through existing services to create work placements and ensuring young people are prepared and access them. This will continue to assist smaller companies to maximise the number of placements created across North Tyneside.

7.17 As of 1st February 2021, the following numbers of applications to create placements had been received across the North of Tyne area:

Area	Number of Businesses	Number of Job Placements
North Tyneside	40	129
Newcastle	18	60
Northumberland	7	22

Totals	65	211
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The main sectors covered by placements:

- Accommodation and food service activities
- Financial and insurance activities
- Information and communication
- Professional, scientific and technical activities
- Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles

Examples of job roles covered:

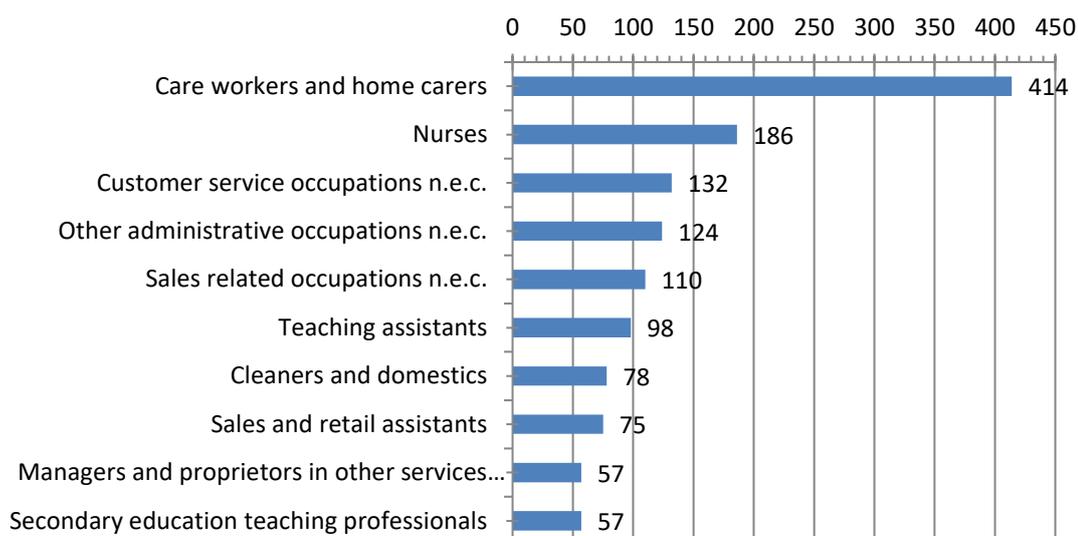
- Digital Marketing Assistant / Trainee
- Workshop assistant and Business Development
- Customer Service Assistant/Barista
- HR Assistant, Business Development Assistant
- Decarbonisation solutions technologist,
- Web and graphic designer
- Administrator/Receptionist
- Catering assistant
- Graphic Production Operative
- Junior Copywriter
- Junior Software Developer/Quality Assurance

7.18 In addition to this support, the team are tracking potential and announced redundancies; so far there have been no major redundancy announcements in North Tyneside, but residents are being affected by closures in sectors including travel, tourism, hospitality and retail. According to the Labour Force Survey, 12,000 people in the North East region were made redundant in August to October 2020. This was the highest level since 2009, and more than 1.5 times the size of any level since early 2014.

7.19 However, vacancy levels are holding up well. In the week ending 1 January 2021, vacancy levels in the North East region were only slightly below their level a year earlier. Vacancy levels increased faster in the region than nationally in the later months of 2020 and the North East is closer to returning to pre-COVID vacancy levels than any other English region.

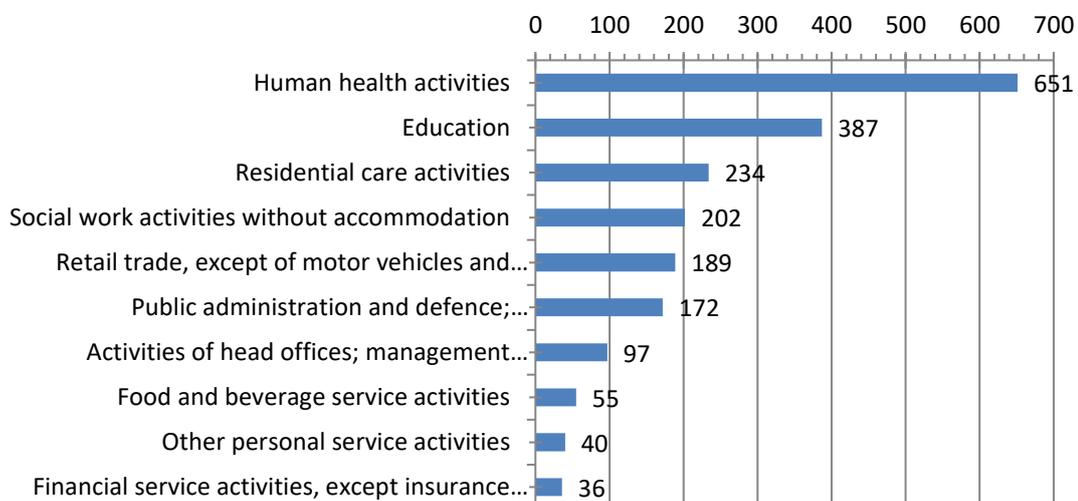
7.20 In North Tyneside, data extracted from the Burning Glass Labour Insight Tool showed that there were 3,962 reported vacancies in 2020 compared to 3,631 in 2019. Table 5 shows the top 10 vacancies by occupation with care workers and home carers being the most reported vacancies with 414 vacancies compared to 216 vacancies in 2019. The other occupations and numbers are similar in numbers to previous years.

Table 5 - North Tyneside vacancies by occupations - 2020



7.21 Table 6 shows the occupations with the main industries recruiting in North Tyneside being health and education. This is also reflected in that the National Health Service (NHS) and North Tyneside Council reported the highest numbers of vacancies in 2019 and 2020.

Table 6 - North Tyneside Vacancies by Industry - 2020



7.22 The Authority's Recruit Silverlink project in partnership with Crown Estate, the owners of Silverlink Retail Park, sees us employ a Workplace Coordinator to work with businesses located on the park to access, promote and match NT residents to the vacancies available.

7.23 The Authority is also working with NTCA, DWP and Northumberland County Council and Newcastle City Council colleagues to access additional funding to develop a new [Employment/Youth Hub model](#), which will provide partnership

support to address youth unemployment. The model will include a range of current partners and could include co-location of services. We are currently recruiting an Employability Partnership Coordinator to support this work.

8. Adult Learning and Skills

- 8.1 The devolution of [Adult Education Budget \(AEB\)](#) to the NTCA presents providers across the North of Tyne area with an opportunity to respond to the needs of residents and businesses across the area. The NTCA took control of devolved AEB of over £24 million from Government from 1st August 2020. The devolved AEB has been allocated to 29 education providers across 10 Grant Agreements and 21 Contracts for Services including the Authority's own Adult Learning Service.
- 8.2 The [Adult Learning Service](#) has received an overall allocation of skills funding of £2.54 million that will enable us to continue to provide a wide range of programmes to support residents to gain the skills and abilities to engage successfully in work, in their own self-development and learning, engage in their community through volunteering and work placements, and support their children's attainment and aspirations.
- 8.3 The focus of this provision is on low skilled, unemployed or disadvantaged young people and adults. A wide range of provision is offered including apprenticeships (at 16-18 and 19 plus), study programmes, community and family learning, first steps engagement to support disadvantaged adults and families, English, Maths and ICT basic skills, work experience, volunteering and provision for the unemployed and for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- 8.4 The service has developed a range of vocational provision in areas such as construction, hospitality and catering, retail, early years and teaching and has received additional funding this year to support the development of digital skills in the local community through a Digital Outreach Project.
- 8.5 The service has significantly increased the use and range of remote teaching and learning methods and blended learning approaches to ensure flexible access to learning in changing circumstances and in direct response to Covid-19 received additional funding from NTCA to deliver Sector Based Work Academy Programmes to support residents to gain employment in the Health and Social Care sector.
- 8.6 The direct impact of this level of skills provision targeted at low skilled, unemployed or disadvantaged is that we can offer a routeway or an alternative to more formal Further Education establishments, including colleges. Many learners progress onto extended learning programmes with colleges or directly access work that they would not have been able to access

prior to the learning provided. Our joint prospectus and progression strategy with Tyne Met College continues to ensure that learners can achieve this progression through a pathway to higher levels of learning assisting them to enter employment and develop their own skills to deliver career development.

- 8.7 However, like many further, higher, adult and community learning and independent training providers the delivery of skills and training provision has been severely impacted by Covid-19. Initially, this meant closing all venues in March 2020 except for supporting the most vulnerable learners including care leavers and young people with SEND.
- 8.8 However, the service also responded quickly to move provision to online delivery utilising [distance learning courses with an extensive offer now developed](#) and adapting to the use of new technologies, such as Google Classroom, to develop blended learning approaches for young people, adults and apprentices looking to upskill and retrain.
- 8.9 The service developed robust Working Safely and Teaching Safely guidance and Risk Assessments to enable a return to classroom learning in July 2020 and has since followed a sensible and considered approach through a Phased Return to Learning Plan and Lockdown Contingency Plans for all skills provision to respond quickly and effectively to changes in restrictions. The service has also introduced Lateral Flow Testing for learners that are required to attend classroom learning.
- 8.10 The devolution of AEB funding for skills and training to NTCA has seen the Adult Learning Service secure additional funding including a new Digital Outreach Project and a Sector Based Work Academy in Health and Social Care.

The Digital Outreach Project (DOP)

- 8.11 The Adult Learning Service has secured £150k per annum over three years from NTCA to address a gap in methodology and practices in current digital skills training by building foundation skills which will support the introduction of the digital entitlement (Sept 2020) and reformed Functional ICT Skills (Sept 2021).
- 8.12 A Digital Outreach Coordinator is engaging with the voluntary and community sector as well as small to medium sized employers around the borough to reach out to residents supporting development of digital literacy. Following an initial assessment to identify needs, a specialist digital skills tutor will provide locality-based pre-entry and entry level individual and small group workshops to build confidence and capability in the use and transfer of skills across a range of handheld devices for home and/or workplace.

8.13 The aims of the project are to:

- Address a growing need for transferrable skills across devices in both the community and workforce
- Build confidence and capability in the basic use of handheld devices
- Support and enable progression into formal qualifications
- Enhance digital knowledge and skills in support of employment
- Challenge social isolation through digital capability
- Support safe use and informed choices in relation to digital media
- Support and strengthen capacity within the voluntary and community sector (VCS)

8.14 The DOP will also build capacity by recruiting, training and coordinating volunteers to become a new and refreshed brand of digital champions who will be supported to transition into the VCS. Over the lifetime of the project (3 years), they will also support the development of Digital Hubs within training venues alongside existing ICT training to support confidence and accessibility building route ways into education and employment.

8.15 In response to the most recent lockdown and the expectations for parents to engage with a range of remote learning techniques to support home schooling, this personalised Digital Skills support offer has also been shared with all Head Teachers in the borough to promote to parents and carers.

The Social Care Academy

8.16 As a direct response to the Government's 'Plan for Jobs', the Adult Learning Service has been allocated £59k of funding to deliver Sector-Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) in Social Care.

8.17 This offers the opportunity for a six-month pilot of SWAPs provision in partnership with social care employer/s as a model for pre-employment training and skill development which will help to supply well-prepared and sector-aware candidates for the social care workforce.

8.18 SWAPs are a way to create a skilled workforce for employers. The programmes are designed to help those who are ready for work, and receiving benefits, to secure employment. SWAPs are also designed to help meet employers immediate and future recruitment needs as well as to recruit a workforce with the right skills to sustain and grow their business.

8.19 A SWAP can last up to 6 weeks and programmes have 3 main components:

1. Pre-employment training – funded through the allocation identified and mapped by NTCA to local growth/recovery sectors including social care

2. Work experience– funded by DWP and of great benefit to the individual and employer
3. A guaranteed job interview with an employer.

8.20 Programmes will be open to jobseekers of all ages and may be eligible for additional incentives in terms of providing ‘in-work’ support for learners during their work experience. We also ensure all learners are work ready by securing DBS clearance prior to interview and offering enhanced training and certification in core Care Standards including Food Hygiene certification.

8.21 The Social Care Academy will enable up to 42 residents to undertake short-burst vocational and employability training which will directly support them moving into employment. This has the potential to lead to ongoing provision which could support up to 65 residents per year to move into careers in a target sector for the local economy.