



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CARDIFF CAPITAL REGION CITY DEAL JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held virtually on Friday, 18 March 2022 at 10.00 am

### **County Borough Councillors - Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-**

Councillor J-P-Blundell Bridgend Council – Chair  
Councillor G Thomas – RCTCBC  
Councillor V Crick – Torfaen Council  
Councillor K Gibbs – Merthyr Tydfil Council  
Councillor J Hill – Blaenau Gwent Council  
Councillor P Jordan – Monmouthshire Council

### **Officers in attendance**

Rowenna O'Sullivan - Skills and Talent Lead  
Geraldine O'Sullivan - Graduate Development Officer  
Sarah Daniel – Principal Democratic Services Officer – RCTCBC  
Tracy Watson – Senior Democratic Services Officer - RCTCBC

#### **42 Welcome and Apologies**

The Chairperson welcomed the following officers to the meeting:

Rowenna O'Sullivan - Skills and Talent Lead  
Geraldine O'Sullivan - Graduate Development Officer

#### Apologies

Cllr John Ridgewell – Caerphilly  
Cllrs Ramesh Patel and Nigel Howells – Cardiff  
Cllr Gareth Lewis – Merthyr  
Cllr James Clarke – Newport City Council  
Cllr Bronwen Brooks – Vale of Glamorgan

Christian Hanagan – Service Director Democratic Services and Communications  
Nicola Somerville - Head of Business Development & Inclusive Growth

#### **43 Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **44 Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** To approve the minutes of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 13 January 2022.

#### **45 Graduate Scheme**

The Skills and Talent Lead introduced herself, and the Graduate Development Officer, and noted that her remit was looking after the Venture Graduate Scheme and Venture Skills Hubs and any other skills interventions required, going forward.

The Graduate Development Officer then provided Members with a current update, explaining that the graduate scheme had been rebranded and relaunched in September 2021. There was a need to change the way things were done in terms of a bit more strategy around taking on graduates and were now known as Venture Graduates, and were now working in cohort models, 3 times a year. There were 41 roles currently being advertised with a closing date of the 3 April and that cohort would then be cohort 2. Cohorts work over a 12-week period, advertising the roles and then shortlisting and assessments with the top candidates sent to employers for final stage interview, with that process continuing after the 3 April. The big advantage of working in the cohort model, enabled working with larger numbers of graduates, with the aim to target about 20- 40 graduates, in each cohort. There was a much better brand awareness with the new website and new ways of working which had seen development and improvement. The Graduate Development Officer acknowledged that she was doing some graduate attraction at the Celtic Manor currently, with the University of South Wales (USW) graduates from 2020 and 2021 and felt that the fact there were live roles at the moment, was a bonus.

A Member asked for more information on cohorts and what was done to follow through and support them e.g., courses to provide them with management skills.

The Graduate Development Officer explained that businesses were asked to employ graduates for a minimum of 6 months, with the majority offering full time contracts. Alongside the internship of 6 months, graduates are paid and supported to do the Institute of Leadership and Management Programme (ILM) at Level 3, which is delivered by the USW. What use to happen was 4-day sessions in USW where graduates would meet up as a group, which was one of the attractive things for us, as even though they were working for individual companies, it was important for them to meet as a cohort, to get to know one another. Currently it is online, and they do 8 half day sessions of 2 hours. The ILM is exactly what you referred to, about giving them the confidence and the development, project management, resilience, change management skills, etc. Graduates grow as an employee with the companies, because that's what they need to develop, work experience but they also develop as a individual, so their awareness of life in the real world improves and develops, their confidence goes up, their personalities raise and businesses see them developing as a person as well.

The Graduate Development Officer noted that they were exploring a piece of work on evaluating the first graduates, who were employed as part of the scheme, where they were today, were they in the same job, had they been promoted, had they settled in the region and what were their career plans, etc. It was known that 85% of graduates stayed in full time employment after the internship. It was important to recognise that the 15% wasn't always the employers saying it wasn't working out, but sometimes the graduates were saying the role wasn't for them. In terms of ILM, this was a really big part of the pilot scheme, however moving forward, sector specific skills may be looked at, that graduates may need for specific roles. In terms of their personal development, it had worked really well. It was not about the assignments; it is about them being part of a cohort/group. Another thing that was done, was to

rotate graduates' case studies on the website, which was a real selling story for those looking at a role at the moment.

The Skills and Talent Lead began by explain to Members about her background. In terms of looking at scaling up Venture, there were a couple of priority areas. There was very much a refocus on skills shortages and sector priorities, for the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR), across the 10 unitary authorities. The plan was to increase the business engagement, the job numbers and focus upon those SME and growth businesses across the region. This would require automation of the current recruitment process, so various hiring platforms were being looked at, that could strip away about 75% of the administration currently undertaken by the team. In addition the Skills and Talent Lead explained she wanted to look at enhancing the cohort model and there would be a piece of work, looking at how to develop a programme, which not only embedded future skills, but also a more vocational/technical pathway as well. The secondary priority would be to look at how to strengthen partnership arrangements with the Universities within the region, to maximise how they can help promote Venture to their graduates and potentially be a deliverer for some of the development programmes that may be developed in the future.

The Chair noted that a resident had contacted him because they had seen graphic that contained graduate salaries by City, noting that Cardiff was the lowest.

The Skills and Talent Lead and Graduate Development Officer both stated that they did not think this was to do with Venture, but they would certainly look into this if the Principal Scrutiny and Democratic Officer could provide them with the graphic.

A Member asked how salaries compared to other regions – were they much lower or were they on a par.

The Skills and Talent Lead noted historically they had been lower, but because of Covid-19 and remote working, there had to be an increase in some of the salary levels, particularly in the more Tech related graduate roles, because it was such a competitive candidate market with graduates able to work globally. This uplift, however, could cause a problem for smaller businesses, but this could be looked at, as part of an incentive package for businesses to be involved.

The Graduate Development Officer explained that businesses were responsive. If they offered a lower salary a conversation would be had about making the role more attractive for graduates, in order to attract the right graduate to a role, who would come in and stay. If the salary was too low, then quite often, an open and honest discussion would be had with the business.

The Member noted that this was not easy, with the current inflationary position.

The Skills and Talent Officer stated that something that could be looked at was how to enhance the graduate package of support, perhaps through some sponsorship from some of the anchor companies in the region and any assistance through unitary authorities, in terms of energy bills, council tax bills, etc.

A Member asked if any monitoring was done in terms of those that had left care

and gone to University and other vulnerable people. Also, looking at woman for example, as it was mostly males that had done apprenticeships in the past. It was important to support them as local authorities, out the other end, to get them into the graduate programme.

The Skills and Talent Lead noted she had managed a large European social funded graduate programme, where there were clear cross cutting theme targets in relation to diversity and inclusion and social mobility and was something she wanted to embed moving forward, both in terms of evaluating statistics and also looking at campaigns that would target harder to reach graduate groups.

A Member referred to the economic inclusion and wealth building, which was an important factor. He felt it was not just a matter of building local wealth, but how people were included across the area and distribution of that wealth created at a source. He noted one of the models, he was particularly interested in was co-operatives e.g., worker owned enterprises. He asked whether this side of things was considered when developing the programmes.

The Skills and Talent Lead explained that this was something the Head of Business Development & Inclusive Growth would have been able to answer and would seek to get a response to the question that could be sent on to all the Members of the Committee.

A Member asked how far down the age range were graduates being targeted as if they knew about the scheme, they could direct their subject choices on a certain route.

The Skills and Talent Lead noted this went back to the strategic partnerships with Universities and about embroiling Venture into graduates from the first year of their degrees. It was hoped University partners could help to build the brand and profile and also help attract those graduates in all years, by developing a meaningful graduate development programme which meant they wanted to apply for, and stay in Wales. This was a piece of work that needed to be strengthened with careers advisors within the University. The Graduate Development Officer added that Venture had taken on two graduates from last November, working with them on the graduate attraction side of things, asking them, where did they look, where did they pay attention to posters, what sort of social media sites were they working on, etc. In addition to working with the Universities and lecturers to raise that brand awareness. The Graduate Development Officer noted the Member made a good point, it wasn't just about targeting the final years or those doing the masters, it was about those going through University and knowing that Venture was an option for them.

The Member thanked the Officer and noted that there were jobs being developed, that people when they first entered University, didn't know existed, so somehow the loop had to be closed.

A Member noted with interest, the question from the previous Member. University courses, in the past, had options that students could undertake, linked to a local business, e.g., EMI, British Aerospace., etc., as well as being sponsored but obviously SME's would struggle to do that. The Member appreciated promotion of Venture, but thought it might be useful if there were schemes where students completed a project for a local business, as part of one of their options on a course.

The Skills and Talent Lead noted, moving forward, towards a sectorial focus where a consortium of smaller businesses could be developed and aligned with the University partnership, so they had a voice and presence. The Admiral's of SE Wales were very good at reaching school leaver level, all the way up, but the small businesses couldn't do that. If there was a joining together in some form of consortium, then that could be a vehicle to help raise the value of working for a small business as well as a corporate for graduates.

The Chair concluded by acknowledging the Members questions and comments, noting this was something that had been spoken about numerous times, in terms of the CCRCD, advertising itself a bit better.

The Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Officer noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be sometime in July, after hearing from respective Councils in relation to who had been appointed

It is **RESOLVED** that Members noted the contents of the report and associated appendices, had provide feedback and suggestions on improvement and agreed that the item would be put on Forward Work Programme for 2022/23, to have update in about 12-18 months' time.

The Chair acknowledged that the Vice-Chair and Cllr V Crick, were not standing for re-election and thanked them for their contributions and wished them both well for the future. The Vice-Chair and Cllr V Crick thanked everybody for their good wishes.

#### **46 Urgent Business**

None.

**This meeting closed at 10.43 am**