



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 20 March 2023 at 2.00 pm.

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors – Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members were present:-

Councillor A Whitcombe (Caerphilly CBC) (Chair)

Councillor R Bevan	Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC (Vice Chair)
Councillor P Davies	Bridgend CBC
Councillor S Garratt	Monmouthshire CC
Councillor P Hourahine	Newport CBC
Councillor D Isaac	Merthyr Tydfil CBC
Councillor P Wong	Cardiff Council
CLlr J Aviet	Vale of Glamorgan
Councillor S Griffiths	Bridgend CBC
Councillor O Jones	Cardiff Council
Councillor R Leadbetter	Blaenau Gwent CBC

Officers in attendance

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Ms R O'Sullivan, Skills and Talent Lead
Ms N Sommerville, Head of Business Development & Growth
Ms S Daniel, Principal Democratic Services Officer
Ms J Daniel, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for absence

Councillor M Cross	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Councillor S Perkes	Vale of Glamorgan CBC
Councillor N Yeowell	Torfaen CBC
Ms Kellie Beirne	Director Cardiff Capital Region City Deal

18 Welcome and Apologies

The Chairperson welcomed Members and officers to the meeting:

Apologies

Mr Malcom Cross – Blaenau Gwent Council
Ms Sandra Perkes – Vale of Glamorgan Council
Mr Nathan Yeowell – Torfaen Council
Ms Kellie Beirne - Director of the CCR City Deal.

19 Declarations of Interest

None.

20 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 10 February 2023.

21 Venture Graduates Update

The Head of Business Development & Growth began by giving Members an overview update on the Venture Graduate scheme including the background of the scheme and position statement to date.

The Skills and Talent Lead continued by providing Members with background to the report informing Members that the framework for the scheme was approved in 2020 with the launch and rebrand of the scheme taking place a year later. The Skills and Talent Lead outlined that the aim of programme is to support SME's in the Cardiff Capital Region to recruit talent and mitigate against risks of 'brain drain' from region. Members were informed that the initial target at the outset of the scheme was 500 graduates over a 5-year period. To date, Members were told that 160 jobs had been created and recruited to with this rising to 170 by end of financial year.

Members were taken through some mitigating circumstances around the figure of jobs created being less than the target with emphasis placed on the impact of Covid-19, Brexit and the overall challenges of building a new Graduate programme for the region. The Skills and Talent Lead informed Members that despite the challenges, the programme has now been strengthened and in good position to perform for future but pointed out that the 500 jobs target would not be realistic to expect to be met.

The Skills and Talent Lead provided Members with in-depth detail of the progress of the Venture Scheme over the past 12 months which has involved realigning the Venture Graduate offer both internally and with further work being completed on the wider communications of the scheme across the region. Members were informed that the scheme is now has realigned strategic direction towards supporting CCR priority SMEs & clusters across the region in Fintech, MedTech, Cyber, Creative, Semiconductors & Net Zero businesses.

Members were also given further detail on the recruitment process adopted by the scheme following investment in the latest technology to fully automate the process providing a more agile and speedy recruitment solution to Graduates, moving away from a cohort model rigid with set dates to being able to offer year-round recruitment offering which has been well received. The Skills and Talent Lead highlighted to Members that this has led to a good stream of business referrals being received and following various events being held to promote the scheme offer there are steady business offers coming through. Members were informed that the scheme is becoming high profile throughout the region and graduate community through strengthening partnerships with Higher Education Institutes in the region.

Members were informed of a change in relation the development aspect of the scheme and detail was provided on the newly developed 'Career Accelerator Programme' (CAP) allowing graduates to choose one of two pathways available to suit their development. Members were informed of the details of the series of Masterclasses, delivered by University of South Wales focused on core

Professional & Transferable Skills. Alternatively, the second pathway available being an intensive, Open University Microcredential, offering a choice of skill areas allowing graduates a more specific form of development.

The Skills and Talent Lead finished presenting the report by informing Members that external evaluation is underway at the moment via Darogan Talent to determine the scheme's key strengths, impact and highlight past weaknesses and factors that have impacted performance to date. Members were informed that the aim is to present the findings to Cardiff Capital Region Senior Leadership Team with a view to expanding programme going forward into future.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report and invited Members to make comments and ask questions.

A Member asked whether the schemes being run by Welsh Government Apprenticeship scheme could be seen as a competitor to the Venture Graduate Scheme.

The Skills and Talent Lead replied that they did not feel it was a competitor as there were no level 7 apprenticeships and the scheme focuses on Graduate level.

A Member noted that the Graduate opportunities set out in the report are predominantly in Cardiff and asked why the opportunities & benefits are not being realised across the wider CCR where numbers remain consistently low. They also questioned whether there was a challenge with engagement outside of Cardiff, and whether businesses are failing to recognise the value to their business and what is being done to help incentivise businesses to take on graduate positions.

The Head of Business Development and Growth replied that when the programme was set up there was the belief that there would be a reliance on Local Authority Officers to send through business referrals, therefore coming from a 'grass roots' basis operating at a level playing field across the region. They acknowledged that due to the timing of the launch of the scheme the focus on Local Authorities was on Covid recovery and support for businesses, therefore, affecting the momentum and engagement. The Head of Business Development and Growth assured Members that roadshows and engagement with businesses and Higher Education institutions takes place across the region. They emphasised to Members that they are always open to engagement and support to raise profile and opportunities.

A Member questioned how ambitious the aspiration for 500 graduate jobs was to be advertised by March '24.

The Head of Business Development and Growth acknowledged this figure was ambitious and referenced some of the barriers outlined in the report and presentation. They confirmed that there is a commitment that the scheme still aims to be ambitious, but they are realistic that this is reliant on business / sector growth to open up opportunities.

A Member asked what scope there is for the regional graduate scheme to help Local Authorities address their respective skills gaps/recruitment challenges in key areas.

The Head of Business Development and Growth informed Members that the scheme aims to work with Local Authority HR departments but outlined the challenges presented due to the difference in recruitment processes. The Officer acknowledged that some Local Authorities are open to engaging with the more agile process adopted by Venture whilst some prefer to adhere to a more traditional process.

A Member questioned the impact the scheme has in respect of graduates from each local authority and requested data to show how many graduates in successful job placements come from each of the regions.

The Head of Business Development and Growth acknowledged the information in the report is heavily centred on one location but noted that the scheme has a wide area of impact for graduates in all locations in the region. The Officer noted that the data of the graduate's postcode of origin was not contained in the report but confirmed this information was being collated and would be available to be scrutinised in the next report. The Officer emphasised to Members that the aim of the scheme is to match up the relevant job opportunities with our graduates from South Wales. Graduates may live in one area but be able to be matched to a job in a different region therefore the benefits of the scheme can ripple across the regions.

A Member referenced the inclusion / Gender balance figures set out in the report noting a high proportion of BAME and International graduates who apply but only a small percentage going on to secure jobs beyond that. The Member questioned whether any analysis was carried out as to why and queried the use of exit interviews.

The Skills and Talent Lead acknowledged there needs to be more research into this area but informed Members of the current support mechanisms in place to support candidates through the process. The Officer also informed Members that 50% of this year's graduates are International students but pointed out possible barriers to overcome including a lack of awareness / fear of businesses around working through the visa application / right to work legislation hence the partnership with Newfield Law as outlined in the report to address this.

A Member questioned whether the scheme utilised exit interviews with candidates.

The Skills and Talent Lead replied that the scheme always offers feedback alongside a request to employers for their feedback but acknowledged that work can be done to look to support graduates who have been unsuccessful which is already underway.

A Member asked what the approach is regarding start-up companies and whether further support is provided for Graduates employed by start-up companies.

The Skills and Talent Lead informed Members that the scheme is working with increasing numbers of start-up businesses and as part of the career accelerator programme Graduates and businesses have support for up to 12 months. Members were informed that during this time regular wellbeing meetings are held and if there is any risk identified then they would look to support further if required.

A Member questioned how the scheme plans to encourage more females to apply for roles to address the gender balance.

The Skills and Talent Lead acknowledged the challenge of recruiting females into STEM roles and informed Members that the current statistics for the Venture scheme are 30%. Members were informed that the scheme is looking to develop video case studies highlighting females in businesses and the wider industry and currently discussions are underway with Chwarae Teg regarding their Women into Tech programme which could form part of future skills offer. The Head of Business Development and Growth also informed Members that the scheme has recently recruited the support of a copywriter and started to look at language used in job descriptions to write with more neutral terms to take a different approach to how jobs are portrayed.

A Member referenced local businesses in their region which could benefit and questioned how the scheme can be enhanced by placing graduates into businesses on periphery of region and encourage more businesses to join the scheme.

The Skills and Talent Lead highlighted to Members that the scheme is accessing more businesses in the region although they would welcome conversations with economic leads in each unitary authority area to provide the schemes toolkit to promote with businesses. The Officer confirmed they are looking to start more active engagement with business development officers over the next year and welcomed suggestions of businesses that can be followed up and support from Local Authorities and Members.

A Member asked what support is available to graduates with a disability.

The Skills and Talent Lead confirmed that if a disability is declared by a graduate, then support is in place throughout the application process and also referenced further support that is available from Venture and the programmes of support available for employers. The Officer highlighted the positives of the accessibility of the process using online applications and interview processes.

A Member asked about the feedback process for graduates who are unsuccessful.

The Skills and Talent Lead confirmed that graduates get a response every step of the process and will be aware if they are unsuccessful along the way. They also informed Members that unsuccessful graduates are provided with further resources and support being referred to careers advisors in their university should they wish to access this. Members were also informed that as part of the employer's pledge when they sign up to the scheme, they agree to provide full feedback for graduates who may be unsuccessful at final interviews. Finally, Members were provided with information regarding the schemes talent match service which encourages graduates to register with the scheme so they can be matched to any future roles suitable to their skills and qualifications.

A Member felt the scheme was positive and requested to have further information regarding KPI targets to help the committee scrutinise the success of the scheme. The Member also asked for clarification regarding the main purpose of the scheme.

The Skills and Talent Lead acknowledged the request for KPI data and confirmed this can be provided as part of a future report. They also confirmed the purpose for the scheme is to both retain graduates who come to the region to study for their degree and to attract graduates who originally lived in the region to return to work there. The Head of Growth and Development also reiterated that the aim is to have an adequate talent pool to enable businesses to grow and flourish, making sure there is a talent pipeline readily available for indigenous business to grow or for inward investors to be able to access talent pool.

A Member questioned the links that the scheme has with Further Education Institutes and their potential for providing added value to the scheme.

The Skills and Talent Lead acknowledged this and informed Members that there are monthly meetings with Further Education colleges to look at how they can work more closely together to promote not only the Venture graduate offer but also recognise talent coming from the colleges.

A Member questioned how the scheme can be broadened to look at a wider range of students not solely those who have chosen to undertake a degree through university. The Member also recommended a skills strategy be developed to enhance the scheme and broaden the skills pool of South Wales.

The Head of Growth and Development acknowledged the current limitations of the scheme focusing on graduates and informed Members this is an area that has been reflected upon however due to resource, cabinet agreement and ensuring a solid offer is provided this currently is limited. The Officer acknowledged the benefits a skills strategy could add to the scheme in allowing it to broaden its offer.

Following conclusion of their discussions the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the scale up of the Venture Graduate Scheme and recommended that a skills strategy is developed.

The Chair thanked Members for their questions and for the Officers attendance.

22 Urgent Items

None.

This meeting closed at 3.10 pm

**Councillor A Whitcombe
Chair.**