

Apprenticeship Programme – Annual Statutory Reporting 2020 - 2021

Who counts as an employee?

You should include the following staff when calculating your employee numbers:

- Anyone on your payroll on whose behalf you make National Insurance contributions
- Staff on fixed-term contracts
- Staff on maternity, paternity or adoption leave
- Staff on sick leave or extended paid leave
- Apprentices employed by the public body through an Apprenticeship Training Agency
- Employees on secondment or loan if you are paying more than 50% of their wages

Do not include:

- Anyone employed through employment agencies
- Those working on a zero-hour contract
- Bank staff
- Employees in sub-contracted organisations who are not paid directly from your payroll
- Those on career breaks

Number of employees who were working in England on 31 March 2020

465

Number of employees who were working in England on 31 March 2021

483

Number of new employees who started working for you in England between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

55

Your Apprentices

Who counts as an apprentice?

You should include the following staff when calculating your apprentice numbers:

- Anyone doing an approved English apprenticeship framework or standard with an apprenticeship agreement in place

Number of apprentices who were working in England on 31 March 2020

30

Number of apprentices who were working in England on 31 March 2021

27

Number of new apprentices in England whose apprenticeship agreements started in between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

This includes both new hires and existing employees who started an apprenticeship

21

Your full-time equivalents (optional)

How to calculate your full-time equivalent numbers

Firstly, work out the number of weekly hours each part-time employee is contracted to work divided by your organisation's standard full-time working week. For example, 10 hours divided by 37 hours equated to 0.27 full-time equivalents.

Then add your full-time employee numbers to come up with a total number of full-time equivalents. Round your total to the nearest whole number.

Number of full-time equivalents (optional)

What actions have you taken this year to meet the target? How do these compare to the actions taken in the previous year?

We, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (the Authority) have continued to evolve the enrolment of our operational firefighters, to ensure the apprenticeship programme is fit for purpose and delivers the right people, with the right skills in the right roles. By utilising the Authority's levy, it has enabled new starters to benefit from local terms and conditions and national pay rates which attracts a larger range of applicants and so the employment of the right candidates.

As part of the Authority's strategy for the retention and upskilling of existing staff and to develop future leaders, we have enrolled one member of staff onto an apprenticeship during this reporting period, to develop their professional leadership skills. This also helps raise the profile, embed and mentor apprenticeship programmes within the organisation. We have employed 20 new operational firefighters who were enrolled on to the level three operational firefighter apprenticeship standard.

Various staff have supported the development of apprenticeship standards within their area of competence by providing representation on trailblazer groups albeit via virtual meetings. This develops future networking opportunities for the Authority as well as a greater understanding of the standards being developed.

The Authority continues to deliver its pledge to the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN). Information, guidance and resources from this network is being used in the attraction, engagement and recruitment of apprentices. These activities have been limited this year due to COVID restrictions.

Throughout the pandemic, we have adapted how we engage with our community to promote apprenticeships with virtual careers talks to local colleges and social media campaigns sharing apprentices 'real life' experiences of their journey. This had a particular focus during National Apprenticeship Week where we promoted the diversity of apprentices within the organisation, highlighting age range and previous work history to inform others that apprenticeships are for everyone.

We continue to review our apprenticeship strategy in line with our workforce planning to ensure that when recruitment opportunities present themselves, that our apprenticeships are part of our blended approach to recruitment.

What challenges have you faced this year in your efforts to meet the target? How do these compare to the challenges experienced in the previous year?

The lack of registered training providers available locally for Business Fire Safety Apprentices and Community Safety Advisors has meant we have been unable to utilise these apprenticeship Standards.

Although we have recruited and enrolled 20 new operational firefighters COVID-19 has presented the biggest challenge to us throughout this reporting period. It has put a stop to the “have a go days” that we programmed in throughout the year, reduced attendance at career fairs and meant we need to adapt our approach to training these new starts

Alongside the barriers the pandemic has presented, it also provided an opportunity for the Authority and its staff to review the way business as usual has been conducted and evaluate and implement learns to be better prepared for future campaigns. Our apprentices have adapted to working virtually with their respective training providers, which has allowed their progress to continue without the need for a break in learning.

The Authority had planned to have representation at WorldSkillsUK live at the NEC and at the National Apprentice show at the MK Arena but unfortunately both were cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

We have unfortunately had some of our operational firefighter apprentices resign from their programme. The reasons for the resignations were sought to allow the Authority to evaluate any learns and implement changes for future programmes. Work has been undertaken to deliver a complete a robust process of recruitment from advertising through to employment to enable the Authority to recruit the right candidates from our local community.

A further challenge we have found when trying to enrol apprentices is that some training providers are only willing to take on cohorts of apprentices and not being able tailor their delivery to meet the requirements of only one apprentice i.e. project management and learning and development level five.

In addition, the lack of availability of the training provider courses for our operational firefighters based around our own workforce planning and timings.

The Authority is now more experienced and knowledgeable with apprenticeships since taking another cohort of operational firefighters and several support staff members through their End Point Assessment. We have been able to gain from this experience and by having regular engagement with awarding bodies through the NFCC Apprenticeship forum and being involved in the Operational Firefighter Apprenticeship standard review. This has allowed us to impart our apprentices with a more rounded appreciation of this process.

The Authorities aspiration of applying to the Register of Apprentice Training Providers (RoATP) and the appreciation of what is required of us moving forward. With the register only being open at specific times of the year could cause issue with our employment programme. In relation to having to be on RoATP as a supporting provider, allowing us to train our own operational firefighters, as we currently have to put aside training time to convert our staff on return from their respective acquisition course which puts a greater burden on our resources.

How are you planning to meet the target in future? What will you continue to do or do differently?

NFCC Workforce Committee has set up an Apprenticeships Board to reinforce profile, and to optimise resources to best support FRS's to deliver their plans. The Authority has representation on this committee to ensure our local proposition aligns National developments.

Continuing to work with Emergency Services to deliver joint trailblazers and identify further opportunities for collaboration.

Continuation of the Authority's strategic workforce planning, where apprentices are an integral element of a blended approach to resourcing. This also involves developing career pathways for upskilling existing staff based on the NFCC leadership framework.

Continuing to support apprenticeship trailblazers for sector-relevant standards by providing resources and subject matter experts to the trailblazer groups.

Continued membership of the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network, improving networking opportunities, and learning from other members and organisations about ways in which we could improve the diversity of our apprentices and, therefore, our workforce.

Optimising the use of national resources to promote apprenticeship careers.

Building relationships with local training providers and other FRS's to develop new opportunities for new starters and existing members of staff to promote and deliver best practice.

Reviewing Apprenticeship options for On-Call employees and how they can meet the apprenticeship criteria to helping us attract and retaining On-Call FF's albeit aspirational at this time

Promotion of our apprenticeship programmes through National Apprentice week, social media campaigns and local events to attract our apprentices of the future, this will also help break down previous challenges and myths. Once COVID restrictions are suitably lifted the continuation of frequent "have a go days" to promote the operational firefighter role to include the targeting of specific groups. Utilising our station crews to champion apprenticeship programmes throughout the service when they carry out visits to include engagement sessions with local colleges that run emergency services courses.

Do you have anything else you want to tell us? (optional)

With current and previous apprentices now embedded across departments and fire stations within the Authority this has enabled a culture change allowing experience to be shared and also serving firefighters to become mentors for those new apprentices.

The Authority will be exploring the possibility of signing up to the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP) as a supporting provider as this will enable us to deliver training to our own staff. It is also always encouraging that the National Apprenticeship service is open and available to discuss opportunities at the NFCC Apprenticeship forums.

We will be exploring the exciting work that Devon & Somerset continue to do with the delivery of On-Call firefighter apprenticeships and looking to see how we can utilise this model for our future On-Call staff giving us the ability to standardise the training and development offered to all new firefighter recruits regardless of contract this is also something that we would be interested in delivering to our Flexi-Firefighters.

The Authority continues to work with its Thames Valley Fire Service partners to determine options for a collaborative approach to operational apprenticeship recruitment. This includes looking at improving diversity and working together to resolve common issues. Specific actions were identified, both internally and through this collaborative work, to improve the diversity of applicants, primarily from both female and BAME candidates. These actions include awareness campaigns, 'have a go days' and allocation of 'recruitment buddies'.

We continue to champion the work we have completed with our apprenticeship programme to support other services and to share best practice, this will also include embedding the NFCC leadership and development framework into our apprenticeships.

Cadet courses and T- Levels are areas that will be looked at as a source for future apprentices within the organisation.