



LOCAL APPROACHES TO APPRENTICESHIP ENGAGEMENT AND READINESS FOR EMPLOYERS

Good Practice Guide for Local Enterprise
Partnerships

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INTRODUCTION

This guide has been created to assist Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) with developing and delivering apprenticeship engagement and readiness support for employers. It has been produced by Learning & Work Institute (L&W) on behalf of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Why local?

The 39 LEPs across England exist to promote economic growth and jobs in local areas. They act to foster more effective strategic co-operation between businesses and the public sector, particularly local government. As part of their role, LEPs support the delivery of relevant national priorities, including apprenticeship reform and the achievement of the national apprenticeship target of three million new apprenticeship starts by 2020, by defining and implementing approaches that reflect local economic needs.

It is well-recognised that the local dimension is critical for the successful delivery of apprenticeship policy. The apprenticeship reform programme intersects with several key areas for which LEPs have strategic responsibility, in particular Growth Hubs and local skills and employment strategies. With their local links and knowledge, LEPs are especially well-placed to support the engagement of employers in small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) with apprenticeships. Recent research from the Federation of Small Businesses highlighted the important role that SMEs could play in enabling the Government to achieve its apprenticeship target.¹ It identified considerable interest in employing apprentices among SMEs, but also multiple barriers and challenges which currently hamper growth.² The research stressed the importance of local approaches for enabling SMEs to engage with apprenticeships. It called for LEPs and Growth Hubs to lead the development and implementation of local apprenticeship plans, and for apprenticeship growth in small firms to be supported through responsive and flexible local employment and skills strategies.³

Engaging with SMEs around apprenticeship reform presents particular challenges for LEPs, due to both the scale and diversity of the businesses involved. To strengthen this local dimension in engaging employers, and particularly SMEs, in December 2016 ESFA offered grants of £5,000 to each LEP to develop and deliver targeted employer engagement and readiness activities in their area. LEPs were invited to propose how they would use the funding, and a total of 30 grants were made. L&W was commissioned by ESFA to carry out

¹ Federation of Small Businesses (2016) *Make or Break: Getting apprenticeship reform right for small businesses*. Download: <http://www.fsb.org.uk/docs/default-source/fsb-org-uk/fsb-apprenticeships-report-final.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

² Federation of Small Businesses (2016) *Make or Break: Getting apprenticeship reform right for small businesses*. Download: <http://www.fsb.org.uk/docs/default-source/fsb-org-uk/fsb-apprenticeships-report-final.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

³ FSB, *Make or Break*.

research to explore how this funding was used, the outcomes it achieved, and to identify examples of good and effective practice for wider dissemination.

Apprenticeship engagement and readiness activities

The research found that LEPs used the funding to carry out the following activities.

Activity type	Number
Events	20
Resource development	8
Campaigns	8
Research	5
Intermediary development support	3

As these figures suggest, some LEPs undertook several different activities in their projects. For instance, resources were developed for dissemination through a campaign, or a media campaign sought to engage employers and encourage them to attend an event where further information and support would be available.

The nature of the interventions and the short timescales of the projects mean that it was not realistic to expect the research to find significant impact attributed to the work in terms of new apprenticeship starts. However, the activities were shown to have made a difference to levels of employer engagement and readiness, and thereby helped to achieve the following intermediate outcomes.

- Increased awareness of apprenticeships.
- Improved knowledge and understanding of apprenticeship reform.
- Greater awareness of local and national sources of support.
- Increased readiness to engage with local and national sources of support.
- Increased interest in employing apprentices

In addition, the activities contributed towards enhancing the local infrastructure for delivering employer engagement and readiness. Organisational outcomes identified through the research included:

- Better understanding among LEPs and partners of employers' engagement and readiness support needs.
- Improved local resources for carrying out employer engagement.
- More effective local personalised support provision for employers.
- Strengthened partnership working.

About this guide

Drawing on the evidence of good and effective practice identified through the research, this guide aims to strengthen the work undertaken locally to support employers in engaging with apprenticeship reform. It includes:

- A good practice framework, setting out the key features of effective practice in reaching, engaging and supporting local employers, illustrated with local examples.
- Suggestions for designing and delivering different types of interventions
- “Top tips” for effective delivery.
- Four case studies of local practice.

The good practice framework is intended to offer a flexible approach which can be used to inform the design, development and delivery of activities in different local circumstances.

The guide will be of interest both to employment and skills leads within LEPs, and to those in partner organisations who work with them on apprenticeship policy in their local area. LEPs are well-placed to lead apprenticeship engagement and readiness work with local employers. They can draw on the knowledge and expertise of partners who encompass all the key apprenticeship stakeholders, and have credibility due to their perceived impartiality and independence from the interests of any single training provider.

It is hoped that by making explicit the key features of good practice in apprenticeship and readiness for employers, and showing what LEPs have achieved with different kinds of interventions, the guide will assist LEPs to optimize the effectiveness of this aspect of their work to support the delivery of apprenticeship reform.

GOOD PRACTICE FRAMEWORK: KEY FEATURES

This section describes the key features of a good practice framework for designing, developing and delivering apprenticeship engagement and readiness activities for employers in local areas.

The research suggested that there is no single *type* of activity which is most effective. What is critical is *how* that activity is delivered. With that in mind, this framework provides a blueprint for developing interventions, which can be applied flexibly to different kinds of activities and across the diverse contexts in which LEPs are operating.

The elements of the framework are summarised in Figure 1 and discussed in more detail below. The six elements form a high-level checklist against which proposed interventions can be assessed. The case studies included at the end of this guide illustrate how the framework could be applied in practice.

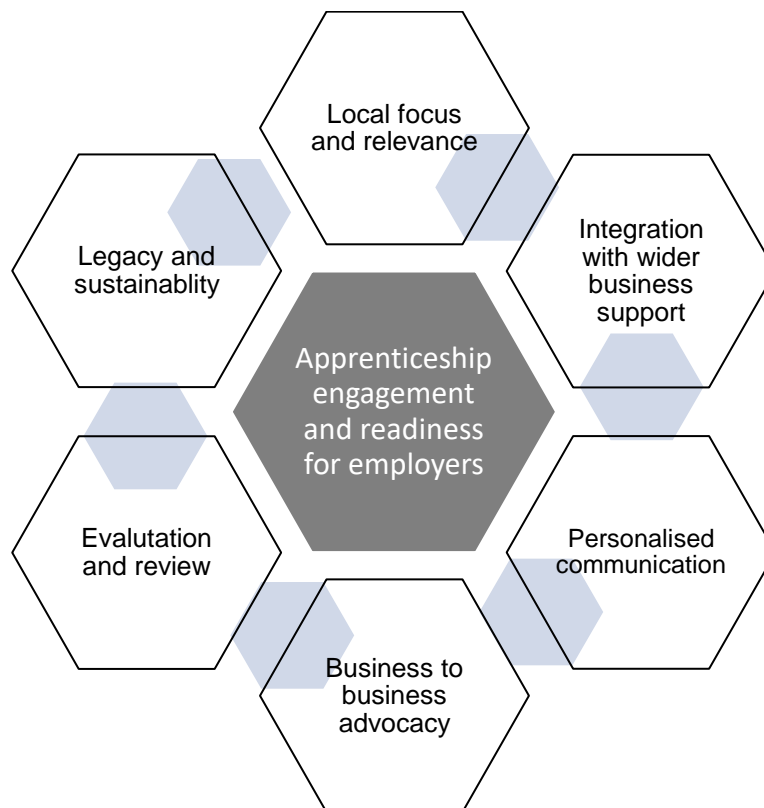


Figure 1. *Good practice framework for local approaches to apprenticeship engagement and readiness for employers*

Local focus and relevance

Involving partners and stakeholders helps to ensure that interventions meet the needs of the local economy and labour market. LEPs are well-placed to take the lead on this, as they can draw on the collective knowledge, insights and experience of a range of partners who encompass all the key apprenticeship stakeholders within a locality, including employers,

local authorities, training providers, careers and enterprise providers, and schools and colleges.

Ideally, activities should be undertaken not as stand-alone projects, but integrated into local planning processes so that they sit within a coherent programme of work to drive business growth, address skills gaps and stimulate apprenticeships.

The research identified a range of ways in which LEPs can align their engagement and readiness activities with these wider local contexts.

- **Employers' are directly involved in shaping activities.** Their involvement can be secured via members of business-focused groups including Employment and Skills Boards, Chambers of Commerce and Apprenticeship Ambassador Networks. They provide detailed intelligence on sectors and roles where skills gaps exist in the local labour market that apprenticeship growth can help to address, and indicate the kinds of support that employers need and how this can most effectively be delivered.
- **Responsibility for both the design and delivery of interventions is devolved from regional to local level.** This method is particularly helpful for LEPs which cover geographically large and economically diverse areas, as it facilitates both reach and relevance of messages.
- **Activities complement those being delivered locally through other business-focused initiatives,** such as National Apprenticeship Week, thereby avoiding duplication and addressing gaps.
- **Materials and resources were locally branded.**

Integration with wider business support

Apprenticeship engagement and readiness activities should be located strategically within wider infrastructure which supports business growth for several reasons.

- The sheer number of SMEs which need to be engaged greatly exceeds that which LEPs alone have the capacity to reach. Working with and through intermediary organisations represents the only feasible way of making contact with these businesses on a significant scale.
- SMEs are tremendously diverse, and cover a huge diversity of sectors, some of which have no tradition of apprenticeships. Engaging via specialist, sector specific bodies can provide the vital entry point and credibility for apprenticeship messages, which is essential if messages are to penetrate across the local business community.
- It may be difficult to engage individual employers on the subject of apprenticeships when they do not yet recognise how this relates to their business needs. This is especially true with regard to SMEs which have lower initial levels of awareness and knowledge of the current apprenticeship agenda, and are likely to regard it as irrelevant to them. These

businesses need support to recognise “*What’s in it for me?*” Embedding employer engagement on apprenticeships into outreach and communications on the wider theme of business growth may therefore be more effective than attempting to address the issue in isolation.

- Many employers who are new to apprenticeships may need access to further, more in-depth, information and support before they are ready to employ an apprentice, and business support services play a crucial role in providing this. The journey which SME employers take from finding out about apprenticeship reform to actually taking on an apprentice can last up to six to twelve months, and often requires individual support and “hand holding”. Appropriate signposting and referral routes, and robust processes to ensure that employers receive effective follow-up to support their next steps, should be integral to engagement and readiness activities.

LEPs involved in the research highlighted a range of ways in which integrating engagement and readiness projects with wider business support helps to increase their effectiveness.

- **Growth Hubs are involved as key partners, with the aim of positioning them as the principal interface between the LEP and SMEs and establishing their role and profile as the main local channel for the delivery of apprenticeship engagement and readiness support.** Building the capacity of Growth Hubs is likely to be necessary, to equip them fulfil this role, for example with in-depth training for Growth Hub business advisers on apprenticeship reform, or by developing the Growth Hub website and on-line resources.
- **Partnerships are developed with business support networks such as Chambers of Commerce and FSB.** These networks act as trusted channels for cascading information to large numbers of SMEs, and facilitate on-going contact with employers to support their apprenticeship journey.
- **Training providers play a key role in the development and delivery of many projects.** They are key intermediaries to whom businesses might look for advice and support on apprenticeships. Working with and through local provider networks, where these exist, has the advantage of both increasing geographical reach and presenting a more impartial aspect than is the case with a single provider.
- **Signposting to sources of further support is embedded into engagement and readiness activities.** Although apprenticeship brokerage services are not available in all areas of the country, where they are in place (usually funded through ESF), they provide a crucial referral route for employers requiring personalised, impartial guidance and support.
- **Apprenticeship content is embedded into events with a broader business development focus.** This may involve piggybacking onto the events of external

organisations, or hosting events on themes such as workforce development or addressing skills gaps into which apprenticeships are introduced as a potential solution.

- **Initial outreach and engagement messages are framed in terms of wider business development concerns**, in order to open up a dialogue into which the subject of apprenticeships can subsequently be introduced.

Personalised communication

Interacting with SME employers in ways which speak directly to their business needs and interests is critical if they are to engage with apprenticeships. Both the diversity and distinctiveness of SMEs, and the time pressures on business directors and managers, mean that blanket methods of communication and generic messages alone are unlikely to gain traction. It is not enough to articulate the broad business benefits of apprenticeships, but rather differentiated and even individualised approaches and content may be needed.

This is well-recognised by LEPs, and the research highlighted a variety of ways in which activities can be personalised and targeted.

- **Data analysis helps to identify specific target groups of employers, facilitating more efficient and effective outreach and engagement work.** This is not straightforward, due to barriers that prevent LEPs from accessing good local business data on apprenticeship that is held nationally (Blue Sheep Data). However, working with other datasets LEPs can compile contact lists of target businesses to underpin subsequent activities.
- **Interventions are delivered which enable quality interactions with employers based on personal contact and support.** Hosting stands at events, undertaking market research and conducting telemarketing campaigns can all help to put personal, and personalised, interaction at the heart of employer engagement.
- **The breadth and diversity of apprenticeship pathways should be stressed, to demonstrate how they can help to address a wide range of skills gaps and business needs.** Many SMEs have outdated misconceptions about what an apprenticeship is, which need to be robustly challenged if employers are to understand how apprenticeships could be relevant to them.
- **Materials and resources are developed which are locally branded and / or respond directly to issues and questions raised by employers.** This helps to build confidence that apprenticeships are relevant to the needs of the local labour market.

Business to business advocacy

Business to business advocacy is the most effective means of delivering messages about the value and benefits of apprenticeships to employers. It gives credibility and weight to communications that cannot be achieved through other channels. The need to hear about apprenticeships from “someone like me” may be particularly important in the case of SME employers, which need to be convinced that there are genuine benefits for their individual businesses.

The research showed how LEPs can use a range of approaches to facilitate business to business advocacy through their activities.

- **Local apprenticeship employers in key sectors act as case studies, describing their experiences and highlighting the business benefits of apprenticeships.** Both live case studies, in the form of inputs to events, and video case studies, can be effective ways of securing the interest of other employers.
- **Employers are directly involved in delivering outreach and engagement activities, providing the front line of initial interactions with the target audience.** Apprentice Ambassadors are well-placed to carry out this role, as their knowledge experience and passion around apprenticeships is often coupled with a high profile and credibility in the local business community.
- **Outreach and engagement activities focused on apprenticeships are embedded into initiatives led by partner organisations with credibility and a high profile in the business world.** Business networks such as Chambers of Commerce and FSB, sector networks and local groups all provide potential access points to groups of SMEs.
- **Current apprentices are involved as speakers on platforms at events, describing their own apprenticeship experience, what they gained from it, and what they contributed to their employer.** These testimonies are often identified as some of the most powerful and persuasive ways of highlighting the business benefits of apprenticeships to employers who were new to the subject, by showing the calibre of individual that could be attracted to their organisation.

Evaluation and review

Engagement and readiness interventions should be robustly evaluated, and reviewed in light of the findings so that lessons can be learned and future delivery planned to ensure that it remains responsive to local needs. Evaluation should be embedded into the project from the outset, and will typically include the following stages: planning; gathering evidence; analyzing and interpreting evidence; disseminating findings; and reviewing and refining delivery.

Key to effective evaluation is clear and realistic identification of what outcomes are to be measured and how and when this can be done. The work undertaken by LEPs through this funding programme focused overwhelmingly on outreach and engagement with employers who had little or no previous experience of apprenticeships, with the aim of helping them to begin or progress on the journey towards become apprentice employers. As was discussed above, establishing appropriate signposting and referral routes from these kinds of project activities is critical for enabling this progression. What this means is that evaluations carried out by projects as part of their delivery should focus primarily on capturing immediate outcomes in terms of employer awareness, knowledge and understanding, attitudes and intentions. .

Evaluation was not a prominent feature of the activities explored in the research, as LEPs had understandably chosen to focus the bulk of the funding on delivery. Nevertheless, a number of approaches were identified which demonstrate some of the ways in which it can be carried out in work of this kind.

- **Methods to capture evidence of direct outcomes are integrated into engagement and readiness activities.** Most commonly, this involves the use of feedback sheets to gauge participants' views on the usefulness of events and their intended next steps.
- **On-line diagnostics are used to obtain a rough idea of the reach of digital materials and resources.**
- **Partners work together to track outcomes that are achieved beyond the immediate delivery period.** This is vital for identifying where additional outcomes have been achieved as a result of further interventions, and recognises that the plethora of apprenticeship-related initiatives taking place in local areas means that it may not be possible to isolate the impact of a single intervention.

Legacy and sustainability

Local approaches to engaging and supporting employers on apprenticeships will have much greater impact if they are not treated as one-off, single actions, but rather as investments which can deliver on-going outcomes. This is because employers need to be able to access information and support at the point when they are ready to do so, and this will depend upon individual business needs and circumstances. Both the day to day business demands of SME directors and managers, and organisational business cycles, impact upon when and how employers may be motivated to engage. Timeliness is key.

While many LEPs involved in the research used the introduction of the levy in April 2017 as a hook from which to hang their activities, they also stressed that there is no single golden opportunity to engage employers. Repeatedly communicating messages, to reach new audiences and to reinforce them with those already engaged, is therefore essential for achieving significant local impact. The research identified a number of ways in which LEPs can address this.

- **Materials and resources are developed for publication on line and wider local dissemination.** This creates a legacy for the funded work beyond the delivery period, and makes information and support available to the widest possible audience. Resources can be used by LEPs and their partners to support future activities, and have a "shelf life" beyond the project itself.
- **Outputs such as film clips and publications are generated from events and disseminated on line and through partner networks,** to reach beyond those employers who are able to participate in person and create a legacy for these interventions.
- **Funding is used to develop the wider infrastructure for employer engagement and readiness, for example by building the capacity of the LEP and intermediary organisations on apprenticeships.**

DESIGNING AND DELIVERING EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

This section draws on the research evidence to highlight actions that could be undertaken when delivering different interventions with a view to maximising their impact on employer engagement and readiness. The case studies provide illustrative examples of practice.

Events

These are most widely used for initial engagement, with the aim of raising employer awareness of apprenticeships and providing information.

- To integrate more personalised support, and help to progress employers to the next stage of apprenticeship engagement, create opportunities for one-to-one interactions. This can be done through Q&A sessions, breakout sessions, workshops or exhibition stands. Employers can gain helpful insights and valuable advice from individuals such as other employers who are committed to apprenticeships, from training providers and from business advisers.

It appears that standalone events delivered directly by the LEP, particularly with a focus on apprenticeships, often struggle to attract employers in significant numbers.

- Work with partners who have strong links to networks of employers, such as Chambers, FSB and local sector networks, to embed workshops or other inputs with an apprenticeship focus into events that they are hosting.
- Work through intermediaries which have good geographical coverage, knowledge and staffing capacity, such as training provider networks, to deliver multiple targeted and bespoke events which cascade information to groups of employers in ways that are differentiated to meet their needs.

Lack of time is often cited as a major barrier to employer engagement via events.

- Produce resources which complement events, and film key inputs, to make content available online for dissemination to a wider audience and accessible at a time that is convenient.

Resource development

Effective dissemination is key to securing impact.

- Growth Hubs or online apprenticeship hubs can provide a locally focused single point of engagement for employers with apprenticeship information, support materials and signposting. Developing apprenticeship content on the Growth Hub website, or another on-line portal,

- Local branding, and case studies of local employers, help to strengthen messages about the relevance of apprenticeships to SMEs.

Campaigns

These often have a “scattergun” approach, aiming to raise awareness of apprenticeships with as many employers as possible. However, something should also be in place to effectively support those who are receptive to the initial message to take the next step.

- Signposting to sources of further information, advice and support should of course be integral to all campaigns. To strengthen this, link campaigns explicitly to the offer of more personalised support such as that available through business advisers, rather than simply directing employers further generic information or events.

A campaign focused on apprenticeships alone is likely to have limited resonance with SME employers who are not already engaged.

- Make the campaign “headline” a wider business issue such as workforce development or business growth, and embed apprenticeships within this as part of the solution.

Research

Research by LEPs with employers on apprenticeships tends to focus on finding out about their levels of awareness, barriers to engagement, and information and needs in order to shape future interventions. But the opportunity to engage them more pro-actively with apprenticeships should not be missed.

- Use telephone interviews to carry out research, as this provides the personal contact that is often necessary to engage SMEs. Make the conversation not simply about collecting evidence, but create space to for a dialogue about what support is available and offer direct support to access it as appropriate. This could involve actions such as make an appointment with a business adviser to explore in depth the potential role of apprenticeships in meeting individual business needs.

Intermediary development support

Equipping intermediaries with the knowledge and confidence to provide effective support to employers on apprenticeships can help both to engage with greater numbers of SMEs and to support them to take practical steps towards employing apprentices. They can help to provide the personal contact that is often necessary when working with SMEs.

- To embed apprenticeships into wider business support, build the capacity of Growth Hub business advisers and others in similar roles to provide apprenticeship guidance and support.
- Work with key contacts in Chambers of Commerce and other business networks, to ensure that they have up-to-date knowledge and information to support and signpost employers on apprenticeships.

“TOP TIPS” FOR GOOD PRACTICE

This section summarises the main messages about good and effective practice identified from the local projects, into a series of “top tips”.

It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of effective actions in employer engagement and readiness. The critical challenge currently facing LEPs as they seek to support this aspect of apprenticeship policy implementation is twofold. First, how to reach and engage large numbers of employers in SMEs on the subject of apprenticeships, and secondly, how to ensure that, once engaged, these employers are able to access the on-going support that many will need to reach the point of employing an apprentice. It is with these specific issues of reach and sustainability in mind that these key points have been identified.

1. **Work with and through your Growth Hub, positioning it as the front line of support for employer engagement and readiness.** Build the capacity of business advisers to work with SMEs on apprenticeships, strengthen on-line communication and resources, and use contacts databases to segment target audiences.
2. **Develop partnerships on apprenticeships with Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses and other local business networks.** Build the capacity of key contacts in these organisations on apprenticeship reform.
3. **Map the end-to-end apprenticeship journey for employers in your LEP area.** Identify what support is available each stage, differentiated by locality and sector as appropriate. Highlight sources of individualised support offered by e.g. Growth Hubs, brokerage services and training providers, and ensure that robust signposting processes are in place to direct employers who need extra support to these from initial engagement activities. Work with delivery partners to identify ways to track and capture outcomes across the journey.
4. **Embed apprenticeship engagement and readiness activities into wider business development and support.** Deliver workshops and other inputs on apprenticeships into events being hosted by partner organisations that have reach and credibility with SMEs, including those in key target sectors. Frame outreach and engagement messages in business development terms, and introduce apprenticeships as a potential solution to address business needs.
5. **Involve employers as advocates of apprenticeships.** Identify those with a strong local and / or sector profile and reputation, as well as an apprenticeship track record, to give relevance, weight and prominence to their contributions.
6. **Create materials and resources that can add value and be used to support on-going delivery of engagement and readiness activities.** Identify opportunities to generate online content which can be locally branded for cascading and disseminating via networks and partners.
7. **Present diverse apprenticeship experiences, tailored to the target audience, to challenge misconceptions and highlight the breadth of opportunities that exist to engage.** Develop case studies and other resources, and use employer and apprentice

testimonies, that showcase higher and degree apprenticeships, non-traditional sectors, and the apprenticeship experiences of older adults.

CASE STUDIES

Coast to Capital LEP

What the project involved

The project consisted of a number of strands of activities, working chiefly with business intermediaries and networking organisations to deliver apprenticeship engagement and readiness support to SMEs. The LEP recognised the need for this approach due to the huge number of SMEs in its area, and the large geography it covers. Project delivery was devolved to the two provider networks in the region: Sussex Council of Learning Providers and Association of Learning Providers Surrey.

There were two strands to the work.

1. **Training for Growth Hub business advisers** (Business Navigators) who work across the Surrey and Sussex area, to equip them with the knowledge and confidence to introduce apprenticeships into all their interactions with businesses. The training consisted of two elements.
 - A one-day training session covering: the apprenticeship reform programme; the impact of the reform on levy and non-levy paying employers; business benefits of apprenticeships; the referral process; and the role of training providers.
 - Small group follow-up sessions covering: local labour market data; skills gaps; the current local apprenticeship offer and progression pathways from pre-employment to higher and degree apprenticeships; and gaps in current provision.

It is intended that the networks will keep in touch with the Navigators in their area, to ensure that they remain briefed and supported as the reforms are implemented.

2. **Engagement and consultation through business networks**, using a flexible approach to suit different contexts and opportunities. Targeted engagement was delivered by the two provider networks to groups of employers brought together via business support networks including Federation of Small Businesses and Chambers of Commerce. A workshop on apprenticeships was also delivered at a “skills and talent” festival run by Wired Sussex, the local business network for the digital media sector.

What it achieved

The project trained nine Business Navigators, and increased understanding about apprenticeships among intermediaries in other partner organisations

- Developing the skills and expertise of Business Navigators in relation to apprenticeships has helped the LEP with positioning the Growth Hub as its front line of employer engagement. The advisers’ new in-depth knowledge and understanding has given them the confidence to embed apprenticeships into the wider conversations that they are having with employers.

- The delivery partners made direct contact with over a hundred small businesses through their activities, and estimate that indirectly through FSB and Chambers, they have reached hundreds more.

Through the Wired Sussex event, the LEP reached and engaged employers in a sector where they had previously struggled to make the apprenticeship message heard. The workshop enabled them to gain a platform via which to challenge misconceptions about apprenticeships and begin to change minds. Event feedback indicated that, by the end of the workshop, 26 employers who had initially declared that they had no interest in apprenticeships had altered their view.

Good practice

Focusing on building the capacity of the Growth Hub has helped to strengthen its role and profile as the key channel for the LEP's business engagement work, and has integrated employer engagement on apprenticeships into wider business facing activity.

The approach of working through the training provider networks has enabled the LEP to exceed greatly the reach that would have been possible if it had attempted to undertake the work directly. Having well-informed and skilled intermediaries in place also enhanced the quality of interactions that are now possible with employers around apprenticeships.

Messages about apprenticeships were introduced into FSB and Chambers of Commerce events on wider themes such as staff retention and recruitment, bridging skills gaps, and working with universities. This has helped to overcome the perception on the part of many SMEs that apprenticeships were not relevant to their business needs. Rather than inviting employers to external events, the LEP took the conversation on apprenticeships into their space, where they were more open and receptive to hearing about the reform programme and having their prejudices challenged.

Working with the Growth Hub, provider networks, FSB and Chambers has also enabled long term, more sustainable relationships to be established with businesses through which they can be supported around apprenticeships. This better reflects the process by which employers might make the decision to take on an apprentice, which takes time, reflection and inputs from different partners.

The training was responsive and highly tailored to the needs of Business Navigators. It included case studies and worked examples of potential "real life" scenarios, which has given trainees the skills and confidence to articulate to individual employers how apprenticeships can help to address their business needs.

Coventry and Warwickshire LEP

What the project involved

The LEP delivered a programme of integrated activities including:

- An information campaign via email, local business press and radio.
- A breakfast event with lecture capture.
- The development of webpages on the Growth Hub website to include apprenticeship information and lecture video from the event.
- A follow-up session, filmed and added to the Growth Hub website.

The activities were delivered in partnership with the Chambers of Commerce, Business Desk online and BBC Coventry and Warwickshire radio.

What it achieved

Thirty-five employers attended the event, and in the six weeks following the event the webpage received around 100 visits.

The initial publicity campaign had the potential to reach tens of thousands.

Good practice

Filming the event has made it possible for SMEs which were not in a position to attend the event (for example, due to time constraints) to access the information in a way that is convenient and timely for them.

Enhancing the Growth Hub's web presence on apprenticeships has strengthened the resources that are available to support the LEP's on-going engagement and readiness work. It has raised the profile of the Growth Hub and enhanced its role as the interface between the LEP and employers on apprenticeships.

Evaluation and review prompted the LEP to conclude that in future it would seek to deliver event content via other meetings with a wider theme (e.g. workforce development, tackling skills shortages in your company). It was felt that this will have wider appeal with the target audience than an event on the specific topic of apprenticeships.

Heart of the South West LEP

What the project involved

The project delivered a campaign which aimed to increase engagement of SMEs in the Heart of the South West LEP area with apprenticeships. It focused on raising awareness among employers of the apprenticeship reform agenda, communicating messages about the business benefits of apprenticeships, and supporting businesses to understand how to engage with the opportunities presented by the new policy.

The campaign consisted of two elements.

- Participation in the Federation of Small Businesses National Conference, which took place in Devon in March 2017. A large exhibition stand was staffed for two days by employers from the South West Apprenticeship Ambassadors Network (SWAAN) and staff from Devon County Council Economy, Enterprise and Skills Service. In addition,

the LEP organised a plenary presentation on the main conference stage on apprenticeships and their benefits to employers, support available and forthcoming changes affecting SMEs delivered by the Director of the National Apprenticeship Service, local employer and their apprentices. The presentation included a Q&A session.

- A media campaign in partnership with local press, which included: editorial features on apprenticeships; news articles and updates on apprenticeship reforms; sectoral and business profiles and case studies of apprentice employers; interviews with business leaders. This was backed up by engagement via social media, and the creation of five video case studies to be disseminated online.

To ensure that the planned activities would meet local need and would not duplicate or displace any existing activity, the LEP undertook extensive consultation with partners including local authorities and business networks at the planning stage.

Devon County Council provided match funding to cover the cost of some of the elements of the campaign and enhance the programme of activities.

What it achieved

A total of 789 delegates attended the FSB National Conference. Prior to the LEP's offer of its two inputs being accepted, there was no specific apprenticeship-focused content on the agenda of this event. Twenty-four local businesses engaged in quality interactions on apprenticeships via the LEP's exhibition stand, taking part in one-to-one discussions with SWAAN members, leaving their contact details and indicating that they wished to be kept up to date with national apprenticeship policy developments and further support opportunities in the LEP area.

Five high-quality videos were created which are suitable for dissemination via different online channels. They feature a range of different industry sectors, including advanced engineering, professional services, and food and drink.

Good practice

The inputs at the FSB Conference were effective in engaging employers who were new to the apprenticeship agenda. Particularly successful features of the approach were:

- Business to business engagement, where local Apprenticeship Ambassadors shared their experiences of and passion for apprenticeships with other employers via the exhibition stand. These were the most valuable, high quality interactions that took place, based on open and honest conversations about how apprenticeships work in practice.
- Contributions to the plenary session from two apprentices themselves, which made a powerful impact on the audience. This was arranged by the LEP in partnership with the apprentices' employer and the local college, and included short testimonies from their employer and tutor.

- Embedding the delivery of information and advice on apprenticeships into a context that was trusted and credible for employers.
- The engagement by the LEP of the Director of the National Apprenticeship Service to provide a plenary input, which helped to raise the status and profile of the messages with delegates.

The media campaign created awareness and provided useful information which will inform the LEP's further work on apprenticeships.

The video content has created a lasting legacy for the project, which can be used by partners and other stakeholders in promoting apprenticeships.

Leeds City Region LEP

What the project involved

Activities in Leeds City Region were designed to complement and enhance the LEP's planned programme of work to promote apprenticeships to employers. They aligned with the region's *More and Better Apprenticeships* strategic priority, and with the locally devolved Apprenticeship Grant for Employers.

The work consisted of two distinct elements.

3. **Information event for employers.** Two major financial houses in the region approached the LEP to request their help in providing information to their business clients on apprenticeship reform and the levy. The LEP organised an event with external speakers which ran in January 2017.
4. **Targeted tele-marketing campaign.** A telemarketing company was commissioned to make contact with a sample of 2,000 SMEs which were not currently employing apprentices. The aim was to engage employers, and arrange face-to-face appointments for as many as possible with skills advisers from the LEP's Skills Services team. The skills adviser would then visit the business to carry out a comprehensive skills diagnostic and provide guidance on skills planning, including identifying where any workforce development needs or skills gaps could be met through apprenticeships. A target of 100 appointments was set for the campaign

The LEP initially intended to match Blue Sheep Data against local data to identify a sample of employers who were not engaged, but was unable to access this so had to create a sample from scratch using its own business database.

What it achieved

Full results from the telemarketing campaign will be available at the end of September. To date (August 2017) the following have been achieved:

- 104 appointments made by telemarketing company;

- 67 skills diagnostics undertaken;
- 22 referrals made for further support on apprenticeships.

Skills advisers have also collected intelligence about employers' barriers to engaging with apprenticeships, which will inform the LEP's future work in this area.

Good practice

The telemarketing campaign has embedded apprenticeships in wider conversations about workforce development. This appears to be a more acceptable approach from the point of view of SMEs, and confirms the LEP's experience that businesses will be reluctant to engage if apprenticeships are promoted as a standalone issue, and prefer a more holistic approach to business development.

The LEP drew on its experience of delivering other initiatives in deciding to adopt a one-to-one approach in preference to running events, as these have tended to be poorly attended. Enabling personalised, face to face interaction through the skills advisers was attractive to employers. Businesses were happy for an independent adviser to visit who wasn't selling anything. Many commented that they are contacted by training providers about apprenticeships who clearly want to just sell their training programmes rather than being genuinely interested in supporting the company and its growth potential.