

Suffolk Chamber of Commerce People and Skills Group

Task and finish group report 1: Kickstart Scheme

Purpose

This report has been formulated to analyse and feedback on the Department for Work and Pensions' Kickstart Scheme. The aim is to reflect on the experiences of a collection of employers and organisations that took part or facilitated the scheme in Suffolk, as well as making recommendations for any similar initiatives that may be organised in the future.

Suffolk Chamber's Involvement

Suffolk Chamber of Commerce has been a supporter of the Kickstart Scheme from its inception. Using the expertise that the Chamber has of the local business community, we were able to make suggestions on the running of the scheme and lobby on behalf of employers for additional funding to contribute to training and onboarding costs that are incurred with any hiring practice. We believe that this additional funding was key in the decision making of employers who went on to apply for the Kickstart Scheme.

Early on, there was an awareness of the need for a cohesive and streamlined approach to accessing the funding behind this scheme, and so Suffolk Chamber partnered with Suffolk County Council, New Anglia Local Enterprise partnership and Suffolk's Borough and District Councils to form the Suffolk Gateway Partnership (SGP). This Partnership signposting to Suffolk Chamber, who coordinated the gateway, gave employers the opportunity to access support and guidance in applying for funding, and built upon the collaborative culture that is in place across Suffolk.

Observations

As the scheme comes to an end, we are now able to reflect back on both the application process and the recruitment process and make observations as to what went well as well as opportunities for improvement for any similar future initiatives.

Application process

Challenges:

- Difficulty in managing expectations of employers early on due to the unknown timescales of the scheme
- There were several changes to the way in which applications were made which proved challenging for those employers or gateways who made multiple applications i.e. for additional funding
- There were lengthy delays in getting funding approved for a good proportion of the scheme. At its worst, locally, this extends to approximately 8 weeks. This added to the frustrations of employers who were already facing a challenging time in their businesses due to the pandemic and were keen to begin recruitment
- These delays, if not managed by gateways correctly, could have been detrimental reputationally to them given that, in the eyes of the employer, gateways were the ones responsible

What went well:

- Having an account manager on hand to answer questions (or take things away to be looked at) was very useful and they did a great job within the limits of their role
- Towards the end of 2021, the application approval process did appear to speed up and new funding was signed off within a couple of weeks in some cases

Recruitment Process

Challenges:

- Without employers and gateways having a knowledge or understanding of the skill level of claimants that were in place and ready to fill roles, positions were being offered that were beyond the scope of abilities and therefore realistically never going to be filled
- Because roles were put forward that were, in some cases, expecting too much of the young people, the onus was then placed on employers to change the roles to fit the young people that were available and hence this created more work for employers themselves
- Employers received notification of referrals for vacancies but the formal application follow up rate from the claimants was low leaving employers underwhelmed with the lack of follow up from the referred candidates and Job Centres. The referral element could have been streamlined to avoid a two-step process and potential delays

What went well:

- Organisation of jobs fairs, online group meetings etc. was very beneficial to a lot of employers and aided in getting vacancies filled much more easily
- The level of contact and account management from the Employer Advisers was excellent and credit should be shown to reflect this

Suggestions for future initiatives

- Greater planning and trial areas that include views and suggestions from a range of employers should be put into future similar schemes to ensure that the process is continuous and not ever-changing
- Access to an online system or platform to manage funding application, view referrals, monitor recruitment etc. should be considered
- Communication to employers of the type of roles that are required and where the skills are around youth employment
- A deeper look into the unemployment age ranges in each area and an extension on the upper age limit of the scheme. For example, local feedback from the Job Centres is that the pool of applicants would have been substantially larger had the scheme been opened up to those that are 25-29 year olds

Report contributors

Emma Alderton, Kickstart Scheme Coordinator, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce

Suffolk Chamber of Commerce and its partners within Suffolk County Council, New Anglia Local Enterprise and Suffolk's Local Authorities formed the Suffolk Gateway Partnership (SGP) when the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) Kickstart Scheme was announced in Summer 2020. Since its inception, the SGP has supported over 210 employers apply for placement funding and these employers have recruited over 300 young people to date.

Lindsay Long, Senior Skills Advisor, New Anglia Growth Hub

The New Anglia Growth Hub is an organisation managed by Suffolk Chamber of Commerce on behalf of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership and provides free business support and advice to organisations across Norfolk and Suffolk. Lindsay is a Business Skills adviser and primarily analyses the skills needs of businesses to advise on which programmes and funding opportunities may be best suited to their needs, such as the Kickstart Scheme.

Jo Kreckler, Head of External Communications, Greene King

Greene King applied independently to take part in the Kickstart Scheme and were approved for 1000 placements to support their various pubs across the UK. Although it operates in one of the hardest hit industries throughout the pandemic, Greene King was fortunate enough to be able to give these opportunities because people are at the heart of their business. They do a lot of work around social mobility and already support lots of young people through apprenticeships and working with The Prince's Trust and a number of other charities. The idea behind Greene King taking part is that it would give young people some work experience with the intention, where possible, of a permanent position once the placements were over and those that were taken on could then move onto developing their career through its award-winning apprenticeships programme.

Andy Crump, Deputy CEO, Inspire Suffolk

Inspire Suffolk is a youth charity in Suffolk and applied directly to take part in the Kickstart Scheme. They applied for a few roles independently in order to support young people whilst having little risk financially for the organisation.

Executive Summary

In summary, the Department for Work and Pensions' Kickstart Scheme has benefitted both young people and employers alike by providing opportunities for recruitment that would otherwise not be available given the current economic turbulence. If another similar scheme were to be arranged in the future, contributors to this report would certainly welcome it but would also appreciate early involvement in shaping its fundamental operation of the scheme.