

How Rochdale Council became a Top 100 Apprenticeship employer through their work in schools

Apprenticeship action plans

Andrew Turner is Work Based Learning Skills and Participation Development Officer for Rochdale Council. He works with schools to show the benefits of apprenticeships.

Andrew recognised that schools needed guidance on how to use their levy as they initially felt the levy was not useful for school workforce development. He explained that the levy is an opportunity, rather than another tax being levied on them.

To change attitudes toward apprenticeships, Andrew made appointments with senior leaders in every school to engage them with apprenticeships.

Andrew listened to what the schools felt they needed and came up with action plans to work for their different needs.

Andrew and his team used these action plans to work with training providers and bring specialist elements into the apprenticeships.

For example, schools asked for training on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Based on this, Rochdale Council offered a Teaching Assistant apprenticeship including SEND training. Around 50 people enrolled onto the programme within the first year.

Andrew also ensures that apprenticeships are an agenda item at almost every school meeting hosted by the council. This means the council apprenticeship team maintain regular conversations with key decision makers.

They use newsletters, events and other opportunities to raise awareness about the success of apprenticeships for the school workforce.

Success in Rochdale schools

In 2018, Rochdale Council were named Northwest Macro Employer of the Year at the National Apprenticeship Awards. In 2020, they were named one of the Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers in the country.

Of the 50 schools Rochdale Council work with, 95% are actively engaged with apprenticeships.

Castleton Primary School

Castleton Primary School were particularly open to Andrew's approach and were

receptive to using apprenticeships for workforce development.

In their apprenticeship action plan, the school planned to recruit two teaching assistant apprentices within the first year. However, when recruiting, there were four candidates that were a good fit.

Castleton Primary School worked with Andrew and Rochdale Council to accommodate training for all four apprentices.

They set a clear support plan and held regular reviews to help the apprentices remain on track.

Having four new teaching assistants within the school enabled the senior leadership team to develop from within. For example, the apprentices raised extra funds by offering a new afterschool club.

All four apprentices have now secured permanent positions.

Redwood Secondary School

Redwood Secondary School have also taken a proactive approach to the apprenticeship levy.

Redwood Secondary School is a large secondary school for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

When the levy was announced in 2016 there was initial concern around the impact on their budget.

Andrew and his team met with business manager, Nancy Wright, to show the opportunities the levy could bring. They talked Nancy through the process to show how the school could develop their existing support staff and learn specialist skills using apprenticeships.

Five apprentices have successfully completed apprenticeships at Redwood Secondary School and secured full time positions.

Seeing the success of apprenticeships, Nancy decided to complete the Chartered Manager Degree apprenticeship.

Nancy had always wanted to study part-time for a degree qualification but was unsure how she would balance study with work. However, her workplace was extremely supportive ensuring she received appropriate time to work on her projects.

The projects benefited the organisation and acted as evidence towards Nancy's apprenticeship portfolio. Nancy felt instantly able to see the benefit of her apprenticeship as her research and learning linked directly to her role at work.

One of Nancy's key projects involved working with the student council to develop outdoor areas at the school.

Nancy commented, 'This was incredibly rewarding as the impact was huge. A new play area provided new opportunities for the young people and contributed towards the school's improvement plan. The project also allowed me to work across different areas within the organisation, which I have found has given me a greater understanding of the organisation as a whole.'

Nancy is the first of Rochdale's apprentices to complete a Level 6 apprenticeship from within a school. Nancy completed her apprenticeship in December 2020, gaining a distinction on her end-point assessment and a first-class BA (Hons) in Business Management.