
Briefing to Overview and Scrutiny Board

Date: 8 September 2020

Subject:

Youth Council Motion – Quality Job Opportunities and Digital Apprenticeships

For Discussion

Report of:

Lori Hughes, Constitutional Services Officer

Summary of the issue:

At the Council meeting on 15th July 2020, the following motion was referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Board:

“The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown has proved to be a trial for many people, around the world.

As a Youth Council we have consulted with various young people, to explore the specific areas of everyday life which have been greatly affected by the restrictions that we, as a nation, have had to follow. We asked young people in Oldham to share their experiences of lockdown for them as individuals.

We have found that these restrictions have had significant impacts on our education experience and employment aspirations and in turn this has led to further stress and strain being put on young people’s mental health during lockdown. Indeed, it has been reported that as a result of schools being closed and jobs being furloughed many young people may lose a sense of structure and positive stimulation, and that this will lead to an increase in anxiety and depression for many young people.

It is now clear that this pandemic will have had a devastating effect on our society, and particularly on young people. The current economic crisis risks pushing an additional 600,000 18 – 24 year olds nationally into unemployment in the coming year. In addition to this, there will be long-term damage to their pay and job prospects even after the economy recovers unless new support is provided.

The risks to the borough could be particularly devastating to young people as the reported youth unemployment rate in Oldham in May 2020 stood at 15.1%, the highest across Greater Manchester. This will be again increased as the employment rates of graduates entering work during the pandemic are projected to be 13% lower than they would have been without the crisis, while rates for mid and low-skilled workers risk falling even more, by 27% and 37% respectively.

Furthermore, those who do find work are likely to face reduced pay. The Class of 2020 report by the Nuffield Foundation states that, ‘one year after leaving education, the pay of graduates is projected to be 7% lower, and 9% and 19% lower for mid- and low-skilled workers’, Oldham’s average salary comparison is already £8000 per annum lower than the national average.

There are also questions about whether there will be work for those who have been furloughed, let alone for those only just beginning to enter the labour market. This all paints a rather grim picture for the future Employment of Young People.

It hasn’t all be bad news and we have seen some positives within the ongoing COVID-19 lockdown. With schools delivering remote teaching our digital skills have increased.

Teachers and students have learnt about apps such as Google Hangouts or Zoom, Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams.

As people are staying at home, they have been using technology a lot more and learning new skills such as how to socialise via video apps, starting online social media accounts, trading products online or freelancing and selling services, some young people have even learned how to code in python or manage big data on excel. We are given tasks and asked to research rather than have somebody stood at a projector or whiteboard giving us the answers. All these skills are transferable and maybe, more than ever, young people will be ready for the world of work and have the creative and digital skills needed for the future workforce.

We believe that Oldham Council needs to be an advocate for the skills young people are currently cumulating during lockdown, as we are currently unsure that these skills will be recognised or that the job opportunities requiring these skills will be available to us. The increase in digital skills have already been proven to assist in productivity within the everchanging workplace, helping increase the chance of those who are unemployed finding a job and helping with the introduction of digital services from some key providers. Young people have had the opportunity to get more acquainted with the digital world whilst during lockdown, whether this is for school, work or home benefits. Some of our young people will have gained new digital skills, in photography, in animation, the list is long, and it would be a shame if these skills could not be enhanced further once lockdown is lifted, and we try to return to our 'normal' lifestyle. These skills should not be left on the backburner and forgotten, leaving the time during lockdown wasted. These new skills could have brought a new light to pathways young people might want to take for their future, and we should not let their potential dwindle and disappear, especially with the rise of youth unemployment becoming an unfortunate reality. A larger recognition of the digital skills will help young people feel more comfortable with entering a forever expanding sector which is shaping our society as we speak.

Lockdown has brought us many negatives in all different aspects of life, however we do not want these negatives to overrule the positives that have come from working online. We need to open up opportunities for young people and we would like to see designated apprenticeships for young people within the digital industry to enable the skills that Oldham's young people have gained to be used and not wasted. This will also help Oldham's economy as we build up our digital industry.

We ask Council to resolve that:

1. Oldham Council pledges its commitment to providing quality job opportunities for young people and developing the digital sector within the town.
2. A review is undertaken of the current apprenticeship offer across Oldham to ensure there is a broad range of high-quality opportunities available to all young people, and;
3. As one of the largest employers in the Oldham, digital apprenticeships are considered for those leaving education"

Recommendations to Overview and Scrutiny Board:

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Board convene a workshop with the Youth Council to discuss the motions on a date to be arranged.
