

**The Southampton Skills Development Zone Apprenticeship:
Research Report**

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LLAKES ESRC Research Centre

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Executive Summary

1. An apprenticeship scheme developed by SSDZ has been an innovative attempt by the four public sector employers represented on the SSDZ Board to work with partners to create new training and employment opportunities for local unemployed 18 to 25 year olds. A team from the LLAKES research centre undertook research into the scheme from August 2010 to December 2011. The research aims included:
 - To develop an evidence base about the apprenticeship scheme, with information on the numbers starting and completing their apprenticeships, and being offered permanent contracts with their employers;
 - To provide an account of the experiences of all the major stakeholders in the scheme and their perceptions of its strengths and weaknesses;
 - To identify the key features of the scheme and perceptions of its benefits that can contribute to its dissemination and expansion.
2. The SSDZ apprenticeship scheme provided an opportunity for eligible young people to participate in a pre-apprenticeship training and recruitment process before being recruited by one of the four employers (City Council, University Hospital Southampton (UHS), Primary Care Trust and Southampton Solent University). The apprenticeship consisted of a 12 month fixed-term employment contract in a 'real job' role. Apprentices were registered on the government supported Level 2 Apprenticeship programme in health and social care, business administration and in (one case) engineering.
3. The apprentices were paid at the appropriate entry point for the job role. Their wages were paid by the employers with a contribution from the DWP's (then) Future Jobs Fund (FJF). Off-the-job training was provided by City College (business administration) and UHS (health and social care). The costs of delivering the formal requirements of the relevant apprenticeship frameworks (including the qualifications) are met by the Skills Funding Agency (SfA)
4. There have been three main cohorts of apprentices: cohort 1 began in January and March 2010, Cohort 2 in September 2011 and Cohort 3 in March 2011.
5. The research involved a range of data collection activities including observation of the pre-apprenticeship course, key informant interviews with 12 SSDZ Board members (including the four employers, JobCentre Plus, training providers and the SSDZ programme and operations managers), and 22 workplace managers and supervisors and training providers; focus group and one to one interviews (total 21) with apprentices belonging to cohorts 1 and 2; the collection of administrative data on the progress of apprentices. Some apprentices in cohort 2 were interviewed at the beginning, during and at the end of their apprenticeship. A total of 55 participants were interviewed in total.
6. The research report provides detailed evidence about the organisation of the scheme, its performance in terms of participation and achievement and the experiences and perspectives of the key informants and the apprentices. The findings can be summarised as follows:

Scheme Performance

7. A total of 47 apprentices, 32 in cohort 1 and 15 in cohort 2 started the apprenticeship scheme. Overall, 34 (72%) gained employment, mostly with their apprenticeship employer, and 36 (76%) successfully completed their apprenticeship framework.

Key Informants

8. The commitment and involvement of the SSDZ Board including the chief executives of the participating employers was central to the successful implementation of the scheme. The major partners in the scheme agreed that the scheme had both social and economic goals which they were committed to helping to achieve.
9. Participants strongly supported the pre-employment training and recruitment programme, and recognised its value in helping unemployed young people choose and apply for a place on the scheme and a particular apprenticeship opportunity.
10. The apprenticeship scheme was conceived as comprising both the pre-employment training and recruitment process and the one year apprenticeship as an integrated model that could be promoted to other employers including in the private sector.
11. The pre-employment training and recruitment process also provided an opportunity for the partners (including the employers, Jobcentre Plus and City College) to build local capacity and shared understanding about the nature and challenges of the scheme and the target group.
12. The ability and willingness of the employers to recruit and employ 'non-standard' applicants into 'real' jobs was crucial. Without this commitment, the young people would have been unlikely to have been considered for posts by the line managers and HR staff and, therefore, would not have benefited from the experience of an apprenticeship.
13. The FJF wage subsidy helped to mitigate the employers' risk in taking on young people who would not normally have been shortlisted for posts owing to their lack of relevant experience. The challenge of sustaining the scheme at a time of financial austerity for employers was seen as considerable.
14. Workplace supervisors and line managers were positive about the ability of their apprentices to develop the required skills despite their lack of prior experience. They also recognised that they had benefited personally and professionally from supervising and mentoring the apprentices.
15. There was some progress in rolling the scheme out to the private sector. The availability of a tested pre-employment training and recruitment model was seen as a benefit and factor that could facilitate the involvement of other employers.
16. The experience and creativity of the key partners in leveraging funding from diverse sources (regional, national and European) was likely to play an increasingly important role in enabling the scheme to be sustained and, or adapted, for example, for inclusion in the plans for the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

Apprentices

17. Overall, the apprentices were very positive about the opportunity to participate in the scheme. They had all been unemployed for at least six months and were very keen to get jobs with training and qualifications attached to them.
18. The apprentices recognised the value of the pre-employment training and recruitment process in helping them to select the 'right' employer and sector for them, as well as to making a good start on the apprenticeship.
19. Apprentices perceived that they would have been highly unlikely to have been shortlisted for jobs with the participating employers because of their lack of relevant work and employment experience. The opportunity to become apprentices and gain employment experience – learning and earning at the same time - with highly reputable public sector employers was highly valued.
20. Most participants felt that they had become valued members of their workplace teams, and were making a positive and productive contribution. Apprentices saw themselves as productive employees from a fairly early stage in their one-year contracts. This raised questions about whether the learning goals associated with the apprenticeship should have been more substantial and challenging.
21. Apprentices were supported by colleagues, supervisors and line managers in their on-the-job learning and in working more independently. Overall, they spoke highly of the help and encouragement they had received from members of their workplace teams.
22. Most of the apprentices experienced an uncertain and anxious period at the end of their contracts when there was considerable uncertainty about whether they would be retained. There was considerable relief when individuals heard that their contracts had been confirmed.
23. The apprentices perceived that their CVs had been significantly improved by their participation in the scheme, their achievements and employment experience, and that this would improve their chances in the labour market. In addition, they felt that they had gained in self-confidence and self-esteem and had improved their inter-personal skills.
24. Experiences with the formal part of the apprenticeship have been mixed. Issues for improvement raised by the apprentices included: the amount of off-the-job time available to study and to complete assignments; the relevance of the qualifications to actual jobs; the level of qualifications, the timeliness with which they were able to complete aspects of their qualification framework; and having adequate access to workplace assessors. Access to an assessor as part of the work team was highly valued as it meant that assessments could be integrated into daily working practice and therefore could occur more regularly.
25. Just under half the apprentices in the interview sample had attained qualifications at Level 3 or above before starting their apprenticeships, which were all at Level 2. This raised questions about whether some individuals at least could have been registered on Level 3 apprenticeships at the outset, or whether they and others could progress directly to Level 3 on completion of the Level 2 programme.

26. Most apprentices had had their educational and career aspirations raised as a consequence of participating in the scheme. There was scope for ensuring that employers provided formal opportunities to discuss career development with individuals so that the completion of the apprenticeship could be viewed as a rung on a ladder, rather than as a single step.

SSDZ Apprenticeship Model: Summary Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

- Vision and leadership
- Employer commitment
- Integrated model: pre-employment & apprenticeship
- Replicability and scope to extend model to other occupations and private sector
- Nature of stakeholder partnership & capacity
- Locally-based social and economic goals
- Recruitment of 'non-standard' applicants
- Workplace experience of apprentices
- Training and support apprentices received from supervisors and colleagues
- Most apprentices offered permanent posts & completed framework.

Weaknesses

- Apprenticeship level not always well-matched to individuals' prior attainment
- Progression to Level 3 not built in to the model
- Formal qualification requirements not always relevant to occupational roles
- Assessments not always timely and sufficiently regular
- Apprentices experienced uncertainty and anxiety about their post-apprenticeship prospects
- Advice and guidance about opportunities for career development and progression
- Lack of secure medium to longer-term funding.

Section One: Introduction

The Southampton Skills Development Zone¹ (SSDZ) has brought together key local partners, including employers, Jobcentre Plus and providers, to address local skills and employment needs. The SSDZ Board is chaired by the Vice Chancellor of Southampton Solent University. An apprenticeship scheme developed by SSDZ has been an innovative attempt by the four public sector employers represented on the SSDZ Board (at chief executive level) to work with partners to create new training and employment opportunities for local unemployed 18 to 25 year olds. The first apprentices were recruited to the scheme in January 2010.

The Board approved a proposal from the LLAKES Centre² to undertake research into the scheme from August 2010 to December 2011. The research team has explored the concept and implementation of the Zone's apprenticeship model as well as the experiences and perception of those involved, including all the main stakeholders (SSDZ Board and operations group members, workplace managers and supervisors, training providers and assessors, as well as the apprentices themselves). The purpose of this report is to outline the research that has been conducted and present the research evidence and findings.

The political and economic context has changed significantly since the apprenticeship initiative was conceived. The scheme has been implemented in the wake of the financial crisis (Autumn 2008) and during a period in which there has been a change of government (May 2010), reductions in public sector spending and growing unemployment.

1.1 Aims

In our research proposal we noted that SSDZ had identified two major challenges for its apprenticeship scheme: a) to develop an apprenticeship model that can be expanded beyond existing stakeholders including into the private sector and into the wider South Hampshire area, and b) to become sustainable beyond the availability of the original funding arrangements, which included access to the resources of the Future Jobs Fund (FJF).

Our research had a number of aims including:

- To develop an independently created evidence base about the apprenticeship scheme, with information on the numbers starting and completing their apprenticeships, and being offered permanent contracts with their employers;
- To investigate and provide an account of the experiences of all the major stakeholders in the scheme and their perceptions of its strengths and weaknesses that can inform the development of policy and practice;

¹ In 2011 the name was changed from Southampton Skills Development Zone to Solent Skills Development Zone.

2. The Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES) is an ESRC-funded research centre hosted by the Institute of Education, University of London, and with partners at the universities of Southampton and Bristol, and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (grant reference RES-594-28-0001).

- To provide a longitudinal qualitative account of apprentices progress into, through and out of the scheme;
- To identify the barriers and opportunities for sustaining the scheme over the longer term and for extending the model beyond existing public sector employers;
- To identify the key features of the scheme and perceptions of its benefits that can contribute to its dissemination and expansion.

1.2 The apprenticeship scheme

In outline, the SSDZ apprenticeship scheme has provided the opportunity for eligible individuals to participate in a pre-apprenticeship training and recruitment process and to be selected for an apprenticeship place attached to a 12 month fixed-term employment contract in a 'real job role'. For the duration of the contract, the apprentices have been paid on the first point of the appropriate pay scale. At the same time the individuals have been registered on the government-supported Level 2³ apprenticeship programme. Given the nature of the jobs available in the participating public sector organisations (City Council, University Hospital Southampton (UHS), Primary Care Trust (PCT) Southampton Solent University) the apprentices have been registered on business administration, health and social care and, in one case, an engineering framework. The apprentices following the business administration and engineering frameworks have attended City College one day a week to complete their Technical Certificates and Key Skills, with assessors from the college visiting the employer to assess the apprentices' work-based competences. In the case of the health and social care apprentices located either at UHS or the PCT, the training and assessment has been provided by the hospital's NVQ centre and qualified work-based assessors.

All apprentices participating in the scheme were registered by City College on the government-supported programme. City College holds a main contract with the Skills Funding Agency (SfA) for managing and providing apprenticeships. City College draws down the relevant funding from the SfA to provide the training and assessment necessary to deliver the apprenticeship frameworks. In the case of the health and social care apprentices, City College sub-contracts this function to the hospital, retaining a proportion of the funding (approximately 30%) to cover administrative costs, its role in undertaking quality assurance, and responsibility for providing performance data to the SfA.

The SSDZ apprenticeship scheme was targeted at 18 to 25 year olds who have been unemployed for at least six months, and who (in the main) can be identified by staff at Jobcentre Plus. Public funding available to help unemployed people into work was also used to support the pre-employment training course, including the costs of utilising an experienced provider to deliver this. The target group of young people was eligible for the previous Labour government's (Department for Work and Pensions, DWP) FJF, which provided resources to pay individual salaries at the level of the minimum wage for 25 hours per week for up to six months before it was withdrawn on 31 March 2011. The availability of

3. Level 2 apprenticeship is usually presented as being equivalent to four or five GCSE passes at grades A* to C.

FJF helped to subsidise the participating organisations salary costs. Apprentices were placed in jobs with salaries of approximately £12-13,000 per annum. The costs associated with the training and qualifications required to fulfil the relevant apprenticeship frameworks has been funded by the SfA (via City College). The arrangements then for funding the SSDZ apprenticeship scheme are complex and have involved cost sharing between a range of partners including government agencies and the SSDZ employers.

There have been three main cohorts of apprentices starting the scheme. Cohort 1 began in January and March 2010, Cohort 2 in September 2010 and Cohort 3 in March 2011.

1.3 Research design and data collection

A mainly qualitative approach to the research has been adopted to elicit the experiences and perceptions of participants. The aim of the data collection strategy has been to generate rich insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the scheme and how it could be improved. The research took place over approximately 17 months (August 2010 to December 2011), with the main fieldwork phase being undertaken between November 2010 and October 2011). Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Southampton's School of Education ethics committee and the University's research and governance office.

The research has involved a range of data collection activities:

- Observation of aspects of the pre-employment training course (August 2010);
- Interviews with SSDZ Board and operation group members;
- Interviews with workplace managers and supervisors from the participating employers
- Interviews with training providers;
- Focus groups, pair and one-to-one interviews with apprentices belonging to Cohorts 1 and 2;
- The collection of administrative monitoring data on the progress of individual apprentices through the scheme.

The interview and focus group topic schedules were designed to be used flexibly to enable the research team to tailor questions during the encounter whilst still covering the important ground. The interviews lasted from between 30 minutes to an hour and a half.

The key topics included (see Appendix for copies of interview check lists):

- Role and history of the Zone, reasons for formation and target groups;
- The Zone's aims, membership, partners;
- Funding;
- Awareness of and knowledge about the apprenticeship scheme;
- Aims of the scheme;
- Role played in designing, implementing, delivering the scheme;
- Experiences and perceptions of the scheme, benefits and challenges;
- Scope for sustainability and expansion.

All the interviews have been transcribed and quotations are used throughout the report as illustrative evidence. A longitudinal dimension to the study was made possible by conducting interviews with Cohort 2 apprentices at the beginning of their apprenticeship, with follow-ups towards the end and, with some individuals, after completion of their contracts. This approach has enabled us to monitor and explore this group's 'learning and employment' journeys over more than 12 months.

In total we interviewed 55 participants. This included:

- 12 interviews with SSDZ Board members, operations group members, individuals with specialist roles), all interviewed individually;
- 22 interviews with workplace managers and supervisors at the four employing organisations, assessors and training providers, of whom 16 were interviewed individually and six in pairs;
- 21 apprentices (8 in Cohort 1, 13 in Cohort 2).

1.4 Apprentice interviews

Six Cohort 1 apprentices were interviewed once on a one-to-one basis. The other two were interviewed twice as a pair, the second time four months after the first interview.

Interviews with Cohort 2 apprentice sample were undertaken in a variety of ways (group, pairs, one-to-one) and frequencies (one, two or three times). In summary:

- Seven apprentices were interviewed three times – early in their apprenticeship, towards the end and following the completion of their apprenticeship). At least one of these individuals' interviews was undertaken on a one-to-one basis;
- Five apprentices were interviewed twice – once early in their apprenticeship and once towards the end, with one being interviewed at an early stage and then again after completion of the 12 month programme. Three apprentices were interviewed as part of groups in both their interviews, and two were interviewed once as part of a group and once individually;
- One apprentice was interviewed once (as part of a group) early in the apprenticeship.

Section Two: Participation, Performance and Apprentice Characteristics

2.1 Introduction

In this section we present our findings on participation in the SSDZ apprenticeship and on the performance of the scheme in terms of the number of apprentices involved, early leavers, successful completers, and employed status on leaving or completing the apprenticeship (see Tables 1 and 2 below). The data have been collected from a variety of sources including the scheme's co-ordinator at Southampton Solent University, City College, the SSDZ programme director, and the employers participating in the scheme. We are very grateful to all those connected with the scheme who helped provide the administrative data that has enabled us to create this summary picture.

2.2 Performance

A total of 47 apprentices 32 in Cohort 1 and 15 in Cohort 2 started on the apprenticeship scheme. Overall, 34 (72%) gained employment, most with their apprenticeship employer, and 36 (76%) successfully completed their apprenticeship framework.

From the data we have been able to collect about the trajectories of Cohort 1, just over two thirds (22 out of 32) of those who started secured employment. Most of these obtained jobs with the same employer and same job in which they completed their apprenticeship and two obtained jobs with a different SSDZ employer but in a similar job, others gained employment elsewhere (Table 1). Approximately 80% successfully completed their apprenticeship.

Table 1 Apprentices Trajectories: Cohort 1

Number	Gender	Age	Employer	Sector	Start date	Completed Apprenticeship Framework	Completed Training Contract	End date	Destination
1	M	22	City Council	Business Admin	11-01-2010	No	No	Oct-10	Emp-DE/SJ
2	M	19	City Council	Business Admin	11-01-2010	Yes	yes	Jan-11	Emp-SE/SJ
3	M	21	City Council	Business Admin	11-01-2010	No - early lvr	No	Jun-10	Emp-DE/SJ
4	M	23	City Council	Business Admin	11-01-2010	Yes	yes	Jan-11	Emp-SE/SJ
5	M	24	City Council	Business Admin	11-01-2010	Yes	yes	Jan-11	Emp-SE/SJ
6	F	22	City Council	Business Admin	11-01-2010	No - early lvr	No	May-10	
7	M	21	City Council	Business Admin	11-01-2010	Yes	yes	Jan-11	Left - other
8	M	22	City Council	Business Admin	11-01-2010	No - non acvr	No	Dec-10	Not emp
9	M	24	City Council	Business Admin	11-01-2010	Yes	yes	Jan-11	Not emp
10	F	19	City Council	Business Admin	11-01-2010	No - early lvr	No	Mar-10	
11	M	24	PCT	Business Admin	18-01-2010	Yes	Yes	Jan-11	Not emp
12	M	19	PCT	Business Admin	11-01-2010	No - non acvr	No		Not emp
13	F	22	PCT	Business Admin	26-01-2010	Yes	Yes	Jan-11	Emp-SE/SJ
14	M	24	PCT	Business Admin	26-01-2010	Yes	Yes	Jan-11	Emp-SE/SJ
15	M	22	PCT	Business Admin	26-01-2010	Yes	Yes	Jan-11	Emp-Other
16	F	22	SUHT	Healthcare	11-01-2010	Yes	Yes	Feb-11	Emp
17	M	22	SUHT	Healthcare	11-01-2010	Yes	Yes	Feb-11	Emp-SE/SJ

18	F	23	SUHT	Healthcare	11-01-2010	Yes	Yes	Feb-11	Emp
19	F	19	SUHT	Healthcare	11-01-2010	Yes	Yes	Feb-11	Emp
20	M		SUHT	Healthcare	11-01-2010	No - early lvr	No		
21	F	21	SUHT	Healthcare	11-01-2010	Yes	Yes	Feb-11	Emp
22	F	20	SUHT	Healthcare	11-01-2010	Yes	Yes	Feb-11	Emp
23	M	25	SUHT	Customer Service	01-02-2010	Yes	Yes	Feb-11	Not emp
24	F	19	SUHT	Business Admin	01-02-2010	Yes	Yes	Jan-11	Emp-SE/SJ
25	F		SUHT	Business Admin	01-02-2010	Yes	Yes	Feb-11	Emp-SE/SJ
26	M	22	SUHT	Business Admin	01-02-2010	Yes	Yes	Feb-11	Emp-SE/SJ
27	M	19	SUHT	Business Admin	01-02-2010	Yes	Yes	Feb-11	Not emp
28	F	18	SUHT	Healthcare	29-03-2010	Yes	Yes	Mar-11	Emp-SE/SJ
29	F	20	SUHT	Healthcare	29-03-2010	Yes	Yes	Mar-11	Emp-SE/SJ
30	F	19	SUHT	Healthcare	29-03-2010	Yes	Yes	Mar-11	Left-other
31	F	18	SUHT	Healthcare	29-03-2010	Yes	Yes	Mar-11	Emp-SE/SJ
32	F	24	SUHT	Business Admin	30-04-2010	Yes	Yes	Apr-11	Emp-SE/SJ

Key: Destinations

Employed with the same apprenticeship employer in the same job role (Emp – SE/SJ)
Employed with the same apprenticeship employer in a different job role (Emp – SE/DJ)
Employed with a different SSDZ employer in the same job role (Emp – DE/SJ)
Employed with a different SSDZ employer in a different job role (Emp – DE/DJ)
Employed elsewhere (Emp – other)
Left to take up education or training (Ed/Tr)
Left to do something else e.g. Travelling (Left – other)

Early leaver (early lvr)
Non-achiever (Non-acvr)
Not employed (Not emp)

Table 2 Apprentices Trajectories: Cohort 2

Number	Gender	Age	Employer	Sector	Start date	Completed Apprenticeship framework	Completed Training Contract	End date	Destination
1	F	19	UHS	Healthcare	06-09-2010	Yes	Yes	06/09/2011	Emp –SE/DJ
2	F	18	UHS	Healthcare	06-09-2010	Yes	Left incomp.	06/09/2011	Emp - other
3	F	19	UHS	Healthcare	06-09-2010	Yes	Ongoing	06/09/2011	Emp –SE/DJ
4	F		UHS	Healthcare	06-09-2010	No	No - early lvr	Nov-10	
5	F	20	UHS	Healthcare	06-09-2010	Yes	Yes	06/09/2011	Emp-SE/SJ
6	M	22	UHS	Healthcare	06-09-2010	Yes	Ongoing	06/09/2011	Emp-SE/SJ
7	F		UHS	Healthcare	06-09-2010	Yes	Yes	06/09/2011	Emp-SE/SJ
8	M	20	PCT	Business Admin	06-09-2010	Yes	Yes	06/09/2011	Emp-SE/SJ
9	M	19	Solent Uni	Eng/Tech	01-09-2010	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Emp-SE/SJ
10	M	23	Solent Uni	Business Admin	01-09-2010	Yes	Yes	01/-9/2011	Emp-SE/SJ
11	M	24	City Council	Business Admin	06-09-2010	No	No	July/Aug 11	Left -other
12	M	22	City Council	Business Admin	06-09-2010	Yes	Yes	06/09/2011	Emp-SE/SJ
13	M	23	City Council	Business Admin	06-09-2010	Yes	Yes	06/09/2011	Emp-other
14	M	21	City Council	Business Admin	06-09-2010	Yes	Yes	06/09/2011	Emp-SE/SJ
15	F	21	City Council	Business Admin	06-09-2010	No	No	Feb-11	Left - other

2.3 Apprentice characteristics

We interviewed a total of 21 apprentices as part of our research, eight from Cohort 1 and 13 from Cohort 2. This means that we interviewed 45% of all Cohort 1 and 2 apprentices, including a quarter of the individuals in Cohort 1 and 13 of 15 of the individuals in Cohort 2.

The following tables indicate the characteristics of the apprentices interviewed:

Table 3: Gender, Age and Ethnicity of Apprentice Sample

Gender	Number		Ethnicity	Number
Male	10		British	19
Female	11		Bangladeshi	2
Total	21		Total	21

Table 4: Distribution of Apprentices by Employer

Employer	Number
SCC	5
PCT	3
Solent	2
UHS	11
Total	21

In total, 11 of the 21 apprentices interviewed have followed the business administration framework, nine the health and social care framework, and one the engineering framework.

Table 5 presents the duration for which the apprentices had been unemployed before joining the scheme:

Table 5: Period of unemployment

Period of unemployment	Number of apprentices
0-6 months	6
7-12 months	8
13-18 months	4
19-24 months	2
25-36 months	1
Total	21

All the apprentices had completed their GCSEs,⁴ two had achieved AS Level, two had completed their A Levels,⁵ three had acquired a vocational qualification at an equivalent level to A Level (e.g. BTEC National),⁶ three had been educated to degree level, nine had a vocational qualification at Level 1 or 2, and one had a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ).

The range of qualifications held by members of the sample indicates that some discretion and flexibility was exercised by recruiters in terms of individual eligibility for the scheme. This arises at least in part because the eligibility criteria (for funding purposes) for FJF and for the government-supported Level 2 Apprenticeship differ. In the case of the former initiative, the key eligibility criteria are specified in terms of age (18 to 25) and unemployment status (six months prior to entry on the scheme). In the case of apprenticeship, participants may be any age from 16 upwards and do not have to be unemployed prior to starting on the programme. However, those who already have Level 4 qualifications or above would not normally be eligible for government funding. Table 7 shows the highest qualifications achieved by apprentices in the sample and indicates that ten had achieved Level 3 or above prior to starting their apprenticeship.

4. General Compulsory Secondary Education in the UK, usually completed at the age of 16.

5. AS (Advanced Subsidiary) and A (Advanced) level qualifications are the main route to higher education. AS level can be a free standing one-year qualification after GCSE or can be the first half of the full A Level.

6. BTEC Nationals are vocational qualifications usually delivered by colleges of further education. They are available in a wide range of vocational areas.

Table 7: Highest qualifications achieved by sample apprentices

Qualifications	Number
GCSEs	1
AS Level	2
A-Level	2
A-Level or vocational equivalent	3
Degree level	3
Vocational L1 or L2	9
Other (GNVQ)	1
Total	21

Most apprentices had left full-time education between the ages of 16 and 18, that is, following completion of their GCSEs at 16, or A Levels or vocational equivalent at 17 or 18. Table 8 provides a specific breakdown of age when the sample apprentices left full-time education.

Table 8: Age when left full-time education

Age	Number
15-16	6
17-18	9
19-20	2
21-22	4
Total	21

Some apprentices had experience of employment for example in retail, administration or customer service, however, all of them were unemployed at the time of joining the scheme and were claiming unemployment benefit. The characteristics of the sample particularly in terms of prior educational attainment indicate that at local level the scheme partners were able to work together to identify individuals whom they believed would benefit from the opportunity to participate. We were also told by some of the key stakeholders that in practice it can be challenging to obtain all the salient facts about young people's backgrounds. Gatekeepers have to walk a fine line between gaining relevant information

and potentially deterring vulnerable young people from applying for training and employment opportunities.

2.4 Apprentice sample outcomes

As part of the research we were able to obtain information on the outcomes of participation in the scheme for the 21 apprentices in our sample. Nineteen of the 21 apprentices completed their apprenticeship frameworks and gained employment at the end of their 12 month contracts. Of the two that did not complete, one left as a consequence of a disciplinary matter and one was continuing his apprenticeship as he had a longer contract than others.

Out of the 19 individuals gaining post-apprenticeship employment, 17 were offered jobs within the organisations where they did their apprenticeships and two obtained jobs with different employers. Out of the 17 individuals taken on by their apprenticeship employer, all except one continued in the same job role. This person moved to a different department in a different job role. Eleven of the 17 were offered permanent jobs and six were offered temporary contracts. Table 9 shows the destination of the apprentices in the sample:

Table 9: Post apprenticeship destinations

Destination	Number
Employed – same employer, same job role	16
Employed – same employer, different job role	1
Employed – different employer outside the network	2
Left	1
Apprenticeship ongoing	1
Total	21

Fifteen of the 19 apprentices who gained employment on completion of their 12 month contract had also achieved the requirements of their apprenticeship framework. The other four were in the final throes of completion. Table 10 shows their apprenticeship status at the end of the contract.

Table 10: Apprenticeship status after 12 months

Apprenticeship status after 12 months	Number
Completed	15
Ongoing	4
Not completed (left scheme early)	2
Total	21

Section Three: Evidence from the Key Informant Interviews

3.1 Introduction

In this section, we present evidence collected from our interviews with SSDZ Board members, the scheme's organisers, workplace managers and supervisors, trainers and assessors. We refer to this group collectively as 'key informants'. Our interviews with key informants focused primarily on why and how the apprenticeship scheme came about, the roles of various partners, the initiative's aspirations and challenges for implementing and sustaining it. Direct quotations are used as illustrative evidence and are all anonymised.

3.2 Origins, rationales and aims

The SSDZ developed out of a previous local authority 'hosted' committee focusing on employment and skills. The thinking behind the formation of the new network occurred when some large public sector employers felt that there was an opportunity for a more 'action-oriented' approach involving them and key agencies including the government 'employment service' (DWP – Jobcentre Plus) to address local unemployment and skills needs. The Board members included the leaders of four public sector employers, Southampton Solent University (Chair) the City Council (CC), UHS and PCT, area directors of DWP/Jobcentre Plus and the then local Learning and Skills Council.⁷ From the start in 2008, both economic and social issues underpinned the rationale for creating 'the Zone', as illustrated by this comment:

Well, we knew that there were a number of issues within the city. Chronic educational deprivation linked to areas of poverty, underachievement in various ways; we knew too that there were employers facing, well we believed that there were employers facing challenges in terms of workforce development. And it was, how do you connect that together that made a difference on the ground. (KI1)

Another KI indicated that large public sector employers have a corporate responsibility to diversifying their workforces, and that this approach can have social and economic benefits for the organisation and for the community:

So I mean there was a social reason why, a social motivation for that, but also actually more an economic one as well where actually if we have high quality, high skill staff that we develop, the evidence is they stay longer with us, they're more productive and they have opportunities to advance and develop within the organisations. (KI2)

7. The Learning and Skills Council was abolished in 2009 and replaced with the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency.

Similarly the rationale for creating the apprenticeship scheme included social, educational and economic aspirations and how an apprenticeship scheme could help to address local concerns. As this comment explains:

...concern around low education attainment, particularly to Level 2, and particularly in the areas of high deprivation in the city and how as a group of public sector employers... could work with partners to raise that as part of social justice, all of the whole importance of recognising that we can improve people's education, they would get them potentially opportunities into work, which would reduce the pressures of other things such as housing needs but also in health needs. (KI4)

It was proposed that a process could be developed for supporting the recruitment of local unemployed people onto apprenticeship programmes with the four public sector employers involved in the Zone:

I actually felt perhaps looking at joint recruitment of apprentices within... across the city, using the Jobcentre as a recruitment process, so we actually take people who are on the New Deal-type aspects, and actually say 'how do we encourage recruitment into apprenticeship with those public sector employers for a fixed period of time so they're actually in real paid jobs'. (KI4)

The initial proposal for the scheme was to rotate the apprentices between the four participating employers in order to create a more 'expansive approach'⁸ to apprenticeship. However, there turned out to be practical reasons why a rotation model was not implemented, including that equal numbers of apprentices were not recruited by each employer and concerns about the demands on the training demands it would place on staff in the workplace. Given the nature of the participating employers, two major occupational sectors, business administration, and health and social care were identified as having the most potential for apprenticeship training in these organisations. The apprentices were to be recruited into 'real jobs' where they would be paid at the usual rate:

So I think the advantage of them not being supernumerary and not being an add-on to the workforce meant that they weren't just seen as a spare pair of hands, they were seen as an essential pair of hands, they were people they needed to get skilled. (KI4)

From the Board's perspective, then, the concept of the apprenticeship aligned very well with the aims of the Zone, and as providing a useful model of recruitment and training for participating employers. At the time when the scheme was adopted the employment conditions were more favourable and that there were concerns about skills shortages. The intention was to develop a working model of the scheme in the public sector that could then be disseminated and promoted to the private sector. The aspiration was for public sector

8. Fuller, A. and Unwin, L. (2003) Learning as Apprentices in the Contemporary UK workplace: creating and managing expansive and restrictive participation, *Journal of Education and Work*, 16(4): 407-426.

employers to set an example for private sector employers to pick up, as the following comment illustrates:

...we're talking about different economic conditions when we started, and at the time of the inception we focused in on developing a replicable model that was within our control in the public sector. So there were significant opportunities in the public sector for jobs, there was significant commitment from sort of the said players that I mentioned earlier ...there was also a commitment to develop the replicable model that we could then - for want of a better word, sell, to the private sector. And the thinking at the time was that we could say 'yeah we've done it, we've done it successfully in the public sector' so we weren't selling an ambition, we were selling a model that was ready baked, you know, 'it's worked for us so why shouldn't it work for you'. And we felt that if we were going to bang the drum of private sector involvement then we should set an example ourselves that we could actually deliver it in the public sector. (KI3)

3.3 Funding matters

It was recognised early on in the development of the scheme that the then Labour government was keen to expand apprenticeship and that this might provide an opportunity to secure resources for the SSDZ scheme. As one KI pointed out:

One of the original driving kind of ideas is where could we leverage in funding, so you get funding for apprenticeships. (KI1)

The need to seek additional funding to enable the scheme to be implemented was given added impetus by the worsening economic environment and its effect on employers' recruitment strategies. The participating employers were very concerned about whether permanent jobs would be available for apprentices on completion of their programmes. The launch of the previous Labour government's FJF provided the opportunity to implement the apprenticeship scheme that SSDZ had been looking for:

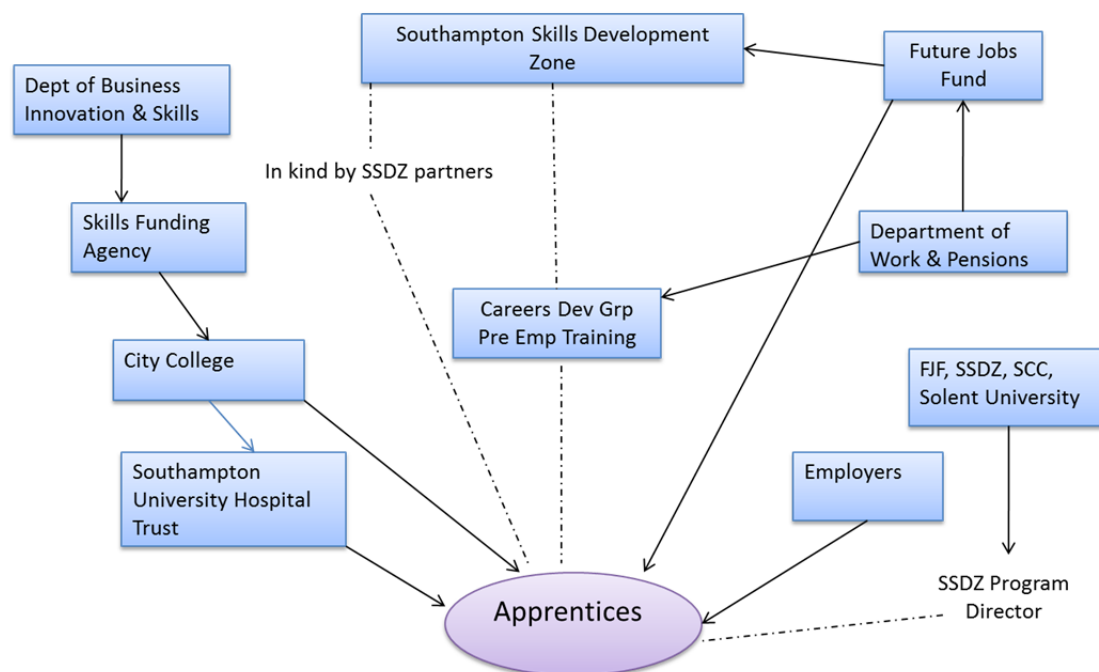
Through that first year, which would be 2009–2010, it was quite clear to me that in reality what we were doing was, although the concept was good, we were not able to finance it across the public authorities to get it off the ground in a more sustainable and comprehensive way. At the time, the then Government had announced what was called the Future Jobs Fund, whereby areas were able to bid for additional resources to actually create apprenticeships in specified areas of deprivation... what we needed to do was to tie the Future Jobs Fund to the enable [it] to actually take off. (KI5)

The CC worked with other local authority partners in the sub-region to bid for FJF securing a sizeable contract for the city. Part of this award was allocated to the SSDZ to provide approximately 60 places associated with the apprenticeship scheme. In addition to FJF, funding available from the Jobcentre Plus to support the long-term unemployed into work via pre-employment training, advice and guidance could be utilised to create a model to help support individuals through the recruitment process.

From a funding perspective, then, the implementation of the scheme has relied on a complex set of resourcing arrangements. These can be summarised as including (see figure one):

- Jobcentre Plus/DWP funding for pre-employment training and support for long-term unemployed people. This resource enabled groups of potential apprentices to attend a bespoke pre-employment training course led by a private provider as part of the supported recruitment process;
- FJF providing a wage subsidy for apprentices;
- SfA paying for the training and qualifications associated with completion of apprenticeship frameworks;
- The employers who a) paid the balance of the wages necessary to employ the apprentices for their 12 month training contract, b) provided in-kind contributions through the time spent by key individuals to participate on the Board and operations groups, and in co-ordinating the scheme, c) provided in-kind contributions through the time spent by HR and line-managers in participating in the recruitment and selection process, and d) provided in kind contributions through the time spent by workplace supervisors/managers and colleagues in providing on-the-job training.

Figure One: SSDZ Apprenticeship Scheme Funding Map



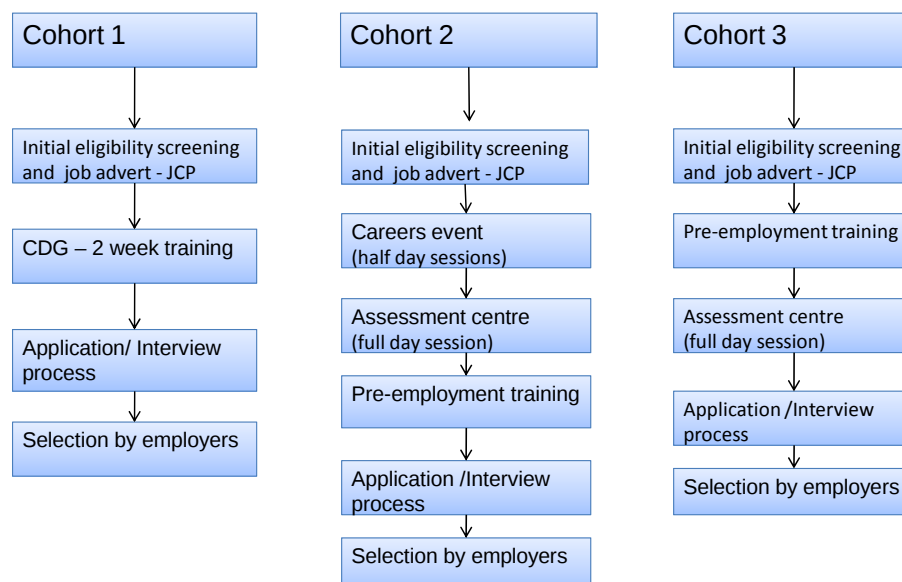
3.4 The role and importance of the pre-apprenticeship process

Importantly, the SSDZ scheme was conceived as both a pre-apprenticeship/pre-employment recruitment process as well as a 12 month work-based training and employment contract (apprenticeship). The pre-employment process was seen as key to the success of the scheme

as it would facilitate the chances of unemployed young people gaining apprenticeships with the participating employers. The process was conceived as a partnership activity involving Jobcentre Plus, the participating employers, the pre-employment training provider and the college. The elements of the process included:

- Selection by Jobcentre Plus advisors of eligible (for funding purposes) participants;
- Pre-employment training course including taster days with employers;
- Careers event – participating employers and apprentices;
- Assessment centre;
- Application/interview process;
- Selection, dependent on CRB check.

Figure Two: Stages of SSDA Apprenticeship Recruitment Process by Each Cohort



The sequence and inclusion of the different components of the process was revised for successive applicant cohorts (see Figure Two) as a consequence of lessons learned:

And that's [the pre-employment process] progressed, I have to say, over the three phases, completely different now to what it was at the beginning. It was very raw at the beginning and not as tight as what we would have liked... (KI7)

Overall, the KI interviews, including those with HR and line managers involved in the pre-employment process, have indicated its value and how participating in the various steps and activities has helped individuals to get to know the employers, their possible line managers, the nature of the various jobs, complete good applications, prepare for the interviews and

generally to be able to start their apprenticeships with a reasonable level of understanding about what their experience is likely to involve.

3.5 Recruiting ‘non-standard’ applicants

From the key informants’ perspectives, the pre-employment process has been essential. This is because the prior attainment and lack of relevant previous experience of most of the candidates means that they would have been unlikely to have been shortlisted under conventional open recruitment conditions. Indeed, they may well not even have applied, having seen that their CVs fell short of advertised recruitment criteria. The challenge of recruiting ‘non-standard’ applicants needed to be managed and the possibility discussed with workplace managers at the outset. As one KI commented:

So rather than only ever looking for people who came with a full skills set, actually saying for a small number of posts, ‘would you consider taking on somebody with limited experience and qualifications and give them the support to get them through that year’ with an option at the end that if they didn’t feel this person was performing, that they didn’t have to keep them... but with the expectation that if they put them through a programme of learning and supported them for a year as an apprentice, as an employee, then actually if they were any good they would want to keep them because otherwise they would be back to square one with a vacancy. (KI4)

As the next quotation from an interview with one of the line managers indicates, the importance of being able to interact with candidates during the pre-employment process and answer their questions was seen as very valuable:

People were asking very sensible questions about what it was like, and hours, and all of those kind of things. (KI8)

Another employer indicated that the availability of the FJF funding had helped to mitigate the risk of taking on an individual who, in terms of how they presented on paper, might normally not be considered:

So there was a little bit of resistance at middle managerial level, to do this from a risk perspective. What the Future Jobs Fund money allowed was to be able to say how we can bring in additional resources to help you do this. And the minute we did that, and the first ten apprentices came in, the impact... was strong, because what they got were people who they weren’t expecting to get. Because on paper they may have been weak, but in reality were very, generally very willing to learn and keen to actually do a good job. (KI5)

As mentioned above, the use of the apprenticeship scheme to create opportunities for training and employment for local unemployed young people, often with limited educational attainment and relevant job experience, raised questions for HR procedures and practices in the employing organisations. Whilst the steer from the chief executive level had embraced the potential of the scheme to diversify their workforces and strengthen links between their

organisations and the local community, from an HR perspective it raised questions, as this comment illustrates:

There was a lot of discussion around whether organisations could actually ring fence vacancies specifically for apprentices... as an organisation, we weren't keen to ring fence our vacancies, that's not something we've ever done.... So what we did is, we went out to departments and asked them to identify where they knew they would have vacancies in that area, and then we held those vacancies. So we didn't generally ring fence everything at that level that the apprentices could apply for, so we just specified, got some areas to sort of buy into the scheme really and give up some of their vacancies to the apprentices. (KI8)

3.6 The importance of employer commitment and partnership working

The initiative was underpinned and sustained by recognition of the importance of the agenda being set by the employers and receiving ongoing support by chief executives. This factor was mentioned time and again by key informants and is summed up by these quotations:

...I thought it was a very simple but very good concept and had the potential to bring people together in [city], and get people working sort of collaboratively and sort of aligning resources etc. One of the attractions as well as the fact that the initiative came from the employers and to me is key to this. (KI10)

Firstly, think you physically have got to have the support and sign up from the key leaders in big organisations. Secondly, I think that shows a psychological contract between all parties within it, and within your own organisation. And, thirdly, we could help to remove and unlock barriers that our teams who were doing this work in the operational groups faced. (KI2)

The close working relationship which developed between members of the operations groups, particularly between representatives of the employers, Jobcentre Plus and the training providers indicated the potential for creating a pipeline of candidates from Jobcentre Plus to the supported apprenticeship recruitment process. As one interviewee commented when talking about the strength of the relationship between the people working on the 'worklessness and newly unemployed' and 'apprenticeship' strands of the SSDZ's activity:

...because I'm very knitted with her on the worklessness and the unemployed group; there's a lot of stuff that we're doing. A lot of it all interlinks, you know, apprenticeships are not just apprenticeships, apprenticeships is worklessness and newly unemployed, as well! So it all mingles in at the end of the day, which is good because you focus when you go to those groups but actually they all interlink. (KI7)

3.7 The sustainability challenge

Our key informants recognised that the 'sustainability' of the initiative was a major challenge facing the apprenticeship scheme and the employers taking part. In this regard, one

interviewee outlined how an enterprising and responsive attitude could help identify and access funding streams being prioritised by the (then) new coalition government:

That's [sustainability] the challenge.... And I've not got a magic wand to provide the answer. I believe though that what we need to do is that we need to ensure that we tune into the 'popular developments of the day' that give some traction. So for example the actual money, yes, that was previously invested in future jobs fund has been diverted into apprenticeships....The present coalition government believe that whilst the future jobs fund was successful, there were more effective ways of using that money. So what the coalition government have done is to increase the number of apprenticeships that are available. So I believe what we have to do... is that we need to look at ways of utilising the development of apprenticeships in a way that can develop the model. So in other words... I mean the model needs to be dynamic, and one way of making the model dynamic is to sort of bend with the flow as it were. So what are we doing to look at how we utilise apprenticeships to get the traction and the sustainability that was originally one of the objectives when we started. (KI3)

Another interviewee reiterated that the original goal was to extend the scheme to the private sector and that there has been some success in involving a large private sector health and social care provider with Cohort 3. The dissemination of the initiative to private businesses and to other occupational sectors is likely to be facilitated by making links with other government supported initiatives:

But the intention from the chief executives had always been... it needed to move out into the private sector as well. So we are actively pursuing at the moment a Retail Skills Academy with the National Skills Academy for Retail. And that retail skills debate will not just be about the traditional, what people perceive in shops at the front end; we also want to think about that from the perspective of hospitality, logistics, and also potentially construction at a later date, as well, and we see apprentices as a very important part of that mix. (KI5)

According to this participant the nature of the model that has been created is scale-able as well as appropriate to the private sector:

The current government of course has announced significant funding into apprentices as well, so we think there is real opportunity to move the model, because it's a framework, it's a mechanism to help people through the system – that's what the Skills Development Zone does, and does it extremely well – into first Retail and then we will see this happening in other sectors as well across the private sector. So I think the model has been tested with the public authorities, but we are now able to showcase that, in a way that is very positive, to the private sector. (KI5)

There is evidence from several of the interviews that the partners are thinking creatively about how to pursue their shared social and economic goals. There is an essential pragmatism about the approach, revolving around the identification of opportunities, and the ability to position and present activities as meeting the criteria of new funding streams

and initiatives as they emerge. It is noticeable that many of the employers and partners involved in the development of SSDZ's activities are seasoned practitioners used to bidding for regional, national and European funds, and are very knowledgeable about the local and sub-regional environment both in terms of the needs of the local population and the diverse partners (eg training providers, charities, employers and agencies) that could be able to contribute to their agenda. Most recently, this has included moves to embed SSDZ's models of activity within the sub-region's new local enterprise partnership (LEP).

3.8 Perceptions from the workplace

Overall, workplace line managers and supervisors were positive about the experience of having an apprentice in their teams. They have enjoyed having the opportunity to mentor a young person, often with limited employment experience and prior educational attainment, and to see them develop their skills and competence as well as their self-confidence and self-esteem. Most workplace supervisors and managers perceived that they had learned a lot from their participation in a scheme that had helped them develop their people management, training and mentoring skills. The apprentices came to them as 'beginners' and 'novices' who needed to be developed, supported and trained in order to become skilled and productive workers:

...it gave our staff the opportunity to learn some mentoring skills. So it worked both ways.... And that was around allocating the right amount of work, the right kind of work, because the X of them were very different, they had differing skills - which complemented each other and complemented the team, but we had to learn that initially and then allocate them the correct stuff. So they could be standing at our desk saying 'what do you want us to do now?' So we had to plan and adapt things as we went along... (KI28)

You have to spend a lot of time with them, a lot of dedicated time. They do make mistakes, you are telling them things over and over and over again, but it's about having the patience and having the right systems in place to support them really. And I guess some of them haven't been in the workplace, and I think one of the first challenges we had was they weren't aware of any office etiquette, they didn't know that they shouldn't be shouting across the office and being inappropriate, and inappropriate language. And so we had to have a session on that, and I think if we had an apprentice in the future we would do that from day one so we were all very clear. They do go off sick, you know, at the drop of a hat, you know, because these are people that haven't been working, so to come to work every day suddenly is a shock to the system. So it's about having all the right things in place and treating them the same as everybody else. (KI28)

Our workplace interviewees suggested that the scheme enabled the apprentices to gain a 'huge amount' of experience and skills as well as build confidence which they initially had lacked:

I've seen their confidence building in the last... you know, since they started in September I've seen a big difference in them, they're a lot more outgoing, they sort of

talk up a wee bit more within meetings. The first few meetings that I had with them it was very quiet, but now when I meet with them it's a lot more relaxed, so I think just their confidence is built. And knowing that if they go along for interviews now they can actually see that they've had... they've held down quite a secure job, whereas six months ago they couldn't have done that. (KI24)

Interviewees were keen to keep 'their apprentices' at the end of the 12 month contract. They had spent time developing and training the young people and, in some cases, had invested considerable emotional energy in their development as well. In addition, they were keen to point out the contribution the apprentices have been making to departmental and team productivity:

...we want to keep the two of them because we've now trained them, and to take on one more to train rather than take on three that we've got to train from scratch. (KI21)

Retaining the apprentices at the end of the contract was seen as a challenge in the existing financial climate, where there was considerable pressure to improve organisational and workforce efficiency. Despite this context, there seemed to be a genuine effort on the part of employers to accommodate the apprentices in permanent jobs. In some cases, this required HR and line managers to think creatively, for example by developing job roles that spanned more than one department. Such opportunities were also perceived as enabling the individual to learn a different and broader set of skills:

...the way that we're set up, he's actually gaining more experience than he would if he'd just been in one section. Because he's effectively doing everything, albeit on a slightly lesser scale, when it comes to recruitment, possible vacancies, he's got experience. I mean in a way he's getting more experience. (KI32)

The workplace supervisors and managers across the participating employers spoke about what they had learned from being involved in the scheme and through developing people that probably would not normally have been recruited due to their lack of relevant experience. They felt that their involvement in the early stages of the scheme, particularly where they had participated in the recruitment and selection process, had helped them assess the needs of the apprentices and find mechanisms within the workplace to support them. Interviewees felt that contact or networking with other participants involved in supporting apprentices across their organisation and possibly the scheme as a whole could play a valuable role in allowing them to share and exchange ideas on how to best support the young people.

Section Four: Findings from the Apprentice Interviews

4.1 Introduction

The findings from our interviews with the apprentices are organised under eight themes:

- Educational experiences and employment background;
- Pre-employment training and choosing the apprenticeship;
- Perceptions of the scheme;
- Supervision and support;
- Personal and professional development;
- Completing the formal requirements of the apprenticeship;
- Coming to the end of the scheme: what next?
- Career progression.

Our qualitative and longitudinal approach to collecting the perceptions and experiences of young people participating in the scheme has generated a large and rich dataset. The extensive use of direct quotations as illustrative evidence provides an opportunity for the voices of the apprentices themselves to be presented.

4.2 Educational experiences and employment background

As outlined in Section Three, the originators and organisers of the apprenticeship envisaged that the scheme would provide opportunities to young people with limited track records of educational and employment success. Many of the apprentices were dissatisfied in some way with their prior educational attainment. A number of them reported home or family related factors as responsible for affecting their educational performance and experiences.

Towards the end of my AS Levels I had a lot going on at home anyway, I just kind of gave up on continuing on to A2, I wasn't... I didn't feel prepared to do another year of A2s, which in hindsight I regret doing... (Apprentice 3, interview 1)

Some started college but left before completing their course, either because they were not enjoying it or found a job. To some this decision was a matter of regret as they realised that their action had not been well thought through:

I was expecting it [college] I think to be a bit more like university in kind of like... being only 16 I don't think I really knew what to expect from college, and it was still quite a lot like school and I didn't really enjoy it at the time. That's just my biggest regret is not staying on and finishing college because I really would have liked to have gone to uni. And I think at the time I just wasn't looking forward enough to realise what effects my actions were taking. I was working part-time in X and I was enjoying that more, so I went 'oh well, I'll just work full time in X' and... obviously after a little while of that I knew that wasn't where I wanted to be in life. (Apprentice 15, interview 2)

Others felt that they had lacked support in relation to their learning needs:

I asked for help once and they turned round and said that I wasn't allowed help, I had to do this certain bit on my own, I wasn't allowed to research or anything like that. And where I suffer with a bit of dyslexia I needed more help on that. (Apprentice 16, interview 1)

Overall, it was notable that many of our interviewees had not particularly enjoyed school and had also found the transition from school to college difficult. They identified issues such as lack of discipline in the classroom, teachers' inability to teach or manage the class and bullying in hindering their performance at school or helping to explain their withdrawal from college:

My school and my college were right next door to each other and I was bullied a lot at school, and so most people from the school went to the college and I didn't want to have to be bullied again optionally, so I just left. (Apprentice 1, interview 1)

A number of interviewees had had some experience of employment prior to starting their apprenticeship. In the main they had obtained temporary jobs in the retail or hospitality sectors as sales assistants or bar staff that had not led to permanent status or career progression. As indicated in Section Two they had all been unemployed for various lengths of time before obtaining a place on the scheme.

Lack of career guidance and advice regarding job or further education was cited as an important reason for not being able to make the 'right career choices'.

I didn't know many people in the city... and that was due to kind of my own... when I went to college I'd make friends at college but then that would be it, I wouldn't kind of socialise with them outside of college. And I thought I was OK with that, but then once college ended I was like 'OK well now I have no... I'm out of college, I don't have a job' and I didn't really know that many people around here. And it was kind of... that made me feel really unmotivated, really unconfident. And then I was going for jobs but I wasn't really wanting them. And I guess that reflected, because that's why I was out of work for so long. And I had some people who would tell me 'oh you can do this, you can do this' but I wouldn't take them seriously because 'I don't want to do that right now'. (Apprentice 3, Interview 3)

In addition, many apprentices spoke of receiving a lack of support whilst they were unemployed and in receipt of the 'job seekers' allowance:

I was working part time at the time so I felt no need to go to the Jobcentre. I had been down there before and from my experience there I'd found it a waste of time... (Apprentice 5, Interview 1)

A few suggested that Jobcentre Plus was helpful in encouraging them to find work but was not particularly helpful in exposing them to any training opportunities or providing career guidance:

They definitely encourage you to look for work, but beyond that there wasn't amazing... obviously with regards to training, they're not as forthcoming with that as there are with telling you 'oh the jobs are here' and things like that. (Apprentice 19, interview 1)

However, all except one apprentice heard about the apprenticeship scheme from Jobcentre Plus. The other had found out about it via the National Apprenticeship Service website.

4.3 Pre-employment training and choosing the apprenticeship

Overall, interviewees from both cohorts valued the pre-employment process and found it useful. In some cases the sorts of skills covered were new to them, whereas for others the course acted as a refresher. In addition, the participants perceived that the opportunity to experience open and taster days with prospective employers and meet potential line managers was very helpful. The following observation was quite typical:

The two week pre-employment, really kind of helped me to build that initial confidence. I think without that I may have kind of stuttered a bit at the interview stage. And it was nice to know that I knew the interviewers, if you like, because I'd already kind of met them... not on a huge basis but I'd kind of saw them around and I'd spoke to them and I'd spent a couple of days with them, so I felt more comfortable talking to them and answering their questions. And also I felt more comfortable asking them questions if I wasn't sure, which was extremely nice. (Apprentice 3, interview 3).

For many of the apprentices who had been unemployed for a long time, the experience of attending the pre-employment training helped them to regain some structure and routine in their lives:

I thought that was quite useful in that I'd obviously been unemployed for quite a long time at that point and it was useful for me to sort of get back into the rhythm of getting up and getting in on time sort of thing and then sitting and doing some work. (Apprentice 8, focus group interview)

Some interviewees mentioned that not all the individuals completing the pre-employment training course were offered apprenticeships, although they had believed that there would be a place for everyone. Limitations in funding as well as employers' attempts to improve efficiency had an effect on recruitment decisions:

I don't know if you're aware but you know the people we saw on the two week training course, not all of them got jobs. And we were told up until that point that we all would get jobs. And obviously that's because of spending cuts and things, but you know, I'd like to ensure that that doesn't happen like with future groups, because it was very disheartening for us. (Apprentice 8, focus group interview)

Participants in the pre-employment course had a chance to express their preferences about employers and sectors. Their choices tended to be based on interest in particular types of

work, and advice from friends and family. One of the apprentices explained her preference for choosing health and social care over business administration:

I think it's just that it interests me a bit more [than business administration]. I've always been... well primary school has always stood out as being particularly good at science and biology particularly, and I did biology at GCSE and at A Level as well, so I guess there is something about that that makes me tick. It's sort of... it's interesting, it's like on a line of you have that emotion almost interest as well as like a knowledge interest. (Interview10, interview 3)

For some apprentices the choice of sector and employer was shaped by parental professions and interests. Some found the taster days had provided useful information about the different opportunities: for example, one of the apprentices chose health and social care because he found out that there were good chances for career progression. Others used the opportunity to help them make decisions about the specific area of the organisation in which they would prefer to work as well as the people that they would like to work with:

I think what I like about this job is the data side of it and the reporting side of it, and having to give figures to this person and figures to this person. I really like working with kind of numerical data, and I think that's what when I first got this apprenticeship I wasn't aware of this side of [the organisation], which is maybe why I was a bit sceptical about getting the position. (Apprentice 3, interview 3)

4.4 Perceptions of the scheme

Most of the apprentices were keen to participate in the scheme irrespective of the nature of work it offered. They saw it as means to 'earning some money' and 'doing at least something' to gain some experience and qualifications. However, as the scheme advanced, many found it to be an enriching learning experience, which they felt would open doors for them in the future. As one apprentice suggested:

...when I was at college I had an aim and then that went a little bit wrong, so from there I just kind of did whatever was convenient to just earn some money... and the first probably turning point was getting this apprenticeship because it basically has limitless possibilities, you get whatever you put in, if you try hard enough you can go from here to anywhere... (Apprentice 19, interview 1)

Apprentices were particularly appreciative of the opportunity the apprenticeship scheme had given them to access jobs that normally only selected people with relevant experience:

it's a good opportunity for people like me that wasn't in a job, and it gives you... rather than going to these interviews and people... because I went to so many care homes and they said 'no, you need experience', whereas this has given me experience. So if I didn't get the job at the end of this I had so much experience I could go off anywhere and do it. (Apprentice 12, interview 3)

Most apprentices were satisfied with their pay and thought that it was appropriate that they were being paid the relevant rate for the job as once they were inducted they were performing similar tasks to other staff. Some apprentices compared the pay and employment benefits they were receiving favourably to the pay of some of their friends and family working in other sectors, and the opportunities for career progression they had working for a large employer:

My mum works for a pre-school and she's a one to one, works with special needs children. She's got a brilliant job she has, but her pay is rubbish. So having a job that is so well paid as well, and so many people know it, and you get a pension, and there's so many benefits to it... Whereas here, I wouldn't say it's easy easy, but you have the contacts, you can branch out. (Apprentice 12, interview 3)

Interviewing participants at different stages of the apprenticeship provided insights into how their perceptions of themselves and their status in the organisation changed. Early on most apprentices clearly saw themselves as 'novices' with a lot to learn about their role, but as time went on they increasingly viewed themselves as employees who had become integral, productive and valued members of the team:

When I very first started I did think myself as an apprentice. I think after a couple of months I felt more like an employee because I felt that my team trusted me and I felt like part of the team, and I was getting on with jobs that I fairly enjoyed. (Apprentice 21, interview 1)

I feel more like an employee, I'm not treated any differently to any of the other staff and they come to me with problems now because I am confident with Microsoft Excel, that's kind of my forte I guess when it comes to computer software, and now I find that even if members of staff have problems with that they'll come to me to see if I know the answer to it. And yeah I definitely feel more like an employee than an apprentice, they've never treated me any differently. (Apprentice 3, interview 1)

The scheme has appeared to be a potentially life changing experience for some of the participants:

I'm coming from a position where I hadn't had any previous experience and I'd been unemployed for a year before that as well, and as much as you try and just focus on putting the next application in and doing it and keeping ongoing it's a very draining process. So just being able to sit back for a year and go 'yes I've got this now, focus on this and then move forward from there...' (Apprentice 8, interview 3)

4.5 Supervision and support

Apprentices' experiences of induction varied. Some reported that they had participated in a thorough induction process, including health and safety training whilst others commented that they had only received brief orientations to the organisation and their role. Initially, most apprentices began by 'shadowing' more experienced colleagues, allowing them to familiarise themselves with tasks whilst at the same time getting to know their new

colleagues. The majority of interviewees spoke highly about their colleagues and how they had helped to support and integrate them into the team. Receiving informal, yet regular feedback on how they were performing and help to feel part of the team, were highly valued:

The team that I work alongside are the most amazing group of people ever. They really made me feel at home from the start. None of them really gave me any kind of... none of them really picked up... if I made mistakes to start with they'd say 'oh you've just got to do this' or 'do this'. And it was really nice that I wasn't kind of separated from them, I never once felt separated. (Apprentice 3, interview 3)

Several apprentices mentioned that they had appreciated being encouraged to ask questions if they did not understand a process or task, or to ask for help if they felt they needed it:

I was told if there was any need or if I'm in difficulty then it was always to raise the issue, to bring the query up to them. If I didn't understand anything just to ask... (Apprentice 4, interview 3)

In addition to acknowledging the support from team members, some apprentices also acknowledge the 'independence' they enjoy in doing the job. This independence and the opportunity of 'working on their own' has enabled them learn more effectively and quickly.

I think the support I get is a good amount of support, it's not too much, it's not overbearing, I don't have people over my shoulder all the time trying to make sure everything's OK, but if I need it they're there, so it's a... I get enough support for what I'm doing... it's a good atmosphere. It's friendly... I like the independence of my job actually, I do like that, knowing that it's only me doing that job... I like the independence of it. (Apprentice 18, interview 1)

4.6 Personal and occupational development

Most apprentices claim that the scheme has helped them develop on both personal and professional Levels, as it has helped them gain confidence, raise their self-esteem and acquire new knowledge and skills. All our interviewees claimed that the experience of has changed them, by for example making them feel more mature and responsible. The following comment is illustrative of this:

I think it's probably made me a little bit more responsible because my working hours are a bit longer than they used to be and I used to kind of stay up till like 2, 3, 4 in the morning and then kind of still roll out of bed at 7...Whereas here, you really can't do that, you need to be a bit more alert... (Apprentice 15, interview 2)

All the interviewees reported gaining confidence from working with colleagues and learning how to communicate with new people:

I guess just talking to colleagues and people who are higher up who at first I was maybe a little intimidated by, I've just been able to grow in my own confidence in how

I communicate with people. And it's kind of reflecting on my personal life as well. Like my family were saying like, you know, 'you used to hibernate away and you're just growing in confidence', which is really nice. So that's really nice for me. (Apprentice 3, interview 3)

However, some apprentices found it difficult to articulate the extent to which it was their participation in the scheme that had changed them in comparison with other factors that may have also been shaping their lives, such as changing personal and domestic circumstances.

Our interview evidence indicated that apprentices particularly in business administration roles, had had the chance (in line with other employees) to attend a range of training courses as part of their employment. These opportunities were felt to augment the training and qualification requirements associated with the completion of the apprenticeship framework and their on-the-job training:

They were really good courses this year. Just divert our skills that little bit more, combined with what we're learning at college and doing day to day at work, yeah it's been an all-round really good experience. (Apprentice 7, interview 2)

Health and social care apprentices reported learning a wide range of skills and tasks on the job and relevant to the ward or hospital department in which they were based. Initially all tasks had been learned under-supervision but overtime they were able to perform them independently, only asking for help on more complex or non-routine tasks. Several interviewees stressed that the nature of the work meant that they were regularly learning new things:

Obviously working in a multi-disciplinary team is very interesting, with doctors, trained nurses, physios, it's all... never really a dull moment, generally you learn something new every day which you always find very interesting. It's definitely interesting work. (Apprentice 19, interview 1)

Business administration apprentices also spoke about how much they learned on the job, and through picking up the knowledge and skills required to work effectively in their particular function or department. For example, those working in planning departments learned about how planning applications are processed. In addition, they developed their computer and IT skills and ability to use office applications as well as general administrative skills associated with minute taking, organising meetings, dealing with phone queries, data entry and so on:

I think probably one of the major things that's developed for me is... like because I didn't have the experience in dealing with people in a professional capacity as it were, so talking to people over the phone, thinking about how I need to approach business phone calls and writing letters, it's those sort of skills, more practical skills that you would use in any sort of organisation really I suppose. But those were the skills that I've really developed. (Apprentice 8, interview 3)

Interestingly, some of the apprentices said that over the course of the year, they were able to develop sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to support and train new staff:

I'm counted in with the numbers. I've been given opportunities to like show other people, new people, what to do. (Apprentice 14, focus group interview)

Some apprentices continued to work in the same setting or department during the course of their training contract, while others had the opportunity of working in different settings within the same employer, or in a variety of roles within the same department:

Well my days vary which is really cool, every day is sort of different for me. Within the Directorate I will work for two different areas. (Apprentice 7, focus group interview)

Well there are three or four different job roles in the little department that I work in and my supervisor's getting me... like giving me a taster of each of them. So for the first two months I was doing one, for the next two months I'm doing another, so I've just swapped over to doing a new role. (Apprentice 8, focus group interview)

Apprentices who largely worked in the same setting for the whole year sometimes found the work monotonous and were concerned about the extent to which they were able to continue learning.

There were times when I was like 'I've done this 100 times already now, I don't really need much more experience in it' but at the same time it's your job, it's what you're paid for. (Apprentice 21, interview 1)

Despite the fact that most apprentices were content with their jobs, some of them found the opportunity restricted in some respects. As the following comment highlights, there can be a tension between the working and learning elements of an apprenticeship and where the requirement of apprentices to be productive workers is prioritised over learning and development:

...I think... I was going to have really some opportunities to learn skills in other areas, say for example the information part of the work and then do some data analysis stuff, but in the end I didn't get to do that because... well the job I was doing was really quite busy and then the person I worked with had to leave her job quite quickly so I had to sort of take on her work... so I haven't had so much opportunity to do things that I would have perhaps done if she hadn't have left. So in some respects it's been a little bit restricted... because the work I do is quite boring, so it would be nice, yeah, to spread my wings and do some work in other departments which could have led to other opportunities really. (Apprentice 2, interview 2)

4.7 Completing the formal requirements of the apprenticeship

As the evidence presented here indicates, our interviewees were generally positive about their participation in the scheme and the support they had received from colleagues and supervisors. They recognised the opportunity it had provided to learn occupational and

interpersonal skills, and to become an integral and valued member of a workplace team and organisation. However, the evidence suggests that apprentices had more mixed views about their experience of pursuing the formal requirements of their apprenticeship framework.

The core components of the apprenticeship frameworks are specified by the relevant Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in line with the blueprint laid down by government for Level 2 Apprenticeships. At the time of the research into the scheme, these requirements included the relevant (in terms of sector) NVQ2, technical certificate and key skills.

As reported in Section Two, some of the apprentices had achieved prior qualifications at Level 3 or above. For these individuals the qualifications in the Level 2 apprenticeship were at a lower educational level, albeit that the vocational subject matter was usually new to them. This raised questions about whether the qualifications were sufficiently challenging and providing the most appropriate platform for career progression for this group. At the end of the training contract and Level 2 framework there was no automatic progression to the Level 3 framework or alternative training pathway. This would have been valued by many of the participants.

In some cases apprentices perceived that the content of the qualifications (particularly the technical certificate and NVQ) was not sufficiently relevant or specific to the roles they were undertaking in the workplace:

I found the NVQ quite... not difficult but it just didn't apply to the job role. I think that it was quite difficult to come up with some scenarios to meet the criteria, because really it just wasn't fitting to my role. There were some sections of it where it was quite generic and that was all right, but there were others where it was very specific... it's completely like separate and completely segregated, which is why I probably found the NVQ to be... nice to have but a little bit... not pointless but not quite applicable. (Apprentice 10, interview 2)

That was probably the worst bit of it, the technical certificate, because that really was aimed at care and stuff, and there were multiple questions in it which just had no application to my role in the slightest, asking about how you take service users down to the shops; and if you were to go on holiday with people, and that's just not something that we do here. (Apprentice 15, interview 2)

The key skills component of the framework was often seen as unnecessary, particularly by those who have achieved passes in their English and Mathematics GCSEs, or had done similar courses prior to the scheme.

They're still kind of discussing it at College at the moment whether I will be doing key skills, but in my eyes I think it's completely stupid to put me on key skills because I've already completed them and I've already been to college. I mean I've done a First Diploma and a National Diploma as well, and that pretty much covers key skills. (Apprentice 5, interview 2)

However, a few apprentices who did not secure good grades in their GCSEs found the key skills provision worthwhile:

Although I passed at GCSE I didn't get great grades in my English and Maths so to actually get them up slightly through this apprenticeship scheme and through going to college, again it's just a great opportunity, a great chance to do it. (Apprentice 9, focus group interview)

Almost all apprentices reported receiving help from supervisors, colleagues, tutors and assessors in completing their evidence portfolios. However, in the initial stages of the process, some participants perceived that they had insufficient or irregular contact with their assessors and they were allocated insufficient time off-the-job to enable them to compile their evidence. Apprentices had diverse experiences of workplace support in completing their NVQs:

...it was sort of introduced as this big package, sort of all singing all dancing, and then since then there's been so many different organisations and sort of like departments involved that everyone sort of seems to like rely on everyone else, and as a result you get isolated because one person thinks that the other person's sorting it. (Apprentice 14, focus group interview)

Limited availability of assessors was raised as an issue by apprentices following both the health and social care, and business administration apprenticeship frameworks:

You see if all my work was set for me I could do it myself in my own time and hand it in over this. But where you're waiting around for your assessor to come up and you don't have one ... and we're waiting around for [the assessor] who is doing us three, it's ridiculous, she can't always be around, she goes on annual leave or we're not there,... it's so unorganised. (Apprentice 12, focus group interview)

In some cases where supervisors changed during the course of the apprenticeship, a lack of communication caused difficulties:

She didn't know. She was shocked when I told her that my contract runs out on the 6th September, she didn't know, she wasn't aware of it. (Apprentice 11, focus group interview)

Assessors from the college undertook workplace observations and visited apprentices in their work settings. The college also provided training consultants who monitored apprentices' progress towards the completion of their frameworks.

The most successful arrangements appeared to be where apprentices had a supervisor or mentor in the workplace who was also their designated assessor. This was helpful as the assessor was readily on hand to observe and provide feedback, and identify regular opportunities for undertaking formal assessments. However, in these instances finding time to complete the requirements during work time was still challenging and it was suggested

that apprentices should have a day a month reserved for meetings with their assessors and completing the formal requirements of the framework.

I feel that there needs to be a study day every month set up so that we can set work and then on that study day go through our work and make sure that it's all there and it's all OK, and hand it in. (Apprentice 13, focus group interview)

Notwithstanding the criticisms, most apprentices seem to value completing the framework and perceive that the achievement will benefit them whether or not they stay within the same sector or with the same employer. Some of those apprentices who were more highly qualified at the start of their apprenticeships had still found some worth in completing the NVQ2, despite their initial preference to gain work and employment experience rather than a qualification from the scheme:

When we first went into the course I was obviously... I wanted the work experience but I wasn't that fussed about doing the NVQ in administration that we were doing. But having done it now, it hasn't necessarily taught me new skills but one of the things that it has been really useful for is, it's made me assess, like, the skills that I am using and learning while I'm working, and that's been really helpful for me when I've been writing CVs and things, and application forms, because I've already got all this work written down that I've done, and I've thought about how the work I'm doing and the skills that it has given me and how that's helped me progress. (Apprentice 8, interview 2)

4.8 Completing the apprenticeship - what next?

The apprentices clearly understood that they had been employed on a fixed-term 12 month contract and that there was no guarantee that they would be offered a permanent position at the end of this period. The interviews held towards the end of the apprenticeship revealed that most individuals were still uncertain about whether they would be retained and so were making job applications. Some apprentices were invited to participate in interviews for posts with their current employer. This was a time of great uncertainty for the apprentices. Many expressed considerable anxiety about what would happen and whether they would become unemployed (again).

Some apprentices indicated that employers were trying to help them by, for example placing them on redeployment lists so that they would be informed of any jobs becoming available, helping them to register with employment agencies, and with preparation for job interviews. One of the apprentices was also given a temporary contract to work in a different department of the same employer in a similar job role to bridge the time between the scheme completion and the start of a new contract. Although most apprentices recognised the influence of the poor financial climate on their prospects, they were demoralised to be reaching the end of their contracts without a clear sense of whether they would be offered a permanent role:

Coming towards the end of it, after you've already been unemployed for a long time and then you know you're coming to the end of something where you've been

employed and you think 'oh no, I'll soon be back to the dole queue', it can be quite a horrible feeling. And it made me start to resent the work I was doing. And after getting a lot of praise and then thinking there was going to be nothing coming out of it, I think... obviously in my case I was lucky there was, but... (Apprentice 21, interview 1)

Some apprentices had indications from their supervisors that they were likely to be retained, for example through seeing that they had been included in the rota beyond the end of their contract. On the other hand, decisions about permanent contracts were made at an organisational level, not just at the department or team level:

I have been offered a job up there anyway and they said that... they basically said if they got rid of me that they would have to find somebody else anyway. And they've asked me whether I wanted it or not and I said 'yeah' and they're just waiting for some feedback from down here to say what's happening. (Apprentice 14, focus group interview)

Other apprentices had received no indication about whether they would be retained. Differences in apprentices' experiences of this aspect of the scheme, was picked up as an issue:

I know everyone's different and obviously [a fellow apprentice] might be offered a job and I might not, but even then it surely should be the same route for everybody because we're all on the same scheme, we all finish at the same time so... and it's the same agents. (Apprentice 11, focus group interview)

As apprentices received the news that they had been offered new contracts, they were able to express their relief that the uncertainty had been removed:

Since being told I have a permanent job... I feel relieved knowing I now have some financial support and I'm safe in my current job, before I found out I had the job it felt as if it was dangling in their hand and I had no idea what was going to happen that was rather stressful and scary for myself. (Apprentice 11, interview 3)

The interview evidence suggests that apprentices were more confident about their future job prospects as a result of completing the apprenticeship and having gained a year's employment with large, well-known, public sector employers. The following comment from one apprentice is illustrative:

If I was to go for a job... let's just say hypothetically I moved somewhere else in England and then I could say on my job application 'oh I worked in the NHS here' and the NHS is known so well around the whole country, probably internationally as well, I think it definitely helps to have that kind of reputable company on your CV and behind you. And you can say 'well I was successful for like a year or two years...', however long I stayed. I think it's definitely beneficial for my future. (Apprentice 3, interview 3)

Overall, apprentices claimed to feel more confident about applying for jobs than they had been prior to their participation in the scheme. This is primarily because they can provide evidence that they have relevant workplace skills and about their occupational competence:

I'm definitely a lot more confident about the future this time this year, than I was this time last year. This time last year obviously I'd been applying for jobs for a year or whatever and hadn't heard back from anyone, whereas I've started applying for jobs now and I've already had an interview, which is definitely an improvement. And previously when I was filling in applications there were lots of blank spaces where I just couldn't fill anything in because I didn't have any evidence that I'd done anything like that, whereas now there's always like some experience that I can use that I can enter, and at least I'm writing something, which is a good step forward. (Apprentice 8, interview 2)

4.9 Career progression

Interviews after the completion of the scheme revealed that apprentices differed in their future plans. Those who had secured permanent contracts were generally content with their jobs and were not thinking too far ahead. Some showed interest in doing an NVQ3 and in developing more specialist knowledge and skills: for example one apprentice in healthcare wished to do an NVQ3 to enable her to progress to a course that would allow her to become an Associate Practitioner (AP). She is enthusiastic about her plans:

I just want to try different things. I don't want to be stuck point blank as an HCA [healthcare assistant], but I don't want to ever say... I love being an HCA and I know some people go to nurse and think 'oh I wish I'd stayed an HCA' whereas I want the experience and the choice. And with AP you can choose whether you want to be the HCA for the day, if there's enough nurses are trained, or you can take a bay, so it's nice to have that choice. (Apprentice 12, interview 3)

Some individuals had career plans that would require higher level and professional training, for example, in accountancy. Those who already had higher level qualifications still hoped ultimately to be able to access employment and develop careers in the areas they had studied during their degrees. Others seemed to be unclear about what exactly to do, although they had general aspirations to progress:

I'm not sure really, like I want to train more because I'm a little bit bored with my job already, like I think I was bored with it after about five months, so I feel like I need to train more and do something else in that area... I'm not sure. But I do want to go to university at some point so I'd have to train up a bit more to go to university, and then maybe completely quit and go to university, or see if they will actually put me through to university, or something like that. (Apprentice 13, focus group interview)

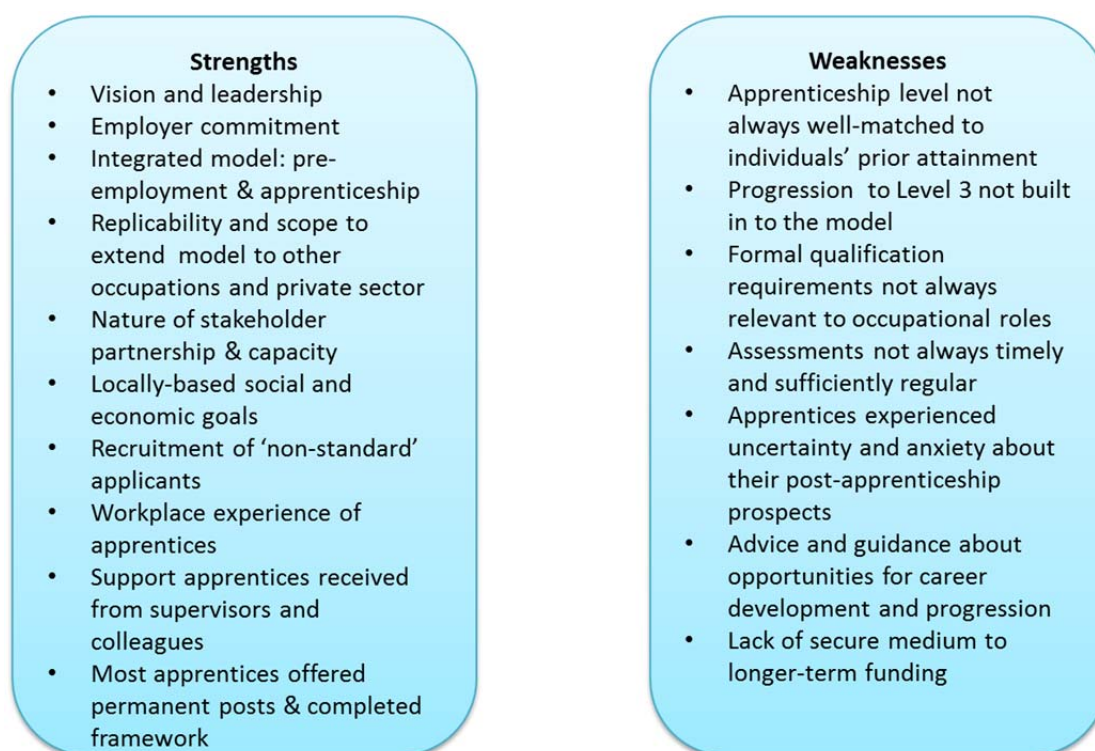
The interview evidence suggested that most apprentices had not had a formal opportunity to talk through their post-apprenticeship educational and career aspirations and potential progression pathways with their line manager or HR staff. There is a risk, at least in some cases, that the momentum gained from completing the apprenticeship might be lost.

Section Five: Conclusions

5.1 Summary

This report concludes with a summary of the strengths, benefits and weaknesses of the SSDZ apprenticeship (see Figure Three). Sustaining and expanding the scheme at a time of financial austerity has been identified as a particular challenge. However, the expertise and capacity associated with the SSDZ partnership, the strength of the relationships between the key stakeholders at local and national level, and their sense of shared mission are likely to produce innovative responses to this challenge. Apprenticeship as a vehicle for training and supporting transitions into employment continues to be supported by government policy and funding which offers an ongoing opportunity to build on the lessons learned from the implementation of the SSDZ scheme.

Figure Three: Apprenticeship Model Strengths and Weaknesses



The conclusions emerging from our research evidence are presented in relation to 'scheme performance', 'key informants' and 'apprentices'.

5.2 Scheme performance

1. The tracking information presented in Section Two indicates that the scheme has been successful in that most apprentices had completed their frameworks and progressed into employment, in the main, with their apprenticeship employer.

2. According to the data we were able to obtain a total of 47 apprentices 32 in Cohort 1 and 15 in Cohort 2 started on the apprenticeship scheme. Overall, 34 (72%) gained employment, mostly with their apprenticeship employer, and 36 (76%) successfully completed their apprenticeship framework.

5.3 Key informants

3. The commitment and involvement of the SSDZ Board including the chief executives of the participating employers was central to the successful implementation of the scheme.
4. The major partners in the scheme agreed that the scheme had both social and economic goals which they were committed to helping to achieve.
5. Participants strongly supported the pre-employment training and recruitment programme, and recognised its value in helping unemployed young people choose and apply for a place on the scheme and a particular apprenticeship opportunity.
6. The apprenticeship scheme was conceived as comprising both the pre-employment training and recruitment process and the one year apprenticeship as an integrated model that could be promoted to other employers including in the private sector.
7. The pre-employment training and recruitment process also provided an opportunity for the partners (including the employers, Jobcentre Plus and City College) to build local capacity and shared understanding about the nature and challenges of the scheme and the target group.
8. The ability and willingness of the employers to recruit and employ 'non-standard' applicants into 'real jobs' was crucial. Without this commitment, the young people would have been unlikely to have been considered for posts by the line managers and HR staff and, therefore, would not have benefited from the experience of an apprenticeship which has the relationship between apprentices and employers at its heart.
9. The financial arrangements required to create the model were complex but the availability of public funding via DWP FJF to support the pre-employment training course and to subsidise apprentice wages, the SfA to pay for the training and qualifications associated with the formal apprenticeship framework as well as the employers' in kind and wages' contributions were all crucial to its implementation.
10. The FJF subsidy helped to mitigate the employers' risk in taking on young people who would not normally have been shortlisted for posts owing to their lack of relevant experience. The challenge of sustaining the scheme at a time of financial austerity for employers was seen as considerable, particularly following the withdrawal of the FJF subsidy.
11. Workplace supervisors and line managers were positive about the ability of 'their apprentices' to learn the job and make a positive contribution, despite their lack of prior experience. They recognised that they had benefited from

participating in the scheme in terms of their own personal and professional development.

12. There was some progress in rolling the scheme out to the private sector. The availability of a tested pre-employment training and recruitment model was seen as a benefit and factor that could facilitate the involvement of other employers.
13. The experience and creativity of the key partners in leveraging funding from diverse sources (regional, national and European) was likely to play an increasingly important role in enabling the scheme to be sustained and, or adapted, for example, for inclusion in the plans for the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

5.4 Apprentices

14. Overall, the apprentices were very positive about the opportunity to participate in the scheme. They had all been unemployed for at least six months and were very keen to get jobs with training and qualifications attached to them.
15. The apprentices recognised the value of the pre-employment training and recruitment process in helping them to select the 'right' employer and sector for them, as well as to making a good start on the apprenticeship.
16. Apprentices perceived that they would have been highly unlikely to have been shortlisted for jobs with the participating employers because of their lack of relevant work and employment experience. The opportunity to become apprentices and gain employment experience – learning and earning at the same time - with highly reputable public sector employers was highly valued.
17. Most participants felt that they had become valued members of their workplace teams, and were making a positive and productive contribution. Apprentices saw themselves as productive employees from a fairly early stage in their one-year contracts. This raised questions about whether the learning goals associated with the apprenticeship should have been more substantial and challenging.
18. Apprentices were supported by colleagues, supervisors and line managers in their on-the-job learning, and to be able to work more independently. Overall, they spoke highly of the help and encouragement they had received from members of their workplace teams.
19. Most of the apprentices experienced an uncertain and anxious period at the end of their contracts when there was considerable uncertainty about whether they would be retained. There was considerable relief when individuals heard that their contracts had been confirmed.
20. The apprentices perceived that their CVs had been significantly improved by their participation in the scheme, their achievements and employment experience, and that this would improve their chances in the labour market. In addition, they felt that they had gained in self-confidence and self-esteem and had improved their inter-personal skills.

21. Experiences with the formal part of the apprenticeship have been mixed. Issues for improvement raised by the apprentices included: the amount of off-the-job time available to study and to complete assignments; the relevance of the qualifications to actual jobs; the level of qualifications, the timeliness with which they were able to complete aspects of their qualification framework; and having adequate access to workplace assessors. Access to an assessor as part of the work team was highly valued as it meant that assessments could be integrated into daily working practice and therefore could occur more regularly.
22. Just under half the apprentices in the interview sample had attained qualifications at Level 3 or above before starting their apprenticeships, which were all at Level 2. This raised questions about whether some individuals at least could have been registered on Level 3 apprenticeships at the outset, or whether they and others could progress directly to Level 3 on completion of the Level 2 programme.
23. Most apprentices had had their educational and career aspirations raised as a consequence of participating in the scheme. There was scope for ensuring that employers provided formal opportunities to discuss career development with individuals so that the completion of the apprenticeship could be viewed as a rung on a ladder, rather than as a single step.

SSDZ Apprenticeship Model: Summary Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

- Vision and leadership
- Employer commitment
- Integrated model: pre-employment & apprenticeship
- Replicability and scope to extend model to other occupations and private sector
- Nature of stakeholder partnership & capacity
- Locally-based social and economic goals
- Recruitment of 'non-standard' applicants
- Workplace experience of apprentices
- Training and support apprentices received from supervisors and colleagues
- Most apprentices offered permanent posts & completed framework.

Weaknesses

- Apprenticeship level not always well-matched to individuals' prior attainment
- Progression to Level 3 not built in to the model
- Formal qualification requirements not always relevant to occupational roles
- Assessments not always timely and sufficiently regular
- Apprentices experienced uncertainty and anxiety about their post-apprenticeship prospects
- Advice and guidance about opportunities for career development and progression
- Lack of secure medium to longer-term funding.

Appendix

Apprentice Interviews: Topic Schedule

SSDZ Apprenticeship Scheme, Southampton

INTRODUCTION

Before starting the interview, ensure that you have introduced yourself and been through the participant information sheet and explained what the study is about and why you are talking to the individual, and also that the interviewee has read, understood and initialled the consent form

Date of interview:

Interviewer:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before I ask you about your experience of the apprenticeship and your prior education and employment experiences, I'd like to collect some background information.

Name:

Gender:

Age: 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 (interviewer to circle number as appropriate)

Apprenticeship employer and if appropriate the department or team they are attached to

Apprenticeship sector:

Can you tell me the highest educational level of educational attainment that you have obtained so far? (Interviewer to complete)

GCSE	☐	
Vocational qualifications L 1 or 2 e.g. BTEC First	☐	
A-Level or vocational equivalent	☐	
Degree or vocational equivalent	☐	
Masters/PhD or equivalent	☐	
No formal qualifications	☐	
Qualifications from abroad	☐	If yes, please tell us
Other	☐	If yes, please tell us

How long were you unemployed before being getting a place on the apprenticeship programme?

Educational Background

Now I would like to ask you some questions about your educational experiences.

Firstly could you tell me a little bit about your experiences of secondary school?

Type of school(s)

Likes/dislikes

How old when left school?

Why left?

Since leaving school have you done any courses or training?

If yes, can you tell us about these

Reasons for choice

Likes/dislikes

If no, why did you decide to not continue with your education?

Can you pick out any experiences or aspects of your educational life which you consider to have been turning points or particularly influential in relation to how your life has developed?

Have you ever faced barriers to accessing education and training since you left school?

EMPLOYMENT BACKGROUND

Now I would like to talk to you about your experience of work and employment.

Can you tell me about any jobs you have done or work experience?

Types of jobs, occupational sectors

Full-time/part-time/ permanent/casual

Voluntary or paid?

Good and bad aspects of jobs

Training/learning at work

Reasons for choosing and leaving each job

Can you tell me about any earlier periods of unemployment?

If yes, how long for?

Reasons

Did you receive any advice from anyone about finding work (family, friends, jobcentre, careers advisors)

Can you pick out any experiences or aspects of your employment/jobs which you consider to have been turning points or particularly influential in relation to how your current choices?

THE APPRENTICESHIP

How did you hear about the scheme?

Reasons for applying

Influencers e.g. family, friends, careers advisors, JCP advisors

Choice of sector, could you choose?

Can you tell me about your experience of the selection process?

Application forms

Interview(s)

Did you attend the PET course and if so can you tell me about the experience?

Likes and dislikes

Strengths and weaknesses of the course

Usefulness – any particular aspects

The other participants

Preparation for the apprenticeship

Now you have started the apprenticeship at XXX employer, can you tell me about your experiences and perceptions?

Induction

The nature of the training, content, structure, on and off the job

Trainers

Supervision

Support, mentoring, feedback

Work tasks, job role, working with others or alone

Nature of the work environment, friendly, social, strict...

Colleagues

Contact with other apprentices in the scheme

Likes/dislikes and overall satisfaction and feelings

Is the apprenticeship what you expected, what could be improved?

Do you feel your learning has developed by participating in the scheme? If yes, in what ways? Probe how they perceive their learning is taking place as an apprentice.

Has anyone (your support organization, PET provider or anyone else) been in touch with you since the start of the scheme and asked you what you thought about it and to follow up your experiences?

FUTURE PLANS

In the final section of this interview I would like you to think ahead.

How do you see your life developing over the next three years?

Employment – type and level of job, expected earnings – terms and conditions, prospects

Factors which may prevent/delay or facilitate your plans?

Further training and qualifications needed to achieve your goals?

Is there anything else that we've not talked about that you would like to tell us? Would you be prepared for us to contact you again towards the end of the apprenticeship about the possibility of talking to us again?

Yes/No

Thank you for your time.

Key Informant Interview: Topic Schedule
SSDZ Apprenticeship Scheme, Southampton

INTRODUCTION

Before starting the interview, ensure that you have introduced yourself and been through the participant information sheet and explained what the study is about and why you are talking to the individual, and also that the interviewee has read, understood and initialled the consent form

Date of interview:

Interviewer:

Background Information

Name:

Organisation:

Job title:

Length of service:

Please tell us about your job and your role in the organisation

Apprenticeship scheme

Please tell us what you know about the SSDZ apprenticeship scheme? (Probe how much/what they know about the scheme, how it was planned, who was involved, the selection process, what was the nature of interaction between the organizations involved, if there were any issues, where did the funds come from, what they know about the specific stages of the scheme i.e. interviews, application forms, the PET course, taster days, and placement).

Can you tell us about your roles and responsibilities in relation to the implementation of this scheme? (Probe for the informant's experience of being a part of the scheme in particular, if he/she was involved in the planning of it, the selection process, the training, what do they see as its strengths and weaknesses, something they enjoyed /found particular difficulties with, and if they have been a part of similar schemes before).

In your view what is the key aim of the scheme? (Probe if they see it as a process of wider capacity building or if they have a rather narrow perspective).

What are the challenges of this scheme? (Probe for issues associated with funding, quality, training expectations, the trainees, monitoring and evaluation etc)

What group/s of people/clients has this scheme targeted? Probe whether they have any shared characteristics or have very varied backgrounds. Probe for social characteristics, education, employment, living in a particular area and so on.

In your opinion, what motivated young people's interest in the scheme and their application to become a part of this scheme? Probe for employment, career, personal interest, enjoyment, familial or social pressures.

What do you think their expectations of the scheme are? Probe for disjuncture between expectations and reality, any difficulties, misunderstandings about the scheme's objectives, etc

In your experience have the apprentices received sufficient and adequate information and advice prior to taking up the place? If not, what kind of information and advice would be beneficial?

What benefits do you anticipate at the end of this scheme? What are your thoughts about its sustainability and or replication by other organizations or in other regions?

Would you recommend other Local Authorities or employers to look into this scheme? (Probe for what changes would you like to make in the scheme if you were to launch it again? How it can be made more effective in terms of up-skilling people and helping them gain sustained employment?

Apprenticeships in Southampton city region

How much do you know about apprenticeship provision in Southampton? (Try to get a sense of regional picture of apprenticeships in Southampton, size, any significant shifts in apprenticeship practice and why (if any), issues/challenges faced, influence of public policy or employers' preference).

What potential is there in this city region to increase apprenticeship provision? What sectors do you think have the most potential and why?

Are you aware of any new apprenticeship initiatives that are in place for Southampton?

Organizations and city region regeneration

Please tell us about your organization? What kind of work it does particularly in relation to employment and training initiatives? Probe for the history of its involvement in similar schemes. (With informants from SSDZ, explore the reasons for the formation of SSDZ, its aims and objectives, membership, partnerships, clients and funding)

What is your organisation's interest in city region regeneration? Probe if they are funded for this activity and if yes by whom? What timescales do they work to? Is their organisation's work affected by changes in government policies and initiatives in relation to education and training?

What clients do they work for? Probe who they see as the key target group(s) e.g. NEETS, intermediate skills, graduates, experienced workers, SMEs,) for their work? What are your aims in relation to serving these groups? What do you see as the main barriers to fulfilling these aims?

What partnerships do they have with local and national organizations such charities and various training organizations? Do they have any links with colleges, universities? What relationship do they have with the national government (e.g. do they have a direct link to a department) Are they linked into European initiatives or part of a city-region network?

How would you define the Southampton city-region e.g. geographically, in terms of remit of established partnerships, other? What do they see are the problems that their city region/regeneration initiatives are trying to address?

What role does E &T play in the regeneration of city-regions? What do they see as the city-region's key needs in terms of knowledge and skills to support regeneration/social cohesion/competitiveness? Is Leitch relevant or is fresh thinking needed? Try and obtain examples of what providers and provider networks are doing, initiatives, schemes etc – particular focus on innovative practices.

What role do employers and, or employers' groups play in the regeneration of city-regions? Can you give any examples of initiatives, projects and schemes?

Snowballing suggestions

Note names of others mentioned in course of interview that it would be useful to contact, talk to, etc.