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6
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Responding to Shropshire's Priorities for Skills

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Introduction

Shrewsbury Colleges Group - where every student makes outstanding progress

Shrewsbury Colleges Group's Mission is to:

Provide outstanding academic and vocational education and training for all 16-19 students and adults; Be a local centre of excellence for higher education; Be the college of choice.

To meet the needs of local employers, a dedicated department has been set up and is branded Business Solutions. Their role includes:

- Information and Guidance - operating a dedicated phone line offering information relating to all training and apprenticeships the college offer. Employment advice is also offered for those employers considering taking on an apprentice.
- Employer visits - to discuss in detail what their business needs are through the completion of an Organisational Needs Analysis. This process identifies any training needs that would address their business requirements
- Apprentice reviews – visiting the employer and their apprentice in the workplace every 12 weeks to assess progress
- Attendance at networking and promotional events
- Recruitment Services – advertising apprenticeship vacancies and assisting with recruitment
- Managing contracts and funding streams
- Account Management

The Business Solutions team consist of Corinne Brown, Business Development Manager, Laura Scotland and Jules Rhodes, Business Development Associates.

The College Offer

The College's strategy is shaped by the key priority sectors as identified by the Marches LEP and the Shropshire Council:

Advanced manufacturing (engineering) – a key growth area for the college with significant investment over the past 3 years. Shrewsbury College is working in alliance with Caterpillar, Staffordshire University and Festo to increase the higher education offer to include full degrees, bespoke training direct to engineering companies and training for apprentices and learners. The project will create an entirely new product design and prototype suite with the latest specialist engineering equipment and software. The outputs from the project by March 2021 will be 191 businesses supported, 387 apprentices, 134 NVQ Level 2 and 3, 504 Level 2 and 3 full time, 82 bite size training courses and 227 HE degrees of which the College has the following targets:

Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Total Target	Achieved To Date
Additional Business Supported	46	61	68	72	70	317	107
Level 2 apprentices	20	17	30	37	41	154	37
Level 3 apprentices	19	26	32	41	44	161	45
Level 4 apprentices	0	4	14	28	32	100	4
NVQ level 2	24	17	15	16	16	119	41
NVQ Level 3	11	11	3	3	3	15	22
Bite sized training courses	40	146	63	70	92	319	186
Level 1/2 Full Time	103	102	34	36	34	164	205
Level 3 Full Time	60	59	70	74	78	340	119
Higher Education	38	52	47	50	50	227	90
Pre 16 (school links/tasters)	121	89	5	5	5	23	210

The College works with a range of large and smaller engineering companies including Doncasters, Caterpillar, Ricoh, Makita, Epwin Group, Tarmac, Syspal, Shropshire Stainless Fabrications and Bilcar Engineering.

Environmental Technologies and Services – there is limited provision in this area offered by the college. Due, in part, to a lack of requests, but there is a service provided for the plumbing industry where we offer rainwater harvesting and solar thermal hot water systems as an alternative to gas.

Food and Drink, Tourism – hospitality is an area of training the college is very proud of. With the Origins restaurant, awarded the 'Highly Commended' rosette award for the quality of its food and standards of service they have cultivated a reputation for fine dining and have a popular full time offer for young people. Tourism is also a full time offer. Apprenticeships are offered in hospitality and catering ranging from 'front of house' to 'commis chef' but are a smaller proportion of the overall employer offer at just 6%.

Construction – our main provision and the leading provider in the area. In response to the Shropshire Council Economic Growth Strategy and the vast number of new builds required in this area, we are now struggling to keep up with demand. Accounting for 53% of our provision, we currently have 333 apprentices and we are constantly recruiting where space allows.

The areas of training that we offer for full time, part time students and apprentices are as follows:

- Brickwork
- Carpentry (site and joinery)
- Painting and Decorating
- Electrical
- Plumbing
- Construction Technical (surveying, estimating etc.)
- Construction and the Built Environment (site supervision) – HNC level

We also offer Plastering to experienced workers on site but have no space to train apprentices at the college.

Employers include David Wilson Homes, Taylor Wimpey, PaveAways as well as a significant number of sole traders in each trade.

The College is a member of the Shropshire Construction Excellence group and the Shropshire Construction Training Group where we regularly network, keeping abreast of their requirements and developments within this sector. We also work closely with the Construction Industry Training Board and the University Centre Shrewsbury where we collaborate on new projects.

Health and Social Care - This is very small provision for the College. With 12 providers competing in this market in a 20 degree radius, it is felt that our focus should be on high investment programmes which traditionally colleges do well at. Local employers include Battlefield Healthcare, Agape Domiciliary Care and Marches Care

Creative and digital industries (including digital health) – offered as part of the college curriculum offer for full time students and higher education with HNC and HND in Computing Science.

Working with Employers to Deliver What They Want

Do they understand what they want?

There are various mechanisms to ascertain what an employer may want. The most effective is the employer visit by one of the Business Solutions team who conduct the aforementioned Organisational Needs Analysis, offering a greater understanding of the company before any suggestions for improvement are made. This discussion aims to address improvements through suggested training. On completion, training is evaluated against any improvements to identify the Bottom Line Benefits achieved.

Often employers will contact the college asking for help, or simply asking for what they think they need. Mandatory training aside, by contacting the dedicated team, this can be explored before going further. The aim, wherever possible is to have a face to face meeting either with one of the sales team or a specialist advisor i.e. college assessor.

Anticipating demand

The College cannot always anticipate demand and relies heavily on secondary research, whether that be news of a large employer moving into the area or plans to build hundreds of new houses. It is also imperative that the College keep abreast of new technologies in all sector areas that they serve, through attendance at seminars, conferences and subscribing to trade journals.

Meeting needs collaboratively

The Marches Skills Provider Network, comprising of colleges, training providers and Higher Education Institutions has been established to 'Help the Marches Work' by encouraging and supporting providers to operate in a culture of collaborative working that facilitates achievement of learners whilst supporting employers in achieving their economic goals. The College is represented on the board and is the Chair for the operational group serving Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

Challenges

20% off the job – a huge challenge to employers who must allow their apprentices 20% of their contracted hours away from their job role to engage in active learning.

Apprenticeship Levy – there is a myth that the Levy has been the main reason for the national take up of apprenticeships being down. This is not the case. 20% off the job training is the main reason with Health and Social Care being the main consumer and therefore having the greatest impact. For non-levy payers nothing has changed other than this rule. Challenges may well come into force when SME's go on to the Apprenticeship Service platform due to go 'live' next April.

Low paid industries – will typically take advantage of apprentice's low minimum wage. High turnover of staff in the hospitality, retail and care sectors for example, makes the stability of apprenticeships very difficult to maintain.

Lack of understanding – employers often find recruiting for an apprentice very daunting. Despite marketing by the National Apprenticeship Service, the content of training programmes and the legalities around employing an apprentice are often misunderstood. Other areas IT skills where employers have no idea what software applications could impact on their overall efficiency.

Growth and sustainability - there is a great deal of difficulty in recruiting graduates who typically complete 'A' levels and leave for University. With workforces typically aged 50+ in construction and engineering this is a great concern and one that we all need to address, both employer and training provider.