

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING SOCIAL MOBILITY ACROSS FE

The Social Mobility Commission has published their 'State of the Nation' report 2021 in which they call for a shake-up in child welfare & significant investment in education.

The report identifies the impact from Covid on the UK, how this will be felt for decades to come and has outlined seven key pillars for recovery with detailed recommendations covering: geography and local power; poverty and living standards; early years; education; apprenticeships and adult skills; digital access; and work and career progression.

It is important that we all respond to the social mobility crisis across our sector, ensuring that education & training opportunities are accessible to all, adaptable to those who need it and cover a range of levels and sectors.

The pandemic has negatively affected those who are most disadvantaged, and it is the responsibility of everyone who works in education to address the social mobility challenge and levelling up agenda.

*"The aim of levelling up should be to reduce the inequalities between different parts of the UK by supporting places outside of London and the South East to be more successful economically. It should also aim to reduce the inequalities that exist between people within more successful places by making sure more people can take up the opportunities available to them"* [www.centreforcities.org/levelling-up/](http://www.centreforcities.org/levelling-up/)

Education is often seen as a key driver of social mobility and the association between low educational achievement and inequality means we need to ensure we are not only providing opportunities for all learners & students but also setting high aspirations for them, having realistic positive destinations, encouraging & motivating learning, supporting them to achieve in a setting that is uplifting & engaging, adaptable to their needs and ultimately improving their educational achievements & empowering learners to make improved life changing decisions.

Supporting social mobility is a key priority for our network in 2021-22 and we have a range of activities and support projects which we will be delivering to support our members and to help ensure that we can all offer a truly inclusive learning environment leading to improved social mobility & take up of education & skills programmes across Yorkshire.

Our members inclusion support programme acknowledges the importance of understanding it is time for change and we believe it is all of our responsibility to rebuild our education programmes so they are fit for all and that no learner or community is left behind.

We have a range of themes covered in our support programme and linking up with some excellent partners to provide the best resources & tools for practitioners, leaders & managers.

Our core social mobility & inclusion themes include.

- Digital Poverty
- Inclusive Learning Environments
- Engaging with local Groups & Communities
- School Engagement

## **Digital Poverty -**

One of the key findings in the social mobility report highlights the need for education institutions for all ages to provide affordable access to devices and networks so everyone can engage in 21st century education and employment systems. We have been running a Digital Poverty initiative since late 2020 to provide devices and sim cards to those who require tech to continue learning through lockdowns or working from home for apprentices. This project is continuing across the region for as long as there remains learners across the FE sector that are unable to access devices to commence or continue learning programmes that lead to improved life choices. As of July 21, the initiative has supported 30 people with laptops that have aided their apprenticeship or AEB programmes. All devices have been donated & gifted by local providers and project partners OneFile and were wiped & upgraded by Pudsey Computers. Another recommendation from the SM report stated we must ensure everyone is equipped with the essential digital skills for life & ensure we have robust training and assessment of these skills in relevant apprenticeship programmes and with the employers we work with. Part of the digital poverty initiative involved reviewing the digital skills of our providers and their learners to improve the teaching of digital life skills and we made referrals across the network to support people with their digital literacy that led to improved work placements and job opportunities due to dedicated support from our members on their skills to learn & earn online. The number of members now delivering a digital skills response as part of their curriculum offer has risen significantly due to the lockdown and improvements to apprenticeship providers digital response is also being seen. Through our Lockdown Learning webinars, we supported many providers with CPD on digital teaching & learning approaches to help ensure learning during lockdown continued to support those who needed it most while remaining engaging and challenging. We also delivered a range of support on the importance of ensuring digital safeguarding & staying safe online was a key focus for providers along with practical ways of adopting a blended approach to teaching that supports learners at all levels and of all ages.

## **Inclusive Learning Environments –**

The Social Mobility report highlights the importance of closing the disadvantage gaps by ensure that those from low socio-economic backgrounds get access to apprenticeships and education courses that lead to better social mobility. We strongly back the need for our sector to improve inclusion in recruitment and delivery by ensuring we operate inclusive learning environments that are open to anyone from a low socio-economic or disadvantaged background. To support this commitment, we have a number of projects running, including;

- Supporting greater knowledge & understanding of LGBTQ across FE – exciting announcement coming soon on this project
- BAME Engagement – Working with local networks to increase the number of BAME starts across all apprenticeships & supporting members to develop their own focused activity, community engagement and promotion opportunities
- Supporting people with disabilities and learning difficulties to engage with FE programmes, ensuring our members recruitment & delivery and providing suitable adjustments where required so that LLDD people do not miss out on courses or employment.
- Apprenticeship wage poverty working with organisations to try & address the minimum wage issue for apprentices which is being cited as a reason for low uptake of vacancies as well as lobbying for change on the benefits issues for young apprentices & their parents
- Supporting mental health & Well-being – for the last 2 years we have hosted a well-being festival aimed at FE practitioners to better aid them in their response to their own and their learner's mental health & well-being. This is an event we will continue to support and continue to highlight the importance of healthy lifestyles, positive mindset, fitness & exercise and enhanced pastoral support for apprentices and learners.

## **Engaging with local Groups & Communities**

We work with a wide range of local stakeholders and groups to ensure our members provision offer is known and engagement with hard-to-reach communities is ongoing. This is a development area for us moving forward and something that the team are committed to in enhancing social mobility and community engagement activities. We have identified the postcodes across West & North Yorkshire that are social mobility cold spots so we can share education & training opportunities and help encourage further take up of our members programmes. We are supporting members to identify their own cold spot areas so they can also develop community engagement activities and we have developed a Skills Matrix and Apprenticeship Directory which is shared with every job centre & careers service across WY & NY, as well as a wide range of community centres, employer networks and groups and at all of the careers & employment events we attend across the different districts. We also host and attend many events and groups to further engage the hardest to reach. These activities include;

**NEET Groups** – we are members of the YNY NEET Group, Leeds 14-19 strategic group, Bradford CTE group and Kirklees NEET & Apprenticeships for All project.

**Inclusive Employers Network** - The Inclusive Employers Network running in Bradford reviews engagement of BAME, STEM, Gender equality issues, patterns and good practice across Bradford and identifies approaches of inclusive practice that lead to innovation, growth and representing a reflective business that supports the community they serve and employ. The Network has developed an Inclusive Employers toolkit which is for employers to use to adopt inclusive practice but is also a great teaching resource for training organisations.

**Supporting Kirklees community** – As Kirklees has a large amount of social mobility cold spots we have dedicated our funded provision to be delivered in this area for 2022 to help support more people into apprenticeships or work and support improved economic growth. We are dedicating ESOL training across different parts of Kirklees for the Pakistani & Asian Women and funding Traineeships in Hair & Beauty in Huddersfield to support as a pathway into apprenticeship and self-employment.

**JCP & Restart Engagement** – We recognise the importance of employment & skills being intrinsically linked to ensure the best outcomes for the communities we serve. DWP & DfE need to be better aligned and work together for the successfulness of programmes and remove the unnecessary confusion, duplication and displacement of the employment & skills offer. To support this, we engage with the job centres across WY & NY and the newly appointed Restart primes to host quarterly provider & advisor meetings to share the skills needs, gaps and patterns across the area so we can have an aligned response for Yorkshire.

**Apprentice Decent Wage Pledge** – We are supporting CSR Scientific Training who are running a campaign for Government, FE sector & others to 'Back our Future' and supporting the apprenticeship decent wage pledge to try & lobby for change on the benefits system for those parents who have children on apprenticeships. We are sharing across our networks and with employers to support & make a commitment to future potential & talent.

## **School Engagement**

Another 'State of the Nation' recommendation is for employers to widen their talent engagement and target schools and further education colleges in social mobility cold-spots for outreach activity, we work with over 180 Schools across WY annually and in partnership with NYBEP in NY to promote local apprenticeship & traineeship provision & vacancies via the ASK project. We work hard to ensure all students have the opportunity to engage with our interventions which include assemblies, workshops, recorded & live presentations and apprenticeship events, schools often have a tendency to hand pick the students they send to our talks, and we try to ensure this is inclusive and fair for all students. We also spend much time developing teacher's knowledge & understanding of apprenticeships, completing myth busting sessions and hold awareness events for parents. We also develop a weekly vacancies padlet shared across all schools and to parents and a termly newsletter which is issued to every school and community group that supports young people highlighting the latest opportunities and provision. Through our opportunities events we provide a platform for local employers, providers, teachers, parents and young people to showcase vacancies and discuss the benefits of apprenticeship & traineeships. We encourage wherever possible for providers to engage with schools through our activities or directly, particularly across social mobility cold spots. We also have tailored, dedicated responses in these cold spot areas, for example in Bradford, as this is an opportunity area we have recorded sessions aimed at particular faith schools, developed sessions to respond to vacancies in particular postcodes and recorded sessions supporting high growth sectors for the city such as NHS to highlight the wide range of opportunities in the area and encourage greater take up with parents to support apprenticeships.

## **YNY LEP Response**

We have a great working relationship with YNY LEP who are committed to improving social mobility across York & North Yorkshire and they have provided some information to included in this paper on their response to this agenda – **CEC work** – connecting employers with schools and colleges to deliver world-class careers education to prepare young people in our region make informed choices about their future and move into positive outcomes that support their social mobility **NEET project** - Our ESF funded NEET programme supports young people not in education, employment or training reconnect with the world of learning and employment alongside a programme of preventative work with young people identified as 'at risk of NEET'. We know that the long term outcomes for young people who fall NEET in terms of mental health, unemployment and earning potential fall far behind their non-NEET peers. This programme of work aims to prevent young people falling NEET and reconnect those who are NEET as quickly as possible with positive outcomes to mitigate the effects of NEET.

**Action Towards Inclusion** – delivered through a partnership of skilled keyworkers and intervention partners who work for organisations in the voluntary and community sector. This programme offers support to those who are the furthest from the labour market due to barriers such as mental health issues, debt and lacking qualifications. So far, Action Towards Inclusion has supported over 2000 participants and got over 1000 of them into jobs, training or job seeking.

**Community Grants** – Funding projects in the voluntary and community sector that support adults move closer towards employment or education. This allows the LEP to ensure there is supporting activity accessible in every district and delivered by those who really understand their communities, empowering people to overcome barriers, gain skills and move into better outcomes.

**Advantage Coast** - Focussing on the 20% most deprived areas of the North Yorkshire Coast this programme aims to:

- support business and enterprise growth
- increase employment through supporting creation of new jobs
- to help those furthest from the labour market improve their employment opportunities by helping to improve skills and experience of unemployed people

**Skills Support for the Workforce** – Enabling businesses to upskill their workforces and give people the skills to move on in their careers.

**Thriving at Work** - focusing on supporting inclusive workplaces that can unlock the potential of staff who are neurodiverse, disabled or experience mental health challenges. These groups of people often fall behind in social mobility and are at greater risk of falling out of work than their peers.

**Specialist Skills Support** – A programme containing numerous elements that support social mobility including skills training for those who are in work and on benefits, tools and training for businesses to enable them to recruit from a wider workforce – those who are often overlooked for interview such as the long term unemployed, those with criminal convictions, caring responsibilities and long term health issues.