

Coventry Skills Summit 2018

Event Summary



EVENT INFORMATION

The Coventry Skills Summit took place on **17th April 2018** at the Ricoh Arena. This was the second Coventry Skills Summit; the first one took place in April 2017 and was focussed on young people. Both Skills Summits were positive and this year's summit was built on findings and discussions from last year's summit. A total of **66 delegates** attended; **17** of these were from businesses, **17** were local and national training providers and **32** represented a variety of organisations from the voluntary sector, higher education, schools, colleges and the local authority.

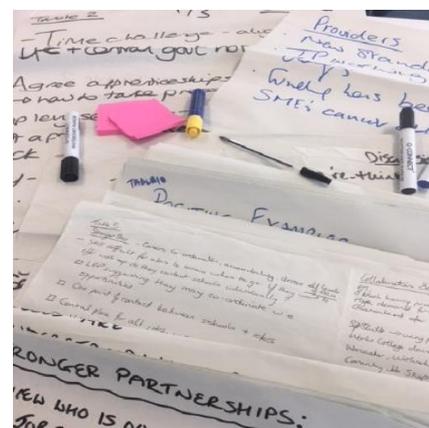
OVERALL EVENT FEEDBACK

Feedback from conversations with delegates and facilitators was that overall, the event was positive. The range of presenters from businesses, training providers and the Local Enterprise Partnership set the foundation for the skills agenda in Coventry. Table discussions enabled delegates to discuss the skills agenda further and what it meant in practical reality now and into the future.

One delegate commented that *"It was great to see so many businesses from Coventry coming together to work towards helping secure good career options and skills opportunities for people in the city. Coventry's innovative and technical industries are growing rapidly and we're seeing an increase in the need for skilled people, so it's fantastic that Coventry's businesses are dedicated to helping make sure there are paths people can take to develop their skills and careers."*

FEEDBACK THEMES FROM TABLE DISCUSSIONS

There was significant feedback that was discussed amongst table groups. This was captured on post-it notes, posters and through feedback from facilitators. There was also a substantial stream of feedback on twitter. The main discussion themes are captured below.



1. Apprenticeship schemes should be made more accessible to businesses, especially Small or Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).

Delegates commented that simplifying and making information about trainee/apprenticeship schemes more accessible could increase enthusiasm and uptake from employers. Ideas for increasing employer engagement with apprenticeship schemes included establishing a centralised point of reference for information about traineeships/apprenticeships and making it clearer how trainee/apprenticeship schemes would benefit their businesses. It was suggested that simplifying the terminology around apprenticeships would also be helpful. Participants noted that deliberate efforts to break down stereotypes about apprentices and apprenticeship schemes helped lessen stigma and helped small and large businesses to see the value that these schemes provide. One table noted that Leadership Development Programmes could support employers as they take on apprentices.

A theme throughout the summit was the importance of engaging SMEs in apprenticeship schemes. Many delegates from small businesses commented that they found apprenticeship scheme levies burdensome and that they didn't always see the benefit of having apprentices in their businesses. Many participants noted that many local businesses are small businesses and that their engagement with the apprenticeship scheme could be the key to addressing the local skills gap.

SME owners and employees stressed that efforts needed to be made to engage with them outside of business hours, as this is the time they use to develop their businesses. They expressed that they were too busy carrying out everyday tasks during normal business hours to fully focus on business development issues. Small businesses said that they need to be flexible to remain competitive and that having new employees, apprentices and contacts from training organisations available for work and contact during 'off-peak times' is very important.

A point of concern for small businesses was ensuring that they could retain the people they trained. One delegate commented that the people they trained through apprenticeships left his organisations to take jobs at bigger organisations with higher salary options, some of which were out of area. Considerations to help small businesses incentivise their trainees to stay with them could be useful in avoiding this. Delegates commented that opportunities are maximised when employers are very clear about their expectations of their apprentices and employees.

2. The importance of effective engagement with people who have recently re-entered the workforce or are trying to re-enter the workforce.

Delegates emphasised the importance and value of integrating people who have been previously unemployed or underemployed into businesses. One delegate commented that employers who are taking on apprentices and employees that have spent a long time out of work should focus on treating these new recruits with trust, patience and understanding, as there can be challenges to overcome as these new employees are trained up in their roles. Discussions included the benefits of volunteer positions as a way to train up people who have been long term unemployed or have suffered with low self-esteem that has kept them out of employment. Volunteer positions help employees understand their strengths and weaknesses and understand their own personal motivations to work.

3. Job opportunities and career options should be clearer and more appealing to young people.

Delegates were very positive about the feedback from head teachers about progress since the last Skills Summit focusing on young people. While delegates spent a lot of time considering how businesses could be better informed about apprenticeships, they also spoke at length about how to better engage students in apprenticeship programmes and prospects for future employment. The importance of giving young people a ‘taste for work’ early on in their careers by making them aware of the behaviour and standards that would be expected of them in the workplace was emphasised. Speakers and delegates alike discussed the importance of unpicking the negative opinions that young people and parents hold about apprenticeships. Delegates recognised that information about employment and apprenticeship opportunities varied widely between schools and that the local skills gap could be narrowed by making this information more uniform and widely available. Delegates also discussed the importance of involving parents in the conversation about apprenticeships and future employment.

4. The potential of addressing skills gap by pooling resources in the local area.

Participants recognised the importance of building stronger partnerships between CWLEP, the Chamber of Commerce, businesses and training providers. There was discussion about working in a more joined-up way to make sure that jobseekers have more equal access to the jobs available and understand clearly what will be expected of them in these roles. There was interest in reviewing the scope of the CWLEP to understand who the CLEP represented and in what way. Participants identified that it is still unclear to employers where to go to advertise when they have work experience opportunities.

The example of Coventry College’s Collaborate to Train model was identified. The model seeks to bring further education institutions and universities together to get young people into work experience placements and internships. Many delegates mentioned that they would like to have a central place to post and access all available jobs, courses, training and apprenticeship opportunities. At one table, the discussion focussed on introducing business advisors into schools and how that would help bridge the gap between employers and schools.

Training providers noted that promoting and fostering training opportunities should be “everybody’s job”, and that having a designated person at a business that was in charge of the apprenticeship and new employee experience was very helpful to them and to new employees. The City of Culture 2021 was recognised as a way of potentially connecting into the Council and Growth Hub apprenticeship campaign and raising Coventry’s profile as a great place to grow in employment. Delegates posited that the City of Culture platform could be used to display the technology and the good jobs we have in Coventry, improving the profile of Coventry on the whole.

5. The significance of soft skills including personal strengths and potential for professional growth, rather than just a strict focus on qualifications

Conversations focussed on the importance of 'soft skills'; effective communication with colleagues, understanding when to step back or take charge in professional situations and the willingness to learn from challenging situations. Businesses and training providers alike recognised the importance of these skills and noted that taking these soft skills into account is just as important as looking at qualifications when deciding who to hire. It was noted that Barclays Bank has instituted the LifeSkills Programme and Ambition Coventry puts significant focus on the development of soft skills. The Job Shop holds industry days that challenge the notion that only the most educationally qualified applicants are suitable for their jobs. Schools can integrate instruction about 'new ways of working' with the promotion of soft skills. One example of this is educating students about video conference calls and how to interact effectively with colleagues using this medium. Another is informing job seekers when it may be necessary to cross cultural boundaries and how to do so.

6. There was a wide range of points made by delegates that do not fit specifically into any of the above themes. These are (in no particular order):

- Libraries can be used in the evenings for training and events for employers and potential employees.
- It is important to target under-represented groups for employment.
- To confront skills shortages, organisations work with offenders to get them their Construction Skills Certification Scheme card.
- The difference between big and small business culture is important to address with job seekers.
- ESOL is currently being offered but it could be even better if it included more sector-based curriculum.
- Further funding for technologies could allow machines to be operated by employees in their native language.
- Everyone could benefit by having access to the Skills Agenda and knowing exactly what it is.
- How do we engage the SMEs that we haven't yet worked with?
- Leadership development to support employers is important.
- Elevate training to regular an agenda item not just any other business.
- It would be beneficial to deliberately show the financial benefits of advancing one's skills.

7. What's next for the Skills Summit?

The first two Skills Summits have brought a range of stakeholders together to take forward the Coventry skills agenda and it is clear that skills are important to the local and regional economy now and into the future. This Skills Summit enabled delegates to catch up on key information and provided some tangible tools for the skills agenda. There will now be consideration of the type of events held moving forward, including frequency, time of the day and events that are already taking place in Coventry. Future events could also have a focus on success stories and tools for success from businesses in Coventry.