

Appendix 1 – Workshop report

Good Work

Some key challenges

A range of issues in the region which are holding back people from accessing good employment were highlighted in the discussion on good employment. These include:

The education system and the role of schools:

- An overly narrow curriculum which mainly focusses on academic achievement and destinations can penalise pupils from deprived backgrounds.
- Careers advice in schools is influenced by cultural factors and unconscious bias, restricting career choices, especially of those pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- The lack of lifelong learning with the direct input and support from employers needs to be resolved to provide people with the skills relevant to the local labour market.

Long standing deprivation

- Deprivation has changed very little, affecting very similar communities and places over decades. The impacts of this is particularly evident in the education system, with achievement and destinations of pupils still largely determined by the socio-economic background and also area they live in.
- It was raised that interventions need to be informed by the communities themselves since a top-down solutions bear the risk of creating dependencies and reinforcing an unhelpful culture of low aspirations. Singling out communities by targeting top-down interventions further bears the risk of stigmatising these same communities.

The role of employers:

- Offering 'good jobs', including the living wage and good working conditions, as well as moving beyond traditional recruitment practise.
- Employers' narrow recruitment practices - There is a long-standing tradition of employers mainly recruiting people based on their academic achievements and particular work experience which is particularly detrimental to people from deprived communities and also restricts the talent pool employers can recruit from. Grant Thornton found that moving away from this approach removes barriers for applicants and proved to directly benefit the business because the quality of employees remained equally high while business are able to draw on a wider talent pool.
- More local businesses offering 'good jobs' - Raising aspirations of pupils is particularly powerful if these aspirations are being fulfilled by the jobs employers are offering. However, the dominance of low paid work in the region often does not do that and further acts as a potential trap by restricting the progression pathways of individuals.

- For certain industries, access to skills (recruiting highly skilled employees) is a considerable challenge. Making jobs more attractive is part of the solution to addressing skills gaps in the region.
- In-work benefits were highlighted as a challenge in terms of distorting employer behaviour around low paid work.
- For the public sector, offering good employment relies on long-term ambition and leadership which extends beyond pay and into the supply chain.

Possible solutions

- Identifying and building on existing community programmes which are successful in addressing specific cultural and physical barriers holding back people outside the city centres from taking up good jobs. Systemising interventions that have proved to be successful and where appropriate could lead to greater impact and delivery efficiencies.
- Working towards an 'Employer Charter': incentivising business to offer good pay, good Terms and Conditions, as well as health and wellbeing policies. An important part of the discussion is that it also makes very good business sense for employers to look after people well. As part of this, local employers (particularly SMEs) who are offering good jobs and working conditions could be identified to provide peer-to-peer support for other small and medium sized businesses locally to enhance their business practices. The implementation of the Employer Charter should be undertaken by a future City Region mayor.
- Enabling better engagement between employers and schools. Due to the wide ranging pressures on schools (which are particularly high for those teaching a high proportion of deprived pupils), employers are finding it difficult to engage. Local solutions could help to increase the capacity and ability of schools to engage with local employers. This could build on the work delivered by the Enterprise Advisor Network across the City Region.
- Exploring the option of providing careers advice at primary school stage. Rather than specific advice about the local labour market in place at secondary school, this would focus on breaking down cultural barriers, including gender stereotypes and (unconscious) biases about what careers are suitable for who.
- Testing the relationship between productivity and working practices, with findings communicated via peer to peer business networks.
- Identifying local businesses (particularly SMEs) which are offering good employment already which could influence the behaviour of other business through peer-to-peer support.
- Sector based approaches - The example of a cooperative model for providing social care in the North East was highlighted as well as the new commissioning model of health and social care in Greater Manchester based on the devolved control over integrated health and social care budgets.

Some examples of good practice

Examples of best practise mentioned in the workshop discussion that members could visit for a practical inside include:

- LS14 – This community project is informed by the very community it serves rather than being parachuted in from the outside. The project also strongly builds on the particular strengths and assets the community brings to the table (<http://www.ls14trust.org/>). Nicola Greenan set up the Trust and Kristal Ireland is a former director at the Trust.
- ‘School as Community Hubs’ in Kirklees promotes integrated working around families and has developed effective working relationships between schools and a number of external services working with children and families. (<https://ws.onehub.com/files/zu1akn6v>)
- Grant Thornton – The accountancy firm have changed their recruitment practices to become a more inclusive employer and to allow the business to recruit from a wider talent pool.
- The Fire Service offers a wide range of youth and community engagement programmes which are mainly aimed at upskilling.
- Grant conditionality applied by the Combined Authority.