

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE - APPRENTICESHIPS

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Apprenticeships held in the Wantsum Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 11 January 2013.

PRESENT: Mr K Smith (Chairman), Mrs C J Waters (Vice-Chairman), Mr R H Bird, Mr A R Chell, Mr L Christie, Mr D A Hirst and Mr R J Lees

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr T Godfrey (Research Officer to Health Overview Scrutiny Committee), Mrs C A Singh (Democratic Services Officer), Mr G Romagnuolo (Policy Overview Research Officer) and Mr S Shrimpton (Research Analyst)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

12. Interview with Graham Razey, Principal and Chief Executive, East Kent College (EKC) *(Item 1)*

The Chairman provided an overview of the previous day, which had been the first day of the hearings. During this day Sue Dunn and Richard Little had been interviewed and the KCC point of view presented. Jon Thorn, Peter Hobbs and Lindsay Jardine had also been spoken to. One of the Committee researchers, Mr S Shrimpton, was asked to read out 8 areas of potential recommendation which the Committee was looking at.

Discussing these, the researcher was asked to circulate them to all Members. It was given as important that the definition of a 'job' and 'apprenticeship' be clarified in the report, with the latter being a form of paid employment while the apprenticeship lasted. Committee staff were also asked to circulate the presentation given the previous day to Members.

It was discussed that the Committee was waiting for confirmation from West Kent College (WKC) about the opportunity to speak to apprentices. Mr Razey made the offer for the Committee to speak to apprentices at EKC as well as or instead of WKC if it did not prove possible.

The Chairman also announced he was likely to have the chance to speak to BT and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. A Member of the Committee commented that improving the skills to work in the manufacturing sector was the key to economic recovery.

The Chairman also said that one surprise from the previous day was the role of Ofsted. Dr Ian Craig was given as someone to speak to and a Member reminded the Committee that Mr Leeson had worked at Ofsted so would be another route to this organisation.

Please introduce yourself and outline your roles and responsibilities.

I have been in the FE sector for 19 years, beginning as a maths teacher. During all of this time I have worked in the South East. While I took the conventional academic route, my father, brother and grandfather have all been engineering apprentices. Rising from lecturer to Principal, I started at EKC when it was known as Thanet College.

EKC has 5,000 students, 400 staff and employs apprentices directly. It has a £15 million turnover. It is the smallest FE College in Kent, but would be categorised as a medium sized College by national standards.

My post involves being the guardian for further education in East Kent. It is a community-based college and the role of FE is to bring education to those not having the opportunity in the past and the enrolment stretches from school leavers to an 84 year old. EKC focuses on reaching the hardest to reach. This poses Ofsted challenges when certain results are demanded. EKC does not do A-levels. It covers pre-GCSE Level 1 skills, L2 (GCSE) skills, L3 and up to L4 skills, equivalent to higher education.

Please talk to us about the benefits of apprenticeships.

The purpose of apprenticeships is technical expertise. It is a route to being a master craftsman in the manufacturing, productive, creative and other sectors. The employer is looking to safeguard his business. There is an ageing technical skills base and businesses need young people taking on these technical skills, which current graduates with higher education do not have. The economic recovery needs to involve the UK producing more as other countries are overtaking us.

Employability is ensured through a structured programme for those up to 25. I am uncertain of the benefits of expanding apprenticeship to those older than 25. Having a trade will help safeguard the future. Many businesses in Kent are small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 50 workers. They are struggling to cope as the people with skills are getting older. There is a real opportunity to stimulate economic recovery if apprenticeships are structured properly. East Kent needs to grow its SMEs. The *Grow For It* KCC campaign element on inward investment is fine but growing SMEs must be the true aim if economic regeneration is to be successful.

The impact on SMEs is something the Committee will need to address. Can you talk to us about qualifications?

There is a danger in this area with a tension between trade specific needs and employer specific needs. The employer has a very specific role which needs undertaking, but if this was taken literally, there would be 10,000 separate qualifications. There is a need to bear in mind what the trade requires – ‘manufacturing’ as a whole against the specific role a given manufacturer needs to be carried out. There needs to be enough apprenticeship frameworks to cover all needs but not so many that the value of the qualification is called into question.

What about degrees and the phenomenon of, for example, history graduates becoming accountants?

Accountancy firms don't want those with accountancy degrees. It doesn't preclude those with them becoming accountants, but accountancy firms, law firms and others hire people with broad skills and provide them with the accountancy skills and so on. A degree does give you wide options; I did a placement with HSBC. However, in a

trade like engineering the higher level skills cannot be taken on without the lower level skills having been learnt. This is not the case with accountancy.

Can you comment on the need for school leavers to have gained a measure of financial literacy?

This is a concern. There is no requirement now for work based learning in KS4 and this is wrong. The National Curriculum is very rigid and I have sympathy for schools as the league tables demand an inflexible way of teaching. The consequences of not performing well in GCSE maths and English are severe.

I was on the education board of the Institute for Financial Services (IFS) for seven years, ending five years ago. The IFS initiated a schools programme to tackle financial literacy and there is a campaign to make financial literacy part of KS3 and KS4, with limited success thus far.

More broadly, there is a concern with the lack of life skills of young people. Colleges are criticised because of this lack of skills after students have been at college for a year, but more needs to be done earlier and there is a need to understand the quality of the students colleges receive. In Kent, 50% have no GCSE in maths and English, which is below the national average. Many of these go to FE colleges. Sixth forms tend to pick up L3 students.

There is a need to encourage employers to get involved with 12/13/14 year olds and there are some good examples, such as Cummings. Unfortunately SMEs do not have the time.

After the Student Journey Select Committee, it took a year to put in place a scheme by Denne and have it taken on by KCC. What more should we be doing pre-apprenticeship?

It is unrealistic to expect SMEs to get involved at that level. The target should be on larger employers, including KCC as the largest employer. Kent needs to tap into national employers based locally.

There is a key role for schools, but what are the drawbacks?

EKC has offered apprenticeships to all schools locally but only 1 accepted. The question is whether schools have the right infrastructure to support apprentices. Caretakers do maintenance but may not be able to train people and otherwise there is only business administration. Schools do not offer the right sort of skills for the economic recovery in East Kent.

Do you mean schools have teachers of quality but this does not show in results?

I have written to Paul Carter on this. Schools don't have people employed who have worked in industry, so they struggle. People with knowledge of industry need to be brought in as you can't expect teachers to deliver this. EKC prides itself on its catering and has nine Michelin star chefs, with people like Gary Rhodes, having trained there. Chefs lecture young chefs. Chefs are hired and trained to teach. You can't get this from a school education.

There is an opportunity now where providers (including FE) can work with 14 year olds on a full-time basis. This in turn poses other problems for schools about how to tap into the deliverers. Where skills are taught by schools, they have often failed.

For your pupils, how many apprenticeships do you have, for how long, and what is their employability?

EKC has run apprenticeships at least since it moved to Broadstairs in 1967. It has around 150-200 apprenticeships with employers at any one time, but this fluctuates. 91% of apprenticeships lead to employment. By this, I mean 91% of those who complete. 25% drop out and 50% of the drop outs in 2011/12 are due to the employer having to lay people off due to having no work. What needs to be developed is a safety net scheme for SMEs. This is something KCC can help with.

If a big business goes under, everyone runs around helping, but there is nothing for 'Joe Bloggs the Builder' who only has a few apprentices. Rather than spending £2-3 million on a scheme to encourage employers to take on apprentices, KCC should fund the safety net. Employers find there are enough grants already. A bricklaying apprenticeship lasts two years but a builder with only six months of work will not take on an apprentice if he may have to be made redundant. This may be something the National Apprenticeships Service can take on; someone needs to.

The Committee is willing to make national recommendations. Is it the case that the fixation on GCSE maths and English creates a distortion in education, and are all apprentices capable of achieving them?

GCSEs in maths and English are not achievable by all; if they were the qualification would be worthless. There is an opportunity here pre-GCSE and pre-apprenticeship. Apprentices can still be expected to work towards them whatever, and this is still a good thing to do. The challenge is employers not wanting to take them on without the qualifications. Businesses want people to add value from day one and want them to have a work ethic, be punctual etc. Employers have a bigger impact on young people than schools or colleges and need to respond to the challenge of making people work ready.

There is also a problem in that young people today are different from those in the past. Education was received passively but now needs to be more involving and a form of entertainment, in effect.

There are pressures on EKC around the achievement of the qualification or the skill. The EKC approach is to teach the skills and let the qualification follow naturally. There are three parts to the education of a young person. Firstly there are the technical skills, but these come last. Secondly, there are the emotional, social and behavioural skills and these need to be learnt before anything else. Thirdly, there are core skills like maths, English and ICT. These latter ones do need to be got right and there is a need to ensure a young person's expectations are the correct ones when they may think they can avoid the second and third set of skills to just spend time on the technical side of things.

There has been a change under the current government to less of an emphasis on qualifications and more on skills from which qualifications will naturally follow. However, there is a lag in the education system and a lag in the Ofsted inspection regime. It is about the quality of teaching and learning, and not all about outcomes. A focus on qualifications means education aims just at getting them past the post.

Some of these issues have been the same since the 1970s, at least. How does EKC choose its apprenticeship topics and what is the split between males and females? Is there any way you can tap into the regeneration projects at KCC?

KCC has a conflict of interest as it runs a training provider. EKC has had zero referrals in the last 30 months; all went to the KCC training provider. This is probably the same across the county. It is not a level playing field. EKC is one of the best catering colleges in the world; no KCC referrals.

KCC should not be a provider but should concentrate on the strategic level. There needs to be a clear strategy.

Training of 14-16 year olds predominantly takes place in KCC Skills Centres. EKC has no access to vocational education for 14-16 year olds as schools are told to use these Skills Centres. Paul Carter argues these Centres have been a great success. I say they have had some success but if KCC really wanted to develop high level skills, there is need to let those with technical skills deliver them.

Closer to home, EKC needs to look at what it offers and stop offering those courses which do not meet the needs of the East Kent economy or which the college is not good at delivering, even if this impacts the bottom line. EKC has done this over the past couple of years with the withdrawal of A levels and public services.

There is no clear technical education pathway in Kent; this leaves parents and children confused. What could happen in schools doesn't, due to lack of access. There is no requirement any more for Independent Advice and Guidance in schools. While this might technically no longer be a KCC responsibility, it still needs to happen. The default otherwise is for more and more people to stay at school, go to university and leave the county. Kent has a lot of university students, but a significant majority leave afterwards.

What does Medway do?

I am not sure, but anecdotally I would say there are fewer barriers to vocational training. There are no Skills Centres for a start.

Any final comments?

I would like to invite the Committee to visit EKC, for lunch and to find out more.

Here is a sheet showing the breakdown of courses.

Regarding your recommendation about the September guarantee, just a word of caution that this might alienate a lot of employers as jobs become available at different times through the year.

Thank you for your contribution today.

13. Interview with Tony Allen, Director, Area Relationship Team South East, Skills Funding Agency

(Item 2)

1. Themes and questions had been forwarded in advance to Mr Allen in preparation for the meeting.

2. The Chairman and Select Committee welcomed Mr Allen to the meeting and explained the scope of the Select Committee.
3. The Chairman invited Mr Allen to give a brief introduction on his role and explain the services of the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).
4. Mr Allen explained the following:
 - The SFA was co-terminus with LEP.
 - SFA was borne out of the Learning and Skills Council.
 - SFA's role was to fund post 19 years Education (Except universities).
 - SFA funded apprenticeships, Adult Education and Community Learning and supported people getting back into work.
 - SFA sat within Department for Business Innovation and Skills
 - SFA operated on behalf of the DfE, funding for all apprenticeships for 16 – 18 year olds.
 - SFA Budget was £3 billion nationally; Kent received between £90 – 100 million per annum, the majority of which was spent on apprenticeships, and the remainder on other work based learning, Adult Education, Community Learning and supporting people getting back into work.
 - The SFA delivered its budget through a network of FE Colleges and Private Training Providers.
 - The FE Colleges - There were 6 FE Colleges in Kent and there were also a number of Private Providers delivering to learners in the county.
 - In Kent, Mr Allen managed 35 training providers. He explained that there were 1000 directly contracted Providers nationally, and 2000 sub-contractors who delivered training. Many of these national training providers delivered in the county, with over 300 providers delivering in Kent. He gave an example of how this worked saying that Newcastle College had employers based in Kent. This was a complex picture across Kent. Graham Razey, Principal of East Kent College, would, as well as in East Kent, deliver training to apprentices in other parts of the country
 - Mr Allen explained that under the last Government there were national targets not only for Apprenticeships, but also for Level 2 qualifications and Basic Skills etc. The Coalition Government had abolished most of these targets, (with the exception of Apprenticeships). The budgets for 16-18 learners and 19+ learners were not interchangeable, as they came from two different government departments.
5. Q – Were there any payments made by results?
6. Mr Allen advised that an element of the rate paid to a provider was paid on results. This related to learners who were unemployed, and was earned by the provider if they were successful in assisting a learner in finding a job. Mr Allen explained the system of providers being paid by a funding rate, dependent upon the type of qualification. He gave the example of IT at level 3 – SFA paid the Provider £14,000 to deliver the qualification. The rate was paid on a monthly profile, dependent upon how long the provider estimated it would take the learner to complete the qualification. An element was based on the learner successfully completing the qualification. A substantial part of the rate paid reflected the cost of delivering the qualification. It did not reflect the demand for the qualification. At present the Providers received funding and it was up to them how they spent the money so they could spend all of this on whatever mix of qualifications were demanded by employers and learners.

7. Q - If KCC wanted to encourage growth in industry what should it do?
8. Mr Allen advised that Apprenticeship growth could be achieved in a number of ways. Employers need to be convinced of the benefits, and also we needed to do more to encourage providers to look to deliver Apprenticeships in new sectors...He gave the example of Mr Razey Principal of East Kent College providing training in wind farming technologies. What we he need to do in order to begin delivering? He would have to invest in new equipment and resources within the college, before he could begin delivering. In addition, there would need to be actual jobs available in order to recruit Apprentices. He considered that it was the cart/horse analogy with the need to up skill to attract the employers to Kent but you can not get the skills until the jobs are here. This required close co-operation between employers and providers. The Government was keen to ensure that employers and providers worked closely together, and that providers worked with employers to develop new qualifications / Apprenticeship frameworks where they did not already exist.
9. Q – What would you do to be reactive?
10. Mr Allen explained that one way would be to incentivise the market. You could make it more financially advantageous for the Providers by increasing the rates paid for Apprenticeships in particular sectors. However, given the fixed budget available for Apprenticeships, an increase in the rates for one qualification, would mean a reduction in the rate for another.
11. Who would provide the direction?
12. Mr Allen considered that this was a role for KCC to set out clearly, through Economic Development, a clear direction on the economic direction it wanted to follow. That is to say, what exactly are the priority sectors that KCC is looking to build on. Colleges and other providers would then respond.
13. Mr Allen considered that Mr Razey made an interesting point in his interview in terms of KCC's role. Mr Allen did not feel that it was KCC role to offer training. It confused people outside. He considered KCC was a strategic commissioner. In terms of the directional travel, KCC needed to work with employers and be prepared to say to providers that "We need more of these and less of those".
14. Mr Allen was critical of KCC own training provision. He felt that it did not seek to deliver the skills priorities that the Council had set out. One solution was that KCC should consider no longer being both a provider and an organisation that set out strategic direction. He felt that KCC acting as a provider did not send out the right message.
15. In reply to a comment, Mr Allen advised that he sat on a Board equivalent to KCC's Skills Board, where employment in agriculture was often discussed. He advised that agriculture provided 2.3% of Kent's employers. Job Centre Plus advised that they only received one or two job vacancies in this sector at a time.

16. Mr Allen considered that if KCC was looking to drive forward the economy of Kent it would not be through agriculture but through manufacturing, IT and digital technologies and it was about how this message was articulated.
17. Q – If two colleges were providing 100 apprenticeships each in the same courses would they both receive the same funding?
18. A – Mr Allen explained that they were allocated the same funding irrespective of where they were in the country. It was a national funding system and it was up to each provider as to how they spent their allocation. If college A delivered apprenticeships for administration and college B delivered apprenticeships for IT, then that was for them to decide and fund from out of their allocation. He added that some sectors were more expensive to deliver, and so attracted a higher rate. E.g. engineering.
19. In response to a question, Mr Allen advised that if a college had 12 employers looking for engineers, then the college may say yes to running the apprenticeship course. They would need to get the right cohort to run the course. There was a point, in terms of numbers of learners, where running the course becomes viable.
20. In reply to a comment on ring fencing funds, Mr Allen advised that there was no ring fencing now but in the days of the LSC there was no distinction in Post 16-18 year olds and 19+. The LSC money could be moved around which meant if the adult funding was under spent and the under 19 year olds needed that funding, it would be moved. That flexibility no longer existed.
21. In reply to a comment that the sectors were right for growth and whether it was possible to incentivise that, Mr Allen felt that this could happen if it was clearly articulated. He would like to see greater incentivising. There was a national funding system which he considered interesting in the context of localism. He considered that you could not respond by tweaking allocations. Mr Allen said that he expected providers to deliver to priorities locally.
22. Q- Was the LEP too big?
23. Mr Allen explained that the message that he was hearing was that Government felt that LEP held the ring to say what the skills priorities were. It was clear this was the responsibility of the LEP and not the Local Authority. The message from BIS supported that. It was about what KCC as the local Authority articulated within the LEP.
24. Q – There seemed to be a tension between employers and skills with the huge demand for employment. The vast majority of apprentices were going on to get a job, should the FE colleges be more specialised eg chefs, car mechanics and would that be of benefit?
25. Mr Allen said that he felt they absolutely should specialise in sectors that were demanded locally.
26. Q- At all levels?

27. Mr Allen explained that Thanet College had for years, a good reputation in hospitality and catering which from an employer's perspective was a good thing. Hadlow College was another example in the Landbased Sector. The problems came on a practical level in terms of students travelling to a college that just delivered Apprenticeships in one sector, especially for those students below level 3. Mr Allen advised that the further the person progressed the higher the level of skills required eg level 4, then he felt that they would be prepared to travel around the county to receive those courses.
28. Q – Are there people that have obtained level 2 at one college then moved to another college to do a more advanced level?
29. Mr Allen advised that there were. He considered that KCC should promote this as it was not dependent on government legislation.
30. The Chairman advised that he had spoken with KFEC asking them what they considered were the challenges and saying that now was the opportunity to reorganise and rethink and cut duplication in FE colleges.
31. Q- Was it not the employer's role to drive the message?
32. Mr Allen considered that if you left it to the employers in Thanet, how would they identify the message? KCC had this strategic role.
33. Q- Was there a good example of a local authority doing this?
34. Mr Allen said that he did know of any. He considered that some local authorities like to have their own training providers. He suggested that local authorities were not always focussed enough to say it was not good at training. If KCC wanted to keep a training role, then perhaps it should consider how it delivered. Shouldn't it lead the way in delivering to the growth sectors? Alternatively, its role was as a strategic body, working with the LEP and setting out the priorities.
35. Mr Allen considered how else you might measure the success of money spent. He said that by default qualifications was an outcome. However, the coalition government recognised – "What does our £1 deliver in qualifications"? and "Does our £1 deliver VFM"?
36. Mr Allen read out a quotation "Young people are no longer dedicated to learning, they are too distracted by technology" which was written in 1870.
37. Mr Allen advised that KCC spent 90% of its allocated funding.
38. Q- Do Unitary Authorities provide training?
39. Mr Allen advised that some did. He felt that it was time that the local authorities to think about how they could break new ground.
40. Mr Allen expressed his concerns that pupils were no longer told about apprenticeship in schools as the schools appeared to be holding onto the pupils. It was also known that schools were position the Raising of the

Participation Age, as the Raising of the School leaving Age – implying that pupils had to stay on at school until they were 18. There were two authorities in his area that held onto the Connexions service. They had maintained pupils going into apprenticeships, those authorities that had not retained their Connexions services showed a decline in pupils going into apprenticeships. He predicted that in a few years time the number of NEETs could increase as a result. He considered that schools needed a mandate to use the National Careers Service and that IAG in schools should be monitored by OfSTED.

41. A Member commented that there seemed to be a large group of young people with low self esteem who were unable to express themselves but if nurtured in the right way would do well.
42. Mr Allen expressed his opinion that for some pupils, school was not the right way for them to proceed in education.
43. Q – How was East Kent College able to offer specialisation all over the country?
44. Mr Allen explained that with apprenticeships there needed to be assessors. Apprenticeships in the main were based in the work place. East Kent College had a pool of assessors all over the country.
45. Mr Allen agreed to consider and comment on the Select Committees recommendations when they were produced.
46. The Chairman and Select Committee Members thanked Mr Allen for attending the meeting.

14. Interview with Paul Winter, Managing Director, Wire Belt Company Ltd, Sittingbourne

(Item 3)

1. Themes and questions had been forwarded in advance to Mr Winter in preparation for the meeting.
2. The Chairman and Select Committee welcomed Mr Winter to the meeting and explained the scope of the Select Committee.
3. The Chairman invited Mr Winter to give a brief introduction on his role and explain the services.
4. Mr Winter explained that he had achieved an HND undertaking a sandwich course (effectively a higher apprenticeship) and later in his career qualified as an Accountant. He had always worked in industry. He raised the following points on the Wire Belt Company Limited:
 - Wire Belt Company exported 70% of its output.
 - Wire Belt Company broke into Germany 12 years ago by buying a German company that was failing. Mr Winter became Managing Director at the time but now a young employee had taken over that role. There were 34 full time employees based in Germany.

- In Sittingbourne there were 65 employees; 7 apprentices, (3 mechanical engineers studying for BTEC, 2 welder fabricators studying City and Guilds and 2 office administration / customer service undertaking NVQ level 3.
5. In reply to a question, Mr Winter advised that the education system was different in Germany. The pupils remained in school until they were qualified but spending a significant amount of time undertaking work experience.
 6. Q - What drives you to have apprentices?
 7. Mr Winter advised that employees with good quality skills were being poached from his company so he put policies in place for Wire Belt to grow. He quickly understood that the company could use apprenticeships strategically. An apprentice would stay with the company to gain a level 3 and above qualification. Wire Belt paid above average to those advance apprentices. 45% of the positions at level 3 and above within Wire Belt Company are held by former apprentices or other trainees who joined directly from full time education. These were not all at shop floor level. There are positions held in marketing, bought ledger accounting and IT all of whom have joined the company from school.
 8. Q- How has funding changed over the years?
 9. Mr Winter advised that more and more funding had been pushed onto companies' shoulders. Wire Belt Company, over time, was investing more, which he considered was acceptable, but generally, as all companies are exposed to more and more cost, it will restrict training activity.
 10. Q- How do you recruit?
 11. Mr Winter advised that there were horror stories but did not want to elaborate but said that there were bad choices made in the past. The system for taking on apprentices has been developed over 10 years. Until recently they have offered work experience for 2 weeks pre 16 years fitting in with the schools curriculum and this has guided the right people into manufacturing. The 2 weeks of work experience is treated as an extended interview where their numeracy and soft skills such as getting to work on time etc could be observed,
 12. Q- How do you build your relationship with the schools?
 13. Mr Winter explained that in many schools manufacturing and engineering has been seen as dirty and unpromising. Mr Winter volunteered to be a Junior School Governor and offered tours of the company to 10 year olds to improve their understanding of Manufacturing and Engineering as a career. Unfortunately there now does not seem to be enough time in the school curriculum. He considered that a few more volunteers as Governors from businesses would be welcome. Representatives from Wire Belt also attended skills events and careers days at schools.
 14. Q- If KCC ran an award scheme would that have an impact?
 15. Mr Winter felt that this would be a way to encourage students to think about apprenticeships as a practical route to work, as this would be multifaceted. An award would also fit in and would be welcomed particularly if it was work

area specific, he advised that NAS did an award and so did KEiBA (Apprenticeship of the Year) and the KCC award could be linked in too.

16. Mr Winter suggested that the challenges would be with administration relating to voluntary work experience post 16 years. Most schools now work to those rules. Wire Belt has recently faced some difficulty in finding youngsters pre 16 years to fill the work experience places. Wire Belt had to organise the work experience for one pupil, who presented well, during the school holidays, which they were willing to do. In office administration, an Advanced Apprentice position for a 16 year old had remained unfilled for a year. When a suitable apprentice had been employed, Mr Winter advised that he had asked the applicant if she had considered staying on at school. She explained that indeed the Head teacher had tried to keep her at school. Mr Winter explained that one of the reasons given for staying on was that an Apprenticeship could not be offered at level 3 without completing level 2 first. Thus creating doubt in the mind of the student that they will progress to Level 3.
17. Q- Would the RPA make this worse?
18. Mr Winter considered that it would, as schools will attempt to retain the more able pupils (those who are capable of achieving Level 3). Wire Belt needed to sustain its business and it could become difficult to get the right quality of student able to achieve the higher level of qualification. He said that he was nervous about this and that he had been speaking with the Engineering Employers Federation on the importance of advanced apprenticeships being started at the age of 16. The company has had to deal with students that had to do remedial maths and by the time in their training that the shortcoming reveals itself it is unsatisfactory to start again with someone new. There had been good support from colleges and training providers for this. Often the issue showed up in college work too and it is often the college that alerts the Company to the problem.
19. Q- The majority of companies in Kent are SMEs. What can KCC do to encourage them to take apprentices?
20. Mr Winter considered that there were companies that believed in developing strong relationships to take on apprenticeships and where it exists, this should be done at the lowest level. Where engagement is needed this could be provided by the traditional Education Business Partnership (EBP) approach as their effectiveness was at a high level. They drew together schools and employers. Current funding for the EBP and CXK is a major issue, which results in many schools being responsible for work experience and careers guidance. Mr Winter holds the opinion that many schools do not undertake this task well and advised that his son had to arrange his own work experience.
21. In reply to a question regarding the use of IT within Wire Belt, Mr Winter advised that IT was important. Wire Belt's IT technician had been with the company for 15 years, since leaving school. [Mr Winter suggested that parents would have a strong influence in a child going on to an apprenticeship]. He considered that having good quality software was vital. He added that his contact with his IT technician was 24 hours a day when it crashed.

22. Mr Winter went on to add that a few years ago, local employers attempted to work together to provide apprenticeships in less popular disciplines. For example, Wire Belt had a problem with employing a maintenance engineer in the past but finding the means to work with other companies to provide a full range of training proved difficult and time consuming. If establishing this type of scheme is considered, and then it's value could be proved through a pilot. He advised that the proposal would be at its best training into overhead positions such as maintenance.
23. Q- Across the county should all colleges offer generic courses to level 2 and specialise in one area at an advance level.
24. Mr Winter said he thought that was how he thought it worked. In relation to City and Guilds there was a situation where a student could not complete his last year in North Kent because there was insufficient demand for the course so he was sent to Tunbridge Wells. For three years, Wire Belt had a member of staff doing a Mechanical Engineering Degree who the company sent to High Wickham because there was nowhere else doing the relevant qualification in Kent. Mr Winter suggested that it would be helpful if there were improved coordination and communication perhaps by constructing a matrix mapped out to see where the gaps are.
25. Q- Does the introduction of high school leavers into higher-level qualifications leave a gap?
26. Mr Winter said that this might leave a gap for Wire Belt. The depth of level 3 customer service was very good. He advised that through the Graduates Service (Grads Kent), Wire Belt has recruited two interns, one gained a permanent job with Wire Belt and the other left to gain a highly paid job elsewhere but then returned because he felt that he was not qualified enough. He was now doing a Masters degree. It was hoped that he would remain with the company.
27. Mr Winter predicted that there was an issue with graduates becoming NEETs due to their lack of contact with employers whilst studying.
28. Mr Winter viewed that there was potential for duplication of effort in promoting apprenticeships between KCC, Service Deliverers, Skills Colleges and HE. Mr Winter also felt that the training sector often dragged their feet and wasted time on vast amounts of (duplicated) surveys.
29. Mr Winter considered that there needed to be a way of enthusing students and employers working together. FE and HE also needed to accept the importance of partnering with employers in both promoting the Manufacturing and Engineering sector and Course composition.
30. The Chairman suggested that the Select Committee needed to look at those relationships.
31. Q- Do you have any further recommendations the Select Committee ought to consider?
32. Mr Winter suggested the following:
- KCC was in a unique position to influence the schools over work experience and career guidance helping find a focus for the youngsters.

- Skills and careers fairs seemed to be held when students had already chosen their options - leaving school or often studying for A levels in the wrong subjects.
- Pupils need to be work ready – More needed to be done on the soft skills eg getting up on time to go to earn a living (Work experience).
- Pre primary school - Need to start thinking about what they want to do. By the time the child graduated from primary school to secondary school they should know what they want to do in the future. If they have something in mind that can lead onto their goals.
- Job Centre Plus – There were issues with unemployed being offered apprenticeships the coordination of the efforts in Kent being done by KCC. Mr Winter mentioned an issue with Kent Apprenticeships where the 0800 number was intended to be a single point of contact but this may no longer be the case.
- Ensuring that skills planning are an element of the outcome of any intervention undertaken by organisations such as High Growth Kent or Growth Accelerator.
- Investors in People (IIP) provided an excellent catalyst for skills planning but numbers registered for IIP is falling as a result of the dropping of the subsidy for fees and introduction of chargeable services.
- Kent Choices 4 U Live which is aimed at school students and young adults could invite employers too.

33. Q- Are there barriers getting into apprenticeships?

34. The sectors with vacancies are those with less appeal – such as manufacturing and engineering, land based, health etc. These sectors especially need to set out the career possibilities and advantages. Land base is a big area with a large population of overseas agricultural workers who are now being promoted into management positions. It is thought that there are unfilled places for apprentices at Hadlow. Mr Winter considered that even today there is still an advantage in parents being involved in career selection.

35. He said that he was pleased with Bloodhound Education project, which is shortly coming to Swale and will help promote the choice of STEM subjects to students. The very important contribution of KCC to this initiative was acknowledged.

36. Mr Winter advised that he visited schools when possible. He also attended events such as Kent 2020, which he did last year when he was asked to do a presentation promoting apprenticeships. He was proud that Mr Whiting and Mr Cubitt had recently visited Wire Belt and he had asked all 7 of his apprentices to undertake the guided tour explaining the area that they worked in before handing on to the next. Each apprentice undertook his or her task very well and with great enthusiasm.

37. The Chairman and Select Committee Members thanked Mr Winter for attending the meeting.

Some parts of Mr Winter's text have been expanded to give further information which could not be covered during the interview.