A Sheffield City Region Combined Authority Report on skills shortages and hard to fill vacancies.

October 2017

As the UK Mobile Telecommunications technology advances so does the need for riggers with the technical and practical knowledge to deliver Mobile Telecommunications requirements.

The issue we faced in attracting and developing young people was that there was no formal qualification for UK telecom riggers and no standardised apprenticeship in this field. 8point8 made the decision to address this skills shortage and develop a rigging specific apprenticeship. We brought together likeminded Employers to form a Trailblazer Group. The Group's proposal for a Wireless Rigging apprenticeship has been approved and the standard is now in development. The introduction of this apprenticeship will enable us to further invest in our workforce, develop young talent locally and contribute to the growth of the local economy.

Case Study: 8point8 Group

A 2015 study found that 2,345 Employers in Sheffield City Region had a vacancy that they considered 'hard to fill', that is they were struggling to fill the vacancy for some reason, be it the Employer's location, the job's working hours or the skills required to do the job. In 2015 the Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership launched a Strategic Economic Plan concerned with creating 70,000 new jobs by 2025, and sees these 'hard to fill' vacancies as a contribution to this target. The Sheffield City Region Combined Authority, which forms part of the Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership, commissioned this report to help understand the issues perceived by Employers and job Applicants that underlie these 'hard to fill' vacancies, so that provisions to address them can be put in place. This report focuses on the Construction, Manufacturing, Creative & Digital and Business, Professional & Financial sectors.

To understand the issues perceived to underlie these 'hard to fill' vacancies a literature review was completed, the findings of which were used inform the primary research undertaken. To collect quantitative data, over 250 Employers and 250 Applicants from across Sheffield City Region and the four sectors completed surveys (there was a survey for Employers and a different survey for Applicants). A number of these Employers and Applicants accepted an invite to attend focus groups, during which qualitative data was collected.
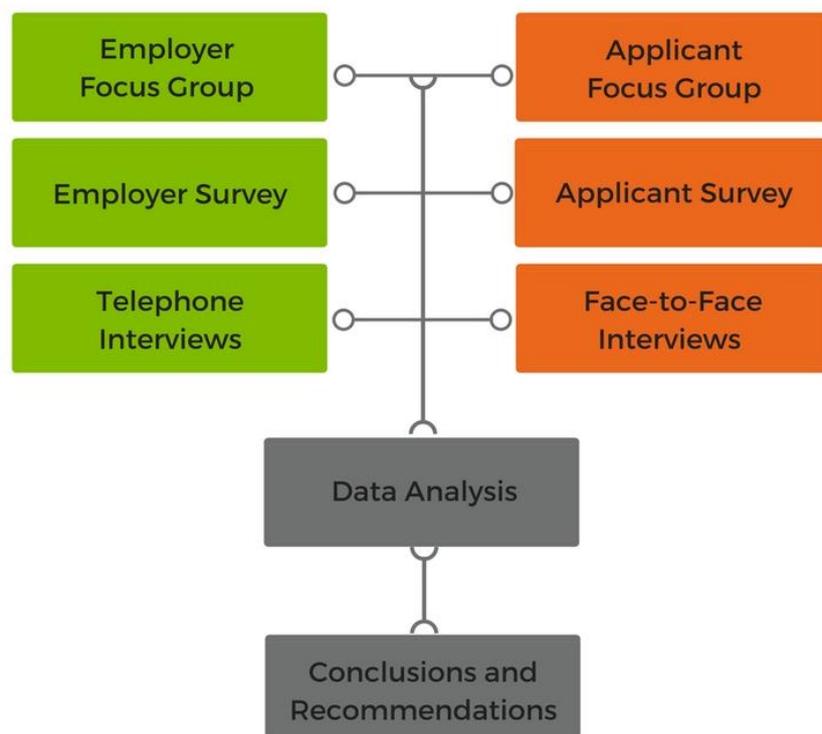

The research methodology.

The data was then collated and presented: eight 'panels' show the survey data, four for each of the Employers and Applicants; two 'causal models' show the focus group data, one for each of the Employers and Applicants.

On analysing the data six 'Themes' to the issues perceived to underlie these 'hard to fill' vacancies emerged.
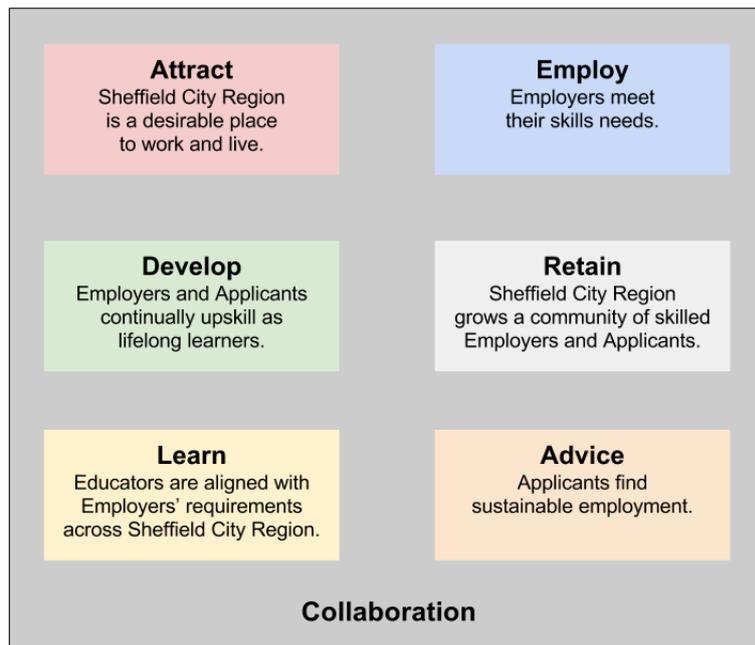
*The six Themes and their outcomes,
under which recommendations have been grouped.*

The individual Themes draw on the relevant research data and include recommendations on how to address the 'hard to fill' vacancies. While the Themes can be actioned in isolation it is in practicing the six Themes in a holistic and coordinated manner that greatest progress can be made in addressing 'hard to fill' vacancies. The 'Skills Creation Cycle' below shows how the six Themes interconnect, and in doing so create economic growth for Employers and Applicants.
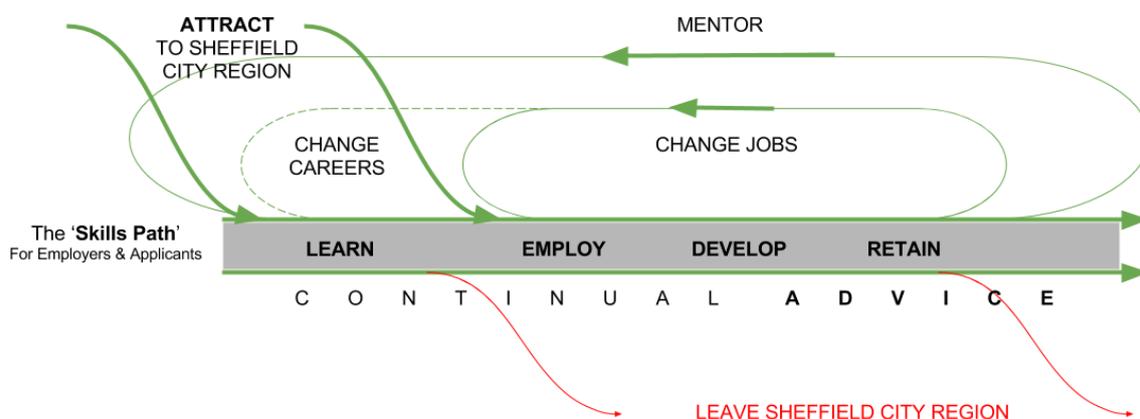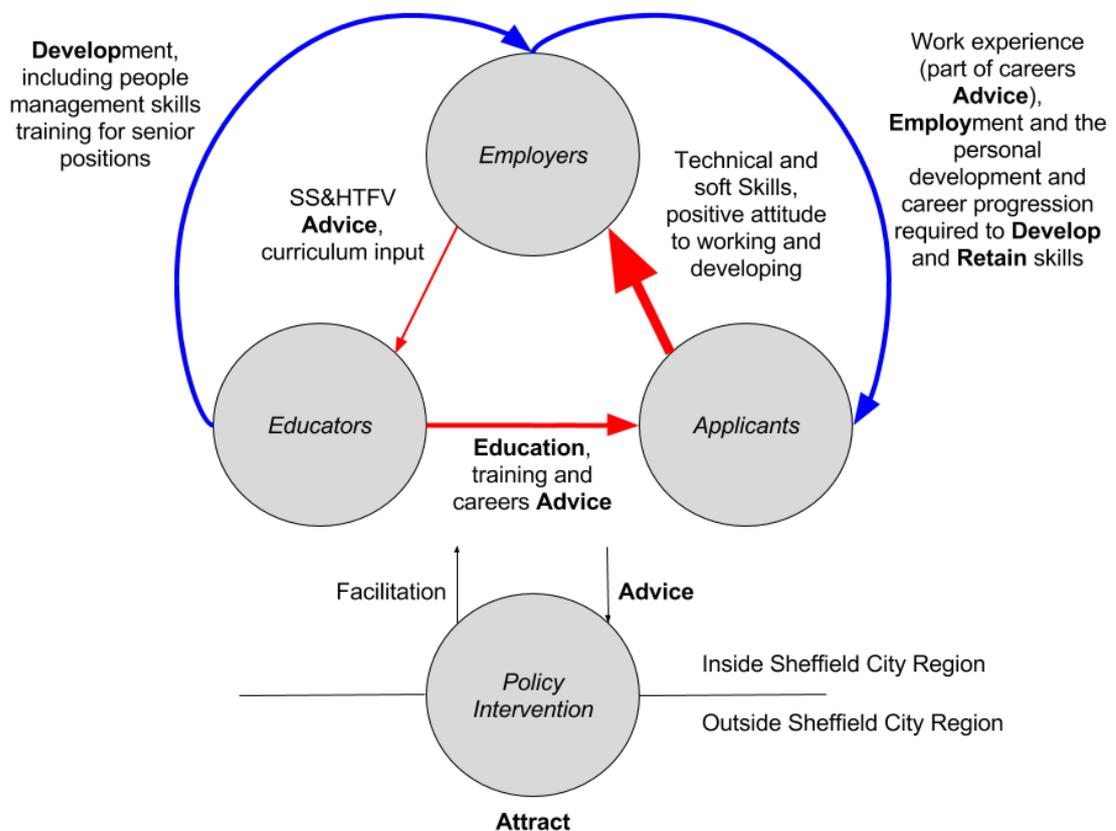

*The Skills Creation Cycle
shows how the six Themes interconnect to create socio-economic gain.*

The Skills Creation Cycle is concerned with:

- attracting Applicants to Sheffield City Region,

- providing Applicants with advice on the employment opportunities across Sheffield City Region and their associated skills requirements,

- equipping Applicants with the technical and soft skills required by Employers,

- the sustainable employment, development and retention of skilled Applicants,

- retaining a pool of skilled Employers and Applicants.

The Cycle recognises the important role that mentors play in the provision of advice, academia and training. Mentees, who can be school children through to experienced Employers and Applicants, benefit from receiving their mentor's experience and knowledge.

The Cycle can also be viewed from the various stakeholders' perspective as shown below.

How collaboration across the stakeholders connects the Themes and so triggers the cyclical effect of growth shown in the Skills Creation Cycle.

Operating in a collaborative manner it can be seen how advice in one direction enables the supply of training, skills and facilitation in the other. This creates the cyclical effect that will enable the long-term economic growth of Sheffield City Region as per the Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Economic Plan.

The six Themes and their abridged recommendations follow.

Attract

Employers should:

- Connect with local schools, colleges and universities, donating time and expertise in support of the development and delivery of the curriculum and syllabus.

- Share their opportunities with schools, colleges and universities through platforms such as U Explore and The Enterprise Advisor Network.

Policy intervention should:

- Create and promote a Sheffield City Region message / brand.

- Promote the replication of initiatives such as 'BID' and their 'Live after Five' project.

- Ensure Housing and Planning policies across Sheffield City Region provide a diverse range of homes.

- Collaborate with Employers to ensure that transport links to areas of employment are affordable, accessible and efficient.

- Collaborate with Employers and Educators to create world class centres of excellence.

Schools, colleges and universities should:

- Share the Sheffield City Region message / brand with students to help them make a fully informed decision about where to seek employment on graduating.

Learn

Employers should:

- Share their skills requirements with Educators and collaborate with them using consistent terminology to enrich curricula and syllabi.

- Consider developing their own apprenticeship / training programmes (possibly in collaboration with other Employers) with the support of training / academic institutions.

Policy intervention should:

- Collaborate with Employers on the creation of 'skills and work ready initiatives' for the Business, Professional & Financial sector.

- Consider collaborating with Sheffield Hallam University on extending its South Yorkshire Futures programme to Sheffield City Region.

- Further explore how the Employers' perception of the underlying factors that make vacancies hard to fill varies across the different academic levels achieved.

Employ

Employers should:

- Review their employment packages and perks of the job and effectively communicate the benefits to existing and potential Applicants.

- Review their current recruitment and induction processes.

- Should review their recruitment criteria to allow for consideration of applicants from outside of their own sector who have transferable skills. These Applicants could be adaptable and bring in valued skills, and 'giving an Applicant a chance' will likely increase loyalty and so support retention.

- Consider targeting the passive Applicants market through professional recruiters, or recruitment boards with chargeable click-through options.

Policy intervention should:

- Collaborate with Employers on the provision of subsidised public transport that enables access to work destinations (e.g. rural industrial estates) with low paid vacancies, and so which make transport costs relatively high.

Develop

Employers should:

- Be clear about their expectation of Applicants to positively engage in training and development by identifying and communicating their development requirements and corresponding training needs. Employers should foster an attitude of lifelong learning in Applicants and facilitate this through the consistent implementation of personalised development plans that include regular appraisals.

- Provide development training to their leadership and management personnel.

- Support the delivery of core training through SCR CA's Growth Hub[1] and Skills Bank[2].

- Look at collaborating with other Employers on training.

- Consider developing their own qualifications (or collaborating with local training providers) in order to bring their Applicants up to the required standard.

- Consider supporting Applicants with regards to undertaking training in their own time.

- Consider developing their own qualifications (or collaborating with local training providers) in order to bring their Applicants up to the required standard.

Retain

Employers should:

- Continually engage Applicants on job satisfaction and identify, or create as required and where possible, career progression opportunities.

- Use salary benchmarking tools to obtain advice on the salary they should be paying to be competitive.

- Consider whether they can improve other aspects of employment (e.g. working environment, culture, leadership and management) to increase retention.

- Consider taking a chance on employing Applicants that have the right attitude, aptitude and transferable skills over sector specific experience.

---

[1] https://www.scrgrowthhub.co.uk/

[2] http://sheffieldcityregionskillsbank.co.uk/

Policy intervention should:

- Inwardly promote to Applicants the full spectrum of job opportunities that exist within Sheffield City Region, together with the world class culture and recreational opportunities.

Advice

Educators, Employers, Applicants and their Family / Carers should:

- Engage in SCR CA's CEIAG (Careers Education, Information, Advice & Guidance) Strategy.

Policy intervention should:

- Collaborate with SMEs and Educators from across Sheffield City Region on a careers fair for SMEs only, providing an opportunity for Employers to engage face-to-face with Applicants on their vacancies and opportunities.

Further Recommendations

Policy intervention should:

- Collaborate with SMEs and Educators from across Sheffield City Region on a careers fair for SMEs only.

- Explore whether Applicants' perception of the careers advice they've received has changed over time to help understand whether it is perceived as getting better.

- Consider including requirements regarding hard to fill vacancies and skills shortages in supply chain procurement activities. Employers should do likewise.

- Consider developing a single platform that makes it easy for Applicants and Employers to obtain information and resources that are relevant to their particular requirements