



Learning the trade

How the East Manchester regeneration apprentice programme gives local residents a route to jobs and skills

Why regeneration apprentices?

Since the turn of the century Manchester has been buzzing with regeneration projects. The 2002 Commonwealth Games put the city on the international map; locally, East Manchester is being revitalised through the work of New East Manchester Ltd and Beacons for a Brighter Future.

New East Manchester (NEM) is the area's urban regeneration company, a partnership between Manchester City Council, English Partnerships and the Northwest Regional Development Agency. It is delivering a long-term strategic vision for physical, social and economic change.

Beacons for a Brighter Future is East Manchester's New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative, covering the neighbourhoods of Beswick, Openshaw and Clayton. Its key aims are to tackle crime; improve the physical environment; promote health and wellbeing; raise educational attainment; and provide skills and training to help local people into work.

By 2004, the Beacons initiative was halfway through its ten-year programme. NDC projects had provided many jobs for the local community – but few were with the NDC scheme itself.

The regeneration apprentice project was developed to address this issue, giving a small team of local residents the chance to be employed within the core team and gain the skills, practical knowledge and relevant qualifications to provide a thorough grounding in regeneration practice and open up related job opportunities.

In line with national policy, the project has focused on developing an entry-level qualification that allows local residents to progress into regeneration professions.

Tom Russell, chief executive of NEM, comments: 'For far too long, the relatively low skills base in regeneration areas has acted as a barrier to local employment in regeneration initiatives.

'But the most important qualities for anyone wishing to work in regeneration are enthusiasm and commitment; everything else can be taught or learnt through experience. Our regeneration apprentices have these qualities in spades.'

Since 2005, eight regeneration apprentices (four in 2005 and four in 2006), have been recruited by East Manchester NDC and NEM. The apprentices are given a full time, two-year contract. They each complete



twelve months of short placements, lasting between four and eight weeks, within each thematic area of regeneration – such as resident liaison, the economic programme and social programmes. They then move on to complete a 12-month specialisation in one area.

The regeneration apprentices were the first in the UK to complete the level 2 'working in the community' qualification. Three have gone on to undertake a level 3 qualification. The remaining

Key learning points

- The project is a significant development in regeneration education.
- Recruitment methods need to be tailored to the needs of local residents, with support for unsuccessful candidates.
- It is important that placement providers do not view the apprentices simply as an extra administration resource, but are aware of their training requirements.
- A training development coordinator in post a few months before the programme begins will speed up delivery.



Close to the community: Regeneration apprentices like Ryan Tracey are drawn from the communities they work to regenerate

five have progressed to a foundation degree in neighbourhood renewal at the University of Salford.

Two partner organisations, Eastlands Homes and Manchester Sure Start, have helped to fund the phase 2 posts, providing placements and a twelve month specialisation.

In January 2006 RENEW Northwest, the Regional Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Communities, awarded the project exemplar status for good practice and innovative working.

As a result, RENEW Northwest, East Manchester NDC and NEM have designed this guide to help organisations replicate this project. The guide shows the processes and challenges the project managers and apprentices have gone through, and issues that could arise in replicating the project.

Sean McGonigle, coordinator of East Manchester NDC, says: 'This model is ripe for rolling out elsewhere. I hope this success acts as a real incentive for other local residents.'

View from the shop floor:

Sarah Armitt

“ I'm 24 years old, and before I applied for this job I had never really thought about a career in regeneration. I was aware of the changes that were taking place in East Manchester, but I had never really looked into the organisations that were making them happen.

I have always worked in administration and I felt I needed a change when the advert for the regeneration apprentices came through my door. I felt this was the exciting challenge I was looking for. Since becoming a regeneration apprentice I have gained a level 2 qualification in working in the community, which took seven months to complete. This gave me enough knowledge to start a foundation degree in neighbourhood renewal.

The best point for me has been developing my project management skills. One project that really stood out was running the annual gardening competition. I helped develop the initial plan and timescales for the competition, as well as judging and organising the awards ceremony, which was attended by the Lord Mayor.

The biggest challenge was learning to adapt to changing work placements every six weeks. This was quite hard and the change in workloads was demanding. Another challenge was coping with a part time degree while holding down a full time job. This enabled me to learn how to manage my time effectively.

My line manager supported me through the programme, offering regular review meetings. These were particularly useful in the first year, while I was rotating between placements. Placement managers have helped me to manage workloads and offered guidance on completing tasks. This has helped me develop project management skills. I've also had in-house training in financial management and procedures, project development and project monitoring.

I feel my greatest achievement is starting the foundation degree. I feel I have contributed to the regeneration of my area by being a regeneration apprentice. I have offered advice on projects to help engage other members of the community and I have been involved in developing and implementing projects that will have a massive impact on the local community.

At the end of this two year programme I will be in a position to apply for project manager or officer jobs. This opportunity has changed not only my career prospects, but also my aspirations for the future.

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How to do it:

making a regeneration apprentice scheme happen

Setting up the project

First, you need to gain local residents' support and evaluate demand for the role. This can be done through consultations and resident surveys.

Then apply for funding. Complete an appraisal detailing expenditure and outputs, and link with partners that can support the scheme.

You'll need a project coordinator, who should be appointed at least eight weeks before the apprentices are recruited. This was a key lesson learned in Manchester: the coordinator will need to finalise the scheme and ensure it has full backing from all partners, including educational institutions, with all the required paperwork in place. The coordinator should ideally have a background in further education.

Then advertise the vacancy among your target

audience. Flyers, local press and websites are effective. Local authorities and other public sector organisations often publicise such opportunities online free of charge.

Recruitment

Application forms should be completed in line with your organisation's formal processes. This is the first layer of screening: if your target audience is postcode specific, for example, application forms should be used to check applicants' home address. It is vital to adhere to equal opportunities procedures.

The next stage is the assessment centre, which will allow you to critically analyse some of the key attributes relevant to the post. You should test for dyslexia at this point to ensure the assessment is fair.

Apprentices are likely to need level 2 standards of numeracy and literacy. You should also conduct psychometric testing at this point. In Manchester, all unsuccessful applicants at this stage were signposted to jobseeker programmes for appropriate further training.

Questions at the interview should focus on the

View from the manager's office:

Carol Bartram

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I'm the economic programme manager at New East Manchester, and I've been involved in training for the last 20 years – it's an area of work I've always been passionate about.

This project evolved following discussions with and challenges from local residents about the small numbers of local people who were employed in the regeneration programme teams. There were local people working within the NDC programme, but it tended to be in an administrative capacity or as volunteers.

We came up with a two year programme that would enable a group of people to develop skills in all aspects of project management and community engagement. What was missing, though, was a qualification that would deliver the key skills and underpinning knowledge.

Somewhat by chance, I attended a meeting with the University of Salford about a new foundation degree in neighbourhood renewal. I asked if we could get assistance to create a pathway that would lead people on to the foundation degree.

That's when I met Janice Estcourt at Open College Network North West Region (OCNNWR), and it all started to seem possible. Quite soon we had a level 2

qualification on working in the community, and Janice was working with OCNNWR to develop the level 3 certificate. It was time to start recruiting people.

We had over 30,000 leaflets delivered to every home in the area and had a fantastic response. We got an independent training provider, Worksolutions, to assess the applicants' numeracy, ICT, communication and literacy skills using Learndirect computerised assessment. This narrowed the number down from 150, but still we interviewed 28 people.

Importantly, everyone who was unsuccessful received a Learndirect certificate showing their skill levels, and we directed those that were unemployed to our employment projects for help in finding work. We recruited four great apprentices, who shared a passion about the area and wanted to help to make a difference. We also appointed a project coordinator, Gary Lamb, who would plan work placements and support the new recruits.

The project went so well during the first year that we decided to repeat it and recruited another four apprentices in 2006.

Getting recognised as an exemplar by RENEW Northwest was brilliant; it proved we had set the benchmark at the right level and the model had worked. I now want other people to have the same opportunity.

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job description and person specification. The interview panel should ideally include a local resident with links to your organisation, as well as the project coordinator and project manager.

Organising placements

The project coordinator should organise placements that will increase the apprentices' knowledge of regeneration, enhance their abilities or provide new skills. Placements should also be in areas where there may be job opportunities.

Thematic placements during the first year should last around six weeks each, but timescales need to be flexible. If other organisations are providing funding, placements should be organised within them.

When they start work apprentices should be given a provisional placement rota for the year. The coordinator should support and advise those providing placements, ensuring the activities undertaken fit the requirements of the apprentices' qualifications.

A project proposal, approved by the coordinator, should ensure that the placement is within the apprentice's capabilities. It is important that the apprentices are involved in the operation and delivery of projects, and not simply used as admin workers or personal assistants.

Monitoring and evaluation

Performance reviews should take place every six to eight weeks to ensure progress is being made, training needs are identified, problems are discussed and resolved, and actions and objectives, with deadlines, are set.

Specialisation

While the initial placements are arranged by the coordinator, the second year placement is chosen by the apprentice. Apprentices should provide two placement preferences, to give the coordinator sufficient scope for meeting their needs. If partners are involved, specialist placements may have to be within their organisations.



Monitoring progress: Like all apprentices, Emma Price receives a performance review every six to eight weeks to discuss any problems and agree training needs

The coordinator should continue to monitor training and development needs, sharing support for the apprentices with the specialist placement managers.

Jobs

The apprentices should be encouraged to apply for jobs in their final year. The knowledge and experience they have gained, coupled with the numerous training and development courses undertaken, should greatly enhance their job prospects.

Qualifications

Level 2 working in the community: The coordinator should arrange for the level 2 qualification to be delivered through a local training provider.

The qualification recognises the application of knowledge within a range of activities such as numeracy, ICT, communication and report writing. The apprentices should verify these activities in the form of evidence sheets, witness statements and a work-based project, undertaken while on placement.

Level 3 working in the community: This is a continuation of the level 2 themes. It requires a broad knowledge of regeneration, as most assignments are based on areas that will need to be researched. The qualification has a more formal study structure than

Onwards and upwards: Elvina Mack

“ I live in Gorton, East Manchester. I am 24 years old and mother to a four-year-old boy, Kimani. I previously worked as a sheltered housing warden, which I enjoyed, but I did not feel this was the right career for me. I had always wanted to improve my skills to get a better job.

After the Commonwealth Games I noticed improvements in my local area, and this made me take an interest in what was happening. So when the advertisement for the regeneration apprentice posts came through my door I immediately applied!

I felt this opportunity was ideal for me, as I could gain qualifications while earning an income in a profession which interested me, as well as being involved in the renewal of my local community.

I now work full time for New East Manchester/New Deal for Communities. Every four to six weeks I am rotated between work placements. It's like starting a new

job every time you move – this enables me to gain a wider knowledge of how regeneration partnerships work.

I have been involved in several projects, from developing a 'what's on' guide to more strategic involvement in project monitoring and finance. I feel I am developing at a steady rate, and the support I receive from the project coordinator has been great.

I feel that it has been the best thing that could have happened to me: I have learned so much in the short time that I've been a regeneration apprentice. My confidence, knowledge and hopes for my future career have increased tenfold, and I have enjoyed every minute of it.

I have recently passed my level 2 working in the community qualification, which has given me an overwhelming sense of achievement, and I am now working on a level 3 qualification, which will enable me to go to university to undertake a foundation degree in neighbourhood renewal.

I really feel I am moving onwards and upwards.”

level 2 and involves attending college one day a week.

Foundation degree: The foundation degree is normally a progression from level 3, but in certain circumstances can be accessed from level 2. Its aim is to aid the understanding of the framework of regeneration. It enhances skills such as learning and performance management, and how these can be applied within the workplace. It requires flexibility and time management, so that individuals can work and study simultaneously.

What next?

The proof of the pudding

The proof of the success of the regeneration apprentice scheme is twofold: first, in the opportunities available to the trainees on completing their apprenticeship; and second, in the enthusiasm of others to replicate the project, or aspects of it.

At the time of writing this guide, the first intake of apprentices were nearing the end of their training. Two of the four had already been offered fulltime jobs – one as a youth intervention officer within the NDC's crime and safety team, the other as a housing

project assistant in the Manchester Salford Housing Market Renewal Partnership.

The other two were both awaiting the outcome of job applications, but were confident of success. Three of the four are in the second year of the foundation degree.

A growing number of organisations are looking to replicate parts of the scheme. There has been particular interest from other NDC projects, including Oldham, Southampton and Sunderland.

In Southampton, the local NDC project, Thornhill Plus You, is using a similar approach to provide qualifications for volunteer members of the NDC board.

The 12 residents will undertake the working in the community qualification before moving on to a foundation degree in neighbourhood renewal. Solent University has been commissioned to provide the foundation degree, and will work with a Southampton-based training provider, TWICS, on the level 2 and 3 qualifications.

Dave Kellett, programme director at Thornhill Plus You, says many resident board members are doing skilled work as volunteers, but cannot be paid without losing benefit entitlement. 'We're getting all of that accredited so they have a bona fide qualification that



On the up: Elvina Mack has gained professional qualifications while working in a job that interests her

will propel them where they want to go,' he says.

The Sunderland scheme, subject to approval by the board of Back on the Map, the city's NDC programme, will train two apprentices, one in each year. Each apprentice will be appointed on a two-year contract.

The second year will involve placements at a range of external organisations including Sunderland City Council, Groundwork South Tyneside and Regeneration Exchange. Apprentices will work towards a certificate in regeneration qualification with the University of Northumbria.

In Oldham, Hathershaw and Fitton Hill New Deal for Communities had been keen to progress a similar scheme to East Manchester; but with a stronger emphasis on basic skills. However, it was not possible to source the necessary funding and plans have been put on ice.

The apprentice scheme has sparked a growing interest in accrediting community work.

Manchester Adult Education Service is running the level 2 working in the community course, developed by Greater Manchester Aimhigher and Open College Network North West Region, and a third cohort of learners are now working towards the qualification. Many of these are community volunteers who would otherwise receive no formal recognition of their achievement. Tameside College has a group of 13

learners working towards level 3.

Several universities have now accepted the working in the community qualification as satisfying their admission criteria for foundation degrees, not only in neighbourhood renewal but also in related areas such as community studies and housing.

■ Details of the Working in the Community qualification are available from Suzanne Leech, curriculum and quality advisor, Open College Network North West Region. Tel: 0161 860 2720 or email: SuzanneL@ocnwr.org.uk

■ For more information about the regeneration apprentice scheme contact Gary Lamb, project coordinator at New East Manchester, tel: 0161 230 2100 or email: g.lamb@manchester.gov.uk

Checklist: the main milestones for an apprentice scheme

- Gain support from your organisation's management.
- Contact local organisations about becoming partners or stakeholders.
- Engage with resident groups and community forums.
- Draw up an appraisal for the project and secure funding.

- Recruit a project coordinator, ideally with a further education background.
- Establish links with local colleges or a university to deliver qualifications.
- Draw up job descriptions and person specifications for the apprentice positions.
- Advertise the vacancies via leaflets, local press or your website.
- Shortlist and invite successful applicants to an assessment day.
- Identify possible candidates and invite them to interviews.
- Recruit successful candidates. Arrange references, and CRB checks if needed. Offer full time contracts with full training provided.
- Organise placements. Draw up a timetable of placements for the next 12 months, but keep it flexible.
- Obtain work plans for the apprentices from placement managers.
- Make it easy for the apprentices to move between placements, organisations and college by providing them with laptop computers, email and internet access where appropriate.
- Hold regular review meetings with the apprentices during their placements.
- Liaise with placement managers on monitoring and progress.
- Hold end of placement review sessions or complete review sheets with apprentices and with placement managers.
- Hold regular apprentice team meetings to foster a team spirit while on individual placements.
- Constantly assess and identify training needs and opportunities. Allow apprentices to assess their own training needs, and provide appropriate training.
- The project coordinator should undertake relevant qualifications to facilitate the smooth running of the programme.
- Apprentices should complete the level 2 'working in the community' qualification.
- Apprentices should progress to a level 3 qualification or foundation degree.
- Support apprentices in choosing appropriate second year placements.
- Ensure smooth passage onto the second year of training.

RENEW Northwest is the Regional Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Communities. We develop dynamic and responsive learning opportunities to provide practitioners with the skills and knowledge required to deliver sustainable communities.

One of our main aims is to gather good practice and help make it accessible to all in a way

that helps others to benefit. Our series of Practice Papers is one way in which we do this.

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RENEW Northwest
RENEW Rooms
The Tea Factory
82 Wood Street
Liverpool
L1 4DQ

Tel: +44 (0)151 703 0135
 Fax: +44 (0)151 703 0136

Email: info@RENEW.co.uk
 Web: www.RENEW.co.uk

Researched, written, edited and designed by Julian Dobson and Chris McCarthy for NS+ Ltd, tel: 0114 229 5726, email info@nsplus.co.uk.
 Photography by Len Grant. tel: 0161 445 3681, www.lengrant.co.uk

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