

## Apprenticeship campaign is a fantastic success story for the region

May 11 2011 by Chris Knox, [The Journal](#)

**The Journal's campaign to help create as many apprenticeship places as possible over 100 days is being heralded as a major success after hitting a magnificent total of 1,355. Christopher Knox looks back at some of the success stories and the efforts made by employers and training providers during the campaign.**

THE Journal and its sister paper the Evening Gazette launched the '100 in 100' campaign on January 20 with the aim of helping to create 100 apprenticeship places over 100 days, following similar campaigns across the country.

Launched in association with the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and supported by the North East Chamber of Commerce, the campaign got off to a fantastic start, so much so that the initial target was surpassed by 83 apprentices in its first three weeks.

With a new target of 500 apprentices, the campaign continued to benefit from high profile backing from some of the region's key businesses, including US conglomerate Procter and Gamble on Tyneside and Newcastle-based Benfield Motor Group, which have both added additional apprentices during the campaign.



The launch of Apprenticeship Week at the beginning of February also ensured that the campaign was given an extra push and included a series of events and recruitment drives across the region.

These included the announcement by car giant Nissan that it was to take on 25 extra apprentices at its site in Sunderland, which will take the total number of apprenticeships it has supported since 1984 to 1,058.

Journal editor Brian Aitken also took it upon himself to promote the campaign during the week by becoming an apprentice for the day, swapping roles with 20-year-old Liam Rogerson, who is currently working his way through a three-year electrical engineering apprenticeship at Newcastle University's School of Marine Science and Technology.

Such support soon helped the campaign to smash the new 500 target with five weeks of the campaign remaining, an achievement that, at the time, had already far exceeded the hopes of NAS regional director John Wayman, who said: "We have been genuinely overwhelmed by the positive response to the campaign from North East employers.

"To have surpassed our aspirational 500 apprenticeships target is truly exceptional and well beyond our expectations."

The fact that the campaign has now gone on to smash the 1,000 mark by 355 apprentices illustrates just how much importance the region's employers are placing on apprenticeships to boost the economic recovery and bridge the skills gap.

With growing fears over levels of youth unemployment in the region, it is now hoped that many of the new apprenticeship places will eventually turn into full-time jobs.

The success of the campaign also comes at a time when the Government is putting its weight behind the apprenticeship programme, with the announcement in the Budget of a £180m package to fund an extra 40,000 young apprentices and 10,000 advanced level and higher apprentices providing a welcome boost.

This means that in total, the Government will support some 250,000 more apprentices than under the last Government's plans.

As such, it was pleasing that The Journal's campaign has been recognised by the Government as having a significant part to play in the growth of apprenticeships.

Responding to news that the campaign had hit 1,355 apprentices, skills minister John Hayes said: "I congratulate The Journal and Evening Gazette, the North East's colleges and training providers and the National Apprenticeship Service for working together to create 1,355 apprenticeships in the North East region over the last three months.

“This is a remarkable achievement that will help change the way this country values vocational skills.

“Having long championed apprenticeships in Parliament, I want to pay tribute to the businesses and organisations that have helped restore them to their rightful place in our national life – a respected, well funded and indispensable route for people from all backgrounds to achieve their ambitions.”

It is fair to say that such an astonishing total would not have been reached if it wasn't for the work of the North East's training providers, which, as well as placing 1,355 candidates with the region's employers, did their bit to publicise the campaign throughout the 100 days.

One such provider is Gateshead-based North East Apprenticeship Company (NEAC), which managed to place 54 apprentices as part of the campaign in areas as diverse as environmental, travel and catering.

Paul Champion, managing director at NEAC, said: “The campaign has far exceeded everyone's expectations and we are very pleased to be given the opportunity to publicise what is fast becoming one of the main sources of employment for many of our young people.

“The campaign has shown employers the benefits of bringing on an apprentice and hopefully more employers will get involved as a result.”

Another supporter of the campaign was Access Training Centres (ATC), also in Gateshead, which managed to place 27 apprentices.

Among these was Leanne Graham, health and social care apprentice and rehabilitation assistant at Newcastle-based care provider Whickham Villa LLP. She said: “I was really keen to achieve my NVQ Level 2 qualification but I also wanted to gain work experience.

“I would definitely recommend apprenticeships. I have found that by doing the work and being hands-on I actually learn more easily.”

Sascia Elliott, sales and marketing director at Access Training Centres, said: “Having a target to follow has definitely focused our efforts as well as brought the apprenticeship programme to the attention of more employers in our area.

“Access Training Centres will complete a rebrand in August, which will include setting up our own recruitment company.

“Apprenticeships are a very hot topic at the moment and the success of The Journal's campaign has validated our decision to move into recruitment.”

The region's local authorities have also been strong advocates of the campaign, with councils working with training providers, employers and jobseekers to help secure placements.

Northumberland County Council alongside their Northumberland Adult Learning Service (NALS) was involved in supporting NAS throughout the 100 days and contributed 59 new apprentices.

At any one time the county council has over 100 apprentices undertaking training.

One such apprentice is 19-year-old Siobhan Hudson, who overcame shyness and a lack of self confidence to achieve an NVQ Level 2 in business and administration and has gained a new work placement, where she will progress to a customer service apprenticeship.

Elaine O'Connor, head of employability and skills for Northumberland County Council, said “The council is committed to opening as many employment opportunities for our young people as possible, and training is a way of doing this.

“We are keen to create sustainable employment opportunities. The council is particularly pleased to be part of such a successful campaign.

“This is an example of both the private and public sector working in partnership to continue to have a skilled workforce and see apprenticeships as a key component of how the region can increase economic growth.”

There have been many more success stories over the last 100 days with employers keen to stress how impressed they have been with their new recruits.

One company that has recently brought on apprentices through the campaign is Wallsend-based equipment repair and measuring specialist AMECaL.

The firm has recruited Stephen Simpson, 21, from Denton Burn, Thomas McFayden, 20, from Hebburn and Josh Howie, 21, from Chapel Park, as advanced engineering apprentices, with Newcastle College providing the training programme.

AMECaL managing director Stephen Oxborough said “Our apprentices are getting on really well and we plan to bring on some more later this year as we have been so impressed with their efforts.

“We had a lot of people to interview for the positions, but we feel we got the cream of the crop.

“I think the majority of apprentices want to work really hard and learn as much as they can on the job, and it is this keenness that makes them stand out in the job market.”

Others include 19-year-olds Andrew Sinclair, from South Shields, and Rachael Scott, from Felling, who secured training in food preparation and hospitality at restaurant Six, which is on the top floor of the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art on the Quayside in Gateshead.

Car insurance company insurethebox, based in Longbenton, also teamed up with Newcastle College to train 20 members of staff and recruit an additional four apprentices, while Newcastle-based Mental Health Concern (MHC) recently announced that it will recruit five apprentices over the next 12 months.

Although these are just a few examples of the many employers that have helped to make the campaign such a success, they nonetheless illustrate the wide variety of frameworks that the programme covers and dispel the myth that apprenticeships are the mainstay of skilled trades, such as construction and engineering.

In fact almost half of the 1,355 apprentices are following programmes in either business administration, customer services, sales and telesales, with the second most popular framework being hospitality and catering, retail, warehousing and storage, with 27% of the apprentices appointed in these areas.

One of the more unusual apprenticeship placements was with Labour MP for Newcastle North Catherine McKinnell, who has recruited Gateshead College student Natalie Denton, 17, as a business administration apprentice at her constituency office in Westerhope, Newcastle, with NEAC acting as training provider.

McKinnell is behind the Apprenticeships and Skills Bill, which seeks to increase the number of apprenticeships in the UK through the use of public procurement contracts.

The Bill has received support from Labour leader Ed Miliband, Lord Alan Sugar, the TUC, Federation of Small Businesses, North East Chamber of Commerce, Unison, Unite, GMB, Ucat, NUS, the Association of Colleges, the Federation of Master Builders and the Electrical Contractors' Association.

McKinnell said: "The Journal's apprenticeships campaign has been a fantastic initiative, and the recruitment of over 1,000 apprentices across the region in a matter of months is a truly impressive achievement.

"Supporting people – of all ages – to develop their skills and employability is crucial if the North East is to grow its way out of the current difficult economic climate, so it's really encouraging to see employers from all sectors across the region taking up the Journal's challenge with such enthusiasm.

"My own apprentice is proving a huge asset to my busy constituency office and I know that she greatly appreciates the opportunity to gain relevant, practical work experience whilst also earning a qualification. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the North East Apprenticeship Company for all of the support they have offered me in recruiting my apprentice.

"Hopefully, The Journal's campaign will result in a genuine renaissance in the number and type of apprenticeships on offer across the region. Equally important is to ensure that apprenticeships are now afforded the status that they deserve."

### **Top five sectors for the campaign**

Business, administration and law – 48% of the 1,355 apprentices  
Top three frameworks: business administration/customer service/sales and telesales

Retail and commercial enterprise – 27%  
Top three frameworks: hospitality and catering/retail/warehousing and storage

Engineering and manufacturing technologies – 12%  
Top three frameworks: engineering/laboratory technicians/glass industry

Health, public services and care – 5%  
Top three frameworks – health and social care/children's care learning and development/dental nursing

Information and communication technology – 4%  
Top three frameworks - IT users/ICT professional/IT and telecomms professionals.

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