

GREATERLONDONAUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR DIRECTOR DECISION – DD2719

Title: Early Connect Pilot – Phase Two

Executive Summary:

This decision seeks approval for the receipt and expenditure of £140,000 of Department for Education (DfE) funding to run the second phase of the 'Early Connect' pilot in London. Through the second stage of this pilot, the GLA will build on the learning from Phase One to encourage the development of new apprenticeship opportunities, and to increase awareness of them amongst 18-year-olds in the capital. This funding will be utilised to commission an external partner organisation which will provide a support service, making young people aware of apprenticeship opportunities they can access and improving their ability to apply for these roles.

Decision:

That the Executive Director of Communities and Skills approves:

1. the acceptance of £140,000 of Department for Education (DfE) grant funding for the purpose of participating in the Early Connect pilot
2. expenditure of £140,000 to commission a partner organisation to provide brokerage and wraparound services to young Londoners.

AUTHORISING DIRECTOR

I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

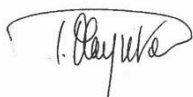
It has my approval.

Name: Tunde Olayinka

Position: Executive Director –
Communities and Skills

Signature:

Date: 1 November 2024



PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. In 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) began a programme of work – the Apprenticeships Young People Strategy – with the intention to increase apprenticeship starts by young people. Analysis of DfE data led the DfE to conclude that driving starts at ages between 18-19 had the greatest potential impact on increasing overall apprenticeship numbers, which have fallen across England since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. DfE understood that the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) were planning to improve their university placements offer by trialling the inclusion of apprenticeships and in February 2023, initial plans for collaboration were announced by both the Secretary of State for Education and UCAS. This culminated in an announcement that from autumn 2024, students will be able to apply for apprenticeships within the UCAS Hub and employers will be able to manage applications for their apprenticeship vacancies through UCAS too. This is intended to support putting apprenticeships on an equal footing with university degrees in terms of respectability and visibility and increase their exposure amongst young people.
- 1.2. To understand how to maximise the effectiveness of this initiative, regional authorities were seen as key players in developing and filling apprenticeship vacancies. The DfE is currently running pilots in three areas in England – London, Lancashire, and the northeast of England – to test this. Funding was given by the DfE to these areas in the 2023-24 academic year to support their pilots, totalling £140,000, £55,000, and £75,000 respectively. Pilot areas are using their pre-existing network of employers, training providers and educational bodies to help create more apprenticeship opportunities locally and to ensure young people can access them. DfE also asked regional authorities to ensure young people were supported in their efforts to secure apprenticeships, recognising that many disadvantaged groups face barriers in being able to secure the roles that they want. There was additionally an expectation that all activities should be monitored to establish their effectiveness. This first phase of the Early Connect Pilot (defined as the work funded by the first DfE grant and supporting activities) was approved under cover of [Director Decision \(DD\)2668](#).
- 1.3. Under cover of [Mayoral Decision \(MD\)2522](#), the GLA has previously funded and supported a pilot (unrelated to the funding outlined in this form), led by the London Progression Collaboration (LPC, now known as WorkWhile), which successfully tested how to increase the number of apprenticeships in London by brokering levy transfers between employers to create more apprenticeships and connecting them to Londoners. The evaluation of the LPC found that providing personalised support to young Londoners looking to access an apprenticeship is a successful model and will be built on through this pilot.
- 1.4. Rinova was appointed to deliver Early Connect through a competitive tendering process held in the winter of 2023-24. The contract was awarded in May 2024 and to date have received 1,429 enquiries from students nationwide (approximately 23 per cent of enquiries are ineligible because of location – being from outside of London – or because of age). Rinova are currently supporting 213 young people with one-to-one support to find and secure an apprenticeship and have just recorded their first apprenticeship starts. Other young people are being supported with lighter touch support, including a range of group sessions providing support on key subject. Whilst the defining feature of the Early Connect approach is a bespoke one-to-one service, they provide a range of support services including providing information and resources and group sessions (both virtual and in-person) on a range of related areas.
- 1.5. Based on data from the Department for Education based on interim Individual Learner Record (ILR) data, the first phase of Early Connect has led to an improvement in Apprentice starts in London for 18 year olds. Compared to the same time in 2022-23, 2023-4 has seen a 6.1 per cent increase in the

number of Apprenticeship starts reported. This compares to a 0.8 per cent increase in Apprenticeship starts in parts of England that are not part of the Early Connect pilot.

- 1.6. The Department for Education took the decision to extend the Early Connect pilot into the 2024-25 academic year and granted London a further £140,000. This decision was taken prior to the 2024 General Election by the previous Conservative government. Again, London was given a large degree of autonomy over how this funding would be used to improve apprenticeship uptake amongst school leavers.

2. **Objectives and expected outcomes**

- 2.1. The Early Connect Pilot (referred to as 'the Pilot' hereafter) aims to increase the number of apprenticeship starts from the 2024-2025 Year 13 cohort (17 to 18-year-olds). We aim to increase the number of starts amongst this demographic by between 10 and 15 per cent, subject to agreement with DfE.
- 2.2. The Pilot will be aimed at all school and college leavers in their final year of full-time education (Year 13) who are seeking apprenticeships at any level.
- 2.3. The core objectives of the Pilot are to:
 - inspire students, their schools, parents and influencers to consider apprenticeships as a viable and credible next step, alongside higher education.
 - bring apprenticeships closer to young people still in education – connecting young people in schools and colleges with employers and providers at the time when they are considering their future options.
 - provide employers with early access to talented young people.
 - provide wraparound support to students to successfully secure an apprenticeship – keeping the interest of those who might not have otherwise been successful.
 - create a greater number of apprenticeship opportunities, specifically for young people.
- 2.4. The second Pilot aims to learn lessons from the first iteration, including around managing demand (a greater number of pupils expressed an interest in the Pilot than was expected) and simplifying referrals onto the programme. This second Pilot will seek to ensure more apprenticeship-ready participants receive support whilst prioritising those with greater needs. We also understand from the Pilot that aiding pupils is not enough, and that more must be done to create the opportunities they need. This means working closely with businesses to ensure they have the resources needed to navigate and benefit from the current apprenticeship system.
- 2.5. The GLA will work with a Steering Group of stakeholders to manage the Pilot. This will include the DfE, employers, providers and other stakeholders. The GLA will also look to improve the accessibility of information on apprenticeships through this group.

Student Support

- 2.6. As in Phase One of the Pilot, we anticipate that the funding received from DfE will be invested in a student support service, giving young people support to find and enter apprenticeships. The funding will be utilised to commission an external partner organisation which will provide a support service, allowing young people to be better prepared for the application and interview process and providing information and resources to ensure that they are more aware of apprenticeship opportunities they can access. This organisation will also provide a wraparound service to young people to support them apply for these opportunities.

- 2.7. The student support element of Phase One of the Pilot will be completed in March 2025 but the learning from current activities will inform the specification for the provider for Phase Two (defined as the work funded by the second DfE grant and supporting activities). We would look to begin earlier in the year (in January 2025) to give Year 13 students a greater amount of time to explore apprenticeships. If more students want one to one support than the programme has the funds to support, young people will be able to receive lighter touch support, including resources and group sessions.

Employer Engagement

- 2.8. As well as supporting young people, we will continue to work with employers to support the Pilot. This includes engaging with a range of employers and representative bodies, including through our steering group. We will look to support employers fill their apprenticeship vacancies and facilitate the creation of more apprenticeship opportunities. We will ensure student support closely aligns to employer need and will engage employers to support in the delivery of group activities for students where possible.

Careers Hubs – working with education institutions and parents

- 2.9. Phase One of the Pilot has been delivered in partnership with our Careers Hubs programme and we would look to continue utilising existing links to Education Institution Careers Leads and parents through the Careers Hubs. Careers Hubs have helped to drive recruitment in schools and colleges to sign up to the Pilot, with 169 having done so. The additional delivery window starting in Autumn term 2024 would increase the reach to parents through planned activities and allow the successful provider to run online and/or in-person events for parents to explore apprenticeships online or in-person.

Position within the GLA's wider ambition for apprenticeships

- 2.10. Early Connect has been designed as a pilot, to identify approaches capable of maximising access to apprenticeships both in London and the other pilot regions. If evidence suggests that the methods utilised during the pilot continue to have a positive impact on access to apprenticeships, then there is scope for it to be expanded over a longer period. The GLA has committed to expanding access to career opportunities for young people in London, and a successful Early Connect programme could enable this. Overall, the programme can initiate the development of a wider GLA programme for apprenticeship support and creation in the capital.
- 2.11. A major outcome of the first Early Connect Pilot was recognising the need to expand employer engagement, in order to generate more apprenticeships in London, especially for young people. Based on the testimonies of participants, numerous young people had indicated that they had applied for large numbers of apprenticeships without success. While student support is important for participants, without additional apprenticeships many will be unable to find suitable positions.
- 2.12. We do not envision using funding received from the DfE for this purpose, given the existing funding for support for young people is low relative to demand. We instead aim in future to obtain additional funding for business engagement work to generate more opportunities for this age group. We will additionally look to build on existing GLA functions, such as our employer engagement teams and the organisation's strong online presence. Our business engagement approach is likely to cover the following aspects:
- Collaborating with large employers to alter their perceptions vis à vis the hiring of young apprentices, highlighting the success of apprenticeship schemes targeted at young people already in existence.

- Exploring offering incentives to SMEs to foster the creation of additional apprenticeships, especially in sectors which offer significant economic potential to London.
- The development of an improved website for Early Connect which includes information for employers on apprenticeship design and development.

2.13. The GLA is advocating for the devolution of apprenticeship levy funding as part of our wider employment and skills devolution strategy. By evidencing effective use of the Early Connect funding to increase apprenticeship start numbers, it will be easier to justify arguing for London Government control of levy funds.

3. **Equality comments**

3.1. Under Section one of the Equality Act 2010, the Greater London Authority must have 'due regard' of to the desirability of exercising decisions in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage. Section 149 of the same Act additionally states that public authorities must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

3.2. As outlined in Impetus' paper '[Research Briefing 3: Apprenticeships](#)' (2019), economically disadvantaged young Londoners are significantly less likely to take on apprenticeships compared those in other regions. This partially stems the fact that poorer pupils are 50 per cent as likely to receive good GCSE marks as their more affluent contemporaries, often a requirement of accessing apprenticeships. Additionally, research by the London Assembly Economic Committee ('[You're Hired: A Bright Future for Apprenticeships in London](#)', 2022) demonstrated that individuals with a disability or learning difficulty make up 12.4 per cent of apprentices, despite 19 per cent of the working age population falling under this category. Additional support to individuals with these characteristics, as proposed by this Pilot, has the potential to reduce this gap in outcomes such as identifying apprenticeships with lower entry requirements or ensuring applications are written to a higher standard which may prove difficult to those with lower English language abilities.

4. **Other considerations**

4.1. *Key Risks and Issues*

Risk	Mitigation
The limited funding available to the GLA and the one-to-one support may mean that the Pilot may not be able to meet demand for one to one support.	It is envisioned that by signposting participants with less support needs to more light touch services, such as those provided by Amazing Apprenticeships, the Pilot will be able to offer intensive support only where it is needed. Given the high number of pupils expressing interest in Phase One, there is a clear desire for this type of support.
There is limited scope amongst existing staff to take on additional activities connected to employer engagement.	The GLA will work with strategic partners and employer representative bodies to maximise engagement with employers within the resources available. In addition, the GLA will explore the availability of

	additional funding to enhance this provision and link into the student support element of the Pilot.
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Links to Mayoral Strategies and Priorities

- 4.2. In the 2022 Health Inequalities Strategy, the Mayor committed to continuing to ensure London is a living wage city and to promote good work opportunities for Londoners. Early Connect will support both these measures. Participants in the Pilot will be directed where possible towards apprenticeships offering at least London Living Wage to their apprentices. By creating a greater number of apprenticeships, Early Connect will be generating roles which develop the skills of those doing them, giving them a platform for success in their long-term careers, whilst being paid a fair wage at the same time.
- 4.3. The GLA has also committed to “fund 250,000 more positive opportunities for young Londoners. This will include access to quality mentoring, alongside investment in more youth workers with a particular focus on schools, pupil referral units, custody centres and major A&Es.” By supporting young people into appropriate apprenticeships, this project will contribute to creating these positive opportunities in line with objectives of the supporting and inspiring young Londoners mandate.
- 4.4. Early Connect will support the Mayoral priority of supporting a flourishing London economy, a key priority of the London Growth Plan and the supporting Londoners to benefit from growth mandate. Apprenticeships can serve as a vehicle to generate new skills and therefore fill the skills gaps which exist in the economy. A more high-skilled economy is linked with greater economic growth, and by upskilling participants Early Connect makes it more likely they will enter into economically productive jobs.
- 4.5. As part of the London Growth Plan, the Mayor has pledged to work with employers to grow London’s economy and foster the creation of good jobs. Employers will be involved in Early Connect throughout as we look to create new opportunities and fill skills gaps. Business representative organisations were key members of the Phase One working group, and this will be built upon during Phase Two. The Pilot will seek to commission an external partner with existing connections in the business world to maximise the prospects of participants, as was the case with the current delivery partner. Participants will be encouraged by the provider to consider apprenticeships in London’s priority sectors, ensuring the Pilot meets the needs of London’s employers as well the economy as a whole.
- 4.6. Early Connect addresses several targets outlined in the Mayor’s Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy Objectives (2022). It will address objective seven (“remove the barriers preventing children and young Londoners from realising their potential”) by ensuring young Londoners are not held back by their lack of experience in the professional space, which puts them at a disadvantage when competing with older individuals. It additionally responds to objectives eight and nine (“To help Londoners at risk of marginalisation in the labour market to get the skills and support they need” and “To ensure London’s workforce reflects its population at all levels and in all sectors”) by prioritising disadvantaged individuals who are statistically less likely to begin an apprenticeship relative to their share of London’s population. This includes individuals with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Conflicts of Interest

- 4.7. There are no conflicts of interest to note for any of those involved in the drafting or clearance of the decision.

5. **Financial comments**

- 5.1. This decision seeks approval for the receipt and expenditure of £140,000 of Department for Education (DfE) grant funding to run the second phase of the 'Early Connect' pilot in London.
- 5.2. The funding would be received from the DfE in two instalments: £75,000 in October 2024 and £65,000 in April 2025 in the Skills and Employment unit's programme budget.
- 5.3. The initial £75,000 will be spent in 2024-25 financial year and the remaining £65,000 will be spent in 2025-26 financial year.

6. Legal comments

- 6.1. The foregoing sections of this report indicate that the decisions requested of the Executive Director of Communities and Skills concern the exercise of the Authority's general powers; falling within the Authority's statutory powers to do such things considered to further or which are facilitative of, conducive or incidental to the promotion of economic development and wealth creation and social development Greater London; and in formulating the proposals in respect of which a decision is sought officers have complied with the Authority's related statutory duties to:
 - pay due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people
 - consider how the proposals will promote the improvement of health of persons, health inequalities between persons and to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom
 - consult with appropriate bodies.
- 6.2. In taking the decisions requested, the Executive Director of Communities and Skills must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty; namely the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, and to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation) and persons who do not share it and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). To this end, the Executive Director of Communities and Skills should have particular regard to section 3 (above) of this report.
- 6.3. All procurements of works, services and supplies required for the Pilot must be procured in accordance with the Authority's Contracts and Funding Code (the "Code"). Furthermore, the officers must liaise with Transport for London's procurement and supply chain team, which will determine the detail of the procurement strategy to be adopted in accordance with the Code. Officers must ensure that appropriate contractual documentation be put in place and executed by chosen service provider/supplier and the Authority before the commencement of the attendant services.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline
Commissioning of contract [for externally delivered projects]	October 2024
Delivery Start Date [for project proposals]	January 2025
Delivery End Date [for project proposals]	January 2026
Project Closure: [for project proposals]	January 2026

Appendices and supporting papers:

None.

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form – NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to
confirm the
following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Andrew Maitland and Tim Riley have drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Assistant Director/Head of Service:

Ayo Akande has reviewed the documentation and is satisfied for it to be referred to the Sponsoring Director for approval.

✓

Financial and Legal advice:

The Finance and Legal teams have commented on this proposal, and this decision reflects their comments.

✓

Mayoral Delivery Board

A summary of this decision was reviewed by the Mayoral Delivery Board on 21 October 2024.

CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

Signature:

Date: 1 November 2024

Fay Hammond