

Workforce Training Services Ltd

Report of the Trustees for the Year Ending 31 March 2023
(Incorporating the Chairperson's Report)

Chairperson's Report

It gives me great pleasure to introduce Workforce Training Services Limited's Annual Report for 2022-23.

The aims of the charity have not changed since it was first established in 1978. While the political landscape has changed greatly over this time, many of the social and economic problems facing our communities remain the same, e.g. access to employment opportunities and good quality jobs, low academic achievement of a disproportionate number of school leavers, health related issues (especially mental health and wellbeing). However, I am pleased to report Workforce continues to meet the skills and employability needs of a wide range of people from the greater Belfast area and beyond, a significant number of whom are disaffected or marginalised through social or emotional difficulties, poor educational achievement and/or lack of employment.

This year, the charity has continued to make strong progress delivering its core contracts which include Training for Success, Skills for Life & Work, ApprenticeshipsNI, the School Partnership Programme, Employment Academies and Belfast City Council's Youth Support Programme.

There is no doubt that education and training are vital in promoting the wellbeing of our young people and other service users. They provide the skills and specialist knowledge needed to secure the good jobs which allow people to participate fully in society – the basic building blocks of a meaningful, productive and healthy life. At Workforce, we strive to improve the wellbeing of our trainees, apprentices and staff through our excellent pastoral support. Promoting people's mental health and emotional wellbeing not only supports educational engagement, but also improves attitude, attendance and outlook and helps raise attainment. A nurturing learning environment is a place that is good for our service users, our staff, and the wider Workforce community.

Skills and access to talent is one of the single biggest issues impacting our local economy today. In May 2021, the Department for the Economy launched its new economic vision for the next 10 years, "10X Economy – an economic vision for a decade of innovation". The concept embraces innovation to deliver a ten times (10X) better economy with benefits for all the people in our community. To achieve this goal, it is critical for our prosperity that we continue to provide our employers with highly skilled trainees and apprentices enabling them to access new talent and in so doing, help our young people to develop further.

Delivering the 10X economic strategy will require transformation of our skills system. However, in order to implement the 10X vision, government must ensure that skills are appropriately funded. Unfortunately, the current economic climate is one of uncertainty; the potential funding cuts to a range of services Workforce provides is hugely damaging for all our trainees and apprentices which will impact negatively on our most vulnerable young people. The financial uncertainty facing services as a result of recent cuts in funding is not helped by the fact that we have no Executive in place. A restored Executive will not solve every problem within our communities, but without the institutions being up and running, we are at a significant disadvantage in dealing with the many problems our sector currently faces.

In spite of the financial uncertainty, the company has delivered strong financial results over the last 12 months which has allowed us to refurbish, renew and update our facilities where necessary. It is vital that we continue to provide the most up to date training and learning facilities for our course participants to enable them to achieve their best possible outcomes. Also, we are committed to investing in the development of our people and the continuous improvement of the delivery of our programmes and services. As a company, we are very proud to have achieved recognised quality marks/standards including the Investors in People Gold accreditation and ISO9001:2015.

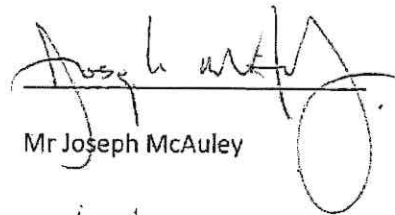
2023 has been a very difficult year for the whole Workforce community. In April, our dear friend and colleague Angie McFall passed away very suddenly at the much too young age of 56. It is fair to say this tragedy shook the entire Workforce family to its core. Angie loved her job working with members of her local community, especially our young people. As the mother of three boys herself, she loved to see our young people's successes, to see trainees gaining qualifications, securing employment and moving on to the next stage of their lives and careers. She especially loved to see those of our young learners who have had to overcome significant barriers succeed. Only with the passage of time will the Workforce family get over Angie's passing. May she rest in peace.

Despite the ongoing challenges presented to us each year, our management team and entire staff body work tirelessly to improve, not only the skills and employment opportunities of our course participants, but also their life prospects and assist them on a pathway to positive outcomes. To them, I offer my deepest gratitude and sincere thanks.

I wish to acknowledge the dedication, commitment and support of my fellow board members who have given freely of their time and provided expert knowledge and experience to ensure the effective running of the charity. In a rapidly changing environment, the need for good leadership and strong governance is paramount for any charity and ensures Workforce continues to deliver for our service users.

Finally, I would like to thank all our delivery partners and funders for their ongoing support and contributions throughout the year.

Chairperson's signature



Mr Joseph McAuley

Date

10/11/2023.

Achievements and Performance

Over the course of 2022-23, Workforce Training Services has delivered its services via programmes contracted through the Department for the Economy, European Social Fund, Department for Communities through the Labour Market Partnership (LMP) initiative and the Department of Education. This year has been another very successful year for the company.

Skills for Life and Work & Training For Success

Workforce is currently contracted by the Department for the Economy to provide professional and technical training and education under the Skills for Life & Work and Training for Success programmes. Skills for Life and Work is designed for young people aged 16 - 17, with extended age eligibility for those with a disability up to age 22 and up to age 24 for those from an in-care background. These programmes are designed for young people who want to develop their skills and get ready for work.

The company typically engages with over 300 learners on its Training for Success and Skills for Life & Work programmes at any one time, making it one of the biggest providers in N. Ireland.

In 2022-23, 169 young people (118 male and 51 female) were recruited from 30 different schools/educational establishments to the Skills for Life & Work programme.

Some of the other achievements and outcomes from these programmes in the last 12 months include:

- 97 young people gained employment and progressed on to the ApprenticeshipsNI programme;
- 397 Essential Skills qualifications in literacy, numeracy and ICT were achieved;
- 323 personal development and employability qualifications were achieved; and
- 1301 hours of one-to-one mentoring support sessions were delivered to participants on these programmes.

ApprenticeshipsNI

ApprenticeshipsNI aims to provide participants with the opportunity to take part in a Level 2/Level 3 Apprenticeship where the apprentice, in paid employment from day one, works towards achieving an industry-approved Level 2/Level 3 Apprenticeship Framework.

In 2022-23, we had 150 apprentices on the ApprenticeshipNI strand, of which 80% progressed from our own Skills For Life & Work provision. In recent years we have strived to increase the supply of apprenticeships and help our young people, a significant number of whom come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, access the ApprenticeshipNI pathway.

Apprenticeship achievement and retention rates are excellent which is testament to the highest quality training and pastoral support provided by our staff.

At Workforce, effective employer engagement is integral to our success in finding quality employment opportunities for our participants. We work closely with employers to ensure our delivery meets the needs of the employer, the business, and the apprentice. Over the last year, we have worked with and supported 224 employers, helping them to provide work placements and employment for our young people.

European Social Fund

Workforce successfully delivered two projects under Call 3 of the NI European Social Fund (ESF) Programme 2014-2020 which ran from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The Path 2 Employment project provided employment opportunities for those groups at a disadvantage in the labour market who were unemployed, including the long term unemployed, or economically inactive. We are pleased to report under Call 3 of ESF, all targets were surpassed. In all, 144 participants were recruited on to the project against a target of 140, of these 60 participants progressed into employment against a target of 35 and 72 participants progressed into education and/or training against a target of 12.

The Get Connected project, which supported young people aged 16-24 who were not in employment, education or training recruited 121 participants on to the project in the last 12 months against a target of 120, with 91 participants progressing into further education and training. A further 21 participants progressed into employment upon leaving the programme. As with the Path 2 Employment project, all targets were surpassed.

In December 2022, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) opened the long-awaited UK Shared Prosperity Fund Northern Ireland programme for applications. This fund, designed as a successor to EU structural funds post-Brexit and, under the programme's 'People and Skills' priority, is aimed at tackling economic inactivity.

Unfortunately, Workforce, like a number of other organisations in the community and voluntary sector, was notified on 31 March 2023 that it had been unsuccessful with the two project applications it made to the fund. We were especially disappointed in the lack of clarity from the UK Government on how successful projects were selected. This is likely to result in a considerable drop in the company's income for the year ahead and we will be faced with making difficult decisions to account for this.

It is totally unacceptable it took the UK Government so long to confirm the outcome of the Shared Prosperity Fund application process. Given the outcome was only made known on 31 March 2023, the day ESF funding was due to expire, it would have placed us in a very difficult situation, especially in relation to workforce planning. As an organisation, we took the decision in January 2023, whatever the outcome of the Shared Prosperity Fund application process, to extend all ESF staff contracts until 31 March 2024. We were keen to provide our ESF staff with some stability and job security and prevent the prospect of very experienced staff leaving the organisation.

The funding and delivery of public services in our communities is at breaking point. There is increasing pressure on salary costs, fuel and energy costs, insurance costs, rent etc. Despite all these costs increasing, funding is not increasing at anything like the same rate which makes it a very tight operating environment for community groups such as ours.

Also, the uncertainty around future funding is not a good way to deliver our services. It makes it very difficult to be strategic, to allocate resources, to facilitate workforce planning, especially without core long-term funding, and minimum three-year contracts for service delivery. As a sector, we need the decision makers to do more to secure our position and stop these continuous funding cycle competitions.

Employment Academies 2022-23

The Labour Market Partnership (LMP) is a province-wide approach developed by the Department of Communities and aims to address issues with jobs and training by combining resources and delivering a collaborative and flexible approach to employability support in each council area. The LMP focuses on improving labour market conditions and addressing issues with employers, training providers, as well as community and voluntary organisations.

Through this initiative, Workforce has developed a strong strategic relationship with five local councils including Belfast City Council, Mid & East Antrim Borough Council, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, and Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council. The organisation delivers a range of skills and employability programmes which include the Customer Service Sector (Hospitality, Leisure & Retail) Academy and the Practical Sector (Transport, Construction, Green Economy & Manufacturing) Academy. These contracts are for a four-year period.

This year alone we have worked with 454 participants, mainly adults, on the Councils' Employment Academies which breaks down as follows:

Transport Academy	No. of participants
HGV	214
Bus	57
Advanced Driving Instructor	8
Other Academies	No. of participants
Construction	110
Plant Construction	13
Leisure	23
Hospitality	12
Community	8
Warehousing	9

Further academies are planned in the coming year for each council area in a range of sectors.

Youth Support Programme

Workforce is also currently delivering Belfast City Council's Youth Support Programme (ages 14-24). The Youth Support Programme offers support to get 14-24 year olds living in the Belfast City Council area into training and employment. Participants take part in a range of training and education sessions including vocational skills sampling, mentoring, Hi 5 workshops which focus on health and wellbeing, goal setting, and a range of other activities that help to prepare the young people for the next steps in their career journey.

This is the final year of the programme which has been running for 4 years. This year, 160 young people have been supported to a positive outcome through their participation on the Youth Support Programme: 105 of these participants entered training on completion of the programme and a further 30 joined the Apprenticeship programme.

School Partnership Programme

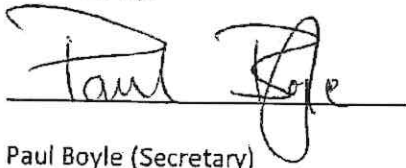
Workforce has a well-embedded school and education other than at school (EOTAS) provision which works with 150 pupils, from four different educational establishments, on the school links programme

each year. This programme provides vocational skills training to Year 11 and Year 12 pupils who have the opportunity to achieve CEA's Occupational Studies qualification which has GCSE grade equivalency. As a result, many of the students, progress to relevant training programmes in Workforce when they leave school.

Plans for the Future

The trustees continue to monitor and review the performance of the charity. Given the current financial uncertainty and loss of ESF funding, the next twelve months will be a time to consolidate occupancy levels in our existing Skills for Life & Work and ApprenticeshipNI provision. We also consider this an ideal time to secure alternative sources of funding for new projects and programmes to ensure the financial viability of the organisation going forward.

The annual report was approved by the trustees of the charity on 15 November 2023 and signed on its behalf by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Boyle', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Paul Boyle (Secretary)

WORKFORCE TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023

STATEMENT OF DIRECTORS RESPONSIBILITIES

The directors are responsible for preparing the Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company Law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The Trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, present their report and the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2023. The Trustees confirm that they comply with the requirements of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice which applies to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015).

Under company law the directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the surplus or deficit of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the directors are required to:

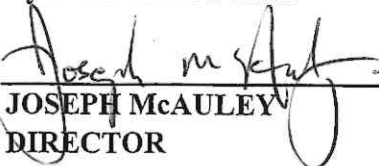
- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the directors are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware; and
- the directors have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

By order of the board:


JOSEPH MCAULEY
DIRECTOR


JULIE MAGUIRE
DIRECTOR

DATE 8th December 2023

DATE 8th December 2023