National Apprenticeship Service
Graduation Ceremonies
Project Evaluation
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Executive summary

Introduction

The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) was tasked by Ministers to organise graduation-style ceremonies for apprentices who had completed Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships.

Three phases of Apprenticeship graduation ceremonies were rolled out:

- phase 1: two initial pilots
- phase 2: four trailblazers in 2013 and 2014

Following the success of the two pilot ceremonies, a Graduation Ceremonies Grant of £400,000 was made available to fund phases 2 and 3. NAS, via the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), awarded the grant to the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) to ensure sector engagement through an open and transparent process.

The aims and key themes of the NAS Graduation Ceremonies Grant were to:

- engage with non-engaged employers (those that do not employ apprentices)
- raise the profile of Apprenticeships so that they become comparable with academic pathways
- gain effective media coverage
- work in partnerships to continue arranging ceremonies in the future, without grants
- link ceremonies with business awards and/or other local/regional skills competitions.

The Apprenticeship graduation ceremonies for the 19 phase 3 projects were held between 7 October 2014 and 26 September 2015.

Project evaluation

Each project completed an evaluation report on its event/s.

The average cost per event was £23,288.21 and the average cost per apprentice was £300.35. The programme had an underspend of £77,558.99 from the £400,000 of grants for phases 2 and 3. This is because 16 projects spent less than originally predicted when they put together their budgets to apply for funds.

Overall, project feedback suggests that the events were successful. The ceremonies were appreciated both by apprentices and employers, and the overall aims and objectives were achieved. However, as this was the first time that many of the graduation ceremonies had been held, some of the projects found it difficult to attract apprentices to attend. It is recognised that more needs to be done to ensure that graduation ceremonies are embedded into the culture of Apprenticeships. Projects suggested a number of ways in which this can be done, including referring to the ceremonies in Apprenticeship promotional material, during the recruitment and induction process, and throughout apprentices’ programmes.

A number of other lessons have been learnt from the phase 2 and 3 Apprenticeship graduation ceremonies. Recommendations are given in this report to improve project planning, marketing and engagement. These should make arranging ceremonies in future more straightforward and less time consuming.

Engaging with the non-engaged

The projects used various ways to attract non-engaged employers, including Apprenticeship awareness-raising briefings, recruitment and networking events, pre-event promotional activities, and promotion through social media.
The most successful approaches included a ‘bring a friend’ initiative and using direct communication with a few, carefully selected employers. Projects that worked with joint local initiatives were also successful at encouraging more employers to commit to taking on apprentices.

**Raising the profile of Apprenticeships**

Press coverage before, during and after the ceremonies, and aligning events to recruitment and market fairs helped to raise the profile of Apprenticeships.

Some projects used caps and gowns to highlight the link with university graduation ceremonies. Articles in the media described the prestigious locations of certain events, which in some instances were the same venues used for university graduation ceremonies. This has all helped to increase the profile of Apprenticeships.

**Gaining effective media coverage**

Social media was deployed by all projects to market and promote the graduation ceremonies. Certain small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that attended the ceremonies shared live updates during the events across their social media platforms, helping to promote Apprenticeships through their own networks.

An average of six newspapers and magazines published information for each of the ceremonies; this included press releases, editorials and adverts.

Local radio stations and TV broadcasts (including the BBC) actively supported some events. This type of media coverage was used by some projects as an opportunity to engage with employers or to encourage SMEs to nominate apprentices for awards.

Many project leads reported that the extensive media coverage of their graduation ceremonies has had a positive impact, and helped to raise interest in Apprenticeships by both potential apprentices and employers.

**Ensuring event longevity**

Out of the 19 phase 3 projects, 16 plan to arrange graduation ceremonies for apprentices in the next year. They intend to use material produced from their events to support applications for sponsorship. The three projects that were unsure about planning future events expressed concerns over funding and the need for more involvement from partners before committing to holding further ceremonies.

**Linking with business awards and/or other locally recognised activities**

Some ceremonies included presentations of special awards and a few SMEs were nominated for business awards. It is hoped that this will ignite further interest by employers and result in more deciding to offer Apprenticeships. This should also help to attract sponsorship for Apprenticeship graduation ceremonies in future.
Background

At the request of the previous and current Ministers for Skills, the NAS was tasked with organising graduation-style ceremonies for all apprentices who had completed their Advanced or Higher Apprenticeships. The ceremonies aimed to recognise the apprentices’ success and create greater awareness of Apprenticeships, whilst raising their quality and esteem. The ceremonies also sought to provide an opportunity for parents, influencers and employers to engage with one another to create a feeling of pride and recognition.

Nick Boles, the current Minster for Skills, supported the concept, saying, “Our ambition is for it to become the norm for young people to achieve their career goals by going into an Apprenticeship or to university, or in the case of some Higher Apprenticeships, doing both. These graduation ceremonies will recognise and reward the success of our apprentices and by doing so, will raise the profile and quality of Apprenticeships”.

Starting at the end of 2012, the Apprenticeship graduation ceremonies were rolled out in three phases:

- phase 1: two initial pilots - City of York in November 2012 and Nottingham City Council in January 2013
- phase 2: four trailblazers - York Business Week, Weston College, Nottinghamshire Training Network and The Design Foundry - Liverpool

Following the success of the two pilot ceremonies, a Graduation Ceremonies Grant of £400,000 was made available to fund phases 2 and 3. For phase 2, £10 per apprentice was allocated. For phase 3, the amount of grant available was approximately 60% of the overall event costs, but actual amounts were decided in the shortlisting process where each application was judged on its own merits.

NAS, via the SFA, awarded the overall grant to the AoC and the AELP as the sector membership bodies, to ensure sector engagement through an open and transparent bidding process.

The overall aims and key themes of the NAS Graduation Ceremonies Grant were to:

- engage with the non-engaged - employers that do not employ apprentices, potential apprentices and their influencers
- achieve parity of esteem - to raise the profile of Apprenticeships so that they are on a par with academic pathways
- gain effective media coverage - to highlight the success of apprentices and employers, as well as engage with the non-engaged
- ensure event longevity - work in partnerships and consortiums across the sector to ensure that graduation ceremonies are repeated and improved in future years without the grant
- link up with business awards and/or other locally recognised activities, regional skills competitions etc.
Governance and management

AoC appointed a dedicated Project Manager to administer the Graduation Ceremonies Grant and manage the phase 2 and 3 Apprenticeship graduation ceremony projects. The Project Manager reported to an Operations Group chaired by AoC’s Senior Skills Policy Manager. The Operations Group included the Marketing Adviser - Apprenticeships and Traineeships from NAS, and AELP’s Head of Qualifications and Delivery.

The work of the Operations Group was overseen by a Steering Group comprising representatives from the following organisations:

- Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)
- Local Government Association
- NAS - Head of Apprenticeships (Yorkshire and Humber)
- Trade Union Congress
- Federation for Industry Sector Skills and Standards
- British Chambers of Commerce
- UK Commission for Employment and Skills
- local enterprise partnerships (LEPs).

An Apprenticeship Ambassador, who works for Bentley Motors, was also a member of the Steering Group.

The Steering Group was responsible for ensuring all aspects of the programme were delivered in a fair and transparent way, without undue bias and within agreed parameters. As well as advising on the scope and criteria of the project, the Steering Group was responsible for allocating the grants. They also helped to ensure that the ceremonies would be embedded in the sector and sustainable for the long term.

The Steering Group met twice during the lifetime of the project, and provided advice and support by email on request.

The Operations Group was responsible for the day-to-day decisions and actions of the programme. The small team worked very effectively together, meeting regularly at the beginning of the programme, collaborating on the production of the invitation to tender (ITT), the template for the final evaluation report, and the assessment and scoring of bids.

Following the awarding of funding, on-going monitoring of individual projects was undertaken by the Project Manager, who kept in regular contact with the organisers by phone and email. Phase 3 projects were required to submit a progress report two months prior to their ceremony highlighting any issues related to the number of respondents, the budget etc, and outlining actions being taken to mitigate the risks identified.

Members of the Operations Group also attended a number of the ceremonies.

An Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremonies toolkit was provided by NAS to support successful projects, achieve consistency, and assist with the promotion of the ceremonies. The toolkit also contained useful information, hints and tips, and templates.

The purpose of the Graduation Ceremonies Grant was to fund the organisation of ceremonies to celebrate the success of those completing Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships and their employers, and achieve the project’s overall aims. To avoid stifling innovation, from the outset, NAS did not want to be prescriptive about how projects should organise their ceremonies.
Tendering and awarding process

The four phase 2 trailblazer projects were selected by NAS, although they were asked to complete an application form that was assessed by the Operations Group. Graduation ceremonies were held between November 2013 and May 2014. Feedback from the phase 1 and 2 projects helped to shape the ITT for phase 3. Evaluation reports submitted by the four phase 2 trailblazer projects are summarised in the ‘Lessons learnt phase 2’ section.

The ITT emphasised the importance of collaboration between local authorities, colleges, private training providers and employers. It was made clear that the grant was a one-off fund that would not be available in subsequent years and stressed that partnership working would be vital if locally hosted ceremonies were to be sustainable in the long term.

The grant had to be spent before the end of the academic year (31 August 2015). The ITT made it clear that it could only be used for those who had completed their Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships by the time of the ceremony. Although those completing Intermediate Apprenticeships could be invited to take part, none of the grant funding could be used towards the costs associated with including them. Neither could the grant be used to fund an event for apprentices from a single provider or a single employer.

The Operations Group was responsible for overseeing the marking and moderation of applications, and for producing a shortlist. The Steering Group ensured that this was done in a fair, transparent and unbiased way. Out of 46 submitted applications, a total of 19 were selected for funding.

North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC) and Gloucester College were two successful bidders that subsequently withdrew from the programme. NECC cancelled because they had a poor response from learners. Gloucester College withdrew due to concerns about the level of resourcing required to stage a successful event. They are, however, investigating ways to include an Apprenticeship graduation ceremony with their Higher Awards ceremonies.

The Operations Group selected two bids from the phase 3 tender round to participate in the programme to replace NECC and Gloucester College. These were from Stockport Council and Scarborough Jobmatch.
Summary of phase 3

The national rollout of phase 3 Apprenticeship graduation ceremonies started on 7 October 2014 and ran until 26 September 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of lead organisation</th>
<th>Name of ceremony</th>
<th>Date of ceremony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk County Council</td>
<td>Apprenticeship Graduation</td>
<td>7 &amp; 14 October 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Devon College</td>
<td>South Devon College Apprenticeship Graduation and Awards Ceremony</td>
<td>16 October 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Yorkshire Learning Providers</td>
<td>Inspiring Apprentices in West Yorkshire</td>
<td>10 November 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of York Council (York Apprenticeship Hub)</td>
<td>York Apprenticeship Graduation and Awards Ceremony</td>
<td>17 November 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills CFA</td>
<td>Higher and Advanced Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony</td>
<td>19 November 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford College</td>
<td>Bedford Apprenticeships Graduation Ceremony</td>
<td>5 March 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croydon Council</td>
<td>Croydon Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony</td>
<td>11 March 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBLA (Work Based Learning Alliance)</td>
<td>Greater Lincolnshire Apprentice Celebration Event</td>
<td>12 March 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMFEC</td>
<td>Nottinghamshire Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony</td>
<td>20 March 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network</td>
<td>Gradu8 2015 Graduation Ceremony</td>
<td>16 April &amp; 13 May 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derby College</td>
<td>Derbyshire Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony</td>
<td>28 May 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leicester City Council</td>
<td>Leicester Apprenticeship Hub Graduation 2015</td>
<td>18 June 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALPS Partnership Limited</td>
<td>Hampshire and Surrey Graduation Ceremony</td>
<td>25 June 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uxbridge College</td>
<td>Hillingdon Apprenticeship Graduation 2015</td>
<td>1 July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council</td>
<td>Apprenticeships Graduation Event</td>
<td>2 July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myerscough College</td>
<td>MyApprenticeship Graduation 2015</td>
<td>8 July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough Jobmatch</td>
<td>STARS (Scarborough’s Talented Apprentices Recognised with Success)</td>
<td>17 July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffordshire County Council</td>
<td>Stoke and Staffordshire Apprenticeship Graduation</td>
<td>22 July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City College Plymouth</td>
<td>Plymouth Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony</td>
<td>26 September 2015</td>
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</tbody>
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See Annex for a summary of each organiser’s Apprenticeship graduation ceremony project.

At 13 of the ceremonies, a total of 507 apprentices on Intermediate Apprenticeships attended, although, as previously stated, funding was not available for these.
Key statistics

The average cost per event: £23,288.21
The average cost per apprentice: £300.35
Range of sponsorship: £0.00 - £10,500.00

Breakdown of number of attendees on the day:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced apprentices</td>
<td>1,588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher apprentices</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate apprentices (not included in grant)</td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guests of apprentices (e.g. parents)</td>
<td>2,927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers employing an apprentice</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers with Apprenticeship vacancies</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers with no experience of offering Apprenticeships</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship providers</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEPs</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local councils</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (e.g. community leaders, representatives from local schools, MPs)</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand total of attendees</strong></td>
<td>6,932</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The programme had an underspend of £77,558.99 from the £400,000 of grants for phases 2 and 3. This is because 16 projects spent less than originally predicted when they put together their budgets to apply for funds. No project could be left in profit or have unspent grant funds. The underspends will be returned to NAS as soon as final invoices have been reconciled.
Marketing and promotion

Social media

The use of social media to market and promote the graduation ceremonies varied across projects. Twitter was the most reportedly used social media platform, although LinkedIn was also used to contact employers and to communicate across projects’ networking groups. Facebook and YouTube were also used by projects before, during and after events with varying degrees of success. Some projects had several thousand - between 1,747 and 13,600 - social media followers, which helped them promote their ceremonies.

Social media blogs, updates, posts, Twitter feeds and retweets, and YouTube videos were shared across partners, employers and apprentice networks to advertise, promote and celebrate the graduation ceremonies, and to generate interest in Apprenticeships. Some SMEs that attended the ceremonies shared updates during the events across their social media platforms, helping to promote Apprenticeships through their own networks.

Social media also proved to be an effective way for some projects to contact specific hard-to-reach groups, for example young people not in education, employment or training (NEETS). They used tailored images and targeted messaging to promote Apprenticeships and their graduation ceremonies.

Projects uploaded video and film footage onto YouTube. Some films were used before the graduation ceremonies to support marketing activities. Several projects filmed apprentices during their graduations to gather material for promoting Apprenticeships in schools, with employers and at career fairs. One project enlisted apprentices prior to the event to promote and showcase the ceremony on social media; they used a film of an apprentice preparing for their graduation and showed another apprentice at work.

Several projects applied clear social media plans and strategies to secure the success of their promotional activities. Some used a ‘countdown to the event’, previewing material that was going to be used in the ceremony to build anticipation and gain momentum. Others gauged the immediate impact of using social media by recording the number of ‘clicks’ and ‘likes’ their marketing received. One project used a ‘pay per click’ campaign and over eight days received 222 clicks. Another project reported 148 Facebook ‘likes’. Some projects recorded the number of views that their website and YouTube videos received, to help them understand what types of promotional activities will be most successful when planning future events. One project organiser commented, “...the number of views on our Apprenticeship Page on the website increased by over 250% during the period of activity compared to the same period in the previous year...”. This highlights the value their website has for promoting Apprenticeships, and also the level of interest in their graduation ceremony.

Newspapers and other media publications

An average of six newspapers and magazines published information for each of the ceremonies. One project received sponsorship from a sector magazine. However, another project, WBLA, had to take the decision to cancel all media coverage because of confusion with local media caused when their original intent of having three ceremonies was reduced to one due of a lack of support from their project partners.

Local, national and sector-specific newspapers and magazines - which included press releases, editorials and adverts - were used to promote the graduation ceremonies. Marketing materials also included bulletins, leaflets, flyers, posters, and partner e-shots for employer networks.

Newspaper coverage before and after the ceremonies helped to highlight the work of apprentices and inspire non-engaged employers to consider taking on apprentices in future.

Projects used a range of advertising formats. Some ceremonies were showcased through a full-page advert in local media, which elicited positive feedback. One full-page advert was in
the style of a university graduate list. Press releases were linked to social media or distributed through local media (including publications for local residents and local news websites) to target audiences with little awareness of Apprenticeships. Many projects reported that the extensive media coverage of the graduation ceremonies has had a positive impact and has helped to raise interest in Apprenticeships from both potential apprentices and employers.

One project issued e-shots to employers that were identified through training providers; they found that this had more impact for engaging with SMEs than any other media coverage. Some projects sent out direct mail (e-flyers and invitations) and in instances found that these had the most impact and resulted in the majority of RSVPs from apprentices. One project lead stated that, “The most effective marketing to the apprentices was done via the providers, who they knew, using letters and posters produced by us, but customised by the local provider … 75 out of the 127 apprentices were from their sub-contractors.”

Other approaches

Local radio stations and TV broadcasts (including the BBC) actively supported some events. Radio channels promoting the events included BBC Radio Leeds, Radio Aire, The Pulse, Sunrise Radio, Capital FM, Real Radio, Ridings FM, Bradford Community Radio, Future Radio, Radio Norfolk, Heart FM, Radio Wave, and Palm Radio. One message given in radio interviews was about how valued apprentices are by their employers. Another radio interview focused on Higher Apprenticeships, explaining how Level 4 qualifications are good progression routes in the financial profession.

The extensive media coverage was used by some projects as an opportunity to engage with employers or encourage SMEs to nominate apprentices for awards. One project received 17 nominations from SMEs for ‘Apprentice of the Year’, which led to an additional category of ‘Apprentice Employer of the Year’; award winners attended the ceremony and their success was also celebrated on social media channels.

Some projects worked with providers, employers, partners, Jobcentres and other stakeholders to network and attend meetings, events and open days to promote their events. The professional networks of key posts, such as Schools and Community Liaison Managers and Business Development Consultants, also supported promotional activities. The existing networks of some employers were used to encourage employer participation. A range of other initiatives were also used including, for example, a ‘bring a friend’ scheme, and a pre-event forum where Apprenticeship and non-Apprenticeship employers were invited to find out more about the benefits of Apprenticeships for their businesses.

Awareness briefings were also designed for presentation in schools to raise the profile of Apprenticeships.

Communication across networks was generally effective. In one instance it was helped by the actions of a particular project partner who produced template letters and posters for all the project’s stakeholders to customise and use when communicating with their apprentices. They found that this helped to maintain a clear ‘corporate’ identity for the event.

Quantifying the success of broadcasting on radio and TV was difficult for some projects to gauge, due to little feedback available for them to be able to measure the impact on target audiences. One project stated that their radio campaign would have reached an audience of 453,000, and 41% of these were estimated to be aged between 25 and 44. Another project observed that although radio and newspapers helped to raise the awareness of their graduation ceremony and the Apprenticeship brand, it was difficult for them to quantify a return on their investment.
Delivery

Project bidders were encouraged to work with NAS and have data-sharing agreements in place to increase participation by widening their invitations to their whole geographical area, targeting those who had completed their Apprenticeships. However, not many had data-sharing arrangements and of those that did, some reported difficulties accessing the SFA data.

In the national rollout, a total of 15,394 invitations were sent out to Apprenticeship graduates; 11,003 invitations were sent to those who had completed Advanced Apprenticeships and 4,391 to those who had completed Higher Apprenticeships. In total, 1,729 (11%) apprentices attended the ceremonies; 1,588 had been on Advanced Apprenticeships, and 141 on Higher Apprenticeships.

Most projects arranged one ceremony, although Norfolk County Council organised four; three in Norwich for different sector groupings, all held on the same day (one in the morning, one in the afternoon and one in the evening) and another ceremony for all sectors combined, held in Kings Lynn. Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network arranged two ceremonies; one in Yeovil to cover Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset, and one in Bristol to cater for apprentices in the West of England, Wiltshire, Swindon and Gloucester. One of the projects (WBLA) had originally planned to hold three ceremonies, but a shortfall in numbers meant they only held one.

The majority of the events followed a traditional graduation ceremony format. Many of the ceremonies were held in prestigious venues, for example Guildford Cathedral, The Albert Hall in Nottingham, De Montfort Hall in Leicester, Brunel University London, Bristol University, and Central Hall in Westminster. The projects reported that the special locations provided gravitas to their ceremonies.

Special guest speakers invited to attend included civic dignitaries (for example, Lord Mayors), local councillors, MPs, personalities and motivational speakers from TV and sports, and TV presenters. The most effective were professional speakers (such as radio presenters), who spent time proofreading scripts and rehearsing.

The 9 out of 19 projects that opted for caps and gowns said that this had helped to recognise the apprentices’ achievements and celebrate their hard work. Photos were taken of apprentices in their caps and gowns before, during and after the ceremonies to commemorate the events and to be used as publicity material in future.

Some projects invited employers to join apprentice-related events either before or after the ceremonies, and these generally received positive feedback and were considered successful. Examples included networking lunches, a cream tea reception and presentations featuring special guest speakers promoting Apprenticeships. Apprenticeship Ambassador employers were also involved in some of the projects.

A number of projects engaged apprentices in the planning process and one ceremony was organised by apprentices under supervision.

For some projects, the different events were useful to support networking activities with employers, although one project acknowledged that graduation ceremonies should primarily be for apprentices to celebrate their achievements.
Some ceremonies included presentations of special awards such as ‘Apprentice of the Year’, ‘Large Employer of the Year’, ‘International Employer of the Year’ and ‘Best Apprentice’; these were the result of online competitions where apprentices uploaded videos onto YouTube describing the benefits and opportunities of individual placements. Awards given included insignias, commemorative badges, prize money and trophies.

Many project leads stated that they intend to use photos, videos, case studies, interviews and other material produced for their ceremonies to secure sponsorship and to encourage engagement from partners when planning future Apprenticeship graduation ceremonies.
Impact

As these were the first Apprenticeship graduation ceremonies delivered by projects, the impact has been quite varied across the projects. The feedback indicates that apprentices and their guests considered the ceremonies special occasions and an opportunity for their achievements to be recognised. The prestigious venues used by some projects helped to make the ceremonies exciting, memorable occasions.

Some projects found that organising ceremonies was a lot of hard work and effort, but a worthwhile opportunity nevertheless. Others found that organising the ceremonies was time-consuming, resource intensive and resulted in disappointingly low attendance. For example, two separate ceremonies arranged by different projects had a particularly low turnout, despite each inviting over 500 Higher Apprenticeship graduates. Only three projects succeeded in having more than 100 Advanced and Higher Apprenticeship graduates attend their ceremonies.

Despite the above issues, and the concern of a small number of projects about funding similar events in future, many were pleased with the response to their ceremonies. Out of the 19 projects, 16 say that they have a useful template to deliver future events and have learnt lessons that will improve some aspects of their graduation ceremonies.

Where projects had successful partnerships, and were able to share tasks and responsibilities, there is recognition that these relationships will be instrumental for the future planning of graduation ceremonies. Others have learnt valuable lessons about working in partnerships, and will ensure that formal agreements are in place before beginning projects together so that all partners share responsibilities for planning and organising their events.

- Engaging with the non-engaged

Non-engaged employers

The projects used various ways to attract and engage with non-engaged employers, including arranging:

- Apprenticeship awareness-raising briefings
- recruitment events promoting Apprenticeships
- networking events
- pre-event Apprenticeship promotion
- social media promotion activities
- a business growth seminar.

Some projects suggested that non-engaged employers would struggle to sit through a lengthy graduation ceremony, particularly if they had no involvement in it, so it would not be of interest to them. Two projects used a ‘bring a friend’ initiative, where employers of graduating apprentices brought employers who had never had apprentices along to their events. This approach was successful and resulted in over 20 non-engaged employers attending the two different events.

Some of the most successful approaches were when projects engaged with fewer carefully targeted employers. For example, one invited only ten non-engaged employers and three attended (30%), one asked 32 non-engaged employers and 13 went to the event (41%), and another invited 55 non-engaged employers and 40 attended (73%). One project invited 50 non-engaged employers and had 100% success rate; this was possibly a result of working on a joint local initiative aimed at encouraging more employers to commit to their future workforces by taking on apprentices.

The outcome was very different for a few projects, particularly those that invited thousands of employers, but very few attended their events. A full breakdown is shown in the table below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of invitations sent to non-engaged employers</th>
<th>Number of attendees</th>
<th>% of original invitations attending ceremony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
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In total, over 15,328 employers not engaged with Apprenticeships were invited to attend the graduation ceremonies and of these, 234 (1.5%) attended.

Some projects were unable to track either the number of invitations sent or those that were accepted by non-engaged employers.

**Potential apprentices**

The events provided a wealth of material to engage with potential apprentices both around the time of the ceremonies and for use in the future. Many projects plan to use the advertising material, photos and case studies produced for their events as part of their recruitment campaigns. Social media messaging, videos and ‘talking heads’ videos uploaded onto YouTube, graduate apprentices and word of mouth about recent ceremonies will help to promote Apprenticeships in future. While promoting their graduation ceremony, one project noticed an increase in interest from potential apprentices.

Guest speakers were invited to attend events specifically because they were considered inspirational and motivational speakers, capable of inspiring young people and encouraging potential apprentices and employers.

For certain projects, the graduation ceremonies were an opportunity to develop relationships with schools and providers. Local pupils, teachers and headteachers were invited to some ceremonies. One project arranged for employers to meet with pupils to promote the benefits of Apprenticeships. Some also encouraged apprentices to ‘bring a friend’ to their ceremonies to promote Apprenticeships to others.

**Influencers**

Attending the graduation ceremonies were:

- a total of 2,927 guests (e.g. family and friends of apprentices)
- approximately 363 Apprenticeship providers
- 41 LEPs
• 93 local councils
• 289 ‘others’ (e.g. community leaders, representatives from local schools, MPs etc).

One key benefit of the graduation ceremonies for the projects has been the opportunity to build stronger relationships with school heads, careers advisers, key industry stakeholders, community leaders, managers, training providers, dignitaries and VIPs, apprentice graduates, and their parents and employers. As a result of this engagement, more groups now know more, and are therefore far more likely to support and promote Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship activities in the future.

• **Engaging with small and medium enterprises**

SMEs were engaged to varying degrees. Some projects had very little engagement with them but recognise that in future it would be helpful to have more one-to-one contact, so plan to arrange Apprenticeship awareness-raising events and briefing sessions specifically for SMEs. Others have started to engage with SMEs and plan to continue to do this in future.

Projects found networking and social media, especially LinkedIn, effective mechanisms to support their communication and engagement with SMEs. One project confirmed that their engagement with SMEs had been a success because they had worked with the FSB at the outset to understand what SMEs would require from an Apprenticeship graduation ceremony so the content reflected their needs.

Some SMEs were nominated for awards; it is hoped that this will ignite further interest by employers and result in more deciding to offer Apprenticeships.

• **Raising the profile of Apprenticeships**

Some projects found that press coverage after the ceremonies helped to increase the profile of Apprenticeships and put the events on a par with university graduation ceremonies. This was aided by photos of graduates wearing formal dress, standing with the special guests and dignitaries who presented their awards, and media articles describing the prestigious locations of some events (in some instances the same venues used for university graduation ceremonies).

One project scheduled their ceremony to align with a careers market place event, using the graduation ceremony to encourage people to consider Apprenticeships. This approach also meant that the ceremony benefited from the additional media coverage promoting the careers market place.

Stories and case studies on social media, in newspapers and magazines, and on the radio that focused on former apprentices who had progressed from Apprenticeships into higher education, and endorsement by high-profile business individuals, also created a positive image of Apprenticeships, demonstrating their comparability with academic pathways.
Lessons learnt phase 2

In their feedback, the phase 2 projects recommended that:

- the grant should be increased per graduate, to help with the costs associated with the events and to enable them to attract suitable speakers
- information/data should be as accurate as possible so that projects can communicate effectively with training providers and access current apprentices’ details
- sufficient flexibility and time should be given to project managers so that they can take on the additional tasks associated with their event/s
- sponsorship must be applied for well in advance of the calendar year, before all allocations have been made.

In addition, projects should:

- consider how to manage apprentices effectively, particularly when they arrive at the ceremony
- ensure photos from the event are available to be downloaded immediately after the event, and make sure that there are individual photos of each apprentice
- keep a formal record of all attendees, including a full breakdown of employers attending the event
- have in place a formal way to evaluate the event
- maximise opportunities to promote the event on social media
- foster an expectation amongst apprentices from the outset that they will graduate.
Lessons learnt phase 3

The reports completed by the phase 3 projects highlighted a number of lessons learnt; as a result, advice on planning future ceremonies is given below.

Delivering the project

It’s recommended that a project management team is appointed, led by an individual with overarching responsibility for the event’s aims, outcomes and strategy. The responsibilities of the team, such as planning resources and timescales, managing stakeholders, communications and marketing should be allocated to named individuals.

Service level agreements with all partners should be used to improve ways of working and ensure better access to accurate data. In order to ensure that data is as accurate and as accessible as possible, it is advisable to liaise with professional bodies and introduce data-sharing agreements at the earliest opportunity. Despite doing this, some projects found that data from the SFA was difficult to access and often inaccurate. Feedback from the projects suggests that improvements could be made to the quality of data and ease of access.

The project management team should consider how much administration will be involved throughout the project and ensure appropriate support is available from the outset. Administrative responsibilities should include managing data, checking the information for accuracy, and ensuring that the data is amended promptly. This is important so that the right graduate apprentices are invited to the event, for managing the invitations process and monitoring the number of attendees.

Additional support may be necessary immediately before, during and after the graduation ceremony. Consideration could be given to enlisting the help of apprentices; this would provide them with useful experience.

A fully resourced project plan should be used to keep the project on track. Responsibilities for managing the project should be divided as equally as possible. Work with all key stakeholders - sponsors, employers and training providers - to plan the agenda to aid engagement and the longevity of the ceremony. To gain maximum support, give careful thought to the timing of the event from all partners’ (including employers’) perspectives.

Planning activities

At least six months (ideally more) should be allocated for planning the event. To encourage attendance, the ceremony should be held as soon as possible after apprentices have completed. To become an annual celebration of apprentices’ successes, plan for the event to be held at the same time each academic year (possibly in the autumn). To ensure it will align with and not clash with other ceremonies, be mindful of the timing of other events within the community.

Note that companies normally allocate their sponsorship budget early in their financial year, so identify potential sponsors for the event at the earliest opportunity. As soon as a sponsor’s commitment has been agreed, advertise the sponsorship in all promotional materials.

Ensure that the event recognises the achievements of the graduating apprentices first and foremost. Plan to include an awards presentation, music and other entertainment to make the event a celebration. Consider using the event to showcase local talent.

Plan for the ceremony to be held at a time when most people are likely to be able to attend. Avoid daytime during weekdays so employers can attend, and avoid weekends to encourage apprentices to participate.

Ensure apprentices and their guests are able to travel to and from the ceremony without difficulty. Support them as necessary, for example by reimbursing travel costs or providing transport, if possible.
When planning the event, include provision for last-minute demand for places from apprentices and guests.

**Engaging with employers**

Engage with employers from the outset so that their suggestions can be included when organising the ceremony. Enlist the support of engaged employers to encourage those who do not employ apprentices to attend the event. It is advisable to discuss Apprenticeships and the graduation ceremony with non-engaged employers face-to-face rather than by email or phone, and to issue personalised invitations.

Bear in mind that employers cannot be expected to stay at the event for a significant time unless there is a direct benefit for them, such as the opportunity to network.

**Booking speakers and venues**

Engage key speakers, VIPs and other dignitaries early in the planning process. Identify speakers who are interesting, and who can motivate and engage with the apprentices and the wider audience. Book speakers well in advance of the event, and use their participation and support in marketing campaigns. Avoid speakers who are likely to use the opportunity as a platform for self-promotion.

Book an event venue that is suitably prestigious to meet requirements. Be realistic about the number of apprentices and other guests who will attend, and book a venue that can accommodate all attendees comfortably. Book catering, photographers, and cap-and-gown hire (if necessary). Consider where there may be opportunities to engage apprentices to support some of these activities.

Advertise details of the ceremony to apprentices, training providers and employer communities. In order to maintain interest, keep reminding them of key elements of the event.

**Promoting the event**

Promote the event widely on social media, YouTube and in publications before, during and after the ceremony. Use the event to build a resource library of photos, videos, press cuttings etc that can be used as promotional material for future events. Direct marketing, including targeted social media, should help to engage the interest of apprentices.

Ensure a consistent approach when marketing the event. Ask all partners to use the same branding and templates.

Request that training providers communicate details of the ceremony to their apprentices. They should have accurate records of the apprentices on their books so are best placed to keep them informed throughout the planning process and to issue invitations.

Engage with schools from the outset to encourage their support of Apprenticeships.
Examples of good practice

Projects evaluated their ceremonies and identified things that worked well and what they would do differently in future. Some examples are given below.

- Proactively communicate with Chambers of Commerce and the FSB. Enlist their support to ensure that the content of ceremonies is relevant and useful for employers. This should increase employers’ involvement in Apprenticeships.
- Invite dignitaries to support events, and guest speakers who are both inspirational and have direct experience of Apprenticeships and business.
- Work in partnership with universities to share their expertise and make use of their graduation venues; this will help to give the events the same prestige as university graduation ceremonies.
- Appoint apprentices and employers who will act as ambassadors to promote the ceremonies and Apprenticeships to a wider market.
- Deploy apprentices to help with the planning of ceremonies and their management on the day.
- Exploit social media as fully as possible to promote the events. Also link media promotion, for example, write an article for a local newspaper and also advertise it on Twitter and other social media channels.
- Gather a library of resource - photos, videos, radio interviews, newspaper articles etc - for promoting the ceremonies and at the ceremonies themselves. These resources can be used in future to support sponsorship negotiations and to promote Apprenticeships in schools and colleges. They can also be used when marketing future events.
- Present awards during ceremonies - for apprentices, employers and any other relevant parties - using a public nomination process if possible. The awards can help to publicise events to a wide audience in advance of, and immediately after the ceremonies. Celebrating success in this way could act as an incentive for others to engage in future events. To further enhance its profile, consider linking the awards to a national award scheme.
- Issue all graduates with clear instructions to enable them to enjoy their special day. Support them if necessary with transportation, reimbursement of costs etc.
- Ensure that the main reason for holding ceremonies is to celebrate the achievements of apprentices.
Sustainability

All but three of the projects from phase 3 will be running a graduation ceremony for apprentices in the next year, and they plan to incorporate what they have learnt from their recent experiences. The three projects that were unsure about planning future events expressed concerns over funding for the events and the need for more involvement from partners before committing themselves. One project was doubtful about holding future ceremonies as their region already has several strategies to promote vocational learning and Apprenticeships. Another project is considering incorporating the lessons learnt from their graduation ceremony into a county-wide skills awards ceremony.

The majority of projects do plan to arrange ceremonies in future and where there are financial concerns, there are plans to arrange events on a smaller scale. Many projects believe future ceremonies will be easier to promote because they now have templates and resources (including case studies, videos, radio interviews, photos and YouTube clips) that can be used for advertising. In addition, many projects have started building relationships with potential key stakeholders and these can be nurtured to encourage the support of a wider-reaching community. Relationships that have been established with SMEs previously not engaged in Apprenticeships are starting to deliver results, so apprentice numbers should grow with future events.

Some projects already have plans in place for future ceremonies:

- City College Plymouth’s training providers have already agreed to commit financially to a graduation ceremony in 2016
- West Yorkshire Learning Providers’ stakeholders have a three-year development plan for Apprenticeship graduation ceremonies; the success of their inaugural event has led the group to believe that they should be able to increase the take up of Apprenticeships and stimulate sponsorship opportunities for future ceremonies
- Staffordshire County Council has had positive feedback that has resulted in the LEP Education Trust planning to support the event across the area.
Conclusion

The continuation of Apprenticeship graduation ceremonies is going to depend on the strength of local partnerships and the ability of projects to attract sufficient sponsorship. The partnerships would benefit from having more large Apprenticeship employers working with them; their involvement would help to raise the profile of the events making promotion easier and bringing in additional funding.

All apprentices and their guests who attended graduation ceremonies thought that they were a wonderful way to celebrate their achievements, and their enjoyment would have been shared with others who may also be considering the Apprenticeship route. This enthusiasm now needs to be encouraged to flourish by positive public relations from everyone who has been involved in the rollout to date.

Due to the novelty of the graduation ceremonies, people did not know what to expect. As a consequence, many of the partnerships found it to be a challenge to secure good attendance by apprentices. There is a lot more work to be done to get to the position where apprentices see the graduation ceremony as an integral part of their programme and a rite of passage. However, using the lessons learnt about project planning, marketing and engagement, arranging ceremonies in future should be more straightforward and less time consuming. It should also be easier to gain sponsorship now that projects have materials to back up their bids for financial support.

If the graduation ceremonies are going to be well supported, information about the events needs to be included in material used to promote Apprenticeships to both employers and young people. Ceremonies should also be mentioned during the Apprenticeship recruitment and induction process, and referred to throughout Apprenticeship programmes. To ensure that the ceremonies are well attended, it would be helpful if dates are published well in advance and events held at fixed points during the year.

To support the planning process, it is important that projects maintain accurate information about apprentices so that they are clear about how many will be graduating, know the best ways of contacting them to keep them informed about ceremonies and can issue invitations. For projects wanting to use SFA data in future, they should set up data-sharing agreements between partners, or ask all partners to send out their own invitations if this is likely to be more effective and efficient.

Although the Apprenticeship graduate ceremony programme encouraged innovation, the events were very similar in format and style. It is hoped that, over time, each region will develop a ceremony that is distinctive to their locality and the needs of Apprenticeship employers in their area. Some partnerships are likely to find that replicating university-style graduations is not going to be the most appropriate model and that holding events in less traditional venues will work better for them. As Apprenticeships are roll-on roll-off programmes, it might be more appropriate to hold a number of small celebratory events throughout the year more closely aligned to apprentices’ completion dates. To ensure the success of future ceremonies, partnerships should, therefore, consider carrying out some research into the way employers and apprentices would prefer to celebrate Apprenticeship achievements.
Bedford Apprenticeships Graduation Ceremony - Bedford College

The event was divided into two: a day event and evening event. The day event was designed to attract and encourage students to consider Apprenticeships by introducing them to employers and training providers, and giving them information about Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship vacancies. The event included presentations from an existing Apprenticeship Ambassador for Bedford, and Bedford College’s Head of Apprenticeships. Due to concerns about a possible shortfall in numbers, the day event was attended by individuals in addition to students attending with their schools. However, on the day, schools brought more students than originally planned. The evening event was the graduation ceremony and included speeches from the local Mayor and a guest speaker, and performances during the interval. Apprentices collected their certificates on the stage and the evening ended with the presentation of ‘Outstanding Apprentice’ and ‘Outstanding Employer of the Year’ awards.

Hampshire and Surrey Graduation Ceremony - ALPS Partnership Limited

The event was held in Guildford Cathedral. The apprentices were all gowned, which helped to give a sense of occasion. In fact, many of the apprentices had not pre-booked gowns, but decided to wear them on the day. An official photographer took photos and each apprentice was awarded with a medal. There were speeches from an employer and an Advanced Apprenticeship graduate, and other guest speakers included the Deputy Leader of Surrey County Council and the Chief Executive Officer of Surrey Chambers of Commerce. After the ceremony, the apprentices and their guests attended a drinks reception.

Croydon Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony - Croydon Council

The ceremony was an evening event for recent Intermediate and Advanced Apprenticeship graduates. They were joined by their parents, friends, employers and other organisations involved in Apprenticeships. Special guests included the Council's Cabinet Member for Economic Development, the Chief Executive of Fairfield Halls, the Chief Executive Officer of Be Employed UK and a representative from the SFA. Certificates were presented to the graduates, and awards were given to the winner and runners-up of the ‘Best Apprenticeship Competition’. A ‘World of Work’ exhibition was held simultaneously with five exhibitors; this was designed to engage and inform guests about Apprenticeship training and related opportunities.

Derbyshire Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony - Derby College

The event began with a networking lunch for employers and providers - this was an opportunity to establish new working relationships. The lunch was followed by a market for employers to meet with Apprenticeship providers, discuss offers and explore future opportunities. The market included an employers’ event where the LEP, SFA and two employers presented their perspectives on the value and future of Apprenticeships. A traditional university-style (cap-and-gown) graduation ceremony followed in the main roundhouse, and an award was given to an ‘Apprenticeship Champion’. The event was used as an opportunity to showcase videos about Apprenticeships and included talks from apprentices and Apprenticeship Ambassadors.

Gradu8 2015 Graduation Ceremony - Dorset and Somerset Training Provider Network

Two events were delivered for the region, each commencing with a cream tea reception for graduates, guests and invited employers, and an Apprenticeship information session specifically designed for employers. Over 100 Advanced and Higher Apprenticeship graduates were recognised during the two events. Apprentice graduates were presented with Gradu8 2015 insignias and commemorative badges. Keynote speakers, hosts and representatives from business and sport supported the two events. Each ceremony was photographed and filmed for post-event Apprenticeship promotion to employer groups, young people and schools.
Nottinghamshire Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony - EMFEC

The event was held at The Albert Hall, Nottingham and started with robing, photos and light refreshments, followed by the ceremony. Speakers included a Nottingham City Council Executive Member for Jobs and Growth, and a video was shown from Jade Etherington, Britain’s most decorated Winter Paralympian. Jade and the Chief Executive of EMFEC Group presented certificates to all the apprentices. After the ceremony, VIP guests (college principals, training provider chief executives, an MP, councillors etc) attended a buffet lunch, and were given presentations about different aspects of Apprenticeships by a range of guest speakers.

Leicester Apprenticeship Hub Graduation 2015 - Leicester City Council

The ceremony was hosted at De Montfort Hall with the aim of highlighting that Higher Apprenticeships lead to university-level qualifications. The event was based on a traditional graduation ceremony and guest speakers included the City Mayor, the Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Leicestershire, a former star from the BBC's The Apprentice, and the Chief Executive of IBM Services Centre UK Ltd. Awards were presented for ‘Apprentice of the Year’, ‘Large Employer of the Year’, ‘International Employer of the Year’ and ‘Apprenticeship Ambassador’, in addition to a special award for Tamara Herbert as part of the Women in Construction project. The event included a performance by dramatic arts students from Leicester College. Following the ceremony, apprentices and guests were invited to enjoy a drink and to take photos in the De Montfort Hall bar and gardens. Afterwards, local employers, training providers and stakeholders attended the Leicester LEP ‘Upskill Your Business’ event for a buffet reception and presentations on the value of Apprenticeships to businesses.

MyApprenticeship Graduation 2015 - Myerscough College

A lot of preparatory activities went into this event, including regular local radio announcements about the ceremony and the production of nine videos (made with apprentices and their employers), which were played during the event. The ceremony was compered by presenters from Radio Wave. The North West Regional Director from AoC provided introductions to the ceremony and presented scrolls to all the apprentices. Sponsors were also invited to present awards to award winners, and photos were taken of apprentices and their guests.

Apprenticeship Graduation - Norfolk County Council

The build-up to the ceremonies included live interviews with a Higher Apprenticeship graduate and their employer before the event. Interviews with several apprentices and employers were also broadcast during each ceremony. Three events were held in Norwich and one in King’s Lynn. All the ceremonies followed the same format with guest speakers providing introductions followed by presentations of achievement scrolls. A presentation and video of case studies were shown throughout all the ceremonies. After the events, advisers with resources were available to answer Apprenticeship enquiries, and there were networking opportunities, photos and light refreshments.

Plymouth Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony - City College Plymouth

A formal graduation ceremony was held on Plymouth Hoe for apprentices from the eight training providers that form the Plymouth Apprenticeship Graduation Consortium, all of which were involved in the planning of the event. The ceremony included a procession and speeches from local dignitaries. A master of ceremonies provided the welcome and introduction to the ceremony, and an Advanced Apprenticeship graduate gave a vote of thanks.

STARS (Scarborough’s Talented Apprentices Recognised with Success) - Scarborough Jobmatch

Before the event, an advert was placed in the local press, and press releases were included in newspapers and on the radio to promote a process for businesses and training providers to nominate their apprentices for awards. Social media Tweets and Facebook posts also helped to promote the ceremony. The event was a black-tie awards ceremony to celebrate the outstanding achievements of local apprentices and businesses within their industry.
sectors. There was a press release in the *Scarborough News* after the event, including a photo feed on their website.

**Higher and Advanced Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony - Skills CFA**

The Skills CFA graduation ceremony was held at Central Hall, Westminster with guest speakers from the BBC and the London Assembly. The event was filmed by the BBC and footage will be used as promotional material for future ceremonies. The event was open to all Advanced and Higher Apprenticeship graduates who had completed a ‘business skills’ Apprenticeship within the London and Greater London region. It aimed to recognise and celebrate the success of as many graduate apprentices as possible. Awards were presented during the event - these included awards for ‘Overall Apprentice of the Year’, ‘Outstanding Apprentice Employer of the Year’, ‘Business Advanced Apprentice of the Year’, ‘Business Higher Apprentice of the Year’, ‘Business Apprentice Employer of the Year’ and ‘Business Apprenticeship Training Provider of the Year’. There were four more awards than originally planned because additional sponsorship funding was forthcoming.

**Stoke and Staffordshire Apprenticeship Graduation - Staffordshire County Council**

The event included three guest speakers and a presentation of scrolls to the apprentices. A film was made showing some apprentices in the workplace and then receiving their scrolls at the ceremony itself. This film will be used for career information, advice and guidance in schools, for general Apprenticeship publicity, and to help plan the ceremony next year. After the event there was afternoon tea and photo opportunities for the attendees.

**South Devon College Apprenticeship Graduation and Awards Ceremony - South Devon College**

The ceremony was arranged for apprentices who had successfully completed Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships during the academic year 2013/14, their families, employers, and other stakeholders including businesses, regional VIPs and dignitaries. The ceremony also recognised high-flying apprentices - those judged to be the best in their respective frameworks. Local employers that were not involved in the awards ceremony were invited to the same venue on the same day to attend an economic growth seminar, where a series of guest speakers discussed strategies for growth, including their experiences with apprentices. The project generated promotional materials for the future, including 20 short videos that showcase high-achieving apprentices.

**Apprenticeships Graduation Event - Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council**

The event included the Chair of the Greater Manchester’s LEP as keynote speaker, in addition to the Mayor of Stockport. The leader of Stockport Council presented the awards and other local dignitaries attended. Photos were taken of graduates with their certificates and wearing caps and gowns; these were provided free to download in exchange for donations to the Mayor’s Charity. The afternoon included music provided by an apprentice and students from a local college.

**Hillingdon Apprenticeship Graduation 2015 - Uxbridge College**

The event was held at Brunel University London. It was the first of its kind in Hillingdon and it recognised the achievements of apprentices living or working in the borough. Apprentices were presented with certificates by The Worshipful the Mayor of Hillingdon. Boris Johnson (the Mayor of London) and Uxbridge and South Ruislip MP recorded a personal video message congratulating the graduates, which was broadcast during the ceremony.

**Greater Lincolnshire Apprentice Celebration Event - WBLA (Work Based Learning Alliance)**

The event was held at the Engine Shed in Lincoln and was attended by apprentices, their families, employers and training providers. The Lord Mayor of Lincoln and Lady Mayoress, the Chief Sheriff of Lincoln and his Lady, a local MP, the Deputy Leader of Lincolnshire County Council and the local Apprenticeship Ambassador presented certificates, lapel badges and celebration scrolls to the apprentices.

**Inspiring Apprentices in West Yorkshire - West Yorkshire Learning Providers**

A pre-event employer forum was held to engage employers that did not employ apprentices. Both Apprenticeship and non-Apprenticeship employers attended to hear about the business
benefits of Apprenticeships and how they can become involved if they were not already. The graduation ceremony followed; this was held at Leeds Town Hall. Dignitaries including the Lord Mayor of Leeds and the Lord Mayor and Mayoress of Bradford attended. The Mayor and Mayoress of Kirklees awarded graduation certificates to apprentices. Guest speakers also delivered presentations. To celebrate achievements, caps and gowns were offered to Advanced and Higher Apprenticeship graduates for portrait photos; this helped to raise the esteem of Apprenticeships.

York Apprenticeship Graduation and Awards Ceremony - City of York Council (York Apprenticeship Hub)

This project participated in all three phases. In 2015, a number of Apprenticeship awards were introduced for the first time, for example ‘Small Employer of the Year’, ‘Large Employer of the Year’, ‘Apprentice of the Year Aged 16-24’ and ‘Apprentice of the Year Aged 25+'. All shortlisted nominees were invited to a VIP reception immediately prior to the ceremony to meet with The Guilds (the sponsor), to network with other apprentices, employers and training providers, and to sow the seed of recruiting them as Apprenticeship champions. Now in its fourth year, this formal graduation celebrated apprentices who successfully completed their Apprenticeships between August 2013 and October 2014 in York and the immediate surrounding areas. In order to be inclusive, the graduation was open to apprentices of all levels and all ages.