Bringing together 33 local arts and cultural sector employers into a consortium to create 80 Creative Employment Programme funded apprenticeships and paid internships, Suffolk County Council have been able to address youth unemployment and diversify the area’s creative workforce.

Aims and objectives

Jayne Knight, Arts Development Manager at Suffolk County Council, led the initiative and wanted to address some key strategic objectives:

“Suffolk has high youth unemployment and poor attainment at GCSE and A levels. We applied to the CEP because we wanted to play a role in reducing unemployment and further develop the capacity of our creative businesses and the local skills base.”

Key facts

- Funding: £197k to create 47 internships and 33 apprenticeships
- All consortium members are small to medium enterprises with less than 100 employees. Some are sole traders
- Located in Suffolk, East of England
- Art form: Multi-disciplinary

Building up a consortium

The council worked very closely with Christina Birt, Creative & Cultural Skills’ Ambassador for the East of England, to engage employers. The network included sole traders and micro-businesses alongside some of the bigger employers such as the New Wolsey Theatre and Aldeburgh Music, enabling smaller businesses to benefit from the consortium’s collaborative approach and shared resources.
Suffolk County Council invests in the majority of the larger organisations so could encourage engagement in the scheme through their funding relationship. Tackling skills and youth unemployment is a priority for the council, so they were also able to secure some additional funds to support the administration of the scheme and recruitment process.

Once the CEP grant was secured the council contracted Christina to explore the best training provision for the apprentices and interns, and Christina was able to negotiate a package with North Hertfordshire College.

The council also brought in Suffolk Artlink, an arts organisation who specialise in working with vulnerable people, to build links with Job Centre Plus.

Bringing in new skills

Christina told us: “Our employers were delighted to have the opportunity to ‘do their bit’ to tackle youth unemployment. We could see that our sector could make a real difference to unemployment figures in Suffolk, and we managed to build up a real momentum around addressing this issue.

“We had very positive discussions about the role of young people in organisations, thinking more about what a young person could do for us rather than what we could do for a young person.

“Social media skills were at the top of many of the employers needs and we were confident that young people could bring some great working knowledge and skills.”

Impact of the CEP

Jayne told us: “The funding meant that we could ask busy employers to take a calculated risk of investing time, and some cash, in building the sector’s workforce.

“While the bigger organisations have been able to allocate funds to support apprenticeships, smaller organisations with limited funds could see that if they recruited someone who had been unemployed for 26 weeks or more they could attract Youth Contract funding, and in that way they could offer a paid internship at a low cost.

“Young people who have been unemployed for six months or longer often need more nurturing to enable them to flourish, so employers that want to take advantage of the Youth Contract need to think carefully about the level of support they are able to provide.

“We managed to create a domino effect and build up a real momentum around addressing this issue”
“Suffolk Artlink and Christina Birt have ensured that we have been able to maintain a high quality approach to all aspects of the scheme and investing in these specialist skills has been crucial for successful delivery.

“In the long term I am convinced that the project will generate a shift in the employment practises of our local sector and will enable us to build new relationships with Further Education providers and Job Centre Plus”.

“My internship is giving me a great learning opportunity and as a result I am now on a path that could lead me to the person I want to become.”
– Jordan Peck, Intern at New Worsley Theatre

Creative & Cultural Skills gives young people opportunities to work and learn in the creative industries. We want to ensure that employers benefit from a skilled generation of talent and continue on a course of economic growth.

Our network of industry and education supporters – the National Skills academy for Creative & Cultural – is open to those who are committed to the provision of high quality creative education and training, apprenticeships and careers advice.

Together we’ve created over 3,500 Creative Apprenticeships in the UK since 2008. Creative & Cultural Skills is the National Provider for the Creative Employment Programme.

Visit www.ccskills.org.uk for more information.

The Creative Employment Programme is a £15m fund provided by Arts Council England to support the creation of traineeships, formal apprenticeship and paid internship opportunities in England for young unemployed people aged 16-24 wishing to pursue a career in the arts and cultural sector.

Positions created will be in a wide range of disciplines, from technical to administrative roles, provided they are located in England and fall within the Arts Council England’s footprint of: Music, Dance, Theatre, Literature, Visual Arts, Contemporary Craft, Combined Arts, Carnival, Circus, Galleries, Museums, and Libraries.

Visit www.creative-employment.co.uk for more information.