

## **LEP column for Commerce Cornwall – publication 17-18 Feb 2016**

By Sandra Rothwell

Unemployment in Cornwall at its lowest level for eight years and the number of claimants fell in the last year from 1.4% to 1%, pointing to an ongoing improvement in the labour market.

But welcome as these figures are, they mask the fact that far too many jobs are still low waged and low skilled, with average earnings in Cornwall just 77% of the national average in 2015, at £17,340 compared to £22,487.

Rather than unemployment being the issue, we need to focus on under-employment so that we improve the quality of jobs on offer and the skills of the workforce needed to fill them.

But that's easier said than done because time and again businesses tell me that they simply can't fill the vacancies they have because they can't find people with the right skills.

Bridging that gap is a key focus of Cornwall's Devolution Deal that was signed with the Government last summer. It gives the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) increased control over employment and skills funding in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly so that the needs of business are better met.

In order to understand current provision of post-16 training and education and where the gaps are, there will be a major review in Cornwall and Devon later this year. The LEP's role will be to make sure that the voice of business features prominently in that review so that future provision really is demand-led.

The Devolution Deal also empowers the LEP to forge much closer links between businesses and schools, and improve careers advice for young people so that they are aware of the options available to them. An excellent example of this is the work of Software Cornwall, where software businesses have come together to promote programming and technology through code clubs in schools, Tech Jams and work experience placements.

And apprenticeships are a key focus. We are determined that young people see apprenticeships as a high quality and prestigious path to a successful career, and to put employers in the driving seat so they get the skills they need - but more on that next month!

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