



Department  
for Education

# “EarlyConnect”

## DfE / UCAS collaboration for Apprenticeships

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Lancashire Skills & Employment Board  
28 September 2023

# Background / Context

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In 2022, DfE began a programme of work – the Apprenticeships Young People Strategy – **to increase apprenticeship starts by young people**. Analysis of DfE data led us to conclude that driving starts at age 18-19 had the greatest potential impact:

- Apprenticeship starts 2021-22 at age 18 fell 21% since 2018-19, nearly twice as much as age 16-17 starts, while age 19-24 starts saw only marginal decline.
- 29% of 18 year olds move into employment without training or end up NEET - we should seek to move these onto apprenticeships.
- 36% move into HE and 18% into FE: some of these will embark on low-value HE/FE courses and there is scope to divert these onto apprenticeships.

At the same time, we realised that UCAS also had plans to improve their apprenticeships offer, and we carried out a joint research project to understand the potential for a collaboration in the apprenticeships space (with UCAS as a key stakeholder for the year 13 cohort). The outcome indicated plenty of scope for a collaboration to deliver real benefits to our users (employers, providers, apprentices) and to raise the prestige of the apprenticeships programme.

In February 2023, initial plans for this collaboration were [announced by the Education Secretary and UCAS](#). We have since established joint workstreams and joint governance arrangements with UCAS to take this project forward.

# Background / Context

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## Project aims and objectives:

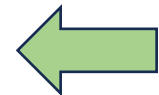
- The overall project aim is to increase the number of apprenticeship starts from the year 13 cohort
- The project will therefore be aimed at all school and college leavers in their final year of full-time education – 18 years olds seeking apprenticeships at all levels.
  - We want to inspire students, their schools, parents and influencers to consider apprenticeships as a viable and credible next step, alongside higher education.
  - We want to bring apprenticeships closer to young people still in education – connecting young people in schools and colleges with employers and providers at the time when they are considering their future options.
  - We want to provide employers with early access to fresh top talent.
  - We want to provide wraparound support to students to successfully secure an apprenticeship – keeping the interest of those who might not have been successful
- We are planning a pilot for this project to start 1 October (2023) for one year until 30 September 2024, followed by an evaluation period. The pilot will take place in partnership with three local regions: the North East, Lancashire and Greater London.

# Scope / Why work with UCAS?

## EarlyConnect is focused on one cohort in one area of skills

A successful pilot and a proven data driven supply and demand could be replicated across other cohorts, but would not include the specifics for young people, advertising early and aligning to academic timeline. We are focusing on this specific cohort now for EarlyConnect, but we have the option later to expand into other cohorts with other partners.

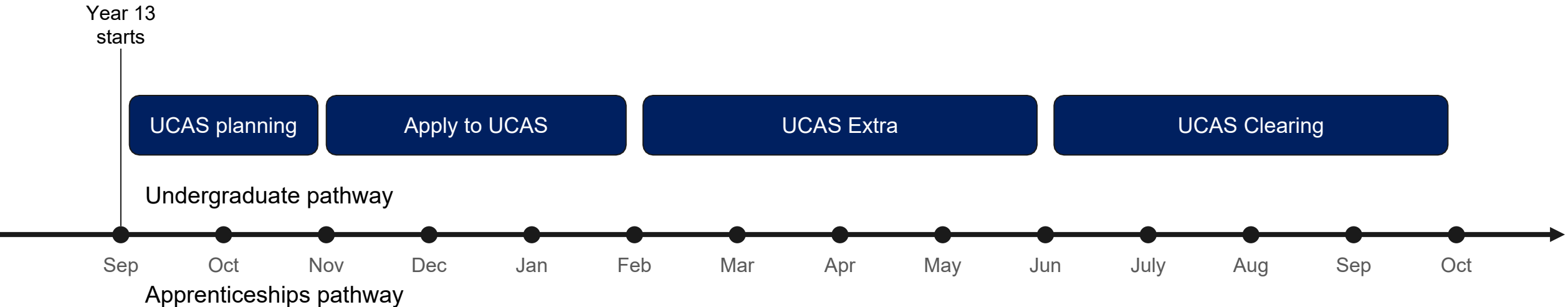
	Y11 leavers	Y13 / 18 yo college leavers	19-25	Over 25s unemployed	All ages Social disadvantaged
A levels					
T levels		UCAS – ambition – <b>not in scope for project</b>			
Higher Education		UCAS – current - <b>not in scope for project</b>	UCAS –current - <b>not in scope for project</b>		
Apprenticeships	AS	UCAS/AS - Early connect – <b>scope of project</b>	AS	AS	AS
Graduate employment		UCAS- current - <b>not in scope for project</b>			
Technical courses		UCAS- ambition - <b>not in scope for project</b>			
Bootcamp		UCAS –ambition - <b>not in scope for project</b>			



# Why work with UCAS

## Today

NOTE: The timeline here shows UCAS events to highlight key moments in the Y13 academic calendar. But we are interested in **offering apprenticeships at all levels, to all students** — not just those considering university.



YP look for apps at the same time they consider their next step.

But there's low availability most employers don't advertise in advance.

So they either wait, or apply to uni instead.

Time passes...

Then, we either lose them to uni

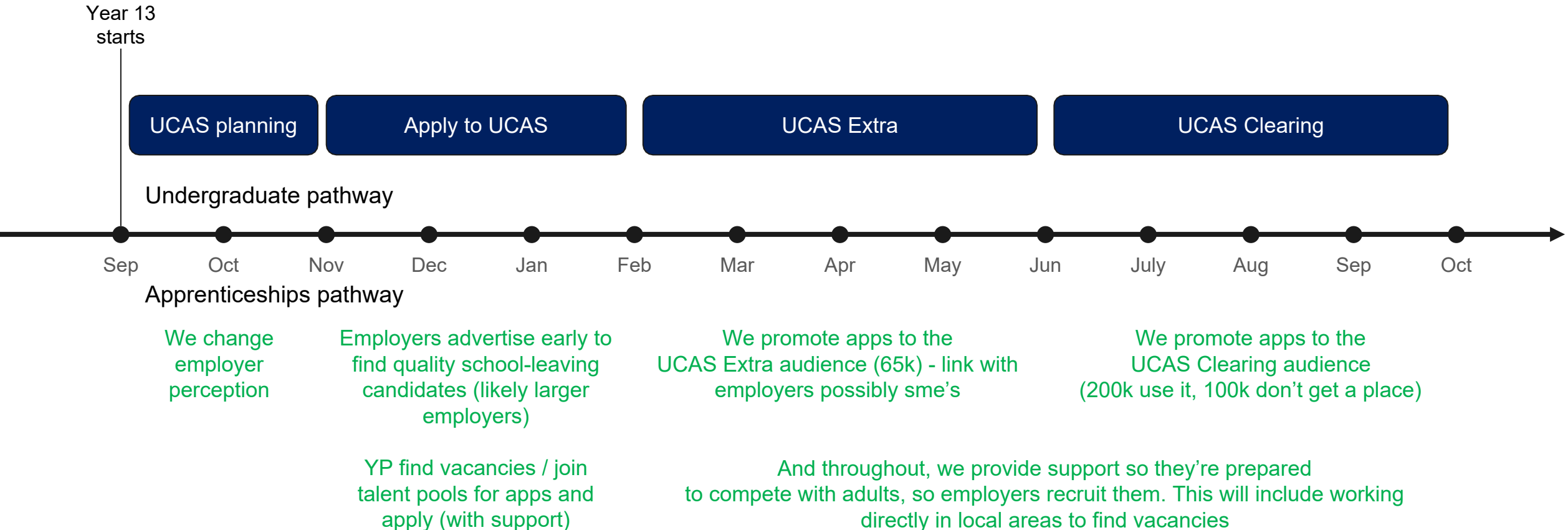
Or they don't get into uni and we lose them to something else.

Or they choose to apply for apps, but they're not prepared enough to compete with adults, so employers don't recruit them.

# Why work with UCAS

## Future

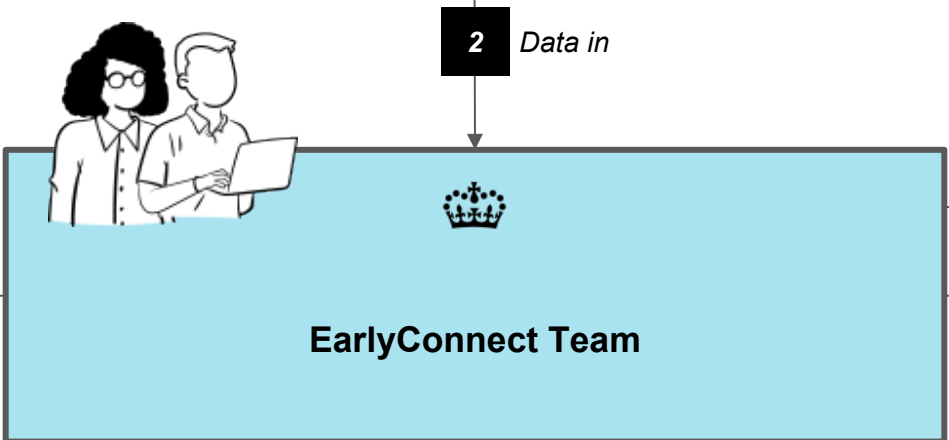
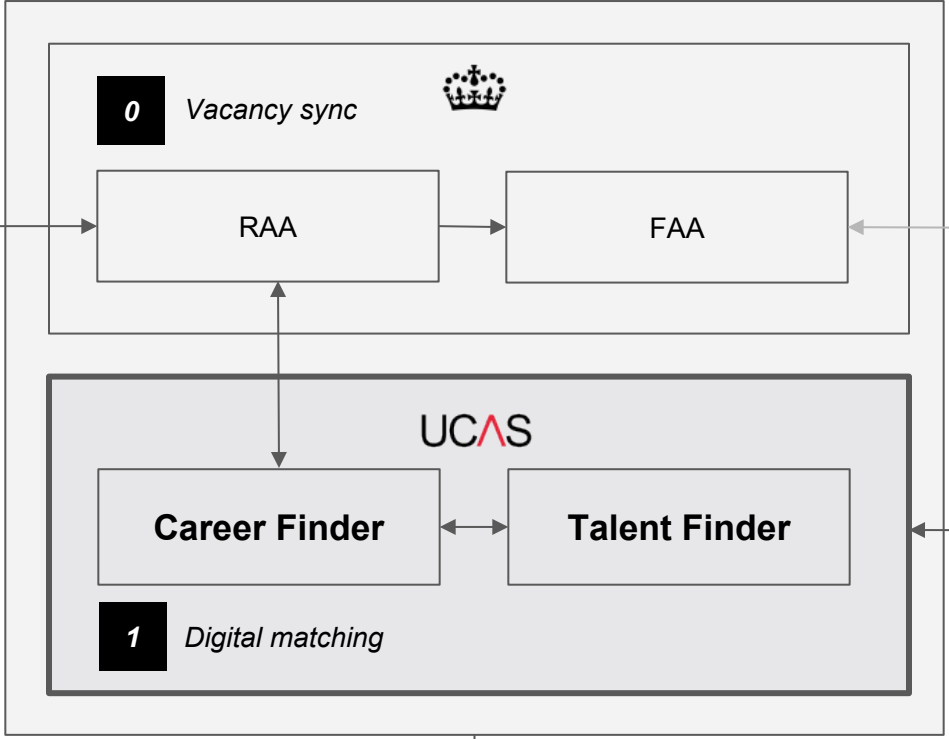
NOTE: The timeline here shows UCAS events to highlight key moments in the academic calendar for 6th form leavers. But we are interested in **offering apprenticeships at all levels, to all students** — not just those considering university.



NOTE: The timeline uses UCAS events to highlight key moments in the Y13 calendar. But we are interested in **offering apps at all levels, to all students** — not just those considering university.

# Service Design

- 0/ VACANCY SYNC  
AS and UCAS will sync all vacancies across both services.
- 1/ DIGITAL VACANCY SERVICE  
UCAS provide personalised vacancy search and recommendations in CareerFinder and Talent Finder.
- 2/ DATA IN  
We'll use data from sources across AS and UCAS to produce data reports to share with local networks, which will drive...
- 3/ VACANCY GENERATION  
Targeted employer engagement to ensure we generate vacancies in the areas where student interest is high.
- 4/ TALENT GENERATION  
Targeted school/college engagement to ensure we generate interest in the areas where unmet vacancies are high.
- 5/ LOCAL SUPPORT  
The local networks service would also provide support to young people throughout the process.



# Vacancies shared from GOV.UK to UCAS

**GOV.UK** Find an apprenticeship [Sign in / Create account](#)

## Search results

We've found **3** apprenticeships in your selected area.

[Receive alerts for this search](#)

**Edit search** [More/less detail](#) **Sort results** Best match

**Keywords (optional)**  
- Refine search -  
engineering

**Your location**  
NN1 4QP  
[Use current location](#)

**Within**  
5 miles

**Apprenticeship level**  
All levels


**Only show**  
 Disability Confident

**Update results**

**Apprentice Production Administrator**  
ARNOLD ENGINEERING PLASTICS LTD  
(Added 13 Apr 2023 - 1 position available)

As the company has grown into Aerospace and Formula one Industries, we have seen an increase in our demands for office administration hence our vacancy for this new role. This role is an excellent opportunity to develop your administration skills being involved with inventory management and sales administration.

**Distance:** 1.8 miles [Journey time](#)  
**Closing date:** 22 Sep 2023  
**Possible start date:** 26 Sep 2023



[Open map](#)

**Apprentice Maintenance Engineer**  
SUTCH LIFTING EQUIPMENT LTD  
(Added 7 days ago - 1 position available)

We are one of the countries leading independent lifting equipment




**UCAS** Discover Undergraduate Postgraduate Apprenticeships [Sign in](#)

## Search

Apprenticeship vacancies

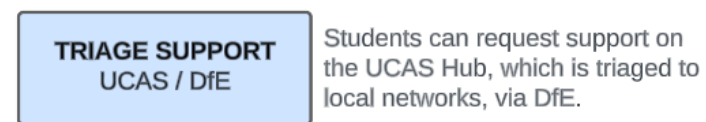
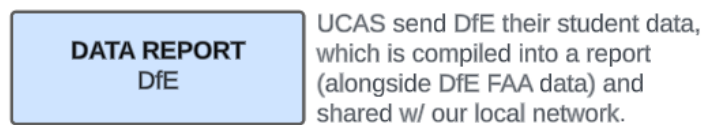
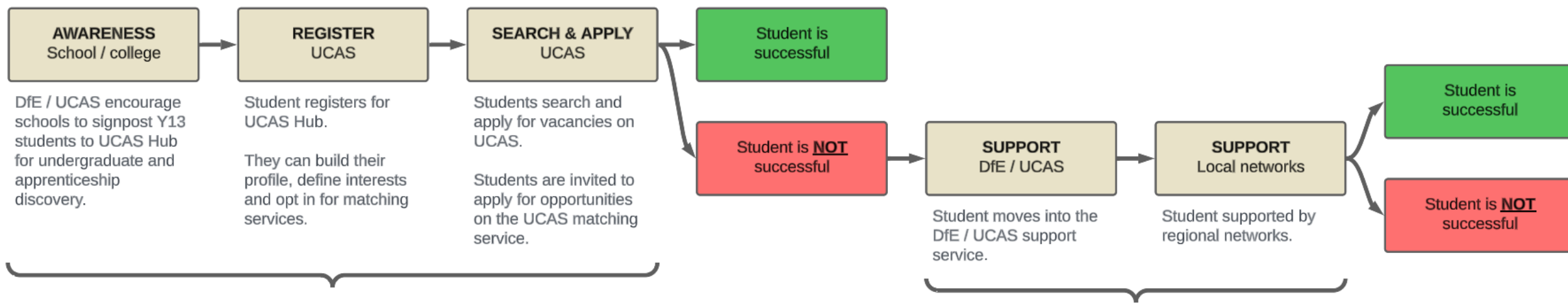
apprentice production administrator

You're currently viewing our BETA product, [click here to see more vacancies](#)

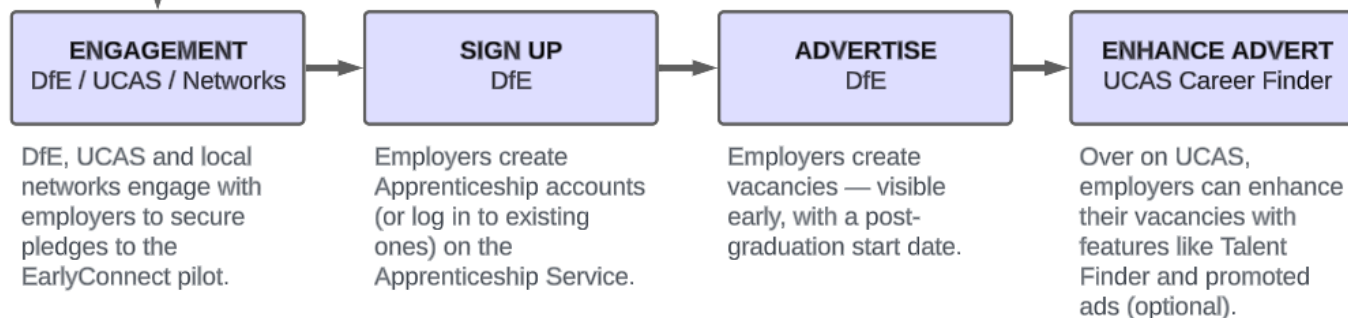
		
<b>Apprentice Production Administrator</b> ARNOLD ENGINEERING PLASTICS LTD Northampton	<b>Production Administration Apprentice</b> PLASTICA LTD ST LEONARDS ON SEA	<b>Production Apprentice</b> CARGILL PLC Manchester
Apprenticeship level: England - Advanced Salary: £12,012.00	Apprenticeship level: England - Advanced Salary: £14,994.20	Apprenticeship level: England - Advanced Salary: £15,471.00



## STUDENTS



## EMPLOYERS



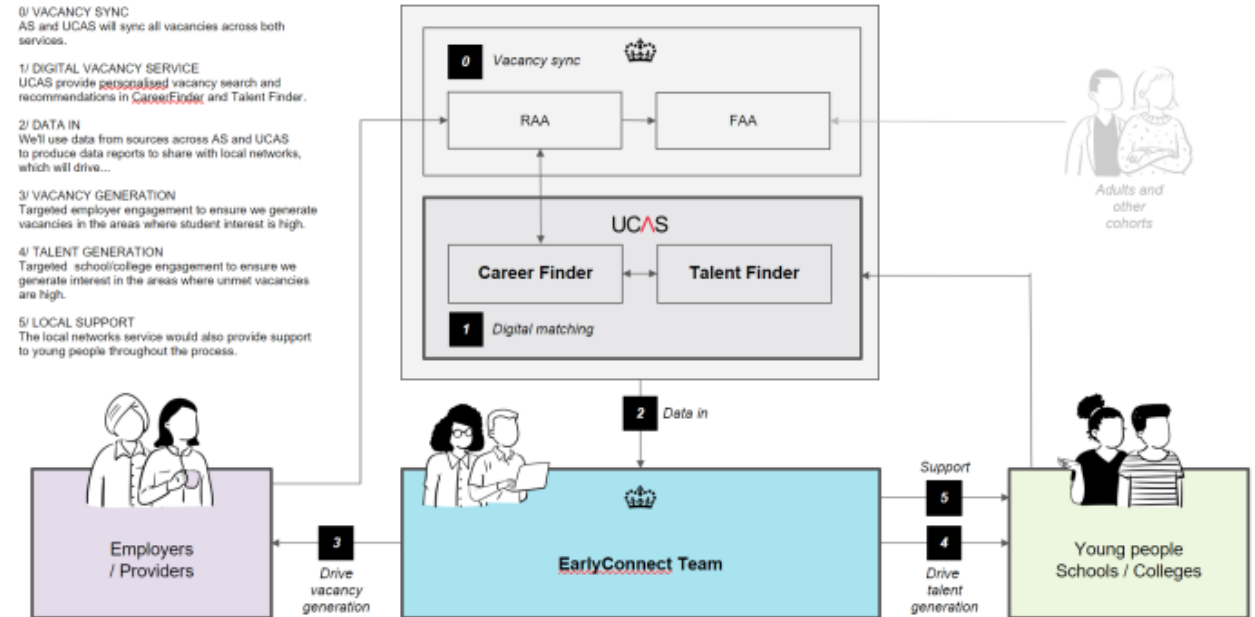
# What are we piloting?

There are components within this diagram which whilst new, will be launched nationally. These are:

- RAA enhancements (DfE)
- Career Finder improvements (UCAS)

The components which we will be piloting are:

- Signposting all students to UCAS.com
- Talent Finder (UCAS)
- Data transfer (between UCAS and DfE)
- Digital student support (across UCAS)
- Wraparound student support (DfE)
- Proactive employer engagement to change recruitment behaviour
- Young people / schools / colleges / providers engagement
- Data-driven local support (using regional networks)



**The key success metric is number of starts baseline per region (avg. of previous 2 years + pre-covid year) vs number of starts in pilot year for this age cohort.**

*How we intend measure the impact of the pilot throughout the academic year is included in this pack.*

# Why are we piloting?

There are various reasons why we have chosen to pilot the new capability (instead of a national roll out), which include:

1) Outputs from the discovery showed that fewer young people are starting apprenticeships because:

- Employers are reluctant / not inspired to take on young people
- Employers don't actively recruit for school leavers

Vacancy generation and employer behaviour change is critical to the success of this programme. Generating more vacancies nationally would involve significant investment and programme change. Instead, we will pilot different ways to generate vacancies through this pilot (see employer engagement plan).

2) The capability being produced at this stage will be a "MVP/MVS" therefore likely that there will need to be limited functionality and workarounds in place during the 2023/24 academic year. Piloting the MVS will help us to manage the messaging around the capability, but also use the user insight to improve the MVS.

3) Working with LEPs using a data led 'supply and demand' model is new to both DfE/UCAS and the LEPs. The pilot will enable us to understand what is the most effective approach to supporting employers and students to create apprenticeship starts.

## Through the pilot we aim to learn:

- How we can harness demand for apprenticeships from young people to drive demand from employers, thereby creating a more dynamic local marketplace, increasing choice for employers and opportunities for young people.
- The best ways we might support candidates to succeed in securing an apprenticeship.
- **Whether the interventions we have put into place result in an increased number of starts for this cohort – 18 year olds leaving school and colleges.**

# Approach to employer engagement (pilot regions)

The project's top challenge is to influence employers to consider young people for their apprenticeships, drive up apprenticeship vacancies and change employers' recruitment patterns to advertise early so that students see the opportunities at the same time as they would be applying for university degrees.

The approach to engaging employers within the pilot regions is outlined below:

Approach to employer engagement	How success will be measured:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Direct engagement with employers within local network areas</li><li>- List of 50 key employers to directly engage with for MVS areas based on previous start date of more than 10+ recruits, aged under 19 at all levels</li><li>- Top 50 SMEs employers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• % and Number of employers engaged and supportive of pilot</li><li>• Number of vacancies pledged to be available for pilot areas</li><li>• Number of vacancies posted in pilot areas on RAA</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outbound campaign targeting AS register employers including SMEs within local network areas</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of employers engaged and supportive of pilot</li><li>• Number of vacancies pledged to be available for pilot areas</li><li>• Number of vacancies posted in pilot areas</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local engagement via local network's employer and provider network</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Number of vacancies generated in response to supply of talent.</li></ul>

# Approach to school and college engagement (pilot regions)

Approach		Timelines
<b>Establish 'focus groups' in MVS areas</b>	Focus groups will be managed by Amazing Apprenticeships. Their purpose is to get 'on the ground' feedback as to how messages regarding the project are landing and support the shaping of the delivery for national roll out (post-pilot).	26/27/28 June 2023 – first focus groups
<b>Invite DfE, CEC and UCAS advisor school contacts to webinars</b>	An invite will be sent to all contacts in the pilot area schools about the project, inviting them to find out more.	Before schools break up
<b>Host webinars for schools</b>	Webinars will be held to launch the project and support the upskilling on what has changed. The webinars will be broadcasted from UCAS's offices	September 2023
<b>Training of UCAS advisors / helpdesks / ASK delivery partners</b>	Develop materials for the training and launch the training from September 2023 in the MVS regions and in the 2 helpdesks (UCAS and DfE).	September 2023 onwards
<b>Track impact</b>	Careers Enterprise Company troubleshooting & school engagement. Feedback and engagement through focus groups Track	

**Thank you! Any questions?**

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