**Employee Guide to the Alternative Employment Programme**

The Alternative Employment Programme (AEP) is a redeployment programme for Cumbria County Council employees who are no longer able to continue in their existing role and who meet the eligibility criteria for the programme.

**Alternative Employment Programme Eligibility Criteria**

You can join the AEP if:

* You become pregnant and cannot continue in your current post; or your post is declared redundant during maternity leave
* Through ill-health or disability, you cannot continue in your current post or where another post could be more suitable due to your disability with a reasonable adjustment
* You have been identified as at risk of redundancy through reorganisation or restructuring; or are at the end of a fixed term contract with at least one year’s continuous service by the date employment is due to terminate
* Reasons connected with discipline, grievance or capability
* Apprenticeship is coming to an end

For whatever reason you find yourself on the AEP you are likely to have a number of reactions to this or feelings about it, all of which are perfectly natural.

You may have been in your current job role for many years; your routine may revolve around the work environment. This change can be daunting.

Redundancy, in particular, can provide opportunities as well as problems although this may be difficult to see at first. We aim to provide you with the support you need through this period dependant on individual circumstances.

Although you are not able to continue in your present post it may be possible to redeploy you to another suitable post with the council through the AEP. The Council has a primary aim of ensuring we retain key skills, knowledge and experience within the workforce, where possible.

Expectations of you and what you can expect in return are included later in this document.

**How the Alternative Employment Programme works**

Once your line manager or directorate HR Manager has confirmed that you are seeking Alternative Employment within the council, you need to complete a preference form. We will use this to match you to suitable vacancies across the council.

You need to complete all sections of the preference form giving as much information as possible. Specific guidance on completing the preference form is included in Appendix One; a template Preference form is included in Appendix Two.

Once you have completed and submitted your preference form you (and any other people on the AEP) will be matched against any roles approved for recruitment before they go to open advert. If you are matched to a vacancy the HR service Centre (HRSC) team will give you the opportunity to complete and provide an application form demonstrating how you meet the role specification. You will need to submit the application form to the HRSC within 2 days of receiving the pack. They will then pass this onto the recruiting manager for shortlisting.

Specific guidance on completing the application form is included in Appendix Three; a template Application form is included in Appendix Four.

Recruiting managers will want to “see you in the role” as much as possible so this is an opportunity for you to show the manager why you are the best person for the job and the relevance to them of your transferrable skills, experience etc. Our Job Search Workshops (see below) will help you to be able to do this.

We ask the recruiting manger to shortlist within 2 days and to interview shortlisted candidates within 2 weeks. Please be aware that you must be interviewed and offered the post **before** your last date of employment. It is important therefore to inform the HRSC team if your leaving date changes.

The HRSC team are here to support you with any queries you may have about the Alternative Employment Programme. The team will guide and support you through all the stages including how to apply and job matching, through to interview and appointment. If you are unsure at any time please call the team on 01228 223333.

**Job Search Workshop**

To maximize your chances of being successfully redeployed into another role, you will be required to attend a Job Search workshop run by Learning and Development. This is designed for all employees on the AEP and will help you develop practical skills on the most effective ways to sell yourself to prospective employers by writing effective CVs; how to write cover letters; understanding the job market and preparing for interview. The skills from this programme can be useful in seeking new roles both within and outside the Council.

**Roles and responsibilities**

As an **employee on the Alternative Employment Programme** the council has a responsibility to look to find you suitable alternative employment where possible but there is still a responsibility for you to take ownership of your own career.

You are expected to:

* Be proactive at every stage of the process
* Complete your preference form
* Attend a place on the Job Search workshop – this 1 day course consistently receives excellent feedback
* Consider all suitable alternative positions you are matched to
* Respond promptly to emails from the HRSC team
* Provide the application form as necessary and within any deadline set
* Actively seek opportunities through the CCC Jobs and Careers website
* Consider reasonable changes in working arrangements, pay and responsibilities
* Prepare for interviews
* Keep the HRSC team up to date with any planned holidays etc. along with up to date contact details at work and at home.
* Understand the implications of refusing suitable alternative employment
* Be prepared to consider acceptance of alternative employment
* Inform the HRSC team as soon as you accept a post
* Inform the HRSC team of alternative contact details if you are away from the office for any length of time (e.g. due to sickness, maternity etc)

**The HRSC team** work hard to ensure recruiting managers and employees on the AEP receive an efficient service. They are committed to the Council’s priority of retaining our workforce wherever possible. They will:

* Aim to process AEP paperwork on the same working day as it is received. During busy periods this will be within 2 working days.
* Match candidates to vacancies using the information on the preference form
* Keep candidates informed of potential matches
* Support candidates at all stages of the AEP
* Liaise with candidates, managers and HR in a timely manner

**Line Managers of ‘at risk’ employees** are required to:

* Complete the Authorisation Form and forward to the HRSC team as soon as possible
* If required, support employees to complete their preference form
* Allow “at risk” employees to attend the Job Search Workshop
* Allow ‘at risk’ employees reasonable time to search for alternative employment and attend interviews
* Notify the HRSC team of any changes, for example if the employee is off work sick for a prolonged period of time.

**Recruiting Managers** have a responsibility to prioritise the employment of AEP candidates. They will be expected to:

* Consider matched candidates from the AEP ahead of other applicants
* Assess AEP candidates fairly against the profile and specification recognising transferable knowledge and skills
* Shortlist AEP candidates within 2 days of receiving shortlist from HRSC noting they only have to ‘reasonably meet’ the essential criteria
* Hold interviews as soon as possible, preferably within a week of shortlisting but in no longer than 2 weeks
* Accommodate a 4 week trial period – this is a statutory requirement
* Provide training and support to enable AEP candidates to develop in the new role
* Be prepared to provide feedback to any candidate who is unsuccessful at short-listing or following interview
* If a candidate is considered unsuitable for the post, written documentation must be provided to the HRSC setting out the reasons why

**FAQs**

**What can I do to improve my opportunities of finding alternative employment?**

Your opportunities for obtaining another job will partly depend on the effort you put into job search and job applications.  You can assist yourself by:

* Attending a Job Search Workshop
* Keeping up-to-date with advertised vacancies
* Being flexible over the job opportunities you consider
* Thinking broadly about the skills and abilities which you have (including those you may not be using in your current post) and the type of jobs which you could consider
* Discussing any possible opportunities with the HRSC team
* Ensuring you keep the HRSC team updated on any changes to your skill profile and preferences. For example, if the hours you can work changes, let them know
* Taking time to fully complete the AEP preference form
* Taking time to fully complete an application form for all roles you are matched to so that the recruiting manager can clearly see how your skills and experience meet the role specification
* Preparing thoroughly for any applications and interviews or discussions you may have

**When am I eligible to join the AEP?**You are eligible to join the AEP when you meet one of the eligibility criteria. Your line manager or Directorate HR will confirm when you are eligible to join the programme.

**Can I change my employee preference form if my situation changes?**

Yes. You must let the HRSC know if your personal circumstances change. This includes your ability to travel; work different hours; if you are going on maternity leave or if you are off work sick etc.

**How am I ‘matched’ against jobs?**

The HRSC team will match you against vacancies based upon the information you provided on your preference form. Therefore it is important that you add all relevant information where possible.

**Can I decline to be put forward for jobs at the matching stage?**

The HRSC team will contact you when you are matched to a vacancy. If you believe your skills and experience are not a reasonable match then you can decline to be put forward. We will ask you to provide a reason why you do not wish your application to be passed to the recruiting manager. You should be aware that if you are considered to be unreasonably turning down alternative employment opportunities you may forfeit your right to redundancy pay.

**Why do I have to complete an application for each job I’m matched against?**

‘Matching’ is carried out against the generic information you provided on the employee preference form. The application is your opportunity to demonstrate how you meet the role specification for a specific role. You should list each of the criteria on the role specification and detail against each item how you meet the requirements of the role. You may find it helpful to keep a standard version and adapt it accordingly for each role you are matched to.

**Do I get priority over other candidates?**

Yes, vacancies are offered to candidates on the AEP before they are advertised internally or externally.

**Do I have to meet all the essential requirements of a post?**

No, managers are looking for candidates who ‘reasonably’ meet the essential requirements of the post. They will consider if a trial period, reasonable additional training, coaching or mentoring could potentially help you to meet the essential requirements within a reasonable time period.

**Will my interview be competitive?**

If more than one AEP candidate is shortlisted then you will enter a competitive interview process with other AEP candidates.

**Will my interview be formal?**

The interviews will usually be made up of a panel. Their role is to assess if you can reasonably do the job and, on occasion, you may be asked to do practical assessments such as intray exercises or a short presentation dependent on the nature and level of the role. Please note that the interview will need to take place before you leave and any offer of employment accepted before your final date of employment.

**Am I still considered for posts when I have verbally accepted another post?**

If you have been offered a post then you will need to accept it within 48 hours.

You must inform the HRSC team when you have accepted an offer of alternative employment as you will not be eligible to be matched to other vacancies.

**Can I apply for a job I see advertised on the CCC website, even if I haven’t been matched?**

Yes, if you see any vacancy advertised on the CCC website that you feel you should have been matched to, please contact the HRSC team as soon as possible and before the application closing date.

**If I apply for a lower grade post is my salary protected?**

Yes, your salary will be protected if you are on the AEP as a result of an internal restructure in which your post is at risk. The pay protection will apply according to the council’s Pay Protection Policy. Pay protection will not apply in other circumstances.

**What happens if I accept a temporary post through the AEP?**

This will depend upon the reason why the post is temporary. For example, if the post is for 12 months’ maternity cover, then you would initially come off the AEP and rejoin 12 weeks before the end of your temporary contract. As vacancies are advertised, the HRSC team will be able to advise you further.

**How long can I stay on the Alternative Employment Programme?**

You can remain on the AEP for up to a maximum of 3 months or until your leaving date (if less than 3 months). There are exceptions (e.g. occupational health conditions and maternity) but your manager and HR can offer further guidance. It is important that you advise the HRSC team if there are any changes in your circumstances or contact details while you are on the AEP.

**What happens if I refuse an offer of alternative employment?**

If you unreasonably refuse an offer of suitable alternative employment you may forfeit your entitlement to redundancy pay.

**Is there a limit to the number of offers of alternative employment I can refuse?**

We will do all we can to match you to posts that match your skills, abilities and preferences. However if you unreasonably refuse an offer of suitable alternative employment you may forfeit your entitlement to redundancy pay.

**Can I ask for a trial period in a prospective job?**

Yes. Employers have an obligation to offer a trial period of 4 weeks if, having been ‘at risk’ of redundancy, you are successfully recruited to a role through the AEP. Cumbria County Council recognises that is in in the interest of all parties to have a trial period and offer this to all staff on the AEP.

In some circumstances the trial period may be extended beyond 4 weeks. If the trial period is unsuccessful then you can go back onto the AEP as long as this is before your original leaving date. However, if you are seen to be unreasonably refusing suitable alternative employment then you may lose your right to statutory redundancy pay.

**Other sources of support**

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| **Jobcentre online**Search online for the latest jobs and volunteering opportunities; information on different work programmes, links to further information on benefits you may be entitled to. | <https://www.gov.uk/jobsearch>  |
| **Citizen’s Advice Bureau**Advice on benefits; employment; tax; consumer affairs and much more | <http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>  |
| **www.gov.uk**A range of information available here from CV building to job vacancies and how to get involved with adult learning | <https://www.gov.uk>  |
| **Move On and Next Step**Careers advice and tools to help you brush up on your skills in:* Maths for work
* Communications for work
* Problem solving
* Working in a team
* Organising yourself and your time
 | <http://www.move-on.org.uk/> <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx/Home.aspx>  |
| **Independent Financial Advisors**This website can help find you independent financial; legal; accounting and mortgage advisers in your local area. There are also a range of online resources and FAQs.  | [www.unbiased.co.uk](http://www.unbiased.co.uk) |
| **Employment Agencies**There are many agencies located across Cumbria. This website lists them by town and is a good place to start your search. Most agencies list what service areas they recruit for e.g. finance; hospitality; education; childcare; clerical.  | [www.quickemployment.co.uk](http://www.quickemployment.co.uk) |
| **Tax Office** | [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk) |

For all appendices please use the following [link](/elibrary/view.asp?id=55773) or see separate document on the Alternative Employment intranet / internet page.