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Cumbria at work



Professor Frank Peck of the University of Cumbria's Centre for Regional Economic Development writes for in-Cumbria on the big issues of the day and the economic data behind them. This month, the latest data on Cumbria sector employment numbers and job growth

In September 2016, employment data for 2015 was released by the Office for National Statistics. A recent review of this data from the Cumbria Intelligence Observatory makes interesting reading.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, jobs in Cumbria are still dominated by five key sectors – manufacturing (38,500), health (31,700), accommodation & food services (28,400), retailing (27,500) and education (19,100).

What is perhaps of greater interest is the pattern of change over time. Between 2010 and 2015, employment in the county grew by 4.4% – a net increase of more than 10,000 jobs across Cumbria. This quite striking figure mirrors national trends – a rise of 7 percent across the country as a whole. It seems that despite austerity and the economic uncertainties that characterised these years, the Cumbrian economy seemed to generate plenty of work opportunities for residents in the county.

Compared with other counties of England, Cumbria's employment performance is quite creditable. The growth rate in Cumbria may have been much below the figures for some highly dynamic local economies in the south-east, midlands and some areas of the north, in particular Cheshire and Warrington (+10%). But Cumbria could claim to be on a par with Greater Manchester (+5.1%), Sheffield City-Region (+4.2%) and surpassed other significant economies across the North including Liverpool City Region (+3.4%), Lancashire (+2.9%) and the Tees Valley (+3.7%).

What activities, then, have generated this employment performance in this time period? Over the five-year period, numerical growth in jobs has been associated with two of the county's dominant sectors – manufacturing and



accommodation & food. There were also encouraging signs of recovery in employment in the retail sector in the most recent year covered by available data (2014-15). Austerity measures have undoubtedly contributed towards continued decline in employment in public administration, a net loss of more than 2,000 jobs between 2010 and 2015. But these losses have evidently been compensated by job growth elsewhere in the Cumbrian economy.

Recent low levels of unemployment in Cumbria (claimant rate less than 2%) suggest that the local economy continues to generate work opportunities for inhabitants.

So what are the implications of these trends for the present day economy? Clearly there are impacts on employers who are seeking to recruit new staff, particularly those with the right skills and aptitudes. The 2015-16 Cumbria Business Survey, for instance, showed that a third of all businesses (32%) had tried to recruit staff during 2015-16 and more than half of these had experienced

difficulty in filling job vacancies.

The signs all point to an inevitable conclusion – that plans for significant future growth and investment in key sectors in Cumbria will depend a great deal on concerted efforts to attract (and retain) new workers to the county. [IC](#)

Cumbria employment data for 2015

SECTOR EMPLOYMENT FIGURES FOR CUMBRIA IN 2015

Manufacturing	38,500
Health	31,700
Accommodation & food services	28,400
Retailing	27,500
Education	19,100

REGION EMPLOYMENT GROWTH BETWEEN 2010 AND 2015

Greater Manchester	+5.1%
Cumbria	+4.4%
Sheffield City-Region	+4.2%
Tees Valley	+3.7%
Liverpool City Region	+3.4%
Lancashire	+2.9%

'It seems that despite austerity and economic uncertainties that characterised 2010-15, the Cumbrian economy seemed to generate plenty of work opportunities for residents'