

NOTE OF EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 20 OCTOBER 2021

The main purpose of the meeting was for Members to:

- Review key developments since their last meeting on 15 September and respond to any issues raised during meetings of key groups held since last Board meeting – in particular the task and finish group who met on 13 October to consider lessons from Accelerate and if there is a future ‘ask’ to support the skills and education agenda in Cheshire and Warrington
- To help prepare for the next meeting of the LEP Board on the changing nature of the labour market
- Review the latest update of the Skills Action Plan and provide a steer on the key issues to address during the refresh of the Skills Report and associated Action Plan
- Review the progress of the Local Growth Fund Skills projects and the workshop hosted by Astra Zeneca on 12 October
- To provide feedback on the proposed next phase of data and labour market analysis

Key Points Discussed

1. Welcome, declarations of interest, introductions with members sharing information on any key developments since the last meeting on 15 September

- List of attendees and apologies (Annex A)
- Members noted Nicola Merriman’s resignation from the Board and considered the scope for inviting new members to join the Board. The following actions were agreed:
 - Paul Colman agreed to explore the scope for inviting some smaller businesses. **ACTION PAUL COLMAN**
 - Dhési to explore the scope for involving a business from the hospitality sector. **ACTION DHESI**
 - Nicola Dunbar and Pat Jackson to explore the scope to invite a business from the Mid-Cheshire Development Board or from Winsford Industrial Estate. **ACTION NICOLA DUBAR AND PAT JACKSON**

2. Feedback from key meetings/activities since last Employers’ Skills and Education Board.

- Members noted the list of meetings that had taken place since the last Employers’ Skills and Education Board meeting.

2.1 LEP Board

- Kath Mackay and Nicola Dunbar updated Members on the LEP Board meeting on 15 September and agreed that the Chief Executive’s report should be shared with all Members.

2.2 Accelerate

- Kurt Allman and Phil Atkinson reported the latest developments:
 - On 18 October the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had written to Kurt confirming that they are considering the project change request and will respond in the next few weeks. Kurt will inform Members as soon as he has confirmation from DWP. **ACTION KURT**
 - The Accelerate project team has lost a number of staff – this is causing some issues.
 - There are currently between 700 and 800 participants on Accelerate funded training and it is expected that 2,500 will participate before the end of May 2022.
 - Kurt will update the ‘lessons learnt’ slide that was prepared for the LEP Board. **ACTION KURT**

2.3 Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) and Digital Connectivity Board

- Nicola Dunbar noted the following:
 - The evaluation of Local Digital Skills Partnerships was published on 30 September.
 - The last Cheshire and Warrington Digital Skills Partnership Board Meeting on 21 September:
 - Agreed priorities for the next 12 months and reflected on progress to date

- Explored how to align their work to the North-West Regional Cyber Security programme
- Received information about the Local Growth Fund skills projects and the recent workshop for projects to share good practice and learn about how Astra Zeneca is using the specialist equipment they have purchased to apply new technologies in their business
- Received feedback on how Members have been spreading the word about digital and the ways in which they will be linked to local schools with high numbers of students eligible for free school meals
- Reviewed the latest developments of the Cheshire and Warrington Opportunities Portal and how Members are influencing the content of the digital skills and careers videos.

2.4 Institute of Technology (IOT) and Skills Accelerator

- Dhesi noted that the information required for the second stage of the IOT bid had been submitted. Following the Cabinet re-shuffle, the Department for Education had delayed the second stage interviews, but these were now expected to take place at short notice in November. Successful bids would be announced at the end of December.
- The Skills Accelerator bid had been successful – £2.7 million investment from Government including £1.85 million for capital. All four colleges will work in collaboration to deliver the programme of investment by March 2022.

2.5 Pledge Board

- Paul Colman chaired the last Pledge Board meeting and reported the following:
 - The Cheshire and Warrington Careers and Enterprise Company Hub model has been launched. This provides enhanced support for schools to help develop their careers strategy over the next 3 years. In the first year 20 schools will be targeted in Ellesmere Port, Crewe and North Warrington with high numbers of students in receipt of free school meals as they do less well than their peers in Cheshire and Warrington compared to nationally. The schools will also include those OFSTED has identified as either requires improvement or inadequate. 18 of the initial group of 20 schools have accepted the invitation to join the Hub and 3 additional schools have now been invited and accepted the offer.
 - The Pledge team has expanded to provide more capacity.
 - The Pledge are planning to set up a cornerstone employers' group as part of the Hub. This will build on the existing employers' group that meets on the last Thursday of every month. A representative of the group will be invited to join the Pledge Board.
 - Over the last month there has been a series of 7 virtual careers expos - one in each Pledge management area as well as careers fairs for students with special educational needs and disabilities. The events have attracted a combined audience of over 17,000 and have included a total of 138 employer and 58 FE/ HE contributors (some duplicated across a number of expos). The videos prepared by employers to explain their businesses are being uploaded to a Pledge Vimeo account and catalogued so they can be shared.

3. The Changing Nature of the Labour Market

3.1 Task and Finish Group Proposals

- Members welcomed the seven proposals from the task and finish group meeting on 13 October. During the discussion the following points were made.
 - **Lessons from Accelerate** - the importance of a smaller, more manageable programme.
 - **Changing Nature of the Labour Market** - There is a significant mismatch between those seeking work and the current job vacancies
 - **First Proposal** - The current labour market where there is a strong demand for people in certain sectors including the 'trades' has resulted in college staff being 'poached' by the private sector. Is there scope for more secondments from the private sector to training providers? The secondments could be very flexible. Members of the Board were attracted to

this proposal and agreed that flexible secondment models involving secondments to support small modules of learning could be of benefit to both employers and training providers. In larger businesses this might be delivered via their 'charitable days' allowances.

- **Second Proposal** – Members suggested that accelerated learning could be achieved via bootcamps during the summer holidays – possibly linked to the Careers and Enterprise Company, Pledge and Youth Federation activities and work experience trials. **ACTION PAT JACKSON TO FOLLOWUP WITH CHRIS HINDLEY AND TREVOR LANGSTON**
- **Third Proposal** – Members agreed the need more communication about the benefits of apprenticeships and to differentiate the messages to students and parents. Members noted that the message to parents is very variable, and the recent Macclesfield Pledge event appeared to attract very few parents. Clare Latham noted Cheshire West and Chester's pilot programme of webinars for parents/carers of young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The aim of the webinars is to get consistency of message focused on aspiration and ambition. Clare suggested that if the pilot is successful, a similar approach might be adopted via the Pledge for mainstream schools/enhanced Careers Hub model as the technology lends itself to getting key messages to wide audiences.
- Members agreed that the proposals from the Task and Finish Group should be taken forward as part of the refresh of the Skills Report and associated Action Plan. **ACTION KATH MACKAY AND PAT JACKSON**

3.2 Preparation for LEP Board Discussion

- Members noted the slides that would be presented to the LEP Board later in the day.
- Kath invited Members to confirm that much of the work of the Employers' Skills and Education Board and the data and labour market intelligence commissioned via the Data and Labour Market Steering Group was reflected in the slides. Kath noted that the challenges identified in the slides could not be addressed by the Employers' Skills and Education Board and asked Members to identify any key points that should be drawn to the attention of the LEP Board.
- Overall, Members confirmed the slides reflected their work and discussions to date. In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:
 - Economic inactivity also needs to be monitored – during the Covid lockdowns the economic inactivity of younger and older people has increased but data lags significantly.
 - The Workforce Recovery Group chaired jointly by Jobcentre Plus and the LEP, is proposing some initial pilot work focused on longer-term unemployed people where partners work together in 2 or 3 local areas – e.g., Crewe, Ellesmere Port and North Warrington.
 - It is important to focus on key local geographical areas and work with local partners, for example, the Crewe Town Board on issues.
 - Businesses and individuals do not always know where to go for help – there are a lot of competing agencies.
 - Kath will report back to Members following the LEP Board meeting.

4. Skills Report and Skills Action Plan

- Pat Jackson informed Members that the action plan had been updated in response to the suggestions at the last Board meeting – all the issues and the actions had been RAG rated and attributed to one or more of the following overall objectives – sustainable, healthy, inclusive, and fast growing. Any issues or actions focused on digital had also been identified.
- Members noted the changes and agreed that it was a good working document. They confirmed that the assessment of whether actions were sufficiently focused on sustainable, healthy, inclusive, and fast growth had been useful but suggested this section of the Plan could now be removed.
- Some Members suggested that more work was needed on actions to ensure that they were going to have sufficient impact on the issues identified in the Plan.

- It was noted that impacts might take time to be realised and the issues were much wider – they could not be addressed only by the Employers’ Skills and Education Board, and it would be impossible to demonstrate impact after only a few months. **ACTION PAT JACKSON, SARAH WILLIAMS AND TREVOR LANGSTON TO FURTHER REVIEW AND REFINE IMPACTS**
- Paul Colman agreed to feedback to the Pledge Board the concerns around impact. **ACTION PAUL COLMAN**
- The Level 3 ‘challenge was noted and Dhesi agreed to reflect and report back on the extent to which it was being address via current plans including the Institute of Technology and the Skills Accelerator. **ACTION DHESI**
- It was agreed that the next few Employers’ Skills and Education Board would do ‘deep dives’ into specific areas of the Plan – young people, employed and economically inactive and unemployed. **ACTION KATH MACKAY AND PAT JACKSON**

5. Local Growth Fund Skills Investments

- Sarah Williams shared a set of slides that provided an overview of the Local Growth Funds. It was noted that, except for the two Reaseheath projects, all projects were now engaging with learners. Reaseheath’s engagement with learners was due to start in November.
- IOTA was the only project that had not submitted a report. Pat Jackson had already contacted Bill Carr and would follow up again **ACTION PAT JACKSON**
- Members noted the successful workshop hosted by Astra Zeneca where projects had learnt directly from Astra Zeneca’s young talent how they were using the Local Growth Fund investment to develop the application of new technologies in Astra Zeneca.
- Sarah also shared the feedback from sponsors and noted that information was supplied on whether encounters with learners were face to face or virtual. Feedback from sponsors confirmed that projects were developing good relationships with local businesses and collaborating to share good practice across all the projects. Different members of the Pledge team are also sponsoring the projects to ensure good links with local schools.

6. Data and Labour Market Intelligence

- Members noted and agreed the proposed next phase of work. An invitation to tender will now be issued. **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

7. Note of last meeting on 15 September and Action list

- The note of the last meeting was agreed, and the action list reviewed.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 Jobs Portal

- Sarah **Williams** updated Members on key developments including the extension of the funding for the Portal to the end of March 2022 and the planned social media campaign. The Portal’s User Group would meet on 21 October to help steer the social media campaign and inform the future development of content on the Portal.
- Sarah asked Members to make links from their websites to the Portal - [Cheshire & Warrington Opportunities \(candwoopportunities.co.uk\)](https://www.cheshireandwarringtonopportunities.co.uk).
- Lucy Liang offered to make a link to local radio – potentially providing an opportunity to interview successful job seekers or employers who had used the Portal. **ACTION LUCY LIANG AND SARAH WILLIAMS**

8.2 Items for future meetings and date of next meeting

- Date of next meeting 17 November 2021

The following members of the Employers' Skills and Education Board attended the meeting:

- *Kath Mackay - Chair
- *Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
- *Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester)
- *Lucy Liang (AUE Ltd)
- Pat Jackson (LEP) *With voting rights

Apologies

- Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)/ Gemma Betteridge/Tom Russell
- *Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
- Paul Kelly (BAE Systems)
- Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
- Maggie Chen

Also attended

- Sarah Williams and David Brennan for specific agenda items

Papers copied to:

- Trevor Brocklebank (Deputy Chair of LEP)
- Kevin Hutchinson (SISK)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
- Jamie Zucker (DfE)
- Clare Cassidy (DfE)
- Mike McLouglin (DfE)
- Peter Skates (Cheshire East Council)
- Kirstie Simpson (University of Chester)
- Nicola Said (LEP)
- Joe Manning (LEP)
- Andy Devaney (LEP)
- Sarah Williams (LEP)
- Trevor Langston (LEP)
- Andrew Bridge and Dave Rowlands (CITB)