

CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON - EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD

NOTE OF MEETING ON 17 FEBRUARY

The main purpose of the meeting was for:

- Members to share information on key developments since the last meeting on 20 January
- Members to receive feedback from meetings/activities of key groups held since last meeting with particular focus on Accelerate
- To review the draft of the Skills Report and associated skills priorities and any updates on data and labour market information
- To review progress of the Local Growth Fund projects and share feedback from project sponsors
- Update Members on the development of the Jobs Portal and plans for the North West online jobs fair

1. **Welcome, and declarations of interest**

Clare Hayward welcomed everyone – in particular Jamie Zucker from the Department for Education (DfE). List of attendees and apologies at Annex A. There were no declarations of interest.

2. **Key developments since the last meeting**

Dhesi summarised the key aspects of the recent Skills/FE White Paper.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- The analysis in the White Paper highlighted many of the same issues that had been highlighted by the data and labour market analysis in Cheshire and Warrington.
- The recognition of the importance of further education was welcomed including the recognition of the importance of reskilling 9 out of 10 adults over the next few years.
- Members hoped that the White Paper would provide a positive platform for the future and stressed the need for pace and simplification of processes. They expressed some concerns about the lack of detail in the White Paper – including the limited information around funding and employer engagement.
- The lack of reference to other Government Departments – in particular, DWP and BEIS was noted.

3. **Local Growth Fund update (spend and outputs) and feedback from project sponsors**

Sarah Williams presented a series of slides that updated Board Members on spend and outputs delivered to date.

Members welcomed the progress in spend and outputs and noted that all projects now have sponsors from the Employers' Skills and Education Board – Eleanor Blackburn agreed to follow up with Sarah the need to take over Stephen Fitzsimons sponsorship responsibilities. **ACTION ELEANOR BLACKBURN AND SARAH WILLIAMS**

It was agreed that a second showcase event would be held in April/May and that LEP Board and Performance and Investment Committee Members should be invited to join the Employers' Skills and Education Board Members at the event. **ACTION PAT JACKSON AND SARAH WILLIAMS**

4. **Accelerate Training Support Programme**

Kurt Allman referred to the recent review of the Accelerate training support programme. An independent review of the bureaucracy involved in administering Accelerate had also been commissioned – Kurt noted that businesses wanted a much slicker system. In a brief presentation Kurt and Phil Atkinson made the following points:

- The need to redesign the Accelerate programme and be prepared to respond to further changes in the economy when current Covid restrictions are lifted. It was important to minimise the exposure to financial and reputational risk for the University and the LEP.
- To date 98% of participants in the programme have received 100% funded training using the LEP and European Social Fund funding.
- The way training providers are currently funded encourages completion of the training (20% of funding is only paid on completion).

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- Members asked for more information about the modelling of the process for converting enquires into delivery and completion of training.
- Dhesi noted that he did not disagree with the need to alter the spend/learner profile in response to the changed economic environment but stressed that the key principals of the project remained – the focus should be on reskilling the workforce not delivering qualifications.
- Dhesi also stressed the need to ‘de-engineer’ the processes associated with Accelerate – he suggested that it had been over-engineered. Dhesi also asked if the funding model could be moved to accept contributions in kind from employers – not just cash.
- Paul Colman commented that a recent presentation on Accelerate to local businesses had focused too much on the Accelerate programme as a whole and not enough on what it could mean in practice to individual businesses – Paul suggested that the approach to marketing should be reviewed.
- Nicola Merriman was pleased that the Accelerate competition for training in the nuclear sector was now live but confirmed that a number of nuclear businesses had already been deterred by the bureaucracy and the information required from individual learners.
- Bill Carr also reported that there had been a massive pushback from employers about the level of bureaucracy associate with Accelerate – and suggested that the processes for individual businesses should be different to the processes for training providers. Bill stressed the need to segment the business market and recognise that, in terms of marketing and business processes, ‘one size does not fit all’.
- There was general agreement that it would be enormously helpful if businesses rather than individuals could provide any personal information required and a certificate to confirm that all their staff had a right to work.
- Andy Devaney noted that even if the bureaucracy was removed, it was still necessary to stimulate demand from learners and employers. We had to translate identified need into demand.
- It was noted that there are currently 1000 hard to fill vacancies in Cheshire and Warrington – this could provide an indicator of the level of demand for key skills.

Kurt thanked Members for their comments – he agreed with the comments. He recognised the importance of learning the lessons to date and committed to simplifying processes as much as possible and to working more closely with training providers. Kurt noted that by April, he needed to submit a change request to the Department for Work and Pensions. He suggested that learner numbers between 1500 and 3000 were more realistic.

In conclusion Clare thanked Kurt for the presentation, agreed the need to review the learner numbers, simplify process and maintain pace. Board Members would welcome the opportunity to support Kurt over the coming months.

Kurt and Phil Atkinson will now arrange meeting with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Accelerate Governing Board and then report back to the Employers’ Skills and Education Board with recommendations. **ACTION KURT AND PHIL ATKINSON**

5. Jobs Opportunities Portal and the 'NorthWestWorks4U' Online Jobs Fair

Pat Jackson provided a brief update on the Opportunities Portal and plans for the online jobs event 'NorthWESTWorks4U'. The Portal is being updated regularly and is more closely tailored to reflect the labour market in Cheshire and Warrington. It also includes specific pages on NHS job opportunities.

Plans for the 'NorthWestWorks4U' online jobs fair are progressing well and all Members have received briefing on the event- this will be updated as more information becomes available.

6. Skills Report including Skills Priorities and Proposed Road Map

Pat Jackson explained that the Skills Report was intended to reflect the data and labour market intelligence work to date. The priorities had been updated and reflected all the comments received from Members at their last meeting on 20 January and their subsequent workshop on 27 January. The aim was to submit the draft report to DfE over the next few days and then finalise the report at the next Employers' Skills and Education Board meeting in March.

David Brennan noted that Members had recently received the latest draft of the Skills and Report and presented a series of slides.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- It would be helpful to have more specific information about the skills needed for the future – this could inform curriculum development and teacher professional development.
- All local colleges and training providers had been given an opportunity to comment on the report.
- It is important to differentiate between the skills needed and the skills currently being demanded – there is a market failure associated with providing information about new technologies and career opportunities to enable learners to make informed decisions about the skills and qualifications to acquire. More action is also needed at national level to address this market failure.
- Action is also needed at national as well as local level to address the stereotyping of certain careers – in particular, digital and STEM related careers.
- It is important to challenge the presumptions around creativity – this is not just for art students - engineers are creative problem solvers.

Jamie Zucker commented that from his personal perspective, the draft report was on the right lines. DfE would apply a light touch to their review of the Skills Report – the aim was to publish the reports from all LEPs by the end of March.

Jamie also noted the White Paper announcement about the Strategic Development Fund – initially in some pilot areas. More details will be available in the Spring, but a key focus will be on expanding higher level technical education.

7. Feedback from key meetings/activities since last Employers' Skills and Education Board

7.1 Pledge Board

James Richards was not able to attend the meeting but had provided the following update.

- The Pledge are currently preparing bids for funding to April 2023 from European Social Funds and the Careers and Enterprise Company. The bids include plans to address specific geographic and gender issues identified by the Data and Labour Market Information. Future work will also be aligned with the priorities in the Skills Report.
- Matching more Enterprise Advisors (EAs) with schools has been a big priority. At the start of January 45 schools (61% of schools) had been matched with an EA and on (61% of schools) and on 17 February 57 (74%) of schools had been matched. There has also been national campaign to

recruit EAs and the Pledge have received 20 leads as a result. The Pledge are confident of matching 85% of schools by the end of April.

- To support employer engagement with younger student (aged 11-14) and to support schools to achieve Gatsby Benchmark 5 (meaningful engagements with employers), the Pledge are running an online 'Spring into Careers' event on 2nd March. To date 30 schools have registered with a combined potential audience of over 12,000.
- Over half term the Pledge are undertaking some pilot work with Year 8 students in Ellesmere Port exploring digital careers with local employers.
- Over the next 6 months there will be a strong focus on working with employers and young people around virtual work experience

7.2 Institute of Technology (IoT)

Dhesi reported that following the submission of an expression of interest to the Department for Education (DfE), he was expecting to be notified by the end of March whether he could proceed to the next stage of an application. He was currently developing a bid to the LEP to support the next stage of developing a full business case for the IoT. He confirmed that the plans were on track and he had not forgotten the need to establish a Steering Group for the IoT.

7.3 Digital Skills Partnership

Nicola Dunbar reported that, at the last Digital Skills Partnership Board meeting on 26th January:

- Members provided feedback on the proposed priorities and actions in the Skills Report and the priorities set out in the business case for 3rd Year funding that had been submitted to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
- Members identified a strong need to deliver digital bootcamps at scale across Cheshire and Warrington – as a start a mini competition has been held using Accelerate funding. As a next step potential demand from employers with furloughed staff will be identified.

7.4 LEP Board

Clare Hayward noted the following:

- The LEP Board had a business case fund to enable partners to develop business cases that would enable partners to bid for funding from Central Government. Traditionally the funds had been focused on transport infrastructure projects but was available for other projects including skills.
- Recruitment of Members to the LEP and associated advisory Boards was progressing well. Expect decisions by the end of March
- Expecting further announcement from No10 about Covid lockdown
- Marketing Cheshire are currently developing a LEP branding policy
- On the impact of EU transition the LEP are trying to differentiate initial teething problems from more systemic issues.
- The newly formed Sustainability Commission is currently looking at a range of issues – some of which will feed into the skills work
- The annual LEP performance review was held last week. The LEP received very positive feedback from the reviewers.

8. Note of last meeting on 20 January 2021 and Action list (5 minutes)

The note of the last meeting was agreed, and the updated action list was noted.

9. Date of next meeting 17 March 2021

The following members of the Employers' Skills and Education Board are expected to attend the meeting:

- *Clare Hayward - Chair
- *Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
- *Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
- *Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester)
- Gemma Betteridge representing Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)
- Pat Jackson (LEP)
- *With voting rights

Apologies

- Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
- Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
- Philip Cox (LEP)
- Maggie Chen
- *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- Kath Mackay (Alderley Park)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
- James Richards (Network Rail)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer

Also attending

- Joe Manning, Jamie Zucker, David Brennan and Sarah Williams for specific agenda items

Papers copied to:

- Trevor Brocklebank (Deputy Chair of LEP)
- Jamie Zucker (DfE)
- Clare Cassidy (DfE)
- Mike McLouglin (DfE)
- Peter Skates (Cheshire East Council)
- Maud Duthie (University of Chester)
- Chris Koral (University of Chester)
- Nicola Said (LEP)
- Joe Manning (LEP)
- Andy Devaney (LEP)
- Sarah Williams (LEP)
- Trevor Langston (LEP)