

NOTE OF CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON - EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 20 JANUARY

The main purpose of the meeting was:

- All Members to reflect on the Local Growth Fund show case event on 16 December and share information about any key developments since the last meeting
- Jobcentre Plus to update Members on the work of the Workforce Recovery Group and the response of Jobcentre Plus to the Covid crisis
- Update Members on the development of the Jobs Portal
- Review the spend profile and outputs delivered to date by the Local Growth Fund projects
- Review the latest report on the impact of Covid on the labour market and the skills report
- Receive feedback from meetings/activities of key groups held since last meeting on 16 December.

Note of Key Points Discussed and Agreed Action

1. Welcome, and declarations of interest

Clare Hayward welcomed everyone to the meeting – in particular, Colin Billingsley from Jobcentre Plus. List of attendees and apologies at **Annex A**. There were no additional declarations of interest.

2. Jobcentre Plus Update on the Workforce Recovery Group and the response of Jobcentre Plus to the Covid Crisis

Colin Billingsley made the following points:

- The Workforce Recovery Group was established in response to the Covid crisis and marked a significant step forward in partners working together and focusing on key priorities for action across Cheshire and Warrington.
- The Workforce Recovery Group have a number of streams of work focused on individuals on furlough and recently made redundant as well as individuals furthest from the labour market with multiple barriers to employment.
- The Work Force Recovery Group has agreed some key measures of success and aims to influence the various programmes of support (including the next phases of European Social Fund programmes) that are available to different cohorts of people.
- This is a great opportunity for Jobcentre Plus to work together more effectively with local partners and to engage with organisations that Jobcentre Plus has not previously worked with – it is important not to lose the energy that has been generated via the Workforce Recovery Group – we cannot go back to previous ways of working. Jobcentre Plus are particularly keen to use the influence of the LEP and the Employers' Skills and Education Board.
- A key success of the Workforce Recovery Group has been the programme of online job fairs – building on the Pledge's online Learn Live career fairs. Tens of thousands of people are engaging in the jobs fairs with the next event scheduled for 27 January.
- As a result of the success of the online job fairs, Jobcentre Plus was approached by Talk Talk and McCann Medical who want to work more broadly on Ambition 2021, a three-day online jobs fair for the North West that will be led by employers who will collaborate and focus on getting people back to work and meet the demand in the Growth sectors.
- Ambition 2021 aims to get 101 employers acting as "good neighbours" applying corporate social responsibility to engage with 20,000 job seekers across the North West. In addition to normal recruitment the 101 employers will "ring-fence" 2,021 job starts during 2021 for local neighbourhood jobseekers along with practical advice, hints and tips for getting a job.
- Colin shares the frustrations of the Employers' Skills and Education Board about the delays in Kickstart with very few job placement opportunities being approved and contracted to date. Colin and Philip Cox have both escalated these concerns within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

- Colin expects that moving forward, the DWP will delegate more responsibility for Kickstart to local Jobcentres.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- Paul Colman thanked Colin for the support that the Chamber had received on Kickstart from Sue Savage and the Jobcentre Plus team. Paul reported that the Chamber has received approval for 100 of their first two cohorts of Kickstart job placements that they had submitted to DWP and are now preparing job descriptions for each placement. The third cohort of placements had just been rejected for no apparent reason.
- Sarah Hopkinson reported that Engie had received approval for 137 placements, but their subsequent bid had been rejected. Sarah was disappointed at the apparent inconsistent approach by DWP. Engie will not launch the placements until after lockdown.

3. **Members reflections on the Local Growth Fund Show Case Event on 16 December**

The following points were made:

- The presentations by the Local Growth Fund projects at the last Employers' Skills and Education Board had been really helpful.
- It was good to hear first-hand from the projects – the presentations were inspirational. It was great to see the positive impact of the investments and the extent to which projects had adapted their delivery models in response to the Covid restrictions.

4. **Local Growth Fund update (spend and outputs)**

Sarah Williams presented a series of slides that summarised spend and outputs delivered to date. Sarah thanked Employers' Skills and Education Board members who are sponsoring the Local Growth Fund projects for helping the projects to move into delivery mode.

It was noted that the Carpe Diem and the NEET projects needed sponsors. Kath MacKay agreed to have a further discussion with Sarah Williams about the NEET project and the time commitment involved. **ACTION KATH MACKAY.** Maggie expressed an interest in sponsoring the Carpe Diem project – Sarah has already followed up on Maggie's offer and made introductions to Carpe Diem.

It was agreed that before the next Employers' Skills and Education Board meeting all sponsors would check the progress of their projects and any support needed. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

5. **Short Demonstration of latest version of the Jobs Opportunities Portal**

Sarah Williams provided a short demonstration of the latest version of the Job Opportunities Portal - <https://www.candwopportunities.co.uk/>.

The Cheshire and Warrington Opportunities portal provides:

- Personalised access to job opportunities
- A single place to search for jobs, apprenticeships and training courses
- 12-14k vacancies that are updated every 30 minutes
- Careers information about 350 different roles
- Information about local key growth sectors
- Ability to tailor to the individual's needs (e.g., specific geographical areas or particular types of job) and set alerts for when new opportunities are posted

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- Clare Lathom has included a link to the portal in all Cheshire West and Chester redundancy support literature and all employment support officers are using the portal as a resource.

- Kath MacKay commented that the Portal was a good idea – and we needed to ensure all the job opportunities in smaller business were included on the Portal. This should include the vacancies promoted via LinkedIn (the way many of the Life Science businesses in Alderley Park advertise job vacancies). **ACTION PAT JACKSON AND SARAH WILLIAMS TO FOLLOW UP RE LINKEDIN.**

6. **Latest Covid-19 Report, Skills Priorities and Proposed Road Map**

David Brennan noted the recent Covid -19 impact report that had been circulated prior to the meeting. There were no follow up questions.

David presented a series of slides that summarised progress to date on the development of the Skills Report including the priorities emerging from the data and labour market work and the revised objectives.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- Priority 2 should include specific reference to sustainability, green job opportunities and life sciences
- Need strong platform of people with Level 2 skills who can progress to higher skills (drop reference in priority 2 to 'higher' skills)
- Priority 2 should reflect the need to equip people with the skills to innovate and drive growth
- Need to get the terminology around 'digital' correct – we mean digitalisation across all sectors
- On recovery – need to build back better, for the future, in response to changing circumstances, must be ambitious
- Need to address retention of talent and reflect on the issue of young people who acquire Level 3 skills, go to University and do not return to Cheshire and Warrington
- Do we need to more on internships and placements and engage more with alumni and graduate networks? Also need to make better use of our existing networks
- Need to reflect on the point that if all 18-year-olds stayed in Cheshire and Warrington we would still need a further 25,000 people with Level 3+ skills – it is essential that we reskill and upskill our current workforce - training must be lifelong
- We still have a gap of 60,000 graduates in the workforce
- Can we integrate internships into major infrastructure investment programmes and provide support for smaller businesses to take on graduates?

Clare thanked Members for their contributions. Pat Jackson and David Brennan would try to reflect the comments received into a revision of the priorities and circulate the revised text as soon as possible – the revised test was circulated later on 20th January.

Members agreed to organise a sub-group of Members to meet on 27th January to review the revised text. **ACTION PAT JACKSON - done**

A near- final version of the skills report would be presented at the next meeting of the Employers' Skills and Education Board on 17th February. **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

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

7.1 **LEP Board meetings**

Clare Hayward noted that the LEP Board were focusing on a number of issues:

- The work of the Sustainability and Inclusion Commission
- The recruitment of new Board members
- The Covid Recovery group and the need for a speedy and efficient roll out of the vaccination programme
- The impact of Brexit – in particular, the rules of origin
- The FE White Paper to be published on 21 January

7.2 Digital Skills Partnership(DSP)

Nicola Dunbar noted the following:

- **Digital Careers Day** - 7 DSP Board Members and/or representatives from their businesses(Astra Zeneca, Bentley, Blue Beck, DriveWorks, Hartree Centre – Science and Technologies Facilities Council Daresbury and Port Swigger), took part in a Digital Careers day on 13 January that was organised by the DSP and the Pledge.

In total 15 businesses were involved in the day and participants attended from 9 schools, 2 colleges and 3 universities. Roles explored included - Games design, Product design, User Experience (UX), internet security, cyber security, process efficiency. Sessions were recorded so the content can be used to assist with the DSP's objective to 'spread the word about digital'.

The day was split into 3 sessions

- Jobs in Digital – exploring different roles
- Routes to jobs – exploring career pathways including qualifications
- Stand out from the crowd - hints and tips on things you can do to make your applications more attractive to potential employers and increased your chances of being successful in gaining a digital role.

7.3 Pledge

James Richards provided the following update:

- **Funding update**
 - European Social Funding (ESF) extension has been approved in principle – we aim to get a proposal to the Department for Work and Pensions by 22 January. This gives the Pledge approximately half the money needed to operate with a reduced but core provision until Autumn 2023
 - ESF Reserve funding – we are developing a further bid. This would, if successful, enable us to operate with a similar staff level as now and allow us to do specific targeted work in key geographic areas to support the LEP's 'levelling up' agenda.
 - Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) – we have a proposal with CEC to move to a hub model, with Year 1 being focused on schools in the LEP priority areas of Ellesmere Port, North Warrington and Crewe.
- **Longer term business model** - we are in discussions within the LEP and with Youthfed around the longer-term business model.
- **The Pledge Board meeting next week** will look at the shorter and longer-term funding models and the student voice
- In terms of activity, the previous quarter the Pledge **hit all ESF targets**.
- This term the main activity is around Industry Insights. Last week was the first on Digital careers run jointly by DSP and Pledge, next Industry Insight events will include construction, self-employment and professional services
- The focus with CEC this quarter is around matching Enterprise Advisors with schools

7.4 Accelerate Board and Current Review

Phil Atkinson and Kurt Allman noted that they had not been to a recent Accelerate Board meeting. However, 50 people had now completed 50 Accelerate funding training and a further 570 were in the pipeline. Progress has been slow, and the University are currently reviewing and remodelling the targets for the programme. It was noted that there has been a recent increase in the unit cost of training funded via Accelerate.

The next meeting of the Accelerate Board will be later in January and proposals for change in response to the current review of Accelerate will be brought to the Employers' Skills and Education Board.

Clare Hayward thanked Phil and Kurt for their update. Clare had seen the report from the review of Accelerate and asked for more information about progress in appointing an MD for Accelerate.

Clare asked for a more detailed update at the next meeting – to include specific information about the customer journey and any feedback on the experience of businesses (for example, Bentley, who had expressed an interest in applying for Accelerate). Clare also asked for the profile of training being funded and details of the pipeline.

Clare suggested that Accelerate should be a focus for the next meeting of the Employers' Skills and Education Board. **ACTION KURT ALLMAN AND PHIL ATKINSON**

7.5 Institute of Technology

Dhesi had not received feedback on the bid from the Department for Education and had not yet set up a shadow board. Dhesi aims to discuss the shadow board with other college Principals with the aim of setting up the Board over the next few weeks **ACTION DHESI**

8. Note of last meeting on 18 November 2020 and Outstanding Actions

The note of the last meeting was agreed, and the outstanding actions reviewed.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Digital inclusion

Kath MacKay noted that access to laptops and the internet was still an issue. However, the Government has just announced a further lockdown scheme to provide more laptops to schools and the LEP has just provided a further 180 devices to the Colleges – funded by the Local Growth Fund. The BBC has also recently announced a campaign to encourage people/businesses to donate unwanted laptops to organisations who can wipe the hard discs, check electric safety and distribute the refurbished laptops to schools.

Phil Atkinson suggested that the issue of access to laptops and the internet was a longer term issue – we need a more strategic, longer term programme that ensures equipment is maintained and kept up to date.

It was suggested that we should keep the situation under review and report back to the next Board meeting. **ACTION PAT JACKSON AND SARAH WILLIAMS**

9.2 Publicity for Reaseheath Local Growth Fund Investment

Paul Colman expressed concern at the delays in obtaining a Ministers quote to be included in a press release about the Reaseheath investment. Paul agreed to provide further details so that Pat Jackson could investigate the problem. **ACTION PAUL COLMAN AND PAT JACKSON**

10. Date of next meeting 17 February 2021

Main items for agenda to be the skills report and Accelerate.

Meeting closed at 15.30 hrs

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

- *Clare Hayward - 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)
- *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- Kath Mackay (Alderley Park)
- *Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester)
- *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- James Richards (Network Rail)
- Maggie Chen
- Pat Jackson (LEP)
- *With voting rights

Apologies

- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- *Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
- Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)
- Philip Cox (LEP)
- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities James Richards (Network Rail))
- Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer

Also attended

- David Brennan, Colin Billingsley 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)
- Charles Jarvis (Cheshire East Council)
- 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 and Trevor Langston (LEP)