

NOTE OF CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON - EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 17 MARCH

List of attendees at Annex A.

1. Welcome, and declarations of interest

Clare welcomed Members to the meeting in particular Paul Kelly from BAE Systems who was attending the Board meeting with a view to becoming a Member.

Clare noted the main purpose of the meeting was to:

- Review key developments since the 17th February – in particular the Chancellor’s budget speech and the implications for the Cheshire and Warrington skills and education agenda
- Receive feedback from meetings/activities of key groups held since last meeting
- Review comments received on the draft of the Skills Report and the latest report on the impact of Covid on the labour market
- Review progress of the Local Growth Fund projects and the proposed more refined output definitions and share feedback from project sponsors
- Update Members on the development of the Jobs Portal and plans for the North West online jobs fair

2 Note of the Last Meeting on 17 February 2021

The note of the last meeting was agreed and there were no declarations of interest.

3. Members to share information on key developments since the last meeting on 17 February

- Members were interested in the Chancellor’s recent announcements about incentives for business to engage in apprenticeships and traineeships and the support to develop leadership.
- Kurt noted that he was meeting the Chancellor with other business schools to discuss how the £586 million support for leadership would be rolled out and agreed to provide feedback to Members after the meeting with the Chancellor **ACTION KURT ALLMAN**
- Kurt also noted the limited reference to the Industrial Strategy in the budget
- There was some disappointment around the limited reference to green skills in the Chancellor’s budget.

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

4.1 LEP Board meetings

Clare Hayward reported that the last LEP Board meeting had considered the key announcements in the Chancellor’s budget and the recently published prospectus for the Levelling-Up Fund. Band 1 local authorities are expected to attract most funding. Cheshire and Warrington are in Bands 2 and 3 so will need to submit very strong bids using data and statistics to make the case for funding.

The LEP Board also discussed:

- the potential impact of HS2 on Cheshire and Warrington
- the review of LEPs and their future role
- the recruitment of new Board members
- the Sustainability and Inclusion Commission where key issues will include the skills needed to support decarbonisation.

4.2 Pledge

Trevor Langston noted:

- the Pledge continues to work with employers and has a strong group of Enterprise Advisors who have recently joined the network.

- there are now 78 schools working with the Pledge and the Pledge is increasingly working with Jobcentre Plus for example, online careers and job fairs and sharing videos and other materials produced by employers
- James Richard, current Chair of the Pledge Management Board is stepping down as chair – so a replacement for James is needed. **ACTION CLARE HAYWARD**

In the subsequent discussion Maggie Chen suggested that the Pledge should share information about financial literacy. Maggie also reported that there are plans to hold a Youth Summit with future leaders during the summer.

Clare Hayward also suggested a stronger focus on life science and green technologies.

4.3 Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) Board

Nicola Dunbar reported that DCMS have agreed to extend the funding for Digital Skills Partnerships for an addition year. DCMS are also undertaking a review of the work of DSPs.

Nicola noted that local employers were working together to develop good practice in virtual work placements.

4.4 Institute of Technology

Dhesi reported that he expects an announcement about the Colleges' bid for Institute of Technology funding in early April – at the earliest. However, the Department for Education has requested a meeting to provide feedback on the bid. Dhesi will report on any further developments at the next meeting. **ACTION DHESI**

Dhesi is also aware of the need to convene an employers' board for the next stage of the Institute of Technology.

4.5 Chambers

It was noted that Stephen Fitzsimons is now acting chief executive of Warrington Chamber.

4.6 Accelerate Board and Current Review

Kurt reported that on 23 March he is meeting the Department for Work and Pensions for the third time to discuss options for re-profiling the Accelerate programme. Kurt is also planning to appoint a strategic lead for Accelerate. To date 1,000 people have participated in Accelerate.

Kurt will report further progress at the next meeting of the Employers' Skills and Education Board. **ACTION KURT**

5. Skills Report and the latest report on the impact of Covid on the labour market

5.1 Report on the impact of Covid on the labour market

Pat Jackson invited Members to comment and ask questions on the latest report on the impact of Covid on the labour market. The report had been circulated prior to the meeting and no further questions were raised by Members.

5.2 Skills Report

Pat reported on the feedback received from the Department for Education – overall the report is considered 'good' with some repetition that needs to be addressed. The report will now be revised to reflect some of the minor comments received. The aim will be to publish on the LEP website by 12 April 2021.

Pat also presented a summary slide to illustrate the dynamics associated with the Level 3 labour market.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- The numbers of Level 3 qualifications delivered by the further education sector has been declining for several years – it is suggested that this is a consequence of the introduction of the apprenticeship levy and the introduction of the loan scheme.
- Kath MacKay commented that she was struggling to get a feel for the demand for skills from employers in Alderley Park with mixed messages coming from employers who, if prepared to pay higher rates, can recruit. Kath agreed to report back on her findings at the next meeting **ACTION KATH MACKAY**
- Kath noted that Alderley Park businesses are experiencing challenges recruiting to very senior roles and are recruiting from outside Cheshire and Warrington.
- Members agreed that to encourage immigration and inward investment we needed a place marketing plan.
- Dhesi noted that the Level 3 issue is a cross regions issue that is a consequence of previous Government policies (including student loans and apprenticeship levy) – there is now a glimmer of light from the recent White Paper but the life-time guarantee will not be introduced until 2025.
- The apprenticeship levy has worked for larger businesses such as Bentley but overall, there have been issues including lack of funding for some routes, disruptions caused by the tendering process and digital accounts. The data illustrates a sharp fall in Levels 2 and 3 apprenticeships.
- It was noted that significant numbers of young people leave Cheshire and Warrington to go to University. There are also significant numbers of young people who come into Cheshire and Warrington to study Level 3 qualifications. Dhesi reported that Cheshire College South and West have 350 more Level 3 learners this year.
- It was agreed that, to increase the numbers of people with higher level skills, we needed to try to keep people for longer in the labour market as well as increasing the numbers of young people and adults in work developing their skills. There are also concerns about the impact of Brexit on immigration – other regions are experiencing similar problems so we cannot rely, as previously, on migration from surrounding areas.
- More is needed to promote and change the perception of manufacturing and all employers need to do more on digital.
- Members suggested that the Skills Report should reference pent up demand that might be released as Covid restrictions are eased.

As next steps Pat Jackson will make the minor changes to the Skills Report as requested and arrange for publication on the LEP website by 12 April. **ACTON PAT JACKSON**

Pat also noted that the LEP have published a draft Covid report which is now on the LEP website for comment: <http://www.871candwep.co.uk/about-us/recovery-plan/>.

6. Local Growth Fund update (spend and outputs) and any feedback from project sponsors and proposed showcase event in May

Sarah Williams presented slides to illustrate the spend to date and the outputs being achieved. Members were pleased to note the increased spend as project completed their investments in specialist equipment. Members are now keen to see progress in the achievement of outputs.

Paul Kelly asked for more information about the projects – in particular their focus on enticing learners into Level 3 skills. **ACTION PAT JACKSON AND SARAH WILLIAMS**

7. **Jobs Opportunities Portal and Plans for online jobs fair ‘NorthWESTWorks4U’**

Members made the following comments on the online Job Opportunities Portal:

<https://www.candwopportunities.co.uk/>:

- Sarah Hopkinson commented that it is a great portal and an incredible source of information. But it is not just a hub of information it is also good at signposting to other sources of information.
- Clare Latham reported that the 18 members of her employment support team think it is ‘incredible’.
- Kath MacKay said that she would provide information about the Life Science sector to add to the Portal.

Members noted the list of employers who have signed up to the online jobs fair on 6th, 7th and 8th April.

8. **Action list**

Pat will update the action list for the next meeting **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

9. **Any Other Business, items for future meetings and date of next meeting**

There was no further business.

Items for next agenda to include Accelerate.

Date of next meeting – 21 April 2021

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

- *Clare Hayward - Chair
- *Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
- Kath Mackay (Alderley Park)
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
- *Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
- *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
- Maggie Chen
- Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
- *Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester)
- Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)
- Paul Kelly (BAE Systems) – attending as an observer
- Pat Jackson (LEP)
*With voting rights

Apologies

- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities James Richards (Network Rail))
- James Richards (Network Rail)
- *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer
- Philip Cox (LEP)

Also attending

- David Brennan, Sarah Williams and Trevor Langston 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)