**Note of Employers Skills and Education Board Meeting on 30 April 2018**

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Clare Hayward welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies.

Clare noted that Julia Teale will represent Bentley Motors at future meetings and that James Richards has changed his job within Network Rail and is no longer able to attend. Work is underway to identify a replacement for James from Network Rail.

Paul Colman suggested we should also identify a Chester based business and he agreed to ask Colin Brew from West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber to suggest individual business people who might be interested in the work of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board. **ACTION: Paul Colman**

**2. Note of Last Meeting on 21 March 2018 and Matters Arising**

The note of the last meeting of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board on 21 March was reviewed and agreed. Members commented that the last meeting had been a useful opportunity to step back and re-focus on the key questions they want to answer. They noted that the meeting had enabled members to challenge proposals and there had been a good dialogue about future priorities. All matters arising would be covered by the agenda for the meeting on 30 April.

**3. Putting Employers at the Heart of Inspiring and Informing Young People, Parents, Teachers, Youth Workers and Individuals Seeking Work or Seeking to Progress in Work**

Pat Jackson reported back on the recent meeting s on 11 April and earlier in the day on 30 April) with the Careers and Enterprise Company and local partners where there had been discussions about the National Careers Strategy and the associated implementation plan and prospectus for 20 pilot careers hubs across the country.

Pat noted that partners were keen to develop the network of Pledges across Cheshire and Warrington and noted that this was a priority of the Employer’ Skills and Education Board and was also a means of delivering the National Careers Strategy in Cheshire and Warrington. Pat noted that the National Careers Strategy focuses on 14-19-year olds in school whereas the plans in Cheshire and Warrington include work with young people involved in and out of school, voluntary groups and some pilot work with primary schools.

The meetings with partners on 11 and 30 April had concluded that the priority was to share good practice and develop the Pledge network across Cheshire and Warrington and that it was not timely to bid for a careers hub at this stage. It was more appropriate to wait for the next phase of careers hubs – once the next pilot phase had been completed.

Members of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board agreed with the recommendations about the Careers Hub outlined by Pat. They considered it was critical to complete the network of Pledges across Cheshire and Warrington and agreed that a bid for a Careers Hub would not be helpful at this stage.

Pat also reported that the discussions about a Careers Hub had focused partners on to the issue of whether they could identify funding for an additional two Enterprise Co-ordinators who would work with schools and further education colleges across Cheshire and Warrington. The Enterprise Co-ordinators would match a volunteer from business with each secondary school and FE College in Cheshire and Warrington. The business volunteers will advise on career and enterprise activities within each school and link with the wider Pledge network to access a range of support from employers who have pledged their support to the Pledge network. Discussions had taken place with several potential funders of the Enterprise Co-ordinators and Pat was very hopeful that funding would be secured over the next few days.

Members asked where the proposed Enterprise Co-ordinators would be based. They suggested that there were a number of options including being based in the LEP or with one of the Chambers. They considered that whoever employed the Enterprise Co-ordinators, it would be essential that the Co-ordinators should work as a key part of the Pledge network and all members of the network should work together as a team to offer a coherent and high-quality service across Cheshire and Warrington. In conclusion Members emphasised the following points:

* The Pledge network must be locally driven with employers at the heart of the network setting the strategic direction and agreeing priorities.
* The Pledge network should work closely with voluntary groups so that young people could be engaged in and out of school.
* The Pledge network, including the Enterprise Co-ordinators should work as a team, they need to improve co-ordination and make the most of private and public-sector resources across Cheshire and Warrington - there must be no split between the public and private sector activities.
* There was an interest in the work in North Wales where there is a strong focus on primary schools and Pat was asked to send a link to their website - <http://actonstem.co.uk/>

Pat was asked to report back these conclusions to those partners who had attend ed the meetings on 11 and 30 April. **ACTION: Pat Jackson**

**4. European Social Funds Progress Report**

Mark Livesey reported that approximately £58 million of European Structural Funds involving an equal proportions of European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) and European Social Funds (ESF) were available for investment. A strong bid for investment of £32 million of ERDF had been made last week. Bids included investment in the Alderley Park bio-city hub and a 3D printer hub. Mark agreed to circulate a list of the proposed ERDF projects. **ACTION: Mark Livesey.**

Outline proposals to invest approximately 75% of the ESF had been developed but there is currently a delay in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) issuing calls to invite bids to invest the funds The delays are caused by real resource constraints within DWP and sub-regions could help to reduce the impact of these constraints by encouraging a few large strategic projects rather than numerous poorly co-ordinated projects.

**5. Cheshire and Warrington’s Institute of Technology**

**5.1. Naming** **Cheshire and Warrington’s Institute of Technology**

Clare Hayward reminded members of the names discussed at the last meeting and invited members views. Members favoured the adoption of ‘SKILLS 4.0’ but asked Phil Atkinson, Julia Teale and Paul Taylor to consider the advantages and disadvantages of this option and report back their conclusions at the next meeting of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board. **ACTION: Phil Atkinson, Julia Teale and Paul Taylor**

**5.2. Governance Arrangements, Proposed Roles and Responsibility and Accountability Chains**

David Brennan outlined the proposed governance and accountability chains.

David also explained that it is proposed to match the European Social Funds with the apprenticeship budget and as a fall-back option use a grant system – like the approach adopted in Sheffield, where the ESF would be matched with up to 30% investments by employers. It was agreed that the use of the apprenticeship budget would be the preferred option but a fall-back option should be prepared in case there are changes in national policy around using the apprenticeship budget as match. Either option would allow investments in modules of qualifications not just full qualifications

Members stressed the need to minimise any bureaucracy for employers but noted that a grant system could potentially be a more flexible option for employers. They noted the danger of a grant system could be a weakening of the strategic focus set by the Employers’ Skills and Education Board.

It was confirmed that the lead applicant for ESF will have to set out proposed procurement arrangements and service level agreements with consortia of training providers.

**5.3. Proposed Accountable Body**

Mark Livesey confirmed that discussions were taking place with an organisation interested in becoming a lead applicant and accountable body. Doors were still open for others to express an interest in becoming a lead applicant.

It was suggested that ideally the independent skills brokers involved in aggregating demand from groups of employers and negotiating training packages with consortia of training providers would be based in the LEP as part of the growth hub.

The ESF funding for the Cheshire and Warrington Institute of Technology would ‘last no longer than three years’ and was still subject to the DWP issuing calls inviting bids for investment proposals. The ESF would be used to pump-prime the Institute of Technology with the aim to create a sustainable model that could deliver more coherent and better quality training packages to groups of employers working together to agree training priorities.

**5.4. Progress Reports from Advanced Manufacturing and Digital Group, Energy Group and Logistics Group**

Phil Atkinson reported that he had chaired a meeting at Daresbury with a group of employers and other partners to discuss advanced engineering and digital skills needs across Cheshire and Warrington. The meeting had agreed that digital skills was a cross cutting training need across a range of sectors as well as a key priority for advanced engineering businesses. The group had agreed that employers would submit information about their skills needs – building on the example that Margaret Cheshire had prepared for the energy sector. Subject to the information provided, a follow up meeting would then be arranged to agree next steps.

Margaret Cheshire reported that she planned to take her draft example to the next meeting of the Energy Hub in Ellesmere Port and then provide feed-back and agree next steps with an initial group of partners on 9 May.

In Neil Warren’s absence Pat Jackson reported that Neil had held a meeting internally with Jungheinrich and subsequently with AO. Gary Byrne from Eddie Stobart had unfortunately been unable to attend. They reviewed the draft example prepared by Margaret Cheshire and had agreed to produce an equivalent version for the logistics sector. Neil had prepared an initial draft and this was now being reviewed by the colleagues from AO and Eddie Stobart.

**5.5. Data Analysis on Apprenticeships in Cheshire and Warrington**

Matt Smith from Cheshire West and Chester local authority explained that his team received and circulated the data cube to local authorities on behalf of the LEP. The data cube contains information about training delivered in Cheshire and Warrington as well as separate data about learners who are resident in Cheshire and Warrington.

Matt noted a number of key points:

* There has been an approximate 30% drop in take up of apprenticeships compared with last year. This is broadly in line with national trends.
* Take-up of engineering apprenticeships is proportionately low with stronger demand for retail, social case and business administration.
* Take-up of advanced and intermediate apprenticeships has dropped. Matthew speculated that that the drop in the number of employers with advanced level apprenticeships would have been significantly greater without a relatively large increase in new employers entering the apprenticeship market – as illustrated by the appearance of new employers and providers in 2017/18.
* Warrington saw a lower drop in apprenticeship starts compared to Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester.
* A significant number of apprenticeships are being delivered by a number of key apprenticeship providers who are based outside of the Cheshire and Warrington area.

**6. Any Other Business and Date and Format of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting planned for May should be cancelled and the meeting in June should be organised as an hour of a closed meeting with the members of the Board followed by an extended meeting with other employers and key partners. **ACTION: Pat Jackson to cancel May meeting**

7. The meeting closed at 17.00 hrs