

NOTE OF CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON EMPLOYERS' SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 16 DECEMBER 2020

The main purpose of the meeting was to:

PART 1:

- Celebrate the progress of the Local Growth Fund projects to date and reflect on successes and how the projects have had to adapt to the Covid restrictions

PART 2:

- Review the spend profile and outputs delivered to date by the Local Growth Fund projects
- All Members to share information about any key developments since the last meeting
- Review progress in the development of revised skills and education priorities and provide a steer on the proposed roadmap
- Receive feedback from meetings/activities of key groups held since the last meeting on 18 November, including the Accelerate review and the Institute of Technology

Part 1 of the meeting was attended by Members of the Employers' Skills and Education Board, Members of the Digital Skills Partnership and representatives of the Local Growth Fund projects. A list of attendees and apologies to part 1 of the meeting at Annex A1

KEY POINTS DISCUSSED AND AGREED

PART 1

SHOW CASE AND CELEBRATION OF LOCAL GROWTH FUND PROJECTS

1. Introduction

Clare Hayward welcomed everyone to the meeting. Clare spoke briefly about the LEP's vision 'to create the healthiest, most inclusive, most sustainable and fastest growing economy in England' and highlighted the critical role of the Local Growth Fund skills investments in helping to deliver the vision.

2. Showcasing the equipment purchased to date

Sarah Williams presented a series of slides to illustrate the range of specialist equipment purchased to date and the amount of funding claimed to date. The slides illustrated the diversity of investments and the nature of the outputs to be delivered (617 jobs, 70,888 learning opportunities and 3570 businesses benefitting).

3. Presentation from a number of Local Growth Fund skills investments

A series of presentations were made to highlight the progress to date of specific projects and how they have overcome the challenges of the Covid restrictions. Presentations were made by the following:

- Macclesfield College Digital Skills Hub (Ian Hirst)
- Cheshire College South and West Digital Doorstep, Cat 3 Project 4.0, STREAM-Widening Access projects (Karen Roberts)
- University of Chester Accelerate Cloud (Brian Fitzpatrick and Jane Pearson)
- Youth Federation Yocto Cyber and Digital Skills Programme (Lyndsey Whitely and Rozita Karami)

Copies of all the presentations were circulated by Sarah Williams after the meeting including a video link to illustrate the progress of the Live Wire/Culture Warrington Made.Digital project.

4. General question and answer session

The following points were made:

- The presentations were fantastic and inspiring

- We now need to tell businesses – in particular, smaller businesses, about the resources available to them. The Pledge has a role in spreading the word, but could we also create a ‘showreel’ of the work
- The presentations illustrate how the education establishments in Cheshire and Warrington have been doing a great job supporting young people during the Covid crisis
- We need to share this good news – using a range of different media
- Alderley Park and probably Daresbury, could offer some practical support in helping to spread the word.

5. Conclusions

Clare thanked everyone for their contributions. Clare stressed the importance of everyone present to use their own networks to spread the word about the projects and stressed the importance of starting to collect stories about the impact of the projects on businesses and individual learners.

It was agreed that a follow up show case event should be held in March/April 2021. **ACTION SARAH WILLIAMS AND PAT JACKSON**

At this point Members of the Digital Skills Partnership and representatives of Local Growth Fund projects left the meeting.

PART 2

MAIN EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD

List of attendees and apologies to part 2 of the meeting at Annex B1

1. Welcome, introductions and declarations of interest

Clare welcomed Members to the meeting.

There were no new declarations of interest.

Clare invited Members to introduce themselves and give any reflections on the presentations of the Local Growth Fund projects. The following reflections were noted:

- The presentations were fabulous/very impressive and brought the projects to life
- The photographs of the specialist equipment did not do full justice to the impact that the equipment had on staff and employees – it had created a real ‘buzz’
- The equipment had enormous potential to have a real impact – to inspire and inform employers and young people and their parents about new technologies and technical and digital skills development opportunities

Clare invited project sponsors to highlight any learning points from the support that they had provided to projects. In response the following points were made:

- Some of the reporting requirements had been very difficult to understand – it would have been helpful to have had an induction for new project representatives
- Bureaucracy has created barriers – Covid has demonstrated that we can be faster and more responsive
- Where bureaucracy is necessary it must be made more straightforward and fit for purpose
- New Members of the Board would like an induction to the Local Growth Fund projects

Clare noted that, in response to Kim Hardman’s comments at the last meeting, an induction session with Clare Hayward had been arranged for later in the week.

2. Local Growth Fund Update

Sarah Williams provided an update of spend and delivery of outputs and sponsor feedback. Members noted the spend to date and the further expectation of spend over the next month as soon as invoices have been received.

3. Key Developments Since the Last Meeting

Members noted the following key developments:

- Smaller businesses were putting apprentice recruitment on hold – Covid was making recruitment and induction very difficult.
- Lots of businesses are swamped with support being offered to them in response to Covid – it was suggested that the Pledge and the Growth Hub were good initial points of contact that could help to explain the various types of support available
- There was still considerable nervousness around any recruitment – Engie had recently won a number of contracts but were reluctant to recruit new staff until the contracts had been signed and delivery scheduled
- Zero carbon is a big business opportunity
- In Astra Zeneca, demand for apprentices is strong across the UK and the support that Astra Zeneca receive from the Pledge in Macclesfield is very strong (they wish they had similar support in Cambridge). But there are still challenges around supporting new recruits under the current Covid restrictions
- Need to bring more smaller businesses to the table and help them understand the benefits of working with education providers
- Some smaller businesses do not have HE departments and need more support

4. Skills Priorities and Proposed Road Map

David Brennan presented a series of slides and invited comments on the draft roadmap (slide 7).

The following points were made:

- There was general support for the approach and format adopted for the road map. It is important that the roadmap is informed by good data.
- We need to develop an infrastructure that is practical and easy for businesses to engage with whether they are recruiting or making people redundant.
- There needs to be a balance between opportunities and the threats of the Covid crisis ('don't create unwanted pressure on businesses that are doing ok' – we are in danger of 'catastrophising' the situation)
- The approach must be pragmatic and future focused – as the impact of Covid and Brexit becomes clear we need to be prepared to shift and bend priorities as we go forward
- Need to focus on older skilled people who are in danger of leaving the labour market as well as younger people – there was concern about the numbers of skilled people becoming economically inactive

Clare Hayward asked Members to reflect on the influencers and enablers listed in the roadmap and identify any additional influencers and enablers **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

Trevor Langston noted that Learn Live are now developing websites for schools which parents are also accessing. Trevor noted that Learn Live have suggested that Cheshire and Warrington online career events might qualify for the Guinness Book of Records in terms of the number of participants.

5. Feedback from key meetings since last Employers' Skills and Education Board meeting

5.1 LEP Board meetings

- Clare Hayward noted that the recent discussions at the LEP Board had included discussions about how to work more closely with local MPs. The levelling up funds are relatively small so it is important to ensure key partners including MPs are engaged.
- The sustainability and inclusivity agenda is also moving ahead, and the Life Sciences Biotech team are drawing together key themes for the North West.
- Clare noted that the LEP has started to recruit new Board members and members of committees including the chairs of the Transport, Digital committees and the Employers' Skills and Education Board. The following link provides more information – www.871candwep/vacancies/

5.2 Pledge

James Richards noted that the Pledge is meeting most of the agreed targets but a little behind on the targets for the Careers and Enterprise Company.

James also noted that work is continuing to develop a more sustainable business model for the Pledge.

A national recruitment campaign for Enterprise Advisors will be launched in January and the Pledge will share the link to the campaign as soon as it is launched. **ACTION TREVOR LANGSTON**

Phil Atkinson suggested that schools should also advertise Enterprise Advisor vacancies. **ACTION TREVOR LANGSTON**

5.3 Digital Skills Partnership Board

Nicola Dunbar reported that the Employers' Skills and Education Board and the Digital Skills Partnership had been sponsoring a student (Emily) on a coding bootcamp (run by Code Nation). Emily had completed the bootcamp and had made a short but highly enthusiastic and inspiring presentation to the last meeting of the Digital Skills Partnership. Since the presentation Emily had already received one job offer and most recently been offered a higher apprenticeship with Bentley.

The Digital Skills Partnership is also exploring the scope to establish skills bootcamps linked to job and apprenticeship opportunities in for example, Bentley and Astra Zeneca.

Nicola noted that the Pledge are planning an online digital event in January and agreed to share a link to the event - <https://candwgrowthhub.co.uk/industry-insights/>.

5.4 Accelerate

Phil Atkinson noted that he had received a report on the outcome of the Accelerate review and outlined some of the key recommendations:

- Achieving the 19,000 learners target is not possible – need to realign target against what is achievable
- The Governing Board is getting too involved in operational issues
- Need a Head of the Operational Board that reports regularly to the Governing Board (Kurt is developing a job description)
- Need to ensure compliance with European rules but must adopt a solution focused approach
- The remit between Accelerate's Governing Board and the Employers' Skills and Education Board is clear and not an issue
- There are too many key performance indicators. Need more focus on developing the pipeline with a less bureaucratic approach to get more trainers and employers on board.
- Need to stream-line and consider the balance of roles within the team (lead generation vs administration). For example, can some of the rudimentary task be taken off-line to free up the lead generation roles?

- Need to consider how to reconfigure and reschedule and request change from DWP in March

Clare thanked Phil for the update and stressed the importance of implementing the recommendations as soon as possible. Phil suggested that it would be helpful for an additional two employers to join the Accelerate Board. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS TO FOLLOWUP WITH PHIL ATKINSON**

Nicola Merriman reported that she had been in touch with an Accelerate broker to explore how members of the National Skills Academy for Nuclear (NSAN) might benefit from Accelerate. Nicola was initially exploring training for 100 nuclear workers. Clare Hayward asked to be kept in touch with how this develops. **ACTION NICOLA MERRIMAN and PAT JACKSON (TO FOLLOW TO WITH ANDY DEVANEY)**

Kath Mackay reported that she was exploring Accelerate as an opportunity for Alderley Park businesses and it was agreed that Nicola Merriman would share the business case that she has developed to access Accelerate for nuclear businesses with Kath Mackay **ACTION NICOLA MERRIMAN**

5.5 Institute of Technology

Dhesi outlined the latest developments:

- The bid for a Cheshire and Warrington Institute of Technology had been submitted by the deadline of 14 December.
- The deadline for preparing the bid had been tight and the focus had been to prepare a proposal that would get through the first stage of assessment – a lot more work would then be required for the next stage of the process.
- The bid focusses on creating a prestigious and distinct organisation focusing on delivering higher technical skills in:
 - Computing
 - Engineering
 - Health and Life Sciences
 - Agri-Tech
 - The Built Environment

With three underpinning themes:

- creating Digital capability
- enhancing sustainability
- promoting access for underrepresented groups.
- The targets for the Institute of Technology are set for year five of the operation so may not be delivered until 2027. The targets needed to be ambitious.
- At present, we do not know the chances of success – it is a competitive process.
- The potential is to be able to access around £12 million of capital funding. The revenue will come from public funding of qualifications to be delivered.
- Cheshire College South and West is the lead body working in partnership with core partners including Warrington and Vale Royal College, Macclesfield College, Reaseheath College and the University of Chester.
- The lead body will be responsible for licensing arrangements with the other colleges.
- Core employers are Encirc, Alderley Park, Case New Holland and Warrington and Halton Health Trust
- Non-core partners include Priestley College and the University of Staffordshire.
- We expect to hear whether the bid has been successful in 2 months and, if successful, we will have 8 months to produce a full bid.
- The Local Growth Fund skills funding has provided a first step towards creating a prestigious institute for Cheshire and Warrington

A note summarising the developments to date was shared.

In discussion, Members welcomed the bid and stressed the need to begin work immediately on the next stage of the bid. They suggested that a shadow Board should be established so that employers could support the development of the next stage of the bid. The following Members offered to join a shadow Board:

- Paul Colman
- Kath MacKay
- Clare Latham
- James Richards

ACTION DHESI TO ESTABLISH SHADOW BOARD AS SOON AS POSSIBLE SO THAT FURTHER DEVELOPMENT CAN TAKE PLACE OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS

5.6 Response to Covid - Workforce Recovery Group

Pat Jackson reported that the Workforce Recovery Group continues to meet on a weekly basis and has established a much clearer understanding of the nature of the various cohorts of people and businesses who have been impacted by the Covid crisis.

The Jobs Portal is live and is being regularly updated so that it is more tailored to the issues faced in Cheshire and Warrington. The portal developers are also in discussion with the LEP on how to further refine the portal and use social media to promote the portal to key groups of people.

Significant delays in the processing of Kickstart offers of job placements are being addressed and increasing numbers of job placements are now filtering through to the local Jobcentres.

Two very constructive meetings have taken place with Cheshire and Warrington Housing Association, Jobcentre Plus, Journey First and the LEP to consider the scope to flex support programmes for newly unemployed individuals. A workshop is now planned for the New Year to develop the details of how to work together more closely and provide a streamlined service to Housing Association tenants.

The European Social Fund bidding round is now live – <http://www.871candwep.co.uk/investment-programmes/>.

6. Note of last meeting on 18 November 2020

The note of the last meeting was agreed.

7. Action list and any matters arising that are not on agenda

The action list was noted and there were no further matters to discuss.

8. Date and venue of next meeting

20 January 2021 – probably via Microsoft Team)

The meeting closed at 15.30 hrs.

The following members of the Employers' Skills and Education Board attended Part 1 of the meeting:

- *Clare Hayward - Chair
- *Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- James Richards (Network Rail)
- *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- *Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
- Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
- Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
- Kath Mackay (Alderley Park)
- *Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester)
- Pat Jackson (LEP)
- *With voting rights

Apologies

- Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)
- Maggie Chen
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
- *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer
- Philip Cox (LEP)

The following Members of the Digital Skills Partnership Attended Part 1 of the Meeting

- Nicola Dunbar (Chair)
- Marie Sarkar (Driveworks)
- Piers Mc Leish
- Andy Moore (Bentley Motors)
- Genevieve Wallace Dean (United Utilities)
- Trudie McGuinness (Reaseheath College – representing the training providers)

The following representatives of the Local Growth Fund Skills Projects attended the meeting

- Simon Burgess (Reaseheath College)
- Brian Fitzpatrick (University of Chester)
- Karen Roberts (Cheshire College south and West)
- Rozita Karami (Youth Federation)

- Tracey Jones (Warrington and Vale Royal College)
- Ian Hirst (Macclesfield College)
- Chris Hatherall (Warrington UTC)
- Lynsey Whitley (Youth Federation)
- George Scott (Astra Zeneca)
- Ben Hunt (Reaseheath College)
- Leah Biddle (Live Wire)
- Jane Pearson (University of Chester)

Also attended

- David Brennan, Trevor Langston and Sarah Williams

The following members of the Employers' Skills and Education Board attended Part 2 of the meeting:

- *Clare Hayward - Chair
- *Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- James Richards (Network Rail)
- *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- *Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
- Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
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- Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)
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- *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer
- Philip Cox (LEP)

Also attended

- Representatives of the Local Growth Fund projects
- David Brennan, Trevor Langston 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)