

NOTE OF EMPLOYERS' SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 14 OCTOBER 2020

The main purpose of the meeting was to:

- Receive feedback from meeting of key groups held since 16 September
- Review progress of Local Growth Fund investments to date – including spend and delivery of outputs
- Review latest data and labour market report (on employer demand for skills)
- Consider how to respond to the changing skills and education priorities and the need to produce a skills report for the Department for Education
- Note the priorities for future European Social Fund bids

Meetings that have taken place since the last Employers' Skills and Education Board meeting:

- Four Workforce Recovery Group meetings held since 16 September
- Digital Skills Partnership Board on 22 September
- Meeting of College Principals on 24 September
- Meeting of Pledge Board on sustainability of delivery model
- Cheshire and Warrington LEP Economic Summit on 30 September
- Accelerate Governing Board co-chaired by Phil Atkinson and Kurt Allman on 6 October

List of attendees and apologies for Employers' Skills and Education Board meeting on 14 October at **Annex A**.

KEY POINTS DISCUSSED AND AGREED ACTIONS

1. Welcome, introductions and declarations of interest

Clare welcomed everyone to the meeting in particular Kim Harding from Astra Zeneca who was attending the meeting as an observer. Clare also thanked Phil Atkinson for chairing the last meeting of the Employers' Skills and Education Board.

There were no additional declarations of interest.

2. Note of last meeting on 16 September 2020

The note of the last meeting was agreed.

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

The action list was reviewed, and a number of updates noted.

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

4.1. LEP Board meetings and Economic Summit

Clare Hayward noted the presentation at the LEP's Economic Summit by Andy Haldane, Chief Economist at the Bank of England and invited Members comments on the event.

Members commented that Andy Haldane's presentation had been very refreshing - it had been good to hear a more optimistic approach to the current crisis.

There was a suggestion that providing so much support to business during the crisis might be discouraging businesses to innovate and adopt new business models.

Clare noted the key roles of the LEP and the local authorities in responding to the crisis and summarised various ways in which the LEP, working closely with all our local authorities had responded.

4.2 Workforce Recovery Group

Pat Jackson noted the role of the Workforce Recovery Group in coordinating support for people affected by

the crisis including redundant people, people at risk of redundancy, young people and the self-employed who are claiming income support as a result of closing down their businesses during the lockdown.

Pat noted the coordination of a range of support including support for new business start-ups, the development of an online portal and work on the persona of different groups of people affected by the crisis.

Andy Devaney noted that many businesses are changing the way they work but the hospitality sector has been particularly hard hit by the crisis.

4.3 Pledge Board

James Richards reported on the recent online careers events - 'Expos' that the Pledge has been coordinating. The most recent Expos attracted around 8,800 participants with over 16,000-page visits. Feedback from students had been very positive, and the employer videos had been identified as the most useful. More work was needed on the web chats – the chat lines moved very quickly and there is a need for a better model.

It was noted that there had not been much interest in T-levels and Dhesi commented that the T-level campaign had coincided with the start of the Covid-19 lockdown.

Sarah Hopkinson and Gemma Betteridge commented that they had supported T-levels in the past but Covid restrictions with most people working from home made placements very difficult to deliver.

Dhesi noted the challenges associated with finding job placements and asked Members to share any good examples with him. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

James Richards highlighted the need for more work with training providers and better coordination with existing open day events run, for example, by local colleges. James also noted the way in which Jobcentre Plus had built on the good practice of the Pledge's online events.

4.4. Digital Skills Partnership Board

Nicola Dunbar noted that the Digital Skills Partnership Board met on 22 September and the Members of the Board were keen to align even more closely with the Pledge, the Accelerate training programme and the Local Growth Fund skills investments.

The recent Digital Skills report had highlighted a number of key issues including the significant gender gap associated with the deficit in the numbers of females with higher level digital skills and the digital deficit in specific geographical areas (Ellesmere Port, Crewe and North Warrington).

The Digital Skills Partnership Board are developing role models and case studies to raise awareness about digital skills. If any Member has a good case study – particularly illustrating women in a digital-based career – please contact Nicola Dunbar. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS** Kath Mackay and Kim Hardman both indicated that they were keen to work with Nicola on this. **ACTION NICOLA DUNBAR TO FOLLOW-UP WITH KATH MACKAY AND KIM HARDMAN**

4.5. Meeting of College Principals

Dhesi reported that the last meeting of College Principals had included a discussion with Pat Jackson about the Local Growth Fund skills projects and the review of Accelerate. There had been a follow up meeting between the College Principals and Kurt Allman that had been very useful. The meeting had recognised the competing demands on colleges and this now needed to be worked through together with the recognition that, as currently delivered, other skills programmes were easier than Accelerate to deliver.

It was noted that some of these issues needed to be addressed during the review of Accelerate as well as

during the update of the skills and education priorities and the development of the Skills Action Plan.

5. Local Growth Fund Investments

Clare introduced the item by reminding Members of the need to focus on outcomes and outputs from the Local Growth Fund skills investments but if the funds are not spent and claimed by the end of March 2021 they will be lost to Cheshire and Warrington. Some investments are progressing well but some need nudging.

Members reported on key projects that still have significant sums to spend:

- **Reaseheath Automatic Dairy** – James Richards had been in contact with Reaseheath and had a meeting scheduled for 15 October. James agreed to provide feedback by the end of the week. **ACTION JAMES RICHARDS**
- **Reaseheath Vertical Farming** – Paul Colman met Reaseheath last week. They are currently going through the tendering process and plan to spend all the money by February 2021. It was noted that this is a very tight timescale and does not allow any room for slippage. This project needs very tight monitoring.
- **University of Chester High Performance Cloud** – Louise Higgins is the sponsor but was not present to give an update. In July, when the LEP met with the University (including Kurt Allman) to review progress the main concern was around the purchase of the bus (it has subsequently been confirmed that the University expect the bus to be delivered in February – this is very tight timing and needs careful monitoring). There was also concern around why the servers had not already been purchased – the University explained that they are reviewing the type of server to purchase to ensure it reflected the latest technology. **ACTION LOUISE HIGGINS TO FOLLOW UP**
- **Warrington Vale Royal Advanced Manufacturing Engineering Training Centre** – Phil Atkinson had a detailed discussion with the college. They expect to spend by 5 February. From what Phil has been told this is achievable but it is a very tight timetable and needs close monitoring. Some equipment is being sourced internationally and will be state of the art.
- **Macclesfield College Digital Skills Hub** – Nicola is following up – **ACTION NICOLA DUNBAR**
- **Astra Zeneca STEM Centre / Digital Innovation Hub** – James Nicholas will follow up **ACTION JAMES NICHOLAS**

Kath MacKay commented that the updates were helpful, but it is difficult to know if the money will be spent. All acknowledged that every project was aware of the need to spend the money or it will be lost. The projects highlighted are of particular concern.

It was agreed that all Members would send progress reports to Sarah Williams over the next week and then Sarah will circulate a consolidated report for the next Employers' Skills and Education Board. **ACTION SARAH WILLIAMS**

Dhesi noted that bids were written post Covid when the profiles of spend were different.

It was noted that a number of projects did not have a sponsor and Sarah Williams agreed to follow up on this with new Members. **ACTION SARAH WILLIAMS**

Bill Carr agreed to sponsor the digitalisation in construction project – possibly with Stephen Fitzsimons

6. Latest Data and Labour Market Report – Employer Demand for Skills

David Brennan presented a series of slides – these were a slightly updated version to the slides circulated in

advance of the meeting. In the subsequent discussion the following points were raised:

- The Office for Budgetary Responsibility scenarios were produced before the start of the second wave of Covid cases and not many people expect the recession to be 'V-shaped'
- The big unknown is the extent to which employers take up the Job support Scheme but to date there has been a flattening of unemployment figures – with more young people enrolling in college to delay entering the labour markets
- Claimant count is not the same as unemployment count – some people claiming Universal Credit are in work on low pay and not all unemployed people are claiming benefits
- Economic inactivity is increasing and the proportion of people who are 'inactive but want a job' and 'retired' are rising. This means that unemployment figures are not rising as much as expected
- There has been a decline in employees and self employed
- There has been a significant increase in the numbers of people who describe their previous employment as 'elementary construction' – Jobcentre Plus are looking into this issue as it could be that claimants are not being classified correctly.
- Stephen Fitzsimons queried the geographical location of the distribution workers (in slide 8). David Brennan agreed to check this – **ACTION DAVID BRENNAN**. Kurt Allman suggested that we might explore the role of an Institute of Logistics and Operation (along similar lines to the St Helens programme).
- The gender pay differences are an issue of concern which we need to explore further to understand **ACTION DAVID BRENNAN**
- Slide 23 is probably the most important slide – it illustrates the jobs with difficult to fill vacancies and is a means of indicating where action is needed to reskill/upskill the workforce to enable them to fill these job opportunities.
- Slide 24 showing replacement demand also highlights a key issue.

Clare Hayward thanked David for the report and stressed the need to use the report to inform the review of skills and education priorities and the Skills Action Plan.

It was noted that as reports are approved, they are posted on to the LEP website - <http://www.871candwep.co.uk/data-and-labour-market-information/>

7. Production of a Skills Advisory Panel Report

Members noted the draft guidance issued by the Department for Education to inform the development of a Skills Action Plan. A finalised version of the guidance is expected shortly.

It has been agreed that David Brennan will help us to develop the Skills Action Plan.

It was agreed that a small group of Members would work together as a sounding board to help steer the production of the report. It was critical for the work to build on progress to date and lessons learnt as well as address the key issues identified by the data and labour market work. The Skills Action Plan must be strategic and actions must be 'ruthlessly prioritised' to achieve impact. An update would be provided for the next Employers' Skills and Education Board and if appropriate a separate workshop would be organised.

Kath Mackay, Nicola Dunbar and Paul Colman offered to join the group. **ACTION PAT JACKSON TO FOLLOWUP AND AGREE NEXT STEPS**

15.25 hrs Any Other Business

- Members noted the request to the Department for Work and Pensions for a bidding round for European Social Funding – Pat Jackson to circulate the request
- Items for future meetings – to include an update on the Accelerate review from Kurt as well as an update on the development of the Skills Action Plan
- New Chair for the Employers' Skills and Education Board – Clare noted that she was keen to identify a new Chair for the Board. Members were asked to contact Clare if they are interested in the chairmanship.

ACTION ALL MEMBERS

- Date and venue of next meeting 18 November 2020

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

- *Clare Hayward - Chair
 - *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
 - *Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
 - Gemma Betteridge representing Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)
 - Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
 - Jasbir Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
 - James Richards (Network Rail)
 - Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
 - *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
 - *Stephen Fitzsimons (Warrington Borough Council)
 - *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
 - Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
 - Kath Mackay (Alderley Park)
 - Maggie Chen (had to leave early)
 - Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
 - *Leah Maltby representing Catherine Walker (Cheshire West and Chester)
 - Pat Jackson (LEP)
- *With voting rights

Apologies

- Philip Cox
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities)

Also attending

- Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca) – as an observer
- Andy Devaney, 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)