

NOTE OF MEETING OF EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 18 NOVEMBER 2020

List of attendees and apologies at Annex A.

The main purpose of the meeting was to:

- Receive feedback from meetings/activities of key groups held since last meeting on 14 October
- Consider the latest proposals for an Institute of Technology in Cheshire and Warrington and identify any employers who might want to be at the heart of the Governance structure
- Review progress of Local Growth Fund investments to date – including spend and delivery of outputs and proposed allocation of remaining funds
- Review issues identified by our data and labour market work and consider how these should be reflected in our skills and education priorities for future action
- Note:
 - Response to Covid and the work of the Workforce Recovery Group – in particular Kickstart and the online jobs, training opportunities portal and the meeting with Housing Association to consider the scope to flex support programmes for newly unemployed
 - the forthcoming invitation to bid for European Social Fund bids

KEY POINTS DISCUSSED AND AGREED

1. Welcome, introductions and declarations of interest

Clare invited each Member to introduce themselves and identify one key issue of current concern. The following points were made:

- Need to get information about current job vacancies to Warrington residents (Stephen Fitzsimons)
- The creation of 'green' jobs and associated skills needs (Maggie Chen)
- Ensuring the needs of lower skilled adults are addressed and identification of where 'green' skills are needed (Clare Latham)
- Ensuring Accelerate achieves it's potential and leads to a transformation of the skills system in Cheshire and Warrington (Kurt Allman)
- A successful Institute of Technology bid (Peter Ryder)
- Higher digital skills development (Sarah Williams)
- How to support employers to continue apprenticeships and recruit more apprentices next year (Nicola Merriman)
- Successful Crewe Town Hall bids and support for the Pledge (Paul Colman)
- Successful delivery of Accelerate and a better definition of digital skills gaps (Phil Atkinson)
- Successful Astra Zeneca apprenticeship programme and using the apprenticeship levy to best effect (Kim Hardman)
- Getting back onto the front foot in supporting businesses through the current Covid crisis (Andy Devaney)
- Reduced (by 30%) occupancy of trains and the impact this has on Network Rail's workforce (James Richards)

Clare suggested that all these points should be addressed later in the agenda item on future skills and education priorities.

It was also suggested that a meeting between Clare Hayward and new Board Members should be arranged to follow up initial inductions. **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

2. Institute of Technology

Pete Ryder outlined plans for a Cheshire and Warrington Institute of Technology. The Department for Education has invited bids against a budget of £120m for a further 8 Institutes of Technology. Pete has subsequently shared a briefing paper that was circulated after the meeting. The Institutes are intended to address and generate demand for higher level technical skills with 1500 students enrolled by year 5 and at least 85% of students study at Level 4 and above and only 15% at Level 3.

In Cheshire and Warrington four colleges (Warrington Vale Royal, Macclesfield, Reaseheath and Cheshire College South and West) and the University of Chester as core partners and Cheshire College South and West as the accountable body. There is also a need for at least three employers to be actively involved as Members of the Governing board.

The deadline for submission of the bid is noon on 14th December and current effort is focused on developing the curriculum offer within the constraints imposed by the Department for Education. If the bid is approved the next stage will involve a long period of refinement of the bid.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- Is there scope to link the Institute of Technology with the Warrington Digital and Enterprise Hub and the proposed Crewe Town Fund investment? (Stephen Fitzsimons and Paul Colman)
- Can we also link to Accelerate (Clare Hayward)
- The Institute of Technology could be part of Accelerate's legacy (Kurt Allman)
- Opportunity to build on current Local Growth Fund skills investments (Pat Jackson)
- Previous discussions by the Employers' Skills and Education Board about an Institute of Technology were absolutely clear - we do not want more buildings (already plenty of empty buildings around) – need more focus on specialised equipment and refurbishments where necessary (Clare Hayward, Phil Atkinson and various other Members agreed)
- What is the vision for the Institute of Technology – it is not clear beyond a focus on digital and sustainability. It must be creative and visionary (Clare Lathom supported by other Members of the Board)

In conclusion Clare Hayward noted that there was general support for a Cheshire and Warrington Institute of Technology but it needed to be employer-led and focused on the priorities of the Employers' Skills and Education Board. Clare asked Members to follow up with Pete Ryder if they wanted to become cornerstone employers. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

In response Pete Ryder and Rachel Kay expressed some concern that the proposals being developed by the Principals were not in line with the views expressed by the Employers' Skills and Education Board. Rachel recognised the importance of being creative but highlighted the restrictions imposed on the curriculum by the Department for Education and the tight deadline.

Pete noted the strong and coherent vision that had been developed by the South West Institute of Technology - the South West Institute of Technology is creating digital learning laboratories, artificial intelligence arenas and augmented reality environments to enable the South West to become a world leader in digital technologies.

Rachel noted that the College Principals and the University were meeting later in the week to review the curriculum content proposed by the colleges and suggested a follow up meeting with the Board as soon as possible after the work had been collated. **ACTION PETE RYDER AND PAT JACKSON TO LIAISE ON POSSIBLE MEETING DATE**

3. Feedback from key meetings/activities held since last Employers' Skills and Education Board meeting

3.1 Accelerate

Kurt Allman reported that the current review of Accelerate is almost finished. It is crucial to find a way of successfully delivering the project on a larger scale and to achieve this objective a proposal is being developed to breakdown the project into smaller component parts working with the colleges and other training providers.

Phil Atkinson noted that he had not yet seen the emerging findings from the review but he was keen to learn lessons from the review and press ahead with delivery – it was important for Accelerate training to respond to the Covid crisis.

It was agreed the next Employers' Skills and Education Board should spend more time at their next meeting on the conclusions of the review and the proposed next steps.

3.2 The Pledge

James Richards reported a series of highly successful online careers events involving large numbers of young people and significant numbers of employers. James was now working with the Pledge executive team to develop some form of pre and post evaluation of the online events.

The Pledge is also developing a longer-term sustainability model.

3.3 Digital Skills Partnership

Nicola Dunbar was keen to get views from Members about a proposed digital bootcamp pilot to be offered to individuals currently furloughed. The proposal is to use Accelerate funding which might fund 100% of the cost of the training if the furloughed individual was employed in a business employing fewer than 250 staff.

Nicola noted that Code Nation, a current supplier of digital bootcamps is already registered as an approved Accelerate training provider.

Nicola asked Members to identify employers with fewer than 250 employees who might be interested in getting involved with a digital bootcamp. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

Clare Hayward suggested that the opportunity should be marketed via LinkedIn, Marketing Cheshire and Board Members.

Phil Atkinson noted the need for speed if the bootcamps were 12 weeks in duration this might go beyond the current furloughing arrangements.

Kim Hardman said that she was not in a position to comment without further information which Nicola Dunbar agreed to circulate via Pat Jackson. **ACTION NICOLA DUNBAR**

Clare Lathom was keen to understand the extent to which longer term unemployed people might benefit from the bootcamps – **ACTION SARAH WILLIAMS TO FOLLOW UP WITH CLARE LATHOM**

3.4 Data and Labour Market Work

Pat Jackson reported that responses to a short questionnaire asking local colleges, local authorities and other key partners about the usefulness of the data and labour market reports produced to date had been very positive. Responses had indicated that the reports were helping to inform the development of the local curriculum. Pat agreed to share a copy of the questionnaire.

The reports and associated summary slides can be found on the LEP website:
<http://www.871candwep.co.uk/data-and-labour-market-information/>

3.5 Workforce Recovery Group

Pat Jackson informed Members that the Workforce Recovery Group had been set up in response to the current Covid crisis. The very high levels of unemployment expected when the Group was first established had not yet occurred so the Group was now reviewing priorities to ensure that key cohorts of people affected by the current crisis are supported. This included young people, long-term unemployed and individuals who are currently furloughed or who have recently become unemployed who are not making contact with Jobcentre Plus. There is some evidence that some of these people who are 50+ and highly skilled may leave the labour market if they are not aware of new job and training opportunities.

It was suggested that Jobcentre Plus might be invited to a future meeting of the Employers' Skills and Education Board to discuss the support being coordinated via the Workforce Recovery Group and to explore the scope for working more closely with Members. **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

4. Local Growth Fund Skills Investments

4.1 Progress of Capital Spend to Date

Sarah Williams outlined progress on investments already contracted including feedback from sponsors. Sponsors of projects where there is concerns about whether the large amounts of funds still to be spent (amounting to a total of £1.8 m) were invited to give their views on the performance of the projects to date and the likelihood of them spending within the timescale agreed in the business plans. In the following discussion the following comments were made:

Reaseheath Centre for Dairy Automation and Robotic Milking – James Roberts reported that progress reports are up to date and the project is looking very positive. The investment will contribute to the longer term sustainability of the College Reaseheath and has already resulted in a decision by Lely who are providing supplying some of the milking equipment (as a result of a competitive tender) to locate their national training centre to Reaseheath. Lely have also decided to provide additional equipment to enable teachers to show the breakdown of the equipment for teaching purposes.

Reaseheath Vertical Farming Centre – Paul Colman reported similar feedback on the vertical farming project. Paul expected most of the remaining money to be spent in February.

Warrington Vale Royal College Advanced Manufacturing Engineering Centre – Phil Atkinson reported a similar position with the Warrington Vale Royal project but expressed concern around potential delays caused by the failure of suppliers to deliver on schedule.

University of Chester High Performance Private Cloud – Louise Higgins was not present to comment on the project but Kurt Allman undertook to check progress within the University and remind them of the tight deadlines. **ACTION KURT ALLMAN**

Clare Hayward suggested, and it was agreed that the next meeting of the Employers' Skills and Education Board should be extended by an additional hour to allow time to celebrate the success of the investments made to date. **ACTION SARAH WILLIAMS AND PAT JACKSON**

4.2. Proposed Allocation of £30K for Equipment to Support Local Growth Fund Skills Projects in Response to Covid

Sarah Williams outlined the proposals for the allocation of £30k to three existing projects to support more online delivery, widening access and extension of the scope of their projects.

Following discussion, the Board agreed to the following additional funding:

Project	Additional Allocation
IOTA	£7,500
Made.Digital	£9,000
Yocto.Digital	£13,500

The conditions of approval were as follows:

- **IOTA** - that IOTA provide details of the equipment they have already purchased with the initial funding and then swapped. They must also increase the outputs for learners
- **Made.Digital** - that the project must spend all of their existing allocation before the 18 November 2020. They will also be asked to amend outputs to reflect the revised offer of £9k
- **YouthFed** – they were required to send a revised proposal for the investment of £13,500 and to confirm match from Barclays and Youth Fed. The revised proposal has already been received. This will enable Youth Fed to procure a licence for Talent LMS for 3 years which support them to effectively manage their eLearning service offer and develop it year on year. They have already provided details of suitable increased outputs.

5. Key Issues from Data and Labour Market Reports and Future Priorities for Action

David Brennan presented a series of slides summarising the key finding of the data and labour market work to date and identifying a number of key issues requiring action.

- Covid-19 - how to mitigate and drive recovery
- Attainment at 19 and disadvantage
- Young people's attainment – spatial issues
- Poor Level 3+ attainment resulting in too many residents with lower level skills
- Gender disparities – in particular with digital skills
- Hard to fill vacancies- as a result of a number of factors including lack of required skills

Clare Hayward reminded Members to link back this agenda item to the first agenda item where Members had identified issues of concern.

In the subsequent discussion the following was noted:

- Young people and people aged 50+ were being disproportionately affected by the Covid crisis.
- The hard to fill vacancies in Cheshire and Warrington mainly required skills at level 3.
- One area with a high level of vacancies requiring lower level skills was customer services – this might be an area where there was a need for more sector-based academies
- We need more creative ways of engaging furloughed and unemployed people who are not currently engaging with the public sector to ensure that they are aware of job and training opportunities
- In Crewe there are plenty of skills capital investments but there is a need for more community-based hubs as well as an enhancement of the Pledge and Accelerate.
- Rachel Kay noted the recent AOC Autumn survey reported (subsequently circulated to Board Members):
- 16-18 enrolments are up in 62% of colleges, by between 15,000 and 20,000 students (around 3%) but the funding formula only provided for 0.1% growth
- Adult enrolments are down in 46% of colleges
- Apprenticeship numbers are down in 73% of colleges
- Higher education (HE) enrolments are down in 49% of colleges.
- Macclesfield College had recently run a series of sector based four week 'brush-ups' for sectors where they had identified job vacancies around Macclesfield but take up had been disappointingly low.

- Maggie Chen was very interested in the work to inspire young people about new technologies and career opportunities but concerned about the poor visibility of appropriate female role models.
- The need to understand more about the skills needs of 'green' jobs and the need for training providers to respond quickly to the changing skills needs in this area which are frequently driven by Government policy decisions e.g. continuation of green home initiatives.

In summary Clare Hayward suggested that the issues highlighted during the discussion should be summarised and presented back at the next meeting of the Employers' Skills and Education Board. **ACTION PAT JACKSON AND DAVID BRENNAN**

6. Note of last meeting on 14 October and Action List

The note of the last meeting was agreed. Most of the outstanding issues were on the agenda.

7. Any Other Business

7.1. European social Funds

Members noted that the proposals to a further round of European Social Funds had recently been agreed by The Department for Work and Pensions. The dates when the bidding round will be launched and the deadline for bids have not yet been confirmed. It was agreed that we should encourage a partnership approach to bidding and discourage large numbers of uncoordinated bids.

7.2. Agenda for Next Meeting

Agenda for next meeting to include:

- Accelerate Update
- Future Skills and Education Priorities and Skills Action Plan
- Update on Local Growth Fund spend and delivery of outputs
- Show casing and celebration Local Growth Fund investments to date.

Meeting closed at 15.30hrs

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

- *Clare Hayward - Chair
- *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
- *Stephen Fitzsimons (Warrington Borough Council)
- *Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester)
- Maggie Chen
- James Richards (Network Rail)
- Rachel Kay (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
- *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- *Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- Pat Jackson (LEP)
- *With voting rights

Also attended

- Andy Devaney, David Brennan, Pete Ryder and Sarah Williams for specific agenda items

Apologies

- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)
- Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
- Kath Mackay (Alderley Park)
- Jasbir Dhesi
- Philip Cox (LEP)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities)

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)