

Meeting of Employers' Skills and Education Board Meeting on 13 May 2020

1. Welcome and Introductions

Clare welcomed everyone to the meeting. No new declarations of interest were made.

List of attendees and apologies at **Annex A**.

2. Notes from Last Meeting and Matters Arising

A number of changes to the notes of the last meeting were requested:

- Page 1 – Nicola Dunbarr requested that the reference to the small company as 'previously struggling' should be deleted.
- Paragraph 4.2.1 - Clare Hayward asked for the following to replace the text in the second paragraph 'that the crisis could potentially result in 1.6 million people in the North West becoming unemployed and 5 to 6 million unemployed in the UK'.
- Page 2, second bullet point - Dhesi noted that 200 of their apprentices had been furloughed but 90% were still in learning.

With these amendments, the notes of the last meeting were agreed. **ACTION Pat Jackson to amend note of meeting.**

3. Action List from Last Meeting

The action list was reviewed, and progress noted.

Clare noted the success of the Pledges' recent virtual careers day at Penketh High School.

4. Key Developments Since Last Meeting

A number of key developments were noted.

4.1 LEP Board

Clare noted that the LEP Board is meeting more regularly and is overseeing the emergency response to the Covid-19 crisis including the work of the Growth Hub and Marketing Cheshire, the PPE task and finish group, the Pledge team's support to Cheshire East to get business loans distributed to local businesses and the work with Banks to support local business.

Clare explained that the Board had initiated work on what will be needed to restart the economy when lockdown finishes - including risk assessments, and work on 'Build Back Better' – the longer-term recovery.

4.2 Accelerate

Phil Atkinson reported that the last Accelerate Governance Board meeting had agreed the tactics for delivery of Accelerate training over the next 6 months including the scheduled start of training on 18 May. The next Governance Board meeting is planned for next week (20 May).

Maud reported that a change control request to enable the LEP to use £600K as match funding and Marketing Cheshire to become a delivery partner had been submitted to DWP. The change control was being processed and Maud was hopeful of a response during the next week.

The first mini competition to provide Accelerate subsidised training courses had been completed and training can start as soon as Department of Work and Pensions approval of the requested change controls has been received.

The spend on Accelerate is significantly behind profile and the University will submit a change control request to cover the change in spend profile in June.

The LEB Board approved the proposed targeting of the £600K that will be used to 100% grant fund some of the Accelerate training and there are on-going discussions about additional LEP funding.

Maud also confirmed that if we go ahead and start delivering 100% grant funded training that spend cannot be reclaimed – we have to wait until the change control has been approved. Maud confirmed that she would check progress again with DWP in the morning.

It was also noted the Marketing Cheshire cannot start promoting Accelerate until the change control has been agreed.

4.3 The Pledge

Pat Jackson updated Members on the recent work of the Pledge.

Pre-Covid-19 the LEP and the Pledge had run some exciting events where employers were meeting small groups of students to demonstrate new technologies and discuss career opportunities but we wanted these events to reach a wider audience and had already started to explore the use of live broadcasts and associated question and answer sessions. The current crisis has accelerated the adoption of live broadcasting.

Over the last few weeks, the Pledge had run two sessions of Learn Live@ 11.00 each week. To date approximately 4,000 people had taken part in each session.

On 6 May the Pledge ran a pilot virtual careers day involving 3 employers and a group of students at Penketh High School. 1,571 people watched the event live throughout the day and there had been 1,782 chats during the day.

Following the success of the Penketh High School pilot the Pledge are running a virtual careers festival involving over 40 employers during the week beginning 18 May. All 63 of our secondary schools and colleges have been invited. As of 19th May there were 2,100 registrations and on 19th May alone there were over 24,00 people viewing the site. Since the campaign went live there have been over 70,000 visits to the site.

The Pledge also plan to run a virtual event to enable our local employers to show case how they have responded to the Covid-19 crisis.

Our local schools and local businesses are very keen for us to continue to facilitate these types of activity. We have been particularly pleased with the extent to which smaller businesses have engaged – it is not very resource intensive for them and yet they manage to reach a large audience of young people from our local schools.

Building on this work the LEP is also planning to invest some of our Local Growth Fund skills funding into capital equipment that will enable us to further widen access to new technologies and career opportunities.

5. Access to Computers

Pat Jackson introduced the paper that had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The paper highlighted the challenges of ensuring all our young people are able to access a computer and the internet to learn on-line during the lockdown. In a survey of head teachers of local secondary schools over half had responded and identified over 2,400 students without computers and 1000 without access to the internet at home.

The LEP was seeking approval from the Employers' Skills and Education Board to launch a campaign to raise awareness about the numbers of students without access to a computer and/or the internet and to encourage businesses to donate cash for new computers or new computers to our most disadvantaged young people. The LEP was also proposing to use £25K of LEP funds to kick start the campaign.

The Employers Skills and Education Board approved the proposals set out in the paper. They advised that the LEP funding should be allocated on condition that one school from each local authority should take the lead in purchasing the computers and each school receiving the LEP funds should confirm that they will provide access to the internet, as required, for the students.

Members were keen to see the campaign launched as soon as possible and Pat advised that the decision of the Employers' Skills and Education Board would need to be ratified by the LEP's Performance and Investment Committee before the campaign launched but the campaign could start as soon as possible after the Performance and Investment Committee meeting on 19 May.

Please note that the Performance and Investment Committee ratified the approval at their meeting on 19 May.

Members also suggested that the LEP should explore the scope for the internet providers such as Open Reach, Talk-Talk and Virgin to provide free internet access to students. Stephen Fitzsimmons agreed to follow up on this. **ACTION STEPHEN FITZSIMMONS.**

6. Redeployment and Job Matching

Bill Carr reported that, earlier in the week, he had chaired a task and finish group to consider the issues around redeployment and job matching and to make recommendations. The group comprised Phil Atkinson, Trevor Brocklebank and James Nicholas and Colin Billingsley and Sue Savage from Jobcentre Plus.

Bill noted that since the lockdown Jobcentre Plus had experienced a 10-fold increase in the number of people claiming Universal Credit. Because of the pressure to support these individuals and the restrictions on classroom-based learning, Jobcentre Plus had been unable to offer training over the last six weeks and had not been able to collect all the usual information about claimants. Although the immediate pressures on Universal Credit had eased, Jobcentre Plus were expecting further demand for Universal Credit as lockdown is released – even though at present around 80% of people who have been furloughed are expecting to return to work.

Bill explained that Jobcentre Plus had shared their Labour Market recovery plan with the task and finish group and had agreed to share any emerging information around the characteristics of claimants. Jobcentre Plus are already members of the Data and Labour Market Steering Group so have access to the various data and labour reports as they are produced.

The task and finish group also provided information to Jobcentre Plus about how the Pledge partners had moved delivery on-line and the success to date of the Learn Live events and the virtual career events. The task and finish group had agreed to share and review all the available information and meet again on 26 May to agree next steps.

Bill Carr invited Colin Billingsley (Jobcentre Plus) to talk through his Labour Market Recovery Plan.

Colin confirmed that he had already been in discussion with Pat Jackson about how to develop closer links between the LEP and Jobcentre Plus. Colin is also a member of the post Covid-19 resilience group chaired by Philip Cox. He confirmed that as pressure to process Universal Credit claimants eased, Jobcentre Plus would focus more on the labour market recovery plan.

Colin noted that he was only able to share nationally available information. He noted that Jobcentre Plus had made first payments to 4,000 people in the week beginning 4 May and another 3,000 first payments in the week beginning the 11 May. Colin expected some of the claimants to return to work and quickly come off Universal Credit however, others would need more support. Jobcentre Plus were now also starting to go back to claimants to collect more background information about the reason for their claims. Initially they were contacting key workers. Colin and Sue Savage both commented on the good practice that they could take from the Pledge on-line work.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Clare Hayward was interested to understand what is happening to employment in different sectors e.g. car manufacturing.
- Stephen Fitzsimmons expressed concerns around possible job losses later in the year as furloughed workers returned to work.
- Paul Colman asked if Jobcentre Plus have plans to set up meetings with local partners and Colin Billingsley confirmed that Jobcentre Plus does have a place-based approach for different labour markets across Cheshire and Warrington. Paul was keen to support this.
- Bill Carr asked for more information about the expected impact of the most recent announcements around the extension of furlough arrangements.
- Clare Hayward noted that because of the statutory 90-day consultation process some businesses had started the consultation process and then stopped after the Chancellor's recent announcement.
- Nicola Dunbar noted that Members of the Digital Skills Partnership may be keen to be involved in a Digital Careers Fair if Jobcentre Plus decided to pursue this idea.
- Colin Billingsley commented that Jobcentre Plus will initially focus on support for developing CVs. He also said that Jobcentre Plus needed to understand more about what had happened to the people who were working and claiming Universal Credit pre-Covid - are they still working?
- Clare Hayward noted that knowledge on what is happening in the labour market will be key. Clare was aware that local authorities are planning to establish employment hubs and accelerate the job matching services. She asked Members to share any intelligence with Bill Carr and the Growth Hub.
- Pat Jackson suggested that Members needed to consider the skills and training implications of the situation and Clare Hayward stressed the importance of identifying any gaps in skills or training.
- Sue Savage commented that, pre-Covid-19, the majority of Jobcentre Plus training had been classroom based and focused on more practical skills e.g. forklift driving. Jobcentre Plus

needed to consider what on-line training could be provided in the interim and to identify new job opportunities.

- Colin Billingsley was clear that, in a digital age, we should be able to offer more flexible training – delivered at different times and using different styles of delivery.
- Clare Hayward noted that being able to use more blended training would be a good preparation for working more on-line post Covid-19.
- Dhesi commented that ‘necessity is the mother of invention’ - a number of training providers have submitted on-line training opportunities for delivery via the Accelerate training programme – this could be an opportunity for Jobcentre Plus to engage in the programme.

Clare Hayward thanked Colin Billingsley and Sue Savage for attending the meeting. Clare commented that the Jobcentre Plus plan was very clear and provided a great opportunity for working more closely with the Employers’ Skills and Education Board. Colin confirmed that he would continue to work with Bill Carr and the task and finish group.

7. Local Growth Fund

Pat Jackson updated Members on the Local Growth Fund skills investments – there had been 14 investments to date amounting to £4.6 million.

In addition to the £25K to be allocated to kick start the ‘computers in schools’ campaign, the remaining funding would be spent on 2 further invitations to bid:

- **Widening access to new technologies and access to digital learning opportunities** - on 15th April the LEP issued an invitation to bid for up to £125,000 to support wider access by local businesses, local schools and colleges and local communities to digital and other new technologies including the technology and expertise in the 14 Local Growth Fund investments that have already been made. The deadline for submission of bids for this investment is 5pm on Friday 15th May 2020.
- **Digitalisation in construction** - an invitation to bid for investment to support digitalisation in construction was issued on 6th April with a deadline of 1st May, all the submissions received had some strengths but none of the submissions met the requirements sufficiently to allow the LEP to award a contract. Most disappointingly there had been a lack of innovation and strategic partnership between the hub and associated satellites.

Pat noted that Nicola Dunbar had helped in the assessment of the digitalisation in construction bids. Subject to the views of the Employers’ Skills and Employment Board, it was proposed to issue a further invitation to bid for £260k to invest in digitalisation in construction, the deadline for this invitation would be 5pm on 11th June. The revised invitation to bid would stress the need for a more strategic partnership approach that would deliver real innovation to businesses across Cheshire and Warrington with clear added value from all the partners participating in the bid.

Nicola Dunbar noted that all the bids received had some merits but expressed her disappointing in the lack of innovation and strategic partnership between those involved in the bids. Nicola commented that a £260 million investment should achieve something really exciting for Cheshire and Warrington – it should not just be an opportunity to purchase some new kit and continue business as usual.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Clare Hayward stressed the need to broaden the reach of the invitation to bid -using social media and making some of the bigger construction companies aware of the opportunity to bid and perhaps enter into a joint venture arrangement with the training providers. In response Phil Atkinson commented that he had seen the previous invitations to bid on numerous occasions via social media.
- Phil Atkinson queried the scope to get better, more strategic cooperation and partnership working between providers and stressed the need to make more small businesses aware of the help available to them. We needed to get better at this.
- Clare Hayward agreed that there was a need to reposition and consider the future role of the Growth Hub and Marketing Cheshire.
- Paul Colman stressed the need for employer engagement to be more focused at local level.

In conclusion, all Members agreed the need to re-issue the invitation to bid and make the invitation more specific about what was needed. **ACTION PAT JACKSON - Done**

Pat Jackson asked Members to contact her if anyone wanted to get involved in the assessment of the bids. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

8. Any Other Business

A number of additional points were made:

- Phil Atkinson reported that he had now contacted Warrington and Vale Royal College as the sponsor for their Local Growth Fund investment.
- It was noted that basic digital skills are a fundamental building block and need to be addressed by the Accelerate training programme - our key vehicle of support.
- Stephen Fitzsimmons agreed and stressed the importance of digital skills in helping businesses to change their business models.
- Julia Teale suggested that digital skills were on a par with mental health training – where there is currently a strong pull from managers and individuals as well as a push from business.
- Dhesi noted that there is a lot of training material available on mental health – we do need a filter and check quality.
- Clare Latham commented that it had been her first meeting and she had found it very interesting - particularly the discussions with Jobcentre Plus. Clare noted that prior to Covid, Cheshire West and Chester Council had delivered training that was mainly classroom based. This had been very suitable for their clients but the Council now recognised the need to move the training on-line.
- Maud Duthie re-emphasised that some Accelerate training has already been commissioned – including mental health.

9. Date of Next Meeting and Items for Agenda

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 17 June 2020 at 13.30 hrs.

Clare suggested that the meeting should start with a stocktake of progress including progress on Local Growth Fund investments and invitations to bid, feedback from Bill Carr's task and finish group and from Phil Atkinson on the Accelerate programme.

List of Attendees and Apologies

- Clare Hayward (Chair)
- Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- Julia Teale (Bentley Motors)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- Stephen Fitzsimmons (Warrington Borough Council)
- Dhesi Jasbir (Cheshire College South and West and representing the training providers)
- Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester Council)
- Maud Duthie (Representing Charlie Woodcock, University of Chester)
- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- Pat Jackson (LEP)

Apologies

- James Richards (Network Rail)
- Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
- Philip Cox (LEP)
- Martin Wood (Department for Businesses, Energy and Industrial Strategy)

Also attending

- Colin Billingsley (Jobcentre Plus)
- Sue Savage (Jobcentre Plus)
- Sarah Williams (LEP, Digital Skills Partnership)

Paper copied to:

- Jamie Zucker (DfE)
- Clare Cassidy (DfE)
- Mike McLouglin (DfE)
- Joe Manning (LEP)