

NOTE OF EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 17 NOVEMBER 2021

The main purpose of the meeting was for Members to:

- Review key developments since their last meeting on 20 October and respond to any issues raised during meetings of key groups held since last Board meeting
- Note the outcome of the tendering for the next phase of data and labour market analysis and the additional analytical facilities now available to access more real-time labour market information and understand more about hard to fill vacancies
- Review the latest update of the Skills Action Plan and look in depth at one aspect of the Plan
- Provide a steer on the key issues to address during the refresh of the Skills Report
- Receive an update on the progress of the Local Growth Fund Skills projects

KEY POINTS DISCUSSED

- 1. Welcome, declarations of interest, introductions with members sharing information on any key developments since the last meeting on 20 October**
 - Members welcomed Kevin Hutchinson from SISK – a potential new member of the Employers' Skills and Education Board.
 - List of attendees and apologies (Annex A)
 - There were no additional declarations of interest.
- 2. Note of last meeting and outstanding actions**
 - The note of the last meeting was approved, and the updated action list was reviewed.
- 3. Feedback from key meetings/activities since last Employers' Skills and Education Board**
 - Members noted the list of meetings that had taken place since the last Employers' Skills and Education Board meeting.
- 3.1 LEP Board**
 - In Kath Mackay's absence, Pat Jackson drew Members' attention to the LEP Chief Executive's October report that had been circulated to Members as requested.
- 3.2 Digital Connectivity Board**
 - Nicola Dunbar was not present to provide an update on the most recent meeting of the Digital Connectivity Board.
- 3.3 Meeting with David Rutley MP**
 - Pat Jackson noted that the meeting that Pat and Kath had attended with David Rutley and Gill Thomas on 5 November had been very useful and constructive. At the Minister's request, Kath Mackay had written a letter to follow up the meeting.
- 3.4 Accelerate**
 - Kurt Allman reported that he had not yet received feedback from DWP to his project change request. He was still planning for a closure to new training on 31 May and closure of finances by July. To date Accelerate have claimed 887 outputs with 803 participants in the pipeline.
 - A marketing campaign is planned to provide a final push to engage more participants (the project change request to DWP assumes 2,250 participants in total).
 - At present there is an under-representation of participants developing basic skills.
 - Phil Atkinson noted that a full meeting of the Accelerate Board will be convened as soon as there is a response from DWP. A key priority will be to ensure all participants are able to complete their training.

- Sarah Williams requested, and Kurt agreed to provide more information about the digital skills being funded via Accelerate **ACTION KURT ALLMAN**

3.5 **Institute of Technology (IoT) and Skills Accelerator**

- Dhesi confirmed that the Cheshire and Warrington partners had received a DfE invitation to an interview on 1 December in response to their £13 million bid for an IoT.
- Dhesi will inform partners as soon as he receives information about the lines of enquiry that DfE want to pursue during the interview.
- An announcement about successful bids is expected by the end of this year.
- Local MPs are well informed about the bid but, as suggested by David Rutley, Dhesi will write to local MPs following the interview on 1 December. **ACTION DHESI**
- Dhesi will share an update on the £2.7 million Skills Development Fund bid after the meeting. Dhesi's paper includes details of what is to be funded at each of the colleges.
- Cheshire and Warrington are one of only 8 successful bids.
- The skills to be funded via the Skills Development Fund are not qualification based but DfE will not fund very short (half-day) training courses.
- A press release about the successful Skills Development Fund bid will be issued shortly.

4. **Outcome of the tendering for the next phase of data and labour market analysis and latest real-time labour market intelligence including on hard to fill vacancies**

- Pat Jackson informed Members that David Brennan had been awarded the contract for the next phase of data and labour market work.
- Sarah Williams shared the latest real time labour market intelligence and details of the additional analytical facilities we have to understand more about hard to fill vacancies.
- In response Members expressed concerns around the apparent mismatches between vacancies and the people seeking work and Kurt Allman offered to share some insights into the reasons for the mismatches. **ACTION KURT ALLMAN**
- Pat noted that the deliverers of RESTART in Cheshire and Warrington had been asked for feedback on why individuals were turning down job offers.
- Keven Hutchinson queried if there were any trends that might suggest changes in retention levels – are the same vacancies recurring over time as a result of poor retention?
- Kevin also noted that it was important not to over-specify jobs and to look at vacancies in different ways – for example, to ensure engineers were using their engineering skills and not being required to take on additional roles/responsibilities that did not require their specific skill set.

5. **Updated Skills Action Plan including in depth look at the work with young people**

- Members noted the shorter, more strategic version of the Action Plan that was published with the Skills Report
- Kath commented that the more detailed, regularly updated action plan was a very comprehensive, working document and invited Members views on what impacts that are realistic and measurable should be used in the Action Plan – bearing in mind that the Employers' Skills and Education board is primarily focused on influencing and informing partners rather than direct delivery. In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:
 - It is important to raise the profile of the Employers' Skills and Education Board so that it can provide more visible thought leadership and increase the awareness of the importance of the skills agenda and remove gender imbalances.
 - It is difficult to isolate the specific contribution of the Employers' Skills and Education Board to the macro impact measures listed in the Skills Action Plan. We

need to bridge the gap between the macro and micro, more operational measures of success and demonstrate the linkages and interdependencies.

- We need to be clearer about what success would look like and develop smaller, more measurable impacts that would contribute very clearly to the overall success criteria – for example we needed to be clear what the digital champions are doing and how their activities are having an impact.
- The changes that we seek will not happen overnight, but we need to understand if our actions are delivering the required impact.
- Can we link the skills measures of success with the metrics used in the LEP's economic strategy documents?
- We need to understand how the Pledge and the Digital Skills Partnership are impacting on students with special educational needs.
- There was concern that, as a result of recent changes in the labour market, gaps between the disadvantaged communities and other communities across Cheshire and Warrington are widening.
- Kath suggested that a small sub-group should look in more detail at the impact measures and report back to the Board. **ACTION KATH AND PAT TO TAKE FORWARD**
- Trevor reported that the Pledge team are currently developing a strategic plan for the Careers Hub and working with the Westminster Foundation on the theory of change and impact measurements. Trevor invited a Member of the Employers' Skills and Education Board to join this work and act as the formal link over the next 6 weeks. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS – completed Lucy Liang has volunteered for this work.**

6. Refreshing the Skills Report

- Pat Jackson shared a set of slides that provided a background to the refresh of the Skills Report and key developments that had taken place since the last report.
- Members were invited to provide a steer on key aspects of the Skills Report that need to be updated. In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:
 - We need to understand more about how employers are flexing vacancies
 - How do we ensure that young people are more aware of the current job opportunities?
 - We need to be clear what has changed as a result of activities since the Skills Report was published – what is different?
 - The colleges face a major challenge in being able to respond and take full advantage of the Government's shift towards higher technical skills.
 - The Skills Report needs to address one-, three- and five-year time frames
 - Employers need to consider 'toning down' their job specifications – this will enable them to attract a wider choice of candidates, but the employer will then need to be prepared to recruit and then provide development opportunities
 - Can we understand why Kickstart placement opportunities have not been filled? Are employers putting in place unnecessary barriers to recruitment and/or are candidates willing to learn on the job?
 - Covid has had a significant impact on students in terms of their levels of resilience and the limited opportunities to develop the 'softer', employability skills (communications, team working, etc). Colleges and employers need to be alert to these impacts.
 - Do we need to work with a smaller cohort of schools and colleges to revisit some of the key challenges? This could draw on national research.
- Kath suggested that we need to draw up an action plan that sets out next steps **ACTION KATH AND PAT**

7. **Progress of the Local Growth Fund Skills projects**

- Sarah provided a brief update on latest developments.

8. **Any Other Business and Date of next meeting**

- Date of next meeting 15 December 2021 – to include presentations by Bentley and Astra Zeneca on digitalisation
- Members agreed that future meetings should mostly continue as video call with one or two face to face meetings over the next 12 months. Pat will send diary invites to include a face-to-face meeting at Alderley Park in February. **ACTION PAT JACKSON – completed.**

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

- *Kath Mackay - Chair
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
- *Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
- *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- *Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester)
- *Lucy Liang (AUE Ltd)
- Maggie Chen
- Kim Harman (Astra Zeneca)
- Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East)
- Kevin Hutchinson (SISK)
- Pat Jackson (LEP)

*With voting rights

Apologies

- Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
- *Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)

Also attended

- Sarah Williams, David Brennan and Trevor Langston for specific agenda items

Papers copied to:

- Trevor Brocklebank (Deputy Chair of LEP)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
- Jamie Zucker (DfE)
- Clare Cassidy (DfE)
- Mike McLouglin (DfE)
- Peter Skates (Cheshire East Council)
- Kirstie Simpson (University of Chester)
- Nicola Said (LEP)
- Joe Manning (LEP)
- Andy Devaney (LEP)
- Sarah Williams (LEP) and Trevor Langston (LEP)
- Andrew Bridge and Dave Rowlands (CITB)