

NOTE OF EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 15 JULY 2020

The main purpose of the meeting was to:

- Discuss any further impacts of the Covid-19 crisis with Members – including the announcements by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 8th July
- Receive feedback from meeting of other groups held since 17 June
- Review progress on the Employers' Skills and Education Board main priorities (the Pledge, Accelerate, the Digital Skills Partnership and the Local Growth Fund investments)
- Consider future funding opportunities and priorities for future investments
- Take decision on two further Local Growth Fund investments

1. Welcome, Introductions and Declarations of Interest

Clare welcomed new Members to the meeting - Kath Mackay (Alderley Park) and Maggie Chen (Member of LEP's Youth Board). Clare also welcomed Sarah Hopkinson (Engie) who was attending as an observer with a view to becoming a Member of the Board.

List of attendees and apologies attached at Annex A

There were no additional declarations of interest.

2. Note of Last Meeting

The note of the last meeting was agreed.

3. Outstanding Actions from Previous Meetings

Members reviewed the list of outstanding actions.

The following points were noted:

- Trevor Langston agreed to share the list of schools where they are vacancies for Enterprise Advisors
- Pat Jackson to follow up with Colin Billingsley his agreement to circulate information about work academies, mentoring circles and virtual job interviews. **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

4. Workforce Recovery Group

Andy Farrall outlined the work of the Workforce Recovery Group that had been established with a small membership of the Local Authorities, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Jobcentre Plus and the LEP.

Andy noted that to date, the numbers of redundant or unemployed individuals in Cheshire and Warrington has been relatively small and many of the longer term unemployed have had to overcome multiple barriers to employment.

As a result of the lockdown we are now entering into a new phase with much larger numbers of unemployed and furloughed workers many of whom have never been unemployed. It is essential that partners work together and make most effective use of limited resources.

The Workforce Recovery Group is focusing on the following cohorts of people:

- Those whose jobs have been made redundant
- Those who have been furloughed or who are currently working but who are at risk of redundancy
- The self-employed who have had to close their businesses during lockdown and are unlikely to restart their businesses without some support
- Young people planning to leave school, college or university this summer
- Young people aged 18-24

The Workforce Recovery Group has the following streams of work:

- Clear inf and advice
- Getting another job and job matching - including job fairs
- Working with larger companies making redundancies e.g. Bentley, Airbus and Unilever
- Establishing a serious start-up service
- Skills and retraining
- Marketing and communications

All workstreams are up and running with the first pilot job fair taking place on 16 July – <https://learnliveuk.com/cheshire-works-4-u-event/>.

One of the challenges will be to contact individuals who are not yet in the system – including those who have been furloughed and are not aware that they may be made redundant.

The LEP has also been offered access to free training for unemployed people until the end of December from the Coursera training Platform – this is a multinational organisation offering a range of training - academic as well as practical course e.g. CV writing.

Kurt Allman noted that the Coursera offer included a good selection of courses with at least 6 courses that could be offered via Accelerate to ‘wet’ appetites for more training via Accelerate.

Dhesi commented that our local colleges were not concerned about competition from Coursera but we did need to avoid duplication.

Clare Hayward noted that the Employers’ Skills and Education Board had highlighted the need for a more coordinated approach to support workforce recovery and action was now taking place via the Workforce Recovery Group. The Employers’ Skills and Education Board would be kept fully informed of progress. The LEP’s role was to provide leadership and coordination.

Trevor Langston reassured Members that the Pledge is only supporting Jobcentre Plus in organising the job Fairs for adults – the Pledge remains focused on their core business.

Clare Hayward stressed the need to focus more on the smaller businesses who are making redundancies and to link redundant people into the new job opportunities – for example at Alderley Park.

Kath MacKay commented that life sciences is booming but some digital companies are facing challenges and not all the impacts of the current economic downturn will be felt until next year.

Kurt Allman noted that in his previous roles at Keele University and in Manchester, he had worked on entrepreneurial start-ups. Kurt agreed to speak to colleagues in Universities to explore ways of supporting the work with entrepreneurial start-ups. **ACTION KURT ALLMAN**

5. Update from LEP Board

Clare Hayward provided an update on two key developments:

- As a result of the LEP’s ‘Getting Students Online’ campaign 387 young people are now receiving devices. This is a real human-interest story that has captured the interest of media. We need to focus on the human-interest stories around the Pledge and Accelerate.
- Cheshire and Warrington had been awarded £15.5m from Government for capital investments.

6. **Impact of Covid-19 Crisis**

Members did not raise any other issues around the impact of Covid-19.

7. **Feedback from Key Meetings held since the Last Employers' Skills and Education Board** 7.1 **Young People Leaving School This Summer**

Dhesi reported that he had chaired an initial meeting on 10 July to consider any targeted support needed for the young people leaving school this summer. The meeting had been very productive and had agreed the need to focus on the students most in need of support. There is a real danger of an increased number of young people who do not progress into education, employment or training when they leave school this year and it will be essential for good communication between the colleges and schools to ensure that the most vulnerable students are identified and supported.

Dhesi suggested the need to focus on 3 key groups of young people:

- **Year 11 students** – the vast majority (95%) will be in the system with lots of support available, partners need to focus on those not currently engaged or who drop out over the summer. By September we will know the identity of the 5% who have dropped out. In the past this cohort have been re-engaged and then fitted them into training programmes that started in September. Dhesi suggested that we need an October offer where the courses start in October. There will be a big challenge to re-engage the students that have been out of education for 6 months during the lockdown.
- **Year 13 students** – some within this cohort will be unsure about going to University and may not be able to access apprenticeships. Their best option is to stay in education until the economy picks up and more apprenticeships become available.
- **Pre 42 day drop out students** – the 42-day point is the signal point where colleges don't get paid if students drop out before they have been in college for 42 days. On average around 6% of enrolments drop out although in some geographical areas the percentage is higher. This cohort also needs targeted support. Post 42 days the dropout is very small.

Dhesi suggested that there needs to be a close dialogue between colleges and local authorities to ensure that students receive 'wrap around support' - that addresses the social and economic issues the students are facing - not just a move to another course.

In the subsequent discussion Members noted the difficulty of businesses taking advantage of a traineeship or kick start offer whilst at the same time making redundancies.

It was noted that the recent survey of colleges had indicated an 80% reduction in the number of people starting an apprenticeship this August. Concern was also expressed about the numbers of apprentices who would be made redundant over the next few months.

7.2 **Local Growth Funds**

Pat Jackson reported on the event held on 8 July where all the Local Growth Fund skills investments had come together to share information about the progress of their projects and share good practice.

The Carpe Diem and Live Wire projects had made extremely good presentations about the way they had responded to the Covid-19 crisis and moved their deliver online. A video of the Carpe Diem presentation is available on request!

Sarah Williams outlined the recommendation in the paper circulated to Members prior to the meeting which invited views on the following bids:

- Widening access to technology and digital skills across Cheshire and Warrington
- Transforming digital skills in construction across Cheshire and Warrington.

Sarah reported that the Performance and Investment Committee were meeting at the same time as the Employers' Skills and Education Board and subject to approval from the Employers' Skills and Education Board had ratified the approval subject to the following conditions.

Widening Access

Sarah noted the recommended conditions for approval on page 6 of the paper circulated prior to the meeting.

Sarah noted that the partnership bid had been led by Cheshire College South and West and includes Warrington Vale Royal College, Warrington University Technical College and Reaseheath College. They are fully committed to working in partnership- including with Macclesfield College, and extending the partnership if needed.

The Performance and Investment Committee were particularly concerned to get assurances that the funds will be spent by the end of September and must be outcome led.

Members of the Employers' Skills and Education Board approved the investment subject to the following conditions:

- The offer letter will require capital spend being completed by the end of September 2020
- The Partnership confirms the LGF grant funding will only be spent on capital expenditure
- The Partnership provides a more detailed project plan by the 14 August 2020
- The Partnership provides a breakdown of the planned revenue - matched expenditure by year and the contribution by partner
- One of the external stakeholders should chair the Project Steering Group.
- The Partnership confirms that the project is state-aid compliant
- Evaluation is to be carried out after the first full year and the fifth year of the project and the results disseminated

In response to a query from one of the Members, it was agreed that the applicants must give assurances about their ability to spend the funds by the end of September but did recognise the need to be sympathetic if the purchase of kit was delayed as a direct result of Covid-19.

Digitalisation in Construction

Sarah Williams reported that most of the issues raised in the paper circulated to Members prior to the meeting had been addressed but the Performance and Investment Committee remained concerned about the strength of the partnership and had suggested that the partners should make a presentation to Members of the Employers' Skills and Education Board and the Performance and Investment Committee.

The Performance and Investment Committee were also concerned about the ability of partners to spend the funding by the end of September. They had also suggested some readjustment of funding between the hub and the spoke as the value added by the hub was not clear enough.

Members of the Employers' Skills and Education Board approved the investment subject to the following conditions:

- The offer letter will require capital spend being completed by the end of October 2020
- The partnership confirms the LGF grant funding will only be spent on capital expenditure
- The partnership provides further reassurance through a presentation by all members of the partnership to representatives of the Employers' Skills and Education Board and Performance and Investment Committee. The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate that the partnership is working collaboratively

- Consideration is given to aspects of the added value of the hub and the extent to which some of the funding for specialist equipment could be allocated to the spokes
- The Partnership provides a breakdown of the planned outputs for 2020-2021
- The Partnership confirms that the project is state-aid compliant
- Evaluation is to be carried out after the first full year and the fifth year of the project and the results disseminated

Unallocated Funds

Sarah Williams reported that Blue Beck had decided not to proceed with their project and £100K had been released for investment. In the subsequent discussion it was agreed that an additional meeting would be convened to consider how best to invest the funds. Members commented that widening access was a major issue as was digital exclusion – they suggested the need for a tablet loan scheme to encourage more online learning.

ACTION Pat Jackson to set up a meeting with Clare Hayward, Nicola Dunbar, Sarah Hopkinson, Kath MacKay and Maggie Chen to agree further investments.

8. Overview of Progress on Key Priorities

8.1 The Pledge

Trevor Langston presented a series of slides.

Trevor noted that the Pledge was sharing their expertise in delivering online career events with Jobcentre Plus and on 16 July would be running a jobs fair <https://learnliveuk.com/cheshire-works-4-u-event/>.

The Pledge team have also started running virtual work experience events - all schools and colleges are very keen to get involved and Ellesmere Port Catholic School have applied for an award based on their work with the Pledge to date.

Trevor expressed some concerns about some students falling behind during the lockdown and the challenges of a digital divide which is a big issue.

Moving forward, the Pledge is keen to engage with more employers and asked if all Members would use their business networks to introduce more employers to the Pledge. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

8.2 Accelerate

Kurt Allman noted the following points:

- He had chaired the last Accelerate Governing Board
- Marketing has started and learner numbers in the pipeline are increasing. To date 100 learners have registered for training.
- There is a need to look at costs of training courses – they are currently an average of only £1000 per course
- and the funding model is based on an average cost of £1400.
- Kurt is keen to explore further opportunities to extend the 100% grant offer – including via further
- European Social Fund investments.
- The Growth Hub are also planning to recruit a third skills broker.

In the subsequent discussion it was agreed that it is important that the Accelerate team draw on the experience of Kath MacKay and Julia Teale to ensure Accelerate is focused on future skills needs. **ACTION - KURT to follow up with Kath and Julia.**

9. Any Other Business

There was no further business. The meeting closed at 15.30 hrs.

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

- *Clare Hayward (Chair)
- *Julia Teale (Bentley Motors)
- *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- *Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- Jasbir Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the FE Colleges)
- Kath Mackay (Alderley Park)
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
- *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- *Stephen Fitzsimons (Warrington Borough Council)
- Clare Lathom (Cheshire West and Chester – interim replacement for Lisa Harris)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
- Maggie Chen (LEP Youth Board)
- Philip Cox
- Pat Jackson (LEP)
- *With voting rights

Also attending

- As an observer and potential Board Member Sarah Hopkinson from Engie
- Andy Farrall, Trevor Langston and Sarah Williams for specific agenda items

Apologies

- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- James Richards (Network Rail)
- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer

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)
- Catherine Walker (LEP)
- Joe Manning (LEP)
- Andy Devaney (LEP)
- Sarah Williams (LEP)
- Nicola Said (Marketing Cheshire)
- Trevor Langston (LEP)