**CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON – EMPLOYERS’ SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 16 SEPTEMBER**

**Note of Meeting**

**The main purpose of the meeting** was to:

* Receive feedback from meeting of key groups held since 15 July
* Review progress of Local Growth Fund investments to date and take decision on investment of remaining Local Growth Fund skills budget
* Provide a steer on priorities for future European Social Fund bids
* Review latest data and labour market report (on young people)
* Consider how to respond to the changing skills and education priorities and the need to produce a skills report for the Department for Education

List of attendees and apologies at Annex A

**1. Welcome, introductions and declarations of interest**

Phil Atkinson welcomed Members to the meeting and reported that Clare Hayward had asked him to chair the meeting in the absence of both Clare and Nicola Dunbar on holiday.

Phil welcomed Sarah Hopkinson from Engie to the meeting. Sarah had attended the last meeting as an observer and had now joined the Board.

Phil also said good-bye and many thanks to Julia Teale who is leaving Bentley, and welcomed Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors) who would be observing the meeting.

Phil also noted that Catherine Walker is replacing Lisa Harris as the representative from Cheshire West and Chester Council but was unavailable to attend the meeting and would be represented by Clare Latham.

There were no new declarations of interest.

2. **Note of last meeting on 15 July 2020**

The note of the last meeting was agreed.

**3. Action List Review**

Members reviewed and updated the action list.

* Sector based work academies - Dhesi has shared the following tweet about sector based work academy work Cheshire College South and West are already doing with DWP:

[#Cheshire](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23Cheshire&src=hash) colleagues are running Virtual SWAP sessions in collaboration with [⁦](https://twitter.com/%E2%80%AA%40CheshireCollSW%E2%80%AC%E2%81%A9) to support our External Recruitment for Work Coaches. [#Winsford](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23Winsford&src=hash) Manager Sarah said "So far we have supported over 80 customers & the feedback has been extremely positive"

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

**4.1 LEP Board meetings**

In Clare’s absence Phil Atkinson noted the Covid Recovery Plan that had been circulated with the papers for the meeting and noted that the LEP was conducting a series of consultations/round table discussions on the plan – two of the events had been chaired by Clare Hayward.

**4.2 Workforce Recovery Group**

Andy Farrall outlined the role of the Workforce Recovery Group. Andy had chaired the first ten weekly meetings. In future the meetings would be chaired by Philip Cox with Gill Thomas (Jobcentre Plus) as the deputy chair. The Group was providing leadership and coordination and identifying where existing programmes could be flexed to meet the current needs of the people newly unemployed or furloughed. The Group’s work programme had been circulated prior to the meeting. Information and communications were a priority.

The Group was expecting a spike in unemployment figures during October and November as the furlough scheme ends. Andy noted that pre-Covid the unemployment figures had been relatively low, and support had been focused on unemployed individuals with multiple barriers to unemployment. The new cohort of unemployed where the main barrier to work was the lack of jobs.

**4.3 Pledge Board Meeting**

James Richards noted that the Pledge was meeting most of the agreed measures of success but there had been issues with some measures as a result of Covid – including the impact on the National Citizenship Service’s summer school.

James noted the significant move to online events which were not just about broadcasting – they had involved meaningful engagement with young people. The Pledge were still waiting for the Careers and Enterprise Company to decide whether these engagements could be counted within the agreed metrics. The Pledge team are also reviewing the online events to ensure the right balance between quality and quantity of engagement.

The Pledge Board are now looking at the sustainability of the Pledge model and the opportunities to use employer contributions in time and resources as match for public sector funding. James invited views from Board Members on where the Pledge should be positioned in the longer term. For example, should it continue to be based in the LEP?  **ACTION ALL MEMBERS TO SEND VIEWS TO JAMES RICHARDS**

In the subsequent discussion Julia Teale asked how the Pledge linked to Accelerate and it was agreed that there was scope for closer links **ACTION JAMES RICHARDS**

The move to online delivery had also raised issues around the digitally excluded and the need for more young people to have access to laptops and internet at home.

**4.4 Accelerate Board**

Kurt Allman reported that the last Accelerate Board meeting held on 10 September had been chaired by Phil Atkinson. The meeting had included a full and frank discussion of progress to date and, as a result, an interim, independent review has been commissioned to identify what is and is not working well.

Marketing Cheshire is now engaged in the marketing plan for Accelerate and there are ongoing discussions with some training providers around how the training providers can help and ‘on board’ employers in the programme.

The new LEP website and core marketing material should be ready by mid- October.

Kurt reported that the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) model was 6 to 7 months overdue. Given the low take up of the programme to date this was not causing a major issue.

Kurt also noted that up to 5% (950) of participants in Accelerate training could be unemployed but these beneficiaries could not be counted as part of the outputs.

Kurt reported that to date:

* 69 training providers had been registered with Accelerate and these providers were offering 89 different training programmes
* the average cost of training provided to date is £480 which is significantly below the forecast average figure of £1500 that is included in the business case so there is some room for offering higher cost training
* there have been 3,700 engagements with employers and learners via the website but conversion to registration is low - there are 71 pre-registered participants, a further 76 registered to receive training and one person has completed their training – this is compared with the target of 480 participants per month
* Marketing Cheshire are planning an increase in the number of marketing events
* Feedback from colleges is that they are unable to engage with Accelerate training until mid/end of October when student enrolments will have been completed and Covid social distancing arrangements have been fully embedded.

In the subsequent discussion Dhesi noted that college enrolments have increased significantly – Cheshire College South and West has 4200 learners compared with their target of 3700. This presents challenges for social distancing.

Clare Latham asked for more information about how unemployed people might benefit from Accelerate. **ACTION KURT ALLMAN TO FOLLOW UP**

**4.5 Data and Labour Market Steering Group**

Pat Jackson reported that the Data and Labour Market Steering Group reviewed the Young People report at their last meeting and a summary of the key issues raised by the reported would be presented later in the agenda.

Pat noted that the last report in the current series would cover Employer Demand – this would be reviewed by the Data and Labour Market Steering Group at their next meeting on 6 October. The Group also needed to consider the next phase of work – there is a budget of £75K available for this current financial year.

James Richards suggested that the next phase of work might include a ‘deeper dive’ into the skills and training needs of under-represented groups in Cheshire and Warrington.

5. **Funding Opportunities**

Pat Jackson reported that there is approximately £290 million of European Social Funds that have been unspent by sub-regions across the country. The money has now been drawn back into a centrally held pot of funds and the Department of Work and Pension is now inviting all LEPs to request further bidding rounds to spend the remaining funds. The deadline for requests to be submitted to DWP is the end of September.

A request to DWP is currently being prepared by Tim Smith on behalf of the LEP. Pat Jackson was asked to circulate a copy of the draft request. **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

6. **Local Growth Fund Investments**

Sarah Williams presented a series of slides summarising:

* the spend profile of investments approved to date
* the proposal for using the remaining funds
* the progress of the digitalisation in construction investment
* the progress of the ’getting students online’ project.
	1. **Progress of Local Growth Fund skills investments approved to date**

The slides show the spend profile of the Local Growth Fund skills projects. To date £4.867 million had been contracted but only £1.131 million spent with a forecast spend of £2.432 million to the end of October.

Sarah advised that if the Local Growth Funds are not spent and claimed by the end of March the projects will not be able to reprofile their spend and will not be able to make further claims and the money will be lost to Cheshire and Warrington.

Members were very concerned that if projects fail to spend and claim funds by the end of March 2021 the money will have to be returned to central Government and will be lost to Cheshire and Warrington. Sarah advised Members that all projects are aware that any Local Growth Funds that have not been spent by the end of March will be lost and funds cannot be carried forward. This is due to Government not releasing any unspent Local Growth funds to the LEPs.

It was agreed that, all Members of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board who are sponsoring Local Growth Fund projects should, as a matter of some urgency, contact the project they are sponsoring and check the progress of the project and whether they are on track to deliver the outputs and spend and claim the Local Growth Funds in line with the contracts that they have signed.

All sponsors will be asked to report back their findings at the next Employers’ Skills and Education Board meeting on 14 October.  **ACTION ALL MEMBERS WHO ARE SPONSORS OF LOCAL GROWTH FUND PROJECTS AS LISTED IN THE SLIDES**

6.2 **The proposal for using the remaining funds**

Sarah Williams referred to the paper circulated to Members prior to the meeting and asked for approval of the proposed spend of the remaining £102,000:

* Use £30k of the remaining funds to support 4 of the 15 already contracted LGF skills projects that are performing well and have a cost benefit ratio (BCR) of between £16 : 1 and £36 : 1, to assist them in moving some of their delivery online as a response to Covid-19 restrictions. The projects would be invited to submit proposals for the additional funding and will be required to increase their outputs.
* Use £27,800of the investment to extend the Widening Access to Technology and Digital Skills project to additional communities north and east of Crewe, to support learners on smaller programmes and those applying for jobs online.
* Use £45k of the remaining funds to provide laptops to a targeted group of 16-19 year olds who are transitioning from school to FE college and in danger of becoming NEET over the next few months. The laptops would be part of a wider package of support provided by our colleges to encourage our most disadvantaged students to stay in education. The £50k would provide up to 180 laptops. The investment would be led by one of our local colleges on behalf of the other colleges. The funding will be allocated based on the number of students who live in areas with the highest Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).

Members discussed the proposal and agreed the recommendation but stressed the need to ensure all these projects deliver on time.

6.3 **The progress of the digitalisation in construction investment**

Sarah Williams recalled that the £260K Transforming Digital Skills in Construction across Cheshire and Warrington project was approved by Members of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board on 15 July 2020 and ratified by the LEP’s Performance & Investment Committee on the same day. At this point the recommended final claim date was the end of October 2020.

Following approval, the project was asked to appear before the LEP’s Performance and Investment Committee in August to assure the Committee that the spend profile of this project and the £656K project already contracted would be managed closely. During this meeting the College asked for an extension of the completion date of the Digitalisation in Construction project from the end of October to the end of December.

Following the Performance and Investment Committee the College asked for a further extension to 5nd February 2021.

The offer letter with a completion date of the end of December has not been signed because the project claim that the end of December for final claim is unachievable. The project is now forecasting spend will be completed by 5 February 2021. Members are asked to approve this adjusted timeframe in order for a revised offer letter to be sent. Members are asked to note that the LEP executive consider there to be a risk that Warrington & Vale Royal may not spend all the grant funding by the end of March 2021.

Dhesi noted that Cheshire College South and West had also been invited to attend the LEP’s Performance and Investment Committee where they had been ‘grilled’ on their spending profiles and had given assurances that they were managing their spend profile very closely.

Kath McKay noted that a failure to spend to profile was likely to affect future Central Government funding of the LEP.

Bill Carr commented that the LEP had been very receptive to his request to allow some adjustment of the equipment he needed to purchase in the light of Covid restrictions.

Members agreed the revised completion date but asked that the project should be monitored closely to ensure spend to profile. Any variation should be reported to the Board who urged the executive to consider re allocating the funds to support the purchase of more computers rather than risk losing the funds to Cheshire and Warrington.

6.4 **Progress of ’Getting Students Online’**

Sarah Williams reported that it was proposed that rather than a campaign run by the LEP, there should be a more focused approach via the Pledge with:

• the Pledge raising awareness with individual business

• as events are promoted – such as the Careers Expos and launch of the Local Growth Fund Projects, raising awareness of opportunities to support young people who may not have access to a device to enable them to participate in the events

Members agreed this approach.

Phil Atkinson suggested that the Board might also identify charitable organisations who would be prepared clean up laptops that were donated by businesses to schools. **ACTION PHIL ATKINSON**

7. **Latest Data and Labour Market Report – Young People**

Pat Jackson presented a series of slides summarising the latest draft data and labour market report. Key issues included:

* Concerns about specific geographical areas (Ellesmere Port, Crewe, and North Warrington)
* The extent to which the gap in performance between young people who are eligible for free school meals and those who are not eligible is significant larger in Cheshire and Warrington compared with the rest of England
* The disappointing performance of apprenticeship completions – particularly those delivered by the private sector
* The massive gender gaps in subjects studied – in particular, digital and engineering skills

Pat noted that the report would be finalised over the next week to include results of the ‘Yoursay’ survey and any further data from the local authorities. The report and updated slides would then be circulated to Members **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

In the subsequent discussion Members noted:

* in Sweden 48% of engineers are female – we should explore what Sweden is doing to attract females to engineering
* the apprenticeship numbers have plummeted since the introduction of the levy
* the key to addressing issues of social deprivation is establishing relationships with parents as well as the young people – if students attend college they usually succeed. The challenge is getting them to attend
* students need to develop the right state of mind towards employment – not just skills
* the data on free school meals was shocking and needed further investigation
* the increase in mental health issues is also a problem
* if the solution was simple, the problems would have been solved – agencies must work together and address the problems at an early stage in the development of children at primary school. Children needed inspiration
* action was needed to improve the underperforming schools in Cheshire and Warrington

Maggie Chen noted that gender pay gap one year after leaving university and stressed the importance of asking young people their views on how the issues identified in the report should be addressed.

Dhesi offered to run some focus groups of young people in Ellesmere Port and Crewe. **ACTION DHESI**

**8. Production of a Skills Advisory Panel Report**

There was no time to discuss this at the meeting, but it was agreed that Clare Hayward, Nicola Dunbar and

Phil Atkinson would meet with Pat Jackson before the next Board meeting to agree next steps including the

need to review skills and education priorities**. ACTION CLARE HAYWARD, NICOLA DUNBAR AND**

**PHIL ATKINSON AND PAT JACKSON**

**9. Any Other Business and Date of Next Meeting**

There was no other business.

Date and venue of next meeting14 October 2020 – probably via Microsoft Team.

**EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2020 Annex A**

The following members of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board attended the meeting:

* \*Phil Atkinson (Daresbury) - Chair
* Jasbir Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the FE Colleges)
* \*Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
* Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
* James Richards (Network Rail)
* \*Stephen Fitzsimons (Warrington Borough Council)
* Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
* \*Julia Teale (Bentley Motors)
* Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
* Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
* \*Clare Latham representing Catherine Walker (Cheshire West and Chester)
* Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
* Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
* \*Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
* Maggie Chen
* Kath Mackay (Alderley Park)
* Pat Jackson (LEP)

\*With voting rights

**Also attending**

* Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors) as observer
* Andy Farrall and Sarah Williams for specific agenda items

**Apologies**

* \*Clare Hayward
* \*Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
* Philip Cox
* Catherine Walker (Cheshire West and Chester)
* 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)
* Nicola Said (LEP)
* Joe Manning (LEP)
* Andy Devaney (LEP)
* Sarah Williams (LEP)
* Trevor Langston (LEP)