**Note of Employers Skills and Education Board Meeting on 14 February 2018**

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Meredydd David welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies – list of attendees and apologies at Annex A.

**2. Note of Last Meeting on 17 January 2017 and Matters Arising**

The note of the last meeting of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board on 17 January 2018 was agreed. All matters arising would be covered by the agenda of the meeting on 14 February.

**3. Follow Up Since Last Meeting**

**3.1 Advanced Manufacturing and Digital**

Phil Atkinson reported that he had agreed to chair an initial meeting of employers and other key partners to scope out the work of an advanced manufacturing/digital group. Phil had invited colleagues from Hartree and Pat Jackson had suggested a list of individuals who had already expressed an interest in being involved in the scoping work.

Phil invited any other members of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board to let Pat Jackson know if they wanted to join the initial meeting – Phil planned to hold the first meeting within the next 2 or 3 week. Phil noted that the first meeting will take a broad view of the advanced manufacturing and digital agenda – it may take several meetings to agree the scope and priorities of the group. **ACTION: PHIL ATKINSON AND ALL OTHER MEMBERS OF EMPLOYERS’ SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD**

Steve Collier noted the confusing array of European and UK National initiatives focused around advanced manufacturing and robotics. For example, the Skillman consortium, the Erasmus programme, the Sector Deals, the Level 3 and 4 qualification developments and associated trailblazers and the work of Innovate UK and EEF. Steve suggested that it would be helpful to scope out some of the key initiatives in advance of the first meeting of the advanced manufacturing/digital group.

Jenny Clucas noted that information on apprenticeship standards is available on the Institute for Apprentices website but details on Erasmus initiatives is more difficult to find.

**3.2 Digital Skills Partnerships**

Pat Jackson noted that the work planned by Phil Atkinson could also be linked to the Government’s proposals to establish local digital skills partnerships across the country.

In the Digital Strategy published in March 2017 the Government set out its commitment to improve the digital skills capabilities of individuals and organisations across England. To meet this digital skills challenge the Government announced the formation of a Digital Skills Partnership to bring together the public, private and charity sectors and key regional stakeholders. Partners had already pledged more than 4 million digital skills training opportunities to symbolise the beginning of partnership working. Christine Gaskell, the Chair of the Cheshire and Warrington LEP had been invited to join the National Digital Skills Partnership.

The Digital Skills Partnership will look at digital skills across the following spectrum:

* Basic (Digital skills everyone needs to participate in the digital economy)
* General (Digital skills required for all job roles across the economy)
* Advanced (Digital skills required for specialised digital roles)

It was agreed that a representative from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) would be invited to join the first meeting of the group chaired by Phil Atkinson to scope work on advanced manufacturing and digital. **ACTION : PAT JACKSON**

**3.3 Logistics**

Neil Warren reported that in December he had chaired a meeting of key partners at the Eddie Stobart training centre. Neil now plans to meet with Pat Jackson to agree next steps.

Neil noted that as a result of the first meeting of the logistics group Eddie Stobart had produced a webinar with Jobcentre Plus to promote the logistics sector to Jobcentre Plus customers. Neil stressed the need to take more advantage of the opportunities to work with Jobcentre Plus to make Jobcentre Plus clients more aware of the career opportunities in the logistics sector. Neil also noted the potential of the New Leaf project to offer work experience opportunities to build confidence of individuals.

Neil expressed some concern about the resources needed to progress the work of the logistics group – it was suggested that initially, a group of graduates from various logistics businesses might help to progress the work. In the longer term, it is proposed that independent brokers will help aggregate employers’ demand and then communicate training needs with the consortium of training providers. The independent brokerage activities would be funded from the Institute of Technology project.

It was agreed that in taking forward this work it will be essential to understand the complexities as well as the opportunities associated with the use of European Funds. The overall value of the Cheshire and Warrington Institute of Technology project would be £28 million (50% European Social Funs and 50% apprenticeship budget).

**3.4 Proposed Governance of Cheshire and Warrington’s Institute of Technology**

Pat Jackson presented a slide to illustrate the proposed governance structure of Cheshire and Warrington’s Institute of Technology. Pat stressed the need to ensure that employers remain at the heart of the governance structure and set the strategic priorities so that employers get the service their businesses need.

A key issue would be the role of the Accountable Body and the associated managing agent role. The Accountable Body would effectively operate as the financial director of the Institute for Technology and would submit the bid for European Social Funds on behalf of the partners responsible for the governance and strategic direction of the Institute of Technology. It would be important to develop protocols that helped to reduce the financial risk of the Accountable Body.

**4. European Social Fund**

**4.1 Latest Thinking on Matching Apprenticeship Budgets with European Social Funds**

David Brennan outlined some of the key issues to consider when investing European Social Funds in the Cheshire and Warrington Institute of Technology through Priority 2.1:

* European Social Funds can be matched with the apprenticeship budget (the digital accounts held by the Department for Education) to support additional work-based learning modules (not just apprenticeship delivery) in any business that is using the apprenticeship budget (not just the levy payers) provided there is written evidence that the business has drawn down the apprenticeship budget.
* Apprenticeship delivery matched with European Social Fund could deliver a broad range of bespoke workforce development support under Priority 2.1. The strategic priorities for the investment of the European Social Funds could be set by employers.
* European Social Funds invest in units that are components of full programmes of training
* Employers specify the requirements, providers deliver
* Overall, the investments must deliver the average unit cost specified by the European Social Fund programme (around £2,000). There is therefore a need to offset high cost, low volume provision (e.g. engineering apprenticeships) with low cost, high volume provision (e.g. modularised, on the job continuous development).
* Although co-funding by the Department of Work and Pensions and the Education and Skills Funding Agency was likely to cease, this provides the opportunity to develop more flexible responses to employers’ skills and education needs using alternative matched funding.
* Under priority 2.1 matching the apprenticeship budget and European Social Funds have the potential to create a £28 million investment budget to enable Cheshire and Warrington to deliver ‘our Institute of Technology’ model.
* The European Social Funds pay for the actual cost of delivering the training.

Steve Collier commented that presumably, the ESF package of support that has been matched with the apprenticeship budget can also be used to support work- based learning modules in a network of other businesses who are not drawing the apprenticeship budget (these businesses might be part of the supply chain or in the same geographical area).  This could help to reduce the unit cost of the funding for ESF purposes.

**4.2** **Plans for Issuing Calls for Investment Proposals**

David Brennan outlined plans for issuing calls for investment proposals that would address each of the five investment priorities agreed for European Social Fund investments:

* Priority 1.1 Supporting people seeking work
* Priority 1.2 Supporting young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)
* Priority 1.4 Supporting those furthest from the labour market
* Priority 2.1 Skills for growth
* Priority 2.2 Links between education and business

**4.3 Date of Next Meeting and Priorities for the Agenda**

Meredydd noted that the next meeting of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board is scheduled for 21 March 2018. Venue to be confirmed.

Members of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board asked for the next agenda to include:

* Draft terms of reference for the Institute of Technology Board.
* Draft terms of reference for the Accountable Body and Managing Agent role.
* The role of the independent broker and the independent brokers relationship with brokers/business managers based in training providers.
* A working example of how the apprenticeship budget might be matched with European Social Funds to deliver a training programme to a group of employers.

**EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 14 FEBRUARY 2018 Annex A**

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

* Meredydd David
* Neil Warren (Jungheinrich)
* James Richards (Network Rail)
* Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
* Fraser Kearney (Cheshire and Warrington Growth Hub)
* Jenny Clucas (Cogent)
* Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
* Julia Teale and Steve Collier representing Lynne Williams (Bentley Motors)
* Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
* Pat Jackson

**Apologies**

* Clare Hayward
* Lynne Williams
* Jim Carroll (Mobica)
* Dame Pat Bacon (Health Sector)
* Jane Ingram (Halifax/Lloyds Banking Group)
* Margaret Cheshire
* Paul Taylor (Taylor Business Park)
* Mark Livesey (LEP)