**Note of Employers Skills and Education Board Meeting on 17 October 2018**

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Clare Hayward welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Rachel Kay for her hospitality and tour of Whites Chef Academy. Clare also thanked Trevor Langston for the opportunity to visit the ‘Get Opportunities’ Fair at the College.

Clare noted apologies.

Clare welcomed Rachel Kay – as a representative of the FE colleges and noted that Elaine Billington (United Utilities) had planned to attend the meeting as a potential new Board member but had been unavoidably detained at work.

Clare noted that a number of members had sent late apologies as a result of unexpected events at work.

Clare also welcomed Sandra Rothwell, Charlie Woodcock, Trevor Langston and Martin Howlett to the meeting.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Clare invited Members to declare any interests. The following standing items were noted:

* Paul Colman – involvement in the development of the Pledge partnership network across Cheshire and Warrington.
* Clare Hayward – working for Cirrus recently named the best leadership and management/HR Consultancy at the CIPD Management Awards. Cirrus now offer apprenticeships as part of their overall service to businesses.

**3. NOTE OF LAST MEETING ON 6 SEPTEMBER 2018**

The note of the last meeting of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board on 6 September were reviewed and agreed.

**4. MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION LIST FROM 6 SEPTEMBER MEETING**

Members reviewed the action list from the last meeting.

Clare commented that the Board was in ‘real danger’ of delivering what it had set out to deliver in the Skills and Education Plan that was published in December 2017!

Subject to approval of European Social Funds, delivery would start early in the New Year and it would be essential for the Employers’ Skills and Education Board to maintain a strong interest in ensuring the delivery was absolutely in line with the Board’s original ambitions – employers must be at the heart of the Pledge network and the Virtual Institute of Technology.

It was reassuring to note that all the actions arising from the last meeting had either been completed or were covered in the agenda for 17 October.

**5. VIRTUAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY UPDATE**

Charlie Woodcock outlined progress in the development of the Virtual Institute of Technology. An outline application for European Social Funds had been submitted by the University of Chester on behalf of local partners to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) by the deadline of 28 September. There had been an acknowledgement of the bid but no further feedback from DWP. We are now following up with DWP and pressing them for a progress report.

Partners were now working with the University on the assumption that the bid would go ahead and the next stage of work involved developing the more detailed bid and associated business plan.

Work was also progressing with local employers to start developing the types of packages of training required. During discussions with employers a number of key challenges had been identified:

* The danger of too much bureaucracy putting off employers,
* The need to provide employers with administrative support to ensure appropriate records were kept to meet the requirements the European Commission auditors,
* The extent to which independent brokers and business development teams in colleges could work together to ensure demand for training from individual employers could be aggregated and made financially viable for training providers to deliver the training,
* Developing a financial model that would provide the resources required to develop and deliver the required training packages.

Charlie asked Members to work with their business networks and develop lists of training needs so that work could start on developing the appropriate packages of support.

**ACTIONS:** **Paul Colman** to follow up with Charlie and explore the opportunities of working with groups of small businesses who are members of the Chamber network

**Julia Teale** to follow up with Charlie and explore the scope to bring together some Bentley supply chain businesses and other larger businesses such as BAE Systems and Siemens (Meeting to be held on 8 November).

**Pat Jackson** to follow up with Neil Warren to ask him to draw together a group of logistics businesses that could work with Charlie

**Charlie Woodcock and Ian Cottrill** to explore scope to draw some financial businesses together.

**Clare Haywood** to invite Charlie to meeting with Lloyds Banking Group

**James Richards** to have follow up discussion with Charlie to consider the scope for using on-line administration of the funding.

In discussion the following key points were made:

* Charlie emphasised the need to start work immediately to develop a pipe line of training packages that could be delivered as soon as the European Funding was approved – details needed to include what would be delivered and how and when it would be delivered.
* Sandra Rothwell stressed the need for the Virtual Institute of Technology to have an intelligence/communications hub that was forward-looking and provided real time market intelligence to training providers.
* Demand for training had to be aggregated and delivered to enable employers to become fit for the future.
* Phil Atkinson recognised the need to deliver the targets/outputs associated with the European Social Funds but he emphasised the importance of not just ‘chasing targets’ but ensuring the funds were used effectively to bring a step change in the delivery of training to employers and the relationship between employers and training providers.
* We needed technology champions to raise awareness of the business benefits of embracing new technologies.
* Given the speed of change of new technologies and the economic climate training provision must be agile and very responsive to demand from employers. Digital would be a very important theme for the virtual Institute of Technology and we needed to consider identifying/recruiting a number of Digital Czars. **ACTION All Members?**
* The Virtual Institute of Technology was a real opportunity to deliver the training employers need to deliver economic growth **and** to build the capacity of local FE Colleges. All Members agreed that it was an opportunity to deliver a step change in the way employers and local training providers work together. However, the funding model of the Virtual Institute of Technology meant that if Colleges did not take advantage of the opportunity there would be a real risk that employers would choose providers outside of Cheshire and Warrington.

It was agreed that Charlie Woodcock should attend the next meeting of the Employers Skills and Education Board on 14 November to provide a further update on progress. **ACTION Charlie Woodcock and Pat Jackson**

**6. GROWTH HUB**

Sandra Rothwell outlined the progress in developing the new Growth Hub.

Sandra explained that a bid for European Regional Development Funds had been submitted to support the Growth Hub in focusing on SMEs with growth potential. The Growth hub would employ a number of independent brokers to work with businesses to ensure they received the support they needed from local providers.

One of the brokers in the Growth Hub would be funded via the Made Smarter North West Pilot – focused on supporting businesses to adopt new digital technologies. It was important that this work was linked with the work of the Virtual Institute of Technology.

The Growth Hub would ensure a co-ordinated engagement and communication with businesses across Cheshire and Warrington. It was critical that the Growth Hub was business led.

**7. PLEDGE NETWORK**

Trevor Langston, Martin Howlett and Sam Norfolk outlined progress to date in the development of the Pledge network – including the appointment of new Careers and Enterprise Company Enterprise Coordinators.

Members were particularly shocked by the work placement statistics from Changing Education – from a cohort of 4,390 16 to 19 years old students in Cheshire and Warrington in 2017/18 fewer than 3% had work placements with science, IT or engineering businesses.

Trevor explained that, subject to the approval of European Social Funds, the Pledge partnership were planning a launch of the Pledge network in March next year.

**8. Digital Skills Partnership**

Pat Jackson advised Members that, as requested by the Employers’ Skills and Education Board, an expression of interest in establishing a Cheshire and Warrington Digital Skills Partnership was being prepared. The deadline for submission to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport was 28th October.

**9. Skills Advisory Panels**

Mark Livesey noted that the Government were developing proposals for Skills Advisory Panels that would probably have an advisory role with a number of responsibilities.

The following is a list of the key responsibilities the Government are proposing:

* Developing a clear understanding of the current and future labour market
* Developing a clear approach to addressing skills and employment challenges within the local area which would then inform the ‘People’ strategy of the Local Industrial Strategy
* Understanding the wider dependencies in the local area and working together with other parts of the LEP link them to skills and employment analysis and integrate them effectively within the Local Industrial Plan
* Acting as a co-ordinator of local skills providers
* Working closely with the National Careers Service and Careers Enterprise Company to ensure that the Skills Advisory Board analysis is embedded in the guidance given to adults
* Promoting apprenticeships
* Advising on where skills and labour market resources should be directed to support local employers and residents.

The Government wanted Skills Advisory Boards to be built around existing infrastructure - to avoid the proliferation of too many committees. It was therefore proposed that the Skills Advisory Board roles and responsibilities would be absorbed within the existing Employers’ Skills and Education Board but this would require changes to the constitution of the Board.

It was agreed that these proposals merited further discussion at the next Employers’ Skills and Education Board meeting in November. **ACTION Pat Jackson to include on agenda for next meeting.**

**10. Local Growth Fund**

Mark Livesey explained that, following previous discussions and advice from the Employers’ Skills and Education Board and discussions with local partners, it was proposed that the £5m Local Growth Fund allocated to investment in skills should be focused on investment in specialist equipment that would support raising awareness of digital and STEM-related skills via the Pledge network or the delivery of digital and STEM-related skills via the Virtual Institute of Technology. The specialist equipment would be located in key locations across Cheshire and Warrington to provide easy access for the effective delivery of digital and STEM-related training.

Given the consensus around and the need to focus on these priorities it was proposed that the LEP should go out to consult on this specific proposal early in the New Year rather than just issue a general invitation to bid for the funds.

Members of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board welcomed this proposal and it was agreed that Clare Hayward would take the proposal to the LEP Board. **ACTION Clare Hayward**

In the interim Members agreed to review the list of specialist equipment that was being developed and make additions or comments as appropriate.

Members asked that the list asked partners to specify:

* how the proposed specialist equipment would add value to the delivery of training and reach new learners,
* who would own the equipment and who would be able to access the equipment and when it would be available
* the arrangements for ensuring people were trained in the effective use of the equipment.

Members also asked if the equipment could be leased – given the fast- changing nature of digital and STEM-related technologies.

Members also suggested that the specialist equipment should be bought/leased in tranches so that the initial investments could be assessed and evaluated before further investments made.

**ACTION Mark Livesey and Pat Jackson**

**11. National Apprenticeship Week**

Pat Jackson noted that National Apprenticeship Week would take place between 4th and 8th of March 2019. She asked Members to let her know of any activities they were planning to promote apprenticeships during that week. **ACTION All Members**

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

There was no any other business.

The next meeting is on Wednesday 14 November between 13.30 and 15.30hrs at Cirrus Offices in Wilmslow.

The next meeting will be held on 17 October at Macclesfield College. The main meeting will be held between 13.30 and 15.30 hrs but members are invited to arrive at 13.00hrs for coffee and a short tour of the Pledge careers fair that is being held at the College.

**The meeting closed at 15.30 hrs**