# **NOTE OF EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 16 JUNE 2021**

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

* Members to review key developments since the 19 May – including the Local Growth Fund Showcase Event that will be held between 12.00 and 13.00 hrs on 16 June
* Members to receive feedback from meetings/activities of key groups held since last Board meeting
* To provide a steer on proposed work to establish a better understanding of the demand for technical skills across Cheshire and Warrington and to review how this links to the action plan in the Skills Report and the focus on reskilling and upskilling the current workforce – have we identified the right priorities?

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

List of attendees and apologies (**Annex A)**. Kath Mackay welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no

declarations of interest.

**2. Members Reflection on Local Growth Fund Showcase Event**

Members had enjoyed the Showcase event and had welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the

Local Growth Fund investments. Members had been impressed by the presentations and suggested that a

third Showcase should be held as a face-to-face event after the removal of Covid restrictions.

Members noted the questions around utilisation and outcomes that had been raised during the Showcase

event and agreed these will be key to the success of the investments. Members expected take up should

increase significantly as Covid restrictions ease.

It was suggested that the LEP should produce some publicity about the programme of investments. **ACTION**

**PAT JACKSON AND SARAH WILLIAMS**

Paul Colman stressed the importance of innovation and horizon scanning and the danger of increasing the gap

between early adopters of new technologies and the late adopters. He suggested that the challenges of

encouraging more early adopters were associated with helping employers navigate around the vast number

of messages that employers receive. We need to do more to keep messages simple (core vs context).

Dhesi argued for more focus on making external partners aware of the investments and perhaps starting a

longitudinal evaluation – capturing early lessons as well as understanding longer term impacts. It was agreed

that plans for an evaluation should be developed. **ACTION PAT JACKSON AND SARAH WILLIAMS**

Phil Atkinson stressed the need to maintain the quality of the initial Local Growth Fund investments – the kit

does not last forever and technologies change. This highlights the need to ensure effective delivery of all

the targets and convince others of the importance of continued investment.

Kath Mackay thanked Members for their feedback and confirmed that a recording of the Showcase event,

slides and email addresses would be shared as requested. **ACTION SARAH WILLIAMS**

3. **Technical Skills**

Members discussed a number of issues:

* What technical skills are needed and how should they be delivered?
* How to stimulate demand from learners?
* How to understand what employers need?
* How to align demand with curriculum planning?
* How to align with job opportunities?
* How to reduce the risk for providers and possible sources of funding

Bill Carr proposed that we need a different approach to learning – particularly around technical and digital skills. Bill noted that when recruiting, employers are interested in what students have learnt outside school. Bill supported the Code Nation approach of ‘hot housing’ and ‘learning on the job’ to develop skills that would enable students to move into work more easily. He noted that Covid has forced us to rethink the delivery model and suggested that Cheshire and Warrington could become a centre of excellence in this new type of delivery but queried whether our universities and colleges would be able to adopt this new approach.

Bill suggested the need for a two-prong approach:

* Rapid development of skills for people leaving school or college
* A focus on young people in primary and secondary school

Sarah Hopkinson queried if there was a need for a pilot and then a rollout programme.

Trevor Langston commented that a focus on young people in primary is regularly identified as a priority at local level but is not a priority for funders. There is also an issue of working with large numbers of primary schools - in Cheshire and Warrington there are 81 secondary schools and over 500 primary schools.

Sarah Hopkinson noted that Engie work with secondary schools and the feeder primary schools.

Clare Latham agreed with Bill’s comments but reminded Members that schools don’t necessarily have the skills to teach, for example, digital skills.

Dhesi also agreed with Bill’s comments but noted the number of times Bill referred to ‘skills’ not ‘qualifications’- the Department for Education measure colleges’ successes in terms of qualifications delivered not skills acquired.

Phil Atkinson suggested there is a role for LEPs to highlight to Government the issue that national skills policy is acting as a barrier to the delivery of publicly funded skills. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS TO CONSIDER**

Bill commented that the move to encourage students to use ipads was also detrimental – it takes away the opportunity for students to explore the technology.

Paul Kelly was not convinced of the need to make learning a programming language compulsory but there was a strong argument to use coding to develop problem solving and other ‘employability’ skills.

Paul Colman reminded Members that the Pledge was originally built around the importance of personal development and access to extra-curricular activities.

Members were also reminded of the need to focus on the technical, higher level skills needed for people in work and those seeking employment – not just young people and new entrants to the labour market.

Kath noted that in Alderley Park businesses often pay salaries that are above the standard rate in order to fill vacancies. There is a big challenge around identifying the skills needs of the existing workforce.

Clare Latham commented that there is also a cohort of young people on Education and Skills Plans that are not physically fit to work.

On the issue of how to align demand for skills with curriculum planning it was suggested that this was a challenge where the Employers’ Skills and Education Board had made a big difference by developing an extremely rich source of data and labour market intelligence and by the strategic investment of Local Growth Funds. The data and labour market information is being used to inform curriculum planning and to inform and motivate students about new technologies and career opportunities. It was agreed that the Employers’ Skills and Education Board had made a difference but there remained the challenge around reconciling the demand for skills with the public funding of qualifications.

Kath thanked Members for their comments. Pat Jackson noted that the comments would be fed back to the next meeting of the Data and Labour Market Intelligence Group who would advise on the specification for the next piece of work on technical skills needs in Cheshire and Warrington.

4. **Feedback from key meetings/activities since last Employers’ Skills and Education Board:**

**4.1 LEP Board meetings**

Kath noted that the last LEP Board meeting on 19 May had spent some time on her feedback from the Employers’ Skills and Education Board. Kath had been invited to give a more detailed update in due course.

At their last meeting, the LEP Board had reviewed and agreed the Covid Recovery Plan and had discussed more generally the impact of Covid on recovery. Kath noted that Alderley Park businesses have been relatively robust throughout Covid but other sectors such as hospitality have been significantly impacted.

Nicola Dunbar also noted the establishment of a Digital Infrastructure Board – initially the Board will identify and review current digital infrastructure and how we can leverage more.

4.2 **Accelerate**

Kurt Allman reported that the University and LEP were meeting later in the day to consider the recommended next steps. Kurt undertook to feedback on the conclusions of the meeting. **ACTION KURT ALLMAN**

Kurt noted that in the interim, Accelerate is continuing to provide funding to support retraining and upskilling of the workforce. To date 415 learners have completed Accelerated supported training with a further 386 registered for training and around 11 enquiries per week. Most of the training is costing between £4.2K and £45 with an average spend of £1.9K for males and £1.4K for females. Key issues include lack of engagement during the onboarding process and the cost of the training contribution required from employers.

**4.3 Digital Skills Partnership**

Nicola Dunbar provided the following update:

* **DCMS Local Digital Skills Partnership Evaluation** – The draft report is with DCMS analysts. Publication is about 1 month behind. It is hoped the final version will be ready at the end of June.
* **Digital and Technical Skills** – a sub-group of Members Digital Skills Partnership Board are undertaking work on establishing the skills required for hard to fill digital roles. This will inform work on developing coherent pathways for entry into digital roles. This links with the item on Technical Skills just discussed by the Employers' Skills and Education Board.
* **Cheshire and Warrington Opportunities Portal** - Digital Skills Partnership Board Members have been asked to review the content on the Digital and Technology information on the Cheshire and Warrington Opportunities Portal.
* **Priorities for Digital Skills Partnership Board** – revised priorities will be agreed with Digital Skills Partnership Board Members at the next meeting on 13th July

4.4 **Institute of Technology**

Dhesi reported the Cheshire and Warrington bid had been submitted before the deadline of noon on 16 June. Dhesi thanked everyone for their help and support in preparing the bid. The Cheshire and Warrington bid is one of 13 bids that are bidding for 8 Institutes of Technology (6 in the North West).

Dhesi does not expect any feedback on the bid until October followed by a panel interview in November.

4.5 **Skills Accelerator**

Dhesi confirmed that bids for a Local Skills Improvement Plan pilot and a Skills Development Fund had been submitted on 25 May. There is strong competition for the funding with only 8 pilot Local Skills Improvement Plans and 15 Skills Development Funds to be awarded across the country.

4.6 **Pledge**

Paul Colman reported that earlier in the day there had been a Pledge Management Board meeting where there had been a discussion about how to develop a sustainable business model for the Pledge.

5. **Skills Report and Associated Skills Action Plan focused on reskilling and upskilling the workforce**

Members reviewedthe action plan on pages 12, 13 and 14 of the Skills Report – in particular, page 13 that focuses on the skills of our existing workforce. Kath suggested that the Report was a useful reference document that could be used to monitor progress.

Sarah Hopkinson suggested that the action plan should be RAG rated **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

Sarah highlighted the challenge of addressing the Level 3 skills gap when then is not enough demand from learners and colleges unable to invest in developing courses where there is little evidence of initial demand – how do we break into this cycle?

Dhesi noted that there had been changes to the funding model to help economic recovery/bounce-back but the funding model remains very price sensitive.

It was agreed that there should be a number of 1-2-1 meetings with Members to review and RAG rate the Skills Action Plan. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS AND PAT JACKSON**

6. **Jobs Opportunities Portal**

Sarah Williams provided a brief overview of the updates that had been made to the Portal in particular:

* Recent social media targeting
* Changes to the design of the front-page including use of images of people to represent key sectors
* Spotlights on hard to fill vacancies e.g., hospitality and care – a social media focus on spotlight on vacancies page – had generated a sharp increase in searches in health and social care
* Further improvements in information about key sectors including links to individual businesses
* The development of an apprenticeship page – and the subsequent focus of social media on apprenticeships had generated 1800 visits to the apprenticeship page and related searches
* A young person page including Kickstart opportunities
* Helpful advice on preparing for online interviews
* Further development of monitoring key aspects of the Portal
* Increasing use of the intelligence generated about real time vacancies and job searches.

**7. Note of last meeting on 19 May**

The note of the last meeting was agreed, and the outstanding action list was reviewed.

**8. Any Other Business**

**8.1 Low Carbon report**

Pat reported that the Low Carbon report was almost complete – the LEP was awaiting the publication of the

Siemens Report on NetZero before final sign-off

8.2 D**ate of next meeting -** 14 July 2021.

**EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 16 JUNE 20210 Annex A**

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

* \*Kath Mackay - Chair
* \*Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
* Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
* Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
* \*Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
* \*Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
* \*Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
* Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
* Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
* \*Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester)
* \*Lucy Liang (AUE Ltd)
* Paul Kelly (BAE Systems)
* \*Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
* Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
* Pat Jackson (LEP)

\*With voting rights

**Apologies**

* Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors
* Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
* Maggie Chen
* Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
* Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer
* Philip Cox (LEP)

**Also attending**

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

**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)