**CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON – NOTE OF EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2021**

**The main purpose of the meeting:**

* Members to review key developments since the 14 July including changes in the labour market as a result of Covid and Brexit
* To provide a steer on whether the skills and education plan should be modified to reflect changes in the labour market
* Members to receive feedback and respond to any issues raised following meetings/activities of key groups held since last Board meeting

1. **Welcome, declarations of interest, introductions with members sharing information on any key**

**developments since the last meeting** on 14 July

List of attendees and apologies (Annex A).

Kath welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no declarations of interest.

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

Members noted the meetings and key events that have taken place since the last Employers’ Skills and Education Board meeting – they found the list useful in setting the wider context of the skills, education and employment work undertaken between Board meetings.

2.1 **LEP Board**

Kath reported that the LEP Board had not met formally in August but were planning a discussion forum in October where they wanted to take a ‘deeper dive’ into the work of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board.

2.2 **LEP Scrutiny Committee**

Kath, Nicola Dunbar and Pat Jackson had all attended a recent meeting of the LEP’s Scrutiny Committee where there had been a discussion about the work of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board. A copy of the slides that Kath had used for the meeting were circulated to all Members. The Scrutiny Committee are particularly keen to understand more about the key performance measures and over impact measures used by the Employers’ Skills and Education Board.

Members agreed with Sarah Hopkinson’s suggestion that the Skill Action Plan should include impact measurements. **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

2.3 **Accelerate**

Kurt informed the Board about the intention to recalibrate the Accelerate programme from delivering support to 19,000 learners to a maximum of 2,000 learners. The project change request had been submitted to the Department for Work and Pensions and was currently being processed. The team delivering Accelerate is still working with local providers but has reduced in size. It may be necessary to close the programme to new referrals if the team becomes too small to handle new work. Kurt committed to informing Members of the outcome of the project change request as soon as he was informed. **ACTION KURT ALLMAN**

Phil Atkinson is pressing for a meeting of Accelerate’s Governing Board as soon as possible. Kurt has been asked to report further developments to the LEP Board in October.

Kurt noted that if Accelerate supports 2,000 learners that is still a significant programme – a similar project without the bureaucracy associated with European funds could still be successful.

Kath suggested that we need to learn lessons from Accelerate and start to think longer term if there is a future ‘ask’ to support the skills and education agenda in Cheshire and Warrington. This could generate a possible single bid to the Shared Prosperity Fund or other future funding opportunities. **ACTION PAT JACKSON AND KATH TO ARRANGE A TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Sarah Hopkinson suggested that the task and finish group might explore a sector specific approach e.g., net zero, and stressed the importance of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board members using their networks to understand more about what support employers need.

Pat Jackson noted that a unique aspect of Accelerate was a focus on skills not qualifications.

Phil Atkinson stressed the importance of going back to the origins of Accelerate to understand why the programme was developed.

Nicola Merriman noted that from a nuclear industries perspective, NSAM had been approved as an Accelerate provider, but employers did not want to engage with the programme because of the criteria and the inability to reclaim VAT from training costs.

Pat Jackson reported on recent conversations with Sheffield Chamber about the Sheffield Skills Bank – also funded with European Social Funds – employers had described the programme as ‘paper driven’ and the bureaucracy as ‘gruesome’ and the programme had eventually had to hand back unspent funds to Government.

2.4 **Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) and Digital Connectivity Board**

Nicola Dunbar reported that she had chaired the first meeting of the Digital Connectivity Board on 25 August. It is a relatively small Board with a good range of skills. The first meeting agreed terms of reference and shared the existing digital infrastructure and digital skills strategies. They agreed that digital is a thread that runs through all agendas and is as important as other utility services.

The Digital Connectivity Board is keen to work with local authorities, identify barriers and create more connections. Ester McVey has also met representatives of the Board and offered to ask a parliamentary question to highlight key issues.

Eleanor Blackburn asked for local authorities and Connecting Cheshire to be involved in the Digital Connectivity Board **ACTION SARAH WILLIAMS AND NICOLA DUNBAR.** Nicola confirmed that Connecting Cheshire has been invited to the next meeting of the Board.

The next meeting is on 29 September and will feedback into the Employers’ Skills and Education Board to ensure any synergies are picked up.

2.5 **Institute of Technology and Skills Accelerator**

Dhesi was not present at the meeting but had advised that there had been no new developments around the Institute of Technology – he had already shared the recording of the MP’s question about the Institute and was waiting for further information about the progress of the Cheshire and Warrington application from the Department for Education.

Dhesi had also advised that the second stage of the bid for Skill Development Funding was due to be submitted by 17th September. The bid includes detailed business cases for a business centre for creative and digital skills in Warrington Vale Royal College, and a focus on decarbonisation/renewable energy skills in Cheshire College South and West, creative and digital skills in Macclesfield and Warrington Vale Royal College and decarbonisation of rural enterprises in Reaseheath.

**2.6 Data and Labour Market Steering Group**

Pat Jackson reported that the Data and Labour Market Steering Group met on 14 September. They approved the Low Carbon report. The report and a set of summary slides will be posted on the LEP website (<https://cheshireandwarrington.com/what-we-do/skills-and-education/data-and-labour-market-information/> ).

The Group also reviewed some initial draft maps where qualification pathways had been mapped against occupations and then set within the context of the Cheshire and Warrington economy – an example of a digital map is available. A small task and finish group of career leads drawn from the secondary schools in Cheshire and Warrington is now working to develop the maps into posters that can be used in schools.

The Group also discussed their next phase of work which will be commissioned by the LEP. It will include an updated assessment of the local labour market following the ending of the furlough scheme and an easing of Covid restrictions.

2.7 **Local Growth Fund**

Sarah Williams noted that the majority of Local Growth Fund projects were now reporting on a quarterly basis with a full update to be presented at the net Employers’ Skills and Education Board in October. Sarah asked all Members who are sponsoring projects to contact them for updates and to send Sarah updates by 11 October so that they could be included in the October report. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

**3. The Changing Nature of the Labour Market**

Pat Jackson drew Members attention to the one-page summary of the evidence drawn from all the data and labour market intelligence (a slightly updated version is also attached). Pat noted the changing nature of the labour market with, at present in Cheshire and Warrington, approximately 22,000 people who are seeking work and over 28,000 vacancies currently posted on the Jobs Portal ([Cheshire & Warrington Opportunities (candwopportunities.co.uk)](https://www.candwopportunities.co.uk/).

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

* **Nicola Dunbar** – Nicola’s logistics hub accommodates 12 companies employing approximately 250 people. There have experienced significant changes in the labour market over recent months. Waitrose is currently offering salaries of £50K plus a £2K golden handshake to lorry drivers. This is impacting the medium sized logistic businesses who are struggling to recruit despite some offering 40% increases in wages. The businesses will need to make significant changes to their job offers in order to compete effectively in the labour market.
* In a response to a question from Clare Latham, Nicola explained that lorry drivers were prepared to move to other jobs offer 20 or 30p extra per hour – this was a reflection of previous working practices. Employers needed to think more flexibly – including offering to pay for qualifications.
* **Clare Latham** noted the potential for inequalities between jobs which were subject to market conditions and where salaries could be raised and passed on to customers (logistics) compared with jobs in the not-for-profit sector (e.g., care).
* **Andy Devaney** noted the tight labour market in health care and hospitality as well as logistics. As well as working to support unemployed people back into work, it is important for the Growth Hub to work with employers to ensure they are more aware of the changes in the labour market and recognise the need to change labour practices. This is also a big opportunity for smaller businesses to change and access real talent. Andy stressed the importance of the Growth Board and the Employers’ Skills and Education Board working together on this agenda.
* **Phil Atkinson** commented that Covid had caused people to rethink their work/life balances. People were choosing to retire early or opting for hybrid working arrangements. Phil suggested that Members should consider what conditions are market driven and what are skills driven.
* **Paul Colman** stressed the need to change the approach to some careers – it was important not to just focus on digital and STEM. (Note that the Job Portal attempts to do this).
* **Kath Mackay** agreed that peoples’ expectations have changed over the Covid period – they want more flexibility.
* **Maggie Chen** agreed that he labour market had changed and suggested that young people had been most affected by the changes – young people do not want jobs for life, they want to move between sectors. Maggie suggested that social media has an important role to play in raising aspirations and providing information about new technologies and career opportunities. Existing promotional materials could be re-purposed and used in social media. Maggie observed that Manchester LEP are very active on Instagram.
* **Trevor Langston** noted that the Pledge now has over 100 videos of employers showcasing new technologies and local businesses – it is important to grow these resources and make better use of existing materials.
* **Kim Hardman** reported that Astra Zeneca was receiving a significant number of job applications although fewer for Level 3 apprenticeships despite the fact these offered important grounding and the opportunity to progress within the business.

Kath thanked everyone for their comments – they needed to be taken into account as Members reviewed the Skills Report Action Plan.

4. **Skills Action Plan**

Members reviewed the latest update of the Skills Action Plan in the light of the previous discussion on the changing nature of the labour market.

In the subsequent discussion the following suggestions were made:

* Ensure a focus on digital connectivity and introduce an extra column to help identify the digitally focused actions.
* Include impact and outcome measures for each action
* Review the RAG ratings (and the definitions of the RAG ratings) to ensure they reflect the level of impact as well as progress
* Be more specific about outcomes and impact (what has happened as a result of the action?)
* Check that the actions link more clearly to the issues they are intended to address

Members agreed that the Action Plan should be updated to reflect the comments made and that Maggie and Clare should provide a sounding board to help the update. **ACTION PAT JACKON, TREVOR LANGSTON AND SARAH WILLIAMS**

Members did not discuss the need to update their roadmap but this can be considered at the next Board meeting **ACTION PAT JACKSON**

**5. Jobs Opportunities Portal**

Sarah Williams summarised recent developments and performance against key performance indicators. Sarah noted that on 22 September the LEP’s Performance and Investment Committee would be considering proposals to extend funding for the Portal to the end of March 2022.

Members welcomed the update and noted that it was very difficult to track whether people get a job as a result of using the Portal.

Sarah Hopkinson commented that it would be a real shame if the Portal did not continue.

6. **Pledge**

Trevor Langston reported that the Pledge was working closely with employers to look at best practices in recruitment, induction, and work experience online.

Trevor invited feedback from Members on whether the Pledge was missing any key issues and if there are trends that the Pledge should address in terms of changes in career opportunities.

Trevor also noted that the Pledge is looking to recruit a new Chair.

Sarah Hopkinson commented that the Pledge was doing a great job and it was important to continue with a focus on recruiting and online working.

Members agreed that the Action Plan should be reviewed to ensure the correct focus for the Pledge’s future priorities. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

**7. Note of last meeting on 14 July and Action list**

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

**8. Any Other Business**

There was no further business.

Date of next meeting 20 October 2021

**EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2021 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)
* Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
* Sarah Hopkinson (Engie)
* \*Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
* \*Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
* Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
* Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
* Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
* \*Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
* Maggie Chen
* \*Clare Latham (Cheshire West and Chester)
* Pat Jackson (LEP) \*With voting rights

**Apologies**

* Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
* Nicola Johnson (Bentley Motors)
* Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
* **\*Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)**
* \*Lucy Liang (AUE Ltd) – has stepped down on an interim basis
* Paul Kelly (BAE Systems)
* Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer

**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)