**NOTE OF EMPLOYERS’ SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 13 JULY 2022**

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

* Review key developments since their last meeting on 15 June including further work on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Local Skills Improvement Plan, the LEP Delivery Plan, and the Pledge celebration event on 30 June
* Review further work on the impact measurement work with particular focus on the long-term unemployed and economically inactive people and young people in disadvantaged communities, and agree next steps
* Review progress on Local Growth Fund Skills investments
* Receive an update on Skills Bootcamps and provide a steer on next steps
* Provide a steer on the development of the Jobs Portal

**KEY POINTS DISCUSSED AND AGREED ACTIONS**

**1. Welcome, declarations of interest, introductions with members sharing information on any key developments since the last meeting** **on 15 June**

* Kath welcomed members to the meeting. There were no additional declarations of interest.
* List of attendees at Annex A. Kath welcomed Colin Billingsley (DWP) and Kate Guise (Warrington Council) who had joined for specific agenda items, and Colin Jacklin (Cheshire East Council), as an observer

2. **Note of last meeting and outstanding actions**

* The note of the last meeting was agreed.
* Members reviewed the updated action list. They noted the actions that had been completed and a number of updates were provided that are now reflected in the updated action list

3. **Updates on Key Developments Since Last Meeting**

3.1 **LEP Board**

* Kath noted the following:
* the LEP Chief Executive’s report to the July meeting of the LEP Board
* the short-listing of Crewe as the potential home of Great British Railways and urged members to take part in the public vote
* the recent developments in political events
* the Life Sciences Fund is now live
* the LEP Delivery Plan and the sections on skills and the Pledge
* the current LEP review.

3.2 **The Pledge and Careers Hub**

* Paul Colman informed members that over 220 people had joined the Pledge celebration event at Alderley Park on 30 June. The initial feedback on the event had been very positive and Trevor Langston shared a draft video of some of the highlights from the event
* Paul noted the recent publication of the Pledge’s core offers to employers and teachers/schools (circulated to members on 4 July)
* Paul reported that the target for the second phase of the Careers Hub to engage with 77 schools had been exceeded with 78 schools now signed up
* The Pledge is running a pilot internship programme involving a significant number of small and medium sized businesses
* A stand-alone Pledge website is being developed which will include landing pages for each local Pledge area and local dashboards

3.3 **Digital Skills Partnership** (DSP)

* Nicola Dunbar reported that a small number of DSP Board members had met on 6 July to discuss

skills bootcamps, Local Growth Fund skills investments and the Jobs Portal.

* Kath Mackay was interviewed by Radio Merseyside about the LEP and Digital Skills Partnership’s work on digital inclusion, the programme was broadcast on Friday 10th June ([link](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0c79n76) Kath’s interview is 2 hours 39 minutes into the programme).
* Some Board Members are assisting with the evaluation of the technical aspects of bids received for the Skills Bootcamps digital – the deadline for submissions is 9am on Thursday 14 July.
* The next meeting of Digital Skills Partnership Board is 18th July and agenda items include:
	+ update on evaluation of Skills Bootcamps bid submissions
	+ what the Board has achieved
	+ Digital Skills Partnership key performance indicators
	+ business support for digital via the Growth Hub
	+ update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund
	+ influencing the ‘local’ content of the Jobs Portal
* Nicola is also the Chair of the Connectivity Board which is responsible for delivering part of the LEP’s Delivery Plan. The Connectivity Board is linking increasingly with Connecting Cheshire and identifying potential gaps in connectivity. They are also exploring alternative approaches to developing the digital infrastructure e.g., use of satellites

3.4 **Accelerate**

* Kurt Allman reminded members that the revised target for Accelerate was to support a total of 2,250 participants. Accelerate closed to new participants on 30 June with 1,300 as the initial total number of participants – Kurt will confirm this figure at a later date **ACTION KURT**
* Kurt said he was disappointed at the total number of participants involved in the programme but noted that it was still a very large programme and there were lessons to learn for future skills programmes including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund
* It was confirmed that any underspend or claw-backed funds are expected to be returned to the Government and then the European Commission.

3.5 **Institute of Technology**

* Dhesi noted the challenges of the second wave of Institutes of Technology associated with sharp increases in building costs due to inflation
* Over recent weeks local colleges have been working together to develop revised proposals that will fit the £13 million budget. This work has now been completed and all the colleges continue to be fully engaged in developing the plans. The cost savings have impacted on learner numbers (1600 by year 5 c.f. an initial figure of 2400 learners by year 5)
* Dhesi explained that there has also been a challenge to ensure the right levels of qualifications, but these have now been agreed by the colleges.
* There will be a gateway meeting with the Department for Education on 29 July when the colleges will present their revised capital investment plans. If agreed the proposals will then be progressed to the next stage.

3.6 **Data and Labour Market Steering Group**

* Pat reported that the updated Digital report had been delayed as a result of ill health.
* Pat noted the latest unemployment figures and the analysis of the skills being specified in current vacancies compared with the skills being specified in the CVs of local residents.
* Paul Colman who had attended the last two meetings of the Data and Labour Market Steering Group commented that he was pleased with progress.

**4. Skills Bootcamps**

* Pat Jackson and Sarah Williams provided an update on skills bootcamp plans.
	+ Offer letters for the first lot of 3 bootcamps had all been issued and learners are expected to start before the end of July
	+ The deadline for bids to deliver the second lot of bootcamps is 14 July and a further invitation to bid for the final lot of bootcamps will be issued in August – this will reflect the learning from the first two lots of bootcamps as well as learning from bootcamps being delivered in other parts of the country.
	+ A number of employers are already helping to assess the technical aspects of the bids received
	+ In September the Department for Education are planning to review progress in the delivery of bootcamps across the country and may re-allocate funding if needed.
	+ Although the first tranche of £1 million for Cheshire and Warrington is relatively modest in terms of budget and numbers of learners, the Department are expecting to issue a further invitation to bid for additional funding later in November or December.
	+ Pat and Sarah are already working with a range of partners who are discussing possible future bootcamps – topics suggested to date include life sciences, rail engineering and maintenance, fibre optics, additive engineering, external insulation, and ground works

5. **Local Skills Improvement Plan and Designation of Employer Representative Body**

* Kath Mackay noted that the Department for Education had invited proposals from employer representative bodies that would be designated as the leads for preparing local skills improvement plans. The Department had decided that the Employers’ Skills and Education Board and the equivalent in other parts of the country were not eligible to apply. However, members of the Employers’ Skills Board had already confirmed that they were keen to work closely with the designated body in Cheshire and Warrington for the benefit of all businesses in the area.
* Paul Colman confirmed that Cheshire West and Chester Chamber had submitted a bid to become a designated body on behalf of all the Cheshire and Warrington chambers. A response from government was expected in July/August but this might be delayed as a result of the current political situation

**6. Skills Local Growth Fund investments**

* Sarah shared a slide summarising the latest returns from the local growth fund projects. It was noted that many of the projects were finding it difficult to engage local businesses – as a result an event was planned for September where projects could share good practice.
* Sarah noted that some of the local growth fund projects had attended the recent Pledge event to demonstrate the specialist equipment and had generated interest from local schools and businesses
* The links to the finalised Local Growth Fund skills videos are:
	+ Advanced Construction Training Centres (5 partner colleges)- <https://youtu.be/YRmqxIiTMhQ>
	+ Network and Cyber Security Lab (University Technical College Warrington)- <https://youtu.be/3gRwqxuIQ3s>
	+ Yocto.Digital (Youth Federation) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BC1HqNnXHgw>

7. **Impact Measures - Work with Young People to address information failures and in particular support young people in the most disadvantaged areas of Cheshire and Warrington**

* Paul Colman, Kate Guise (Warrington Council) and Trevor Langston led a discussion on the challenges of inspiring and informing young people, their parents and carers about new technologies and career opportunities and addressing the differences in educational achievement between students in disadvantaged communities and their peers in less disadvantaged areas.
* Kate Guise talked through a series of slides (already circulated to members on 14 July). Kate explained that overall, there are a high number of good and outstanding schools and colleges across Cheshire and Warrington, with high overall achievement and progression rates with good progression into further and higher education for students not eligible for free school meals. However, for the students eligible for free school meals there is a high inequality gap with relatively low numbers progressing to higher education including higher apprenticeships.
* Pat noted that the Young Person Report and the recent Skills Report had also highlighted the issues and identified them as key challenges (Pat shared a set of summary slides with members on 14 July)
* Kate asked members how can we work together to enable the free school meal students to catch up with their peer group and how can we measure improvements more quickly (latest data available is 2019)?
* Kurt highlighted the need to work with schools and colleges to improve the progression into higher education.
* Members agreed that the presentation was very sobering - the reasons why students succeed, or fail are complex. The solution is not easy and required a multi-disciplinary approach, including links to Cheshire East’s Inequalities Commission. Members asked what employers could do to help – what were the key building blocks?
* Paul Colman noted that Kirstie Simpson at the University of Chester is planning a study on the issues at a school in Cheshire and Warrington
* Paul commented that employers had an important role to help inspire and to encourage a stronger youth voice
* Dylan Houghton (a young employee of Warrington Council) suggested that first generation to go on to HE was an indicator, but university was not the only measure of success
* Paul Colman suggested the members should set up a sub-group to explore the issue in more detail and develop an action plan. Trevor offered to suggest some measures of success **(ACTION TREVOR)** and Paul, Kate. Trevor and Nicola Dunbar all indicated that they would be happy to join a sub-group - **ACTION PAT JACKSON TO FOLLOW UP WITH PAUL COLMAN**

**8. Impact Measures – Impact of Covid on unemployed and economically inactive people**

* Colin Billingsley provided an overview of the impact of Covid on the labour market – it had not been as expected with current numbers of job vacancies far exceeding the numbers of people looking for work and may economically inactive people not claiming benefits
* Colin summarised the current situation:
	+ 14,000 people on Universal Credit looking for work and available for work
	+ 18,000 on Universal Credit not expected to work with no regular interventions from Jobcentre Plus
	+ 18,000 on Employment Support Allowance with very little intervention from Jobcentre Plus
	+ 25,000 on Universal Credit doing some form of work. Jobcentre Plus is continuously working with 10,000 of these people to help them increase their earnings
* Colin also introduced his colleague Vicky Cooney who is currently working on a national pilot on how to have conversations with people who are working 9 hours per week about how to increase their earnings – Colin invited employers’ views on how they might work with Jobcentre Plus on this issue.
* In terms of impact measurements, Colin posed the question on what progress could be made with the 36,000 people who are either not expected to look for work or who are on Employment Support Allowance – Jobcentre Plus are not interacting regularly with this group of people but other partners may be having regular contact on health or community issues
* Matthew Smith referred to work with nursery school parents who might need short interventions over a prolonged period to build their confidence and help them to move back into well paid jobs. Colin agreed to follow up on this issue with Matthew Smith **ACTION COLIN BILLINGSLEY AND MATTHEW SMITH**
* Sarah noted that some skills bootcamps were targeting mums returning to work
* Paul Colman agreed this was an important issue for employers – given the high numbers of current vacancies.
* Paul suggested it might be useful to explore the scope for building on the work of the Pledge with employers and young people and develop a similar approach for older workers that would help to reduce the high levels of ‘white noise’ that employers face.
* Colin commented that Ministers have a strong in these issues and Colin was keen to explore the issue further and set up a discussion forum with links to local employers - **ACTION PAT JACKSON TO FOLLOWUP WITH COLIN BILLINGSLEY**

**9. Jobs Portal**

* Sarah Williams provided an update on the Portal. Funding has been agreed with a range of partners to enable the Portal to continue for another 9 months. The Portal will in future contain landing pages for specific geographical areas. A user group of local partners will help to develop the Portal further.

**10. Any Other Business and Date of Next Meetings**

* Date of next meeting 14 September 2022
* Kath and Pat will identify a date for a face-to-face meeting later this year.

**EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 13 JULY 2022 Annex A**

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

* \*Kath Mackay - Chair
* \*Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
* Tim Smith representing \*Eleanor Blackburn (Warrington Borough Council)
* Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
* Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
* Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the training providers)
* \*Matthew Smith (Cheshire West and Chester)
* Tamara Barker (Engie)
* \*Lucy Liang (AUE Ltd)
* Kim Hardman (Astra Zeneca)
* Sophie Baldock (representing Bentley Motors)
* Pat Jackson (LEP) \*With voting rights

**Apologies**

* \*Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
* Julia Teale Mid Cheshire Health Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
* \*Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
* Nicola Johnson/Gemma Betteridge (Bentley Motors)
* Cllr Sarah Pochin (Cheshire East)
* Kevin Hutchinson (SISK)
* Maggie Chen
* Ben Longworth (BAE Systems)

**Also attending**

* Colin Billingsley (Jobcentre Plus), Kate Guise and Dylan Houghton (Warrington Council), Colin Jacklin (Cheshire East Council) Trevor Langston and Sarah Williams, for specific agenda items

**Papers copied to**:

* Trevor Brocklebank (Deputy Chair of LEP)
* Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)
* Jamie Zucker (DfE)
* Clare Cassidy (DfE)
* Mike McLouglin (DfE)
* Peter Skates (Cheshire East Council)
* Kirstie Simpson (University of Chester)
* Nicola Said (LEP)
* Joe Manning (LEP)
* Andy Devaney (LEP)
* Sarah Williams (LEP) and Trevor Langston (LEP)
* Andrew Bridge and Dave Rowlands (CITB)