**NOTE OF EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 16 OCTOBER 2019**

1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Clare Hayward welcomed everyone to the meeting. The list of attendees and apologies is at **Annex A.**

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following standing items are 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.
* Paul Colman – Board members of Cheshire College South and West
* Paul Taylor – Director of Wire, Warrington
* James Richard – Director of 4WardFutures

1. **NOTE OF THE LAST MEETING OF THE EMPLOYERS’ SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD ON 18 SEPTEMBER**

The note of the meeting was amended to reflect the points that James Richards was not a voting member and Dhesi’s full name is Jasbir Dhesi. The revised note of the meeting was agreed, and the revised action list noted.

1. **PROGRESS REPORT ON ACCELERATE CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON**

Charlie Woodcock reported that DWP have approved, subject to contract, the bid for investment of £14.8 million European Social Funds into Accelerate Cheshire and Warrington. The contract should be with the University over the next few days.

As soon as the contract has been signed the University will appoint the team who will administer the investment programme. There are still some members of the financial team to appoint but the Dynamic Procurement Framework is already in place.

Charlie expects DWP to require four conditions to be addressed prior to the initialisation meeting which will take place once the contract has been signed.

Based on being able to have staff in post to run Accelerate by 2 December, the aim would be to pilot some initial work in January with full roll out in February/March 2020. The investment programme needs to support 19,000 learners over 3 years with an initial target of 600 learners for January, February and March 2020.

Members of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board and the Governance Board responsible for overseeing the delivery of Accelerate will have a key role in helping to attract the right type of investments in skills by local businesses.

Charlie highlighted a number of challenges to the delivery of Accelerate:

* The need to spend all £29,600,000 of funding. If not, we risk claw back and a fine. With an average unit cost of £2000 that will be no easy task
* Adhering to the output profile so we need to hit large numbers immediately and stick to our outputs profile
* Whilst we have always discussed our focus being on digital skills delivery, we cannot afford to ignore all training needs that are requested by employees, as these are also crucial to development and growth.
* The need to clarify if anyone on the Employers’ Board who is dealing with the strategy of this bid intends to bid for delivery. They will not be able to as this would be a conflict of interest and if they are party to project partner delivery discussions then they will not also be able to be a training provider on the project and/or an employer who benefits from the funds for their employees.

In response Members expressed concern at:

* The danger of too much focus on spending the money at the expense of achieving the change of culture and longer term objectives of Accelerate (aggregating demand for skills that meet the needs of local employers who need to move up the value chain and improve productivity in priority sectors as well as building the capacity of our training providers)
* The dangers of displacing training and education that would have taken place without Accelerate
* Failing to use Accelerate to raise aspirations and only deliver the immediate skills needs of employers without focusing on the longer-term skills investments needed to raise productivity and achieve business transformation.

All recognised that the tensions between maintaining the spend profile and quality investments needed careful management.

There was also discussion about the need to comply with EU procurement regulations but also to build the capacity of local providers. There was concern that if local providers were not financially robust they would not be eligible to become Accelerate ‘accredited training providers.

All agreed that the investment was intended to be a legacy investment. It was agreed that a sub-group would meet Charlie and Maud on 28 October to pursue these issues, agree a governance structure and agree decision making rights. **ACTION Clare Hayward, Charlie Woodcock, Philip Cox, Maud, Pat Jackson to meet on 28 October 2019**

Charlie also asked for a meeting with the LEP to agree working arrangements that would ensure effective delivery of the investment programme. **ACTION Charlie Woodcock and Pat Jackson to arrange**

It was also noted that Accelerate still needed a strap line. **ACTION Pat Jackson to follow up with Clare Hayward.**

All agreed the need for a coherent sales and marketing approach to engage employers using a coherent message that presented the opportunities of working with the Pledge, the Digital Skills Partnership and Accelerate. **ACTION Philip Cox and Pat Jackson to follow up with Catherine Walker and Marketing Cheshire and Warrington**

**5. PROGRESS REPORT ON PLEDGE AND DIGITAL SKILLS PARTNERSHIP**

Sarah Williams presented a series of slides to illustrate the road map for the Digital Skills Partnership and draft measures of success. All Members were asked to review the measures of success. **ACTION All Members**

Sarah was asked to prioritise the skills map targets to include to assist Accelerate in their first target of 600 people trained. **ACTION Sarah Williams**

Trevor Langston presented a series of slides to illustrate the progress of the Pledge partnership including the Pledge road map and draft measures of success. It was noted that the targets included the Gatsby Benchmarks. There was some discussion about whether the targets for employer engagement were sufficiently ambitious and Trevor was asked to explain the analysis that underpinned the targets proposed in the road map. **ACTION Trevor Langston**

Trevor also showed progress towards developing a coherent programme of activities – at present the list is not coherent but it is stimulating local partners to review the list and develop a more coherent approach.

Trevor spoke about the development of a video to promote the Pledge and asked Clare if she would review the video. **ACTION Trevor Langston and Clare Hayward**

**6. LOCAL GROWTH FUND (LGF)**

Pat Jackson reported that since the last Employers’ Skills and Education meeting on 18 September, sub-groups of Members had met on 25 September and 3 October to review all the bids received. The employers had raised a number of queries about each bid but overall, considered the bids to include some good investment propositions that, in nearly all cases, needed some further work to ensure targets and outputs were realistic and achievable. They also wanted reassurance that costs were eligible for funding and that the investments would be monitored over 5- year periods, were state aid compliant and were all prepared to commit to working collaboratively with the Pledge and the other LGF investments.

Following the Employers Board meetings on 18th and 25th September and 3 October, LEP officials had held meetings with every bidder. All the meeting s had been very constructive, and bidders were in the process of responding to queries raised during the meetings.

Pat noted the bids that had been approved and were now ready for contracting. The value of these proposed investments and targets were not significantly different to the original values of the bids as received and reviewed by Board Members and represented good value for money. Pat would send round for information early next week a final list of value of investment and outputs to be contracted for each of the bids listed as approved. Members would have 5 days in which to respond before contracts were issued. All Members agreed to this proposed action. **ACTION Pat Jackson**

It was expected that all other bids would have responded to outstanding queries in time for a further paper with recommendations about the values of proposed investments and targets to be contracted to be submitted to the next meeting of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board in November. The revised proposals of any bids that had changed significantly as a result of responding to queries raised by the Employers Skills and Education Board would also be circulated. **ACTION Pat Jackson**

It was proposed that a meeting of all bidders would be held in the second half of November to encourage collaboration and joint working , The meeting was also an opportunity to identify any gaps in provision that might be addressed if there was any remaining LGF budget to be allocated.

**7. MEMBERSHIP OF EMPLOYERS’ SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD**

A table showing membership of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board and the Pledge Management Board as well as proposed membership of the Digital Skills Partnership and Accelerate Governing Board was circulated and members asked to propose additional members to ensure a wide spread of membership across key sectors and different geographical areas. **ACTION All Members**

**8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Next meeting to be held on 13 November at United Utilities offices in Warrington. The next meeting should focus almost entirely on Accelerate. With future meetings focusing on more in depth progress reviews of the Pledge and Digital Skills Partnership. The next meeting should also include a focus on data and labour market intelligence.

**CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP Annex A**

**EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 16 OCTOBER 2019**

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

* Clare Hayward
* Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
* Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
* Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
* Jasbir Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the FE Colleges)
* Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
* James Richards (Network Rail)
* Philip Cox
* Pat Jackson (LEP)

**Apologies**

* Nicola Dunbar
* Paul Taylor (Taylor Business Park)
* Julia Teale (Bentley Motors)
* Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
* Faye Van Flute (Lloyds Banking Group)
* Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer

Also attending Sarah Williams (LEP), Charlie Woodcock and Maud Duthie (University of Chester), Trevor Langston (LEP)