**Meeting of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board on 18 March 2020**

List of attendees and apologies at Annex A.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Clare thanked all who were attending in such unprecedented times.

**2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

Nicola Merriman had not attended the last Board meeting and asked for an update on Accelerate – is there a ‘go live’ date? And can NSAM start promoting Accelerate to NSAM businesses? Nicola noted that NSAM has already seen a significant downturn in demand for face to face courses and they are very keen to promote more on-line learning whilst people are at home.

In response Maud Duthie noted - Accelerate is already up and running but has not yet been launched officially. The first Governance Board meeting is on 19th March, and the delivery team are currently working, 2 skills brokers are in place and work is progressing on the marketing plan. Maud will circulate Accelerate leaflet to all Members. **ACTION Maud Duthie.**

**3. CORONAVIRUS**

Clare Hayward asked Maud if Members could have a clear project plan for Accelerate so that they can see next steps on delivery and how to address the challenges of Coronavirus.

Nicola Merriman noted that NSAM is trying to support their training providers by promoting on-line learning, and they need some good news stories. Nicola asked if we could have increased communications to promote good news stories.

Andy Devaney explained that the Growth Hub is working with local partners to lead the response to Coronavirus. 95% of current queries from business to the Growth Hub are inevitably about Coronavirus. The Growth Hub web site is currently updated at least daily with all details of the latest announcements from Government. The website also provides access to a range of webinars about, for example, coping with cash flow and working from home. The Growth Hub is also in regular contact with Government feeding in concerns raised by business.

Andy noted that, on Accelerate, the challenge in the current circumstances around Coronavirus, is getting access to businesses to agree training priorities and then persuading the businesses to find the 60% contribution needed from employers.

Members asked Andy about the current level of activity in the Growth Hub? Andy responded that the Growth Hub is trying to encourage businesses to use the website rather than via telephone access.

Paul Colman reported that the Chamber is making extensive use of the Growth Hub for information about Coronavirus and the Chambers are collecting information from Chamber members about the impact of Coronavirus. Many businesses are trying to adopt a work from home approach as soon as possible.

Members queried if we could develop information about the on-line learning that is available. Andy Devaney noted that the challenge was to refer to good practice material, including webinars. But we need to be cautious about flooding businesses with too much information.

Andy asked for regular information from Members that can be fed back to Government about the impact of Coronavirus on local businesses. Andy to share proforma for recording concerns. **ACTION ANDY DEVANEY.** Andy also invited Members to share any information or details of on-line learning materials that could go on website. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

Stephen Fitzsimons reported that he had been contacted by a number of businesses about the possibility of developing self-support networks via the business exchange. Stephen agreed to report back on any follow up action. **ACTION - STEPHEN FITZSIMONS**

Phil Atkinson noted that the Accelerate Governance Board meeting on 19th March will need to be able to address the huge paradigm change resulting from Coronavirus. Maud explained that 28 training organisations are now registered to deliver training via Accelerate and 15 more training providers are being assessed.

Clare Hayward stressed the need for Accelerate to become outward facing to businesses, not just having an internal focus on processes and procedures.

**4. ACTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

Members reviewed the outstanding actions highlighted in red:

* **James Richards and Phil Atkinson** to update their declarations of interest – completed.
* **All Members** to contact Trevor Langston if interested in becoming an Enterprise Advisor or aware of anyone with an interest in becoming an Enterprise Advisor – nil return to date but Trevor to re-circulate list of vacancies.
* **Charlie Woodcock** to provide Members with read only access to Accelerate’s Dynamic Procurement System – outstanding. Maud stated that the University could not provide read only access to Members but would circulate a list of all 28 ‘approved’ providers – immediately following Accelerate’s Governance Board meeting on 19th March. Maud also indicated that applications from a further 15 potential providers were currently being reviewed.
* **Andy Devaney** to prepare list of frequently asked questions relating to Accelerate – outstanding but Andy will provide list asap.
* Need to identify replacement for Lisa Harris who is leaving Cheshire East Council – outstanding
* **Nicola Merriman** had not yet been able to share with the University the quality control procurement system developed by NSAM – any release of this information had to be approved by the next NSAM Board meeting.
* **All Members** to provide Catherine Walker with a five-word story about Accelerate – nil responses – to be addressed during presentation on marketing – the next item on the agenda.

Clare Hayward asked Members to review all the outstanding actions and provide updates as soon as possible. **ACTION ALL MEMBERS**

A revised list of outstanding actions to be circulated.

**5. MARKETING AND BRANDING AND PR**

Nicola Said talked through her slides.

Key points to note:

* Marketing Cheshire will become a partner with the University of Chester in the delivery of Accelerate – a change request is currently with DWP.
* The Growth Hub is the key contact point for businesses to access Accelerate.
* Marketing Cheshire are currently redesigning the Growth Hub website with a planned launch in early June. The redesign will include bringing the skills programmes into the wider Growth Hub offer to businesses.
* The skills programmes collectively have allocated a significant budget to marketing. The budget must be used to maximum effect, with a joint branding and coordinated approach.
* Customer journeys need to be coordinated and Nicola recommended that a single customer relationship management data base should be used across all the Growth Hub programmes including the skills programmes.
* Similarly, we need a coordinated approach to ensure an effective use of social media channels.
* There is an inception meeting next week which will trigger the start of re-designing the web site.
* Nicola suggest that the Employers’ Skills and Education Board should establish a marketing subgroup and Marketing Cheshire will produce briefing packs for all Members by early April.
* It would be possible to launch the Accelerate marketing campaign in early April but this would not be a very effective use of the budget. Marketing Cheshire will advise on the best time for a formal launch and the start of marketing spend – in the light of Coronavirus.

In discussion the following questions were raised:

* Maud – in principal, a coordinated approach is welcome and a clear customer journey is key to the success of Accelerate - so it would be helpful to have more details of the proposed customer journey.
* Marketing Cheshire is working on the marketing strategy in advance of becoming a formal delivery partner.
* Philip Cox noted that we must be as helpful as possible to businesses, so what-ever is the first point of contact (Exporting, Pledge, Accelerate) – we must have a coordinated response.
* Maud queried if the Growth hub has sufficient resources to deal with queries.

**ACTION - ANDY, PHIL AND MAUD TO DISCUSS AT MARKETING MEETING NEXT MONDAY then feed-back to Employers’ Skills and Education Board asap.**

* Andy Devaney noted that the Growth Hub has already developed a pipeline of interest and is actively trying to engage more businesses. Andy stressed the need for a clear, more coordinated customer journey.
* Phil Atkinson commented that we should have a contingency plan and potentially reprofile Accelerate as a result of the Coronavirus crisis.
* Nicola Dunbar stressed the need to support small businesses and adapt our plans to respond to the changing situation – we need a new way of thinking. It is critical that we adopt a pragmatic approach – we cannot expect everything to be absolutely polished.

**6. THE PLEDGE**

Trevor presented his slides and noted the following:

* The Pledge is currently in a strong position as regarding meeting the targets contracted with the Department of Work and Pensions for the European Social Funding.
* The Pledge team are piloting a number of different approaches to work placements and will be evaluating their effectiveness over the coming months.
* The ‘Yoursay’ survey of young people across Cheshire and Warrington is currently live and should be able to provide considerable insight about young people’s views about the local economy and the quality of careers advice and guidance they receive.
* There are some concerns around whether the National Citizenship Service summer school will run this summer.
* As expected, there have been mixed response from businesses and schools about whether they want to continue working with the Pledge in the light of the Coronavirus crisis.
* The Pledge team are able to offer increasingly clearer information about data and labour market information as a result of the work of the Data and Labour Market Steering Group.
* The team are currently working with the Digital Skills Partnership to explore how we can build on the recent piloting of live broadcasting via ‘Learn Live’ to support more distance learning and potentially create a number of regional hubs that employers could use to broadcast to students across Cheshire and Warrington. The Department for Education have agreed that ‘Kick start’ funding from the Careers and Enterprise Company can be used to run further pilots.
* The Pledge are proposing to use Start Profile to provide a landing page for young people to find out more about job opportunities across Cheshire and Warrington. It was stressed that an procurement of this type of landing page must be transparent – there was some concern that a single tender process was not appropriate. **ACTION Trevor Langston to check the procurement rules with Youth Federation.**
* How can we collectively give stronger messages about the importance of digital and engineering jobs in Cheshire and Warrington – in practice, it is very difficult to find work experience, apprenticeships and job opportunities in digital and STEM-related areas. It is also important to understand more about what digital and STEM-related jobs involve.

In discussion the following points were made:

* We are expecting a Department of Education announcement about closure of all schools and colleges at the end of this week (possibly triggered by absences of teaching staff).
* Clare Hayward asked if there is more we can do to support our schools and can we do more to prepare our support for when schools return?
* If schools close, the Growth Hub and the Pledge will be working together closely to divert resources as needed.
* Trevor asked for advice on how we could secure a list of job and work opportunities to match with young people – could we use Learn Live to achieve this? Should we establish clearing houses so that young people who do not succeed in securing their first apprenticeship can be picked up and offered other opportunities. Paul Colman recommended that local Pledge management boards should be asked to consider this issue.
* The longer term delivery model for the Pledge needs careful consideration – we cannot rely on continuation of 100% funding from the public sector but if we are to attract the private sector funding this cannot be seen to be promoting individual funders. **ACTION TREVOR TO SET UP TASK AND FINSH GROUP TO REVIEW LONGER TERM FUNDING MODEL.**
* Paul Colman stressed the importance of embedding the Pledge locally to ensure local ownership.

**7. INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

Pat Jackson reported that the LEP had worked with all our local colleges to submit to the Department for Education an expression of interest in establishing an institute of technology in Cheshire and Warrington. The Cheshire and Warrington institute of technology would build on our existing skills and education priorities and be an opportunity to build on our recent investments of Local Growth Fund and continue to invest in the specialist equipment to deliver digital and STEM related learning across our area.

Philip Cox and Pat had spoken to Department for Education officials about our plans and officials had indicated that they were not necessarily looking to invest in shiny new buildings and were in general comfortable with our proposals. They said that Ministers were open to investment in specialist equipment and some refurbishment. Further guidance will be available when the Department for Education publish their wave 2 guidance.

In discussion Members commented that an Institute of Technology along the lines proposed was a very exciting opportunity and suggested that a task and finish group should be established to work with the college Principals. The task and finish group might be an opportunity to involve some new members of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board.

8. **LOCAL GROWTH FUND**

Members noted the progress to date and the proposed use of the remaining funds to support:

* the digitalisation in the construction industry
* the extension of digital facilities into more local communities via, for example, libraries, community centre and pop-up cafes and
* investment in equipment to facilitate on-line broadcasts by employers into schools as well as more on-line training facilities for schools and local businesses.

Members agreed the proposed approach to invest the remaining funds and commented that this was really exciting and an opportunity to achieve a major shift in the numbers of local residents able to access and use the facilities. The next step would be to draft the invitations to bid to deliver the proposed investments. **ACTION PAT JACKSON AND SARAH WILLIAMS**

Clare Hayward also reminded all Board members of their sponsorship responsibilities for the Local Growth Fund investments and asked Members to provide an update on their sponsorship to date.

It was suggested that we should use Microsoft Team to share information.

9. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 22 April – probably via Microsoft Office.

**10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 15.30 hrs.

**Annex A**

**LIST OF ATTENDEES TO MEETING OF EMPLOYERS’ SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD ON 18 MARCH 2020**

**Attended by:**

* \*Clare Hayward (Chair)
* \*Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
* \*Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
* \*Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
* \*Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
* James Richards (Network Rail)
* Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
* Stephen Fitzsimmons (Warrington Borough Council)
* Jasbir Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West representing the training providers)
* Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
* Maud Duthie representing Charlie Woodcock (University of Chester)
* Philip Cox (LEP)
* Pat Jackson (LEP)

**Apologies from Members**

* Julia Teale (Bentley Motors)
* Lisa Harris (Cheshire West and Chester Council)
* Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
* Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Observer)

\*With voting rights

**Also attending:**

* Andy Devaney (LEP)
* Sarah Williams (LEP)
* Catherine Walker (LEP)
* Nicola Said (Marketing Cheshire)
* Mark Shepherd (LEP)
* Trevor Langston (LEP)
* Chris Koral (University of Chester)

**Apologies:**

* Peter Skates

Paper also copied to:

Jamie Zucker (Department for Education)

Clare Cassidy (Department for Education)

Mike McLoughlin (Department for Education)