

CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON – NOTE OF EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING HELD ON 17 JUNE 2020

The main purpose of the meeting was to:

- Discuss any further impacts of the Covid-19 crisis
- Review the key issues emerging from the data and labour market work – the draft reports on the adult workforce and digital skills and the May and June reports on the impact of Covid-19 on employers' demand for skills
- In the light of the data and labour market work and the intelligence from Member consider need to update the skills and education priorities
- Review responses to the recent Local Growth Fund invitations to bid and agree next steps

1. Welcome, introductions and declarations of interest

List of attendees and apologies at Annex A. There were no further declarations of interest.

Clare welcomed everyone to the meeting – in particular, Kurt Allman from the University of Chester. Kurt was joining the meeting for the first time.

2. Note of last meeting on 13 May 2020

The note of the last meeting was agreed.

3. Action list from previous meeting and any matters arising that are not on agenda

The action list from previous meetings was reviewed.

Pat Jackson noted that several of the actions relating to Accelerate would be completed now that the change control had been agreed by the Department for Work and Pensions on 1 June – this meant that training delivery could commence as soon as possible, and Marketing Cheshire could start marketing Accelerate.

All actions that had been completed would be removed. Revised list of outstanding actions circulated.

4. Impact of Covid-19 Crisis – any key developments from Members since the last meeting.

Clare invited Members to highlight any key developments since the last meeting. The following key points were noted:

- Bill Carr noted some nervousness around whether people who have been furloughed would be able to return to work and how many would be made redundant as they start to return to work. Bill stressed the need to focus more support on training people in work to develop the new skills needed to develop new business models in response to the Covid-19 crisis.
- Paul Colman agreed with Bill's comments. Paul noted that 40 to 50% of his members were still not responding to calls or emails – this suggested that they had still not returned to work and would need support as they returned.
- Paul also noted that a lot of businesses have become more agile in response to the lockdown – it is important to share good practice about these changes and support businesses to become stronger.
- Andy Farrall drew Members attention to the paper that had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting setting out proposals for a response to the expected major spike in redundancies over the coming months.

- James Richard noted that Bentley Motors had already announced that they were shedding 1000 jobs. James expected Network Rail to make some redundancies following recent restructuring.
- Dhesi noted that the colleges and other training providers were dealing with the need to restructure and adopt different models of delivering training. They expected to shed staff because of the amount of business with employers that they had lost as a result of Covid-19.
- Pat Jackson noted that we should not assume that apprentices were not being recruited only because of job losses – sometimes it was because employers were unsure how to recruit remotely and how to induct apprentices into businesses that were having to manage social distancing. It was important to share the good practice that other employers were adopting.
- Clare confirmed that it was important to share good practice about how to recruit and induct new members of staff under the current social distancing requirements. It was important to raise confidence across the business community.

4.1 Accelerate

Phil Atkinson reported that the Accelerate Governing Board had met on 16 June and raised a number of concerns about the proposed targeting of the LEP's £600K. Phil spoke to a paper that he has subsequently shared.

Phil highlighted the issues that had been considered and agreed by the Accelerate Governing Board on 16 June. He was seeking ratification of the proposed changes:

4.1.1 Scheme of delegated approval - that Andy Devaney and Maud Duthie van der Venne as Accelerate Project Leads have delegated powers to authorise training (of up to £5k per individual) that is in line with the agreed training themes list (STEM, digital, leadership and wellbeing). This authorisation will apply to the 100% and 40% funded training courses. Project Leads should have the discretion to include other training subjects to be delivered under the 100% funding where demand has been identified among SMEs and the training is in line with ACCELERATE themes. Any training outside of this: either by cost or subject matter must be referred to the ACCELERATE Board for authorisation.

Phil proposed that this scheme of delegated authority should be approved.

4.1.2 Removal of the age limit for 100% funding - the LEP Board provided £600K to enable 100% grant funding for £1m in training in response to Covid-19 impacts. The LEP Board had agreed it should be targeted at employees who are under 35 years old working in businesses with fewer than 50 staff as these are potentially the hardest hit by the crisis. The LEP Board delegated to the Employers' Skills and Education Board the ability to change this if necessary.

Phil reported that the feedback from the skills brokers is that the needs of the smaller businesses are across the age range and the under 35 age limit impacts on their ability to respond to the crisis. The ESF contract manager is also very keen to point out that ESF is strong on equality and diversity and by opening it up to all age groups we would aid this requirement. We also have as a project, specific target groups like women, people above 50, disabled and ethnic minorities. It was suggested that we also should be targeting these groups with the 100% funding.

Phil proposed that the 100% funding scheme should be opened to all age groups and other target groups identified by the Employers' Skills and Education Board, in SMEs up to 50 staff, whilst continuing to specifically target the under 35s.

4.1.3 Short-term courses under 100% funding – Phil reported that the majority of training that currently is procured, is related to digital, STEM and business management subjects for delivery over a 6 months period. Due to the timescales and aim of getting the project back on track and up to speed, there was a proposal to focus on short term courses as part of the 100% funding. This will not just aid the project, but also the skills providers, as payment is given upon completion. In this uncertain climate with skills providers feeling the economic downturn, they would be under less financial pressure delivering short term courses.

Phil proposed that priority is given to promoting and delivering the short-term courses in the first instance.

4.1.4 Time Limit on 100% funded training - the 100% grant is in response to Covid-19 and is targeting individuals that are furloughed. To encourage individuals to access this scheme should there be a time limit (for example training to be signed up for by 31 December 2020) on the 100% funded training?

Phil proposed that the 100% funding is initially promoted with a sign-up time limit of 31 December 2020 and that this is reviewed once we have an overview of how many individuals are taking up the 100% funding.

4.1.5 Support for Unemployed and individuals being threat with redundancy - the European Social Fund Contracts Manager has confirmed that the project can support a small percentage (to be defined) of individuals who have been made redundant. If the individual was signed up to the project while in employment and is made redundant during the support, we can claim the output and results. If individual is signed up while being unemployed, we can claim output but not the results.

Phil proposed that ACCELERATE should target those at threat of redundancy and any decisions on supporting unemployed will be done in consultation with DWP and their support programmes.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

Philip Cox explained that the £600K had been allocated to the Accelerate programme by the LEP Board under certain conditions. The funding was replacing investment from employers but should be treated in the same way as an employer investment – it needed to deliver the outputs as agreed. Any changes of the type proposed by Phil Atkinson could be delegated to the Employers' Skills and Education Board but the LEP must be informed of the decision.

The Employers expressed some concern at the danger of focusing on unemployed people if this displaced funding already available from other sources including Jobcentre Plus.

The Employers' Skills and Education Board agreed to the proposed changes as set out by Phil but asked to see the list of agreed training themes. **ACTION ANDY DEVANEY AND PAT JACKSON**

Andy Devaney agreed to report the decision of the Employers' Skills and Education Board to Maud. **ACTION ANDY DEVANEY - COMPLETED**

4.2 Task and Finish Group on Redeployment and Job Matching

Bill Carr noted the progress of the Task and Finish Group to date. A note of the last meeting of the Task and Finish Group has been shared.

Colin Billingsley noted a number of points:

- During the lockdown, Jobcentre Plus's role had initially been to get people into the system as quickly as possible to enable them to draw Universal Credit. Jobcentre Plus was now focused on helping

people to leave the system as quickly as possible – either returning to work or to alternative employment

- Jobcentre Plus want to help people into paid employment, sustainable employment and then into higher paid employment
- Colin wanted to ensure that the training offered by Jobcentre Plus matched the training priorities of the LEP and the Employers' Skills and Education Board. He noted that we are currently in a unique labour market - the under 35s and those at risk of redundancy have not traditionally been a Jobcentre Plus target
- How can Jobcentre Plus establish closer links with employers - with the support of the Employers' Skills and Education Board how can they better target employers and engage them?

Clare confirmed that the Employers' Skills and Education Board were very keen to use their business networks to help identify employers that could be targeted by Jobcentre Plus and asked Bill Carr to work with the Task and Finish Group to develop proposals on how this could be achieved. **ACTION BILL CARR**

5. Data and Labour Market Intelligence Reports and Emerging Skills and Education Priorities in response to Covid-19 crisis

David Brennan presented a series of slides and invited comments from Members.

Clare thanked David for his presentation – she noted that the presentation had highlighted issues that reflected long-term trends as well as the immediate impact of Covid-19.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- **Stephen Fitzsimons** noted that the presentation was very timely. Warrington are in the process of developing a Towns Fund bid and it would be helpful to share the slides with the consultants who are helping to prepare the bid. It was agreed that the slides could be shared but they represented a point in time and emerging conclusions which would be updated as further reports were produced.
- **Andy Farrall** commented that too much data can cloud the picture – the report was 'brilliant' but we need to focus on the actions needed to address the issues in the report. Between 30 and 60,000 redundancies are likely over the next six months as furloughing is feathered out of the system.
- **Andy** noted that Jobcentre Plus and the Local Authorities have previously worked well together to support a few thousand people with multiple barriers to employment. The cohort of people currently at risk of redundancy is much larger and has very different characteristics compared with the long-term unemployed and economically inactive people. Urgent action is needed to address the expected large number of redundancies.
- **Andy** stressed the need for leadership and coordination using data and labour market to inform decisions. Partners must be brought together to share capacity and agree urgent actions – along similar lines to the approaches adopted by Liverpool, Manchester and Staffordshire. It was agreed that we should find out more about what was happening in other areas.
- **Clare Latham** agreed with the focus of Andy Farrell's paper and expressed concern about the limited capacity of partners to respond to the impending crisis. She agreed that efforts to date had been focused on the long-term unemployed and economically inactive – this was the focus of the recently approved Journey First ESF funded programme.
- **David Brennan** commented that we will need to 'prioritise the priorities' – what will happen to the 10,000 18 year olds and 2,000 16-year olds expected to leave school this summer – they will be most affected by the crisis – some will opt stay in education, but even this might prove difficult within the current social distancing regime.
- **Dhesi** agreed with all the comments made. He highlighted the particular concerns around the young people who will be starting college in September who will have not been in education for the previous

6 months and going forward may only be able to attend college one day per week. Dhesi noted that the traditional young people not in employment, education or training will be hardest hit and have the most barriers to employment.

- **Andy Devaney** agreed the need to prioritise the priorities. He suggested that of an estimated 30,000 redundant people, 20,000 might just need online support from Jobcentre Plus whereas more difficult case would need more focused and proactive support.
- **Clare Hayward** suggested that the Employers' Skills and Education Board should establish 3 task groups focused on different cohorts of the population:
 - Those being made redundant
 - Those still in work or furloughed who needed to be upskilled or reskilled
 - Young people including apprentices.
- **Colin Billingsley** supported Clare's proposal and stressed the importance of brigading activity. Whilst recognising the political issues associated with shifting some support for the long-term unemployed and economically inactive to those most recently unemployed or at the risk of redundancy. Colin stressed the need for this to be considered.
- **Dhesi** commented that the current crisis made it imperative for partners to come together to pool resources.
- **Phil Atkinson** was concerned about who would champion the work and ensure everything was properly coordinated.
- **Clare Hayward** suggested that this was a potential role for the LEP working in partnership with the Local Authorities and other partners. It was important that the organisations came together to lead the efforts – not necessarily deliver everything. The leadership group also had an important role in communicating with central government to ensure key challenges and blockages at national level were addressed quickly and effectively.
- **Paul Colman** asked if data and labour market information could be more localised to inform the work of local partners. Pat Jackson agreed to explore the scope for this. **ACTION PAT JACKSON**
- **Phil Atkinson** noted that many of the blue-chip companies already have programmes of support for redundant workers where they link people to new job opportunities. We needed to link to this work and draw on good practice.
- **Andy Farrall** warned against the dangers of over-engineering the response to redundancies or the threat of redundancies. Initial work should focus around the local authorities, the LEP and Jobcentre Plus. Other partners could be drawn in as required.

It was agreed that Clare Hayward, Pat, Andy Farrall and Andy Devaney would follow up and agree actions after the meeting. **ACTION CLARE HAYWARD, PAT JACKSON, ANDY FARRALL AND ANDY DEVANEY**

6. Local Growth Fund Investments – an update and agreement on the next steps for processing the bids for investments in digitalisation in construction and widening access to new technologies and learning opportunities

Pat Jackson presented the paper that had been circulated prior to the meeting. She thanked Nicola Dunbar, Phil Atkinson and Piers McLeish for helping to assess the bids and for providing feedback to the bidders.

Members agreed with the recommendations in the paper. Members:

- Noted progress on the first, second and third tranche of approved investments
- Approved the bid for investment in digitalisation of construction subject to the LEP executive team working with the colleges involved in the bid, to develop the bid and associated businesses case into a stronger submission that provides more detail related to the following points:
 - Governance for the project and the involvement of employers in the governance

- How is the model is going to work – the added value of the colleges working together as a hub and spokes including the proposed specialisms of each college
 - The role of the hub, how it will add value to the work of the other colleges and the justification of the split of funding for £140k for the Hub and £30k for each of the spokes
 - How the project builds on the expertise and specialist equipment that the colleges already have - providing some specific examples. (There were some specific concerns around why the colleges needed so many relatively standard laptops)
 - Outputs need to be significantly more ambitious.
- Agreed that the next meeting of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board on 15 July will consider the revised proposal for investment in specialist equipment to widen access to technology and digital skills in parallel to the Performance and Investment Committee ratification of the investment subject to the decision of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Warrington Town Centre

Stephen Fitzsimons noted that Warrington were preparing two bids for the Towns’ Fund to be focused on training for the digital and the care sectors.

7.2 Jobcentre Plus

Colin Billingsley noted a number of strands of Jobcentre Plus activity:

- **The Pledge** – Jobcentre Plus are working increasingly more closely with the Pledge
- **Sector work academies** – Jobcentre Plus are supporting several sector work academies such as the Amazon/Hermes academy where they were recruiting additional staff to the sites in Warrington. Colin was keen to involve employers in other similar events
- **Mentoring circles** – again Colin was keen for Members of the Employers’ Skills and Education Board to use their networks to help engage more businesspeople in mentoring circles
- **Virtual job interviews** – Jobcentre Plus are developing virtual sessions to help individuals develop their interviewing techniques.

Colin agreed to circulate information about these activities via Pat Jackson **ACTION COLIN BILLINGSLEY AND PAT JACKSON**

7.3 Items for future meetings

Clare Hayward suggested that at future meetings she would provide updates from the LEP Board meetings.

Date of Next Meeting - 15 July 2020 – probably via Microsoft Team

EMPLOYERS SKILLS AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETING ON 17 JUNE 2020

Attended by:

- *Clare Hayward (Chair)
- *Bill Carr (Carpe Diem)
- Paul Colman (South Cheshire Chamber)
- *Phil Atkinson (Daresbury)
- *Nicola Dunbar (Deputy Chair)
- Jasbir Dhesi (Cheshire College South and West – representing the FE Colleges)
- James Richards (Network Rail)
- Kurt Allman (University of Chester)
- Louise Higgins (United Utilities)
- *Stephen Fitzsimons (Warrington Borough Council)
- Clare Lathom (Cheshire West and Chester – interim replacement for Lisa Harris)
- Philip Cox
- Pat Jackson (LEP)
*With voting rights

Apologies

- *Cllr James Nicholas (Cheshire East Council)
- *Julia Teale (Bentley Motors)
- Nicola Merriman (National Skills Academy Nuclear)
- Martin Wood (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) – observer

Meeting also attended by:

- David Brennan
- Andy Devaney

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)
- Catherine Walker (LEP)
- Nicola Said (Marketing Cheshire)
- Joe Manning (LEP)
- Andy Devaney (LEP)
- Sarah Williams (LEP)
- Nicola Said (Marketing Cheshire)
- Trevor Langston (LEP)