

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (BLEP)  
 SKILLS ADVISORY PANEL (SAP) MEETING**

Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 18 November 2020, from 10am, via Teams

<b>Present:</b>	Professor Gavin Brooks, Buckinghamshire New University (Chair)	(GB)
	Sue Cross, Adviza	(SC)
	Heather Dean, Buckinghamshire Business First	(HD)
	Karen Mitchell, Buckinghamshire College Group	(KM)
	Gill Harding, Buckinghamshire Council	(GH)
	Ian Barham, BLEP Partnerships Manager	(IB)
	Caroline Perkins, Buckinghamshire LEP	(CP)
	James Moorhouse, Buckinghamshire LEP	(JMo)
	Ian Harper, Buckinghamshire New University	(IH)
	John Browning, Bucks Skills Hub	(JB)
	Marina Jackson, BLEP Under 19 Skills Manager	(MJ)
	Kerry Senatore, Careers & Enterprise Company	(KS)
	Katie Higginson, Community Impact Bucks	(KH)
	Ailie Smith, Creative Media Skills/Creative Industries Sector Group Lead	(AS)
	Dena Read, Department for Education	(DR)
	Imelda Goldsboro, DWP	(IG)
	Paddy Patterson, EKFB	(PP)
	Juliet Anderson, Health Ed England/Bucks Health & Social Care Academy	(JA)
	Dave Oxley, McAfee/Digital Sector Group Lead	(DO)
	Jo Meloni, The Misbourne School	(JM)
	Mark Wood, Reaction Engines/Space Sector Lead	(MW)
	Maria Butler, SiteReady Ltd	(MB)
	Sally White, Sylo beyond HR	(SW)
	Bev Kelly, University of Buckingham	(BK)

<b>Apologies:</b>	Cllr Anita Cranmer, Buckinghamshire Council
	Kevin Hocter, BEIS
	Sarah Stevens, Sylo Beyond HR

<b>In Attendance:</b>	Sarah Fraser, BLEP	(SF)
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**ACTION**

**1 WELCOME**

GB welcomed all those on the call, particularly Bev Kelly who was attending her first meeting representing University of Buckingham.

**2 MINUTES**

The Minutes from the meeting held on 7 September 2020 were agreed as an accurate record of discussions held; all matters arising having been actioned or covered on the agenda.

### 3 THE ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

IB provided an overview of the economic landscape within which the Buckinghamshire LEP, and by extension the Skills Advisory Panel, are operating, complicated by the changing priorities, timescales and advice related to COVID-19, and in light of a 20% drop in GDP from the first lockdown and a further drop of approximately 8% forecast for the second lockdown.

It was reported Buckinghamshire Council were shortly to launch a further round of Discretionary funding to support businesses affected by COVID-19, the priority for this funding being to assist, as quickly as possible, businesses that have to date been unable to access support; maximum grants available being £5k.

As discussed at the last meeting, the LEP has completed its Economic Recovery Plan and is working to deliver this under the 3 phases of the plan: Response; Recovery; Rebound.

The SAP noted the decision taken to withdraw from the Oxford to Cambridge Arc in September in support of, and to focus on a Buckinghamshire Devolution Deal, recognising the relationships with partners/organisations cross border continue to be highly important, with projects such as East West Rail remaining an absolute priority for Buckinghamshire. Despite Buckinghamshire Council and Buckinghamshire LEP's withdrawal from the Arc, it was noted cross border groupings, including Buckinghamshire representatives on eg the Arc Universities Group, continue to look at ways to work and collaborate together.

A draft Devolution proposition has been shared with Government and has support from local MPs and politicians. The proposal highlights the benefits of the coterminous arrangements of key groups within Buckinghamshire, the scope of the proposal including (but not limited to) the investment required to: deliver housing at an accelerated pace; support vital infrastructure programmes including digital infrastructure improvements; help town centres recover following COVID-19; and support innovation. The proposal also seeks far greater control over budgets, including its skills budget; and increased autonomy around how to deploy funding eg in apprenticeship delivery.

The key themes Government continues to focus on are around "levelling up" and the "green economy" (or "green industrial strategy"). It was suggested R&D development and innovation may assist in addressing these agendas. For example, the work being undertaken by Bosch on hydrogen, whether in fuel or within household appliances etc, the benefits of the work being shared wider than Buckinghamshire. It will be vital to have a workforce with the skills necessary to support this 'green recovery'.

The final key area of focus for the LEP is Brexit and it was suggested there will be a skills and training element within the preparations that all organisations must now be making for transition.

### 4 COVID-19 EFFECTS ON TRAINING PROVISION (Presentation attached)

GB, KM and JM provided an overview of the effects of COVID-19 on recruitment and retention, finances, new practices, and unintended consequences from the perspectives of university, FE college and school.

Common themes arising from the attached presentation/verbal updates provided were:

4.1 General

- All establishments have remained open since returning to work and study following the first lockdown.
- All adapted rapidly to move to online teaching, moving to blended delivery as guidelines have changed and confidence in COVID-safe measures increases.
- All sites have increased mental health support provision, for both students and staff. A big rise has been reported in self-harming and suicidal thoughts for students which is significant cause for concern. All institutions have worked to support all students but particularly those who are vulnerable or who have safeguarding issues.
- Staff are fatigued and morale has been impacted.
- Extra-curricular activities have been impacted which is having a detrimental effect on students' wellbeing. Work is ongoing to address this in a safe way.
- All sites have been working to support community endeavour eg donating PPE, seconding staff/releasing students to work on the front line, providing parking/accommodation, etc.
- It has been challenging to respond to constantly changing advice from Government, exacerbated by learning establishments not receiving advice ahead of public announcements.

4.2 Recruitment and retention

- Recruitment figures have held up well, partly due to the introduction of online enrolment for all, although the mix of courses has changed; increases seen in applications for medicine and subjects allied to medicine places, within the Health & Social Care sphere, and in terms of Access courses;
- There has been an increase in people rethinking their career and significant additional interest has been received in post-graduate courses.
- There has been an increase in planned January starts around reskilling eg Construction, Aviation.

4.3 Finances

- Increased costs have been seen in cleaning, implementing COVID-safe measures, supporting student/staff wellbeing, and providing equipment to facilitate home working/learning.
- Colleges are supporting, at their own cost, students who fall outside bursary arrangements.
- Alumni have been active in supporting student hardship funds.
- The impact on income is expected to be seen as the academic year comes to an end.
- There have been increased insurance costs around cyber security.

4.4 New Practices

- All organisations have updated risk assessments, policies, and safety measures in place, working with Public Health England etc, reflecting COVID-19 precautions/guidelines, and these are being monitored and reviewed regularly.
- Track and trace systems have been successfully implemented at all sites and there are opportunities to share this learning with other organisations.
- Social distancing measures are being implemented and timetabling has been adjusted where possible to maintain these, which has impacted to differing degrees depending upon the learning establishment.

4.5 Unintended Consequences - Positives

- Attendance and behaviour have improved.
- Students have struggled to return to a routine after the extended gap but have returned with a renewed understanding of the importance of their education

- Staff across all sites have reported improved technical skills as a result of having to move to online teaching.

#### 4.6 Unintended Consequences - Negatives

- There is significant uncertainty, particularly students who are unsure what will happen with their exams in 2021. Learning establishments are working to try and ensure that there is no lost learning for students.
- Students require more support in understanding their next steps – future training, job prospects and what qualifications they will take into their future.
- Industrial placements have been impacted.
- Support for employers will be needed as students move from education into work without the benefit of work placements and with the impact of COVID-19 on health and wellbeing.

#### 5 **SKILLS STRATEGY – Summary update**

HD provided an update on progress with refreshing the Buckinghamshire Skills Strategy discussed at the last SAP meeting. Progress has been slowed by work to respond to COVID-19 but it was reported the headlines within the Strategy will be around:

- **Digital** – Acknowledging the importance of ensuring appropriately skilled workforce.
- **Apprenticeships** – Buckinghamshire’s figures being well below the national average.
- **Traineeships** – Employer education needed, only 7% understanding what these are.
- **T Levels** – Awareness needs raising with employers and far more placements secured.
- **Preparedness for work** – More work is needed particularly in non-selective schools, supporting social mobility strategies.
- **Careers** – The momentum developed through the Careers Hub in secondary schools will be maintained with an ambition to extend this work into primary education.
- **Employer training** – An increased level of investment is needed for employer training.

It was noted additional resource is being sought to undertake this work which it was hoped would be taken to the LEP Board in Spring 2021.

#### 6 **LOCAL SKILLS REPORT**

Following discussion at the last SAP meeting, work has progressed on development of the Local Skills Report, a contractual requirement from DfE feeding into the national Skills & Productivity Board, covering the Buckinghamshire Skills Strategy, Skills Action Plan, case studies and updated evidence base.

It was agreed to circulate questions from CP to assist in further preparation of the Local Skills Report. Those present were asked to respond and provide as much detail as possible.

CP/ALL

#### 7 **REDUNDANCY SUPPORT UPDATE** (Presentation attached)

Further to discussion at the last meeting, JB shared an update on the redundancy support available to employers and employees in Buckinghamshire and how this is being ‘corralled’ on the Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF) website currently, moving on to the new Skills Hub website once completed.

It was confirmed where to source this information is being shared regularly through BBF newsletters and through Buckinghamshire Council’s website and residents’ newsletters.

All members of the SAP were encouraged to share links to the information available with their own networks and any adults/young people with whom they engage.

**ALL****8 SKILLS SHOW FEEDBACK**

MJ provided feedback on the first Virtual Skills Show held in Buckinghamshire (or anywhere else). The programme had included:

- 25 employer-led curriculum-related sessions during w/c 9 November for Yr 9 students.
- 2 evening sessions for students in Yrs 11, 12, and 13 and their parent carers on future options (these sessions achieving attendance from over 25 schools).

It was reported all sessions have been recorded and will be published by 20 November for those that were unable to join the sessions live. Additionally, an offer is to be made to schools from employers that took part in the sessions to provide follow up.

Thirty five employers were involved in producing the sessions, all of whom have indicated that they will be happy to undertake follow up activity and will recommend the same to other employers.

It was noted the Virtual Skills Show has been promoted to other LEP areas and many have responded indicating they are interested in the event and its outputs.

**9 DATES OF 2021 MEETINGS (all 10am-12pm)**

- 15 January
- 12 March
- 7 May
- 2 July
- 17 September
- 12 November

The meeting closed at 12pm