

CONFIDENTIAL

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

Minutes of meeting held on Friday 15 January 2021, from 10am, via Teams

Present:	Professor Gavin Brooks, Buckinghamshire New University (Chair)	(GB)
	Juliet Anderson, Bucks Health & Social Care Academy	(JA)
	Ian Barham, BLEP Partnerships Manager	(IB)
	Lucy Bowman, DWP	(LB)
	John Browning, Bucks Skills Hub	(JB)
	Maria Butler, SiteReady Ltd	(MB)
	Cllr Anita Cranmer, Buckinghamshire Council	(AC)
	Heather Dean, Buckinghamshire Business First	(HD)
	Nadine Edwards, DWP	(NE)
	Ian Harper, Buckinghamshire New University	(IH)
	Katie Higginson, Community Impact Bucks	(KH)
	Marina Jackson, BLEP Under 19 Skills Manager	(MJ)
	Bev Kelly, University of Buckingham	(BK)
	Karen Mitchell, Buckinghamshire College Group	(KM)
	James Moorhouse, Buckinghamshire LEP	(JMo)
	Paddy Patterson, EKFB	(PP)
	Caroline Perkins, Buckinghamshire LEP	(CP)
	Dave Oxley, McAfee/Digital Sector Group Lead	(DO)
	Kerry Senatore, Careers & Enterprise Company	(KS)
	Sally White, Sylo beyond HR	(SW)
	Donna Wilkinson, Buckinghamshire Council	(DW)
	Mark Wood, Reaction Engines/Space Sector Lead	(MW)
 Apologies:	Sue Cross, Adviza	
	Imelda Goldsboro, DWP	
	Kevin Hocter, BEIS	
	Jo Meloni, The Misbourne School	
	Dena Read, Department for Education	
	Ailie Smith, Creative Media Skills/Creative Industries Sector Group Lead	
	Sarah Stevens, Sylo Beyond HR	
 In Attendance:	Sarah Fraser, BLEP	(SF)

ACTION

1 MINUTES

The Minutes from the meeting held on 18 November 2020 were agreed as an accurate record of discussions held; all matters arising having been actioned or covered on the agenda.

2 LOCAL SKILLS REPORT/SKILLS ACTION PLAN (Presentation attached)

Further to discussion at the last meeting, JB/CP provided a reminder on the purpose of the Local Skills Report and the outline content of the report, including the Local Skills Action Plan which builds on the skills analysis previously undertaken.

The meeting moved to 5 facilitated breakout sessions themed around:

- Future Workforce
- Skilled and Productive Workforce
- Inclusive Workforce
- An Informed Approach
- A Digitally Proficient Population

Generic feedback/information/suggestions arising from the breakout sessions included:

- Actions are deliberately high level and highlight good work being undertaken.
- Inclusion of examples of actions being undertaken showcasing what employers are doing within the county.
- There must be consistency around stages/timings in the document, perhaps under a RAG rating.
- More is needed on partnership working.
- Greater use should be made of the sector groups in place.
- The new Skills website is vitally important, as is ensuring this is maintained collectively to make it the “go to” destination for skills information in the county.
- More needs to be done to mobilise key sections of the workforce who are currently not engaged with this work.
- There is a significant gap around the Green Recovery – many careers within this sector will be new careers and consideration is needed as to how to support these roles and the SMEs/Start Ups providing them.
- Assumptions are made around everyone having access to digital technology.
- More needs to be done to ensure equal access and support for all (those with disabilities and the older generation were particularly mentioned).
- The Skills Report and Skills Action Plan should reference the Digital Strategy (and other relevant strategies) and ensure links/alignment are made.
- What are the measures for success and how might we spread knowledge through the wider population?

2.1 Next Steps

Those taking part in the breakout sessions were thanked for their specific comments which will be incorporated into the draft Skills Action Plan.

It was reported the executive team will now work to produce the first full draft of the Local Skills Report, following which there will be a consultation period with DfE prior to final submission on 31 March 2021.

SAP members were asked to forward any further thoughts on any area of the full Report to JB/CP by the end of January.

ALL

It was confirmed there will be a further opportunity to make comments on the Report prior to final submission, and that SAP input into this document, which will enable the Buckinghamshire LEP to deliver on its skills agenda, is critical.

JB/CP

3 PARTNER UPDATES

3.1 McAfee

- The majority of McAfee employees continue to work from home; the requirement to home school children having a greater impact on the workforce than the requirement to work at home.
- The company is reducing its workforce across the world by around 10% as a result of Covid.

3.2 Space Sector Group/Reaction Engines

- Space is benefitting from Government's desire to increase jobs within the sector and to have indigenous launch sites.
- There is significant ambition around development of the site at Westcott Venture Park which will bring in opportunities both upstream and downstream in the space arena.
- Level 4 Apprenticeship was approved in 2020 and work has just begun on a Level 6 apprenticeship.
- There is a desire to maintain the existing level of apprenticeships in businesses in the space sector, the majority of employers recognising and supporting this ambition.

3.3 Skills Hub – Under 19s

- The Skills Hub is working to support schools as they move again to online learning for the majority of students, whilst also supporting an increasing number (around an additional 8% vs the first lockdown) of key worker/vulnerable students in school.
- During National Apprenticeship Week (first week of February) the Skills Hub will be providing x3 online sessions: x1 for employers; and x2 for young people and their parents, and it is planned to include lots of content from young people currently employed as apprentices providing 'peer to peer' learning and discussion.
- The Skills Hub is working on some virtual work experience pilots with employers which it is hoped to roll out to all schools for use later in the year.

3.4 Bucks College Group (BCG)

- BCG has moved lessons online but remains open for vulnerable students.
- There have been issues around vocational exams, exams in January being cancelled. The College has continued with the licence to practice electrical trades etc and attendance at these sessions has been better.
- Discussions are ongoing with local MPs to ensure Ministers are informed/talking about vocational qualifications as well as A' Levels and GCSEs. Work is also underway with Awarding Bodies around arrangements for teacher assessment and the evidence required to undertake these.
- The College nursery has remained open and operational throughout the crisis.
- The College has just been awarded T Level in Construction from 2022.
- Bucks College Group will be building a new campus in the heart of High Wycombe (hopefully operational September 2023) providing significant campus buildings in the two largest towns in the county and ensuring the Group has facilities fit for future demand.

3.5 Sylo Beyond HR

1. Work needs to be done to help employers understand the impact of change for students over the last 12 months and the need for onboarding new recruits to help address this.
2. Employers are thinking about the skills they need from new recruits, not just qualifications.

3. Support is needed to help employers with their own resilience (lockdown 3 has eaten into this) so they are able to employ students leaving education and appropriately onboard new recruits that have been through disrupted exam cycles etc.
4. Lockdown 3 has seen an increase in mental health challenges.
5. Lockdown 3 has also seen challenges arising in managing remote teams and the skills needed to support performance management, succession planning, etc. There are various routes to best practice, not least through the BBF hub. **SW to forward links to SAP members.**

SW

3.6 HS2

- HS2's new job brokerage system has been launched since the last SAP meeting and it is hoped to establish links with key stakeholders/partners.
- HS2 is launching a volunteering strategy in the business, making time available to every member of staff annually, and would be interested in talking to any organisations that may have volunteering opportunities.

3.7 Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC)

- The work of the CEC has seen a strengthened careers education system across the country with around 81% of the state funded sector engaged with CEC; 94% of large employers having links with schools, colleges and universities.
- The CEC's Cornerstone Conference will be taking place at the end of January with key major employers.
- CEC now has 3,600 SME Enterprise Adviser volunteers working with schools and colleges on a one-to-one basis.
- The Gatsby Foundation survey around the impacts of Covid-19 has found issues with:
 - Reduced access to work experience opportunities.
 - Getting sufficient employer encounters/ensuring that these are meaningful interactions.
 - Accessing labour market information and ensuring this is up to date (the new Skills website will assist with this locally).
 - Ensuring continued support for learners.
 - Ensuring one-to-one guidance for pupils.
- CEC is looking at how to support local areas with transitions work, including work with, for example, Year 10 students who have missed significant amounts of learning in the last year. It was suggested there perhaps needs to be more on transition in the Buckinghamshire Skills Strategy.
- An Enterprise Adviser recruitment campaign has now been launched national called "Rewrite the Story" – **KS to forward information to SAP members to share with their networks.**
- 'Careers Champions' is to be launched replacing annual awards activity. This is to celebrate unsung heroes championing careers guidance through the years, who have had a positive influence through their work on the lives of young people. **KS to forward further information to SAP members.**

KS

KS

3.8 Community Impact Bucks (CIB)

6. There is significant concern around funding in the third sector in the coming year, and around how many of the organisations currently mothballed will restart following the pandemic.
7. There are less volunteering opportunities available at the moment as a result of Covid-19, and there has been a significant change in the demographic of those volunteering, with far more younger people able to give time to their community, and many elderly volunteers shielding.

8. CIB is running a matching service with Buckinghamshire Council and have over 1,000 volunteers available – recognising this may change as restrictions are lifted.
9. There is concern around the impact on volunteers when dealing with distressing cases. CIB are developing online training to help volunteers manage their own mental health.
10. There is growing financial insecurity in the community. Citizens Advice Bureau has reported more people contacting them, and with increasingly complex cases. It would be useful if employers making redundancies could think about what support can be offered/signposted to help staff manage financial questions following redundancy.

3.9 Health Education England/Bucks Health & Social Care Academy

- The health and social care sector is under significant pressure with w/c 18 January 2021 expected to be the peak for the Trust in terms of Covid patients. As a result, other processes are suffering.
- Work continues with JB and People First on the Hospitality to Care redeployment programme but capacity to progress this currently is limited.
- The Health Care Assistant volunteer scheme has been rebranded as the “Positive Steps Programme” and it is hoped to grow this going forward. Four, previously unemployed, people have been employed as HCAs during January.
- The Social Cadet scheme started on 14 January and six students are working through this scheme with Buckinghamshire Council and Buckinghamshire College Group.
- The Academy has a series of mini-lectures running currently that may be of interest to SAP members. **JA to share links with the group.**
- There are plans in place to establish a third sector volunteering part of the Academy. These plans are on hold currently but JA will contact KH to discuss further.

JA

JA

3.10 Buckinghamshire LEP

- Significant funding has been allocated to Buckinghamshire to support businesses hit by Covid-19.
- Detail on the new UK Shared Prosperity and Levelling Up Funds is awaited from Government.
- An open call will shortly be released for projects to utilise £2m Getting Building Fund monies by 31 March 2022.
- The LEP is working with Heathrow around a Freeports bid.
- The LEP’s AGM will be held on 2 March 2021 (10-11.30am) and will include a range of speakers, including Andrew Pierce, Columnist and Consultant Editor for the Daily Mail.
- Information on the most recent labour market analysis figures will shortly be published on the LEP’s website. Members of the SAP were asked to contact JM if they wished to be added to the LEP’s mailing list to receive information directly.

3.11 Buckinghamshire New University – Aylesbury Campus

- A significant number of students continue to work remotely. However, there are also many on site studying courses in exempt categories eg nursing.
- A package is being developed to assist students with accommodation issues.
- Apprenticeship numbers have remained robust during the latest lockdown and the withdrawals and breaks seen in the first lockdown have not been repeated.
- The latest policing course has just started and whilst the mix of students has changed slightly the course is going ahead.

3.12 DWP – Job Centre Plus

- Whilst considered key workers, the number of people working on site with JCP has been scaled back, with much of the work being undertaken online.
- Offices will be open to customers from 18 January onwards from 10am-2pm only, and this is only for vulnerable customers and those unable to access services digitally.

- A 13 week youth programme has started, aimed at 18-24 year olds, referring those taking part to the most appropriate forms of support; the Kickstart programme, Sector Based Academies etc, to help provide work placements and the skills needed to enter the labour market.
- The Kickstart programme has seen thousands of vacancies posted, with a significant number in Buckinghamshire.
- The new Job Finder support programme has been launched with targeted support for those unemployed for less than 13 weeks with the aim of helping these people back into employment as quickly as possible.
- DWP/JCP continue to signpost and refer customers to different support programmes, recognising there is significant support available but that it is not held in one place and not always easy to find. More needs to be done to ensure a joined up approach.
- DWP has seen a 300% increase in claims in the last year and there is a rolling programme of recruitment in Job Centres to meet this increased caseload. Prior to Covid, case loads were quite small but were largely people with multiple barriers to employment. Cases being seen now are largely job-ready people but perhaps in sectors that are no longer viable, so there is significant work to be done in re-skilling or redirecting people into new sectors.

3.13 Buckinghamshire Council

- Skills is a key pillar within the new Recovery and Growth deal being prepared by the Buckinghamshire Growth Board. It is hoped to submit the final document to Government in the next 2-3 weeks.
- There are currently around 85k students in Buckinghamshire's 274 schools (approximately one fifth of the student population).
- All schools have been through a rapid digital awareness growth, some more successfully than others. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of the digital agenda for schools, that access to Broadband is not equal across the county, and that there are issues around ensuring access to equipment for all.
- There is increasing concern around children's mental health and the council is already seeing some very concerning things arising as a result of lockdown.

3.14 University of Buckingham

- Like others, a significant number of students are learning online and it is anticipated this will continue until Easter. However, some students remain on campus.
- The University has a Covid-19 testing centre up and running.
- A large number of claims are being made to the Student Hardship Fund to supplement income where people are no longer able to work alongside learning.
- The University has also seen an increase in the number of alumni faced with redundancy returning to the University's careers service.
- The University's new Vice Chancellor, Professor James Tooley, is now in post.

3.15 Buckinghamshire Business First

- BBF has been dealing with a vast number of business support calls over the last year.
- From April-December 2020 £6.7m in grants has been distributed and BBF has worked with 5,000 unique businesses. On the back of this, 700 new jobs will be created and 300 new products or services brought to market; BBF will monitor delivery of these.
- During the last year BBF has, necessarily been very reactive but is utilising some short term funding available from BEIS to contact businesses proactively during the next few months with the help of 8 new temporary Advisers. Feedback received by these Advisers has been mixed: some businesses are in absolute dire straits; others have seen opportunities opening up during the crisis and are growing.

ACTION

- Buckinghamshire's Peer Networks programme, offering 18 hours of support to businesses to learn from each other within facilitated groups, has now finished and was very successful. It is hoped more funding will be allocated for further programmes in the future.
- Buckinghamshire Business Awards are now open for applications to be submitted until 31 January. SAP members were asked to encourage businesses they are speaking to to enter the awards.

ALL**4 DATES OF 2021 MEETINGS (all 10am-12pm)**

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

5 SUMMARY ACTIONS**Local Skills Report**

1. **SAP members** to forward any further thoughts on Report to John Browning and Caroline Perkins by end January.
2. **JB/CP** to ensure SAP members have a further opportunity to comment on the Report prior to final submission.

ALL**JB/CP****Partner updates**

3. **Sally White** (Sylo HR) to forward links to best practice on managing remote teams and the skills needed to support performance management, succession planning, etc.
4. **Kerry Senatore** (CEC) to forward information on:
 - "Rewrite the Story", Enterprise Adviser recruitment campaign.
 - "Careers Champions" celebrating unsung heroes championing careers guidance through the years, who have had a positive influence through their work on the lives of young people.
5. **Juliet Anderson** (Health Education England/Bucks Health & Social Care Academy):
 - To forward information to SAP members on the series of mini-lectures being run by the Academy.
 - JA to contact Katie Higginson re establishment of a third sector volunteering part of the Academy.
6. **SAP members** to encourage businesses they are speaking to to enter the Buckinghamshire Business Awards.

SW**KS****JA****ALL**

The meeting closed at 12.05pm