



Employment & Skills Board – Draft Minutes

Tuesday 14 May 2024

Venue:	Virtual meeting	
Time:	10.00 to 12.00	
Present:	<p><u>Board Members:</u></p> <p>Charlotte Horobin (Chair) Sarah Worsley Ross Renton Julia Nix Mark Robertson Leigh Roberts Katy Davies</p> <p><u>CPCA Officers:</u></p> <p>Claire Paul Melissa Gresswell Laura Guymer Alexis McLeod Joanna Morley</p>	<p>CEO, Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce Senior HR Officer, Baker Perkins Principal Anglia Ruskin University District Manager, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Principal and CEO, Cambridge Regional College Policy and Insight Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council Managing Director, Evolve Your Future</p> <p>Assistant Director, Employment & Skills Project Manager: Skills Bootcamps and Special Projects Strategic Careers Hub Lead Senior Programme Manager Governance Manager</p>
Apologies	Dan Thorp	Cambridge Ahead

Minutes:

1	Welcome, Apologies and Introductions
1.1	Katy Davies, Managing Director, Evolve your Future and Leigh Roberts, Policy and Insight Manager for Cambridge County Council were welcomed and introduced themselves to the Board.
1.2	Apologies had been received from Dan Thorp
2	Minutes of the Employment and Skills Board meeting on 20 February 2024 and Action Log
2.1	The minutes of the meeting of 20 February 2024 were approved as an accurate record.
2.2	The updates to the Action Log (published on the web page here) were noted by the Board members.
3	Work Programme (Forward Agenda Plan)
3.1	The Work Plan for the Skills and Employment Committee was noted by the Members.
	<p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <p>Julia Nix to introduce Dan Harris, Chair of Neurodiversity in Business to Ross Renton.</p>
4	Governance and Membership Review
4.1	Melissa Gresswell informed the Board that five CVs for potential members of the Board would be reviewed next week. The review would take into account the sectors and organisation size already represented by current board members and take into consideration any potential gaps. Melissa would coordinate with Claire and Charlotte on this work.

<p>5</p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p>	<p>DWP – Update:</p> <p>Board members received a presentation on unemployment data and trends for the CPCA area from Julia Nix, District Manager DWP. The presentation has been published on the webpage and can be found here: Employment & Skills Board - May</p> <p>The following points were raised in discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was clarified that those not claiming benefits but not working were still considered economically inactive. • The time period covered by the data presented referred to the month of April. • The impact of the pandemic on the younger working-age group's ability to secure employment was highlighted. • The increase in unemployment rates, especially in Cambridge, was largely attributed to the 16 to 24-year-old demographic. • Providers emphasised the struggles in supporting younger age groups due to a huge oversubscription of alternative provision and also because of pandemic-related challenges. • The unemployment rate in South Cambridgeshire was confirmed as being within the expected range despite lower claim rates. • The support services available for employers were highlighted as a way of helping and address the mismatch between job vacancies and available workforce. • The relationship between unemployment rates and job vacancies was not just about the two numbers but was rather a matter of matching skills and considering geographical factors • It was noted that there had been a shift in employment trends up until July, with more individuals transitioning directly into employment rather than pursuing further education. Information was sought on the possible reasons for this. • There was a lack of available data on the backgrounds of unemployed individuals, but it was speculated that factors such as home schooling, mental health issues and lack of employability skills all contributed to this shift and to youth unemployment. • Young job seekers had changing work expectations particularly regarding flexible working arrangements. • Employers needed to adapt their recruitment practices to better engage with young job seekers including unpacking job roles and providing meaningful work experiences. • The premise of the Good Work Charter was to provide practical help for employers, and neurodiversity initiatives to address recruitment challenges would be an example of this. • Many young job seekers preferred working in a physical workplace because of the collaboration and socialization. <p>ACTION:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Julia Nix to provide the group with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data on unfilled "hard-to-fill" vacancies for further analysis. - A detailed definition of the 'economically inactive' for further clarification. - A breakdown of data by different age groups for each district.
<p>6</p> <p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p>	<p>Universal Support Update</p> <p>Board members received an update on Universal Support Programme from Laura Guymer, Strategic Careers Hub Lead. The presentation has been published on the webpage and can be found here: Employment & Skills Board - May</p> <p>The following points were raised in discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Universal Support Programme aimed to address economic inactivity by reintegrating individuals furthest from the workforce back into employment. • There were various existing programmes and initiatives in the region, including the Work Well programme, UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care (IPSPC), and subcontracted employment provisions by DWP. • Cambridgeshire and Peterborough had been successful in becoming a vanguard area for the Work Well Programme, an initiative by the Integrated Care Board focusing on a holistic approach to employment. • The limited time available to deliver the project, whilst still awaiting clarification from Central Government on some of the requirements, was noted.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition, concerns about provider sustainability, realistic target numbers, and governance timeline challenges, particularly regarding the upcoming Skills and Employment Committee meeting and Combined Authority Board decisions, were also discussed. • In response to a query about the allocation and utilization of the UKSPF within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) it was clarified that the majority of the UKSPF funding went directly to local authorities, with limited allocation to the CPCA, so the decision-making and project implementation primarily rested with these local authorities. • The Chair acknowledged the significance of the discussion around the UKSPF, and the concerns that were raised about potential underspend and lack of transparency in the allocation process, and proposed revisiting the topic in a future meeting. <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A more detailed examination of the UKSPF, to explore strategic implications and opportunities for improvement, to be scheduled as an agenda item for a future meeting.
7	Apprenticeship and Technical Education
7.1	Board members received a presentation on Apprenticeship and Technical Education from Laura Guymmer, Strategic Careers Hub Lead. The presentation has been published on the webpage and can be found here: Employment & Skills Board - May
7.2	<p>The following points were raised in discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the discussion was to gather intelligence on the region's status regarding supporting young people into apprenticeships and technical pathways and to better understand regional perspectives on the factors influencing these transitions. • Board members were invited to provide their 'gut feeling' scores on a scale of one to five for the series of questions posed. • The collected data would be analysed and used to help identify priority areas for intervention. • At future meetings there would be a review of progress and the strategies implemented to address identified challenges • Employers in the area had higher than average awareness and knowledge of apprenticeships but challenges remained. • The ability to take on more apprentices or T-level students was limited because there was a lack of available skilled mentors to support new entrants. • There was a lack of recognition and understanding of T-levels among students, parents, employers and universities which manifested in a significant drop in student numbers when transitioning from vocational qualifications to T-levels. • The issue of inadequate public transport and the need for colleges to subsidise transportation for students was highlighted. • There was limited availability of degree apprenticeships because of the reduced funding for them compared to traditional degrees. • Significant concerns regarding the engineering T-level programmes in Northamptonshire were reported; specifically an 80% dropout by the end of the first year due to the lack of practical experience and insufficient placement opportunities. The Government's withdrawal of T-level brokerage support and SME support payments had exacerbated the dropout rate and likely negatively impacted the employment statistics for the 16-24 age group. • Factors that affected the conversion rate from interest to actual apprenticeship take-up included a lack of vacancies, mismatched supply and demand, and barriers such as requirements for Maths and English qualifications. • The importance of direct engagement with employers and practical demonstration of opportunities afforded by apprenticeships was highlighted. • Job adverts could be over specified, and it was suggested that HR practices be addressed to make job requirements more realistic with more of an emphasis and recognition of transferable skills.
8.	Good Work Charter – Progress Update
8.1	Board members received a progress update on the Good Work Charter from Claire Paul, Interim Assistant Director Skills. The presentation has been published on the webpage and can be found here: Employment & Skills Board - May

8.2	<p>The following points were raised in discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a lack of support for a formal accreditation process but SMEs showed strong interest in a Charter that could provide practical tools and support for employers • A form of 'task and finish group' would be assembled to develop the Charter's narrative and practical tools.
<p>9.</p> <p>9.1</p>	<p>AOB</p> <p>There were no other items of business.</p>

Meeting Ended: 12.05