

6. SKILLS STRATEGY SUBGROUP RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GCGPEP BOARD (MC/AA)

FOR DECISION

Board members are requested to approve and ratify the recommendations with their amendments as appropriate.

Background

1. The Skills Strategy Group was formed with the intent of leading the creation and implementation of a skills strategy for the LEP area.
2. The reference group (See Appendix A for full list) held its first meeting on 28 March 2012; attendees numbered thirty including a good mix of training providers, funding bodies, public sector partners, business groups, and local business leaders (business being the majority). Chaired by Allan Arnott the group was given the task of putting forward skills issues, debating them, and deciding on the nature and direction of the group. Outcomes from the first meeting included a consensus on a small exclusively business led core-group to lead the development of a process to lead toward the creation of a LEP strategy for skills.
3. Therefore, on 16 May 2012 the core-group met consisting of eight business representatives along with Allan Arnott (AA) and Mark Cooper (MHC). The outcome of this meeting was the development of a paper to focus the work carried out by the Skills and Business Growth Lead together with the Skills Strategy Group input (See Appendix B).
4. On 19 June 2012 the larger reference group met to consider the content of the skills paper and to refine a series of recommendations to be put forward to the LEP board at their next meeting. This outcome forms the basis of this paper.
5. Concurrently with the above there have been other substantial areas of work. AA & MHC attended, and presented to, the Cambridge Area Partnership (CAP) Conference (Cambridgeshire wide event) which included secondary schools and further education providers, along with key businesses from the private and public sector.
6. MHC has met with all the schools partnerships in Cambridgeshire and continues to work closely with CAP in order to facilitate their efforts to create a business and school partnership to broaden the understanding of 'work' amongst their students.
7. There have been numerous additional meetings to guide the direction of the skills strategy attended by AA, MHC, and Neil Darwin.
8. Alongside Vicki Ford MEP, MHC has attended and presented to the Association of Colleges in the Eastern Region Student Conference (ACER) attended by student leaders from across the East of Anglia. MHC continues to work closely with ACER and its membership to improve demand led training delivery alongside promoting a culture of innovation and enterprise in our colleges.
9. Both AA and MHC have attended the Cambridgeshire Adult Learning and Skills Board, MHC now has a permanent partner role in this group, alongside representatives from the VSE sector. Work here has enabled our LEP to have a significant input in shaping Cambridgeshire County Council's skills strategy, this work continues.
10. AA, MHC and ND continue to work closely together to move the GCGPEP Skills Strategy forward.

Skills Mission

11. First, increase the provision of demand led training on a local basis; second, raise qualification standards across the LEP area; third, ensure that businesses and training providers are supplied with a motivated and economically aware body of potential employees and trainees.

Proposed Recommendations to the LEP Board

1.	Schools into business, business into schools Purpose: Give young people a sense of 'economic place' and 'work awareness'.	'Support and encourage sustainable projects to bring schools, businesses, students, and parents into partnership with the aim of developing the skills, employability, and aspirations of the future workforce.'
2.	Careers guidance Purpose: Improve awareness of economic options at an age where future choices can be influenced.	'Engage with government in its consultation to widen careers advice from the 14-16 to 12-19 age range. To achieve, not just a widening of delivery, but to lobby for strict business and enterprise led careers guidance to be embedded into the curriculum in our schools.'
3.	Vocational training partnerships Purpose: Make a significant amount of publically funded training demand-led by business.	'Support the efforts of businesses to become involved with post-16 providers to encourage recruitment into business via a vocational training route. Furthermore, promote the formation of partnerships between businesses and training providers to enable a realignment of provision with demand.'
4.	Showcase examples of best practice for business led training Purpose: Enable businesses to grow by increasing the skills abilities of their workforce.	'By showcasing examples of best practice via the LEP website, and other channels, businesses can see the benefits of apprenticeships and other employment based training schemes and how they create sustainable employment.'
5.	Easy access to funded training information Purpose: Increase business take-up of publically funded training by creating an easy to use portal.	'Create and manage a central place for businesses to find information on funded training.'
6.	Skills surveys Purpose: First, give businesses the tools they need to understand the training needs of their businesses. Second, give training providers the forecasting they need to provide the correct courses.	'Facilitate the production of localised skills surveys based on a rigorous, meaningful, and common methodology.'
7.	Local skills groups Purpose: Facilitate the LEP skills strategy on a local level.	'Support the creation of skills groups across the LEP area to focus on the issues faced in the locality with the emphasis on actions via business led partnerships.'
8.	Funding Streams Purpose: Enable the capture of skills relevant funding streams.	'Investigate and put mechanisms in place to source skills specific funding streams; challenge those that are not 'fit for purpose' at local level.'

APPENDIX 6A: MEMBERSHIP OF THE SKILLS STRATEGY GROUP

Lynsi	Hayward-Smith	Cambridgeshire County Council (Representing Cambridgeshire Adult Learning and Skills Board)
Michael	Mealing	Federation of Small Businesses
Michael	Large	East of England Business Group
Gill	Prangnell	Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce
Paul	Beeson	Stainless Metalcraft (Chatteris) Ltd
Sean	Brown	Marshall Aerospace
David	Nixon	Perkins Engines
Peter	Chisnall	Climate Energy
Jaqui	Fairfax	Commercial Utility Brokers (UK)
David	Foster	Foster Property Maintenance Limited
John	Foster	Foster Property Maintenance Limited
Rebecca	Britton	Urban and Civic
Gillian	Doughty	RPC Containers Ltd
Iain	Crighton	Crightons
Mark	Davenport	Frimstone Limited
Tim	Leathes	Urban and Civic
Steve	Pleasance	Quotient Bioresearch
Guy	Mills	Cambridgeshire County Council (Representing the Economic Development and Enterprise Forum, a cross-GCGPEP Economic Development Officers group)
Tracey	Cox	Skills Funding Agency
Peter	Northover	BIS Local
Annette	Pottinger	Job Centre Plus
Julie	Coleman	Job Centre Plus
Prof. Mike	Thorne	Anglia Ruskin
Allan	Arnott	GCGPEP
Mark	Cooper	GCGPEP
Neil	Darwin	GCGPEP
Anne	Constantine	Cambridge Regional College
Angela	Joyce	Peterborough Regional College
Karen	Martin	Ixion Holdings
Susanne	Stent	Huntingdon Regional College

This group is currently being added to with the intention of increasing business sectors represented and to add secondary education membership.

APPENDIX 6B: MINUTES BASED PAPER FROM 16 MAY CORE BUSINESS MEETING

Skills Strategy Group Meeting on 16 May 2012 - 14:00 to 16:30

This document is not intended to be an exhaustive set of minutes. The intention is to show the key areas discussed and provide a way of moving work forward.

Present:

Allan Arnott OBE (Chair)
Mark Cooper (LEP)
Paul Beeson (Stainless Metalcraft)
Sean Brown (Marshall Aerospace)
Jaqui Fairfax (CUB)
Gillian Doughty (RPC)
David Foster (Purple Pig)
Tom Baker (U&C)

Apologies:

Neil Darwin (LEP)

Item 1: Welcome and introduction

The meeting was introduced by Allan Arnott who reflected on the last meeting and invited an open discussion on skills to be led by Mark Cooper.

Item 2: Summary and conclusions so far

Mark Cooper gave his view and summary of work on skills so far led a discussion which also included Item 3 (Skills approaches and answers to problems) in the original agenda.

Taking into account Mark's work and views expressed during the meeting the following conclusions and possible solutions are put forward:

There are two distinct areas of focus: First, readiness for work which, from a business point of view, makes some people difficult to employ and to train further with specific skills. Second, missing sector/business specific skills that make it difficult to recruit people with the right skills, or to outsource training effectively.

1. Readiness for work

This area is wider than just secondary education; however, the focus needs to be in this area in order to build firm foundations.

Schools and Business

There are currently several projects running in the LEP area focused on improving business/school engagement and work experience: Opportunity Peterborough has a Skills Vision with a brokerage service, Fenland has the Fenland Enterprise in Education project, the Cambridge Area Partnership is in the process of forming a new orientation toward businesses and employers, and Huntingdon Secondary Education Partnership is working up proposals. From a LEP point of view this means that Cambridgeshire, including Peterborough, is well covered and our role is one of support and guidance where needed. For our Norfolk and Suffolk areas the New Anglia LEP is also working in this area; meetings have been held to discuss approaches and it is hoped that we can work collaboratively. This leaves Kings Lynn and West Norfolk, Uttlesford, North Hertfordshire, and Rutland where more work needs to be done to identify partnerships and contacts.

Careers Advice for Young People

The statutory duty to provide careers advice shifts in September this year from the Local Authority to schools. This means that careers advice will have to be performed by schools; but, there are no official parameters other than the age range of 14-16, just guidance. There is a government consultation on increasing the age range for careers advice to 12-19.

Conclusions

First, the Skills Strategy should include firm recommendations on school/business integration by highlighting the core parts of OP's Skills Vision, the FEE project etc that are needed to create an effective school/business partnership. Second, we can recommend that these 'brokerages' form links to FE with similar objectives. Third, the LEP can engage in the consultation on widening the careers guidance age with the intention of pushing the wider age-range but also using it as an opportunity to lobby for firmer parameter for school careers guidance. The core parts of local business/schools projects could be used as a basis for this thereby feeding a local agenda into national policy making. Finally, the SSG needs schools representation on its reference group.; as part of its work with schools partnerships the LEP needs to investigate a way of covering this.

Purpose

- Enable young people to have an understanding of their 'economic place' in society.
- Build a sense of 'route' to employment with employment or enterprise being the endgame whether employment is entered at 18 after compulsory education/training or in mid-twenties following university.

2. Sector/business specific skills

From the point of view of this discussion there are two areas serviced by FE colleges that are important to demand led provision. First, colleges provide an apprenticeship service to businesses where vacancies are listed both locally on FE websites and national via the National Apprenticeships Service website. The college provides a link to business by dealing with the training aspect of the apprenticeship; they also pre-vet applicants before they are interviewed by businesses. Colleges, under influence from government, are working hard in this area to build better relationships with businesses. Second, the core training that is offered by FE is aligned with student 'wants' rather than business needs.

Apprenticeships

In general the increase in numbers here is positive. There is a concern that although demand is leading, the actual numbers on course are being inflated beyond the employment capacity in the local area. For instance, the fourteen apprentices taken on by Marshall Aerospace this year will all be fully employed by the company and will, barring drop-outs, all continue to be employed at the end of their apprenticeships. In contrast to this the NHS scheme run from Addenbrooke's has a continued employment rate of around 50 per cent (154 recruited, 75 into continued employment, 48 still in post). Having said that apprentices are far better 'on course' than not and will learn good employment skills that can be utilised outside their specialism.

Core Training

First, FE colleges offer a large range of courses at varying levels and there is an argument to suggest that most, if not all, of these courses make someone more employable. This misses the point and highlights a key issue simultaneously: that of who the customer is from an FE point of view. The focus is on providing courses that students want, not what businesses need. Alignment of demand needs to take place for a significant amount of SFA funded courses. This holds true of providers outside of the FE structure as well (see NHS above).

Second, the critical mass that FE needs to achieve in order to provide a course within their resource levels is too high. For instance CRC do not train Marshall Aerospace apprentices, instead they are bussed to Bedford (although there are negotiations ongoing to rectify this). Jaqui Fairfax's CUB cannot secure training for apprentices at COWA because the break-even figure cannot be reached. This leaves employers who could utilise their local colleges at a disadvantage to courses that have high student numbers yet are not economically driven in the local area.

Conclusions

First, apprenticeships: This is an area we should encourage and have a positive recommendation for. This should include a caveat regarding longer-term employment outcomes. But, any recommendation must be from a business perspective and have provision to address the problem of critical mass. The apprenticeship brand needs to be protected from being overly politicised and must be 'owned' by employers.

Second, core training: Aligning demand with delivery is the focus of any strategy; achieving this is our priority. In order for FE to align their provision with business needs real data needs to be gathered. Furthermore, business must be integrated into training provision planning. One solution is to equip businesses with the tools needed to forecast their needs effectively and then capture this via a survey approach. This would give us an authoritative voice that providers could respond to. Encouraging FE to recruit business development personnel that focus on what businesses want; connecting smaller businesses together to provide the right course and the right numbers. This would need to be incentivised correctly in order to work. FE could offer training needs analysis that is focused at business needs rather than selling existing training packages. There is an option that involves either capturing SFA funding or putting conditions on that funding to FE. For instance, in order to run a course on travel and tourism it would be necessary to show local business need for this course by endorsement either by local business or in line with LEP strategic aims. The SFA are in a unique position to be able to influence funding to create a demand led environment.

A further note on surveys: for a survey to be effective it needs to be responded to; it also needs to reflect reality. Too many surveys are self selective and their results are somewhat discredited by this. We can get around this and make our results more effective by focusing in on LEP objectives. This may mean that we start on a specific sector, or sectors, and work from there; the results should be more meaningful and also cuts down on associated marketing costs that are needed to generate a good response. The LEP needs to say what it wants to happen in terms of sectors, clusters etc...

Purpose

- Give business the input they need into what skills are being generated in the LEP area.
- Empower local people to understand what they need to do in order to increase their chances of employment.
- Empower employees to be able to access the training they need to increase the chances of long term development.

Item 4: Conclusions and actions

Broad conclusions: First, although there is not a 'one size fits all' solution and the LEP skills landscape varies considerably, there are core policies and recommendations that can form a LEP skills strategy. Second, this group must make strong recommendations and take some decisions about the nature of the strategy; this must happen at the next meeting on 19 June. Third, whilst there is a national agenda and the LEP can have influence there the focus of the SSG should be on what we can achieve locally. Fourth, whilst unemployment is an issue, the focus should be on business and what they need rather than on specific issues that are already being dealt with via other bodies. It was felt that if demand provision and readiness for work of young people can be addressed then this group is playing its part there.

6. SKILLS SUBGROUP RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GCGPEP BOARD

Actions: First, It was agreed that all attendees would produce some brief notes on how they saw the discussion and what was important going forward. These have formed the basis of this paper. Second, the next meeting on 19 June should make strong recommendations and decide the outline of a strategy. Third, secondary education needs a voice on the reference group, MHC to investigate. Fourth, the business sectors represented need to be widened so that the core group can have different voices on a rotating basis, MHC to lead. Fifth, MHC to get board approval for a paid secretariat service.