



Employment & Skills Board – Draft Minutes

Tuesday 12 December 2023

Venue:	Virtual meeting	
Time:	10.00 to 12.00	
Present:	<p><u>Board Members:</u></p> <p>Charlotte Horobin Julia Nix Sarah Worsley Mark Robertson Michael Moriarty</p> <p><u>CPCA Officers:</u></p> <p>Claire Paul Laura Guymmer Janet Warren Melissa Gresswell Alexis McLeod Jo Morley Callum Boddington</p>	<p>CEO, Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce District Manager - Department for Work & Pensions (DWP/ JCP) Senior HR Officer, Baker Perkins Principal, Cambridge Regional College Head of Employee Services, Mick George Ltd</p> <p>Interim Assistant Director Skills Strategic Careers Hub Lead Commissioner – Adult Education Project Manager: Skills Bootcamps and Special Projects Senior Programme Manager Governance Manager Governance Assistant</p>
Apologies	Vic Annells Alex Rossiter/ Dan Thorp James Gazzard	

Minutes:

1 Welcome, Apologies and Introductions

- 1.1 Charlotte Horobin, CEO, Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce, introduced herself to members as a new member of the Board and explained that as she was also a member of the Business Board, she had been asked to chair the meeting in the absence of the Chair, Vic Annells.
- 1.2 Apologies had been received from Alex Rossiter, Dan Thorp, James Gazzard and Vic Annells.
- 1.3 Michael Moriarty, Head of Employee Services, Mick George Ltd was introduced as a new member of the Board. Board members welcomed him and introduced themselves.

<p>2</p> <p>2.1</p> <p>2.2</p> <p>2.3</p>	<p>Minutes of the Employment and Skills Board meeting on 10 October 2023 and Action Log</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting of 10 October 2023 were approved as an accurate record.</p> <p>The updates to the Action Log (published on the web page here) were noted by the Board members.</p> <p>Claire Paul would follow up with Nathan Wilkins from the CITB in the New Year so this action would be carried over. Claire also gave a further update on the Further Education Cold Spots projects and confirmed that, after a tender process, the consultants who would lead the Feasibility Study were Grant Thornton.</p> <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Claire Paul, Assistant Director – Skills to organise a meeting with Nathan Wilkins from the CITB to further discuss the role of apprenticeships.
<p>3</p> <p>3.1</p>	<p>Work Programme (Forward Agenda Plan)</p> <p>Board members confirmed that they had received the Skills and Employment Committee Agenda Plan and moving forwards, would provide feedback to help plan a relevant work agenda.</p> <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New ESB members to be added to the circulation list for Skills and Employment Committee agenda papers.
<p>4</p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.2</p>	<p>Governance and Membership Review</p> <p>Melissa Gresswell, lead officer for the Board welcomed Charlotte and Michael as the two new members of the Board since the last meeting in October.</p> <p>Liss was reviewing the current membership to check whether the Board was fully representative of the employment and skills arena and hoped to attract some of the priority sectors not covered. There had been an ongoing conversation between Vic, Claire and Liss about promoting the ESB as a high-powered advisory board, and an increased, fully representative membership to give advice and guidance would help with this.</p> <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Officers to review membership and approach underrepresented sectors. Any suggestions for new members would be welcomed.
<p>5</p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p>	<p>DWP – Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment Data and Trends • DWP Back to Work Plan as well as Work Well <p>Board members received a presentation on unemployment data and trends for the CPCA area from Julia Nix, District Manager - Department for Work & Pensions (DWP/ JCP). The presentation has been published on the webpage and can be found here: Employment & Skills Board</p> <p>The following points were raised in discussion:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Across the CPCA area there were 15,594 people classified as ‘searching for work’ and the DWP was concentrating on helping those individuals get back into work. b) The ‘working with requirements’ figure of 9,246 referred to those with a child under the age of 1 or those who had limitations because of a disability. c) There were 23,259 people classified as ‘not required to work’ because they were either too ill or because they had caring responsibilities. This group was referred to as the ‘economically inactive’. d) The ‘working with no requirements’ group were working but claimed families tax credit.

- e) The CPCA area had relatively low unemployment rates, with East Anglia having a rate of 3.5% in comparison to 4.3% for the UK as a whole.
- f) Fenland rates had come down as rural industries and local businesses had started to focus more on supporting local people into work.
- g) It was suggested that the rise in Cambridge unemployment rates may have been because young people were still recovering from the Covid pandemic and were not moving back into work at the rate expected.
- h) The impact of Covid on young people had been particularly pronounced, particularly for those from more disadvantaged families, but FE colleges were now seeing a rise in their numbers.
- i) To unlock opportunity, particularly in Peterborough where the unemployment rate was highest, employers needed to embrace the neurodiverse workforce. Often candidates did not have the experience on paper, and were not the best at crafting a CV, but once in front of an employer for an interview (rather than having to go through a lengthy HR process), their potential could be seen.
- j) The Restart Programme, which was contracted out to private providers who worked to support someone back into work, was to be extended for a further two years.
- k) Adult work experience had been very successful for both the individual and the businesses which could in effect 'try before they buy'
- l) Providers of skills courses could be linked with the relevant employers to offer more work experience.
- m) The Government had announced that programmes to support mental and physical health were being expanded. Claire Paul, as part of her role with creative and cultural industries for the CPCA, would be able to share with the Board at their next meeting more details on a scheme to prescribe music and art to improve mental health
- n) The Work Well Programme was a trail blazer programme to support the development of integrated health and work services to help disable people and people with health conditions to start, stay and succeed in work.
- o) CPCA officers confirmed that they were having meetings with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the DWP to pull a collaborative bid together to tender to be a vanguard area for the Work Well programme.

ACTIONS

1. Julia Nix and Janet Warren to liaise with City College Peterborough, a provider of adult social care courses, and link them with adult social care employers to facilitate work experience placements.
2. Mark Robertson to facilitate an introduction for Claire Paul with Cambridge Community Arts

6 Sector Focus and Strategy

6.1 Claire Paul, Assistant Director- Skills led a discussion asking the Board for their thoughts on how the CPCA could have a strategic impact in the skills and employment priority sectors, to align with its devolutions ambitions of both doubling GVA and reducing inequality in the area.

6.2 Claire made the following points in her introduction:

- a) It was vital that the CPCA also supported the 'infrastructure sectors' such as health and care where people were doing the jobs that were not necessarily the shiny new ones in the new industries but nonetheless were as important, if not more so, in making our communities and the region flourish.
- b) The CPCA needed to work across the region with all its partners to deliver the Skills strategic objectives and it was a collective challenge to consider the objectives and how best to go about achieving them.
- c) In terms of tackling the key sector priorities the biggest challenge for employers would be defining and being clear about exactly what the talent was that they wanted to grow. This would make a real difference as opposed to have a lengthy training needs analysis which you could get lost in.

- d) Once the skill or talent required was defined an end-to-end process could be developed looking at how things could be started off in schools and continued through further education and universities.
- e) People looking for work needed to get to a position where they had the skills to be work ready or to move to the next stage and then they needed to be connected to the next opportunities which meant working with employers through the whole process, like a 'stick of rock' from beginning to end, including working with employers to support onward development once people were in work.
- f) The sector challenge was to look at all the existing programmes and schemes that existed in the region and find a way to knit them together to create a sector talent 'pipeline'.
- g) The Board was asked to consider where, within the pipeline, there were gaps and to think how funds could be used strategically to join this up and connect into one line by developing a few pilot programmes as a proof of concept.
- h) There could be a massive opportunity around disability and long-term health that some of CPCA funds could be used for.
- i) The question was also asked about how all partners could work with employers in common purpose on the massive issues around reskilling, upskilling, cross skilling, career development and what could be done to support SMEs, who often did not have the capabilities or the time to do this.

In general discussion the following points were noted:

- j) There was agreement that there needed to be more targeting, so providers became more aligned to what was really required. Instead of a job title, providers needed to know exactly what employers wanted people to do and, ideally, to what standard. With this information training could be better tailored to meet the employment market, and the emerging market, but it required a central steer on this to undertake the commissioning.
- k) From an employer's perspective it would be good to know how all parties worked as it was sometimes difficult to know who did what and how it all came together. An example was given of Level 3 apprentices in the manufacturing engineering sector who started off going to the local college but if their employer wanted to develop them to go on to an HND or a degree there was not a clear pathway outlined for this.
- l) Employers were constrained in what they could use the apprenticeship levy for in terms of upskilling.
- m) Most businesses would probably agree that they should be upskilling their staff more and that central support for this would help.
- n) Employers needed to trust the DWP/ CPCA and have a strength of relationship that allowed challenge and honest feedback when things did not work.
- o) It was vital to empower and enable employers, so they knew where to go and how to navigate the systems.
- p) Achieving a 'scrabble tripe word score' i.e. where one step could achieve many objectives in one fell swoop, was always about the strength of collaboration. If those providers with the mindset and will to collaborate, could be economically enabled then real impact could be delivered.
- q) A recent skills boot camp course for software developers had not really aligned with job outcomes as it had been aimed at level 3 and should have been at a higher level 5. This example supported the view that there needed to be more research into exactly what the employer needed and the wider role rather than just looking at a job title.
- r) A key skill that could be developed in the region was verbal English skills as being articulate and confident would make a difference in almost every job role. This was for people of all ages but perhaps in particular for young people who had been affected by the Covid pandemic. These 'softer' or 'employability' skills could be much more valuable to an employer as hard skills could be taught on the job.
- s) Any new approach and strategy could get defeated if there was too much detail and too much time spent on writing processes. Instead of it being perfect there had to be a braver and more proactive approach to try different things.
- t) Employers could open themselves up to a much more inclusive way of recruiting and support people with neurodiverse needs.

- u) The DWP had a disability employment advisor who helped employers engage with all disabilities including neurodiverse ones. There was also a lot of financial support that employers could access to help with this.
- v) The CA could look to provide some very simple things for SMEs that would help with employing the neurodiverse; for example, a top 10 tips, so that it wasn't always about how you adapted the candidate to fit the workplace but sometimes about how the workplace could be adapted to suit the employee.
- w) Diversity in the workplace was not just about initial recruitment but also about how people were encouraged to stay, especially those who were neurodiverse. An analogy was given which was it was like inviting everyone to the party but when they got there they were expected to dance. In a tight labour market employers needed to know how to encourage people to dance when they arrived.
- x) Apprenticeships were another area where it was so important to get the apprentices to stay right to the end of their journey. Failure to do this had systemic issues because if there was no endpoint assessment then the money did not follow which had a knock-on effect on technical training provision.

ACTIONS:

1. Julia Nix to liaise with Sarah Worsley to further discuss employing people with neuro diverse disabilities and to get in touch with an engineering and manufacturing business in Thetford that has had particular success with this.
2. Claire Paul to take away the points discussed and to continue the development of the sector focus work.
3. The Governance Manager to write and circulate the minutes in a timely fashion so that actions could be worked on immediately and the momentum on this process was kept up.

7 Skills Bootcamps

- **2022-23 FY and 2023-24 FY Update**
- **Preparations for 2024-25 FY**

7.1 Melissa Gresswell, introduced a discussion on Skills Bootcamps and asked members to share their thoughts and views on how delivery of this year's courses until July 2024 could be supported and also on the planning for the 2024-25 courses. The slides accompanying the discussion can be found on the webpage here: [Employment & Skills Board](#)

7.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- a) The CPCA had to bid annually for the funding for bootcamps that it received from the Department of Education . Unlike other education budgets this spending was not yet fully devolved so there were certain regulations around them that could not be flexed, such as their duration. However, there was flexibility in delivery and this could be either face to face or online.
- b) Employers could recruit from Skills Bootcamps course cohorts to fill job vacancies for free.
- c) Officers were awaiting formal communication from the DfE this week on the bid submitted in September for Bootcamp funding. It was expected that the CPCA would receive £2.8m, the same as the previous year.
- d) Funding covered digital, technical and green skills but 30% could be spend on what the DfE had termed 'other'. In the current wave of courses therefore Level 3 and 5 leadership and management courses had been commissioned under this 'other' category.
- e) As an example of close co-operation on designing courses, Baker Perkins and Howdens had worked very closely with CPCA officers and providers to launch an introduction to engineering skills bootcamps which would help them recruit to their 2024 apprenticeship pipeline.
- f) It would be useful to facilitate a discussion between larger employers (Rolls Royce was given as an example) and smaller employers who could benefit from interviewing and capturing those who were not successful in getting a place on the Rolls Royce apprenticeship scheme but nevertheless were excellent candidates with a lot to offer.

	<p>g) Claire Paul had done some similar work last year and had come up with a model which revolved around an anchor employer whose job was to then wave the flag and get all of their supply chain in the region involved. This model could be scaled and applied to the bootcamps scheme.</p> <p>h) Marshalls had been involved in reviewing their applicants to see where they could be 'referred on' if they were unsuccessful on their programmes. Conversations could be opened up with other employers to see how this process of a cascade of applicants could be formalised.</p> <p>i) Howdens and Baker Perkins had been working together, even though in essence they were in competition for the same people, in order to increase the number of applicants they had coming through.</p> <p>j) Mick George were looking to see if a training academy could be established for the construction industry and would discuss this further with Melissa Gresswell.</p>
8.	Any Other Business
8.1	Claire Paul advised members that a similar discussion on Strategy would be held at the Skills and Employment Committee meeting in January before a more formal proposal was put to them in March.
8.2	Conversations were happening with partners around co-ordinated activity for National Apprenticeship Week which would take place between 5-11 February 2024.
9.	Date of Next Meeting
9.1	The date of the next meeting was 20 February 2024

Meeting Ended: 12.00