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

Minutes of meeting held on Friday 2 July 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)
	Emily Cashen, MHCLG	(EC)
	Ann-Marie Conlon-Taylor, Milton Keynes College	(ACT)
	Cllr Anita Cranmer, Buckinghamshire Council	(AC)
	Heather Dean, Buckinghamshire Business First	(HD)
	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)
	James Moorhouse, Buckinghamshire LEP	(JM)
	Ian Murphy, Buckinghamshire Business First	(IM)
	Dave Oxley, McAfee/Digital Sector Group Lead (Part meeting)	(DO)
	Caroline Perkins, Buckinghamshire LEP	(CP)
	Martina Porter, All Spring Media (Creative Sector Group Chair)	(MP)
	Claire Reeves, Adviza	(CR)
	Paul Skitt, Flannery Plant (Construction Employer Group Chair)	(PS)
	Sarah Stevens, Sylo Beyond HR	(SS)
	Alex Warner, Milton Keynes College	(AW)
	Donna Wilkinson, Buckinghamshire Council	(DW)
Apologies:	Shabnam Ali, Buckinghamshire Council	
	Kerry Senatore, Careers & Enterprise Company	
	Karen Mitchell, Buckinghamshire College Group	
	Mark Wood, Reaction Engines/Space Sector Lead	
	Claire Wardle, Health Education England	
	Dena Read, Department for Education	
	Sue Cross, Adviza	
	Jo Meloni, The Misbourne School	
In Attendance:	Sarah Fraser, BLEP	(SF)

ACTION

1 **WELCOME**

GB welcomed all those on the call, particularly those attending their first SAP meeting.

2 **MINUTES**

The Minutes from the meeting held on 7 May 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

2.1 <u>Matters arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)</u>

2.1.1 ➢ **Community Renewal Fund** – A decision is expected in July on the Buckinghamshire bid submitted, which included projects submitted by partners associated with the SAP and the Creative Industries Sector Action Group.

2.1.2 ➢ **Bid writing capacity** – IH confirmed Buckinghamshire New University has some limited capacity available to deploy to assist in bid writing. It was agreed HD will pull together a sub group to look at this subject (including JA and KH), to collate capacity available and consider how to market this resource to partners. **HD**

2.1.3 ➢ **Action carried forward – Apprenticeships –** IH/KM/MP to discuss development of a proposal to Government around apprenticeships that responds to the requirements of the Skills White Paper. **IH/KM/MP**

2.1.4 ➢ **DWP Youth Hubs:**
   o LB will liaise with Buckinghamshire Council to ensure the work of DWP's Youth Hubs align with Buckinghamshire Council's proposed Jobs/Skills Shops. **LB**
   o LB to link MP with the Youth Hub Manager in Chesham. **LB**

2.1.5 ➢ **Future SAP meetings –** It was agreed to continue SAP meetings through Teams for the moment, the group considering this has been a successful forum in the last year.

3 **DIGITAL DISCUSSION - CONTEXT AND RESEARCH UPDATE** (Presentation attached)

HD/CP set the context for the breakout discussion and provided an update on the research available around existing/desired skills, roles required currently by employers, skills gaps and what might be required in the future, including what funding might be required from the public sector to support skills development in this area.

3.1 Comments**:**
   ➢ There is an enormous demand in the county (and across the country) for software developer engineers.
   ➢ Research figures over the last year have seen a reduction in 'churn' as employees have chosen to remain with employers to a greater extent during the pandemic.
   ➢ The SAP should consider whether the pandemic has brought about a change in the skills required in the workforce and whether there is a need to rebalance SAP focus.
   ➢ The use of the word "digital" may not be appropriate and may be too broad ranging.
   ➢ SMEs looking to innovate through technology may be able to benefit from funding available through R&D grants.
   ➢ It would be useful to examine whether the pandemic has brought about a change in people's attitude to contracting vs being employed, and whether the change in tax regime (IR35 etc) will bring about further change.
   ➢ The SAP may need to look at the level of skills young people are acquiring in education; employers will assume a certain level of ability prior to employment.

3.2 Construction perspective
PS reported on work undertaken at the Construction Employer Group looking at how digital development affects the construction sector; progressive work tending to be led by companies focussed on large infrastructure development that have scale and access to necessary resource to lead/implement change.

Development within the sector is moving at pace, for instance, technology is already available for companies to use driverless plant/machinery. However, the regulatory framework is not currently in place to allow use of all technology available. The sector is making use of global positioning technology and telematics, etc, but there is a strong desire to move forward and use all technology available.

The Construction Employer Group will be drawing together all intelligence available from those in supply chains and will feed this thinking into development of the Buckinghamshire Digital Strategy, and into thinking around skills requirements for current and future roles.

4   **ROUNDTABLE: "DIGITALLY ABLE POPULATION" - THE SKILLS ACTION PLAN**

It was reported one element of the SAP's work going forward will be to monitor progress against the priorities outlined in the Local Skills Action Plan; this meeting's focus being Priority 5, "Digitally Able Population".

The group moved to breakout sessions to consider progress against this Priority.

4.1   Plenary feedback:
  ➢ A better understanding is needed of what individual sectors require; what is already provided; and where gaps remain. For example, AR and VR are important in the healthcare sector but more information is required for other sectors.
  ➢ People need access to technology to undertake training to improve their skills and more needs to be done to raise awareness on this. Those claiming benefits can be issued with a laptop and dongle if required.
  ➢ Case studies etc are required to demonstrate what can be achieved; including, within this, case studies to start addressing gender imbalances and encouraging the uptake of training by those with protected characteristics.
  ➢ More can be done to promote opportunities to people throughout their working life, irrespective of their current career stage. Promotion of opportunities is key.
  ➢ There are currently no programmes for Digital Leadership.
  ➢ 'Digital skills' covers a very broad spectrum, perhaps too wide.
  ➢ Teachers as Digital Champions in schools would be a sensible thing (to share learning at teacher level rather than student level).
  ➢ There is a real need for continued grants for SME to enable them to take up/ implement new technologies.
  ➢ Digital Champions/Ambassadors within businesses are also needed, as are opportunities for peer to peer learning.
  ➢ Sharing of intelligence with DfE on the skills required is needed.
  ➢ There is a tremendous amount happening on this agenda already, but there is a real need to corral this intelligence.
  ➢ Bucks Skills Hub is a good focus for all this work but also need to involve, BBF, Schools, Unis, other stakeholders.

5   **SOUTH CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY** (Presentation attached)

AW shared information on the work of the South Central Institute of Technology (SCIoT) and the outcome of work commissioned in 2020 to look at the demand for digital skills across the region covered by the SCIoT (report available here:
New Report: An Analysis of Digital Pathways in the South Central Region - Emsi (economicmodelling.co.uk))

5.1   Comments:
  ➢ The SCIoT is running on site and online teaching simultaneously but with the facility to watch lectures online later, dependent upon students' individual circumstances.
  ➢ Whilst there has been a greater move to online over the last year, face to face training is particularly important for those that might lack confidence (if not ability).
  ➢ The SCIoT runs HE programmes and students are able to apply for funding to meet course fees (HNC/HND levels). Apprenticeships follow a separate cost model.
  ➢ The SCIoT works closely with universities across the region within which it operates and is happy to develop further these relationships.
  ➢ The SCIoT will be offering short courses in cyber security going forward, recognising that new cyber threats are constantly emerging.

➢ It was suggested there may be elements of the 'blended learning' arrangements that could be shared with the business community through Buckinghamshire Business First as the country moves to return to 'normality' following the pandemic. IB/HD to follow up with AW.

➢ SCIoT could usefully add to the business case pressing for an Aylesbury Link on East West Rail, providing detail around access to education. IB to follow up with AW.

The SAP thanked AW for his presentation and the update on the work of the SCIoT.

AW indicated he would be happy to be contacted should partners wish to explore collaboration opportunities further: alex.warner@mkcollege.ac.uk.

6   **PARTNER UPDATES**

(GB requested partners forward updates to SF for inclusion in the Minutes – as below):

6.1   All Spring Media
➢ All Spring Media are working with Amazon around apprenticeship levy transfer with significant funds available. MP is working with Amazon on linking with Creative Industries SMEs (£1m ringfenced funding) but would be happy to be a conduit for other sectors.
➢ The Creative Industries Sector Action Group has been interrogating skills gaps in the sector and looking at how to better ensure diversity and increase uptake of roles across a more diverse cohort.

6.2   Flannery Plant Hire
➢ PS reported Flannery are involved in Apprenticeship trailblazer groups; there being a push to use these groups to design and develop wider technical and digital skills. It is hoped to reduce the fragmentation around skills delivery in the sector through this mechanism.

6.3   Buckinghamshire New University (BNU)
➢ BNU are planning a return to "normal" from September, pending government advice. Programmes will be delivered face-to-face unless government restrictions necessitate a return to mixed or even fully online delivery. A "public heath guarantee" is offered to students in halls, meaning they won't be charged accommodation fees if the university is directed to close and accommodation rates have been kept at approximately last year's levels (roughly 30% lower than 2019-20 tariff), to ensure more students fall under the University's care in what might prove to be challenging circumstances.

➢ In 2021-22 BNU will launch its First Generation Fund. This will support students from families where university education is new, and will provide financial support for up to five years to successful applicants, supporting costs such as accommodation, equipment, books, travel, childcare and mentoring. Students may enter at foundation year level if suitable, pursue a degree and then have a further year of transitional support into postgraduate education, an internship at BNU or new business incubation, depending on which route they choose. BNU will be working with the Bucks College Group and UTC to identify suitable recipients, and working with those students in 2021-22 to prepare them for the step into HE in September 2022. The fund has already received a sizeable donation from a generous benefactor and will be seeking further donations in order to grow the number of beneficiaries it can support.

6.4   <u>Sylo, Beyond HR</u>
- ➤ SYLO are managing an upturn in requests for recruitment support from Bucks based clients; alongside frustration that individuals are not applying – and not just from a lack of relevant skills.
- ➤ A Bank of England update at our Hartwell House Networking meeting confirmed individuals are likely to be seeking to make changes to the way in which they work (aiming for better work-life balance) with employers fielding increasing demands for wage rises.
- ➤ As a business, we are continuing to support employers who are making changes to their working models; embracing Hybrid working and all that entails.

7   **NEXT STEPS**

HD/JB/IB to consider how to broaden discussion around the Digital agenda in order to feed into the Buckinghamshire Digital Strategy, possibly holding round tables with external speakers/sector specialists, and involving the Chairs of the various Buckinghamshire Sector Groups.   **IB/HD/JB**

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

- ➤ 17 September, 12 November

9   **SUMMARY ACTIONS**

9.1   ➤ **Bid writing capacity** – HD to pull together a sub group to look at this subject to collate capacity available and consider how to market this resource to partners.   **HD**
9.2   ➤ **Action carried forward – Apprenticeships –** IH/KM/MP to discuss development of a proposal to Government around apprenticeships that responds to the requirements of the Skills White Paper.   **IH/KM/MP**
       ➤ **DWP Youth Hubs:**
9.3   o LB will liaise with Buckinghamshire Council to ensure the work of DWP's Youth Hubs align with Buckinghamshire Council's proposed Jobs/Skills Shops.   **LB**
9.4   o LB to link MP with the Youth Hub Manager in Chesham.   **LB**
9.5   ➤ **Blended working** - IB/HD to liaise with AW on whether SCIoT can share learning arrangements that may be applicable for businesses, to be shared through BBF.   **IB/HD**
9.6   ➤ **East West Rail** - IB to liaise with AW as to whether SCIoT can add to the business case pressing for an Aylesbury Link on East West Rail.   **IB**
9.7   ➤ **Next Steps –** IB/HD/JB to look at how to move the digital discussion forward.   **IB/HD/JB**

The meeting closed at 11.56am