

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

Minutes of meeting held on Friday 18 March 2022, from 10am, via Teams

<b>Present:</b>	Martina Porter, All Spring Media (Chairing) (Creative Sector Group Chair)	(MP)
	Shabnam Ali, Buckinghamshire Council	(SA)
	Juliet Anderson, Bucks Health & Social Care Academy (part meeting)	(JA)
	Beth Baker, University of Buckingham	(BB)
	Ian Barham, BLEP Partnerships Manager	(IB)
	John Browning, Bucks Skills Hub	(JB)
	Robert Curtis, Cities & Local Growth Team, BEIS/DLUHC	(RC)
	James Gilpin, DWP	(JG)
	Katie Higginson, Community Impact Bucks (part meeting)	(KH)
	Kevin Hoctor, Cities & Local Growth Team, BEIS/DLUHC	(KHo)
	Marina Jackson, BLEP Under 19 Skills Manager	(MJ)
	Simon James, Buckinghamshire Council	(SJ)
	Mohika Kulkarni, Young Person Representative	(MK)
	Aqsa Mahmood, Young Person Representative	(AM)
	Jenny Mcarady, DWP	(JM)
	James Moorhouse, Buckinghamshire LEP	(JM)
	Dave Oxley, McAfee/Digital Sector Group Lead (Part meeting)	(DO)
	Paul Skitt, Flannery Plant (Construction Employer Group Chair)	(PS)
	Cllr Julie Ward, Buckinghamshire Council	(JW)
	Mark Wood, Reaction Engines/Space Sector Lead	(MW)
<b>Apologies:</b>	Professor Gavin Brooks, Buckinghamshire New University	
	Cllr Anita Cranmer, Buckinghamshire Council	
	Heather Dean, Buckinghamshire Business First	
	Ian Harper, Buckinghamshire New University	
	Jo Lynch, DWP	
	Karen Mitchell, Buckinghamshire College Group	
	Richard Peters, The Misbourne School	
	Kerry Senatore, Careers & Enterprise Company	
	Jon Wardle, NFTS	
	Sally White/Sarah Stevens, Sylo Beyond HR	
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Sarah Fraser, BLEP	(SF)

### ACTION

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

MP welcomed all those participating in the call, particularly those joining for the first time and, within this, offered a very warm welcome to Asqa Mahmood and Mohika Kulkarni, attending the meeting as Young Person Representatives.

#### 2 MINUTES

The Minutes from the meeting held on 21 January 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

2.1 Matters arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)2.1.1 ➤ **Green economy/skills:**

- BLEP has commissioned a green economy audit looking at progress businesses are making towards Net Zero in Bucks and to investigate opportunities that might be available. The results will be brought back to a future meeting.
- Discussions are underway between Buckinghamshire Council and Silverstone around the possibility of running a competition for students around the use of digital technologies to help make schools more energy efficient.

IB

All other actions arising from the last meeting had been completed or would be covered in the course of the agenda.

3 **LEVELLING UP WHITE PAPER & NATIONAL SKILLS LANDSCAPE**

The Levelling Up White Paper has now been published, however, there is very little new investment linked to this, which is unsurprising given the financial pressures imposed by the pandemic and, latterly, the conflict with Ukraine.

The White Paper has outlined:

- The future role for LEPs supporting local business needs.
- That LEPs, in areas where there is a Combined Mayoral Authority, will likely become part of the Authority.
- A number of county deals are to be announced which will establish a different relationship with Government. Buckinghamshire will work with individual Government departments and agencies eg UK Space Agency, where investment is more likely to be directed towards Buckinghamshire.

The BLEP Board has agreed, in principle, to establish a 3 year budget, allowing the LEP to operate more independently of Government support. To do this will require development of Enterprise Zone locations in order to secure investment from retained business rates, ensuring support for the LEP's agendas (including skills work) continues.

With regards to the Skills agenda, Government has said that Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) can be led by employer-led organisations (previously the advice was Chambers of Commerce) which now allows the Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF) Growth Hub to lead on this in Buckinghamshire. The aim is to provide continuity through the Skills Action Plan and the various networks in Buckinghamshire. The LEP will also monitor what is happening other areas eg Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce will be setting up an LSIP across Bucks, Berks and Herts.

From a local perspective, the SAP is considered a very important grouping and the LEP is keen to maintain continuity of this group, recognising that skills funding from April onwards is still to be confirmed.

SAP members were asked, if speaking with Government officials/organisations or, indeed, local MPs, to reinforce the value of the SAP and the Local Skills Report in shaping the curriculum to meet employer needs and, for example, providing support to events such as the Skills Show.

ALL

4 **LOCAL SKILLS REPORT LAUNCH AND BRIEFING EVENTS** (Presentation attached)

The Local Skills Report was published on 28 January 2022. One of the most important roles for the SAP will be in maintaining up to date information on skills and training needs in the county and BBF/BLEP teams will continue to carry out research into the Bucks economy, important industries/priority sectors in the county etc.

Those present were asked to continue promoting the Local Skills Report so that this may be seen and used by as wide a constituency as possible in order to continue the joined up thinking across the county.

ALL

[Buckinghamshire Local Skills Report | Educator Resources | Buckinghamshire Skills Hub \(bucksskillshub.org\)](#)

5 **SKILLS BOOTCAMPS UPDATE** (Presentation attached)

Following discussion at the last meeting JB/PS provided a brief update on progress with the Construction Sector Bootcamp bid that has been submitted, valuing c £2.4m. The outcome of this bid is expected in April following which contract discussions will take place April-June.

Policy documents received regarding Bootcamps were confusing but good support was received in preparing the bid from the helpful team at DfE.

Reflecting on the tight timescales associated with the call for bids to provide Bootcamps, MP reported discussions are being held to look at how to get ahead of short lead times in the future and to think about the interventions that might be needed going forward.

6 **SKILLS SHOW FEEDBACK AND DISCUSSION** (Presentation attached)

MJ provided an update on the success of the Bucks Skills Show held on 9/10 March at Westcott Venture Park. Comments from SAP members included:

- It would be useful to have a “Creative Industries area” at the Show in future years, similar to the Construction sector area this year.
- A number of employers found the evening session offered more time to have better quality conversations with adults and young people visiting their stands, recognising this has to be balanced against employers availability to be outside their business.
- Future years will see the reintroduction of preparation sessions for schools ahead of the Skills Show to ensure that both employers and young people get the most from the event. Schools will also be encouraged to prioritise older students to attend the Show in future, younger students attending in smaller groups which will need to be efficiently managed by each school.
- In previous years Skills Shows have run on a Saturday and for some employers this has worked more effectively, both in terms of manning exhibition stands and in the quality of conversations with young people and their parents.
- Representation at Shows from those in the Digital Sector needs to be better co-ordinated in the future and more interactive experiences provided for young people.
- Better co-ordination is, perhaps, needed when there are a number of similar events taking place to ensure no duplication eg Bucks Skills Show, Buckinghamshire Council’s Apprenticeship & Jobs Fair, and the Careers Fair at Dr Challoner’s High School. Better co-ordination would also help ensure employers are not overloaded with requests to support events.

- Having a “National Careers Week” does not assist in event planning, as those organising events will use this week as a springboard.
- It would be useful to have University attendance at future Shows to answer questions arising from students wishing to progress studies.

The next steps will be to take the feedback received before, during and following the event, to produce a post-event report which will consider how the Skills Show may be improved for 2023. This report will be shared with the Rothschild Foundation, who supported the 2022 Skills Show, and with the SAP.

The biggest question for the 2023 Skills Show will be around how the event is to be funded, no clarity as yet received from Government re skills funding post 31 March 2022. The desire is that the Skills Show will continue to be a free event for young people and those seeking to change careers, and be as accessible as possible.

## 7 FUNDING LANDSCAPE AND SAP FUNDING SUB GROUP

AC provided an overview of the funding group established as a sub group to the SAP looking at the funding landscape as it currently relates to skills and employability.

This group met on 25 November 2021 and looked at how the funding envelope has changed, with particular reference to the UK’s exit from the EU which has brought to an end a range of ESF/ERDF etc funded programmes. Lifelong Learning programmes have also now come to an end.

The sub group considered what experience is available to respond to new funding streams opening up, what resource is available and how to identify opportunities that may work for Buckinghamshire.

It was suggested the first clear opportunity will come with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which will be replacing EU programmes. The expectation is the Fund will be for £2.6bn of new investment up to 2025; £500m in Year 1. A specific objective of this fund is to design programmes around employability and skills, as well as investing in ‘place’. More information on the fund allocation process/quantum for Buckinghamshire is expected in the next few weeks.

There is a clear willingness to work together on future bidding opportunities, bringing together universities, agencies, the private sector, and the third sector, building on the knowledge/experience in SAP members, to bid for funds both on a Buckinghamshire basis and also to wider, regional funding opportunities. The work being undertaken in identifying interventions needed on the skills front, and to pull information together to respond at short notice to bidding opportunities, will also play into this work. There are clear advantages for all in a collaborative approach to producing funding bids.

The attached slides provide an overview of the ‘Skill Up Bucks’ and ‘Boost’ programmes, funded through the Community Renewal Fund (CRF), being run through the Buckinghamshire Skills Hub/Visit Bucks. These CRF programmes have provided the opportunity to pilot ways of doing things differently in the county and the outcome will help to shape bids to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as it comes online.

- “Skill Up Bucks” programme aimed at aligning schools, colleges and local employers to provide work experience opportunities for anyone living in the county, developing both the available skills pool for local employers and opportunities for young people.

- Visit Bucks' "Boost" – A new programme designed to accelerate tourism, hospitality and leisure businesses and the wider visitor economy in Buckinghamshire.

In addition to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Careers & Enterprise Company has an opportunity coming through to apply for hub innovation funding; the Buckinghamshire Skills Hub being required to present projects that are innovative in nature. The prospectus for this fund is due to come out in the next 10 days or so and the detail/outcome will be brought to a future SAP meeting.

**It was agreed:**

- **To convene a meeting of the funding sub group twice per year, with additional meetings being called, if required, considering both where funding opportunities are arising, and where Buckinghamshire wishes to grow support.**
- **To arrange a meeting for the SAP Chair and the Chairs of each of the Sub Groups to consider opportunities arising.**

AC

IB/JB

## 8 SECTOR GROUP UPDATES

### 8.1 Construction

The Construction Employer Group is meeting every 3-4 months. Key themes for the group recently have been around digital technology and green skills and a separate "Solutions Sub Group" has been established to look specifically at these areas in addition to considering how to address skills shortages in the sector, looking at recruitment and retention.

The Solutions group has been focussed most recently on providing a co-ordinated Construction offering at the Skills Show, collaborating to ensure the range of opportunities available in the construction sector were clearly articulated.

### 8.2 Creative Industries

Collaboration came out as a key theme at the most recent Creative Industries Sector Action Group meeting, considering how employers can most effectively support each other.

The greatest challenge to the Creative Industries sector is the rapid level of growth being experienced and the need to find an additional 50k skilled staff over the next 3 years.

A collaborative approach in assessing needs and ensuring data is available in advance of funding rounds will be vital, looking at the full scope of what is needed in terms of short term interventions, apprenticeships, degrees, and recruiting people into the industry.

### 8.3 Digital

The Digital group was disbanded some time ago as it was considered the group touched so many areas in the skills agenda and could not operate effectively as a standalone sub group. However, it was suggested there is a need to pull together digital employers so that they might collaborate and more effectively support events such as the Skills Show.

It was agreed it would be useful to bring digital thinking into a meeting of the various SAP/Sub Group chairs.

## 9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

### 9.1 Community Impact Bucks (CIB)

- Buckinghamshire Council, BBF, CIB and others are working to put together something to welcome Ukrainian refugees arriving in the county, acknowledging there is no information yet as to the number of refugees that Buckinghamshire might host. Refugees will be able to work in the UK and recognising there is a strong creative industry in Ukraine with many displaced media people, it was suggested there may be an opportunity to help address shortages in the sector in the UK.

### 9.2 Innovation Hubs

- IB reminded those present of the innovation hub space available at both Buckinghamshire New University High Wycombe and Aylesbury Campuses, and also at the University of Buckingham, and Westcott Venture Park.
- Buckinghamshire New University is investing £15m in the eastern wing of the University over the next 6 months. This will provide an improved 'Welcome' to the University and also improved facilities for business meetings.

### 9.3 Bucks Skills Hub

- The Skills Hub ran a few online sessions as part of National Apprenticeship Week for both young people and their parents. With c400 people at the Key Stage 3 session, and c770 at the Key Stage 4/5 session, there is a clear appetite for these events.

### 9.4 All Spring Media

- The organisation is hoping to win the Creative & Design Apprenticeship Provider of the Year Awards at the 2022 Apprenticeship Awards ceremony on 22 March 2022.

## 10 CLOSE

MP thanked all those on the call for their attendance and contribution to discussion, noting that the changing landscape requires closer collaboration and greater sharing of ideas/knowledge/resource from all partners if Buckinghamshire is to be able to proactively support the enormity of the skills agenda.

## 11 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS (10am-12pm)

- 13 May, 8 July, 16 September, 18 November

All meetings will be held via Teams with the exception of either 13 May or 8 July.

## 12 SUMMARY ACTIONS

- **Green economy/skills** – IB to share the results of the green economy audit being undertaken. IB
- **Skills Advisory Panel** - SAP members were asked, if speaking with Government officials/organisations or, indeed, local MPs, to reinforce the value of the SAP. ALL
- **Funding Group** – AC to convene a meeting of the funding sub group twice per year, considering possible funding opportunities/where Bucks wishes to grow support. AC
- **SAP Chair/Sub Group Chairs meeting** – IB/JB to arrange a meeting for the SAP Chair and the Chairs of each of the Sub Groups to consider opportunities arising. IB/JB
- **Local Skills Report** – SAP members to continue to promote the Local Skills Report wherever possible. ALL