

Heart of SW LEP CIC Board meeting

Paper 4.6 September 2017

Report title: Opportunity for Digital Skills Trial

Report theme: Board

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Purpose of the report

To brief the Board on the potential for the Heart of the SW to be a pilot area for a Local Digital Skills Partnership.

Recommendations

The LEP Board notes the contents of this paper.

Background

In March, Government published its Digital Strategy which aims to create a world-leading digital economy that works for everyone. The Strategy set out seven priorities for the UK to focus on:

- i) Building world-class digital infrastructure for the UK
- ii) Giving everyone access to the digital skills they need
- iii) Making the UK the best place to start and grow a digital business
- iv) Helping every British business become a digital business
- v) Making the UK the safest place in the world to live and work online
- vi) Maintaining the UK government as a world leader in serving its citizens online
- vii) Unlocking the power of data in the UK economy and improving public confidence in its use

The digital skills priority aims to tackle digital exclusion, develop the full range of digital skills that individuals and companies across need for the future and develop a strong collaboration between the public, private and third sector in tackling these. One action includes setting up a Digital Skills Partnership and in late August Simon Leeming, the Department for Culture Media and Sport's (DCMS) Head of Digital Skills Partnership, visited the Heart of the SW.

The meeting briefed Simon on the wide range of digital activity from multiple partners across the HotSW area and heard how the Skills Partnership is looking to develop a more coherent framework for digital skills across the UK, recognising that this is fragmented at present and that there are challenges around identifying what "digital" specifically means.

Over the autumn Government will be looking to establish a small number of local digital skills partnerships to deliver this on LEP geographies, working with LEPs and other local partners. Initially this would be a few trial areas, plus a control LEP area. Provisionally, DCMS are

aiming to establish the national Digital Skills Partnership Board by mid-autumn and the trial local partnerships by early 2018. The local partnerships would help develop what DCMS call a 'playbook' for other LEP areas to learn from in developing their digital skills. There are four parts to the cycle a local partnership area would go through:

- DCMS perform data gathering exercise with local partners to identify skills gaps, infrastructure and data needs
- Match provision to the needs using this data
- Provide upweighted delivery in that LEP area drawing from aspects of the private sector support the digital strategy has drawn together, complimenting existing work. For example, Lloyds Bank has committed to creating 20,000 digital champions by 2017 to help "people and organisations use the internet to improve digital skills and financial capability".
- Evaluation to develop 'playbook' for other LEP areas to learn from

The control LEP area would get the data gathering and monitoring stages but not any of the additional assistance. DCMS are also aiming to provide resource to help coordinate these local partnerships, meaning LEPs and other partners would not be expected to implement this unsupported.

Digital has been identified within the draft Productivity Plan as a major opportunity for the LEP area and participation as a trial area would be an excellent opportunity for the LEP and partners.

Next Steps

Criteria are still being developed and the call for trial areas will be open. Although HotSW participation is therefore not guaranteed, it is recommended that the LEP works with other partners to secure trial status for the HotSW.

In making a case to DCMS, the LEP area has several potential offers

- The HotSW area has clear strengths in key aspects of digital; these include data analytics around Exeter or cyber security, for example the Growth Deal 3 Blue Screen Project X investment
- A comprehensive range of activity is already under way across the HotSW. This includes work on digital inclusion, Innovation Exeter's activity to build Exeter as a national centre for data analytics, work to develop a higher-level skills digital offer, and the Cosmic-led digital leadership programme for small businesses
- HotSW participation would allow DCMS and other LEP areas to understand the role digital skills can play in addressing productivity challenges of a rural area
- Similarly HotSW participation would enable DCMS and other LEP areas to understand the role digital skills can play in inclusion across urban centres and a dispersed rural geography

These proposals were discussed at September's People Leadership Group where there was support for taking this forward. A holding response has been sent to DCMS and next steps will be to formally confirm HotSW's interest and to respond to a call when published.

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