Finance & Resources Committee

26 April 2018

Background

This paper sets out a proposal to fund work in support of the local Digital Skills Partnership.

Recommendation

That F&R agrees the recommendation to fund up to half the cost of the research work, to a maximum of £21,525 from HOTSW LEP007 Research.

Background – local Digital Skills Partnership

Government's 2017 Digital Strategy set out 7 strands of activity to complement the aims of the Industrial Strategy and build the economy of the future. The strands are

1. Building world-class digital infrastructure for the UK
2. Giving everyone access to the digital skills they need: overall aim of addressing the root cause of digital exclusion, ensuring people of businesses have the skills needed for a digital economy and tackling the digital skills gap in a co-ordinated and coherent way.
3. Making the UK the best place to start and grow a digital business
4. Helping every British business become a digital business
5. Making the UK the safest place in the world to live and work online
6. Maintaining the UK government as a world leader in serving its citizens online
7. Unlocking the power of data in the UK economy and improving public confidence in its use

There is a range of corporate support working individually and with Govt on some of the skills priorities, e.g. the BT funded Barefoot Computing Project which provides free cross-curriculum computer science resources and volunteer-led workshops to help primary school teachers with no previous computer science background feel confident in delivering the curriculum. Other corporates include Barclays, Lloyds, Amazon, Google and Microsoft, HP, O2, Cisco and others.

Govt sees its role as convening and providing coherence to all those active in this area, rather than being 'top down' and controlling the activity. A national Digital Skills Partnership has been established to do this, bringing together technology companies, local businesses, local government, charities and other organisations. It will facilitate coordination between the various programmes, including the sharing of knowledge and best practice. The Partnership will also look at options for improving the coherence of digital skills provision and so make it easier for individuals to find the training that's right for them, and to ensure that training opportunities are available across the country.

The national DSP has two specific objectives and HotSW and Lancashire have been selected to pilot local DSPs under the first of these:

- increase the digital capability needed to build thriving local digital economies by sharing and incentivising best practice at a local level and supporting the creation of Local Digital Skills Partnerships; and
- create a more coherent framework that enables people and organisations to identify and access good digital skills training opportunities and enables providers to collaborate to upscale and innovate.

The HotSW DSP is still in 'shadow' phase and will be launched publicly in June, reporting to the LEP People Group. The LEP worked closely with Cosmic and DCMS to shape the partnership and is chairing the DSP in its current format. Two workshop-style meetings have been held to agree priorities and ways of working and participants have included DCC, SCC, PCC, South Devon College, B&T College, Met Office, Leonardo, Bluescreen, EE/ BT, Somerset & Devon Chambers, Plymouth & Exeter universities, training provider networks. A more formal membership list and terms of reference will be developed ahead of the summer launch. DCMS has made available a small amount of funding for 1 year to enable employment of a digital skills partnership manager in each of the pilot areas. A new Job Description for that post is being developed ready to be advertised and recruited and the host partner for this needs to be agreed (separate to this paper). The enthusiasm of participants in the workshops has been notable and the next meeting is timed to have an initial review of the research this paper is seeking funding for.

Nationally, Govt are working to a 5-step model - data gathering, matching provision to needs, delivery, evaluation and sharing of data/learnings - and the local DSP has adopted this as a starting point. The HotSW DSP is able to draw on the national support through Google, Microsoft etc to deliver the local action needed and the first step is to strengthen the evidence base to ensure the support can be targeted effectively. Plymouth and Exeter universities have developed a proposal to understand the evolving digital skills needs in businesses and individuals within HotSW over the next 10 years and what the gaps in provision are. A research proposal is included as an annex to this paper.

Funding

	Plym	Plym CiK	Exe	Exe CiK	Total	Less CiK
Management	1,500	1,625	1,250	1,625	6,000	2,750
1. **Exploration of digital skills landscape**	3,500	650	5,000	650	9,800	8,500
2. **Employer survey**	3,000	650	7,000	1,950	12,600	10,000
3. **Mapping of digital skills**	8,250	1,300			9,550	8,250
4. **Final Report**	1,500	650	1,500	650	4,300	3,000
					0	0
Travel and subsist (ACTUALS)	500		300		800	800
	18,250	4,875	15,050	4,875	43,050	33,300

Funding Sources	
CiK	9,750
HotSW LEP	**21,525**
DCC	6,000
Other partners (TBC)	5,775

The information above is extracted from the proposal. Total project cost is £43,050 of which Exeter and Plymouth universities will contribute £9,750 in in kind costs, leaving a balance of £33,300 to be funded. Devon CC are contributing £6,000 and it is proposed the LEP contributes £21,525 - half the total project cost. The balance will be drawn from other DSP partners though the proposal has been structured in phases so the work can commence immediately. If the remaining £5,775 were not forthcoming, the budget would allow the exploration, employer survey and final report to be funded as a worst case scenario, though clearly this is not a desirable outcome.

Given the profile of the DSP with Government, the pilot status of the HotSW area, the leadership role the LEP has so far taken in the DSP and the need to ensure a robust evidence base from which to develop interventions, it is recommended that the LEP also take a lead role in funding the research, contributing half the total costs to a maximum of £21,525.