

Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership

LEP Board Paper agenda item 6b.

Report title: People Leadership Group / Skills Advisory Panel Update

Date: 6 July 2020

Purpose: This paper is for noting

Link to LIS:

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|-------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|--------|
| Inclusive Growth | | Clean growth | | |
| Energy | Engineering | | Digital | |
| Ideas/ Innovation | People/Skills | Infrastructure | Bus. Environment | Places |

Timing: June-September 2020

Financial Impact: None

Decisions requested: None

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Summary

- 1.1 People Leadership Group / Skills Advisory Panel ('SAP') activity has continued at pace over the summer period as the COVID crisis has continued to develop. Though the summer has seen a period of partial resurgence around the economy as the situation has slowly unlocked, relative levels of unemployment, youth unemployment and activity and economic inactivity rates have all remained high. Sectorally, whilst the economy has also seen a period of renewal in many areas, furlough levels remain high within the most vulnerable sectors (notably tourism and leisure) with an expectation of successive waves of disruption still to come as we move into winter 2020 / spring 2021. This is reflected in considerable levels of additional Government activity around employment and skill announced by the Chancellor in his summer statement, that is now rolling out to sit alongside these emerging patterns.
- 1.2 On a day to day basis, the LEP's People capacity continues to be split across a range of projects and programmes focused on recovery and wider adaption, working with Departments and wider partners around emerging recovery initiatives and policy development. This has included new provision across digital support, additional support for

apprenticeships and traineeships, a renewed push around policy and recovery strategy development, and most latterly, the soft launch of the Kickstart Programme by Government. It is currently anticipated that these core themes will continue and accelerate over the autumn as the impact of Covid continues to crystallise.

1.3 A brief update on each of the People Group's Core projects / workstrands is set out below for information:

- **Skills Advisory Panel ('SAP')** – SAP activity continued over the summer, with the publication of the Government's final guidance on the development of a Skills Strategy for each LEP area by March 2021, linked to both local skills and employment need, but also with a strengthened focus on aligning ongoing recovery activity. The development and agreement of the Skills Strategy will now form the primary focus of the SAP's activity through to Christmas, with the SAP meeting on the 17 September due to provide a first consultation session around the emerging document.

More widely, the SAP continued over the Summer to focus upon the implementation of its research and deep dive activity, with the first of its deep dives around the future of work taken forward by the University of Exeter and its Business School, whilst initial activity was undertaken around Social Mobility and Technical skills. Further content around these topics will be published shortly, with the social mobility deep dive now to link to the emerging social inclusion panel. More widely, the University continued to feed into wider quarterly monitoring and reporting around the COVID crisis and ongoing impact, with joint working with DCC around furlough data, employment trends and other pinchpoint topics. On the back of this, work is now ongoing on the provision of a quarterly update that will be produced for the SAP around key indicators and topics from later in the Autumn.

- **Departmental Engagement, including Kickstart and other initiatives** – Given the range of Government activity put forward through the Chancellor's announcement in June, and with work around the CSR ongoing, the People theme team has been heavily involved over recent months in discussion around the emerging shape and nature of Government's support for those unemployed or at risk of unemployment. This includes working with DfE around their emerging approach to future skills provision; with DWP around provision linked to both younger people and older adults displaced by recent events; with DCMS around their emerging offer of digital literacy and sectoral support; and with wider agencies and partners (such as the CEC) around their emerging ask for CSR 2020 and to reinforce the LEPs potential role in those plans.

Over the past month, a heavy focus has been placed upon the development and roll out of the Kickstart scheme, providing up to 6 months' worth of support of wages and related costs to allow a business to employ a young person. Activity has focused on two core areas, seeking to understand and prepare for the roll out of the scheme from November locally as details have emerged, and make the case to DWP for a sensible level of local coordination and alignment. On the latter, this work has been taken forward in conjunction and coordination with national partners, including the LEP Network, LGA, AoC, Chamber network and others.

Despite this however, recent announcements from DWP have left significant confusion and concern amongst partners around the programme, with a lack of clarity about how the programme will be aligned, and more importantly how the engagement with businesses and young people will work in practice (particularly for small businesses). As a result, work is no ongoing by the People team to work with LEP partners around aligning and seeking to bring together emerging plans on Kickstart to try and facilitate a more seamless approach to its delivery (subject to whether further guidance may still arise from DWP).

- **Careers Hub** – Following the reporting of its successes at the last LEP Board meeting, and agreement to extend the Hub to become the largest in the Country, recruitment and preparatory has been ongoing for a cross LEP launch of the expanded service from September. This includes the recruitment of 3-4 new members of staff to support the expanded network to over 160 schools, early engagement with schools to understand their COVID plans and the impacts for careers and other content, and ongoing work with Enterprise Advisors and the areas Cornerstone network around 2020 provision and support. Work has also been ongoing with the CEC to understand the networks next steps and assist in their emerging case for CSR 2020, seeking to make a strong argument for mainstream funding and support over the next three years of the Hub programme.
- **Digital Skills Partnership, including the Digital Skills Innovation Fund activity** – The Digital Skills Partnership has continued to develop and deliver on its core offer and functions over the summer, bringing together its 50 partner organisations and accelerating delivery of both existing and new projects linked to digital skills. This included the renewal and reshaping of the Bounce Back Digital programme, with 147 business access the programme in a three week period, and a further 293 signed up for additional activity); ongoing development of the area's NESTA EdTech Challenge programme, working closely with South Devon College; finalisation of YTKO's Digital Construction bid to the European Social Fund; finalisation of a digital careers support programme working with DCMS and the Careers Hub; and support for the development and eventual approval of the recent FE digital capital bid from the HotSW's colleges.

In addition to this existing activity our Digital Skills Manager has also led on the development of a £1.2-£1.5m bid to DfE as part of the National Retraining Scheme, working with 12-14 individuals projects to fasttrack individuals into higher value employment and training opportunities across the LEP area. Work is current live to submit the bid into DfE by the end of September, with further information to be provided to the board in its next reporting cycle.

- **European Social Fund Delivery and Appraisal** – Work continued around the allocation and delivery of the HotSW's ESF programme over the summer period, seeking to finalise the £44m for the HotSW. This included ongoing clarification and finalisation of £10m of ESF provision, including £3.5m for Health and Social Care support; £3.2m for sector skills support through the SMART Specialisation programme; £1m of support for construction and digital capacity building; and additional support within Somerset around NEET capacity and sector skills provision. Relevant project teams have nominally been agreed now by the area's ESIF committee, with final sign off and contracting due to be completed

in theory over the next month. However, though the pace of MA activity has increased, challenges remain around the pace of DWP's secretariat in completing appraisals through to contract and enabling delivery.

- **Communications and Redundancy / Redeployment Activity** – Alongside project and policy activity, the People Group / SAP Secretariat has continued to enhance the LEP's communication and information services over the summer period, both in support of emerging redundancy and redeployment activity and to reinforce the LEPs core offer. Most recently, this includes the launch / imminent launch of the standalone Skills Launchpad site, which seeks to further reinforce the LEPs advice and guidance capacity, building on an initial provision rolled out earlier in the summer. Linked to this, colleagues in Plymouth have worked with the LEP team around a co-branded approach (Skills Launchpad Plymouth) which is providing a local offer to the city.