

**Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership
LEP Board Paper agenda item 6b)**

Report title: People Leadership Group / Skills Advisory Panel Update

Date: 15 November 2020

Purpose: This paper is for noting

Link to LIS:

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

Timing: October-November 2020

Financial Impact: None

Decisions requested: None

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Summary

- 1.1 Autumn 2020 has seen a period of relative stability across the employment and skills landscape following the dramatic events of early 2020, with relative levels of unemployment stabilising across much of the HotSW over the October/ November period. Rates however remain significantly higher than those experienced in 2019, including an unemployment rates of around 5%, furlough rates (up to the onset of the second lockdown) of around 12-15%, and youth unemployment of around 10-12%. As of the date of this report however, the impact of the second lockdown has yet to fully materialise, though it is anticipated that this will add between 2-4% to the figures set out above over the balance of 2020 and the start of 2021

- 1.2 In response, Government has continued to announce and roll out a range of support programmes to assist individuals to both remain in work and to train. These included an additional commitment from the Prime Minister in mid-October to a universal adult learning offer from March 2021, including free provision for Level 3 qualifications for those who have not already achieved an equivalency; the implementation of the Government’s Kickstart programme; and the announcement and awarding of additional funding for boot camp and fasttrack retraining pilot activity, including a workstream within the HotSW.

1.3 On a day to day basis therefore, the LEP's People theme capacity has been focused upon clarifying the detail behind individual announcements and programmes, and then seeking to facilitate forward activity. This has been alongside continuing to deliver the LEP's main programme activity, including actions around careers, apprenticeships and information advice and guidance.

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

- **Skills Advisory Panel / Local Skills Plan** – Development has been ongoing over the autumn period on the first draft of the emerging Local Skills Plan, with a requirement to provide a final approved version to Government by March 2021. The first draft is currently due to be sent out to SAP partners next week, to be discussed at the SAP Board on 1 December. This will then be followed by an ongoing cycle of iteration and consultation through to the middle of February 2021, before final submission in early March. As part of the development and approval process for the Skills Strategy, the strategy will also be brought back to the LEP Board and Joint Committee session in the new year for endorsement.

In addition to the development of the Local Skills Plan, work has continued over the winter on the area's wider skills evidence base, with a substantive amount of additional evidence gathering and analysis being undertaken. This has included finalisation of the SAP's first deep dive programme into the future work, and preparation for future workstreams. This also includes preliminary activity around the establishment of the LEP's Social Inclusion Panel, and associated research and policy development activity working with the SAP.

- **Kickstart** – Work has continued at pace across the area over the past 8 weeks linked to the roll out of the Government's Kickstart programme. Whilst the LEP has decided not to directly deliver the Kickstart programme (and potential further complicate an already fragmented marketplace), work has been ongoing to support local Gateway organisations to take forward activity and ensure effective referrals. This has included the use of the Skills Launchpad brand to provide local referral information, coordination of discussions with DWP over shared issues arising, and general support around the programme. At present, this has led to around 300-400 businesses working with 5-6 local Gateway organisations across the area, providing 100% coverage of the LEP area.

It should be noted however that Kickstart remains a complex and difficult initiative for smaller businesses to engage with, with the Gateway approach often administratively burdensome. The LEP and its partners are working with DWP around these issues, but it has become clear that DWP's design of the programme was not as well evolved to work with small business as national and regional partners would have liked. Work continues around this crucial delivery area, with local JCP colleagues working closely with HotSW partners to try and influence DWP national procurement and operational matters.

- **Careers Hub** – Roll out of the expanded Careers Hub programme continued over the start of the Autumn term, despite barriers emerging from COVID 19. This included 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 also accelerated around the development of a higher quality virtual work experience offer, and on the provision of a new specific programme working with DCMS around a focused advice and guidance approach linked to digital careers.

- **DfE Bootcamp Programme** – The HotSW successfully secured £1.7m of funding toward 10 ‘bootcamp’ programmes in engineering and digital training / upskilling in late October. Working with college partners, leading private sector training providers and several of our larger businesses, the programme will provide 750 funded opportunities before March 2021 for individuals to access new training provision, and access / prepare for a range of related job opportunities. These include specialist provision in health and social care, photonics, across the digital sector, linked to nuclear and the development at Hinkley Point, and support for welding and engineering opportunities within the Marine sector. Work is currently ongoing around relevant contracting and procurement processes, with the hope that delivery can begin in early December.
- **Communications, policy development and redundancy / redeployment activity** – Alongside the deliver of new programmes, work continued at pace across the area around day to day activity and the LEP’s existing people work plan. This included the launch of the Skills Launchpad in October 2020, with the site already attracting several thousand hits a month linked to skills and employment advice and guidance. Work has also continued around responding to the ongoing redundancy and redeployment challenges emerging from COVID, with the LEP (working in conjunction with upper and district level local authority Colleagues) seeking to support taskforce and local partnership activity around business closures and ongoing job losses. Notable recent examples include around a significant closure in South Somerset, working with colleagues in Northern Devon around a wave of smaller business closures, and ongoing work around the retail sector.

In addition to COVID response, the People theme team has also continued to engage with Government around a range of emerging skills and employment funding and policy matters. This includes around the development of the next round of Long Term Unemployment support from DWP; additional support and provision for the over 50’s;; working with local authority colleagues around their emerging plans for Youth Support and provision; and ongoing work around the development of the FE White Paper and National Skills Fund / Shared Prosperity Fund.

In addition, and in line with previous Growth Funding cycles, the People Theme team is currently leading on two of three skills led programmes recently agreed through Get Building Fund, seeking to conclude contracting by the end of November.