

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

Report title: People Leadership Group / Skills Advisory Panel Update

Date: 6 January 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: November / December 2020

Financial Impact: None

Decisions requested: None

Author and contact details: Phill Adams, phill.adams@devon.gov.uk

Summary

- 1.1 Winter 2020 has proven to be an extremely tough period overall for the Heart of the South West around employment, as further COVID disruption has led to a further period of uncertainty. Despite some improvements in unemployment and vacancy rates in the September/ October period, the run up to and the aftermath of the Christmas period, with two successive waves of restrictions, has seen a further worsening of conditions. As of 30 November, claimant unemployment had risen back to 5% overall, roughly in line with the position in June. Youth unemployment similarly increased by 0.2% in November to 7.5%, whilst unemployment amongst the over 50s increased by the same amount to 3.7%. This is despite November traditionally being a period of seasonal reduction in claimant count due to Christmas employment in many areas. Teams are currently awaiting data for the December but anticipate it will be difficult.

- 1.2 Despite the difficulty of underlying conditions however, there is some evidence that both furlough and other support programmes continued to protect a material proportion of the labour force. As of 31 October 2020, 46,300 individuals were still furloughed across the area, or approximately 6.2% of the total workforce. A further 5-7% were also benefitting from the

support for self-employment programme. In the absence of these two programmes, it is anticipated that unemployment would be between 5-7% higher than the current rate, with a disproportionate impact upon Torbay and South Devon, Northern Devon, and Mendip and West Somerset. As set out in November, the Government also 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 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 fastrack 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 continued over the past two months on supporting both activity around employment and retaining, and promoting wider activity to support young people and adults around confidence, like skills and general preparation for recovery.

1.4 A brief update on some of the People Group's current work, and core projects / workstrands, is set out below for information:

- **Skills Advisory Panel / Local Skills Plan** – Development has been ongoing over the autumn /winter period on the first draft of the emerging Local Skills Plan, with an initial consultation undertaken with SAP partners over the November / December period. Following on, a second draft is due to be shared with the Board, SAP and Joint Committee shortly for further consideration / recommendation, with a final draft then required by DfE before 31 March 2021.

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 since Kickstart 's launch in November to maximise the number of local placements involved. At present, this has led to around 300-400 businesses working with 5-6 core Gateway organisations across the area, providing 100% coverage of the LEP. As of 4 January, around 400-500 placements had been agreed in principle, though work was ongoing around delivery of these in the face of a further lockdown period.

It should be noted however that Kickstart remains a complex and difficult initiative to enact with small businesses, with the Gateway approach having required significant focus by lead bodies over the period. The LEP and its partners continue to work with DWP around related issues, with the latest meeting of core partners on the 8th January.

- **Careers Hub** – Roll out of the expanded Careers Hub programme continued over the Autumn / Winter 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.

In light of the recent lockdown decision, Careers Hub team members have spent the post-Christmas period offering up immediate support to schools around their existing remote provision, and planning additional offers around virtual and online options to support young people who may not be taking exams this year. Teams are particularly focused on how best to support young people who have now had two extended period of disrupted teaching and learning, and where aspiration and ambition may become a key challenge

- **DfE Bootcamp / 'Training4All' Programme** – The HotSW successfully secured £1.7m of funding toward 10 'bootcamp' programmes in engineering and digital training / upskilling in late October, with the programme's formal launch on the 4th January (Training4all). 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.

To date, delivery is on track, with 75% of places filled. Some discussion has begun with DfE however over the past week about delaying individual face to face elements around technical skills / engineering, recognising challenges around delivery in the current lockdown.

- **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.

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 completed contracting before Christmas on two of the three GBF skills projects (The third, as a Devon based scheme, was successfully completed by colleagues in Plymouth to the same timetable). Collectively, the three skill programmes involved will secure over £5m of match and support over 3,000 learners during their lifetime.