

Minutes from the Great South West Partnership Innovation Board (formerly HotSW Innovation Board)

13:00 – 15:00, 17th January, 2023

In attendance

Stuart Brocklehurst, Victoria Hatfield, Paul Powell, Paul Coles, Stephen Mariadas, Layla Burrows, Kevin Forshaw, Toby Parkins, Ian McFadzen, Andrew Dean, Jane Purdy, Tony Welch and Paul Hickson.

Apologies

Sally Basker, Jane Portman, David Ralph, Wayne Loschi, Icarus Allen, Chris Evans, and Martyn Ashford.

Initial comments

SB provided background to the Innovation Board and its focus on particular aspects of innovation for those new to the meeting. The HotSW Innovation Board is now expanding its geography to cover the Great South West. Consequently, we may well have an expanded remit. Toby Parkins was welcomed as the co-chair of the Group. We therefore will look again in future at the content of what we do.

SB updated the Board on his new role as Deputy Vice Chancellor for Business and Innovation at the University of Exeter. Retaining links with his previous role in Applegate (now owned by Troy).

Minutes from the meeting held on 24th October 2022

Accepted. SB will pick up the action for the HEIs to liaise with the CBI in support of the MESA proposals.

Progress with the Maritime and Environment Science Accelerators (MESA) and an update on our related ongoing political engagement around Innovation

SB gave a recap on the history of the proposal. It has now been picked up by current MPS and is back on the agenda of government, but it could be that we incorporate other high value opportunities from the additional geographies of the GSW. Nonetheless, there is a pressing need for investment in Accelerator-like

LB Advised that developments of this scale do require very senior leverage with ministers.

KF NPL are working with Lloyds register on the Maritime Autonomous Assurance Testbed and are awaiting feedback from government. It may form a part of the eventual national shipbuilding strategy. Extensions of the approach could also be placed in partner countries around the globe.

SB Had spoken with government raising that this is the first time for a considerable period where the UK could take an international lead in shipping.

VH Updated the group on the Net Zero Innovation Hub. Looking to be funding support from April 2023 using Shared Prosperity Fund. The activities will be targeting small businesses – supporting their move to NetZero. Other District Councils will also have money for innovation.

ACTION VH: To pass further details of the SPF Innovation offer from District Councils, when this comes available - to AD for circulation to the group.

Discussion on the expanded innovation programme for the Great South West Board

SB We now have a broader geography and broader remit. It had been suggested that the Innovation Board should also embrace 'skills'.

PC was against embracing skills within this group - as it is such a pressing topic that instead of being attached to another theme - it merited a separate group feeding directly to GSW Board level.

KF Agreed and stated the importance of maintaining close links with this group.

IM Also agreed and emphasised the importance of the connection between our emerging innovation driven businesses and the skilled workforce needed to enable subsequent growth.

TP Recalled that in January 2021 TECH SW surveyed its members and asked what the biggest challenge was for them – the top problem was skills. The Pandemic was number 2. This emphasised the real importance of skills - which remains the largest challenge facing businesses. He had been speaking with an industrial partner developing a major new innovation – they stressed skills as their biggest need. He was concerned that trying to cover all skills – may not deliver what is needed for innovation. So – posed the question that perhaps we give a particular focus to skills for innovation through this group?

SB Noted that currently within the GSW Board, Skills was seen as an enabler and sat with Construction/House Building. Perhaps it may therefore be better within this group?

SM Recognised that whatever the structures that emerge – there is a real need to communicate the need for new skills.

PC We have a productivity challenge in the UK and skills is a central part of that. Not focussing sufficiently on skills will go counter to the experiences of the business and academic community. We must signpost where new opportunities require new skills. How can we explore models where industry invest together with FE to joint create posts.

ACTION SB: Write to the Chair of the Great South West Board Partnership Board – stating that the unanimous view of the Innovation Board was that skills is so vital that it needs to be a separate Programme Board. Further, that this topic should be on the next GSW Board. Copying the letter to the group and reporting back to the next Innovation Board.

KF we must also ensure sufficient allocation for ERDF replacement funds. Knowledge Exchange staff currently act as intermediaries linking support into businesses and this resource will be very depleted soon as EU funds disappear and are replaced by lesser amounts of funding.

SB We also should recognise that currently there is resource for innovation via Innovate SW and related activities elsewhere and to highlight this.

ACTION: AD to add an Agenda item for the next meeting to update members on the current availability of support such as debt or equity funding and associated support services

VH Recognised the roles of chambers are also important and that they have a task to play in promoting funding opportunities and support for this.

TP LSIPs are being rolled out – and these will probably only be as effective as the organisations that engage with them. Key (particularly with skills) is to take a bottom-up approach. It can be easy to miss the real innovators – as they can be hard to find and are often not engaged with traditional

business support. The Innovation Board is about doing things differently, we mustn't just reproduce what we have done before if we need different.

SB Highlighted the Entrepreneurs Panel and their role. This is light touch, but they have an opportunity to express an opinion.

ACTION ALL: Please send suggestions of new members to AD

JP: Confirmed TPs suggestions. Recognising the gap between Schools and FE persists and that more must be done to raise awareness of opportunities within our geography.

SB Any new group also needs to work with the Social Mobility Commission

Delivery priorities and approaches for Innovation Support in our region

SB As the world changes the need for Innovation Support is important.

ACTION ALL: As a matter of course to feedback to the Board where they identify a need for Innovation Support and associated skills needs

JP Spoke on behalf of Business West (who will deliver Somerset Innovation Network) who will oversee a series of centres specialising in sectoral support. To an extent this has been driven by the nature of the funding.

IAERO – partnered to offer events, workshops, 1-2-1 etc. with clients in that industry. Also seeking to drive collaboration and research. Examples include 3D Printing and Digital marketing.

Digital Innovation Centre - Lining with people like SETSquared to see what support can be delivered. They will support where they may not have considered within their activities. Not seeking not reproduce what already exists.

Somerset Energy Innovation Centre – low carbon and renewables. Supporting to grow and develop.

A driver is to use local businesses where practical.

SB Recognised that we shouldn't be just investing in new buildings and centres – but also investing in skills and support is critical.

KF Updated the Board on the latest innovation aspects of the Freeport. Plymouth and South Devon Freeport is around stimulating technology and developing new products and services. Freeports count as international soil so can involve importing without duties. PML and UoE are also partners along with UoP. There are a large number of planned collaborative projects and associated patent applications. There is an expectation from government that Freeports will succeed so an associated innovation support offer may be successful.

LB LB's Innovate UK team are also meeting with BEIS around the Freeport.

ACTION: LB to update the group as to any changes.

PH Updated on the developments at Gravity which is more catalyst than a support service. But is certainly seen to be a means of driving growth and innovation. It benefits from a number infrastructure assets (motorway, water supply etc.). The local authority remains cautiously optimistic for ensuring major new business locations and associated jobs, with new announcements soon.

TW Presented on Innovate UK Edge services in the SW region. They form part of UKRI in BEIS and invest over £7b in R&D across the UK. Target is businesses with fewer than 500 employees and often early-stage businesses:

- Innovation (especially 1-2-1 support)
- Sourcing funding and finance
- Entering new markets

TW highlighted examples of the kind of Innovate UK support for specific businesses.

TP offered to showcase exemplar Cornish innovative businesses - to help highlight what else is going on across other parts of the region.

SB Asked what our needs are as a region and are we missing some significant need?

KF We really do need a range of support, plus access to the kinds of specialist facilities and equipment that can sit in a research base. But HEIS cannot subsidise the use of this equipment. Some support is needed somewhere for this – both new equipment and subsidised access.

SB Agreed and recognised that this is the case and could be expanded.

NOTE: The Board recognised emerging businesses need access to the kind of technology and research assets held by research-intensive organisations such as universities and PML – but the mechanisms (including funding) to enable this still require attention.

IM We need to avoid the likes of ERDF boundaries and to work across borders. With intelligent brokerage impacting regardless of the geography. Perhaps a cross-partner Discovery Room approach where people could help unlock access to whatever equipment and facilities needed can be found.

SB The Technopole would be a route for this. As currently envisaged.

Discussion on skills needs (including suggestions for the next Panel Survey)

SM highlighted the re-licensing of the SWIoT as an opportunity to shout about what we really want our IoT to 'also' address.

ACTION: ALL get back to Stephen regarding skills and what skills we may wish the IoT to embrace (including suggestions for the next Panel Survey).

AOB and new opportunities

Nothing was raised.

Date of Next Meeting

ACTION SECRETARIAT: Circulate a DOODLE POLL next Great SW Partnership Innovation Board

Contact

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Secretariat - Andrew Dean a.dean@exeter.ac.uk

Members of the Board

Organisation Types	Enterprise	Member
CHAIR	Applegate	Stuart Brocklehurst
HotSW LEP	HotSW LEP	David Ralph
2* universities	Exeter Plymouth	Chris Evans Kevin Forshaw
3* key research assets, Met Office, UKHO, PML	MET Office UKHO PML	TBC TBC Prof Icarus Allen
2* science parks	Exeter Science Park Plymouth Science Park	Sally Basker Ian McFadzen
1 rep for innovation centres	EPIC	Wayne Loschi
1 SWIOT and FE	SWIOT	Stephen Mariadas
1 LA ECC, PCC, SCC or DCC	ECC	Victoria Hatfield
1 LA from another LA	South Somerset	Jane Portman
2 Corporate Reps	Babcock Leonardo Helicopters	Paul Powell Martyn Ashford
1 LEP Board Observer	Independent	Paul Coles
1 Innovate UK	Innovate UK	Layla Burrows
Great South West	Headforwards	Toby Parkins