



West Midlands Combined Authority

Meeting: Skills Advisory Board

Date: Wednesday 21 November 2018 at 10.30am

Location: Council House, Coventry City Council, Earl Street, Coventry

Present:

Councillor George Duggins (Chair)	Portfolio Lead for Productivity & Skills
Lee Barron	Midlands Trades Union Congress
Rob Colbourne	PTP Planning
Jackie Dunne	Black Country LEP
Lesley Hagger	Lead Director of Children's Services
Dave Maclean	Chair, Digital Skills Task Force
Kirston Nelson	Lead Director of Education
Julie Nugent	West Midlands Combined Authority
Nick Page	Lead Chief Executive
Tim Pile	Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP
Marion Plant	Coventry & Warwickshire LEP
Philip Plowden	West Midlands Universities
Aaron Reid	Chair, Construction Skills Task Force

Observers:

Johanna Hoyal	Department for Work & Pensions
Emran Mian	Department for Education
Nick Riddle	Department for Work & Pensions
Karen Riley	Education Skills Funding Agency

In attendance:

Rachel Egan	West Midlands Combined Authority
Clare Hatton	West Midlands Combined Authority
Councillor Kevin Maton	Coventry City Council

1. Terms of Reference

The board considered its draft terms of reference that set out its role and responsibilities, along with its functions.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the terms of reference of the Skills Advisory Board be agreed.

2. Development of the Regional Skills Plan

The board received a presentation from Nick Page on the work that had been undertaken in developing the Regional Skills Plan and how the implementation of the plan could be best achieved. He stressed that the region had to earn the right to get further devolution and funding from the Government, and that delivery of the Regional Skills Plan would be the means by which this could be achieved.

Philip Plowden highlighted the importance of retaining graduate skills within the region and stressed that this should be a key workstream within the plan. Dave Maclean considered that the roll out of 5G technology could act as a significant driver of the skills agenda within the region. Nick Page said that there was a need to develop a consistent framework to measure the impact of the work being undertaken so as to be able to clearly demonstrate the difference the Regional Skills Plan was making.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the presentation on the development of the Regional Skills Plan be noted.

3. Delivering the Regional Skills Plan

The board received a presentation from Julie Nugent on proposals outlining the delivery of the Regional Skills Plan. She indicated that a delivery plan would be presented to the next meeting of this board that would seek to ensure that the region had the ability to deliver the skills the region needed. She stressed that inclusive growth would be a golden thread running through the whole of the delivery plan, which would also have to address issues such as apprenticeships, mentoring, automation and taking advantage of the upcoming City of Culture and Commonwealth Games events.

Aaron Reid noted that within construction there was a recognition that the sector needed to collaborate more widely in order to meet employment shortages, and the Regional Skills Plan provided something for the construction industry to work towards in a joined up approach. The board recognised the value that procurement could play in helping to achieve inclusive growth, and Julie Nugent undertook to submit a further report on this to a future meeting. Tim Pile welcomed the development of a delivery strategy as critically important, but warned of the danger of trying to do too much. It was therefore necessary to prioritise objectives, along with being clear on what the sector was going to stop doing.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the presentation on the delivery of the Regional Skills Plan be noted.
- (2) That Julie Nugent submit a delivery plan to the next meeting of this board.
- (3) That Julie Nugent submit a report on using procurement to help achieve improvements in inclusive growth to a future meeting of the board.

4. Devolution of the Adult Education Budget 2019/20

The board considered a report from Julie Nugent on the detail of the proposed approach to commissioning Adult Education Budget provision following its transfer to the WMCA from July 2019. This reflected the principles previously set out in the Regional Skills Plan, as agreed by the WMCA Board in June 2018.

Clare Hatton reported that this would be the first time the region would have direct control over skills funding, and the report set out the approach that would be taken in respect of the regional commissioning of services. It was intended that a key benefit of this devolved funding would be that stakeholders would work more collaboratively and have a focus on moving hard-to-reach people into employment.

Councillor George Duggins indicated that in the first year, it was intended to allocate money on a historical basis, although any budgetary underspend would be redistributed to those organisations that were successfully delivering their skills programme in order to ensure spend.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the approach to the regional commissioning of the Adult Education Budget in relation to the 2019/20 academic year, as outlined in the report, be noted.
- (2) That the Skills Advisory Board, with the support from local authority and LEP officers, would monitor progress, impact and recommend changes to the deployment of Adult Education Budget funding.

5. Use of WMCA Skills Funding to Match Fund European Structural Investment Funds

The board considered a report from Julie Nugent that set out the options for the use of WMCA skills funds as match funding for European Structural Investment Fund projects.

The report set out a number of options relating to how WMCA resource could be used alongside ESIF to deliver the priorities of the Regional Skills Plan. Rachel Egan reported that the latest round of ESIF funding pre-dated the creation of the WMCA and was allocated on LEP boundaries. This has provided extra challenges based on the three-LEP geography of the WMCA. It was now proposed to allow WMCA skills funding to be utilised by recipients as match funding for ESIF purposes.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That it be noted that recipients of WMCA skills funds would be permitted to use that funding as match for European Structural Investment Fund projects, subject to the prior agreement of the Director of Productivity & Skills and demonstrating that its use as match funding supported the priorities of the Regional Skills Plan.

6. Agenda Items for Next Meeting

- Regional Skills Plan Delivery Plan
- Procurement

- Dashboard reporting arrangements
- Mapping of service provision and funding sources to include customer journeys from both an individual's and an employer's perspective.
- Adult Education Budget performance (report in November 2019)

7. Date of Next Meeting

The board requested that its next meeting be arranged for May 2019.

[The meeting ended at 12.15pm]