



# West Midlands Combined Authority

**Meeting:** Skills Advisory Board

**Date:** Monday 14 December 2020

**Location:** Microsoft Teams

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## **Present:**

Councillor George Duggins (Chair)	Portfolio Lead for Productivity & Skills
Julie Nugent	Director of Skills & Productivity WMCA
Lowell Williams	Chair of Colleges of West Midlands
Kirston Nelsom	Lead for Directors of Education
Anica Goodwin	Tamworth Borough Council
Professor Philip Plowden	West Midlands Universities
Helene Dearn	Department for Work and Pensions
Marion Plant	Coventry & Warwickshire LEP
Tim Pile	GBSLEP
Profession Nazira Karodia	Black Country LEP
Rob Colbourne	AELP
Aaron Reid	Chair of Construction Skills Taskforce
Marc Romain	Business, Professional & Financial Services
Ron Lee	Chair of Automotive Skills Taskforce
Matt Jones	Chair of Digital Skills Partnership

## **In attendance:**

Clare Hatton	West Midlands Combined Authority
Jose Lopes	West Midlands Combined Authority
Sophie Thompson	West Midlands Combined Authority
Tatum Matharu	West Midlands Combined Authority

## **1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Lesley Hagger, Nick Abell, Paul Kett, Ben Coates, Karen Riley, Nick Francis and Councillor Kevin Matton.

The Director of Skills and Productivity informed members of a new sub-group of this Board; the COVID Response Jobs and Skills Delivery Board, chaired by Councillor Ian Brookfield. The implementation of this board sought to respond to the economic impact of the COVID 19 pandemic. Members considered and noted new the board.

Resolved:

- (1) The new board be noted.

**2. Minutes – 22 May 2019**

The board considered the minutes of its meeting held on 20 January 2020.

Resolved:

- (1) That the minutes be noted.

**3. Regional Skills Priorities**

The board received a presentation from both the Director of Skills and Productivity and the Head of Skills Delivery of the regional skills priorities following the key changes seen through the COVID-19 pandemic, the progress made Pre-COVID19 as well as the challenges and the progress against the Regional Skills Plan. The Head of Skills Delivery went on to provide the board with information on how the pandemic had hit the region the hardest in terms of youth unemployment, exacerbation of inequalities and future uncertainties relating to furlough and Brexit.

The Director of Skills and Productivity shared information on the regions skills priorities following the COVID-19 pandemic and the response to support provided for young people, getting the West Midlands back to work and future skills, future jobs and new opportunities for funding to support level 3/4 retraining. The board was also informed on the progress made on the Adult Education Budget priorities for 2019/20 and following the COVID-19 pandemic the new 2020/21 priorities to ensure that all residents were supported and ensure a broad adult offer remains.

Action:

- (1) The presentation to be shared with members.

Resolved:

- (1) The presentation be noted.

**4. Update on Impact of COVID on Schools**

Kirston Nelson provided a brief overview of the position from an education perspective whilst recognising the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the majority of provisions focused on remote working it was recognised that face to face learning brought better engagement. In terms of attendance the regions data was in line with national statistics. Kirston expressed concern over 16 – 17 year old NEETS in relation to being able to be able to retain them within the current provisions. There continues to be pressures on FE and school's system with the reintroduction of OFSTED inspections.

**5. Update on Impact of COVID on Colleges**

Marion Plant shared as well as understanding demand the need to understand the eco-system reacting to the demand. In terms of colleges it was noted that the experience had been mixed but the collaboration had been positive. She highlighted that FE establishments had gained an increased confidence in digital competence and remote learning. She noted that challenges related to maintaining COVID-19 secure establishments and disrupted learning and attendance.

## **6. Update on Impact of COVID on Universities**

Philip Plowden provided an overview from a Universities perspective; it was recognised that majority of learner continue to access courses from home online, however digital poverty had been increased therefore education establishments remained opened in a secure manor. Future return of students to Universities required testing systems being implemented.

Action:

- (1) Future board meetings to have a more substantive item on the role of universities on regional skills.

## **7. Update from Employer Taskforces**

The Chair of the Construction taskforce informed the board that real progress had been made in delivery of Gateway with 44% of residents within the region trained and now progressing to employment and the AEB continue to deliver outcomes but with a 12% progression to employment, therefore it was recognised to deliver AEB through the Gateway model. In regard to looking forward the offer will be extended to employees including apprenticeships and in employment training.

The Chair of the Digital Skills Partnership provided the board with a brief overview of the work undertaken by the taskforce. Lots of achievements were recognised in terms of being the first in the country to deliver significant volumes of retraining through bootcamps and developing new provisions to meeting employer requirements. The £5million digital retraining fund had been positive with a 55% increase into jobs or career progression opportunities. In terms of looking forward the taskforce will continue to secure additional funding to continue digital skills retraining and support digital inclusion.

The Chair of the Automotive Taskforce informed the board of the challenges seen within the automotive industry following the COVID-19 pandemic but also the uncertainties Brexit brought, therefore it was noted that there had been a reduction in annual car production by 33% and sales by 50% impacting jobs across the sector. In order to improve and grow jobs in the sector for the future, workstreams had been developed with a focus of electrification, battery manufacturing and digital platforms.

The chair of the Business, Professional and Financial Services provided that from a sector perspective there had been a mixed impact across the sector, with the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating requirements for greater knowledge based and digital skills and capabilities. It was recognised that consideration need to be taken on future working arrangement as this may change.

Tim Pile queries as to whether future taskforces at other targeted sectors would be development and implemented as he felt they were useful and beneficial in understanding key challenges. The Director of Productivity and Skills confirmed that the team were keen to work through existing taskforces before developing future taskforces and future updates of other sectors will be brought back to this meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) That the update be noted.

Action:

(1) Future boards to include updates from other LIS Sectors.

**8. Commonwealth Games Update**

The board received a presentation from the Business Engagement Programmes Manager who provided an overview of the Commonwealth Games workstream. It is hoped that the opportunities provided by the Commonwealth Games and the Jobs and Skills Academy aimed as a springboard to progression post the games. Work being undertaken focused on reaching those hardest hit groups by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tim Pile recognised that although the Commonwealth Games was only a two week event consideration needed to be taken on the future opportunities the games posed. It was noted that as capacity is built within the team further work would be undertaken to develop this.

Resolved:

(1) That the update be noted.

**9. Department for Education Update**

No update was provided from the representative as apologies were given.

**10. Department for Work and Pensions Update**

Helene Dearn provided an overview from a Department for Work Pensions perspective, it was noted that across the West Midlands there had been an increase in universal credit claimants with the sole priority ensuring claimant are paid on time. The organisation continue to ensure a service of delivery continues in a secure environment, being accessible for face to face contact but changing the culture of service delivery was also recognised.

**11. Cities and Local Growth Unit**

No update was provided from the representative as apologies were given.

**12. Agenda Items for Next Meeting**

It was noted that an update will be provided on skills capital.

**13. Any Other Business**

There were no items of any other business.

**Date of the Next Meeting**

Monday 24 May 2021