



West Midlands  
Combined Authority

## Skills Advisory Board

**Date:** Monday 9 January 2023  
**Time:** 10.30am  
**Location:** Microsoft Teams

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### Attendees

Councillor George Duggins (Chair)	WMCA Portfolio Lead for Skills & Productivity
Dr Fiona Aldridge	West Midlands Combined Authority
Julian Beer	Birmingham City University
Councillor Christopher Burden	City of Wolverhampton Council
Corin Crane	Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce
Rachel Egan	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
David Gaughan	West Midlands Combined Authority
Clare Hatton	West Midlands Combined Authority
Michael Jarrett	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Mike Lewis	West Midlands Combined Authority
Kirston Nelson	Coventry City Council
Dr Julie Nugent	West Midlands Combined Authority
Julie Obada	City of Wolverhampton Council
Miriam O'Leary	Colleges West Midlands
Carmen Pardavilla	Department for Work & Pensions
Marion Plant	North Warwickshire & Leicestershire College
Matthew Pointon	TUC
Darren Priest	Department for Work and Pensions
Councillor Kindy Sandhu	Coventry City Council
Tim Steele	University of Wolverhampton
Lowell Williams	Colleges West Midlands

### 1. Introductions / Notes and Actions of Last Meeting

Apologies were received from: Nick Page (Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council), Helene Dearn (Department for Works and Pensions), Councillor Ian Brookfield (City of Wolverhampton Council), Anica Goodwin (Tamworth Borough Council), Matt Jones (ParentPay), Marc Romain (Barclays), Ron Lee (Ron Lee Consulting), Tim Pile (North Warwickshire and Leicestershire College) and Councillor Brigid Jones (Birmingham City Council)

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record. The Chair noted that the actions arising from that meeting were to be addressed as part of item 3.

## 2. **Setting the Scene: Local Labour Market**

The Board received a presentation from Dr Fiona Aldridge, Head of Insight & Intelligence, outlining the latest local labour market position for the region. She explained that much of the current outlook is down to national and international factors. Further work is being undertaken, to understand in more detail the implications for skills provision in the region.

Rachel Egan queried whether other data could be sourced to help policy leads gain better insight into the causes of economic inactivity, as this would help focus how resources like the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is used. Dr Fiona Aldridge confirmed that the Insight Team uses publicly available data and agreed that it is key to work with local stakeholders such as Local Authorities and DWP who can provide more granular data and insight into the challenges facing the region. Councillor Kindy Sandhu also queried the availability of employment data relating to women, people with disabilities, BME and those impacted by Covid. Dr Fiona Aldridge acknowledged that the data presented was high level, but that further analysis is undertaken by particular demographics. Julie Obada flagged that Wolverhampton Council is using Experian data to look at houses with disposable income across the LA Area, this is helping to assess the impact of the cost-of-living crisis in Wolverhampton. She also mentioned that the Council was working with DWP to access specific data sets and would be happy to engage with the WMCA on this. Councillor Christopher Burden highlighted that more needed to be done to support the LGBT community in the region, as data indicated that the West Midlands is lagging behind other regions in supporting LGBT employers and employees.

**ACTION:** For the WMCA's and Wolverhampton Insight Teams to meet and share data that will enable a better understanding of labour market challenges.

## 3. **Careers Strategy**

The Board received an update from Clare Hatton, Director of Employment & Skills and Kirston Nelson, Chief Partnerships Officer & Director of Education and Skills on this item. The update outlined the ambition for an all-age careers offer, provided the latest position on the devolution asks of Government in respect of careers provision and an update on the transition of the Careers Hub function from LEPs to the WMCA and local authorities on a hub and spoke model.

Kirston Nelson spoke on behalf of the West Midlands Education Skills Partnership, sharing that the current careers advice approach had been inconsistent for the region, and would welcome the concept of a more place-based approach ensuring better integration, with more local intelligence being shared as well as better local relationships being formed. She also highlighted the need to focus on primary education to build a workforce for the future.

Julie Obada expressed her commitment to the careers strategy. She also explained policy leads needed to understand the implications of the Government announcements on the new statutory duty for schools. Michael Jarret also explained that Sandwell LA was currently engaging with DfE on educational priorities for the Borough.

Marion Plant shared her frustration on the lack of information available for parents, teachers and young people. She stated that the careers strategy provided a new opportunity to create some clear materials around the journey from school to employment and the opportunities available after training. Clare Hatton then stated that there is an opportunity to do this jointly across the region and also to make sure that young people are signposted to national and global opportunities to match their ambitions. Lowell Williams emphasised Marion's point and asked if Colleges West Midlands could coordinate the collection of skills training information.

**ACTION:** WMCA to further explore how Colleges West Midlands can support the collection of skills training information.

#### **4. Local Skills Improvement Plan**

Corin Crane, Chief Executive, Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce provided an overview of the West Midlands & Warwickshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIPs), along with a summary of the sectoral focus and key activities, a timetable for completion and the role of the WMCA in accordance with the statutory guidance. He outlined the three tier governance structure, which is an Employer Board, an operational steering group and working with existing skills structures across the region. David Gaughan, Head of Employer Services presented the WMCA's perspective on the LSIP and explained the role the CA will have throughout the process. He emphasised the need to ensure LSIP research accelerates and doesn't duplicate what is already known. He then expanded on the WMCA's role within LSIPs, including engaging with the Secretary of State and how the CA will respond to the LSIPs research findings.

Councillor Kindy Sandhu commented on the importance of companies been able to understand what skills they need to grow, and the need for those contributing to the LSIP research from business to be well informed on that need. Corin explained that this is all being factored into the LSIP work.

Marion Plant highlighted that the East Midlands was also developing a Local Skills Improvement Plan and was keen to understand what engagement had taken place. Corin Crane confirmed that discussions regarding Local Skills Improvement Plans were taking place at a national level along with good partnership work with relevant individuals from the East Midlands.

Rachel Egan queried whether the NHS are being engaged as employers. Corin Crane explained that this was a challenge and asked for support in doing this. Rachel Egan agreed to support this. Dr. Julie Nugent recommended an offline conversation to discuss which local businesses are being contacted to avoid duplication.

**ACTION:** Rachel Egan and Corin Crane to work together on garnering more engagement from the NHS.

Julian Beer, asked for Corin Crane to engage with the Innovation Board as part of the LSIPs work. Dr Julie Nugent provided assurance that work is taking place to join up the work of the LSIP with that of the Innovation Board.

**5. Plan for Growth**

The Board received a presentation from Dr Fiona Aldridge, Head of Insight & Intelligence. She provided the background to the strategy, explored the role of technical skills as a key driver of growth and the skills implications of the strategy. She then led a discussion on how to collaboratively work together to create a stronger technical skills offer at levels 4/5 to support delivery of the Plan for Growth.

Lowell Williams felt that colleges would respond positively to developing capacity in the areas highlighted. He also said that consideration was required in terms of engagement with employers, as well as developing a network of highly technical specialist facilities. Michael Nichols said there are merits to looking at regional technical infrastructure which already exists, agreeing with the points made by Lowell Williams.

**6. Any Other Business**

There were no further items for discussion. The Chair confirmed that the date of the next meeting would be confirmed in due course to members.