

West of England LEP Board Board Meeting

Tuesday, 9 March 2021, 9.00 am
Virtual Meeting

Prof Steve West (Chair)
Katharine Finn (Vice-Chair)
Christopher Grier
Neil Douglas
Dick Penny
David Brown
Jon Reynolds
Mohammed Saddiq
Margot Day
Heather Cooper
Joanne Rumley
Zoe Metcalfe
Natasha Swinscoe
Richard Bonner
Sue Rigby
Mayor Tim Bowles
Cllr Dine Romero
Mayor Marvin Rees
Cllr Toby Savage
Cllr Donald Davies

West of England LEP
PwC
Airbus
Viper Innovations
Independent Consultant
The Bristol Port Company
GDS Digital
Wessex Water
Buro Happold
Hargreaves Lansdown
Foot Anstey
ValueSwift
Academic Health Science Network
Arcadis
Bath Spa University
West of England Combined Authority
Bath and North East Somerset
Bristol City Council
South Gloucestershire
North Somerset Council

AGENDA

	Subject	Presenting	Pages
1.	Welcome and apologies <i>Apologies have been received from Jon Reynolds and Cllr Don Davies</i>	Steve West	
2.	Queen's Awards for Enterprise and for Voluntary Service	Lord Lieutenant Peaches Golding [20 mins]	3 - 4
3.	Minutes of the meeting of 20 January 2021 To approve minutes from the previous meeting.	Steve West	5 - 8
4.	Declaration of Interest <i>All Board members have a responsibility to treat all proposals/projects equally and impartially and must therefore declare whether they or their organisation has either a direct or indirect interest in any of the projects to be considered by the Board.</i>	Steve West	

	Items for discussion		
5.	Phase Two Recovery <i>The LEP Board to consider workstream 1, What is the future for town and city centres and how will places be used in the future?</i>	Jess Lee [25 mins]	9 - 12
6.	Any Other Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Freeport Bid Update</i> 	All	
	Items for information		
7.	Reports on Sub-Groups <i>To provide the LEP Board with a summary on the progress of organisational sub groups.</i>		13 - 18



Queen's Awards for Enterprise and for Voluntary Service

Queen's Awards for Enterprise

Why apply for an Award?

The Queen's Awards for Enterprise are

- a badge of recognition of an outstanding British brand: a "royal seal of approval" as an exceptional UK business, now including Social Enterprises (see below). Queen's Awards for Enterprise are the highest official awards for UK businesses
- a statement that what the business does is genuinely distinctive in its market-place, marking out the business above and beyond its competition. The Award is likely to increase sales and growth: for example the great majority of winners in the International Trade category have attributed increased sales directly to winning the Award
- a very good promotional tool, with strong media and broader PR potential. With the Awards a business has the right to fly the Queen's Award flag at its main office and to use the QA emblem on its marketing materials
- a boost to staff morale and a good reason to celebrate: the Awards are usually presented by the Lord Lieutenant at the premises of the winners, and representatives of the winning businesses are invited to a Royal reception
- a significant help in the recruitment of new staff: Award winners confirm that the prestige of the Award enhances the status of the business in the recruitment market at all levels.

Each Award category has additional entry criteria.

The Queen's Awards for Enterprise are valid for 5 years.

What are the categories of Queen's Awards for Enterprise?

The Queen's Awards for Enterprise have four categories, namely for

- innovation
- international Trade
- sustainable development (based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals)
- promoting opportunity through social mobility

Who can apply for a Queen's Award for Enterprise?

Any business, social enterprise or non-profit organisation can apply for any of the categories.

To be eligible for an Enterprise award the organisation must be based in the UK, have at least two full-time employees (or full-time equivalents), file its company tax returns with HMRC, be a self-contained organisation that markets its own products or services under its own management, and demonstrate a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility. Although some very large businesses have achieved high profile for having won a Queen's Award, most of the award winners are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

The applications process

An application form is available online. It is quite detailed and requires some investment of time to complete. Applications must be submitted between May and September each year. Shortlisted organisations are notified in October, and in November these shortlisted organisations must submit verified commercial figures. The winners are notified in March and are officially announced in April.



Queen's Awards for Voluntary Service

Why apply for a Voluntary Service Award?

The Queen's Awards for Voluntary Service are

- an acknowledgement of the excellence of the organisation in encouraging volunteer participation in the activities of the organisation, in training its volunteers and in managing its volunteer programme. They are the highest award given to volunteer groups across the UK
- a useful statement of the organisation's focus on volunteers, thereby strengthening the organisation's attractiveness in its recruitment of volunteers
- a mark that the work of the organisation, through its volunteers, is distinctive in relation to other organisations active in the same or similar fields
- a boost to the morale of the whole organisation, including its volunteers but also those others who work in the organisation who may have developed the volunteering programme
- a helpful support in fundraising and in dealings with others: donors, charitable foundations and others recognise the Award as one signifying particular distinction and excellence.

The Queen's Awards for Voluntary Service are valid without time restriction.

Who can apply for a Queen's Award for Voluntary Service?

Applicants for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service are likely to be non-profit organisations, but any business or social enterprise can apply which has a strong volunteer component.

To be eligible for a Voluntary Service award the organisation must comprise a minimum of two people. It should have been operating with an exceptional group of volunteers for at least three years, and its volunteers should have taken the initiative to create, lead and drive forward the work of the organisation in a way that is truly distinctive and excellent. The Voluntary Service award is judged on the quality of the volunteers' contribution to the work of the organisation and on the quality of the volunteer support programme. The Award is not judged on the quality of the organisation itself or on what it actually does.

The applications process

A nomination form is available online. The "nominator" must be independent of the volunteer group being nominated but should have good knowledge of the volunteer group's work. The nomination must be submitted with two letters of support from people who are also independent of the organisation. The form must be submitted from April, with a closing date in September. Nominations are reviewed by local assessment panels: this is a detailed review of all aspects of the organisation's volunteer support, including its policies and processes for volunteers, and is normally carried out by two Deputy Lieutenants coordinated by the Lord Lieutenant. The assessment panels decide on the ones to be sent to the National Awards Committee. This Committee makes its recommendations to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which sends a final list to the Queen for approval. Winners are announced in early June.

West of England West of England LEP Board

Wednesday, 20 January 2021, 9:30am
Meeting held “virtually” via Zoom

Present:

Prof Steve West, West of England LEP (Chair)
Katharine Finn, PwC
Neil Douglas, Viper Innovations
Dick Penny, Independent Consultant
David Brown, The Bristol Port Company
Jon Reynolds, GDS Digital
Mohammed Saddiq, Wessex Water

Joanne Rumley, Foot Anstey
Margot Day, Buro Happold

Officers In Attendance:

Patricia Greer, Chief Executive
Stephen Bashford, WECA (item 4)
Malcolm Coe & Pete Davis, WECA (item 5) Lynda
Bird, WECA (item 6)
Menna Davies & Alison Barrat, WECA (item 7)
Jess Lee, WECA
Melissa Houston, WECA
Tim Milgate, WECA

Also Present:

Richard Gutsell, Atkins (Consultants) (Item 4 only)

Apologies:

Christopher Grier, Airbus
Natasha Swinscoe, Academic Health Science
Network

Heather Cooper, Hargreaves Lansdown
Zoe Metcalfe, ValueSwift
Richard Bonner, Arcadis
Sue Rigby, Bath Spa University
Mayor Tim Bowles, West of England Combined
Authority
Cllr Dine Romero, Bath and North East Somerset
Cllr Donald Davies, North Somerset Council

Susan Hayter, Bath & North East Somerset
James Cooke, South Glos Council
Dave Perry, Chief Executive, South Glos Council
Ben Moseley, Bristol City Council

Mayor Marvin Rees, Bristol City Council
Cllr Toby Savage, South Gloucestershire

Minutes

		Action
1	Welcome and apologies The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting and welcomed Professor Sue Rigby to the Board.	
2	Minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2020 The minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2020 were agreed as a correct record.	
3	Declarations of Interest The Chair reminded Board members that they had a responsibility to treat all proposals/projects equally and impartially and must therefore declare whether they or their organisation had either a direct or indirect interest in any of the projects to be considered by the Board.	

	<p>The Chair stated that his employer the University of the West of England (UWE) had been in receipt of growth fund funding in the past. There were no further declarations of interest.</p>	
	Items for Discussion	
4	<p>Freeport bid</p> <p>Stephen Bashford, Director of Business and Skills introduced a discussion on the Freeport bid. Richard Gutsell from Atkins, the appointed consultants, gave an update on the process undertaken to develop a Freeport bid, including multi-criteria technical analysis and discussions with key stakeholders to develop a shortlist of preferred site configurations.</p> <p>A sub-group of the LEP Board has been working with WECA and Atkins. They endorsed the rigorous process undertaken to date. They noted that this will be a competitive process and a successful bid will bring clear benefits to the region by linking to our inward investment strategy and building on our strengths. The group endorsed the proposals.</p> <p>In discussion Members of the LEP Board endorsed the process undertaken and raised the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A real opportunity to build on strengths of innovation, technology and digital - Opportunity to ensure that our skills agenda will provide opportunities for our residents - The proposals are aligned with existing housing and transport facilities and well placed to align with future changes to work/travel patterns as we move out of the pandemic - Significant opportunities to attract other companies to the region and for regeneration - Need to ensure we address the balance of manufacturing and the green agenda - Need to stress our unique selling point in terms of key markets of import/export, drawing on International Market Prioritisation work - Western Gateway are supportive of Freeports in the WG area and will support both this and any separate submissions to the Welsh process <p>Agreed:</p> <p>(1) That the LEP Board agreed that West of England+ Freeport bid (Bristol Port – Severnside – J21 Enterprise Area and Gravity) be submitted on or before 5 February 2021</p> <p>(2) That the supporting narrative be further strengthened in line with comments received.</p>	
5	<p>Existing and Future Funding</p> <p>Malcolm Coe and Pete Davies gave a summary of existing and future funding for the LEP and West of England Combined Authority. Board Members considered an accompanying report on the Local Growth Fund and Getting Building Fund .</p> <p>The following points were raised in discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It was confirmed that there would be no monies returned to government as all funds were allocated 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Certainty has been requested from Government regarding future funding and discussions continued with both ministers, civil servants and other regional Mayors through the M9 group • The Chair requested that regional narrative on challenges and opportunities is refined to reflect the impact of the covid pandemic. Members to advise if they would like to be involved. <p>Agreed:</p> <p>(1) That the present and future funding arrangements be noted; (2) Members to advise if they would like to support this activity.</p>	
	Items for Information	
6	<p>LEP Delivery Plan</p> <p>Lynda Bird, Head of Performance, Planning & Projects updated Members on arrangements for agreeing the annual LEP Report and Delivery Plan which will go to WECA and Joint Committee on 29 January with the Business Plan before being submitted to the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.</p> <p>Agreed: That the arrangements for submitting the LEP End of Year Report and Delivery Plan to BEIS be noted.</p>	
7	<p>Communications Update</p> <p>Menna Davies, Head of Communications and Alison Barrat, Marketing Manager, updated Members on a new communications campaign to be launched on Monday 25 January 2021 with the aim of ensuring that local residents and businesses could access existing support, together with increased visibility of the Authority's work and services.</p> <p>The LEP Board were asked for their assistance in increasing awareness of this social media campaign.</p> <p>In discussion Members noted that disadvantaged communities may not think that the messages were aimed at them, or may lack digital access. It was confirmed that messaging would be tailored to reach as many communities as possible.</p> <p>Agreed: That the communications campaign launch planned for 25 January 2021 be noted.</p>	
8	<p>Board membership update</p> <p>The Chair gave an update on the membership of the West of England LEP Board. The term for a number of members was due for renewal at the end of January but given the ongoing challenges the Chair had written to formally offer an extension to their term on the LEP Board until Summer 2021 to ensure continuity during this challenging period. The Chair confirmed that all had accepted the offer to remain on the Board and expressed sincere thanks to them. He confirmed that a recruitment plan will be developed to ensure diversity of membership.</p>	
9	<p>Reports for the Joint meeting - West of England Combined Authority Committee and West of England Joint Committee</p> <p>The Chair noted that the reports for the Joint Meeting of the West of England Combined Authority and West of England Joint Committee had been published</p>	

	<p>the previous day. Board members were invited to comment on the reports and pass their comments to Steve West or Patricia Greer prior to the Chair's attendance at that meeting.</p> <p>Agreed:</p> <p>(1) That any comments LEP Board members may have on the reports to be considered by the Joint Meeting of the West of England Combined Authority and West of England Joint Committee at its meeting on 29 January 2021 be passed to the Chair and/or Chief Executive directly;</p> <p>(2) That those comments be taken into considering during the Chair Steve West's submission to that meeting.</p>	
10	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>The Chair noted the ongoing need to protect the NHS as we move through this current lockdown. He invited LEP Board members to comment on the current situation. The following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst businesses were not complacent, certain sectors of the economy remained strong in January 2021, although it was acknowledged that some other sectors such as hospitality continued to struggle with lockdown restrictions; • Brexit had caused some extra bureaucracy but to date providing the additional information had been manageable; However, there were issues around "settled status" of some employees post-Brexit; • Financial Services had offered volunteering opportunities for staff to support the NHS. • In response to a question regarding whether businesses were claiming the additional support available to them through local authorities, an update will be brought to the next business briefing • It was requested that an update on Mass Transit proposals be brought to the next meeting. 	
	The next Full Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, 9 March 2021, 10.00 am	

**West of England Local Enterprise Partnership
Board meeting – 9th March 2021**

Recovery phase 2: future of town and city centres

Purpose of the report

1. To provide the LEP Board with an update on the work underway on phase 2 recovery planning.
2. To support the Board's consideration of workstream 1, future of town and city centres, and how the Board would like to ensure the voice of business is reflected.

Recommendation

The LEP Board are asked to consider the specific questions on workstream 1, 'what is the future for **town and city centres** and how will places be used in the future?' and to discuss the following issues:

- Beyond the three key drivers of change identified below, are there other driving forces that are impacting on our towns/city centres?
- To what extent are businesses in the West of England planning for these changes? (eg hybrid working etc.)
- What do these mean for businesses and employers in the West of England?
- What makes the West of England an attractive place to do business and how do our towns and cities contribute to that?
 - What features do employers want to see in towns/cities in the future?
- What are the implications for businesses of emerging preferences for 'staying local'?

Background

Recovery Phase 1

3. Our regional recovery plan was published in October 2020. This plan set out immediate actions to support people and businesses directly impacted by the economic challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic. Actions sit alongside broader national and local activity to tackle the impact of the virus.
4. To deliver the plan, existing programmes and plans across the region have been refocused, and a regional recovery fund has been established – funding a range of activity, including supporting people to reskill, supporting small businesses, and high street renewal.

Recovery Phase 2

5. The conclusions of the recovery plan highlighted a range of medium-term challenges to our regional economy as a result of Covid. Issues such as changing models of work, increased reliance on digitally enabled business models, etc. On some issues, the pandemic has sped up pre-existing areas of change, on others, new challenges have emerged. Phase 2 of our recovery work will consider these medium-term challenges. The conclusions of this phase will serve as a bridge between our immediate action to stabilise the economy and getting the region back on track to deliver the Local Industrial Strategy. The conclusions of this work will influence our approach to the Spending Review and broader engagement with Government on opportunities to strengthen our regional recovery.
6. There are three broad drivers of change that Covid has brought to our regional economy:
 - Social distancing, restrictions and concerns for health
 - Increase in home/remote working
 - Acceleration of digitisation/ecommerce
7. These drivers have influenced changes in behaviour during the pandemic, some of which may sustain and some of which has accelerated existing evolutions in the way we live, work and travel. The drivers of change will have impacts across our regional economy, raising a series of questions to explore as we plan for the future.
 - i. What is the future for **town and city centres** and how will places be used in the future?
 - ii. How can we **support people to move swiftly back into work and young people to progress?**
 - iii. How can we **support businesses and sectors to harness and capitalise on innovations** Covid has required?
 - iv. What are the **climate change implications of the 'new normal'**? How can the opportunities be maximised and challenges mitigated? (**1: Transport**)
 - v. What are the **climate change implications of the 'new normal'**? How can the opportunities be maximised and challenges mitigated? (**2: Energy and wider opportunities**)
 - vi. **How have communities been impacted** and how do we support recovery in different areas?
8. The next steps for each of these workstreams is set out at annex 1.
9. The LEP Board are invited to focus on the first of these questions and to consider what themes we need to reflect in this work from the perspective of local employers of all sizes, anchor institutions and other groups represented on the LEP Board.
10. The role of the business community will be central to the future of the region's town and city centres and the LEP Board are invited to consider the following questions:

- Beyond the three key drivers of change identified above, are there other driving forces that are impacting on our towns/city centres?
 - To what extent are businesses in the West of England planning for these changes (e.g. hybrid working etc.)
 - What do these mean for businesses and employers in the West of England?
 - What makes the West of England an attractive place to do business and how do our towns and cities contribute to that?
 - i. What features do employers want to see in towns/cities in the future?
 - What are the implications for businesses of emerging preferences for 'staying local'?
11. Officers will highlight the existing activity across the region and will present the key pieces of evidence to support the discussion.

Annex 1

Key question	Next Steps
What is the future for town and city centres and how will places be used in the future?	Working group including UAs, anchor institutions, business community to help answer key questions
How can we support people to move swiftly back into work and young people to progress?	Ask Skills Advisory Panel to ensure key questions are taken into consideration as work progresses
How can we support businesses and sectors to harness and capitalise on innovations Covid has required?	LEP Board convene discussion with broad sector representation to understand longer term implications and opportunities of drivers of change for delivery of the LIS
What are the climate change implications of the ‘new normal’? How can the opportunities be maximised and challenges mitigated? (1: Transport)	Ensure key questions are taken into consideration in development of infrastructure priorities, through infrastructure advisory boards
What are the climate change implications of the ‘new normal’? How can the opportunities be maximised and challenges mitigated? (2: Energy and wider opportunities)	Reflect key questions in implementation of Climate Emergency Action Plan and Green Infrastructure Strategy
How have communities been impacted and how do we support recovery in different areas?	Use data to develop understanding of where impacts have been most acute – identifying whether communities / places have been hard hit that we have not previously focused on Review WECA activities in light of analysis to identify gaps

**West of England Local Enterprise Partnership
Board meeting – Tuesday 9 March 2021**

Sub Groups Summary

Purpose of the report

1. To provide the LEP Board with a summary on the progress of organisational sub groups.

Business Insights Panel [Date of late meeting 18th February 2021]

Overview

The Business Insights Panel was established last April following the introduction of the first national C-19 lockdown. It brings together leaders from key business support, network and finance organisations to gather intelligence, align efforts and ensure the region's firms get the support they need.

Chair: Tim Bowles

Feedback from latest meeting

- Generally, the picture remains mixed across the regional economy but there are some positive signs starting to emerge. Key dates for businesses being 22nd Feb PM roadmap announcement and Budget on 3rd March.
- ICAEW shared its Business Confidence Monitor (covering 5,000 members nationwide) which showed a marked improvement in business sentiment and anticipation of a relatively quick recovery. However, South West businesses were reporting 0.7% reduction in headcount and some persistent skills gaps.
- Looking forward, sales and exports are expected to rise over the next quarter. Capital investment and R&D growth being reported too. Tentative signs of recovery.
- The Panel reflected that much of the Covid-19 financial support, like Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Schemes (CBILs) is now a year old, and banking sector reaching out to customers to better understand impact of lockdown '3.0' and what is needed going forward.
- Panel members seeing continued increase in entrepreneurship and start-up activity.
- A number of panel members referenced the Budget and issue of reversal of VAT charge for construction sector, particularly affecting supply chain and liquidity. One to watch.
- Tourism and Hospitality still facing significant pressures. Consumer confidence has dropped in the latest sentiment tracker delivered at the end of January. Very much waiting on PM announcement.

Taskforce – Regional Recovery Programme [Date of last meeting: 24.02.21]

Overview

The West of England Recovery Taskforce was set up to drive the West of England's economic recovery following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Led by Regional Mayor, Tim Bowles, this is a partnership between the West of England Combined Authority, the LEP, business, universities and the region's councils.

Chair: Tim Bowles

Feedback from latest meeting

This was the final meeting of the West of England Regional Recovery Taskforce, which has been meeting since May 2020 to feedback on the impact of restrictions and the take up of national and regional support to help inform and shape our response to the pandemic.

The Taskforce has put together a Regional Recovery Plan which outlines how we will harness our region's creativity and diversity to protect and secure jobs, while building back greener and creating opportunities for all residents to share in the recovery. The plan was agreed in October 2020 and activities from the plan have now been incorporated into the WECA Business Plan for 2021.

Alongside the recovery plan, WECA committed £9.4m to support implementing the plan through specific interventions identified with the Taskforce. The following progress was highlighted:

Green Business Grants Programme is now open - providing energy efficiency improvements to buildings or business operations to small & medium enterprises.

Talent Retention Scheme will go live in April, providing a web-based platform to advertise employment opportunities to those businesses facing the prospect of making their staff redundant.

Small Business Grants will be launched shortly:

- Grants of between £1,500 and £6,000 will be available to support businesses from all sectors to adapt to challenges due to Covid-19.
- The grants can be used for activities that create jobs, new products and services or increases productivity.

Arrangements are being finalised for our Community Recovery Fund, Digital Skills Investment Programme and Culture & Creative Support together with our High Streets Renewal Catalyst Fund.

Tim Bowles extended his sincere thanks to the Taskforce Members for their work to support the regional recovery response and welcomed the continued involvement of Taskforce Members to share insights and expertise as we move forwards.

Skills Advisory Panel [Date of last meeting: 12th February 2021]

Overview

Government established Skills Advisory Panels (SAPs) to support Mayoral Combined Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships to fulfil their local leadership role in the skills system, by helping them understand their current and future skills needs, and labour market challenges. The West of England SAP convened by WECA has been meeting since February 2020 and has been a key mechanism to feed in understanding on the changing nature of skills needs and employment, particularly through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chaired: Chris Grier

Deputy Chair: Joanne Rumley

Membership Review

To ensure compliance with government guidelines, some recent changes have been made to the membership: Nigel Costley (SWTUC) and Poku Osei (Babbasa) have been invited to join the Panel; and HE and FE attendance will now attend on a rotational basis to allow each of the institutions to attend a SAP meeting to represent their sector respective.

Feedback from latest meeting

The SAP meeting in January was structured around updates from each sector on the labour market and skills impacts of Covid-19 and lockdown. The following was reported:

- Business West shared its latest quarterly economic survey
<https://www.businesswest.co.uk/resources/business-west-q4-quarterly-economic-survey-report>
- The **HE sector** has moved to blended learning which has had positive outcomes and led to some innovation in delivery. However, the pandemic is likely to leave a lasting negative impact on the sector with some concerns about student's wellbeing, especially for 1st years. There remains a risk to 2021-22 intake, particularly regarding levels of international students which has already deeply affected parts of the sector.
- The West of England **FE colleges** provided a joint statement. Positively, innovation in delivery to adapt to C-19 has worked well for many students, though the younger age group (16-17) are missing the social interaction. Underlying demand for education and training is stronger than ever, for adults as well as young people. However, there is difficulty in delivering where digital poverty exists and low-income families are struggling with connectivity and space to work. The impact on vocational HE learners not in a classroom has been significant. Loss of teaching time is approx. a third of the whole teaching year. For apprenticeships, breaks in learning may need to be considered and employers may not retain them. This will impact the longer-term skills pipeline.
- **Private training providers** also reported high levels of adaptation and innovation, but the learning that requires practical elements has been difficult or not assessed, which

has had an impact on provider payments. Independents can feel as though their learners are less well supported, e.g. Lateral flow tests, IT kit has not been offered to learners with independent training providers as they have been to FE/schools etc.

- For **Community learning**, providers have been quick to respond, providing individual support to many learners who are vulnerable. Difficult to access the most distanced learners as this needs face to face or community contact so there has been some shift in the learner profile. There have been some difficulties in digital poverty, but this should be much alleviated through the Digital Growth Fund. Families are struggling to engage where they need to support children during the day, so need to adapt hours around this and take a whole family approach.
- No exams will have a big impact on **schools** – government has committed to maintaining the 2020 grade levels for this year, which is good news for young people, but gaps in learning will persist. Public information and encouraging employers to understand what the gaps are will be essential. ‘Ed Tech’ is a potential game changer – more progress made in last few months than over years previously. Many learners more comfortable with remote learning.
- Much of **Voluntary & community** is heavily engaged in health and social care. Some growth through temporary funds and work, leasing property to house homeless...etc but noting a short-term response. Growing concern about funding for the future. Some small community groups may not survive, but these have vital role. Structural inequality is the issue, not just mental health alone. The former leads to the latter. Digital poverty is an issue in the community.
- **Health & care** – the latest surge of Covid-19 has had huge impact and there are a number of shortages across the wider sector, not only in frontline but in support roles which impact people returning home. There have been much higher levels of staff sickness and depletion of skills levels to then cover the amount of care needed. There has been a call to arms to try to meet the need. Increase in applications for roles and training, but issue is retention. International recruitment is a focus, but this comes with language training demand. Apprenticeships and traineeships, digital upskilling and new ways of working are all a core focus. Staff have had to widen their skills base quickly, in order to mobilise across the system.

Cultural Strategy Engagement Group [Date of last meeting: 15.02.21]

Overview

The purpose of the West of England Cultural Strategy Engagement Group is to act as an advisory group to support development of the West of England Cultural Strategy which will provide a regional framework for culture with a joint vision, objectives, measures and criteria for funding that will support economic growth. It includes representatives from WECA, the region's universities and local authorities.

In addition, with support from Arts Council England, the group has acted as a shadow body to progress the development of a West of England Cultural Compact. This will build on the existing strong partnership working across the region to create a new strategic partnership for the cultural sector which will set ambition for the impact of culture in the region and strategically connect the sector to the broader aspirations and priorities of our Local Industrial Strategy and Regional Recovery Plans.

The intention is to establish an interim Cultural Compact in April 2021, to build momentum and prove value, before a final launch of the Cultural Strategy in September.

Chair: Dick Penny

Feedback from latest meeting

- Group agreed process for starting with an interim Cultural Compact in April 2021, building to September launch of Cultural Strategy. WECA is in process of securing a new role to co-ordinate activity for the next six months.
- Group agreed a series of draft documents which had been developed to guide the work of the Compact e.g. Terms of Reference, task and roles, and framework for a number of policy sprints.
- Group received a presentation on the proposed £1m Cultural and Creative Business Support Programme, part of WECA's £9.4m regional recovery fund. The programme is aimed at SMEs working in the creative industries, including creative freelancers (sole traders and directors of limited companies), who require support as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was warmly welcomed.

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