

**West of England Local Enterprise Partnership
Board meeting – [1st October 2019]**

ESTABLISHING A WEST OF ENGLAND SKILLS ADVISORY PANEL

Purpose of the report

1. To set out a proposed approach to establishing a West of England Skills Advisory Panel, aligned with government's requirements, to oversee the strategic implementation of the Employment and Skills Plan.

Recommendation

2. To agree the overall approach to establishing the Skills Advisory Panel, including specifically:
 - Role of the Skills Advisory Panel as defined in par 10
 - Relationship with existing governance as described in par 11
 - Proposed membership of the Skills Advisory Panel and nomination of two LEP Board members (including the Chair)
 - Next steps to formally establish the Skills Advisory Panel

Background

3. In December 2018, Government issued guidance for the creation of Skills Advisory Panels (SAPs) to support Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to fulfil their local leadership role in the skills system, by helping them understand their current and future skills needs, and labour market challenges.
4. The guidance sets out that SAPs will be local partnerships aiming to strengthen the link between public and private sector employers, local authorities, colleges and universities. It recommends that, where existing employment and skills boards are functioning well, they will take on the SAP function (in addition to any other responsibilities they hold) rather than creating a new body.
5. Alongside these policy objectives, Government has also provided a clear view through the guidance on the makeup, complementarity, and role of the SAPs within each area.

Headline points include:

- SAPs must adequately reflect the economic geography of their LEP areas in their membership, including a good balance of employers, providers, public sector partners and the third sector.
- SAPs must also include membership from national agencies, including the local area leads for ESFA, Cities and Local Growth Unit, and Jobcentre Plus.

- SAPs should be no bigger than 15-20 formal members, though can include support and analytical members with observer status.
 - SAP Board members will be expected to be able to demonstrate clear knowledge of the skills needs of the economy and speak authoritatively on the topic. Board members collectively will also be able to understand financial and resources matters linked to skills provision.
 - In the first instance, SAPs will be advisory, shaping and guiding the content of the People strand of the LIS and wider skills prioritisation with partners. However, they will also have specific roles within T Level promotion, informing the Careers Service, and supporting ESFA, DfE and DWP in prioritisation activity.
6. Alongside guidance on the establishment of SAPs, Government also announced a one-off grant of £75,000 for each LEP to establish / reinforce SAP intelligence and analytical capability.

Current Position

7. In line with guidance and the emerging requirements of the LIS process, the West of England LEP/WECA, is now required to formally establish a SAP. This needs to be fully integrated within our wider governance structure and able to play a full role in shaping the implementation of LIS and Employment and Skills Plan (E&S Plan).
8. The West of England is in a strong position to do this following the recent development and publication of the E&S Plan. Indeed, a bespoke 'Skills Expert Group' was set up to help shape this and ensure the Plan was reflective of a range of stakeholder views and robust intelligence. The Expert Group will now be superseded by the SAP.
9. Regarding intelligence capacity, WECA has utilised SAP capacity funds to develop the evidence for the Local Industrial Strategy with specific technical capacity to support the E&S Plan. A significant evidence base was built up to underpin the LIS/E&S Plan and WECA's economic analysis unit, working with colleagues in the constituent UAs, will ensure this is a rich source of intelligence for the Skills Board, SAP and LEP.

Proposed way forward

ROLE OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND SAP

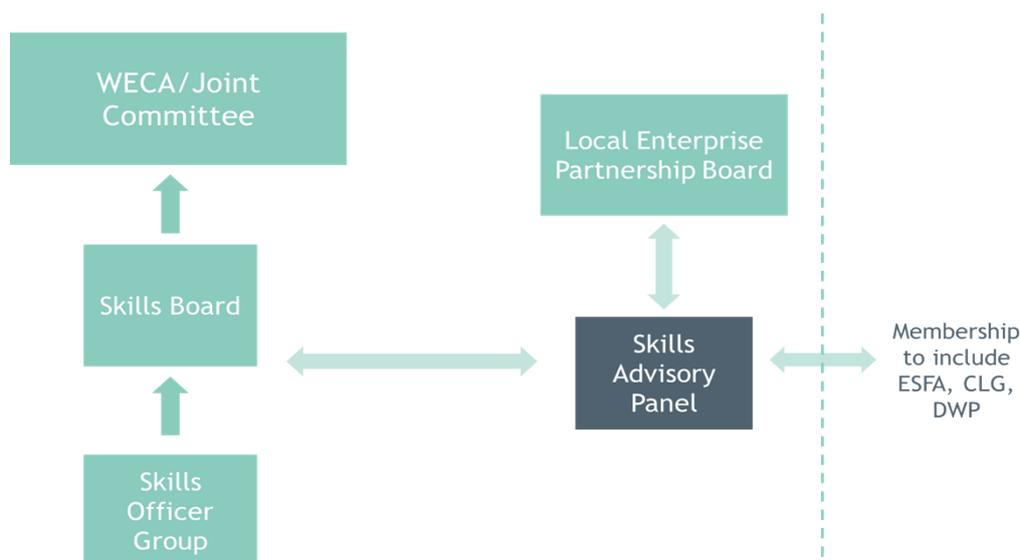
10. The purpose of the West of England SAP will be to oversee the strategic implementation of the LIS and supporting E&S Plan. In line with government guidance, it will do this by:
- Providing **strong leadership on skills prioritisation** within the West of England area, engaging with employers and providers and providing **skills advice to the LEP and WECA to shape delivery**.
 - Developing a clear understanding of **current and future skills needs** and the West of England labour market, including:
 - The development of a **robust shared evidence base** for the skills and labour market analysis, which identifies areas of needs and opportunity; and

- The development of a clear understanding of **existing provision** within the West of England, including the extent to which is addressing gaps.
- Acting as **co-ordinator** of local skills providers, and ensuring alignment of delivery against identified employment and skills needs.
- Working closely with **careers advisory services (including National Careers Service/Careers Hub)** to ensure learners are properly informed about local career routes and opportunities.
- Raising the profile of **apprenticeships and T Levels agendas** with local employers and providers.
- Advising where **skills and labour market resource should be directed**.
- Sharing **analysis and best practice** with partners, including Government and other SAPs, to improve overall efficiency within the skills landscape.

RELATIONSHIP WITH EXISTING GOVERNANCE

11. It is important that the new SAP is complementary to the existing regional governance. In theory, the SAP will facilitate more informed and evidence led decisions to ensure that delivery against the LIS and E&S Plan is grounded on real economic need. Figure 1 below sets out a simple schematic illustration for how the SAP will perform its role within the existing WECA governance.

FIGURE 1: WEST OF ENGLAND SAP & EXISTING GROUPS



NB other Regional Boards (Business, Transport, Housing and Planning) and LEP sub-groups removed to illustrate direct relationships with SAP; however, in practice information flows will need to work across all Boards

12. In effect, the SAP will be a ‘strategic advisor’ on employment and skills matters to the LEP Board, which will have strategic oversight of delivery of the LIS and its four thematic priorities.
13. It will also provide expert support to the Skills Board for its role in the “development, delivery and implementation of policies, strategies and schemes”. For example, recommendations on funding made to the Joint/WECA committee will seek a technical input from the SAP to ensure delivery is focussed on economic need and aligned with existing national, regional and local delivery.
14. Information and intelligence will need to flow freely between all Boards and Panels to ensure effective advice and decision making in implementing the LIS/E&S Plan. Timings of meetings will also need to be finely tuned to ensure smooth passage of recommendations and decisions.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SAP

15. LEPs were established as a partnership between business and local government, alongside other public, private and voluntary and community organisations. It is recommended, therefore, that membership of the SAP will be agreed by the LEP Board in accordance with government’s guidance for SAPs.
16. It is proposed that the Chair of the SAP will be an existing member of the LEP Board, appointed by the Board with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform the role. The Chair will formally report back to the LEP Board alongside other LIS thematic leads.
17. The proposed make-up of the SAP based around government guidance is set out in Figure 2 below. In addition to the above membership, the Board will also be attended by relevant observers and experts depending on the agenda.

FIGURE 2: PROPOSED SKILLS ADVISORY PANEL

Role/Representative	Organisation
Chair	LEP Board Member (private sector or provider)
Business	LEP Board Member (private sector or provider)
Business	Chamber of Commerce or FSB
Business	Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
Local Authority	West of England Combined Authority
Local Authority	West of England Unitary Authority
Provider	Higher Education Representative
Provider	Further Education Representative
Provider	Schools Representative
Provider Network	Training Provider Network Provider
Third Sector	Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise
Health Sector	Public Health England or Health Education England
Agency/Government	Employment and Skills Funding Agency
Agency/Government	Cities and Local Growth Unit Rep

Agency/Government	JobCentre Plus Representative
Trade Union	South West TUC
Diversity Champion	TBC

TERMS OF REFERENCE

18. Terms of reference will be developed in detail in due course in collaboration with appointed Chair and agreed by SAP; however, these are likely to include:

- **Meetings:** It is suggested that the SAP will meet six times a year to mirror Skills Board and LEP Board meetings. Meetings will be held at various locations across the West of England region.
- **Conflicts of Interests:** The SAP will often be involved in commenting on or advising on policy and/or funding recommendation. Conflicts of Interests will be managed in the same way as for the LEP Board.
- **Administration:** WECA officers will provide executive support to the SAP. Any changes to ToR or membership of the SAP to be determined by the LEP Board.

NEXT STEPS

19. Following agreement by LEP Board, it is suggested that the appointed Chair work with WECA's Head of Business & Skills (in consultation with UA Skills Leads) to assign individuals against the organisational groups highlighted above.

20. The Chair of the SAP will formally invite members to join the SAP with the aim of holding an inaugural meeting in late October 2019. A progress report will be presented to the LEP Board at its next meeting.

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