

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF OSB/SKILLS ADVISORY PANEL
JOINT MEETING WITH BUSINESS SUPPORT
Tuesday 7th March 2023
Microsoft TEAMS Virtual Meeting
4:00pm – 6:00pm
MEETING MINUTES**

PRESENT

NAME	POSITION AND ORGANISATION	MEMBERSHIP
OSB		
Iain Littlejohn	Director of Organisation Design and Change Management at Change Audit Ltd	Chair
Helen Hall	UK Recruitment & Partnerships Director, Oxford Brookes University	Member
Kate Berman	Director, Olamalu	Member
Richard Kennell	Chief Executive Officer, SOFEA	Member
Richard Byard	Director of Business Development, OxLEP	Member
Bernard Grenville-Jones	Managing Director, Activate Apprenticeships	Member
Eddy McDowall	Chief Executive, Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers	Member
Prof Ewart Keep	Director, Centre for Skills Knowledge & Organisational Performance, Oxford University	Member
Mark Vingoe	Chief Executive Officer, The Engineering Trust	Member
Joanna Hart	Director, Space Partnership	Member
Paul Jones	Apprenticeships Lead, Oxford Professional Education	Member
James Gilpin	DWP Oxfordshire Jobcentre Plus	Member's Deputy
Rob Curtis	Deputy Area Lead for Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, Areas and Analysis Directorate	Associate
Business Sub Group		
Su Copeland	Priddey Marketing	Member
Stephen Clarke	Inward Investment Group	Member
Peter Mols	Outside Ideas	Member
Tagore Ramoutar	IOD Oxfordshire SME & Start Up Ambassador	Member
Grant Hayward	OSEP	Member

IN ATTENDANCE

Joanna Birrell	LSIP Engagement Officer, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce	Speaker
Ant Parsons	ALP Synergy	Speaker
Sarah Marlow	Deputy Skills Hub Manager	OxLEP Skills
Dianne Hankin	Social Contract Programme Administrator	OxLEP Skills
Sebastian Johnson	Head of Innovation and Inward Investment, OxLEP	OxLEP Inward Investment

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

Alexander Brandham	Group Leader UK Apprentice Programmes, BMW	Member
Sally White	Sylo Beyond HR	Member
Sarah Jaycock	High Spec Composites	Member

Paul Roberts	Aspire Oxfordshire	Member
Steve Clarke	Inward Investment Group	Member
Rob Lewtas	DIT (Trade South East)	Member
Giles Orr	Oxford Brooks University	Member
Helen Brind	Growth Hub Manager	OxLEP Growth Hub
Sally Andreou	Skills Hub Manager	OxLEP Skills

PAPERS:

- Labour Market Information slide pack Feb 2023
- OxLEP Skills Board Focussed LMI – Net Zero, Green Skills & Future Skills Feb 2023

1	IL	<p>Welcome, apologies, members’ declarations of interest</p> <p>The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and introduced new members, deputising members and guests from the Business Support Subgroup. Apologies were noted. Meeting etiquette and protocols were highlighted, and attendees were advised that the meeting would be recorded for the purposes of minute taking.</p> <p>James Gilpin advised he was attending as Jo Lynch’s deputy.</p> <p>Declarations of Interest - Bernard Grenville-Jones, in his capacity as a member, declared his interests as Executive Director of Activate Learning and Managing Director of Activate Apprenticeships and Business School, and Chair of SOFEA.</p> <p>The chair reminded members to ensure declarations of interest were up to date. All members would be sent a new Declarations of Interest form to refresh the Board’s records. ACTION: DH</p>																				
2	IL	<p>Previous minutes and matters arising</p> <p>The minutes from the meeting of 26th November 2022 were approved.</p> <p>Previous meeting actions:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Details</th> <th>Who</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>• Independent training provider recruitment –members of the provider network to vote for a representative.</td> <td>SA/SP - closed</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Private sector employer representatives – proceed with recruitment.</td> <td>RB - closed</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Update regarding guidance of LSIPs feeding into SAP Boards</td> <td>SA - closed</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Seek clarity on who has been invited from OxLEP to the LSIP Advisory Panel and how many non-Chamber members.</td> <td>RB/SA/ GT - closed</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards – support social media posts by liking or sharing.</td> <td>All – closed</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Become mentors on the OxGROW platform and share the opportunity with colleagues and networks</td> <td>All - closed</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Template social media posts for Levy utilisation/pledging to be shared along with all Social Contract leaflets</td> <td>SM – C/F</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• ‘Opportunities for Oxfordshire Employers’ leaflet to be circulated</td> <td>SP - closed</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Circulate slides</td> <td>SP - closed</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Details	Who	• Independent training provider recruitment –members of the provider network to vote for a representative.	SA/SP - closed	• Private sector employer representatives – proceed with recruitment.	RB - closed	• Update regarding guidance of LSIPs feeding into SAP Boards	SA - closed	• Seek clarity on who has been invited from OxLEP to the LSIP Advisory Panel and how many non-Chamber members.	RB/SA/ GT - closed	• Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards – support social media posts by liking or sharing.	All – closed	• Become mentors on the OxGROW platform and share the opportunity with colleagues and networks	All - closed	• Template social media posts for Levy utilisation/pledging to be shared along with all Social Contract leaflets	SM – C/F	• ‘Opportunities for Oxfordshire Employers’ leaflet to be circulated	SP - closed	• Circulate slides	SP - closed
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		All actions were completed / followed up in this agenda except bullet point 7.
3	IL	<p>Chairpersons Update</p> <p>The Chair introduced the following new Independent Provider Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Jones, Apprenticeships Lead, Oxford Professional Education Group. • Mark Vingoe, CEO, The Engineering Trust • Joanna Hart, recently moved roles from the Skills Factory to the UK Space Agency. • Matt Peachy, local government representative had left the council, so the Chair has sought approval to invite Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of OCC who also sits on the LEP Board to join Skills Board from the June 2023 meeting. Members agreed to this proposal. <p>The Chair reported two additional private sector Members had been identified and sought the Board's approval to invite them to join Skills Board. Chris Meah, a local entrepreneur, who has a coding school and Mark Wood, CEO of Reaction Engines. The proposals were agreed subject to confirmation from Richard Byard.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ACTION: RB</p> <p>Bernard Grenville-Jones will now sit as a full Member, Gary Headland (CEO) having nominated him to represent Activate Learning.</p> <p>The Chair advised the Board that, due to personal commitments, he will step down as Chair later in the year. RB will pursue any expressions of interest in skills from new NEDs joining LEP Board, with a view to them joining as Chair of Skills Board after the local elections, which should improve dialogue between LEP Board and Skills Board.</p> <p>No questions were raised.</p>
4	RB	<p>OxLEP Update</p> <p>Sir Alistair Fitt is the new Chair of LEP Board. A briefing session was held on 6 March for the new LEP Chair and 4 new NEDs, all keen to engage. Cllr Susan Brown who is well connected in the skills world will be valuable asset to Skills Board, joining from the next meeting.</p> <p>We are approaching the year end period with the usual uncertainty, having received confirmation from government for core funds for LEPs, although these are much reduced from last year, with an indicative letter of comfort for continuation of services. Core funds are reduced from £375k to £250k – we await confirmation of funding for growth hubs. All were reminded that the LEP Board approved a 2+1 business plan in September to guarantee funding continues across the main areas of activity: skills, business support, internationalisation and boosting trade links. This endorsement from our Board allows us to plan business activities effectively pending government funding notifications.</p> <p>The Strategic Economic Plan is being developed, updating from the original economic plan CEP in 2016, through the Local Industrial Strategy in 2019. We have commissioned SQW to work with the whole system led by OxLEP, working with Local Authority partners to develop a strategic economic plan for Oxfordshire. This will update the narratives of the LIS and Economic Recovery Plan and ensure we have an up-to-date understanding of the broader economy and the key challenges our economy will face in the medium term. Members should have received invitations to submit evidence, thanks to those that have responded. SQW will gather as many views as possible ahead of a series of workshops planned to deep dive into key areas of concern/challenge. The skills/economic inclusion agenda is one key area to explore. An advanced draft will be signed off</p>

by LEP board at end of June to launch in September. This will help identify key areas and priorities for the organisation across skills and business support activities.

Operational updates:

The Social Contract led by Sarah Marlow is delivering fantastically well with innovative approaches tackling long term strategies, liberating the Apprenticeship Levy locally. This is a long-held ambition of this group, addressing the frustration that of the c.280 business paying levy across Oxfordshire only about 25% utilise it fully.

The small Social Contract Programme team support levy payers to transfer up to 25% of their levy to support Oxfordshire SMEs and charities. So far £380k of levy has been transferred, plus a pipeline of c. £200k of levy in progress. Members who are a levy paying business not utilising it fully are invited to contact the team for assistance. Noted that health and social care has been a significant beneficiary so far particularly GP surgeries, addressing another long-term challenge held by this group.

The Apprenticeship Grant programme is live which seeks to unblock some of the barriers we see for apprentices, grants of c.£1500 are available per apprentice start/completion. LMI data will refer to this later, on the agenda.

'No Limits' – delivered in partnership with Aspire and SOFEA is supporting those furthest from labour market by a series of interventions and is significantly ahead of some targets.

CareersFest takes place at Kassam Stadium 22 & 23 March – all welcome to attend. Around 3,000 young people invited to engage with 60+ employers and training providers and raise awareness of the great opportunities on their doorstep. This meets the focus of the group regarding the deep dive on business skills and other priorities in the Skills Strategy.

We are also engaging with some local authority partners on the use of the Shared Prosperity Fund – each district partner has c.£750k profiled across this current financial year +2 – 80% is profiled in 2024/25. Each partner has Skills and Green Skills priorities, and we are working with colleagues and a county developer to organise a green skills roundtable event at the end of March to dig into the challenges and narrative around green skills, net zero, low carbon, environment skills.

An initial conversation has taken place with Retrofit Academy, who have a significant national profile working with the government, LEPS and local authorities, to help formulate action for a primary area of challenge: LA partners have a target to retrofit c. 30-40,000 houses over the next two decades to ensure environmental enhancement. We therefore need a tangible action plan to find the labour force and equipment to help deliver that target and address the main challenges, e.g., language and definitions.

A health and social care roundtable was held at Activate Learning, (in the care suite, supported by the board with an of investment £500,000 capital). This brought together providers and young people currently learning in the health and social care sector with 50+ attendees and very positive feedback in terms of creating and supporting talent pipeline, a continuing key theme for our activities. Later this year there will be other sector specific roundtables to address their challenges. The Growth Hub has a sustainable business support roundtable at

end of month with focus on sustainability. Green Skills is a provider-based roundtable, business support looks at business needs in terms of sustainability.

Four-Day Week

Information has been shared regarding OxLEPs new working pattern from April, piloting a 30-hour working week (Monday to Thursday) for six months. The core principles behind the trial are to support our ambition to be an employer of choice, improve staff recruitment and retention whilst maintaining operational capacity and efficiency, and supporting workforce wellbeing, building on the successful implementation of the home-based digital platform.

The organisation is undertaking training in preparation, and after the trial we will share insights with colleagues and other partners. From an operational point of view, it is business as usual and sub-contracting arrangements will not be affected. Should important business, e.g. a ministerial visit, be arranged for a Friday, we will support it.

Questions were invited.

Recognition that so much money being retained in Oxfordshire via the Apprenticeship Levy, although it was acknowledged that £1,000,000 is still outstanding to be secured.

In response to a question about the current status of the Oxford/Cambridge ARC and Cambridgeshire Unitary, it was noted that the Oxford Cambridge ARC should now be referred to as the Pan Regional Partnership. Government have indicated support, with some limited investment, for the pan regional partnership (PRP) which is working up its core areas of activity. Part of the challenge and rationale for replacement of the ARC is that it became synonymous with a million plus homes, which was not the intended public focus.

PRP will focus on a more limited area of priorities, including internationalisation, so we will concentrate on promoting the strength of the Oxfordshire/Cambridge area on a global scale. Moderna's recent confirmation of investment into Harwell is a testament to the strength of the life sciences sector locally and will generate c.250 minimum new jobs within that context.

Another core area of PRP activity is environmental quality to ensure there is complimentary parity between the PRP area containing four LEPs and 32 local authorities. One of the opportunities within the government incentive to develop PRPs includes areas such as the apprenticeship levy – this could give an opportunity to get more equality of operation across the area and have one system that applies to the PRP so all can engage whether an area has devolution or not.

HMG have a clear ambition to devolve responsibilities where practical using local government reform as the mechanism for devolution via Mayoral Combined Authorities, Unitary Authorities, County Deals or similar. In addition to the existing 10 or so areas that already have agreed devolution deals about 8 areas are currently negotiating with government. Oxfordshire is not currently engaged in any devolution negotiations – we will keep the board informed should this change.

The number one priority within various depts is pursuing deals, and the next set of areas looking for deals will probably crop up soon. But the government are still seeking Tier 3 deals involving a directly elected leader for the next set and agreed politically both parties appear to support the devolution agenda

		The Chair asked that the minutes note the excellent progress being made with the programmes.
5	JB	<p>LSIP – verbal update</p> <p>An update was provided from the initial meeting of the LSIP Advisory Board in January which focussed mainly on governance and way forward. It is in the early stages of employer engagement with a series of surveys and events taking place from now until April/May, inviting employers to gauge what skills they will be needing in the future. It was disappointing that four out of the six meetings are being held at colleges/university rather than at other businesses to encourage greater employer attendance and this has been fed back. The next Board meeting is on 13 March where employer feedback will be received.</p> <p>Emerging themes were shared on a series of slides which could be circulated after the meeting. ACTION – JB/DH</p> <p>The survey had closed on Monday although still in active engagement with employers, and the feedback from Oxfordshire is positive. The purpose is a re-emphasis of where views are being sought, and priorities. Information gathered will be shared for inclusion in the Skills Strategy.</p> <p>Emerging themes were not always the ones expected and others’ perspectives were invited, particularly logistics and transport, health and life sciences combined and social care skills issues and labour shortages.</p> <p>When evaluating responses, it is important to hear the voice of really small businesses, which provide a large number of vacancies; particularly important in the digital sector as they are really small.</p> <p>Berkshire and Oxfordshire Growth Hubs were thanked for promoting this survey.</p> <p>It was noted one of the challenges in the rationale of the LSIPs is the focus on improvement, but we cannot look at the skills system in isolation. Post 16 vocation does not automatically trigger with school leavers. A lot of work is needed to enthuse and inspire young people. The LSIP and steering group is aware of work that is underway and should avoid duplication of work to support the Careers Enterprise Company and Careers Hub co-investments.</p> <p>The LSIP was invited to continue to give future quarterly updates.</p>
6	RB	<p>Priority Focus Introduction - Business skills provision and support</p> <p>LMI slides were circulated ahead of the meeting. Key points from the data are:</p> <p>Universal credit numbers across county have plateaued to just over 10,000. Pre pandemic was c. 6,000. We recognise that UC is an in-work benefit but is a good indicator of those out of work who could support labour shortages. This is more pronounced in Oxfordshire than other areas although we have virtually full employment as a real challenge.</p> <p>There has been a huge growth in job postings, c.39,000, a 42% increase during January. Over the past 2 years job postings were driven by health social care sectors relating to pandemic, now this has reverted to foundation type roles in warehousing, service sectors etc supporting industries. Labour rather than skills shortages are apparent which will impact on productivity.</p> <p>One target for the Social Contract Programme was to increase apprenticeship starts to above pre pandemic levels, which has been achieved. However, locally</p>

		and nationally there is a challenge on completions. How do we collectively retain and support apprentices?
7	RB	<p>Business Churn and National Data</p> <p>C.500 net positive in terms of Business Churn meaning 500 more businesses being created above those that are deregistering, although these could be one person operations or SMEs on very high growth trajectory. The labour market is complex, we are aware of huge frustration in the business community around how they engage with government funding opportunities, the ease of access, terminology and rules and regulations, which raises the importance of the devolution agenda. Of c. £5million of apprenticeship levy generated in Oxfordshire only c. 20% is utilised with the remaining £4 million going back to government, due to inflexibility around business needs for skills and training, rather than qualifications.</p>
8	AP	<p>Business Support Tool</p> <p>Slides were circulated before the meeting. The Growth Hub's purpose is to support any business trading in Oxfordshire by means of several sources of funding.</p> <p>Two impact reports have been produced, giving the breadth of support and case studies, November 2021 https://mp-flipbook.co.uk/impact-report and November 2022. https://oxlepbusiness.co.uk/impact-report/</p> <p>Over 6060 hours of support have been delivered. More than half are start-up or pre-starts. One target is to address the scale-ups which are harder to engage. Regular online webinars are held with participants based worldwide due to the strong Oxford brand.</p> <p>Funding in 2023-25 is affected as some programmes end, but support will continue funded by other sources.</p>
9	All	<p>Roundtable Discussion</p> <p>Leah Bryan in the Social Contract Team praised for her exceptional help in guidance on taking on an apprentice having made 3-4 referrals to her in last month. ACTION: SM agreed to pass on the comments to Leah.</p> <p>Point of discussion included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social care providers' reticence over taking on apprenticeships. • The significant and growing number of early retirees, 50+ age group – can they be enticed back to work/mentor young people? • Are older people seeking apprenticeships? ACTION: RB will include detail in the minutes - Information to follow • Now levy has been pledged and in the new tax year it all gets reset, producing repeat work. Should the emphasis move from encouraging employers to unlock levy, and persuade small businesses to take up the pledges? • RB attends regular meeting with County Council which was originally stood up for Afghan refugees and now supports Ukrainian refugees and has a broader influence across the refugee community. At end 2021 employers were asking how can they engage with Afghan refugees in addressing a labour shortage, mostly in the automotive sector in north of the county? The OIEP cohort and system was utilised and arranged work experience visits to a couple of employers, however as most had only just arrived in the UK finding work was not top priority. Most were in resettlement hotels but not sure where they were

		<p>staying, but the system is being stood up again to support Ukranian and Hong Kong communities. We are very keen to support those communities as it addresses some of challenges we have.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers' perceived challenges when taking on ex-offenders, over 50s and refugees. • Emerging themes from discussion are how do we engage those not already engaged, eg early retirees, refugees, over 50s that could help support our economy moving forward? • If going down devolution route, from a skills perspective, what would our ask be to government? We need greater freedom and flexibility on rules and regulations around funding which impede engagement from businesses. • Unless anything has changed over the recent years, of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) that FE providers receive, a lot is returned unspent because of rules and regulations around how it can be spent with the vast majority of national AEB funding spent on pre Level 1 and Level 1 ESOL and basic employability skills. The vast majority of all AEB is spent in London and 4 other large cities. • If businesses want new skills we don't have training provision for locally, then how do they want that delivered? • Employees want education which is directly applicable to their daily work and the only way is to achieve this is more flexibility. • In five years from now we could have a massive crisis around Green Skills as the skills system is not moving fast enough to meet Net Zero targets. Need to signpost people to Green Skills. • In Oxfordshire there are 40,000+ registered limited companies – c. 50,000 sole traders and only 4,000 have 5 or more staff. These microbusinesses will have the challenge of training and developing staff. We need to find ways to work with these and help micros to get over early hurdles from 2-5 staff. <p>All members to consider what would they like from the skills and business support ecosystem taken forward in any discussions with HMG and local stakeholders for reflection at the next meeting. ACTION: ALL</p> <p>Information will be circulated for contribution and set up so it can build upon each other's responses. ACTION: RB</p>
10	ALL	<p>Other Members' Update/s - None</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifelong Loan Entitlement Government Consultation Response just been published in relation to unification of the student finance system for Further and Higher Education across levels 4, 5 and 6. It is in the form of an online account replacing the Adult Education Budget with a mix of online and blended learning. Learners can access courses from across the country which are completed by module to fit in with other responsibilities.
11	AL	<p>Future Meeting dates: Future meetings will be held at 4:00pm to 6:00pm (virtual unless notified otherwise) on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuesday, 13th June 2023 • Tuesday 12th September 2023 • Tuesday 21st November 2023 <p>AOB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards to be held at the Williams F1 Conference Centre, on 18 May - all members encouraged to attend.

ACTIONS

Item	Details	Who	When
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RB to invite Mark Wood and Chris Meah to join Skills Sub-Group	RB	After meeting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SM to relay thanks to Leah Bryan for exceptional help with Social Contract programme apprenticeship referrals	SM	After meeting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RB add information regarding older apprentices to minutes	RB	After meeting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All members to consider what would they like from the skills and business support ecosystem taken forward in any discussions with HMG and local stakeholders for reflection at the next meeting and give feedback	All	After meeting
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Circulate Joanna Burrell's slides after meeting.	DH	Complete
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Declarations of Interest forms to be issued to all Members	DH	Complete

MEETING CLOSED: 6.04pm