

# MCA - EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY BOARD

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON:

TUESDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2021 AT 1.00 PM

## VIRTUAL MEETING

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### Present:

Councillor Sir Steve Houghton CBE (Co-Chair)	Barnsley MBC
Councillor Tim Cheetham	Barnsley MBC
Professor Chris Husbands	Sheffield Hallam University
Councillor Denise Lelliott	Rotherham MBC
Councillor Paul Turpin	Sheffield CC
Councillor Rachael Blake (Reserve)	Doncaster MBC
Helen Kemp	MCA Executive Team

### In Attendance:

Dan Fell	Doncaster Chamber
Helen George	MCA Executive Team
Rob Harvey	MCA Executive Team
Sue Sykes	MCA Executive Team
Charli Taylor	MCA Executive Team
David Akeroyd	Barnsley College

### Apologies:

Councillor Lani-Mae Ball	Doncaster MBC
Nigel Brewster	Private Sector
Angela Foulkes	Chair of Skills Advisory Network

## 1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were noted as above.

## 2 Declarations of Interest by individual Members in relation to any item of business on the agenda

None.

## 3 Urgent items / Announcements

None.

## 4 Public Questions of Key Decisions

None.

5 **Minutes from Previous Meeting on 19 October 2021**

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021 be agreed as a true record.

6 **Matters Arising**

None.

7 **Skills Accelerator Project (Local Skills Improvement Plan and Strategic Development Fund) (verbal)**

D Fell, Chief Executive of Doncaster Chamber of Commerce, gave a presentation on the Skills Accelerator project which came from the DfE White Paper – ‘Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunities and Growth’.

The presentation gave details of:

- The background and ethos of the project.
- Focus and challenges.
- How it was intended to achieve the objectives.
- DfE deliverables.
- Timeline and next steps.
- The Skills Accelerator Board.
- Business engagement and partner commissions.
- Emerging themes.

The Board discussed the importance of making the project as inclusive as possible and that it took cognisance of existing local and regional structures and work in the area of skills.

It was also acknowledged that the timescales were extremely challenging.

The Board also felt that it was important that the work coming out of this project fed into the Skills Strategy.

Prof. C Husbands commented that one of the major barriers to long-term skills development was underlying low level on literacy and numeracy and this should not be lost sight of.

D Akeroyd gave a short presentation on the Skills Accelerator Strategic Development Fund (SDF) which included:

- The principles of the SDF funding.
- The opportunity – current remit.
- The future opportunity for longer term work.

It was noted that the principles of the funding were:

*“Investigating and addressing the barriers to engagement in skills development following the outcome of the LSIP’s project led by Doncaster Chamber of Commerce.”*

It was pointed out that, due to the timescales involved, this was having to be run in parallel with the Chamber of Commerce’s work leading to the necessity to make several assumptions.

In answer to a question from Cllr Lelliott, D Akeroyd commented that T Levels were not linked to the project as they were only currently available to 16-18 year olds but he would be happy to brief the Board on T Levels at a future meeting.

D Akeroyd commented that the Project Team would welcome input and ideas for stakeholders and partners – contact details were contained within the presentation. It was also hoped that the Skills Accelerator project would have further discussions with the Skills Minister in the New Year.

The Chair thanked D Akeroyd for the presentation.

## 8 **Adult Education Budget: Delivery Update**

R Harvey spoke to a paper which gave an update on the delivery of the Adult Education Budget (AEB).

It was noted that there were a number of factors which could have an impact on AEB over the rest of the academic year. The factors were summarised in the paper and three accompanying papers provided greater detail on the impacts and suggested approaches.

Covid could compromise providers’ ability to deliver AEB provision. Grant providers in non-devolved areas had the reconciliation threshold lowered to reflect the difficult delivery environment. Currently the threshold was set at 100% by SYMCA’s Funding and Performance Management rules. It was noted that, since the paper was written, the Omicron variant of Covid emerged leading to further uncertainties around delivery.

Members were informed that at this stage of the academic year it was too early to know if the MCA would need to change this threshold. The accompanying paper discussed appropriate processes for ensuring that as the academic year progressed, SYMCA set an appropriate threshold and was providing an adequate level of support to the Grant Providers.

It was noted that the MCA had received reports on the first three months of devolved AEB delivery, therefore it was too early to forecast how close providers would get to delivering their full delivery plan for 2021/22. The accompanying papers, 7ii In Year Procurement and 7iii Reallocation of AEB Funding discussed the options available to the MCA if a situation developed where collectively procured and grant providers were unable to meet their contracted delivery targets.

The Board was reminded that there would be a Mayoral election in May which would be preceded by a period of purdah which would limit some of the activities of the MCA. This was, in part, why the papers sought to agree courses of action now.

The Board discussed clawback options, recognising that this was not an easy problem to solve considering the many current uncertainties. It was recognised that other MCA's had proposed different paths with different thresholds and that there may need to be more interventions to ensure the money was spent. It was important to remember that this was public money and it was part of the MCA's role to ensure that it was spent in-year if possible.

The Chair commented that it would be prudent to start with the highest standard of threshold, and then there would be the flexibility to amend this if there were good reasons that the threshold had not been met.

Cllr Turpin commented that a 90% threshold could cause problems in Sheffield as delays means that some courses were not due to start until January and this could put delivery organisations at financial risk.

RESOLVED – That the Board agree that (whilst recognising the position in Sheffield):

- i) **AEB Grant Reconciliation relating to Covid** – SYMCA would adopt any nationally set Grant threshold for reconciliation.
- ii) **In Year Procurement** – Should gaps emerge on the procured side of AEB due to aggregate performance issues, SYMCA would time any new AEB Procurement to bring in new provision for the start of the new academic year (2022/23).
- iii) **Reallocation of AEB funding** – Should gaps emerge on the grant side of AEB due to aggregate performance issues, SYMCA would time any changes made to grant arrangements for the start of the academic year (2022/23).

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## **Skills and Post-16 Education Bill - progress and implications**

H George presented a report which detailed progress and implications of the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill.

The Board was informed that the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill had passed its third reading in the House of Lords on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2021 and was introduced in the House of Commons on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021. The Bill formed the legislative underpinning for reforms set out in the Department for Education (DfE) White Paper, Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth as well as measures following the Augar Review of Post-18 Education and Funding published in May 2019.

Members noted that the Bill had implications for residents across South Yorkshire accessing post-18 skills and education provision and for businesses who were seeking to improve skills in the workforce.

The Bill put into statute a framework to facilitate stronger employer and provider involvement in local skills systems. It aimed to create a system that could be influenced by employers and which assisted providers to respond to employers' needs.

The report gave full details of provisions within the Bill, potential tensions and issues which remained to be tested.

The Board noted that the Bill included a clause which would give the Secretary of State a new power to make regulations to establish and maintain a single national list of relevant FE and training providers. The regulations would prohibit providers not on the list from receiving funding from central or local authorities, and from agreeing sub-contracting arrangements with other providers. This meant there would be implications for South Yorkshire's devolved AEB should future commissioning involve allocating funding to new providers who were not on the list. MCAs were currently making representations to DfE to ensure there was scope to influence the national list and to add providers where and when necessary.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

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## **Performance Report**

S Sykes presented a report which provided the Board with the latest performance on Education, Skills and Employability (ESE) programmes being delivered on behalf of the MCA.

The Board noted that the SYMCA currently had 44 projects that fell within the remit of the ESE Board. The schemes were funded from various funding streams with a total value of £65m of which £6.77m was capital and £58.23m revenue.

The expenditure baseline for 2021/22 was initially set at £41.66m and the latest forecasts suggested outturn expenditure of £36.67. That level of expenditure would generate a material underspend of £5.29m. The underspend related to related to Gainshare funding activity that could be re-profiled without recourse to government.

The report contained tables which highlighted the forecast full-year expenditure profiles set against the baseline targets and the AEB forecast against current claims. It was noted that the core grant profile was paid on profile and reconciliation would take place later in the year.

The Board was informed that the principal drivers for Gainshare delays were revised forecasts for Renewal Action Plan activity within the year, leading to a £6.30m reduction. Enhanced Apprenticeship activity was now expected to commence late in quarter four, whilst the Kickstart South Yorkshire scheme was now expected to fall into the new financial year.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted

**Any Other Business**

The Chair announced that this was Helen Kemp’s last meeting. He thanked Helen for all her hard work, the time and effort she had put in was much appreciated and he wished her well in her new role.

H Kemp commented that she had enjoyed her time with the MCA and was sure the Team would continue to do a good job.

In accordance with Combined Authority’s Constitution/Terms of Reference for the Board, Board decisions need to be ratified by the Head of Paid Services (or their nominee) in consultation with the Chair of the Board. Accordingly, the undersigned has consulted with the Chair and hereby ratifies the decisions set out in the above minutes.

Signed .....

Name .....

Position .....

Date .....