

**EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY THEMATIC BOARD**

**05.01.2021**

**Skills Strategy Development – principles and approach**

**Purpose of Report**

This paper seeks members' direction on proposals for development of a Skills and Employability Strategy. It seeks agreement for a set of core principles and an overall approach that will inform the next phase of development.

**Freedom of Information**

The paper will be available under the Combined Authority Publication Scheme

**Recommendations**

That the Board consider and agree:

1. The core principles for developing the skills and employability strategy.
2. The priority themes for inclusion in the strategy.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Residents and businesses across South Yorkshire face education, skills and employability challenges that affect their lives and their ability to realise their potential. Challenges are the result of both long term trends – poor educational achievement, endemic low skills levels and higher than average levels of poverty and worklessness - and the short term impact of the pandemic, with jobs in the lower paid sectors that tend to be prevalent in South Yorkshire being hardest hit by the economic downturn.
- 1.2 There are significant opportunities in South Yorkshire, but in order for residents to benefit and for businesses to feel confident about a supply of skills, we need more people with better skills, both in terms of the flow of skills into the labour market and the skills of those already in it.
- 1.3 Members have commissioned development of a strategy for skills that would allow us to set short and longer term priorities to address these issues in the context of the wider ambitions for economic growth as set out in the Strategic Economic Plan and our commitment to a stronger, greener and fairer future.
- 1.4 This paper sets out the core principles that we would like to apply to development of a strategy and the overall approach we plan to take. Approval by the members will allow us to get work underway.

## 2. Proposal and justification

- 2.1 A collaborative and forward-facing skills and employability system in South Yorkshire will equip our people with information and high-quality provision enabling them to develop the skills needed to aspire and achieve their full potential. It will also support increased local productivity in an inclusive economy future proofed for everyone. In order to give focus to the skills system locally, we need a skills and employability strategy.
- 2.2 As we develop the strategy, we will use evidence, consultation, and partnership to understand, respond to and deliver innovative approaches and policies. Development will be co-designed with a wide range of partners, sharing knowledge and expertise, and enabling us to set out how we will work together over the next decade to create a skilled, resilient and productive workforce, driven by ambition, innovation and entrepreneurialism.
- 2.3 The members are invited to comment on **core principles** that will underpin development:
- This should be a South Yorkshire strategy, not a South Yorkshire version of a national strategy. It should address the very specific skills and employability issues that affect South Yorkshire, both in terms of underlying skills challenges and shorter-term issues caused by the pandemic, but also in the way it focuses future skills development on the renewal and growth opportunities of the future. It should also look to the existing strengths and capability within the region as a basis for building a response to those challenges. There is a real opportunity to learn lessons from the Doncaster Opportunity Area programme.
  - Development of the strategy must start with a ‘blank-page’ and be firmly rooted in an evidence base that considers across all age groups – from 0-2yrs through to adults, including learning for wellbeing in later life. We need to understand the barriers to employability and success that prevent South Yorkshire residents from achieving their potential, as well as the building blocks that are working well. We will develop a road map of education and skills interventions to help us understand gaps in provision. In order to set a sensible but ambitious plan we will need a) to work collaboratively and b) to prioritise and sequence effectively and c) to set measurable improvement goals.
  - The Strategy must set skills and employability development in the context of the priorities in the Strategic Economic Plan and Renewal Action Plan. It must sit alongside a robust evidence base setting out analysis of the current and future employment and skills needs in South Yorkshire. This will need to be focused on the present (impact of the COVID pandemic) and the future, we will through our intelligence hub, and the work of our Skills Advisory Network collect information regarding future labour market and job opportunities.
  - Residents and businesses should be at the heart of our strategic development, both in terms of the process we go through to develop the strategy and in terms of the final document/s. The strategy should be a meaningful and accessible document and one which explains how our approach will make a difference. We therefore plan to be as consultative as possible, bringing in evidence from across South Yorkshire communities, so that residents and businesses can contribute to the process.
  - Timeline: we need a skills strategy, but we need time to ensure we have the right strategy and not simply a brigading of ‘everything that we usually do’. We will need to set a timetable for development that allows us time to do justice to the challenge linked to plans for future investment. In the interim, we will develop a narrative that we can use to tell a coherent story about how the programmes and initiatives we are running link to the SEP and RAP. We propose that Skills Strategy development should be a standing item on the Education, Skills and Employability Board agenda and that we should come back to members with a proposed timeline at the next meeting.

**Do members support these core principles to underpin our approach?**

- 2.4** Members are invited to comment on the priority themes for the strategy:
- Whether we are making progress across South Yorkshire in driving up educational outcomes and achievement so that young people have the right skills and qualifications to progress in learning or employment;
  - How investment in education, skills and employability across South Yorkshire will be used to drive a change in the ambitions of our residents improving skills and contributing to inclusion, prosperity and growth;
  - Information and choice – how we will ensure residents and businesses have the information they need to make career and recruitment and workforce development choices;
  - How the South Yorkshire skills system works for residents, employers and stakeholders and what our offer is for key groups – for example a ‘youth offer’;
  - Support available to residents at key transition points in their lives / career development so that they are well prepared for the world of work, career progression and further study;
  - How we will put employers at the heart of skills and employability system;
  - Establish a clear focus on progression within South Yorkshire, with clear pathways and a curriculum offer that enables residents to acquire the skills they need to progress from basic into intermediate and advanced level technical vocational professions linked to our employment and growth sectors;
  - How we will learn from health-led trials to achieve greater integration between health and skills / employment in commissioning services, capitalising on the fact that ‘good work is good for your health’.
  - Demonstrating the benefits of locally commissioned provision, including system simplification, building on the existing strengths of our locally based providers and stronger partnership with the third sector and community organisation, especially in targeting support for those with the greatest barriers in our most deprived communities.

### **Do the members support these priority themes for the strategy?**

## **3. Consideration of alternative approaches**

- 3.1** The approach set out in this paper can be flexed in line with members’ responses.

## **4. Implications**

- 4.1** Approval of the approach in this paper will allow the Education, Skills and Employability team begin to put in place the consultation process necessary to underpin development of the skills and employability strategy.

### **4.2 Legal**

This paper is seeking views from members in advance of development of a strategy.

### **4.3 Risk Management**

Risk 1 – the approach recommended in this paper reduces the risk of us developing a strategy that does not meet needs across South Yorkshire.

### **4.4 Equality, Diversity and Social Inclusion**

Development of a skills and employability strategy is an opportunity to consider how we secure better outcomes for all residents across South Yorkshire, but with a particular focus on achieving better inclusion and progression for groups who are at greater risk of disadvantage.

## **5. Communications**

- 5.1** No immediate communications needed. Subject to members' approval, we will be developing a consultation process to support development of the strategy. We will develop this in partnership with the communications team.

## **6. Appendices/Annexes**

- 6.1** N/A

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Background papers used in the preparation of this report are available for inspection at: 11 Broad Street West, Sheffield S1 2BQ

Other sources and references: