

EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS BOARD

**Meeting held in the LSC offices, Wynyard Park House, Wynyard Avenue,
Billingham, TS22 5TB at 2.00pm on 29 January 2008**

1. Chair's welcome and introductions
2. Apologies

Gill Rollings, Middlesbrough BC
Stewart Atkinson, Tees Valley Training Providers Forum
Professor Cliff Allan, University of Teesside
Adrienne Simcock, Hartlepool BC
Antony Steinberg, Hartlepool BC (colleague to attend)
Robin Beveridge, One NorthEast (Suzanne Henderson to attend)

3. Note of meeting on 29 October 2007

Notes of previous meeting held on 29 October 2007 were agreed.

4. Tees Valley City Region – Higher Skills Strategy and Action Plan

Graham Henderson presented to the Group a draft higher level skills strategy. Graham explained that he was on the Tees Valley Unlimited Leadership Board and had volunteered to the Board to produce a Higher Level Skills Strategy. Graham circulated two documents to the meeting.

Graham talked the Board through the two documents, highlighting:

The “National Review of Skills” by Lord Leitch (2006) had identified the need for higher level skills to meet the future needs of the national economy; consequently, more of the population needed higher level skills. Graham stated that the higher level skills strategy for the Tees Valley City Region needed to recognise that:

- Skills needed to be properly accredited for benefit of both employers and individuals
- There needed to be a focus on key sectors of the Tees Valley economy
- Business needed to be convinced of the value added of skills
- There was an opportunity for better working between Further Education and Higher Education in Tees Valley; this was essential if we are to achieve the volumes of activity and skills increase that we need in the City Region
- If employers are to become more involved in skills, there is a need to deliver more skills in the workplace or in a work environment
- There was substantial demographic change ahead, decreasing the number of young people, increasing the age of the workforce and general population. We could not therefore rely on a stock of young people solving workforce needs of the future.

Graham stressed that the Strategy was presented as a draft and he welcomed all inputs. The Board discussed the proposed Strategy and the following comments were made:

Sarah Robinson (FE Sector) recognised need for the Strategy to both reflect Government priorities and secure more/ better employer engagement. Sarah also noted that the way in which employers took part in skills shaped the structure of skills providers in an area.

The Board agreed that there were many complex issues to consider, not least the balance between competition and quality; but the issue needed leadership in the Tees Valley.

The Board discussed the balance between regional and sub regional approaches. It was agreed that the City Region was an appropriate level at which to consider higher level skills, yet we needed to acknowledge regional strategies/ activities and national activities. A good example was the creation of national “Skills Academies”, which would have national, regional and local impact.

Graham Henderson added that discussions were taking place between the Higher Education and Further Education sector in Tees Valley aiming to build a unique partnership; this could be accelerated if the views of the Board were supportive.

Richard Poundford (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council) stated that there was also a need to grow the number of people in the labour market and asked how do we increase the number of people motivated to take part in the economy. This was often a question of motivations, not simply of supply and demand.

Chris Roberts commented on the fact that there was always likely to be some tension in Tees Valley about regional approaches. He felt there was a need for us to focus on what actions we are taking in Tees Valley to deliver the “people” aspects of the Regional Economic Strategy; the Group therefore needed to be clearly focussed on actions and some “good wins”. Chris also noted that Government agencies were increasingly directly involved with employers and quoted the example of the forthcoming creation of a national Apprenticeship Service.

Graham concluded his presentation by saying that he was happy to play whatever role the Board wished, in relation leadership of the Strategy and communication with the Leadership Board.

Action: It was agreed that Board members would consider the draft Strategy and provide any comments to either Graham Henderson or Nick James by Friday 15 February.

5. Employment and Skills Board – Revised Proposals including employer engagement mechanisms

Nick James (Learning and Skills Council) presented to the Board with initial proposals for membership and priorities of the Employment and Skills Board.

Chris Roberts noted the need to recognise the national and regional developments relating to Employment and Skills Boards.

Sandra Cartlidge (Middlesbrough Borough Council) expressed a concern regarding a risk of adding to “infrastructure”. It was important to build on current structures and connect these more effectively.

Sarah Robinson noted that whilst both Universities were represented on the proposed Board there was no representative from the Further Education sector. It was agreed that the Board should contain one representative for the Further Education sector.

Richard Poundford (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council) expressed the need for the Boards remit to focus on disadvantage and to fit with the existing Local Area Agreement targets and activities.

There was a general support for the proposed way of working with employers; namely, working systematically through existing defined groups rather than creating new structures. It was also recognised that

this was a critical time for alignment of the Boards work with Local Area Agreements, sub national review and regional developments.

Action - It was agreed that Board members would provide any specific comments on Board membership, priorities or any other aspect of the report to Nick James by 15 February.

6. Tees Valley Business Support – “The Single Offer”

Chris Livingstone (Job Centreplus) updated the group on discussions between Jobcentre plus and Business Link seeking to develop a joint offer for employers in the Tees Valley. It was hoped that this approach would eventually be extended to incorporate communications and services from local authorities. The proposal included development of a website offering practical help, training for brokers/ advisers and improved communications. A project manager was now in place through secondment from JC plus.

Graham Henderson asked how this approach was dealing with higher level skills. Chris Livingstone confirmed that the project included Information, Advice and Guidance services who could provide this kind of support. Graham Henderson advised of the existence of the Lifelong Learning Network in the region that had particular focus on Leadership and Management, Process and Digital media sectors.

Mike Lakinski reported that Business Link North East were currently upskilling their workforce to improve their signposting services. Chris Roberts reported that LSC funding was available to support higher level skills. Nick James stated that this approach demonstrated that the sub Region did not need more skills/ work related products or services but needed to focus resources on co-ordinating and communicating existing funding and activities.

7. Update on Multi Area Agreement

John Lowther (Tees Valley Partnership) updated the Board on progress of the Tees Valley Multi Area Agreement (MAA). He advised the Board that the current MAA did not include skills and employment actions and was focussed on implementation of the City Region Business Case. John described the three elements of the MAA (regeneration, housing market renewal and transport) plus an additional fourth area focussing on a potential “Housing Growth Point”. Discussions were now taking place with ONE North East to try and shift resources into town centres and housing renewal as a key component of place regeneration.

The MAA will give “freedoms and flexibilities” specifically to vire money between funding streams and for greater delegation of appraisals and approvals from ONE North East. Discussions were ongoing with treasury and DBERR about delegation of resources. It was hoped that John Healy would act as a supporting minister for the Tees Valley MAA.

It was hoped that the MAA would be in place by April 2008.

Chris Roberts informed the group that there could be very substantial amounts of money delegated by central government to MAAs. This in turn raise many issues relating to accountability.

8. Practical Examples of Frameworks to meet Employer Demand

Chris Livingstone (Job Centreplus) introduced this item as an opportunity for Board members to be informed of some practical examples of approaches to skills issues in the City Region.

Rod Varley (North East Employer Consortium) presented the “Regional Construction Employer Integrator” programme. The rationale of the programme was to shift people from benefits into work, using the leverage of local authority regeneration procurement to place obligations on contractors. The construction sector in the region was forecast to have a £4bn output. The programme was delivered in Tees Valley through the “Building Futures” routeway. This approach has been nationally endorsed.

Steve Davidson (Job Centreplus) asked if there were any links to Local Employment Partnerships (LEPs).

Diane Martin (Hartlepool Borough Council) confirmed that this was the case.

Chris Livingstone presented the “NEPIC Routeway” for the process sector – it was expected that between 40 and 60 people would progress through the programme. The programme consisted of a two week induction/ aptitude period, followed by three months training funded by Jobcentreplus up to a level 1 qualification or City and Guilds Level 2. This was then followed by a 16 week fixed term contract with TTE. The programme was scheduled to start on 4 February.

The Board noted the success of both projects.

9. Any Other Business

Chris Livingstone advised the Group of the publication of the Child Poverty White Paper and it was agreed that this needed to be considered at the next meeting of the Board.

Nick James reported to the Group that a project called "Chemical Ambition" had previously been funded by Single Programme through the Tees Valley Partnership. The project raised awareness and interest of young people from Redcar and Cleveland in the Process and Engineering industry and was being delivered by A4E working with NEPIC. The funding for the project was scheduled to finish at end March 2008 but discussions were now taking place with Redcar and Cleveland LEGI programme to see if they could provide continued funding.

The next meeting was scheduled for 2.00 PM, 29th April 2008 at Wynyard.