

**EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS BOARD**

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

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**PRESENT**

Steve Davidson	Job Centreplus, Chair
John Lowther	Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit
Tony Jones	Learning and Skills Council
Sarah Tennison	Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit
Stewart Atkinson	Tees Valley Work Based Learning Providers Network
Colin Stratton	Federation of Small Businesses
Malcolm Potter	Tees Engineering Alliance
Keith Hunter	TTE
Gill Rollings	Middlesbrough Borough Council
Sara Robinson	Further Education Sector
Gwenda Lyn Jones	Darlington Borough Council
Mark Rowell	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Antony Steinberg	Hartlepool Borough Council
Cassie Houlden	EKOS Consultants (Item Three only)
Diane Martin	Hartlepool Borough Council (Item Five only)
Les Howard	North East Employer Coalition (Item Five only)
Nick James	Learning and Skills Council, note taker

**APOLOGIES**

Chris Roberts	Learning and Skills Council
Chris Livingstone	Job Centreplus
Richard Brine	Corus

**NOTES OF MEETING**

**1 SUB NATIONAL REVIEW AND MULTI AREA AGREEMENT**

John Lowther (Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit) updated the Board on the publication of the sub national review and progress of the Tees Valley Multi Area Agreement. The Multi Area Agreement focuses on capital programmes for

transport, housing and regeneration. It seeks a number of flexibilities in budgets and delivery and it is expected it will be agreed by Government in July 2008. Both ONE and GO/NE are supportive of the approach; the next phase of work will be to develop a programme for delivery from July onwards.

The current MAA does not specifically include skills/ employment issues in its coverage. However, it is hoped that the MAA will be expanded in a few years time to include higher level skills and employability.

John then updated the group on the key messages in the sub national review consultation:

- Regional Development Agencies will become more strategic, focussing on programmes not projects
- A new Local Authority Leaders Forum will be set up in the Region to scrutinise ONE North East's work
- An Integrated Regional Strategy will be introduced, combining existing strategies such as Regional Spatial Strategy and Regional Economic Strategy. Currently, though skills is not included in the new Integrated Strategy.
- Local Authorities will be required to produce an economic assessment of their area – in the Tees Valley, it was likely that this would be at sub regional level, with links to District level and Local Area Agreements.
- Regional Funding Allocations could be extended to include skills budgets but it was not clear how this might be done.

Sara Robinson (Further Education Sector) commented that funding for adult skills was increasingly open and competitive. It would be difficult therefore to manage within a regional allocation; there was also the issue of Higher Education funding, both for the Higher Education and Further Education sectors, and how this could be dealt with under a new approach.

Stewart Atkinson (Work Based Learning Network) reported that local authorities are encouraged to come together for commissioning services and this could fit well with the Multi Area Agreement approach.

Steve Davidson (Chair) asked how the Local Authority Leaders Forum might work. John Lowther responded that it was likely to be set up independently from the Integrated Regional Strategy structure and that its aim would be to ensure accountability and set priorities. The Association of North East Councils (ANEC) are currently working on proposals for the Forum.

Sara Robinson (Further Education Sector) reminded the Board of the proposal to raise the age for compulsory participation in learning to 18 by 2014; this would create huge additional costs and affect the ability to move and plan funding. Nick James (Learning and Skills Council) drew attention to the proposed National Apprenticeship Service, National Employer Service and national Adult

Advancement and Careers Service all of whom would have national budgets and structures beyond regional management.

## **2. UPDATE ON EMPLOYABILITY STRATEGY**

John Lowther (Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit) updated the Board on work currently being undertaken by Shared Intelligence. Following on from the Tees Valley City Region Business Case, Shared Intelligence are developing a clear employability strategy to be ready by end Summer 2008. This Strategy is expected to focus on issues of employer engagement and how the Regional Employability Framework could be delivered most effectively across Tees Valley. This would be based on a “provision scanning” exercise. Shared Intelligence are about to set up two working groups to help develop the Strategy. It was noted that this work needed to consider the wider economy and labour market affecting the sub region and that County Durham in particular had a relatively poor economy. It was agreed that Shared Intelligence will present an Interim Report to the Board at its July meeting with the final report expected to be available in September.

## **3. LINKAGES BETWEEN COUNTY DURHAM/ NORTH YORKSHIRE AND TEES VALLEY CITY REGION**

Cassie Houlden (EKOS Consultants) presented to the Board on a study that had been commissioned by Learning and Skills Council to identify and inform the linkages between the Tees Valley City Region and the wider North Yorkshire/ County Durham areas. It was intended that this work would inform the development of the Multi Area Agreement and City Region Skills Strategy.

Sara Robinson (Further Education Sector) said that the City Region will help address some issues but is not an end in itself. Learners and employers are customers and the real issue is providing them with high quality learning opportunities. Darlington College (and other Colleges) are already working on a regional and national basis; the Multi Area Agreement may help join us some sub regional issues.

Stewart Atkinson (Work Based Learning Providers Network) stated that funding in itself was not the issue to be addressed, rather it was methods of procurement of learning and skills.

Sara Robinson noted that with forthcoming changes to the management of funding of learning for 14-19 year olds, it was important that Durham and North Yorkshire continued to support people going outside of their areas to learn.

John Lowther (Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit) noted the need to ensure that Tees Valley was joined up with County Durham and North Yorkshire; however, they

would themselves have the opportunity to decide if they wanted their own Multi Area Agreements.

Antony Steinberg (Hartlepool Borough Council) asked what the position was the two Regional Development Agencies i.e. ONE North East and Yorkshire Forward. He also noted that the Sub National Review talked of a Single Programme for the Region; Cassie Houlden responded by saying that on the basis of their consultation work, North Yorkshire RDA did not feel included in current MAA development. John Lowther added that County Durham is currently in a hiatus pending the local government elections.

Steve Davidson (Chair) asked how possible cross boundary transport issues were being addressed. John Lowther responded by saying that the City Regions proposals for bus network improvements needed to consider County Durham and North Yorkshire links; there was also the possibility of extending the Tees Valley Metro to Bishop Auckland.

#### **4. UPDATE ON HIGHER LEVEL SKILLS STRATEGY AND “HIGHER EDUCATION AT WORK” CONSULTATION**

Nick James (Learning and Skills Council) gave a verbal update on work on the Higher Level Skills Strategy for the City Region that had been presented by Graham Henderson (University of Teesside) at the last Board meeting.

Stewart Atkinson (Work Based Learning Providers Network) responded that it was great to see Graham Henderson involved in this work and seeking to engage with the Work Based Learning sector. The key was to ensure flexibility in progression into higher level skills. Stewart noted that 18% of existing Level 3 achievements in the area are through “Advanced Apprenticeships” so there is big capacity for progression – but it needs flexibility. Stewart also reported that the Work Based Learning Network has recently been approved for a pilot for 50 Apprenticeships progressing into Higher Education.

Malcolm Potter (Tees Engineering Alliance) reported that the Engineering Alliance is currently working with University of Teesside through a secondment from the University to work with employers on higher level skills.

Steve Davidson (Chair) reinforced the view that as 75% of the expected 2020 workforce were in work now, the focus of the Board on Higher Level Skills issues in the workforce was critical. The Board discussed the need to focus the Higher Level Skills strategy on the economic sectors identified in the City Region Business Case.

## 5. JOBSMART/ EMPLOYER GATEWAY

Diane Martin (Hartlepool Borough Council) and Les Howard (North East Employer Coalition) presented to the Board on the Employer Engagement Model within the REF – focusing on Job Placement and sub-regional local projects. Diane Martin described the approach being taken towards the 2010 Tall Ships Race and Tourism in the Tees Valley. This included a joined up approach to worklessness, links to Business Link North East services, links to “VisitTeesValley” in relation to the Skills Passport for the sector and to “Cultural Volunteering”.

In response to a question from Gwenda Lyn Jones (Darlington Borough Council), Diane Martin confirmed that the “Employer Gateway” proposal was an extension of the “Building Futures” programme. On this basis, the local authority representatives agreed that details of the proposal would need to go to respective local authority Cabinets before commitment could be made. In discussion, Diane Martin also confirmed that:

The Tees Valley local authorities would be asked to identify suitable clients for the programme and opportunities with employers/ projects.

The Employer Gateway would focus on Tourism/ Hospitality Sectors

The Employer Gateway would not just support “hardest to reach” individuals but also those who were job ready (in line with the REF model)

Sara Robinson (Further Education sector) advised that it was expected to be announced shortly that Darlington College will be part of a National Skills Academy in partnership with People First, the Sector Skills Council for the sector. Sara also commented that there were still uncertainties and ineffectiveness in working with Business Link in respect of Skills Brokerage.

John Lowther (Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit) commented that there would be opportunities to extend the “Employer Gateway” model into major projects/ recruitment events as well as other sectors. Steve Davidson (Chair) added that he saw the model as having a number of applications – geographic, thematic e.g. Tall Ships, as well as working with existing employers and supporting JobCentreplus led Routeways and Local Employer Partnerships (LEPs).

Diane Martin confirmed that this was a well established model in Tees Valley, through programmes such as “Building Futures” in the Construction sector. “VisitTeesValley” were already working with existing employers in the Tourism and Hospitality sector and new posts were also going to be established to support the sector. Antony Steinberg agreed that this was a useful model which could also be used to support inward investment projects, and that this was a good opportunity to extend the approach across the sub region.

Mark Rowell (Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council) requested copies of the representation.

**Action: Les Howard to provide Tees Valley Partnership copies of the presentation for distribution to the Board.**

Mark Rowell expressed concern about possible capacity issues within the skills network, and that if demands or projects are too big, then bottlenecks may arise and employers/ individuals become disenchanted.

**Agreed: The Board agreed the proposal in principle subject to more detailed information at the next Board meeting.**

The meeting closed.

The next meeting of the Tees Valley Employment and Skills Board is scheduled for 14.00 on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2008, Venue to be advised.