

**County Durham Economic Partnership
Learning and Skills Working Group
23 May 2007**

In attendance;

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| Nick James | CDEP LSWG Chair (Learning & Skills Council) |
| Richard Smith | CDEP EPO Secretariat |
| Zoë Thirlaway | CDEP Secretariat |
| Claire Fewster | CDEP Secretariat – Single Programme |
| Graham Tebbutt | CDEP Secretariat – Single Programme |
| Ginny Williams | DCC – Children & Young People Services |
| Christine Caine | JobCentre Plus |
| Kelly Al-Sundukchi | North East Chamber of Commerce |
| Sally Hudson | East Durham & Houghall College |
| Sara Allen | One Voice Network |
| Nick Brewster | FE Representative (Bishop Auckland College) |
| Karen Marshall | One NorthEast |
| Margaret Bell | 14-19 Partnership |

Apologies;

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| Richard Prisk | District of Easington Council |
| Andy Palmer | Sedgefield Borough Council |
| Catherine Bleasdale | County Durham and Darlington PCT |

Welcome and Introductions

Nick James welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that Margaret Bell had been invited as an addition to the meeting as he felt that it was important to have the perspective of the 14-19 agenda. Nick James emphasised that he would go through the appropriate official processes to include her in the group if everyone were agreed.

Agreed Action: Nick James

It was highlighted that the LEA no longer existed and it was now under Children and Young Peoples Services.

The BSN/BLNE issue was still in a state of flux, but as soon as the new structure was finalised a representative would be brought onto the group.

The group was informed that Jeanette Trafford from the Life Long Learning Partnership had now left the organisation and a new representative would be suggested in due course.

It was suggested that the Education Business Link Consortium should have a representative on the group, although an alternative arrangement could be that Ginny Williams would act as a representative for this organisation. It was agreed that EBLC would be a useful organisation to have represented on the group as it would support the EBLOC work. Nick James agreed to take this request to the Board.

Agreed Action: Nick James

It was emphasised that the purpose of the restructure was to create a smaller more defined group therefore all the group members would need to ensure that they were communicating proactively with partner organisations.

Declarations of interest

Margaret Bell – Potential Projects – Margaret explained that she was on the management board for the ILC.

Nick Brewster – Potential Projects – Nick declared an interest when the Durham Logistics College was raised.

Matters arising

None

Chairs Report / New LSWG arrangements and future work programme

Nick James explained the reasons for the partnership re-structure, how the new structure would work and highlighted the areas of work the new partnership would need to help deliver. It was highlighted that the new working group should be more strategic and not just about Single Programme spend.

The perspective of the group would be driven by the County Durham Economic Strategy. The strategy was taking longer to produce than originally anticipated but it was difficult to get the balance right between being part of the bigger North East region through the City Regions agenda and the more localised County Durham issues. There was a risk the County could become marginalised if it couldn't demonstrate what it was offering to the regional agenda. The next draft of the strategy would be going to a special Board meeting on the 18 June, if it was agreed at that stage it would be released for wider consultation. It was hoped that the strategy would be signed off by the end of September as the LAA was going through a process of review and the CDES would need to feed into the new LAA targets. It was agreed that the CDES should be looked at in more detail at the next meeting if the CDEP Board signed off the document.

Action: Secretariat

Nick James provided a short summary of the special skills SAP meeting that had taken place on 21 May. He explained that IFF had been commissioned to look at local level skill data across the County. This report had provided evidence that County Durham was actually doing better than anticipated eg 80% of the workforce was qualified to at least level 2. However discussions were still taking place to establish the validity of the findings as there were disparities between these results and the literacy and numeracy results. It was hoped that ILF would be able to bring its findings to the next meeting.

Action: Secretariat

The Secretariat requested group members identify the strategic issues and key work areas which should be included in the work programme. Ideas included;

- Input into CDES
- City Regions
- Skills survey
- Leitch and other related reports
- Welfare to Work
- Diploma lines
- Foundation learning tier
- How to improve engagement and take up, including employers
- Links to learning partnerships
- Adult Learning Strategy
- Eradication of NEETS for under 35s. Discussions were needed around deliverability. This would link into the work that the 14-19 Partnership were doing.

Any additional work items should be provided to Richard Smith at the Secretariat.

Action: All

Single Programme Report

Nick James provided a short summary of the report. He highlighted that there had been an underspend in the last financial year but that all of the skills outputs had been achieved, however only 1,359 of the 2,550 were achieved through skills projects the rest were gained from projects outside the L&SWG remit. Concern was raised over the level of approved activity as it was not high enough at this stage in the financial year. It was highlighted that a decision on delivery mechanisms had not yet been made by ONE and there was a risk that any funding not spent by the end of this financial year would be lost to the County.

Nick James went through the list of projects for the 06/08 period. It was agreed that Margaret Bell would follow up on the Sedgefield Borough Vocational Skills Centre.

Action: Margaret Bell

Nick James explained that he had been in discussions with the Durham Business School regarding the use of virtual learning facilities for businesses through the 'Raising Employer Demand for Skills' project. A PIF had been submitted to ONE and once that had been approved then they would need to engage with other parties.

Action: Nick James

A PIF had been submitted for the 'Reducing Worklessness' project. The Business Case will be brought back to the LSWG for information.

Action: Secretariat

The 'Inclusion Delivery within HMP Institutions' project is based around work at Low Newton and Deerbolt Prisons. A meeting was taking place on 8 June to try and take this project forward.

Concern was raised that the Sedgefield Construction Centre had been lost from the list. It was agreed that the Secretariat would look into it.

Action: Secretariat

Potential Projects

Industrial Learning Centre (ILC)

Richard Smith explained the key points relating to the ILC project. It was highlighted that this facility would provide targeted support for young people, adult providers and employers, providing access to courses that schools and FE colleges would not be able to deliver, which would add value to the skills offer in the County. There would be strong links with employer based learning and the facility would be open after work hours for 'twilight use'.

The project had been approved in principal by the previous L&SWG a couple of years ago. At that time a study was carried out to look at the long term financial sustainability of the project and it did not demonstrate a suitably robust long term future. Since then a further financial report has been drawn up and following verification from TBR consultants the project is now looking much more financially sustainable. This project would still be classed as a medium risk project. Part of the problem was that although schools had been approached to ascertain whether they would use the facility, and they had received a positive response, they could not commit long term as future annual school budgets were not known. The group were asked if they felt the Partnership should support this project to the next stage which would be to draw up a business case and whether they felt that the funding being requested was appropriate.

The level of reserves in the financial breakdown was raised and it was suggested that 18 months running costs should be used as a rough guide for appropriate levels of reserves.

It was highlighted that a number of partners had supported this project for many years and it would be a huge loss if the Partnership could not move this project to the next stage. The issue of the newts on the site were raised and whether this was still a problem. Richard Smith agreed to check the situation and report back to the group.

Action: Secretariat

It was felt that the revenue element of the project was the most vulnerable and that some partners were confused by the potential uses for the centre. The Secretariat would bring the Business Case back to the L&SWG for information.

Agreed

Action: Secretariat

Sedgefield Borough Training

Nick James provided a short summary of the project. The project sponsor (Sedgefield Borough Council) is currently in discussions with a range of possible providers. The project sponsor is currently considering various options for progressing the project and will feed these back to the CDEP at an appropriate time.

East Durham Engineering and Technology Centre

Richard Smith provided a short summary of the project and explained that the study was made up of two stages. Firstly demand was looked into and then shortfalls in provision were identified. There were still some concerns that although there had been indications that people would use the facility these were only suggestions. In terms of spend, funding was not being requested for this year as the Partnership had paid for the study to be carried out, but they were looking for verbal support. Concern was raised that the footprint for this kind of facility would need to be very large to work and that links with Sunderland may be needed in order to achieve this. Further information would be brought back to the group as soon as it was available.

Action: Secretariat

Durham Logistics College

Nick James highlighted the emerging DLC project and explained that it would be looking to bring forward construction skills from premises in Langley Park. This was an alternative proposal to Derwentside and Bishop Auckland Colleges. Concerns were raised as to whether any in depth discussions had taken place with the local schools as they were currently backing the original proposal. It was agreed that further information would be brought to the group when available.

Action: Secretariat

County Durham Economic Partnership Skills Summit

It was explained that Ken Jarrold (Chair of the Board) felt that the skills agenda was one of the County's most significant issues. It had been agreed at the Board that a Skills Summit should be organised for Autumn time, the exact date was yet to be confirmed. Richard Smith explained that he would be pulling a small group together to draw up the programme and he welcomed any suggestions of key topic areas or particular sectors which should be targeted. He would bring this work back to the next meeting and actively engage with the L&SWG and its members.

Agreed

Action: Secretariat

11. Date and time of next meeting

All Venues are yet to be confirmed but all meetings will start at 10:00.

Tuesday 10 July 2007

Tuesday 11 September

Tuesday 06 November

Tuesday 15 January 2008

Tuesday 11 March

Tuesday 13 May