

# MINUTES - **DRAFT**

## Meeting: Higher Level Skills Advisory Group

**Date:** 4 December 2019

**Time:** 10.00am

**Place:** Room E, 169 Union Street,  
London SE1 0LL

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### **Members present:**

Nichola Hay, Skills for Londoners Board member (Acting Chair)  
Dr Graeme Atherton, London Higher  
Pat Carvalho, Harrow College Uxbridge College  
Professor Martin Doel, University College London  
Ruben Hale, University of Arts Awarding Body  
Yvonne Kelly, Barking & Dagenham College  
Mary Vine-Morris, Association of Colleges

### **GLA Officers:**

Julia Harrowsmith, Senior Manager – Strategy and Relationships, Skills & Employment

James Lee, Principal Policy Officer, Skills & Employment  
Laura Marshall, Senior Board Officer, Skills & Employment (Clerk)  
Cameron Tait, Principal Policy Officer - Strategy, Policy and Relationships, Skills & Employment (Item 1-5)  
Beth Wheaton, Senior Policy Officer, Skills & Employment

### **Others in attendance:**

Magdalen Attwater, University of London  
Richard Boniface, RCU  
Peter O'Brien, London Councils  
Gareth Parry, RCU  
Jessica Strenk, Middlesex University London  
Anne Thompson, RCU

## **1 Introduction and apologies**

- 1.1 The Deputy Chair welcomed members to the meeting of the Advisory Group and led a round of introductions.
- 1.2 Apologies for absence were received from the Chair, George Johnston. The Deputy Chair, Nichola Hay chaired the meeting on his behalf.
- 1.3 Apologies for absence were also received from David Hillier, Simon Ashworth, Rebecca Plant, Katie Bell (Jessica Strenk attended in her stead), Dr Bob Gilworth (Magdalen Attwater attended in his stead) and Dr Philippa Lloyd.

## **2 Declarations of Interest**

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

## **3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

### **3.1 RESOLVED:**

**The minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2019 were agreed as a correct record.**

## **4 Actions Arising**

### **4.1 RESOLVED:**

**The actions arising from the previous meeting were noted.**

## **5 Higher Level Apprenticeship Policy**

- 5.1 The Group received a report covering recent changes in higher level apprenticeship provision in London.
- 5.2 Members heard that since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April 2017, there had been a rise in the number of higher level (Level 4/5) and degree level (Level 6/7) starts in London. However, at the same time there had been a decline in intermediate and advanced level apprenticeships (Level 2/3). Members noted that London had a larger share of higher and degree level apprenticeship starts than the rest of England.

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5.3 Members were asked to consider several questions and discuss key issues which included: to what extent the current mix of apprenticeship provision reflected the needs of London's employers and economy, methods to support progression routes into and from higher level apprenticeships, and ways to ensure that the welcome growth in higher level apprenticeships in London was sustained and how this would be funded.

5.4 Members raised several points, including:

- the importance of protecting higher level apprenticeships but not at the expense of intermediate apprenticeships;
- the nature of other higher level skills provision being rebadged as apprenticeships;
- incentivising employers to invest in 16-18 year old apprenticeships;
- the way that providers look at apprenticeships and skills progression by sector;
- the variations in economic development strategies in boroughs;
- the need to focus on small to medium enterprises (SMEs) not just the bigger levy payers;
- incentivising early talent by looking at standards and entry routes for all sectors and all levels;
- the view of apprenticeships as a vehicle driven by the market and employers versus as a vehicle for social mobility;
- incentivising employer behaviour and the Mayor of London's role linked to this; and
- the importance of workforce planning, and the importance of essential skills (project management, leadership, management, etc.)

Officers noted the issues with SME applications, specifically the setting up of a digital account.

5.5 Members were also asked to consider ways to improve diversity in London's higher level apprenticeship take-up and what the Mayor of London could do.

5.6 Key points raised included:

- opening up opportunities for early talent coming in at Level 2/3 and higher;
- promote new opportunities over upskilling existing workers;
- incentives and targeting for employers rather than restrictions around the use of the levy;
- employers signing up to pledges (possibly through the Good Work Standard);
- reviewing recruitment practices and workplace development;
- reviewing careers advice provided in schools and colleges;
- promoting degree apprenticeships in colleges in disadvantaged areas of London;
- the rebranding of degree level apprenticeships;

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- audiences and marketing messages;
- the importance of role models, information, advice and guidance in improving diversity;
- working with universities and degree apprenticeship providers to coordinate ‘taster courses’; and
- examining different cultures rather than applying a blanket approach.

5.7 Officers provided Members with a basic update on the apprenticeship programmes.

**5.8 RESOLVED:**

**The content of the report was noted.**

*[Cameron Tait left the meeting]*

## **6 Higher Level Skills (Level 4/5) Research Update**

6.1 Members received an update on the Higher Level Skills (Level 4/5) research being carried out by RCU. This research is looking at the provision of, participation in and demand for education and skills at Levels 4/5 in London. Members were provided with interim findings, with the final report due in April 2020.

6.2 Gareth Parry presented the history of higher level skills to the Group, specifically referring to the prevalence and preference of higher level skills and the lesser take up of degrees in the 1950/60s and the reversal of this trend in the modern day. Members also noted the differences between higher level skills take up in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the government funding attached to prescribed education in the 1980s, the modern development of the increased range in Level 4/5 education and the credit awarding system, and the development of the foundation degree in the 1990s which was planned to become the model for Level 4/5 education. Members noted that historical language continues to live on which had led to confusion in the sector.

6.3 Richard Boniface presented the interim findings of the research being carried out by RCU.

6.4 Members suggested that the research included learner attainment data at levels 4 and 5, a comparison of delivery of level 4 and 5 provision in certain parts of London and sectors against the location of employers. The research should also include 2018/19 data if this was available in time, to examine whether trends were continuing.

6.5 Anne Thompson presented the fieldwork, strategy and schedule for the research, specifically highlighting the interview studies in forty sites that would

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be taking place in two waves from September 2019 to February 2020 and explaining the methodology of the field research.

- 6.6 Ruben Hale explained he was unsure if University of the Arts London (UAL) learners were included in the data presented by RCU. UAL were set to be interviewed by RCU at a later date and would discuss this issue then.
- 6.7 The Chair asked that Members shared any relevant employer contacts via the Clerk. RCU would approach these employers as part of the research project and the interview studies.
- 6.8 The Chair also asked that data on apprenticeship provision in London presented to the Apprenticeships Advisory Group was shared with Members.
- 6.9 RESOLVED:**
- (a) The content of RCU and the research team's presentation and interim findings were noted;**
  - (b) Members to share relevant employer contacts with the research team via the Clerk. RCU would approach these employers as part of the research project and the interview studies; and**
  - (c) Officers agreed to share with the Group data on apprenticeship provision in London previously presented to the Apprenticeships Advisory Group.**

## **7 GLA Update**

- 7.1 Beth Wheaton thanked Richard Boniface, Gareth Parry, Anne Thompson from RCU for presenting at the meeting.
- 7.2 Members were asked to provide any comments on the interim RCU findings to Beth Wheaton by January 2020 so that they could be considered before the report was finalised.
- 7.3 Members noted that the final RCU report would be published in April 2020 and the next meeting of the Group would be in June 2020, due to the Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections (May 2020). Officers would meet with Members individually before the next meeting to provide them with updates.
- 7.4 Richard Boniface explained that RCU were wanting to include learner student case studies in their findings to highlight the benefits of studying at Level 4/5 to learners. Members noted that cooperation of providers would be helpful and Members felt that it was important to capture those students who had not attained Level 4/5 and had dropped off.

**7.5 RESOLVED:**

The GLA update was noted.

**8 Date of next meeting**

- 8.1 The date of the next meeting was to be confirmed and was expected to take place after the Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections (7 May 2020).

**9 Any Other Business the Chair Considers Urgent**

- 9.1 Peter O'Brien explained that London Councils were re-running their Higher Education Journey report which tracked people's progression into and out of Higher Education. Members noted that this report was due to be released in May 2020. Peter O'Brien offered to share the link to the "Higher Education Journey of Young London Residents 2018" report with Members.

- 9.2 The Chair asked for this report to be shared with the Group and the Apprenticeship Advisory Group when it was released in May 2020.

**9.3 RESOLVED:**

- (a) That London Councils' "Higher Education Journey of Young London Residents 2018" report would be shared with the Group; and
- (b) That London Councils' Higher Education Journey report would be shared with members once released in May 2020.

**10 Close of Meeting**

- 10.1 The meeting closed at 11.51am.

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