

MINUTES - **DRAFT**

Meeting: Higher Level Skills Advisory Group

Date: 9 July 2020

Time: 1.00pm

Place: Remote Meeting

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Members present:

George Johnston, Skills for Londoners Business Partnership member (Chair)
Nichola Hay, Skills for Londoners Board member (Deputy Chair)
Simon Ashworth, Association of Employment and Learning Providers
Yolande Burgess, London Councils
Professor Martin Doel, University College London
Ruben Hale, University of Arts Awarding Body
Yvonne Kelly, Barking & Dagenham College
Rebecca Plant, Microsoft
Mary Vine-Morris, Association of Colleges

GLA Officers:

Laura Marshall, Senior Board Officer, Programmes and Governance, Skills & Employment (Clerk)
Forogh Rahmani, Senior Manager – Strategy and Relationships, Skills & Employment
Atif Shafique, Senior Policy Officer – Strategy and Relationships, Skills & Employment
Beth Wheaton, Senior Policy Officer – Strategy and Relationships, Skills & Employment

Others in attendance:

Magdalen Attwater, University of London
Richard Boniface, RCU
David Lee, Queen Mary University London
Gareth Parry, RCU
Anne Thompson, RCU
Graham Whalley, RCU

1 Introduction and apologies

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting of the Advisory Group and led a round of introductions.
- 1.2 Apologies for absence were received from Katie Bell, Dr Graeme Atherton, Pat Carvalho and Dr Philippa Lloyd (David Lee attended in her stead).
- 1.3 Members noted that Dr Bob Gilworth had retired from the University of London and had now stood down from the Advisory Group. The Chair put on the record his thanks to Bob for his work on the Advisory Group.
- 1.4 Members heard that Magdalen Attwater would be attending future Advisory Group meetings as a substitute representative for the University of London until a permanent successor to Dr Gilworth's role had been appointed.

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 4 December 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Actions Arising

- 4.1 Members heard that the London Councils' "Higher Education Journey," which was due to be published in May 2020, had been delayed due to COVID-19. London Councils were in the process of agreeing a date to publish the report.
- 4.2 **RESOLVED:**

The actions arising from the previous meeting were noted.

5 Governance Update

- 5.1 The Advisory Group received an update on governance arrangements now that the Mayor of London and London Assembly elections had been

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postponed to May 2021. Member appointments, which were due to expire in May this year, would be extended to September 2021.

- 5.2 Members would receive formal confirmation of this shortly and would also be asked to update their register of interests.

5.3 DECISION:

The governance update was noted.

6 GLA Recovery Planning Update

- 6.1 The Advisory Group received an update on GLA recovery planning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 6.2 Members heard that a strong, responsive skills and employment system would be critical to recovery, particularly as the crisis was likely to lead to a substantial rise in unemployment and deepen structural inequalities in the labour market.
- 6.3 Members noted the strong actions that the GLA had taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including a £11m Skills for Londoners (SfL) COVID-19 Response Fund.
- 6.4 The Advisory Group heard that the London Progression Collaboration (LPC) launched the 'Reskilling Recovery Fund' on 9 July 2020, which called on large employers to pledge unspent levy funds. It was noted that to date £1m had been pledged by organisations such as Amazon, BBC, Federation of Small Businesses and Catch 22.
- 6.5 Atif Shafique, Senior Policy Officer highlighted that the GLA had been working closely with boroughs and the M9, and there had been engagement with Ministers and officials in the Department for Education (DfE), Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Treasury.
- 6.6 Members noted that six indicative proposals to support London's recovery had been identified.
- 6.7 Atif Shafique highlighted that the GLA was working with London Councils to coordinate work on London's transition (coordinate steps out of lockdown across the Capital) and recovery (to coordinate the planning for London's future post-recovery).
- 6.8 Members noted the governance bodies set up to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic at the GLA which included the London Recovery Board, London Recovery Taskforce, Economic Recovery Group and Social Recovery Group.

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- 6.9 Forogh Rahmani, Senior Manager – Strategy and Relationships explained that work was underway to look at the Skills & Employment Unit's stakeholder engagement plans as the Unit wanted to involve as many people as possible to shape skills & employment work and how to take the work forward.
- 6.10 Members heard that a SfL Board/Business Partnership COVID-19 recovery workshop was taking place on 13 July 2020.
- 6.11 Members noted that the Mayor was in contact with Chancellor of the Exchequer and other M9 Mayor's frequently and the GLA was happy to advocate on behalf of Members where possible. Forogh Rahmani asked for Members to feed in their advocacy asks and reflections on the "Plan for Jobs 2020"¹ to the team.
- 6.12 Professor Martin Doel felt that a sectoral approach was beginning to emerge. It was noted that the focus of the Mayor's activity was currently geographical (London) but increasingly the incentivisation and some of the response at the skills level and global level would be sectoral. It would be important to understand what the key sectors for London would be going forward and what areas the Mayor could have the biggest impact.
- 6.13 Professor Martin Doel also raised the point around Devolution White Paper which was highlighted in the presentation. Members noted that there was a Further Education (FE) White Paper in production. He encouraged Members to be aware of the FE White Paper.
- 6.14 Forogh Rahmani explained that the GLA had been involved in some discussion with DfE around the FE White Paper and there was a real push to do more on skills as part of the recovery package. Members noted that the "Plan for Jobs 2020" speech did not include any announcements on skills apart from the sector based work academies. It was noted that the Metro Mayors had been clear that they wanted more local power to respond to COVID-19 recovery at a local level.
- 6.15 Members heard that there was more appetite to look at a more sectoral-based approach and the creative industry, green economy and health & social care were key priority areas for the Mayor. Forogh Rahmani encouraged Members to feed in their views and ideas on recovery and any lobbying asks for the government as the GLA was pulling together a response on what had not been included in the "Plan for Jobs 2020" speech.
- 6.16 The Chair explained that the SfL Business Partnership was sectoral focussed and felt that the sectoral approach discussed above, would be useful for the Business Partnership to feed into.

¹ The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak delivered his "Plan for Jobs 2020" speech on 8 July 2020.

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- 6.17 Ruben Hale picked up the point around a sectoral approach, specifically questioning whether the plan was to move people around the economy as quickly as possible to patch holes in employment figures or to do something longer term. He questioned what the strategic view from government and local regions was on the opportunity to upskill people into some high value or longer term employment in industries that stood a better chance of growth and survival in the future.
- 6.18 Mary Vine-Morris noted that the SfL Board did not include representation from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus. She felt that DWP and Jobcentre Plus should be involved in discussions, especially after details announced in the “Plan for Jobs 2020” speech.
- 6.19 Members heard that the Chair and Deputy Chair had questioned whether SfL subordinate bodies could feed into the SfL Board/Business Partnership COVID-19 recovery workshop. It was noted that officers were looking into how this would work.
- 6.20 The Deputy Chair, Nichola Hay highlighted the early talent focus, specifically questioning how to get communications out to young people and how to support them with careers planning. She highlighted ideas such as a London Youth Hub and the need for enhanced careers advice on the ground and virtually.
- 6.21 Nichola Hay also raised the point around subcontractors and AEB flexibilities, specifically highlighting that some subcontractors could not get access to funds to support programmes that would benefit recovery, due to the AEB being limited to a specific group of providers. She also mentioned the Kickstart scheme, specifically highlighting the need for training that could support the six-month work placements with employers.
- 6.22 RESOLVED:**
- (a) The presentation and subsequent discussion was noted; and**
 - (b) Members to feed in their views and ideas on recovery, any lobbying asks and reflections on the “Plan for Jobs 2020” speech to the team.**

7 Level 4/5 Research

- 7.1 Members received an update on the Higher Level Skills (Level 4/5) research being carried out by RCU. This research looked at the provision of, participation in and demand for education and skills at Levels 4/5 in London.
- 7.2 Members noted that the majority of the fieldwork was completed prior to the closure of institutions due to COVID-19. However, a set of learner case

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studies due to accompany the research had been delayed until the autumn term.

- 7.3 Richard Boniface, Gareth Parry and Anne Thompson presented the draft executive summary of findings on the research that had been carried out by RCU.

[Yvonne Kelly left the meeting]

- 7.4 Professor Martin Doel highlighted that he had received feedback on the growth of pharmacy technician courses in particular, both in and out of London. He explained that this was likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 7.5 Professor Martin Doel suggested that the Mayor could use the limited funds he had in a 'nudge fashion' to reinforce particular sectors and to offer incentives to providers and/or to employers in sectors identified as being particularly important.
- 7.6 Mary Vine-Morris questioned the conclusions that prompted student demand and employer demand. Gareth Parry explained that fieldwork and a literature review informed the conclusions around student and employer demand. He highlighted that the RCU were struck by the diversity of strategies adopted by organisations within a sector, as well cross sectoral differences.
- 7.7 Mary Vine-Morris felt that the conclusions reached around student and employer demand would have an impact on what was done next. There was a problem around understanding employer demand and how to respond to it in an appropriate way.
- 7.8 David Lee felt that there needed to be caution around subdividing sectors and provision as there could be a situation where a false criteria was created. He felt that the right level of granulation was needed.
- 7.9 Members noted that the executive summary was a draft and the GLA had not yet signed up to or commented on any of the recommendations outlined in the executive summary. The final version of the report may not include all the recommendations set out in the draft executive summary.
- 7.10 The Chair thanked the RCU team for all their work and reminded Members to email the Clerk and Beth Wheaton, Senior Policy Officer with any views and comments on the executive summary.
- 7.11 **RESOLVED:**
- (a) **The content of the report and executive summary at Appendix A of the report was noted;**

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- (b) The Clerk to circulate the RCU presentation slides with the Advisory Group; and**
- (c) Members to feed in their views and comments on the executive summary to the Clerk and Beth Wheaton.**

[Rebecca Plant left the meeting]

8 Date of next meeting

- 8.1 The next meeting of the Higher Level Skills Advisory Group was to be confirmed.

9 Any Other Business the Chair Considers Urgent

- 9.1 There was none.

10 Close of Meeting

- 10.1 The meeting closed at 14.32.

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