

MINUTES - **DRAFT**

Meeting: Higher Level Skills Advisory Group

Date: 24 February 2021

Time: 2.00pm

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
Dr Graeme Atherton, London Higher
Yolande Burgess, London Councils
Pat Carvalho, Harrow College Uxbridge College
Dr Kate Daubney, Director of the University of London Centre of Excellence for Careers & Employability and Director of The Careers Group, University of London
Professor Martin Doel, University College London
David Hillier, Chair of Linking London Higher Education in Further Education Practitioner Group
Mary Vine-Morris, Association of Colleges

Skills & Employment Unit, GLA Officers:

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

Others in attendance:

Lindsey Bowes, Research Director, CFE Research
Dr Tracey Cockerton, Deputy Dean (Learning, Teaching and Quality) for Health and Education, Middlesex University
Sophie Spong, Research Manager, CFE Research

1 Introduction and apologies

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting of the Advisory Group.
- 1.2 Apologies for absence were received from Ruben Hale, Yvonne Kelly, Dr Philippa Lloyd, and Rebecca Plant.
- 1.3 Members heard that Katie Bell had left the Higher Level Skills Advisory Group since its last meeting, as she had left Middlesex University in December 2020. A letter had been sent from the Chair, thanking Katie for her contributions to the Advisory Group during this Mayoral term.
- 1.4 The Chair explained that Dr Tracey Cockerton, Deputy Dean (Learning, Teaching and Quality) for Health and Education was joining the meeting as an attendee, representing Middlesex University. It was noted that GLA officers were working with Middlesex University to find a permanent replacement member.

2 Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 Professor Martin Doel explained that he had signed a confidentiality agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) to advise them on their funding and accountability work around the Skills for Jobs White Paper. He highlighted that he would need to be careful in what he shared during the discussion at Item 5.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

3.1 RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Actions Arising

- 4.1 Beth Wheaton, Senior Policy Officer explained that GLA officers were organising a roundtable in March 2021 to launch the RCU report and to discuss how the GLA could take some of the recommendations outlined in the RCU report forward. She highlighted that this roundtable meeting would also discuss the elements of the Skills for Jobs White Paper that looked at higher technical education in more detail.

4.2 RESOLVED:

The actions arising from the previous meeting were noted.

5 Reflections on the Skills for Jobs White Paper

- 5.1 The Skills for Jobs White Paper was announced by HM Government on 21 January 2021. The White Paper set out reforms to post-16 technical education and training to support people to develop the skills needed to get good jobs and improve national productivity.
- 5.2 The Skills Strategy Manager outlined the GLA's response to the White Paper, explaining that the White Paper had provided a welcome focus on improving outcomes in Further Education (FE), which would ensure skills provision was more aligned with the needs of local labour markets and would increase support for teachers. The White Paper also recognised that investment in the local skills systems was essential.
- 5.3 The Skills Strategy Manager explained that the GLA wanted to work with government to build a successful delegation of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) to ensure London's skills system was equipped to support Londoners into good jobs, improve wellbeing and community cohesion, as well as meeting the needs of London's employers.
- 5.4 During the subsequent discussion, the following points were raised:
- The fact that there were lots of opportunities for building up level 4 and 5 skills which was welcome news.
 - The lack of understanding around what was meant by 'local' in terms of the Local Skills Improvement Plans.
 - The idea of establishing "College Business Centres" within FE colleges as an interesting model which seemed to be like Institutes of Technology (IoTs) in how they would be set up.
 - The idea of a system of credit modularisation.
 - That there was no commitment to a three year spending review in the Skills for Jobs White Paper.
 - That there seemed to be a limitation to a one year horizon which would undermine the move to maintenance grants/loans for higher technical skills.
 - The strong reference to the Chamber of Commerce (among others) in the Skills for Jobs White Paper versus the lack of reference to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs), local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), etc.
 - The idea of implementing the flexible lifelong loan entitlement from 2025 outlined in the Skills for Jobs White Paper and the suggestion that there might be a shift away from grants towards loans.

- The limited references to transferrable skills alongside specialist/technical skills throughout the Skills for Jobs White Paper which was surprising given the likely long term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market and the need to support career agility.

5.5 RESOLVED:

The Higher Level Skills Advisory Group noted the update and the subsequent discussion.

6 Adult Education Roadmap

- 6.1 Members received a presentation on the Adult Education Roadmap, currently being developed to build on the learning from the Adult Education Budget (AEB) delegation and the first year of AEB delivery by the GLA, to plot the direction of adult education in London for the next Mayoral term.
- 6.2 Members heard how the Roadmap would support the COVID-19 response and recovery work, and how longer-term aims would help to shape adult education to London's needs. An overview of timescales and next steps, which would include roundtables with external stakeholders, was also provided.

[Lindsey Bowes and Sophie Spong joined the meeting].

- 6.3 During the subsequent discussion, the following points were raised:
- The Adult Education Roadmap was welcomed by the Group as it allowed for longer term planning which was needed. It was noted that long term planning usually could not happen because of the limitations around funding.
 - The difficulty of looking at the long term when providers and organisations were focused on the operational, in response to COVID-19.
 - The need for providers to have planning stability so they could take some risks, look forward and develop provision which would be required in the long term.
 - The importance of establishing relationships and recognition of the time that this would take.
 - That there was a focus on learners with limited/basic skills. The purpose of the Advisory Group was to look at learners progressing in work or progressing into higher level skills and members suggested that work needed to be done on mapping the journeys of the different types of learner and all these learners should be supported.

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- The importance of learning pathways, especially when there was a high likelihood that people could be unemployed for a significant amount of time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The impact of COVID-19 on assessment processes, such as changes to GCSEs and A-Levels in response to school closures and impacts on examinations, linked to the impact on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
- The need to build in a level of flexibility to the Adult Education Roadmap as entry points for adults (i.e. young people leaving the school system, looking to go into employment) would likely change due to COVID-19.
- The need for a plan for adult education to fit with the needs of 16-18 year olds entering adult education.
- The importance of making sure that providers had access to funding so skills needs could be addressed.
- That there was a difference between the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) and the DfE objectives and there was a need to acknowledge this in the Adult Education Roadmap and to work to resolve it.

6.4 Karissa Singh, Senior Policy Officer highlighted that she would send a follow-up email after the meeting, explaining that members could email her with any additional comments or feedback on the discussion questions outlined in the presentations or the Adult Education Roadmap more generally.

6.5 RESOLVED:

The Higher Level Skills Advisory Group noted the presentation and the subsequent discussion.

[Karissa Singh left the meeting and Atif Shafique joined the meeting].

7 Contextual Admissions and Work Experience Research

- 7.1 Beth Wheaton, Senior Policy Officer explained that the GLA commissioned CFE Research to conduct two separate qualitative studies focused on contextual admissions and work experience in February 2020.
- 7.2 Members heard that the first report looked at the use of contextual admissions by London's universities. The second focused on the provision of work experience and employability support. Representatives from CFE Research presented key findings from the research.
- 7.3 Members noted that field research with providers and students was undertaken from March – October 2020. However, COVID-19 had had a significant impact on the fieldwork, and the influence of the pandemic on the findings had been considered in both qualitative studies.

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[Yolande Burgess left the meeting].

- 7.4 Dr Kate Daubney questioned whether CFE had talked to Careers Services whilst carrying out the research, explaining that it was important to understand whose voice was represented in the research. Lindsey Bowes and Sophie Spong explained that a mix of stakeholders fed into the research but highlighted that Careers Services specifically fed into the work experience.
- 7.5 Dr Kate Daubney explained that there was no mention of data in the research studies. She highlighted that numerous universities across the country carried out Careers Registration. Careers Registration gathered together data which could be used to map socio-economic indicators (as well as other marker backgrounds) of different students with their career readiness. She questioned whether anyone raised the issue of data whilst CFE Research carried out their research.
- 7.6 Lindsey Bowes explained that the data source mentioned above was not mentioned specifically during the research. Stakeholders specifically spoke about the national administrative data sets that were available such as participation of local areas (POLAR) data and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data. She highlighted that stakeholders consistently flagged issues around getting access to data that offered granularity. Dr Kate Daubney explained that she was happy to discuss this issue with CFE Research further outside of the meeting.
- 7.7 Dr Graeme Atherton questioned whether there was any appetite for coherence in terms of the approach towards contextual admissions from institutions. He explained that a key issue was around universities having different structures and having individualised approaches which added to the complexity. He also questioned whether the research focused on more selective universities.
- 7.8 Lindsey Bowes explained that CFE Research spoke with selective institutions predominantly for the contextual admissions research. She highlighted that the issue around coherence was interesting in that coherence often mitigated against providing clear, concise information on what contextual admissions were and who might be eligible. She explained that each institution often had different target groups or nuances in the students that they were seeking to engage with as part of their access and participation strategy. This had led to nuanced approaches and a had created real challenges around the availability of generic information on contextual admissions (what contextual admissions are, who might be eligible, how learners could benefit, etc).
- 7.9 **RESOLVED:**

The Higher Level Skills Advisory Group noted the Contextual Admissions and Work Experience reports and subsequent discussion.

8 'No Wrong Door' approach

- 8.1 Members received a presentation on the 'No Wrong Door' approach, which aimed to coordinate skills, careers and employment support so there was 'no wrong door' for Londoners and to ensure that employment and enterprise provided a secure route out of poverty. The 'No Wrong Door' approach formed one of four project work strands of the 'Good Work for All' mission. This mission aimed to "support Londoners into good jobs with a focus on sectors key to London's recovery."
- 8.2 The Deputy Chair explained that it was important for practitioners to be able to signpost correctly and to understand individual needs. Practitioners needed to be able to refer people and make sure individuals followed the correct skills pathway that was suitable for their needs.
- 8.3 Pat Carvalho questioned where colleges, FE and training providers fitted into the 'No Wrong Door' approach. She felt that the 'No Wrong Door' approach would benefit from a relationship with college Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services as well as employer services. She mentioned that there could be some duplication and that there was a need for the 'No Wrong Door' approach to align with the Skills for Jobs White Paper.
- 8.4 Mary Vine Morris felt that the focus had been on entry level but there was a need to keep asking about the higher level skills system. Higher level learning usually meant that relationships with learners took longer to develop and that the interest should not just be around the point of entry but should be up to five years later if applicable. She explained that the assumption that every person comes to services with no skills was particularly wrong, especially when viewing the levels and types of unemployment (people being made redundant that have a lot of skills) created by COVID-19.

8.5 RESOLVED:

The Higher Level Skills Advisory Group noted the presentation and the subsequent discussion.

9 Date of next meeting

- 9.1 The next meeting of the Higher Level Skills Advisory Group was to be confirmed.
- 9.2 Members heard that the pre-election period for 2021 GLA (Mayor of London and London Assembly) elections lasted from 22 March 2021 until midnight on polling day, Thursday 6 May 2021. The Senior Board Officer explained that GLA officers would be in touch after the election to outline the next steps for the Group.

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- 9.3 The Senior Board Officer explained that, as is usual practice, the Skills for Londoners (SfL) subordinate bodies would be disbanded at the start of the pre-election period. Officers would undertake a review of the subordinate bodies to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the SfL Board and Business Partnership and were responsive to any new policy development and manifesto commitments, particularly in light of the COVID-19 recovery work. Officers would also review the subordinate bodies to ensure they reflected Mayoral manifestos/new commitments.
- 9.4 The Chair, Deputy Chair and GLA officers thanked the Advisory Group for their hard work, contributions and commitment throughout this Mayoral term. The Senior Board Officer highlighted that members could get in touch with her throughout the pre-election period.

10 Any Other Business the Chair Considers Urgent

- 10.1 There was none.

11 Close of Meeting

- 11.1 The meeting closed at 15.34pm.

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