

Moving our employment and skills work forward

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This paper aims to support a Board discussion to take stock of our employment and skills activity over the past year, agree how we re-position our messaging around new Government policy, and plan activity over the coming year. This paper will be discussed at the City Regions Board on 16 June.

Alongside this item is a separate paper on young people's education, employment and training.

Action/s

Members are asked to:

1. Note activity over the past year (paragraph 2)
2. Advise on re-positioning our work given new Government policy (paragraphs 3-5)
3. Provide a steer on any new activity for the upcoming year (paragraph 6)

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Moving our employment and skills work forward

Background

1. This paper aims to support a discussion that takes stock of our employment and skills activity over the past year, any re-positioning needed on our messaging given new Government policy, and planning activity over the coming year.

Activity over the last year

2. Much of our work in the past year has focused on the Covid-19 implications. We have:
 - 2.1. Responded to Covid-19 with a **jobs and skills recovery position paper** that puts Work Local principles at the heart of our solution. Alongside this we developed policy positions on **Kickstart** and **Restart** which have both shaped DWP's evolving thinking. The Boards also took a view on the **Further Education White Paper** which will inform lobbying on the new Skills and Post-16 Education Bill (May 2021).
 - 2.2. Organised a roundtable between both Boards and the **Minister for Employment** to discuss various Plan for Jobs initiatives (December 2020).
 - 2.3. Launched new data on projected **green jobs** required in each local authority area by 2030 and 2050 (June 2020). This landed well with our sector, stakeholders, national media and with Parliament having provided written and oral evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee (March 2021)
 - 2.4. Organised a **Devolution APPG session** (July 2020) on green jobs, Work Local and recovery bringing parliamentarians, councillors and stakeholders together.
 - 2.5. Worked with sector to set out the implications of the Government's **Adult Education Budget** funding rule change on councils' adult and community learning provision. Proactive work to influence the Government in progress (**see annex A**).
 - 2.6. Responded to the [DfE's flexi-apprenticeship consultation](#) (**see annex B**).
 - 2.7. Brought together **Whitehall** leads with councils to engage on, and shape, Plan for Jobs related activity, and ran a workshop with the sector and the **National Audit Office** on its inquiry into the workings of DWP during Covid-19.
 - 2.8. Enhanced our **improvement support offer** which included:
 - 2.8.1. **Councillor's guide** to maximise local adult and community learning service.
 - 2.8.2. **Local government's role in jobs and skills recovery**. To share learning and ideas across the sector we launched two online resources: 1) *Top tips on five themes to boost a local jobs and skills recovery* delivered by the *Learning and Work Institute* setting out what the sector can do to: **deal with economic shocks and opportunities, improve basic skills and capabilities, retrain the local population, address long-term unemployment and youth unemployment**. 2) Thirteen case studies delivered by *Rocket Science* showing local government's role to support jobs and skills during the crisis and looking ahead to recovery. These are on a new [Local employment and skills recovery learning hub](#) and launched at a [webinar](#) on 20 May with 208 delegates.

2.8.3. **Mapping national employment and skills provision.** As most provision is commissioned and procured nationally by Government departments or their agencies on different geographic boundaries, it can be difficult for council employment and skills teams to know what support is available and when. This completed project by *Research Matters* has mapped provision out and aims to help improve conversations between local and national government on how to collaborate on existing provision by geography and any future opportunity. It will be available in the summer.

Re-positioning our messaging around new Government policy

3. In our jobs and skills recovery messaging, we recommend:
 - 3.1. Much better alignment locally and nationally of infrastructure investment to create jobs with employability measures so residents benefit from new local opportunities;
 - 3.2. That with sufficient resources and a co-design partnership to shape new and re-design existing Plan for Jobs initiatives, local government can coordinate well-intended but disconnected national schemes around 'place' so they become greater than the sum of their parts; and
 - 3.3. Moving beyond recovery and looking ahead to the Levelling Up White Paper, our Work Local principles should form a blueprint for skills and employment devolution.
4. The Government's likely approach to jobs, skills, recovery, and levelling up are set out in:
 - 4.1. The Levelling Up White paper may signal a shift from devolution and a focus on outcomes as suggested in the Queen's Speech notes: *"increasing and spreading opportunity, because while talent is evenly distributed, opportunity is not ... creating new good jobs, boosting training and growing productivity ... not through a one-size-fits-all approach, but nurturing different types of economic growth and building on the different strengths that different places have."* (Queen's Speech notes, p30)
 - 4.2. [Skills for Jobs](#) Further Education White Paper (January 2021) confirms a business-led approach to prioritising local skills provision through Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) which will soon be [piloted](#). Our reading of the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill launched on 18 May 2021 puts employer leadership of LSIPs on a statutory footing but with no clear role for local government. **We recommend the LGA works across local government to influence this legislation.**
5. To land our skills and employment work more effectively, and in addition to paragraph 3, we propose introducing a new emphasis on our work which strikes a balance of:
 - 5.1. Continuing to lobby for improvements in programmes and structures of the skills and employment system as all communities require joined up services if they are to truly 'level up', which Work Local principles advocate.

5.2. Building on evidence in our new employment and skills recovery hub and stepping up our comms work, more effectively communicate local government's practical role to support people, places and businesses. In parallel we should describe how we are the Government's default natural partner in making good various Plan for Jobs initiatives e.g. Kickstart and Restart.

5.3. **A Board Member steer on paragraphs 3-5 is welcome.**

Next steps

6. New activity over the coming year is suggested below to complement our existing work. A Board Member steer is sought on this or any further suggestions:

Activity	Timescale
Establish a time-limited LGA 'Jobs Taskforce' comprising Lead Members from both Boards to increase engagement with stakeholders (educationalists, employers, think tanks etc) to support policy alignment on topical roundtables (FE system, engaging business, green jobs)	Autumn 2021 -
Parliamentary activity to shape the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill	June 2021 -
More systematic engagement with relevant Ministers (DWP and DfE) to discuss renewed Plan for Jobs initiatives, local government's role in supporting jobs and skills through lockdown and recovery, improving relationships with Government agencies and providers at a local level.	Summer 2021 -
The impact of the end of furlough on local authority areas alongside existing unemployment, and what is needed from the local provider base to help adults retrain for new jobs	September 2021 –
Exploring how improved and closer working between DWP and local government on the ground could facilitate better outcomes for the unemployed and increased business engagement.	Autumn 2021 – Spring 2022
Continue to enhance our improvement offer: this could include developing a guide to Good Work Charters, and helping the sector expand its employment and skills offer and facilitate learning amongst each other (knowledge hub).	Autumn 2021 –

Implications for Wales

7. While employability is a devolved matter, the LGA and WLGA liaise to share approaches on the level of local / national collaboration.

Financial Implications

8. Any new policy and improvement work will be covered through the 2021/22 allocated budgets.