

Productive Skills 4 Devon Meeting

Held on Thursday 26th November 2009, 2pm
Okehampton Business Centre, Okehampton

Present:

Name	Organisation
Tim Jones (Chair)	Devon and Cornwall Business Council / Enterprise Plymouth
Andrew Lightfoot	DEP Executive Officer
Ben Neild	SLIM
Charlotte Hanson	Community Council for Devon
Chris Lorimer	Exeter College
Craig Marshall	Training Provider Network
Daniel Bailyes	DEP Project Assistant
David Rowe	University of Plymouth
Geoff Hallett	Devon Education Business Project
Graham Morris	Plymouth Employment and Skills Board
Jo Pye	SLIM
John Davey	Careers South West
Julia Foster	Devon County Council
Liz Abell	Devon Renaissance
Philip Done	North West Devon Workforce Development Action Group
Philip Oldfield	Exeter City Council
Steve Pitcher	North Devon +
Tony Skeel	Learning and Skills Council
Trevor Day	PS4D Consultant

Apologies:

Name	Organisation
Anne Barnett	Devon County Council
Caroline Murphy	Train to Gain (Business Link)
Deborah Passmore	Torbay and South Devon Employment and Skills Board
Janet Sinclair	Job Centre Plus
Jeremy Filmer-Bennett	Devon and Cornwall Business Council
Kate Foster	University of Exeter
Keri Denton	Devon County Council
Margaret Davidson	Devon County Council
Michael Cozens	South Hams District Council
Rosie Bates	Devon County Council
Sallie Kittle	Job Centre Plus

1. Welcome / Introduction

Tim opened the meeting by thanking the staff at the Okehampton Business Centre for use of their facilities and welcomed Daniel to the team. Daniel recently began work for the Devon Economic Partnership on a 5-6 month graduate placement organised by Exeter University, replacing Lucy Gough who recently moved onto her next assignment.

2. a. Monitoring Report: SLIM

Ben Neild from SLIM presented the 'Skills Performance Monitoring Report' to the meeting. The presentation will be placed on the website for all to download if required.

Action (Ben and Daniel): Ben to send Daniel glossary of the acronyms used in the report and Daniel to place the presentation with glossary on the website. Link to be sent to all on the PS4D mailing list.

A few notable highlights included:

- The employment rate in Devon according to the Labour Force Survey has been rising, bucking the national trend. However, there was a warning to watch out for confidence intervals.
- The percentage of those actively seeking work (the economically active) is rising, possibly due to retired workers seeking to supplement their pensions as a result of the recession.
- Part-time working is down a bit, though unemployment has not increased at the rate expected for the loss of GDP and productivity. This may partly be due to shorter working hours.
- Unemployment rate increases highest in Torbay and South Devon (in line with regional average). Devon has a low rate increase, but again care needs to be taken with confidence intervals.
- Long term unemployment, worryingly, is rising everywhere, becoming more widespread and at more or less the same rate.
- The percentage of those moving from employment to Incapacity Benefit is rising in the majority of areas, with a higher percentage of people claiming IB in Devon than in the region as a whole (though it meets the national average). Liz suggested this may be due to the fact that population age is not factored into the data.
- Youth unemployment statistics are a concern with higher than regional or national averages in all parts of Devon.
- Good news is that vacancies have held up thus far.
- Frustration was expressed at the levels of educational attainment. Ben, however, warned not to take the figures too seriously due to statistical confidence levels.
- On the traffic light indicators, Devon scores well concerning employment rates, but not so well concerning benefit claimants.

Steve Pitcher suggested that perhaps an explanation for the dampening effect seen in the report, regarding lower than average increases in unemployment rates in north Devon, may be due to intervention in the worst affected areas – which is easier to achieve in smaller rather than larger communities.

Chris Lorimer pointed out that EHOD would be entering an era of public sector austerity. With its full effects yet to be seen, the picture appears bleak. He suggested that Ben consider this in his next analysis.

Tim asked those present to suggest ways in which this key up-to-date data could be used to greatest effect.

- The economic value of training to employers e.g. increased productivity, needs to be clearly communicated to employers (Andrew).
- Craig also made the point that most employees, after training, remain with the same firm – this fact also needs to be communicated to employers to end the perception that once trained (with all the associated costs) other firms benefit by snapping up those individuals.

b. Research Proposals: SLIM

Ben outlined SLIM's research proposals regarding the £50k allocation for research from the reward grant.

Tony argued that investment needs to be directed at developing those skills that result in the greatest impact. The blanket based provision of the past may be in need of revision. The sectors with the most potential need to be identified.

The forces driving the current market also need to be understood (Tim).

Action (Ben): Will meet with each of the ESBs individually and collectively to develop a proposal and report back at the next meeting.

3. Green Skills, Green Jobs

Jo Pye presented to the meeting the green theme that SLIM has been developing, and would be hosting a seminar for the following day.

She argued that the low carbon agenda presented one possible way out of the recession. The bulletin had already gone out to everyone present. Jo also has two further research briefs to hand out.

Action (Jo and Daniel): Jo to email Daniel the presentation and the research briefs. Daniel would then place them on the website and email the link to all those on the PS4D mailing list.

In brief, the presentation brought to the attention of those present the benefits of a green economy and what green jobs / skills are. There were updates on the latest legislative developments and key recent low carbon strategies including, most influentially, 'The UK Low Carbon Industrial Strategy'.

A number of points were raised in discussion following Jo's presentation:

- Tony argued that Devon had a natural head start in a number of the green jobs listed in Jo's presentation. However, there was need for some major capital investment in order to prevent Devon from slipping behind.
- On this point Tim brought our attention to the nuclear skills available in Plymouth. A plan needs to be worked out as to how we take advantage of that. At the moment opportunities are being missed.
- Tim also pointed out that the Devon Strategic Partnership would provide an ideal platform to raise this issue on a strategic level.
- Referring to a point made by Jo, Andrew suggested that there is a great opportunity to 'future proof' businesses by green skilling them now. Although there are initiatives underway at the moment, it still needs to be converted into real employment opportunities.
- Chris argued that a new group was needed to look into these issues further. Tim agreed and argued that there is a need to get the infrastructure in place.

Action (Chris): On the basis of the SLIM report, Chris will liaise with Bicton College and ideas for further action will be brought back to the next meeting.

Steve also drew our attention to the DEPs Esco's seminar on the 10th December. Please contact Daniel for more information.

4. Backing Young Devon Proposals

Andrew reported that £154.3k of the reward grant money was reserved for a scheme worked up by Connexions, Young Devon and the partners in the Future Jobs Fund to support apprenticeships. It is hoped to bring these groups together to support the initiative. How could the money be put to best use?

Tim suggested that some of the money be reserved to present awards to those who succeed in order to inspire them and other young people. He shared with the group the benefits that such recognition could bring – this was supported by those present.

Young People's Business Support Scheme

Chris reported to the group the broad details of the scheme organised by Exeter College to support enterprise among young people aged 14-19. The proposal was passed around for all to see. It is hoped that the scheme can inform similar schemes elsewhere in the future.

Action (all): If there are any partners / links that have been missed in the proposal could Chris be contacted.

Future Jobs Fund

Andrew reported that the scheme had found work for its first eight long-term unemployed people this week in Devon.

5. a. Skills White Paper

Tony reported to the meeting about this and passed an outline of his main points out to each person present. If you would like a copy please contact Daniel. Rather than repeat everything on that sheet, these are a few highlights:

- A number of policy documents have been produced locating skills strategy and delivery into the context of recession and recovery.
- The HE and FE skills system maintains commitments to Leitch targets with a new ambition to increase participation in HE / advanced apprenticeships / equivalent to 75% by the age of 30. Progression from apprenticeships into HE also to be improved by linking technical training through HE.
- Balanced scorecard system to be brought in, rating providers by outputs, not just qualifications e.g. employment.
- Plan to increase the number of advanced apprenticeships. Tony also reported that over the last 5-10 years the achievement rate for apprenticeships has dramatically improved, perhaps due to its improved perceived image as a route into work.
- The HE paper encourages HE institutions to be more business responsive, rather than remaining inside the ivory tower.
- Skills Accounts to be introduced in 2010 to provide more choice to the learner.

Tony also reported on the planning process. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UK CES) will produce an annual National Strategic Skills Audit. BIS will produce an annual Skills Investment Strategy, leading to regional skills strategies produced by RDAs. Regional Investment Plans need to respond to specific regional and sectoral needs – ESBs will be needed for this in order to be clear as to what local needs demand.

6. Reward Grant

a. Revenue Allocations

A note had previously been circulated outlining the allocations. If you would like a copy of this note, please contact Daniel.

First of all, the number of applications outstripped the available funds. Secondly, the money available was less than previously thought due to a reduction in level 4 skills in Torrington. Thirdly, and finally, Andrew reported that the reward money had yet to be signed off by the government.

Research proposals and Backing Young Devon would both take a collective approach.

b. Capital Grants

Andrew had already invited proposals which would be sifted as to their suitability. Philip Oldfield suggested that the capital money be spent on a single big impact green skills academy, possibly based at Bickton College. The idea was welcomed and other ideas would also be encouraged.

7. Local Employment and Skills Boards

a. Experience from elsewhere

Reports from ESBs elsewhere in the country had been circulated to local ESBs.

b. Updates

- Gareth Brocklehurst has been appointed as Chairman of Torbay and South Devon ESB.

8. Any other matters arising from notes of last meeting, 25 September

Notes agreed.

9. News round-up

- Graham announced that a contract for 181 jobs had been agreed in Plymouth with the Future Jobs Fund. Changes were also taking place within the economic development team within Plymouth City Council.
- A new Principal was now in post at Bicton College, with the aim of securing its future.
- Employability.org website has now been launched and Geoff gave his thanks to those involved. Geoff also commended Torridge District Council as a real model authority for taking young people on work experience placements within the council.
- Steve reported that Sarah Vincent had recently taken on her 600th employee in her pharmaceuticals firm, in North Devon.
- The Flybe Training School was moving ahead (Philip Oldfield)
- John brought to the attention to the meeting recent legislation on apprenticeships and IAG strategy

Action (John and Daniel): John to email to Daniel overviews of both and Daniel to email them to the group.

- Andrew reported that he had recently spent time interviewing potential candidates for Devon School for Social Entrepreneurs and was very happy with the process so far. In the morning before this meeting Andrew also spent time in Plymouth at an event designed to help people with learning difficulties into employment. There is a target for six a month in Devon and more needs to be done to integrate this agenda with, for instance, Young Devon.

10. Confirm meeting dates in 2010

Next meeting will be February 12th 2010, at 2pm. Venue to be confirmed.