

D2N2 Provider Advisory Board Meeting: 7 July 2014
EMFEC, Robins Wood House, Nottingham

Present:

Kerry Bentley (MD, Derby Business College Limited)
Andria Birch (Projects Development Manager, WEA East Midlands)
Duncan Cale (Operations Manager, Working Links)
Trevor Clay (Principal, Chesterfield College)
Gaynor Davis (Strategic Bid Support, University of Derby)
Paul Eeles (Chair of Provider Advisory Board, Chief Executive, EMFEC)
Alex Ford (MD, Care Training East Midlands)
Karen Hodgson (Chief Executive, Nottinghamshire Training Network)
Yultan Mellor (Vice Principal, Central College Nottingham)
Sue Phillips (Assistant Principal, Bilborough College)
Mandie Stravino (Principal, Derby College)
Bobby Upple (Director, Commercial Services, EMFEC)
Katrina Woodward (Skills Development Co-ordinator)

In attendance

David Ralph (Chief Executive, D2N2 LEP)
Neil Brown (Policy and Intelligence Officer, EMFEC)

Apologies for Absence

Richard Horsley (D2N2 Board Member)
Graham Howe (Vice Principal, West Nottinghamshire College)
Steve Meadows (Chief Executive, The Derbyshire Network)
Julie Richards (Deputy Principal, Chesterfield College)

1 Welcome and Introductions (*Paul Eeles*)

PE welcomed the group to the inauguration of the newly formed Provider Advisory Board.

2 Where the Group fits into LEP Governance Arrangements (*David Ralph*)

Provider Advisory Board will advise the LEP Board but not have decision making powers itself.

- Two central functions: Group to be given “heads-up” on what programmes /projects are about to be commissioned, and to address skills policy issues through the LEP.
- Anticipated role for Group in developing Skills Programmes and specifications (whilst observing proper distance).
- Important to engage with the providers (470+) outside the group also; Group does not have to be the only forum for engagement, and volume of provision (learner numbers) is not the only benchmark.
- Group is for Providers in general as opposed to representing specific sectors; what Group *does* is the most important thing.
- PE highlighted areas such as supporting D2N2’s Freedoms and Flexibilities also addressing any tensions in providers meeting D2N2 Key Sectors.

ACTION: PE/BU to contact non-attendees to the inaugural meeting and update DR

3 Purpose of the Group /Terms of reference (*attached*)

Members in agreement, apart from:

- Purpose 8: MS asked to be amended so that delivery means in the D2N2 Key Sectors in addition to the D2N2 area.

4 LEP Skills Agenda Overview (*David Ralph*)

- DR stated it was an auspicious day with the Growth Deal announcement for D2N2 (7 July), signalling a sea-change in Skills Infrastructure development. Three big Capital Projects announced for D2N2 area. D2N2 now a Commissioning Body.
- D2N2 Skills Plan is the basis for the commissioning framework.
- £104 million of ESF Programme funding to commission over 6 years (2014-2020).
- KW gave overview of the 5 Key ESF Programmes being commissioned; planned to start in January 2015. Programmes:
 - meeting the needs of key sectors (£6.5m)
 - increasing employability/employability framework (£2m)
 - supporting hard to reach groups/social inclusion (£9m)
 - increasing employer uptake of apprenticeships/traineeships (£4.5m)
 - graduate Internship Programmes (£0.5m)
- DR stated that the commissioning documents are currently being written for the above programme and agreed with PE a role for EMFEC in consulting providers on the proposed content and shape of the programmes.

ACTION: EMFEC (BU/NB) to consult providers on the five Key ESF Programmes (on behalf of D2N2) and to feedback comments to the LEP asap.

- 4 of the 5 Programmes are SFA “Opt-in” Programmes, which have an overall allocation of £32.1m: £21m employment /£10.7m skills (over 7 years). So far, allocations have been made for the first three years. Supporting hard to reach groups is DWP programme.
- Programme specifications due by end of November; PIDs currently with SFA, with feedback due within 4 weeks. Specifications will not be available to the Project Advisory Board until made public on the D2N2 website.
- KW stated match for higher level skills activity will come from Universities.
- Joint LEP / SFA events planned prior to ESF Programmes procurement process.
- PE stated SFA able to do one-to-many forums.
- KW stated SFA will sit on D2N2 Skills Commissions and ESBs.

5 Development of a D2N2 Provider Charter (*Bobby Upple*) attached

- BU presented an overview of the D2N2 Provider Charter which will signal a commitment from D2N2 providers to support the delivery of the LEP Skills for Growth Strategy.
- PE stated that the Provider Charter is an important mechanism for connecting providers with the LEP and ensuring focus on demands of the LEP (ie Skills for Growth Strategy).
- DR stated that the Charter should show that providers clearly understand that the direction of travel is to greater employer-led provision over the long-term; a cultural change. A Charter that listens to employers may encourage mainstream funding pots going forward.
- The Charter challenge is what the benefits are for providers in committing to this cultural change.
- KW stated that the Charter should create an “outcome based” environment, and emphasise genuine influence from the LEP. Also stated that there is still an issue with employer awareness of the skills offer in the region.

- MS stated that it is important to “drill down” why employer needs appear not being always met; may often be an issue with budget /funding for training. Called for statistical analysis to confirm and evidence local employer need; skill-gaps etc. interrogating the SFA Data Cube, ILR analysis.
- KW advised skills gaps data in the D2N2 Sector Skills Action Plans is anecdotal.
- Group also to look at EFA HEFCE funded provision.

6 Skills Policy Discussion

An “Open Session” inviting discussion of national skills policy and impact on D2N2 Skills activity:

SMEs (Trailblazer)

- PE highlighted the proposal by D2N2 to create a Trailblazer Apprenticeship for SMEs, opening up a wider discussion about the engagement of SMEs.
- KH stated that for SMEs issues remain with perceptions of a complex and confusing skills offer (eg various programmes / initiatives) and concerns about provider response times.
- TC stated that there is a resource issue for BDM functions at colleges as opposed to colleges not understanding how to engage with SMEs.
- TC stated that there are concerns that new Trailblazer Standards do not reflect Sectors, and are not sufficiently relevant for the operations of SMEs; More like job descriptions as opposed to frameworks.

ESF Programmes

- AF stated ESF procurement has not always been helpful to local providers; bringing in non-local provision, displacing commercial activity (full-cost provision) and not sustainable beyond the lifetime of the given Programme. Important to get procurement right, reflecting genuine skills gaps.
- AF stated need for a “quid pro quo” of providers committing to the Skill demands of D2N2 with the LEP commissioning ESF Programmes that offer sustainability / “long term” models of provision.
- Board discussed importance of moving beyond a landscape of funding driving certain behaviours (“perverse incentives”, setting up expectations in employers of free / funded training being the norm e.g. Train to Gain).
- DR stated Provider Advisory Board to act as a vehicle raising concerns and issues that they may identify with proposed programmes, combating any “unintended consequences”. Also would be useful for colleges to capture growth statistics in terms of number s of employers engaged.
- MS suggested an overview of suggested topics for the “Skills Policy Discussion”

ACTION: EMFEC to produce one page overview of suggested policy issues for “Skills Policy Discussion” meeting item; to be circulated to Provider Advisory Board members ahead of the next meeting

7 Any Other Business

ACTION: Notes from the meeting to be uploaded to the D2N2 website

8 Date of Next Meeting

Next Provider Advisory Group meeting to be in second week in September (date tbc)