

Agenda Item 9

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

23 April 2008

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL APPROACH TO POST 16 EDUCATION, TRAINING AND SKILLS

Report of the Review Panel Chair

1. **Purpose**

- 1.1 To present the findings from the strategic review examining the approach taken at a strategic level to regional to post 16 education, training and skills. Both the summary and full report is available on the Assembly's website www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=86

2. **Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Assembly
- discuss and endorse the findings of the review panel
 - approve recommendation ER3 made specifically to the Regional Assembly

3. **Background**

- 3.1 In 2007 the West Midlands Regional Assembly was invited by David Cragg, Regional Director, Learning and Skills Council and skills adviser to the Assembly, to examine the contribution of the LSC to the Region. Following discussion it was agreed that this would take the form of a strategic review of the Regional approach to post 16 education, training and skills. The review was jointly commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council and the West Midlands Regional Assembly.
- 3.2 The Review Panel was chaired by Councillor Jo Jones, The Vice Chair was a co-opted member, Mike Bell, Learning and Skills Council. All Panel members have dedicated a significant proportion of their time to complete the review. The review commenced in May 2007 and consisted of eleven evidence sessions attended by 40 individuals.

3.3 Progress in implementing review recommendations will be monitored by the Strategic Review Group.

4. Report Recommendations

4.1 The Panel believe that Region has already significantly improved it's performance in a number of key areas with gaps being narrowed in comparison to the national average and in some cases out performing the national average. The Panel are conscious that whilst performance has improved there is still much to be done and recognize that the publication of the Skills Action Plan will help guide further improvements.

4.2 The rationale for each recommendation is discussed within the main body of the report.

Strategic Recommendations

SR1 That the current regional organisations involved in skills should concentrate efforts on achieving the aims of the regional Skills Action Plan and that any new structures, created as a result of the Sub National Review and the "Raising Expectations" white paper, should make early and serious commitments to the implementation and continued development of the Skills Action Plan.

SR2 The government should be asked to acknowledge the publication of the Skills Action Plan and its key role in guiding skills development within the Region and to recommend that this action model be adopted by all other Regions as best practice.

SR3 The government should take the lead in ensuring that by 2013 diplomas are not seen as a secondclass level of attainment in accordance with paragraph 2.3 of the Raising Expectations white paper.

SR4 As migrant workers can contribute to the reduction of the skills gap the Minister for the West Midlands should requested to raise with his ministerial colleagues the provision of a mechanism whereby the qualifications of migrant workers can be more easily recognised by employers.

SR5 If the City Region Strategy proves to be successful in raising skills levels Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council consider going in to partnership with other local authorities in the Region to extend the strategy to other deprived wards in the Region. An evaluation should be completed by September 2009.

Employer engagement

- ER1 All employer organisations should encourage their members to develop their own apprenticeship schemes and to promote the benefits of apprenticeships to especially to young people but also more widely and that those employers who already do so should receive support to act as role models for such promotion other employers in order to meet the target of 14,700 young people per annum undertaking apprenticeships by 2011 in accordance with the targets set out in the Skills Action Plan.
- ER2 Employers organisations should be proactive about raising awareness of the new diplomas amongst employers especially SMEs in order to meet government expectations that by 2013 every young person shall have access to these.
- ER3 The forthcoming Regional Assembly scrutiny review of Business Link West Midlands be requested to explore how effectively Train To Gain is being promoted to employers.
- ER4 Employer organisations such as the CBI and the Federation of Small Businesses should encourage their members, especially those not currently engaged in skills development, to learn of the benefits of training through the experience of other companies and that the next iteration of the Skills Action Plan should identify this as an aim.

Public Sector

- PR1 As part of their commitment to the public sector skills pledge local authorities within the Region should be encouraged to take the lead within their communities by offering a greater range of apprenticeships in order to increase by 2.5% the number of local authority apprentices by March 2011.
- PR2 The LSC, colleges and employers organisation should be encouraged to take all necessary steps to increase the number of students who undertake vocational courses to level 3, to progress to level 4 qualifications, in order to reduce the 2.62% shortfall in the West Midlands compared to the PSA national indicator milestone for 2011.
- PR3 Colleges and training providers in rural areas should develop closer partnership links with universities and other degree awarding bodies to enable the provision of higher level technical qualifications at a local level. Demonstrable progress should be made in order to contribute to the development of local authority commissioning plans envisaged in the Raising Expectations white paper.

PR4 Jobcentre Plus should be encouraged to provide details of jobs that are available across the Region and a wider sharing of vacancies should be in operation by January 2009.

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Review Panel Chair

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