

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JOINT OSB /
 BUSINESS SUPPORT SUB-GROUP
 Tuesday 3rd December 2024
 Microsoft TEAMS Virtual Meeting
 4:00pm – 6:00pm**

PRESENT

NAME	POSITION AND ORGANISATION	MEMBERSHIP
OSB		
Richard Byard	Director of Business Development, OxLEP	Chair
Richard Kennell	Chief Executive Officer, SOFEA	Member
Kate Berman	Director, Olamalu	Member
James Gilpin	DWP Oxfordshire Jobcentre Plus	Member's Deputy
Eddy McDowall	Executive Director, Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers	Member
Paul Jones	Apprenticeships Lead, Oxford Professional Education	Member
Prof Ewart Keep	Director, Centre for Skills Knowledge & Organisational Performance, Oxford University	Member
Business Support Sub-Group		
Stephen Clarke	Cherwell College	Member
Grant Hayward	OSEP	Member
Tagore Ramoutar	IOD Oxfordshire SME & Start Up Ambassador	Member
Steve Clarke	Driftway Solutions	Member
Peter Mols	Outside Ideas	Member

IN ATTENDANCE

Ruth Meakin	Social Contract Programme Coordinator	OxLEP Skills
Nikki Wakefield	Careers Hub Lead	OxLEP Skills
Clayton Lavallin	Economic Development Team Leader, OCC	Associate
Sarah Marlow	Skills Hub Deputy Manager	OxLEP Skills
Cheryl Cole	NCS	Associate

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

Helen Brind	Growth Hub Manager	OxLEP Business
Su Copeland	Priddy Marketing	Member
Sally Andreou	Skills Hub Manager	OxLEP Skills
Alexander Brandham	BMW Group	Member
Mark Vingoe	Chief Executive Officer, The Engineering Trust	Member
Jessie Dobson	Oxfordshire County Council	Member
Chris Meah	CEO, School of Code	Member
Chloe Taylor	Oxfordshire County Council	Member
Dr Olga Kozlova	University of Oxford	Member
Neil Brookes	Group Executive Director, Activate Learning	Member
Nico Decourt	Head of Educational Partnerships, Oxford Brookes	Member
Helen Carstairs	University of Oxford	Member
Christina Rofique	SOFEA	Guest
Nicci Marzec	Aspire	Guest
Peter McLintock	Mills Reeves	Member
Cllr Susan Brown	Leader of Oxford City Council	Member

PAPERS: LMI, Business Churn Data, Growth Hub Feedback Document and Public Reports Pack.

AGENDA

1	RB	<p>Welcome, apologies, members' declarations of interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair welcomed all to the meeting, apologies were noted, and no declaration of interests were raised. • KB & Olamalu were congratulated on their National Apprenticeship and Skills Award 2024 for the South-East.
2	RB	<p>Previous minutes and matters arising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes from the previous meeting in September were approved by all and signed off. <p>Previous actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Support Tool. OxLEP continue to gather intelligence and information to help understand what businesses would like to ask Central Government. The two questions raised are part of the business support tool and feedback has been received, reviewed and shared. • There is a monthly request from DBT to gather business intelligence and desktop research. Useful to understand what is happening in the local economy. OxLEP then feedback this information in a business intelligence report which goes to Central Government for them to review and use. • Over recent weeks there has been number of business challenges. A well-known Oxfordshire aerospace manufacturer has unfortunately gone into administration, with 200 job losses. There is also news of a long-established manufacture of medical equipment in Oxfordshire who will be closing on their 100th anniversary. This highlights changes to the labour market and changes to the dynamics of the business community. • Emily Manser has moved onto a different role in government. There is now a new area lead for Oxfordshire. Action: New area lead to be invited to these meetings going forward. • Care Providers Roundtable Feedback Action. Meeting was well attended by care providers. Everyone was interested on how to recruit in the domestic market, social care is currently heavily reliant on overseas recruitment. This cannot be a long-term plan, so it was useful to have the meeting to explore different ideas. The key is in sparking local recruitment. • Action item 10 (previous minutes). GH & NW haven't managed to pick up on action item 10, however GH will pick up with Eleanor Gordon-Martin. This action will be most relevant once a second round of sessions have been run between British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) & OxLEP. Action: NW will get in touch with GH once another session has been run with BASE.
3	RB	<p>Chairperson's Integration Update</p> <p>OCC Cabinet Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 9 recommendations that set the direction of travel (more details can be found on the slides that will be shared): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The County Council is now responsible for economic development functions (including strategic economic planning). This function together with the delivery of government funded programmes has been transferred to upper tier authorities. OxLEP have, for several years, delivered economic development services under a service level agreement with the County Council which reflected the TUPE transfer. Politicians now have the shared understanding and responsibility moving forward. 2. The County Council agreed to retain the existing infrastructure (OxLEP will operate as an OCC owned company) - OCC are responsible for

		<p>OxLEP. OxLEP functions as a Teckal company. This structure has VAT and procurement benefits but can be restrictive too.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Agree to establish a Shareholder Committee as a Committee of Cabinet with Terms of Reference. NB. States 'shareholder' but there are no shares in the company. The Committee is responsible for activities moving forward. The cabinet is made up of 10 individuals, where 9 of the 10 cabinet members will be included. The other person will need to be a Non-Executive Director. To summarise, cabinet have responsibility for OxLEP's actions moving forward. 4. Change the trading name of the Company to Enterprise Oxfordshire. From 1st of April the company will be OxLEP Limited trading as Enterprise Oxfordshire. Companies house registration will remain, but the company will go through a rebranding exercise. The rebrand is currently being worked on. 5. Agree to the Shareholder Committee immediately appointing the company directors. The County Council have agreed that this should be three people, an Independent Chair, a Non-Executive Chair, a County Officer and a County Politician. 6. Cabinet will be responsible for developing a new Strategic Economic Plan, in consultation with partners, founded on the strategic priorities of the Council. Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs) that OxLEP have developed previously have always been on the priorities of Oxfordshire, there is now subtle changes in the narrative. There is a new 'Modern Infrastructure Strategy' green paper that is being consulted on which will form the base for National Infrastructure Strategy. Local growth plans will most likely look like SEPs. 7. Agree to the Shareholder Committee tasking the company directors to oversee the development of a business plan and budget for 2025/26. In November OxLEP was tasked with creating a multi-year business plan. A 5-year business plan was created with gold, silver and bronze funding options. County Council priorities were included in this business plan such as driving forward and accelerating the transition of net zero and engagement with community wealth building. 8. Agree to establish an Oxfordshire Economic Partnership Board to support the Cabinet in the discharge of its economic development functions. Trying to make sure the voice of the business is not lost and that wider stakeholders are engaged. The board will be a space where key stakeholders can meet to address key long-standing challenges that Oxfordshire has. 9. Delegate authority to the Council Chief Executive in consultation with the Executive Director of Resources and the Director of Law and Governance and monitoring officer to agree and conclude the details of amendments to the contract with OxLEP Ltd. The extension of the contract to 31st March 2026 and confirmation of arrangements regarding the delivery of the Skills Bootcamps initiative.
4	RB, NW, & SM	<p>Skills Hub Operational Updates</p> <p>Skills Bootcamps (RB)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently delivering Wave 5. A proposal was submitted last Autumn, and approval was granted. • Bootcamps are a DfE initiative with a maximum of 16-week courses for people aged 19+. They are aligned to support local training needs and labour shortages. • The £1.7 million programme will support 250 learner starts with an 80% success rate ambition.

- Bootcamps are not just training. They are about interviews and employment too.
- There is a Wave 5 delivery slide which outlines all the different courses in detail for further reading. Wave 5 covers 6 main areas: Health & Life Sciences, Engineering & Manufacturing, E-bikes, Green Construction, Green Sustainability and Hospitality. 6 different providers are delivering these areas.
- OxLEP are overseeing the delivery contracts.
- Primary audience is for those who are out of work, but this does not exclude those who are currently in work as the Bootcamps can be used to upskill employees and self-employed.
- There is no cost to the learner.
- Wave 6 expressions of interest have been submitted.
- Logistics and Mechanics have been requested by employers. The rise of AI should not be ignored, could there be something around coding and data & analytics. Hoping to hear back in January.

CEC Strategy for Academic Year (NW):

- An update was given on what the CEC team have been focusing on during the first term and what the team have been pushing forward with schools.
- CEC 24/25 priorities are:
 - Making sure schools are providing quality careers experience and that there is engagement across the schools in terms of delivering that.
 - Supporting disadvantaged young people and reducing the number that are becoming NEET.
 - Supporting students that are missing out on careers activities etc.
 - Promote a greater understanding of the labour market, apprenticeships and technical education routes for students, parents and teachers.
 - Meaningful engagement from employers - employers reaching out into schools and supporting. Making sure encounters are inclusive.
 - Supporting needs of future Oxfordshire economy. Identifying where the need is, from employers, as well.
- CEC team are working with 60 schools across Oxfordshire.
- NW has written a paper on how we can better support disadvantaged young people and what their next steps might be. **Action:** A link to this paper will be shared with the minutes. This is a focus.
- NEET numbers are up 16% year on year, and this will most likely increase.
- Disadvantaged means - young people on free school means, on SEND, on low attendance etc. Anyone who has barrier in accessing the careers provision in their school.
- Key for headteachers to support the disadvantaged students.
- Making sure headteachers unpick what they want their careers programmes to look like, understanding the gaps in the programme and understand from a learner's perspective what is missing from the programme so that improvements can be made.
- Asking schools to look at Gatsby Benchmarks.
- There is a new tool (Careers Impact System) that allows schools to look at the operational and strategic things they need to be doing to make sure their careers programme is having the greatest impact.
- Understanding needs of learners - number of tools that they can use to do this. There's the Future Skills Questionnaire which is useful. There is

also Compass. Need to look at strengths, gaps and priorities as a school before they introduce anything additional.

- Keen for schools to have distributed leadership when it comes to Careers rather than it all falling on a school's Careers Lead.
- The slides highlight programmes that can be accessed and the support that is available through OxLEP.
- Highlights from the last term for CEC team included: launch of Teachers Encounters Programme at Catapult in September, this is where teachers went out into the workplace to take learning back into the classroom. Off the back of this there is now more companies who want to be involved such as the NHS, UK AEA and the European Space Agency.
- There was an Inclusive Employer two-day workshop in partnership with BASE. Supporting employers to look from the first outreach into schools and all the way up to employment. Focusing on the adaptations employers might need to make for people with SEND.
- Positive Destinations Project was launched with six schools. Supporting groups of year 11 students at risk of becoming NEET.
- Aspirations Fair for special schools. 4th time it has been delivered and it was a fantastic event. 250 students, 12 schools, 25 employers. Engagement between employers and students was phenomenal.
- Launch of Oxfordshire's Horizons Programme. Offer for KS3 students who are disadvantaged. 108 workplace visits for students.
- First Cornerstone Employer Group Mock Assessment Centre. Barriers to young people going into apprenticeships is not being sure what an assessment centre looks like. A mock assessment centre day has been created with 40 students. Next one is taking place in January and this day will be filmed.
- Experience of the Workplace Project working with Buckinghamshire CEC Hub. This is using extra funding that was granted. **Action:** More information on this project to be shared at the next meeting.
- Careers Fest which is due to take place in March 2025. 80 employers are booked for the event. Donations have been made too by employers.

For any businesses, there is the Employer's Standards Tool which the CEC have launched, it is a free tool used for reaching out into schools.

<https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/employer-standards/>

Skills Hub Updates:

- **Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards.**
 - Awards for 2025 have been launched, open for entries/nominations from 21st November – 24th of February.
 - There are 12 categories enabling awards for apprentices, employers, schools and training providers.
 - Will be held at Blenheim Place on Thursday 22nd May.
 - There is a link on slide with details on how enter the awards: [Apprenticeship Awards - OxLEP Skills](#)
 - **Call to Action:** Like and share the event on our social media and use the hashtag #OAAwards2025.
- **Social Contract Programme.**
 - **Levy.**
 - Received over £3.7million of levy through the levy release scheme. Trying to optimise the money we have. There is £1million left to allocate.
 - **Apprenticeship starts.**
 - 250 new apprenticeship starts through the programme. Hoping to extend the programme for another three to six months.
 - Health & Social Care have had the most take up of the funding (20%).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There has been a recent spike in interest to use the funding that is available. ○ Levy amount will increase if the programme does get extended as pipeline of repeat pledges in place. <p>UKSPF 'No Limits' Programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is a six-month extension to the programme (Phase 3). Funded through UKSPF funding. ○ Programme is designed to support those who are economically inactive and who are facing barriers to employment, training and education. ○ Proving very successful with 600 - 700 people having been through the programme. At least 25% of these people are employed and another 25% are ready to be employed. ○ Digital devices and travel bursaries have been delivered. ○ Looking to extend this programme. <p>CEPs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Significant interest in CEPs across the county particularly in the West of Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, where hasn't been much engagement previously. ○ Barton Park activity, this development has been ongoing but looking to achieve some great outcomes. ○ Oxford North development, very engaged. ○ Smaller CEPs being volunteered with several Lidl's in the pipeline. ○ There is a large-scale future strategic development with the Thames Water Reservoir development - working with Thames Water to design the CEP, looking to start construction in 2026 subject to approvals. <p>T-Levels Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A question was raised about T-Levels being included in the Apprenticeship Awards. Is there a chance that T-Levels could be included in the future? ● KB reported that there was a push at the National Apprenticeship Awards about T-Levels. Employers need more encouragement and support on the structuring of placements. ● Not many T-Levels are being delivered in Oxfordshire currently. There needs to be more uptake on T-Levels by training providers as well as young people. The demand and appetite for T-Levels is low which mean colleges are not responding and there is some scepticism about their longevity. One member has taken on four T-Level learners into his business and has positive feedback for them. ● National Apprenticeship Week Webinars talk about T-Levels. The webinars give parents, schools and teacher more information. There is a huge lack of awareness, and the CEC are trying to push the awareness of T-Levels. Abingdon and Witney College are currently running six or seven T-Level courses. ● Action: Research and understand what the current overview of T-Level delivery is in Oxfordshire/ across the UK and the take up of T-Levels. ● Action: T-Levels could be an agenda item for the next meeting to discuss in more detail. We could invite guest speakers from training providers, beneficiaries and employers to give their view/ insight on the topic. ● https://feweek.co.uk/students-blamed-for-not-finding-t-level-industry-placements-research-finds/?mc_cid=3878523a28&mc_eid=13386d5dd5
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5	All	<p>Group Discussion</p> <p>The following areas were proposed to the group and a discussion commenced:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) 2024 Budget - Impact on businesses b) Skills Devolution c) How can we ensure Oxfordshire benefits and is supported? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Representative Organisation Feedback. Business confidence is low. Increases in Employers NI contributions and the reducing of the threshold has had financial impact on businesses. There is a stalling of employment opportunities. Interesting that there has been a spike this week in business engagement with the levy – what could be causing this? • Adult social care perspective. Likely that we will see several businesses close. The cost of adult social care is going to rise. 50% of funding that goes towards services for working age adults with disabilities is funded by the public purse and they are businesses that are not run for profit. Significant discussions to be had with the local authority following what the local government settlement brings. It is not looking positive. • Small business atmosphere. The small business world has a negative atmosphere right now. There is news of businesses closing for Christmas breaks earlier than they normally would (13th December). The business environment is getting ever more challenging. Businesses with larger teams of staff that are looking at how they can operate with a reduced headcount. There is lack of recruitment appetite. National government policy has a huge role to play. Available money for support keeps on decreasing. • IOD survey. Sentiment on the IOD is negative, it's fallen every month on the survey since the election and then plummeted even further after the budget. • Craft spirits' sector. Duty has been put up which means tax receipts will fall. Hospitality is hit higher as the sector contains more people at the living wage/ minimum wage. The food and drinks sectors in Oxfordshire will struggle and they will have challenges finding places to sell stock. Tesco have destocked some of their ranges. There has been Covid, Ukraine, Inflation and now the Budget which have all hit sectors hard. • Farming. New ways need to be found to support farmers so that they can focus on producing food rather than worrying about finances. They have inheritance tax, policy, grant scheme and EU subsidy challenges. There is a major worry around food security, not enough support for farmers and the government needs to focus more on rural areas. • Action: Does OxLEP have connections with the farming sector that could be explored? RB to understand challenges of the farming sector through County Council and contacts. EM is in contact with a farmer who is part of the NFU. EM could send these contact details to RB as a connection point. All agreed that an NFU representative would be useful to hear from. • Skills Devolution. The Devolution white paper is imminent, and it will set out the framework for continued devolution and greater freedom of flexibility to localities particularly those with mayoral combined authorities (MCAs). It will potentially set out a framework for certain elements of devolved skills too. The devolved Adult Education Budget (AEB) came with little flexibility and freedom. There was only a small pot of funding. • 8 Trailblazers are being announced with the Budget around greater integration around public health, skills and labour market.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curious given the recent industrial growth strategy and the focus on the eight growth driving sectors, how explicitly government will link some of the Skills Devolution piece to some of those growth sectors. The better able we are to support skills development the better we are to enable growth. Need to catch the skills market effectively. Could we do something around how Skills can help in those eight specific growth sectors? When we have had discussion with government in the past around devolution it has primarily been around apprenticeships and greater freedom of flexibility. We want to be able to use our money better and not have so many restrictions. • Skills England. In the next 1 to 2 years Skills England is going to be looking for a new balance between national, secretarial and regional skills policies. Think there will be less ability by DfE to control what happens in such a tight way. There will be new thinking around packages that cover innovation, business support and skills. Think there will be new pilots and new ways of thinking around skills policy and skills funding. • Skills Devolution White Paper. Everyone to absorb the white paper when it is released and understand it and then maybe we could have a discussion around it at a future meeting and figure out how we can use it to benefit Oxfordshire specifically. • https://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2024-10-31/farmer-claims-budget-is-kick-in-the-teeth-for-industry-on-its-knees
t	RB	<p>Future Meeting dates, Members' Updates and AOB: Future meeting dates are TBA but are likely to take place in March, June, September and December Meetings to take place 4:00pm – 6:00pm (virtual)</p> <p>Member Updates None AOB None</p>

ACTIONS

Item	Details	Who	When
1	Share all slides, presentations and links.	RM	January
2	Emily Manser has moved onto a different role in government. There is now a new area lead for Oxfordshire. New area lead to be invited to meetings going forward.	RM	March
3	NW has written a paper on how we can better support disadvantaged young people. A link to this paper will be shared.	RM	To be circulated with these minutes
4	Research and understand what the current overview of T-Level delivery is in Oxfordshire/ across the UK and the take up of T-Levels.	To be assigned	
5	Does OxLEP have connections with the farming sector that could be explored? RB to understand challenges of the farming sector through County Council and contacts.	RB	
6	EM is in contact with a farmer who is part of the NFU. EM could send these contact details to RB as a connection point.	EM	
7	Experience of the Workplace Project working with Buckinghamshire CEC Hub. More information on this project to be shared at the next meeting.	NW	March
8	T-Levels could be an agenda item for the next meeting to discuss in more detail. Guest speakers from training providers,	RB/RM	

	beneficiaries and employers could be invited to the next meeting to give their view/ insight on the topic.		
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THE MEETING CLOSED: 5:55pm