

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JOINT OSB /  
 BUSINESS SUPPORT SUB-GROUP  
 Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024  
 Microsoft TEAMS Virtual Meeting  
 4:00pm – 6:00pm**

**PRESENT**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>POSITION AND ORGANISATION</b>	<b>MEMBERSHIP</b>
<b>OSB</b>		
Richard Byard	Director of Business Development, OxLEP	Chair
Richard Kennell	Chief Executive Officer, SOFEA	Member
Kate Berman	Director, Olamalu	Member
Nico Decourt	Head of Educational Partnerships, Oxford Brookes	Member
James Gilpin	DWP Oxfordshire Jobcentre Plus	Member's Deputy
Chris Meah	CEO, School of Code	Member
Mark Vingoe	Chief Executive Officer, The Engineering Trust	Member
Eddy McDowall	Executive Director, Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers	Member
Paul Jones	Apprenticeships Lead, Oxford Professional Education	Member
Cllr Susan Brown	Leader of Oxford City Council	Member
Claire Farrow	IDE Lead, Reaction Engines Ltd	Member
Neil Brookes	Group Executive Director, Activate Learning	Member
<b>Business Support Sub-Group</b>		
Su Copeland	Priddey Marketing	Member
Stephen Clarke	Cherwell College	Member
Steve Clarke	Driftway Solutions	Member
Grant Hayward	OSEP	Member
Dr Olga Kozlova	University of Oxford	Member
Peter McLintock	Mills Reeves	Member
Tagore Ramoutar	IOD Oxfordshire SME & Start Up Ambassador	Member

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Jonathan Black	University of Oxford	Speaker
Jo-Anne Cavalier	Oxford Brookes	Speaker
Kathie Bowden	Satellite Applications Catapult	Speaker
Helen Brind	Growth Hub Manager	OxLEP Business
Sally Andreou	Skills Hub Manager	OxLEP Skills
Sarah Marlow	Deputy Skills Hub Manager	OxLEP Skills
Nikki Wakefield	Careers Hub Lead, Skills Hub	OxLEP Skills
Dianne Hankin	Social Contract Programme Administrator	OxLEP Skills
Emily Manser	Dept of Business and Trade	Associate
Clayton Lavallin	Economic Development Team Leader, OCC	Associate

**APOLOGIES RECEIVED**

Prof Ewart Keep	Director, Centre for Skills Knowledge & Organisational Performance, Oxford University	Member
Pete Mols	Outside Ideas	Member
Alex Brandham	Group Leader UK Apprentice Programmes, BMW	Member
Paul Roberts	Aspire	Member
Jessie Dobson	OCC	Member's Deputy

**PAPERS:** LMI and Business Churn Data, previously circulated.

1	RB	<p><b>Welcome, apologies, members' declarations of interests</b></p> <p>The Chair opened the meeting, welcoming all attendees and introducing new members Dr. Olga Kozlova and Claire Farrow. Apologies were noted. Meeting protocols were reiterated, including the recording of the meeting for minute-taking purposes. No declarations of interest were made.</p>
2	RB	<p><b>Previous minutes and matters arising</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minutes of the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023 meeting were approved.</li> <li>• All actions from the previous meeting were completed, with the refresh of Members' Declarations of Interest deferred until after the LEP transition.</li> </ul>
3	RB	<p><b>Chairperson's Update and Transition Update</b></p> <p>The Chair referred to the business information previously circulated to members. For future reference these can be accessed as below:  <a href="https://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/local-skills">https://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/local-skills</a></p> <p>For the agenda of the next meeting, the Chair proposed a general discussion around the devolution principles and particularly devolved Adult Education Budget (AEB) which is currently c£8.6m annually.</p> <p>Other areas in scope for any potential devolution include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogue with DBT about inward investment, which we already have and will continue to engage with.</li> <li>• Bus franchising opportunities, but County are already responsible for transport services.</li> </ul> <p>Members will be updated on progress with any emerging policy areas that could lead to significant change, especially around skills and business support.</p> <p><b>Transition Update</b></p> <p>A decision on transition options from OCC Cabinet meeting today was anticipated, with a positive outcome expected.</p>
4	HB	<p><b>Business Support Group Update</b></p> <p>European Funded programmes have now closed with outstanding feedback received from the funding manager from both projects. A video illustrating the work of three European projects can be viewed here and will be shared with the LEP Board. <a href="https://youtu.be/nY5ZsdhE18">https://youtu.be/nY5ZsdhE18</a></p> <p>Engagement with events and grant applications is encouraging. The 'Unlocking your Exporting Potential' workshop has been slow to engage needing more development. Suggestions on renaming the workshop to focus on selling abroad rather than exporting (to cover services not just products) were noted.</p> <p>The Business Directory, which sits on OxLEP Business website, is a free service for the SME community to advertise themselves and promote networking and is for clients that have been supported by OxLEP.</p> <p>Net Zero activities have been progressing slowly with the group meeting regularly. SMEs are encouraged to start on their NZ journey and collaborate together. The Growth Hub Business Support tool is being enhanced to ask more questions around 'Net Zero' and identify what support is needed. It was agreed that the language used discussing preparations for Net Zero should be consistent and relevant and promote why it is important to local businesses.</p> <p>HB to share activity sheet on Growth Hub projects underway.</p> <p><b>Action: HB</b></p>
5	PJ MV	<p><b>Training Provider Network</b></p> <p>Action from the last meeting: Feedback sought from the Oxfordshire Training Provider Network Group, addressing the discord between what training member organisations are able to offer versus the specific skills employers require, gave the following responses:</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The inflexibility of current funding structures to make best use locally of AEB funding. Current funding rules often dictate the types of training that can be funded and training providers can be limited in tailoring programmes to meet specific employer needs.</li> <li>• The one size fits all approach can hinder the group's response to a specific region's needs.</li> <li>• Localised control over funding allocations would allow for a much more responsive and targeted approach, ensuring training aligns better with specific economic needs of the local region.</li> <li>• It is recognised that the apprenticeship levy might not fully address the diverse range of skills that local employers are seeking, so the ability to explore a slightly more flexible approach to how levy funds can be used, beyond traditional apprenticeships, could help.</li> <li>• Despite the encouraging work of the LSIP to bring employers and providers together there is still a mismatch in response due to how funding can be used.</li> </ul> <p>Attendance is encouraged at the various Oxfordshire working groups in different industries in order to address these issues.</p>
6	JB ND KB	<p><b>Graduate Promotion and Retention</b></p> <p><b>Jonathan Black presented on Collaborating with the Oxford University Careers Service</b> – slides to be circulated after the meeting.</p> <p>The Careers Service is a gateway to every student, sending a weekly newsletter directly to students, graduates and researchers in term time promoting activities. Companies can advertise their vacancies for free on the CareerConnect vacancy database. Targeted mailshots can be sent to specific student groups for a small charge. Businesses can offer various types of internships through the Careers Service: Micro (unpaid placements of a week's duration), Summer (paid project based internships) and Crankstart (a bursary scheme for UK domiciled undergraduates selected from household incomes below the median of £32,000). Themed careers fairs are held 8 times a year where businesses can meet with students.</p> <p>Client Project opportunities give students the opportunity to work on a consultancy basis in small groups on live business projects on a one week or one term basis to develop an idea, which is also free.</p> <p>The Employer Engagement Network is a group of employers with various levels of benefits for services provided by the Careers Service.</p> <p>Comments from members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OSEP had engaged with the service and it was highly recommended.</li> <li>• Partnerships and community engagement work, while an excellent initiative, may need more promotion to raise awareness.</li> <li>• With huge numbers of small businesses in Oxfordshire, one challenge is reaching them - many are not networked into business organisations – what else can we collectively do to publicise this?</li> </ul>

- It was recognised that some people may be put off contacting the University but the diverse backgrounds of students to take part in projects is of great value.
- OCC engages with the Careers Service and has found it of great value. Help was offered with connections through the community employment and procurements plans to enable recruitment to the projects – options to be followed up outside of the meeting.
- Case studies of businesses engaging with the projects were suggested, to illustrate the benefits, addressing questions on possible resource drain involved in supervision and monitoring the quality of work.

Lockdown had brought the benefit of students working with businesses all over the world although placements with businesses that are Oxfordshire based is encouraged.

A 1-2 page summary of the project is all that is needed from the business, and the University will advise them how to progress it. Brand new start-ups are not usually engaged with as they don't have enough background to work with. Projects would be especially welcomed from the care sector and Jonathan encouraged contact through the Careers email address for an initial discussion.

**Jo Cavalier from Oxford Brookes presented on how they can help employers recruit talent.** Slides will be shared after the meeting.

Oxford Brookes use JobTeaser for free advertising of vacancies. Companies can create a profile on the site. Jobshop provides part time jobs, of around 15 hours, for students during semester time. Careers fairs run through the two semesters. Weekly popups take place where an employer has a stand outside the Careers Office, promoted in advance in a high footfall area and are themed to different sectors. Volunteering is also popular acting as a link between community and students.

Cllr Brown raised a business association for Cowley Road is in early planning stages and the University agreed they would explore possibilities to engage.

Overseas students are experiencing difficulty in obtaining evidence to enable them to have a successful application to UKVI to offer a job because of the way services are contracted. This was not something that the University had information to hand but agreed to look into it.

**SPIN: Space Placements in Industry**

**Kathie Bowden presented on the above programme.** Slides to be shared after the meeting.

The scheme, now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year, resulted from skills industries across the space sector struggling to recruit as applicants lacked work experience. Funding from the International Space Innovation Centre provided grants to companies to offer opportunities to students, paid for a minimum of 8 weeks. Funding has now been doubled from the Space Agency with over 500 alumni in various placements in the UK and abroad working in the space sector or tech sector, some of whom who started as 'Spinterns' are now on senior leadership teams in businesses.

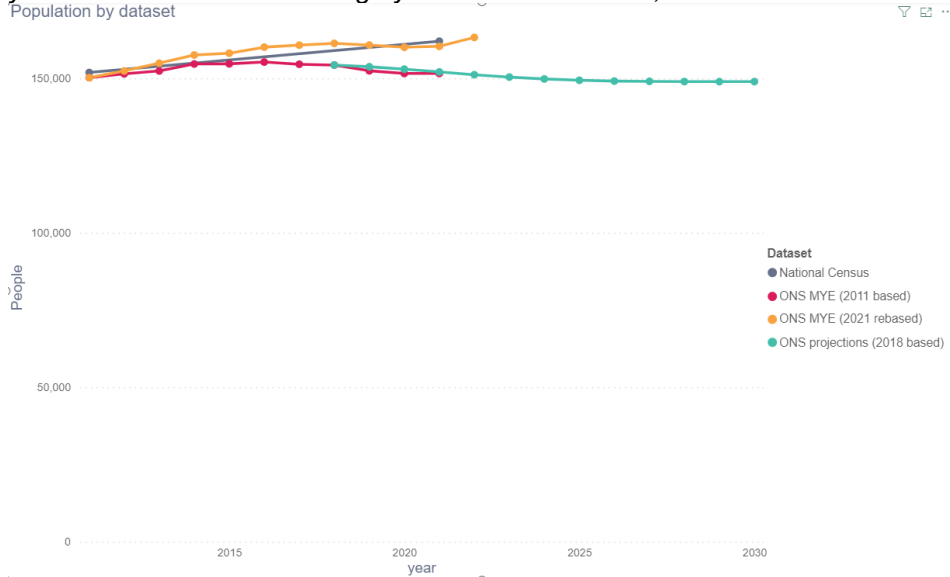
Companies offer placements which helps grow talent and students develop their skills while still studying and are inspired to see there is a place in space for them.

	<p>Funding enables each project to pay the student, thereby de-risking the scheme for the companies. Projects are evaluated on a competitive basis to meet set criteria, including quality of the project, feasibility to complete the project in 8 weeks, and the skills to be developed in the student. While recognising the skills issues the space sector has, including soft skills, it allows companies to evaluate the student over a longer period with the potential to employment. The placements are paid at or above National Living Wage and covers all universities in the UK in departments way beyond STEM.</p> <p>Space Agency funding is hoped to continue next year, and the project needs to have a connection to space, e.g. agriculture, transport or business students doing market research, communications etc.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the speakers for their excellent presentations highlighting the breadth and scale of opportunities within Oxfordshire. The speakers were invited to advise how the group can help to promote these activities, seeking to retain as many graduates for Oxfordshire.</p> <p>The more the group can propagate messages the better, making people aware of the depth and breadth of opportunities. The Satellite Applications Catapult's use of a blind recruitment platform to evaluate applications, deterring the use of AI, creates a level playing field. Last year's programme resulted in a much more diverse range of applications.</p> <p>A question was raised whether universities undertake exit interviews for students as they graduate to understand what will make them stay? JB responded that housing is an issue for not remaining in central Oxford and suggested this could be a project on how to get more post grads to stay.</p> <p>ND was unsure whether Oxford Brookes has any data on graduates remaining in the area. It makes a difference if employers can engage with students to provide projects – a placement enables them to use their skills and gain maturity to prepare them for work after their studies. A discussion was welcomed on how to get students involved in project placements.</p> <p><b>ACTION: JB, ND and SA to meet to discuss project placements.</b></p> <p>Cllr Brown highlighted challenge of the expense of living in Oxford and suggested employers either helping to provide housing or the building of more affordable houses which will take time to evolve.</p>
7	<p><b>SA Skills Hub Update</b></p> <p>OxLEP have obtained a £1.7 million grant for skills bootcamps delivery from the Department of Education. The courses are suitable for adults aged 19+, are free 16-week courses based on employer "in demand" skills as identified in the Oxfordshire LSIP.</p> <p>Ten courses will be delivered covering Data Analytics, Amazon Web Services, digital marketing, hospitality, green E Bikes and green E vehicles, green sustainability skills, green construction, engineering and manufacturing and health and life sciences. All taking part in the courses will be offered an interview on completion of the bootcamp.</p> <p>Any members experiencing difficulties in recruiting to any of the sectors covered are invited to interview the successful completions or help develop the curriculum for Skills Bootcamp courses. This is particularly welcomed with engineering and manufacturing, and health and life sciences.</p>

		<p>The Apprenticeship Levy target has now reached £2,386,000. Repeat businesses are pledging again, 151 apprenticeships have been created retaining this money through pledges in Oxfordshire instead of returning it to the Treasury and benefits Oxfordshire residents.</p> <p>CEC have held training on how to become an inclusive employer, created a new video highlighting 'Josh's story' – last year's Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards winner, showing his experiences, support and path to employment. This showcases help given by the CEC to young people with SEND to help them raise their aspirations.</p> <p><u>Dates for diaries:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CareersFest – Kassam Stadium 20-21<sup>st</sup> March.</li> <li>• Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards 2024 – Final on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024 at Williams F1 – we welcome all to attend to be part of the celebration of talent in Oxfordshire.</li> </ul> <p>The Chair recognised the success of the Apprenticeship Levy and how it met the long standing ambition of the Skills Board to retain the levy for use locally within Oxfordshire, and of the 150+ apprenticeships created, 45% are in the health and social care sectors addressing long term challenges.</p>
8	RB	<p><b>Future Meeting dates, Members' Updates and AOB:</b>  21<sup>st</sup> May 2024  3<sup>rd</sup> September 2024  3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024  Meetings to take place 4:00pm – 6:00pm (virtual)  <b>Member Updates</b> - None</p> <p><b>AOB</b>  In response to a query from Cllr Brown on the population figures within the circulated economy overview documents Sarah Marlow's response to Cllr Brown and OCC's response is below:</p> <p>"Many thanks for raising the discrepancy in population data statistics for Oxford City used by Lightcast in the Economic Overview Reports circulated to members of the OSB/BSSG group, as part of the LMI pack for Oxfordshire.</p> <p>"I have since sought clarity from Lightcast whose datasets and analytics were shared with the and support from one of the Insight Analysts at Oxfordshire County Council. In the response below from OCC the analyst notes the use of Office of National Statistics datasets and the impact of the recent Census on the mid-year estimates. Lightcast acknowledged this explanation of the current data used and confirmed that its Economic Overview report does not reflect the current uplift shared by the analyst but anticipates that the upcoming data run this month will align with the analyst's findings. Lightcast offers further assistance if needed.</p> <p>"OCC Analyst explains discrepancies in population demographic stats:  <i>Following our discussion earlier about the lower population for Oxford City in Lightcast. It looks like they are using a couple of Office of National Statistics (ONS) datasets. For past data they use the mid-year estimates (MYE) and for future data they use the sub-national population projections (SNPP).</i>  <i>Following each national Census the ONS rebase the mid-year estimates between the censuses. <a href="https://ons.gov.uk">Rebasing of mid-year population estimates following Census 2021, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)</a>. This rebasing cause Oxford stats to be revised upwards when the update came out in November last year.</i></p>

“It looks like Lightcast hasn’t updated their report yet. This will cause a disconnect with the SNPP as they are based on the original 2018 MYE and will be not be updated to be based on 2022 MYE until next year [Subnational population projections: 2022-based - Office for National Statistics](#).

“Below is a chart of the different datasets, the red line being the original MYE and the yellow the rebased ones. the grey dots are the Census, and the teal line is the SNPP.



“I hope that you find this a useful update to the Economic Overview Report and that it provides some clarity around the discrepancy in the data provided and the data you currently have. Once the 2022 Mid-Year Estimates have been adjusted by ONS the stats should align better.”

## ACTIONS

Item	Details	Who	When
3.	Item for the Agenda of the next meeting – a discussion on devolution principles – details of these to be circulated with the minutes.	DH	After meeting
4.	Helen Brind to share activity sheet on Net Zero projects underway	HB	After meeting
6.	SA to meet with Jonathan Black and Nico Decourt to discuss project placements.	SA	After meeting

The meeting closed at 6:15 pm.