

Developing an All Age Skills Strategy: Follow-up and action planning workshop

A Report

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Developing an All Age Skills Strategy: Follow-up and action planning workshop

Executive Summary

Introduction, background and approach to the workshop

1. Central Bedfordshire's recent Local Economic Assessment (LEA) recognised the need to develop an All Age Skills Strategy to support continued local economic growth. Central Bedfordshire Council recently conducted a programme of consultation to inform the development of the All Age Skills Strategy. A key part of that programme was a series of workshops and interviews with public agencies, training providers and businesses.
2. The Council produced a draft strategy and commissioned Public Perspectives to conduct a follow-up workshop with those stakeholders involved in the earlier series of workshops and interviews. The aims of this workshop were to:
 - A. Provide feedback to participants on the findings and responses to the initial workshops
 - B. Present to participants the highlights of the draft strategy
 - C. Sense check the key issues, principles and priorities contained within the draft strategy
 - D. Identify and discuss key actions and activities required to deliver the strategy and to inform the development of an action plan
3. There was also an important wider aim of creating a sense of continued involvement with, and ownership of, the strategy amongst key stakeholders and providing an opportunity for stakeholders to network.
4. The workshop took place on 17th October 2011. All stakeholders invited or involved in the earlier workshops and interviews were invited to take part. Overall, 36 participants took part. A further number expressed an interest in the workshop, but were unable to attend and have asked to be kept in the loop.
5. The workshop participants were broken in to three separate break-out groups to discuss actions to help deliver each of the three priorities in the draft strategy:
 - Working together
 - Developing the future and current workforce
 - Raising individuals' aspirations and achievements

Some important points to note

6. The aim of the workshop was to identify and discuss key actions and test proposed areas of activity to help deliver the strategy, rather than produce a polished action plan. However, the workshop discussions have produced a long-list of current and potential actions and activities which could inform the development of a detailed action plan to deliver the strategy.
7. Actions and activities to deliver the strategy presented in this report have been identified through analysis of the participants' discussions. Although the potential actions and activities have been sense checked for relevance and value, they should not be seen as recommended actions from Public Perspectives but rather potential or suggested actions and activities for consideration.
8. The priorities in the draft strategy are interrelated so a number of the key issues and actions highlighted in this report under one priority are relevant to the other priorities. Also, in some cases there are similar issues and actions identified that appear under more than one priority, albeit with different nuances relevant to the particular priority. In terms of actual delivery it will be important to extract maximum value from these cross-cutting actions to make progress across multiple objectives.
9. The workshop did not identify any magic solutions or quick fixes. The workshop discussions show support for the direction of the strategy and the emerging areas of activity focus. The workshop has also identified a number of proposed actions and activities for further consideration. However, it is important that further work is done to develop the specific delivery mechanisms, set of accountabilities and the fine detail of a delivery plan for the strategy.
10. This report presents the findings from this workshop only. The potential actions and activity identified through the earlier workshops and consultation are not repeated in this report (although this report does sometimes acknowledge where there are similar findings). The findings of the earlier workshops and consultation remain valid and should be considered alongside this report when finalising the draft strategy and developing a delivery plan.

Key findings

11. The workshop highlighted nine key findings. These provide reassurance about the importance of the strategy and the relevance of the draft priorities. They also provide direction and ideas to inform the development of a delivery plan:
 - **There is continued support for the principle of an All Age Skills Strategy and enthusiasm to remain involved and support its implementation:** Some two-thirds of those that took part in the earlier workshops attended the follow-up workshop, with many others unable to attend expressing an interest to remain involved and contribute to delivery. All of those that completed the workshop feedback form agreed that

developing an All Age Skills Strategy is important to help improve the skill levels of residents and support the growth of the local economy.

- **There is strong support for the priorities contained within the draft strategy:** The workshop was an opportunity to provide feedback to participants on the findings from the earlier round of consultation and present the draft priorities. Participants were broadly supportive of the draft strategy and its draft priorities. All but two of those that completed the workshop feedback form, agreed that the proposed priorities in the draft strategy were the right ones. Of the two that did not agree, one was neutral and the other disagreed on the grounds that they felt that there needed to be a greater focus on enterprise skills and support for those wanting to become self employed or start a business.
- **There is general support for the emerging areas of activity focus within the draft strategy:** All participants agreed with the emerging areas of activity focus. However, there were some gaps highlighted and some suggested additions. It should also be noted that that many of the activities cut across delivery of more than one priority.
- **The workshop highlighted that there are no magic answers or quick fix solutions to deliver the priorities and address the local skills challenges:** The workshop discussions highlighted that there are some significant barriers to delivering some of the key areas of activity. However, participants did help provide some clear direction to inform the future delivery of the strategy and did identify some practical ways forward for consideration.
- **A lot of skills activity is already happening, it just needs to be better coordinated and focussed in a common direction:** The discussions under each priority highlighted a large amount of relevant activity already taking place. However, there was a sense that this activity could be better coordinated, some identified gaps covered and more focus on addressing an agreed set of priorities so as to maximise impact.
- **Partnerships working is key to making the most of what is already happening:** Participants agreed that improved coordination and a more strategic approach to delivery could be achieved by working in partnership. To this end there was support for the development of a partnership board or similar, with supporting work on identifying the existing activity and provision, and facilitating partnership working through the use of technology.

- **Effective business engagement is essential to deliver the strategy:**
Participants agreed that effective employer engagement remained essential to deliver the strategy. However, there were significant barriers to achieving this due to current labour market conditions, although participants felt that there were opportunities to coordinate and influence the employer engagement activity currently delivered by providers and public agencies.
- **Some of the challenges presented by limited resources could be tackled through developing, promoting and utilising voluntary services provided by businesses, providers and individuals:**
Participants at the workshop appreciated that the strategy had to be delivered within limited resources. There were several examples of local voluntary schemes such as the Timebank initiative where businesses provide their expertise to other businesses on a voluntary basis. There were suggestions that such a scheme could be extended to involve training providers and support information, advice and guidance work with local schools and young people.
- **A key focus for the strategy should be on schools and young people:**
Participants at the workshop said that engaging with schools and supporting young people should be one of the priority actions of the strategy. There was a sense that there was already quite a lot of provision for unemployed people to develop the skills to get in to work or start a business. However, this support was not as readily available for young people still at school. Suggested actions included targeting young people at an early stage before they become NEET (not in employment, education or training) and bringing businesses and schools closer together to help them deliver to young people high quality and realistic enterprise and careers information, advice and guidance.

12. By way of summary, the following represents the key issues and actions participants highlighted to deliver each of the priorities:

Priority 1: Working together - key issues and actions

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

- There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as the importance of partnership working, identifying and meeting employer needs and the value of local labour market intelligence

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

- There are a lot of existing and effective partnerships and networks, which form a healthy basis on which to develop a skills partnership

- There are examples of existing effective employer engagement, although there was consensus that more could be done
- Some agencies and providers currently use local labour market intelligence effectively, although there was consensus that there is scope to improve the relevance of local labour market intelligence, share and utilise it more

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

- Competition between providers could make it difficult to work in partnership and coordinate employer engagement
- In the current economic climate employer engagement is a major challenge

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

- Develop a partnership board or similar to oversee the implementation of the strategy and influence the activity of key strategic partners and stakeholders
- Develop a comprehensive picture of the local skills partnerships, networks and activity to inform the development of the partnership board and the implementation of the strategy
- Use on-line and social media technology to support the development of a skills partnership, make it easier for employers to access providers and opportunities and share local labour market intelligence
- Extend the Timebank initiative to involve training providers and employer engagement
- Coordinate employer engagement through the existing public agency employer engagement infrastructure
- Consider commissioning a bespoke employer engagement service
- Consider shaping current employer engagement activity to target more micro and SME businesses
- Target bespoke local labour market intelligence at key partners and organisations, especially training providers and schools, to shape their activity

Priority 2: Developing the future and current workforce – key issues and actions

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

- There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as supporting businesses to grow, promoting the value of skills development and working with training providers to meet the needs of employers

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

- There is a reasonable amount of existing business engagement, skills brokerage and skills promotion work, which forms a healthy basis to deliver this priority

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

- Effective engagement with businesses and schools is a major challenge and one which is key to the successful delivery of the strategy

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

- Build on existing activity and effort in this area, influencing the activity of providers and agencies
- Extend the Timebank initiative to develop a programme of business champions and mentors to work with businesses and the workforce
- Extend the focus of this priority to include enterprise skills development and support for business start-ups
- Extend coverage beyond higher level qualifications to foundation level, pre-apprenticeship and level 1 skills development

Priority 3: Raising individuals' aspirations and achievements - key issues and actions

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

- There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as the importance of working with diverse communities, raising aspirations, developing employability skills and delivering high quality and realistic careers advice

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

- There is a lot of activity targeted at young people and vulnerable groups, although there was agreement that there are gaps

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

- Effective engagement with schools and breaking the cycle of a lack of aspiration and ambition amongst some families are the major challenges

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

- Build on and link together the skills agenda with the child poverty agenda, the 14-19 Strategy Group, the Get Britain Working programme and other relevant agendas
- Develop a programme to bring businesses and schools closer together
- Develop a programme of employability and soft skills training and opportunities in schools, linked to a formal qualification and educational outcomes
- Support schools and teachers to provide high quality and realistic careers and employment information, advice and guidance through bespoke local labour market intelligence and specialist provision

Developing an All Age Skills Strategy: Follow-up and action planning workshop

Main Report

Introduction and background to the workshop

1. Central Bedfordshire's recent Local Economic Assessment (LEA) recognised the need to develop an All Age Skills Strategy to support continued local economic growth. Central Bedfordshire Council recently conducted a programme of consultation to inform the development of the All Age Skills Strategy. A key part of that programme was a series of workshops and interviews with public agencies, training providers and businesses.
2. The Council produced a draft strategy and commissioned Public Perspectives to conduct a follow-up workshop with those stakeholders involved in the earlier series of workshops and interviews. The aims of this workshop were to:
 - A. Provide feedback to participants on the findings and responses to the initial workshops
 - B. Present to participants the highlights of the draft strategy
 - C. Sense check the key issues, principles and priorities contained within the draft strategy
 - D. Identify and discuss key actions and activities required to deliver the strategy and to inform the development of an action plan
3. There was also an important wider aim of creating a sense of continued involvement with, and ownership of, the strategy amongst key stakeholders and providing an opportunity for stakeholders to network.
4. The workshop was also used to update participants on the development of the Economic Development Plan, which has been developed in tandem with the All Age Skills Strategy.
5. It should be noted that the aim of the workshop was to identify and discuss key actions and test proposed areas of activity to help deliver the strategy, rather than produce a polished action plan. However, the workshop discussions have produced a long-list of current and potential actions and activities which could inform the development of a detailed action plan to deliver the strategy.

Approach to the workshop

The make-up of the workshop

6. The workshop took place on 17th October 2011. All stakeholders invited or involved in the earlier workshops and interviews were invited to take part. Overall, 36 participants took part, with a further 6 signed up that did not attend. A further number expressed an interest in the workshop, but were not available on the set date and have asked to be kept in the loop. The full list of participants is included as an appendix to this report and full contact details for all those that signed up and expressed an interest in the workshop is available to Central Bedfordshire Council.

Facilitating the workshop

7. The workshop was facilitated by staff from Public Perspectives, and supported by a Central Bedfordshire Council staff member.
8. A workshop programme was developed to ensure a consistent and appropriate line of questioning across the workshop break-out groups and to ensure full coverage of the aims and objectives of the workshop (the workshop programme is included as an appendix to this report). The workshop participants were broken in to three separate break-out groups to discuss actions to help deliver each of the three priorities in the draft strategy:
 - Working together
 - Developing the future and current workforce
 - Raising individuals' aspirations and achievements
9. Officers from Central Bedfordshire Council observed and participated in the workshop, providing an opportunity to receive "live" feedback.

Reporting

10. The workshop discussions were recorded and flip chart notes taken. These recordings were used to conduct a thematic analysis to identify key themes and issues emerging from the discussions. Quotes from participants have been used to provide evidence and bring life to the findings.
11. Actions and activities to deliver the strategy presented in this report have been identified through analysis of the participants' discussions. Although the potential actions and activities have been sense checked for relevance and value, they should not be seen as recommended actions from Public Perspectives but rather potential or suggested actions and activities for consideration. Potential actions or activities have been included in this report if they met one or more of the following criteria:
 - The action or activity was mentioned by several participants
 - The action or activity was strongly supported by at least a small number of participants
 - The action or activity is similar to (and thus supported by) proposed actions or activities identified through the earlier workshops and consultation
12. The priorities in the draft strategy are interrelated so a number of the key issues and actions highlighted in this report under one priority are relevant to the other priorities. Also, in some cases there are similar issues and actions identified that appear under more than one priority, albeit with different nuances relevant to the particular priority. In terms of actual delivery it will be important to extract maximum value from these cross-cutting actions to make progress across multiple objectives.
13. Overall, it is important to note that the workshop did not identify any magic solutions or quick fixes. The workshop discussions show support for the

direction of the strategy and the emerging areas of activity focus. The workshop has also identified a number of proposed actions and activities for further consideration. However, it is important that further work is done to develop the specific delivery mechanisms, set of accountabilities and the fine detail of a delivery plan for the strategy.

14. It should also be noted that this report presents the findings from this workshop only. The potential actions and activity identified through the earlier workshops and consultation are not repeated in this report (although this report does sometimes acknowledge where there are similar findings). The findings of the earlier workshops and consultation remain valid and should be considered alongside this report when finalising the draft strategy and developing the delivery plan.
15. The report is divided in to the following four sections, with the first three sections focusing on the three draft priorities:
 - Section 1: Working together
 - Section 2: Developing the future and current workforce
 - Section 3: Raising individuals' aspirations and achievements
 - Section 4: Summary and conclusion: key issues for consideration and potential ways forward
16. For each of the first three sections, the following questions, which were discussed during the workshop, will be answered:
 - Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?
 - What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?
 - What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?
 - What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

Section 1: Working together

Key findings/issues

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

- There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as the importance of partnership working, identifying and meeting employer needs and the value of local labour market intelligence

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

- There are a lot of existing and effective partnerships and networks, which form a healthy basis on which to develop a skills partnership
- There are examples of existing effective employer engagement, although there was consensus that more could be done
- Some agencies and providers currently use local labour market intelligence effectively, although there was consensus that there is scope to improve the relevance of local labour market intelligence, share and utilise it more

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

- Competition between providers could make it difficult to work in partnership and coordinate employer engagement
- In the current economic climate employer engagement is a major challenge

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

- Develop a partnership board or similar to oversee the implementation of the strategy and influence the activity of key strategic partners and stakeholders
- Develop a comprehensive picture of the local skills partnerships, networks and activity to inform the development of the partnership board and the implementation of the strategy
- Use on-line and social media technology to support the development of a skills partnership, make it easier for employers to access providers and opportunities and share local labour market intelligence
- Extend the Timebank initiative to involve training providers and employer engagement
- Coordinate employer engagement through the existing public agency employer engagement infrastructure
- Consider commissioning a bespoke employer engagement service
- Consider shaping current employer engagement activity to target more micro and SME businesses
- Target bespoke local labour market intelligence at key partners and organisations, especially training providers and schools, to shape their activity

Introduction

- 1.1 This section highlights the key issues and actions that were raised in discussion about the draft All Age Skills Strategy Priority 1: Working together.
- 1.2 The draft strategy summarises the aims of this priority as:

‘Enhance partnership working and improve the availability and dissemination of local labour market intelligence’

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as the importance of partnership working, identifying and meeting employer needs and the value of local labour market intelligence

- 1.3 Across all participants there was broad support for the following emerging areas of activity focus outlined in the draft strategy:
 - Develop an effective skills partnership
 - Identifying employer needs
 - Establish a mechanism for the collation and dissemination of information
- 1.4 Participants at the workshop thought that building an effective skills partnership was essential to deliver the strategy. They said it was an important mechanism to co-ordinate activity on identifying employer needs and collating and disseminating local labour market intelligence:

‘There is no doubt that working together in partnership is crucial to delivering the strategy . . . and I can see how it would be the way in which we can engage with businesses and identify their needs . . . and the way in which we can bring together and then communicate local information to providers, agencies and other key partners.’

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

There are a lot of existing and effective partnerships and networks, which form a healthy basis on which to develop a skills partnership

- 1.5 Participants identified numerous examples of partnership working and skills provider networks already in place, which they felt were effective and valuable. Consequently, participants were clear that the development of a skills partnership to oversee the implementation of the strategy needed to build on and make use of what was already happening:

‘I’d say we already work well in partnership . . . we already work with NAS [National Apprenticeship Service], the Skills Funding Agency

and Job Centre Plus, so there is already some market led good partnership working going on already. . . if you scan Central Bedfordshire you'll find lots of good examples of partnership working.'

'There's lots of networks and partnerships out there . . . I think we get worried when there's a threat about reinventing the wheel . . . we need to make sure there isn't duplication with all these partnerships and networks and make it easy for providers and employers to engage with them.'

There are examples of existing effective employer engagement, although there was consensus that more could be done

- 1.6 Participants provided some examples of existing and effective employer engagement. However, there was a general consensus that this was limited. It was felt that employer engagement tended to be focussed on existing relationships between employers and providers rather than building new relationships. It was also felt that in some cases employer engagement focussed too much on large businesses at the expense of not engaging with small and medium sized businesses:

'I think every provider is already doing some pretty effective employer engagement, if we didn't we wouldn't be in existence . . . it's meat and drink to us in many ways . . . but we do probably just focus on those businesses we already know and already work closely with . . . so perhaps there is a way for us to target our employer engagement in a more coordinated and effective way.'

'I'm representing from the business side of things here and I'm just so surprised to hear about how many agencies and networks there are working in this field . . . I didn't realise this and there is clearly lots of help out there for businesses if they need it . . . so you need to engage with businesses more to tell them about it . . . there's a real danger that you'll bombard yourselves with all this information but not the businesses that matter most . . .'

'I'd say that NAS and the SFA [Skills Funding Agency] and Job Centre Plus already do a lot of employer engagement and work with providers to fill the vacancies and skills requirements of employers . . . but what is probably not happening enough is engagement with smaller businesses . . .'

Some agencies and providers currently use local labour market intelligence effectively, although there was consensus that there is scope to improve the relevance of local labour market intelligence, share and utilise it more

- 1.7 Participants provided some examples of existing and effective use of labour market intelligence to inform their activity. However, there was a general consensus that there is scope to collate the various sources of local intelligence together to make it comprehensive and up to date. It was also felt that there is scope to improve the sharing and communication of relevant local intelligence and make sure it is targeted at key stakeholders to inform their activity:

‘We use a lot of LMI [labour market intelligence] and information to inform our work [Job Centre Plus] but perhaps there is scope to share it more and also use other information we don’t have access to.’

‘I don’t think it’s hard to get hold of labour market intelligence, but the real challenge is putting a local flavour on it . . . as a provider it would be really good to have something that regularly told me what was happening locally, what the new developments are, what new businesses are coming in to the area . . . I just don’t have the time at the moment to go looking for it.’

‘The most important things about labour market intelligence for me are making it useful and ensuring that it is used by key organisations and stakeholders . . . so it needs to be up to date and have useful local information . . . and it needs to be used by providers . . . and especially schools to inform their IAG [Information, Advice and Guidance] work.’

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

Competition between providers could make it difficult to work in partnership and coordinate employer engagement

- 1.8 Several participants acknowledged that training providers are businesses and are in competition with one another. However, there was also acknowledgement that training providers have a history of working together when it is in their common interest:

‘There needs to be a balance between competition and collaboration . . . we can and do work together when it makes sense . . . but we are also independent companies and have to follow our own path . .

. but if it makes sense and if the opportunities are there we can and will work together . . . there's more than enough to go round.'

In the current economic climate employer engagement is a major challenge

- 1.9 As was the case in the earlier workshops, participants were clear that one of the major challenges would be to engage and capture the interest of employers in the current economic climate where skills development was not necessarily a priority. However, some participants saw this as an opportunity to promote to employers the value of skills development as an investment to help grow businesses in difficult times:

'You need to speak the language of business . . . that means showing businesses how developing their workforce, bringing in apprentices and supporting skills development will help grow their business . . . it is difficult to get employers interested when all they are thinking about at the moment is survival and saving money . . . but we know, and we need to show them, that skilling up their workforce is an investment that can give them a commercial advantage.'

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

Develop a partnership board or similar to oversee the implementation of the strategy and influence the activity of key strategic partners and stakeholders

- 1.10 Participants agreed with the idea of setting up a partnership board or similar to sit above the existing partnerships and networks (although some participants expressed the need to avoid duplicating existing mechanisms and avoid having too many meetings which could take away the focus from actual delivery on the ground). This body would have representation from key partners and organisations and feed information up and down through the various partnerships and networks. Some participants saw the greatest value in such a body to be its ability to influence strategically the work of key partners and stakeholders to make sure their activity is focussed in a common direction:

'You need something to mesh all these partnerships and networks together . . . something that will bring together all the information, resources and expertise to get the most out of it.'

'We need a way to be able to carry on these conversations we've had through these workshops in the future . . . we need a forum to come together again . . . It makes sense that there would be

something that would sit above all the existing partnerships and networks to get the most out of them.’

‘The partnership has got to have a common set of priorities . . . the biggest thing to come out of any partnership working will be to make sure all the agencies and providers are working towards a common goal . . . that their resources and activity is all going in the same direction.’

Develop a comprehensive picture of the local skills partnerships, networks and activity to inform the development of the partnership board and the implementation of the strategy

1.11 Some participants suggested that there seemed to be so many local partnerships and networks and so much activity around the local skills agenda that it would make sense to map it. This would help provide a comprehensive picture of the local provider landscape and local skills infrastructure, which would be vital information to inform the development of a partnership board, avoid duplication and help monitor the implementation of the All Age Skills Strategy:

‘There is so much going on out there . . . do we know all that is happening? . . . You need to map all the providers out there and all these different partnerships and networks . . . you need to know exactly what is going on out there before you do anything else . . . all this will inform the strategy and how it’s implemented.’

Use on-line and social media technology to support the development of a skills partnership, make it easier for employers to access providers and opportunities and share local labour market intelligence

1.12 Several participants suggested that on-line and social media technology could support partnership working and networking, make it easier for employers to access providers and provide a simple and easy way of sharing labour market intelligence. At its most basic, the suggestion was to have a simple e-mail network of providers and agencies to share information and developments. At its more advanced some participants suggested the development of an on-line directory of providers and the use of on-line discussion forums and social media networks. The feasibility of all the different mechanisms needs to be considered and potentially external support required. However it was clear that technology could provide a simple and low cost mechanism to support partnership working, networking and sharing information:

‘. . . surely it’s easy to keep communication and networking going in this day and age . . . we just need an e-mail network and maybe

some sort of on-line forum to help us keep in touch and share information and ideas . . .’

‘We’ve already developed a directory of providers . . . it could easily be updated and kept up to date . . .’

‘I’m not sure you need a directory . . . it always takes so much effort to keep those sorts of things up to date . . . we need to do things that don’t cost us much money . . . but certainly we need to think about how technology can help us work together better and share information . . . we need to know what’s going on out there and who’s doing what . . .’

Extend the Timebank initiative to involve training providers and employer engagement

1.13 The potential of the Timebank initiative was raised through discussions and several participants felt that the initiative could be extended to engage with employers about skills development. The Timebank initiative aims to match local providers of business services such as marketing, financial planning, sales and HR to businesses that are looking to start up, grow or move into the area. The programme went live in November 2011. Some participants at the workshop saw the initiative as an opportunity to promote the importance of skills development to businesses using the service. This could be achieved by educating the businesses providing services through Timebank about the local skills development opportunities so that they act as advocates for the skills agenda. It could also be important to ensure that training providers are part of the Timebank offer:

‘Timebank seems like a really interesting initiative . . . can’t we just extend that to this area . . . it could be an excellent way to engage with businesses and provide them with advice about how to develop their workforce . . . training providers should be encouraged to be part of this.’

‘I can see how using intermediaries [through Timebank] to promote skills development might help . . . but I’m not sure it’s the best delivery mechanism . . . you need to get skilled training providers involved to do it properly . . . you should think about getting training providers to be part of the Timebank initiative.’

Coordinate employer engagement through the existing public agency employer engagement infrastructure

1.14 Participants were not able to provide any magic solutions to meet the challenge of effective employer engagement. However, the main public agencies at the workshop – National Apprenticeship Service, Skills Funding Agency and Job Centre Plus – all conducted employer engagement activity and had infrastructure in place to match potential employees with skills development opportunities to meet employer needs. All of these agencies felt that there was an opportunity to improve the coordination and effectiveness of their employer engagement through close partnership working (this idea is similar to the idea expressed in the earlier workshops that effort should be made to make use of the experience, expertise and networks of providers that already do a lot of effective employer engagement):

‘We already do a lot of employer engagement . . . the infrastructure is already in place . . . it would be nice to do more if we had the resources . . . but we already do quite a lot . . . and as part of this we do work in partnership with providers, employers and other agencies but I could see how this could be improved through even closer partnership working.’

Consider commissioning a bespoke employer engagement service

1.15 Some participants said that it was important to have a single point of contact for employers to make it easy for them to access support and also a service which actively engaged with employers on the skills agenda. However, there was an appreciation that this would require resources and funding which may not be available:

‘You’ve got to make it easy for employers to find out about the support and opportunities that are available . . . I think you need to find a way of having a single point of contact . . . this could be a web based service or a helpline . . . at the moment some employers just wouldn’t know where to start . . . if they’re busy and they’ve got other priorities they are just going to give up.’

‘Companies are often very reluctant to admit they’ve got training and skills shortages . . . it is only when a trained, knowledgeable and independent broker tends to sit down with the company and discuss their needs do they tend to realise they have a need and they’re often then prepared to fund some training and skills development . . . so I think there’s a real gap here now with the loss of Business Link . . . so there needs to be a human and informed contact angle . . .’

'I think FE colleges should have the resources to have a high quality, dedicated business engagement service which could work on behalf of the whole of Central Bedfordshire . . .'

'It would be great to have a dedicated employer engagement service . . . almost a case officer type approach . . . but I'm sure that costs money that no one has at the moment . . .'

Consider shaping current employer engagement activity to target more micro and SME businesses

- 1.16 Some participants said that existing employer engagement focussed too much on large businesses at the expense of not engaging with micro, small and medium sized businesses, which form the majority of businesses in the area. They felt that it was these businesses that would benefit more than larger businesses from targeted employer engagement activity. Some participants said that providers and public agencies should be encouraged, potentially incentivised and given the information to target these businesses:

'I think we forget too easily the micro-businesses . . . those with less than 10 employees . . . they are a lot harder to target and to persuade to engage in skills development but they are the ones that need it most to help them grow and push on to the next stage.'

'I think there is always a tendency to target the bigger employers but the reality is that they are pretty good at identifying and filling their skills needs . . . it's the SMEs that need more help to plan for the future, diagnose their skills needs and fund skills development programmes so I think resources should be diverted more at this group of businesses . . . it's the smaller companies that don't know where to go for help and give up looking if it isn't easy for them to get support . . . so we need to go to them . . .'

Target bespoke local labour market intelligence at key partners and organisations, especially training providers and schools, to shape their activity

- 1.17 The value of local labour market intelligence was universally acknowledged by participants. Although there was not a magic answer from participants about how to collate and communicate relevant local labour market intelligence, there was a sense that this should be straightforward and facilitated through the various partnerships and networks. Most participants said that the biggest area of action around local labour market intelligence should be to tailor it for different users then target it at key partners and organisations. This was especially with training providers to inform their employer engagement activity

and with schools to inform the information, advice and guidance they provide to their pupils:

‘It’s important to get that up to date local information and intelligence to key partners . . . training providers need to know where to target their efforts and if you give them the information you can nudge them in the right direction . . .’

‘I think there needs to be a way of getting schools to think beyond the normal limits of their world . . . they tend to have a very traditional approach to careers advice and qualifications . . . so it tends to be a very closed world . . . the main thing is to get young people the right type of careers advice and make them aware of the various training and employment opportunities . . . giving schools this local labour market intelligence could be a really important way of addressing this . . . it will help schools tailor the advice they provide to make sure it is realistic . . .and to make sure they are preparing their pupils for the real world.’

Section 2: Developing the future and current workforce

Key findings/issues

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

- There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as supporting businesses to grow, promoting the value of skills development and working with training providers to meet the needs of employers

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

- There is a reasonable amount of existing business engagement, skills brokerage and skills promotion work, which forms a healthy basis to deliver this priority

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

- Effective engagement with businesses and schools is a major challenge and one which is key to the successful delivery of the strategy

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

- Build on existing activity and effort in this area, influencing the activity of providers and agencies
- Extend the Timebank initiative to develop a programme of business champions and mentors to work with businesses and the workforce
- Extend the focus of this priority to include enterprise skills development and support for business start-ups
- Extend coverage beyond higher level qualifications to foundation level, pre-apprenticeship and level 1 skills development

Introduction

2.1 This section highlights the key issues and actions that were raised in discussion about the draft All Age Skills Strategy Priority 2: Developing the future and current workforce.

2.2 The draft strategy summarises the aims of this priority as:

‘Increasing the proportion of the workforce with recognized qualifications, and supporting access to academic and vocational opportunities’

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as supporting businesses to grow, promoting the value of skills development and working with training providers to meet the needs of employers

2.3 Across all participants there was broad support for the following emerging areas of activity focus outlined in the draft strategy:

- Support businesses to grow and innovate, create employment opportunities and increase productivity
- Promote the value and awareness of academic and vocational opportunities to employers and the current and future workforce
- Encourage training providers to respond to the skills requirements of employers

2.4 Participants were clear that it is important to work with businesses to support their skills planning and the skills development of their staff. They were also clear that it is important that the current and future workforce is appropriately skilled to take advantage of the local employment opportunities:

‘There is an issue with some businesses about their long-term legacy planning . . . we need to work with businesses to ensure that they plan for this, that they know what support is available and that we work with them to resolve their problems . . . skills planning and developing the skills of their workforce could give businesses an advantage in these difficult times.’

‘The challenge is getting businesses to realise the value of training . . . so there needs to be work with businesses around planning . . . diagnostics . . . and demonstrating the value of training . . . we need to break down that fear that some businesses have that training their staff will mean they will leave . . . they need to appreciate it is an investment to develop skills . . .’

‘I think one issue is ensuring that skills development and training is linked to where the jobs are . . . so it’s no good training twice as many hair dressers as are needed when only half are going to get jobs . . . so we need to join up the dots between where there are employment opportunities and the training on offer . . . we need to make young people aware of what jobs are available so that they train in areas where they can get work . . .’

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

There is a reasonable amount of existing business engagement, skills brokerage and skills promotion work, which forms a healthy basis to deliver this priority

- 2.5 As highlighted with the “Working together” priority, there is already a reasonable amount of business engagement activity happening. In addition, the workshop identified several examples of skills brokerage activity (through agencies such as NAS and Job Centre Plus, as well as through independent training providers) and using business champions to promote the importance of skills development to businesses and the workforce:

‘We work with a lot of directors that are like rabbits in the headlight that need support during these current economic times . . . we try and identify the skills gaps with them and try to identify training and skills solutions to help them develop their business and their workforce in the current environment . . . once they get in to it they realise the value of it . . . there is a demand out there but you have to make companies aware of the opportunities out there in the first place.’

‘We work as part of the work programme with Job Centre Plus and we work with employers to get them in to work and say to the employer that if you keep them in a job for two years, we’ll fund their training so we’ll up-skill them while in work. Essentially, we’re focusing on getting people in to work over a longer time period and skilling them while they’re in work rather than just focusing on skills development or short term employment.’

‘We’re [Job Centre Plus) already doing a lot of this through the Get Britain Working measures . . . so we conduct a skills review with our customers and then support people to receive training and work with employers to train our customers to meet their job requirements.’

‘We [Prince’s Trust] use mentors to support young people while they are progressing in their jobs . . . they provide that informal support and guidance which some young people need . . . it doesn’t tend to be built in to the way organisations work anymore so we feel a need to provide it when we place a young person in a new job.’

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

Effective engagement with businesses and schools is a major challenge and one which is key to the successful delivery of the strategy

- 2.6 As with the priority “Working together”, participants said that getting businesses interested in skills development could pose a major challenge in the current economic climate. In addition, participants thought that engaging with schools and influencing the quality of their information, advice and guidance to young people was essential to promote realistic and appropriate skills development to the future workforce. However, several participants felt that schools were not always interested in this and that engagement with schools would be challenging:

‘Schools are sometimes just not interested in opening up their doors and doing things that are not clearly linked to academic or educational achievement.’

‘It is even harder now with Academy status schools to influence their agendas . . . Local Authorities are finding themselves with less and less scope to influence schools.’

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

Build on existing activity and effort in this area, influencing the activity of providers and agencies

- 2.7 As mentioned, participants felt that there is a lot of activity already happening around employer engagement, skills brokerage and promoting and supporting skills development amongst the future and current workforce. Some participants felt that the Local Authority and the proposed partnership had an important role in helping to coordinate and strategically shape the focus of this existing activity:

‘I’m sure there’s more we could do . . . but a starting point will be to make better use of what we’re already doing . . . as you can hear there is already lots of stuff happening . . . lots of employer engagement . . . lots of skills brokerage work and promoting the agenda and opportunities . . . we just need to make sure it is better coordinated and focussed.’

Extend the Timebank initiative to develop a programme of business champions and mentors to work with businesses and the workforce

- 2.8 Throughout the discussions examples of several different voluntary ‘champion’ and ‘mentoring’ schemes emerged. There was a sense that in a time of limited resources, volunteer led interventions could be an important way to fill gaps in service provision. As part of this, there was a sense that businesses needed impartial support and advice. There was also a view that some schools would benefit from closer involvement with businesses and young people would benefit from careers advice and employment mentoring support from businesses and business professionals:

‘Maybe there is a kind of Big Society answer to this . . . we need to find a way of getting individuals . . . the community . . . business professionals to give something back . . . it would be good to find a way of getting businesses and providers to work closely with schools and for businesses to receive impartial advice and support about skills and development.’

‘I can see that the Timebank initiative is a good idea . . . but it would be good if it could be broadened . . . if it had a wider remit so that it wasn’t just about businesses receiving support from other businesses . . . but could also allow individuals to provide support to businesses and businesses and individuals to work with schools.’

Extend the focus to include enterprise skills development and support for business start-ups

- 2.9 Several participants felt that the strategy needed a greater focus on promoting and delivering enterprise skills development and supporting business start-ups. Participants felt that enterprise and business start-ups could be important drivers of business and employment growth. There was also a view that the current support available for business start-ups was often limited to getting the business launched rather than providing on-going support and skills development to help the business survive the critical first years and grow:

‘I think this strategy does not have enough emphasis on enterprise . . . there needs to be more here around providing people with the skills to develop and launch their own businesses . . . enterprise, self employment and business start-ups are one of the ways in which we’ll get the economy moving again.’

‘There is quite a lot of support out there, especially for unemployed people, to set up their own businesses . . . the problem is that once you’ve got them to the stage of launching the business, we have to

pull out . . . but that is probably the most critical time when support and the skills to grow the business are most needed.'

'Start ups are an important way of getting people out to work but my concern is that lack of advice that's out there for them once they've set up and there needs to be some infrastructure in place to help them along in their first couple of years of trading as otherwise the start ups could fall away and we're back to square one.'

Extend coverage beyond higher level qualifications to foundation level, pre-apprenticeship and level 1 skills development

2.10 Several participants felt that the most important issue was the lack of provision and take-up of foundation, pre-apprenticeship and level 1 skills and qualifications. The sense was that the employability skills and core skills such as literacy and numeracy of some young people was a barrier towards their successful employment. It was felt that provision and promotion of these skills should be the priority ahead of targeting higher level skills provision (this issue and actions to address it are explored in more depth under priority 3: Raising individuals' aspirations and achievements):

'We overly focus at the moment on level 2 upwards rather than on foundation level and I think we need to make sure that we don't forget that group . . . there is a real issue around employability skills and core skills like literacy and numeracy.'

'I think we agree that there is already reasonable provision out there around level 2 and above, the issue is below that . . . some employers are not happy with the quality of some apprentices and their employability . . . so maybe we need to think about developing an NVQ in starting work or employability . . .'

'There seems to be a gap in basic skills provision . . . or not in provision but in take-up is an issue . . . we are oversubscribed at level 3, but undersubscribed at level 1.'

Section 3: Raising individuals' aspirations and achievements

Key findings/issues

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

- There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as the importance of working with diverse communities, raising aspirations, developing employability skills and delivering high quality and realistic careers advice

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

- There is a lot of activity targeted at young people and vulnerable groups, although there was agreement that there are gaps

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

- Effective engagement with schools and breaking the cycle of a lack of aspiration and ambition amongst some families are the major challenges

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

- Build on and link together the skills agenda with the child poverty agenda, the 14-19 Strategy Group, the Get Britain Working programme and other relevant agendas
- Develop a programme to bring businesses and schools closer together
- Develop a programme of employability and soft skills training and opportunities in schools, linked to a formal qualification and educational outcomes
- Support schools and teachers to provide high quality and realistic careers and employment information, advice and guidance through bespoke local labour market intelligence and specialist provision

Introduction

3.1 This section highlights the key issues and actions that were raised in discussion about the draft All Age Skills Strategy Priority 3: Raising individuals' aspirations and achievements.

3.2 The draft strategy summarises the aims of this priority as:

'Promote and raise awareness of the support and opportunities available at all ages for skills development and the importance of skills in achieving ambitions within our communities'

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as the importance of working with diverse communities, raising aspirations, developing employability skills and delivering high quality and realistic careers advice

3.3 Across all participants there was broad support for the following emerging areas of activity focus outlined in the draft strategy:

- Promote the benefits of learning to individuals of all ages and promote the opportunities available
- Support the provision of opportunities that are appropriate to the needs of particular groups and areas, recognising the importance of softer skills and ultimately leading to a rise in attainment levels
- Support the development of employability skills, through training, work placements, volunteering and enterprise
- Support careers advice to incorporate labour market intelligence

3.4 The following quotes highlight the importance placed on this priority and the emerging areas of activity focus:

‘I’ve been pleased from the start that this is an “all age” strategy . . . you’ve got to target all ages and all communities, not just young people . . . You need several plans to deal with the different groups . . . it is a multi-layered problem and you don’t just want to develop actions that target the young . . . you need to target older groups as well . . . those that are receiving benefits . . . those that are newly made redundant . . . those that have been working somewhere for decades and find themselves not having the skills to get a new job.’

‘You need a whole family approach . . . we find that a lot of the young people we work with have parents that are like them . . . many of them do not work . . . and so there is the whole issue of a lack of aspirations within families . . . so you need programmes that target the whole family . . .’

‘A key issue is around the employability skills of young people . . . we hear from employers that this is an issue and we see it amongst some of the young people we work with, we need to make sure young people are flexible and adaptable to the different employment opportunities available . . . it’s often not about specific skills or training for a specific job . . . but about having transferable and employability skills . . .’

‘There’s a good network of IAG provision for adults in the area . . . but I feel there is a real problem with the IAG provided to young people . . . there is a history of poor advice provision and that is only going to get worse with the loss of provision . . . the new provision needs to be focussed not just on academia and going to university but also on jobs, apprenticeships, vocational qualifications and opportunities.’

- 3.5 Although participants supported the focus on targeting specific communities, some participants raised concerns about targeting different geographical communities:

‘I always get concerned about targeting initiatives in one area as it can exclude those just outside the catchment area . . . and there’s also the problem of just overwhelming an area or a group with so many initiatives that they seem to get lost in one another . . . I don’t think geographical interventions tend to work . . . communities tend to be spread across more than one geography.’

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

There is a lot of activity targeted at young people and vulnerable groups, although there was agreement that there are gaps

- 3.6 Participants said that there is already a lot of activity targeted at young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) and unemployed people. However, there was also a sense that there were some gaps in provision. Some participants felt that work with young people should start much earlier, not when they were already NEET. Participants also felt that there was not enough focus on the employability skills of young people and a lack of quality and realistic information, advice and guidance:

‘There’s a lot of work happening in other areas around reducing child poverty, equalities, social mobility . . . these all have a link to the skills agenda and they all need to be joined up.’

‘There’s already a lot going on with NEET young people, for example, giving them employability and customer service skills and then supporting them in to employment . . . but my concern is that we don’t get in early enough . . . we need to be working with young people much earlier, before they become NEET.’

‘There’s already good provision of IAG for adults . . . and the all age careers service will strengthen that . . . but I’m not sure an approach like this will suit young people . . . it will be too generic and too distant . . . young people need more focussed attention.’

‘A priority has got to be working with schools and young people . . . too many are leaving school without the basic employability skills and basic core skills . . . they are leaving school without having been given any realistic advice or preparation for the working world . . . we’ve got to make sure that schools are preparing their young people for work, not just for university . . . and giving them realistic advice about the types of employment opportunities that are available to them . . .’

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

Effective engagement with schools and breaking the cycle of a lack of aspiration and ambition amongst some families are the major challenges

- 3.7 As with the priority “Developing the future and current workforce”, participants said that engaging with schools and influencing the quality of their information, advice and guidance to young people was essential, but a challenge for a number of reasons that include: careers guidance is not part of the curriculum, teachers are not trained as IAG (information, advice and guidance) workers and a lack of resources to use specialists. Participants also felt that there needed to be a holistic family approach to tackle endemic issues within some families which can limit the aspirations of some young people. However, there was an appreciation that tackling such issues is a major challenge:

‘We need to work with families, not just young people . . . limited aspirations and opportunities for some young people come from their family backgrounds . . . the skills agenda needs to work as part of other agendas designed to tackle these deep seated family issues . . . but we’ve known this for a long time and there aren’t any magic answers to this problem.’

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

Build on and link together the skills agenda with the child poverty agenda, the 14-19 Strategy Group, the Get Britain Working programme and other relevant agendas

- 3.8 Participants felt that there was already a lot of work taking place to address related issues through the child poverty agenda, 14-19 Strategy Group, Get Britain Working programme and other relevant agendas. The sense was that

the skills agenda should be linked in with these and that programmes should be modified to mutually influence each other. As part of this, the suggestion was that these agendas should be formally linked through the skills partnership:

‘There needs to be a way of linking the skills agenda with all these other agendas . . . they all benefit one another . . . the skills agenda should be influencing the work in other areas and vice versa . . . you need to get some of these key partners . . . schools and other stakeholders . . . working alongside you.’

Develop a programme to bring businesses and schools closer together

3.9 Several participants felt that local schools needed to be opened up and brought closer to local businesses. There is perhaps a key role to be played here by the Local Authority and the skills partnership. Suggestions ranged from businesses providing careers guidance and mentoring to young people, to delivering enterprise training in schools:

‘The IAG (information, advice and guidance) in some schools is just not up to it . . . It’s a lot to ask teachers to be able to provide high quality advice if they don’t have a background in business themselves . . . we need to find a way of working with schools and influencing the IAG they provide . . . we need to bring businesses and schools closer together.’

‘We need to find ways of getting local business leaders, local providers in to schools to mentor, advise and inspire . . . we need to develop a mechanism to encourage this and provide a way of bringing businesses and schools together.’

‘There needs to be a way of bringing businesses in to the community more . . . to be mentors to young people . . . or deliver a programme of training to young people about business and enterprise . . . that is currently being done by teachers that have little or no experience of business.’

Develop a programme of employability and soft skills training and opportunities in schools, linked to a formal qualification and educational outcomes

3.10 Building on the above action, several participants felt that a formal programme of employability training and softer skills training should be introduced in schools, targeting young people at risk of becoming NEET. The view was that schools should take more responsibility to prepare their young people for the working world. It was acknowledged that to make such a programme attractive

to schools, it would need to be delivered as a formal qualification and linked to improving educational outcomes:

‘Employers are not just interested in formal qualifications . . . but also other examples of skills development and experience . . . their personality, their motivation, their attitude . . . so for example where they have done voluntary work or been involved in specific projects . . . so we need to think about programmes where we get young people involved to develop their skills and give them extraordinary experiences . . . we need to be getting in to schools and working with young people from an early age to develop their experience and their attitudes and motivations . . .’

‘The challenge in supporting softer skills developments in schools is a lack of funding. There used to be some funding available for providers to go in to schools and work with young people as part of the extended schools provision, but the funding for that is no longer there. So anything that’s developed will have to be linked to qualifications that the schools value, it will have to use qualifications as the currency to get schools interested, for example ASDAN qualifications for children that are struggling with GCSE’s . . . so it can still happen, but you’ll have to think about the accreditation attached to those programmes.’

‘You need to find a way to make skills development and careers advice relevant to schools . . . it needs to be linked to an educational qualification . . . it needs to be presented to schools in a way that supports them in achieving their educational outcomes . . . otherwise it [skills development and careers IAG] will continue to be a poor relation in our schools.’

Support schools and teachers to provide high quality and realistic careers and employment information, advice and guidance through bespoke local labour market intelligence and specialist provision

3.11 Throughout the workshop participants consistently highlighted the importance of high quality and realistic careers advice and guidance to young people. Participants felt that schools needed extra resources and expertise to provide effective careers advice. Solutions to this included providing bespoke local labour market intelligence to help ensure careers advice was up to date and relevant to the local job market. Participants also felt that specialist and impartial advice could be provided through local businesses and/or specialist careers advisers:

‘You need to have careers officers and advisors that are aware of the different job opportunities available now and predicted for the future . . . there needs to be realism amongst young people but that can only happen if there are educated careers advisors providing realistic advice and support . . . That’s the importance of feeding in good LMI in to IAG . . . you’ll always get young people that want to work in certain professions but they need to be given impartial advice about where the jobs are . . . it needs to be realistic . . . without stifling their ambition.’

‘It’s not really fair on the teachers to ask them to do this work as part of their day jobs . . . they don’t have the time or experience to be careers advisors or experts about business and enterprise . . . schools and teachers need help and so there should be some consideration about funding a specialist and impartial careers service for local young people . . .’

‘I think a good example is where businesses go in to schools and provide some careers advice and guidance . . . it takes a lot of organisation but can have more impact than a teacher providing such support . . .’

Section 4: Summary and Conclusion: Key issues for consideration and potential ways forward

4.1 By way of conclusion, the workshop highlighted nine key findings. These provide reassurance about the importance of the strategy and the relevance of the draft priorities. They also provide direction and ideas to inform the development of a delivery plan:

- **There is continued support for the principle of an All Age Skills Strategy and enthusiasm to remain involved and support its implementation:** Some two-thirds of those that took part in the earlier workshops attended the follow-up workshop, with many others unable to attend expressing an interest to remain involved and contribute to delivery. All of those that completed the workshop feedback form agreed that developing an All Age Skills Strategy is important to help improve the skill levels of residents and support the growth of the local economy.
- **There is strong support for the priorities contained within the draft strategy:** The workshop was an opportunity to provide feedback to participants on the findings from the earlier round of consultation and present the draft priorities. Participants were broadly supportive of the draft strategy and its draft priorities. All but two of those that completed the workshop feedback form, agreed that the proposed priorities in the draft strategy were the right ones. Of the two that did not agree, one was neutral and the other disagreed on the grounds that they felt that there needed to be a greater focus on enterprise skills and support for those wanting to become self employed or start a business.
- **There is general support for the emerging areas of activity focus within the draft strategy:** All participants agreed with the emerging areas of activity focus. However, there were some gaps highlighted and some suggested additions. It should also be noted that that many of the activities cut across delivery of more than one priority.
- **The workshop highlighted that there are no magic answers or quick fix solutions to deliver the priorities and address the local skills challenges:** The workshop discussions highlighted that there are some significant barriers to delivering some of the key areas of activity. However, participants did help provide some clear direction to inform the future delivery of the strategy and did identify some practical ways forward for consideration.

- **A lot of skills activity is already happening, it just needs to be better coordinated and focussed in a common direction:** The discussions under each priority highlighted a large amount of relevant activity already taking place. However, there was a sense that this activity could be better coordinated, some identified gaps covered and more focus on addressing an agreed set of priorities so as to maximise impact.
- **Partnerships working is key to making the most of what is already happening:** Participants agreed that improved coordination and a more strategic approach to delivery could be achieved by working in partnership. To this end there was support for the development of a partnership board or similar, with supporting work on identifying the existing activity and provision, and facilitating partnership working through the use of technology.
- **Effective business engagement is essential to deliver the strategy:** Participants agreed that effective employer engagement remained essential to deliver the strategy. However, there were significant barriers to achieving this due to current labour market conditions, although participants felt that there were opportunities to coordinate and influence the employer engagement activity currently delivered by providers and public agencies.
- **Some of the challenges presented by limited resources could be tackled through developing, promoting and utilising voluntary services provided by businesses, providers and individuals:** Participants at the workshop appreciated that the strategy had to be delivered within limited resources. There were several examples of local voluntary schemes such as the Timebank initiative where businesses provide their expertise to other businesses on a voluntary basis. There were suggestions that such a scheme could be extended to involve training providers and support information, advice and guidance work with local schools and young people.
- **A key focus for the strategy should be on schools and young people:** Participants at the workshop said that engaging with schools and supporting young people should be one of the priority actions of the strategy. There was a sense that there was already quite a lot of provision for unemployed people to develop the skills to get in to work or start a business. However, this support was not as readily available for young people still at school. Suggested actions included targeting young people at an early stage before they become NEET (not in employment, education or training) and bringing businesses and schools closer together to help them deliver to young people high quality and realistic enterprise and careers information, advice and guidance.

4.2 By way of summary, the following represents the key issues and actions participants highlighted to deliver each of the priorities:

Priority 1: Working together - key issues and actions

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

- There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as the importance of partnership working, identifying and meeting employer needs and the value of local labour market intelligence

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

- There are a lot of existing and effective partnerships and networks, which form a healthy basis on which to develop a skills partnership
- There are examples of existing effective employer engagement, although there was consensus that more could be done
- Some agencies and providers currently use local labour market intelligence effectively, although there was consensus that there is scope to improve the relevance of local labour market intelligence, share and utilise it more

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

- Competition between providers could make it difficult to work in partnership and coordinate employer engagement
- In the current economic climate employer engagement is a major challenge

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

- Develop a partnership board or similar to oversee the implementation of the strategy and influence the activity of key strategic partners and stakeholders
- Develop a comprehensive picture of the local skills partnerships, networks and activity to inform the development of the partnership board and the implementation of the strategy
- Use on-line and social media technology to support the development of a skills partnership, make it easier for employers to access providers and opportunities and share local labour market intelligence
- Extend the Timebank initiative to involve training providers and employer engagement
- Coordinate employer engagement through the existing public agency employer engagement infrastructure

- Consider commissioning a bespoke employer engagement service
- Consider shaping current employer engagement activity to target more micro and SME businesses
- Target bespoke local labour market intelligence at key partners and organisations, especially training providers and schools, to shape their activity

Priority 2: Developing the future and current workforce – key issues and actions

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

- There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as supporting businesses to grow, promoting the value of skills development and working with training providers to meet the needs of employers

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

- There is a reasonable amount of existing business engagement, skills brokerage and skills promotion work, which forms a healthy basis to deliver this priority

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

- Effective engagement with businesses and schools is a major challenge and one which is key to the successful delivery of the strategy

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

- Build on existing activity and effort in this area, influencing the activity of providers and agencies
- Extend the Timebank initiative to develop a programme of business champions and mentors to work with businesses and the workforce
- Extend the focus of this priority to include enterprise skills development and support for business start-ups
- Extend coverage beyond higher level qualifications to foundation level, pre-apprenticeship and level 1 skills development

Priority 3: Raising individuals' aspirations and achievements - key issues and actions

Are the emerging areas of activity focus the right ones?

- There was broad agreement with the emerging areas of activity focus, such as the importance of working with diverse communities, raising aspirations, developing employability skills and delivering high quality and realistic careers advice

What activity is already taking place that could help deliver the priority?

- There is a lot of activity targeted at young people and vulnerable groups, although there was agreement that there are gaps

What issues, barriers or challenges need to be managed to help deliver the priority?

- Effective engagement with schools and breaking the cycle of a lack of aspiration and ambition amongst some families are the major challenges

What are the most important activities or actions that could help deliver the priority?

- Build on and link together the skills agenda with the child poverty agenda, the 14-19 Strategy Group, the Get Britain Working programme and other relevant agendas
- Develop a programme to bring businesses and schools closer together
- Develop a programme of employability and soft skills training and opportunities in schools, linked to a formal qualification and educational outcomes
- Support schools and teachers to provide high quality and realistic careers and employment information, advice and guidance through bespoke local labour market intelligence and specialist provision

Appendices

Delegate list

Name	Organisation
Yasmin Ali	Relate
Emma Aylott	Central Bedfordshire College
Vanda Bailey	The Learning Partnership
Tracy Beesley	JHP Training
David Bray	Central Bedfordshire Council
Richard Carrington	Aldwyck Housing
Andrew Cawthorpe	The Prince's Trust
Laura Chandler*	Zenos
Peter Christmas	Groundwork Luton & Bedfordshire
Anna Clarke	Skills Funding Agency
Martin Clohisey	EVO Ltd
Katrina Dougherty	Skills Funding Agency
David Douglas	MAPS
Wendy Featherstone	Central Bedfordshire Council
Stephen Ferris*	The Learning Partnership
Matthew Fletcher	National Apprenticeship Service
Ketan Gandhi	Central Bedfordshire Council
Joanne Giles	Seetec
Jim Gledhill	Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils
Saundra Glenn	BedSeN
Ali Hadawi	Central Bedfordshire College
Christine Knox	Skills Funding Agency
Katrina Kozuch	North Hertfordshire College
Rose Lavin (Dale Morgan)	TCHC
Marion Maher*	Go East
Sarah Moore*	Workers Educational Association
Kevin Moxley*	Millbrook Proving Ground Ltd
Carol Nemar	XERS
Carole Pullinger	The Learning Partnership
Peter Rayner	BPHA
Joe Richardson	Job Centre Plus
Judith Robinson*	Independent
Tessa Ryan	Exemplas
Patricia Seabright	Archimedes Consulting
Chris Shawyer	Seetec
Bob Shore (Tracey Plunkett)	Central Bedfordshire College
Paul St John Bennett	Business Learning
Karen Taylor	Bedford College
Dee Thomas	4YP UK
Daniela Vuolo	Central Bedfordshire Council
Chris Wiley	Consign
Kirsten Whitehouse	Eureka Schools

Note: Names in brackets were substitutes

*Did not attend

All Age Skills Strategy Action Planning Workshop: Outline Plan - Final

Context:

- Central Bedfordshire's recent Local Economic Assessment (LEA) recognised the need to develop an All Age Skills Strategy to support continued local economic growth.
- A series of workshops, focus groups and interviews took place throughout June and July 2011 to inform the development of a draft strategy, which is currently out to consultation.
- A follow-up workshop is now required to help develop actions and activities to deliver the strategy.

Aims:

The aims of the workshop are to:

- Feedback to participants the findings and responses to the initial workshops
- Present to participants the highlights of the draft Strategy
- Sense check the key issues, principles and priorities contained within the draft Strategy
- Identify and discuss key actions and activities required to deliver the Strategy and to inform the development of an action plan
- Discuss how best to take forward future partnership working and governance arrangements around the delivery of the Strategy

The workshop will also be used as an opportunity to update participants on the development of the Economic Development Plan and an opportunity for participants to network.

Note: We are not aiming to provide you with a draft action plan at the end of this workshop. However, we do intend to provide you with a long-list of current and potential actions and activities which could address the priorities within the draft strategy.

Audience:

- The workshop will be made up of a mix of stakeholders from different sectors – education, training, public, VCS and Business sectors, most of which attended the initial series of workshops and interviews.
- The aim is to have between 40-50 attendees at the workshop
- On arrival, participants will be told which group they are in. Each group will be made up of up to 12 people and will form the break-out discussion sessions. These groups will be a mix of participants from across different sectors.

Risks to manage:

Risk	Mitigation
Participants will struggle to identify useful actions and issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relevant lines of questioning• Using experienced facilitators• Provide proposed list of actions from CBC to prompt discussion

Lots of issues to cover, diluting the discussion on key elements of the workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured agenda • Tight time management • Using experienced facilitators
Low turn-out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.S.V.P Process • Reminder Process

Basic logistical requirements:

- Access to venue available from 8.30am at the latest
- Room to be able to hold about 50 people
- Room laid out in round or square tables, with up to 12 people per table
- Projector screen and projector for presentations (Public Perspectives can provide the projector)
- Flip chart materials (provided by Public Perspectives)
- Light Refreshments – on arrival (tea/coffee/water/juice/biscuits/pastries and at break (tea/coffee/water/juice)

Materials to support discussion and strategy development

We will use the following materials to ensure we get the most out of the workshops:

- A presentation on the draft AASS and feedback from the previous workshops
- An evaluation/feedback form for participants to complete at the end of the workshop, which in part will provide an additional opportunity to make any comments/points to inform the strategy, including listing commitments that their organisations can agree to in delivering the strategy

Capturing information

We will capture information in the following ways:

- The plenary discussions and break-out groups will be audio recorded
- Flip chart notes will be taken throughout the break-out sessions and plenary discussions
- At the end of the workshop (either directly at the end of the workshop or via e-mail/telephone the next day), the facilitators and any relevant observers from Central Bedfordshire Council will conduct a short de-brief session to discuss the effectiveness of the workshop and identify any key themes and issues which emerged

Involvement from Central Bedfordshire Council Staff

We actively encourage involvement from Central Bedfordshire staff. We propose this is as follows:

- Provide a senior/relevant member of staff to conduct a presentation about the All Age Skills Strategy at the start of the workshop and answer questions throughout the day
- Observe the plenary discussions and the break-out session discussions
- Take part in the de-brief at the end of the workshop

Outline Programme:

Time	Activity
9.15am	Arrival, registration and refreshments <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staffed by Public Perspectives• On arrival participants will be provided with an agenda, information pack, sticky name label and told which group/table to sit at
9.45am	Opening: welcome and introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivered by Public Perspectives• Outline purpose of workshop• Outline importance of All Age Skills Strategy (and EDP)• Introduce key people (from Public Perspectives and CBC)• Outline structure of workshop• Housekeeping• Ground rules for participation• Any questions before get started?• Participants to introduce themselves
9.50am	The Draft All Age Skills Strategy (and EDP): A Presentation by Central Bedfordshire Council <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation to be delivered by relevant CBC staff member• Presentation to last no more than 15 minutes• The presentation should:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Feedback the key findings from the previous workshops– Outline key aims of the Strategy– Outline key issues driving the Strategy– Outline key draft priorities for the Strategy– Outline progress of EDP• The presentation will be followed by an initial Q&A, facilitated by Public Perspectives. This will include the following prompts:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Does the summary of findings resonate with you?– Do the draft aims, issues and priorities reflect the points you raised previously?
10.15am	Break-out session 1: Working together Enhance partnership working and improve the availability and dissemination of local labour market intelligence <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Break participants in to groups (no more than 12 per group)• Groups facilitated by staff from Public Perspectives/CBC• Initial round of introductions in each group – name, organisation and why important to be here? (c5 mins)

	<p>Key lines of questioning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can this priority be delivered? (c10 mins) Prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you currently work in partnership? (Think of just key one or two things – avoid long list) - How do you currently provide and/or use LMI (Think of just key one or two things – avoid long list) - What new activity or actions can help enhance partnership working? - What new activity or actions can help enhance the quality, dissemination and use of LMI? - What barriers and/or challenges need to be overcome to deliver this priority? - What actions or activity do you need to stop or change to help deliver this priority? • What do you think of some of the potential areas of activity/focus and how can these be best delivered? (Note: each one will be read out and described/participants given handout) (c15 mins) Prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop an effective skills partnership - Identifying employer needs - Establish a mechanism for the collation and dissemination of information • Thinking of all the actions and activities raised, which are the top 3 things to do? (c5 mins) Prompt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which are quick wins? - Which are short-term actions? - Which are longer term actions?
10.45am	<p>Plenary Feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole group discussion facilitated by Public Perspectives • Feedback will be from facilitators. It will focus on areas of agreement/disagreement rather than a narrative of all the points raised in the group • Feedback to focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is already happening that can help address this priority? - What new actions and activities are important? - What are the priority actions overall? - What are the quick wins? • Participants in each of the groups to elaborate on points and/or raise questions on points made
11.00am	<p>Break</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grab some more light refreshments • Comfort break

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitators discuss key points and linkages so far
11.15am	<p>Break-out session 2: Developing the Current and Future Workforce</p> <p>Increasing the proportion of the workforce with recognized qualifications, and supporting access to academic and vocational opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Break participants in to groups (no more than 12 per group) Groups facilitated by staff from Public Perspectives/CBC <p>Key lines of questioning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can this priority be delivered? Prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you currently do that addresses this priority? (Think of just key one or two things – avoid long list) What new activity or actions can help address this priority? What barriers and/or challenges need to be overcome to deliver this priority? What actions or activity do you need to stop or change to help deliver this priority? What do you think of some of the potential areas of activity/focus and how can these be best delivered? (Note: each one will be read out and described/participants given handout) Prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support businesses to grow and innovate, create employment opportunities and increase productivity Promote the value and awareness of academic and vocational opportunities to employers and current and future workforce Encourage training providers to respond to the skills requirements of employers Thinking of all the actions and activities raised, which are the top 3 things to do? Prompt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which are quick wins? Which are short-term actions? Which are longer term actions?
11.45am	<p>Plenary Feedback (note: depending on time, we may not run this feedback session and compress it in to the final feedback session i.e. combine feedback on break-out sessions 2 and 3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole group discussion facilitated by Public Perspectives Feedback will be from facilitators. It will focus on areas of agreement/disagreement rather than a narrative of all the issues discussed in the group Feedback to focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is already happening that can help address this priority? What new actions and activities are important? What are the priority actions overall?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the quick wins? • Participants in each of the groups to elaborate on points and/or raise questions on points made
12pm	<p>Break-out session 3: Raising Individuals' Aspirations and Achievements</p> <p>Promote and raise awareness of the support and opportunities available at all ages for skills development and the importance of skills in achieving ambitions within our communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break participants in to groups (no more than 12 per group) • Groups facilitated by staff from Public Perspectives/CBC <p>Key lines of questioning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can this priority be delivered? Prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you currently do that addresses this priority? (Think of just key one or two things – avoid long list) - What new activity or actions can help address this priority? - What barriers and/or challenges need to be overcome to deliver this priority? - What actions or activity do you need to stop or change to help deliver this priority? • What do you think of some of the potential areas of activity/focus and how can these be best delivered? (Note: each one will be read out and described/participants given handout) Prompts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote the benefits of learning to individuals of all ages and promote the opportunities available - Support the provision of opportunities that are appropriate to the needs of particular groups and areas, recognising the importance of softer skills and ultimately leading to a rise in attainment level - Support the development of employability skills, through training, work placements, volunteering and enterprise - Support careers advice to incorporate labour market intelligence • Thinking of all the actions and activities raised, which are the top 3 things to do? Prompt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which are quick wins? - Which are short-term actions? - Which are longer term actions?
12.30pm	<p>Plenary Feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole group discussion facilitated by Public Perspectives • Feedback will be from facilitators. It will focus on areas of agreement/disagreement rather than a narrative of all the issues discussed in the group • Feedback to focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is already happening that can help address this priority?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What new actions and activities are important? - What are the priority actions overall? - What are the quick wins? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants in each of the groups to elaborate on points and/or raise questions on points made
12.45pm	<p>Next steps and Q&A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered by Public Perspectives • Summarise some key points • Outline next steps in developing the All Age Skills Strategy (and EDP) • Note that key members of CBC staff available for informal discussion at close • Opportunity for final Q&A
1pm	<p>Thank and close</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for informal discussion with facilitators or CBC staff • Collect workshop feedback sheets

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