

**South East LEP Skills Advisory Panel**

**23rd April 2020 – Microsoft online meeting**

**Minutes and Actions**

**Attending**

**Louise Aitken** (LA) South East LEP   
**Neil Aitken** (NA), BT Group

**Holly Aquilina** (HA), East Sussex County Council (*for LEP area local authorities)*

**Suzanne Bennett** (SB),SELEP *(updating)*

**Amy Cable** (AC), Lower Thames Crossing

**Helen Clements** (HC), Morgan Sindall *(construction sector lead)*

**Mike Derrick** (MD),Oakdown House Ltd (*care sector lead)*

**Samantha Desforges**, (SD) Berry Gardens *(food and land-based sector lead)*

**Viki Faulkner** (VF), University of Brighton *(HE lead)*

**Vimbai Foroma** (VFo) SELEP *(SAP Analytical toolkit lead)*

**Diana Garnham** (DG),Skills East Sussex Chair

**Lindsey Hayward,** Konica Minolta *(Engineering / Success Essex lead)*

**Trevor Hutchinson** (TH), DP World London Gateway *(logistics sector lead)*

**Dan House** (DH), Stansted Airport *(attending for Liz Austin)*

**Jeremy Kerswell**(JK),Plumpton College**(Vice Chair)**

**Lynne Matthews**(LM), EDF Energy / Bradwell B

**Jo Nolan** (JN), Screen South (*creative sector lead)*

**Angela O’Donoghue** (AOD), South Essex College (***Vice Chair, CHAIR*** *for this meeting*)

**Dena Read** (DR), Department for Education *(observing)*

**Ajay Sharman** (AJ), STEM Learning

**Jo Simmons**(JS)SELEP *(observing)*

**Pauline Smith** (PS),CXK (*for training provider networks / National Careers Service)*

**Rebecca Smith** (RS), Social Enterprise Kent *(for voluntary sector)*

**Sharon Spicer** (SS), SELEP*(observing)*

**James Wilkinson**(JW),SELEP Digital Skills Partnership *(presenting)*

**Wayne Wilson** (WW), Kent Association of Training Organisations

**Paul Winter** (PW), Wire Belt Company Limited (*Kent & Medway Skills Commission Chair)*

**Apologies**

Colette Bailey, Metal (**CHAIR** and *LEP Board Lead*)

Ana Christie, Sussex Chamber of Commerce *(SME Lead)*

Iain Hawthorn, HSBC *(finance sector lead) –* technical issues joining

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| **AGENDA ITEM / NOTES** | **ACTION/ PAPER** |
| **Introductions** |  |
| AOD explained that she was chairing the meeting and talked through the rules of engagement given that it was an online meeting. Colette Bailey will chair the next meeting.  LA noted apologies and updated that Leonardo Gagliano of Hilton Group had moved to another role. The new hospitality lead was confirmed as Jayne Wilcocks of Chartwells. Jayne was unable to attend that day due to food delivery as part of Covid-19 response. LA also welcomed new care sector representative Mike Derrick of Oakdown House Ltd and Amy Cable of Lower Thames Crossing.  All members introduced themselves and their area of work. |  |
| **Minutes and actions of the last meeting (23rd January 2020)** |  |
| There was one minor amend to the minutes under the SAP Analytical Toolkit item. VF (Viki Faulkner) noted that her initials rather than VFo’s (Vimbai Foroma) had been included - the update was provided by VFo.  LA noted that the proposed SAP Autumn event described in the January minutes was currently on hold given Covid-19 challenges but options for an online event would be explored.  The minutes were otherwise confirmed as a true and accurate record and approved.  LA confirmed that outstanding actions would be picked up through the meeting agenda. Members were reminded also of the action around returning biographies if they hadn’t already. | **ACTION:** All members to return outstanding biographies /photos to LA |
| **SELEP’s Covid-19 response, Suzanne Bennett and Louise Aitken** |  |
| AoD welcomed SB to the meeting, SELEP’s Chief Operating Officer.  SB outlined SELEP’s Covid-19 response to date:   * **Daily business briefings,** available on the SELEP website and which members can subscribe to at <https://www.southeastlep.com/news/newsletter-archive/> (scroll down to subscribe). Members commented on how useful the briefings had been. * **A business survey** had been undertaken to get input from SMEs across the SELEP area and which had had a good response rate. Results are available at <https://southeastbusiness.org.uk/coronavirus-guidance-for-employers/business-impact/>. A further survey on recovery will be launched soon. * **The Growth Hubs**are sharing a wide range of information and responding to queries. Further information at <https://southeastbusiness.org.uk/>. This incudes a Covid-19 support section which is updated regularly. * **Ministers and MPs**– SB updated that a meeting with MPs was taking place the following day and regular engagement was also happening with Ministers through SELEP’s Chair and Vice Chairs. This also enabled feedback through groups such as the SAP and the business survey. A strong local business voice is being fed back to government. * **Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) -** SB also noted how important the DSP had been in the response and that Jim would be speaking further about this later. * **Main SELEP Board**– the SELEP Board had a virtual board meeting the previous Friday which was its first in a new formation including new business members. Minutes and a recording of the meeting is available at <https://www.southeastlep.com/meetings/strategic-board/> * **Gathering intelligence**– there is a current focus on gathering intelligence to developing a response and assisting with recovery. This will include a review of the LEP’s Local Industrial Strategy.   *Apprenticeships*  As a further example of SELEP’s Covid response, LA noted that a letter had been sent by the national LEP Network to highlight challenges with apprenticeship funding. This had originated from a SELEP letter following SCTP highlighting issues. This was then highlighted nationally by SELEP’s Chair Chris Brodie which confirmed that all LEPs had similar concerns.  **POST MEETING NOTE:** A Provider Relief Scheme was launched which partly responds to concerns raised. SELEP will continue to liaise with local provider and college networks to understand any remaining challenges. Further information on the Provider Relief Scheme is at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-post-16-provider-relief-scheme>  There followed a general discussion on apprenticeships with many employers expressing concern at the challenges around social distancing balanced with financial pressures and offering enough supervision and mentoring. There was also concern around apprentices being made redundant or not returning after furloughing. A decline in numbers is anticipated. (Note that some of the following feedback was captured in the ‘chat’ section of the meeting).  HC noted that in New Anglia LEP’s construction group they had discussed the possibility of front-loading training through colleges and providers whilst apprentices are furloughed. VF noted that this was happening at the university with civil engineering apprentices who were continuing learning although furloughed. LM noted that some learning had been possible in welding also. DG also said that CITB had done a lot of work around this and had produced online learning which would be worth exploring.  LH noted that in the longer term many employers may reassess what they require and skills across the organisation. This may lead to some employers taking on more apprentices in the longer term.  AS highlighted also that with T-Levels due start in September, there could be added pressure.  Members agreed that it would be good to explore potential solutions, such as apprentices being employed by the government and with training fully front loaded. Technical solutions could also be developed and the success of online working was already being proven. LH gave the example of Konica Minolta whereby engineers have been doing more online, on demand practical skills development. This has taken the form of short videos available at the time. Aspects such as mentoring and coaching could be offered online also. AC agreed that it would be positive to ensure best practice and continue agile and flexible working.  Colleagues noted that it would be useful to find data on furloughed apprentices. VF noted the distinction between apprentices who have been furloughed and apprentices placed on break in learning.  PS noted that the ASK contract could assist and help young people with their concerns. (<https://amazingapprenticeships.com/about-ask/>)  PS also highlighted the National Careers Service support that is available. Further information is contained in the attached press release. The National Careers Service helpline nationally is 0800 100 900.  LA noted that this and other support would be captured also in a summary of information available for individuals to be available soon. This will include signposting to government sites such as <https://findajob.dwp.gov.uk/> | **ACTION:** LA and VFo to see if data on furloughed apprentices is available |
| **Digital Skills Partnership Update, James Wilkinson** |  |
| AoD welcomed JW to the meeting. LA explained that the Digital Skills Partnership had been key to the SELEP response to Covid -19. The SELEP DSP is one of 6 nationally, funded through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and involving joint working with them.  JW gave a presentation on the DSP work to date and the way it has been responding to Covid-19. This includes a proposal to work with existing organisations to support, for example, with the purchase of kit and access to the internet. A lot of work is already happening nationally with organisations such as <https://futuredotnow.uk/devicesdotnow/> This will be confirmed soon and will be accompanied by an ask of partners across the area for any unused kit to support. The government had also recently announced support for school children so the SELEP response was likely to focus on older age groups <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-major-package-to-support-online-learning>  Members noted that a clear ask to share would be useful.  Further information is included in the attached slides.  The DSP page on the SELEP website is regularly updated and includes information on online resources for businesses, students / teachers and the wider community. Further information is at:  Resources for businesses and their staff: <https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/04/SMEInfo.pdf>  Resources for students, educators, young people and parents:  <https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/05/EduInfo0505.pdf>  Resources for individuals and furloughed staff:  <https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/05/CommunityInfo0405.pdf> | **ACTION:** JW to share further information when available |
| **SAP Analytical Toolkit and letter to government, Louise Aitken and Vimbai Foroma** |  |
| *Refocusing the letter to government*  LA outlined that at the previous meeting a draft letter to government had been shared, introducing the SAP. Given current Covid-19 challenges, it was proposed that this should be updated to reflect any challenges and feedback from employers. LA noted that these would be captured as part of the feedback from members later in the agenda. A redrafted letter would be shared with all members for approval before sending. Members noted that this should also emphasise the importance of vocational learning to recovery.  *Department for Education feedback*  LA noted that Dena Read from the Department for Education had kindly joined the meeting and would feedback any headlines and issues centrally. Additionally, LA confirmed that the SAP Team at the Department had confirmed another year of funding for SAPs, which indicates good support from government and will provide continuity. There are requirements such as producing a Skills Report by April 2021. LA will feed back on this meeting also and the fact that it has taken place virtually.  *Refocusing the analytical toolkit – Covid-19 impact*  LA noted that part of the requirement for a SAP is to produce an analytical toolkit, which will build on existing information supporting the LEP Skills Strategy at <https://www.southeastlep.com/our-strategy/skills/reports-and-evidence-base/>.  In view of Covid-19, the analysis is currently refocusing to look at the short-term impact on jobs, benefits and sectors. This will be regularly updated. VFo gave an update on information available so far, including a look at the pub and restaurant sector nationally.  NA noted there was a current CBI working group looking at matching demand between sectors with high labour demand vs those that are furloughing.  DG noted that it would be useful to explore demand further at the next meeting and the transferability of skills and short transfer courses.  Members noted how useful this information was and asked for it to be circulated later that day (actioned).  **Post meeting note:** VFo updated some of the stats within the original presentation and an updated copy is attached. | **ACTION:** LA to re-draft and circulate letter to government    **ACTION:** explore demand / transferable skills further at next meeting |
| **Feedback from members on Covid-19 and impact** |  |
| AoD noted that it was particularly useful to hear feed back from employers and their current experiences. Members were invited to feed back in the order that they appeared in the online participants list:  **Neil Aitken, BT:** BT are still recruiting currently and able to operate remotely. It has been a busy period ensuring connectivity and with digital tools being developed. The macro environment is important so downturn for SMEs is a concern. NA highlighted the BT ‘Skills for Tomorrow’ programme which includes a range of online courses, webinars and information for families, businesses and communities. Further information at <https://www.bt.com/skillsfortomorrow/>  **Helen Clements, Morgan Sindall:** HC noted that there had been some negative press for the construction sector more broadly in terms of social distancing and continuing to operate in the early stages of lockdown. Social distancing has been one of the biggest challenges, but some staff are back on sites. Most apprentices are currently furloughed. New apprenticeship opportunities and entry roles are likely to decline and is an area of concern. Other sector representatives also highlighted concern at a potential steep decline in apprenticeships. Demand from clients is also a potential challenge going forward.  **Dan House, Stansted Airport:** Freight services are continuing to operate and cargo demand is high. There is a core staff of 250 at the airport, with around 70% of the workforce currently furloughed. Ensuring support and communications to staff is a priority. Given current restrictions, passenger numbers are significantly lower with usual numbers at approximately 45-50,000 reduced to around 100-200 currently. Access to runways is enabling essential works to be carried out. Support is provided to the wider community such as being a site for testing.  **Diana Garnham, Skills East Sussex (SES):** DG noted that she’d recently started as Chair of Skills East Sussex and had chaired one face to face meeting just before lock-down. The focus is currently on economic recovery and gathering data to investigate this further. SES is gathering qualitative data by consulting with members and local employers. Issues such as the transferability of skills are being explored to help people move to sectors with need such as health and care. This may also be a good opportunity to change perceptions of such sectors.  **Holly Aquilina, East Sussex Council:** HA noted that she represented all the upper tier authorities at these meetings and had therefore consulted them beforehand. There is a current focus on ensuring learners can access support. Some apprenticeships are continuing and new apprenticeships offered in some areas. There is current concern regarding self employed people and micro businesses who may be particularly impacted currently.  **Jo Nolan, Screen South:** JN said that it had been a very busy period and with no staff furloughed. Work can continue remotely. In the longer term, the quality of recording kit and equipment is a challenge if work has to take place remotely. There is also likely to be an increased need in the longer term due to the current backlog. The new Ashford International Film Studios had received planning permission the previous day and will create 2,000 jobs, which is very positive news. This is a joint venture between Quinn Estates, the Creative District Improvement Company and funding partners U+I. A large area of focus for the sector is conveying the range of opportunities and working with local colleges and providers.  Some feedback from SMEs locally is that they think it will be several years before they are able to return to normal. Aspects such as international work and touring are clearly impacted.  **Lynne Matthews, EDF (Bradwell B):** LM noted that call centre staff were currently working from home. There is a current focus on staff well-being and ensuring safety given the current challenges. Construction sites such as Hinkley have been mostly demobilised but the site is still running. This presents logistical challenges (e.g. buses on site). Bradwell is still at stage one. Essex County Council has commissioned research into workforce needs which will be useful (and will inform SELEP planning also). The Covid-19 recovery phase will potentially offer some opportunities to encourage new people into the sectors, such as females into engineering. DG noted the websites <https://www.future-made.co.uk/> and <https://www.goconstruct.org/> which could help with this also. HC noted that Morgan Sindall are also developing a range of virtual work experience offers.  **Paul Winter, Wirebelt Company Ltd:** PW noted that orders were continuing as usual and with the main challenge currently to isolate and distance staff. Across the manufacturing and engineering sector, it varies with some having furloughed staff, but many still have full order books. Some new opportunities have arisen for apprentices who have been able to come to the fore. Within the supply chain, PW noted that companies had been adapting, such as a local distillery switching production to hand sanitizer. However, some supply chain closures have impacted on the ability for some manufacturers to continue to operate. Potentially PPE supply was a role for local SMEs to operate collectively also.  **Samantha Desforges, Berry Gardens:** SD said that they were still very busy and no staff had been furloughed. Nationally, there is a demand for over 63,000 pickers. A range of websites are advertising opportunities such as [www.britishsummerfruits.co.uk/jobs](https://www.britishsummerfruits.co.uk/jobs) and <https://hopslaboursolutions.com/feed-the-nation/>. Due to increased demand, more agency staff have been taken on than usual. It’s still business as usual and with recruitment continuing. All office staff (150) are currently working from home and safeguarding has been put in place in the packhouses such as segregating, screens and PPE which is also a requirement of the supermarkets for suppliers. Mental health of the workforce and supporting those working from home has been a challenge. This was echoed by other members also.  **Trevor Hutchinson, DP World London Gateway:** TH noted he works in compliance rather than operations, so wasn’t as close to some of the current operations work. The port was still showing a reasonably good turnover but that may drop given current challenges. The Logistics Park is still attracting a lot of commercial interest. TH also noted that hardware (phone and laptops) to support home working was an issue and having enough supplies. Transport of staff is also a challenge as the staff bus has had to be cancelled. With no public transport to the port, access is therefore an issue currently. HA asked whether there had been an increased demand for drivers. TH noted that at London Gateway there hadn’t been and that a fall off in movements was anticipated so shortages weren’t likely. AoD noted that driver apprentices at SE College had been halted temporarily as companies have moved them into other areas of the business such as warehousing. This could exacerbate driver availability in the future.  **Amy Cable, Lower Thames Crossing**: AC confirmed that it was still business as usual and as work is currently document heavy focused, it’s practical for staff to work from home. Mental health of staff is a challenge and ensuring the support of managers for those working from home especially where colleagues have child-care responsibilities. This was echoed by other colleagues also. AC noted how well they’d adapted to current circumstances which has shown what’s possible and could be taken forward into best practice and supporting more people into the industry. Currently there’s a recruitment freeze. The unknown aspect of return to work and whether this will be phased, dependent on age groups is challenging in terms of planning next steps.  **Mike Derrick, Oakdown House Ltd:** Have had around a 15% vacancy rate. MD noted that employees being off sick was an additional current challenge where approximately 10-15% of the workforce were currently off. Capacity is therefore an issue and ensuring a good level of care. The availability of PPE is a continued area of concern. Skills for Care have been helping with some of the online training needed. HA also highlighted a national site launched that day for care sector recruitment - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/adult-social-care-recruitment-care-campaign-launched-to-boost-workforce> . RS noted that they had experienced some recruitment challenges also and have converted an office into a socially distanced training room in order to deliver fast-track inductions for the care team.  **Jeremy Kerswell, Plumpton College:** Ensuring a high-quality remote learning offer for thousands of FE and HE students is the current focus but staff have adapted well to this. Ensuring support for vulnerable groups and safeguarding has also worked well. Student achievement is a priority. JK noted that the current position for vocational qualifications from government would be helpful as has been the case with A Levels and GSCEs. Lack of clarity is putting young people at risk and making them anxious about their future. This adds to safeguarding concerns and mental health of students. The FE sector has significant concerns regarding finances going forward. There is a focus on ensuring continued support for apprentices and employers. End point assessments are a concern as there may not be enough capacity to carry these out in September.  **POST MEEITNG NOTE:** Further assessment guidance has been issued to make it easier for end-point assessments to take place during the COVID-19 outbreak as per <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/covid-19/recent-announcements/list-of-standards-with-temporary-discretions-or-flexibilities/> . Further information is also at [Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education’s guidance for COVID-19](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.instituteforapprenticeships.org%2Fresponse-to-covid-19%2F&data=02%7C01%7C%7C1cfa6efebd10461f8eb808d7f00af7b8%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C0%7C637241802207895034&sdata=rccDfO1oeUmmN99Lm8qDhoEd%2B6MIyZJFxV0q2ZlC2Sg%3D&reserved=0)  **Angela O’Donoghue, South Essex College:** AoD said that most learners at the college were still on programme and able to learn remotely. Some apprentices were still able to work with employers where social distancing is adhered to, particularly in engineering. There is concern around end point assessments of practical courses such as bricklaying which will need to be done in person rather than remotely. Availability of assessors is also a concern.  **Viki Faulkner, University of Brighton:** VF noted that that conferences and events were a source of income for HE which will currently be impacted. Some graduates in health have been fast tracked to work in hospitals as fully qualified doctors and nurses to help cope with current demand. Apprenticeships are continuing to go well. VF echoed concerns regarding end point assessments. Contracts with students for halls of residence have been released early where they are no longer required although those with private landlords are outside the university control, so they are working together to ensure students aren’t financially disadvantaged. There are concerns about international students as these provide a lot of income. There are also some practicalities around the timing of online learning given time differences. VF noted a piece of work by Universities UK had identified a likely £790 million loss of income for universities through accommodation, catering, fees, conferences and related issues in the current academic year. Admissions for next year are likely to be impacted also. International students are worth £6.9 billion per year to the UK economy. This could drop by as much as 47% in the best-case scenario or no income in the worst case scenario.  **Ajay Sharman, STEM Learning UK:** AS noted that they had developed a programme of remote CPD courses supporting with aspects such as science and computing. The STEM Learning UK website ([www.stem.org.uk](http://www.stem.org.uk)) also has home learning and support for teachers and families via a live chat function. Supporting vulnerable groups was a concern. LA confirmed that information was also on the DSP page of the SELEP website - <https://www.southeastlep.com/our-delivery/skills/digital-skills-partnership/>  **Social Enterprise Kent:** RS provided an update following the meeting as she had to leave the call. Care sector training is continuing and has mainly switched to digital. This has helped maintain some training income although this has significantly reduced. Health and care training mainly focusing on inductions and mandatory training. Some care homes have cancelled however, where they have COVID cases. Lack of PPE is a major concern. There has been an uplift in applications since COVID which has been welcome as they’re really needed.  For the voluntary sector work, it’s still very busy. Some in the sector (such as retail social enterprises) have furloughed staff but most are delivering food and services. Some are losing money in the process as currently doing this for free. Some funding is coming through but a lot of this is for smaller charities. SEK are speaking to Big Lottery about additional funding and lobbying on behalf of the sector as many charities are so busy responding to current circumstances, they don’t capacity to write bids. Employment support and social prescribing is continuing and extremely busy providing support to the community. This was focused on older people and those with long-term health conditions but has also been extended to families. |  |
| **AOB** |  |
| Members agreed that in current circumstances it would be useful to meet ahead of the scheduled meeting date of 23rd September in June or July. | **ACTION:** LA to circulate dates for an online meeting in June / July |