

Information Item: Digital Skills Partnership (DSP) Update

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of the paper is to provide an update to the Strategic Board (the Board) on the progress made by the South East Digital Skills Partnership (SE DSP) in year one.

2. Background

- 2.1. Local Digital Skills Partnerships (Local DSPs) bring together regional businesses, large employers, charities and public sector organisations to tackle local digital skills challenges. Supported by corporate partners and other Government departments, these partnerships are working to build thriving and inclusive local economies. The first DSPs were launched in 2018 in Lancashire, Heart of the South East and West Midlands.
- 2.2. In October 2018 a new round was launched and SELEP submitted an Expression of Interest to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to become a Digital Skills Partnership area. This was a cross cutting area of need, identified in the SELEP skills strategy and an area of innovation for SELEP through initiatives such as earlier European Social Fund (ESF) calls for virtual reality and online learning. On 21st December 2018, DCMS confirmed that this was successful.
- 2.3. DCMS confirmed that they had received a significant number of Expressions of Interest and just three LEP areas nationally were successful (South East, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, Cheshire and Warrington). Evaluation involved cross Government input and the short-list was supported by the then Minister for Digital and Creative Industries, Margot James.
- 2.4. This secured £75,000 to recruit a Partnership Co-ordinator (initially for one year) to lead on this work and establish a local Digital Skills Partnership for the SELEP area. Jim Wilkinson was appointed to this role and began in post on July 1st 2019. Since this time SELEP are delighted to have had confirmation from DCMS of funding for year 2.
- 2.5. DCMS support, in addition to the aforementioned financial input, also includes monthly meetings with leads for Digital Skills Partnerships nationally and fellow DSP Coordinators in the other pilot regions. These meetings have proven extremely valuable, in terms of introductions to corporates keen to work through local DSP's and gathering insight into central Government discussions around digital skills.

3. DSP Structure and Priorities

- 3.1. The South East Digital Skills Partnership was launched in June 2019, in Hastings. Speakers included Christian Brodie, Michaela Neild (Google UK), Angela O'Donoghue (South Essex College) and Dan Shelley (East Sussex College Group) and SELEP Leads were delighted to show a message from Margot James, then Minister for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, welcoming the 100+ attendees and wishing the Partnership well. More information about the launch is found [here](#).
- 3.2. The first meeting of the South East Digital Skills Partnership's Steering Group took place in October 2019. Around 40 partners attended this first meeting, including representatives of the private, public and voluntary sectors, as well as representatives of educational institutions. SE DSP Co-Chairs were confirmed, (Professor Melissa Hanna-Brown, Pfizer UK, and Alison Parmar, Federation of Small Businesses), and attendees agreed 5 priorities for the DSP thanks, in part, to responses to a DSP survey shared prior to the first meeting.
- 3.3. Membership includes representation from SELEP's Skills Advisory Panel (SAP), Skills Working Group and U9 Group.



- 3.4. Steering Group members agreed that the Digital Skills Partnership would focus on the following:
 - 3.1.1. **Support to SME's** to ensure that staff and leaders are responsive to developing technologies and equipped with the digital skills to boost productivity/efficiency
 - 3.1.2. **Support to Educators and Students** to ensure that teachers have the confidence to teach digital courses and modules and that students leave with the skills required in an increasingly digital world of work, and the understanding of jobs and career pathways
 - 3.1.3. **Support to our residents** to prevent further digital exclusion
 - 3.1.4. **Ensuring alignment** between the region's education offer and the needs of industry across the South East
 - 3.1.5. And the production of a regional **Digital Skills Prospectus** to improve access to courses and qualifications and wider learning opportunities
- 3.5. The SE DSP has now also established Working Groups, led by DSP Members and focusing on each of the priorities identified above. Working Group Leads and their Members will drive activity, identify and secure funding, share digital success stories and report to the Steering Group on a quarterly basis. Working Groups share the DSP's over-arching vision of a universal, minimum standard of digital skills for all residents, while also tackling priority-specific challenges, outlined on the DSP website.

4. Progress in Year One

- 4.1. The SE DSP is delighted to have agreed the over-arching vision and priorities, appointed Co-Chairs and established the structure of the SE Digital Skills Partnership, including Steering and Working Groups.
- 4.2. Partnership members were instrumental in the co-delivery of Pfizer and Discovery Park's 'Digital Twin' event in February of this year. Organised by Professor Hanna-Brown, DSP Co-Chair, members delivered a workshop on the day, with support from DCMS, about the DSP and digital skills priorities.
- 4.3. The Partnership has been instrumental in making introductions between organisations working in the digital skills space. For example, connecting Microsoft to the prison network across the South East has since led to delivery of digital skills sessions for inmates. Also, connecting East Sussex College to local NHS CCG's, resulting in the design of a digital skills platform for GP staff and residents, thanks to leveraging CCG funding for digital skills interventions.
- 4.4. The Partnership has delivered impactful interventions, alongside regional and national stakeholders. For example, the delivery of 8 Google Digital Garage events across the region, targeting SME's and students, delivery of a Facebook digital skills session, in partnership with Braintree District Council, and work alongside Huawei to link school representatives to their discussions about resources for schools and the production of a forthcoming white paper.

5. Our Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak

- 5.1. The South East Digital Skills Partnership initially focused on the production of a list of resources for educators, SME's (including charities) and residents that has been shared on the website and is subject to continual updates.
- 5.2. Inclusion sits high in the list of priorities for the DSP and, with that in mind, we looked to help address the fact that too many of our residents are not online and therefore further excluded and



isolated. Board Members will be surprised to note that 1.5m are not online across the UK and it's estimated that around 6% of residents in the South East fall within that group (Lloyds Consumer Digital Index). 19% of residents in the South East do not possess essential digital skills for life, measured against the Government's Essential Digital Skills Framework and, without SELEP intervention, it's estimated that 7% will continue to lack these skills in 2030. DSP Co-Chairs and Working Group Leads have agreed a donation to the national Devicesdotnow campaign that, upon final SELEP sign-off, will enable partners to ringfence devices and connectivity for residents in key target areas across the South East. The SE DSP will benefit from impact study information relating to beneficiaries in Essex, Kent and East Sussex. Provision of equipment and connectivity will enable vulnerable residents to engage with increasingly digital services, learn new digital skills (thanks to partnership with the Good Things Foundation) and prevent feelings of isolation thanks to support around online communication methods.

- 5.3. Regular meetings with DCMS and other DSP Leads have continued throughout the period of lockdown. Discussions have focused quite heavily around support to SME's, and DCMS looking to take up responsibility for support to micro-sized businesses across the UK The Digital Skills Partnership in Year Two
- 5.4. Working Group Leads will convene their members at quarterly meetings throughout year two and report on progress to the Digital Skills Partnership Co-Chairs and Steering Group.
- 5.5. Working Groups' shared, over-arching vision of a universal, minimum digital skills level for our residents will be a focus of activity, alongside each Working Group's unique priorities, as follows:
 - 5.1.1. Support to SME's Working Group: Digital Healthchecks for SME's and digital/tech adoption programmes, Retraining programmes (with a view to shrinking sectors etc) and digital/tech workforce diversity.
 - 5.1.2. Support to Educators and Students: Strengthening links between education and the private sector, industry-led CPD programme for educators and innovative models for delivering work experience for students (eg. Virtual/Simulated)
 - 5.1.3. Prevention of Digital Exclusion: Support to charities to increase their digital skills capability, improving access for our most vulnerable residents and improving careers information, advice and guidance for the unemployed.
 - 5.1.4. Alignment between education and industry: Co-design of local offer, alongside industry, support to embed new digital programmes/courses and sharing of good practice.
 - 5.1.5. Digital Skills Prospectus: Input into DCMS/DfE discussions around future iterations of national Skills Toolkit to ensure local offer is reflected and production of Prospectus itself (in the form of an App).

6. Accountable Body Comments

- 6.1. In 2019/20, Essex County Council as the Accountable Body for the SELEP received year 1 grant funding from DCMS of £75,000. Due to the launch of SE DSP part way through the year only a proportion of the grant was utilised and a balance of £32,558 remains at year end. This will be subject to Accountability Board approval to carry forward the balance into 2020/21, at the July 2020 meeting.
- 6.2. Essex County Council, as the Accountable Body for the SELEP received year 2 grant funding from DCMS of £75,000 in March 2020.

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