



Regional Network Meeting – London East

Monday 11th June, 2018

CAN Mezzanine, Waterbridge House, 32-36 Loman Street,

London, SE1 0EH

Attendees:

Name	Local Network
Mark Pike	Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Provider Network (Chair)
Paul Mitchell	Sussex Council of Training Providers
Michael Radcliffe	Kent Association of Training Organisations
Mark Dawe	Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
Jane Hickie	Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
Nichola Hay	London Work-based Learning Academy (& AELP Board Member)
Carol Anson-Higgs	Essex Provider Network
Cheryl Swales	Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) (Minutes)

Agenda Item	Notes and Key Actions
Welcome and Introductions	Mark Pike welcomed everyone to the meeting and everyone introduced themselves.
Minutes of Last Meeting	<p>The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as accurate and it was noted that all actions were either complete or on the agenda for further discussion. The following clarification points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry over issues slowly being resolved. ESFA have no intention of not funding any apprenticeships but haven't put this in writing. This is causing some issues for providers moving forward (particularly sub-contract arrangements) and this will also distort the starts figures. ESFA attended the last Sussex network meeting and there was a general feeling that they understood what was happening on the ground but were only able to communicate a ministerial statement to delegates in their update. Feedback from providers is that they have no confidence in the system at the moment. • Exclusivity agreements with Levy payers – although this may be concerning some providers this is a commercial agreement between the employer and provider so although there have been further instances of this happening this is down to own business decisions (on both sides). • NAS – links to ASK project and now Keith Smith is involved there is some hope that providers will be recognised in future activities. NAS are almost not allowed to talk to providers in the old agreements so Keith is keen to set up a PRG for providers rather than only with representative bodies. Also, the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (through Jason Holt) is keen to look at how we can bring the AANs, CEC and the local provider networks together on the ground to do something that will have proper impact. • VAT – AELP have heard that there are a couple of providers challenging the rules around VAT and back payments but otherwise it seems to have gone quiet. It was reported that one prime provider in Kent is keeping some (historical) money back

from their subs 'just in case' which is causing some tension. AELP advice on this is as long as the contract is right it should be secure. Mark Dawe asked if anyone is aware of any providers who have heard from the copyright agency regarding licences but delegates were unaware of any instances.

Action: Networks to remind providers of copyright laws and the education deal (also to be included on other agendas so all networks are aware)

- List of providers from ESFA – It is quite messy and it is not clear what providers are offering and where; current data is almost impossible to interpret. There was a discussion about it there would be a way to identify providers through the RoAPT for apprenticeships but it is whether networks can access this information and if it shows geographical breakdowns (quickly and efficiently) to provide valuable data.

Action: AELP to take this action forward with ESFA again

Regional Update

Essex Provider Network

Carol reported that she recently attended the East of England Local Government conference which was interesting with the opportunity to hear what LA's are doing around apprenticeships. The Essex EPA Hub is nearly set up and the network are currently looking for a Hub Manager but if people are aware of anyone is looking for a new role let Carol know, salary circa. £40k but the person needs to be very knowledgeable on apprenticeships. The Hub will be ready to go live in August and whoever takes up the position will be the first hub manager in the country!

Essex Employment Skills Board feedback is that there is still such a huge gap in employer understanding about the system.

Waiting to see skills strategy which is due to be published in June through the LEP board.

Network meeting attendance is still strong and membership is still holding up which is encouraging. The network is doing lots of work with Essex CC (who are very proactive) around CIAG in Schools, trying to get another hub together which may attract some funding. Big concerns at present with lack of ability to recruit quality delivery staff for apprenticeships, higher apprenticeships and other provision particularly in the Engineering, Construction, Logistics sectors and there was a discussion about this as this is reflected throughout the country - this is one of the main concerns at present (and was echoed by the other delegates). The network is aware that there is a DfE initiative ongoing to look at workforce development and another route the network have been looking at is to work with the Armed Forces covenant who also attended the network, they have 40 ex service personnel who want to go into teaching but this is hard itself as people are not often ready to deliver to 16 year olds! A lot of touting across the sector also going on!!

Sussex Council of Training Providers

Paul reported that Alan Barker from ESFA gave presentation at the last network meeting on the Apprenticeships Service which was interesting. Providers with no levy contracts were asking if they will be back in the game come April 2019? Paul is pursuing Alan for an answer (as is AELP with ESFA nationally) but is concerned that providers are thinking that they will automatically be allowed to offer to non-levy payers. Still questions around if there will be a re-refresh of the register etc. Clarification needed from ESFA.

CPD – the network are currently reviewing their CPD programme as it hasn't had a lot of demand from members recently. Sector has had turmoil for some time which has now turned to business so emphasis is not on CPD at the moment. Providers have no time or money due to the loss of staff and changing business models (others are experiencing the same so some networks are signposting to bigger events and external deliverers i.e. AELP). Some key themes around funding and inspection are more popular than others. ESFA were keen to deliver updates on the funding system as providers are still not understanding it. Strategic Leaders group met last week – very familiar issues repeatedly coming out including uncertainties around sub-contracting (despite AELP guidance docs), levy and how it is being used in ways that will affect social mobility and non-use of levy funds, funding band reviews concerns and fears that there is a hidden agenda on down-grading bands for existing standards. Picking up that sector is calming but providers are still struggling along and some

just managing to stay afloat without the tools to overcome the risks. The hope is still that IfA and ESFA will do something to help the sector and if they don't it's a real worry that providers will start to disappear. Concerns that unintended consequences are not understood by ESFA, even though AELP are doing what they can.

Nichola suggested that it would have been useful to do some strategic planning earlier in the process with smaller providers around cash flow, managing wages.

Michael stated that providers now need a time of balance and sustainability to allow time to embed what is happening without more changes. Distinct danger that the apprenticeship brand (that has been built up so far) will be affected if there is not a period of calm to allow the building blocks to be put into place and tested.

Waiting to see results of Ofsted visits to new providers.

Mark Dawe reported that he doesn't see any sign of stability for another 24 months due to the things that need to be changed and shifted around. We are expecting a much bigger push once April/May statistics are released and there are some conversations starting back up about 'in-kind' arrangements especially for non-levy employers. AELP feeding something in around what could be done this afternoon to the secretary of state and ESFA. Hopeful that there will be some changes soon.

AELP London

Nichola gave an update on AELP London which is still going through transition since the launch in April 2018 but things are going really well. The website is being developed and they are currently looking for a policy advisor. Working very closely with GLA who launched the skills strategy last week and are very interested in working closely with AELP London around solutions and collaboration to make things work. Met with a team of 10 people from the skills team talking about procurement, ESF, AEB etc. and they were really interested and asking the right questions; currently organising for them to go out and meet providers.

World Skills meeting – link to survey circulated to other networks – looking to raise the profile and show what this means to employers, learners and training providers.

Action: Networks to share World Skills information circulated with their members

Nichola also went to an event with Grant Thornton where there was a big focus on skills but there is a need to be careful they are not doing things that lots of other people are already doing i.e. employer strategies.

2nd July roundtable being held with Keith Smith in attendance (new date)

Involvement in FETL Project – Employers in the Driving Seat (see National Update)

Currently ramping up membership and re-engaging with the sector. The Advisory Board meeting was held after the recent Strategic Forum (open to all AELP London members to attend). Response from members have been quite good and they are actively engaging. Key part of AELP London and meetings with GLA are generally trying to base them there and also talking to London councils to involve them with AEB providers.

Kent Association of Training Organisations (KATO)

Michael reported that the KCC draft skills agenda is out but they are currently in turmoil. They are setting up Education People which will be an independent section of KCC to support apprenticeships and schools and a large part was under their control and influence but the senior leadership that had driven skills and employability across Kent have gone or are going. The new team is clear at present what their role is but Michael is meeting with the team and there is an opportunity to work further with schools. Also working with Guilds to look at what is happening with ASK, AANs etc. Report is in final draft then Michael will share with the group, looking to make some recommendations on networking with employers in a more coherent way around standards and how employers can get involved.

Skills Strategy – emphasis on skills is unknown at present. As more info is received they can support it but KCC is holding out on what they are saying. New CEO for Education People is starting from scratch,

Skills commissioning – key employer event held and KCC gave presentation on Made in Kent at which Michael pointed out the NAS site to ensure it is used properly.
CPD is also an issue in Kent – have changed format of network meetings with more operational topics introduced rather than higher level strategic.
Are finding CPD needs have changed so KATO are not putting on their own CPD events but are working with members who put CPD on for employers and staff and linking up that way to promote all of the local opportunities.
ETF/SDN partnership - KATO submitted a proposal for the OTLA contract and got the contract. Uni of Kent is involved along with a Prime and a sub with the focus on working with employers front end entry and planning for standards. Each organisation will lead a standard.
Planning around work placements and conversations going on across the region on the issues on this.
Have changed membership requirements and are locking down everything that goes onto their membership pages.
Michael has now been in post for 6 months (originally interim) looking for new committee so talking to other larger AEB and non-accredited providers and changing the AGM. Michael feels that there is no need for Director level role in KATO.
Employment and skills network going out for a contract for 3 years across the LEP – need to talk to providers in other regions – are being asked by large housing associations for resident training and significant work placements/jobs going to big lottery to fund it but pilot in the meantime.

Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Provider Network

Mike reported that a meeting was held on Friday to discuss driving more Apprenticeship Ambassadors and driving different work collaboratively. Discussions around T Levels (only 4 providers in Eastern region) and issue of duplication around curriculum areas. Not many providers have got involved yet sitting on the side-lines.
Issues much the same as mentioned above – starts are down and 20% OTJ is one of the issues along with employers paying the Levy as a tax rather than recruit apprenticeships, £300 per learner being lost for Health and Social Care apprenticeships and one large provider is reportedly 25% down on starts (equating to 37% down on income) so are now starting to cut staff.
Example of working with LA's and procurement processes resulting in only 6 starts
Have looked at putting open letter to Robert Halfon to try and get some impact.
Other areas being reported as 10, 15, 38% down on starts.
Norfolk and Suffolk going out to tender for someone to manage the network on a freelance basis, looking at different models.

National Update

Mark gave a national update which included the following points:
AELP currently working on two FETL projects – workshops have been held around the country and are really well attended with a rich set of material showing an understanding the environment and how best to make the most of it. The other is Employers in the Driving Seat running nine roundtable events looking at employers, training provider, learner, parent behaviours to ascertain what the drivers are to provide some good information and tools around getting some calmness and getting this back into ESFA.

Governance Research – draft findings will be given at the AELP National conference but results are showing that there is no coherent approach to governance. Code of practice with key elements of good practice within the sector which will be applied around size of provider to show independent scrutiny really setting out key elements drawing on four different codes – quite powerful evidence for the sector on how public money is being spent. Sue Pember has been facilitating this project and has visited 8 sets of ITPs with very rich discussions being held. Outcomes are showing that formal processes are not being followed but what is being used works. This is good evidence to defend the sector whereby

it is said that we are just profit taking – results will demonstrate how government money is being used in the right way.

AELP On-line training module to train EPAs to teach them the basics of EPA to allow the EPAOs to wrap their systems around this. Links to the point about building up capacity – it is a free resource to all AELP members. AELP is running a workshop at the conference to showcase the resource which will be launched this month.

Level 2 paper due out this week which captures the damage that has been done and also the importance of Level 2 around Brexit, social mobility etc. and drawing on some standards to show they are robust and solid with good knowledge, skills and behaviour requirements. AELP have pulled together (much like the social mobility paper) which will be sent to MPs and will hopefully get some good press pick up – will be used at the conference. Sussex have an MP distribution list and they do circulate things like this to get the networks on their radar and this was encouraged by AELP.

April 2019 – referring to earlier discussions Mark reported that there is no way that non-levy funding will go free market in April 2019. Some discussions are being had around if there is a mixed model to get things moving without losing control. TAS would be crazy to let all employers onto it and Mark has stressed that providers would be happy to administer this for employers to accept the data at their end once entered. Care needs to be taken on what information is given – need to allow those with contracts to continue with some head room for growth and loss where they are not growing but can only accept this is if all providers have access to the non levy world. ESFA also looking at other considerations around refreshing the register raising the bar on who can/can't be on it (more emphasis on track record). AELP have stressed there should be no further contract rounds!! There will have to be some controls and what AELP is doing nationally and the networks are saying is that all good providers should have the opportunity and will work on what is best for providers with some level of control. Those not on now will have to be phased in but how this will work in reality is as yet unknown. Still no idea on when the register will open again but ESFA have said they are still looking at what this will look like which suggests is it still some time away. Some providers are getting close to their caps which may send them in to a spiral.

20% off the job – the guidance issued by AELP is giving providers and employers more confidence about the flexibilities. We are hearing more that focus is on the up front planning – this is key and Ofsted is saying that this is their focus. ESFA have promised that they will not be going into detail and will also be looking at the detail of the plans to see if what was planned has happened, if not they will drill down and look at other things. As far as we are aware no-one is recording 20% OTJ on the ILR that we know of. If any providers get picked up on anything that is in that guidance AELP need to be aware as ESFA have done everything but endorse the document. If the guidance is being challenged by ESFA at audits, we will fight that.

T-Levels – pilots already mentioned above, consultation deadlines extended twice. AELP pushing for as many providers (and types) to be involved as possible – but no formalised curriculum or assessment as yet so many are 'watching this space'.

Devolution – Funding will go to where the learner is resident which will have an impact and is important for providers to be aware of. AELP has said that 1st year should be as it then contracts will be retendered. Lots of sub-contracting goes on but going forward with priorities in the different areas this will need to be considered. Mayor has ultimate responsibility to ensure where the money is being spent and what the outcomes are. £15k eligibility threshold changes can have consequences also.

ASK

The ASK project has been rolled over for another 12 months after the current year has expired, However, proposition moving forward may be completely different so it will be

	<p>interesting to see what happens. The recent bid was a useful way to show how we can pull the networks together and how it can be facilitated across the system.</p> <p>Existing providers asked to look at 2 models and asked to agree that they would go with the lead. Have agreed different model with 22k up to 48k payment by result and paid on profile – interesting model and they have listened</p>
<p>AELP London</p>	<p>See regional update section.</p>
<p>Careers Enterprise Council</p>	<p>Moving slowly – webinars on 15th and 18th (delays due to staffing issues), has been a lack of communication until now. £8,500 available to the networks to work with the LEPs but not maybe as what originally thought it would be. Has been slightly confused as message was that AELP was looking for funding for the networks but this is independent from the CEC activity. Advice is to be careful what the networks give for what they are getting back. Networks should have a co-ordinator available to support and the networks then engage with the co-ordinator – networks not to be afraid to push back if this is not happening.</p> <p>Feedback to Jane/Mark if any issues</p> <p>Mike reported that he is working with CEC re post 16+ version, changed version still relates to schools language still alienating colleges and providers particularly using as a tool for Ofsted.</p>
<p>Events Programme</p>	<p>A regional network events schedule costing model was tabled and discussed. Mark and Jane explained that it is a working model that is flexible and it is important that it works for all. Costs (excluding VAT), variables such as facilitators, back office and support, venue hire, refreshments, network promotion funding, (fixed costs £900 + variables) with margins split between the networks and AELP. AELP non-members will pay the same as members</p> <p>Feedback is that colleges are keen to provide venues (with free delegate places) and providers don't want to travel too far. Will utilise the AELP events team/system so we will do the invoicing (costs are excluding VAT) and take complete responsibility (other than venue). The more AELP knows what providers want the more it can be tailored and enhanced.</p> <p>Agreed to run with it and see how the model works – the model will be shared at all network chairs meetings over the next couple of weeks. If networks have anything that is of interest then we can look at providing the event and if the right messages are not getting out then it would be good to have the feedback.</p> <p><u>Note:</u> not all of the AELP offer will come under this arrangements so there is a particular offer for the networks.</p> <p>There was a discussion about how the information can be shared between the networks and with their members</p> <p>Action: Michael to draft survey and review with Carol and Paul</p> <p>Action: A more formal document will be produced after all of the chair meetings have been held.</p>
<p>Agreement of actions from the meeting</p>	<p>Actions as above</p>
<p>Next Meeting</p>	<p>12th September, 1:00pm – 3:30pm at Loman Street, London</p>