

# **Central Bedfordshire All Age Skills Strategy**

Draft – 14 February 2012



## Forward

In an increasingly competitive world, skills have a critical role to play. Individuals require skills to enable them to secure and progress in employment; businesses need a skilled workforce to stimulate productivity and encourage competitiveness and innovation; and collectively skills are required to support the local economy to compete nationally and internationally, with the ability to exploit times of economic prosperity and to withstand the negative effects of economic downturns.

Here in Central Bedfordshire the Council believes we need to develop a strategy to deliver a flexible and mobile workforce, that meets the needs of employers, is able to respond rapidly to environmental shifts and will enable Central Bedfordshire to achieve its full economic potential. The All Age Skills Strategy sets out the high level priorities and actions needed to make this happen, and critically how we need to work together.

The strategy supports the Council's medium term priorities from 2012 which include:

- Maintaining the employment rate of Central Bedfordshire, so that it is 5% higher than the national average (currently 72.6%)
- Demonstrating the Council's aspiration to be in the top 50% nationally of Key Stage 4 results for (1 measure) 5 X A\*-C, including English and Maths GCSE by 2014
- Limiting the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs)

Whilst Central Bedfordshire Council has led the development of the strategy, we are doing so in partnership and believe it provides a platform to grow and expand the strong partnership working base we have in Central Bedfordshire. All partners will need to work differently to successfully deliver the skills priorities for the area and, ultimately, create a skilled workforce to fuel economic growth in Central Bedfordshire.

The strategy has a critical role to play in delivering the Economic Development Plan (EDP). The EDP affirms the Council's commitment to support sustainable economic growth in Central Bedfordshire to enable private and voluntary and community sectors to invest and grow and support our residents to be able to benefit from new economic growth by increasing our supply of skilled people, supporting businesses to grow and thrive and

getting our residents into work.

We recognise that having an All Age Skills Strategy is not the end of the journey, but rather we are at the beginning. Delivering the priorities will not be easy, there are no magic answers or quick fix solutions but we believe by working differently and with businesses at the heart of what do, we can make a real difference and we relish that challenge.

Cllr Ken Matthews

**Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development, Central Bedfordshire Council**

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## Why an All Age Skills Strategy?

Skills are vital to our future and at the heart of successfully growing the local economy to deliver sustainable growth, build stronger communities and promote social mobility. Skills are critical to employers in all sectors and a highly skilled workforce will facilitate the growth of existing businesses, increase the attractiveness of the area to inward investors, generating job creation and fuelling local economic growth. Central Bedfordshire has an economy of £4.2B (Local Economic Assessment, 2011) and over 11,000 businesses. There is over £500M invested in school, further and higher education in the institutions serving the local population. This strategy aims to develop greater integration to connect skills provision to business needs for the benefit of the economy and community.

There is a growing acceptance that despite significant public sector investment in vocational skills in the UK, training has too often been designed around qualifications and the needs of public funding streams rather than the needs of the UK economy and what employers believe will improve their competitiveness.

“For adults, better skills and economically valuable qualifications are a route to achieving better jobs, career progression and higher incomes to support their families. Better skills are the key to greater social mobility, ensuring that individuals can get on because of their talent and hard work, and not just because of their background. For employers, a more highly-skilled workforce is a route to achieving higher productivity and, in the private sector, greater competitiveness and profitability” *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England, July 2007*

The All Age Skills Strategy will direct how Central Bedfordshire will step up to meet the skills challenge. Delivering the strategy will not be easy. We recognise that today's standards are not good enough for tomorrow. Average is no longer good enough; for Central Bedfordshire to have a competitive advantage, the area needs to be exceeding national averages, and needs to be performing as well as, if not better, than the best performing areas. Building on what we are already doing, the development of the strategy offers the opportunity to set this in motion. This needs to be a collective effort with an integrated solution. More than ever, the solution requires a better collective understanding of the needs of employers and partners working to encourage greater ownership and investment in skills by employers.

We do not need a new set of initiatives. Instead we need to transform the way in which the skills system works for employer-led training. We must create the space for employers to step up and work within their supply chains and business clusters, together with employees, colleges and training providers, to develop the skills they need, framed within a skills agenda which is employer, rather than government owned. Greater employer ownership means greater responsibility. We need a single market for skills development into which employers and employees are prepared to make a greater contribution for higher quality training.

*UKCES, Employer Ownership of Skills: Securing a sustainable partnership for the long term, December 2011*

Employer ownership of skills development can only be encouraged by all partners changing the way they work. We need to build on the good practice examples where local training organisations are working closely with employers and develop better ways of listening to employers and guiding them through the available support.

In most cases, this will not be the direct responsibility of Central Bedfordshire Council to deliver, but we wish to improve the co-ordination and effectiveness of this dialogue between the employers and providers and ensure our residents are best placed and informed to progress in and through employment and increase the well being and prosperity of our residents.

## The Challenge

At the heart of the All Age Skills Strategy is how, in partnership we bring together the skills that businesses and the Central Bedfordshire economy need now and in the future with provision delivered by local providers that must also meet the needs of individuals and local communities.

'...in order to build an internationally competitive economy, the future employment and skills system will need to invest as much effort on raising employer ambition, on stimulating demand, as it does on enhancing skills supply. In this way, we can create a **'virtuous circle'** of skills development, between the skills available and the skills required. *UKCES*

*Ambition 2020: World Class Skills and Jobs for the UK, Wath-upon-Deerne: UK Commission for Employment and Skills, May 2009.*

Central to this will be how partners in Central Bedfordshire integrate and work with employers to better understand their needs and help them navigate the complex skills system to meet these needs. Providers will not only be judged and funded on the quality of the learning experience but how well this fits with employer's skills demand and is success in securing long term employment for the trainee. Effective communication between employers and partners is central to this and will strengthen providers position in the market for learning by becoming a credible voice for employer demand, helping them compete on the basis of quality and innovation rather than volumes and funding priorities.

This in turn will help improve labour market information (LMI) for Central Bedfordshire residents to support their learning choices with real-time knowledge on the skills and aptitudes that employers value.

It will support businesses to grow and innovate, individuals to improve their employment or employment prospects and grow the economy of Central Bedfordshire through an integrated skills approach.

## National and Local Picture

The focus of this strategy is upon a new approach to skills in Central Bedfordshire. However, Central Bedfordshire cannot be viewed in isolation. National strategies and policies have implications on the funding available and the allocation of this, and also on the way in which the local authority and other organisations operate. Similarly, there are a number of local strategies that will influence the All Age Skills Strategy, such as the 2011 Economic Development Plan, Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14, Child Poverty Strategy and Transport Strategy.

The actions set out in this strategy are in line with skills policy at a national level and aim at integrating skills provision in Central Bedfordshire. The key national strategic drivers can be summarised as follows:

**Deregulation and simplification** – with a move away from centralised control, individuals, employers and communities are expected to have greater influence in shaping services to meet their needs, with providers given increased flexibility to respond to these needs. Both the Academies Act 2010 and the Education Bill 2011 offer greater freedoms for schools and colleges, whilst the national skills strategy, '*Skills for Sustainable Growth*', proposes simplified funding structures for colleges and training providers.

**Changes in funding** – whilst some funding will remain for lower level qualifications, and for those on active benefits, *Skills for Sustainable Growth* places emphasis on individuals and employers to finance their own training and skills development. Similarly, following the 2010 Browne Review, the level of university tuition fees is to increase. There is a national focus on apprenticeships – increasing the number, with an emphasis on higher level apprenticeships and more access to apprenticeship opportunities for those from under-represented groups.

**Work with employers on vocational skills** – the 2011 Wolf Review found weaknesses in the provision of vocational education, highlighting the need for employers to be involved in defining vocational qualifications and for more to be done on helping young people gain employment skills and work based experience. More recently, UKCES has set out a vision to embed employer ownership at the heart of vocational training and encourage greater involvement of employers in skills partnerships with employees, trade unions, colleges and training providers.



**Economic recovery** - the Central Bedfordshire economy is performing better than the national average but it is still weak. Unemployment has hit a fifteen year high with particularly high levels of youth unemployment recorded. Nationally the government is seeing re-skilling and up-skilling as a response to the down turn for both individuals and businesses. Central Bedfordshire wishes to keep ahead of this response.

**Raising Participation Age** – The Government is raising the participation age so that all young people at 18 or under have to be in full time education or with an accredited training and work programme by 2015. This will refocus efforts on young people who are not currently in employment, education or training.

**Benefits Reform** – the changes to the benefits system are expected to increase the numbers of people seeking work as incapacity and disability benefits are withdrawn or reduced. This will bring additional pressures to the skills infrastructure.

## Developing the Strategy

The development of the strategy has been led by Central Bedfordshire Council working in partnership with a range of businesses, employer representative groups, providers, stakeholders, networks, the voluntary and community sector and individuals. In summer 2011, three workshops were held with external stakeholders. Additionally, just over 100 individuals participated in a number of focus groups or interviews with a range of adults including people out of work, older people, low skilled and people with disabilities. Young people in years 10,11, and 12 and those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), post NEET and looked-after children were also included. The business interviews with 20 employers provided views on employability, apprenticeships and the importance of skills to businesses, particularly within the current economic climate.

The full findings are detailed in a consultation report produced by Public Perspectives. The consultation identified two key findings:

- businesses have to be at the heart of the Strategy to generate a co-ordinated and commercially valuable skills improvement offer, based on up to date local labour market intelligence
- the need to support aspirations to generate demand for skills improvement

The formal consultation ran between August and October 2011. This was followed by a workshop with Central Bedfordshire partners to confirm the priorities and consider actions.

This workshop identified a number of findings:

- Support for the principles of an All Age Skills Strategy with support for integrated implementation
- All provision to be better co-ordinated and focused in a common direction
- Effective business engagement remains key to delivering the strategy
- Co-ordination with schools and young people should be an early focus

## The Priorities

### **Priority 1: Working Together**

**Enhance integrated working and improve the availability and dissemination of local labour market intelligence**

We have an opportunity to build on the relationships that already exist and the positive attitude and support shown for the development of the All Age Skills Strategy. We now need to take this to a new level.

The local authority needs to look at how it works with partners and its role in meeting the priorities contained within the strategy. This is a chance for the local authority to develop its role as an enabler, bringing together partners to ensure that the skills needs of employers, individuals and the growing economy are understood and met, and to enhance its role as an influencer of strategy and funding. This is an opportunity for the local authority, as an employer, to lead by example. The jobs and skills challenges facing Central Bedfordshire are significant, and can only be achieved by a marked change in how the local authority thinks and works, and how all partners work together.

We should look at the way local intelligence is collected and shared. We need effective integrated mechanisms for identifying the needs of both existing employers and the businesses of the future. This information needs to be shared to inform the planning of provision and to support more informed decision making. At present, although significant intelligence exists, it is not always specific, up to date, accessible or available to all providers.

It is crucial that this integrated intelligence takes into account changes in the delivery of careers advice. The introduction of a National Careers Service, from April 2012, offers an opportunity to explore the role of labour market intelligence, how this is shared with careers advisors and the ease with which this can be interpreted. With its focus on the over 19s, there is also a challenge around how young people receive advice, the quality of the advice they receive through schools and how young people not in education access advice.

There is a changing national economic development landscape and particularly the establishment of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). These have a business chair and a

high level skills remit and in Central Bedfordshire Council's case, the South East Midlands LEP (SEMLEP) is seeking to support the growth of high advanced technologies and precision engineering which have high specialist skills demands and need to be factored into the future governance structures. Central Bedfordshire as a key partner in SEMLEP will consider how best the LEP can help the implementation against this strategy and how it might contribute across the wider geography of SEMLEP.

## **Areas of Activity Focus**

### **1. Building employer ownership**

More effective employer engagement is central to the improvement of skills in Central Bedfordshire. This is being built through effective on-going relationships with employers to:

- Encourage businesses to discuss their growth and skills needs and aspirations
- Provide support to find the most appropriate solution for their needs or work jointly with them to create a solution to their needs;
- Improve the quality of the learning system as a whole by building on those areas with good employer engagement.

Two way dialogue with business will become the norm for skills providers and partners. In order to achieve this it will be essential that businesses, particularly small and medium sized enterprises find it is easier to engage in the complex, ever changing and often confusing picture of what is available locally and how skills may improve their business. Easy and simple is our goal.

We will look to promote channels for sharing this information with training providers, encouraging improved and shared working amongst provider networks to enable employer needs to be met efficiently. Meeting the needs of employers effectively will encourage their investment in skills and grow the market for vocational skills in Central Bedfordshire.

We will utilize existing mechanisms, such as the Bedfordshire and Luton Business Survey, information available through other networks and existing work being undertaken by partners. It will be important to ensure that employers can be referred from any skills partner through developing communication and mutual trust. A key part of this process will be to segment the employer market – to understand and expect that not all businesses will

wish to engage in all aspects of this process, while others may be sufficiently interested and willing to act as skills champions or strategic partners in the development of Central Bedfordshire learning infrastructure.

## **2. Develop an effective employer led skills partnership**

One of the initial activities will be to scope and develop an effective skills partnership by bringing together an employer led skills forum involving a range of organizations with roles in delivering the skills agenda. Leadership will be key. This will look to build on existing provider networks and partnerships, but early conversations will explore appropriate models and communication approaches.

The skills partnership will have a fundamental role to play in directing the implementation and evaluation of the All Age Skills Strategy. It will shape and influence the range of activities that will help achieve the strategy's ambitions. The partnership will also have a crucial role in facilitating the sharing and use of intelligence. We will look at how online and social media can be utilized to support the partnership, facilitate the sharing of information and make it easier for skills partners to learn of opportunities.

### **Priority 2: Developing the Current and Future Workforce**

**Increasing the proportion of the workforce with recognized skills, and supporting access to academic and vocational opportunities**

In order to meet the current and future needs of employers, it is essential that the workforce has the required skills and qualifications. We recognise that these skills and qualifications can be obtained in a number of ways, through academic study, vocational opportunities, work based learning and apprenticeships.

Overall, Central Bedfordshire performs well in respect of qualifications with the proportion of the resident working age population qualified to Level 4 above regional and national averages. However, this is below the benchmark level for our statistical neighbours, with some areas significantly outperforming Central Bedfordshire.

The Children and Young People's Plan highlights some of the key attainment issues for children and young people. As with skills in general, performance compares well but there

is room for improvement: at Key Stage 1 performance is above the national and statistical neighbour averages, but improvements in Key Stage 2 performance have been far greater nationally than locally. While performance at Key Stage 4 is above the national average improving, Central Bedfordshire lags its statistical neighbours.

Within Central Bedfordshire, the growth in the number of apprenticeship starts is slower than in many other local authorities. There is still significant room for improvement across both the private and public sectors in Central Bedfordshire.

The recession is having a significant impact on the amount invested in work related training with fewer than a third of employers funding off the job training in 2011 compared to 37% in 2010<sup>1</sup>. SMEs are finding it particularly hard to secure the resources to invest in workforce development.

National research has shown significant discrepancies in the amount of training received by employees with different levels of qualifications. Those without a Level 2 qualification, for example, receive on average one fifth of the amount of training received by a graduate employee. With little training, the chances of progressing in employment are limited.

At the same time, research has consistently demonstrated that UK productivity would benefit most from investment in intermediate Level 3 qualifications and technical skills. Almost a quarter of employers reported skills shortages and skill gaps in the 2011 Bedfordshire and Luton Business Survey, primarily in technical, practical or job specific skills.

## **Areas of Activity Focus**

### **1. Ensure that Central Bedfordshire businesses can improve their competitiveness through investment in workforce skills**

In order to improve competitiveness, employers need to invest in the skills of their workforce. We recognise that as a skills partnership, we have to make the case to employers on the need to invest time and resources in developing the skills of their workforce, enhancing understanding of how skills can improve competitiveness and awareness of how to source high quality workforce development.

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<sup>1</sup> Bedfordshire and Luton Business Survey

We recognise that the importance of skills to a business is entwined with the nature of the business itself. Where appropriate, we will be encouraging employers to utilise the knowledge and resources available from the area's high quality educational institutions.

The starting point will be to build on existing good practice employer-learning provider relationships.

## **2. Promote the value and awareness of academic and vocational opportunities to employers and current and future workforce**

With approximately 80% of the workforce of 2020 already having left compulsory education, there is a need for a focus upon training and developing those already in employment.

With a move away from state funded training, there will be a need to convince both employers and their employees of the advantages of training and the benefits of investing their own time and finances. For employers, the advantages of training could be promoted in a number of ways. This includes through a skills brokerage models, the use of business skills champions, training and support with workforce development planning, leadership and management support, or investigating the possibility of financial incentives for businesses to invest in training. The over-riding principal should be that employers' learning needs are rooted in their business needs with a clear perspective on why any investment in training will impact on their competitiveness.

As part of a coherent skills partnership approach and building on current business relationships, learning providers need to develop closer relationships with employers and seek to encourage employer representatives on vocational curriculum boards to ensure that their courses are up-to-date and relevant to current business practice, ensure that employers offer apprenticeships, work placement opportunities and are involved graduation process and in alumni networking events.

For employees, there is a need to address perceptions, promoting the message that learning is a pathway to employment and income and does not cease when employment begins, articulating the advantages that can arise from up skilling, and encouraging employees to take the initiative in requesting training from their employer. Learning providers can use this to enhance their information, advice and guidance services to individual learners, on what qualifications employers' value and wider career pathway planning which links to activity under Priority 3 below.

Thought will also be given to how employers and employees are made aware of provision and the information that is available to them. This will include academically focused learning (including learning at foundation level), work based learning, apprenticeships or pre-apprenticeships. Again, this will involve the use of appropriate labour market intelligence, and skills partnership working with provider networks and the National Careers Service.

### **3. Encourage training providers to respond to the future skills requirements of employers**

As the flexibilities held by training providers increase, there is a need for the local learning infrastructure to anticipate new developments in the learning market. For example, small firms have for many years struggled to access courses delivered in a traditional format and there remains a need to develop modular delivery to reach those employers. With over 85% of Central Bedfordshire Council businesses being less than 10 employees this is a critical local issue.

As more employers invest in training and see the benefits arising from this then the market for training will grow. Poor performance by one is likely to lead to the employer not training rather than switching to another supplier so it is in the interests of all providers that the quality of the training on offer is high and the messages about training are coherent and integrated.

Employers often work through trusted suppliers and so skills brokerages can work well when one provider manages the input of other (specialist) providers as necessary. The skills partnership will encourage more collaborative arrangements, while retaining their competitive edge and specialism. The key to successful delivery will be coherent and positive communication, flexible responses with high quality delivery.

Consideration will also be given to targeting employers in those sectors where future growth is anticipated or can be supported. Again, the mechanisms for engaging with employers and identifying their particular skills needs will be crucial and embedded within skills partnership business engagement activity. This may be taken forward within the umbrella of the Local Enterprise Partnership.



### **Priority 3: Raising Individuals' Aspirations and Achievements**

**Promote and raise awareness of the support and opportunities locally available for our residents of all ages for skills development and the importance of gaining appropriate skills in achieving those ambitions**

Whilst the importance of skills is at the heart of the All Age Skills Strategy, this importance is not necessarily identified by all. For many, skills development and training may be a low priority; this may be because they are not aware of the advantages that can accrue from training, they are unaware of the opportunities available, or due to barriers to learning.

*"too few adults possess the skills to succeed in tomorrow's labour market, or the motivation, confidence and opportunity to gain them" UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Towards Ambition 2020:skills, jobs, growth. (October 2009)*

The overall figures for Central Bedfordshire conceal a range of geographic and demographic variations in qualifications and attainment. Unsurprisingly, there is a strong correlation between qualification levels and employment prospects. Those with no qualifications are less likely to be in employment, whilst those with low qualification levels are likely to be concentrated in low skilled, low paid employment. The statistics also show that there are groups of young people who are less likely to perform well educationally, in particular boys, some ethnic minorities, children in care and children on free school meals.

The traditional view is that low aspirations among many young people, particularly those from more deprived backgrounds fundamentally affect their chances in securing qualifications and then entry into progression pathways such as further learning or employment. However, recent research suggests that while the capacity of the individual to navigate a path between education and training made a difference to the individual's ability to secure employment, a key factor in this journey was that their career aspirations were out of line with their qualifications<sup>2</sup>. Around two in five young people aspired to careers requiring higher educational qualifications than they were expected to achieve.

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<sup>2</sup> Yates, S., Harris, A., Sabates, R. and Staff, J., *Early Occupational Aspirations and Fractured Transitions: A Study of Entry into 'NEET' Status in the UK*, (*Journal of Social Policy*, October 2010)

The importance of better information, advice and guidance that is focused on the needs and capacity of the individual learner is vital if we are to ensure effective use of the market for learning. We aim to inform aspirations at an early stage at a point when young people still have time to meet these challenges if they really want to secure their career of choice. This needs to be fully informed by an up-to-date employers' perspective but we also need to ensure that we time the interventions to make maximum effect.

This is also the case in terms of the gender stereotyping of young people's occupational choices limiting the skill shortages and inequality of opportunity and income. Work experience at school that deliberately sets out to challenge these stereotypes has widely been seen as a necessary first step and breaking up traditional experiences and ideas about the workplace and its demands. Without this, girls who consistently outperform boys throughout education fail to maintain this advantage in career status and pay. Again, the evidence suggests that to challenge such stereotypes early intervention is necessary from around Year 7<sup>3</sup>.

The strategy also recognises that the barriers to learning include disability and seeks to continue supporting the relevant skills development for people who may remain further from employment but for whom a pathway towards employment can still be developed. Training that supports health and social care often provides connections to wider training provision and aspirations and is included within this Skills Strategy.

## **Areas of Activity Focus**

### **1. Support careers advice to incorporate local labour market intelligence**

The Education Act 2011 requires schools to provide independent careers guidance to all pupils, but repealed the requirement to provide a programme of careers education. Taking into account this change, along with changes to Connexions, and the National Careers Service focus on the over 19s, careers advice needs to be an area of focus within the skills partnership. There are very clear links to the actions in Priorities 1 and 2 that aim to build employer ownership and involvement in learning in Central Bedfordshire and in such a way that this knowledge can be fully reflected in careers advice.

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<sup>3</sup> Ofsted *Girls' Career Aspirations (April 2011)*

We will work with partners, including the 14-19 Strategy Group, to influence impartial careers advice in schools, to ensure that this incorporates intelligence on current and future employment opportunities and the skills required to access these. This should include exposing young people to employers and their employment requirements and opportunities from early in their education. This information needs to be delivered sufficiently early so that young people have the tools to help them decide what they would like to do in future and so what sort of learning pathway do they want to follow. The provision of information and support for other professionals who may be responsible for giving advice, particularly to young people, for example, social workers supporting young people leaving care. This may include mentors, for example from businesses, to offer specific information, acting as role models and inspiring young people.

Attention will also be given to establishing links with the National Careers Service, National Apprenticeship Service, SEMLEP and its partners, so that everyone has access to information and advice that is relevant and incorporates labour market intelligence.

## **2. Promote the benefits of learning to individuals of all ages and promote the opportunities available**

There is a need to showcase the benefits of learning to individuals, and to provide information, advice and guidance on the training opportunities available and the outcomes that can be expected from undertaking such training. It is essential to provide information, advice and guidance that allows learners to make an informed choice – whether a young person wanting to choose a career or an employee wishing to switch to a more rewarding career.

We will explore collaboration opportunities with partners ensuring that we tailor our consistent messages and recognise that channels of communication, that will engage young people, may not be appropriate for those who are already employed.

All learning providers need to consider how their tutors might best respond if one of their learners asks “how do I go about getting a job in this sector?” New approaches should be considered that use career matrices and pathways that are no longer based on single employers or even single sectors but give individuals an indication of how to progress when the labour market no longer provides the opportunity to do this within one firm or sector.

We recognise that individuals may seek information, advice and guidance from a number of sources and in a number of formats. Through partnership working with children's centres, schools, family learning and the community and voluntary sector we will ensure that learning is promoted and information, advice and guidance available to individuals of all ages. We will also explore the potential for Community Learning Champions who could act as advocates for learning locally. This activity will closely align with priorities identified within the Child Poverty strategy and DWP Get Britain Working programmes.

### **3. Support the provision of opportunities that are appropriate to the needs of particular groups and areas**

It must be recognised that a one size fits all approach is not appropriate. A targeted, tailored approach is therefore required to meet the specific needs of groups including those with disabilities, including learning disabilities, and BME groups, including Gypsy and Traveller communities. These groups are vulnerable to exclusion in an approach focussed on growth. Additionally, given the concentration of low achievement in particular geographic areas, consideration should be given to focusing activity in these areas.

Thought also needs to be given to the accessibility of learning opportunities. The Economic Development Plan acknowledges that a lack of available and affordable transport is a barrier to accessing training opportunities, and proposes access planning through the Local Transport Plan and supporting schemes such as Wheels to Work.

### **4. Support the development of employability skills, through training, work placements, volunteering and enterprise**

There are two main target groups for this activity; those still in education and those of working age who are not in employment.

For those not in employment, the skills partnership will work closely with providers of the Work Programme and with JobCentre Plus, to ensure that support is maximised locally. This could include through Get Britain Working measures, including supporting the further development of work clubs and enterprise clubs, and the take up of the New Enterprise Allowance. Externally funded (European Social Fund) schemes focusing on pre-enterprise, volunteering and work limiting illness, will continue to be utilised.

For those still in education, the skills partnership will work with the 14-19 Strategy Group to

encourage schools to continue with work experience, support improved linkages between schools and businesses, to incorporate enterprise education into the curriculum and through the provision of labour market intelligence, encourage schools to support those skills necessary for employment, including self employment. The Youth Contract will provide a platform for developing work experience and skills development and will allow Central Bedfordshire to build on the successful experience gained through the Future Jobs Fund.

## Implementing the Strategy

The Central Bedfordshire All Age has been produced by Central Bedfordshire Council on behalf of the skills partners in the area.

Central Bedfordshire Council is committed to working with all partners to strengthen the links and understanding between local employers and providers to ensure that a stream of appropriately skilled people are able to progress in and through employment across our area. The Council will seek to encourage local employers or providers to step forward to lead a dialogue that will establish new ways to better meet those needs against the priorities set out in this strategy. This will benefit the Central Bedfordshire economy, businesses, people and communities. The consultation and recent conversations suggest that this approach by the Council to bring employers and providers closer is welcomed by skills partners and business representatives. Offers to lead, contribute and to build on existing local good practice and emerging models are being received.

The Council do not seek to lead the partnership but do commit to progressing a number of key actions:

- Facilitate the integration of local employers with providers to establish new ways of joint working to drive forward the skills agenda and increase local prosperity
- Roll out a Central Bedfordshire wide employer engagement framework that builds relationships with key employers and provides a mechanism to gather and impart data and share information
- Make the case to employers, including through intermediaries on the need to invest in skills through case studies and local role models

- Support and deliver workforce development activities to key sectors such as adult social care and children's workforce including increased focus on apprenticeships
- Enable a cross council approach to working with local providers to inform future provision based on the needs of employers
- Target skills provision to those with the lowest skills and furthest from the labour market by utilising robust local intelligence. In 2012/13 the priority as stated in the EDP will be unemployed 16 – 24 yr olds
- Review the priorities, focus and delivery of the Adult Skills & Community Learning Service (ASCL) in order to deliver efficiencies and re-focus on delivering All Age priorities
- Promote the opportunities and benefits of learning to individuals through case studies and positive role models fully utilising corporate Council communication channels
- Ensure the new national All Age Careers Service incorporates local labour market intelligence and all learning opportunities
- Influence providers and agencies on this skills agenda
- We will extend the strategy approach beyond the Central Bedfordshire Council area to other SEMLEP partners recognising the economic geography and the need to join up and seek benefits for business across a wider area as well as achieving local authority efficiencies through collaboration
- Ensure a coherence with the Council and partners plans to meet the Raising Participation Age by developing progression routes from statutory education and training into higher education or employment

## Monitoring Progress

It will be important to quantify the impact that the Strategy, the integrated approach and its accompanying actions are having on skills and the local economy. The skills partnership will aim to develop an evaluation framework to really understand the outcomes from the strategy and how interventions are delivering change or not. The following indicators will be monitored annually. There will be four high level outcomes that are sought with a supporting basket of measures:

- Reduced level of reported business skills gaps and shortages
- To maintain the employment rate of Central Bedfordshire, so that it is 5% higher than the national average
- to be in the top 50% nationally of Key Stage 4 results for (1 measure) 5 X A\*-C, including English and Maths GCSE by 2014
- % of working age people with level 2, 3, 4 qualifications

Supporting basket of measures may include:

- Number of people in apprenticeships
- % of people in the Private Sector who have received job related training
- % of business investing in training
- % of college and university graduates gaining employment on qualification
- Satisfaction rates with skills provision by business

Some of these are the key indicators with the Sustainable Community Strategy and overall performance against them will be published annually as part of the annual review of the Local Economic Assessment and in regular online bulletins.

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