

Sussex FE & Skills Strategic Leaders' Forum

Summary of third meeting - 8th May 2017.
The Shelleys Hotel, Lewes. 10am - 2pm.

Present: Paul Mitchell (Chair), Richard Freeman (Vice-Chair), Kerrith Bell, Gill Cahill, Jo Cronin, Richard Davis, Ann Potterton, Oliver Trailor

Apologies: Amir Bahrami, Anne Feldberg, Fiona Ras, Craig Mincher, Vanessa Potter, Dan Shelley, Caroline Turner, Dan Wallman, Clare Westbrey-Tong, Ian Whitehead-Ross

Reflections on the Strategic Leaders' Forum + Next Steps

It is a useful space for local leaders in the sector.

Fluctuating/inconsistent attendance does hamper some development, but is probably unavoidable; membership should be open to whoever wants to attend from the SCTP full members, providing they have a senior decision-making role.

Peer review / support is key and should remain the driver for the group.

It is crucial to have room to take heads above the day-to-day, and being forced to think strategically and wider than one's own organisation.

Important to keep agendas open; responding to changing priorities. Members will be invited to submit ideas, questions, challenges, useful articles or think-pieces for discussion in advance of meetings, allowing at least a week for people to read in advance.

The Forum has lots of room to develop one big, positive voice that adds to local, regional and national debate. Collective statements from the group, taking a strategic view on policy, funding or leadership, should be commonplace.

A mission statement is needed for next year, in addition to the terms of reference.

Members would be happy to contribute towards costs to keep Forum going if needed.

More regular channels back to wider members are needed, including an

update at each members' meeting.

The Forum will have more of a role in determining SCTP's CPD programme for the year, as well as targeting resources and projects development.

For example, the current feeling is that more maths resilience CPD is not particularly needed, whereas advice for new lead levy providers (getting head around reporting, compliance and data) is.

Leadership Development Academy

A working task & finish group will now take this forward, pending seed funding.

A summary of the research was circulated and discussed, and a full report will be attached to these notes.

Richard Davis will deliver a report to SCTP members at the full meeting later this month.

It was noted that the consultation survey had a very low response rate. The major feeling is that not enough context - or framing of relevance of the idea to individual members at this stage - was given. The task & finish group will review how to re-consult in different ways.

Open Discussion

Big push towards engaging SMEs from members, but fear that there will be no funding to deliver demand. Leaders need to recognise that Government priority could well be only levy-payers for the next two years - Brexit obsessions will also hold up many decision-making timetables.

The promised big impact on local skills devolution hasn't happened, and the localism agenda seems to have stalled. Devolution deals have taken a back-seat - leaders are unlikely to keep this as a main focus for strategic development.

High risk strategies - should leaders carry on delivering L2+ and hope ESFA fund growth in 'quality' provision?

Health & Social Care standards have no EPA with many questions unanswered - providers within SCTP network are making a quality call and not starting standards without a named EPA in place, but this is detrimental to budgets and planning.

Businesses having to be more strategic and dump long-term customer segments as new risks emerge. The SME market shrinking and many public sector employers are just not ready to use their levy pot effectively yet.

Does this Forum think that Government long-term strategy is to shrink market, getting rid of subcontractors and smaller businesses? This direction of travel has serious implications on local strategy (with high volume of both).

Influence on this will only come from employers, who are now the drivers of any FE & skills policy - SCTP need to lobby FSB and Chambers to put forward joint statements on the looming gaps in provision and skills. Providers will not be heard without business backing.

Some levy-payers not in favour of the 20% rule; just want to pay for the on-the-job - expecting a more commercial training offer. What implications are there for this? If employers didn't like the 20% rule then they might do their training outside the apprenticeship system and just buy the training commercially with no rules attached. If they are part of the Government funded apprenticeships system then the 20% rule must be adhered to (but this difficult as they haven't defined what it means yet - and perhaps policy will be shaped by a small number of levy payers). One example is schools - some do not want to employ teaching assistants for a year (they just want to pay term time) and then they don't want them 'in training' for 1 day per week. So they have discussed not using levy money and just paying for the course and paying them how they want. Apparently that may be cheaper.

We still have poor data on mapping provision regionally and locally. The Industrial Strategy recognises that vocational skills sector is very unclear to end-users. Are there too many people in the sector happy with the status quo?

The national site for finding providers excludes subcontractors if you click 'I am not a levy payer'. Local offer, like apprenticeships-in-sussex.com is still needed to ensure that breadth of provision is searchable. But sites like this can still be more user-friendly.

Next meeting – September 2017, Date/Venue TBC.