

Higher Technical Qualifications Knowledge Network: Data and Employer Engagement

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Session details: Data and Employer Engagement: In delivering the DfE-funded Local Skills Improvement Plan for Leicester & Leicestershire, East Midlands Chamber – through a Knowledge Transfer Partnership with a local university – took a novel approach to both gathering and presenting secondary and primary data sets. This session will explore the approach behind the creation of the new Collective Intelligence Skills Observatory, with a specific focus on the development of a new daily survey-based app used to engage a broader range of employers.

About the speakers: Chris Hobson (chris.hobson@emc-dnl.co.uk) is the Director of Policy & Insight at East Midlands Chamber, where he leads on engagement with Government policy making and the development and provision of business-insight services to support better decision making. Dr Gareth Thomas (skillsandemployment@yahoo.com), formerly of the Skills funding Agency, set up Skills and Employment Support Limited in 2014. The organisation supports a wide range of public and private sector partners to achieve their goals and ambitions in the skills and people development arena.

Notes from the session:

The session showcased the Collective Intelligence Skills Observatory providing attendees with a firsthand view of the ways in which data was presented. [You can access the Observatory here.](#)

Building the observatory: The observatory gathers and uses information from a range of extant data sources (e.g. HESA and Lightcast) and was created by a De Montfort University graduate as part of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP). This initial work is currently being augmented by a data visualisation project in association with Leicester University. At the very heart of the work was a challenge to do things differently: if you keep asking the same questions in the same way to the same people, you will end up with the same results. The project has worked closely with FE and HE colleagues to find out how they devise curriculum, to ensure that data can be shared in a useful and usable way.

Collecting primary data -from experience the Chamber know that businesses often don't know exactly what jobs or people they need. To collect useful information, the project therefore broke business needs down into Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) which not only have greater longevity than roles and job descriptors but are also more likely to be sector agnostic. Given that businesses, like students, often suffer from survey fatigue, the project created virtual employer panels by sector, and then issued participants with an App which pushed a daily short survey out over a 6 week period. Since that first push, the survey has moved to a set of short questions for the period of a fortnight once a quarter. The daily questions are designed to take 60 seconds to complete. And while it did take a lot of work upfront to recruit the businesses and get the App

downloaded onto business phones, once involved people stayed engaged and said they felt the process was both useful and interesting.

The approach was also key to democratising information collection, moving beyond the usual big business suspects who have the time and resource to help in employer liaison work, and allowed the project to engage with micro and small businesses. And the focus on KSBs allowed longitudinal trends to be identified and tracked. As the Chamber is required to update LSIP on annual basis these longitudinal trends are key; some questions will remain constant as the questions refresh each quarter.

So what have they found? Some of the trends are perhaps unsurprising but nevertheless interesting. Digital knowledge and skills (asked on two separate days) appear to have reduced as an indicator – associated perhaps with the recent burgeoning of all things AI over last year (anecdotally businesses are finding this tricky). In contrast, environment/green knowledge and skills are showing an upward trend and businesses seem to be growing in confidence

And where next? Mapping is the ultimate destination. Ideally the project would like to be able to map geographically where KSB demand is across the county of Leicestershire in relation to educational post code and business demand. Where are the hot spots and cold spots and how can we address this? They know anecdotally there are market towns with no access to the skills development to support local firms' needs – but the aim is to provide data to prove this. The team are also hoping to enter into a data sharing agreement with the Department for Education to gain access to the ILR dataset. Finally, the project is also keeping an eye on the [skills classification work](#) funded by DfE with the aim of aligning this to local education data. The ultimate aim is to support the region to match skills development and training with need – and it's hoped that the data insight may help education providers to collaborate to create positive solution. The team are now developing their own bespoke App which provides more flexibility for gathering and cutting data, facilitating options to drill deeper based on answers given.