



Oxfordshire Economic Partnership
c/o Oxford Innovation Ltd
Mill Street
Oxford OX2 0JX
Tel: 07990 521433
Fax: 01865 209044
E-mail: info@oep.org.uk
Web: www.oep.org.uk

Select Committee
South East England Regional Assembly

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The impact of SEEDA on the regional economy through Enterprise Hubs and Gateways

The Oxfordshire Economic Partnership welcomes the Regional Assembly's Select Committee and the wider debate on the impact of SEEDA on the regional economy through Enterprise Hubs and Gateways.

The OEP has been closely involved with Enterprise Hubs since their inception - leading the set-up and detailed submission for the North Oxfordshire Enterprise Hub - one of the first batch of Hubs - and following that, the Southern Oxfordshire Enterprise Hub. The OEP continues to take a role in both of these Hubs, sitting on the Steering Group of each and promoting the investigations into the possible establishment of a third Hub in Oxfordshire.

The OEP was involved in the initial discussions and research around how Hubs could be adapted to work in the rural environment across the South East, and the initial development work in Faringdon before the concept of Enterprise Gateways was established. However, since the involvement of Business Link in the Enterprise Gateway process the OEP has had little interaction with the Gateway. We hope that this will change now that a Director is in post.

Due to having only a marginal knowledge of Enterprise Gateways workings, many of the following comments are confined to Enterprise Hubs although some of the general points are applicable to both.

The OEP welcomes the concept of Enterprise Hubs and considers the aims of the commercial exploitation of the research base and improved support for start-ups to be important for the success of the South East economy. The work that they are doing fits closely with the priorities and objectives of the OEP and compliments work that continues throughout Oxfordshire in the high-tech, knowledge based industries. The OEP is pledged to continue to support the Enterprise Hubs and hopes to work closely with all partners including SEEDA on their continued development.

It is essential that Enterprise Hubs reflect the economy that they were developed out of, continually developing relationships with partners which enable the delivery of support services. The Hubs are only modestly funded and thus must work closely with a host of partners if they are to deliver their outputs. FE, HE and research institutions all play an important role in this, along with Business Links, local authorities, LSC, EPs etc etc. These relationships need to be developed over time in the context of the local situation and will only work where trust and understanding have been built, which may take some time and clear evidence of delivery.

There are obvious benefits to the Enterprise Hubs working closely with each other and others, for the benefit of their client base and the economy as a whole, but this must be based on trade and business need. It is hoped that the Hubs would wish to work closely with such as SEEDA's inward investment team, sector groups, Investor Developer Managers and Trade Partners UK. There are clear inward investment and exchange of international best practice opportunities to working in partnership.

This whole way of working depends on the Hubs having a strong base with commitment for long-term funding and support.

The Director of the Hub is obviously an important component in its success. Their dedication, dynamism and diplomacy is essential if the Hub is to be successful. Directors and the network of these Directors across the region is clearly a valuable and powerful asset not only locally but also to the region as a whole. To maintain this network and encourage these highly motivated individuals to remain as Hub Directors the issue of longer-term funding security needs to be addressed. We recognise that this process is difficult for SEEDA and acknowledge that this is beginning to be addressed.

We are unclear how the current proposals by SEEDA for the on-going funding of Hubs through a property portfolio will work or indeed if it is an area where SEEDA ought to be getting involved. It does not seem to be a guaranteed source of funding. Certainly there will be a significant lead in time and SEEDA may well be competing with organisations that it currently has as partners.

The South East is a diverse region - the model used for the development of Enterprise Hubs and Gateways needs to reflect this diversity, allowing the Hubs and Gateways to fit into the local economy, indeed be delivered through the local economy and not imposed upon it. We recognise that SEEDA requires outputs from their programmes to justify funding spend but how these outputs are delivered should be negotiable and allow flexibility to be most effective in the local conditions.

Much of the excellence of the work has come about through effective partnership working which is essential to the running of these Hubs, trust and reputation have been built and this takes a long time and is easily lost so it is essential that the Enterprise Hubs have commitment for long-term funding and support.

The Oxfordshire Economic Partnership hopes that these comments are useful and add-value to the on-going discussion on Enterprise Hubs and Gateways.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J Mitchell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Jean Mitchell
Partnership Co-ordinator

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