

EEF South response to the issues identified for the Global Challenges Select Committee 7 September 2007

(Completed prior to the sub national review announcement)

High level strategic

i. Are SEEDA's limited resources prioritised appropriately, and is enough effort being spent on lobbying central government to keep the South East 'engine of growth' running?

SEEDA has many diverse and competing demands not helped by an objective to 'narrow disparities between the regions', which we do not see as good use of limited resources for the region. SEEDA already has almost the lowest RDA budget compared to other less 'internationally focused' RDAs. We understand that SEEDA does lobby government to ensure that the South East's needs are accommodated and also to show that the region is not universally prosperous.

Whilst we would be unable to comment specifically on whether or not SEEDA resources are appropriately prioritised, or whether enough time is spent on lobbying central government, we can endorse SEEDA's recent organisational re-structuring giving priority and a dedicated directorate for Global Competitiveness.

Feedback from our members suggests that the poor transport infrastructure in the South East is a long-standing and limiting factor, especially for globally competitive businesses.

ii. Is there sufficient coherence between the economic development agenda and the spatial/physical planning framework?

In the past there has been confusion with the fit between regional policies e.g. economic development (RES) and regional spatial planning (RSS); despite the Integrated Regional Framework, which seeks to cover policy at a strategic level, we remain unconvinced about the coherence and interrelationships. We are, therefore, encouraged by the intention of SEERA and SEEDA to have a single delivery plan which aims to simplify the messages and actions for the consumer.

iii. Is there enough engagement of businesses in purposeful dialogue on global challenges?

The RES consultative process was comprehensive and wide ranging, and we found that SEEDA's engagement with us as a partner and stakeholder was generally fit for purpose. Our experience is that the SEEDA's communication channels at both a strategic and operational level are good, as is our membership of various sub-regional groups and consortiums. We believe that SEEDA should maintain a strategic focus and role and rely on business representatives to provide a conduit for engaging with businesses. There is clarity on what SEEDA is seeking to achieve through the RES where the 'Global Challenges' feature strongly. However, our own experience of, and interaction with, the Global Regions Initiative is limited.



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iv. How effective are SEEDA's policy formulation skills in a rapidly changing world?

We see SEEDA's re-structuring, including the creation of a directorate for 'Global Challenges', as a response to the changing priorities and challenges. We believe they do listen to and act upon intelligence and advice from, for example, their sector consortiums.

External marketing and networking

v. Are the scale and shape of inward investment attraction efforts appropriate for the region?

vi. Could more be gained from international networking?

vii. Is the South East marketed and branded to best effect?

Based on our experience we are unable to adequately comment on SEEDA's external marketing activity, but feel that they do well within their limited resources. We are aware that SEEDA is developing their Greater South East platform which will align more closely with our own area. This should benefit employers who have not seen any benefits from government-imposed boundaries.

Internal issues with external implications

viii. Does SEEDA maximise the potential of universities as a resource for addressing the global challenge?

We are aware that HESE, as a member of the Regional Skills Partnership, provides an opportunity to discuss common issues and actions with other key stakeholders. In conjunction with Higher Education colleagues SEEDA has also created Regional Resource Centres, which will provide a sector focus for expert knowledge transfer and, with more marketing, should provide an invaluable resource for employers.

From our members' viewpoint we are aware that business contact with Higher Education is more positive than is the case for Further Education Institutions. However, our experience is that universities in the South East do not operate as an effective cluster. SEEDA, Higher Education and business could jointly do more to take advantage of the expertise available by being more proactive and collaborative to service employer needs to become, or to stay, globally competitive.

ix. Could SEEDA play a stronger role in developing skills to meet global challenges?

We agree that the development of skills is a complex issue and that employers often find it difficult to access and obtain advice and or support for developing their workforce. As developing skills is integral to business success and global competitiveness, SEEDA should be adequately funded to include skills development within their remit.