

## **SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON SEEDA's APPROACH TO LABOUR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT**

Submission from: **Higher Education Funding Council for England**

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HEFCE is supportive of SEEDA's work in employment and skills, and of the regular and objective review of the RDA's approach to these issues. We were happy to assist Ancer Spa earlier in the process by completing telephone questionnaire.

With regard to the context and issues paper, we were particularly interested in paragraph 2.1, question 2 which asks about the effectiveness of:

*'key strategic regional agencies with an interest in labour force and employment, such as SEEDA, Job Centre Plus and the LSC in developing a joined up....approach' .*

Taking into account the strategic role of higher education (HE) in creating and assuring a suitably skilled labour force, HE is perhaps conspicuous by its absence in that question.

Question 3 of the same section refers to SEEDA's Corporate Plan giving *'considerable emphasis to higher level skill management and technical skills*. The paper then asks: *Is this focus appropriate.....?'* We consider the focus to be appropriate considering, for example, the government target that by 2020, more than 40 per cent of UK adults in work should be skilled to graduate level and above.

Question 8 of the same section asks *how effectively (does) SEEDA....engage with FE and HE sectors*. As we told Ancer Spa, we in HEFCE might be reasonably satisfied that SEEDA looks to engage with us at a project level on a regular and early basis. This is evidenced by the RDA's commitments to (notably) higher education in the Medway towns and in promoting Physics in the region. However, when taken as a whole the impact and outcomes of such engagement inevitably compares poorly when compared with regions where the RDAs have more money to spend.

The 'Executive Summary' point 5.5 talks of the *"...challenges of getting different agencies to work together for a common purpose"* and that SEEDA's role in *"...successful education-led regeneration in Medway, Folkestone and Hastings"* meant having to *"work closely with local government and other partners...each with its own decision making process and timescale"* which *"did not aid effective delivery"* .

We understand that co-ordination is one of the 'key issues', especially at a time when there are such pressures on the public purse. We do however wonder if these statements present the RDA-centered view.

To summarise:

1. HE is a key part of the employment agenda. SEEDA appears to share that view.
2. The limited amount of money that SEEDA can bring to the table might inhibit how effectively it can engage with partners
3. Co-ordination between agencies is important, but needs to be a matter of negotiation