

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

Submission from: **Kent and Medway Local Skills and Productivity
Alliance/Employment and Skills Board**

Date: **September 2008**

Q1. Within the RES there is a need for an update to include the close working with Skills Sector councils as these have now altered the range and breadth of qualifications available to business and students. The rapidly changing economy will also bring the economic activity targets into sharp focus.

Q2. With the development of the LSPA into the local ESB the key partners that can influence the skills agenda are brought closer together. The involvement of employers is key in developing a demand led system of skill brokerage. Working together in the development of LAAs and MAAs has ensured key partners are linking in strategic ways to enhance the total offer. The key worry is that employers will become overwhelmed as agencies all wish to consult with them over a wide range of issues. The strength of the ESB will be in acting as the gatekeeper to ensure that employers are consulted, but not overly so.

Q3. Whilst higher level skills can offer high economic returns, the social needs for those with no or low qualifications are equally importance when considering quality of life issues. The potential for the ESB to scrutinise the PCDL budget, for example, would enable employers to ensure this money, from the public purse, was being used to a) meet the needs of those with poor (or none) qualifications in achieving core work skills and b) address the needs of local employers and business. Core employability skills, ensuring people are well motivated, enterprising and generally work ready are also an issues which need support and further emphasis.

Q4. The development of the ESB will greatly enhance the say employers have in monitoring and influencing potential spending on skills. However, the lack of funds to instigate small pilot projects will reduce the hands on work which employers have generally benefited from through the LSPA. Employers may see this new ESB as more of taking shop and as such of less immediate benefit.

Q5. The new ESB will lack funds to use on projects. The role in influencing those partners who have funding will therefore be key if action is to be directed at those underperforming areas. It must not be forgotten that demand led skills can have three directions, a) student led demand, b) business and employer led demand, and crucial to the ESB, c) economic development led demand. It is this third category where the ESB will need to influence funders away from the short term easy wins offered by the first two directions.

Q6. Through the new ESB the route to engaging with employers has become clearer and more purposeful. However, having 12 or so employers at a table cannot be said to fully represent employers views, alongside this there will be a virtual network of

several thousand employers (utilising existing networks from BLK and LSC) who can be consulted on issues, as and when they arise.

Q7. The RSPA has been a useful vehicle to report back to colleagues' local activity, and to receive information on new initiative from CLG. However, when the new ESB is fully functioning, there will be a need for the RSPA to reflect these changes. More employers and fewer public service attendees, reflecting the changes that LSPAs have undertaken, with invited speakers from the public service as required.

Q8. Whilst the ESB will be a useful tool to address the skills needs locally with employers, FE, HE and adult services, there might still be a gap in effective communication with the voluntary sector. This arises from the various and disparate nature of this sector. It maybe necessary to devise a more appropriate method, through some virtual means, to ensure this sector is properly consulted.

Q9. Having the manager of the ESB firmly established within the LA, does permit some clear collaboration, however, there are still issues due to the large and varied nature of LA work in economic regeneration, labour and employment issues.

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