

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

Submission from: **NHS South East Coast**

Date: **September 2008**

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## ***1. Within the RES, does SEEDA adequately capture the range of key issues and challenges regarding labour force and employment in the region?***

Yes, within the RES SEEDA does capture the key range of demographic and economic challenges regarding labour force and employment in the region. The NHS in the south east has worked closely with SEEDA in developing the RES to ensure that health inequalities which are important to the NHS are taken into account. We have a close working relationship with SEEDA through our strategic partnership working and through our aligned approaches on implementing the South East England Regional Health Strategy and the RES. We look forward to continuing to work with SEEDA and the Assembly in ensuring the best alignment between regional health and regional economic strategies. There is evidence of good strategic working at a regional level between SEEDA, Jobcentre Plus and the LSC, as evidenced by the recent partnership meeting at GOSE where the 3 agencies set out their approaches to improving skills and employment opportunities.

We welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the Regional Employment & Skills Summit on 8<sup>th</sup> July this year and we would wish to support any future events having more focus perhaps around specific themes

The new Health Innovation Education Clusters (set out in Lord Dazi's next stage review High Quality Care For All) also present an opportunity to take forward some of these challenges

## ***2. How effective are the key strategic regional agencies with an interest in labour force and employment, such as SEEDA, Job Centre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council, in developing a joined up and coherent approach?***

We feel this is an area that could be improved upon as we found that, when seeking views from NHS employers locally, people were not necessarily clear about the role of these agencies. In the NHS there is potential for Skills for Health to play a major role in assisting with this, for example via the Health Sector Strategic Alliance across South Central and South East Coast which was established early in 2008 and currently includes LSC but not SEEDA.

An event is planned for 20<sup>th</sup> October to take forward the Sector Skills Agreement and we hope SEEDA will be a key player working with Skills for Health. Following this Sector Skills Forums will be established for each of South East Coast and South Central which will include NHS and wider partners.

**3. SEEDA's Corporate Plan gives considerable emphasis to higher level management and technical skills. Is this focus appropriate and what should it do to also ensure development of basic skills and employability?**

While SEEDA's corporate plan includes a focus on management and leadership development which is important it also recognises employability as a relatively new challenge for SEEDA. Whilst not neglecting the need to develop the skills in higher order occupations the SHA would like to see a greater priority in developing the employability agenda across the south east. This is particularly important for the NHS because of the impact of unemployment and unemployability through ill health i.e. long term conditions or disability on a healthy lifestyle. The Strategic Health Authority, Primary Care Trusts and NHS Trusts across the south east welcome the opportunity to work on employability with SEEDA and other regional organisations.

The link between developing staff in bands one to four of the NHS Career Framework and NHS service transformation has been highlighted within the Learning for a Change in Healthcare Report (2006). It is stated that without the continuous learning and development of healthcare staff, especially those in the lowest pay and career grades and those most frequently excluded from learning and qualification, the plans for service transformation are at serious risk of failure.

There is a need for sustained, increased investment in 2008/09 in Skills for Life, NVQs, Healthcare Apprenticeship Schemes and development of Assistant Practitioners and other Band 4 workers through Foundation Degrees.

Implementing widening participation and developing the workforce within bands one to four will contribute towards achieving a number of key objectives of the NHS South East Coast. These include improving patient safety, developing a workforce which is competent and appropriate to current and future patient needs, developing an affordable, flexible workforce, and making the NHS a model employer. We are working with the LSC, Skills for Health, and Skills South East Skills Brokers through the Joint Investment Framework (JIF) to progress this agenda.

**4. Is the range of SEEDA's activities appropriate and suitably targeted to tackle labour force and employment issues? Where should the balance lie between strategic and local interventions?**

Views from the NHS locally indicate a strong track record at strategic level but that more direct local interventions would be welcomed to bring about sustainable changes.

Within the NHS South east Coast we have set up local workforce partnership arrangements during the last year. These arrangements currently include Higher Education Institutions and in some cases Local Authority membership. We plan to strengthen the involvement of other partner agencies and organisations during the coming year and would welcome SEEDA's active involvement

**5. Is SEEDA doing enough to encourage sustainable job creation in the region, particularly in under-performing areas? How and where should it focus resources on this issue to best effect?**

We are unsure about this aspect and of course more could always be done. In particular we would welcome the opportunity to work with SEEDA to discuss this key aspect in more detail.

**6. How effective is SEEDA in engaging with businesses to understand their skills needs and in promoting employers' responsibilities regarding skills development?**

SEEDA demonstrates a range of activities in engaging with businesses to understand their skills need and indeed this is a feature of their impressive recent approach to corporate social responsibility known as the Corporate Cabinet.

One effective approach that the Strategic Health Authority has been party to in working with SEEDA on tackling employment and labour issues in the region is the Work Wise UK/Work Wise South East programme. Although this is yet to be proven effective in the south east it has the potential and is relatively newly developed. Work Wise South East aims to work with employers in the public and private sector across the south east to ensure a more flexible approach to working. From a health perspective this is important as we hope it would enable people with long term conditions, mental health problems and other disabilities to be more likely to secure long term employment. It also recognises that within the context of SEEDA's Corporate Cabinet there is a specific focus on improving employment opportunities.

SEEDA has driven the regeneration agenda in Hastings and Bexhill through its local delivery vehicle Seaspace. The capital programmes have had challenges but buildings are now being developed. Unable to comment on the assertion in 5.1 that employment has not improved as a result of buildings such as the University Centre Hastings going up and feel sure SEEDA will have the evidence they need. The issue of skills shortages is difficult to challenge (5.7) but with some of the worst educational attainment levels in the southeast we are conscious that SEEDA and partners are working from a very tough position in Hastings.

Although SEEDA had driven some impressive work in the areas of most need, it would seem that they could play a more active role in promoting employers responsibility more generally

**7. What has been your experience of the Regional Skills for Productivity Alliance? What needs to be done to ensure its long-term effectiveness? What can SEEDA or other partners do to support the evolution of Local Skills for Productivity Alliances into revised roles as local Employment and Skills Boards?**

Unable to comment as no experience of this Alliance

**8. How effectively do SEEDA and other strategic regional organisations engage with the further and higher education sectors, voluntary and community sector, local partners and deliverers to tackle employment and labour issues in the region? What more needs to be done?**

The SHA considers that SEEDA and local authorities could do more to exploit the opportunities provided by the Local Area Agreement framework to ensure that other partners in the local area are working together on labour force unemployment issues.

This will become of vital importance should the proposal set out in the Sub-National Review (SNR) come to fruition, i.e. for SEEDA to delegate considerable regeneration funding to local authorities and for local authorities to have a duty to assess the economic wellbeing of their area. There is more that SEEDA can do in working with the Third Sector who are very able partners in the main at supporting the “into work” agenda. For example, in Hastings Third sector organisations have begun work on the mental wellbeing programme-*Bridgebuilder*. This project demonstrates a natural empathy for some of the most disadvantaged communities and employs a professional approach to diversity and the extra challenges people from diverse communities face. SEEDA working with the Third Sector can make the most of the sectors strong structures in rural areas and together they have considerable experience of setting up initiatives and tackling the problems of employment pilots and running grant schemes to 'incubate' third sector enterprise initiatives.

Our Workforce Strategy in NHS South East Coast is currently subject to an annual refresh and we will use this as an opportunity to strengthen our partnership arrangements with a range of stakeholders.

We will also want to use this as an opportunity to work collaboratively with stakeholders on a strategic approach to increasing the diversity of the health care workforce.

***9. How effectively do SEEDA and local authorities work together on labour force and employment issues? In the light of an increasing role for local authorities in this area, what more needs to be done to ensure effective joined-up working arrangements?***

Unable to comment on this aspect. Our Education Commissioning Development Board includes a local authority member but this is a relationship that we need to strengthen both at local and strategic levels.