

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

Submission from: **Southampton Information Training and Employment  
Services (SITES)**

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The responses below have been prepared on behalf of the SITES partnership and its Board. SITES, (Southampton Information Training and Employment Services) is a partnership of providers from across the city covering the public, private and voluntary sectors. The partnership is overseen by a Board, and it has set two key priorities as part of its current Action Plan; to tackle worklessness and engage employers in delivering improvements within the city of Southampton.

Its views in response to the questions set out within SEERA's context and issues paper are indicated below.

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

**The RES does cover the strategic level skills and employability issues facing the region, particularly in relation to raising the competitiveness of the region by upskilling and increasing the employment rate.**

**However, in our view the variability in employment levels across the region is not given enough emphasis. Southampton is identified as a 'Diamond for Growth', yet its employability issues are very different from, for example, those of Basingstoke.**

**The RES also does not indicate what SEEDA would do as unemployment rises, which it is what we are now starting to see in the current economic climate. SEEDA has previous experience and practice of actions taken in the past, often in relation to specific sectors or skills areas, such as Engineering. These could be brought back into play.**

**The RES also does not highlight the impact that migrant workers, particularly those from Eastern Europe, has had upon the labour market across the region or indeed at local level. Southampton has been a particular magnet for migrant workers, which while of benefit to local employers in meeting Skills needs and increasing their productivity, has meant that low skilled and entry level jobs are less open to indigenous workers.**

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

**The role for agencies to work together and have a coherent approach is just emerging for this region, and it is lagging behind the developments that other regions such as the North East and London have taken forward, or those areas where City Strategy Consortia were created. These have enabled both strategic and local organisations to come together under a co-ordinated plan, align funding and work together to common objectives for their area. The plans and structures developed in these other areas could be mirrored for this region and local areas.**

**The establishment of an Employment and Skills Board for the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire area at a sub-regional level, which is part of the Multi-Area Agreement, should enable these organisations to work with local partners more effectively.**

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?

**There seems to be a lack of coherence between the RES and the Corporate Plan. For example, the RES highlights the need for information, advice and guidance, yet it is not identified within the Corporate Plan.**

**It is important to consider skill needs at all levels and across important skills sectors, if the region is to retain and develop its competitive position in the world.**

**Basic skills and employability are a vital part of the agenda. These are best supported at local level and often through Voluntary and Community sector providers, as they are best at accessing communities both in terms of geography and interest or need. Additional support to family and adult learning is also an important way to engage residents into skills and employment support. This could be directed through local authorities or Registered Social Landlords as an effective way to reach people.**

**Building the capacity of VCS providers is not just about helping them to find funding, but more importantly is about providing resources and funding to enable them to deliver. It is important to remember that this region has fewer resources than others to support these needs, and the new ESF small grants programme would provide a maximum of £12,000 to an individual organisation to deliver support to communities.**

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?

**The RDA needs to respond along the lines of 'think strategic, and act local'. Therefore, it needs to enable actions to be tailored to the needs and provision available locally. As an RDA it has the flexibility in its funding and action to facilitate greater variation across the area, unlike other agencies which have to deliver initiatives or programmes on a national, or regional basis.**

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

**SEEDA has made significant investments that support job creation through its property and land investments, and many of these have been in or near to areas of deprivation. Whether the jobs arising from these developments will be sustainable in the long term is dependent on wider market issues.**

**SEEDA could do more in relation to investments and its development portfolio in the future to try and ensure a mix of jobs and employment that will provide greater sustainability.**

**Resources to encourage job creation and tackle barriers to employment are best devolved to as local a level as possible, using intermediary organisations to oversee this support on SEEDA's behalf.**

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

**The creation of Skills South East to support the implementation of Train to Gain has been useful as a means for co-ordinating delivery and engaging with employers on their skills needs and responsibilities. The Local Skills for Productivity Alliance here in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight has also proved valuable in engaging with employers. It will be important not to lose the involvement of businesses in the integration process with the Employment and Skills Board.**

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?

**We have no experience of the Regional Skills for Productivity Alliance at local level. If it remains, then it would need to ensure that its actions or decisions are disseminated well.**

**In terms of supporting the evolution of LSPAs to Employment and Skills Boards, it will be vital that SEEDA, as well as the Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus, ensure that the remit of the Employment and Skills Boards are clearly set out so that partners understand their involvement and roles. There is also an expectation that the Boards are to be public, private and third sector partnerships, but as yet there has been limited third sector involvement in the processes to date.**

**It will also be important to integrate the planning and commissioning of delivery carefully within the ESB's role, bringing together information and priorities from a range of stakeholders in order to meet local needs in a pro-active and responsive way.**

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 main way that SEEDA and other strategic bodies engage with the different sectors involved in the skills and employability agendas is through their funding streams and resource allocation. The approach to this has and is changing, and the ability to deliver to meet local needs is moving to regional and, or national procurement processes. Regional bodies need to support local delivery through these processes by ensuring that sub-contracting or grants really enable local providers to access resources, and that this expertise and capacity on the ground is not lost.**

**The approach that the SITES partnership has taken may be one to follow, whereby individual organisation's independence and sector interests are respected. It seeks to move partners along the route to greater understanding of local needs by keeping organisations informed of new developments and initiatives; building capacity across the sector by pointing them to resources or bidding for resources to enable local delivery; working in partnership with them in implementing joint actions, and facilitating partnership working through staff training. It has acted as a consortium, with organisations such as the City Council in the lead, to bid for larger contracts and enable more local providers to take part and deliver on the ground where they are best able. This has helped to retain local capacity and expertise in delivering skills and employment support to city residents.**

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?

**SEEDA has worked well on labour force and employment issues with Southampton City Council and Southampton Partnership over a number of years. This was particularly the case through devolved funding streams such as the Area Investment Funds. SEEDA is also involved in local partnership structures such as SITES and Southampton Partnership's Economy and Enterprise and Skills and Employability Boards. It is not yet clear how these local structures will fit with the new Employment and Skills Board for PUSH.**

**Those authorities with education authority roles will gain responsibility for FE funding for 14-19 year olds while the Sub-National Review of Economic Development is likely to give local authorities more responsibilities on these issues, although not necessarily more resources. Capacity within authorities to take these agendas forward will vary across the region, and it will be important that the transition phase, while responsibilities move to new organisations, is managed well so that the expertise and emphasis on these issues does not stall. Otherwise, the region and local communities could lose out and we will continue to underperform by not maximising the performance and productivity our local workforce can contribute to improving the local, and regional, competitiveness.**