

Hampshire County Council

The framework paper by Wessex Partnerships covers most of the main points and asks some pertinent questions. However there are four additional points that it might be worth submitting to the Select Committee.

1. Although the material supporting Discussion Issue 4 on skills is mainly focussed on NVQ levels 2 and 3, the analysis and forecasts prepared for Hampshire also suggest a significant demand for skills at NVQ level 4 and above (degree level and upwards). Driving up skills at all levels will be fundamental for SE manufacturing to remain a strong competitor in the evolving knowledge economy, but, in Hampshire at least, the additional demand at NVQ level 4 and above outstrips that at levels 2 and 3. In response SEEDA could be asked more specifically about their role in meeting the skill needs of the manufacturing sector at NVQ level 4 and above. Such a role might involve becoming more hands-on in ensuring effective local business collaboration with the HE and FE institutions in the region. Learning providers need to become more aware of business needs generally and of the specific need for specialist provision in advanced manufacturing. And equally businesses need to become more aware of this provision and how to access it easily.
2. It might be helpful if there were a clearer distinction in the discussion issues between the short, medium and long term responses expected to the particular issue being raised. There is a tendency in the paper to think short term, and sharpening up on SEEDA's immediate strategy and priorities will be important, but many of the issues raised, such as that above, have a medium term and long term dimension. Since the RES runs to 2012 it would not be unreasonable to press SEEDA for their medium and longer term thinking on achieving the highly skilled, knowledge intensive, highly productive and innovative manufacturing sector that everyone seems to agree that the SE needs.
3. The third point lies slightly outside the terms of reference set for the Select Committee but might be worth introducing nonetheless; it has to do with effective infrastructure. Driving up productivity in the manufacturing sector and introducing lean production techniques will have implications for infrastructure provision just as for skills and business support. Such infrastructure issues will range from the transport network to broadband communications, appropriate sites for manufacturing business development and even to housing including affordable housing. Whilst these issues lie more within the SEERA domain rather than SEEDA, the Select Committee might provide an appropriate opportunity to probe SEEDA's views on the importance of these issues, alongside the skills and business support issues, as a means of achieving and sustaining a competitive and productive manufacturing sector in the region.
4. Finally the role of advice, particularly the MAS runs strongly through the paper alongside various discrete references to the degree and nature of the take-up of the services. Perhaps the Committee should be invited to explore how the resources is targeted and how it might be better(?) targeted to maximise the long-term impact - i.e. how to reach the hard to reach business where advice might be especially beneficial.

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