



20/08/2003

Mr Philip Craig  
Head of Policy  
South East England Regional Assembly  
Berkeley House  
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Dear Mr Craig

Select Committee on Learning & Workforce Skills

The Kent & Medway Economic Board has considered the Context and Issues paper for the above Select Committee, by circulating the paper among a small number of interested and relevant Board Members, and seeking responses.

The response enclosed summarises the range of views received.

In the process of seeking these responses, one Board Member in particular expressed a concern commonly shared by Private Sector colleagues on the way the Public Sector tends to react when a new initiative is implemented, which is to appoint additional dedicated staff, thus reducing the resources available to deliver the initiative. This may be justified in many circumstances, but there is a worry that it can also lead to duplication of effort, 'empire-building', and also greater confusion for businesses on the receiving end.

Yours sincerely

Denise Eden-Green  
Communications Officer

Encl.



## **Response to South East England Regional Assembly Select Committee on Workforce Skills.**

Kent & Medway Economic Board

20/08/2003

**Recommendation 1:** There is a role for SEEDA in the Learning & Skills agenda in identifying the needs of the economy and of employers, and articulating those needs at a strategic level. There has been much criticism on the part of employers that training programmes & courses are supply-driven, and therefore not responsive to their needs. Mechanisms should be developed to meet the training needs of employers more closely.

As the Economic Development Agency for the South East, SEEDA should be best placed to co-ordinate this input, through consultation with the widest possible range of stakeholders – business support agencies, trade associations & bodies, economic partnerships, employers, private sector training providers, and so forth.

**Recommendation 2:** Agreed – there is a great deal of confusion over roles & responsibilities in this field, and a co-ordinated approach is much to be welcomed.

**Recommendation 3:** Agreed. Where SEEDA has developed pilots and projects, the value of these needs to be captured by a consistent evaluation process which can be relied on to promote Best Practice when the pilots and projects are translated into mainstream L & S delivery.

**Discussion Issue # 1:** Change in emphasis towards preparation for work in L & S & understanding of the implications of this change in emphasis:

Yes there is support for the change in emphasis towards preparation for work in l & s delivery. No there is probably not an understanding of the implications of this change in emphasis.

**Discussion Issue # 2:** Stakeholders are bemused by the proliferation of strategies, plans and visions, and find it very difficult to extract information that is relevant to them. The one-stop shop idea is repeatedly rehearsed as an ideal, particularly for consumers of information/services, but the overlapping remits of the various organisations makes this impossible to realise in practice.

Clarity over what constitutes the strategic approach as distinct from delivery mechanisms would be helpful to many stakeholders.

Consistency in process and language would assist with enabling stakeholders to grasp the range and complexity of the issues.

**Discussion Issue # 3:** The National Skills Strategy should provide the higher level political context, and impetus for the provision of workforce skills policy and delivery in the regions. Whether it is right for SEEDA to lead on both policy and delivery in the South East is another

matter. It might be appropriate for SEEDA to develop local policy, with delivery the responsibility of the LSC or Sector Skills Councils.

**Discussion Issue # 4:**

See above – discussion issue # 3.

**Discussion Issue # 5:** (There does not appear to be a discussion issue no 5 in the paper)

**Discussion Issue # 6:** No. We would recommend the approach taken among the Economic Partnerships, which is a priority-based approach with a regional focus. The Kent & Medway Economic Board, together with the Surrey Economic Partnership has established a working group to focus on Priority 7 of the FRESA, on behalf of the whole of the region. This work is firmly rooted in the FRESA structure, but seeks to provide a joined-up approach across the region to issues that have particular resonance in several areas.

**Discussion Issue # 7:** The local Learning & Skills Council (Kent & Medway) has recently (approx. March 2003) published a thorough analysis of workforce skills and service provision in the sub-region, based on a sectoral approach. We are unclear about how widely this analysis has been circulated, but it is a valuable resource to the development of a better understanding of the needs and the profile of the local labour market.

There is a lack of clarity and consensus on the hierarchy of organisations operating in this field. Skills Insight seems to be the right repository for labour market intelligence once researched and obtained, but local lead bodies may differ between sub-regions. Whether it is the role of the FRESA or Skills Insight to identify a lead organisation responsible for collating local labour market intelligence may be debatable.

As far as the local situation is concerned, the LSC seems to have taken the lead (see first paragraph in this section). This approach to date has provided comprehensive research data. We are currently unaware of the extent of activities and the capacity of the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in the local context.

There is a need for both SEEDA and the LSC to integrate bottom-up input more into their planning processes, to ensure that service delivery meets the needs of the stakeholders more closely. Partnership working can facilitate and support this approach.

Denise Eden-Green  
Communications Officer