

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Date: 8 September 2000

Subject: **Skills Insight**

Report of: Chief Executive

**Recommendation**

That the Committee considers the proposal for the Assembly to become a core partner in Skills Insight.

---

**1. Background**

1.1 Skills Insight is a company that has been jointly created by SEEDA, the South East TECs, higher and further education networks and other regional organisations with an interest in labour market information. The 'core partners' of Skills Insight see merit in involving the region's local authorities in particular in this project. It has accordingly been proposed that, notwithstanding the fact that many constituent interests of the Assembly are already represented in the core partner group of Skills Insight, the Assembly itself should become a core partner.

**2. Skills Insight**

2.1 The proposal received from Skills Insight (attached) is reasonably self-explanatory. The approach has been to recognise the breadth of bodies interested in high quality skill research in the region by creating an arms-length unit owed jointly by the region rather than by any one organisation, such as SEEDA. Instead of each organisation employing its own experts and collecting its own data, Skills Insight provides a means of achieving both critical mass in terms of research capacity as well as economies of scale across the region. It should also have the benefit of building a common information base on skills at both the sub-regional and regional levels. Skills Insight will in effect become a region-owned expert consultancy supplying skills and other economic data wherever they are required for regional or local policies, and from which specific research can be commissioned.

2.2 That Skills Insight is a good idea is not in doubt. There is considerable discussion taking place between regional bodies about common research and

information across all policy areas, not only skills. For example, the Sustainable Development Framework will give rise to monitoring requirements that overlap with those of the Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance, as well as other regional strategies. There is a view that a virtual 'regional observatory' might be created that will effectively be a network of those engaged in data collection across the piece; the NHS has, for example, already established 'health observatories' in each region.

- 2.3 The question facing us in this case however is whether the Assembly should contribute financially to Skills Insight; the proposal is for Assembly participation at the sum of £20,000 per annum. One of the key grounds for the proposal seems to be that the Assembly offers a convenient way of engaging the region's local authorities, who are the principal players yet to be brought on board, and who of course collectively fund the Assembly. Were the Assembly to 'subscribe' to Skills Insight with this specific objective, arrangements would need to be put in place in order to ensure that the right contacts in local authorities - e.g. education, planning and economic development departments - were indeed engaged, and their views represented satisfactorily on the Skills Insight board.
- 2.4 I have consulted local authority chief executives in order to test opinion on this matter. The responses received at the time of writing are universally hostile to the Assembly's financial participation in Skills Insight. The prevailing view is that it is the job of the newly established regional and sub-regional bodies, such as the RDA, the Learning and Skills Council, the regional arms of national training organisations and the Small Business Service, to collect, analyse, and disseminate labour market information for the region as part of their core business.
- 2.5 Whatever members' views on this issue, without having made budgetary provision there is no prospect of the Assembly participating financially in Skills Insight in the current financial year.

**Paul Bevan**  
**Chief Executive**

11 August 2000