

## **Skills and Business Growth Update**

### **Introduction**

After starting with the LEP on Monday 28 November the round of general engagement meetings - started as part of an induction process - still continues in an effort to give the LEP a visible presence across its area. The focus has been on personnel involved in economic development and key government partners. These meetings are beginning to morph into a more purposeful approach based on early objectives identified for the role via the Executive Team directorship and published LEP objectives.

The secondments of Amy Wilson (Fenland EDO) and Julie Coleman (JCP) will certainly add to the capabilities of Skills and Business Growth as well as the Executive Team in general - Julie will start on 19<sup>th</sup> January, Amy TBC. Colin Lovegrove (from CLG) continues to be very helpful in relation to the Skills Sub-Group assisting with access to government and cross-LEP information sources.

### **Skills**

Skills work has been centred on the effort to get a sub-group up and running in early 2012. Several productive meetings have been held chaired by Allan Arnott OBE. We are currently putting together the working mechanism for group objectives, group membership, and the LEP proposal to the group. The skills area is a mass of organisations, groups, and individuals all with a similar purpose but lacking in strategic direction; the LEP will be able to bring these partners into a coherent whole.

Although the sub-group should be the driver for skills work the SBG team will continue to meet with business and government partners throughout the area. These meetings will be used to gather information about current practice - good and bad -, individual perspectives, and skills barriers to business growth. From the data captured, alongside the early outcomes of the sub-group, a LEP level plan will be created that will set the strategic direction for the LEP skills agenda.

It is expected that an initial overview of the mapping activity and data capture for skills provision across the LEP will be available for the next board meeting on 13 March as work in progress. This is an early milestone for the team and is essential to bring some order to the LEP understanding of the skills arena. Furthermore, the overview will inform the work of the sub-group as well as start to disseminate good practice via its membership.

Looking to the future the pressing need to bring providers and employers together in a meaningful and long-term relationship is the key factor for a successful skills policy. SBG will focus on finding a way to make this happen, simply and effectively.

### **Business Growth**

Work in this area has not progressed as far as that for skills, although a lot of the work there has a relevance to business growth. Starting during January, business growth objectives will

be added to the round of meetings the team will carry out as part of the skills agenda. The real change here will be shift from mainly government focused partner meetings towards local business. Could the board help here and recommend businesses to contact; particularly SMEs that show signs of high-growth or are being held back from growing.

The team will also start to map business support provision in order to identify what is left following the closure of EEDA and its funding streams to support providers. As in the skills area there is a lot of work going on, but it is essential for LEP planning to identify good practice, what gaps there are, and any opportunities.

**Conclusion**

The Skills and Business Growth area is starting to make progress. Input from secondments and government partners is helping scope the area but the real challenge is to engage business as fully as possible. The LEP area is far more focused than the previous regional approach but it is still a large area with a diverse range of issues and, of course, successes.