



## East of England

### All Party Parliamentary Group

**Co-Chairs:** Jess Asato MP and Andrew Pakes MP

**Vice-Chairs:** Blake Stephenson MP & Marie Goldman MP

*Sent by email on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2025*

Dear Baroness Jacqui Smith

#### **KEY QUESTIONS FOLLOWING THE EAST OF ENGLAND APPG MEETING**

***Delivering future skills to Get East of England Working to its maximum growth potential***

**Held Monday 24<sup>th</sup> March in Committee Room 5, House of Commons**

We were delighted that you were able to address the East of England APPG on Monday March 24<sup>th</sup> which as you know focussed on skills and how, working together, regional partners and the Government can better meet the future skills requirements if our region is to maximise its considerable potential for sustained growth.

The minutes of the meeting which we trust are a fair and accurate – although not verbatim - record of your opening remarks and responses to the questions asked are [here](#). As indicated at the meeting, the East of England Skills Delivery Group met subsequently to review the points raised and we would like to present the following six issues for your further consideration.

#### **1. Apprenticeship Changes.**

As you know there is broad support for Government changes to apprenticeships including reducing their length when appropriate and removing the necessity for adult apprentices to retake Level 2 Maths and English where functional skills cannot yet be evidenced. We also heard your statement of changed priorities indicating a plan to focus on foundation apprenticeships. However, the region's partners and wider stakeholders remain concerned about the proposed defunding of level 7 apprenticeships especially those that are delivering skilled persons in those sectors where there are clear shortages eg the Advanced Clinical Practitioner apprenticeship in medicine and those sectors that are critical to growth such as accountancy.

The following other points should also be borne in mind:

- not all level seven learners are mature students, many start on level 4 and end on level 7. In fact Level 7 apprenticeships often act as 'entry-level' and 'early career' qualifications to key professions, driving social mobility for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and also addressing current acute skills needs for employers who support key growth sectors
- there should be an assessment of the impact on universities of defunding level 7 apprenticeships
- the number of level 7 apprentices in the East of England is in the low thousands

***We would ask that the defunding of all level 7 apprenticeship should be reconsidered in light of regional and sectoral priorities as well as cross referenced with the Government's Industrial Strategy and its declared Missions. (In other words some exceptions could be made.)***

## **2. Devolution and AEBs.**

As you heard there is broad support for the Government's proposals for devolution and the more widespread devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) has been welcomed. However, there is concern that AEBs are subject to cuts of 3% in Combined Authority areas and 6% in non Combined Authority Areas. Given the point you made at the meeting – that skills plays a critical role in improving productivity and therefore growth – this would seem a counterproductive budget reduction given the Government's growth mission. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority have already reported that the reduced budget will result in 600 less learners despite the evidence that 78% of learners go on to sustained employment or further training nationally.

***Our conclusion would be that this cut should be rescinded if at all possible and certainly reversed at the earliest opportunity.***

## **3. LSIPs.**

We welcomed your positive comments regarding the four Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) in the East of England and understand further discussions will be taking place between the various LSIPs and officials shortly.

***Our ask in relation to this is threefold. Please would you provide no reduction in the funding envelope; seek to have the maximum duration of the next phase of their work – for example three years not two; and publish the guidance for LSIPs as soon as possible.***

## **4. Public Sector Workforce Skills Pipeline.**

We remained concerned about the public sector workforce skills pipeline. There are too many vacancies in critical sectors including health and social care, teaching and within parts of local government eg housing and planning departments.

***We would welcome dialogue with Government to share learning and develop a pilot to support more people particularly into health and social care, including dentistry (for which there is no provision in the whole of the East of England which in part explains the “dental desert” that many people in the region face).***

## **5. Changes to Migrant Visas**

As you are aware, the Chancellor has announced there will be a new immigration White Paper this summer. The Norwich Research Park (which includes UEA) is advocating for policies that are more conducive to global talent recruitment into areas where there are critical skills gaps restraining growth – like AI, Science etc. International students studying in the UK and global talent recruitment are closely interconnected and it is important to get these issues right in the new immigration White Paper.

***Our conclusion is that we still need to race to the top and attract the best and brightest. We would hope that as Minister for Skills and for Higher Education you will have a strong voice in the drafting of the Immigration White Paper and also advocate for a constructive dialogue on immigration that shifts the political rhetoric and improves outcomes of UK universities. The increased cost of the graduate visa should also be reversed.***

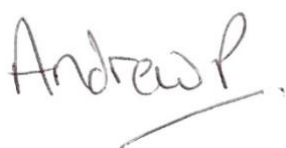
## **6. Regional collaboration and more colleges.**

A historic challenge that continues to stifle progress in reducing skills deficits is that there are not enough FE technological colleges, especially in Suffolk. We are aware a letter has been written to the Minister by various MPs and stakeholders on this matter and heard you say at the meeting that the Government is focussing on the 16-19 age group and trying to focus on biggest gaps, which are in level 4 and 5. You will also have heard the comments regarding Innovate Cambridgeshire and its Opportunities Hub proposal and pilot work, which aims to create 'pipelines and pathways' into appropriate education and training, in response to sector need.

***Our conclusion regarding this is that we would look forward to Skills England having a strong regional dimension and presence. This would benefit the East of England as it would likely help ensure better accessibility of stakeholders to good quality and timely data. It would also be an opportunity to work more closely regarding gaps in skills delivery and relevant initiatives. We would specifically like to invite an official from Skills England and/or your Department to join the quarterly meetings of the East of England Skills Delivery Group.***

We look forward to your responses to the points raised above and would, of course, welcome a private meeting with you in Whitehall if you would prefer to respond by way of a meeting.

Yours sincerely



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**Chair, East of England Skills Delivery Group**  
**and Labour MP for Peterborough**



**Johnathon Cuthbertson**  
**Officer lead, Skills Delivery Group**  
**Head of Employability and Skills, Essex County Council**

*Email sent on behalf of the East of England APPG's Skills Delivery Group by Steve Barwick, Director, East of England APPG Secretariat*

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