

East of England: Adult Skills & the Industrial Strategy

What can we do and learn, bigger, better, faster, together?

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Intro...



“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” – African Proverb

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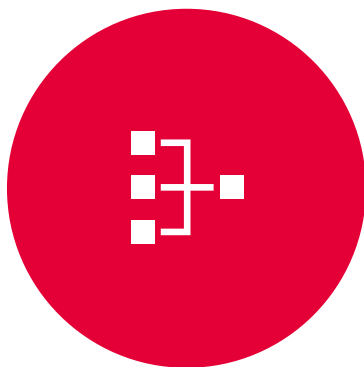
Executive Summary- Current System Context

Industrial strategy requires that we have the highly skilled workforce needed to deliver growth.

ECC's approach has emphasised skills-based education for all ages, aligned to future plans for the role of Skills England



The new Government has prioritised delivering Growth and Economic Stability: Developing adult skills levels through an employer-led approach has been identified as priority to securing this agenda.



A raft of reforms / changes have been mooted but further detail is required to evaluate impact: Whilst well-intentioned there is potential for unintended consequences to arise from some emerging proposals.



Despite fiscal challenges there are significant opportunities to transform citizen outcomes: working in partnership to transform lives through business growth and skills development.



Regional partnerships, system leadership & policy clarity are critical to securing the priorities: Understanding the future roles, powers and funding, clear strategy and enabling local flexibility will create success.

Lots and very little has happened since the 4th July. More detail is emerging, and some of this rests on us.

The East of England Picture

The East of England is a powerhouse in the UK economy, contributing £162 billion in GVA annually. It's home to many industries of the future, from life sciences to renewable energy and aviation, and is projected to add 600,000 new jobs by 2036.

However, challenges remain:

- **The participation rate in adult skills training is the lowest in England, at just 2.7%.**
- **Apprenticeship participation is also lagging, ranking 8th out of 9 regions.**
- **Many residents face barriers such as lack of access to transport, training, and flexible funding solutions.**

These challenges are compounded by fragmented leadership in the skills system, which can hinder our ability to respond quickly to local employer and resident needs.

The region with the fastest growing population (2011 to 2021)



March 2024 East of England APPG report

Three recommendations:

1. **Increase apprenticeships:** Increased flexibility of Apprenticeship Funding and tackling the practical barriers to apprenticeship uptake.
2. **Get FE and skills infrastructure funding right:** Increase ASB, greater funding flexibility to fund courses needed by employers, including short-courses.
3. **Remove barriers to skills:** Explore / enhance system join-up and navigation and removal of barriers such as transport, equipment which currently are unfunded.



All change: Key Announcements

Policy announcements since July: Whilst there is an emerging picture and key announcements (some with alignment to the March 2024 report) **further clarity is urgently required to secure growth and confidence of businesses through investment in skills.**



Creation of Skills England: A new strategic body (established in shadow) bringing together Central & Local Government, businesses, training providers and unions to meet post-16 skills needs across the UK aligned to the Government's industrial strategy.



A national jobs & careers service and Work Health and Skills Plans: with a focus on tackling long-term sickness and NEET. A new 'Connect to Work Programme' to be rolled out nationally by Tier 1 LA's from 2024/5 to get those with barriers to access training and employment.



Apprenticeship Levy Reform: creation of 'a flexible growth and skills levy' enabling a proportion of levy funds to be used for short training or skills courses as well as proposed de-funding of Level 7 apprenticeships to open Level 2/3 Opportunities.



Accelerated and Standardised Devolution agenda: devolution of powers and funding to Local Areas including skills (AEB and UKSPF), transport and economic strategy – all key levers of securing sustainable growth. . White Paper due November.



£300m for Colleges: Use of investment to be agreed / remains unclear but potentially includes funding for tutor pay rises.



Invest 2035: A national Industrial Strategy: Industrial Strategy Green Paper published to provide stability that supports business growth including securing the right skills.

Mind the gap: Eastern Region Concerns

As we move forward, I see three key priorities for collaboration:

- 1. Increasing Employer Investment:** We must co-design funding models that incentivise employer investment in skills and training.
- 2. Securing Policy Clarity:** Together, we must push for greater definition in policies like Level 7 apprenticeships and devolution, ensuring they align with our region's needs.
- 3. Removing Barriers:** Tackling practical obstacles like transport, digital access, and funding flexibility will unlock opportunities for more residents.

The Power of Collaboration

Despite these challenges, Essex and the wider East of England have demonstrated how collaboration and systems leadership can drive progress:

- **Employer Partnerships:** Through initiatives like Employer Representative Boards (ERBs) and Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), we've aligned skills provision with industry needs, unlocking millions in additional GVA.
- **Apprenticeships:** By securing £4.2 million in unspent levy funds, Essex placed 796 new apprentices into meaningful roles, demonstrating the power of targeted collaboration.
- **Careers and Employability:** We've ended the postcode lottery for careers advice in schools, with 97% now delivering statutory requirements.

These successes are not accidents—they are the product of clear leadership, shared objectives, and strong partnerships between

What is top of your worry list?

“The best way to predict the future is to create it.” –

Peter Drucker

The opportunity: Collaboration across organisations and securing devolution of funding will enable us to deliver an all-age, inclusive skills-based education approach that **focuses on skills not qualifications**, ensuring our residents are well-prepared for and have visibility of opportunity.

Specific asks and opportunities include:

1. **Concentration of funding and powers at the right level is critical-** commissioning and PPP
2. **Remove the barriers to investment-** pump-prime & co-invest in the system.

Lessons from Essex

In Essex, we've embraced systems leadership as a route to influencing policy and overcoming barriers. We're reshaping our service for:

- **Public-Private Collaboration:** strategic engagement for advocacy and influence of government policy on devolution and skills.
- **Regional Investment:** We've secured significant funding for green sector upskilling and public-sector workforce development, delivering measurable outcomes for local communities.

The lesson here is clear: **when we come together with a unified voice, we can achieve more than any single organisation can alone.**

Essex as a systems Leader – Our regional collaboration



**NHS Anchors
Pilot £400k
Investment &
£2.4m Secured
From NSIPs**

Enabled Local Jobs For Local People

- **337 residents & care leavers** from deprived backgrounds gained NHS employment with cost savings of over £600k to the NHS
- **£2.4m investment secured from Longfield Solar Farm NSIP** to upskill residents in the green sector to access new jobs



**GE Careers Hub
£263k
Investment
Funding**

Equality of Access To Opportunity

- **97% of schools** now delivering statutory careers reqs & **84% (+25%)** achieving at least 3 Gatsby Benchmarks, ending the County's postcode lottery of careers IAG
- 25k readers of the Essex Careers Magazine



**Apprenticeships
Hubs £500k
Investment**

Unlocked Skills & Growth

- **796 additional apprentices** of all ages placed into roles, securing **£4.2m of unspent levy** to support their training, delivering **£88m GVA PA**



**Multiply
£7.9 Grant
programme**

UK-Leading Commissioning

- **1.4% of that national budget we have now (So far!)** achieved **7% of that national course starts**
- **4,591 course completions**



**Backing Essex
Business -
£1.3m
Investment**

Support To Help Business unlock Growth:

- **1,503 Jobs** created and safeguarded, generating **£78m** additional GVA.
- **1,700 local business** supported and **£2.3m** new business finance secured
- **60 local businesses** inducted Essex £multibillion public sector supply chain



**Strategic
Business
Engagement
£118k
Investment**

Unified Strategic Business Leaders To Champion Key Policy Matters:

- **Secured 100 letters of support** for devolution in November 2023
- Greater Essex Business Board
- **United Greater Essex Businesses** with network of networks

What we're doing now.....

Continue to develop our systems-leadership approach, delivering strategic products for our partners-

1. **Aspirational Essex:** Maximise our impact and leadership through introduction of employer and provider charters to incentivise/ showcase the positive behaviours of local partners.
2. **Essex Connector:** Development and introduction of a UK-first digital careers tool.
3. **Essex Business & Skills Growth Service:** Integrated. Restructure to create a single business facing service and single front door
4. **Strengthened Lobbying** at an EoE scale
5. **Apprenticeship support fund:** £2500 bursary to encourage business take-up of apprentices.

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.” – Henry Ford

How might The East of England respond?

“Leadership is not about being in charge. It is about taking care of those in your charge.” – Simon Sinek

1. **Continue to push for collaboration and systems leadership of Skills & Employability in the region:** using this as a core lever for economic growth with a focus on collaborating on identified challenges
2. **Ensure Devolution is secured:** building local and regional partnerships to maximise the value of funding and powers.
3. **Deliver strategic engagement and influencing:** Government is in listening mode, now is the opportunity to influence and engage ministers on matters such as Apprenticeship Reform, securing continuation of Employer Representative Boards and securing clarity on leadership on key topics.

If We Do One Thing Together....

If we learn one lesson, let it be this: **systems leadership and collaboration are not optional—they are essential.**

Let's commit to working together to present a unified regional voice that champions clarity, alignment, and ambition in skills policy. By doing so, we can transform challenges into opportunities and ensure the East of England remains a leader in economic growth and innovation.

*“In the middle of
difficulty lies
opportunity.”*

– Albert Einstein

Coming together to Overcome Challenges....

What are the barriers of investment related to people and skills?

What UK government policy solutions could best address these?

What more could be done to achieve a step change in employer investment in training in the growth-driving sectors?

What one thing should we focus on... together?