



East of England

All Party Parliamentary Group

Co-Chairs
Vice-Chairs
Secretary
Treasurer

Daniel Zeichner MP and Peter Aldous MP
Heidi Allen MP, Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP and Sandy Martin MP
Clive Lewis MP
Dr Dan Poulter MP

East of England All-Party Parliamentary Group Employment, Skills and Productivity: The Region's Local Strategies

Tuesday 15th January 2019, Room A, 1 Parliament Street, London SW1A 2NE

1. Welcome and introductory statements

Daniel Zeichner MP and Peter Aldous MP, the Co-Chairs of the East of England All-Party Parliamentary Group, welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted its excellent turnout.

Daniel Zeichner, the MP for Cambridge, opened the meeting by discussing the region's employment, skills and productivity challenges. Mr Zeichner also said that the East of England's labour market faces lot of pressure at the low- and high-skilled ends in particular. He also mentioned uncertainty surrounding Britain's exit from the European Union and how it will have a massive effect on the East of England's employment, skills and productivity.

2. Statements

Doug Field, the chair of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), spoke about the Partnership's industrial strategy for the Norfolk and Suffolk region. He said the LEP is a "strong partnership" with a "robust strategy." Mr Field also said New Anglia – and likely the wider East of England region as well – suffers due to skills shortages, poor productivity and inadequate infrastructure.

New Anglia LEP's industrial strategy is focused on key areas of business growth for the region, including energy; the life sciences and biotech; agriculture; and advanced manufacturing and engineering. As well as advancing these industries, the regional industrial strategy also focuses on creating inclusive growth to benefit the entire region.

Mr Field gave examples of the LEP's work on this strategy, including £10m in funding for a local energy programme and setting up the New Anglia Growth Hub, which he claims has supported around 8,000 regional businesses so far. He concluded by saying that "collaboration is key" in solving the East of England's employment, skills and productivity challenges.

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Rob Moane, Director of People Development at British Sugar, began by introducing the business. He said that British Sugar is a “resilient” business with strong family ties to the East of England, and also claimed that the company brings £200m to the regional economy and has created 9,000 jobs nationwide. Mr Moane said a lack of necessary skills in the region is a huge issue for British Sugar.

The company relies heavily on STEM and related subjects, and there is currently a severe shortage of such skills amongst young people in the East of England. Of the apprentices it does take on, Mr Moane said, the company retains 80% of them. With this success in mind, Mr Moane said the company believes the current ‘apprenticeship levy’ should be made more flexible. As Mr Field had previously pointed out in the New Anglia industrial strategy, Mr Moane also said that inadequate regional infrastructure was a big issue for British Sugar, as their products require transportation and poor transport links mean a smaller pool of potential workers.

*Chris Jenkinson, the Eastern regional secretary for UNISON, then spoke. UNISON is the largest trade union in the UK, with around 90,000 members in the East of England alone. It is also a provider and facilitator of skills training, with a particular focus on adults who have been out of education or training for long periods of time. Mr Jenkinson said that UNISON works in partnership with “progressive” employers to provide ‘upskilling’ training for employees. He gave several examples of successful skills partnerships the union has established in the region, including a Lifelong Learning Partnership Agreement with Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King’s Lynn. *Sir Henry Bellingham, the MP for North West Norfolk, described this as “fantastic news” for the area.**

3. Questions, comments and discussion

Daniel Zeichner MP opened the discussion portion of the meeting by saying that hearing from the meeting’s wide range of attendees should hopefully reflect the region’s very diverse concerns and experiences. He also raised the issue of the Government’s recent immigration White Paper, saying that it could have a negative impact on the region’s scientific industries and research and development.

Sandy Martin, the MP for Ipswich and a Vice-Chair of the APPG, mentioned that he would like the attendees to help MPs to identify ways in which Parliament can help the region, as Members are not always aware of how they can help.

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Peter Richardson, the chief executive of Community Action Suffolk, said that the care sector in the East of England is currently experiencing extreme difficulties in the recruitment process, especially for lower-skilled jobs (e.g. some healthcare workers).

Vesela Ivanova, from London Stansted Airport, mentioned similar recruitment issues. She said that the Airport currently employs around 2,000 people, of which 200 will need to apply for settled status after the UK exits the European Union. Stansted management is planning to pay these fees to ensure continuity of employment. Ivanova also said that the Airport works with Haringey Council to subsidise travel for Haringey residents who are employed at Stansted. Both of these measures, Ms Ivanova said, are designed to build careers as opposed to simply providing jobs.

Peter Aldous MP, Co-Chair of the APPG, interjected to mention the recurring issue of poor regional infrastructure, saying it made little sense to recruit workers from a London council when plenty of potential employees live far closer to the site in the East of England.

As Mr Field had previously spoken about his LEP's funding for a new energy programme, *John Best, of the East of England Energy Group*, advised that the region should not just focus on the energy industry, but – more specifically – the clean energy sector. He mentioned that the sector is constantly developing and some of the skills it will need in the future have yet to be invented, and so Chris Jenkinson's idea of 'lifelong learning' is extremely relevant to the sector. Peter Aldous MP then mentioned that the East Coast Energy Internship Scheme is helping to encourage young people to join the clean energy industry.

Children and young people in the East of England often have no idea of the local career opportunities available to them, according to *Jane Paterson-Todd, the chief executive of Cambridge Ahead*. Whilst her organisation is attempting to solve this issue, there is a far greater need for services than they can fulfil.

Doug Field agreed with her analysis, saying that his LEP recognises that the region needs a 'holistic economy,' involving health, skills, nightlife, etc. When visiting local schools, the LEP found that 90% of children did not believe that they would be able to live and work in Norfolk as adults. *Chris Jenkinson* added that children must be able to access clear, impartial and independent careers advice, and not advice that simply serves local businesses or the economy.

Will Morlidge, of the Careers and Enterprise Company, then said that he believes that it is vital that schools see themselves as part of the economic development landscape. There is statutory

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guidance requiring all schools to have a careers strategy, and there is a key role for his company, as well as LEPs and businesses, to ensure that these strategies are grounded in the current and future needs of the local labour market.

Daniel Zeichner MP then interjected, asking about the progress of the Accelerate East programme. *Harriet Fear, of Cambridge Ahead*, said that she had previously attended a board meeting for the programme, and that members were particularly keen on lowering the age that children start careers education to seven. Attendees from both the Careers and Enterprise Company and Lowestoft Rising mentioned that it was important that local politicians pressure the Department for Education to give the issue of primary careers education more attention.

Neil Hayes, the Chair of Hertfordshire LEP, asked the audience to focus to that part of the region. Whilst currently prosperous, he said, the local economy is “plateauing.” One of three main towns has run out of employment/enterprise space due to booming housing developments. If space is not available in Hertfordshire, companies will likely move into different regions or even countries. *Sir Henry Bellingham MP* then mentioned that employment space is a particular challenge for larger towns, but smaller towns are now keen to capitalise on this and create their own industrial estates.

Sir Henry, a Norfolk MP, asked if such a scheme could work in Hertfordshire. Mr Hayes said it could, but there would need to be coordination between neighbouring LEPs in order to keep ‘homeless’ businesses within the area. He also suggested such a scheme could work within the entire East of England.

Gemma Head, of the East of England Energy Group, said that the region desperately needs to collaborate more, describing it as a “messy picture” for industry and education. She said there is a lot of ‘good will’ for the energy sector in the region - as evidenced by earlier portions of this meeting – but there is no one coordinating this good will. Daniel Zeichner MP agreed; as there is a stronger tradition of working partnerships in other regions (such as the North of England), but because the East of England is much more diverse, partnerships will need work.

Dr Andy Williams, Vice President of Cambridge Strategy and Operations at AstraZeneca, reiterated the importance of the life sciences sector in the region. One particular challenge of the sector is that it is very difficult to exactly define the skills employees need. As a result, life sciences partnerships need to “aggregate demand” to lessen skills shortages. Presently, skills policy starts nationally and trickles down to a regional level. In order to be properly effective, this must change.

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Daniel Zeichner MP suggested that Local Industrial Strategies could be of help in aggregating demand, whilst *Doug Field* added that skills provision must emphasise ‘upskilling’ and ‘cross-cutting’ skills to meet needs.

4. Conclusions

Peter Aldous MP suggested that, because of the region’s key industries, there should be a focus on STEM in education and skills provision. He suggested this should begin at the primary school level, as he remembered a local pilot scheme a few years ago that sought to teach science to young children in a fun, accessible way. *Dr Andy Williams* mentioned that AstraZeneca has a ‘teaching lab’ for this purpose, but logistics and bureaucracy prevent them from extending this region-wide. Williams then raised the question of how to involve children who do not have an existing interest in science. *BT’s Giles Ellerton* said his company runs a ‘cross-curricular’ Barefoot Computing programme for non-STEM teachers in order to encourage further interest.

Peter Aldous MP concluded the meeting by stressing that the Group must follow through on the excellent points and ideas raised.

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