

Monday 25th July

Dear Andrea Jenkyns MP, Minister for Skills

Unfortunately, the diary of the previous Minister responsible for skills did not permit him to join the East of England APPG meeting on July 5th that considered how the region will meet its current and future employment and skills challenges. There was a very good discussion amongst Chambers of Commerce, LEPs, leading businesses, major infrastructure investors such as the Lower Thames Crossing and Parliamentarians, all informed by [the briefing paper](https://eastofenglandappg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/APPG-Employment-and-Skills-Briefing.pdf) prepared by the Centre for Public and Policy Engagement at the University of Essex. I would like to share the five main points that emerged.

First, the East of England has a richness of economic potential that the region’s partners and the Co-chairs of the regional APPG, are becoming more and more aware. It is home to very many of the industries of the future – agri-tech; agri-science; life sciences; renewable energy; technology and advanced engineering.  The East of England is truly the science and innovation region. It is a major International Gateway. And it will be the greenest region as it transitions towards the decarbonised economy of 2030. It could significantly help “turbo-charge” the economy of UK plc.

Second, opportunity and success bring their own challenges. There are currently 193,000 job vacancies and just 102,000 officially unemployed. The East of England is projected to deliver around 600,000 new jobs by 2036 indicating a workforce approaching 4 million rather than the current 3.2 million. There are questions and issues regarding the extent to which population growth will make up this shortfall not least regarding the housing and transport investment required. The East of England [was the fastest growing region in the period 2011 to 2021](https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censuspopulationchange/) – up 448,000 people or 8.3%. May we ask, is the region’s expected ongoing faster than average population growth factored into Government thinking and funding?

Third, increasing the economic activity of the existing population will clearly be part of the solution. This means making work attractive to those who for various reasons are not currently participating in the economy. There needs to be more part time work, more work for those with disabilities (visible and invisible) and, in short, more interesting and rewarding work. Unless this happens we are in danger of not having the people to realise these economic opportunities, generate economic growth and increase the tax take that would fund levelling up elsewhere in the UK.

Forth, we welcome the Government’s investment in skills and the wide range of policy initiatives that it has committed to. Partners are keen, for example, to engage with the full roll out of Local Skills Investment Plans (LSIPs) in the East of England. Indeed, the APPG meeting demonstrated there can be confidence in the capacity of regional employers, both private and public – and indeed employees and their representatives – to work together and identify and deliver the skills of the future.

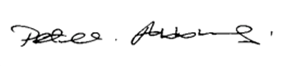
Page 2

Indeed, the devolution of skills funding, including for adult education and apprenticeships, should accompany the establishment of LSIPs and Chambers of Commerce should be given capacity funding to take forward their responsibilities including working with relevant partners in their localities and building on the legacy of DfE funded Skills Advisory Panels and their Local Skills Reports.

Fifth, to create the workforce for the economy of the future – one more skilled in data; renewable and hydrogen energy; construction; health and social care; life-sciences and agri-tech – is a challenge not just for BEIS and DfE but also DLUHC, DCMS and HMT. A joined-up Whitehall response is required because creating this workforce requires not just good early years, primary, secondary, further and higher education but also the right curricula, a ramping up of in-house skills training, better transport connections, enhanced digital connectivity and more affordable housing. There is also a growing shortage of tutors that needs to be addressed.

Partners of the East of England APPG would appreciate your perspective on the issues raised above and invite you to address the Group to discuss how we can better work together to address them at a date in the future that suits your diary. It would certainly be an unfortunate and unnecessary wasted opportunity - for UK plc as well as those who live and work in the region - if the massive economic and workforce potential of the East of England was not to be realised. Please ask your office to liaise with Steve Barwick of the APPG Secretariat – [steve@devoconnect.co.uk](mailto:steve@devoconnect.co.uk) – who has sent this email on my behalf.

Yours sincerely

                                                                        **Peter Aldous MP                                                            
Co-Chair**

**East of England**

