



East of England
All Party Parliamentary Group

Co-Chairs Peter Aldous MP and Daniel Zeichner MP

Vice-Chairs Baroness Janet Cohen, Jonathan Djanogly MP, Matt Hancock MP, Lord Alan Haselhurst, Rachel Hopkins MP, Lord Stewart Jackson, Gagan Mohindra MP, Priti Patel MP, Andrew Rosindell MP, Giles Watling MP

Secretary Clive Lewis MP

Treasurer Dr Dan Poulter MP

Levelling Up Skills in the East of England

10 to 11:15 am, Wednesday 19th July, in the Jubilee Room, Houses of Parliament

MINUTES

Welcome and introductions

- **Peter Aldous MP and Daniel Zeichner MP, Co-Chairs, East of England APPG**
 - *Welcomed all to the meeting including keynote speaker, panellists and audience*
 - *Remarked that the Levelling Up report prepared by the APPG with EELGA and other partners had identified low confidence that the skills target in the White Paper would be delivered.*

Keynote speaker

- **Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education**
 - *Complimented both Co-chairs of the APPG - Daniel for championing universities in a thoughtful way and Peter for supporting further education so well*
 - *Remarked that his first ever speech in the Commons was on skills and apprenticeship and that this is his passion*
 - *Very proud of East of England – great people like Essex’s Ruth Gilbert and great companies like AstraZeneca*
 - *Said he believes in a “ladder of opportunity” that starts with careers advice and includes qualifications, skills, lifelong learning*
 - *Chancellor has 4 Es and I have 3Ps – place, privilege and prestige.*
 - *You can’t maximise opportunity without social justice and social justice is rooted in areas where people live.*
 - *Harlow College inspired me and still informs my thinking.*
 - *I am supportive of devolution – 60 percent of Adult Education Budgets have already been devolved and there is a commitment to devolve further*
 - *There are also deals for Norfolk and Suffolk as well as Local Skills Improvement Plans which bring HE and FE together with Chamber of Commerce.*
 - *Local places are identifying local skills needs which is right.*
 - *There are good examples of East of England’s LSIPs identifying the skills needs of the future eg agri-tech and life science*
 - *This government has also spent £2.8bn on capital expenditure in the skills sector*
 - *Institutes of Technology will be flagship of the future – level 4 level 5 – people will get good jobs from local employers. The South East Essex IoT will be excellent.*

- *It cannot be said that we don't invest in East of England or in skills*
- *There are 5,000 apprenticeships in East of England*
- *We have lifted the cap on apprenticeships with small businesses*
- *It will be transformative when students applying for university can see on UCAS application forms apprenticeship opportunities*
- *Degree apprenticeships are not just about management*
- *There is an obsession with Oxford and technology is treated as not as good / second class*
- *I want to see a skills revolution – want to ensure every single place has skills including neglected places eg Suffolk*
- *I also want to raise the prestige of technical education – so that the UK is seen in the same positive way as Switzerland and Germany for vocational education.*

Questions

- *Peter Aldous raised IoTs and asked if Government would revisit the application for an East of England IoT which had been turned down?*
- *Robert Halfon replied to say there are 12 now and will be 21 – however his passion is for as many IoTs as possible so please do everything you can to champion this agenda*

- *Andy Sparks from Essex Chamber of Commerce said the system is very bureaucratic – know plan is to cut this but could that be speeded up?*
- *Robert Halfon replied to say he hates paperwork – and that he was aware that Harlow College already had ten audits this year. Please send egregious examples but he added that in cutting bureaucracy it is important not to diminish quality*

- *Toby Warren of Suffolk Chamber of Commerce said employers are more focussed on skills rather than qualifications – can we move more towards this approach? Also businesses often need “bite size” training opportunities for employees.*
- *Robert Halfon replied that the lifelong learning entitlement will be transformative. Every single adult can borrow £37,000 and people can choose what to learn and when*

- *Dean Pierpoint of Norfolk Chamber of commerce asked what more can we do to engage independent providers.*
- *Robert Halfon said he would look into that but Further Education do already engage with independent providers and it is up to them to do so more*

- *Jan Feeney of Norfolk county council said she was delighted to hear about the Minister's passion for apprenticeships and called for more flexibility regards the use of the Levy.*
- *Robert Halfon replied to say that if there are examples of inflexibilities please write to me*

- *Cllr Anna Smith Anna said it is important that performance measures league tables don't inadvertently stop good courses that meet needs but don't appear on official measures. She welcomed moves towards skills devolution so far and said the next step is to create a seamless service, with greater devolution of funding and powers*
- *Robert Halfon replied to say that 60% of AEB budget devolved – the Government have gone a long way towards devolution but there does need to be accountability.*

- *Jacqui Hall from AstraZeneca said the company has achieved great success with apprenticeships but it's been very hard work. How can we make the system simpler?*
- *She also said that AZ is keen that degree level apprenticeships remain in place, with the ability to retain an independent university qualification that is recognised both within the UK and internationally.*
- *Robert Halfon replied to say that his dream is that 50% of degrees are apprenticeships. We are trying to simplify – please write to me sooner rather than later. Watch this space.*

- *Claire Pike of Anglia Ruskin University said that ARU hosts around 3,000 degree apprentices and shares the Minister's enthusiasm. Going forward how can universities work in lockstep to upscale?*
- *Robert Halfon replied to congratulate ARU on its new medical school, with first cohort of graduating students, and pointed out that a growing percentage of clinical staff will be from apprenticeships by 2030. He also pointed out that 90% of apprenticeships get jobs, often for life.*
- *Robert Halfon also mentioned forthcoming simplification of regulatory structures and processes, and said that universities should keep promoting degree apprenticeships to their networks of employers. Robert Halfon invited Claire Pike to write to him on what measures would be helpful for universities to upscale degree apprenticeship provision.*
- *Claire Pike mentioned the role of flexi-job apprenticeship agencies in helping SMEs engage with apprenticeships, with which Robert Halfon agreed.*

- *Dr Ruth Gilbert of Essex County Council asked what the Government was doing to 'join up' and present the various support services/training opportunities available in England, to ensure individuals and support services (like Essex County Council) may access/present support services and training opportunities collectively.*
- *The Minister responded with reference to the Government's planned 'one stop shop' website, to be launched at the end of this year.*
- *Dr Gilbert said that it was important the Government presents options and opportunities by age/stage/life transition points e.g. choosing sixth form/post 16 options at 15, or returning to work/ changing careers, 'earn and learn' options. There is a need to avoid singular 'product' campaigns (e.g. T levels) in favour of 'know your options' so that young people and adults may make informed choices e.g. across A levels, T levels, apprenticeships and jobs.*
- *She also raised the inequity created by lack of funding for transport for industry placements (for example for T levels) and for work experience, impeding Levelling Up. The cost of travelling to Ford from Canvey Island can be prohibitive. If we can see what the barriers are then we can do something about it. The point here is the imperative to ensure in Levelling Up areas individuals are work-ready and work available – this agenda is not just about courses and certificates.*

- *In conclusion, Robert Halfon said thank you to all in the audience and on the panel for what they are doing in East of England to build the skills nation. He said he wanted Essex and the whole of the East of England to be the flagship for skills.*
- *Peter Aldous MP said thanks to the Minister for his passion and vision and added that the Co-chairs will in due course be writing to him with the key conclusions from the meeting.*

Panel:

- **Cllr Anna Smith, Deputy Mayor of C&PCA and spokesperson on skills for EELGA**

- *Anna informed attendees she was a former post-16 teacher and leader so it is great to be in a room with people who care so much about education and skills*
- *She said she wants to make the case for local government's role in the skills agenda and in that respect it had been encouraging to hear what the Minister said*
- *She pointed out councils do not have monopoly of wisdom but are now much better at partnership. Well placed to convene business and learning providers*
- *There must be enough funding and a "single pot" with local discretion in order to make sure get the right skills to the right people*
- *Also need to think creatively and to consider connectivity – the Multiply maths bus is a great initiative as it took learning to people and 77% of job seekers outside London do not have a car.*
- *Skills policy is therefore also about bus reform and getting better transport – including overdue improvements to Ely Junction.*
- *Anna concluded by telling the story of 'Grace' a BTech student who is at a school in an area where there are too many young people not in education or employment (NEET). It takes her 90 minutes to get to school and she was skipping lunch to pay for it. There must be meaningful local funding and provision that can help support her get the skills to get on in life.*

- **Jacqueline Hall, Head of Early Careers, AstraZeneca**

- *Jacqueline gave an overview of early careers with AstraZeneca whose HQ is on the Cambridge bio campus. Here there will soon be 2,500 scientists of which 200 are 'early career' scientists. Of those, 126 are apprentices*
- *She explained that AZ's programme of apprenticeships has grown massively and now brings diverse groups into apprenticeships. 80% stay with us.*
- *AZ has also passed on unused apprenticeship levy to the London and East of England ambulance services.*
- *A more simple system of skills funding would make huge difference so that short courses are eligible and smaller companies can take up apprenticeships more easily.*
- *She concluded by saying that despite being one of most prosperous regions, the East of England does suffer from low uptake of skills*

- **Professor Claire Pike, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education Enhancement), Anglia Ruskin University**

- *Claire began by explaining that 3,000 of ARU's current students are apprentices – 10% of the total - this is higher than national average, which is 5%*
- *ARU recently announced merger with Writtle University College and it is also a member of the University Alliance mission group, which is the voice of professional and technical universities.*
- *ARU is very invested in education that supports the economy, especially the public sector.*
- *It runs apprenticeship courses in a range of economically/publicly relevant subjects including: healthcare/nursing; policing; construction, engineering and the built environment; business and management; digital and data science; and laboratory sciences.*

- ARU's door is always open to employers, to co-create courses to meet current and future industry needs.
- ARU recently started a new degree apprenticeship in Laboratory Science. This is highly relevant for the region, where consultancy consistently shows a skills gap for people to run and manage laboratories in the thriving Cambridge innovation sector. ARU has created an articulation agreement with the Cambridge Academy of Science and Technology (CAST), whereby students from CAST's T-level in Laboratory Sciences can progress to the cognate degree apprenticeship.
- She stated that the Laboratory Science example is a positive, linear interaction between FE, HE and employers; a systems-level approach is needed. We need to build pathways, ladders and bridges between skills, education and training opportunities for learners and employers, in an ecosystem-wide manner.
- She concluded by informing attendees that ARU is working with Innovate Cambridge and Cambridge University Health Partners, supported by the Lifelong Learning Institute, to deliver an Opportunities Hub to do this. Building on the Minister's announcement of a 'one-stop shop' website to articulate available education, skills and training offerings, the Opportunities Hub would be a staffed service to: co-ordinate employers' needs with education providers who can fulfil those needs; perform horizon-scanning to provide key recommendations to skills challenges – ranging from porters to global companies; inspire and raise aspirations of children in primary and secondary schools; and provide commercial/managerial mentorship to promising SMEs who are seeking to scale-up to become global companies.

- **Ruth Gilbert, Head of Employability and Skills, Essex County Council**

- Ruth started her comments by pointing out that the interconnectivity of services and initiatives is important in order to avoid duplication and ensure services are built around people's lives to empower them.
- At Essex County Council, we call it 'Project Jigsaw' – joining up pathways, ladders and bridges: sharing initiatives and information: and co-funding - to improve work and life choices and opportunity systems leadership.
- In Essex we say go big or go home – here are our three principles
 - a) Make sure people can make informed choices – careers services
 - b) Provide training brokerage – because there is a myriad of providers
 - c) Provide employer brokerage – liaising with industry to understand their needs
- Essex is seeking to improve informed choices by creating an all-age industry-led careers education service. For example, Ford don't want to be approached by 30 individual schools and can't help all of the hundreds of schools in Essex, individually, but could support a few 'shared' industry open days, schedule webinar career showcases, with Q&A online across schools and colleges. Essex County Council co-ordinate this service.
- Essex is also providing training brokerage. In South Essex we realised there were a large number of companies which needed technical skills but each was too small to attract specialist training providers (e.g. for advanced 'green' engineering). Essex County Council were able to work with such specialist providers including universities and independent providers to meet these "pooled" training needs.
- It also worked with partners to seed fund a limited South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS) apprenticeship as there was a demand for apprenticeships, but the numbers did not previously add up. Again, it was the Council that made this happen, but it is important to note that it is run by employers.

Questions and contributions:

- *Transport is a theme which we should highlight*
- *Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships are actually declining*
- *SMEs are still needing incentives*
- *Need to understand barriers and then go to schools and colleges with initiatives eg Autumn catch up and 'Boot Camps'.*
- *Functional skills are critical*
- *I am really worried about level 2*
- *We need to focus on declining industries and also emerging ones*
- *Skills are integral to the economic and social success of the East of England*
- *Need to build aspiration*
- *In future there will be 'chameleon' careers – if leaving school at 18 you are not going to be doing the same job for the 50 years until retire at 68*
- *Think differently – maybe what is needed is an HGV course*
- *We want a dynamic well trained population*
- *Don't always think like today: think differently*
- *Skills is a team game*
- *Tutor shortages are a major problem*
- *FE sector is critical*

Next steps what is the one thing the Government must do and what is the one thing those in the East of England must do?

- *Government needs to understand how skills interconnect with other issues and in that sense DfE needs to be more connected to BEIS, DWP, DLUHC and DfT*
- *More degree apprenticeships*
- *Transport is critical to skills*
- *There needs to be an IoT for whole of region – not just the one in South Essex*
- *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations must be central to the design of all skills and levelling up solutions – including considerations of the protected characteristics, but also caring responsibilities and financial accessibility of skills/education/employment provision.*
- *There needs to be inclusive design of education so more online learning – right courses for the right learners delivered in the right way*

● **Thankyou's: Peter Aldous MP, Co-chair, East of England APPG**

- *Peter informed attendees that the presentations, questions and points contributed will help inform the letter that the Secretariat will draft and which once approved will be sent to Robert after the meeting*
- *He thanked all the panellists and all the attendees as well as the partners of the APPG and the Secretariat*
- *The meeting ended with Peter informing attendees that the next meeting is on Levelling Up Digital and Physical Connectivity, Tuesday 12th September between 17:00 and 19.00pm, back here in the Jubilee Room*

ATTENDEES

Peter Aldous MP	MP for Waveney and Chair East of England APPG
Daniel Zeichner MP	MP for Cambridge and Chair East of England APPG
Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP	MP for Harlow and Minister for Skills
Ethan Harries	Office of Robert Halfon MP
Natalie Dilwarm	Office of Robert Halfon MP
Jo Churchill MP	MP for Bury St Edmunds
Cllr Anna Smith,	Deputy Mayor of C&PCA and spokesperson for EELGA
Jacqueline Hall,	Head of Early Careers, AstraZeneca
Professor Claire Pike,	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education Enhancement), ARU
Ruth Gilbert,	Head of Employability and Skills, Essex County Council
Matt Stewart	EELGA
Mike Archer	AstraZeneca
Tracey Cox	DfE
Annette Nott	DfE
Gemma Betney	Anglian Water
Lydia Dareheath	Anglian Water
Abi Nichols	England's Economic Heartland
Hanane Elmaarouf	England's Economic Heartland
Simon Papworth	Freeport East
Patrick Hall	London Stansted Airport
Owen Stratford	Infrastructure Matters
Lydia Thacker	Infrastructure Matters
Fliss Miller	Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority
Constance Anker	Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority
Chris Shimwell	Greene King
Emma Shearer	CityFibre
Ben Sampson	Voluntary Norfolk
Francesca Day	Essex County Council
David Hutt	Gleeds
Jan Feeney	Norfolk County Council
Sophie Skipp	EEEGR
Andy Sparks	Essex Chamber of Commerce
Toby Warren	Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Simon Allen	New Anglia LEP
Tom Lloyd	West Suffolk College
Richard Tunnicliffe	CBI
Daryl Keyworth	Careers and Enterprise
Rose Ryan	Careers and Enterprise
Jeff Joseph	Bouygues
Dean Pierpoint	Norfolk and Suffolk LSIP
Gareth John	First Intuition
Paula Hornett	Paula Hornett Skills Consultant
Steve Barwick	Secretariat for the East of England APPG

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The academic partners of the East of England APPG are the Centre for Public and Policy Engagement at the University of Essex, The University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University and the University of East Anglia.

