



## 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

SENT BY EMAIL 22<sup>ND</sup> AUGUST 2023

Dear Robert

### LEVELLING UP SKILLS IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND

As you know the East of England APPG addressed the issues of levelling up skills in the East of England at its meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> July and we would like to thank you again for addressing the Group and sparing so much of your valuable time.

As you know the meeting was informed by a background briefing – [here](#) – and heard from a number of excellent speakers, alongside yourself, including:

- **Cllr Anna Smith**, Deputy Mayor of C&PCA and spokesperson on skills for EELGA
- **Jacqueline Hall**, Head of Early Careers, AstraZeneca
- **Professor Claire Pike**, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education Enhancement), Anglia Ruskin University
- **Ruth Gilbert**, Head of Employability and Skills, Essex County Council

The meeting also benefited from a number of contributions from skills practitioners and business leaders across the East of England including, **Jan Feeney** of Norfolk County Council, **Dean Pierpoint** of Norfolk Chamber of Commerce and **Andy Sparks** from Essex Chamber of Commerce. A comprehensive summary of the meeting is attached.

As you will recall, discussion focussed on how Government can support the East of England's skills agenda and what else key players in the region can do to improve the skills of its residents.

As was made clear, the East of England has a rich and talented pool of both working aged people and school age young adults whom, with the right training and skills development, will create a skilled workforce for the region's future. However the recent '[Levelling up the East of England: 2023 – 2030](#)' report identified that skills shortages and mismatches of skills with local employer needs both currently and in the future is a real risk to the East of England's levelling up, net zero and growth agendas. To take just two examples - AstraZeneca's world-leading research and the major Lower Thames Crossing project – the need for an appropriately skilled workforce could not be clearer.

***Whilst there is much to be proud of in the East of England, including the high level of degree apprenticeship places, five key themes emerged at the meeting and we would be delighted if you were able to respond to them in turn either by letter or at a private meeting with ourselves in Whitehall:***

1. **The need for an East of England Institute of Technology:** As you know application for an East of England IoT was unsuccessful. Although we welcome the South East Institute based in Essex we believe there is a strong case for an East of England IoT given the need for a skilled pipeline for technical careers across Norfolk and Suffolk and beyond in order to meet demand from our key sectors – Clean Energy, Agri-food, ICT and digital creative, Health Informatics. Without a reliable and sustainable supply of technical professionals the East of England will not secure its place on the global stage as a globally recognised, technology-driven, creative and inclusive economy which is leading the transition to a post-carbon economy through sustainable food production and sustainable energy generation.



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2. **Simplification - of bureaucracy, brokerage and messaging.** The APPG heard clear calls for simplification in three key respects.
  - (i) There were loud and persistent calls for the bureaucracy that surrounds eligibility and access to skills training and apprenticeships to be made simpler for employers. AstraZeneca's experience was that if this were done so that short courses are eligible and smaller companies can take up apprenticeships more easily this would make a huge difference.
  - (ii) It is important to simplify and join up the advice to those seeking skills: the meeting heard of sub regional projects seeking to do this. One in Essex is dubbed 'Project Jigsaw' which seeks to join up at the County Council geography the various skills pathways, ladders and bridges and share initiatives and information so a seamless service is provided to the public. Meanwhile ARU are leading the development of an 'Opportunities Hub' – a staffed service which aims 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.
  - (iii) There was a plea for simplification of the Government's messaging so that instead of singular 'product' campaigns (e.g. for T levels) there is the promotion of a 'know your options' approach so that young people and adults may make informed choices e.g. across A levels, T levels, apprenticeships and jobs.
3. **Skills training is not just about certificates.** There was a strong sense that skills policy is not just about technical skills and certificates but also very much about ensuring individuals are work ready and can afford to access training. Not being work ready is often the greater barrier to employment. Being able to access to training means that the issue of transport costs for those on placements, short courses and further education should be addressed. The APPG heard this was particularly relevant to the goal of levelling up as for example the cost of travelling to Ford from Canvey Island can be prohibitive. In this respect, greater access to skills does not just depend on the right courses but also on issues such as bus reform.
4. **Skills devolution could and should move on apace.** Another clear theme that emerged was that the Government should promote "skills devolution" to allow opportunities for greater local oversight of skills funding and coordination across local partnerships. More than ever we need to work collaboratively to address the skills and labour market challenges faced by our region and to respond to the proposals set out within *the Government's White Paper, Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth*. Local Skills Advisory Panels which bring together employers, skills providers, local authorities and key local stakeholders to better understand and resolve skills mismatches at a local level will be at the centre of this but there is also a strong case for devolving more funding for skills and apprenticeships. Local authorities and combined authorities are best placed to convene, join up and work in partnership with Local Skills Improvement Partnerships to commission and deliver services.



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**5. Meeting the DLUHC target for skills will still require significant effort nationally and regionally.** Finally, returning to the issue of the Levelling Up White Paper target for skills a number of questions arise:

- (i) Is the White Paper target – “By 2030, 200,000 more people in England [therefore 20,000 in East of England] will have successfully completed high quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 [therefore 8,000 in East of England] more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas” – still a DfE target?
- (ii) Which parts of the East of England are defined as being “in the lowest skilled areas”?
- (iii) Given participation in further education and skills training in the region is at the lowest level in England how confident is the Department for Education that the levelling up skills target will be met; and if so what, if any, additional measures will deliver this?

In conclusion, partners in the East of England are ready to work with yourself and DfE officials to deliver on this all important agenda. We recognise its importance not just for the region but for UK plc, not just for levelling up but for economic growth and delivering net zero. We have recently agreed with DLUHC to work in conjunction with EELGA and other partners through a Levelling Up Delivery Partnership to make progress on skills as well as health, transport and housing. Officials from your department would be most welcome to support this initiative and they should contact [Adam.Thorp@eelga.gov.uk](mailto:Adam.Thorp@eelga.gov.uk).

Meanwhile if you or your officials have any questions regarding the content of this letter please contact Steve Barwick of the APPG Secretariat who has sent this letter on our behalf.

Yours sincerely

**Peter Aldous MP**  
Co-Chair  
East of England APPG

**Daniel Zeichner MP**  
Co-Chair  
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Sent on behalf of the co-chairs by Steve Barwick – [steve@devoconnect.co.uk](mailto:steve@devoconnect.co.uk) - East of England APPG Secretariat.

