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Dear Mr Barwick

Thank you for your email of 3 July to the Minister for Skills about skills provision, workforce demand and the delivery of national skills reforms across the East of England. Government ministers receive a large volume of correspondence and are unable to reply personally on every occasion. I have been asked to respond.

Thank you for setting out the East of England Skills Delivery Group's views on the opportunities and challenges facing skills provision in the region. I recognise the important role that employers, providers and local partners play in supporting economic growth and developing the skilled workforce needed to meet current and future demand.

Further Education Capacity and Investment
The Government is investing more than £570 million between 2026/27 and 2029/30 to expand college capacity and facilities, helping to train the next generation of construction workers and create more places for 16 to 19-year-olds. This investment will ensure more learners can access the education and skills they need to secure good jobs, progress in learning and contribute to economic growth.

We know that local areas understand their needs better than anyone. That is why £283 million of the total £570 million capital investment has already been allocated to Strategic Authorities to ensure investment supports regional priorities.

Skills Devolution
Your proposal regarding skills devolution in the East of England has been carefully noted. The Minister welcomes the valuable contribution of the East of England Skills Delivery Group and the insights that employers, providers and local partners bring to discussions on meeting the region's current and future skills needs.

The Government recognises the important role that Strategic Authorities play in understanding local labour market needs and supporting economic growth. Strategic Authorities will have a stronger role in joining up skills, work, health and

transport interventions to tailor pathways to local employment opportunities and support local growth.

People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
You also highlighted concerns about the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and welcomed the publication of Alan Milburn's Review.

Alan Milburn's interim report, *Young People and Work*, published on 28 May, set out his assessment of the factors contributing to the rise in the number of young people who are NEET.

The next phase of the review will focus on identifying potential areas for reform to improve opportunities for young people, with a final report expected in the autumn. To inform his recommendations, Alan Milburn continues to engage with experts across the labour market, welfare and health sectors, as well as employers and people with lived experience.

Further information is available in the interim report, *Young People and Work*: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report.

Level 7 Apprenticeships
We continue to fund Level 7 apprenticeships for those aged 16 to 21, as well as for 22 to 24-year-olds who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or have been in local authority care.

We have no plans to reopen the decision on Level 7 apprenticeship funding. However, all current Level 7 apprentices who started before 1 January 2026 will be funded through to completion.

Given the benefits to businesses and employees, the Government is encouraging employers to invest in upskilling their staff aged over 22 to this level. Employers who wish to do so can privately fund Level 7 apprenticeships for staff aged over 22. Further information is available in the Government's guidance on privately funded apprenticeships: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-rules-2025-to-2026/privately-funded-apprenticeships-rules-and-guidance

Skills England
Skills England's Investment and Infrastructure Skills Service (IISS) is working with regional partners through the East of England Regional Skills Partnership, established jointly with the West Suffolk Construction and Technical Excellence Centre (CTEC). The Partnership brings together major infrastructure projects, including Anglian Water, Sizewell C, National Grid, East Anglia 3, the National Hospitals Programme, the School Rebuilding Programme and the Lower Thames Crossing, alongside DWP and other regional partners, to develop a shared understanding of current and future workforce demand.

Through the Partnership, Skills England has developed an initial workforce demand forecast based on data provided by anchor projects and is using this to assess

current provision against projected occupational needs, identify priority skills shortages and develop coordinated responses with employers, providers and government partners.

Engagement also includes local and strategic authorities, Chambers of Commerce and sector bodies such as the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB), helping to ensure that regional intelligence, employer insight and provider capacity inform future skills planning and investment decisions. A short-term secondment from a regional local authority into the IISS team is further strengthening local insight and supporting delivery.

This evidence-led approach is intended to ensure that skills investment reflects the workforce needs of the region's anchor infrastructure projects while creating opportunities for local people. Skills England is also working closely with the Construction Skills Mission Board to align regional and national workforce planning activity, strengthen the evidence base for investment decisions and avoid duplication.

As the Partnership develops, it is engaging providers and wider regional partners to coordinate the supply-side response to identified workforce priorities, with the Partnership providing strategic oversight and alignment across activity.

Skills England would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Chair of the East of England APPG to discuss this work in more detail and explore opportunities to further align activity across the region.

Thank you for your invitation to meet with members of the East of England Skills Delivery Group and to attend a future meeting of the East of England APPG and Skills Delivery Group. The invitation has been noted and shared with relevant officials.

The Government values the Group's continued engagement and commitment to supporting skills development, workforce planning and economic growth across the region.

I hope this reply is helpful. The Government looks forward to continued engagement on these important issues.

Niki Francis-Bentley
Head of the Ministerial Correspondence Team