



Greater Essex Skills Board
held on Teams
Tuesday 22nd July 2025 2pm – 4pm

Attendees

Joanne Giles – Essex Chambers of Commerce
Elaine Oddie – Essex Chambers of Commerce
Claire Wright – Rose Builders
Stuart Rimmer – Thames Freeport
Sarah Hamilton – Chelmsford College
Berenice Kude – Ford
Marcella MRaberty – London Stansted Airport
Brian Warrens – The Backstage Centre
Helen Clements – Morgan Sindall
Cllr Tony Ball – Essex County Council
Hyla Grimwade – Greater Essex Careers Hub
Jonathan Cuthbertson – Essex County Council
Kate Kozlova-Boran – Thurrock Council
Nick Brown – Southend City Council
Andy Wright – EPN
Lauren Philips – DWP
Karen Spencer – Harlow College
Ian Tompkins – West Essex Anchor Group NHS

1. Welcome, apologies, Minutes & Actions arising from previous meeting

- JG welcomes all Board members to the meeting.
- Board approve minutes from previous meeting 29th April 2025.

Apologies

Dave Cope – DWP, Lauren Philips attended in place
Paula Hornett – EPN
Natalie Bonnick – Lower Thames Crossing
Karris Rowbotham – DP World
Ann Scott – FSB
Tom Broome – Constellation Marketing
Denise Brown – South Essex Colleges Group
Janis Gibson – CAVS
Robert Walker – University of Essex



1. LSIP – status and activity

Joanne Giles shared updates on the publication of the June 2025 progress report and accompanying data reports, which showcase significant progress in skills development in Essex. She emphasized the importance of analysing the Individual Learner Record (ILR) data to identify gaps in delivery and mentioned ongoing projects, including the essential skills project led by Louise Aitken, which aims to create a consistent language for skills across sectors. Skills England had commented on all of the reports and could see that there was significant amount of progress that had been made with the work that has been taking place within Essex. I have to meet with Skills England on a quarterly basis and they do provide us with feedback that says we are an exemplar within the County and to be able to showcase with all of the other LSIPs in the work that takes place and the collaboration that takes place across all colleagues and all areas that you know they wish that other areas were as collaborative as Essex.

Joanne Giles discussed the anticipated funding updates, noting that the Treasury is expected to release funding for the ERBs from October to March, with a longer-term funding plan from April 2026 to 2028. Karen Spencer raised a question about the LSIF's continuation, and Joanne indicated that while infrastructure funding is likely to persist, it may revert to older funding models. Johnathon Cuthbertson provided additional context about the transition period and the evolving role of LSIPs within the new combined authority framework.

LSIP 2.0 – Planning and Employer Engagement

Joanne Giles discussed the active engagement of SMEs in the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), indicating that there is no sign of employer fatigue. She mentioned that draft guidance from Skills England is expected soon, which will clarify the roles within the combined authority and how the LSIP will align with the growth plan linked to the industrial strategy.

Discussion on AI Integration and Skills Development

Joanne Giles emphasized the importance of integrating AI into the skills development strategy, noting the potential carbon impact of AI technologies. Brian Warrens mentioned his involvement with Pot Studios and the Docking Station project, which focuses on AI applications. Helen Clements raised concerns about the risks of AI analysing its own content, suggesting that this should be addressed in the skills plan.



Employer Engagement and Strategic Collaboration

Joanne Giles highlighted the efforts to enhance employer engagement through a new strategic approach. Lauren Phillips informed the group about the DWP's operational changes and an upcoming meeting regarding the Hertfordshire Get Britain Working Plan, inviting collaboration. The discussion emphasized the importance of mapping existing employer engagement efforts and improving communication among stakeholders.

2. DWP Update LP – SWAPS

Lauren Phillips presented the quarter two swaps forecast for Essex, indicating a 50% decrease in expected swaps compared to the first quarter, primarily due to the summer break and funding issues faced by colleges. She noted that only four out of ten LSIP growth sectors are currently being supported and stressed the importance of ensuring that each swap has an employer linked to it to improve quality and outcomes for Jobcentre customers.

Discussion on Employer Engagement and Work Experience Challenges

Lauren Phillips discussed the importance of adapting to the labour market's needs and acknowledged the bureaucratic challenges faced by educational institutions and training providers. Karen Spencer pointed out that the system's rigidity, rather than a lack of willingness, is hindering flexibility in work experience placements. She proposed inviting the national guidance group to visit the academy to better understand these challenges.

Discussion on Vocational Training and Workforce Needs

Ian Tompkins highlighted the significance of vocational academies, such as the one in Stansted, and raised concerns about the availability of skilled workers, particularly care workers, amid ongoing regeneration efforts in Harlow. He stressed the importance of fostering partnerships between sectors and simplifying bureaucratic processes for work placements in schools. Ian Tompkins called for a collaborative approach to address these challenges effectively.

Collaboration on Course Participation and Job Centre Engagement

Sarah Hamilton expressed concerns about low attendance rates for courses, noting that only 47.8% of job centre referrals resulted in participants starting the courses. She requested support from Lauren Phillips and her team to improve engagement and ensure a sufficient number of referrals. Additionally, Sarah mentioned the introduction of boot camps as a valuable progression for participants after completing swaps.



Careers and Enterprise Hub – update

Hyla Grimwade provided updates on the work experience guarantee for students aged 11 to 16, which aims to ensure all young people receive a week's worth of work experience. She stressed the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders to prepare for this initiative and mentioned the need to dispel myths and provide training for employers to facilitate smoother feedback processes.

* Work Experience Guarantee: Discussion on the implementation and management of the new work experience guarantee for students.

Employer Engagement and Work Experience Strategies

Joanne Giles stressed the value of collaboration among employer engagement practitioners to maximize opportunities for apprenticeships and work experience. Marcella MRabety expressed the challenges of managing numerous requests for work experience and the importance of strategic feedback. Hyla Grimwade proposed a task and finish group to gather insights from employers and educators to enhance work experience initiatives, while Brian Warrens emphasized the role of technology in improving access to workplace experiences.

* Role of Parents: The importance of involving parents in the work experience process and how to effectively communicate with them.

3. Local Authority – skills and funding update

- **Essex County Council**

Cllr Ball – Year of Opportunity has started. There's a directory of events on the SEQ Year of Opportunity website, and there'll be a variety of events moving forward, engaging employers and the career system. Skills Boot Camps formally launched on the 1st of June and today we have 90 starters. Regarding Connect to work, we are pleased to say that we did get sign off from DWP and that's quite an achievement. Only five other areas in the country have been approved. The Digital Careers Tool, which was formerly the Essex Connector, sponsored by this board is continuing to be developed. What's interesting is that when we did some market testing, some new opportunities came to light, so we've explored but delayed the commissioning and now expect tenders to open in early autumn.

JC – I did my main update about the service that we've redesigned, the only substantive point I'll make there is, we'll be reaching out to colleagues in



due course to do introductions. The only other point to note is, building on the bootcamp point, we have the bootcamp program, which has been delivered very effectively with the colleges so far. Thank you very much to all of our college contacts who have delivered that as well as ACL. Commissioning will be live, and there'll be a directory of services going live on the opportunity's portal in the next couple of weeks with the confirmed providers, I'm happy to have a call with you directly on how we refer in for those from job centres because they're quite important.

- **Thurrock Council**

We're clearly discussing implications of devolution and Local Government Reform in relation to our adult skills and in relation to our career services so that's going through. We're behind Essex where there are structures that we're still contemplating different structures so perhaps in the autumn term we'll come up with one that's viable and that we're happy with. Doing a deep, neat dive and that kind of evolved into looking at the skills gap for all our residents in Thurrock, so we're going through that and hopefully that will finish in the autumn term. Boot camps, thank you, we're running a few, mainly concentrating and focusing on health and social care in early years, because that's a bread and butter offer from Thurrock Adult Community College. We are successfully delivering adult careers guidance, which is funded by I've still no decision from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, what that will look like from April 26th. And lastly, we did a very, very successful work experience project with Balfour Beatty and 15 NEET young people. It was a virtual work experience for two weeks and then culminated in a kind of Dragonstone scenario at Belford BT offices in Chafford Hundred so if anybody wants any information from that then myself and Lauren Edmonds from Balfour Beatty and Central Training who were able to accommodate the young people for those two weeks.

- **Southend on Sea City Council**

Really rich conversations going on and especially as we hurtle towards devolution. I see a lot of Johnathon at the minute. I think I need to tip my hat to Hyla and the Careers Hub for their annual meeting, which was really good. A feather in the cap for Hyla and a good nod to the work that's happening there. Working with Johnathon Cuthbertson and Essex around



Hyla's program, so for those of you who don't know, that's our sort of entry level kind of qualification into social care work and we're just working through whether we can continue that. That's been going now for almost four years. A bit like what Kate's speaking to UKSPF, we're still delivering those successfully through system partners here in Southend, but again, don't know what's coming, or if anything is indeed coming. Part of the devolution, LGR conversations and how skills fit into that. We're also looking at legacy around one of our programmes that ran out of money after 10 years, National Lottery funded, A Better Start. That was a very successful project for getting parents who'd been away from the workplace for several years and perhaps lacked confidence, offering them taster sessions back into various different industries to get them to try and build their confidence to go back into the workplace. Within the team, we are trying to do something internally at Southend where we're trying to take a lead within Southend about our models for signposting to all these different offers around the skills landscape and we're also trying to embed external funding opportunities into a corporate package so we can signpost internally across various different services like adult social care, corporate parenting responsibilities etc.

Greater Essex Skills Devolution Preparation Discussion

Johnathon outlined the significance of preparing for the devolution of powers in Essex, which will commence in May 2026, and the role of skilled professionals in shaping the skills strategy. Jo emphasized the necessity of compiling a document that presents the challenges and risks associated with the skills system, aiming to guide the future mayor. The discussion included the importance of employer engagement and strategic commissioning in the skills landscape.

Actions:

- Joanne Giles will circulate the AI-generated notes of the meeting to all participants.
- Joanne Giles will publish the minutes of the last meeting on the board.
- Joanne Giles will analyse the ILR data over the summer and throughout the autumn to identify gaps in delivery.
- Louise Aitken will lead the essential skills project and work closely with colleges and independent training providers.



- Joanne Giles will circulate the draft guidance from Skills England regarding the new local skills improvement plan to the board.
- Lauren Phillips will ask her teams to plan swaps in specific growth sectors between October and December.
- Hyla Grimwade will work with partners to prepare for the implementation of the work experience guarantee starting from September 26.
- Hyla Grimwade will share the link to the EqualX model in the chat for further information on work experience.
- Hyla Grimwade will consult with employers and educators to gather feedback on work experience programs and identify what is working and what is not.
- Joanne Giles will provide updates on the piece of work regarding devolution preparation to the group and the board.

4. AOB