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**Greater Essex Skills Board
held at Launchpad, Southend
Tuesday 21st October 2025 2pm – 4pm**

Attendees

Joanne Giles	–	Essex Chambers of Commerce
Denise Rossiter	–	Essex Chambers of Commerce
Elaine Oddie	–	Essex Chambers of Commerce
Lewis Whybrow	–	Essex Chambers of Commerce
Helen Clements	–	Morgan Sindall
Hyla Grimwade	–	Greater Essex Careers Hub
Jack Daniels	–	Essex County Council (Via Teams)
Kate Kozlova-Boran	–	Thurrock Council
Nick Brown	–	Southend City Council
Paula Hornett	–	Essex Provider Network (Via Teams)
Lauren Philips	–	Department of Work and Pensions
Ian Tompkins	–	West Essex Anchor Group NHS
Cherie Leavy	–	Lower Thames Crossing (Via Teams)
David Warnes	–	Chelmsford College
Jayne Sheehan	–	South Essex College Group
Hollie Wood	–	Active Essex
Peter Kay	–	Tarmac
Liz Storey	–	SEATS
Rachel Brown	–	University of Essex (Via Teams)

Welcome, apologies, Minutes & Actions arising from previous meeting

- Jo Giles welcomes all Board members to the meeting.
- Board approves minutes from previous meeting 22nd July 2025.

Apologies

Jonathan Cuthbertson	-	Essex County Council, Jack Daniels attended in place
Karen Spencer	–	Harlow College
Natalie Bonnick	–	LTC, Cherie Leavy attended in place
Stuart Rimmer	–	Thames Freeport
Tom Broome	–	Constellation Marketing
Marcella McRaberty	–	Stanstead Airport
Berenice Ford	-	Ford
Claire Wright	–	Rose Builders

Denise Rossiter – CEO update

Denise posed the question to the group, “What value the LSIP provides to businesses and providers, after 3 years of the project being in action?” What are the tangible results that have been achieved? and how can they be presented more effectively. This is particularly with reference to employer engagement within the private sector and finding case studies that can articulate that benefit. Joanne Giles confirmed this as a priority for the upcoming LSIP 2.0 report.

The question was initially addressed by Nick Brown and Hyla Grimwade, who highlighted the fatigue businesses feel around this discussion. From their perspective, the main challenge lies in engaging employers who are unaware of LSIP’s existence. Without the central voice that LSIP provides, navigating the various policies and commissioned projects becomes difficult and discouraging for them.

Lauren Philips added that Essex LSIP is more advanced in terms of results and awareness compared to LSIPs in other regions, citing several examples. David Warnes noted that the roundtables are particularly valuable for influencing the broader structure. Helen Clements emphasized that these discussions help businesses identify common pressure points and express concerns—especially regarding how current apprenticeships are failing to meet the needs of those completing them.

Jayne Sheehan highlighted that the current focus is on individuals who are not in employment, while upskilling existing employees is often overlooked. Employers tend to find it easier to hire people who are already skilled rather than invest in training their own staff. This view was echoed by Hyla Grimwade and Helen Clements, who noted that many SMEs lack the capacity to engage in training due to time and financial constraints.

The LSIP has been effective in working with small businesses, meeting them directly to build traction for training and address their needs. Importantly, this engagement does not need to be council-led, as small businesses often hesitate to interact with councils. Instead, they require clear signposting and practical support, which LSIP can provide through networking opportunities and roundtable discussions.

Nick Brown and Ian Tompkins steered the discussion toward the significant amount and value of work LSIP has delivered despite operating on a limited budget. They noted that conversations around skills in the county are ongoing, yet employers often feel fatigued because larger authorities and central government seem disconnected from the core issues. A key challenge lies in the delay between immediate policy actions and their long-term impact on learning and employment ecosystems.

Hyla Grimwade and Jo Giles emphasised that LSIP’s purpose is to lobby for the right changes and move away from simply “firefighting” short-term problems, as guided by reports, roundtables, and board discussions. Denise had previously mentioned that case studies demonstrating LSIP’s successful influence on policy, curricula, and businesses could help focus larger authorities on the right priorities.

David Warnes added that, from his perspective as an education provider, roundtables offer direct opportunities to understand what businesses need and to shape syllabuses accordingly, producing graduates better prepared for employment. He expressed willingness to be featured in case studies.

Finally, Jo Giles proposed that the board collectively write to Skills England to highlight key frustrations and demonstrate that LSIP has exceeded its requirements. This would position the board to request evidence of change from Skills England, showing that LSIP's research and input are being acknowledged. The board agreed that Jo will draft the letter on their behalf.

Denise Rossiter thanked us for the discussion and left the meeting.

Elaine Oddie – Update on accounts and funding

Elaine opened the section by outlining the approval process for funding through the Department for Work and Pensions and Skills England. She confirmed that the budget for the next six months has been approved, which includes a telemarketing campaign aimed at reaching businesses and ensuring their voices are heard.

Nick Brown and Ian Tompkins expressed support for this expenditure, noting that the work achieved so far has been substantial, not only within individual sectors but also in fostering connections between them. They highlighted that keeping plans simple and relevant has encouraged smaller businesses to participate.

Helen Clements added that businesses are increasingly fatigued by repeated conversations that fail to result in meaningful action from decision-makers. While employers are willing to discuss their skills shortages, they need to see tangible steps being taken to address these gaps. She emphasised that policy changes often operate on long timelines and are not communicated through channels that provide clear feedback to businesses.

Joanne Giles – Update on LSIP Roadmap

Jo began by explaining the updates previously made to the annual LSIP reports and how these will inform the development of the second iteration of the LSIP. She emphasised that this work is not carried out solely by her and the LSIP team, but also involves contributions from local authorities, businesses, and providers. Their input helps determine progress against the previous plan and identify priorities moving forward.

Jo then posed a question from an employer's perspective: What more can we, as a collective board, do to strengthen collaboration? She noted that employers are unlikely to view the report as a clear reflection of the work being done, highlighting the need for more visible engagement.

Liz Storey responded by reframing the question, asking what board members can do to make the plan easier for Jo and more digestible for its intended audience. She also asked about the key challenges in articulating the plan to government.

Jo explained that these issues are common across all 39 LSIPs. While regular meetings with Skills England and the Department for Education provide opportunities for intermittent feedback, the

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frustration for all LSIPs is that this feedback is not consistently reflected in released policies, a sentiment echoed by the rest of the board.

Jo then steered the conversation toward the difficulties of engaging SME businesses. It is often unclear how to translate the LSIP into language that SMEs understand, enabling them to see its benefits and take advantage of available apprenticeships. This led to a discussion between Jayne Sheehan and Helen Clements, who expressed concern that central government appears to be missing the core message LSIPs are trying to convey. They noted that policies such as foundation apprenticeships do not address the fundamental issues LSIPs aim to resolve.

David Warnes, Ian Tompkins, and Hollie Wood shifted the discussion toward identifying the key skill elements missing from current policy. A recurring theme from roundtables, private discussions, and board meetings is that soft skills, along with resilience and independence to learn and improve, are areas where the current system is failing.

The lack of understanding and ability to manage these skills within businesses is so significant that it calls for a fundamental shift starting at lower education levels. This would ensure that individuals entering the workforce possess the essential skills needed to engage effectively in their careers.

Rachel Brown highlighted the challenge of integrating these skills into curricula that are heavily focused on end-point assessments. David Warnes noted that upcoming curriculum reviews present an ideal opportunity to implement these changes, but as Rachel pointed out, these reviews are likely to overlook this need.

Helen Clements shifted the discussion to the government's expectations of employers regarding upcoming changes to work experience. She noted that the wide range of placement opportunities being requested, such as T Levels, apprenticeships, outreach programs, traditional block placements, and day placements, often creates challenges for employers. Health and Safety requirements and compliance constraints mean that businesses cannot always offer all types of placements, and these should be more targeted based on each business's capabilities.

Hyla Grimwade added that while larger companies may have the flexibility to explore and provide multiple options, many SMEs tend to give up after looking online, rather than reaching out to experts like herself who can simplify the language and make the process feel more accessible.

Hollie Wood and Liz Storey shared that, from their experience, the main difficulty in coordinating SMEs for work experience and apprenticeships is the time investment required. SMEs often struggle to find cover for their operations while delivering these opportunities, a challenge that also applies to upskilling their current employees.

Jo Giles summarised the discussion by asking whether the most meaningful measure of LSIP's impact should be case studies where employers identified skills shortages and, through LSIP's work, were connected to the right providers to address those gaps. Liz Storey questioned whether smaller businesses even recognise their own skills gaps initially, suggesting that revising the terminology to empower SMEs might encourage them to engage and share this data more effectively.

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Paula Hornet joined via Teams and noted that, from her perspective, value for money is reflected in LSIP's reach. She agreed with Lauren Phillips that Essex LSIP is significantly ahead of other regions in terms of influence and collaboration, creating a strong ecosystem around skills development. Paula added that when comparing LSIP's spend to other initiatives like Connect to Work, the outcomes are equally beneficial but achieved on a much smaller budget.

Nick Brown, Helen Clements, and Peter Kay expanded on Paula's points, observing that policy often moves in cycles, with governing bodies attempting to "reinvent the wheel" to claim ownership of successes. They noted that the scale at which these bodies operate prevents them from accommodating bespoke training or qualifications tailored to specific industry sectors.

Joanne Giles – Update on LSIP 2.0

Jo introduced this section by outlining the upcoming changes expected with LSIP 2.0 and the new statutory guidance to be released. A key shift will be the transition of responsibility from the Department for Education to the Department for Work and Pensions, bringing different mindsets and expectations regarding the plan's outputs.

To prepare for this, fifteen roundtables have been scheduled to address the plan within each relevant sector and to maximize the involvement of local authorities. Jo then asked the group if there were any additional actions they would like to propose, aside from including travel and tourism as a sector, which is already anticipated.

Kate Boran responded by emphasising the importance of breaking down skills requirements within each sector and gathering detailed feedback directly from employers. She agreed with adding travel and tourism, noting that in Thurrock, the docks and airports serve as a source of inspiration for young people and help spark interest in joining the workforce. However, she highlighted a key challenge: skills teams within local authorities and organisations like LSIP are small and lack the capacity to maintain expertise and influence across every sector.

Nick Brown added that Southend is difficult to leverage through green initiatives. While there are wind farms and related opportunities, these are not routed through councils, and the roles available are highly specialised, requiring only a small number of staff. He further noted that devolution will significantly impact employment and opportunities, but with so many uncertainties around governance, there are currently no guarantees or clear ways to proceed without venturing into speculation.

Jo Giles invited Jack Daniels to share any Essex County Council updates via Teams. Jack summarised ECC's partnership with LSIP in developing both the first and second iterations of the plan, noting that the plan aligns well with ECC's priorities. He highlighted Visit Essex as an organisation that plays a key role in promoting the region and collaborating with businesses reliant on the travel and tourism market, making it an effective channel for reaching SMEs in that sector. Jack suggested that similar organisations could be leveraged to engage other sectors in the same way.

Jo then asked Rachel Brown how the government's focus on skills in higher education has influenced their university's strategy and course offerings. Rachel explained that their direction

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is currently in flux due to the appointment of a new chancellor and the lack of clarity on priorities for the upcoming academic year. She noted that the university faces a choice between strengthening existing business links in areas where they already provide apprenticeships and higher education, or diversifying into additional sectors, a decision that will be heavily influenced by the institution's financial position and available incentives.

Ian Tompkins highlighted that the key sectors for his area around Harlow include construction, Stansted Airport and its surrounding infrastructure, and health and life sciences. This prompted a discussion on whether the current focus on higher education (HE) is appropriate or if greater emphasis should be placed on lower levels of training and education.

Helen Clements raised concerns about apprenticeship policy, questioning whether its strong focus on outcomes limits the ability to tailor courses to the specific needs of the industries they represent. This also led to a broader debate on whether other HE courses are fit for purpose, or if the modules offered restrict graduates' suitability for certain roles.

Jo responded that identifying which industries require which qualifications is a core function of LSIP. This evidence feeds into the action plan used to lobby central government, enabling adjustments to the apprenticeship levy to better serve employers and educators, and incentivizing appropriate funding through local authorities, particularly under devolution.

Nick Brown then questioned whether such changes could risk creating a bidding war if commissioners are not fully informed about the county's needs.

Hyla Grimwade questioned whether having 11 key sectors dilutes the focus, noting that very few industries are excluded under the current coverage and expressing concern that this could overstretch the team. Jo responded that this breadth is necessary because it reflects the unitary and county growth areas; given the size of the county, LSIP must represent all its industries.

Jayne Sheehan agreed with LSIP's new focus, adding that upskilling within the education sector is already managed effectively internally. She suggested that spending too much time on areas outside LSIP's influence is inefficient, and concentrating on specific sectors is more productive.

Jo explained that while there is no fixed template for the report, statutory guidance is followed to ensure it effectively advises the local authority on commissioning skills, particularly as the county moves toward devolution, with Essex County Council taking on centralised authority for this process.

Lauren Phillips – DWP Update

Lauren opened the section by outlining the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) projections and objectives, including a guarantee of work experience placements for any young person unemployed for 18 months. She requested feedback on how to make this happen, acknowledging the challenges involved. While specific details are still pending, the requirement for more work experience is clear, currently, 200 people have started placements in Essex, but the target is closer to 1,000. Lauren also noted a data issue: youth statistics are grouped as ages 18–24, whereas they need 18–21, causing delays as data must be manually adjusted. Each placement will need to last two weeks.

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David Warnes asked if the initiative would resemble the Kickstart scheme. Lauren confirmed it would be similar but on a smaller scale, as eligibility is limited to those aged 18–21 who have been out of work or education for 18 months. Like Kickstart, it could involve guaranteed payment for 30 hours over six months, though the policy is not finalised. Helen Clements raised concerns about management and KPIs if the model mirrors Kickstart. Kate Boran and David Warnes commented that Kickstart had high retention rates and worked well. Lauren requested employer feedback on Kickstart, as she was not involved in DWP at the time. Kate questioned whether the target audience would be on Universal Credit and eligible, or if barriers to work prevent them from being visible to DWP.

Helen Clements added that this demographic requires more time and effort to train, asking how the scheme will be made manageable for SMEs that cannot invest heavily in time or money. She suggested including pastoral care to support participants and reduce the burden on employers.

Jo Giles emphasised the need to articulate the value clearly for SMEs, presenting it as an opportunity to take someone on with financial support for a set period. She proposed hosting an event to communicate this in simple terms, suggesting December 15th as a webinar or workshop trial.

Lauren and Jo then discussed next steps for feedback ahead of the January board meeting. Lauren noted two main challenges: sourcing paid work experience for those unemployed for 18 months and arranging regular placements. The group, led by Hyla Grimwade, agreed that employer fatigue from repeated requests for opportunities is a major concern.

Ian Tompkins highlighted additional barriers, such as unclear job descriptions, complex application processes, and lack of employer support for candidates' personal challenges, issues he observed in the NHS. Jayne Sheehan responded that colleges are helping students navigate these processes and encouraging employers to simplify them.

Lauren concluded by thanking the group and sharing data showing significant local improvements linked to LSIP initiatives, including boot camps that are strengthening the skills landscape. While boot camps are still growing nationally, Essex has made major progress, with swap forecasts improving directly due to LSIP and college efforts. Lauren confirmed this data can be shared as a case study, noting it comes from the national dashboard, which limits detail. She also highlighted sector boot camps addressing logistics and agtech gaps. Jo requested comparative data against other areas, and Lauren stated that while full data isn't available, Essex performs significantly better than Hertfordshire in both quality and volume, with local collaboration improving markedly over the past six months.

Hyla Grimwade – Careers and Enterprise Hub Update

Unfortunately, due to time constraints this will be added to notes sent out and included in the next board meeting.

Actions

- Jo Giles will draft a letter to Skills England outlining key frustrations and feedback from the group to present at the upcoming meeting with Mel Collins.

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- Each participant to find three new people to invite to the next LSIP meeting to increase engagement.
- Jo Giles will explore the possibility of organizing supply chain events to connect small businesses with training providers and colleges.
- Paula Hornett will invite all independent training providers to bring along a representative from their employer network to the meeting on the 19th.
- Lauren Phillips and ECC will gather data on boot camps to provide a clearer picture of the current situation.
- Jo Giles will collaborate with Hyla Grimwade and DWP to present findings on work experience changes at the next Board meeting.

AOB