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Greater Essex Skills Board

held via MS Teams

Tuesday 20th January 2026 2pm – 4pm

Attendees

Joanne Giles	-	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
Fiona Marriage	-	Essex County Council
Kate Kozlova-Boran	-	Thurrock Council
Sarah Clark	-	Southend City Council
Katherine Ball	-	Essex Provider Network
Dave Cope	-	Department of Work and Pensions
Cherie Leavy	-	Lower Thames Crossing
David Warnes	-	Chelmsford College
Peter Kay	-	Tarmac
Rachel Brown	-	University of Essex
Claudia Girardone	-	University of Essex
Louise Searley	-	Searley Owen
Karen Spencer	-	FEDEC
Cllr Tony Ball	-	Essex County Council
Martin Beable	-	Greater Anglia
Claire Wright	-	Rose Builders
Lucy Spencer-Lawrence	-	Southend City Council
Hayley Chapman	-	Active Essex
Matthew Harding	-	Thames Freeport
Marcella M'Raberty	-	Stansted Airport
Stuart Green	-	Genting Casino

Welcome, apologies, Minutes & Actions arising from previous meeting

- Jo Giles welcomes all Board members to the meeting.
- Board approves minutes from previous meeting 21st October 2025.

Apologies

Ann Scott, Stuart Rimmer (With Rep), Steve Mannix, Nick Brown (With Rep), Johnathon Cuthbertson (With Rep), Denise Rossiter.

Welcome to new members

With the circulation of the LSIP 2.0 happening this year, it has become more important to ensure that the board represents the key sectors as identified by the LSIP and local authorities across Essex. We have created a matrix to show our current distribution.

LSIP Sector	IS8 + 2 Sector	Board Rep	Roundtable Booked/Complete	
Manufacturing, Engineering & Aviation	Advanced Manufacturing	Y	2x Booked	Stansted Airport / Tarmac / Ford
AgriTech & Food Tech		Y	Complete	Ground Control
Community & Voluntary		Y	Complete	Active Essex / Mercury Theatre
Construction & the Built Environment	Construction	Y	1x Booked 1x Complete	Morgan Sindall / Rose Builders
Creative & Cultural	Creative Industries	Y		POT Studios / Mercury Theatre
DigiTech	Digital and Technologies		Booked	
Education		Y		FEDEC / UoE
Health, Social Care & Med Tech	Care	Y	1x Booked 1x Complete	Active Essex
Professional Services	Professional and Business Services	Y	1x Booked 1x Complete	Searley Owen
Transport & Logistics		Y	Need new host	Stansted Airport / LTC / E&S Water / GA
Travel & Tourism		Y	Booked	Genting Casino / Mercury Theatre
	Clean Energy Industries			
	Defence		(Part of Engineering)	
	Financial Services		(Part of Prof Serv RT)	
	Life Sciences		(Part of Care/Med Tech)	
	Sport and Leisure	Y		Active Essex

Jo mentions skills England have asked us to refine our priority sectors, we must have 6-8. The draft copy of our report will go to the board first for commentary, so that if there are any features of the sector missed that the board feels necessary to include, they will respond.

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Considering the missing elements, the board has been expanded to be inclusive of all the sectors necessary to represent. Jo then welcomes new board members.

Martin Beable	-	Greater Anglia
Hollie Wood (On leave)	-	Active Essex
Liz Storey	-	SEATS
Lousie Searley	-	Searley Owen
Stuart Green	-	Genting Casino
Steve Mannix	-	Mercury Theatre

Matters arising

At the last meeting it was agreed that Jo would draft a letter to Submit to Skills England outlining our key frustrations and feedback from the group. While no letter was written, Jo included it into our government response to Skills England. This is done on a quarterly basis and that feeds back up the chain. All the issues outlined were included, with specific precedence for the way that funding comes down not to us but to all the other organisations. One of the big risk areas raised by Jo was the fact of UKSPS funding not going to be available and what does that look like and short-termism regarding funding.

Jo mentions that an action point was to invite three people to the next meeting. The group then discuss the benefits of a larger board and if the point would be drowned out by too many voices. It is agreed that more people will be invited to the roundtables and events rather than the board. Helen Clements and Karen Spencer add the opportunity to engage SMEs and business with less of a vested interest in the skills area are through the more generic input sessions where they are freer to air grievances. Jo continues to agree, the point leads on from a major thread of the last meeting regarding the divide between education and business, both in the way they engage people and the language they speak. Louise suggests a sector specific one pager that would assist in addressing the divide, showing the 'So What' factor and speaking their language to boost their engagement.

Jo proceeds to highlight an example of an upcoming event that will specifically showcase the LSIPs outcomes and give direct tutelage to businesses that require assistance surrounding apprenticeships and funding benefits. Andy mead of finishing line is helping us to pull together this event using his success story on how to grow their organisations through connections to training and funds. The main objective of this is to get employers to understand the processes and successfully give employers access. Hyla suggests utilising the local district council to assist through their employer engagement processes. Katherine

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Ball suggests recording the event, this will however be included in the talking heads project with USP.

Update to accounts and funding

Elaine Oddie highlights the process changes from the DWP despite which, there have mostly been same staff dealing in general, making the handover seamless. Due to the change in who holds the LSIP, the financial year has been done in two halves of £110,000 each. £250,000 approved for the new year which will be enough to happily run the plan April to April. The full budget is still being constructed now but will look like previous iterations. Audited for a year in March.

Updates to LSIP Action Plan 2023-26

Jo opens the section by explaining how we need to be able to produce case studies from the action plan to show how we have moved the dial on skills and improved the areas of priority. There will be nothing that concludes the last plan as we move into LSIP 2.0, but we want to be able to show the impact we have made positively on employers with case specific examples. Jo asks what we as a board want to show and how would we show that to employers around the county, whether that's a document or article.

Karen opens the response by detailing how they have had to look at return on investment as a college and the cost/benefit to the economy of having skilled young people and the impact a pipeline like that it has on local economy. Karen would be happy to pass on their research for us to use as example. Other colleges should be able to provide similar where they have invested in courses and responded where their feedback through LSIP has taken place.

Fiona Marriage suggests infographics linking to specific bits of work that have been undertaken and using examples of young people specifically. Jo mentions the plan of 'talking heads' with USP College to show this using exemplar businesses and sector specific case studies. This also leads on from the earlier comment on a one pager, it is agreed that this would be useful.

Cllr Tony Ball queries who the audience is, this will change how they will receive information and need to be targeted differently. Jo replies this is under consideration as employers won't respond to the action plan unless they are already deeply embedded. Tony then brings back round to the idea of a one pager to show employers sector specifics 'we said, we did' as the most effective answer for business. Lousie continues that we should be showing examples where we have engaged local collages to provide for the areas that

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businesses are asking for missing areas. It only needs to be small, one liners, showing where if you weren't part of the conversation with LSIP, you wouldn't have had that.

Hayley Chapman adds that Active Essex have their own report showing their impact using qualitative and quantitative case studies relevant to sectors that could be used.

<https://www.activeesseximpact.org/sport-physical-activity-sector>

Helen gives another example of how their company have utilised their own learners to boost their engagement to apprenticeships through video format.

<https://youtu.be/iRZUTRRTCsQ?si=UxgxmpBU-hGhni4b>

Jo asks for case studies on how the board or colleagues are commissioning differently as a local authority and how colleges are providing differently thanks to the outcomes of the project.

Update on LSIP 2.0 development – emerging risks

Jo explains the first draft of the LSIP needs to be submitted by 31st March, including all the sector priorities that are outlined by any of the combined or local authorities. Ours haven't changed bar the addition of the visit / travel and tourism. What's coming through from each of the round tables so far is that essential skills are still the main concern of employers. Communication, resilience and timekeeping, each remain common across the sectors. There is some work that has taken place around soft skills. Louise is working on a project with FEDEC to format the skills and be able to show them.

Karen follows on that from recent discussion with her students, employers aren't giving young people the opportunities. They can't get work experience past a couple days, a Saturday job or any way of helping them develop their skills through business. She feels that this has been skewed by changes recently to apprenticeships recently too raising the average ages of apprentices and focussing on adult skills.

Helen continues that she finds companies are at a disadvantage where the education system isn't built to assist young people in developing the skills that are relevant to getting those opportunities mentioned. Part of this is also from the handholding of parents and not getting the experience of finding opportunities for themselves.

Dave Cope agrees with Helen. It is a joint responsibility, and from a DWP perspective he hopes that the changes to apprenticeships and skills policy responsibility make that work better. Dave also expresses hope that Jobcentres will finally be allowed to focus primarily on helping people find work through CV work etc. rather than just moderating the benefits system.

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Clarie Wright specifies the point that apprenticeships have changed significantly in relation to Construction Trade, which has impacted the type of person that can get on an apprenticeship. They used to be those good with their hands or vocational types who, with respect are not coming out of school with the qualifications to get on an apprenticeship, but we are now getting more academic types that are then not satisfied. They may be very good at all the exams but are not as concerned with gaining experience to hone their trades.

David Warnes mentions that the pull on business is only going to get greater as vocational work experience and T levels expand on top of the already heavy demands of organisations. Dave confirms that they are aiming at 100 additional work experience places per month, only adding to the fatigue that businesses will feel. It would be more successful if all the requests came from a singular authority rather than 100 requests from 100 colleges or schools. Dave expands, there are currently lots of conversations with DWP that the current definition of a Work Experience placement we are working to is out of date, and won't work for under pressure big employers, let alone SMEs. The duration is too long, criteria too inflexible etc. This again comes back to being able to count it as an outcome towards a target, rather than recognise the value of the placement.

Jo queries if we need to nominate people from local authorities or other bodies past just Jo and Hyla to maximise the reach of information to the employers and condense rather than letting them get bombarded from all angles

Kate Kozlova-Boran agrees and understands the position from an employer perspective. She queries how we narrow the gap between what young people want and what employers can give. Cherie Leavy adds from experience that she sent out an offer to work experience on LTC to 18 students and only had 1 response. This was to a group of young people already studying that subject, illustrating the divide.

Marcella M'Raberty describes how Stansted Airport have plenty of examples how they support young people's education and adults back to work, all programmes are delivered in partnership with Harlow College, Stansted Airport College, DWP, local schools (i.e. as school mentoring, work experience) She then gives one example how we work with the DWP and Harlow college to help adult jobseekers to secure jobs on-site [Stansted Academy Awareness Video](#)

Lousie then mentions the impact of AI on recruitment, where confirmation bias means that they just see what they expect and don't actually understand the business, this goes both ways. Louise continues to question the ability of SMEs and businesses as a whole to assess



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the capacity within teams to train and upskill while completing their generic work required. Karen expands think capacity on both parts is critical, agreeing that it isn't a blame game, it's about working together

Fiona explains how the county council have commissioned to identify experiences of young people in work and the challenges around them. They are aware of the lack of capacity to support work experience or apprenticeships. They also found similar things on confusion of lots of organisations knocking on the doors for opportunities along with some confusion on the insurance and liability involved.

Peter Kay echoes that ultimately employers want and need employee ready talent (because of cost pressures). It should also be recognised that AI is replacing many tasks which were previously opportunities for work experience placements so we need to help employers re-design what work experience could be.

Hyla Grimwade continues this point, focussing on changing language being used to direct to the benefits rather than the issues that arise or the extra work could impact on people likelihood to engage. Louise adds It's absolutely a coordinated education/marketing effort that we need to change the tone of the conversation. Cherie adds being honest with ourselves and figuring out where an apprenticeship etc is actually available and what capacity they must support them has to be illustrated at the same time. Childhood In Essex research may be useful to inform our thinking and preconceptions about young people and their parents in Essex: [Childhood in Essex | Essex Open Data](#). Jo acknowledges myth busting and sign posting as a priority alongside the 'talking heads' idea to help with engaging with more employers into the LSIP. For example, when we say 'work experience' there are many different interpretations on this term.

Katherine questions if there is data around the profile of employers who are sitting poor essential skills in young people, i.e. how long it is since they offered an opportunity to a young person. Are those at these latest round tables the same as those who attended the first iterations of LSIP roundtables and is the feedback based on continuing evidence of having given opportunities and been disappointed or is it feedback based on historic experience stopping them from providing opportunity. If more employers could be supported to provide early work experience and help instil skills for work through that experience, then the confidence and essential skills gained at the point of T level and apprenticeship placements application will improve.

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Jo agrees the focus is on employers talking to employers and describing the returns on investments in the correct language and show relevance to the explicit problems of the sector that are shown to us especially through roundtables.

Louise reiterates the need for easy to consume content: 'How hard is it to employ an apprentice - it isn't' 'Options to close your hiring gap' (apprentice, work experience, part skilled etc.)

Martin Beable explains Greater Anglia just under 200 apprentices across their entire company, the vast majority of which are adult learning. Rail has a large aging workforce, meaning they have had to work hard on offering bespoke apprenticeships in varying fields. From his experience getting out and engaging is the only way to boost recruitment and engage the workforce further, diversifying in all ways at a low cost, especially while utilising apprenticeship levies. Martin would be happy to help with talking heads.

DWP Update – Dave Cope

Dave provided an update on the Youth Guarantee, explaining that the programme acts as an umbrella for several initiatives, with the Jobs Guarantee forming just one component. The Jobs Guarantee pilot is being delivered in Hertfordshire and Essex and focuses on a small, specific cohort of long-term Universal Credit claimants aged 18 to 21. This represents the first government-approved subsidised employment scheme since Kickstart in 2020. Although its scale is modest, it signals a significant policy direction. Dave noted that policy detail on the wider Youth Guarantee remains limited, but a recent appointment of an independent Skills Advisor to the Secretary of State is seen as the first step toward clarifying how Skills funding and responsibilities may shift toward DWP.

He also referenced other ongoing programmes, including Connect2Work, which is operating but will not expand into a large national contract under the current government. However, he acknowledged that welfare reform remains the missing piece in this broader transformation. Jobcentres themselves are undergoing significant change, as the government aims to shift them from benefit administration into places where people seek work and careers advice regardless of benefit status. This shift underpins the emerging Jobs and Careers Service, which merges the National Careers Service with Jobcentres.

Jo emphasised the importance of clear, simple messaging for employers, focusing on what a programme is, why it benefits them, and how they can access it. In response, Dave shared that a recent national advertising campaign designed to attract employers to use Jobcentres had been unsuccessful, demonstrating that traditional messaging no longer



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resonates. He noted that employers are facing new challenges and that many future services will need to follow supported-employment approaches.

Local Authority Updates – Essex County

Cllr Tony Ball provided an update on Essex County Council's work to align its Employment and Skills Strategy with the LSIP programme, noting the close collaboration with the Chambers to ensure activity is evidence-led and consistent with the priorities of all partner organisations. Tony explained that Essex is strengthening its alignment with Southend and Thurrock through joint commissioning work, particularly in relation to NEETs and health-related careers. He also confirmed that work continues surrounding the new Essex Growth Agency website, due to go live in April, which will act as a one-stop shop for advice and signposting for residents and businesses.

Tony went on to describe continued investment in apprenticeships through an enhanced partnership with SEATS, the recommissioning of the Apprenticeship Support Fund, and ongoing brokerage services. He also confirmed ongoing support for LSIP priorities and planning for the devolution of the Adult Skills Fund. Regarding Skills Bootcamps, Tony reported that Essex has received £1.6 million for Wave 7. Although this is a significant reduction compared with earlier waves, it aligns with national reductions, and enough to continue provisions.

Fiona added that greater scrutiny is also needed around programme outcomes, stressing the importance of understanding how many learners move into sustainable employment rather than simply monitoring participation. She then provided an operational update on several programmes delivered by her team. These include the Functional Skills Programme funded through the Year of Opportunity, offering 100 English and Maths qualifications and supported strongly by DWP teams; the mentoring programme supporting 30 young people via local businesses; and a 120-place university preparation programme, which launched last week with 75 participants, including 10 young people with additional needs. She also highlighted an innovative primary careers initiative called "Roxy's Journey,"

<https://www.essexyearofopportunity.co.uk/essex-year-opportunity>

Local Authority Updates – Thurrock

Kate begins by noting that Thurrock continues to operate in a period of significant flux, with ongoing uncertainty related to devolution and the postponement of mayoral elections. This environment of change affects all partners, and she emphasised the need to continue progressing delivery despite these external pressures.



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From the perspective of the Adult Community College, Kate confirmed that Thurrock will be applying for Wave 7 Skills Bootcamps funding and highlighted that the college has already successfully delivered four bootcamps.

Kate then updated the Board on the employability and skills team's wider work. The team supports all-age residents, with a target of 200 individuals, though they are actively engaging with around 600, providing intensive support to the core target group to progress them into employment, education, or training. She emphasised that funding remains a significant challenge in Thurrock, where the council continues to operate under intervention.

Kate reported that Thurrock has completed a deep dive into NEET activity, resulting in a set of agreed actions, and is now progressing work referred to as TSEP (Thurrock Skills and Employability Programme). A workshop is planned for early March, and colleagues will be invited to contribute to shaping what the programme should look like, ensuring it is developed as a genuine partnership initiative.

Local Authority Updates – Southend-on-Sea

Sarah confirmed that Southend City Council continues to host the HALO programme, which delivers health and social care pathways to work. As mentioned by Tony, the programme is funded by Essex County Council until September. With UKSPF funding now coming to an end, Sarah noted that short-term funding remains a challenge, and longer-term planning is difficult, mirroring the situation described by Thurrock.

Sarah reported that Southend has been awarded Pride in Place funding for Shoeburyness, offering up to £20 million over the next ten years, although this figure is still subject to governance processes. Priorities for the funding have not yet been confirmed, but she emphasised that the programme will be both resident-led and data-driven, with further information expected through an accompanying data pack. Depending on the direction the work programme takes, Southend is keen to ensure alignment with Essex County Council on skills and employment pathways, including the integration of Connect to Work and the new Get Essex Working initiative.

The team is also exploring how Section 106 and CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) mechanisms could be used to support employment and skills activities, alongside developing employment and skills plans.

Looking forward

Jo opened the discussion by highlighting the need to strengthen employer engagement and explore what additional steps could be taken to support this work. However, she



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emphasised that to significantly enhance employer outreach, the group would need to identify potential funding opportunities. Jo invited colleagues from local authorities to outline any existing or upcoming funding pots that could support joint employer engagement activity.

Fiona agreed that more coordinated employer engagement was needed, particularly to support apprenticeship opportunities for next summer's school leavers and to underpin employer-led programmes already in motion. Fiona shared that ECC would be developing its commissioning plan over the next two to three weeks, considering priorities for the coming year. She suggested that the council might move away from many small programmes toward a smaller number of larger-scale commissions.

Jo proposed that colleges, independent training providers, and other partners might come together around a collective bid to deliver coordinated employer engagement. Jo also noted suggestions about upskilling employer-facing colleagues and adopting more effective language when communicating with businesses, arguing that these shared improvements could have a more substantial impact when delivered collaboratively and supported by funding.

Fiona agreed and suggested that what the group was really talking about was an employer hub – a single, coordinated front door for businesses. She emphasised the need to move beyond the concept and begin defining what such a hub would actually look like in practice.

David Warnes added another consideration for coordinated funding and engagement: the Construction Technology Excellence College (CTEC), which is based in Suffolk and overseen by the Cambridgeshire Combined Authority but covers the wider region, including Essex. He suggested that Essex should work with other Eastern Region ERBs to ensure a joined-up approach to CTEC funding distribution, ensuring fair access for Essex.

Kate then contributed from a Thurrock perspective, confirming that there were no available funding streams locally due to the authority's financial position. She supported Hyla's earlier point that a joined-up approach should begin even before funding becomes available, drawing on the collective employer engagement expertise already present within the group. She suggested that scoping work could begin now so that plans were ready to activate when funding does emerge.

Sarah echoed this sentiment for Southend, expressing hope that a successor programme to UKSPF would eventually be announced. She noted that once further details are known, Southend would work with employer representatives and partners to explore how



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messaging and engagement could be strengthened, including opportunities to share information more effectively across supply chains.

Actions

- Schedule a Careers Hub update at a forthcoming meeting.
- Define Board purpose & composition (clear ToR) to optimise employer value.
- Send draft and action plan to Board for input to be incorporated into finalised LSIP.
- Look into developing one pager content to assist in boosting employer engagement per sector.
- Develop “talking heads” content series (aimed at employer-to-employer) starting with The Finishing Line growth story.

AOB