

Minutes

South East Business Support Advisory Board (SEBSAB) Holiday Inn, Guildford – 14 January 2009

Present: Alex Pratt (Chair), Kieran McNamara (East Sussex County Council), Rafiq Chohan (Slough Borough Council), Roger House (FSB), Andy Barter (FSB), David Seall (EEF), Rodger Broad (IOD), Gina Fegan (South East Media Network), Jill Farrell (LSC), Deborah Wyatt (Business Link Hampshire & Isle of Wight), David Rowland (Skills South East), John Weston (HESE), Janet Edrich (AOSEC), Magali Walker (GOSE), Alastair Reid (Sub Regional Partnerships), Lynda Jones (Jobcentre Plus), Astrid Flowers (rep Sector Skills Councils), Russell Moss (BERR), Marilyn Huckerby (SEEDA), Phil Bailey (SEEDA), Sarah Watson (SEEDA), George Gilvear (Effective Contracting) Ann Johnstone (SEEDA), Ivan Perkovic (SEEDA – Item 8)

Apologies: Jeff Alexander (SEEDA), Bernie Topham (Eastleigh Borough Council), Ross McNally (SE England Chambers of Commerce), Nick Woolfenden (SEERA), Oona Muirhead (SEEDA), Fay Webster (ICAEW), Malcolm Hyde (CBI South East), Carol McKinley (RAISE), Debbie Dacombe (UKTI),

1. Welcome to New Members and Introductions – Alex Pratt
2. Minutes of the Last Meeting – Alex Pratt

David Seall clarified that his organisation was now called EEF and not EEF South. Having noted this, the minutes were agreed. All actions had either been delivered or would be covered during this meeting. Russell Moss agreed to send an update on HEI funded products and BSSP. [Russell has since notified that an Information Note is being developed by BERR, to be finalised toward the end of January.]

3. “Barriers to Growth” Survey 2009 – Andy Barter, FSB [SEE SLIDES]

Andy Barter presented the findings of the FSB “Barriers to Growth” Skills & Training research based on 1500 responses. The research is undertaken every 2 years. Good educational levels are seen as important by businesses. Key skills gaps are identified as literacy/numeracy, technical skills and customer services/communication for the Under 25s, and advanced IT skills, managerial skills, communication & literacy for the Over 25s. Lack of skills is seen as a constraint on business growth. “Learning by Doing” is seen as important and experience is seen as the most important thing. Use of Train to Gain, however, is growing. The main source of business advice is other businesses/friend (68%), followed by through the internet, through banks and through Government Business Support channels (growing).

The group agreed that training was often more important to the employee than to the employer, and that some more work should be done to identify the impact on the business. The increased use of the Internet was acknowledged, and that businesses wanted advice 24/7. It would be good to understand the customer journey behind this. Whilst colleges were doing well in tackling poor levels of numeracy and literacy, young people were still leaving school with poor skills in these areas. The group identified that there was a lot of research about skills, but was it all being brought together?

Action: (1) Gather together a picture of what research is available on

skills for business, to review at next SEBSAB (AJ), (2) Share the data that Local Authorities have with SEBSAB (KMcN), (3) SEBUS to think about identifying a small number of key common questions to ask in surveys(SEBUS)

4. Business Support Simplification Update – Ann Johnstone & Deborah Wyatt

AJ began with a summary of the Government's announcement of the "Real Help with Finance" package that morning. 3 products have been announced:

- Enterprise Finance Guarantee
- Capital for Enterprise Fund
- Working Capital Scheme

Further information is available via the Business Link website:
www.businesslink.gov.uk

The group sought clarification on how "Real Help with Finance" sits with BSSP. It sits under the campaign call "Real Help for Business", with Business Link as the access channel. RC was disappointed not to see reference to the "credit crunch" on the Business Link website and felt that Government had missed the opportunity to hook businesses into the available support. DW recognised that there were different needs in different areas and expected that the Business Link regional marketing campaign, launched this week, would address this. RB identified that SEBUS was an excellent route to getting information to businesses and should be utilised.

BSSP is now firmly in the implementation stage. Whilst the portfolio of products has been released, however, they are not yet all live (nationally). SEEDA is working to move its funded programmes to the new framework, as are Local Authorities, supported by the SEEDA Area Teams. 53 (of 74) Local Authorities have contributed to the South East mapping to date. The latest Transition Log was circulated. The performance management framework for the products is still being developed by BERR. The timescale for full compliance with BSSP is April 2010.

DW said that a cascade system was now in place within Business Link, so that information can reach all those that need it within 4 hours. This is then followed up more intensively, as appropriate.

5. Innovation & Growth Teams – Update – Marilyn Huckerby [SEE SLIDES]

MH reminded the group that the target market for the IGTs was a small number of businesses with growth potential. The IGTs focused on the 5 BSSP products with relevance to these companies, 3 of them exclusively. MH clarified that they would not be restricted to working with companies within their own geographical patch – the 8 zones were guidelines. 4 bids have been received and are being developed, for Zones 4,5,6 & 8. MH asked for the help of the business membership organisations in reaching those mid-size companies (T/O) who eschew publicly funded business support. MH acknowledged that there were some difficult areas and that some staff were leaving due to uncertainty, but clarified that the timescale is necessary and that she, with the Area Teams, will discuss any issues. GF wanted to see the Sector Consortia and the IGTs working as an additional resource for each other, and asked MH to help with this.

Action: (1) All to raise issues with MH, (2) MH/GF to clarify how Sector Consortia and IGTs will work together.

6. Business Link - Consultation Paper Feedback – Sarah Watson & George Gilvear [SEE SLIDES]

During the consultation period, 6 events had been held with 150 attendees. 60+ written submissions were received and 200 businesses were interviewed. The consultation feedback presented to the meeting concentrated on the stakeholder feedback. Main messages were that Business Link remains confused in the marketplace, distinction unclear between the service and the provider, the term (not the activity) IDB has little currency.

The timetable is that the OJEU notice was issued on 2 January, return of PQQ will be 13 February, with parties notified 23 February, bid submissions returned 24 April, selection made June 09 and contract close July 09.

AP clarified that this is SEEDA's biggest budget spend and clearly an important remit. RH asked when business will be involved in the process and if they will be asked to give a view on the bidders. AP clarified that procurement rules did not allow for this but the intention is for businesses to be involved in reviewing the evaluation criteria and it may be possible for them to see the presentations, but SW was checking the legal position. KMcN asked how the new provision would engage meaningfully with different localities. AP saw 2 opportunities (i) through the service output and (ii) through increased buy-in of the partners. SW aims for a consistent regional service with local characteristics.

7. South East Business Support Strategy – Phil Bailey

Progress was not as rapid as PB would have liked. 60+ collective responses to this and the BL consultation, whilst welcoming the strategy they gave similar comments to those just heard around the detail. Given the economic downturn, the strategy needs to be revisited to ensure it is not complacent. New finance packages have come out at national and regional level that should feature in the strategy. The strategy must be flexible enough to respond to economic conditions.

Action: PB to summarise the consultation responses, revisit the strategy in the light of current economic conditions and send out before next meeting, for discussion at April meeting.

8. South East Economy Update – Ivan Perkovic [SEE SLIDES]

IP presented a thorough assessment of the state of the south east economy as at end December 2008 and confirmed the UK was technically now in recession. Q4 was predicted to show the largest drop in output since the early 80's. The manufacturing sector is more affected than any other. Predictions are to see recovery towards the end of this calendar year, and the SE economy should recover well. AR asked for more feedback to businesses. They were providing intelligence into SEEDA, but not getting much out.

9. AOB and close

Wrap Up – Alex Pratt

Alex and Jeff Alexander are working to turn SEBSAB to (i) move beyond hearing to action, and (ii) creating a cohesive group, supportive of one another – with inclusion to come cohesion.

Date of the next meeting is:

21 April 2009, 10am– 12.30pm (plus lunch)