

South East Diamonds for Investment & Growth Skills & Employability Group

**Wednesday 21st April, 2pm – 4.00pm
Pacific House, Reading**

Item		Action
1	Attendees	
1.1	Present: Anne-Marie Mountifield (PUSH, Chair), Martin Towers (SFA), Alan Cufley (Portsmouth), Andrew Boye (Employ Medway), Diane Hayward (Basingstoke & Deane BC), Ephraïdige Rinomhota (Milton Keynes), Tom Morris (Oxford CC), Mark Privett (JCP), Matt Smith (SEDfIG), Sumit Chakraborty (SEDfIG)	
1.2	External attendees: Bruce Nairne (Step Ahead Research), Steve Matthews (Step Ahead Research),	
1.3	Apologies: Caroline Wood (SEEDA), Grant Thornton (Reading BC), Viv Ottaway (SFA), Michael Nix (Brighton & Hove).	
2	SEDfIG Skills & Employability Strategy & Action Plan	
2.1	The Chair provided a brief update regarding the past activities of the Skills Group, including past ERDF bids, event support and the adoption of the SEDfIG Skills & Employability Strategy & Action Plan in February 2010. It was outlined that there was a need to build upon the recommendations laid out in the Action Plan, whilst also taking account of the fast-changing economic climate.	
2.2	Step Ahead Research (SAR), the consultants commissioned by the SEDfIG to develop the 'Skills & Employability Strategy & Action Plan', presented a brief overview of the development of the study, fundamental principles, strategic priorities and the final actions and tasks which had emerged following a comprehensive process of consultations with Diamond members and stakeholders at various stages of the research. Background data research had been carried out by the SEEDA Economic Research Team, with consultation and strategy development then carried forward by Step Ahead. The plan was based around four core principles – subsidiarity, partnership, feasibility and complementarity. Five strategic priorities had been identified, around which appropriate actions, reflecting the principles above, were formulated. The priorities were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strategic Priority 1: Provide Regional Diamond Leadership and Co-ordination. ■ Strategic Priority 2: Develop Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) skills; and Improve Business Leadership and Management; and ■ Strategic Priority 3: Simplify the Skills System to Make it Easier for Employers and Learners to Engage; ■ Strategic Priority 4: Strengthen Education – Business Links, from School to Adult Learning; ■ Strategic Priority 5: Improve the Work Readiness of Young People and Adults, 	
2.3	SAR also informed the group about ongoing developments in the regional skills sector, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The setting up of the South East Apprentice Company (SEAC) with government funding across Kent, Surrey and Sussex to create around 1000 apprenticeships over the next 3 years. http://www.se-apprenticeship.co.uk/index.php ■ Work being taken forward around Local Economic Assessments involving the drafting of 'Worklessness Assessments' and 'Work and Skills Plans', which would provide a useful insight in 	

	<p>understanding the magnitude of the challenge at the local and sub-regional levels.</p> <p>2.4 Discussion amongst group members then took place. The Chair outlined the need to take account of the fast-moving economic climate, and the likely impact of future public spending constraint. Research by Centre for Cities had illustrated the looming impact of public sector spending and job cuts, and recognition of this would need to be incorporated into future work.</p> <p>2.5 MP pointed out that there had been a change of focus at JCP, with more focus on the young jobless category. He outlined that there was considerable differences in the work-readiness of the client base, which are classified in terms of 'red', 'amber' and 'green', wherein the red and amber represented critical categories, and would be prioritised for intensive focus. MP agreed, if possible, to supply further information on the sub-regional / local make-up for all three categories (red/amber/green), so as to formulate informed decisions.</p> <p>2.6 MP also offered to provide details of appropriate JCP External Relations Managers across the Diamond areas, to enable local authorities around the table to pick up appropriate contact as necessary.</p> <p>2.7 MT informed the group that the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) was involved in drafting the 'Regional Skills Strategy' and would circulate the regional priorities statement around the group.</p> <p>It was agreed that an update on SEEDA's recent restructure and its impact with respect to skills would benefit the group with regard to its future working.</p> <p>2.8 ER provided an update from Milton Keynes, informing the group that employment figures had received a boost in Milton Keynes due to improvement in house building activity.</p>	<p>MP</p> <p>MP</p> <p>MT</p>
<p>3.</p> <p>3.1</p> <p>3.2</p>	<p>Next Steps</p> <p>Following discussion, members agreed to develop a work-plan for the next twelve months focused upon the following eight priority actions, as identified in the SAR work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Action 1.1b - Establish an Employment and Skills Best Practice and Intelligence web-page on the SEDfIG website to share best practice, disseminate policy developments and funding opportunities and publicise employment and skills Diamonds events. ▪ Action 1.2a - Develop a regional 'Funding Watch' facility to enable groups of Diamonds to adopt collaborative approaches to bids for ESF/ERDF funding to address shared employment and skills issues. ▪ Action 1.2b - Develop an on-going 'Diamonds Policy Response' facility so that a collective Diamonds view on employment and skills announcements can be articulated to central Government where appropriate. ▪ Action 2.1c - Building upon existing good practice, identify innovative ways of encouraging employer placements and increasing the number of STEM apprenticeships. ▪ Action 4.1a - Two Forum meetings and three best practice updates on SEDfIG website, based on Forum outcomes ▪ Action 4.1b - Identify key businesses as education-business link ambassadors to use as case studies to promote the business benefits of links with education to the business community. ▪ Action 4.1c - Identify and share best practice in delivering business engagement activities across the Diamonds Partnership. ▪ Action 5.1c - Develop two pan- or joint Diamond proposals for funding to develop common approaches to support work-readiness. <p>These actions reflected areas of work identified as priorities in recent discussions with the SEDfIG Board and SEEDA.</p> <p>In addition, it was also felt useful to identify a number of topics for discussion at future meetings, alongside potential speakers. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SEEDA – update on new structures and future management of inward investment function. - SFA – update on Regional Skills Strategy development. - NAS / SEAC – enhancing apprenticeship take-up / delivery. <p>It was agreed that MS & AMM would circulate an action-plan for the group, reflecting the above discussions.</p>	<p>AMM / MS</p>

<p>4</p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.2</p>	<p>Communications</p> <p>Matt Smith presented an update on the recent communications activity of SEDFIG. The partnership had commissioned Linstock Communications to take forward public affairs work, beginning with a Comms Strategy that was agreed by the Board in October 2009. This had been followed by initial work to establish a presence and profile for the group, and was now being carried forward through targeted messages and lobbying, utilising evidence gained through the research of the partnership.</p> <p>The SAR research had been used as the basis for a recent article in <i>New Start</i> magazine, which had put forward some of the key 'asks' set out in the research. Subsequently, discussion had taken place with GOSE, who were keen to incorporate key messages arising from the research piece into their post-election strategy planning. Copies of the article were circulated.</p>	
<p>5</p> <p>5.1</p>	<p>Networking Event</p> <p>Matt Smith informed the Group that the next Networking Event would be held in July 2010 and that the theme would be based on 'Tackling Worklessness', wherein relevant speakers/think tanks and local authorities with evidence of best practice in this area of work would be involved.</p> <p>Further, detailed proposals would be circulated to partners imminently.</p>	<p>MS</p>
<p>6</p> <p>6.1</p>	<p>AOB</p> <p>The dates for the next meeting and preferred locations would be circulated to members. A central Reading venue would be preferred.</p>	<p>AMM/MS</p>