



“Combating the local skills deficit through adult and further education

Foreword

During the 2004/05 Municipal Year, the Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny decided that it should undertake an in-depth scrutiny project which would look at the contribution of further and adult education in addressing the local skills deficit.

At the same time, the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) Essex undertook a similar project as part of its Strategic Area Review (StAR). Following a presentation by senior representatives of LSC Essex on the background, progress and findings of the Review Implementation Group to the Committee at its meeting on 28 September 2004, it was suggested, and subsequently agreed, that the outcome of the Learning & Skills Council Strategic Area Review in relation to the local deficit should be the in depth scrutiny project for the Committee.

The Committee's in-depth scrutiny project commenced in November 2004 and witness/evidence gathering sessions were held with key stakeholders in January and February 2005. We examined with them the local skills base in Southend and compared the extent of any deficit with other areas and explored access to education providers in the Borough and adjacent areas to available to residents in Southend-on-Sea.

We are pleased that Council and LSC Essex are already in discussion regarding the interim findings of the StAR and that the recommendations of this in-depth scrutiny project are already being implemented.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have been involved in the in-depth scrutiny project, in particular those who took the time to attend meetings to give their evidence, and our colleagues on the Education and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, together with the officer Project Team.

Councillor Andrew Moring
Chairman

1. METHODOLOGY

SCOPE, OBJECTIVES AND

The Scope of the Scrutiny; Objectives and Outcomes

- 1.1 In the Municipal Year 2004/05, the Council's Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee decided to undertake a scrutiny on the subject of the contribution of further and adult education in addressing the local skills deficit. However, prior to the commencement of the in-depth scrutiny project, the Committee received a presentation by senior representatives of LSC Essex on the background, progress and findings of the Review Implementation Group. It was evident from this presentation that the work being undertaken by LSC Essex as part of their Strategic Area Review (StAR) would be similar to the scrutiny study to be undertaken by the Council. A copy of LSC Essex StAR consultation document is attached to the report at **Appendix 1.**
- 1.2 The StAR consultation document was published by LSC Essex on 19 November 2004 but, unfortunately due to the timescale set by LSC Essex it was not possible to co-ordinate a response from the Scrutiny Committee by the required deadline.
- 1.3 To avoid an unnecessary duplication of effort by both the Council and LSC Essex, the Committee therefore agreed that the in-depth scrutiny project should consider the information and outcome from the LSC Essex StAR in relation to the potential contribution of further & adult education providers in the Borough and adjacent areas in addressing the skills deficit experienced by Southend residents.
- 1.4 The objectives agreed by the Committee were:
- to consider how the Strategic Area Review was undertaken and examine in detail the scope and any findings of the Strategic Area Review;
 - to examine the local skills base in Southend-on-Sea and compare the extent of any deficit with other areas;
 - to identify and examine access to further and adult education providers in the Borough and adjacent areas available to residents in Southend-on-Sea; and
 - to indicate how further and adult education can address the skills deficit in Southend.
- 1.5 The outcome agreed by the Committee was to make appropriate recommendations to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Essex to maximise the opportunities for Southend residents to address their local skills deficit through adult and further education programmes.

- 1.6 The scrutiny was carried out by the Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee assisted by an Officer Project Team comprising:
- Tim Row Project Co-ordinator
 - Andy Downing Acting Assistant Director, Learning, Achievement and School Effectiveness
 - Jill Warnes Principal, Southend Adult Community College
- 1.7 A small team of Members of the Committee were attached to the Project Team in order to provide guidance and to act as a consultative body during the course of the scrutiny. This comprised:
- Councillor Andrew Moring (Chairman, Conservative)
 - Councillor Mrs Pat Rayner (Vice Chairman, Conservative)
 - Councillor Mrs Carole Roast (Liberal Democrat)
 - Councillor Mrs Jane Norman (Labour)
- 1.8 A project plan for the study was drawn up and approved by the Committee at its meeting on 9 November 2004. The scrutiny project commenced following the publication of the StAR Consultation Document by the LSC Essex on 19 November 2004 and ceased following the formal approval and publication of this report in July 2005. A copy of the consultation document was copied and circulated to all Members of the Committee for their consideration and to facilitate their understanding of the principal issues and to identify possible key witnesses/stakeholders and appropriate potential questions. A copy of the Area Profile was also circulated. It was hoped that the information obtained from the LSC and other stakeholders would enable a clearer understanding of the skills deficit in Southend-on-Sea and help identify possible strategic options to address this.

Evidence Gathering

- 1.9 The Committee also received oral and written evidence from various representatives of adult and further education service providers, voluntary sector organisations and other related agencies. All the evidence was taken in public under the Local Government Access to Information Rules.
- 1.10 The stakeholders involved in the oral/written evidence process are outlined in paragraph 1.11 below. Witnesses were advised of the areas of potential questioning prior to the meeting and, a few days before the meeting, a final list of questions was provided to the witnesses to allow them time to formalise their answers. Stakeholders were given the opportunity to make an initial presentation on their work and its relationship with the subject matter of the scrutiny and to provide preliminary written answers to the pre-notified questions which would form the basis of a discussion with Members on the issues raised. At the committee meeting, Officers took a note of the answers

and any ensuing discussion. Following each meeting, a copy of the note of evidence was sent to the witnesses for comment on its factual accuracy prior to publication.

Key Witnesses/Stakeholders

- 1.11 The Committee received evidence from the following individuals representing the organisations indicated, to whom the Council is grateful:-

14 January 2005 – Witness Session No. 1

Ms Sue Coole – South East Essex College
Mr Neil Bates – Prospects
Mrs Jill Warnes – Southend Adult Community College
Mr Rick Oliver – Southend Adult Community College
Mr Roger Culpin – Southend Adult Community College

11 February 2005 – Witness Session No. 2

Ms Maureen Frewin – Southend Association of Voluntary Services
Ms Michele Lucas – Connexions

Invitations were also issued to the local branch of Job Centre Plus, the Chamber of Commerce and South East Essex Sixth Form College (SEEVIC) but these invitations were declined.

2. MAIN ISSUES FOR SCRUTINY

- 2.1 The initial phase of the scrutiny exercise involved research into the Area Profile for Southend-on-Sea undertaken by LSC Essex and what might be considered to be the main issues in relation to the subject matter of the scrutiny.
- 2.2 The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is the lead planning and funding body for post-16 education and skills (excluding higher education). Its mission is to *raise participation and attainment through high-quality education and training that puts learners first*, and thereby achieve its vision that by 2010, *young people and adults in England will have knowledge and productive skills matching the best in the world*.
- 2.3 In *Success for All* – the Government’s strategy for further education and training – the rationale for Strategic Area Reviews is outlined. It recognises that individuals should have equal opportunities for progression and personal development. It also recognises that achieving the right mix of provision in an area is one of the most critical steps in strategic planning within the learning and skills sector.

- 2.4 The review by LSC Essex was undertaken in partnership with a variety of key stakeholders which included those involved in the in-depth scrutiny project. The purpose of the StAR was to make a fundamental examination of learning provision, together with that which is currently offered and which is required against the priority needs of learners, employers and communities, the need to drive up quality and increase success rates in many areas of provision, and to improve its cost effectiveness, the volume and type of education and training needed to meet the LSCs targets.
- 2.5 The scope of the StAR included a review of 14+ education within the authorities in Essex (including Southend and Thurrock). This was subdivided into five geographical areas which were based upon some of the indicators regarding travel to learn and reflected areas of economic regeneration such as the Thames Gateway. Southend, Rochford and Castle Point formed one of the areas. The objective of the in-depth scrutiny project undertaken by the Committee however, related to further and adult (16+) education and training within the Southend area and sought to identify any barriers in engaging people to take up training, together with any access issues.
- 2.6 The Local Area Profile showed that Southend's population is around 160,300 (10% share of Essex) and the number of VAT registered firms in the district is approximately 2,640 (6% share of Essex). There are high levels of deprivation in many wards across the borough, particularly for employment, but Southend has by far the highest rate of unemployment in Essex (3% compared to 1.9%).
- 2.7 Qualification levels in the borough are similar to those of Essex - with 30% having no qualifications compared to 29% for Essex. Of those with Level 3 qualifications and above Southend has 22% compared to 23%. Southend and Essex both have similar rates of poor literacy and numeracy skills. Overall a slightly higher proportion of Year 11 school leavers achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C than in Essex. However there is a large variation in this measure for different schools within the Borough. Those year 11 pupils who do not achieve five GCSEs at A*-C are 42% of school leavers in the Borough compared to 43% for Essex. With regard to Year 11 school leavers, they follow similar patterns to Essex but are more likely to follow the AS/A2 level route (47% compared to 42%). With approximately 66,300 people working in Southend, the main industry sectors include Energy & Water, Retail, Hotel & Restaurants, Business Activities and Public Services. 59% of Southend's employed residents work locally. There is a large inflow of workers and a significant number commute to the city of London.
- 2.8 Government has identified the Thames Gateway as an area for potential growth and has set a target that an additional 8,000 jobs

should be created by 2007. Southend has also been set a net job growth target of 13,000 in the period 2001-2021¹.

3. EVIDENCE/FINDINGS OF THE SCRUTINY

- 3.1 As indicated earlier in this report, the background knowledge and understanding of the issues was obtained from publicly available information, although evidence relating to Southend in particular was obtained via the formal evidence-taking sessions with key stakeholders.
- 3.2 A detailed record of general comments and specific responses to questions posed by Members of the Committee was prepared. This record of evidence was forwarded to a representative of each stakeholder group which contributed to the study in order to ensure that the recorded evidence was factually correct. A copy of the evidence for each witness session is attached at **Appendices 2 and 3**.
- 3.3 For the sake of brevity and to avoid unnecessary repetition, it was not considered necessary to further summarise the findings at this stage but rather to move directly to a discussion of the evidence prior to outlining conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE EVIDENCE AND FINDINGS

- 4.1 The commentary below relates broadly to the main issues of the scrutiny set out in Chapter 2, and it is set out in the context of LSC Essex StAR Consultation and in relation the objectives and anticipated outcome of the scrutiny.
- 4.2 The findings of the LSC Essex StAR consultation suggest that Essex is yet to arrive at a broad consensus in many areas about how to move forward following the StAR process. It illustrated that there was no overall agreement reached for any of the proposed options for a number of issues. It also indicated that achieving consensus around the 19+ agenda seems to be the more acute issue, with suggested options being better received for the 14-19 agenda. Service providers and the Local Education Authority concurred with the views set out below.

14-19 Strategy

- 4.3 The current arrangements between the LSC Essex, Connexions and the three LEAs (Essex, Thurrock and Southend) will develop coherence across the LSC Essex area and will enable the implementation of the 14-19 Strategy, whilst allowing localities within

¹ The Council's Economic Scrutiny Committee is undertaking an in-depth scrutiny project which is looking at "the Economic Growth Aspirations for Southend-on-Sea". The scrutiny findings are due to be considered in the Autumn of 2005.

the area the flexibility to deliver the strategy in ways that are relevant and appropriate to them.

- 4.4 Geographically based Forums should underpin the Pan Essex Strategic Group. However, the existing Southend-based Forum should work in formal liaison with Castle Point and Rochford to strengthen links and ensure cohesion.

14-19 Structures

- 4.5 It is unlikely that the current collaborative effort will be sufficient to address the key issues identified in the StAR. The Council is however, committed to extending collaborative working with school sixth forms, providers of work based learning, further education providers and other relevant parties to meet and exceed learner need and is in the process of finalising a document in relation to this. Appropriate funding would help strengthen the Council's work in this area.
- 4.6 Poor quality provision needs to be challenged and rationalised with the proviso that support and development is stressed. An extension of provision is needed to respond not only to demographic changes but also the developing 14-19 agenda i.e. broadening the curriculum, enhancing the availability of high quality vocational training and enabling learners to access a mix of provision.
- 4.7 In order to meet and exceed the learner need and meet local and regional skills need the further development of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and specialist schools within Southend, should be considered. The benefits and possibilities of establishing an Academy could also be explored.²
- 4.8 E-Learning is also crucial in achieving the breadth and enhancement required by the national 14-19 vision in meeting learner need. Southend's schools' ICT infrastructure, in terms of the provision of broadband and the availability of virtual learning environments, is ahead of national targets and is well placed to work in a partnership to develop e-learning.

14-19 Learner Support and Progression

- 4.9 Improving awareness of vocational learning amongst 14-19 year olds across the ability range can be achieved by supporting and expanding initiatives such as 14-16 increased flexibility programmes and young apprenticeships. These types of vocational initiatives are however, expensive and whilst there is a need for more provision there is currently no additional funding available.

² This has been rejected by the DfES

14-19 Meeting Skills Need

- 4.10 With nine specialist schools (and another two on the way) out of twelve secondary schools in Southend, it is too late to plan a coherent network of Further Education (FE) Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and schools with Specialist status. Schools could however, be influenced to work more strategically if applying for the new additional funding for a second specialism. The schools' resources and expertise should be used to develop the available curriculum across the Borough.
- 4.11 More strategic engagement with employers who possess the learning infrastructure to support the delivery of skills would be more efficient and could avoid employers' disengagement through their being approached by too many different separate agencies. It is however, essential that, whilst being more strategic, it delivers opportunities wherever the learners are.
- 4.12 Resources should be redirected and targeted to support sector priorities and delivery in key skills areas in order to be more responsive to employers' needs and to address imbalances. However, it is essential to safeguard high quality provision which may not meet local sector priorities but does meet learners' needs and/or national needs. There is also some concern as to whether a regional skills analysis would be sufficiently accurate and predictive for future skills gaps.
- 4.13 In the Regional Spatial Strategy 14³ it is recognised that a strategic partnership should be formed between the Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, London East and London LSCs to address learning and skills issues arising from the demographic and socio-economic expansion around the Stansted/M11 corridor. Cross border working and the ability to tap into the opportunities offered by Thames Gateway is fully supported and a funded regional LSC structure has already been established.

Adult (19+) Strategy

- 4.14 The options set out the StAR consultation in relation to the future development and implementation of national and local skills strategies are not supported on the grounds that skills alliances should be locally (i.e. Borough) based.

Adult (19+) Structure

- 4.15 Locally based networks of strategic partnerships could be established, in order to deliver the community learning element of the Skills Strategy. They should not focus exclusively on community learning but

³ The Regional Spatial Strategy 14 or the East of England Plan is produced by East of England Regional Assembly and sets out the draft special strategy to guide development within the East of England for the next 20 years.

also encompass work-place delivery. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is not in a position to deliver training. All planning of education and training should be strategically linked with the LSP and the LSP in Southend would benefit from a learning arm of all post-19 providers, including the voluntary sector, to plan effectively across the Borough. Whilst the development of Community Learning Consortia to support the objectives under the strategy for the voluntary and community sector may be desirable it must be linked with providers. There is a danger of fragmentation with an array of consortia with different strategic objectives.

- 4.16 To ensure delivery to those adults that may have experienced barriers to learning in the past it is essential to maintain a local focus. Evidence suggested from key witnesses suggested the development of a one-stop shop for Essex, Thurrock and Southend would be too bureaucratic and unfeasible.

Adult (19+) Partnerships and Collaborative Options

- 4.17 Establishing a network of excellence to raise attainment across the learning and skills sector is fully supported. However, focussing on CoVEs may inadvertently exclude organisations that have not been able to apply for this status in the past. A range of quality accreditation, including Beacon, Matrix, Charter Mark and good inspection grades, should be used.
- 4.18 The introduction of collaborative marketing activities across providers would only work if there was a clear strategic direction and progression routes clearly mapped out.
- 4.19 Offering incentives for learning providers to develop and promote learning opportunities in the priority skills areas has been successful. The Skills for Life is a good example of this. Short-term funding may however distort the market and displace actual and potential students. Building on the specific funding protocols that have already been developed for WBL Consortia and the development of broader funding protocols will not necessarily increase the provision of flexible and cross-provider skills delivery; funding is a complicated issue particularly for Adult and Community Learning and the effectiveness of cross-provider funding other than for short-term projects, which have their own problems, is uncertain.
- 4.20 The development and funding of collaborative pilots to establish innovation in skills delivery is particularly apposite for LEAs and the voluntary sector working collaboratively together. Although the development of a Centre of Excellence for Skills for Life is supported, a local dimension would be crucial for its success. A virtual and local blended model would therefore be the most appropriate option, otherwise the centre would have no impact on part-time Skills for Life tutors and potential tutors who live some distance away.

Adult (19+) Learner Support and Progression

- 4.21 Feedback from learner surveys highlights the barriers faced by adults that prevent them from taking part in learning such as childcare, transport and cost. Additionally, the evidence gained from the witness sessions confirms that significant numbers of adults have poor literacy and numeracy skills, yet relatively few of them recognise the need to improve their skills. Alternative forms of training, such as e-learning and on-going support must therefore be explored. LEA adult education services need to be funded for e-learning in the same way as Further Education and Work Based Learning, in order that those traditionally excluded from learning will not have their problems exacerbated by the lack of innovative e-learning approaches. The use of incentives to encourage work based learning, such as paying employee release costs, have been used with some success to facilitate work based learning and the development of the workforce.

Adult 19(+) Meeting Skills Needs

- 4.22 The conclusions of the StAR in relation to Adult learning showed that there is a lack of coherence in collaboration and curriculum planning and it suggests that there is support for developing consortia with the voluntary and community sector. This was an issue that also emerged from the witness sessions.
- 4.23 The development of Skills Centres/Academies, based upon the principles of CoVE, will assist in the implementation of the national Skills Strategy and meet local skills need. The Committee welcomed the fact that a new skills centre is being developed in Southend which will focus on trade skills needing heavy plant, one of the key priority sectors of the StAR.
- 4.24 The Profit from Learning scheme has been extremely successful, giving power to the employer rather than the training provider. This in turn has driven change and responsiveness within educational establishments.
- 4.25 Through the evidence gained from the witness sessions and the information that has been gained from the StAR, there is clearly a need for an adult (19+) strategy. A Strategy Group should therefore be established, with the LEA as facilitator, to develop a Strategy involving mapping of provision, identification of duplication and gaps, and working together, in partnership, to utilise resources more effectively and efficiently. The Strategy could then be fed back into the individual organisations' curriculum development plans.
- 4.26 As a result of this project and in response to the perceived lack of coherence of the adult provision in Southend, the Southend Adult Learning Consortium has now been established. This comprises representatives of the LEA, Prospects College, SEEC and SACC.

Whilst the terms of reference have still to be developed, it will seek to develop such coherence and will start by undertaking a mapping exercise to determine just what the current and potential provision is for adult learners across the Borough. The consortium will also provide a single voice when talking to employers about skill needs and LSC with regard to targets and funding.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the following proposals be supported:-

5.1 In relation to 14-19 Education and Training

- (i) Geographically based Forums should underpin the Pan Essex Strategic Group. However, the existing Southend-based Forum should work in formal liaison with Castle Point and Rochford to strengthen links and ensure cohesion.
- (ii) The Council is committed to extending collaborative working with school sixth forms, providers of work based learning, further education providers and other relevant parties to meet and exceed learner need and is in the process of finalising a document in relation to this. Appropriate funding would help strengthen the Council's work in this area.
- (iii) In order to meet and exceed the learner need and meet local and regional skills need the further development of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and specialist schools within Southend, should be considered. The benefits and possibilities of establishing an Academy could also be explored.
- (iv) Improving awareness of vocational learning amongst 14-19 year olds across the ability range can be achieved by supporting and expanding initiatives such as 14-16 increased flexibility programmes and young apprenticeships. These types of vocational initiatives are however, expensive and additional funding will need to be identified to finance this.
- (v) Schools could be influenced to work more strategically if applying for the new additional funding for a second specialism. The schools' resources and expertise should be used to develop the available curriculum across the Borough.

5.2 In relation to the 19+ Education and Training

- (i) The options set out the StAR consultation in relation to the future development and implementation of national and local skills strategies are not supported on the grounds that skills alliances should be locally (i.e. Borough) based.

- (ii) All planning of education and training should be strategically linked with the LSP and the LSP in Southend would benefit from a learning arm of all post-19 providers, including the voluntary sector, to plan effectively across the borough. Whilst the development of Community Learning Consortia to support the objectives under the strategy for the voluntary and community sector may be desirable it must be linked with providers.
- (iii) The development and funding of collaborative pilots to establish innovation in skills delivery is particularly apposite for LEAs and the voluntary sector working collaboratively together. Although the development of a Centre of Excellence for Skills for Life is supported, a local dimension would be crucial for its success. A virtual and local blended model would therefore be the most appropriate option, otherwise the centre would have no impact on part-time Skills for Life tutors and potential tutors who live some distance away.
- (iv) The use of incentives to encourage work based learning, such as paying employee release costs, have been used with some success to facilitate work based learning and the development of the workforce. Further consideration should be given to this.
- (v) A Strategy Group should be established, with the LEA as facilitator, to develop a Strategy involving mapping of provision, identification of duplication and gaps, and working together, in partnership, to utilise resources more effectively and efficiently. The Strategy should then be fed back into the individual organisations' curriculum development plans.

**SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL
CHILDREN & LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – IN-DEPTH
SCRUTINY**

“Combating the Local Skills Deficit through Further & Adult Education”

**WITNESS SESSION NO.1
14th January 2005**

ATTENDEES

Ms Sue Coole – South East Essex College
Mr Neil Bates – Prospects Business Technology Training Ltd
Mrs Jill Warnes – Adult Community College
Mr Rick Oliver – Adult Community College
Mr Roger Culpin – Adult Community College

QUESTIONS

1. Do you perceive there to be a deficit in skills? If so, in what areas?
2. Do you plan ways to meet the skills deficit? How?
3. What factors determine the timetable and the range of course available?
4. How do you engage employers to develop their training to address the skills deficit?
5. What do you perceive to be the barriers in engaging people to take up adult/further education and the courses available?
6. Could the local authority support your planning framework? How?

RESPONSES

a) SOUTH EAST ESSEX COLLEGE

Ms Sue Coole, Director of Student and Community Services, responded on behalf of the College to the questions previously submitted on behalf of the Committee.

Response to Question 1

Ms Coole confirmed that the College did indeed perceive a deficit in skills, and told the Committee that substantial numbers of adults aged over 19 have no formal qualifications. Significant numbers of adults also have poor literacy and numeracy skills. She further confirmed that half of all adults aged between 16 and 74 are qualified below Level 2 (LSC StAR Review 2005). However, she said that they were still waiting for the first tranche of students to come through who had benefited from the Government’s literacy and numeracy initiatives.

She told the Committee that the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was focusing on four priority areas:

Construction
Logistics and Transport
Retail, Wholesale Trade and Hospitality
Health & Social Care

Response to Question 2

Ms Coole outlined various ways in which the College is working to meet the skills deficit. She said that they try to identify where there are gaps in the curriculum, and then work to address them. Much of their work is related to Skills for Life.

The College is working with its NOVA partners to support the areas of Construction, Retail, Health & Social Care and Logistics through training and work-based vocational learning, and she told the Committee that they currently have 100 students on Hospitality and Catering NVQs and AVCEs. In the future they hope to offer a Foundation degree in Hospitality. The College is a large provider for 14-19 and 19+ courses in Health & Social Care courses, and they work with employers via the Profit from Learning Project, through which clients are supported to achieve Skills for Life qualifications alongside Health & Social Care qualifications. General Retail is covered by a strand of the Business and Management Studies Programmes, and Fashion Retail is covered within their Fashion Communicating and Marketing Programme. Skills for Life programmes are provided to Jobcentre Plus clients both at East Street and at Outreach centres, and Skills for Work provides support for a variety of skills development and enhancement of Job-seeking Skills.

The College is a Centre of Vocational Excellence (COVE) for the Microsoft Technological Regional Academy, which aims to provide professional development courses for both employers and their employees.

Ms Coole told the Committee that there are currently approximately 600 mainstream students who have been diagnosed with skills requirements who are receiving on-course literacy and numeracy support. There are also Move On programmes for adults who do not have any qualifications in literacy or numeracy, and Learndirect provision is offered both at East Street and the Luker Road campus. Flexible programmes of learning are also offered at evenings and weekends to meet individual requirements.

Response to Question 3

Ms Coole said that the College carries out ongoing curriculum reviews in line with LSC targets and the outcomes of market research / labour-market research and trends. The Higher Education Recruitment Group identifies courses and timetables, and the internal College Curriculum Management Groups review the curriculum on a regular basis before reporting termly to the Academic Board.

The College works with partner organisations such as the University of Essex to identify generic and specialist areas of development, and also works with Sector Skills Councils to develop various curriculum areas in line with labour-market research. There is ongoing development work with the 14-19 MIX IT

Strategy Group to identify a cross-Southend curriculum strategy for 2005-2010. There is also work with local Secondary Schools via projects such as Optima to identify the current and future development needs of learners.

In addition there is work with employers through Business Development and Business College to provide training and development to meet the labour-market needs, as well as meetings with focus groups of employers which were established to indicate sector requirements and inform the College's responses.

Response to Question 4

The LSC has agreed a target of a 10% rise in employer engagement each year. Ms Coole told the Committee that this target has been exceeded in 2004/05. Employer engagement is addressed through working with Business Link, and through the Business College and Business Development. The College works with employers on Higher Education and curriculum-based employer panels, and the Employer Forum meets on a termly basis. There is a partnership with the University of Essex Business Development Centre, which is based at Princess Caroline House.

Ms Coole acknowledged that the fact that Southend had a high proportion of SMEs (small to medium employers) was a problem in that such employers did not always see the merit in offering training. The College found that the larger employers, such as the banks, were more co-operative.

Ms Coole said that the SeeBiz Magazine is sent to employers on a regular basis.

Response to Question 5

Ms Coole believed that barriers were often caused by previous unhappy experiences of education, and where people do not perceive a need, or do not want, to develop higher-level skills. There is no quick fix to enable people to gain the skills they need, but long-term attendance on courses does not always fit into lifestyles, and lack of flexibility and too much accountability can also be off-putting factors. People need a lot of support in order to move to a more autonomous level, and do not always have the motivation to improve or extend their skills, especially when their current financial situation is adequate for their needs.

Response to Question 6

Ms Coole urged the facilitation of a Strategy Group to look at the issue of adult skills across the Southend area. The aim of the group would be to develop a Strategy involving mapping of provision, identification of duplication and gaps, and working together, in partnership, to utilise resources more effectively and efficiently. The Strategy could then be fed back into the individual organisations' curriculum development plans.

Additional points:

- Members expressed concern at the number of 16-74 year olds who were qualified below Level 2. Officers cautioned against misinterpretation of Ms Coole's figures, as it was not necessarily the case that adults with qualifications below Level 2 had poor literacy and numeracy skills.
- Ms Coole said that a lot of work was being done with disaffected youngsters to give them the opportunity of work-based training.
- Members raised the issue of nursing, where there is a recognised shortage. Ms Coole said that some of the strands from the Health & Social Care courses could lead into nursing.
- In relation to Question 6, Mr Downing confirmed that steps had already been taken to set up a meeting between partner organisations to address the issue of the provision of adult education across the Southend area.

Councillor Moring thanked Ms Coole on behalf of the Committee for attending.

b) PROSPECTS BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY TRAINING LTD

Mr Neil Bates (Chief Executive) responded on behalf of Prospects to the questions previously submitted on behalf of the Committee.

He explained that Prospects is an employer-led registered charity that focuses on vocational skills training. It was set up in 1969 by one of the industrial training boards. Employers were charged a levy, Prospects then exercised a grants system, and employers could then recover their levy by offering training.

Prospects now has two major skills centres – one in Fairfax Drive, which concentrates on construction training, and another vocational centre in Basildon which focuses on engineering. They have around 2,000 students a year, of whom around 300 are currently on apprentice-based programmes. The programme for 14-16 year-olds is a vocational curriculum, aimed mainly at students who have had problems at school, and for whom vocational training gives an alternative focus. The programme for 16-24 is more apprentice-based, and operates alongside such initiatives as the New Deal. Prospects also offers technical training for employed people, for which employers have to pay.

Because there is no pre-selection on to their programmes, Prospects attracts a high proportion of disaffected youngsters. Around half of the students who come in at 16 have few or no GCSEs, and have significant skills needs.

Most of the funding comes from the LSC, and Prospects also receives funding from the EAZ. Some students attend on a part-time basis, dividing their time between school and Prospects.

Mr Bates emphasised the direct relationship between the competitiveness of a business and the skills of its workforce. He also maintained that an individual's skills levels affected their social and economic circumstances. He claimed that there had been a long history of under-investment in vocational training, and that funding in further education was driven by qualification outcomes. However, he believed that there was currently more awareness of the skills shortage.

He went on to outline Prospects' proposals for a new vocational college in Southend, following the results of their own market assessment. The intention is to cater for around 4000 students from the age of 14, split between three academies – engineering, construction and business. They hope to work in partnership with a consortium of local schools, with the schools covering the more academic aspects of courses, and Prospects covering the vocational aspects.

Mr Bates acknowledged that Prospects was now receiving recognition for the vocational programmes it was offering, although there was still a stigma attached to vocational training among middle-class parents. Schools were reluctant to release the brighter students as it affected their exam figures, and he stressed the need to change the system so that all students had their achievements at Prospects recognised.

Mr Bates referred to the high rate of unemployment in Southend (1 in 3, as opposed to 1 in 9 for the rest of Essex), and the huge gap between the qualifications and skills of those unemployed and the demands of business. He told the Committee that the unemployed in Southend remain unemployed for longer than anywhere else in Essex. He said that there was effectively an underclass in Southend with expensive long-term training needs who were unable to share the prosperity of the town. He claimed that 6% of school leavers leave school with no qualifications at all, and that it was these people, who were not engaged with either education or employment, whose problems needed to be addressed.

He confirmed that he would be very keen to be part of any strategic group such as Ms Coole had suggested, and was anxious to see an overall strategy developed for adult learning. With the growth within the Thames Gateway there was a forecast for an additional 8000 jobs by 2007, and he urged the necessity of more students on vocational courses, especially those courses connected with the construction industry.

Councillor Moring thanked Mr Bates on behalf of the Committee for attending.

c) ADULT EDUCATION COLLEGE

Mrs Jill Warnes (Principal) responded to the questions previously submitted to the Adult Education College on behalf of the Committee. She was accompanied by Mr Rick Oliver (Vice Principal – Curriculum) and Mr Roger Culpin (Vice Principal – Quality).

Response to Question 1

Mrs Warnes confirmed the skills shortage in Southend, and quoted figures of 20% of the Southend adult population who have no qualifications at all, and 35% who have less than Level 2. The Basic Skills Agency produced a report in 1998 which gave figures of 13,500 adults with low or very low literacy skills, and 30,500 adults with low or very low numeracy skills. Mrs Warnes also gave figures issued by the LSC, who have targets to improve the basic skills of 2.25 million adults and to reduce by at least 40% the number of adults in the workforce who lack an NVQ Level 2, or equivalent.

Mrs Warnes said that over 2,000 adults come to them every year, and she identified a particular skills deficit in skilled trades, among care-home staff and childcare workers, and among non-teaching staff in schools. Mrs Warnes also made the point that the basic skills that employers need are increasing all the time. She confirmed that the Adult Community College tended to offer part-time courses, while the South East Essex College offered more full-time.

Response to Questions 2 and 3

Mrs Warnes confirmed that they were working to address the skills shortage. It was often difficult for people to admit to a lack of skills, and the College endeavoured to make it as easy as possible by trying to run courses near to where people live. They currently use 60 sites within the Southend area. In a recent inspection 48 were visited by inspectors and the College achieved a high grade for this work. They try to offer provision for shift workers, as well as working in partnership with the Probation Service, the YMCA and the Council. People enter provision at every level, and many are not nearly ready to take national tests, although this is the ultimate goal.

Mrs Warnes said that the College also has a strong partnership with SAVS, helping to give people the skills they need within their voluntary organisations and then transferring them into the workplace where appropriate. Their work in this area has been taken up by the LSC as a model in reaching out to people who hadn't considered adult education.

Through the AdVance Partnership the hard-to-reach adults with no qualifications were targeted. The LSC regarded these adults as a priority, and SAVS were well placed to locate such people through community and voluntary groups. The AdVance Centre on the main adult college site offers them help with basic skills and national tests. Such adults are prevented from easily accessing mainstream opportunities by various factors such as disability, fear of failure, or the experience of attending unsuitable courses in the past.

Response to Question 4

Mrs Warnes said that employers wanting training for their workforce are encouraged to contact the LSC. A skills broker then identifies suitable trainers within the area, and the employer chooses who they would like to deliver the training. In this way the College has been involved in a number of projects.

The College has developed a workplace needs analysis to determine, with the employer, the culture of the workplace and the type of training needed. This is followed by individual training needs analyses with individual members of the workforce, including diagnostic assessment. These processes are now being advocated by the LSC throughout Essex.

Mrs Warnes gave details of the different organisations for whom the College has provided a wide variety of courses, including Southend Hospital, Southend Borough Council, and a number of care homes in the area. The College has also been working with schools to provide training for the non-teaching staff. Their induction course for teaching assistants, for example, has been expanded and transformed into an NVQ so that all substantial training undertaken is accredited and meets national guidelines. They have also been moving towards a generic NVQ with different options for administrative staff.

The College is the main provider of childcare training locally, and has a strong partnership with Southend Sure Start. Extensive work has also been carried out with ethnic minority groups to offer ESOL alongside heritage language provision. Introductory courses to help speakers of other languages to teach their main heritage language has often led to students moving on to other work in the College.

Parents with low skills are often motivated to the first step into learning by the desire to help their children succeed, and the College recently gained a Beacon Award for extending participation in basic skills, based on family learning.

Mrs Warnes emphasised the flexibility of the College's provision. In particular, the College is very willing to deliver courses on employers' and community premises. Their timetabling is very flexible, and they deliver courses at 7.00am at the Hospital and on Sunday afternoons for Chinese workers, as well as accommodating the changing timetable demands of shift workers.

Affordable childcare is offered at the College's Cockleshell Nursery, with further subsidies for those who cannot afford the provision, and other sites are served by a mobile crèche.

Response to Question 5

Mrs Warnes identified various factors that could prove to be barriers, including the fear of failure and the experience of failure in the past. There is often a reluctance to acknowledge difficulties with basic skills, especially as there are significant numbers of people in Southend who have achieved a great deal without any qualifications. The cash-in-hand, casual work economy were also contributory factors in discouraging adults from taking up training.

From the employers' point of view, there are often problems in releasing staff for training, as this affects productivity, and a reluctance to embark on training for staff who then leave for better jobs. There is often an inability to fund training, and sometimes a lack of management skills can be a contributory factor.

Response to Question 6

Mrs Warnes said that there used to be a Learning Partnership, and the lack of this was felt. She stressed the need for a planning framework for all the adult providers, which would reduce the danger of unplanned competition. She said that there was currently no strategy for adults from 19+, and urged that there was a clear role for the Local Authority to act as facilitator.

Additional Points:

- Members asked about the average age of their students, and Mrs Warnes said that this must be around 40.
- Mrs Warnes told the Committee that part-time adult education tutors are not generally trained extensively, but that the Southend College had broken the mould by insisting on training at level 4, and providing it in-house. The College had been recognised by the LSC for its proficiency with the numeracy curriculum, and had taken a lead role in organising the delivery of the new level 4 qualification for numeracy tutors throughout Essex.

Councillor Moring thanked Mrs Warnes and her colleagues on behalf of the Committee for attending.

**SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL
CHILDREN & LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – IN-DEPTH
SCRUTINY**

“Combating the Local Skills Deficit through Further & Adult Education”

**WITNESS SESSION NO.2
11th February 2005**

ATTENDEES

Ms Maureen Frewin - SAVS
Ms Michele Lucas – Connexions

QUESTIONS

1. Do you perceive there to be a deficit in skills? If so, in what areas?
2. How do you identify a skills deficit?
3. Do you believe there to be a mismatch between skills need and the willingness of potential employees to engage in development/training?
4. How do you believe this can be addressed?

RESPONSES

a) SAVS

Ms Maureen Frewin responded on behalf of SAVS to the questions previously submitted on behalf of the Committee.

She prefaced her response by telling the Committee a little about SAVS. She explained that they had originally been set up to train volunteers, and now worked in partnership with Southend Adult Community College. They had formed an Advanced Partnership, whereby learning and training were made available to adults working in the voluntary sector – the College provided the tutors, while SAVS found the students. SAVS had a database for all voluntary organisations throughout the town, and they circulated everyone on the database three times a year with opportunities for learning and training. They also held open days and open evenings. They carried out training needs analyses on a regular basis in order to ascertain what training was needed. They targeted young adults who were not engaging in either learning or employment, and through the Reach Out project they sent workers into various areas of the town to find out what sort of training the hard-to-reach sectors of the community wanted. All students were registered on the College’s database, which meant that some tracking was possible. Ms Frewin said that there was a move towards accredited learning, making it easier to transfer skills to the workplace. SAVS believed that volunteers should have job descriptions so that they knew what was expected of them, as this was often not the case.

Response to Question 1

Ms Frewin said that the perception in Southend was that there was indeed a deficit in skills. SAVS was very aware of the report by the Basic Skills Agency which had identified very high levels of adults needing basic skills support. She drew attention to the fact that basic skills were now changing. Whereas they used to be about reading, writing and maths they now extended to other skills, including computer skills. She explained that most people did not come to SAVS primarily for training, but that it was often possible to direct them towards support.

The Learning Skills Council had highlighted that 20% of adults do not have qualifications up to Level 2, but Ms Frewin stressed that the 20% covered the whole adult group, whereas SAVS was mostly dealing with those adults who had left school some time ago, and not recent school leavers. She emphasised that there was a gap between the skills needed by employers and those currently offered on vocational training. She explained that it was often necessary to be very imaginative to get some people to take up training, and that it was better to sit and discuss their needs with them rather than put them through needs-analysis tests.

Response to Question 2

Ms Frewin explained that it was necessary to identify training needs on an individual basis, and then to direct people into the appropriate learning pathways. It was also necessary to establish exactly what employers needed.

She emphasised the need for the different training providers in Southend to come together to discuss training issues. There was currently no forum for them to talk about the different opportunities and to coordinate their courses.

Response to Question 3

Ms Frewin explained that SAVS was not a training provider, and did not currently engage with employers. Many of the people who came to SAVS were unemployed, and saw volunteering as a route to employment. She told the Committee that they would be setting up a Social Enterprise Centre of Excellence in the future, and through this long-term project would be setting up relationships with employers.

Response to Question 4

Ms Frewin believed that the Social Enterprise Centre could play a central role in providing opportunities for people and then moving them on to employment. She believed it would link in with the Seedbed Business Centre. However, she said that Business Enterprises did not really understand the ethos of voluntary organisations; for SAVS, the social element came first, but businesses were more interested in making profits. She recognised that SAVS needed to work with businesses in their drive to make people employable.

Additional points:

- Members raised the issue of IT courses offered by local venues such as Community Shops, and queried whether SAVS directed people towards them. However, Ms Frewin believed that there were too many such courses with not enough people taking them up, and stressed that there should be more coordination between the providers setting the courses up. She was also concerned that funding streams tended to be too rigid.

Councillor Moring thanked Ms Frewin on behalf of the Committee for attending.

b) CONNEXIONS

Ms Michele Lucas responded on behalf of EST Connexions to the questions previously submitted on behalf of the Committee. She explained that her role was to promote the vision of Connexions at a local level, and to ensure that it was meeting the needs of all young people aged 13-19 and up to 25 with identified disabilities in Southend.

Response to Question 1

Ms Lucas believed that there was a shortage of training opportunities rather than of actual skills. She said that many young people apply for training, but the places go to the youngsters with the higher qualifications. This invariably means young people with lower qualification sets find it difficult to access the provision.

Ms Lucas believed that there would be many opportunities within the Thames Gateway development including key areas like construction, and was anxious that our youngsters would be in a position to benefit from the jobs that would be generated. She said that the biggest challenge came from those young people who were not involved in either training or employment (NEET), and that she had recently produced a report to highlight this issue. She explained that there were many small businesses were not in a position to offer training opportunities. She recognised the importance of working with local employers, and said that there was a significant number of 16-year-olds who wanted to progress into work. She believed that the pathways for 14-19 will provide a more flexible route, and that the key to this was the collaboration of schools in meeting this agenda

Response to Question 2

Ms Lucas informed the Committee that Connexions have a presence in all schools, colleges and community bases, where their role is to provide impartial advice and guidance. They target the 13-19 age range, extending this up to 25 where there was any sort of disability. They engage young people through presentations, and found that Year 9, when options were chosen, and Year 11, when different pathways were being chosen, were particularly important years.

Some youngsters knew which direction they wanted to take, and for these Connexions offered 'Fast Tomato', an interactive tool that they could use themselves. For others, Years 11 and 12 were 'hotspots' when youngsters needed close monitoring. January was another 'hotspot' time, when more support was often needed.

Ms Lucas told the Committee about the Education Maintenance Allowance, which was paid to all young people who stayed in education or training meeting the criteria. She confirmed that Southend had done particularly well in promoting EMA's and as a result young people meeting the criteria were remaining in education/training. She said that there was a major issue around how young people prepared for the transition to college or work, and how they presented themselves in that new world. She referred to the U Project, which identifies young people in year 11 at risk of entering NEET this provides a programme, which culminated in a residential course each summer. This project was about preparing young people for transition and how to interact with a different groups of people.

Response to Question 3

Ms Lucas said that there was sometimes a mismatch between the perception of skills and the reality, and that it could be a challenge to persuade youngsters to recognise their skills deficit. It was part of the Learning Skills Council's role to engage with employers. Ms Lucas recognised that there were always cost implications to training and that this was particular true for small businesses.

Response to Question 4

Ms Lucas told the Committee that it was difficult to address everyone's issues, but that Connexions tried to take small groups of young people who are NEET to see where things had gone wrong, and to try to get the youngsters engaged again. She said that JobCentre Plus also tried to target certain groups to address their issues.

Additional Points:

- Members suggested that it would be beneficial for Ms Lucas to attend the Business & Tourism Partnership meetings.
- Members referred to a video of a recent U Project, in which youngsters had been mountain climbing in Wales, and it was agreed that members of the Committee could watch it at a future Scrutiny meeting.
- Members were concerned as to how Connexions could help students with problems who had been excluded from mainstream school. Ms Lucas reassured them that there was an intensive team with a much smaller caseload which was able to focus on students such as these. She also told the Committee that such students could always self-refer to Connexions.
- Members raised the issue of the ageing workforce. It was recognised that because people worked for longer it meant there were fewer opportunities for youngsters just starting out.

Appendix 3

- Members asked whether youngsters were tracked, and Ms Lucas confirmed that all youngsters were tracked until their 20th birthday. Connexions had a role to support them until that time.
- Ms Lucas asked what the Council's policy was, and what support was offered, towards youngsters who were taken into their employ.