



2024-0033048

**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills**

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Johnathon Cuthbertson
Chair, East of England Skills Working Group
Head of Employability and Skills, Essex County Council
By email: stevebarwickpc@outlook.com

04 November 2024

Dear Mr Cuthbertson,

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 October, in which you offered your congratulations regarding my appointment to the Department for Education and outlined a number of issues around skills policy. It is a privilege to serve, and I am looking forward to working with you as we deliver on our manifesto commitments.

I welcome the East of England Skills Working Group's support of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), and I was pleased to read that the region is benefiting from the increased engagement between businesses, skills providers and local stakeholders.

As you note, the current grant-funding period for the designated Employer Representative Boards (ERBs) leading the LSIPs runs until March 2025. We recognise that the ERBs leading the LSIPs are vulnerable to fixed-term funding and that this presents a risk to the programme's success. Future funding arrangements for LSIPs will be determined in the current Spending Review and communicated to ERBs as soon as possible.

We have long heard calls from businesses for greater flexibility in our apprenticeships system, and how levy funds can be spent. We are acting on this and are introducing a reformed Growth and Skills Levy that will deliver greater opportunity for employers, individuals and the wider economy. This will support us to deliver new foundation apprenticeships which will give young people a route in to careers in critical sectors, and allow funding for shorter apprenticeships, giving learners and employers greater flexibility over their training than under the existing system.

We recognise that degree apprenticeships can offer huge potential for people to progress into professions traditionally only accessed by a traditional Higher Education. However, we also need to take tough decisions to rebalance the apprenticeship programme towards those at the start of their careers or not already well-placed to get on. This is why, taking advice from Skills England, we will be asking more employers to step forward and fund level 7 apprenticeships outside of the levy. This will enable better targeting of the levy and help more people to get on at the start of their working lives.

The training eligible for funding under the new levy will develop over time. Skills England will work closely with employers, training providers, unions and other key partners to identify priority skills gaps, helping ensure that levy-funded training delivers value for money, meets the needs of business and helps drive economic growth for all regions across England. We will set out more details on the design of the Growth and Skills Levy, including Skills England engagement plans, in due course.

We recognise the importance of attracting the best global talent to our science and technology sectors. The UK's existing immigration offer enables talented individuals to come to the UK through a variety of routes, including the Global Talent and Skilled Worker routes. For example, Home Office data shows 8,174 Global Talent visas were awarded in the year to June 2024, an increase of 16% on the previous year.

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology leads on the recruitment and retention of researchers. The UK remains a top destination for international researchers, and we are determined to create a fair and properly managed immigration system that brings down historically high levels of legal migration.

As you state, devolution is a priority for this government and the Devolution White Paper, due to be published later this Autumn, will set out our vision for the future. This will include details on our ambition to widen devolution so that more areas can benefit from the freedoms and powers that devolution brings.

One of the main objectives of the Analysis and Insight division within Skills England (previously the Unit for Future Skills) is to structure and improve access to skills data. It does this by linking up data sets, mapping education, skills and jobs at local levels and providing tools that enable exploration of the data.

We are finding ways to make existing data more available and easier to use for decision makers in the skills system. For example:

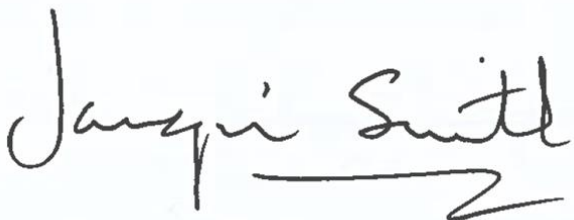
- Our Local Skills Dashboard provides a hub for up-to-date information and data on local skills, education and employment. This was launched in February 2023, after several prototypes and consultation with local users: The dashboard can be found at: tinyurl.com/YC6XDMEP.
- Our Jobs and Skills Dashboard, launched in May 2024, allows users to explore employment, demand and education pathways for both STEM occupations and occupations most relevant to the UK critical technologies. This can be found at: tinyurl.com/53NEMU3F.
- An accompanying ad-hoc statistics release was also made available on Explore Education Statistics in May 2024 which is available at: tinyurl.com/342CX2WS.
- Developing a Career Pathways Dashboard that will show the range of educational routes learners take to gain employment in different occupations.
- Developing the UK Standard Skills Classification (SSC) to better identify skills and map them within courses and across the workforce using a common language. The first phase setting out the plans was published in October 2023. A prototype SSC will be developed by Autumn 2024, with the final version available in 2026. Further information can be found at: tinyurl.com/5ZM3MP7E.

We will also publish a Post-16 Skills and Education Strategy setting out a clear and coherent vision for skills in England.

Finally, I am grateful for your kind offer to meet. Unfortunately, due to heavy diary pressures, I am unable to commit to a meeting at the present time.

Thank you for writing to me. I hope that this response is useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue background. The signature reads "Jacqui Smith" in a cursive style, with a horizontal line underlining the name.

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