



**FENLAND
PARTNERSHIP**



Business in the
Community

**THE BIG
CONVERSATION**
TURNING WORK EXPERIENCE
INTO WORK INSPIRATION



Cambridgeshire
County Council

The Fenland Skills Summit

and

The Fenland Big Conversation



31 March 2011

The Boathouse, Wisbech



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1. Introduction and key areas for action

Firstly, and most importantly, thank you to all the speakers, delegates and students that attended the Fenland Skills Summit. Some very positive feedback was received on the day and many businesses were enquiring about whether there will be a similar event held in future. There will be! This event was just the start of a long-term project to improve skills levels in Fenland. We will need input from local businesses, schools, young people, public bodies and other learning providers as this project progresses to make sure we are working together in the best possible way to make positive changes. We will keep you informed of what is going on so that you can get involved.

Thanks go to the following for organising and being involved in the event:

- The Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce for leading the organisation of the event and John Bridge, Chief Executive of the Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce, for hosting the Skills Summit
- The 14-19 Partnership for contributing to the cost of the event and organising the students' involvement in the Big Conversation
- Mike Brophy, Regional Director at Business in the Community for bringing the Big Conversation to Fenland
- Fenland District Council, for providing the venue and assisting in organising the event and in particular Councillor Chris Seaton, Portfolio Holder for the Economy, for his support for this event and skills improvements in Fenland
- Cambridgeshire County Council, for assisting in organising and promoting the event
- Tom Jackson, Editorial Content Manager at the Cambs Times for hosting the Big Conversation

The organisers would also like to thank the organisations that sponsored the Skills Summit:

- The College of West Anglia
- University Centre Peterborough
- Business Link East
- The Cambs Times



We are working hard to address the issues raised at the event and we will need everyone's enthusiasm and expertise to help us make this happen. The key areas for action are as follows.

From the **Skills Summit**, the following areas of action were identified:

- Improvements in **engineering, manufacturing and construction** skills in Fenland – these sectors are a priority for Fenland and the UK
- Make it easy for employers to **access apprenticeships** and to ensure that a flexible range of apprenticeships are available
- Education establishments/training providers should be more **flexible** to adapt to the changing needs of businesses
- The proportion of local people with good **basic skills** needs to increase. Soft skills such as interpersonal skills and team working, and attitudes to work among Fenland people, need improving
- Any schemes aiming to improve skills levels need to consider the rural nature of the district and **access problems**
- Currently there are too many young people leaving school who are not ready to move into a work environment – there needs to be some way of improving the **transition from school to work**

From the **Big Conversation**, the following areas of action were identified:

- **The need for a strategic group** of partners coordinating work experience and business-school engagement across the district to provide a consistent service to students, schools, training providers and businesses and make sure activities are addressing issues in the Fenland economy



- **Improved preparation for students:** help in making decisions about their placement and a consistent, challenging and transparent process for allocating placements, including interviews and/or assessments where appropriate
- **Improved preparation for employers:** comprehensive information on the benefits and requirements from businesses, clear guidance on the process and a network of supporting partners
- **A consistent work experience programme** for each placement, with expectations clear between the student and employer from the outset, key objectives for the students, progress monitoring, records of achievements and follow-up sessions with students afterwards
- **A continual learning process** which enables the scheme to improve each year and good practice to be shared with partners across the country

This report summarises the views of delegates that were recorded at the Skills Summit and the Big Conversation. Section 2 details some of the issues where solutions may already exist but local businesses have not come across them. Sections 3 and 4 summarise the key findings from the Skills Summit and Big Conversation respectively. Section 5 details the activity now happening to address some of the key areas of action from the Skills Summit. This includes the new 'Business Class' project, which involves local partners, businesses and Business in the Community working together to build a strategic partnership between local schools and businesses. This and other exciting projects are being shaped around all the evidence gathered at the Skills Summit, so please have a look at the details in section 5 (see page 12) of this report.

We would like to keep a continual and open dialogue with local businesses and other partners while these projects are being developed and during their delivery, so please do feel free to contact us at any time with your thoughts and suggestions. See page 13 for Amy Wilson's contact details.

2. Some easy answers...

It was clear that there were some common themes in the discussions between delegates throughout the day. In some cases, the issues discussed will require long-term collaborative action, but in other cases, there are already things going on that can help. Some of the key areas of discussion and questions where there is an existing solution are listed below:

I would like to offer an apprenticeship but I'm not sure how to find someone that I can be sure will be interested.

- The National Apprenticeships Service offers a matching service to link apprenticeship opportunities with those seeking an apprenticeship in the relevant industry. For more information and to get started with taking on an apprentice, go to:
www.apprenticeships.org.uk
- You can also talk to a college if you would like advice on taking on an apprentice. Have a look to see what local colleges can provide, and use their expertise to work out the best options for you.
- Getting involved with schools is a great way to stimulate interest in working for your business among young people and inspire them to take on an apprenticeship placement or employment with you after they leave if things go well. To get involved, see page 13 of this report for Ian Alford's contact details. Ian will run through everything you need to know.

It would be good if I could reduce the risk of taking on a young person or apprentice by taking them on through a work experience or work trial placement first.

- Job Centre Plus offers this service already, and so far this year the Wisbech office have successfully placed more young people in Work Experience than any other office in the whole of East Anglia. JCP also offer a Work Trial scheme to local employers. Their services are free and they will be happy to chat with you to

make sure they provide a service tailored to your needs. Just call Peter Weight, Labour Market and Recruitment Advisor at Wisbech Job Centre Plus, for more information on 01945 675805 or email peter.weight@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk. If you require the services of a different JCP office, Peter will be able to give you details of the relevant person to contact.

- You can also get involved with school work experience schemes. Many employers have successfully built up a great reputation and have stimulated interest among local young people, who then want to go to work for them after they leave school. To get involved, contact Ian Alford; see page 13 for details.

The skills course I want isn't offered in Fenland

There may be some educational establishments that you haven't yet considered that would be able to help you. The following ones are already offering their services to Fenland businesses, so if you haven't already, have a look to see if any of these can help:

- The College of West Anglia – www.cwa.ac.uk
- Huntingdonshire Regional College – www.huntingdon.ac.uk
- Boston College – www.boston.ac.uk
- Peterborough Regional College – www.peterborough.ac.uk
- University Centre Peterborough – www.peterborough.ac.uk/ucp
- Cambridge Regional College - www.camre.ac.uk
- The Open University – www.open.ac.uk

A range of other training providers may also be able to help, so do shop around. Some colleges offer a brokerage service, so you can ask them for assistance in finding the right course if they don't provide what you are looking for. Business Link also provides help with finding training solutions, which may include finding funding to help with your training costs. Go to the Business Link website to find out more:

www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/layer?topicId=1074202347

3. The Skills Summit

The Skills Summit was held in the morning session of the event. Over 40 local businesses and other organisations attended to hear talks from inspirational Fenland business people and put forward their views on skills issues in Fenland. To have a look at all the presentations that were given on the day, please follow the link (please note you may need to copy and paste into your browser):

<http://www.cambridgeshirechamber.co.uk/newsevent.php?newseventid=210>

After the talks, delegates were asked for their opinions on a range of skills-related issues in Fenland. The following points summarise the main areas of discussion:

What skills gaps does your business face now and in the future? How easy do you find locally sourcing the training you require? Where are the greatest pressures in your sector?

- There are big problems with engineering, manufacturing and construction skills in Fenland. We need more people qualified to level 4 or higher in these subjects as many people currently employed in these industries are retiring or approaching retirement. Many skilled adult engineers are being replaced by semi-skilled individuals.
- It would be good to see a young apprenticeship scheme for 14-16 year olds
- There is no local work-based accountancy skills provision and there are significant gaps in sales training
- Training providers are not able to respond flexibly to industry needs
- The rural nature of Fenland means there are access problems for apprentices
- In some cases, basic soft skills such as interpersonal skills and attitudes to work need improving
- Research shows engineering, IT, financial and health skills are important for economic growth



***What would be the advantages of apprenticeships to businesses?
What are the barriers to employing an apprentice and how could
these be overcome?***

- Would benefit local economy
- Is a cost-effective labour option
- Can source training specific to a company
- Need to increase the flexibility and range of options
- Access – rural infrastructure is a problem, transport to and from training provision may be a considerable distance and lack of rail links in Wisbech
- Finding local people with interest/right attitude can be a problem
- The historical image of apprenticeships is a problem
- Need to raise awareness of opportunities among parents, students and employers

***How could your recruitment process be improved to avoid
disadvantaging the young people who have limited or no
employment history?***

- Link with college(s)
- Job Centre could provide trials in the workplace (*note: this is already in place, see section 2, p.4 for details*)
- Could have an apprenticeships training association
- Schools could offer short courses to reduce risks associated with employing young person – get them used to work
- Behavioural assessments prior to employment

4. The Big Conversation

The Big Conversation was held in the afternoon session of the event and involved students from the 4 Fenland secondary schools and the College of West Anglia as well as local business people. The whole session was focused on a discussion on aspects of work experience. There were a number of ideas and suggestions that were familiar in many of the questions.

A summary of the key points from these discussions is shown in the tables below:

The benefits of work experience

YOUNG PEOPLE	EMPLOYERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - work experience is viewed by young people as a positive experience and they tend to enjoy learning in work rather than in a school environment – - number of comments from young people relating to difficulty settling back in school after being in a work placement - one work placement is not enough to help with important career decisions and gaining required experience of being in workplace - need to increase number and variety of placements available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - getting experience of being in the workplace – self discipline, team working, applying learning - corporate social responsibility requirements - keeping up with new technologies and social phenomena - learning from the opinions of new people/making improvements - talent spotting

What fears do you have in taking part in work experience?

YOUNG PEOPLE	EMPLOYERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - nervous about duties, meeting new people and what to expect - might not get the desired placement - not being introduced/shown round beforehand - general feeling from YP was that despite early fears they settled very quickly into placements and they thought that they needed experience so had to go out and get it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - legislation/bureaucracy - not understanding the rules/what do we do if student misbehaves? - un-coordinated approach – overlap of schools needing placements - placements not always appropriate - distraction from own work/need someone to supervise - sometimes not sure if YP feel forced to work

What expectations do employers have, and are they realistic?

YOUNG PEOPLE	EMPLOYERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responsibility - appearance - confidence - following the rules - well-mannered and approachable - general feeling that employers are realistic in what they expect from students and even higher expectations would be ok – student’s personality will determine whether they reach expectations - want to learn about the industry and to understand the environment - lack of guidance in some cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - students should be timely and reliable - would like students to engage with staff - need to approach with the attitude of ‘the more you put in the more you get out’ - could be measurements around goals and objectives for things like responsibility, timekeeping etc

How could preparation for work experience be improved?

YOUNG PEOPLE	EMPLOYERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inviting employers to explain expectations - more support to students – guidance on how to approach employers and ongoing support to move into FT employment - being shown around the workplace before starting and meeting the people there - session at school to draw up a plan of things to achieve in placement - interviews should be held to allocate placements - more assistance and preparation with decision-making beforehand - info from other students who have done WE already 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - schools need to be better engaged with businesses - YP need to see where they will be working - Buddy system to share concerns - Fully understand what YP want to achieve from placement - Would like interview beforehand

What should employers do to get the most out of work experience?

YOUNG PEOPLE	EMPLOYERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan time for WE within business - Provide progress reports (daily if possible) with a quick 10 minute review after each day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare a variety of worthwhile projects which give a true reflection of what it's like to work in company - Provide a work timetable - Ask what the YP wants to get out of their placement and agree objectives - Enthuse and be prepared - Nominate a mentor

What should young people do to get the most out of work experience?

YOUNG PEOPLE	EMPLOYERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need lessons in schools to run through expectations, how we should approach employers, how to do a good application and agree expectations with employer - Want to be treated like an employee and given responsibilities - Want something to fill in (like a workbook) to record details of placement and achievements to look back on - Written record of skills, achievements, experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask questions - Don't be afraid to ask for help - Employers could visit schools beforehand to set out generic expectations - Persevere with a checklist - Up to the student to find out more about the employer before placement - Is most valuable to treat student like employee but in some cases not possible due to length of time required for training an employee - Plan little projects for student - Make sure the student has chosen a placement that is appropriate for them and meets their needs

How could employer involvement be improved?

YOUNG PEOPLE	EMPLOYERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinated approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinated approach - Tailored programmes of WE around what student wants and what business is able to provide - Make sure students are aware of what they can do - Find time to invest in training, build relationships between employers and schools

5. Moving forward

Fenland District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and the Fenland 14-19 Partnership have a joint vision for local people and organisations to:

'Work together to build a sustainable, skilled workforce and improve opportunities for all residents and businesses to be successful and prosperous in the future across Fenland'

The partners involved in organising the Fenland Skills Summit are now working to develop an exciting project called 'Business Class', which will address many of the issues raised in the Skills Summit and Big Conversation. There are also other activities being planned to help raise adult skills levels and skills among the Fenland workforce. These include the 'Fenland Works!' project, which will provide a programme of unemployment support for local residents, and a project to increase the learning opportunities available to those employed in Fenland businesses.

The 'Business Class' project has successfully been delivered in some other areas of the country, led by Business in the Community. It is one of The Prince of Wales's flagship education programmes, which aims to build and sustain strategic partnerships between schools and businesses and foster collaborative action to address local needs. The Business Class model provides a simple and effective framework for developing and managing the partnerships. Across these partnerships, businesses work in geographical clusters with schools on wide-ranging issues such as Governorship, Head Teacher mentoring, change management, attendance support and curriculum enrichment. 149 Business Class partnerships are currently in existence or development across the country, and very positive feedback has been received from both schools and businesses involved.

All the above skills projects are in very early stages; however they are rapidly gaining momentum and support from local partners and businesses. We will all be working hard to make sure these projects help us to reach the skills vision for the district and complement other activities. Thank you to businesses for your support and involvement so far in the Skills Summit and Business Class. Raising skills levels will be a long-term initiative in Fenland, but there is a great feeling of commitment and collaboration among local partners and businesses, and it won't be long before we start to notice some changes that make real positive differences in Fenland.

6. Key contacts:

- **Cambridgeshire County Council Employer Engagement Team**
Contact: Karen Charlton, Employer Engagement Manager
Tel: 07917 503596 Email: karen.charlton@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Website: www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk
- **Cambridgeshire Chamber of Commerce**
Contact: Helen Bosett, Sector Co-ordinator
Tel: 01733 370809 Email: h.bosett@cambosci.co.uk
Website: www.cambridgeshirechamber.co.uk
- **Fenland District Council Economic Development Team**
Contact: Amy Wilson, Economic Development Officer
Tel: 01354 622507 Email: awilson@fenland.gov.uk
Website: www.fenland.gov.uk
- **The Fenland 14-19 Partnership**
Contact: Ian Alford, Partnership Manager
Tel: 07790 731184 Email: ianalford@mac.com
- **Business in the Community (BITC)**
Contact: Mike Brophy, Regional Director (East of England)
Tel: 01638 663272 Email: mike.brophy@bitc.org.uk
Website: www.bitc.org.uk/east
Work inspiration campaign: www.workinspiration.com



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