

Strengthening links between employers and schools

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Leading businessmen are calling on Essex schools to work closely with local employers to support young people preparing for the world of work and to gear up for the new vocational school diplomas.

Simon Bartley, managing director of S4 Consulting Limited and Chair of Summit Skills, the Sector Skills Council for building services engineering, stressed the importance of matching up the skills needs of Essex employers with the development of new vocational diplomas in the school curriculum.

About 100 delegates at a major conference held in Chelmsford heard how 14-19-year-olds in the county stand to benefit from boosting the ways in which employers can engage and work closely with their local schools.

Managed by the Learning and Skills Council, Essex, the organisation which exists to make England better skilled and more competitive, the event, "Building Bridges: 14-19 Employer Engagement" focused on developing effective partnership

working with employers to support the Government's education reforms for young people aged 14 to 19.

Clare Kershaw, Partnership Director, LSC Essex, said: "The conference focused on the challenging theme of employer engagement which is vital if the new vocational diplomas are to succeed.

"We highlighted employers' views of engagement with education and set out where the main opportunities and issues lie. There are many examples in Essex of good practice where schools are working very well with their local employers and this was an exciting opportunity to learn from this experience."

Mr Bartley said: "If we are going to make these new vocational diplomas an exciting alternative to traditional academic courses, then we have to bring employers on board from the beginning – and not just bolt them on later.

"Teachers and employers have got to develop a shared understanding of what is required to help young people leave school with the right competencies and to acquire a positive attitude for the workplace. "

He said one of the main problems preventing closer links with schools is that employers do not understand the language used in education and likewise schools may not always understand the needs and language of employers.

Mr Bartley said that unless young people leave school with the right attitudes and skills in place, then the wider UK economy could suffer: Not only could we as a country lose the global battle for economic success, but also the European battle – we could end up a third world country with no real way of funding public services," warned Mr Bartley.

His views were echoed by Gary Duncan, Associate Director of Countryside Properties, who spoke of the need for young people to be “work ready” when they leave school; currently he said many are leaving without the necessary basics, including communication skills, enthusiasm, drive, commitment to work and aspirations for the future.

Other speakers included, Paul Rolinson, Chair of the Essex branch of the Institute of Directors, and Richard Hussey, Director Link-Ed.

Work-related learning is now a legal requirement for all schools to boost work-readiness and employability of young people; the aim is to involve employers in the design and delivery of the national curriculum so that vocational courses are relevant to the world of work and meet employers’ skills needs.

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The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England’s young people and adults to world-class standards. Our vision is that by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

