



A Manifesto Proposition for Greater Essex

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Forward



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Greater Essex is one of the largest counties in England, it is a diverse area, with one of the longest coastlines, rural and urban areas and some of the wealthiest and most deprived parts of the country. Proximity to London is significant, with high levels of commuting to the capital or home-based working for London-based employers.

Home to nearly 77,000 enterprises, 99.7% of which are small and medium sized, and the strategic location of some of the country's largest national infrastructure projects including the Lower Thames Crossing, Stansted Airport upgrade and two Freeports (Freeport East & Thames Freeport). In line with the government's goal of building 1.5m new homes in this parliament, Essex has high ambitions in housebuilding, with Garden Communities forming part of a plan for 148,000 new homes by the mid 2030's.

Skills levels among the 1.8 million population have improved but are still generally below the national average, although there are wide variations at local level. Feedback from employers confirms that many sectors are struggling to recruit.

We are living through a period of immense change. Factors such as the digital revolution, changing work patterns, net zero goals, inflation & cost of living and population growth are having a significant local impact on businesses and households alike.

The Federation of Essex Colleges will play a vital role in working with the Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) on a place-based skills strategy.

Our vision for a Greater Essex 21st Century work force

We, as anchor institutions in Greater Essex, will create the conditions for a skills and employment system that delivers greater economic growth, with opportunities for all local people and employers.

It will become easier for employers in Greater Essex to find employees with the right skills, and people from all backgrounds will have a greater choice of appropriate, meaningful work that pays well and allows them to prosper and progress.

We will do this by ensuring that there is a shared understanding of the skills system, one that is responsive, inclusive and efficient. Courses will be designed to deliver maximum productivity, be accessible to all and shaped and delivered in partnership with employers and other stakeholders.

We have closely aligned these ambitions with those promoted by the Greater Essex Business Board in their Skills Manifesto.



Executive Summary

What Essex Colleges Need from the Mayor

Why It Matters

Essex is growing fast—new homes, major infrastructure, and a changing workforce. But too many people still lack the skills to get good jobs, and employers struggle to find the talent they need. Colleges are ready to fix that.

Who We Are

FEDEC is a group of Essex colleges working together to train over 43,000 people every year. We're on the ground, in every district, helping residents and businesses thrive.

What We're Asking For

1. Make Skills Simple and Accessible

- Back a single Essex-wide system so residents and employers can easily find training and support.
- Fund adult education based on what's already working – don't reinvent the wheel.
- Remove barriers like confusing boundaries and complex funding methodologies.

2. Focus on Inclusion

- Guarantee support for young people not in education or work.
- Help adults retrain and get job-ready, especially in growth sectors.
- Ensure people with special needs get the right support to succeed.

3. Work With Employers

- Make apprenticeships and work placements a priority.
- Incentivise businesses to invest in training.
- Launch a fund to upgrade and extend college facilities and attract industry experts to teach.

4. Build for the Future

- Set a bold Essex Skills Vision for 2030 and every five year period thereafter.
- Invest in college buildings and equipment where growth is currently hampered by capacity.
- Tackle areas with low skills and high unemployment.
- Fund mental health and practical support for learners who need it.



Bottom Line

Colleges are ready to deliver the skills that Essex needs. With the Mayor's backing, we can unlock opportunity, drive growth, and make Essex a great place to live, learn, work and invest.

Our Vision for Skills



The Greater Essex Economy: Opportunities and Challenges

Source: Annual Population Survey ONS May 2025

The Challenges

4.6% of the population aged 16-64 have no qualifications

Nearly 1,600 young people are not in education employment or training (NEET)

Over 50% of Greater Essex employers report a skills shortage or skills gap, especially in high growth and technical areas

Only 40.6% of the 16-64 aged population are skilled at level 4 or above (compared to 47.6% nationally)

Essex has an ageing population with 20.6% of the population aged over 65+ (compared with 18.4% nationally)

Rising demographics of young people, rising populations and increased demand for technical skills create capacity issues with additional capital investment needed in college accommodation

37% of Essex employers offer no training at all to their staff

40% of Essex residents only hold up to a level 2 qualification

Pockets of high worklessness in some districts (for example, 48% of 16-64-year-olds in Clacton are out of work)

The Greater Essex Economy: Opportunities and Challenges

Source: Annual Population Survey ONS May 2025

The Opportunities

Essex is home to some of the UK's largest major infrastructure projects, including the £10bn Lower Thames Crossing

Garden Village and Garden Community projects expected to increase demand for housebuilding by 211,000 homes in the next 15 years

Investment in Essex Connect to Work to facilitate the No Wrong Door philosophy

An Essex economy that contributes £50bn GVA to the UK Treasury and 878,000 jobs that depend on a workforce with the right skills

Jobs for the Clean Energy sector expected to grow, requiring 15,000 green jobs by 2030

Strong LSIP that defines skills priorities and is built on trust and collaboration

An employment rate at 79.1%, 3% higher than the UK average

c£30 million potential investment in Adult skills for Essex residents

A strong contribution to the skills priorities for Essex, including logistics (two Freeports), agri-tech (11% of the Essex GDP) and aviation (2 airport hubs)

Our Priorities and Approach

This Manifesto focuses on four priority areas that will support individuals from all backgrounds to engage with the labour market, progress and thrive, promoting economic growth and business success.

Alongside our priorities, we have also agreed a set of joint principles setting out how we will work with the Mayor, the MCCA, the Essex Provider Network and the Greater Essex Business Board to establish a coherent, locally relevant and deliverable skills strategy for Essex.

The priorities are shaped by the best available evidence about the shape of the Greater Essex labour market, how it is changing over time, and draws on intelligence and sector information from the Local Skills Improvement Plan updated in June 2025.

FEDEC's four priorities are to create a skills system which:

- **Is truly joined-up**
- **Drives inclusion & work ready behaviours**
- **Works with employers from all sectors**
- **Gets the basics right.**

This Manifesto aligns with and fully supports the Greater Essex Local Skills Improvement Plan and recognises the need for a coherent skills strategy that addresses geographic and sectoral 'coldspots' and gaps in skills provision that FEDEC and partners can deliver on.



Our Priorities and Approach

Priority 1: A Truly Joined-up System

1.1 Receive an Adult Skills Fund grant allocation, based on historical delivery models to Essex residents

Established providers of Adult Education in Essex should have the certainty of contracts, avoiding destabilising the sector and providing confidence to the Mayor that adult skills priorities will be met

- A simplified commissioning process for FE colleges that utilizes the existing Accountability Statement and Local Needs Duty, a requirement for FE Colleges under the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022

1.2 Champion a 'No Wrong Door' Essex Skills Connector to drive a commitment to lifelong learning

Everyone in Essex – employer, resident, or educator – should be able to access the support they need via one simple, smart, unified system

- Establish and champion a **'Skills Connector' brokerage** across Greater Essex by 2026, co-developed by FEDEC, the EPN, SEATs, GEBB, the LSIP Board, and ECC
- Advocate for this to act as a **single front door**, integrating platforms such as Extraordinary Essex, and Essex Opportunities
- Embed AI/CRM-driven signposting and a 'Jargon Buster' to simplify access to funding & training opportunities
- Deliver the Lifelong Learning Entitlement to residents of Greater Essex through credit based modular learning

1.3 Embed a 'local jobs and skills pledge' in Every Major Investment

Essex should lead the way in linking economic growth with local talent development

- Require that all significant publicly supported investments or planning applications include a **Skills & Talent Delivery Plan**, co-designed with FEDEC, GEBB and aligned with LSIP priorities
- Use this clause to ensure targeted commitments on apprenticeships, upskilling, outreach to **disadvantaged and under-represented groups, and local hiring**.
- Model this on successful initiatives elsewhere and make it standard practice in Greater Essex through advocating a "By Essex, For Essex" approach

1.4 Advocate a Skills Sovereignty Deal for Greater Essex

Decisions on skills should be made in Essex, by Essex, for Essex

- Launch a coordinated **advocacy campaign** for devolved control of adult skills funding as part of the September+ devolution push
- Align local skills budgets to employer needs, economic clusters, and community outcomes, shaped with FEDEC through the GEBB-LSIP Joint Venture

1.5 Recognise that artificial MCCA boundaries do not reflect travel to learner and travel to work patterns

Access to skills that reflects the economic geography of the region

- Remove false political boundaries to learning & skills
- Recognise true travel to learn and travel to work patterns



Our Priorities and Approach

Priority 2: Supporting Inclusion & Opportunity

2.1 Develop an Essex Youth Guarantee to provide support for those young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

We will champion opportunities for young people to access education and training

- Commissioning process of education and training support for NEETs that addresses the fundamental causes
- Being an active systems leader for auto-enrolment for young people identified as NEET

2.2 Advocate inclusive employment practices for business in Essex and provide a support network for employers

We will promote an inclusive by design approach to recruitment and employment practices

- Develop a support programme and toolkits, using the Innovate UK **'Steps to Inclusive Employment'** project as a best practice example

2.3 A Commitment to focus on the essential skills and work ready behaviours of young people

We will promote essential skills aligned to the behaviours that employers are asking for in their recruits

- Develop an Essex-wide platform that identifies a universal framework of essential skills, along-side sector and job specific behaviours those entering or re-entering the labour market need to be successful employees

2.4 Commission skills training for adults 'moving forward' to get them job ready and able to access job opportunities

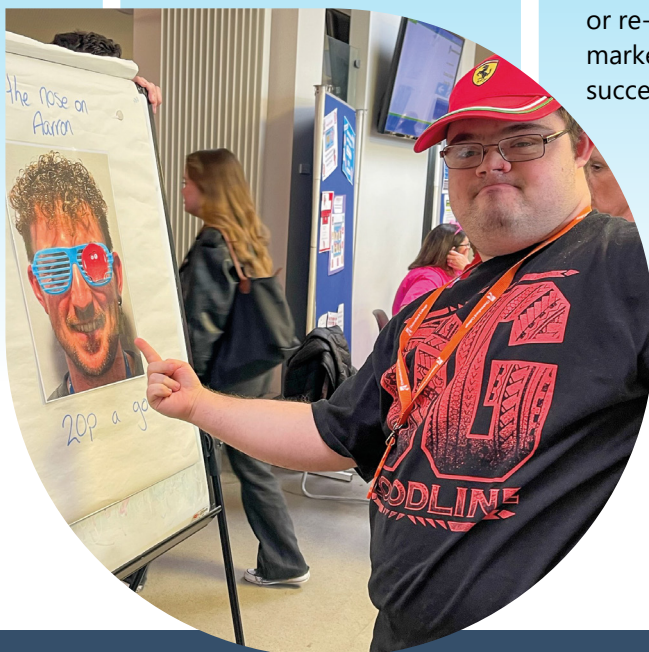
We will match ambition with investment – unlocking the innovation potential of Essex's people and businesses

- Commission a programme of **Bootcamps and Sector-based Work Academy Programmes** (SWAPs) aligned to priority growth sectors in Greater Essex
- Work with the **DWP** to identify priorities and opportunities such as the **Youth Guarantee**
- Provide a comprehensive offer to support those wishing to improve their English language

2.5 Provide sufficient access to an effective and high quality SEND curriculum

We will support an inclusive programme that meets the needs of Essex learners with a SEND need

- Offer a range of **outcomes-focused and person-centred** programmes for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Enabling effective preparation for adulthood: employment, community **inclusion, independent living** and good health
- Using data to inform planning on a regional basis



Our Priorities and Approach

Priority 3: Working With Employers From All Sectors

3.1 Champion a flexible and 'fleet of foot' approach to skills commissioning and partnership working, being agile enough to respond to changing needs of residents and businesses as identified in the LSIP

A systems approach that enables providers to work collaboratively, with formal and informal partnerships that flex with the changing skills landscape

- A simplified commissioning process for FE colleges that utilises the existing Accountability Statement and Local Needs Duty, a requirement for FE Colleges under the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022

3.2 Defend and Grow Apprenticeships, capitalising on the Growth and Skills levy flexibilities

High-level technical and professional pathways are non-negotiable for Essex's economic success

- Determine the priorities for spending the flexible element of the **Growth and Skills levy**, with a focus on level 4 and level 5 provision in priority sectors
- Form and lead a **High-Level Skills Taskforce** to co-invest in sustainable Level 4+ delivery models across the region

3.3 Employers playing their part in a joined up approach

A commitment to the importance of training and development from employers

- Promoting **Apprenticeship and Foundation Apprenticeship** opportunities
- Commitment to **industrial placements and work experience** placements for young people at college

3.4 Establish a Technical Excellence Skills and Innovation Fund

We will match ambition with investment – unlocking the innovation potential of Essex's people and businesses

- Pledge support for a pooled **Essex Technical Excellence Partnership Fund**, blending UKSPF, LSIF, Turing, private investment, and Innovate UK bids
- Focus initial investment on growth sectors: Advanced Manufacturing, Logistics, Health Tech, and Creative Industries
- Enable upgrades to college facilities, staff CPD, and business-embedded training delivery

3.5 Grow and Keep Essex Talent – Together

We will build a globally competitive Essex workforce – by attracting, growing, and retaining talent

- Set a bold collective goal: **Make Essex the best place to employ, grow, and keep talent**
- Identify revenue funding to address **teaching shortages** within FEDEC in key sectors, helping redress the £10k gap between school and college teacher pay
- Develop a Greater Essex programme to attract the best **talent from industry** to support FEDEC deliver skills training in priority sectors



Our Priorities and Approach

Priority 4: Getting the Basics Right

4.1 Back a 2030 Essex Skills Vision – With Collective Accountability

We will look ahead with ambition – and act now to secure Essex's competitiveness

- FEDEC to host an annual regional skills competition, promoting technical excellence in high growth sectors aligned to major infrastructure projects
- Launch an Essex Digital Skills Academy to promote and invest in digital, AI and cyber-skills bootcamps
- Advocate for a Construction Skills Compact to unite developers, colleges and major housebuilders under a Mayoral Compact to train local people for new housing and infrastructure schemes



4.2 A Capital Investment programme for FEDEC that support sector specific growth

Securing capital investment for FEDEC that supports sector-specific growth plans aligned to the LSIP, IS8 and Technical Excellence College priorities

- Sector-specific growth needs (e.g. construction/house-building)
- Place-based capital investment priorities aligned to Extraordinary Essex

4.3 Tackling Cold Spots and eliminating skills deficit

Data-driven cold spot analysis to identify skills deficits at local level

- Link to the economic growth, devolution and 'levelling-up' socioeconomic agendas
- Identify gaps in progression pathways (e.g. from Level 2 to Level 4 in sector specific skills)
- Identify geographic cold spots and specific locations for additional investment for job growth



4.4 Providing wrap around support for those in education

We will ensure those with identified barriers to learning are given the support and guidance to succeed

- Secure revenue funding for disadvantaged learners not covered by core funding, to address low uptake in skills (e.g. due to transport, access or wraparound costs including mental health support)
- Provide revenue funding for a mental health support worker in each FEDEC college, matching the commitment the Department for Education has made for all schools in England

How FEDEC is Delivering

Training and Supporting Adult Residents in Essex

**Bootcamp
programmes
for over 1000
adults in
Essex**

FEDEC delivering Bootcamp programmes to **over 1,000 adults in Essex**, training the next generation of retrofitters, heat pump installers, teaching assistants, health and care workers, warehouse operatives and construction workers

**£1.4m
invested
into
Essex
Bootcamps**

£1.4million invested into Bootcamps **delivered to Essex residents** by FEDEC in 2025-26

**FEDEC
co-chairs
the Inclusive
Stakeholder
Alliance**

FEDEC co-chairs the Inclusive Stakeholder Alliance, ensuring **a joined-up approach to supporting Essex residents** with additional needs

**FEDEC helps
to develop
a virtual career
hub - Careers
City Central**

The development of a virtual careers hub, Careers City Central, used by FEDEC and partners to **provide high quality careers education, information, advice and guidance to Essex residents**

**FEDEC
delivers
training to
nearly 24,000
adults**

FEDEC is delivering training to nearly 24,000 adults, **70% residing in Essex**, with the largest sectors being engineering (25%), retail (20%) and construction (18%)

What is FEDEC?

FEDEC is a well-established group of education and training providers in Essex, delivering high quality education and training to over 16,000 adults, 4,200+ apprentices and over 23,000 young people in Essex.

The FEDEC estate covers 25 locations across all districts in Greater Essex, but is in urgent need of capital investment to build capacity and deliver outstanding education and training in world-class facilities. We work collaboratively and collectively for the benefit of our Essex geography to support high quality education, training and skills provision that meet the needs of our economy.

Our mission is to support the region's economy and drive up the prosperity of all people in Greater Essex through the transformational power of learning and skills development.

Our partnership approach delivers relevant post-16 learning and skills for individuals and businesses. FEDEC members take a systems approach through:

- Speaking as one voice to promote and raise the profile of further education and skills, including apprenticeships, adult education and higher



education, to influence change for the benefit of our learners, communities, region and members

- Collaborative planning and delivery of a cohesive regional skills offer, building on our successful models from the Strategic Development Fund and the Local Skills Improvement Fund
- Collaboration and sharing of experience, expertise and resources at all levels within providers, as well as growth and efficiency opportunities
- Strategic partnerships with key stakeholders in business and government
- Working collaboratively with the Essex Provider Network (EPN), representing the independent training providers, towards these common goals
- Working with the Greater Essex Business Board to promote the benefits of a highly skilled workforce to businesses

FEDEC Members are:

Adult Community Learning Essex

Chelmsford College

Colchester Institute

Harlow College

New City College (Epping campus)

South Essex Colleges Group

The Sixth Form College, Colchester

USP College

Writtle College ARU

25
Campus
Sites

16,674
19+
Learners

4265
Apprentices

23,226
16-18
Learners

4252
Staff
Employed

£190m
of ESFA
Funding



Appendix:

Statement from the Essex Provider Network

E S S E X
P r o v i d e r
N e t w o r k



The Essex Provider Network (EPN) supports the aims and objectives of the FEDEC manifesto on behalf of its members and as the representative body of the majority of local and national Independent Training Providers (ITP's) operating in Essex, partnered with all Essex FE/Adult learning colleges, Higher Education Institutes (HEI's), plus a variety of awarding bodies and influential associate organisations, all of which contribute to a collaborative approach towards the development of a cohesive skills delivery objective for Greater Essex.

The EPN is fortunate to have in place strong strategic partnerships pan Essex, allowing its members to capitalise on the uniquely progressive collaborative approach across the skills delivery sector. Strong trusted working relationships, built between the Federation of Essex Colleges (FEDEC) the Local Skills Improvement planning team (LSIP) led by the Essex Chamber of Commerce and the three local authorities within Greater Essex, has over the past few years ensured that the Independent Training sector are fully immersed in skills delivery planning. The Independent sector interests are represented at Essex Skills & Business Board (ESBB) level, as well as LSIP sector skills groups, each one of

these sector specific groups report directly into the (ESBB) and contribute towards intelligence submitted to Skills England.

At regional level EPN represent our membership on the East of England Skills Delivery Group, tasked with reporting to the Skills All Political Party Group (APPG), towards a strategic framework for levelling up skills in the East of England. Meetings take place termly, offering insight into employers requirements across neighbouring counties.

The EPN members are fully committed to the anticipated advent of a Greater Essex Mayoral Combined Authority, with the ability to make local strategic decisions, further joining the public and private sectors together around a unified vision for skills and economic growth. Building on existing collaborative working across skills delivery partnerships, the EPN in representing our wider membership is committed to fully engage in decisions of strategic significance reflective of the needs of Essex Skills planning and delivery, now and for the future, with the ultimate objective of maximising the growth potential of the Essex economy and that of the wider East of England.

Paula Hornett
Chief Operating
Officer – EPN