



# Feedback to Stakeholders



**London Skills and Employment  
Board**

Stakeholder Survey 2009

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## 1. The London Skills and Employment Board

The London Skills and Employment Board (LSEB) was established in 2006 with the statutory authority to set the skills and employment strategy for London and to guide the adult skills budget of the Learning and Skills Council in the capital. Chaired by the Mayor, the employer-led Board's role extends to bringing the key decision makers and funders together in order to achieve greater coherence and improved performance from the highly complex and fragmented skills and employment system in London.

The Board's establishment marked a significant step towards achieving a stronger link between the supply and demand for skills and employment services, by looking to strengthen the accountability of the system to the benefit of individual Londoners, businesses and the city as a whole. One year on from the publication of *London's Future*, the Board is fulfilling its statutory duty to keep the London Employment and Skills Strategy under review. The first annual review comprises a number of components which will be published on the LSEB website in late 2009. As part of the annual review process, the LSEB consulted partners on an update of the Strategy, as well as carrying out a wider stakeholder survey. The results of the survey are summarised here, along with responses from the Board following discussion of the survey's findings at a recent awayday.

## 2. Stakeholder feedback – the 2009 baseline

The LSEB commissioned a stakeholder survey in order to assess:

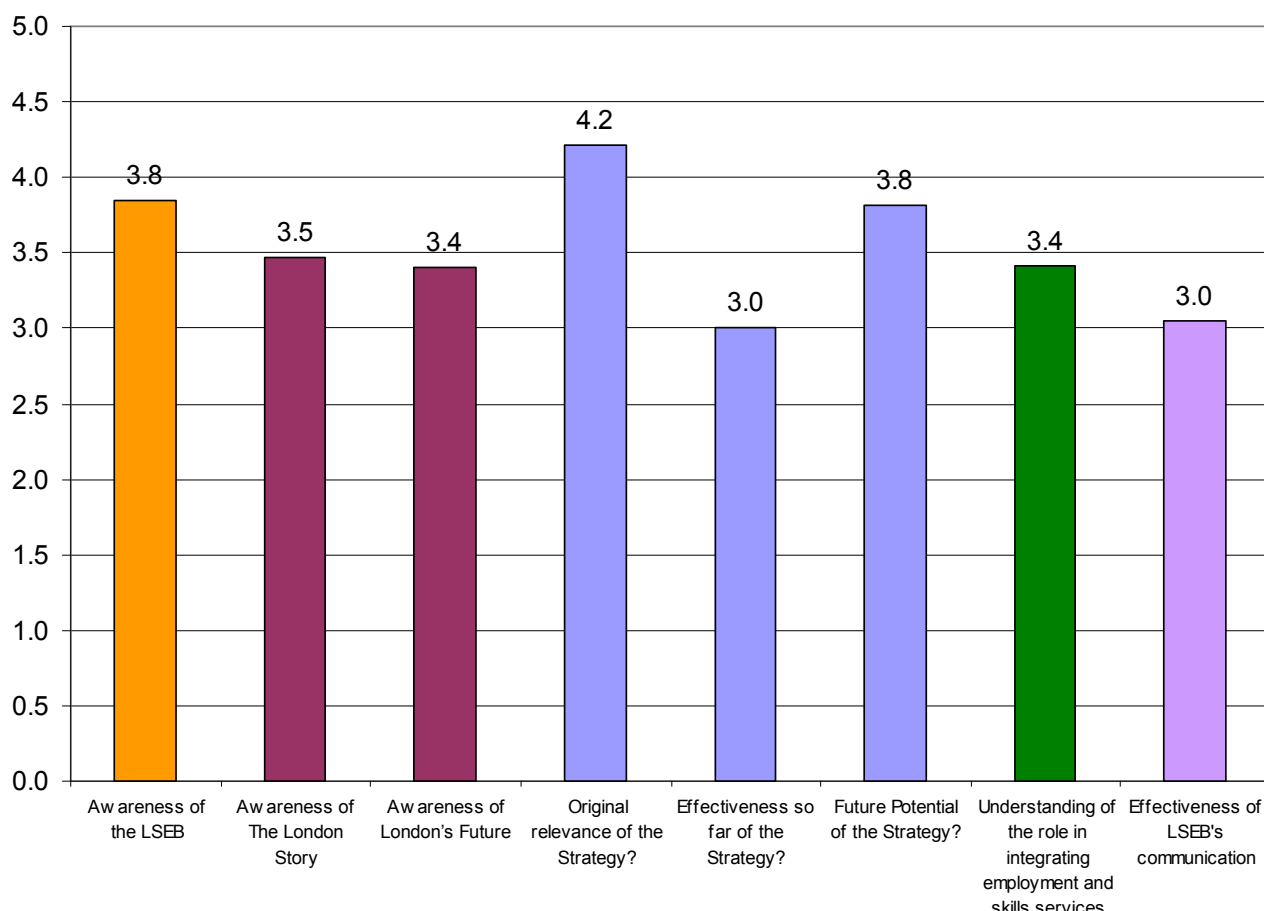
- the level of awareness of the LSEB and its Strategy;
- perceived effectiveness (and continued relevance) of the Strategy;
- the role of the LSEB in integrating employment and skills, and
- future priorities for the LSEB in light of the changing economic context.

The Board also expressed a desire to create a baseline for the LSEB in terms of how it is perceived by its stakeholders on a range of issues relating to its profile and performance. The line of questioning used was sufficiently generic to enable the Board to reuse the data in future should it choose to plot progress against the 2009 baseline, albeit with potentially different individual respondents.

The 2009 LSEB Stakeholder Survey included contact with approximately 100 different stakeholders. Overall, feedback on the role and remit of the LSEB has been positive, and there is clearly strong support for what it is trying to achieve.

The following graph represents the mean score from all responses of the Board's various stakeholders to a set of questions. The baseline scores correspond to a range of values on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates either poor awareness or perceived ineffectiveness and 5 indicates either an excellent awareness or perceived effectiveness.

**Graph: Overview of key baseline indicators drawn from the LSEB's 2009 stakeholder survey**



### 3. Awareness of the LSEB

The survey findings indicate that there is a relatively high level of awareness of the Board and its Strategy. Amongst the 25 stakeholders who took part in in-depth interviews, as might be expected, awareness and understanding were both very high, but the 70 plus survey respondents – from across 7 different categories of stakeholder – also reported strong levels of awareness. There was some lack of clarity about the precise extent of the Board's powers, but consultees were broadly aware of the core elements of its role. Those closely involved with the Board also showed a strong appreciation of the challenging political terrain and operational environment in which the Board has to function.

### 4. Responses from the Board to the stakeholder survey

The report focuses in turn on the main areas of feedback from LSEB's stakeholders and the response from the Board on a range of areas, which include:

- LSEB's Strategy

- Remit and focus of the Board
- Employer engagement
- Ways of working
- Communication.

## 5. LSEB's Strategy

The Board's Strategy (*London's Future*), as well as its analytical underpinning (*The London Story*) have been well received. The Strategy's diagnosis of the weaknesses of the capital's employment and skills system and its prescription for fixing it were regarded as the right approach and entirely relevant at the time it was published. The three pillars to the Strategy – of encouraging employers to make more opportunities available, of supporting individuals to achieve and improve their skills, and of working with the current institutional structures to improve effectiveness and performance of 'the system' – were seen as refreshingly easy to recall and understand.

However, a high level of understanding of the LSEB is not currently translating into as favourable an assessment of its impact to date, and it is clear that the Board will need to prioritise implementation of its revised strategy, as well as the communication of its progress, in the year ahead. There is a certain perception amongst stakeholders that there has been slower progress than hoped towards achieving the objectives of the Strategy. The recession has, rightly, demanded attention and resources, which have placed extra burdens on the LSEB Secretariat and the three delivery agencies (LSC, JCP and LDA) which are integral to the implementation of the LSEB's Strategy. In spite of the sudden onset and apparent severity of the recession, there is a strong sense among stakeholders that the structural issues affecting London's labour market remain, and that these should also remain the focus and priority for the Board. Overall, respondents felt that the Strategy needs a 'refresh but not a rewrite' and is as relevant as it was when first published.

### The Board's Response:

In rolling forward the Strategy to 2014, the Board has retained the strategic aims at the heart of the original Strategy, but revised the document to ensure that it takes account of the recession and the steps needed to afford London as smooth a path as possible into the recovery.

The Board is determined to make greater progress on implementing the strategy. The Board agreed a revised implementation plan for 2009/10, (from the version published in July 2008), to reflect the need to tackle the impact of the recession on businesses and Londoners.

To focus attention on the implementation of the strategy, the Board has revised its governance arrangements for 2009/10 so that each of the delivery agencies, (JCP, LDA, LSC) lead a programme board on one of the three strategic aims. LDA lead on employers, JCP on individuals and LSC on issues around the employment and skills system. Members of the Board sit on the Employer and Individual Programme Boards as well as on the Joint Delivery Group, which oversees implementation across the strategic aims.

## 6. Remit and focus of the Board

Many stakeholders are highly aware of the barriers limiting the Board's ability to increase the level of integration and coherence in the system. They are sensitive to the fact that the Board is a strategic rather than an executive body. Many were aware of the tension inherent in the Board's objective of bringing a uniquely London dimension to the work of delivery agencies, Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council, which still largely work to nationally set policies, targets and budgets. Several respondents indicated that the Board should be given greater influence and power over the employment and skills system, reflecting the general devolution of governance to the Mayor.

At the same time, some respondents felt that there was a risk that the Board fails to demonstrate what it can achieve with its current powers by spending too much time and effort lobbying for additional authority. Several interviewees asked whether the Board is using its existing statutory powers, or indeed the expertise of its members, to the fullest extent in holding the delivery agencies to account.

### The Board's Response:

Board members acknowledge the role of the Board as a strategic body with influence rather than an executive organisation. Within the provision of its statutory powers the Board is already providing guidance to the LSC, which will produce the plan for the new Skills Funding Agency for 2010/11, to maximise its influence on this process. The Board has agreed four short term priorities as part of the revised strategy that will be published in late 2009, which the delivery agencies will deliver upon by March 2011.

At the same time the Board recognises there is a case for increased powers and influence if it is to achieve its ambitions for improved results for businesses and individuals through services integrated across organisational boundaries. The Board intends to discuss with government why these changes are needed

Given the importance of effective stakeholder communication, the Board intends to produce a document summarising LSEB's role, vision, objectives and priorities and make it available to stakeholders.

## 7. Employer Engagement

For a body that is employer led, with a significant presence of blue-chip employers on its Board, respondents perceived the LSEB's work on employer engagement as relatively weak and some suggested that engagement and communication with employers should be stronger.

**The Board's Response:**

There is a sense among Board members that the LSEB's role should be to engage with business organisations, existing channels for employer engagement such as the Skills Ambassadors Network, the London Employer Accord and SSCs, rather than to seek direct relationships with employers in London. The Board has asked the Employer Programme Board to consider these issues further as part of its work programme. Members of the Board will continue to use their own channels and speaking opportunities to promote the work of LSEB through their own networks.

**8. Ways of Working**

The survey suggested that the Board may be too big and as a result Board meetings are considered to be set-piece conferences, with lengthy agendas. While the business is invariably completed, it leaves little time or room for debate. Both the Chair of the LSEB (the Mayor) and the Vice-Chair (Harvey McGrath, who also chairs the London Development Agency) are regarded as essential to the continued profile and impact of the Board. They attract the high-powered business leaders who largely make up the LSEB. The Mayor has the opportunity to use his "bully pulpit" as a means of extending the influence of the Board, but this will only be possible if he continues to prioritise the Board and its work.

**The Board's Response:**

The Board has asked that Board meetings be conducted differently to provide time to debate key issues. At the same time the Board has agreed it wants to find time to review progress routinely on implementing the strategy, the implementation plan and short term priorities. The new programme boards should help provide new dynamics to Board meetings. The Board now has a single scorecard by which it can gauge progress across the strategy.

**9. Communications**

The survey and consultations with stakeholders also considered the LSEB's communications and their impact to date. There was a widely held opinion that the Board lacked the visibility to match its influence and potential powers, but also an appreciation of the capacity limitations of a small Secretariat, and that it was not necessarily appropriate for the Board to have a high public profile. A number of the LSEB's partners have offered to assist the Board and the Secretariat in its communications work which it may want to take up, providing "piggybacking" opportunities, (e.g.. at events/conferences) and/or acting as channels or conduits to key stakeholder groups, (e.g. providing space in newsletters etc).

**The Board's Response:**

The Board agreed that communications to stakeholders could be done in a more efficient way and the Secretariat will be taking forward these proposals. There is also an appetite for a single skills brand which end users should be able to recognise as the gateway to services for employers and individuals.