

## **South West RDA: progress report 2008-09**

This report summarises the progress the South West RDA has made in 2008-09 on the delivery of its employment and skills responsibilities, and should be read in conjunction with the full annual report and accounts. The main challenge to the Agency in 2008-09 was to manage an increasingly volatile operating environment. We sought to proactively manage the risks and to maximise the opportunities that were presented by significant changes in the economic and political landscape. Our revised corporate plan has a strategy which emphasises:

- creating the conditions for productivity led growth
- developing a low carbon economy
- creating success places (some places were identified as priorities for intervention)

Progress against the specific corporate plan aim of **helping people acquire the skills the economy needs** was assessed as follows:

### **More people gaining economically viable skills and more businesses with the access to the skills they require – GREEN**

As partners will be aware the main focus of activity in 2008-09 was the joint working on the response to the economic crisis. We convened a group of all the relevant partners which fed into the Regional Economic Task Group chaired by the Regional Minister. There was good joint working on the area action forces, the development of a regional economic recovery plan and a variety of policy announcements and implementation activity, including the Future Jobs Fund. As part of this work the RDA has approved new funding to support Skills for the Future and a talent retention programme for key sectors. In related work the Train to Gain integration with Business Link was successfully completed and operational targets were exceeded.

Positive progress has also been made on the Flybe training academy. We are also working with partners on the development of a national skills academy for nuclear training in the SW – this will support the decommissioning of existing power stations and new builds in Somerset and Gloucestershire. Plans for other academies have been scaled back due to funding constraints. We completed the STEM research which for the first time set out the workforce pipeline and which is guiding further work to increase STEM subject take up.

### **Greater clarity and direction to regional education and skills activity – GREEN**

The RESP, funded by the RDA, has played a key role in supporting both the collaborative efforts on the crisis set out above and the wider employment and skills agenda. The Board and related groups provided a strong mechanism to coordinate the crisis work and the positive relationships enabled us to maximise support for the SW – e.g. on the Apprenticeship training agency pilot, and make appropriate strategic linkages – e.g. to the ESF refresh. We have had feedback from national colleagues indicating that our partnership working is in advance of other regions. Alliance and standing group events have helped wider partners engage with the work which has been particularly challenging and increasingly complex. Examples include the Positive Steps conference, events on ESF, LESBs, and the Future Jobs Fund. Relationships have been developed with the National Apprenticeship Service and the RESP mechanisms are helping to support the transition from the LSC to the SFA/YPLA. The RESP has been flexible, changing its approach to reflect the changing landscape – for example putting a greater emphasis on employment in recent months. In related work the RESP has also developed the skills framework for the Rural Development Programme (RDPE) which is managed by the RDA.

### **More people participating in the economic life of the region – AMBER**

Whilst some good work has been taken forward in the context of the crisis there is a decreasing focus on the economic inclusion agenda nationally and regionally, and in a tighter funding environment this work is becoming a lower priority. Positive delivery has continued through the Gloucester City Employment and Skills Programme and West at Work which has supported crisis efforts. The RDA is continuing to support much of the regional infrastructure that underpins delivery of this aim approving further funding for RISE and ESW in 2008-09 in addition to that which is provided for South West Forum. This was a positive outcome given the constraints in the funding environment. On the enterprise front specialist business support has been provided to over 1,000 social enterprises registering a 94% satisfaction rating with Business Link. 469 Enterprise Week events were held across the region. Our support for the Princes Trust business programme has also generated good outputs in terms of business creation and young people assisted with their skills development. However, more limited progress has been made in some areas due to the financial constraints – for example on women's enterprise and other elements of the BERR enterprise strategy. On 2012 activity has included the development of the educational pilot programme in schools (Be the Best), and the volunteering programme (Personal Best and Train of Events), but the overall programme was scaled back due to funding constraints.