Pre-submitted questions to SEEDA Board Members
(2009 Annual Open Public Meeting)

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)

Q: What are SEEDA's plans for coping with a constrained fiscal environment across the public sector?

Trevor Osborne, Chairman of the Advisory Committee, South West Excellence

Q: SEEDA has been at the cutting edge of the south east economy driving economic and environmental advances. If the agency is to continue it will inevitably operate a restricted budget which may be insufficient to provide the effective stimulus that the south east will need to play its prominent role in the UK economy. How will SEEDA determine the best value options and which initiatives will be lost?

Board Member = Peter Jones
Executive Director = Robert Crawford

Answers:

The downturn we have experienced over the last year is unprecedented, certainly in our working lifetimes. SEEDA responded with a rapid sharpening of focus – our overriding priorities became helping individuals, businesses and communities combat the recession and investing to ensure the region is in a position of strength for the subsequent upturn.

SEEDA, like many other public sector organisations (Local Authorities included) is becoming a sharper focused, smaller, agile and responsive organisation. We will save £3.6 million per annum in our administration costs by 2011.

Our new focus will deliver interventions with a direct and measurable impact on business investment, sustainable growth, innovation and productivity. By promoting economic development we will support community, individual and business growth.

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)

Q: How is SEEDA working to improve the prospects for successful commercialisation of innovation/entrepreneurialism in the South East?

Board Member = Alex Pratt
Executive Director = Jeff Alexander

Answers:

SEEDA investment is supporting the development of an Innovation Culture though its' innovative business support products and services such as Business Link (e.g. for start ups), the Manufacturing Advisory Service, the development of our eight Innovation and Growth Teams, Knowledge Networks and sector development activity.

Other examples:

Supporting development of a 'Space Innovation Centre' offering an environment where businesses, universities and government bodies can work together to create new technologies, applications and IP for UK, European and global space programmes.

£2.3m investment in a new National Enterprise Academy in Buckinghamshire

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)

Q: What are the most effective examples of SEEDA's effort to bring business and education institutions together?

Board Member = Keith Mitchell
Executive Director = Robert Crawford

Answers:

This is an increasing priority – innovation led developments are the future. Two particular examples are:

The £7.3m Canterbury Innovation Centre (funded by SEEDA) will provide much needed high-tech incubation space and support for budding entrepreneurs. The Innovation Centre aims to be a magnet for local start-ups as well as those from further afield, including the USA, Israel, Singapore and Europe. SEEDA has been working closely with the East Kent Spatial Development Company (EKSDC), University of Kent, Canterbury Enterprise Hub and Canterbury City Council on the project.

Part of SEEDA's economic strategy for the South East is to get more businesses and experts in universities working together on research and development projects to help make companies more competitive.

In my own area, Oxfordshire: Building on the location of the European Space Agency at Harwell and the potential of the space sector to develop a 'Space Innovation Centre' offering an environment where businesses, universities and government bodies can work together to create new technologies, applications and IP for UK, European and global space programmes.

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)

Q: Are SEEDA looking at the impact of Copenhagen Agreement and climate change legislation, i.e. at strategies for supporting business deal with change?

Board Member = Keith Riley
Executive Director = Oona Muirhead

Answers:

Priority is being given to the development of a Low Carbon Industrial Strategy, including working across the Greater South East to encourage behaviour change. Specific actions include:

- Developing proposals for a major retrofit programme for existing buildings including attracting significant EIB funding, to achieve energy efficiency and increase productivity for businesses and public sector;

- Investing in the Institute for Sustainability Science and Innovation Campus in response to calls from the Technology Strategy Board to develop measures that support realisation of low impact buildings;

- Support for the roll-out of ultra low carbon vehicles, including support for the Mini E demonstrator for Innovation Platform;

- Providing a route into innovative finance for clusters of businesses, public bodies and householders to develop retrofit and renewable projects that will create market and supply chain pull;

- Generating grass-roots behaviour change programmes in the run up to and beyond the Copenhagen Summit in December 2009;

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)

Q: What was SEEDA's most successful programme of 2009?

Board Member = Sue John
Executive Director = Robert Crawford

Answers:

Difficult to choose one. Some highlights of SEEDA's successes over the past year are in the Annual Report Summary (which you all have a copy of).

I've been particularly pleased with our swift reaction to the recession:

SEEDA's £15m package of recession business support, was launched in August 2008 & extended in December 2008. This includes additional Business Link services, grants for business investment, help for businesses to access finance, support for those facing redundancy and assistance for businesses trading overseas or investing in the region. For example:

- £3 million Transition Loan Fund, giving access to finance for sound businesses. We have made 22 offers, worth £2.58m, creating or safeguarding over 800 jobs.

- The Continuing Employment Support Service, with JobCentre Plus, provides free support for those facing redundancy. In 2008-9 it supported nearly 12,000 employees in finding new jobs.

That has paid off: in 2008-09, SEEDA helped reduce the impact of the recession by creating or saving 8,000 jobs. 17,000 people were helped to find work. 22,000 people were helped to improve their skills.

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)

Q: Are there key economic sectors that SEEDA is looking to support in the region?

Board Member = Dolores Byrne
Executive Director = Robert Crawford

Answers:

SEEDA is introducing a new focus on six key high value economic sectors in order to maximise inward investment, international trade, innovation and growth. We will focus on projects that have a direct link to GVA and have potential to drive the UK out of recession. These are:

- Environmental technologies
- Advanced engineering and marine
- ICT and digital media
- Life sciences and health technology
- Financial services
- Aerospace and defence

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)

Q: Given the wealth of the technology supply chain and research facilities available in the South East of England, combined with the recent drop in the value of Sterling, **what is SEEDA doing to promote inward investment?**

Jim to respond
Executive Director = Jeff Alexander

Answers:

South East England is one of Europe's most attractive regions for overseas companies with the region attracting around 14% of the total FDI into the UK

SEEDA's work with UK Trade & Investment has delivered strong returns during a difficult year for the global economy. During 2008-09, SEEDA worked with UKTI to attract 90 new inward investment projects to the South East, creating or safeguarding over 3,800 jobs over the next three years. SEEDA also helped attract:

- £3 million into the Thames Gateway
- £1.4 million from the European Social Fund – eg for skills training and employment for older workers.

Hi-tech sectors such as science led innovation and space/ aerospace are key South East sectors that have potential to drive the UK out of recession. SEEDA and UKTI are active in promoting the area to hi-tech companies from the US and elsewhere.

Laura Moffatt, MP for Crawley

Q: As a supporter of the work of the Development Agency how can I understand the value of the work undertaken to either secure or support business in my constituency and relay that to my constituents?

Board Member = Phil Wood
Executive Director = Paul Lovejoy

Answers:

SEEDA is involved in many projects that benefit constituents across the region.

In Crawley, for example, Gatwick is a key driver of the economy so we are supporting the development of 'Gatwick Diamond for Investment and Growth' – one of eight key priority areas for SEEDA across the South East with the aim to help businesses grow to create jobs and develop low carbon footprints.

This is of course in addition to core services such as Business Link, Manufacturing Advisory Service, Innovation and Growth Teams that help develop skills so that people can access jobs and to support the economy.