

City Regions Board – Report from Sir Richard Leese CBE (Chair)

1. The City Regions Board was established in April after the recent LGA governance. Its objective is to support our emerging city regions and to ensure that present and future city regions have sufficient legal and financial autonomy to drive growth and support their residents. The Board has met twice and we have developed a focused work programme based around skills and employment, the future of city regions and trade.
2. Since the Board was established, the national debate has been moving quickly. The Heseltine Report established a benchmark for the present Government. With the publication of the Adonis report on devolution earlier this year, there is now a clear cross party consensus on devolution to city regions. The real debate as the election approaches is on the delivery of these promises. The LGA, Core Cities, Key Cities and London Councils are holding numerous events throughout the conference season to ensure that the message from local government is clear. We are up for the challenge.
3. In developing the Board's work programme, we want to ensure a robust evidence base to promote the benefits of city regions to the UK. Much of this work has now been commissioned and over the next few months we will be considering a number of independent reports which will challenge both central government and ourselves as city leaders. I have set out some examples below of the work that is due to be discussed in the autumn.
4. We have sponsored the independent commission of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA). This is a business led commission which is examining the benefits of stronger city government in England and the advantages to UK plc. It is producing its final report in October and we hope that the strong voice from business leaders will be heard by all parties as we approach the election.
5. In July, the Board considered the findings of the LGA on the future skills and employment challenges that will hit the desk of an incoming (or returning) minister. The analysis from CESI shows that there will be a significant and widening skills deficit by 2022 that will constrain local growth and potentially leave significant swathes of the population behind. Further reports are due from CESI in the autumn. In the longer term our objective is to promote a new localised model for skills and employment provision that can be considered as an alternative to centralised models as ministers consider the re-letting of the work programme in 2016.
6. There was a very detailed debate on city regions' frustration at the progress on local trade and investment policy at the last Board. Our evidence shows that the localised trade models being pursued in London, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are working well. Consequently, other English cities are being left behind. We are commissioning independent research to provide the evidence for local models of trade and investment. We will be building on the excellent work that is already being driven in our cities to support businesses to export, and encouraging new investment.

7. Finally, we are arranging our own peer challenge from city leaders in Europe and the Commonwealth. We want to put our own plans up to the scrutiny of our international peers and our legal and fiscal powers to deliver. This is planned for later in the year and again should offer a challenge to both ourselves and ministers.
8. Our next Board meeting will be in late October and we will be welcoming some new members. We also have a new Vice Chair of the Board (Cllr Paul Watson of Sunderland) who will join Cllr Abigail Bell, Cllr Marco Cereste and Mayor George Ferguson as the Board's Group leaders.

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