

**SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE
GROWTH**

Consultation response form

JULY 2010

Skills for Sustainable Growth response form

If you are unable to use the online comments boxes to record your responses, please complete the questionnaire below and send it to:

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The Department may, in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, make individual responses available on public request.

The closing date for this consultation is 14 October 2010.

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Please tick the option below which best describes on whose behalf you are responding:

<input type="checkbox"/>	General Further Education College
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sixth Form College
<input type="checkbox"/>	Charity or social enterprise
<input type="checkbox"/>	Training Organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local Government
<input type="checkbox"/>	Individual
x	Local Government
<input type="checkbox"/>	Large employer (250+)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Medium employer (50 to 250 staff)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Small employer (10 to 49 staff)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Trade union or staff association
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please describe):

Principles for a skills strategy

1. We welcome views on these principles and whether there are others we should consider.

Qualifications do not always equal skills or increased productivity. There is a need to capitalise on those who already have invested in training but are not productive, e.g. unemployed/under-employed graduates.

Any work on skills needs a complementary programme about working practices by employers, for example creating new vacancies rather than increasing the potential for paid overtime, the negative profile of some sectors such as hospitality and what employers are going to do about raising the profile to attract young people in particular.

We welcome the link between learning/skills acquisition and enterprise and innovation.

Apprenticeships and the new 14-19 Diplomas can be part of a 'credible vocational training offer' but more needs to be done to persuade employers to give them a chance. More work is need to iron out issues of progression e.g. BTEC level 2 to Apprenticeships.

Impartial, Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is very important but this must include IAG regarding Level 4 and above. All too often the IAG community has neither the expertise, funding or capacity to offer this.

Accreditation of existing knowledge must not be cancelled out completely, often accreditation of in-house training in businesses by universities is one way to encourage more employees to take up the training and to provide progression routes into higher level skills acquisition. Accreditation of prior learning is also very useful as a hook into a wider qualifications.

We welcome the emphasis of employers being encouraged to play their part.

2. How can we further simplify the skills system, including the number, roles and responsibilities of the many organisations working in the system?

Training providers will always have a self-interest.

Independent brokerage and those who can have a strategic view are very important. Customer demand could simply mean that providers end up doing more of what people want whether it fits with the nation's or local area skills needs at all.

3. In view of the current fiscal deficit, what areas of public investment in skills could be reduced and where could private investment be increased? What are the main constraints on changing the balance between public and private investment and how could these be overcome?

Need an increase in employer funded apprenticeship schemes. Individuals investing time and money in training should be offered guaranteed placements/interviews/work trials.

Funding for those who want to engage and are going to be economically productive but might need some new skills e.g. those actively choosing to change career, recent graduates, those made redundancy and having to change careers. Also learning that 'hooks' people in e.g. modular or bitesize accredited or non-accredited learning. This can then be used to enter further learning.

A respected and credible training offer

4. How could the Apprenticeship programme be improved? What can be done to increase the proportion of apprentices progressing to Level 3 and beyond? What and how should employers contribute to Apprenticeships?

Apprenticeships should be sponsored by an employer. Some apprenticeships, e.g. construction, are often never completed because the students cannot find employment or placements.

Progression into of apprenticeships needs to be encouraged further, for example by ironing out issues of those wishing to progress from some BTECS to Level 2.

Higher level apprenticeships could provide a more logical route to higher learning instead of trying to 'shoe horn' progression to some degrees.

Foundation degrees of course could be a crucial element here. Respect of the vocational route can only be achieved through putting it on a par with A levels.

There could be some added elements to some apprenticeships to support progression to HE, such as Maths content for those in engineering.

5. We welcome views on how best to support people who might in time benefit from an Apprenticeship but who do not currently have the skills to begin one.

Confidence building courses should be free of charge for participants. Also employers should be given support to manage employees who are most vulnerable in the labour market.

6. We welcome views about progression from Level 3 Apprenticeships into higher education, including whether there is demand for Higher Apprenticeships at Levels 4 and 5.

It is important to determine the views of employers on Higher Apprenticeships. Training on the job, that is specific to the job, at no cost is probably more appealing. This is probably more productive than day-release or block training.

Higher level apprenticeships could provide a more logical route to higher learning instead of trying to 'shoe horn' progression to some degrees. Foundation degrees of course could be a crucial element here. Respect of the vocational route can only be achieved through putting it on a par with A levels. There could be some added elements to some apprenticeships to support progression to HE, such as Maths content for those in engineering. In other cases support of bridging units would be helpful. There does seem to be demand from some apprentices and employers for progression, but not from others. Some of the reasons why there is not interest – the need for flexible study; higher level skills not perceived as necessary, apprentices wanting to stay in employment and not go onto a full time degree. There is plenty of good practice developed by Lifelong Learning Networks and Aimhigher across England that should be drawn upon relating to progression of apprentices and the development of Higher Level apprentices.

7. How should we ensure that training leads to real gains in skills, knowledge and competence and not just the accreditation of existing skills?

See comments about accreditation above – it is not all bad. Overall training should be tailored to the businesses needs, Businesses often require quick, non-accredited options. The current public funding system does not allow for the non-accredited path except through some one off funding pots which will disappear.

8. How can we incentivise colleges and training organisations to offer a flexible and cost-effective 'needs-led' offer for people who are out of work or at risk of becoming unemployed?

Colleges should be paid on outcomes in terms of qualification gained plus additional payments on 12 weeks employment.

9. How can we encourage colleges and training organisations to make the transition from learning to work as smooth as possible, enabling progression in the workplace, as well as to further learning?

Use independent intermediary organisations to support the learners.

10. How can we better promote enterprise education in further education colleges and throughout the training system?

Use good practice elsewhere for example where universities and schools have embedded enterprise education in the curriculum/qualifications.

Funding and entitlements

11. Should Government continue with an entitlements based approach? How can we ensure that Government money is targeted where it is needed most and where it will achieve most value?

Helping individuals and employers choose the learning they want

12. How can the learning market be made to work more efficiently, effectively and economically and to be more responsive and accountable to demand by individuals and employers, while also delivering value for money?

More courses, at all levels, to be provided as day-release/evening courses and funded by the employer. Whilst remembering that Colleges, Universities, Training providers are essentially businesses too and they need viable cohort sizes or they will have to increase charges to the employer/individual.

13. We welcome views on how best to ensure employers are able to shape the skills system to meet their needs.

As question 12 above.
Developing forums for businesses to get involved and take ownership. We have some good examples in York through the York Business Forum and York Economic Partnership models.

14. We are interested in views on what more might be needed to make the system responsive to employer needs.

More detailed local intelligence provided by local impartial brokers would be useful.

15. Which qualifications have most value for employers and learners? Which do not have value? How do we evolve the Qualifications and Credit Framework so that it focuses on the former and removes the latter?

Requires direct response from employers and learners.

16. How can we improve the accessibility and quality of careers information, advice and guidance services for adults?

Free and independent advice delivered where the clients want it and for all levels including level 4 +
There could be payment by those who can afford it or paid through redundancy packages.

17. We welcome views on the vision for lifelong learning accounts, and their potential usefulness.

This type of programme was previously manipulated by some, unscrupulous training providers. If it is reintroduced it requires policing through compulsory independent advice from a recognised/licensed agency.

18. We welcome views on approaches to informing learners and employers including how better information can be made available while reducing bureaucracy.

Supporting partnerships and umbrella organisations which can synthesise and disseminate information.

Giving colleges and training organisations the freedom to respond

19. We welcome views on our planned measures for simplification and freeing colleges and training organisations.

Freeing up the HE funding for Colleges offering HE would be helpful such as allowing them to offer modular provision which doesn't necessarily lead to a full qualification.

20. How can we enable colleges and training organisations to be more efficient and responsive to the needs of employers, learners and their community but without adding new layers of control by local bodies?

Someone, somewhere has to provide timely and accurate information on employer needs to colleges, training providers and universities (it could be the same body, something like an RDA). A strategic overview in a locality is still important to provide some sort of indication of the 'direction of travel' required to support the economy. Employers (particularly private business) need to contribute views and engage fully with providers more than they do at the moment.

21. What mechanisms could we use to hold colleges and other training organisations to account for their performance in responding to employers' needs and for prioritising training that adds real economic value?

Simple, non-bureaucratic measures. Currently there are different reporting systems between different type of organisations. It might be worth pulling them together.

Incentives to train in priority areas

22. Do we need a framework that will enable and encourage employers and individuals to invest in training in priority areas and for colleges and other training organisations to provide appropriate courses?

Yes! Absolutely crucial!

23. Should we promote training innovation, particularly in rapidly changing or wholly new areas of the economy? If so, how might we do this?

Yes.

24. How can we ensure employers can access high quality labour market information?

By having one service that collects and disseminates it even if it draws upon a number of different sources to do so.

Encouraging a more productive workforce

25. What would enable businesses to use skills as a driver of productivity and business improvement?

Business leaders need to be supported to understand how to manage and deploy their staff along with recognising skills gaps in relation to productivity. This can continue to be provided through leadership training, support with developing workforce development plans, mentoring. However this sort of support is likely to have to be subsidised (not free) to encourage business take up.

26. We welcome views on ways in which businesses can be encouraged to increase the UK's leadership and management capability to create better run and more highly performing businesses.

As above.

Reinvigorating adult and community learning

27. How could we encourage the development of productive partnerships with third sector organisations?

Supporting (inc. some funding) for organisations such as the CVS which are in many local areas to support and help establish more third sector organisations and which play a vital role in encouraging volunteering. There are a number of other umbrella organisations often covering local areas which support training in the third sector organisations too. There are so many, often small, third sector organisations which really benefit from the support of a larger, umbrella type of organisation such as the CVS. E.g. to support smaller organisations to come together to offer services, to support with back office functions and so on.

28. We welcome views on new ways that colleges could be used to support the community.

29. How could adult and community learning be reinvigorated? We especially welcome ideas for how businesses and others could be encouraged to engage in supporting local community learning to help create local ownership and momentum.

Businesses will want to see the financial gain in being involved including raising profile with the view to getting more business. A small number may be interested in pure philanthropy.

Measuring success

30. We welcome views on those indicators of success would be most useful to you or your organisation.

Perhaps focus less on numbers of x or y qualifications but on outcomes e.g. VAT registrations, wealth generated, people in employment, views of employers and individuals on what they gained from training, numbers accessing training. Simply counting the qualifications will not tell us if the nation is informed, empowered, innovative....

Do you have any other comments that might aid the consultation process as a whole?

Please use this space for any general comments that you may have.

Comments on the layout of this consultation would also be welcomed.

Overall there seems to be lack of reference to the role of universities and other providers of higher level skills such as colleges offering HE opportunities. Universities often excellent at supporting enterprise and innovation within the student body and through other engagement with businesses, the public and third sectors.

In terms of employers there seems to be an assumption that this is purely about private business. Of course private business is extremely important in terms of this agenda but the third sector and public sector also need to be seen as important parts of the employer picture despite the cuts in the public sector. Third sector organisations are going to play a key role in implementing the 'Big Society' vision and also in 'picking up the pieces' if some public services are cut particularly to the most needy people in our society.