

Appendix 3

EURIM Working Group Summary

Theme/WP: Lifelong Learning

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Date prepared: 11/04/03

Date finalised: 11/04/03

Circulation: All Group Members

THE EUROPEAN
INFORMATION
SOCIETY GROUP

EURIM



Building a world-class UK workforce

20th January 2003, 14:00 – 16:30hrs, EMTA 22 Old Queen Street, London, SW1

Summary of possible recommendations and actions

Give Learning and Skills Councils (regional and sector) the remit to rationalise current routines for employer consultation and academic-industry liaison, with major reductions in the number of parallel meetings/exercises, to improve participation on both sides

Encourage universities and colleges to enrol graduates in continuous professional development and lifelong learning programmes as a matter of course and to develop these as a potentially more important revenue stream than publicly funded undergraduate courses.

UK Online to be followed by a programme to promote sustainable community access points with world class content availability and technical/learning support, plus crèche and childcare facilities and home access for those who need them

Use the Learning and Skills Councils, and all other routes, to ensure that publicly funded lifelong learning agendas are directed towards the areas of skills shortage and not just used as a euphemism for adult literacy and numeracy programmes.

Enable and encourage universities and colleges to respond to the growing demands for flexible education and training by expanding and building on current modular and networked degree programmes and other courses, including those which are now international.

Give regional and sector skills councils the remit and resources to organise industry-strength market research into skills needs (national and local) in co-operation with the private sector and to ensure that public sector providers have marketing budgets to promote those courses and qualifications which fall within their remit.

Focus cross-party political attention, including trades union support, on the need to give individuals the confidence to undertake re-training, especially those who are in their late 40's and have been made redundant, and on the need to make individually funded training towards industrially and professionally recognised qualifications fully tax deductible.

Ian Bruce and Philip Virgo to organise a follow up meeting to review the possible recommendations, discuss which might be progressed through EURIM and which should be addressed via other channels and agree action plans accordingly.

1. Introduction and Objectives

1.1 The Objectives were:

To discuss what EURIM could/should be doing to promote constructive debate and discussion on the actions necessary to help achieve the recently announced DfES target of creating a world class UK workforce by 2010 with 90% of young people qualifying for University or skilled employment.

To discuss what other activities EURIM could/should undertake in the areas of skills and learning in (and for) the Information Society.

1.2 The background questions were:

- What actions are required to ensure that we have the skills base, business models and funding frameworks necessary to create and sustain world class, lifelong learning, infrastructures for all ages and at all levels: from initial education through to workplace learning and/or career change?
- What might be the roles of current UK players (colleges, universities, qualifications bodies, skills councils etc) in markets for those higher level vocational skills which are expected to have become international?
- How might we get there from here - including possible changes for funding/policy frameworks to encourage and/or enable change: whether planned or evolutionary?
- Which of the resulting issues are already well addressed in existing forums which bring the necessary players together? Which of those not yet well addressed would benefit from bringing players together across organisational and political boundaries?

1.3 Discussion was structured around six topics

- Aggregation of spend on networks (support and materials as well as technology)
- The future role and funding of the Universities
- The role and nature of the Learning and Skills Councils, both regional and sectoral
- How far Learning and Skills policy can/should remain national and how far it should be a mix of local/regional and international
- The role or otherwise of EU programmes etc.
- The position of those cross-sectoral skills which are likely to move into severe shortage over the course of the next year

2 Discussion

2.1 Aggregation of spend on networks (support and materials as well as technology):

This is being addressed within the Broadband Stakeholders aggregation and education groups and EURIM is supporting their work.

Broadband is already delivered to 30 per cent of schools nationally as 2Mbits/sec pipes and all HE and FE colleges are able to connect to least 2Mbits/sec pipes via SuperJANET which provides national content delivery, including to the DfES Regional Broadband Consortia and has a broadening remit to cover lifelong learning. There has been a policy decision by JISC (which brings together the funding for Janet) not to support profit-driven users, although it can be used to deliver training to SMEs, but non-profit making organisations, including any public sector organisation, can now connect to SuperJANET which is currently using only 10% of its capacity.

There are concerns that aggregation could lead to new tiers of convolution and delay (the special procurement vehicles) although there is a need for work to align procurement cycles and capital spending and to sort out the confusion of capital and revenue spend. Both infrastructure and applications also require support to be aggregated.

The educational benefits can be spectacular, for example pupils in Milton Keynes finished one key stage a year early using quality content over a reliable broadband service. But access is geographically and socially patchy. We need easy access to lifelong learning direct into people's homes and to libraries and other public access points for those who find home access beyond their financial reach for home broadband.

The UK Online centres have capital spend only for equipment, not for the content, support and management necessary to help the public make effective use of that equipment. They have no-where to go at the end of the three-year funding cycle.

We need to use the technology to get more of the 18 to 30-year-old age group into education and aggregate spend to give more access to high quality lifelong learning. Personalised access is key to successful lifelong learning. Are we serious about giving better opportunities to women, if so, open learning centres should have crèche and childcare facilities.

We need to look at the micro-picture (what actually works) as well as the big picture. Private sector demand took off when the price came down. We need to deliver content at the right bandwidth to the right place at the right price. There are issues of quality of service with disjointed technologies and

mismanagement but the key is to ensure that the fibre is connected to something useful - this is more critical to success than mere delivery.

The public sector is not yet aggregating its needs across organisational boundaries to obtain economies of scale and suppliers are not yet co-operating with one another to share resources and reduce costs. The Health service has two to three times greater usage and infrastructure than education and is currently installing 256Mbits/sec uncontended pipes to all doctors and health centres but will not yet share network capacity with education and other networks because of security and data protection fears. This may change as a result of negotiations between the NHSIA and UKERNA security teams and a couple of pilot trials. There is a need to address unfounded security and data protection concerns which are being used as an excuse for inaction and to publicise the results of relevant tests and trials.

2.2 The future role and funding of the Universities:

Computer Science (including fast growing subjects like graphics and multi-media technology) has a staffing crisis and earnings (from commercial work, overseas students etc.) are often used to cross-subsidise departments where student numbers are falling. There are many possible responses (from regional lifelong learning and technology support hubs, integral with the local community, through to promoting centres of global excellence) but current organisational and funding frameworks constrain choice.

As well as the Higher Education Review there is an adult learning review.

The supply of graduates is important. Most employers organise around the skills currently available rather than trying to predict their future needs. The ability of graduates to rapidly acquire new skills outside a planned training environment is integral to the way they operate. Universities face the problem that many first-year undergraduates lack learning skills. There should be more focus on these in school so that UK non-graduates are also better able to acquire new skills.

There are problems with the statistics regarding the relationship of graduate employment to the courses followed. Of the estimated cohort of 16,000 computer science students it was said that half do not go into IT although 80 per cent go into employment (higher than almost all other subjects) and it was said that many are in jobs where they use their IT skills.

In assessing the obligations on employers to train and update their staff we need to look at their needs, including their productivity and competitiveness agendas at a time when many are struggling to survive.

The creative arts are major users of bandwidth and have a major, and often ignored, contribution to towards aggregation, skills and delivery.

We need to do far more to keep the skills of those teaching in Universities and Colleges up-to-date but how do we achieve this given their current workloads?

We need to recognise the growing demands for flexible and family friendly education and training as well as jobs. Flexibility is now built-in to many courses and we need to use the new technology institute programmes to promote and encourage new groups of students. We should expand and build on the various modular masters and other networked degree programmes, some of which are now international.

While there are constraints on HE many professional (e.g. qualified engineers) need to constantly update their skills and knowledge. We should recruit those coming out of university onto continuous professional development (alias lifelong learning) programmes.

We have recently seen tens of thousands of skilled technicians and engineers made redundant from the communications manufacturers - we need programmes to cross train them with the skills in current demand.

We are losing a vast sector of potential technicians and professionals by thinking in linear and synchronous ways rather than opening up new routes to enable mature individuals to acquire new

skills. We need to blur the boundaries and learn from vocational education in Germany which leads into a lifelong learning and working agenda at an early age.

We also need to ensure that publicly funded lifelong learning agendas are directed towards the areas of skills shortage and not just used as a euphemism for adult literacy and numeracy programmes.

2.3 The role and nature of the Learning and Skills Councils, both regional and sectoral:

- How far these are to be employer driven (whether in name or reality)?
- How far they are to be driven by public sector policy objectives, and if so, the objectives of which department(s) and agencies)?

The answers to these questions have dimensions with regard to the needs on which the Councils focus, the criteria used to measure their success and the criteria they use in turn to measure the success of their programmes (e.g. proportion gaining jobs, promotion or qualifications) and/or skills providers (e.g. lowest nominal cost per place, matched employer or individual funding, work placement, qualification etc.)

The regional Learning and Skills Councils cover the England while the Sectoral Skills councils will provide national perspective for the United Kingdom. The Sector Skills Development Agency does not control spend but is trying to set the framework for development, including for labour market data and to ensure better employer inputs

There was disagreement as to how well placed most employers now are to know the areas of skills shortages - given that many have now outsourced their personnel and training functions and their outsourcing suppliers commonly have chains of subcontractors. The ability of even large employers who have kept such functions in-house to predict the skills needed to handle emerging technologies was also questioned. It was, however, agreed to be vital both to greatly employer inputs at all levels and open up routes for inputs from the specialist contractors, including individuals, on whom they increasingly rely for key skills.

This raised some very big issues regarding the functions of existing and new bodies. How many employers have any idea what the various bodies do? Where should they go to find out?

We need to greatly simplify the situation for employers, especially SMEs and should promote the role of Regional and Sector Skills Councils regarding DfES consultations on employer skills needs and ensure that they are resourced accordingly

2.4 How far can/should Learning and Skills policy remain national and how far it should be a mix of local/regional and international?

We are seeing the increasing growth of international skills networks; for example the Cisco Networking Academy program (details on the CISCO website) is a scalable model which trains trainers and provides course, materials and quality assurance across the world for delivery by local academies (which may include schools as well as universities, colleges and the private sector) as well as on-line. Other major ICT suppliers (e.g. Microsoft and Oracle) have similar programmes as have a growing number of global engineering companies (e.g BAE and Rolls Royce from among those still based in the UK) .

We need to make individually funded training fully tax deductible as appears to be the case in almost all other nations. It had appeared that HMG was about to go down this route with the top-up routines for the Individual Learning Accounts but when these were suspended this was lost to sight.

Employers want bite-size chunks of learning but this conflicts with the qualification schemes around which public sector provision is so tightly targeted

Learning Tree as a model of training in the private sector, using good quality market research to rapidly respond to emerging demand and then promoting its courses to those who need them. The public sector needs much better targeted courses and to make its target audiences aware of them but its providers commonly have no marketing budgets, let alone market research budgets.

2.5 The role or otherwise of EU programmes etc.

The EU has money and should be used as a source of funding, whatever our views on the relevance of its skills programmes and the competence with which they are delivered. It does, however, take an inordinate amount of time to get funding from any of the schemes. There is a need to aggregate expertise and achieve both economies of scale and faster response in bidding.

2.6 How should we address those cross-sector skills likely to move into severe shortage over the course of the next year? e.g. computer security and forensics at all levels, multi-media (and the converging infrastructures of communications, computing, broadcast and content) at all levels etc.

There are few qualifications for, for example, auditing computing systems. Demand is driven by employer needs. Demand for training is driven by those who want to get into the new jobs. The biggest need is to give individuals the confidence to undertake re-training and re-skilling, especially those who are in their late 40's and have been made redundant.

Is it preferable to have business leaders with some IT skills or IT experts with some business expertise? Which is easier to train? Should we let the markets decide or encourage the sector skills to create routines to co-operate in building better routines for cross training those with relevant backgrounds?

At this point we ran out of time.

3 Summary of possible recommendations

3.1 Aggregation of spend on networks (support and materials as well as technology):

- JISC and other funding bodies to work to align procurement cycles and capital spending and ensure a better balance between capital and revenue spend.
- UK Online to be followed by a programme to secure sustainable community access points with both world class content availability and technical/learning support, plus crèche and childcare facilities and home access for those who need them
- Awareness programme, including publicity for the results of relevant tests and trials, to prevent unfounded security and data protection concerns from blocking aggregation of demand to achieve better value for money and economies of scale,

3.2 The future role and funding of the Universities:

- Improve the focus on learning skills in schools so that universities can spend less time on remedial education
- Rationalise the routines for academic-industry liaison, with major reductions in the number of parallel meetings/exercises, to improve participation on both sides
- Mandate the timetabling of periods of professional development to keep the skills of those teaching in universities and colleges up-to-date
- Encourage universities and colleges to routinely enrol graduates in continuous professional development (alias lifelong learning programmes) as a matter of course and run these as a potentially more important revenue stream than the initial course.
- Respond to demands for flexible and family friendly education and training by using new technology institute and other programmes to expand and build on modular masters and other networked degree programmes, including those which are now international.

3.3 The role and nature of the Learning and Skills Councils, both regional and sectoral:

- Focus on improving employer inputs at all levels and open up routes for inputs from the specialist contractors, including individuals, on whom they rely for key skills.
- Promote the role of both Regional and Sector Skills Councils regarding DfES consultations on employer skills needs and ensure that they are resourced accordingly
- Use the Learning and Skills Councils, and all other routes, to ensure that publicly funded lifelong learning agendas are directed towards the areas of skills shortage and not just used as a euphemism for adult literacy and numeracy programmes.
- Give regional and sector skills councils the remit and resources to organise industry-strength market research into national and local skills needs, in co-operation with the private sector and ensure public sector providers have marketing budgets for their courses.

3.4 How far can/should Learning and Skills policy be local/regional and international

- Recognise that while pressures for local delivery are increasingly the courses and materials to be delivered are becoming increasingly international.
- Give sector skills councils the remit to facilitate delivery of existing world class content to meet current employer needs, whether or not related to UK developed qualifications.
- Make individually funded training towards industrially and professionally recognised qualifications fully tax deductible.

3.5 The role or otherwise of EU programmes etc.

- Give Skills Councils the remit to aggregate expertise and achieve economies of scale and expedited response in EU bids to meet needs in their geographic or sector areas.

3.6 Cross-sector skills in current/prospective shortage:

- Focus political attention on the need to give individuals the confidence to undertake re-training, especially those who are in their late 40's and have been made redundant.