

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.

Name: Philip Virgo, Secretary General

Organisation: The Information Society Alliance (EURIM)

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

	General Further Education College
	Sixth Form College
	Charity or social enterprise
	Training Organisation
	Local Government
	Individual
	Large employer (250+)
	Medium employer (50 to 250 staff)
	Small employer (10 to 49 staff)
	Micro employer (up to 9 staff)
	Trade union or staff association
X	Other: Parliament and Industry Group (parliamentary, corporate and associate members including employers, professional bodies and trade associations)

Principles for a skills strategy

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

The Consultation paper begins with statements as to why skills are important and lists some of the reasons why employers and individuals are not investing in learning and skills, such as fear of poaching, credit restraints, reliance on migrant worker, uncertainty of return and lack of confidence on the part of low-skilled returners. The “principles” fail to address any of these.

There is a need to begin with a clear policy objective such as:

To ensure the UK has the world class skills base necessary to attract, create, sustain and grow the wealth creating industries of the future.

In that context social inclusion is indeed highly desirable, but is secondary to removing the current incentives for employers to export jobs or import workers when they cannot locally obtain the skills they need, when and where they need them, whether by retaining their existing staff or by recruiting well-educated and motivated recruits. More-over 80% of the workforce in 2020 has already left school or college and/or graduated - with skills that will atrophy and become obsolete unless practised and kept up to date.

With that in mind, the “principles” should be to:

1.1) enable market forces to work by reducing the after-tax tax cost (both time and money) of regularly and routinely updating the skills of the existing workforce (at all levels), recognising that basic disciplines (academic, professional, technical) change slowly while the half-life of applications skills is often 18 months or less

1.2) encourage the provision of local access to world-class education and training infrastructures (including networked partnerships of schools, colleges, universities, research centres and private sector training operations) that will deliver modular courses, materials, work experience and skills accreditation when, where and how individuals and employers wish

1.3) reward individuals and employers who invest in the skills of themselves and their staff, including those employers who confine their use of immigrant labour to international career rotations, to the transfer of world-class skills to their UK employees and to the creation of UK employment opportunities.

1.4) focus publicly funded training for first entrants, or those excluded from the labour market, on skills in demand within the individual's travel to work radius and involve local employers (including public sector) in selection, training, work experience and motivation.

1.5) make it very much easier for those who cannot find work locally to relocate to where it is available, including the provision of residential facilities linked to work-experience programmes with potential employers.

1.6) ensure that accreditation routines (for courses, qualifications, training providers and individuals) are designed primarily to help employers and students make well-informed choices that are relevant to their business needs and career aspirations. [any other objectives are secondary].

1.7) require those running publicly funded training programmes to provide information to prospective students as to which employers have recruited from those programmes or, in the case of new programmes, are looking to do so.

The policies that result from applying the principles will have failed unless they also lead to a greater willingness on the part of employers and individuals to invest more (time as well as money) in the acquisition of new skills.

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

2.1) There are serious questions as to whether the structure, terms of reference and methods of working of bodies like the Higher Education Funding Council for England or the Technology Strategy Board are a major part of the problem: using committees of formidably intelligent advisors to try to predict the future and/or adjudicate bids from those bidding for funds to meet future needs. Meanwhile those producing the technologies that will shape the future have little or no time to respond to their consultations. The head of educational and academic relationships for one of the world's largest ICT suppliers logged over 3,000 requests to supply representatives for UK groups planning courses and curricula – most of them duplicating effort at the national level and failing to address local variations.

2.2) There is an urgent need to reduce the load on employers by grouping such requests and routing them through appropriate channels, local or national – for example those sector skills councils that can demonstrate the support of employers (of all sizes) across the industries they serve and of the relevant trade associations, professional bodies and trades unions. Public sector organisations, particularly Local Government, are often the largest employers in any given geographic location and should be encouraged to play an active role in the relevant sector skills councils. The skills councils need to be given the authority to do the job properly, including vis a vis HEFCE and other funding agencies and government as an employer.

2.3) There is an urgent need to reduce the pressure on departments to choose between cutting costs at the expense of quality and focussing on overseas students in order to survive as a world-class skills supplier. Complex funding structures which try to average fees and funding across courses that have very different delivery costs need to be replaced by structures that better reflect the cost of delivery and enable public funding to follow the student. These should include vouchers and learning accounts, whilst also drawing in funding from those willing and able to pay for themselves. Those who cut delivery costs by replicating courses and modules across multiple locations and institutions should be rewarded, not penalised.

2.4) There will still be a need to fund the creation of innovative courses or enable existing courses at additional locations, at least until the UK education industry has recovered from its dependence on drip-feed central funding. During the transition period, those running or proposing publicly funded courses, qualifications and accreditations should provide evidence of employer support, including recruitment from existing programmes and their current/planned use for the training and career development of in-house staff.

2.5) Proposals for innovative courses should also include evidence of support from employers planning to use them for their own staff or wanting them to be available for their customers (e.g. training to handle the innovative products and services that they are bringing to market). Public support may still be needed, particularly when the innovations are being made by those without marketing or support budgets (e.g. "free" open source software).

2.6) Meanwhile there is a need to actively encourage education and training providers (at all levels) to share modular material (including assessment routines) for local delivery to national and international standards, whether as part of publicly funded training or as directly revenue earning commercial short course modules.

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?

3.1) The main savings are in the overhead costs of bodies like HEFCE, including the cost, including time, of bidding for public funding and of adjudicating the bids.

3.2) A first target should be to reduce the cost/effort spent bidding for public funding to duplicate what is already available elsewhere. This should include encouraging arrangements to re-use existing material, courses and qualifications, providing local access to that which is successful in other parts of the country or overseas. That will require fostering a "market" mentality

3.3) A second target should be to encourage shared access to existing facilities, and investment in new ones, including across public and private sector education and training needs for all ages: e.g.

- school premises, equipment and communications networks to be used in the evenings and at week-end for small firms courses, home-work centres and mature learning (e.g. University of the Third Age) and also local access to FE/HE courses – including those available on-line from across the world.

- college and university facilities to be used similarly for modular training delivery (including commercial short courses and self-study) for local employers and individuals training themselves.

- libraries, museums, community centres, village halls, pubs, clubs and sports centres to be used similarly as shared access centres

The main constraints are:

3.4) Funding, fiscal and administrative arrangements which penalise those who seek to share facilities and/or mix public and private funding other than via centrally planned programmes. There is a need to clarify the routines for avoiding the imposition of business rates on mixed-use facilities and for interpreting the EU state aid rules in the same way as other member states.

3.5) The way IR35 currently penalises micro-businesses who seek to invest heavily in maintaining and updating the skills of those who run them. The UK appears to be unique in requiring individuals to pay for the acquisition of skills that are not “wholly and necessarily” needed for their current employment, from after-tax income. It is also unusual in taxing (Income Tax and National Insurance) those under training as full employees, rather than giving whole or partial exemption (from income and payroll taxes) to reflect time spent off the job and the cost of work place supervision.

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?

4.1) The “Apprentice” market includes thousands of post-graduate interns and trainees working in accountancy, banking, catering, engineering, law, medicine and so on – not just those in the NVQ related programmes. Many are unpaid. Some even pay for posts as “interns”.

4.2) Most of the UK workforce acquired most of its practical skills from informal apprenticeship: “sitting next to Nellie”. The biggest cost of delivering effective apprenticeship programmes is that of structuring, supervising and assessing good quality work experience. The cost of the off-the-job elements (including those provided by FE Colleges) is trivial by comparison. Far more attention needs to be paid to supporting and rewarding “Nellie”.

4.3) The best way of encouraging more employers to participate and of organising apprenticeships through level 3 - 5 (i.e. including modular degree courses and professional qualifications) is to give full or partial exemption from PAYE (both income tax and national insurance) for those trainees who are covered by training contracts (Neal v. Strathclyde Regional Council 1984) to develop skills to professionally recognised standards.

[this has the added benefit of giving employers more confidence that they will get a return from their investment in training and trainees more confidence that they will not just be treated as cheap labour – because a contract cuts both ways.]

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.

5.1) Involve potential employers in the initial assessment programme to determine whether individuals have the potential and motivation to benefit.

If they do, then this can create win-win sponsorship situations.

If they do not, decisions have to be made as to whether they are worthy of public funding until they do, or should be routed to another programme.

5.2) The long-standing and understandable desire to create routines that automate (or otherwise avoid personal responsibility for) such decisions is a major reason for the limited success of past programmes.

5.3) The Women into IT Foundation (1988 – 94) found that direct employer involvement made the difference between programmes that had placement-into-work rates of 70 – 80% and those with placement rates of 20% or under.

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.

See answer to 4 above. The demand can be seen in the success of programmes for unpaid graduate interns whose parents can afford to support them. This does not assist government objectives for equality of opportunity.

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

7.1) The assessment of existing skills to see what training is necessary is central to the career development regimes of those employers that still have structured in-house programmes. It is used to identify the gaps that need to be filled and to better target time and resource. It is particularly important for new, emerging and evolving skills.

7.2) The training, assessment and accreditation routines of “traditional” apprenticeship and professional development programmes – from Chartered Accountants to Chartered Engineers and Computer Practitioners often entail significant periods of supervised work experience (“sitting next to Nellie”), with checklists of the competences to be acquired, demonstrated and recorded. It is particularly important to the professions to ensure that those checklists are maintained in times of change and that “Nellie” is fully up to date. There is a need to ensure that those funded by the public sector do likewise

7.3 Given that there is little or no vocational education or off-the-job training for many of the high level skills currently in crisis (e.g. Information Security, the production of Multi-media content, on-line Marketing etc.) it is particularly important to be able to accredit those with skills in current demand (however acquired). Examples include the assessment routines of the Institute for Information Security Professional (supported by CESG) and those being used by the Computer Games Industry (ELSPA) to accredit degree courses. [So far only 4 University Courses out of more than 30 meet the criteria set by Multi-media and Games employers]. This illustrates the scale and nature of the current mismatch between demand and supply.

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?

There is a big difference between those who are already out-of-work and those who are at risk.

The latter includes much of the private sector work force, unless they can keep their skills up to date. It now includes a significant proportion of the public sector work force. The points of leverage are:

8.1) To allow those at risk to offset the cost of acquiring new skills against their current or past taxable income, whether or not their employer is willing to share the cost.

8.2) To include retraining programmes as part of any redundancy package, including for those about to be made redundant from the public sector and its contractors. It is also important to ensure that these are not taxed as a "benefit in kind".

8.3) The problem is more difficult with regard to those who are already out of work. One solution used, apparently successfully, in other parts of the European Union is to include a requirement to give training and work experience to defined groups (e.g. those locally registered as unemployed) within public sector invitations to tender and then to encourage potential bidders to involve local colleges and training providers in their bids.

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?

By embedding supervised work for local employers on college premises and other forms of supervised work experience as part of their training programmes. [Blurring the dividing line between learning and work has many other benefits and was central to the success of traditional apprenticeship programmes.]

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

By embedding basic financial and business skills in the heart of mainstream education and training [c.f. the Board of Education “Suggestions for the consideration of Teachers and others concerned in the Work of Public Elementary Schools” (first issued in 1905). Several of the “suggestions” for teaching practical skills included working out the cost of the task, including the price necessary to cover the time taken at a given hourly labour cost.]

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?

11.1) The UK having to increasingly compete for jobs with nations (such as India, China and most of Asia, Africa and South America) where post-school learning and training is seen as a personal and/or family responsibility, albeit usually encouraged by tax incentives. One approach is to limit “entitlement” to literacy, numeracy and the first entry skills in demand from **local** employers.

11.2) The other approach is to switch to vouchers and/or payments into individual learning accounts but with much more rigorous and relevant quality control of those with whom the vouchers can be spent, including the use of payment by results measures, whether literacy or numeracy tests or placement into work.

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?

12.1) Encourage training providers, both public and private sector, to co-operate in organising market research into the skills and training needs of those employers who might pay them to train their existing workforce or wish to recruit those who they train at the expense of the trainees or taxpayers.

12.2) Encourage providers to co-operate, via marketing and delivery networks, in providing the local delivery of modular training for an increasingly mobile workforce, to common national and international standards. Even those who have no intention of moving geographically will increasingly work on-line for organisations that expect staff and contractors around the country (or around the world) to be trained to common standards.

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

13.1) Rationalise consultation channels around those sector skills councils that can demonstrate the support of employers (of all sizes) across the industries they serve, the relevant trade associations, professional bodies and trades unions.

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

14.1) Require those seeking public funding for their courses and materials to demonstrate support from employers who wish to use their services to train existing staff and/or recruit new staff from among those they train.

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?

15.1) Most employers have never heard of most UK qualifications and have no idea what those they have heard of mean, if anything, with regard to the competences they can expect. Hence the reason the qualifications rarely appear in UK job advertisements or recruitment specifications.

15.2) Many of those that used to be recognised and valued (e.g. City and Guilds 726) were dropped from UK public sector training provision because they did not fit the requirements of the Qualifications and Credit Framework or its predecessors. Some are still popular and in demand in other parts of the world and several Universities (including Cambridge) and professional bodies derive significant global revenues from accrediting qualifications that are not available via UK public sector education and training providers.

15.3) The need is to use “industry strength” market research to identify which qualifications are valued by which employers and to drop those that are not from the frameworks used by the public sector for planning and funding.

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

16.1) Rationalise the number of publicly funded careers websites and promote cross-linkages to those sites most likely to be accessed by the target audience, rather than creating and promoting a new brand name.

[Those with Internet Access have a bewildering choice of careers advisors vying for their attention. Googling “independent careers advice” in the UK gives nearly 500,000 hits. www.careersadvice.direct.gov.uk/ is by no means the most prominent.]

16.2) Give more priority to providing access to careers advice for “the final third”, effectively excluded from the on-line world by geography or disability.

[Those with limited Internet access or unable to use a conventional screen and keyboard or telephone call centre service have a major problem. This should be linked to the case for better broadband access in general.]

16.3) Support the accreditation of reputable training providers, akin to the services currently provided by the British Council for overseas students or by the Institute of IT Training and its equivalents for other sectors. Those Sector Skills Councils which represent a critical mass of employers should be the channel for public sector support (including from government as an employer) for those relevant to their industries. Where industries and skills sets are not covered by healthy sector skills councils there will be a need to find alternatives: e.g. trade associations and professional bodies

16.4) The UK Borders Agencies should actively support reputable accreditation services routines to help enhance the UK position as a global leader in world-class education and training, welcoming those coming to “learn and return” while limiting and discouraging fraud and abuse on the part of those simply seeking to bypass immigration controls.

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

17.1) The stated “vision” is narrow, limited and unlikely to produce better results than past attempts at training records, skills passports etc. If they are worth having then they are worth falsifying. A recent survey by recruitment and credit reference agencies found that around 30% of CVs contained “exaggerations” and 10% had “major falsehoods”. It is unlikely that anyone will be willing to cover the cost of credible quality control, let alone take responsibility and liability for correcting falsehoods.

17.2) It would be much better to return to the “original” vision for “Individual Learning Accounts” before these were brought into disrepute by widespread fraud when those responsible for implementing policy ignored advice, including from the contractors. The ILAs should not be yet another marketing and recording service. They should be a prime channel for public sector funding to follow the student, with controls to ensure the funds are spent with reputable training organisations, accredited by relevant professional bodies and employers’ organisations, working with and through the appropriate sector skills councils.

17.3) The accounts should link directly to funding and booking services, with proper safeguards against fraud, impersonation and the abuse of personal information. They should also be tied into accreditation services for the training providers as recommended in 16.3.

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

18.1) It is not clear how the “Framework for Excellence” helps employers or individuals make better-informed choices than by accessing other services, such as careersadvice.direct.gov.uk.

19.2) Those running publicly funded programmes, including colleges and universities and third sector organisations, should make information on their services available via relevant mainstream marketing channels.

That information should include:

- which employers (local and national) have recruited and/or are looking recruit in future from which of their courses
- what accreditations they have: including for delivering supplier specific skills [these are, for good or ill, more often required by employers than generic skills] as well as those from professional and technical bodies, trade associations, regulators and others.

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.

19.1) The objectives are welcome but there is an implication that these will be met by creating new partnership bodies instead of “encouraging” existing bodies to come together.

19.2) Channel funding via those channels which have effective employer representation on their advisory boards.

[Given the pressures on the time of those employers who are in a position to available make staff with the necessary experience, this will also require a major reduction in the number of channels.]

19.3) The choice of which channels to preserve should be informed by the willingness of employers (including public sector employers) to make such staff available.

19.4) Advisory boards should not include consultants or pensioners unless these are nominated by employers to represent their interests.

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?

20.1) Require them to provide evidence that current courses are used by local employers and that their plans for innovation or expansion have support from those planning to expand locally or to relocate to the area they serve.

20.2) Create routines for rapid response to inputs from bodies like UK Trade and Investment when potential employers are planning either to relocate to the UK or to leave because they cannot find the necessary local skills.

20.3) Require funding agencies to report quarterly on what proportion of their funds they have disbursed on programmes as opposed to running the agency, including advisory committees, assessing bids etc. Require them to report the costs incurred by those they fund in competitive bids for programmes,

[It is alleged that the collective costs of those bidding for limited funds can be greater than the funds available and yet the “success” of “challenge” programmes is often measured by the number of bids rather than net output]

20.4) Set mandatory time limits for funding agencies to respond to submissions.

20.5) Encourage funding agencies to merge advisory committees and assessment operations and pool budgets from different sources to reduce overheads and help colleges and universities to deliver more for less,

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?

21.1) The most important mechanism is to report success in training employers’ existing staff and in producing recruits who enter paid employment. Anything else is a proxy of limited value.

21.2) The methodologies used should be agreed with relevant employers groups nationally, via the sector skills councils, but the priority given to specific measures may well differ by locality as well as by industry.

21.3) The means of handling local priorities should be discussed with the Local Government Association in line with the Coalition Government plans to devolve authority from the centre.

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?

22.1) The need is to replace frameworks based on vain attempts to forecast demand in the future (to support curriculum planning) by processes which

- facilitate industry strength market research into current and emerging skills needs, and
- enable rapid and flexible response: including to
- organise pilot training programmes and to
- scale and replicate those that succeed.

22.2) We need to recognise and accept the difference between education and training. Basic professional and technical disciplines change slowly, if at all. They are, however, essential if individuals are to be able to rapidly master new technology-specific skills as the latter change and evolve over time.

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

23.1) by enabling and encouraging public sector training providers (at all levels) to work directly with those planning the launch of new products and services so as to organise training for their potential customers and users (when, where and how it might be needed) while maintaining flexibility as to the scale of delivery until the scale of actual demand is apparent.

23.2) by working with user communities, particularly those in the public sector, to organise training in areas where suppliers are unlikely to assist with technical support or marketing and promotion budgets: e.g. the use of the open source software that is likely to become a mandatory part of future Government ICT programmes.

23.3) the mechanisms for achieving this are in a state of constant flux as new groups of enthusiasts create "special interest groups" within existing professional bodies, academic groupings or trade associations – or create new ones. The need is therefore to support light touch, informal networks which bring together those willing to co-operate to deliver pilot programmes which can be rapidly copied and scaled if and when successful.

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

24.1) By identifying what is relevant to them, making it available and making them aware that it exists. Some sector skills council already do this, collecting information from those who produce this as a by-product of services to monitor salaries, staff conditions and recruitment advertising.

24.2) These tend to produce national or regional analyses (e.g. North West, North East, Inner London, Outer London etc.) of limited value to those looking at specific travel to work areas. There is a need to also work with local authorities on travel to work areas, using common and meaningful (to employers) terminology.

[The 1996 IT Skills Trends Report, which predicted the Y2K skills boom and bust www.eurim.org.uk/activities/skills/96SKILLS.pdf shows what can be done with what is readily available, but also shows the limits.

A simpler methodology for a specific travel to work area was produced more recently to aid London Charities planning IT training programmes to help those living in some of the most disadvantaged parts of London to get back into work. See appendix.]

Encouraging a more productive workforce

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

25.1) The correlation quoted on page 9 confuses cause and effect. Technical advance, productivity and business process improvement share the same driver: the need to be competitive.

The lack of skills and motivation is an inhibiting factor.

The availability of skills is an enabler, not a driver.

25.2) Studies of what influences the location of growth industries, especially those which could be located anywhere in the world, indicate that the availability of local supplies of world class technician (NVQ level 3) and post graduate (NVQ level 5 and 6) skills are among the top six. For some industries they are among the top 3 (alongside “fiscal, regulatory and planning certainty” and “quality of life for key employees”).

25.3) Hence the success of technology clusters, such as those around Cambridge, Southampton/Portsmouth, Cheltenham or Derby. The success and expansion of these has, until recently, been limited mainly by the supply of technician level skills.

25.4) Unfortunately that problem looks set to be compounded by limitations on the indigenous supply of world-class post-graduates and on the ability to bring in experts from overseas to help plug that gap and help with skills transfer. This has serious effects on knowledge based industries such as aerospace, communication, multi-media entertainment or pharmaceuticals.

Nick Stevens, the chief executive of RSA was recently quoted as saying “we are seeing a double skills whammy; because of the Coalition Government’s approach to immigration policy both multinational pharmaceutical companies and growing biotech companies are having problems bringing in the skilled staff on whose input their future success depends. This is coupled with concerns of the supply of high quality Life Science graduates in the UK – the Life Science Leaders of tomorrow. Unless the Government looks again at its strategy on skills mobility and supply, they cannot succeed in their expressed intention of stimulating the knowledge economy”

25.5) The rate at which some of the technologies and disciplines are evolving means that even post-graduates need regular updating. The decision by HEFCE to withdraw funding from the equivalent and lower qualifications (ELQs) was a serious blow to many of the courses and qualifications that were successfully meeting that need. Some now have differential pricing. Others, for example in Cybersecurity skills, and area of global crisis, now cater mainly for overseas students, forcing UK students to study overseas. The role and terms of reference of HEFCE in this area need review.

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.

26.1) The first and most important is for Ministers to listen to business leaders and to instruct their officials to respond when they ask for their problems to be addressed. Only then will major employers engage constructively - as opposed to quietly moving operations that need to be globally competitive out of the United Kingdom.

26.2) Ministers need to recognise that it is commonly easier for those running globally competitive growth business to leave the UK rather than endure the hassle of trying to persuade those who are not listening.

Reinvigorating adult and community learning

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

27.1) Those running successful third sector organisations have even less time to spend on exploratory discussions with officials than those in business.

27.2) The best point of leverage is to engage those major charities already running operations to bring the socially excluded into mainstream education and training. Several of these have advisory board members and other volunteers with experience of running large organisations (both public and private sector) who are now supposedly retired or are who cannot afford to retire but are content to be paid at well-below their previous market rate.

27.3) The individuals concerned are, however, often working harder and under more pressure than when in mainstream employment. They are rarely willing to provide their expertise free of charge - unless they can see a direct and immediate benefit to those they are seeking to help. They rarely have the time to attend meetings that do not have a tangible and relevant objective, let alone to help consultants do studies or surveys - unless their time is covered by an appropriate donation.

27.4) The alternative is to work through those employers who are already helping their programmes, including via groups like IT for Communities which brings together the charitable support efforts of industry – including to aid

programmes for socially inclusive education organised by charities. The appendix was produced to aid one such programme.

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

See the answer to 27 above.

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.

See the answer to 27 above

Measuring success

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

30.1) The measure of success for Government policy should be whether it attracts high value-added jobs and industries to the UK.

30.2) The measure of success for individual courses and qualifications is whether they lead to valued added employment for those using them.

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.

The consultation is UK centric and thus of limited relevance in an age where leading edge skills are increasingly defined and delivered on an international basis.

The UK is no longer a world leader in education and training except where our Universities, Professional Bodies and Trade Associations are working in partnership with those in other countries to develop materials, courses, qualifications and accreditation services for global rather than intra-UK or intra- EU markets.

The consultation fails to raise the question of whether the HEFCE “model”, which dates back to back to 1917 and the desire to match the German scientific skills bases, is relevant to the 21st Century. It is complex and sophisticated but time-consuming and costly at a time when other nations have moved on – apparently successfully.

The following Appendix may be useful in answer to questions 27 – 9

This note was written before job advertising had migrated to the Internet and on-line browser and open source skills had replaced PC maintenance and "Microsoft Office". Nonetheless the basic approach still appears relevant.

Forecasting Demand for "Graduates" from an ICT Course: Notes for those requesting help in planning ICT courses for the socially disadvantaged in the London area.

Background

ICT trainees are not normally a "marketable commodity" until they have at least one successful work-placement and reference. Most employers want to recruit experienced staff because they lack the time/resource to supervise trainees.

Most employers have no idea what the 800 or so ICT qualifications on offer mean (if anything). Most surveys of demand for ICT skills use vague definitions that are meaningless to most employers and most forecasts are based on poor response rates and appear, with hindsight, to have been inaccurate for most parts of the UK.

There are a wide range of different ICT skills. Some require considerable professional level training and experience to master but demand may only be in hundreds or thousands for the whole country. Some are specific to an application or industry. Some may be in more widespread demand and can be learned quite rapidly by those with the necessary aptitude (measurable). Others may be needed by hundreds of thousands of secretarial and clerical staff and those who support them. It is important to be clear which levels and types of skill the trainees are expected to acquire.

Experience over the past twenty years with ICT courses for disadvantaged groups has been that the most successful (in terms of placement) fall into one of three broad categories:

- remedial education (literacy, numeracy, modern office skills etc)
- remotivation (for those made redundant or returning from a career break).
- re-entry (higher-level skills for those who dropped out of the education system well before reaching their potential)

Students may well progress "up the chain" but the nature of the ICT skills which it is realistic to expect them to acquire are initially very different.

What is the Objective?

Is the objective to justify spending public money?

If so, this probably entails requiring trainees to acquire a qualification which is recognised by the funding agency – whether or not it means anything to prospective employers.

Is the objective to place trainees into paid employment, whether or not they complete the course?

If so, this means earning a reputation among local employers as a place from which to recruit.

Is that employment a stepping - stone to a career path or merely a way of earning money?

Either way it is important to know the motivations of both students and potential employers.

What is the geographic area for which you are forecasting demand?

Are the majority of your potential students dependent on public transport?

- If so, what is the realistic “travel to training” area served by your course(s)?
- What are the “travel to work” areas realistic for those in different parts of your catchment area?

For some parts of London these can be unexpected because of Bus, Train and Tube anomalies as well as cultural/social patterns.

Who are the potential employers?

Use local employment agencies, newspapers and directories to identify those employers in the area who are not only looking for staff but may be able (and willing) to take on work-experience trainees.

These will usually be a mix of:

- medium to large organisations used to supervising trainees and/or with a supply of non-critical tasks suitable for trainees who may (or may not) deliver.
- those needing but unable to pay for staff to do tasks which require little or no supervision (including local authorities, charities and voluntary organisations).

If you are able to provide/fund workplace supervision (or provide quality controlled work experience as part of the course) the list of target employers can be expanded considerably, perhaps including small firms.

The Computer Users Year Book is the best source for finding organisations which employ professional level ICT staff. Its volumes cover sites and suppliers. Kellies, Kompass, Yellow Pages and the many other trade

directories plus Job Centre/TEC/Skills Council files can be used to find local employers in general. Most are, however, more likely to wish ICT skills as part of a “modern office skills” mix..

What definitions of ICT Skills should you use?

Whatever definitions are used in dealings with funding agencies and others you should also take care to use those understood by your potential employers.

If you are training higher-level skills for local ICT employers (dealers, suppliers or organisations which have computer departments) then you should use the “Skills Framework for the Information Age” (available from the E-Skills NTO) and also the simpler definitions used by Salary Survey Publications to analyse recruitment advertising in the Computer Press and on the Internet.

If you are training lower level skills you should scan the advertisements in the local press and/or by local recruitment agencies to see what they are looking for (e.g. Secretary/Receptionist with Microsoft Office).

Short Cuts to placement

- 1) Contact local ICT dealers/suppliers/consultancies to find which of them (or their customers) are looking for which skills. Ask them which hardware/software they have been selling locally over the past couple of years (the equipment which trainees may have to use) and what they are now selling (new skills which they or their customers may need to acquire).
- 2) Leaflet drops to local firms, recruitment agencies and “executive” housing estates (where local employers may live) to invite those with ICT skills needs to semi-social networking events to help “plan” course content and placement routines.
- 3) Invite recruitment agencies and employers to help with trainee selection and offer opportunities to “support” and/or “pre-select” those to whom they would like to offer work-experience placements or employment.