

Policy Update

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(Issue 2)

The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009

The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act received Royal Assent on 12 November. The Act paves the way for the Machinery of Government changes, which were first announced two years ago, including the:

- Abolition of the Learning and Skills Council
- Establishment of the Young People's Learning Agency, the Skills Funding Agency and Ofqual
- Transfer of responsibility for commissioning 16-19 education and training to local authorities.

From April 2010, responsibility for securing education for all 16-19 year-olds in England will be transferred to local authorities, who will plan, commission and fund provision for young people in their area. Because many young people may live in one local authority, but receive education in another, local authorities will be expected to work together in sub-regional and regional groupings to ensure that commissioning plans reflect the ways young people travel to access learning and training.

The Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) will publish national frameworks to support local authority planning and commissioning, monitor the coherence and affordability of commissioning plans, manage the national funding formula, and provide data and analysis. The YPLA will also have powers to intervene if a local authority appears unable to develop robust commissioning plans within a set deadline. The Act also puts Children's Trust Boards on a statutory footing and imposes a duty to co-operate to promote children's well-being. The duty covers all maintained schools, Academies, sixth form and FE colleges and Jobcentre Plus.

The Act places Apprenticeships on a statutory footing, and guarantees that all suitably qualified young people will be entitled to an Apprenticeship place after 2013. The Apprenticeship provisions apply to England and Wales. The Act also requires that young people in schools receive appropriate information, advice and guidance about vocational training opportunities.

Until now, sixth-form colleges (SFCs) have been treated as part of the further education sector. Their distinct identity will now be reflected in a separate legal status. The main difference between SFCs and general FE colleges is that they will have a closer relationship with their home local authority and a single commissioning and performance management relationship with that authority. The choice of whether to be a SFC or FE college will rest partly on each college's own assessment of where its core business lies.

One further provision will be of particular interest to IEBE members. Section 47 of the Act states that local education authorities in England may secure the provision of work experience for young people aged over 16 but under 19 (or under 25 in the case of learners with learning difficulties). The word "may" indicates that this power is optional. However, the second part of Section 47 is legally binding on all local authorities in England: they must encourage participation in work experience by young people aged 16-19 (or 16-24 for young people with learning difficulties), and must encourage employers to provide work experience for these young people.

We strongly recommend asking local authorities how they intend to deliver their new responsibility to encourage work experience for young people aged 16 and over. There may be potential for IEBE members to provide tailored services in this area.



Skills for growth: the national skills strategy

The Government's new skills strategy was published on 11 November. It focuses largely on adult skills – that is, ways of meeting the needs of people already in the workforce – but does acknowledge the vital role of education and training up to the age of 18.

The strategy places a lot of emphasis on Apprenticeships, particularly at level 3 (and above), and on opportunities to progress from Apprenticeships into higher education. As with other recent policy statements, there is also a focus on the jobs of the future, including life sciences, digital media and technology, advanced manufacturing, engineering construction and the low carbon economy. This is obviously relevant to the work which many IEBE members do in the STEM area.

Regional Development Agencies will be tasked with producing a regional skill strategy, in consultation with local authorities and other interested parties. Although the strategy does not say so, RDAs have been told to produce the first version of their skills strategies by January 2010. **IEBE members should contact their RDA if they wish to be involved in writing the regional skills strategy.**

Finally, Ministers have decided that Sector Skills Councils need to be reviewed (again), with the aim of creating 'a substantially reduced number of bodies that achieve a better fit with the likely sector boundaries of the future'. It is too soon to say how or when these changes will be made.

The full strategy can be downloaded from <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/skills-for-growth>.

Selected extracts are provided below.

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"In this White Paper we set a bold new ambition for the higher education and skills systems – that three quarters of young people should participate in higher education or complete an advanced apprenticeship or equivalent technician level course by the age of 30. This broadens out, but does not supersede, our 50% higher education participation target, by including advanced vocational education and apprenticeships as routes of equal value and status through which young people can achieve their potential and gain good jobs.

It is as valuable for a young person to gain a good technical qualification through an apprenticeship as it is to go directly into university. We will create a modern class of skilled technicians and associate professionals and highly skilled craft and trade occupations, linking the world of learning and the world of work. We will almost double the number of advanced apprenticeships for 19-30 year olds, and increase the opportunities for high level apprentices to move on into higher education.

If suppliers want to work with Government – whether to build a new school or hospital, to develop a new IT system, or to deliver facilities management services – they should be expected to invest in the skills of their employees and provide apprenticeship opportunities. We will support 20,000 apprenticeship places over the next three years through this route.

We will work with the Department for Children, Schools and Families to support the development of University Technical Colleges. These will offer new opportunities for 14-19 year olds to undertake vocational and applied study. Alongside the introduction of 14-19 Diplomas, University Technical Colleges will greatly strengthen the flow of young people coming into the labour market with the skills and capabilities employers want and particularly for technician careers. We will ensure good progression from University Technical Colleges to other routes of study including advanced apprenticeships and foundation degrees.

One in eight undergraduate students is now studying in further education colleges in England. As set out in our framework for higher education, we will expand new types of higher education programmes that widen opportunities for flexible study for young people and adults. This will include part-time and workplace-based courses, and the expansion of foundation degrees which are vocational degrees completed in two years designed jointly between employers and higher education. We will also implement Alan Milburn's proposal for an apprenticeship scholarships fund

next autumn, so that some 1,000 young adults receive £1,000 each to incentivise further progress with their learning and skills in higher education.

The UK Commission will produce an annual National Strategic Skills Audit, starting in 2010. Regional Development Agencies, working in partnership with local authority leaders, sub-regional bodies and other partners such as Sector Skills Councils, will be tasked to produce Regional Skills Strategies. These will articulate employer demand and set out specific skills investment priorities for their region.

We will focus more of the skills budget on the areas of the economy which can do most to drive growth and jobs. Priorities for increased funding include life sciences, digital media and technology, advanced manufacturing, engineering construction and low carbon.

Many further education colleges and training institutions offer business skills training and signpost learners to their local Business Link provider. But, too often, those who might wish to combine the skills needed for a trade, like plumbing, with business start-up help, have to navigate the system on their own to find the support that is available. This can put off all but the most determined. So, while 18% of young adults have considered starting their own business, and 13% of economically active adults are self employed, only 3-4% of those leaving further education are actually self-employed after one year.

We will ensure that further education learners who want to go down this route are able to go to college and come out both qualified and ready to run a business. Our ambition is that a coherent “Qualify with a Business” package is available that integrates key business skills alongside the vocational training that learners undertake. This would be backed up by information and support on self-employment and business start up; opportunities to meet small business owners and self-employed individuals; and help with the transition from learning to trading including signposting to financial support and incubation facilities where available.

We are asking the UK Commission to come forward with proposals for consolidating the 25 Sector Skills Councils into a substantially reduced number of bodies that achieve a better fit with the likely sector boundaries of the future, and more flexibility to respond quickly to emerging and future skills needs in a fast-changing world.”

Higher Ambitions: the Government's green paper on higher education

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has published a paper on the future of higher education. According to the BIS web site, 'Higher Ambitions sets out how universities can remain world class, providing the nation with the high level skills needed to remain competitive, while continuing to attract the brightest students and researchers'.

While the document may be of general interest to IEBE members, some passages could open up new opportunities to work with universities, other HE providers and employers. The full document can be downloaded from <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/higher-ambitions>.

Selected extracts are provided below.

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“Employer links with higher education

Business and employers need to contribute more. They will do this through joint research programmes, vocationally oriented courses that they part-fund, sponsorship of students and much greater use of universities for management and leadership training.

Employers also need to ensure they provide opportunities for students to acquire the necessary skills through work placements, sandwich course years or support for employees who are studying. All this should be underpinned by close working with universities on course design.

Employers need to ensure that prospective students understand what employers' skills requirements are, including the numbers of graduates they are likely to need and the specific skills those graduates should have. One way they can do this is to work with Sector Skills Councils so that they can provide this information to prospective students on a sectoral basis, together with information about what to look for, and what to avoid, in vocational courses.

As the key definers of the skills needs of our economy and the key beneficiaries of the skilled workers produced by higher education, businesses have a crucial role in the funding and design of programmes, in the sponsorship of students, and in offering work placements and practical experience for students.

Employability

We will ask all universities to publish a statement on how they promote student employability. Universities must be free to define what works best for students in different courses and different institutions. But it is a top concern for business that students should leave university better equipped with a wider range of employability skills.

All universities should be expected to demonstrate how their institution prepares its students for employment, including through training in modern workplace skills such as team working, business awareness, and communication skills. This information should be in place in time for applicants for 2011/12 to refer to, so as to help students choose courses that offer the greatest returns in terms of graduate opportunity.

The skills and confidence that support entrepreneurialism form an important subset of employability skills. We will work with the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship and RDAs to increase the opportunities for higher education students to develop business start-up skills, and to enhance their prospects of success."