

Higher Education at Work High Skills: High Value

Response Form

We welcome views and comments from all those involved in higher education – as customers, learners or providers, and from others with an interest in it.

Your responses may be sent by email, fax or post to one of the following:-

By email to: highlevelskills.consultation@dius.gsi.gov.uk

By post to: High Level Skills Consultation, DIUS, Higher Education Group, N4, Moorfoot, Sheffield, S1 4PQ.

By fax to: 0114 259 1102.

The deadline for responses is Monday 7 July 2008.

We expect to publish a summary of responses in due course. Individual respondents will not be identified in this but please note the Freedom of Information statement below.

Please email any enquiries to highlevelskills.consultation@dius.gsi.gov.uk

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Royal Society of Chemistry

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Please indicate with a tick which type of organisation you represent

Higher education institution	
Further education institution	
Private training/learning provider	
Sector Skills Council	
Representative organisation or Professional body	√
Trade union	
Employer	
Employee	
Learner	
Other – please specify	

Please note that the boxes below can be extended to accommodate your views.

Consultation response from the Royal Society of chemistry

The RSC is the UK Professional Body for chemical scientists and an international Learned Society for advancing the chemical sciences. Supported by a network of over 43,000 members worldwide and an internationally acclaimed publishing business, our activities span education and training, conferences and science policy, and the promotion of the chemical sciences to the public.

As well as answering the questions below the RSC would like to make the following point.

Many initiatives which support or impinge on employer engagement are already being undertaken by a range of different groups, some with government funding (e.g. Chemistry for our Future). As outlined by delegates at the London High Skills:High Value meeting on 3 July it will be important that there is joined up thinking across government departments and other non governmental organisations to ensure that the best of these initiatives are supported and promoted along with any new initiatives.

Question 1: What incentives would encourage employers to be more involved in providing careers information, advice and guidance both before, and during university?

Incentives for employers to provide careers information may not be the right route. A key aim of government is to try and rationalize the provision of career and enhancement activities (e.g industrial and academic outreach into schools) in the STEM area. Therefore incentives for employers to be more involved with national bodies (e.g professional bodies, Science Council Future Morph project etc) to help provide a coordinated approach to delivering high quality specific Information , Advice and Guidance (IAG) would be a better route.

To achieve this employers may need to be given funding as an incentive to release staff to work with the overarching organisations.

It is important that there is confidence that the information advice and guidance (IAG) providers in schools and universities are not only given enough time to deliver high quality IAG but that the emphasis on NEETS (young people not in employment, education or training) does not detract from providing IAG to the average and very brightest students.

Question 2a: Given that subject choice at 14 and GCSE and A level attainment are critical factors, is there a case for specific incentives to prospective students to take Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects?

There is much evidence to suggest that the key factor in student subject choice at GCSE and A level is due to good, indeed inspirational teaching. It would probably be most beneficial if any incentives were directed at encouraging good graduates in the specific STEM disciplines to pursue a career in teaching. This is obviously dependent on there being a large enough pool of STEM graduates. The provision of well equipped modern science facilities in schools and colleges is also crucial

Financial incentives to take STEM subjects could well work but would this be sustainable?

Other incentives such as enhanced UCAS points for STEM subjects may be an alternative.

Direct help from employers via school links that work well should also be encouraged – it can be very effective.

Question 2b: How could any incentives avoid simply reinforcing the decisions of people who would have chosen STEM subjects anyway?

In order for the system to be fair this would not be possible to implement, and encouragement for those considering STEM subjects is a good thing.

However, incentives could be offered to those who are looking to refocus their studies after having completed a set of GCSE or A level qualifications outside the STEM area. This does however, go counter to the current thinking in HE where Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQ) have just had significant funding withdrawn and STEM was not classed as an exemption.

Question 2c: More generally, is there a case for providing incentives to universities or employers to encourage more young people to study STEM and pursue careers in it?

The greatest incentive to universities would be the provision of adequate funding for the practical based subjects in HE. Whilst the £75m provided for 3 years to 2010 has gone some way to address this there is as yet no certainty of this continuing beyond 2010.

Question 3: What support and incentives would help universities offer access to the workplace for all their students?

Greater and easier access to employment placements. The provision of high quality work placements has considerable staff and financial implications for both the university and the employer. This needs to be recognized and compensated to both parties.

The benefits to students of courses with placements should be reinforced with regard to their future employability.

Communication being better between HE and employers.

Question 4: How can we help employers better articulate their needs for broad based employability skills?

Universities and employers need to work together to ensure that the benefits of PDP are targeted appropriately and that students and academics are aware of the importance for students and employers of the ability to articulate the skills learnt during the course. The RSC has worked closely with employers and universities to provide a subject specific Undergraduate Skills Record (USR) that helps students identify and record the skills gained during the course.

Question 5: What more can we do to provide more graduates with the language skills and cultural awareness to thrive in a global marketplace?

Ensure that the content of courses is adequately contextualised with applications in the world of work. Demonstrate the global nature of employment and provide opportunities for the development of language skills alongside courses.

Unfortunately government policy has downgraded how modern foreign languages are perceived starting at secondary level.

Question 6a: What further incentives are needed to stimulate and meet employer demand for high level skills?

“stimulate” and “meet” sitting in the same sentence is an odd juxtaposition. The important word is “meet” for employers are (or at least the CBI and others are) always stressing the need for transferable skills. There is a need for a proper debate on this: the issue of “teaching” high level skills directly (or indirectly through conventional study) compared with the osmotic method of “absorbing” them - i.e. can you teach them at all) have never been properly aired.

Question 6b: How can we best build on the contributions of further education colleges and providers and their links (in particular) to networks of small and medium sized enterprises?

Work is being carried out by the Joint Forum for Higher Level skills (across DIUS,UUK, QAA, employers and professional bodies – RSC is represented on this group) to look at how the frameworks being introduced across HE relate to FE. Support for this and information to employers will be crucial.

Question 6c: How well does the framework for high level skills support employer engagement?

Question 7a: How can we best work with businesses and employers, Trade Unions and employees to encourage demand for high level skills?

The developing Sector Skills Councils may play a big role here. It will be important to ensure that there is joined up thinking across the SSCs, professional bodies and FE/HE providers. Work is being undertaken here through the Gateways to the Profession Collaborative Forum (chaired by Bill Rammell and on which RSC has a representative).

Question 7b: How can we encourage rapid implementation of an effective framework for credit accumulation and transfer?

The implementation of the credit accumulation framework will be dependent on the providers and employers seeing a true value in it. The ability for students to undertake courses that are relevant to their employers will be critical, the credit accumulation will be of importance to the individual to ensure that they can demonstrate the skills they have developed. The key factor will be to prove that there is value to both employers and individuals and that a proper and agreed tariff is seen as workable and effective.

Question 8: Do we have the right incentives to encourage higher education providers to be more responsive to business and employer demand?

Some form of incentive in the way of support for employers to send staff for specific and more general training may assist in the joint development of courses. If HE providers are given some guarantee of support from employers by jointly developing courses this will go a long way to aid the certainty of making the courses viable. However, development of courses is very cost and labour intensive and a ring fenced fund to support this may provide the appropriate incentive. Again, some formal and effective communication mechanism is needed (or perhaps there is one, but it is apparently ineffective).

Question 9: What should be the key features of a model for regional and sectoral bodies to play a much greater role in solving local skills problems and linking higher education institutions and businesses?

RDAs and SSCs will need to be able to demonstrate that they have the support of the region or the sector and can provide an adequate supply of students to make courses viable.

Question 10: How can we encourage Regional Development Agencies and Sector Skills Councils to work together to solve local and sectoral skills needs?

The key issue is having the appropriate quality and number of staff within these organisations for dialogue to begin.

Question 11a: What further incentives are needed in universities – e.g. through internal appraisals, promotion processes – to increase demand from academic staff for business secondments?

Reduce the impact on career progression of the emphasis on publication.
Make it worthwhile in career terms.
Again, encourage HE/employer dialogue.

Question 11b: And how can we encourage movement in the other direction so that business people are increasingly contributing directly to course content, design and teaching?

More difficult: perhaps (as mentioned above more than once) is how to encourage this to be taken forward via effective communication.
HE and business agendas are different; the process above will be aided by each.

Question 12: How can we do more to increase the level of STEM skills in the existing workforce?

**Retract the withdrawal of funding on ELQs for STEM.
Effective shorter courses, arranged by employers and HE working together.
Incentives for employers to have effective CPD for staff in this area, and at all levels of the organisation.**

Other comments

Please let us have any other comments not covered by the above.

The recent introduction of the withdrawal of funding for Equivalent or Lower Qualifications seems to be contradictory to the whole premise of increasing skills in the workforce. Many of the part-time or distance and learning providers such as the Open University and Birkbeck will be hard hit by the introduction of these measures and once provision is reduced or removed it will be costly and difficult to reinstate such courses.

The information you provide in your response will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations, which allow public access to information held by the Department.

This does not necessarily mean that your response can be made available to the public as there are exemptions relating to information provided in confidence and information to which the Data Protection Act 1998 applies.

You may request confidentiality by ticking the box provided, but you should note that this will not necessarily exclude the public right of access.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply ✓

All UK national public consultations are required to conform to the following standards:

1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.

Further information on the Code of Practice can be accessed through the Cabinet Office Website: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation-guidance/content/introduction/index.asp>