

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

REGIONAL STATEMENT OF SKILLS PRIORITIES FOR 2007/08-2009/10

Response Template

If you wish to provide a written response to the consultation document, we would be grateful if you would send your response, using this pro forma, to:

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Or if you prefer to fill in by hand, post or fax a copy of your response to

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We would appreciate your response by 1pm on Monday 23 October.

Theme 1: Young People

Issue 1: Increasing the participation of young people in post compulsory education
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Questions

- § What changes are needed to move towards the ambition of having 90% of 17 year olds in formal education by 2015?

Response

NWUA support the work of initiatives such as Aimhigher which are working to increase the number of 18-30 olds progressing to HE. This work includes activity in both primary and secondary schools to raise aspirations. It is critical that all work in this area is joined up to achieve the step change needed to have 90% of 17 year olds in formal education.

Theme 1: Young People

Issue 2: Increasing the proportion of young people with the skills needed for employment
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Questions

- § What are the key indicators of young people's skills levels?
- § Are soft skills sufficiently mainstreamed into provision?

Response

It is important to realise that the need for soft skills is an issue relevant to all levels of provision and not just at level 2. These skills are just as critical to students having attained level 3 qualifications and to students on graduation or after achieving a post-graduate qualification. HEIs are constantly working to embed more of these skills in their provision and this work will continue in order to respond to the feedback from employers that graduates have the required level of technical skills but not the skills such as team working, communication skills etc...

Theme 1: Young People

Issue 3: Fostering progression to level 3 and to higher education

Questions

- § Is better achievement at GCSE Maths and English the key to improved level 3 progression?
- § Is there a sector/subject dimension to HE progression – is there a need for more young people to achieve degree level qualifications in specific subjects to support growth sectors?
- § To what extent is widening access to HE a priority?

Response

There are significant sector dimensions to HE progression and this is a very complex area with no simple answers. Progression to HE in many science related subjects such as engineering, chemistry, physics, maths and also in languages has significantly decreased in recent years. This is often due to the image of the sector and the number of students choosing not to take these subjects at level 3 and therefore not being able to choose these subjects at HE. There is a need to address these issues and some work is already underway in these sectors by a wide range of partners including HEIs.

However, it should also be recognised that HEIs are responding to demand; this is demand from students and does not always agree with employer demand. This is also an important recognition of the value of undertaking HE level study even when this does not lead to an obvious career path in the same way as some vocational subjects.

Widening access to HE must be a priority for the region if we are to increase the percentage of our workforce with level 4 and above qualifications. This will be through widening access for young people who would not traditionally progress to HE, as well as for those already in the workforce who are not already qualified to HE level. These activities are critical to the economic growth of the region and of the priority sectors as outlined in the RES.

Theme 2: Adults

Issue 4: Tackle worklessness, by linking people, jobs and training

Questions

- § Is partnership working sufficiently developed to tackle the worklessness issue?
- § Which sectors need to further develop their strategies for engaging the workless?

Response

More needs to be done to recognise the role HE can play in the worklessness agenda. Not all people included in this group are low skilled many have been employed in high level occupations and HEI involvement could be important in reskilling these people and ensuring they return to employment.

NWUA have had some initial discussions with JobCentre Plus around this area of activity but further work is required.

Theme 2: Adults

Issue 5: Increasing the proportion of adults with the skills needed for employment

Questions

- § What changes are needed to provision to increase adult level 2 attainment and acquisition of basic skills?

Response

NWUA has not responded to this questions as it is not directly relevant to HE.

Theme 2: Adults

Issue 6: Support adults to progress beyond level 2 and attain skills and qualifications at levels 3 and above

Questions

- § How to support adults to attain level 3 and level 4 qualifications.
- § Is there a strong case for public subsidy? There are generally strong earnings returns to acquiring intermediate and higher level qualifications.

Response

There are already a significant number of initiatives already working in this area and any new activity needs to take full account of these. There are currently four HEFCE funded Lifelong Learning Networks (Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire, Cheshire and Warrington and Cumbria) all who are working on

meeting the skills needs of sectors in their sub-region at level 4 and above.

The NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder is also of significance in this area and this will be working with sector skills councils and regional brokers to identify employers skills needs and then working with the region's HE providers to meet these needs.

The region should look to support these new initiatives and complement these with any further activity.

One of the objectives of the NW Pathfinder is to investigate the level of contribution employers are prepared to make for HE provision which is specifically tailored to their needs. Therefore the pathfinder does offer some public subsidy expects this to be matched by the employers. Evaluation of this should allow us to be able to answer the last question in a more informed way. Current evidence shows that some employers are prepared to pay significant amounts for HE level training but this is not the case across the board.

Theme 3: Cross-cutting issues

Issue 7: Develop innovation skills.

Questions

- § Is there market failure on the demand and/or supply side, and if there is, what is the nature of it?
- § What is the appropriate balance between private/public investment?
- § What are the key skills interventions needed in the North West for supporting innovation?

Response

It could be said that more stimulation of demand is required for innovation skills. At HE level the 15 NW HEIs are ideally placed to deliver such skills requirements although additional resourcing of such activity would enable greater activity. The full capability of the supply side can only be seen when sufficient demand is created.

There should be public investment to assist in stimulating demand from employers, employers ideally would see the value of such skills to the productivity of their business and therefore contribute funding. However it is recognised that this does not always occur and therefore further public intervention may be required.

To support innovation is it critical that skills delivery runs alongside wider business support offered by HEIs including research and knowledge transfer. All three aspects are important to business growth and cannot be dealt with individually.

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Theme 3: Cross-cutting issues

Issue 8: Develop enterprise skills

Questions

- § Is there market failure on the demand and/or supply side, and if there is, what is the nature of it?
- § What is the appropriate balance between private/public investment?
- § Is lack of skills a major contributor to the enterprise gap?
- § Where should provision focus to develop enterprise skills and encourage new business formation?

Response

Many of the issues for this area are similar to above, there needs to be further stimulation of demand for enterprise skills. The NW HEIs are again ideally positioned to meet this demand and the full capacity of the sector can be seen if more demand is created.

Work needs to be undertaken to test the levels of investment employers are willing to contribute to the delivery of such skills, the appropriate level of public contribution could then be agreed to ensure an increase in enterprise activity across the region.

The lack of skills is only one contributor to the enterprise gap. The culture of the region also has significant influence and the work to close the enterprise gap is much more far reaching than just addressing skills issues.

The HE sector is an ideal place to focus some of the provision. HEIs are able to provide the enterprise skills required to their graduates as they develop an interest in new business formation. Many institutions also run schemes for recent graduates providing these skills.

Theme 3: Cross-cutting issues

Issue 9: Develop management skills

Questions

- § Is there market failure on the demand and/or supply side, and if there is, what is the nature of it?

- § What is the appropriate balance between private/public investment?
- § What are the key issues around management skills within sectors? (See the annex for an indication of management skills needs identified by sector consultation).

Response

At HE level there is a wide range of management related qualifications available at all levels and delivered in a many different way from full time courses, to part time provision, short courses and work-based provision. We would not therefore see there being a market failure on the supply side.

Management skills are a cross cutting need for sectors, HEIs will often deliver generic management skills alongside more sector specific issues and such courses can be easily created by conversations between the employer and the HEI.

The region should work together to promote the range of management provision available and therefore assist in meeting the needs identified in the annex.

Theme 3: Cross-cutting issues

Issue 10: Develop leadership skills

Questions

- § Is there market failure on the demand and/or supply side, and if there is, what is the nature of it?
- § What is the appropriate balance between private/public investment?

Response

It is often seen as difficult to envisage how you can teach leadership skills and these need to be nurtured in individuals rather than specific provision created. HEIs are again in an ideal position to nurture these skills in people enrolled on any of the provision delivered by them.

Some public investment should be allocated to such activity to ensure successful well led businesses thrive in the region in the future.

Theme 4: Underpinning Priorities

Issue 11: Stimulating demand for and investment in skills from individuals.

Issue 12: Stimulating demand for and investment in skills from employers.
Issue 13: Providing high quality responsive support to meet regional skills priorities.

Questions

- § Is there a need for greater focus on employer engagement?
- § Is there a risk of missing opportunities to link local people currently excluded from the workforce to job opportunities arising from major regeneration and other projects?
- § Are partnership working arrangements to link the workless to employment opportunities sufficiently developed?
- § What can be done to make learning more responsive to the needs of employers and individuals?

Response

There is a need for a greater focus on employer engagement at all levels and by all partners. It is also important that this work is joined up. HEFCE have a strengthened focus on employer engagement following the grant letter from DfES in January 2006. Since then HEIs have been asked to submit expressions of interest to HEFCE for funding for employer engagement work and many HEIs in the NW have submitted initial plans which will co-ordinate with the NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder to provide a renewed focus on this activity across the NW HE sector.

Partnership arrangements have developed significantly over the last 1-2 years through the work of the RSP. HEIs are also developing their links both individually and collectively with other skills partners through a wide range of activities. Further work is needed to continue this development and the NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder provides an ideal opportunity for this.