

CDI briefing on the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill

3 June 2021

The body of this briefing has also been sent to Gillian Keegan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, in response to her letter to the CDI regarding the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill (the Bill)

Below are the CDI's reflections on the Bill in the spirit of offering our support to maximise the benefits of the legislation and achieve the goals set out in the White Paper. We have previously produced a response to the White Paper which has been provided as a separate document for reference and is built upon below.

There are many positives in the White Paper and the Bill, including;

- Encouraging lifelong learning, retraining and reskilling for more productive careers and to develop the workforce to fill existing technical gaps.
- Recognising the value of the FE sector by reducing the disparity in perception of technical pathways.
- Increasing the focus on and investment in FE, though it is unclear how much this recovers the under-investment in FE over recent times and how much is additional funding as opposed to covering any cost of greater student numbers.
- Encouraging higher level technical skills that meet the current and future needs of the economy and reflecting different learning styles for students.
- Streamlining and simplifying the funding system with greater flexibility for providers to meet local needs.
- While our preference would be for learning and retraining to be free – at least for those on lower incomes to ensure fair access – the Lifelong Loan Entitlement is an improvement on the current situation. We also welcome the free funding for those without a full level 3 qualification.

We do feel, however, that an opportunity has been missed to strengthen the education and employer remits with professional career development. We support the statements in the White Paper regarding the need to build an 'agile and adaptable workforce' where people 'update their skills and move into growth sectors', and key to that will be developing the career management skills of the workforce. High-quality career guidance, provided by qualified career development professionals;

- Helps individuals understand their own strengths, development areas and desired career outcomes.
- Uses local and national labour market information (LMI) to advise individuals of the roles that are in demand, ensuring their investment in training (through the Lifelong Loan Entitlement) is well spent.
- Raises awareness of current and emerging employment opportunities that individuals may not have visibility of from their existing network, helping widen thinking and increase openness to alternative careers.
- Helps navigate the available academic and technical pathways to gain the right training and skills to reach their goals and be productive.

- Gives people the confidence to make these choices so they are encouraged to invest in their skills development.
- Provides them with lifetime career management skills to continue to invest in their education and training, supporting future role changes.

One of our core concerns with the White Paper is that there is no mention of a replacement for the 2017 Careers Strategy that effectively ended in 2020, leaving a lack of direction for the government's careers policy. The White Paper also lacked clear proposals around personal career guidance and was a missed opportunity to show ambition and investment in career guidance to enable the government's skills agenda. A stronger focus on career development is a critical lever to encourage individuals to retrain and reskill.

The career development sector – through individual practitioners, providers and organisations like the National Careers Service and Careers Hubs - plays a vital role, alongside employers and FE providers, in creating truly effective Local Skills Improvement Plans. By helping ensure individuals are aware of the opportunities and the pathways to reach them, develop the confidence and skills to manage their careers and make investments in retraining and reskilling, qualified careers development professionals are also a key element in delivering those plans.

Technical education and training provision linked to local needs could result in more variation of training and education at the local level, requiring greater local careers guidance to ensure potential students are aware of the available options. In addition, some individuals may need additional support before making choices that commit them to loan-funded training, particularly those for whom such a debt commitment would be a more significant burden. Lack of confidence in the benefits of this investment could deter otherwise productive people from making the right decision.

We have some specific comments regarding the Bill;

- If the Lifelong Loan Entitlement only applies at levels 4 to 6, this leaves those with limited qualifications who require a level 3 under-served. While I appreciate the government's aim to increase higher technical skills, some individuals may need support accessing initial training at a lower level to enable them to move up the skills ladder.
- The initial testing for the Lifelong Loan Entitlement only covers levels 4 and 5. To properly test the proposal and reach parity with higher education routes, level 6 should also be included in any trials.
- We are surprised that the Chambers of Commerce have been specifically identified as an employer representative group, rather than encouraging an expansion of the work that already takes place through Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Alternatively, Chambers of Commerce and other employer groups could be encouraged to engage with their local LEP, who could lead on the development of the local skills improvement plan alongside their existing activities.
- The definition of Local Skills Improvement Plans would be enhanced by including the expertise of career development professionals, who also play a key facilitation role in the execution of the plans, supporting individuals based on an in-depth knowledge of local skills needs and expertise in career guidance.
- It would also be beneficial if Local Skills Improvement Plans were developed with local Career Hubs, which are already working to support the development of skills in the area.
- We welcome clarifying the technical qualification landscape which can be confusing for learners and employers, but any streamlining must recognise the variety of needs, learning styles and aspects of skills required for different roles within each profession, otherwise it

risks a narrowing of choice and provision that misses key skills or suits only certain learning styles, disadvantaging some students.

- While we support developing skills needs identified by employers, provision must also recognise that many people retrain to generate new, creative businesses. So adult learning and skills training must continue to provide access to skills to enable new, creative enterprises as well as support existing employer needs.
- FE needs significant support in providing high quality careers guidance, where it has been less of a focus than schools, despite students having to make major career choices at the end of further education.
- Careers support also needs to be available to adults to help them avoid becoming unemployed. Career development services made available to people in declining industries or at risk of redundancy can enable them to seek retraining opportunities and avoid the economic loss of productivity and personal duress that unemployment can bring.
- While we agree that colleges should have clear links to local skills needs, this needs to be balanced with ensuring local students can still access training to develop skills that are in demand outside their local area, to retrain to develop nationally required skills without having to travel excessive distances to reach that provision.
- The Bill indicates legislation exempting mergers directed by Secretary of State for Education from the Competition and Market Authority's statutory merger control regime. While we support the principle of addressing quality issues within providers, we need to ensure choice of provision in the local area to allow students access to a range of education and training.
- It should be recognised that if fees are charged to approve qualifications, these costs are likely to be passed on to providers through higher qualification fees, so additional funding would be needed by FE providers to address this.
- Adopting best practice FE ITT is a positive step, and we would welcome the inclusion of an appreciation of career development in that training, to ensure FE teachers are able to identify when students have a career need that requires support by a qualified career development professional.
- The Office for Students' quality assessments are positive in the principle that disadvantaged students should not suffer lower quality training. However, this only works if providers are funded and supported to meet the additional needs that those students have, otherwise the provider is being penalised for lower outcomes that may be caused by their intake rather than the quality of their service.

We have several other comments on the content of the White Paper which will be of value as further legislation is enacted;

- We support the focus on ensuring people can access training and learning flexibly throughout their lives and are well-informed about what is on offer through great careers support. That careers guidance needs to be available at the right time and in the right format for the differing needs of each individual.
- We support the aim in the White Paper to 'provide clear information about career outcomes through occupational maps, wage returns data and ensuring providers give pupils information about all options'. This needs to be delivered by qualified careers development professionals who can not only deliver information, but also work with each student to offer advice and guidance as needed to ensure the best outcome for them and build the right skills in the workforce.
- The CDI welcomes the White Paper's indication to align the work of the NCS and CEC, though believe this alignment should include the work of DWP Work Coaches acting as triage into

careers services. Work Coaches are not employed as qualified career development professionals, but they should be trained to identify career development needs and ensure a smooth and effective handover to NCS to access the appropriate level of support.

- Training for Careers Leaders in developing programmes needs to be supplemented with investment in the qualified career development professionals who deliver those programmes. With no mandatory minimum qualification or salary requirement, the provision across schools is more variable than it should be. Schools need sufficient funds to employ professional careers advisers, qualified to deliver careers guidance, otherwise we risk failing to attract sufficient qualified people.
- It is positive to see a lowering of the age range for duty to provide independent careers guidance, with increasing research suggesting more careers contact in early years – including primary – leading to better education, employment and training outcomes.
- We welcome the Ofsted thematic review of careers guidance in schools and colleges and the CDI would be very happy to work with them to develop a standard or framework against which to measure, as well as advice to support schools and colleges with the implementation of recommendations.
- We share the desire to embed careers education and guidance in the life of every school. Having careers more embedded within the school builds confidence in teachers and careers practitioners, and gives students a more positive perception of their career interventions.

It is positive to see a renewed focus on technical skills and recognition of the value the FE sector can bring. The career development sector can play a valuable role in achieving the government's aims, though there are limited references to the role of career development in the White Paper and almost nothing in the Bill. We believe a positive step forward would be the development of a new Careers Strategy alongside the White Paper, to set out the government's direction for career development to support education, training and employment across all age groups. Since the end of the previous strategy in 2020 this direction has been missing across England, while Scotland and Wales have developed positive career strategies.

As the UK-wide professional body for career development, the CDI are keen to support the development of the new Careers Strategy, to define and deliver a clear career development direction.

For further information, please contact:

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