

Developing Skills in the West of England – The Local Authority Contribution

Recommendation

That the Partnership:

- i) Confirms its commitment set out in the MAA to the development, with each unitary authority, of Public Service Compacts incorporating:
 - a. The Skills Pledge, with a commitment to promoting the Skills Pledge to supply chains;
 - b. Targets for Level 2, Level 3 and above and skills for life qualifications, to be agreed with each authority;
 - c. The delivery of apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships to younger job entrants (which provide for both Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications) and to a graduate recruitment scheme;
- ii) Charges this officer group set out below with the task of producing a plan for specifying and delivering those targets;
- iii) Notes that a report on the actions set out below be made to the Partnership within three months.

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Board members of the actions taking place to develop skills, particularly Levels 2 and 3, in the West of England and to endorse this work and the future developments planned.

Background

2. Members will recall that the Partnership committed collectively and formally to the Skills Pledge in September of last year. This was as a result of work undertaken by an officer working group, much of it on an informal basis.

The Skills Challenge

3. Within the local authorities the demands on the flexibility and skills of the workforce continue to increase; for example:
 - a. For Bristol City Council, the Business Transformation process – tackling in particular the age profile of the workforce
 - b. For Bath and North East Somerset Council, integration with Bath and North East Somerset NHS
 - c. For all authorities, responding to the legislative requirements in children's and adults' social services
 - d. For all authorities, exploiting new technologies as a route to greater efficiency and flexible working practices

- e. For all authorities, the expansion of the e-government agenda to e-learning (enabling improved access to learning and development for those with flexible working patterns and remote workers)
- f. For all authorities, the need to help upskill their work force and to keep up with technological changes and usage.

The External Context

4. A key element of the MAA is the improvement of the skills base in the West of England. If we are to be a knowledge-based economy attracting and retaining high-value added businesses, we need a skills base to match. Adding to skills levels is a key lever to increasing Gross Value Added (GVA) and hence the wealth creating potential of the city region. An increase of 10% in the proportion of those with higher level skills (Level 4+) could produce a 2 - 3% rise in GVA. Furthermore jobs at a higher skills level create wealth to sustain the lower skills service jobs within and beyond the city region. Compared to someone with no formal qualifications a Level 3 achiever will see, on average, an increase in earnings of around £179,400 over the course of a working lifetime.
5. In the context of jobs growth and an ageing work profile, there is much to do to grow that skills base and we have some ambitious targets in the MAA over the next 5 years.
6. At a time of recession we are facing a greater challenge than ever in sustaining and growing our skills base. It is not yet clear which sectors of industry and commerce will be most badly affected, but all will be reducing costs wherever possible and this, of course, will impact adversely both on employee numbers and employee training. This makes it even more important that the training in the public sector is sustained and supported.
7. It is helpful that the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is demonstrating a new willingness to work with key public sector organisations and to offer funding support for more flexible forms of training delivery. In particular:
 - a. Train to Gain – Now available to local authorities; flexibilities include, for example, additional full level 2 qualifications and part or “thin” qualifications in core areas of competence, leadership and management training.
 - b. Apprenticeships and graduate traineeships – The establishment, for example, of Local Authority Apprenticeship Programmes through working with the newly formed National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) which has the prime responsibility for policy development and the delivery system for Apprenticeships.

Proposed Action

8. The authorities are already making use of some of these opportunities and working together to exploit the funding that is available:
 - a. Work in North Somerset, undertaking a profile of skills in all of the areas of the workforce to identify those with little or no external qualifications, literacy, numeracy and ICT needs, resulting in an embedded process that ensures a

continuingly updated data set and access to a range of NVQ opportunities in generic and professional skills.

- b. Since July this has been taken up by the other three authorities with the LSC funding a qualification and skills profiling exercise across Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire, again focusing primarily on areas of the workforce where qualifications are rare or in some case not known because of previous recruitment practice.
9. The aim is to bring behind this a substantial in-house training programme, i.e. once the training needs are identified we will work with the LSC to ensure that substantial funding for training provision via Train to Gain and the Apprenticeship Service is unlocked – with real financial benefit for the authorities as well as an improved workforce.
10. In the process this project has been a vehicle for building on an established and very successful learning and development partnership that has been in existence for more than ten years across the four authorities. Working at this sub-regional level we have a working group comprising:
 - a. Learning and Development Manager for North Somerset Council
 - b. Senior HR Consultant, Strategy (E&OD) for Bath and North East Somerset Council
 - c. Development Advisor for Bristol City Council
 - d. Human Resources Manager for Bristol City Council.
 - e. Senior HR Consultant (Human Resources and Organisational Development) for South Gloucestershire Council
 - f. Economic Development Manager/National Apprenticeship Employer Services Manager, LSC
 - g. Director, West of England Employment and Skills Board.
11. The group is currently overseeing the qualification and skills profiling project, but is capable of much more and is already exploring:
 - a. How to join up the training which follows from this profiling exercise;
 - b. How to develop better relationships with local providers and make better use of in-house training resource, where available, and better use of other training providers facilities;
 - c. Possibilities for a joint approach to, for example, apprenticeship and graduate recruitment and development programmes, building on the work they are already undertaking jointly around leadership and management development and management mentoring.
12. Given the local authorities' collective commitment via the Skills Pledge to improving their skills base and the commitment in the MAA to increasing the proportion of the workforce with Level 2 and 3 qualifications, the group could be charged with the responsibility for developing a plan to achieve these objectives – on behalf of the West of England Partnership. This is set out in the recommendations to this report.

Author:

David Draycott, Director, West at Work Employment and Skills Board

Tel. 0117 372 6412; e mail: david.draycott@lsc.gov.uk

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