

Skills North East Regional Employment and Skills Partnership

Policy and Research Newsletter

Spring 2009

Welcome to the first edition of the Skills North East policy and research newsletter.

We hope that this will be a useful update for partners, helping you to keep track of employment and skills policy, research and partnership developments in the region.

The redeveloped Skills North East website is also a good way of keeping in touch with what is happening – register today on www.skillsnortheast.co.uk to sign up to the partnership and receive alerts when new content is added to the site.

We would really like to hear from you about this newsletter and any suggestions you may have for future issues; email us on skillsnortheast@onenortheast.co.uk to let us know what you think.

Skills North East Secretariat team

Real Help for Business and People Now

One North East, Jobcentre Plus, the Learning and Skills Council, Business Link, Government Office and ANEC have come together to establish the Skills and Employment Response Group (SERG). SERG is leading a joint response to redundancies and unemployment during the recession – mapping out the help that is available to both businesses and individuals, identifying where the gaps in provision are and aligning resources to meet these.

Real help

for business
& people

now

The response to the economic downturn covers four themes:

- **Resilience:** To help the region's employers to retain as much of their current workforce as possible during the economic downturn through measures to cope with the new economic environment
- **Redundancy / Redeployment:** To minimise the number of people who become unemployed, if or when redundancies become necessary. Or to put it another way – to move as many people as possible 'from a job, to a job'
- **Recruitment / Retention:** To ensure that entry or re-entry to the world of work is as swift and effective as possible for individuals who are unemployed (whether as a result of the current economic downturn or on a longer term basis) and that they are helped to stay in work and move up the career ladder.
- **Readiness for the upturn:** To look beyond the current downturn and maximise the region's

Business advice
and support.

0845 600 9 006

www.businesslink.gov.uk/northeast

Getting back to work.

0845 606 0234

www.direct.gov.uk

Changing jobs.
Updating skills.

0800 027 7944

www.nextstepnortheast.org.uk

readiness to emerge in a strong position for the economic upturn.

In order to ensure that businesses and people know where to go for help, SERG has publicised three key contact numbers through the 'Real Help for Business and People Now' campaign (see pic).

A campaign website is being developed to assist with communications - www.realhelpnortheast.co.uk.

A SERG section is being created on the Skills North East website (www.skillsnortheast.co.uk) which gives information about the work of the group and the overall campaign.

Regional Funding Advice to Government

Every three years, Government asks regions for advice to shape future spending plans, through the Regional Funding Advice (RFA) process. This year's exercise included skills for the first time, alongside economic development, transport, and housing and regeneration. The Regional Employment and Skills Partnership (RESP) was charged with preparing the skills element of the Advice.

The RESP consulted widely with a range of partners towards the end of last year to develop and then test out the skills messages for RFA. There was a high degree of employer and stakeholder engagement in the process and a broad consensus over regional priorities.

The region's skills advice focuses on:

- measures to simplify, strengthen and integrate our skills system
- improvements to increase flexibility and responsiveness
- proposals to evolve a regionally and locally shaped skills system

The skills advice has been integrated with advice on spending priorities for economic development, transport and housing and regeneration. Following sign off by the One North East Board and local authorities, the response was submitted to Nick Brown MP, Regional Minister, who submitted it to Government at the end of February. A copy of the Advice is available on the [Skills North East website](#).

For further information, please contact [Gillian Williamson](#), One North East (0191 229 6492).

Reform of the skills system: update

The White Paper '[Raising Expectations: enabling the system to deliver](#)' (March 2008), published jointly by DIUS and DCSF, set out the government's proposals for structural reforms of the pre-19 and post-19 education, learning and skills system. The aim of the reforms is to ensure the system can continue responding to demand and is able to support the integration of employment and skills.



Since publication of the White Paper, key elements in the North East's progress towards the changes are:

- **16-18 Transfer.** Three proposed sub-regional groupings (SRGs) - Durham, Tees Valley, and Tyne and Wear and Northumberland – submitted their Stage 2 proposals to Government in

February. These documents and the overarching Regional Planning Group submission are available on the [14-19 portal](#). Partners will have the opportunity to engage further with the development of the SRGs and regional infrastructure during the year.

- **The Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA).** This organisation will be a Non-Departmental Public Body. As part of the transition arrangements leading up to April 2010, the LSC will establish a 'YPLA Board' to agree the YPLA's objectives, policies, values and standards of performance. The LSC is currently recruiting a Chair person to lead this Board.
- **The Skills Funding Agency (SFA).** The SFA will be part of DIUS and will be a national organisation consisting of four business unit functions which will be delivered from a national office and 9 regions (including the North East). The four units will have responsibility for the funding of Train to Gain, the Adult Advancement and Careers Service, and Learner Responsiveness, and the funding and delivery of the National Apprenticeship Service. Within DIUS, a separate SFA Unit has been established to lead the design and implementation of the new agency. The SFA will formally come into being in April 2010.
- **Adult Advancement and Careers Service.** The new service is to be set up by autumn 2010. Ten trials of the new service are being implemented in the North West, West Midlands, South East and London.
- **National Apprenticeship Service (NAS).** NAS, which will become part of the SFA, is due to be fully functional by April 2009. It will have three core elements: a dedicated field force for the region for employers, a Learner Services team that will work with all key intermediaries to ensure young people and adults are aware of the benefits of an Apprenticeship, and a dynamic on-line Apprenticeship Vacancy Matching System (AVMS). The AVMS went live on 8 December 2008 to learning providers to start uploading their vacancies. It has been available to candidates from January and already hosts 10,000 employers' details, with over 3,500 live vacancies. John Wayman has been appointed as the Regional Director of NAS in the North East region. The recruitment process for other positions is ongoing and is expected to be completed by May 2009.

DIUS and DCSF publish monthly update bulletins on progress with implementing the current changes. [Click here for the relevant page on the DIUS website.](#)

North East Sector Skills Information Project



Partners, employers and individuals will in time be able to access the most up to date and relevant information about the North East labour market due to a collaborative project involving One North East, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils (TASSC).

Meeting the skill needs of employers and industry is fundamental to achieving high productivity. The Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) have responsibility for expressing employer views, and this demand needs to be collated and understood by learning providers so they can respond to it. SSCs have good national information but it is up to a wide range of organisations at all levels to complement this with intelligence that stems from their own research activities and interface with employers. This is vital

since the differences between regions are often far less pronounced than the differences within a region.

The **Sector Skills Information Project** will improve the extent and depth of our regional and sub-regional skills information and ensure that partners, employers and individuals can easily access the most up to date and relevant information. The Alliance will take the lead role in ensuring that the information we disseminate reflects the views and needs of employers.

The project will build on the research and networks already in existence and it is hoped that a wide range of partners (both users and providers of information) will get actively involved.

At the end of the project the North East will have:

- A sustainable system of providing information and support to the SSCs
- Accessible and organised 'bottom up' intelligence about skills and employment needs
- A 'Who's Who' in the skills sector together with a synopsis of their requirements
- Agreement to ensure that each skills partner understands the system and their own role in making it work.

For more information please contact [Liz Robson](#), One North East (0191 229 6623).

How does the North East compare with other regions on employment and skills?

Regional Skills Partnerships compare progress on employment and skills every six months. Latest figures for last year show that:

- The North East was one of the top improvers in terms of the proportion of people aged 19 to pension age attaining a Level 4 qualification with an increase of over 6 percentage points between 2001-2007
- Between 2001 and 2007 the North East had the largest reduction in people aged 19 to pension age with no qualification, down 6 percentage points
- The North East has seen the biggest increase in the number of pupils attaining 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* -C; proportions have increased from 43% in 2000/01 to over 65% in 2007/08. However, when English and Mathematics are included then the North East proportion (44.6%) falls below the English average (48%).

More detail is available from the report [Regional Economic Indicators November 2008](#) with a focus on skills, produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on behalf of the RSPs.

For more information contact [Liz Robson](#), One North East (0191 229 6623).

Equality and Diversity Research

Northumbria University, on behalf of the North East Equality and Diversity Partnership (NEEDP), has recently produced a statistical profile of equality and diversity in the region. This report provides an overview of the key issues for each of the equality groups (age, gender, etc) as well as for the main dimensions of human rights (education, security, etc).



Whilst comprehensive, the report is arranged such that each chapter 'stands alone' as a handy

reference point for statistics in that thematic area. There is also an executive summary that brings together the key messages from each thematic area. Some of those key messages are:

- the North East region has the highest proportion of disabled people in England, representing a quarter of the working age population
- women continue to experience occupational segregation in the North East
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi people (particularly women) have the lowest employment rates in the region
- significant numbers of migrant workers are registered in rural parts of the region
- health is a key dimension of equality but the North East performs poorly on a range of health indicators

The report is available from the [NERIP website](#).

In spring 2009, Northumbria University again on behalf of NEEDP produced a report on Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Employability. This discusses the causes of the employment gap for different ethnic minority groups in the region and proposes approaches for enhancing the employment prospects of such groups. The final report contains a 'factor intensity matrix', which provides an 'at a glance' overview of the main employability barriers for each of the main BME groups in the region. The recommendations will be considered by the NEEDP and the Regional Employability Framework. Key points raised include:

- The North East non-white population is likely to have doubled since 2001: from 1.9% in 2001 to 3.8% in 2005.
- There is evidence of ethnic occupational segregation: people from Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Chinese and Other Asian groups continue to be over-represented in the Wholesale, Retail, Hotel and Restaurant sectors.
- BME communities experience a complex mix of problems. For example, improving qualification levels was viewed by many as the answer to accessing better employment opportunities, but at the same time, a number of immigrants are over-qualified for the work they are undertaking. They are more likely to change jobs or professions more frequently and remain under-employed.
- Along with perceived employer prejudice, a lack of language skills and a general lack of labour market awareness are also major barriers to participation for many BME individuals.

For more information contact [Jon Carling](#), NERIP, (0191 229 6377).

We hope you find this newsletter informative and interesting. If, however, you do not wish to receive our bulletins in future, please email us by [clicking this link](#).