

Briefing – Implications for the Region National Skills Strategy– ‘Skills for Growth’

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Background / Context

On 11th November BIS published the National Skills Strategy White Paper – [Skills for Growth](#). The New Industry, New Jobs policy paper first announced this strategy which would present the ‘**skills activism**’ element of ‘industrial activism’. On 16th November the [Skills Investment Strategy 2010-11](#) was published.

The **key points** of the strategy:

- It introduces a **new overarching ambition** for the higher education and skills systems – 75% of young people (up to the age of 30) to participate in higher education or complete an advanced apprenticeship or equivalent technician level course. A central plank of this strategy is a significantly expanded advanced apprenticeship system with a clear vocational route from apprenticeships to foundation degrees and beyond.
- There is a focus on **strategic skills** and a continued commitment to **literacy and numeracy, first full level 2, first full level 3 for 19-25 year olds, training support for the unemployed and informal adult learning for vulnerable and low skilled learners.**
- Continued commitment to **demand-led provision** – with a stronger role for Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), UKCES and RDAs in developing the intelligence on skills priorities. In aligning these with economic development, engaging business and employers will be critical with greater emphasis being placed on employer/business co-funding.
- Introducing new methods of **measuring success and progress.**
- **Greater focus on the individual** with the introduction of Skills Accounts and a public rating system of colleges and courses so that students can make more informed choices.
- **Simplification of skills system** through a reduction in the number of skills bodies, with simpler funding and monitoring arrangements for colleges.
- BIS and DWP will publish an Employment White Paper which will provide details on the **integrated employment and skills system to support the unemployed.**

Implications for the Region

- There may be a concern about the region’s capacity to create the required number of apprenticeship opportunities. It should be noted that there is a further commitment to generate apprenticeships to support Raising the Participation Age (RPA) and ensure those in the 14-19 age group have the full range of education and training options available to them
 - The Executive Summary of Skills for Growth emphasises the need for flexible provision. It states, *“For this reason, skills policy must be based on twin objectives: wider and more flexible access to skills training at every level, including through more opportunities to study part-time; and an even greater focus on the skills required for the modern world of*
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work." Yet the main body of text does not expand on the issue of flexible provision. This is a significant element of the Higher Education Framework because it directly impacts on how institutions can meet the needs of individuals and businesses – which would suggest it is also important for colleges and other training providers. The Higher Level Skills Board, as part of the Regional Employment and Skills Partnership, is to review this at its meeting in December and consider commissioning research on the supply of, and demand for, flexible provision in the region.

- The focus of the strategy is largely on vocational skills. There is little reference to the softer employability and transferable skills which are just as important in meeting the region's skills requirements.
 - The introduction of the University Technical Colleges provides another pathway for 14-19 year olds. 14-19 year olds may need greater clarity on the scope of the offer available to them to support them in making informed choices.
 - Whilst a significant Train to Gain budget still remains as part of this strategy – TtG is not given prominence in Skills for Growth. There are a number of points to note in relation to TtG:
 - The strategy highlights past successes but does not promote its future role;
 - The initial £17m to expand the advanced apprenticeship system and the £20m for the Joint Investment Schemes is from the Train to Gain budget;
 - The Government will stop the full funding of repeat qualifications within Train to Gain – the principle of 'firstness' will be reinstated; and
 - TtG has been charged with accrediting skills rather than developing new skills. This strategy calls for the focus to be on training programmes that offer the biggest skills gains for individuals rather than assessing existing skills.
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