

This summer saw the publication of the Government's eagerly awaited Skills Strategy White Paper. With consultation ongoing, we devote our lead article to the Skills Strategy and, in particular, what it may offer to employers.

The Skills Strategy emphasises the need for a more demand-led approach "placing employers' needs for skills centre stage and managing the supply of training, skills and qualifications so that it responds directly to those needs". Yet any discussion about employers' needs leads inevitably to a litany of problems and barriers: inflexible provision, inadequate or irrelevant qualifications, lack of funds, unresponsive colleges and providers, lack of information and knowledge about what is needed and what is available. And that is assuming that employers actually understand their needs in the first place.

The Skills Strategy does, on the surface, seem to be a genuine attempt to deal with many of these issues. But we have to ask ourselves whether it is necessary to wait for major structural changes to our system, or does the real problem lie in a lack of imagination and ingrained behaviour? For every story of unresponsive colleges/providers and disinterested employers,

there are success stories where employers and providers have developed innovative solutions, work well together and are changing the face of the workforce. What is their secret to success?

Understanding employers' needs and tackling the barriers to meeting them will be explored during SLIM's forthcoming Learning Theme, where we will be joining with the FRESA groups (see page 4) to look at the best practice that is emerging despite some of the structural barriers. Our lead article highlights some of the key issues inherent in this apparent mismatch between employers' needs and publicly-funded training provision.

We also take a look at the latest FRESA developments. Remember the Framework for Employment and Skills Action? Things may seem to have gone a little quiet but partners are busy working on a range of FRESA Strategic Objective and Activity Groups developing plans for action. More planning and too little action? Well, decide for yourself when you see some of the things that are already happen in FRESA-land.

We also take a brief look at the recently published DTI Strategy and new developments on the Skills for Business front.

And we hear from Richard Crocker of the Federation of Small Business who talks about the importance of skills and the problems faced by his members in getting the right training provision. The Skills Strategy, it seems, can't come soon enough.

Finally, thanks go to those of you who took part in the recent Learning Theme on *Improving Information, Advice and Guidance services in the South West*. The report of the Learning Theme, out soon, will highlight a number of recommendations developed through the online discussion and workshop, and already the results have fed into the FRESA process. But we don't rest on our laurels for long. Just when you thought it was safe to come out, the next Learning Theme is with us (see above). If you are interested in the Flexible Training Solutions, the Skills Strategy and how this region should respond, then fill in the enclosed fackback and join us in the next Learning Theme. Over the next few months, you will have the opportunity to get up to date with latest thinking, discuss key issues, network with others and influence future policy in the region.



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Skills Strategy - a focus on employers

The gap between skills needs and skills supply is one of the most pressing problems facing the UK economy as it strives for greater competitiveness. Raising employers' demand for skills is essential and the need for a more demand-led approach has emerged as a consistent message in recent government policy statements on this issue. And, with the drive to increase productivity now at the top of the Government's agenda, getting more employers involved in training and in decisions about future skills needs, is more important than ever.

In July, the Government published its Skills Strategy White Paper¹, which aims to ensure that employers have the right skills to improve their business and individuals have the right skills to be employable and personally fulfilled. At the heart of the Strategy is the aspiration to improve employer engagement in workforce development. Yet the challenge of involving employers is not new, so what does the Skills Strategy offer that will make a difference? And, whilst its aspirations may be sound, are its proposals enough to overcome the legacy of under-investment in learning and skills and offer a real opportunity for change?

At a basic level there is a mismatch between what employers need and what is on offer through the publicly-funded training system. If the Skills Strategy is to succeed, it must tackle this mismatch.

Training and productivity

It is now widely recognised that a skilled and adaptable workforce is an essential ingredient of the competitiveness of UK business and is equally important to firms of all sizes.

The importance of skills is highlighted when we recognise the fact that the shortfall in the UK's productivity, particularly when compared with our European partners, is in part explained by the UK's long-term weakness in the level of human capital². For, despite recent improvements in schooling, the UK has a smaller proportion of workers with basic and intermediate skills than France and Germany. This arises at both level 2 (5 GCSEs) and at level 3 (A level) where the UK has half the proportion of the working age population qualified to level 3 as Germany.

The impact of these shortfalls in skill levels lies not only in lower productivity but also affects the sustainability of employment and results in an uneven distribution of skills across the population. Many young people and adults are hampered by their lack of skills in obtaining secure, well paid jobs and all of the accompanying social and personal benefits which accrue.

As the Unison report, *Learning for Life: Learning for Everyone*³, points out,

*"Britain's flexible labour market is underpinned by an inequitable training system. Over 50 per cent of employees with no qualifications have never been offered training with their current employer, compared to just 16 per cent with a degree"*⁴.

Indeed, inequality and polarisation is evident⁵ with women, older workers and ethnic minorities being over represented amongst those with no or few qualifications.

But whilst issues of social equality are important, the driving force behind the Skills Strategy is the need to improve productivity and competitiveness. And there is much evidence to suggest a positive link between expenditure on training and productivity.

Recent research, carried out for the DfES by the ESRC Centre for Business Research⁶, suggested that training by firms has a positive impact on business performance including:

- a positive relationship between expenditure on training by firms and their employment growth (although in terms of quantitative 'economic' significance the picture is very mixed) with a similar result found for turnover; and
- a positive impact on the change in the profit margin, with the impact greater amongst smaller firms.

Earlier research by the Institute of Fiscal Studies⁷, which analysed the effects of skills training on productivity, revealed that a 5% increase in the incidence of training in any given sector resulted in a 4% increase in labour productivity. It also found that workplace training resulted in greater increases in productivity than increases in individual wages, and that increases in formal training were better than informal training for boosting productivity.

So training pays, but are employers convinced?

Why don't employers train?

The first thing to acknowledge is that many, if not most employers do train – just not formally – and the smaller the employer, the less likely they are to spend money on formal training.

As the CBI report, *Informality works*⁸, points out:

"Training has a key role to play in meeting employers' skills needs and in raising the productivity of employees and individual firms. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) form the backbone of the UK economy, but are all too often portrayed as uninterested in training and unappreciative of the value of employee development".

SMEs (firms with less than 250 employees) currently account for over 99% of all enterprises, over 55% of employment and just over half of all financial turnover.⁹ The growth of smaller firms is also a key factor in the UK's output growth. However, whilst it is widely assumed that small firms do not train, the CBI report points to the fact that over three quarters of firms employing 5-24 employees provide on-the-job training and more than half provide off-the-job training. While SMEs do undertake less training than larger firms, this is more pronounced for off-the-job (formal) training and training leading to a qualification.

The report also counters the view that SMEs do not value their staff. A fact borne out by the CBI's Employment Trends Survey which shows

¹ *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential*, Skills Strategy White Paper, DfES, (July 2003).

² Crafts, N, and O'Mahony, 'A Perspective on UK Productivity Performance' *Fiscal Studies* Vol. 22 (3), (September) (2001).

³ *Learning for Life: Learning for Everyone, In response to the Government's Skills Strategy*, Unison, (April 2003).

⁴ Campell, M, *Learn to succeed: the case for a skills revolution*, The Policy Press, (2002)

⁵ *Skills in England*, Volume 1, Learning and Skills Council (2002)

⁶ Cosh, A, et al, *The Relationship between Training and Business Performance* (July 2003)

⁷ Dearden, L, et al, *Who gains when workers train? Training and Corporate Productivity in a Panel of British Industries*, Institute for Fiscal Studies, (March 2000)

⁸ *Informality Works: A new approach to training for SMEs*, Human Resources Brief, CBI, (March 2003)

⁹ *ibid*.

that SMEs are more likely than larger firms to rate workforce skills as a major factor in their competitiveness. Indeed, over 75% of SMEs cited their workforce's skills as one of the three factors contributing most to their competitive advantage, compared to 60% of the largest firms¹⁰.

However, it is the lack of formal accredited training that has led government and its agencies to focus attention on encouraging SMEs to train. So why do too few businesses train formally?

The fact is that SMEs face distinctive constraints on training formally. The CBI report points to the fact that managers need to be convinced that training will add value, as the costs of formal training – and particularly tailored training – are disproportionately higher for SMEs. Yet the quality of the training on offer and its flexibility is too often considered poor. SMEs commonly cite the fact that trainers do not understand the needs of business, that the content of courses is not focused on their needs and that provision is rarely at a time and place that suits the employee. SMEs also have difficulty getting information they can trust on training and learning opportunities and need help in identifying what training is required.

The CBI therefore proposes that the Government should support SMEs in four key areas:

- ❑ Help SMEs to identify means of improving business performance, including skills development, and recommends use of the BITE system¹¹
- ❑ Support informal learning for managers
- ❑ Provide qualitative information and support employers in finding suitable training
- ❑ Ensure SMEs can access flexible and relevant training.

So how does the Skills Strategy respond to these calls?

The Strategy aims:

“to put business needs centre stage, raising demand for training by tackling the barriers and giving employers and employees greater choice and control over the content and delivery of training; help businesses use skills to achieve more ambitious longer-term business success”¹².

Specifically, the Strategy¹³ seeks to benefit employers by:

- ❑ offering a new guarantee of free tuition to help adults who need it to and expand training opportunities for apprenticeships, technicians, higher crafts and trades, and associate professionals, to meet skills gaps identified by sectors and regions (known as a ‘Level 3’ qualification);
- ❑ rapidly expanding the network of Sector Skills Councils which will be a new voice for business, mapping the skills needs and priorities of businesses in their sector, and setting the standards for training to meet them;
- ❑ learning lessons from the Employer Training Pilots to develop a national programme to support employers with help focused on those with low skills, delivering the training businesses want in the way they want it
- ❑ reforming qualifications to make them more business-friendly and responsive to the needs of employers and employees, such as ensuring greater business involvement in the course design, delivery and assessment of Modern Apprenticeships;
- ❑ establishing a new ‘no wrong door’ approach for business support, so that businesses know who to turn to for the help they need. Business Link, local Learning and Skills Councils and Jobcentre Plus will work together to meet

business requirements, publish an Employers Guide to Good Training, to bring together clear information on everything people in business need to know about the quality of training available in their area; and

- ❑ introducing a new management and leadership drive for SMEs, working with Investors In People to offer mentoring and support with informal learning.

In terms of improving access to flexible and relevant provision, the White Paper also recognises that as well as building employers and employees’ demand for skills, this must be balanced out by a range of measures designed to improve the supply side.

The Government says it will “work with colleges and training providers to help them respond more effectively in providing skills, training and qualifications to meet employer and learner needs”¹⁴.

The approach builds on the ongoing reforms being delivered via the *Success for All* programme, launched in November 2002 with the aim of raising overall quality and effectiveness in colleges and training providers.

The *Success for All* discussion document¹⁵ includes four key changes to improve the supply of skills and training:

- ❑ giving a wider choice for employers and learners of publicly-funded providers of adult skills and training;
- ❑ increasing the range of ICT and e-learning resources;
- ❑ reforming the funding system to give incentives for providers to be more responsive while cutting bureaucracy; and
- ❑ helping colleges and providers to build their capacity to offer a wider range of support for local employers.

Improving flexibility and relevance of provision

So if part of the aim of the Skills Strategy is to improve the relevance and access to training for employers, what is preventing that now?

A recent report commissioned by the DfES examined FE relationships with business. *Further Education Colleges’ View on FE-Employer Links* (ECOTEC)¹⁶ highlights a number of key issues affecting the relationship between FE and employers. In particular, it looked at the flexibility and responsiveness of provision to employers’ needs.

The study showed that, whilst almost all colleges offer what might be called a ‘common core’ of flexibilities to help make their provision more responsive to employers, less than half provide services such as business solutions, research and development, and product design.

These services are different in a number of important respects from the ‘common core’ of flexibilities. Not only do they require a more proactive approach on the part of colleges to working with employers; they entail the taking of an holistic approach to business training which sees it as part of the development of business processes and/or new markets, rather than as a discrete need to be addressed. This may mean colleges are actively involved less in responding to needs and more with creating demand amongst employers. Indeed, both these features require colleges to build much closer relationships with employers which requires a much greater institutional commitment on the part of the college. It also requires college staff with higher levels of employer-handling skills, understanding the needs of the industry, supported by requisite continuing professional development opportunities.

The report concludes that there are three broad types of barriers to improving employer responsiveness:

- ❑ systemic barriers external to the college, predominantly funding arrangements and qualifications;

¹⁰ *Employment Trends Survey*, (2002)

¹¹ BITE is the Business Improvement Tool for Entrepreneurs produced by the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership.

¹² *The Skills Strategy White Paper*, DfES (July 2003), p 7

¹³ *Skills for Success: What the Skills Strategy Means for Business*, DfES, (2003)

¹⁴ *The Skills Strategy White Paper*, DfES (July 2003), p 7

¹⁵ *Success for All: Reforming Further Education and Training*: Discussion document, DfES (June 2002)

¹⁶ McCoshan, A, and Souto Otero, M, *Further Education Colleges’ View on FE-Employer Links* (ECOTEC)

- internal college weaknesses, such as the constraints of timetables and lack of the requisite skills amongst staff, particularly industry knowledge and selling skills;
- and employer barriers, primarily a failure to see the benefit of workforce development and perceptions that college provision does not meet business needs, together with a lack information about what FE can provide.

The report found that those colleges that are successful in dealing with employers are those which are successful in addressing barriers to responsiveness. For example, funding and qualifications issues are addressed through the use of alternative sources of funding, such as the European Social Fund, and through the stretching of qualifications systems to adapt them to employers' needs. Local barriers on the college and employer sides are attacked through long-term strategies to build trust and to overcome poor perceptions of FE provision. This is done through the establishment of effective mechanisms of employer contact which develop close relationships with employers, and the employment of staff with marketing and sales skills and with detailed, up-to-date industry knowledge.

As the report highlights, the fact that the problems encountered by the sector in working with employers are not unique and useful lessons can be learned from experiences elsewhere, particularly from organisations involved in business support, not least Business Link and Chambers of Commerce.

The Skills Strategy – is it enough?

The Skills Strategy certainly begins to lay the foundations of a more demand-led approach to skills, and whilst the consultation is underway, the initial reaction from key stakeholders has been broadly positive. The Strategy seeks to tackle some of the barriers to improving the demand and supply of skills that currently exist, but, to the disappointment of some, it does stop short of statutory measures.

For instance, in its initial thoughts on the Skills Strategy, the TUC outlined its disappointment at the lack of a post-voluntary framework, citing support from unlikely quarters such as the recent assessment by the Chief Economic Adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that there is “a growing recognition that the old voluntary and ad-hoc approaches to skills policy did not work” and that the UK needs to move to a “post-voluntary approach to skills training” (Speech by Ed Balls, 26 March 2003).

The trade union, Unison, has proposed a Workforce Investment Act which would entail a new statutory framework to deliver increased investment, employer engagement and participation in workforce development, with the smarter use of regulatory levers to boost skills demand.

But it seems for now that these calls have fallen on stony ground and the reality is that the Government shows no signs of ditching the current voluntary approach in favour of statutory measures.

For more information on the Skills Strategy see <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/index.shtml>. Review section

Reviewsection

FRESA update

Whilst consultation on the national Skills Strategy is ongoing, here in the region the Framework for Employment and Skills Action (FRESA) process is being driven forward. This time last year (Skills and Learning Intelligence Bulletin, Vol.6), we reported on the development of the FRESA document and the formation of the South West Regional Employment Forum (REF) to oversee the FRESA process. So what's been happening since?



Well, you might be forgiven for thinking not too much. Except that it is important to remember that the FRESA is not just a document, it is a process; a process of engagement between partners, to agree needs, determine the priorities for action and to ensure that partners take a lead in making things happen.

Partners are currently engaged in discussion through three FRESA Strategic Objective Groups (FSOs):

- Engaging Employers
- Raising Individuals Aspirations and Skills for Working in the South West
- Working Towards a Natural Balance

The FSO groups meet once a month. The key stages in their immediate work plans are: identification of priority activities; development of implementation plans for priority activities; development and agreement of a communication and dissemination plan; delivery of priority activities; monitoring of achievements and success; and update of implementation plans.

In addition, there is a South West Employment and Skills Research Forum to provide advice and support to the REF and the FSO Groups in taking forward their work.

A wide range of research and development projects are now emerging from these groups which will start to map out the scale and nature of the needs in the region, identifying key issues which will need to be addressed and piloting new initiatives. Here are just some of the ones that are being developed:

FSO 1 - Engaging employers

Brokerage - an 'Activity Plan' has been established which aims to “enhance the role of Business Links/sector organisations in acting as the principal source of advice for small businesses on human resource issues (brokerage)”. It is being lead by SBS and Education Business Links.

Flexible training solutions research proposal – a joint research project with the FSO 3 'natural balance' group will aim work with employers and training providers to identify best practice and the critical factors required for successful adoption and delivery of flexible training for employees and employers. This will also form the basis of the next SLIM Learning Theme.

Management and Leadership Development Programme

A proposal has been developed to pilot a management development scheme in the South West to co-ordinate provision of programmes to businesses, in particular SMEs and micro-businesses.



FSO 2 – Inspiring individuals

Adult Guidance - SLIM ran a Learning Theme on Adult Information, Advice and Guidance, culminating in a workshop on 15 July. The recommendations have been taken on board by the Adult Guidance Group and form the basis of an Activity Plan which aims to improve capacity and co-ordination of IAG across the region.

Basic Skills Provision - A range of actions are being taken forward, including:

- Support for the work of trades unions and employers to identify people lacking basic skills and to develop enhanced workplace training
- Increased support for identifying adults lacking basic skills in community settings and providing community-based learning
- Developing and identifying successful models of effective delivery and sharing them across the region
- Developing capability and capacity for Tutor Training to be linked into the successful models.

Employability Skills - a research proposal is being developed to examine the extent to which young people (14-19 year olds), employers and training providers share perceptions and aspirations relating to Employability skills and the extent to which these are met by provision.

FSO 3 – Working for a natural balance

Care - a research proposal is being taken forward on Care Barriers to Employment and Training. The research will focus on six 'Areas': mapping carers in different age bands; mapping legislation, services, funding and initiatives; identifying gaps in policy and provision acting as barriers to carers' participation in education, employment and training; identifying gaps in policy and provision acting as barriers to South West employers' recruitment of carers; identifying gaps in policy and provision acting as barriers to advice and guidance providers' support for carers; and, identifying gaps in policy and provision acting as barriers to public, private and voluntary sector training providers' support for carers.

Findings are expected in the Spring of 2004.

Emerging skills shortages - a research project is under way to: map existing data sources and analyses; develop a descriptive overview of the skills market and policies with gap analysis; assess the need for further research into the demand for, and supply of, skills in the region.

So a great deal is now emerging as a result of the FRESA process which will place the region in a better position to plan for and respond to the competitive forces which it faces. Regular updates on the work of the FRESA are produced in the form of a monthly newsletter which can be found on <http://www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/skills/fresa/fresa-newsletter.shtml>. For more information on the work of the Research Forum and the progress of the research projects, contact Ben Neild, SLIM Manager.

DTI Strategy: Prosperity for All

Two years ago the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) underwent a fundamental review and set itself a clear ambition of raising UK productivity to deliver 'Prosperity for All'. Now published (September 2003), the DTI's Strategy claims to represent a sharpening of focus, rather than a change of direction for this key government Department.

Alongside the Strategy, the DTI has published a companion paper detailing the analysis underpinning the strategy and in particular the five drivers of productivity: investment, innovation, skills, enterprise and competition. This provides useful reading for an update on the UK's latest economic and competitive position: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/about/dti-strategy-analysis.pdf>.

At the heart of the Strategy is the need to improve productivity, seen as the most crucial factor in securing long-term growth in living standards. UK productivity has been consistently lower than that of our major competitors and here in the South West we have amongst the lowest levels of productivity of any region.

Through the Strategy the DTI intends to focus where it has most impact so as to:

- Help business to access the knowledge and ideas it needs to innovate
- Encourage employers and employees to improve their skills and create more productive, high performing workplaces
- Ensure the right frameworks exist so that markets are open and fair at home and overseas
- Ensure that all regions are able to fulfil their economic potential.

Over the next five years, the DTI will be enhancing its efforts to improve productivity but focusing on a number of areas: transferring knowledge; maximising potential in the workplace; extending competitive markets; strengthening regional economies; and, forging closer partnerships.

For more information on the Strategy, see: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/about/dti-strategy.pdf>

Skills for Business (SfB) network Partnerships Manager appointed for SW England

Pauline Moylan takes up post as Skills for Business (SfB) network Partnerships Manager in SW England on 29 September 2003. Skills for Business comprises the emerging Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA).

Pauline is already known to many of the regional partners from her roles as the South West representative of the former NTO National Council, and as Sector Skills Consultant to the South West of England Regional Development Agency.

Skills for Business has been positioned to take a central role in engaging employers in the National Skills Strategy, and in the activities that emerge from the Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA). The Partnerships Manager's role will be an important link between the newly formed SfB network in the South West and the key partners involved in both the supply and demand for skills.

One of Pauline's first tasks will be to create an SSC Forum in the South West, and to determine, with the network, its role in delivering the FRESA actions.

"I am looking forward to reviving my working relationships with a wide range of partners in the region, and to supporting the SfB network in fulfilling the Vision set out in the SSDA's Strategic Plan".¹

The SSDA Vision is that the UK will have a workforce with world-class skills, which enable the highest levels of business performance across all sectors of the economy.

This ambitious vision will be delivered by developing and sustaining an influential Skills for Business network, capable of increasing workplace productivity, eliminating skills gaps and shortages, creating opportunities for everyone and improving learning supply.

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Skills for Business network Partnerships Manager
South West of England Regional Development Agency,
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e-mail pauline.moylan@ssda.org.uk
tel 0117 933 0276

¹ Raising Performance through Skills - SSDA Strategic Plan 2003 -2006

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Research and information sources

Abstracts

Improving occupational learning: the validity and transferability of NVQs in the workplace

31-Jul-03

DfES

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR425.pdf>

This is a report on Stage 3 of a programme of research on the validity and transferability of NVQs in the workplace. The aims of Stage 3 were to "investigate the validity of NVQ assessments and the transferability of NVQ achievements through use of a range of research methods". The report covers engineering; childcare education; business administration; and hairdressing, examining the following:

- National Standards and the requirements of the workplace
- Training routes, contexts, learning strategies and the achievement of competence
- Effectiveness – the ability to transfer learning to the workplace
- Assessment and accreditation processes and the achievement of competence

Research brief also available at

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RB425.pdf>

Further education colleges' views on FE-Employer links

26-Jun-03

DfES

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR442.pdf>

Findings from research carried out to examine the views of Further Education (FE) colleges on their links with employers and to explore barriers and incentives.

All the information provided in this report covers the views of senior college management and departmental personnel. This report is not aimed at providing an audit or external evaluation of the current situation of FE/ employer links.

Also presents an overview of literature in this area as well as raising policy implications and issues for further research flowing from the study.

Research brief also available at

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RB442.pdf>



Employment transitions of older workers: The role of flexible employment in maintaining labour market participation and promoting job quality

01-Mar-03

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/343.asp>

This report studies the role of 'bridge jobs' in the lives of people leaving work between 50 and state retirement age. Using national survey data, the research examines the characteristics and experiences of those leaving permanent jobs, factors associated with moving to temporary, part-time or self-employment and the qualities of alternative forms of work.

Making the difference: provider support for learner retention and achievement in work-based learning

LSDA

<http://www.lsda.org.uk/pubs/dbaseout/download.asp?code=1392>

This publication is based on research commissioned by the Learning and Skills Development Agency, reporting in the autumn of 2002. It is based on the results of research with practitioners, focusing on how providers address performance issues and what works for them. It aims to explore the factors that enabled work-based learning providers to secure high rates of retention and achievement



Perspectives on Individuals' Learning and Employment - South West Region Household Survey 2002

01-Jun-03

Learning and Skills Council

Five of the South West region's six local LSCs commissioned a co-ordinated household survey, which took place between November 2002 and January 2003. The survey was designed to examine a range of skill and learning issues, including learning participation, qualifications and skills, and information, advice and guidance (IAG). Chapters cover:

- skill needs and the demand for learning
- the characteristics of learning
- employers' engagement in learning
- what drives and inhibits learning
- better basic skills
- IAG
- learning and young people
- key messages for LSC strategy.

http://www.southwestsurvey.com/Downloads/regional_report.pdf

Provider Performance Review - Local Guidance

01-Feb-03

Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council

<http://www.lscdevonandcornwall.org/attachments/Guidance%20Provider%20%20LSC%20Spring%202003.pdf>

This local guidance is intended to support both Provider and LSC staff in relation to the Provider performance Review process.

The over-arching performance review framework table is available, as are local targets for FE Colleges, WBL and UFI providers. Within the performance review framework, the performance of colleges and providers is assessed in the three key performance areas:

- Participation and recruitment
- Learner experience and performance
- Management

Events

Widening Adult Participation: Lifting the barriers to learning

23 October 2003 A recent survey found that 71% of those without a qualification said that nothing would induce them to go back into learning (National Adult Learning Survey 2001), yet the NIACE 2002 Survey into adult participation found that 90% of adults believe that learning can make a positive difference to one's life. The LSC strategy on widening adult participation will provide an important opportunity for renewed action. This conference will look at the many complex and sensitive barriers that must be addressed if real progress is to be achieved, and assess how new funding mechanisms will support such change. Victoria Park Plaza, London SW1V 1EQ
Neil Stewart Associates

info@neilstewartassociates.co.uk

<http://www.neilstewartassociates.com/jd125/>

RNIB South West Regional Conference: S 140 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000

10 November 2003 1-day conference to address the implications for disabled young people in transition and those who work with them. There will be input from Connexions, Local Education Authorities, the FE sector and Parent/Representative Groups. Taunton Rugby Club
Ella Jenkins/Ann Marshall, RNIB South West
Tel: 0117 9341712/9537750
e&esouthwest@rnib.org.uk

HERDA-SW Conference: Aim Higher 2003: delivering SW solutions together

13-14 November 2003.

The principal networking event for those with an interest in HE's place in supporting the region, 'Aim Higher' will provide a unique opportunity to play a part in shaping the developing regional agenda for the SW.

Imperial Hotel, Torquay
Sasha Cann, HERDA-SW

Tel: 01392 229579; Fax: 01392 229395

herda-sw@southwestrda.org.uk

Extending Links between Higher Education and Business

Thursday 13th November 2003

Savoy Place (IEE), London WC2

<http://www.neilstewartassociates.com/jb159/index.html>

Access to Higher Education

25 Nov 2003 Lyngford House, Taunton

K1Fletcher@plymouth.ac.uk

Keith Fletcher, Open College Network
01752 232381

SLIM's Learning Theme on Flexible Learning Workshop at Lyngford House, Taunton

5 December 2003 Hilary Todd

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slim quarterly bulletin is produced by

The Marchmont Observatory



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Who's who in the South West



Interview with Richard Crocker of the Federation of Small Businesses

1 Hi Richard, could you start by telling us a little about yourself, your background and how you got involved with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)?

I am a Chartered Accountant and currently run Jobsincornwall.co.uk and josbinplymouth.co.uk, which are specialised online job markets serving these two geographical areas. I've been a member of the FSB since 1998 and got involved because I thought the 5b programme in Cornwall had been a disaster. If the Objective 1 programme was to have any chance of success, it needed investment in private businesses to be a central part of its strategy. The FSB was in a better position to lobby for this than my own business at that time. Since then my involvement has grown into other areas.

2 So what is the role of the FSB and how it is funded?

The FSB has over 180,000 members nationally and is therefore the largest business organisation in the UK. In the South West, it is bigger than the CBI, the IoD and the Chambers combined. It is funded 100% from membership subscriptions and services.

Its principal day-to-day activities are:

- Being the principal representative voice of owner managed businesses in the UK.
- Representing individual members interests
- Providing services to members such as legal advice, telecoms and insurance etc.

3 How important is the skills and learning agenda to the FSB and what sorts of things are the FSB getting involved in to ensure that their members' interests are taken on board?

Our membership lists poor workforce skills as one of the key barriers to their growth and prosperity. It is a very important issue on our agenda, along with fighting the increasing levels of red tape the government imposes on us which makes the labour market less flexible and increases the costs and risks of employing people.

Our involvement is both in terms of fighting increased labour market regulation, fighting increased payroll-related/collected taxes and in improving the provision of both basic and advanced skills by government-funded establishments. We are seeking improvements in quality, as well as flexibility and relevance.

4 What are some of the problems faced by your members in accessing learning opportunities and what are the FSB doing to assist?

Over £23 billion is spent annually by employers on workforce training. However, the risk of investment in workforce skills is often too high for employers to absorb alone. Small businesses often spend valuable time which could be spent training staff in non-productive regulatory compliance tasks.

The FSB fights unreasonable regulations and is also, through the FRESA, working with the tax-funded agencies to improve the level of support educational and training institutions give to small businesses to increase the level of small business investment in training.

5 How significant is the flexibility and relevance of learning for South West Small Businesses?

Flexible learning is a term used to describe employer led and market led skills provision. Most of the most valuable skills used in the workplace have been provided by this method and the aim is to increase the level of training activity in this area to provide a more productive and profitable workforce.

This issue is very significant for business in the South West as most of the Region's wealth and taxes are generated from within small business activity.

We need to know more about how flexible training can be extended by harnessing the resources of the tax funded training and education establishment to better support small enterprises. This can be done either by providing them with resources unavailable to them from the private sector, or to help manage the risk of increased training investment.

6 You are a member of the FRESA's 'FSO3 Group'. Can you explain what this entails?

FRESA stands for Framework for Regional Employment Skills Action. This is a Regional plan to improve employment skills. FSO3 is a group which has been tasked with addressing the issue of improving the way the labour market operates to increase its efficiency. FSO3 identified Flexible Training as a key way by which the market for skills could be improved.

There are many examples of good practice in Flexible Training. We would like to see examples and case studies of this more widely communicated and understood. We also hope it will bring together the tax-funded education and training establishment with their employer customers.

We hope to discover the value of Flexible Training demonstrated in practice. We also hope to discover how the recommendations of earlier research in this area have been implemented and where lessons can be learnt to shape new initiatives and redirect investment.

The FRESA has led to a greater understanding of the problems faced by various partners in the process of developing skills. Many of these problems can be traced back to the prescriptive and constraining method by which the Government distributes funding for training and education. These constraints limit the ability of training providers to provide the services businesses need. Funding also seems to be biased towards the wishes of individuals, rather than the needs of the regional economy as a whole.

Understanding these barriers and finding joint solutions to them is a very important part of the FRESA's work and one in which the FSB is very pleased to play its part.

