

Enterprise and Learning Committee

EL(3) 17-08 (p13) : 12 June 2008

**Government Skills submission to the National Assembly for Wales
Enterprise and Learning Committee's inquiry into the economic
contribution of higher education.**

Introduction

1. The following submission has been prepared for the Enterprise and Learning Committee's inquiry into the economic contribution of higher education by Government Skills.
2. Government Skills the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for central government and the armed forces. This includes all government departments, their executive agencies and Assembly Government Sponsored Public Bodies (AGSPBs) and the armed forces. This represents an overall footprint of 800,000 staff. In Wales approximately 37,000 staff are employed in the sector which is 1.2% of the population (based on ONS UK population statistics 2008). Government Skills was licensed in February 2006.

Background

3. The Government Skills Skills Strategy for Government represents the Sector Skills Agreement is an assessment of skills needs and priorities within the central government sector. It identifies and articulates the sector's current and further workforce skills needs so that key stakeholders (employers, learning providers and Government Skills) can take collaborative action to address them. The Skills Strategy for Government is a three year strategy which was approved by the Permanent Secretaries Management Group (PSMG) in January 2008 and was formally launched on 1 April 2008.
4. Government Skills concluded its Action Plans in Wales in February 2008 following consultation with each of the five project board partners (Welsh Assembly Government, Careers Wales, Job Centre Plus, Wales TUC and HEFCW). These action plans, combined with the SSA Stage 1 and 2 report formed the Evidence Base for Wales. Government Skills, in partnership with each of the partners, is committed to reviewing the action plans on a bi annual basis. The action plan with HEFCW (Higher Education and Funding Council for Wales) agreed a partnership agreement with HEFCW which is outlined below as the basis for an on-going relationship between the Sector and Welsh HEIs.
5. As the last of the 25 SSCs to be licensed, Government Skills has yet to achieve demonstrable evidence of the impact that it has had on HEI within Wales or indeed the UK. However, through its action plan with HEFCW, Government Skills has a commitment over the period 2008 – 2011 to develop these links and

to develop sector-tailored programmes to be delivered by the HE sector. This commitment is demonstrated within the action plan shown at Annex A.

6. As such, Government Skills has yet to establish full engagement with HEIs within Wales or the UK, however, this has been agreed within the action plan with HEFCW as a medium term action for Government Skills to commence during 2008. Given the timing, Government Skills is at present unable to comment on the impact of the strategic engagement of HEIs with regard to the central government and armed forces sector. However, the delivery of the action plan with HEFCW will facilitate this process by achieving the short, medium and long term objectives set for the period 2008 – 2011.

7. Government Skills is aware that HEFCW is currently funding a feasibility study on workforce development, and await the outcome of this study to inform future developments in higher level work-based learning provision. Government Skills would encourage HEIs to formally engage SSCs in this process, in order to assist in the ongoing development of collaboration with both HEFCW and the HE sector in Wales.

Recommendation

8. Government Skills will continue to deliver the objectives set out in its' action plan with HEFCW (Annex A). This action plan is due to have its first six monthly review on 30 July 2008.

ANNEX A

Government Skills and HEFCW Action Plan for Wales (as agreed February 2008)

Level 1 – Immediate (short – medium term) funding issues eg pilot projects

Key Objective	Specific Action/ Proposed Delivery	Timescale for Delivery
Development of Foundation Degrees	Provide research/information to HE providers from employers on the need and potential course content for Foundation Degrees – especially with regard to central government and public service	2008-11
Raise awareness of Government Skills in HE and ensure good communication between Government Skills and HE providers where appropriate	HEFCW to assist with brokering of links between Government Skills and HEIs to discuss the priorities identified through the SSA and opportunities for collaborative action.	2008 onwards
To ensure good and effective communication of the role of Government Skills.	Government Skills to prepare a brief excerpt of the Skills Strategy for Government (Government Skills response to the SSA) that will highlight the role of Government Skills and any issues, priorities or actions relevant to HE and to which HEIs can be invited to respond. HEFCW to disseminate to key contacts within HEIs.	2008 ongoing

Level 2 – Medium-term issues, eg raising the demand for training, skills development and learning in the sector

Key Objective	Specific Action/ Proposed Delivery	Timescale for Delivery
Development of effective employer engagement with FE and HE	Work with key stakeholders (i.e. employers within Wales and with colleagues leading on products, services and qualifications within Government Skills) to provide information on relevant skills provision needed in the Central Government Sector and to communicate any findings to HEFCW for dissemination to relevant contacts within HEIs.	2008 ongoing

Level 3 – Long-term structural and strategic issues

Key Objective	Specific Action/ Proposed Delivery	Timescale for Delivery
Respond to changing needs of HE provision as a result of further devolved powers: ie. the possible development of devolution within Wales with the potential achievement of primary legislation powers for the Welsh Assembly Government/National Assembly for Wales	Work with the Sector learning and development managers and communicate all developments to HEFCW for dissemination to relevant contacts within HEIs.	2008 ongoing
<p>Work with key partners in order to implement the Government Skills Strategy for Government (response to SSA process) in line with the implementation plan which includes the following points</p>	<p>Government Skills to work with key stakeholders throughout the sector (initially HR Directors) in order to implement the following aspects of the Skills Strategy for Government;</p> <p>1. Opening up good practice to other employers. For instance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opening up the Defence Academy e-learning offer to OGDs through defining and publicising the offer by March 2008 - Opening up DWP's NVQ accreditation centre to OGDs by March 2008 (subject to resolution of headcount issues) - Piloting the IT qualification ITQ in HMRC and possibly DWP <p>2. Embedding professional skills standards over time into HR processes and decisions. Each Department's contribution may include a mix of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing guidance for recruiting managers on the balance between core and professional skills - piloting assessment frameworks with the larger professions for use at appraisal and recruitment - bringing together a coherent departmental position on broader experience, taking account of guidance issued by professions 	<p>The Government Skills Strategy for Government is a three year work programme (2008 – 2011)</p> <p>March 2008 ongoing</p> <p>March 2008 ongoing</p> <p>September 2008 ongoing</p> <p>August 2008 ongoing</p> <p>October 2008 ongoing</p> <p>December 2008 ongoing</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing HR/HOP networks to manage talent and plan development strategies <p>3. Ensure by April 2008 that departmental skills strategies contribute to the Government Skills Strategy, and are aligned with it in areas of common action.</p> <p>4. Sharing good practice and experience of engagement with HE and FE providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying a range of examples of current engagement already in practice within the central government sector - Allocating the Department's lead responsibility for developing the employer voice in relation to HE and FE provision. <p>5. Government Skills to continue to the develop the Heads of Professions (HoPs) networks in order to secure the HoPs contributions are likely to include (but are not committed or restricted to;)</p> <p>a) segmenting their profession's workforce;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o established professions to provide GS with existing segmentation data for their workforces by 31 March. o GS to identify issues arising – e.g. relating to consistency – and agree solutions by 31 May in consultation with representatives of a sample of professions. o GS to circulate to all professions by 30 June a standard for the approach to segmentation. o semi-established professions to supply segmentation data – professions to nominate dates ranging from May to December. <p>b) setting professional skills standards;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Policy and Operational Delivery standards set below G7 by September 2008 	<p>May 2009 ongoing</p> <p>Annually from April 2008 ongoing</p> <p>From April 2008 ongoing</p> <p>By March 2008 ongoing</p> <p>By April 2008 ongoing</p> <p>By June 2008 ongoing</p> <p>By July 2008 ongoing</p> <p>January 2009 ongoing</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New qualification in policy piloted in Northern Ireland and Whitehall by September 2008 ○ Operational delivery qualification piloted by March 2009 <p>c) quantifying supply of and demand for skills in their area;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 professions to deliver quantifications in 2008, 10 in 2009, the rest in 2010 <p>d) shaping career and workforce planning;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 HOPs to have published briefing papers for discussion with other professions by September 2008 <p>e) supporting professional development;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 HOPs to have promulgated good practice by December 2008 <p>f) making links to the wider labour market.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 HOPs to have promulgated lessons learnt from working with other SSCs to set and use industry wide standards by July 2008 <p>g) promoting engagement with education sectors.</p> <p>h) Sharing good practice and experience of engagement with HE and FE providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying examples of current engagement by end of April • Allocating the profession's lead responsibility for developing the employer voice in relation to HE and FE provision by March 2008. <p>Government Skills will support all of the above stated activities. In addition it will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establish by [July 2008] a small shared services function to support the heads of the 20 smaller professions; - co-develop with OGC Buying Solutions a Learning and Development Framework Contract to ensure targeting of common skills needs and facilitation of delivery partnerships. An ITT will issue end 	<p>October 2008 ongoing</p> <p>October 2008 ongoing</p> <p>March 2009</p> <p>2010</p> <p>October 2008 ongoing</p> <p>December 2008 ongoing</p> <p>August 2008 ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>May 2008 ongoing</p> <p>April 2008 ongoing</p>
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	<p>Feb 2008 with contracts to framework suppliers issued in June 2008</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the joint commissioning of core skills programmes, starting with a pilot in Analytical Skills (agree scope and plan pilot by end March) - Undertake cross-sector performance needs analysis so as to better understand common learning and development needs, starting as part of the Analytical Skills joint commissioning pilot. Evaluate and roll out full programme if appropriate by September across core skills - Develop skills awards for internal providers, preferably as part of the Civil Service Awards. Agree way forward in time for 2008 awards by February - Pilot expansion of apprenticeships in government (1st tranche April 2008, 2nd tranche September 2008) - Establish a network for Departments and professions on HE/FE engagement - facilitate by June 2008 an initial sharing of information about Departments' present arrangements and experience on HE/FE engagement. - Establish active relations with relevant Sector Skills Councils and conduct an initial review of their experience and practice in establishing relations with HE/FE sector by end of April - Conduct a paper review of current employer/profession engagement with HE/FE providers by end of May 	<p>July 2008 with ongoing support thereafter</p> <p>June 2008</p> <p>Ongoing – pilot to be conducted by March 2008</p> <p>October 2008</p> <p>April 2008</p> <p>September 2008</p> <p>To be in place by January 2009</p> <p>July 2008</p> <p>May 2008 ongoing</p>
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