

Higher and Further Education Engagement

From Provider to Partner



Aim

Government Skills is leading a workstream to equip the UK public service with the skills needed to ensure effective delivery of services, both now and in the future through better engagement between departments and professions, and the higher and further education sectors.

To put it simply – getting more from higher and further education.

This Higher and Further Education workstream supports all three priorities identified within the Skills Strategy for Central Government:

- Driving up **professional standards** – by identifying and filling skills gaps and helping learners to transfer the knowledge gained at college or university to the workplace
- Taking **common action** to address common skills needs – through using a collective approach to secure greater value-for-money
- Realising the potential of the **higher and further education sectors** to re-skill the workplace – by helping training providers to better understand the needs of government, present and future, and thus increase the relevance of course content and the flexibility of provision.

Background

Universities, Further education (FE) colleges and other providers are already working closely with employers to ensure the relevance and currency of their courses. They are often happy to consider adapting a course, developing new bespoke content or offering additional services which add value for employers. However, they sometimes struggle to communicate this willingness to engage to government departments and professions. Government Skills is keen to develop relationships with the HE and FE sectors in order to support this process.

Many departments and professions have been slower to seek partnership with providers for a number of reasons: they may not realise what is possible, or may fear that it will involve too much time and effort, or they may simply not know where to begin. Our evidence suggests that departments, like other employers, sometimes find it difficult to articulate their needs to training providers. Government Skills has a good relationship with each of the departments, devolved administrations and professions in government and can help identify opportunities to engage with the HE and FE sectors.

Government Skills encourages departments and professions to take a collective approach to the procurement of qualifications through the work it initiated on Common Actions. Currently many departments either negotiate with individual providers or accept an off-the-shelf product and price. Better engagement between departments, professions, and HE and FE education providers will ensure better value for government and a greater influence on content and delivery.

Case Study 1: A Cross-Government Procurement Framework for MBA/MPAs

Government Skills carried out a training needs analysis (TNA) on the use of Masters in Business Administration and Masters in Public Administration qualifications within government. The TNA included collecting data and interviewing employers, providers, current learners and recent graduates.

Employers wanted to be sure that they were getting good value and realising maximum benefits from sponsorship of these qualifications. To support this Government Skills is working with a coalition of 14 departments and devolved administrations to develop a cross-government procurement framework for MBAs and MPAs.

Universities and business schools throughout the UK and beyond will be invited to tender for a place on the framework. A competitive tendering process will ensure transparency and fairness. Stakeholders from the coalition will be involved in the evaluation of tenders to ensure that employers' needs are met. The framework will be operational by April 2010.

Any government department, agency or devolved administration will be able to use the framework as part of their central or local sponsorship arrangements. The framework will also be available to local government and other public sector organisations. Assuming the framework is successful, additional qualifications can be added to it in due course.

In addition to the framework we will support the transfer of learning from the qualification to the workplace. Examples of this may include a masterclass to encourage employers to be more involved in the selection and championing of work-based projects.

Case Study 2: Specialist Courses for Linguists

Early in 2009 Government Skills was approached by the UK Inter-Departmental Standing Committee on Languages, which had identified a need for specialist language training that was not currently being met. The Standing Committee asked Government Skills to help it to identify suitable Higher Education providers.

Government Skills worked with relevant government departments and agencies to clarify their specific needs and to prepare a persuasive business case. As it was unlikely that a single university would be able to provide all of the courses that are needed, we approached university umbrella groups seeking potential HEI partnerships.

The first of the new courses will be available from 2010.

How can you get involved?

Government Skills is looking for new ways to support engagement between departments and professions, and the higher and further education sectors. If you have a suggestion for an area of work where Government Skills could make a difference, please contact one of the team: tanya.lawes@government-skills.gsi.gov.uk or claire.fisher@government-skills.gsi.gov.uk



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