

Ref: S760/gb



**The Institution of
Engineering and Technology**
Michael Faraday House
Six Hills Way, Stevenage
Hertfordshire SG1 2AY
United Kingdom
T +44 (0)1438 313311
F +44 (0)1438 765526
www.theiet.org

The Knowledge Network

Mr Tommy McVeigh
Training Programmes Branch
Department for Employment and Learning
Lesley Buildings
Fountain Street
BELFAST BT1 5EX

20th September 2006

Dear Mr McVeigh,

Re: Training for Success: Professional and Technical Training

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) is pleased to respond to DELNI's consultation, dated July 2006, on how the Department proposes to take forward its commitments under the Skills Strategy in relation to the reconfiguration of Training and Adult Skills.

The IET was formed in March 2006 through a merger of the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE) and the Institution of Incorporated Engineers (IIE). The IET has in excess of 150,000 members worldwide drawn from a broad range of science and engineering disciplines. The membership represents a wide range of expertise, from technical experts to business leaders, encompassing a wealth of professional experience and knowledge, independent of commercial interests. This letter has been prepared on behalf of the Institution's Trustees, after inviting input from its general membership and, in particular, the Engineering Policy Group Northern Ireland, a body of Northern Ireland senior professionals from industry and academia across a broad spectrum of science, engineering and technology.

The Institution has produced its response based on the Northern Ireland economy being able to undertake higher value-added work requiring a more highly skilled workforce than is the case for so much of its 'traditional' manufacturing which has progressively moved overseas. The DETI publication "The Future of Manufacturing in Northern Ireland – March 2006" set out this scenario for the Northern Ireland economy. For the engineering sector of the Northern Ireland economy this demands workforce skill sets at NVQ level 3 standards and above.

The Institution has responded to the questions raised within the consultation to the extent of its competence. These responses can be found in the attached Annex in which the question is restated with the response.

No aspect of the Institution's submission is confidential and DELNI may, at its discretion, place it in the public domain using any appropriate means.

If you require further information or amplification of any aspect of this submission then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Graham A Paterson', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Graham A Paterson

Head of Policy

Tel: 01438 765685

Email: gpaterson@theiet.org



Response by the Institution of Engineering and Technology to DELNI's consultation "Training for Success: Professional and Technical Training", July 2006

Question 1. What is your view of the draft key principles outlined above?

They are welcomed. It is noted that the new initiatives will attempt to build upon the strengths, and learn from the weaknesses, of those they replace.

Experience from the Jobskills programme in Northern Ireland (NI) suggests that to attract high calibre young people to modern apprenticeship programmes it is important to employ them from the start and for there to be a career path opportunity within the employing organisation.

Question 2. Are there any improvements or other cross-cutting issues which should be addressed?

The soundness of the draft key principles is diminished by the omission of on going engagement with employers, and employer groups. This has to be a key principle as the NI economy is competing in a global market place which means the required skills can change rapidly. Such change is usually first detected in industry and the supply sector. Workforce flexibility and business agility are key elements to economic success; workforce flexibility is underpinned by training.

Whilst the importance of Essential Skills may not be recognised equally by all employers offering modern apprenticeships they are regarded as being important for the wellbeing of the NI economy as a whole. Inclusion of Essential Skills might be usefully incorporated within the technical certificate and NVQ's undertaken by apprentices.

Question 3. What is your view of the proposed range of flexible new provisions?

The proposed flexible provisions are welcomed. It is observed that whilst skills are generally most easily realised in the workplace this is not necessarily the case when it comes to training. Not all highly skilled workers make good trainers. There is understandable emphasis placed on contracting training to industry-recognised bodies. However, some skills are only practised within specific industries, and organisations, for example application specific integrated circuit (ASIC) layout design, for which recognition of suitable sole trainers may be appropriate.

Experience has shown that for training to be effective, and for self-esteem to grow, apprentices have to be given the opportunity to put into practice their learnt skills. This places a requirement upon the employing organisations to have the time, resources and supporting skills to help the trainees/apprentices exploit the training they receive.

Question 4. Do you agree that the emphasis should be on Apprenticeships?

It is agreed there should be emphasis placed upon employer led apprenticeships. To help candidates, parents, and school careers advisors make decisions concerning joining an apprenticeship scheme there needs to be clarity as to what an apprenticeship involves, what skill capabilities will be gained, and what career opportunities might result from successful completion of a modern apprenticeship

programme. There are aspects of the proposals which go against such clarity – see response to Question 5.

Question 5. Do you agree that there is merit in introducing a specific Level 2 Apprenticeship?

It is believed that within the engineering sector of the NI economy introduction of a level 2 apprenticeship will cause confusion, with industry probably not regarding a level 2 apprenticeship qualification as representing a skilled person. It is suggested that for the NI economy to achieve its aims will require that, within the engineering sector, an apprenticeship will need to be to at least NVQ level 3 standards.

Question 6. Do you agree that employer engagement is central to a new era of training provision; how can that commitment and engagement be secured?

Yes. As indicated in the response to Question 2, engagement with employers must be ongoing. Ideally the individuals facilitating the development planning viz. coaches and mentors should be engaged with employers so they gain first-hand up-to-date knowledge of the skills requirement in the NI workplace.

In an ideal implementation there should be flexible shared training where apprentices employed by one employer can move temporarily to another organisation to learn necessary skills only readily available in the other organisation. Employers might then be persuaded to tender to provide skills training (even by means of short term specific training contracted out from within larger apprenticeship schemes). Financial incentive for employers to provide such training could help test commitment and secure engagement.

Clearly, there might be a fear that such a scheme would jeopardise competitive advantage, say by passing on key know-how which ends up being exploited by another competitive NI organisation. In the longer term, such views work against the overall good of the local economy, but it has to be appreciated that SME's, in particular, will be minded to protect their own skills and knowledge base.

Question 7. Should contracts for Level 2 and Level 3 Apprenticeships be offered to industry recognised bodies/employers or to training organisations or to both?

As indicated in the responses to Questions 1 and 5, within the NI engineering sector employer led, NVQ level 3 standards, or above, apprenticeship is the recommended route. There must be stringent quality assurance in place for all apprenticeship training, both within the employing organisation and any external resource providing part of the training.

Question 8. Do you consider that Training Organisations who solely act as a Managing Agent should be able or unable to tender for occupational areas delivered by a third party?

Any third party involved in the apprenticeship training process must meet the high standards required to ensure that the individuals undertaking the training get every opportunity to succeed, and that the sponsoring, or employing, organisation gets the quality of outcomes necessary. Any Managing Agent should be required to demonstrate that their recommended third party training organisations can deliver the training and skills required. Use of a Managing Agent should be at the discretion of an employer.

Question 9. What is your view of the proposed funding model?

The funding model appears reasonable. It is suggested that, because of the advanced mathematics skills required, Computer Science should be elevated from Group 4 to Group 5.

'Outcomes related payments clearly speak to the motivation for success, this does not necessarily address the fact that an employer's greatest investment, with minimal return, in each apprentice comes at the start of the apprenticeship course. It is therefore suggested that consideration should be given to funding some payments during the first year of an apprenticeship.

Question 10. Is the proposed funding model too complicated?

Whilst the funding model is not seen as too complicated it is suggested that clarity would be improved through worked examples with milestones and payments, taking into account the point made in the response to Question 9, concerning payments in the early stages of an apprenticeship.

Question 11. How would you feel as an employer or a supplier operating under the proposed funding model?

To large multi-national organisations the employer portion of the funding models are token amounts however, they have greater significance for SMEs/local NI businesses. These latter businesses need a simple claims procedure devoid of 'red-tape' and complexity, with prompt payment, as they do not have the luxury of large finance departments, nor, as a rule, cash-flow with great elasticity.

Question 12. What is your view of the proposal for revised travel arrangements?

It is recommended that participation in an apprenticeship programme should be through employment and in this circumstance travel funding should be irrelevant.

No unemployed deserving candidate should be precluded from undertaking training simply because they cannot pay the costs of attending the training location; to this extent the revised travel arrangements are welcomed.

Question 13. Do you agree that EMA should extend to unwaged trainees? If not, why?

It is recommended that participation in an apprenticeship programme should be through employment and in this circumstance EMA payments should be irrelevant.

For unemployed, and low wage trainees, Education Maintenance Allowance is regarded as appropriate for income levels that fall within the household income bands stated.

Question 14. Do you agree that Level 2 and Level 3 Apprenticeship provision should be available to adults over the age of 25?

In the NI engineering sector only apprenticeships to at least NVQ level 3 standards are likely to be recognised as representing a skilled member of the workforce. For this reason this is all that should be offered to adults over 25 years of age.

Experience from mature student routes to academic success (e.g. Open University) shows that older persons undergoing training often do well due to increased maturity and motivation. In the apprenticeship streams the same principles may well apply. The inclusion of mature candidates may also help the overall ethos and outcomes where there is a mix of apprentice ages.

Question 15. Is there merit in introducing a lower level upskilling initiative and in what circumstances?

Low-level skills are often some of the first jobs to suffer through technological change with those affected often least able to adapt to the changing work environment. Assuming that the NI economy has work opportunities for these members of the available workforce, then those who are prepared to undertake retraining should be provided with the means, and if necessary the resources, to do so. However, for the NI engineering sector this does not alter the fact that it is recommended that apprenticeships *per se* should not be diluted to anything less than NVQ level 3 standards, and should be an employed position within a company.

----ooo0ooo----