

High Level Skills Consultation
Department for Innovation,
Universities and Skills
Higher Education Group,
N4, Moorfoot,
Sheffield
S1 4PQ

07 July 2008

Dear Sirs,

Higher Education at Work: High Skills: High Value Consultation.

BCSC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Higher Education at Work: High Skills: High Value Consultation.

The BCSC mission is to promote best practice in the development and management of the retail environment and to portray a common vision, helping our members work together, exchange and develop information and advance the professional and commercial aims of the retail property industry as its centre of excellence.

Retail is an important contributor to the economy in terms of employment and GDP. Retail accounts for 8% of GDP and employs 2.9 million people. Moreover, retail development brings economic and social benefits through providing employment and creating vitality and viability. Economically-successful town and city centres are both the drivers of the regional, sub-regional and local economies and the barometer of a region, sub-region or a locality's success.

It is important to assess the important contribution which education and training plays in employment. This is a key agenda for BCSC in 2008 and beyond: initiatives such as the BCSC Student Portal and work with Skillsmart in developing the National Skills Academy for retail, aligned with initiatives for Managing the Night Economy in collaboration with the Civic Trust and BIIAB, illustrate the importance of 'vocational' training for people and the contribution which retail operations can contribute to the overall enhancement of employment opportunities. BCSC, in collaboration with the College of Estate Management, also offers a two-year diploma course increasingly recognised as providing formal qualifications for shopping centre managers.

Retail is particularly important in this regard as highlighted in the 'Under-served Markets: Retail and Regeneration' report. When launching the Report, John Healey MP, Minister of State, on 27 October 2007 said:

“The benefits are two-fold. Firstly, local authorities can improve the lives of their residents by tapping into the retail potential in their areas and at the same time providing an entry point to employment. Secondly, deprived areas also offer commercial opportunities for retailers as they would be filling a gap in the market.”

We agree that both the demand (the skills requirements of employers) and the supply (number of workless people) needs of the local labour market can be directly met by bringing together the resources dedicated to each through a co-ordinated, vocationally driven education and training system. BCSC consider it has a key role to assist, given the strategic position it occupies in the retail market and would encourage a strategy focussed on utilising BCSC and its equivalents in other sectors of the economy and commerce to assist in promoting the higher skills base needed to effectively compete with the best OECD nations.

Please find the response from BCSC attached. Please do get in touch with me if you would like any further information from BCSC concerning our response to this consultation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Green". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'M' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'n'.

Michael Green
BCSC Chief Executive

Higher Education at Work High Skills: High Value

Response Form

We welcome views and comments from all those involved in higher education – as customers, learners or providers, and from others with an interest in it.

Your responses may be sent by email, fax or post to one of the following:-

By email to: highlevelskills.consultation@dius.gsi.gov.uk

By post to: High Level Skills Consultation, DIUS, Higher Education Group, N4, Moorfoot, Sheffield, S1 4PQ.

By fax to: 0114 259 1102.

The deadline for responses is Monday 7 July 2008.

We expect to publish a summary of responses in due course. Individual respondents will not be identified in this but please note the Freedom of Information statement below.

Please email any enquiries to highlevelskills.consultation@dius.gsi.gov.uk

Name

Davinder Jhamat - BCSC

Position in organisation

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Organisation (if applicable)

BCSC (British Council of Shopping Centres)

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Please indicate with a tick which type of organisation you represent

Higher education institution	
Further education institution	
Private training/learning provider	
Sector Skills Council	
Representative organisation or Professional body	
Trade union	
Employer	
Employee	

Learner	
Other – please specify	Strategic Body for the Retail Property Industry

Please note that the boxes below can be extended to accommodate your views.

Question 1: What incentives would encourage employers to be more involved in providing careers information, advice and guidance both before, and during university?

Employers in relevant sectors should be encouraged to provide information, both before and during university to maximize the opportunity for students to make informed choices.

Strategic organisations, such as the BCSC and our equivalents in industry and commerce, have a key role to play in ensuring significant information is co-ordinated on behalf of the industry sectors in order to encourage early consideration of career choices. Ideally, this should be before the selection of university courses which may assist in choosing a career path as well as during, to help frame focus on individuals eventual post graduate career decisions.

Question 2a: Given that subject choice at 14 and GCSE and A level attainment are critical factors, is there a case for specific incentives to prospective students to take Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects?

The BCSC does not wish to comment save for considering that there is a need for a broad range of subjects to be taught at GCSE and A level, to enable students to make informed choices on future education and/or make career choices.

Question 2b: How could any incentives avoid simply reinforcing the decisions of people who would have chosen STEM subjects anyway?

(see above) No comment.

Question 2c: More generally, is there a case for providing incentives to universities or employers to encourage more young people to study STEM and pursue careers in it?

(see above) No comment.

Question 3: What support and incentives would help universities offer access to the workplace for all their students?

The dissemination of information is critical to career choice, as is the opportunity to provide effective work placement or other experience during a student's education to help frame the career choices of the individual.

This should extend to collaboration with further education based career services and specific Heads of Department who should be encouraged to strengthen ties with certain employers and organizations for the sharing of information and opportunities.

Strategic bodies, such as the BCSC have a role to play in seeking to promote career choices and could potentially assist, through strategic liaison with higher education establishments, in the placement of students in companies and organizations affiliated with the BCSC.

Question 4: How can we help employers better articulate their needs for broad based employability skills?

Effective liaison with industry through strategic organisations such as the BCSC will help define accurate and market facing career frameworks. The BCSC can, in turn, liaise with members and affiliated organisations to ensure such curriculums are vocationally structured and commercially representative to best provide skills sets which match employer requirements and expectations.

This will have a dual function in encouraging greater 'market facing' degrees and higher education courses, potentially with an emphasis on vocational training which may attract greater number of students and go beyond achieving skills levels in equivalent OECD countries.

Question 5: What more can we do to provide more graduates with the language skills and cultural awareness to thrive in a global marketplace?

Greater vocational training as part of university led courses and greater emphasis on European and world markets as part of all courses which are affiliated to commercial, industrial or service sectors of the market.

These can be very effectively undertaken through partnership with strategic sector organisations, such as the BCSC or its sector equivalents, and can extend to providing lecture support, careers advice and in some cases co-sponsorship of vocationally led courses. An example of this is the close affiliation the BCSC has through its shopping centre management courses with the College of Estate Management at Reading University.

Question 6a: What further incentives are needed to stimulate and meet employer demand for high level skills?

Career focused courses which better enable the students learning process in a commercial and business orientated manner, so that upon graduation, the student is able to immediately meet the expectations of a commercial environment and understand the culture of the workplace.

The BCSC appreciates that higher education courses can only go so far to achieving this in isolation, so recommends that all courses consider the extent to which work experience in the relevant sector can be targeted as part of a student's overall higher education.

This requires a careful mix of both education and vocational having to hone both 'hard' and 'soft' skills, both equally in particular to an employer in the market place. It is important students recognize the different requirements of employers and emphasis on adaptability in the work place is critical.

Question 6b: How can we best build on the contributions of further education colleges and providers and their links (in particular) to networks of small and medium sized enterprises?

Stronger relationships can be built through organisations such as the BCSC, which has a wide range of members, focused on companies and organisations in the retail property sector.

Building these links enables wide opportunities within the sector's network and

feedback on higher education and vocational courses. Similar organisations in equivalent sectors of commerce and industry, can, in our view, fulfil a similar role, to the benefit of commercially focused, market savvy courses, backed by work placement and training as part of the relevant subject.

Question 6c: How well does the framework for high level skills support employer engagement?

The framework suggests a number of important elements which should be reinforced, such as a method for matching skills to business needs, and where required, to seek partnerships between universities and other educational establishments and business. Emphasis must also be placed on vocationally realistic higher education courses and the active encouragement of universities to extend the valuable learning experience the student has while undertaking a degree or other course, into the workplace through effective work experience which should be undertaken in liaison with employers in the relevant sector.

This is key to closing any actual or perceived gap between student abilities on the workplace upon graduation, and employer expectations. BCSC is focusing on education and training as part of one of its core activities, given the importance and role which BCSC plays in the retail property sector as a whole.

Question 7a: How can we best work with businesses and employers, Trade Unions and employees to encourage demand for high level skills?

Through effective liaison with organisations such as the BCSC and our equivalents across all relevant sectors.

Question 7b: How can we encourage rapid implementation of an effective framework for credit accumulation and transfer?

Understanding the needs of organisations is paramount to delivering effective higher education.

The BCSC note that generally, employers equate education and qualifications with skills and the ability to learn and that this, in turn, translates to realisation of higher salary expectations which can then be recycled throughout the economy through the economic multiplier. Therefore the ability to deliver 'market ready' graduates will, in turn, lead to faster career progression and greater salary realisation, to the benefit of the UK economy as a whole.

Question 8: Do we have the right incentives to encourage higher education providers to be more responsive to business and employer demand?

It is the view of the BCSC that much more could be done to encourage greater face to face liaison between education and industry. We are unsure how this can be achieved, but at the very minimum there should be active encouragement to involve and include organisations such as ourselves in speaking to students undertaking relevant/industry focussed courses.

Question 9: What should be the key features of a model for regional and sectoral bodies to play a much greater role in solving local skills problems and linking higher education institutions and businesses?

The model employed must provide an effective conduit/gateway with business and industry through the mobilisation of key organisations in business sectors (such as the BCSC in retail property). Effective linkage and partnering, through these organisations, to key companies/employers and education institutions to identify gaps in skills is an important role for flexible and commercial teaching.

Such an approach to the provision of additional teaching/training should also include vocational training for those already in the sector. The BCSC consider there is the opportunity to develop skills through courses affiliated with professional bodies, which can offer the greatest opportunity for bespoke 'on the job' training and the widest range of employer-led job opportunities.

Question 10: How can we encourage Regional Development Agencies and Sector Skills Councils to work together to solve local and sectoral skills needs?

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) should have a key responsibility not only to identify areas of strategic growth in employment but also in likely areas of skills gaps/oversupply at a regional level. RDAs can then effectively liaise with business and commerce to identify market requirements so that sector skills councils can work with education authorities and universities to help formulate programmes to match skills supply with employer demand.

Question 11a: What further incentives are needed in universities – e.g. through internal appraisals, promotion processes – to increase demand from academic staff for business secondments?

Compulsory business secondments could be implemented as part of future recruitment requirement. It would be desirable to supplement voluntary arrangements for those already employed which required, for example, the need to spend at least a period of 6 months in any 5 years within commerce. It is our view that an approach similar to this would enable greater alignment with the sector and up to date experience which would promote greater learning and understanding on the requirements facing students upon graduation.

Question 11b: And how can we encourage movement in the other direction so that business people are increasingly contributing directly to course content, design and teaching?

The role of accredited courses is key in seeking 'buy-in'. As part of these accredited courses, lectures should be given, or supplemented by, experts in the industry who can both impart knowledge and build inspiration.

Question 12: How can we do more to increase the level of STEM skills in the existing workforce?

No comment.

Other comments

Please let us have any other comments not covered by the above.

Please see covering letter.

The information you provide in your response will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations, which allow public access to information held by the Department.

This does not necessarily mean that your response can be made available to the public as there are exemptions relating to information provided in confidence and information to which the Data Protection Act 1998 applies.

You may request confidentiality by ticking the box provided, but you should note that this will not necessarily exclude the public right of access.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply X

All UK national public consultations are required to conform to the following standards:

1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.

Further information on the Code of Practice can be accessed through the Cabinet Office Website: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation-guidance/content/introduction/index.asp>