

Consultation on Skills for Sustainable Growth Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

A response from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

September 2010

Introduction

1. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of over 170 national voluntary youth organisations and regional and local youth networks, NCVYS has been working since 1936 to raise the profile of youth work, share good practice and influence policy that has an impact on young people and the organisations that support them.
2. The NCVYS network reflects the diverse range of voluntary organisations working with young people at community, local, regional and national level. Most of our members offer opportunities to engage in challenging activities or develop creative talents. They also support young people to become active in their communities and offer opportunities for their voice to be heard. Some offer interventions to prevent or tackle specific issues such as homelessness or offending behaviour. Others offer counselling, advice, guidance and information. All contribute to young people's personal and social development; some also engage with spiritual development.
3. For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's Policy Officer, Dominic Weinberg on 020 7278 1041.

Context

4. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Consultation on Skills for Sustainable Growth.

Principles for a skills strategy

5. NCVYS broadly agrees with the principles in Skills for Sustainable Growth, although we would like to emphasise the role of the voluntary and community sector in supporting the most vulnerable groups, providing informal education and training and as an employing sector in its own right.

Recommendation: BIS should continue to support and recognise the distinctive contribution of the voluntary and community sector to skills development. BIS should nurture development of the voluntary and community sector as a viable employer and skills development resource.

6. NCVYS has expressed for some time that the skills system is too complicated. There are too many organisations working in the skills delivery system and their responsibilities are confused. NCVYS members tell us that the skills system is complicated by the large number of bodies that need to be consulted with, the fact that there are often new qualification frameworks to get to grips with, and systems and funding streams which are difficult to navigate and not always accessible. Continuous change within the workforce development world is ultimately unhelpful.
7. NCVYS and our members struggle to engage with all the relevant Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and question whether they are really employer-led bodies. Although they do have employers represented on their board, there is concern that they are not accountable to any memberships (the employers).
8. NCVYS suggests that membership organisations and professional bodies e.g. institutes and trade associations, should have a bigger role to play in meeting the skills gaps and needs of their relevant sector. These bodies have a better understanding of the needs of employers and the occupation or trade due to being in constant dialogue with them. Greater buy-in of employer investment would be achieved if the employer representative bodies were given a bigger role and ownership in leading skills development.
9. NCVYS is also concerned that the skills system is characterised by its own complex language. This makes engaging in skills delivery work difficult and inaccessible and ultimately is a key factor in the disengagement of employers.

Recommendation: Membership organisations and professional bodies should have a bigger role to play in meeting the skills gaps and needs of their relevant sector. This would enable more relevant training opportunities and result in less complexity in the system.

10. A number of NCVYS members would like to develop specialist training or qualifications/units, but have been unable to progress this as their occupational area does not fit under a single Sector Skills Council. These members struggle to find the money and time to progress without any support from a SSC and are unable to develop the skills and knowledge of paid staff and volunteers working with vulnerable young people and families in communities. Examples of this training include: a drug education unit for youth and family workers; a leadership programme targeted specifically at aspiring managers within Foyers (which provide accommodation, education and training services for homeless

young people); a youth advice worker qualification (made all the more urgent given the level of youth unemployment).¹

11. NCVYS thinks the following statement on accreditation is unhelpful: 'Accreditation of existing competence is not enough to make a real and lasting difference to our skills base'. Accreditation of existing competence provides evidence that an individual has already attained a certain level of competence and skill. In place of the above statement the government should be encouraging continuing professional development (CPD), in order for the learning journey to be the continuous process of developing skills and knowledge.

A respected and credible training offer

12. To improve the Apprenticeship programme the Government should put in place a support programme to increase the number of assessors and verifiers. The lack of assessors and verifiers is a significant barrier to the success of the Apprenticeship programme.
13. Apprenticeships could be improved if all sectors (voluntary, public and private) were equally involved in contributing to apprenticeship development. Such apprenticeships should work with a broad spectrum of occupations and meet skills gaps needs, and ultimately provide a viable route to employment and training for young people and adults.
14. Voluntary and community sector training providers should be supported and the procurement system for commissioning improved. The sector has a valuable role to play in skills delivery, particularly assisting under-represented groups/vulnerable individuals to take on apprenticeships. A number of reports from the Learning and Skills Council have documented the importance of this role.^{2 3}

Recommendation: Voluntary and community sector training providers need to be supported to develop apprentices, deliver training and improve commissioning arrangements.

15. The Government needs to make the apprenticeship system easier to access for the individuals and employers. For example, there have been reports of difficulties in finding appropriate training in a local area, and so the necessary infrastructure needs to be in place. The complexity of the apprenticeship model is leading employers in the voluntary and community sector to create their own 'grow your own workforce programmes'. Individuals need clarity on entry routes that lead to apprenticeship programmes and the progression routes after completion.
16. Employers should contribute to Apprenticeships through employer-led bodies leading work to ensure that the frameworks meet the criteria of the relevant trade or occupation. Bodies such as membership organisations, and institutes and trade associations have a better understanding of the needs of employers and the occupation/trade and should have a bigger role in framework design, and other work connected to meeting the skills gaps and needs of their relevant sector.

¹ For further information see: *The Youth Advice Workforce: Now And In The Future*, Youth Access, September 2009 <http://www.youthaccess.org.uk/publications/advice.cfm>

² *Understanding the Contribution of the Third Sector in Learning and Skills*, Learning and Skills Council, September 2009
[http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Understanding the Contribution of the Third Sector in LSC.pdf](http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Understanding%20the%20Contribution%20of%20the%20Third%20Sector%20in%20LSC.pdf)

³ *Transition to the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency: identifying key issues for the third sector*, Learning and Skills Council, May 2009
<http://www.ncvys.org.uk/UserFiles/Training/nat-thirdsectorandtransition-may09.pdf>

17. Employers also need advice, and the system of finding appropriate training providers ought to be simplified. The model of Fair Train⁴, providing a one stop service of advice, information and access to range of training providers, is welcomed. The Fair Train model understands the voluntary and community sector well, particularly as the training providers are employers and service providers too.

Recommendation: Employers need to be given support to understand the apprenticeship system.

18. NCVYS has a number of suggestions of how to support people who might in time benefit from an Apprenticeship but who do not currently have the skills to begin one.

- The National Citizenship Service for young people could be used to prepare them to take on an apprenticeship.
- Pre-apprenticeship programmes, which aim to remove the barriers that prevent individuals from learning, should be introduced for those who require them. The current world of skills delivery is unfortunately one of outcomes e.g. payment by achievement of qualifications. Recognition needs to be made to the work required to remove the barriers to learning e.g. improving confidence, attendance, and literacy and numeracy skills. The voluntary and community sector is very good at providing a holistic approach.
- Some occupational related training may be required before people take on an apprenticeship, so that there is some understanding of the area of work before beginning their apprenticeship, and the individual can also be certain that this is an area of work they wish to commit to for a number of years.
- Individuals need to be prepared for the workplace and have some basic necessary skills e.g. IT, literacy and numeracy, communication, team work. Therefore the attainment of Key Skills/Functional Skills needs to begin at the pre-apprenticeship level. Lessons could also be learnt from the current Foundation Learning programmes.
- A pre-apprenticeship tool or appropriate careers advice should be introduced to help assess whether the subject area of the apprenticeship is the correct one for the individual – this may prevent people from dropping out of the apprenticeship (an issue for Tower Hamlets College and their youth work apprenticeship programme). The use of volunteering is a good way for individuals to test out a career area.
- Build in the possibilities to gain as many other certificates and awards as possible even at any pre-apprenticeship stage.
- Small businesses ought to be incentivised to invest in young people and the local community – e.g. small business offering work placements to young unemployed people could see this recognised in local property rates when leasing from the local authority

Recommendation: There should be a number of opportunities available to support people who in time might benefit from an Apprenticeship. Creative approaches to pre-apprenticeship programmes that work across the voluntary, public and private sector would help create broader training and employment opportunities for young people.

19. NCVYS is not aware of any demand from our employers for Higher Apprenticeships at Levels 4 and 5, although there is a gap at level 4 in the youth work qualifications framework. We do have level 5 Foundation Degrees in place, so it may be confusing to have both a Higher Apprenticeship and a Foundation Degree, which are both vocational but include also academic learning.

20. To prove that the training provides real gains in skills, knowledge and competence and not just the accreditation of existing skills, the Government should give the Qualifications and

⁴ Further information available at <http://www.fairtrain.org/>

Credit Framework a chance to work. QCF qualifications provide the opportunity for learning and assessment to take place through the integration of practical activities in a work based setting with academic activities. Recognised prior learning can take place and learners submit portfolios as they do in NVQs. There are some learning providers who are not offering any taught provision, but instead facilitate learners gaining the units or qualification via the submission of a portfolio.

21. The accreditation of existing skills is needed when they are a necessity for partners and funders, such as local authorities and commissioners, who require the evidence that an organisation has the skilled staff in place. These bodies are typically only satisfied that this can be evidenced through acquiring qualifications.
22. Non-accredited training is popular within the voluntary and community youth sector, particularly amongst volunteers. There are a number of reasons for this: they could already be a skilled professional in another field and offer volunteering time but not seek accreditation; they may excel in their work but struggle with literacy and numeracy problems and find achieving accreditation difficult.
23. Another way to show that training provides real gains in skills, knowledge and competence is through strategies, such as Training Needs Analysis, that ensure that people undertake the required training. They can then assess after training if it has helped to make a difference to improve skills and knowledge e.g. via supervision, peer observation, self reflection exercises, assessment, and feedback from service users. When funding is tight, employers are going to make sure they get value for their investment and assess that it has made a difference to their organisation.

Recommendation: There needs to be further understanding of the training needs of those who work in the voluntary and community sector, and provision to meet those needs.

24. Many voluntary and community youth sector's training organisations already offer a flexible and cost-effective 'needs-led' offer for people who are out of work or at risk of becoming unemployed. One example is the Prince's Trust's Youth Steps training programme.⁵ The Government should continue to support (through improved commissioning arrangements) these training organisations that provide creative and innovative programmes that meet learners' needs.
25. The Learning and Skills Council recognises that 'third sector providers invest considerable time and effort into the recruitment, initial guidance and needs-assessment of their prospective students. Third sector providers tend to take a holistic, rather than a funding-led, approach to learning delivery, with learners offered not just their funded course but also commonly mentoring, one-to-one tutoring and guidance, personal support and job-searching advice. Consequently, third sector learners can extract maximum benefit from their learning.'⁶
26. Colleges and training organisations can best make the transition from learning to work as smooth as possible by offering a holistic approach to remove the barriers referred to above. They should also work in partnership with other organisations and offer work placements. The Learning and Skills Council recognises that the voluntary and community sector has 'strong relationships with other organisations, in both the public and voluntary sectors, and draw on these relationships to engage learners and offer additional support'

⁵ Prince's Trust Youth Steps Training Programme http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/need_help/courses/youth_steps.aspx

⁶ *Understanding the Contribution of the Third Sector in Learning and Skills*, Learning and Skills Council, September 2009, Page 7
http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Understanding_the_Contribution_of_the_Third_Sector_in_LSC.pdf

and that the sector has 'established in-house, simulated, workplace environments or social enterprises that are very effective for those learners who are furthest from the labour market.'⁷

Recommendation: The role of the voluntary and community sector in supporting individuals to make the transition to work should be recognised and this role supported. The voluntary and community sector is very successful at providing creative and innovative programmes that meet learners' needs, and offers a holistic approach that helps support the individuals furthest from the labour market.

Funding and entitlements

27. The Government should introduce a mixture of funding approaches and one way to support those most in need is by an entitlement based approach which means-tests with regards to income. The BIS consultation paper on A Simplified Further Education and Skills Funding System and Methodology⁸ recognises the importance of establishing a nationally defined group of learners who would be entitled to full subsidy where funding allowed, and introducing a locally-determined bursary scheme, where those in need are determined by each college or training organisation.
28. A discretionary pot of money which colleges and voluntary sector training providers can use to meet demands from employers and learners would also be welcomed. Criteria would need to be set, such as the requirement for matched funding (if the learner is not eligible for full support). Evidence would need to be collected to demonstrate the demand and impact it would make, e.g. to the local economy.

Recommendation: A mixture of funding approaches, including entitlements based on income and discretionary pots of money for training providers, would be welcomed.

Helping individuals and employers choose the learning they want

29. For the learning market to work more efficiently, effectively and economically, and to be more responsive and accountable to demand by individuals and employers, there needs to be further exploration of contract levels, as referred to in the BIS consultation paper 'A Simplified Further Education and Skills Funding System and Methodology'⁹. NCVYS believes there could be opportunities to explore consortia arrangements within the voluntary and community sector for training contracts, this would be particularly beneficial for smaller training providers (a different contracting system is required for larger training providers), who often provide specialist training and/or reach out to specific communities and vulnerable groups. Consortia arrangements would enable the Skills Funding Agency to have fewer direct contractual arrangements, and for the sector to have easier and more efficient procurement arrangements in place.
30. NCVYS has been expressing for some time that there are issues regarding procurement and contracting. The Learning and Skills Council has recognised the challenges of setting up consortia arrangements.¹⁰ A previous consultation response expressed that we

⁷ As above

⁸ *A Simplified Further Education and Skills Funding System and Methodology*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, July 2010 <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/f/10-1070-fe-funding-consultation.pdf>

⁹ *A Simplified Further Education and Skills Funding System and Methodology*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, July 2010 <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/f/10-1070-fe-funding-consultation.pdf>

¹⁰ *Transition to the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency: identifying key issues for the third sector*, Learning and Skills Council, May 2009 <http://www.ncvys.org.uk/UserFiles/Training/nat-thirdsectorandtransition-may09.pdf>

welcome 'the recognition that a different approach to procurement for third sector organisations operating as learning providers in local communities is needed. Some voluntary and community youth sector (VCYS) learning providers are not able to operate as independent learning providers, and are unable to seek Learning and Skills Council (LSC) training provider registration, as they cannot survive financially being paid retrospectively for the training that they deliver. Therefore, many voluntary and community youth sector (VCYS) learning providers forge partnerships and contractual arrangements with further education colleges and Local Authorities' (LAs) adult education departments.'¹¹

31. It added 'Many providers are currently paid on outcomes, e.g. when a young person achieves a level 2 qualification. Due to the nature of the sector, a VCYS organisation typically would continue to support a young person even if they were never able to achieve a level 2 qualification. They would recognise achievements that young person had made in terms of attendance, improvement in literacy skills, confidence building, behaviour and skills development. No funding would be forthcoming for the recognition of this work, which puts pressure on the staff within VCYS organisations. To encourage existing VCYS learning providers to continue to offer provision, and attract other VCYS organisations to set up as new learning providers, the outcome-based criteria system needs to change and the procurement system simplified.'

Recommendation: The complexities faced by the voluntary and community sector regarding procurement and contracts should be addressed.

32. Employers are best able to shape the skills system to meet their need if membership and professional organisations are supported to take on responsibility for improving skills for occupations and trades.
33. The Qualifications and Credit Framework needs to be given a chance to embed, and work is required to promote the vast range of qualifications and units on offer. It therefore seems too soon to assess which qualifications have most value for employers and learners. Assessments of the take-up, value and appropriateness of qualifications need to take place at regular intervals and could be made by Awarding Organisations and employer-led bodies. For example, NCVYS has worked in partnership with ABC Awards and the Open University to create its own factsheet about the Vulnerable Young People Worker QCF qualifications, which has been promoted to voluntary and community youth sector employers. NCVYS is also working with ABC to run events for training providers within the sector to promote these qualifications.
34. To improve the accessibility and quality of careers information, advice and guidance services for adults, further promotion of the Next Steps Service is required. Employer-led bodies also have a role to play in providing good quality careers information and advice in relation to the occupational groups they support. NCVYS have produced a range of careers information¹², which could be made available to Next Steps IAG staff. Advice services such as Next Steps IAG and the National Careers Advice Service ought to be made aware of the provision of careers information that can be provided by membership and professional/trade organisations, which have vast knowledge about their own occupational groups/trades. To ensure that the quality of advice is high, Next Steps IAG Services should have achieved the Matrix Quality Standards.¹³

¹¹ *Raising expectations: Enabling the system to deliver*, Department for Children, Schools and Families and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, June 2008

<http://www.ncvys.org.uk/UserFiles/Policy/Policy%20consultation%20responses/NCVYS%20response%20to%20DCSF%20DIUS%20Raising%20Expectations.pdf>

¹² <http://www.ncvys.org.uk/index.php?page=283>

¹³ Further information available at <http://www.matrixstandard.com/>

35. NCVYS is uncertain about the vision for lifelong learning accounts and would welcome further information. We are currently working with SkillsProfile¹⁴ to adopt their SkillsProfile system to allow learners to easily build and maintain a verified record of their skills, qualifications and achievements. This could feed into the vision for lifelong learning accounts.

Recommendation: Membership and professional organisations should be supported to take on responsibility for giving advice and guidance, and improving skills for occupations and trades.

Incentives to train in priority areas

36. Golden Hello Schemes have been popular in encouraging individuals to take up training and qualifications connected to social work and teaching. NCVYS has appealed for a Golden Hello Scheme for youth work, since funding remains the biggest barrier to the take up of qualifications and training in the voluntary and community youth sector.
37. Employer-led bodies are best placed to support training innovation and help employers to access high quality labour market information. They should be given the resources to be able to research and gather labour market information and disseminate to their memberships/sectors.

Recommendation: Membership and professional organisations should be supported to improve training innovation and help employers to access high quality labour market information.

Encouraging a more productive workforce

38. In order for businesses to use skills as a driver of productivity and business improvement NCVYS believes continual promotion of the importance of skills is crucial. Research showing the benefits of investment in skills development could be complemented by case studies demonstrating how employers have invested in creating a highly skilled workforce and the productivity improvements that have resulted.
39. NCVYS is aware that many voluntary and community organisations are cutting training and development and therefore cutting the investment in developing skills. Investment in developing skills ought to be celebrated to ensure that our workforce remains high quality and able to respond to opportunities that can help to sustain the sector.
40. Organisations can be encouraged to increase their leadership and management capability through action learning and networking opportunities for leaders and managers. The voluntary and community youth sector has greatly benefited from the Leadership and Management Programme (a key strand of the Young People's Workforce Reform Programme, managed by the Children's Workforce Development Council).

Recommendation: BIS should promote the importance of skills and provide evidence of how skills development can lead to productivity improvements.

Reinvigorating adult and community learning

41. Productive partnerships with third sector organisations can be encouraged through investment in voluntary and community organisations and the infrastructure organisations that support them. The voluntary and community sector is already good at working in partnership, but relationships with the state and the private sector could be significantly strengthened in some areas.

¹⁴ Further information available at www.purplepassport.com

Measuring success

42. Voluntary and community sector organisations need to measure success not just by the completion of qualifications by learners, but by the achievements these organisations make in helping to remove the barriers that learners (particularly from vulnerable groups) face, which prevent them from entering work and education. Therefore examples of success indicators could include: improving confidence and self esteem, arranging specialist support to address drug addiction problems, to reduce re-offending.
43. The voluntary and community sector is also beginning to develop its use of social impact reporting. This reflects the comment made in Skills for Sustainable Growth: 'Learning is not just about developing skills for employment – learning also helps to create a better society'.

Further comments

44. The primary focus of Skills for Sustainable Growth has been around the provision of training. Although training is one of the key workforce development approaches to contribute to skills development, the sector uses other approaches which still help to increase the skill levels of its workforce, such as mentoring, supervision, learning clusters, peer observations, and networking.
45. Feedback from some NCVYS members indicates that in this difficult financial climate, the voluntary and community youth sector needs to maximise its own workforce development resources, by collaborating and supporting each other. To achieve this, the sector requires some capacity-building support in order to help it identify the workforce development resources that exist. This will empower the sector to value its own resources which contribute to skills development and to encourage maximum usage of these. Examples include training facilities, experienced mentors, assessors, tools and learning packages.

Recommendation: The voluntary and community youth sector needs to be supported as it has a vital role to play in skills delivery of its workforce, the young people that it helps and particularly the vulnerable groups it reaches out to. It can do this in partnership with Government and a wide range of other organisations but requires infrastructure support and investment to allow it to build upon its own resources, unique ability and reach.