

Students Shaping the Post 16 Skills Plan – Executive Summary

In response to Area Reviews, the Sainsbury Review and Post 16 Skills Plan, NUS alongside the Rt Hon Vince Cable MP have worked together with students across England to produce this report aimed to influence the political agenda and public consciousness on reforms to the FE and Skills Sector.

The project was conceived during the summer of 2016 as a response to the lack of consultation and involvement of students in the wave of reforms to the FE sector. All too often the voice of employers is placed front and center of the debate when it comes to vocational education, but we know that students, as key participants within the sector, want the opportunity to shape their learning.

The report sets out a range of policy recommendations and key critical points in relation to the Post 16 Skills Plan and changing FE landscape, outlines a clear vision for what students believe makes excellent vocational teaching and learning and finally makes the case for learner voice to be embedded throughout the vocational and technical education sector.

Key Recommendations

Quality teaching and learning

- A more applied level 2 qualification for English and Maths should be developed and promoted to support students who do not excel at GCSE English and Maths obtain a qualification that gives them a grounding in these core subjects.
- Success measures for students (and providers) shouldn't just rely on grade metrics, but look at the development of the student in the round, taking into account their growth and development.

Work Experience

- Government should ensure that colleges have adequate funding and support to deliver high quality work placements which complement and build on the learning they do in the classroom.
- The Government should provide students with financial support for travel and subsistence to ensure that cost is not a barrier to accessing a good quality, subject appropriate work placement.

Basic Skills and the Transition Year

- A much broader definition of Basic Skills other than English, Maths and digital should be adopted to encompass the breadth of skills students want to acquire to support their progression onto further study, independent living and to play an active part in civic society.

Apprenticeships

- Common standards should be developed for procedures in recruiting, appointing, supporting and reviewing apprenticeships. Every training provider/college should follow consistent procedures and standards for apprenticeships.
- Apprenticeships should include and lead to clear, appropriate and nationally recognised qualifications facilitated and taught by properly qualified teachers and instructors.

Financial support for adult learners

- The Government should review the current maintenance loans proposals to ensure that financial support is available at higher level technical for all courses and qualifications

delivered across the sector, not just at Institutes of Technology or National Colleges.

Lifelong learning

- A voucher style system should be created for older adults from low socio-economic backgrounds to support them with the associated costs of re-entering education and training.

ESOL

- The Government should reverse recent cuts and deliver a sustainable public funding settlement for ESOL provision.
- Responsibility for developing English language skills and ESOL provision should be given to a single government department.

Careers Information, Advice and Guidance

- The Careers Strategy must deliver a funded universal all ages all stages careers service which focuses on delivering tailored careers IAG at key intervention points during a person education and working life.
- There should be substantive careers education delivered through the National Curriculum which addresses a wide range of skills, not just careers.

Citizenship Education

- The Government should improve and expand the provision of Citizenship Education at Key Stages 3 & 4. In addition Citizenship Education should be included in the definition of 'Basic Skills' taught in colleges across all levels and included as a core component of the Skills Plan's Transition Year.

Democratic Engagement

- The Government should lower the voting age to include 16 and 17 year olds in the

franchise, allowing them to vote across the UK in regional and national elections and referendums.

- Providers should offer students the option to register to vote when they enrol on a course or apprenticeship.

Student Voice

- Student and Apprentice panels should be created to sit alongside employer panels to co-lead on the design of standards and assessment plans for the 15 proposed new routes through technical education.
- The board of the Institute for Apprenticeships should create a reserved place for a representative of college-based learners and apprentices. This should be done in conjunction with the establishment of "learner panels" for those who are undertaking classroom based learning, that would sit alongside the already established "apprenticeship panels."
- Mechanisms for student representatives to communicate with local decision makers need to be in place as the devolution of skills policy and funding to local authorities increases.

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