

## **Meeting the Skills Needs of Local Government**

### **Purpose**

For discussion and decision.

### **Summary**

This report invites the Board's comments on the direction the LGA should take in helping councils to get the most out of the system for identifying and delivering workforce skills.

### **Recommendations**

That the Resources Board:

- i. consider the proposed approach to skills-related activity;
- ii. endorse the three proposed principles; and
- iii. endorse the proposal for a sector skills champion.

### **Action**

Officers will take forward any actions agreed by members.

**Contact officer:** Sarah Messenger  
**Position:** Head of Workforce  
**Phone no:** 0207 187 7342  
**Email:** [Sarah.Messenger@local.gov.uk](mailto:Sarah.Messenger@local.gov.uk)

## Meeting the Skills Needs of Local Government

1. The advent of a new Government presents an opportunity for a critical examination of skills needs and provision in England. With the delivery of policy around skills being seen as a prime element in proposals to devolve powers, councils will get an increasing level of responsibility. However the development of a new skills system is a complex issue which encompasses councils' roles not only as local economic champions but also as commissioners and providers of services. Councils' own needs are critical given the drive to integrate health and social care services.

### The Current Skills Context

#### Economic focus & reduction of bureaucracy

2. The main thrust of skills policy (post-education) over the last few years has been on economic development and the role of employers. Some bureaucracy has been removed and there is a greater commissioning role for the Department for Education so that it can aim to have bigger impact in stimulating the economy through the private sector. Little attention has been paid to the skills needs of public sector employers.

#### Focus on young people

3. The secondary focus of skills policy has related to the employment of young people. The LGA has taken a strong line with its series of reports called 'Hidden Talents' which lobby central government around the key theme of helping young people transition into work through skills acquisition – mainly through promotion of apprenticeships and revitalised 'career' support. The most recent report is attached at **Appendix A**.

#### Devolution and Skills

4. Plans for devolution include funding for skills and employment support through councils to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Councils that understand the needs of their local economy will be best placed to use these new powers and funding to not only support their local growth agenda but also help embed employment and skills opportunities in a wider local education offer. The detail is yet to emerge but it is important for the LGA to have conversations with national skills bodies as described in this paper to ensure that they embrace devolution as well.

#### Councils as local employers

5. Whilst it is vital that local government continues to play a significant role in leading the employment and skills agenda for their local area, their role as an employer is just as significant. All jobs, both commissioned and using direct employees are important especially where the economy is weaker and more dependent on public sector employment. A number of challenges facing councils as employers in relation to skills have been identified. These are:
  - 5.1. There is a need to do **more joint procurement** of learning and development solutions between public sector partners and councils;
  - 5.2. Cross-sector working means skills need to be universally recognised and transferrable;

- 5.3. There is a poor understanding of the local and regional **demand and supply issues for skills** and how councils need to respond to them;
  - 5.4. There is a **lack of strategic workforce planning skills** added to poor quality regional and national data to enable the sector to lobby government departments and challenge the way skills interventions are funded;
  - 5.5. There has been a rapid loss of experience, knowledge and skills through workforce reduction which has rendered **succession planning ineffective**;
  - 5.6. There has been a reduction in **investment in training** and development due to government reducing funding to local councils;
  - 5.7. There is a need for more effective ways to pay, reward and engage key workers to **aid recruitment and retention**; and
  - 5.8. There are **skill shortages** in certain key professional roles for example Children's social workers that require regional and/or national interventions.
6. These challenges cannot be solved without a strong skills system where partner organisations work together with Government. The LGA has a key role to play in conversations to make this happen.

### **A Complex skills system**

7. Despite recent changes the skills system in the UK remains extremely complex and the LGA needs to find a way to help councils to get the best out of it. It is often difficult to persuade councils that it is worth engaging with all this because there is not much obvious evidence of delivery. There is a need to look again at the formal role of skills bodies to ensure that they demonstrate clear value for money in their services.
8. One major overall challenge is that the organisations concerned are, by the nature of their remits, focused on particular segments of the local government workforce and/or service areas. The system is poorly understood and does not appear very joined-up. The remainder of this paper describes the organisations the LGA is working with to try and simplify matters.

### **Skills for Justice/Skills for Local Government**

9. Skills for Justice is the official sector skills council for local government and has created a trading arm called Skills for Local Government. Skills for Justice core role is to work with the employers in understanding their skill needs now and in the future and provide the infrastructure and support to address these skills requirements; importantly they help employers to set the required standards/qualifications for certain key roles.
10. At a recent meeting which also involved the National Association of Regional Employers it became apparent that Skills for Justice were unable to support the local government sector without any funding. All sector skills councils have seen their core government funding reduce and now disappear and are now reliant on their employer base funding their activity. Skills for Justice have financial support arrangements with the Fire Service,

Police, Ministry Of Defence and Justice Service employers. Local Government does not have this relationship with Skills for Justice and cannot access any services without paying for them. The challenge therefore is to understand what core services we require from Skills for Justice, if any, to help tackle the key skill challenges we face and how to pay for these services.

### **Skills for Care**

11. Skills for Care is the employer-led workforce development body for adult social care in England, covering around 17,000 employers and a workforce of around 1.5 million. Skills for Care now hosts the National Skills Academy for Social Care and offers workforce learning and development support and resources from entry level through to leadership and management roles. The very fact that Skills for Care covers so many diverse employers is a challenge in itself because the role of councils as the primary commissioners of these services can often be obscured, although efforts have been made to improve this.
12. A recent meeting between Lead Members of the Resources and Community Wellbeing Boards and Skills for Care management agreed an intention to build on the good operational level relationships between the two organisations with stronger joint planning discussions. This is intended to overcome the difficulties caused by a change in Skills for Care governance which removed the LGA's representation on the main Board. The LGA needs the ability to help shape Skills for Care work priorities and also to develop joint projects where suitable.

### **Department for Education**

13. Following the abolition of the Children's Workforce Development Council, the Department has taken direct responsibility particularly for children's social work. This organisational change may or may not have had much effect on the quality of service provided but it has made it somewhat more difficult to influence policy development at an early stage.
14. The policy of the 2010-15 Government was to focus on rapid recruitment and accelerated development of high-calibre entrants to social work through the Frontline and Step-up-to-Social Work programmes. Although these programmes are well-structured and a number of councils participate, the LGA analysis is that what is needed also is a focus on retaining experienced social workers in the workforce which requires a different approach to personal and career development.

### **The College of Social Work**

15. The College of Social Work is a membership organisation that was created partly as a result of the work of the Social Work Task Force. It oversees professional standards for social work.
16. The LGA has had a variable relationship with the College although we supported its development. It will be important to influence the College's work such as the review of the Professional Capabilities Framework to ensure that it helps deliver the skills and competencies needed by councils as the main employers of social workers.

### Health Education England (HEE)/Local Education and Training Boards (LETBs)

17. HEE is responsible for the education, training and personal development of all NHS staff. It supports healthcare providers and clinicians to take greater responsibility for planning and commissioning education and training through LETBs. HEE has oversight of around £5bn of expenditure each year. The current focus is largely on ensuring that predicted demand for specialist medical groups over the next 15 years is met.
18. The LGA has argued that more money should be spent on developing the current workforce, especially in the context of the integration of health and social care; there has been some recognition of this but the current remit is statutory. It will be important to continue to argue for some changes in spending priorities. The LGA has also called for the main committees of LETBs to include a lead local authority Chief Executive as a matter of course.

### Public Health England (PHE)

19. As part of its range of responsibilities PHE has a statutory responsibility to ensure the development of the public health workforce. This is done under a variety of initiatives set out under the umbrella of the national Public Health Workforce Strategy which was published jointly by the Department of Health, PHE and the LGA. Much of the delivery of skills development is done regionally and locally but there are national projects including a talent management system which covers council staff not in direct public health roles.
20. The relationship between the LGA and PHE is an excellent one with many programmes run on a partnership basis and a joint group dedicated to advice and support on development of public health teams. It will be important to ensure that the relationship is maintained and that useful programmes continue.

### Overall conclusions

21. The skills agenda is extremely important and the LGA has a key role in taking things forward by improving engagement on the issues as described. There are three suggested principles which could underpin this work:
- 21.1. The need for a more **simplified and streamlined skills system** that **avoids the issues of duplication and competition** experienced across government departments, quangos and organisations in the system
  - 21.2. The need for a **properly funded delivery model** that takes account of national, regional and local needs based on a set of clear strategic priorities (sector based) that support skills acquisition for adults (post-16) **linked to employer demand**
  - 21.3. The need for **better advice** for organisations and individuals wishing **to access support for their skills needs**, where possible at a local level.
22. The intention would be to use these principles in discussions with Government and in relationships with the organisations discussed.
23. Finally, to help take forward the LGA's views on skills policy and delivery it might make sense to identify a member as a "sector skills champion".