

REPORT TO: Employment, Learning, Skills and Community
Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 14th November 2011

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Policy and Resources

SUBJECT: Employment, Learning & Skills Quarterly Policy
Update

WARDS; All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform the Board of recent national policy announcements relevant to employment, learning and skills.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

2.1 The report is noted.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 A steady flow of policy announcements, consultation exercises, reports and ministerial statements are issued by government departments and agencies that have varying degrees of relevance to issues on the employment, learning and skills agenda and related topics.

3.2 Therefore, it is proposed to provide brief summaries of key announcements in a 'digest' format to the board on a quarterly basis, along with observations of local relevance, where appropriate, so the Board can consider whether to initiate more detailed scrutiny and/or report to a future meeting.

4.0 RECENT KEY POLICY ANNOUNCEMENTS

4.1 Higher Education White Paper

In June the Government issued a white paper [Students at the Heart of the System](#) . This picked-up some of the recommendations of Lord Browne's enquiry into the funding of higher education and student finance (October 2010)

The paper set-out the Government's proposals for the reform and future funding of higher education in England. The key aims of the proposed changes are to deliver:

- a more responsive higher education sector in which funding follows the decisions of learners and successful institutions are '*freed to thrive*';
- a new focus on the student experience and the quality of teaching;

- encourage further education colleges and other alternative providers to offer a diverse range of higher education provision.

COMMENT; Many of the proposals in the White Paper are a significant departure from current arrangements, and will require legislative change. A Higher Education Bill is expected to be announced for the 2012 session of Parliament.

4.2 **DWP Worklessness Co-design Final Report.**

The Department of Work & Pensions ('DWP') worked intensively with five Local Authorities to co-design solutions to local issues of worklessness. This work built on the HM Treasury and Department for Communities and Local Government led initiative "Total Place".

The five Local Authorities involved were Birmingham, Bradford, Lewisham, South Tyneside and Swindon.

The final report explains what has been achieved, lessons learned and the next steps. It also highlights how DWP can work together with Local Authorities, providers, employers and community groups to co-design solutions to worklessness to fit local circumstances and needs. The final report includes a check list for Local Authorities setting out opportunities to work in partnership with JCP and Single Work Programme providers

COMMENT: Much of what the report suggests is already happening to some extent in Halton, especially through the work of the Halton Employment Partnership. Also, the recent work around enhancing partnership working on the theme of developing a stronger local workforce offers opportunities for further progress.

4.3 **Launch of Higher Apprenticeships Fund.**

Trailed in the 2011 Budget and the Government's Plan for Growth, in the summer the Government formally launched a £25 million fund to boost support for up to 10,000 more Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships, especially by small to medium size employers. Higher Apprenticeships, originally introduced in 2009, are aimed at giving firms in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, information technology and engineering the hi-tech skills they need to grow.

COMMENT; This represents a welcome, albeit small, additional funding stream to support efforts to attract and nurture inward investment and growth in the STAM (Science, Technology and Advanced Manufacturing) sectors in Halton. Details can be accessed through relevant local websites such as [Science Halton](#) and [Halton Science - Where Science and Innovation Succeed](#) .

4.4 **Flexible, effective, fair: Promoting economic growth through a strong and efficient labour market.**

As part of the launch of its 'Red Tape Challenge' at the Conservative Party Conference, the Government published a discussion paper setting out guiding principles to its approach for the reform of the UK labour market framework.

The Government wants a labour market that is both strong and efficient. By strong and efficient, it sees a labour market that is:

- **flexible**, encouraging the creation of jobs by making it easy to get people into work and to stay in work;
- **effective**, enabling employers to manage their staff productively;
- **fair**, with employers competing on a level playing field and workers provided with a strong foundation of employment protections.

The document (which can be accessed [HERE](#)) goes on to pose a series of thematic questions. However, there was no commitment to 'next steps' other than the responses are to be fed into the Government's on-going Employment Law Review that may see legislation announced in the next Parliamentary session.

COMMENT; Not unexpectedly, responses have been polarised; on one side a warm welcome to an attempt to remove unnecessary bureaucracy faced by SME's seeking to take on or dismiss employees, whilst the alternative view is that the proposals are the start of an attack on employee's hard-won employment rights and safeguards.

4.5 **Launch of Lifelong Learning Accounts.**

Launched without a great deal of publicity in early October through the Next Steps section of the DirectGov website, Lifelong Learning Accounts are an on-line resource whose objective is to;

'...empower adults to take more control over their learning with clear information and advice on skills, careers and financial support all in one place.'

Account holders will have free access to a number of online tools;

- Skills diagnostic tool to identify their interests, strengths and needs.
- Localised course and job searches.
- A CV builder.
- 'Eligibility checker' to identify Government funding available to them
- Facility to store personal learner information – CVs, skills tests, job & course searches – in one place they can share with an adviser.

More details can be found here [Lifelong Learning Account](#)

COMMENT; A useful resource, albeit requiring some familiarity with IT and the internet. It will be interesting to see what the level of take-up is both geographically and by different sectors of the community.

4.6 **Europe 2020 Strategy.**

Issued earlier this year by the European Union, the core objective of the [strategy](#) is to raise the employment rate for women and men aged 20-64 to 75% in member states by 2020.

There will be two Europe 2020 flagship initiatives;

"An agenda for new skills and jobs: a European contribution towards full employment"

"Youth on the move" - aimed at "enhancing the performance of education and training systems" and "seeking to equip young people properly for labour market needs".

COMMENT: For the next nine years the EU will focus on the delivery of this strategy. Therefore, a significant proportion of its financial resources will be dedicated to achieving the target. The exact implications for Halton in terms of legislation and financial support available should become clearer during spring 2012

4.7 **Liverpool City Region - Building on its Strengths: An independent report.**

This report, commissioned by the Prime Minister, is an independent assessment of the potential for growth, job creation and investment in the Liverpool City Region. Available [HERE](#) .

However, it was only published on Thursday 20th October, as your agenda for today's meeting was being prepared, a verbal update will be made at your meeting.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 5.1 The varied range of issues covered in this report potentially present a number of challenges and opportunities across a number of the Council's current priorities. Each would therefore require a thorough analysis at some point in the future.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 There are no immediate risks or opportunities directly relating to the

information in the report at this point in time. Again, a full assessment could be necessary at some point in the future.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 Not applicable.

8.0 FURTHER INFORMATION

8.1 If members would like a more detailed analysis of any of the issues mentioned in this report, or paper copy of any of the documents referred to, they should contact;

Nick Mannion at Nicholas.mannion@halton.gov.uk 0151 906 4885

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the act.