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Doing things differently:
Step changes in skills & inclusion

National
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INTRODUCTION RECOMMENDATIONS APPENDIX

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‘Skills enable people to find better jobs and secure higher wages. Improving skills helps to address social deprivation, poverty and inequality’

FOREWORD

There has been extensive research into the causes of social exclusion, much of which has identified a lack of skills and other barriers to employment as a key determinant of poverty and alienation. This report focuses on the importance of skills in improving access to employment for three traditionally excluded groups: black and minority ethnic people, disabled people, and offenders and ex-offenders.

The relationship between skills and inequality is complex: in bringing together the skills agenda and the equalities agenda, this report seeks to explore the role skills can play in tackling both worklessness and social exclusion.

While this report addresses each of the three excluded groups in turn, there are many common issues. They are all overrepresented within the NEET population (not in education, employment or training); are underrepresented within the apprenticeship scheme; have high unemployment rates; and are clustered within low skilled work sectors.

Doing Things Differently: Step Changes in Skills and Inclusion examines three key factors. Firstly, the report looks at the barriers which prevent these vulnerable groups from entering education, moving on to examine the barriers which prevent progression through the learning pathway, and finally looking at the barriers to gaining sustainable employment. It then proposes a set of recommendations on how these barriers can be removed.

During the research it has become apparent that many of the initiatives to tackle equality and diversity issues are superficial, focusing only on processes and arbitrary targets. Inflexibility within the structure of the skills system itself, particularly in funding mechanisms can also act against the skills development of these vulnerable learners. The report also argues that stereotypical assumptions about these vulnerable groups serve to stifle potential by perpetuating low aspiration. We must tackle these attitudes by fostering a culture for equality in learning which goes beyond the structures and processes that are in place.

The participation of so many stakeholders in this Inquiry reminds us that addressing these barriers will require a collaborative approach. Social inclusion is a shared responsibility, with all agencies and institutions, and all staff acting across different functions working toward this goal. We must ensure there is a coherent and holistic approach which addresses the varying causes of social exclusion, particularly the complex relationship between the employment and skills agendas, while also taking a personalised approach, which recognises the diverse needs of every individual.

It is time to put inequality in the spotlight; we must define ambitious national skills equality targets and make a commitment to deliver them. This report urges Government, training providers and employers to challenge themselves to 'do things

differently'; we need to move away from an approach to equality and diversity which can often lead to a 'tick box' mentality, and ensure the focus is on real outcomes.

Our thanks go to everyone who took part in the research, including those individuals who participated in the roundtable discussions where lively and candid debate was heard. Particular thanks also go to all those individuals who provided case studies of their personal learning journeys and to our sponsors, the TEC Trust Fund. We are also very grateful to Liane Cresswell who supervised the research and compiled this report.

Jacqui Henderson CBE
Director, Creative Leadership
and Skills Strategies



Gordon Marsden MP
Chair, Associate Parliamentary
Skills Group



INTRODUCTION

Context

In the context of the recession the skills agenda has in part been driven by concerns for rising youth unemployment and the desire to prevent the creation of a ‘lost generation’. However, as this research demonstrates, there are many groups in society who have been facing barriers to employment since well before the recession began, and the current economic climate has only served to exacerbate their exclusion.

As a recent report by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills states, in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods, 54% of the working-age population have skills below Level 2, and 26% have no qualifications at all.¹ It is clear we can not let this under-achievement continue. We must harness this potential to ensure the UK remains competitive in the global arena and can achieve its world class skills target by 2020.²

This report concludes that the skills and employment agendas are inextricably linked, and must be tackled with an integrated approach in order to help remove the barriers to social inclusion. The Leitch Review, and Government’s subsequent policies on skills, emphasise the need to up-skill and re-skill the workforce through a responsive and demand led system.³ However, as this Inquiry demonstrates, if the underlying barriers to inclusion are not tackled first the continued expansion of the existing skills model will only serve to exacerbate existing inequalities.

The Business Case

Addressing inequalities within skills policy is imperative, not just for social justice and societal cohesion, but also for the economy. A report by the Centre for Policy Studies states: ‘youth unemployment loses £10 million every day in productivity to the economy and £20 million every week in Job-seekers Allowance. The life time cost of educational under-achievement will be £18 billion’.⁴

It has been estimated that raising the employment rate of disabled people to the national average could boost the UK economy by £13 billion,⁵ and that investment in prison education could cut reoffending by up to 5%, resulting in a £325 million saving in the costs of incarceration.⁶ The cost of the ethnic minority employment gap through benefit payments and lost tax revenue is estimated at £1.3 billion a year, the cost in terms of lost output is estimated at £7.3 billion.⁷ As the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, John Denham MP, recently stated: “We cannot afford the inequality and discrimination at work which restricts opportunities, wastes talent, and sets artificial limits on people’s careers and prospects”.

1 Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, Skills for Life: Changing Lives, p.13 (2009)

2 Lord Leitch, Prosperity for all in the Global Economy- world class skills (2006)

3 Lord Leitch, Prosperity for all in the Global Economy- world class skills (2006)

4 Centre for Policy Studies, Wasted: The betrayal of white working class and black Caribbean boys, p.6 (2009)

5 Stephen Evans, Disability, Skills and Work: Raising Our Ambitions, p.1 (2007)

6 Professor Tom Schuller, Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning: Learning Through Life (2009)

7 National Audit Office, Increasing Employment Rates for Ethnic Minorities, p.4 (2008)

It is critical in the current economic climate that we seek to better engage these traditionally excluded groups in skills development and training. Greater emphasis on equality in skills policy will maximise the opportunities for all learners to achieve their potential and contribute to a more productive and skilled knowledge economy.

Key themes

This report addresses the skills needs of three disproportionately excluded groups:

- Black and minority ethnic (BME) people
- Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD)
- Offenders and ex-offenders

In addressing these specific groups, this report looks at the impact of both race and identity on social exclusion. However, the Inquiry acknowledges that social exclusion is a complex issue and that factors outside of the scope of this research, such as gender, age and class also impact on social mobility. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, John Denham MP, recently remarked: “New trends that are linked to race, class and identity make the situation much more complex”.⁸

The three groups addressed in this report are extremely diverse; much progress has been made towards addressing inequalities and it would be wrong to assume that all learners within these groups are excluded. Participants in the Inquiry highlighted the varying degrees of success amongst these learners, however, they also noted the persistence of many barriers which have not yet been fully addressed.

The recent report by the Department for Communities and Local Government highlights the need to tackle the complexity of inequality through a much broader and collaborative approach: ‘It means tackling social exclusion, child poverty, poor housing. It means investment in education and skills, creating job opportunities. It means tackling poverty and raising family incomes. This is not a job for one public service or one government department but for us all’.⁹

The majority of barriers identified within this Inquiry were: attitudinal, such as societal preconceptions about the potential of these learners; institutional, such as the inflexibility of structures; or cultural, such as the lack of a tradition for participation in certain work sectors. Many of the barriers identified within this report also apply to other disadvantaged learners outside the remit of this Inquiry; addressing these key issues will, therefore, widen skills provision for a large number of learners in society and contribute towards greater social mobility.

8 Department for Communities and Local Government, Speech by Rt Hon John Denham MP, Tackling Race Inequality, 14th January 2010 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/speeches/corporate/tacklingraceinequality>

9 Department for Communities and Local Government, Tackling race inequality: A statement on race, p.12 (2010)

Outlined below are the key themes drawn from evidence to this Inquiry:

Careers Education and Guidance

Careers education and guidance was widely criticised by participants in the Inquiry. Inadequate careers guidance can fail to challenge preconceived assumptions about the potential of these three groups of learners. These attitudes can be reinforced by the low expectations which parents, training providers and employers often hold for these learners. Subsequently these groups of learners are steered into low skilled, stereotypical work sectors serving to perpetuate the cycle of inequality. Participants argued that careers guidance must be learner-centred. Greater professional development of those involved in delivering careers guidance is critical, particularly the use of specialised training to ensure that guidance is tailored to the needs of different learner groups. This was similarly identified by the Skills Commission Inquiry into information, advice and guidance which noted that high quality careers guidance, ‘increases equality of opportunity’.¹⁰

Funding Methodology

Current skills funding methodology was widely criticised by participants for its inflexibility. This was largely attributed to target driven mechanisms which emphasise processes and accreditations over other outcomes, further compounding a ‘tick box’ mentality to equality and diversity. Participants welcomed the UK Commission for Employment & Skills’ (UKCES) emphasis on ‘simpler and more flexible funding’, and its recommendation to give greater autonomy to training providers to enable them to be more responsive to learner demand.¹¹ The new Government skills strategy, which will allow outstanding colleges enhanced freedoms to use their resources more flexibly, was also welcomed.¹² However, participants argued that these freedoms should be widened to include those colleges which perform particularly well on equality and diversity provision.

Machinery of Government Changes

Participants in the Inquiry raised significant concerns about the machinery of Government changes, as outlined in the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act (2009), and the impact of these new arrangements on these particular learners. Participants welcomed the devolution of responsibility for skills commissioning to local authorities; however, the Inquiry also identified that this new power must be accompanied by greater transparency and accountability at the local level, through the regular publication of data on skills attainment and learner progression. Participants also stressed the need for coherency and collaboration across the skills agencies created under the new legislation, to ensure that vulnerable learners do not ‘fall between the cracks’.

Apprenticeships

There is severe underrepresentation of these three groups of vulnerable learners within the apprenticeship framework. National Apprenticeship Service full apprenticeship

10 Skills Commission, *Inspiration and Aspiration: Realising our Potential in the 21st Century*, p.31 (2008)

11 UKCES, *Towards Ambition 2020: skills, jobs, growth* p.27 (2009)

12 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *Skills for Growth*, p.16 (2009)

funding is available for 16-18 year olds, reducing to around 50% for those aged 19 and over. Participants noted that this can disproportionately affect BME and disabled learners who are more likely to use non traditional pathways into higher levels of learning, and therefore more often take up apprenticeships at a later age. The Skills Commission Inquiry into apprenticeships also identified this discrepancy: ‘reducing apprenticeship funding at 19 years old deepens inequality by stifling levels of progression to advanced apprenticeships for the large group of learners who develop later than average’.¹³

Employment

While skill levels are a key factor in determining employability, even skilled learners from these groups face difficulties in progressing into employment, demonstrating that there are other underlying barriers to inclusion in the labour market. Participants to the Inquiry supported the view that employer attitudes can act as a barrier to employment for these three groups, particularly preconceived assumptions about the ability of these learners as well as restrictive recruitment policies. A perceived difficulty in recruiting and supporting these learners is also exacerbated by a lack of awareness amongst employers of the support mechanisms available. The clustering of vulnerable learners within stereotypical work sectors can partly be attributed to a failure of careers guidance. A lack of access to societal networks within particular industries and work sectors can also act as a barrier to employment.

Additionally, participants noted that many of these learners are acquiring skills that often do not best meet the needs of employers in their local labour market. Furthermore, target focused funding criteria result in an emphasis on the attainment of qualifications, meaning that many of these learners suffer disproportionately from a lack of ‘soft skills’ such as communication and leadership, which employers often tend to value above qualifications. However, participants also noted that qualifications which recognise achievement can serve to boost the self confidence of those from disadvantaged backgrounds, encouraging them to continue their engagement with learning. It is essential that any skills policy addresses this balance between the need for accreditation and the achievement of ‘soft skills’.

Diversity

Despite the recurrence of these issues throughout the Inquiry, it is important to emphasise that these groups of learners are not homogenous. The wide ranging skills needs of these learners, and the different challenges which each individual faces, highlight the need for a person-centred approach to skills policy: ‘one size does not fit all’. The Inquiry identified the need for further analysis of skills and employment data, and for this data to be disaggregated and differentiated, in order to better monitor the disparities across all groups in society. However, the collection of data should not be seen as an end in itself, but should be analysed and effectively used to develop more targeted strategies.

13 Skills Commission, *Progression Through Apprenticeships*, p.36 (2009)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Black and Minority Ethnic Learners

Recommendation

The Department for Children, Schools and Families should urgently expand its work in partnership with both specialist voluntary sector organisations and local authorities to develop media communication tools in order to help inform the parents of BME learners about the different learning choices available to young people. If necessary, additional resources should be invested in order to achieve this aim.

Recommendation

The National Apprenticeship Service should launch a specifically targeted campaign to raise awareness about the apprenticeship scheme amongst BME communities, through promotional material directed at both learners and employers. This campaign should include the use of role models in non traditional sectors, and increased information about the support mechanisms available to small and medium sized employers.

Recommendation

The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Training and Development Agency should continue to develop resources which address negative aspirations for BME learners, and ensure these become integral components of training and Continued Professional Development for both teachers and careers advisors. This training should be developed to include information on the wide ranging expectations and outcomes of different ethnic groups. Such measures should also be reflected at higher education (HE) level, with the Office for Fair Access encouraging HE institutions, particularly the Russell Group universities, to participate in careers guidance at institutions with a high BME student population.

Recommendation

The remit of the Department for Work and Pensions' Ethnic Minority and Employment Taskforce and concurrent Ethnic Minority Advisory Group should be expanded to include skills policy. This Taskforce should have a clear leadership structure and be made a cross-departmental working group covering the Departments for: Work and Pensions; Business, Innovation and Skills; Children, Schools and Families; and Communities and Local Government. This cross-departmental collaboration should be replicated at the local level. Local learning providers such as Further Education colleges, Connexions services and Job Centre Plus should share ownership of equality and diversity targets, and be monitored by local authorities as part of their new skills commissioning role.

Recommendation

Sector Skills Councils, particularly those representing sectors with low numbers of BME workers, should encourage employers to form partnerships with learning providers with high numbers of BME students. This arrangement should be formalised through the Education and Employers Taskforce.

Recommendation

The pilot scheme in equality procurement, which the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Children, Schools and Families have undertaken, should be rolled out across all Government departments in an initial 5% of selected contracts, with a clear and progressive plan to gradually increase this percentage as the scheme develops. The lessons learnt from the pilot show that robust equality and diversity requirements need to be reinforced through assistance to contractors in the initial stages, as well as through clear sanctions for poor performing contractors.

Offenders and Ex-Offenders

Recommendation

The Ministry of Justice should further explore the inclusion of education and training programmes within the sentencing process, particularly for offenders serving short term sentences, including those who are on remand or licence recall.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Justice should work towards a culture change within the prison system by making participation in education and training an integral part of the daily prison regime. Additionally, prison staff should be enabled to encourage offenders to participate in learning, through the use of incentives such as wing privileges.

Recommendation

Careers information and advice services (CIAS) within prison should be made aware of the full range of learning and skills opportunities available, including those which fall outside the remit of mainstream OLASS funding, and promote these opportunities to offenders.

Recommendation

The Government should continue to invest in the development and implementation of the Virtual Campus learning environment, and continue to develop online learning technologies and resources for prisoner skill development.

Recommendation

A quarterly best practice sharing forum should be set up at the regional level between all relevant providers, including HM Prison Service, HM Probation Service, NOMS and OLASS. This forum should be an opportunity for providers to reflect on, and commission according to, the new Comprehensive Area Assessment reports.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Justice should explore the expansion of release on temporary licence for work experience and work trials, and set up an employer network where exemplar employers can share best practice of recruiting and employing ex-offenders.

People with Disabilities

Recommendation

The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) should undertake a full equality and diversity impact assessment of current apprenticeship funding criteria and apprenticeship frameworks. This should include a re-evaluation of functional skill entry requirements, as well as the possibility of widening such criteria to include a greater variety of ability measures.

Recommendation

In light of recent legislation, the Government should reissue guidelines for local authorities regarding their duty to provide the learning difficulty assessment. The Government should also issue information targeted at disabled learners and their parents regarding their entitlement to this assessment, including how and when this assessment will be carried out.

Recommendation

Disability awareness training for teachers and careers advisors should be further extended, with the introduction of specific qualifications for careers advisors who choose to specialise in provision for disabled learners.

Recommendation

Government should ensure that local authorities, within their new skills commissioning role, collect and publish robust and accurate data regarding the skills attainment and employment rates of disabled learners in their area, and ensure that this data is effectively used for planning, commissioning and oversight.

Recommendation

Training providers who score highly on equality and diversity provision within their Ofsted reports should be rewarded by Government with a more flexible funding allocation. Government should also publish clear guidelines and develop training resources, for Further Education colleges on how the Foundation Learning framework can be used to fund work placements and supported employment programmes. Specific attention should be paid to the use of the Additional Guided Learning hours.

Recommendation

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) should encourage employers to promote equality and diversity in their employment practice and to specifically target underrepresented groups within their sector. SSCs should champion those employers who are successful in engaging with disabled people.

Recommendation

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions should work with the National Apprenticeship Service, Skills Funding Agency and Young People's Learning Agency to simplify funding mechanisms that support disabled people in both learning and work. A more coherent funding system should be developed which imposes less bureaucratic burdens on employers and individuals.

APPENDIX

Research methodology

The National Skills Forum, in association with the Associate Parliamentary Skills Group, held a series of roundtables with key experts and stakeholders from across the skills and equalities agendas. The findings and evidence from these discussions form the basis of this report. These meetings were chaired by Gordon Marsden MP, Chair of the Associate Parliamentary Skills Group, and Jacqui Henderson CBE, Director of CLASS Ltd and Trustee of the Tec Trust Fund.

The Inquiry was also informed by written evidence collected from an open consultation, as well as interviews with key stakeholders including Government agencies, MPs, training providers, employers and third sector organisations. Please visit www.policyconnect.org.uk for full evidence submissions.

Participants and Contributors

Roundtable 1

BME Learners

Dr. William Ackah	Birkbeck College, Lecturer in Voluntary and Community Studies
Dr. Husna Ahmad	Faith Regen Foundation, Chief Executive
Tunde Banjoko OBE	LEAP, Chief Executive
Femi Bola	University of East London, Director of Employability
Paul Butler	LSC London, Lead Board Member on Equalities
Alan Christie	EHRC, Director of Policy
Jaine Clarke	NAS, National Apprenticeships Director, Business Development
Jeremy Crook OBE	DWP Ethnic Minority Advisory Group, Vice Chair / BTEG, Director
Jacqui Henderson CBE	CLASS Ltd, Director
Sandra Kerr	Race for Opportunity Campaign, National Director
Robin Landman	Network for Black Professionals, Chief Executive
Kate Lloyd	ConstructionSkills, Equality and Diversity Manager
Anne Madden	EHRC, Head of Education, Skills and Employability Policy
Emy Onuora	BME Education Strategy Group, Co-Chair
Chanelle Rogers	Ufi, Partnership Manager, London Region
Julia Tyson	Wates Construction, HR Director
Baroness Verma	Conservative Spokesperson for Universities and Skills
Caroline Waters	BT, Director of People and Policy

Roundtable 2

Offenders and Ex-Offenders

Jane Bateman	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Head of Offender Learning
Simon Boddis	National Offender Management Service, Deputy Director of Offender Employment and Skills
Frances Crook	The Howard League for Penal Reform, Director
Bobby Cummines	UNLOCK, Chief Executive
Alan Duncan MP	Conservative Shadow Minister for Prisons
Maria Eagle MP	Minister of State, Ministry of Justice
Jacqui Henderson CBE	CLASS Ltd, Director
Shanie Jamieson	Kensington and Chelsea College, OLASS Director
Malcolm Jenkin	London Probation, Director of Interventions
Pat Jones	Prisoners' Education Trust, Director
Juliet Lyon CBE	Prison Reform Trust, Director
June Marriott	HM Wormwood Scrubs Prison, Education Manager
Gordon Marsden MP	Associate Parliamentary Skills Group, Chair
Sue O'Hara	LSC, Offender Learning Director
Anne Pike	Open University, Former Offender Learning Co-ordinator
Malcolm Thomson	CLINKS, Project Manager
Jackie Worrall	NACRO, Director of Policy and Public Affairs

Roundtable 3

Disabled People

Simone Aspis	Alliance for Inclusive Education (Allfie), Campaigns and Policy Co-ordinator
Stephanie Betts	London North Aimhigher, Disability Programme Manager
Huw Davies	BASE, Chief Executive
Joyce Deere	Ofsted Inspector
Madeleine Durie	NAS, Director of Policy Performance and Funding
Christine Haugh	Middlesex University, Disabled Student Programme Manager
Jacqui Henderson CBE	CLASS Ltd, Director
Mary-Lynne Jones	Lewisham College, Head of Supported Learning
Dr. Graham Jowett	The Association of National Specialist Colleges (Natspec), Vice Chair
Peter Lauener	Young People's Learning Agency, Chief Executive
Andrea Lewis	Skill: National Skills Bureau for Students with Disabilities, Policy Director

Peter Little OBE	Independent Chair of DCSF LLDD Advisory Group/Skill: National Skills Bureau for Students with Disabilities, Trustee
Lord Low of Dalston CBE	Royal National Institute of Blind People, Vice-chair
Gordon Marsden MP	Associate Parliamentary Skills Group, Chair
Barbara McIntosh	Foundation for People with Learning Difficulties, Director
Jonathan Shaw MP	Minister for Disabled People
Paul Warner	Association of Learning Providers, Director of Employment and Skills

Written contributions

[A4E](#)
[AimHigher Greater Merseyside](#)
[Arts Council England](#)
[CASCAiD](#)
[Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion](#)
[City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development](#)
[CRISIS](#)
[Coventry City Council](#)
[DCSF](#)
[Equalities and Human Rights Commission](#)
[Energy & Utility Skills](#)
[HMP Ford](#)
[Learning and Skills Council](#)
[Learning and Skills Council, London Region](#)
[Lewisham College](#)
[National Apprenticeship Service](#)
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[NIACE](#)
[OCR](#)
[Prisoners' Education Trust](#)
[Prospects](#)
[Remploy](#)
[SummitSkills](#)
[Switchback](#)
[Ufi/ Learndirect](#)
[UKCES](#)
[Working Chances](#)
[YWCA](#)

Additional meetings

Dr. Mary Harris OBE	Director of the Young Offenders Programme, National Grid
Robert Holland	Policy Officer, Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
Yola Jacobsen	Programme Director, NIACE
Barry Sheerman MP	Chairman Select Committee for Children, Schools and Families
Chris Sims	Policy and Strategy Advisory, City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development
Sharon Walker	Research and Policy Officer, City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development
Geoffrey Wolfson	Trustee, Prisoner's Education Trust
Dianah Worman OBE	Diversity Director, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Case Studies provided by:

[Association of Accounting Technicians \(AAT\)](#)
[Blue Sky](#)
[City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development](#)
[Faith Regen Foundation](#)
[Local Employment Access Projects \(LEAP\)](#)
[Lambeth College](#)
[Lewisham College](#)
[Learndirect](#)
[Meganexus](#)
[The Prisoners' Education Trust](#)

Glossary of Terminology

CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessments
CPD	Continued Professional Development
DBIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DCSF	Department for Children Schools and Families
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EHRC	Equalities and Human Rights Commission
EMAG	Ethnic Minority Advisory Group
ESOL	English for Speakers of other languages.
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
LLDD	Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
LSC	Learning & Skills Council
MIAP	Managing Information Across Partners
NAS	National Apprenticeship Service
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
OLASS	Offenders' Learning and Skills Service
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
RARPA	Recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
SMEs	Small and medium sized enterprises
SSC	Sector Skills Council
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
YPLA	Young People's Learning Agency
Level 2:	5 GCSEs at A*-C or equivalent
Level 3:	2 A-levels or equivalent

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