

Reforms to technical education: the vital role of career education and guidance

In November 2015 the then Minister for Skills, Nick Boles MP, established an independent panel to advise on measures to improve technical education in England. The panel, chaired by Lord Sainsbury, reported in April 2016 and the Government published its response to the 'Sainsbury Panel' report as a Post-16 Skills Plan in July 2016.

This statement represents the CDI's response to both the Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education and the BIS and DfE Post-16 Skills Plan. The Career Development Institute (CDI) is the UK-wide professional body for everyone working in career education; career information, advice and guidance; and career coaching.

Technical education within the education and training systems

We have not attempted to provide a detailed response to each of the 34 recommendations in the original report and the Government's responses to those recommendations. Instead we have focussed on the overall direction of the report and the BIS & DfE Plan, and the specific issues that relate directly to the work of our members and the needs of individual young people and adults whom our members support.

We agree with the need to raise standards and to rationalise existing qualifications. We therefore welcome the Government's endorsement of the recommendations to establish a framework of 15 routes covering all employment-based and college-based technical education at levels 2 to 5. This will make it much easier for young people and adults to understand what options are available, and for careers professionals to support those individuals.

In addition, we were particularly pleased to see the Panel's recognition that not all 16-year-olds who are considering technical education will be ready to access such courses when they complete compulsory schooling and that they should be offered a 'transition year' to help them prepare for further study or employment. We welcome the Government's commitment to undertake further work on the 'transition year' and to draw on approaches that have proven successful in the past. We believe that the programme should be designed not only to help the students develop the skills to succeed on courses of technical education but also to give them opportunities to try out different vocational areas, building on the best of pre-vocational courses such as the former Diploma of Vocational Education.

Careers education and guidance

The Sainsbury Panel Report quite rightly identifies the vital role that careers education and guidance will play in the success of a reformed technical education system. It recommends that the Government should adopt the Gatsby benchmarks as the basis of a common national approach to careers education and guidance. The Panel goes on to say that the Government should support schools and colleges to embed details of the 15 new routes into their careers programmes and that the National Careers Service should review how it presents information on technical education to its clients.

In its response the Government re-states its plan to publish a new strategy to reform careers education and guidance but provides no further details. It is vital, not just for the reforms to technical education but for the wider skills agenda, that we remove the current patchiness and inconsistency in careers provision for both young people and adults as a matter of priority. Reforms to education and training qualifications are an important part of meeting the skills challenge but if we are to grow the economy and ensure prosperity for everyone, all individuals will need high quality career education, information, advice and guidance on the routes available and how to access them.