



## Business North Call for Evidence EDUCATION & SKILLS FOR BUSINESS

### **Business North**

Launched in February 2016, Business North is a united voice, open to all northern business leaders and representing the voice of business on issues of economic growth in the North. Firms of all sectors and sizes are welcome to join as well as representative bodies and national organisations that have significant interests in the north.

The group provides thought leadership on issues affecting the north and will challenge and support the government on issues that are truly pan-northern. In order to gather the views of the business community, Business North is conducting a series of 'calls for evidence' on key economic issues. This call for evidence concerns education and skills.

### **Background**

A region's biggest asset is its workforce, and investment in the north needs to focus on skills as well as connectivity. This was stressed in the 2016 report of the National Infrastructure Commission and the same theme has been taken up by experts in both education and economic development. An analysis by the OECD found that improving skills levels across the population, particularly among those with 'low or no' qualifications, was a priority for regional growth in the north of England.

Key challenges for the North include:

- Qualification levels *below* the national average (71.5 per cent. of the population are qualified at NQF Level 2 or above, compared to 73.4 per cent. nationally).
- Students in the north have *lower* average levels of attainment than those in the south at every stage from the early years to GCSE (despite some areas of high performance).
- Excellent universities but lower rates of progress to higher education for northern pupils.
- Resources needed to make the most of newly-devolved powers and frameworks for vocational and technical education.
- An ageing population necessitates investment in lifelong learning and retraining.
- Historically lower investment in workforce development leading to a lower skills base in the existing workforce.

### **Questions for Business**

As well as telling us about the primary sector in which your business operates and the size and locations of your business and your workforce, we would welcome your responses to these **five** questions:

1. In understanding the impact of skills on your business and your workforce:
  - Does your business take a strategic view on workforce development?
  - Have you identified the skills you need over the next five years and mapped them against your existing skills base?
  - Do you anticipate significant changes in the skills requirements of your business in the short to medium term?

- What are the main priorities for your business in skills and education? What kinds of opportunity, resources or policy do you think your business needs from government, education providers or the public sector in order to deliver these priorities?
2. Has your business encountered any difficulties in getting the skills you need over the past two years? What kinds of difficulties have you experienced, and how has it impacted on your business? How did you try to overcome these issues?  
For example did you encounter any of the following?
- Not enough people who apply for jobs have the skills needed.
  - Your current employees lack the skills they need to do the job.
  - Changes in technology or ways of working mean that people have to learn new skills.
  - It's difficult to find training that meet your needs (and if so why is it unsuitable?).
  - Your employees don't want to do training and skills development (and if not, why not)?
  - Any other difficulties in getting the skills you need?
3. Are there particular kinds of skill which are essential for your business or your plans for your business, but which you have found hard to get? What kinds of problem have you encountered in getting these skills for your business? How did you try to overcome these? We are particularly interested in difficulties you may have had in getting the following kinds of skill:
- Specialist knowledge or niche skills for your industry or for a particular role within it.
  - Problem solving, decision making, and/or creativity.
  - Communication and/or 'people' skills.
  - Management and leadership skills.
  - The willingness and ability to learn new things quickly and/or to assimilate information.
  - Basic literacy skills and/or numeracy skills.
  - Any other specific area of skills.
4. How have recent policies on skills impacted on your business? We are interested in your views on your awareness of and familiarity with, the impact for your business of, and the good and bad points of policies including:
- The Apprenticeship Levy.
  - Funding for further education and adult education.
  - The Employer Ownership of Training initiative.
  - Elements of skills policy which have been devolved to Local Authorities/LEPs/Combined Authorities, for example under the City Deals and Growth Deals.
  - Any other areas of skills policy.
5. It's important that employers have a voice in shaping the content of training, and also the ways in which it is provided. What kind(s) of involvement would be most practical and useful for you and your business? Are there any kinds which you don't think would be worthwhile for you? Some possibilities might include:
- Opportunities to work directly with schools, colleges, universities and training providers.
  - Representation of employers via LEPs or on sub-groups of LEPs.
  - Via business bodies such as the CBI, the Chambers of Commerce, Business North, or sector organisations.
  - Via a new and bespoke kind of approach.
  - Any other kind of engagement.

***How to respond***

Our call for evidence is open until 31 December 2017. However, submissions sent before the end of October 2017 will be collated for a short statement ahead of the Autumn Budget. Submissions of no more than 3,000 words, can be made in writing and sent to [north@ippr.org](mailto:north@ippr.org). Please indicate whether or not you are willing to have your submission made public on the Business North website.

***Next steps***

A short statement will be developed in early November and used by Business North representatives in discussions with government and other local and regional bodies ahead of the Autumn Statement. A full statement and summary of the call for evidence will be produced and published in early 2018.

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