

Future-Ready Skills Commission Interim Report feedback	
Recommendation	Yorkshire Universities response
<p>1. Careers information needs to be relevant to the local labour market and empower individuals to make informed decisions.</p>	<p>Careers information should reflect local labour market information. At the same time, Yorkshire Universities (YU) members are developing the skills of people who will work eventually in international, national and regional labour markets and sectors. We want to create more opportunities for talent to flourish in the region. Equally, it is also important that careers information adopts a broad horizon and forms part of the process of attracting employers from all over the world to recruit from within Yorkshire.</p> <p>Universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs) provide valuable and effective careers advice and guidance services informed by national and local labour market intelligence and other information. The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) is a professional association for HE careers practitioners, and it provides advice and develops best practice across the sector. AGCAS is establishing a ‘task and finish’ regional working group to strengthen knowledge and understanding on regional and local labour markets and skills issues relating primarily to graduates. This will elevate and enhance further the data and analysis underpinning HE careers information and advice, based on high-quality evidence and intelligence on local and regional labour markets and business trends and recruitment patterns. YU will be joining the AGCAS working group.</p> <p>A huge number of university degree courses include employability skills and compulsory careers sessions. Many HEIs also offer extra-curricular schemes to help students to develop the ‘soft skills’ valued by employers. The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) quality assessment mechanism is based, in part, on metrics covering employment and graduate transition into the workplace. Therefore, universities and other HEIs have a strong incentive to ensure that students are given effective information and skills to access quality jobs after study.</p> <p>As part of their access arrangements, HEIs in Yorkshire are doing more to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds utilise university careers services, which include mentoring advice, access to alumni networks or specialist careers outreach programmes.</p>
<p>2. Employment and skills should be integrated within local housing, transport and environment strategies.</p>	<p>We need an integrated approach to local and regional development that encompasses research and innovation, employment, skills, enterprise and infrastructure. Some of the tools required to support development are best deployed at a local/sub-national/regional level, others at a national level, but</p>

	<p>alignment of national priorities with local and regional strategies is vital regardless of what form of devolution model exists.</p> <p>Having access to affordable and reliable transport improves the opportunities for individuals to access learning and employment. Poor quality transport infrastructure in parts of Yorkshire acts as a drag on productivity and undermines social mobility. In Greater Manchester, a new travel card giving Greater Manchester's 16 to 18-year-olds the freedom to travel, work and learn has been launched. This is seen by Greater Manchester as playing a vital part in creating a 'UK-leading skills system', and in increasing inclusive growth within and across parts of Greater Manchester. Regions need the tools to integrate policy and investment across different thematic areas, and the space to experiment and learn from success or otherwise. Integration of skills with other economic development functions would be more impactful were local and regional discretion more evident.</p>
<p>3. The local approach to skills, employment and health needs to be joined up to support progression to work.</p>	<p>Helping more local people into work and making employment pay and rewarding is an important priority in Yorkshire, where too many people are struggling with in-work poverty and precarious employment. At the same time, in order for people to secure quality, productive jobs and to address the challenges of technological change, we need clear progression pathways for more individuals to gain higher level skills levels – up to levels 7 and 8 – as this will contribute towards improved productivity.</p>
<p>4. The skills offer for businesses needs to be simplified through coordination at the level of functional economic areas.</p>	<p>Because of its highly-centralised nature, the post-16 skill system in England has been subject to constant change and churn and remains complicated for individuals, business and communities to navigate.</p> <p>LEPs and other institutions, such as Combined Authorities or Metro Mayors, can play an important role in providing information and advice for business on skills and business activities. However, other actors, such as universities, colleges and other learning providers, have established relationships with businesses (including membership bodies, headquarters and supply chains) in the region and at national and international levels, driving skills development, enterprise and research and innovation activity. These arrangements will continue. There is merit in considering the development of shared and consistent messages within regions and city-regions, utilising membership bodies, such as Yorkshire Universities, but communications with business will inevitably be multi-faceted given the diverse nature and multi-level geographies that shape business and public sector organisation activities.</p>

<p>5. Investment in technical education and skills should be increased to sustainable levels.</p>	<p>Further Education (FE) has been seriously under-funded for years, and as a key element of local and regional skills systems the sector requires sufficient resources to prepare individuals for work, higher-level forms of education and support for businesses to attract and retain skilled workers in key sectors. We need the FE and HE sectors, which enable individuals to realise their ambitions, and work for communities, the economy and society, to both be funded appropriately. A strong and vibrant college sector is valuable to universities and the world-class HE sector we have in Yorkshire, and both are pivotal to driving higher level skills. Taking funding away from one part of the system to ‘redistribute’ to another part will undermine skills improvements. We should be calling for a greater level of investment in the system overall.</p> <p>Universities work closely with FE and business in Yorkshire, helping to support integrated career pathways that are industry-relevant, meet defined skills needs, and provide coherent progression and flexible opportunities to engage in learning. The University of Hull and York St John University, for example, are part of a regional consortium with the FE sector that is developing the first Yorkshire Humber Institute of Technology, which will support high-level technical skills.</p>
<p>6. Greater collaboration is needed in order to spread good workplace practices to improve business performance and productivity.</p>	<p>Greater collaboration between education and training institutions and sectors – and between business, employer and workforce representatives – is essential to underpin effective ‘planning’ for skills development in regions and to align particular sector and institutional strategies and investment. Work as part of supply chain activity or ‘cluster’ formations can also impart good practice in relation to product and process innovation and business performance and productivity. This provides further evidence of the value of integrating skills, with innovation, business support and enterprise support. In addition, there are opportunities to enhance workforce performance and productivity via coordination and investment through the leading HE management / business schools in the region.</p>
<p>7. The learning offer should be simplified and made more affordable, with the right level of finance that removes barriers to access and supports progression in learning.</p>	<p>It is important to make a clear distinction between funding and financing. Finance suggests that there is a pay-back on investment (i.e. loans). This seems like a sensible recommendation to improve awareness and understanding amongst individuals to access resources to undertake re-training. This recommendation should relate to both FE and HE, and relate to measures that address Equivalent or Lower Qualifications, support for part-time undergraduate study, support for mature students, Masters and doctoral studies, etc.</p>

	<p>It is important to note that Universities UK has campaigned for the introduction of maintenance grants for students who need financial assistance, recognising that concerns about living costs is a greater deterrent than the level of university fees for the majority of students.</p>
<p>8. Employers need to be motivated to train and re-train staff and support progression at all levels, including those in lower paid work to gain higher level skills.</p>	<p>This is a sensible proposal, and it is important that measures here include the higher education sector. The motivations for employers to invest in training and development are multiple, but the evidence points towards the fact that the successful businesses and organisations are the ones that invest continually in their people. The Commission should consider the scope of skills training the Apprenticeship Levy can support and what innovations can be brought to this process. For example, the West Midlands is the first combined authority (CA) in the country to officially support levy transfers. The CA works with large employers to transfer unspent levy funds – money that would otherwise be lost to central government – to local SMEs in need of apprenticeship funding. It keeps investment within the West Midlands, helping to support young people, and develop core skills in the region. So far, large employers in the West Midlands have transferred £4.2 million of levy funds in three months. We therefore welcome the steps being taken in Leeds City Region to encourage employers with unspent levy to fund apprenticeships in other local businesses and/or fund more apprenticeships in their own organisation. And that more levy funding paid by Leeds City Region businesses will remain in the City Region.</p>
<p>9. Local areas should have strengthened responsibilities for planning the provision of technical education and training so that it is responsive to local economic priorities.</p>	<p>Technical education has traditionally been thought of as solely vocational, but it is increasingly being delivered by universities and HEIs in a wide range of subject areas. Technical education encompasses level 4/5, apprenticeships and degrees such as law, engineering and medicine, and key areas of demand are business services, leadership and management, showing that interest is not just in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects.</p> <p>As well as these, there is value in non-technical higher education at level 4 and 5, such as arts qualifications.</p> <p>Boosting technical educational opportunities in the region would benefit learners by offering a wide range of skills and routes which could entice individuals to stay on after level 3 – a level which 36% of young learners currently do not progress beyond.</p> <p>Universities and HEIs are committed to developing higher technical qualifications. In order for this to be successful, Universities UK recommends the following actions:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an additional opportunity for learners alongside academic and apprenticeships pathways. • Provide opportunities for learners to progress between different pathways, giving them the broadest possible choice of options. • Build on existing qualifications and existing providers to provide a firm foundation for success. • Focus on providing opportunities to enable those young people that have a level 3 as their highest qualification to get on the path towards higher paying skilled jobs and professions. • Ensure that flexibility is increased to enable those in work to engage in more learning and reverse the decline in part-time higher education. • Avoid the addition of significant bureaucracy and cost that is unrelated to actual provision and ensure the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education delivers a streamlined approval process. • Invest in promotion, communication and guidance. • Encourage and incentivise partnerships between higher education and further education and links with employers.
<p>10. Employers need greater influence over the design and delivery of technical training to ensure it is responsive to local economic priorities.</p>	<p>Employers would welcome a regional skills system that is more agile and enables staff to undertake learning, training and development that matched business objectives and broader local economic priorities. In a joint review with the CBI, Universities UK recommended that a more flexible learning system should feature the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Apprenticeship Levy should evolve into a more flexible 'Skills Levy' so that it can cover a wider range of training, including more flexible study. • Greater support for students moving between work and study across their lifetimes, with the education system supporting shorter and more flexible courses. • Stronger collaboration between employers, HE and FE, to help learners progress on to qualifications between A-levels and a university degree. <p>In aligning with the drive for more flexible forms of learning, universities, including those in Yorkshire, report significant employer demand for degree apprenticeships (DAs) across a wide range of subject areas at level 6 and level 7. YU worked closely with UUK to shape the findings and recommendations of a major review of DAs. The review recommended that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government (and local and regional institutions) should lead a campaign to promote the benefits of DAs to employers and the public, including better careers information and guidance at an earlier age

	<p>in schools, and that UCAS should make the application system for degree apprenticeships as straightforward as it is for undergraduate degrees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government should invest in initiatives to support social mobility, lifelong learning, and the growth in DAs among underrepresented groups. • The system should develop to meet current and future demand for higher level skills in areas such as digital technology, management, and public services, and to boost local and regional economies. • Employers should be helped to include a degree within their apprenticeships where they see it adding value to their business and to their apprentices, and the government should commit to streamlining processes and reducing unnecessary costs in the system. DAs should be embedded in local industrial and local skills strategies. There should be more support for the flexible delivery of DAs. <p>We would encourage the Future Ready Skills Commission to support these recommendations in its final report.</p>
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General comments

YU welcomes the aim of the Future-Ready Skills Commission to develop a blueprint for an education and skills system that can deliver against local economic priorities, the fulfilment of individual potential and the promotion of inclusive growth. Aside from our specific comments on the ten recommendations, we have some more general comments to make.

We would like to see a more explicit reference within the interim that HEIs are at present delivering skills outcomes of benefit to local and regional economies in a number of different ways, including through foundation, under-graduate, post-graduate, and degree apprenticeship routes.

The interim report states that many workers are over-qualified for the jobs they do. We would like to see the evidence base for this (page 6 - Employers face skills shortages, yet many workers are over-qualified for the jobs they do). This does not seem to pin the challenge down.

There is perhaps a lack of understanding of HE funding – we need to balance funding (a proxy for market need and employability ambition) with courses that are aligned with market insight, research capability and capacity, industrial strategy and local educational provision.

YU Feedback on FRSC Interim Report – 6 December 2019

We would encourage the Commission, in the final report, to focus more upon:

- Promoting and enabling more diversity in the workforce.
- Enabling business start-ups, innovation and building research capacity to support greater productivity – a cycle for creativity and economic growth.
- Supporting businesses to navigate the plethora of qualifications.
- Alignment to industrial strategy (national and local).
- How technical education will be supported from schools onwards, these skills have a high dependency on mathematical/analytical skills which are poor in some areas of the region (page 6 - A blueprint for a devolved skills system).

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