

Policy Watch

Who does what in the skills system

Issue 1.0

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It's been described as fiendishly complicated, it's been the subject of numerous Reports and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills has been looking at ways of simplifying it. So why is the skills system in England so complex?

Any number of reasons but perhaps three stand out.

First the skills system exists in a state of perpetual evolution. Maybe this is as it should be, better to have a system that's flexible, responsive and able to react to global challenges than one that's static and immutable. But there are two caveats to this: one is that change should be based on empirical evidence not political imperative; system change does at present tend to follow in the slipstream of Ministerial change. And the other is that system change should be based on defining principles. The recent '*Raising Expectations*' White Paper which has initiated the latest round of landscape changes for example describes the changes rather than the guiding principles behind them.

Second, it's not just the number of bodies and agencies that make the system appear complicated, it's the range of mechanisms that are constantly being developed to support them. Sector Compacts, City Strategies, Innovation Vouchers, Skills Accounts, Area Agreements, Pathways to Work - each no doubt important but collectively adding to the sense of complexity.

Third, old bodies never die they simply mutate into something else. The result is the system tends to build on itself until it either collapses or re - invents itself thus precluding the need for change in the first place.

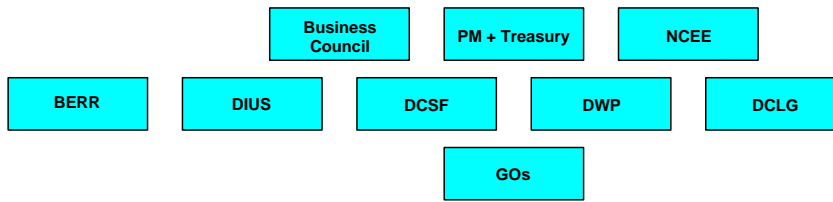
In an effort to try and understand the skills system of England a bit better, this Paper looks at who, and often what, does what. In doing so, it uncovers, working away in the skills system somewhere:

- 4 planning and funding bodies
- 4 regulatory/inspection agencies
- 5 Government depts
- 9 bodies supporting or representing providers
- 10 support agencies
- 12 strategic bodies
- 16 separate support mechanisms.

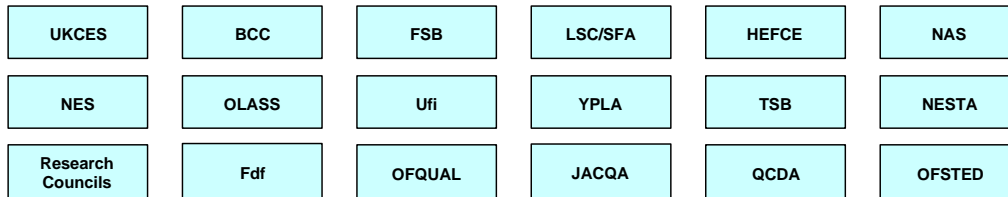
Brief details on each and the their role in the skills system of England follows.

Helping us deliver the skills agenda

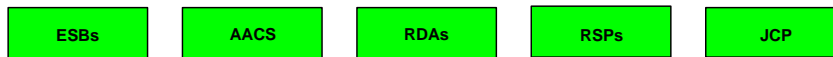
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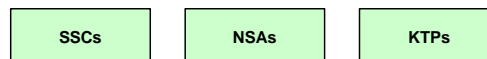
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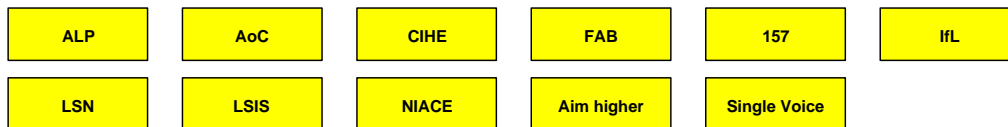
LOCAL



SUPPORT MECHANISMS



REP BODIES



PROVIDERS



Abbreviations explained in the text

Many bodies operate on more than one level. This diagram is thus a simplification intended only to offer a visual representation of where the different 'bits' of the system are chiefly located

Adult Advancement and Careers Service (AACCS)

This is the name given the new integrated advice and guidance service for adults currently being developed. The model was proposed in the 2006 Leitch Report and was formally announced in 2007. The aim is to create an overall Agency that can identify skills needs through routine Skills Health Checks while equally providing advice and guidance on matters like careers, jobs, skills, housing, childcare and finance. The new integrated service will therefore work closely with providers, the voluntary sector, health and financial services. The Government released the prospectus for the new service in October 2008. It will be piloted in 10 areas.

Key fact: The service is to be fully operational from 2010/11 and will sit within the new Skills Funding Agency

Aimhigher

As the name suggests, this is a Government sponsored programme to encourage more young people, particularly from under represented areas, to go on to higher education. Widening participation in HE has been a major Government policy driver ever since Tony Blair announced a 50% participation target for young people in 1999. This particular programme was launched in the 2003 HE White Paper which brought together two previous initiatives, the Excellence Challenge and Partnerships Progression into one '*coherent national outreach programme.*' Aimhigher is managed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and works across schools, FE and HE through Regional Networks, Area Partnerships and an Associates scheme.

Key Fact: The Government and HEFCE have committed to support Aimhigher with funding of £239.5m over the next 3 years

Alliance of Sector Skills Council

This is the body that acts as the collective voice of the 25 Sector Skill Councils (SSCs.) Officially launched in April 2008, it is owned by the member Councils. As an organisation, it is a company limited by guarantee, funded by the subscriptions of members and with offices across the UK. Its role is to represent the SSCs, promote their interests and activities and help build the capability of the SSC system.

Key fact: It has recently appointed its first Chief Executive and established its own website

Association of Colleges (AoC)

The Association of Colleges was set up in 1996 to act as the voice of FE colleges in England and Wales and to promote their interests. It offers a range of promotional, influencing and support services to members, being represented, for instance, on over a hundred Government and agency policy groups. It operates through a regional structure with offices in most of the UK regions all leading on FE issues.

Key fact: Over the last year, the Association has revised its constitution and now has a President working alongside a new Chief Executive

Association of Learning Providers (ALP)

This is the body that represents learning and training providers. It was created in 2002 by the merger of two separate training provider groups and currently has a membership of about 400 different private, not - for - profit and voluntary training organisations. It has a Board of Directors, a Senior Management Team and plays an influential role in supporting its members in providing learning and skill services.

Key fact: ALP's stable of regular newsletters including Countdown, Connect and Sector Connect provide excellent summaries of learning and skills activity

BERR

This is the Dept for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform which was created out of the old DTI as part of the Machinery of Government changes of June 2007. As the '*voice for business*' in Government, BERR has responsibility for three national performance targets: raising productivity; delivering the conditions for business success; improving the economic performance of the English regions. BERR's current budget is £3.8bn with over two thirds going on delivery partners.

Key fact: Full details of BERR's activities can be found in its first business plan released in June 2008. Details may change following the arrival of Peter Mandelson

British Chambers of Commerce (BCC)

The British Chambers of Commerce is a non - political organisation owned and directed by its members. It brings together a network of 60 accredited Chambers of Commerce and a number of Associate Chambers to speak, debate and lobby on behalf of British business on issues such as skill development, business services and trade. It created its own Skills Task Force in 2003.

Key fact: The BCC produces a Quarterly Economic Survey, a highly regarded survey of economic and business trends

Business Council for Britain

This was one of the bodies set up by Gordon Brown shortly after he became Prime Minister in June 2007 to provide advice to Government on the business environment and the nature of policies and priorities relating to it. It is comprised of leading business figures including Sir Richard Branson and Sir Terry Leahy, chaired by a senior business figure - currently the Chair of HSBC - and determines its own work programme. It is serviced by BERR and meets several times a year.

Key fact: At its last meeting in July 2008, changes to membership were announced

Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE)

The CIHE has been in existence since 1986 with a mission to strengthen the relationship between HE and business. The Council has adopted a number of key themes such as widening participation, employability and enterprise, and research and knowledge transfer that guide the core of its work but equally it produces Reports and generates discussion on a wide range of issues.

Key fact: The Council has recently published an important Report on the importance of global higher education

City Strategy Pathfinders

City Strategy Pathfinders have been operating since 2006 in 15 areas across the UK where unemployment and disadvantage are at their worst. The aim has been to test out how best to bring national and local agencies together in support of the needs of the jobless. The Pathfinders have been given considerable freedom by the DWP, their managing dept, to determine local solutions.

Key fact: The Secretary of State announced in June 2008 that the Pathfinders would be extended for a further two years to 2011

Dept for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)

This is one of the Government Departments created when the DfES was split as part of the Government changes of June 2007. The aim was to create a much stronger set of integrated responsibilities around Children, Schools and Families, hence the title. Many of these responsibilities were gathered up in the Dept's comprehensive 10 year Children's Plan which provides much of the driving force for the Dept and is defined by 6 Dept Strategic Objectives: secure the wellbeing and health of children and young people; safeguard the young and vulnerable; achieve world class standards in education; close the gap in educational achievement for children from disadvantaged backgrounds; ensure young people are participating and achieving beyond 18; keep children and young people on the path to success.

Key fact: Planned expenditure by the Dept is set to rise from £50.3bn currently to £59.4bn by 2010/11

Dept for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

DCLG was created in May 2006 as a successor to the Office of the Deputy PM. It has responsibility for housing, urban regeneration, planning and improving local services. Its main influence on the skills agenda is through its work with Local Authorities as identified in the Local Government White Paper '*Strong and Prosperous Communities*' published in Oct 2007. This set out a performance regime based around 198 indicators.

Key fact: As part of its stated desire to promote greater flexibility and responsiveness at a local level, the Government has pulled together a number of separate grants into a new Area Based Grant. This is an important Grant in helping support a number of education initiatives such as 14 - 19 collaboration

Dept for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)

This is one of the Government Departments created when DfES and DTI were restructured as part of the Government changes of June 2007. From the former, DIUS gained responsibility for skills, further and higher education while from the latter it gained responsibility for science and innovation. DIUS has set out its activities in '*a blueprint for success*' which is defined by 6 Dept Strategic Objectives: improve the skills of the population; strengthen the capacity, quality and reputation of the F/HE systems; pursue global excellence in research and knowledge; encourage and foster the use of science; build social and community cohesion; accelerate the commercial exploitation of creativity and knowledge through innovation and research.

Key fact: Total Dept spending is due to reach £26 bn by 2010/11

Dept for Work and Pensions (DWP)

The DWP was set up in 2002 to lead on the Government's welfare agenda. This has become increasingly important as the Government has sought to make skills training a requirement in benefit payments while at the same time support the country's changing demography. Most of the eight agencies through which the Dept works including Jobcentre Plus and the Pensions Service will be used by people at some point in their lives. Following the Spending Review last year, DWP has adopted a new performance framework built around two targets: '*maximise employment opportunities for all*' and '*tackle poverty and promote greater independence and wellbeing in later life.*'

Key fact: DWP has recently completed a consultation on changes to the welfare state which would see those with skills 'barriers' required to undertake training to help them back into work.

Employment and Skills Boards (ESBs)

Proposed by Leitch in his Final Report, these local Boards are being considered and in some cases adopted in various parts of England as a way of bringing together local employment and skill activity under local employer leadership. In its response to Leitch, the Government took a voluntarist stance encouraging local areas to develop a Board where necessary but setting no fixed model. A key issue is how far they can simplify and drive forward local employment and skills strategies.

Key fact: One of the most well - known Boards, the London Skills and Employment Board, released a new Employment and Skills Strategy for London in July 08

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

The Employment and Support Allowance is a new way of helping people with illness or disability move into work. In Britain, there are 2.6m people dependent on incapacity benefits and as indicated in the recent welfare Green Paper, the Government is keen to help as many of those who can, undertake some form of work. ESA builds on Pathways to Work and New Deal by offering '*personalised support and financial help.*' When someone becomes entitled to ESA they enter a 13 week assessment phase during which they receive basic financial support and are assessed under a Work Capability Assessment. Following this, they can either be placed under a Work - Related Group where they receive weekly payments but are expected to take part in work focused interviews, or under a Support Group where because of their incapacity, they receive direct financial support.

Key fact: ESA replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support for new customers as of 17 October 2008

Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB)

Formed in 2000 by the four largest vocational awarding bodies, FAB is a membership body representing organisations that award vocational qualifications in England. Currently with a membership of over 70, FAB provides a forum for awarding bodies collectively to consider developments in vocational qualifications and to lobby on key issues. FAB is a company limited by guarantee.

Key fact: FAB's current Strategic Plan is built around 3 priorities: external stakeholders; membership; and strategic projects

Federation of Small Businesses

Set up in 1974, the FSB promotes and protects the interests of the self - employed and small and medium businesses within the UK. It is non - profit making and non - party political and currently has 210,000 members and 230 branches.

Key fact: According to recent figures, there are 4.7m small - medium businesses registered in the UK providing for 48% of private sector employment although many are facing difficulties under the current economic climate

Foundation Degree Forward (fdf)

fdf was set up following the 2003 Higher Education White Paper with a remit to support the development of Foundation Degrees. It works with a range of agencies and bodies and especially with employers through its regional and networked services offering advice, guidance, consultancy and intelligence on Foundation Degree development. The target is to have 100,000 Foundation Degree places by 2010; currently just over 70,000 learners are registered or expecting to. Funding has been confirmed to fdf through HEFCE up to at least 2010/11.

Key fact: As of May 08, FE colleges can apply to award their own Foundation Degrees

Government Offices (GOs)

The Government Office Network was set up in 1994 to support the delivery of Government policies at regional and local levels across the English regions. The Network links up eleven different Government depts covering areas like education and skills, housing, health and unemployment to ensure they are joined up and delivered effectively at a regional level. The hub of the Network is the Regional Co - ordination Unit which provides the knowledge and performance management support and the interface with Whitehall. The Network has considerably refocused following a review in 2006

Key fact: The Government's 2007 sub - national review and the accompanying appointment of a Minister for each of the English regions has strengthened the strategic role of the GOs. Details are set out in the GO Strategic Priorities Framework 2008 - 2011

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

This is the body set up in 1992 with responsibility for distributing public money to universities and colleges in England that provide higher education; at present that means 130 universities and HE centres and 124 colleges. This money is distributed in the form of a grant which this year amounts to £7,476m. Most of this goes on teaching (£4,632m) and research (£1,460m) but there are also sums available for business engagement, capital funding and growth. Apart from the HEFCE grant, HE providers can charge tuition fees currently to a maximum of £3000. HEFCE operates as a non - departmental public body within a policy framework set out by DIUS and amongst other responsibilities has a remit that includes ensuring accountability and promoting good practice and widening participation.

Key fact: The Government's current target is 60,000 additional student numbers by 2010/11 although it has currently set a reduced ceiling for 2009/10

157 Group

This is the name given to a group of leading FE colleges who got together in March 2006 after the 2005 Foster Report on FE had advocated that *'large, successful colleges with strong management capability'* should work together to strengthen and promote their services. The idea was set out in paragraph 157 of Sir Andrew Foster's Report, hence the name. Currently there are 24 colleges in the Group

Key Fact: There are two essential criteria for membership: achieving a Grade 2 or higher for leadership and management in the last Ofsted inspection and having a turnover of at least £35m pa.

Institute for Learning (IfL)

This is the professional body for teachers, trainers and tutors working in the learning and skills system. It is an independent not for profit company limited by guarantee, largely funded by subscription fees and providing the mechanism for those working in the sector to gain licensed practitioner status. The Institute adopted a Code of Professional Practice for all those registered with it which came into force in April 08.

Key fact: The Government aims to professionalise the workforce by 2010 and recent regulations require teachers to register with the IfL and to undertake regular continuous professional development

Jobcentre Plus (JCP)

Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency of the DWP. It was created in 2002 by bringing together parts of the Benefits Agency with the Employment Service. It supports people of working age in moving from welfare to work while at the same time helping employers fill vacancies. It takes in, for example, over 10,000 vacancies a day. Jobcentre Plus works very closely with the LSC and other bodies in helping to support and improve the skills needs of those out of work. The Government's aim is for an 80% employment rate.

Key fact: The DWP announced in October 2008 a simpler system of Jobcentre Plus registration particularly for claimants who move regularly in and out of work

Joint Advisory Committee for Qualification Approval (JACQA)

JACQA is a new, non - executive body for advising on 14 - 19 qualifications announced in the 14 - 19 Qualification Strategy White Paper earlier this year. It will be jointly owned by QCDA and the LSC and its role will be to advise the Secretary of State on the eligibility of 14 - 19 qualifications for public funding using criteria set out in the White Paper. In pursuance of this role it will undertake termly reviews of qualifications submitted and biennial reviews of the overall 14 - 19 qualification system, working closely with stakeholder groups such as SSCs, HE and awarding bodies. It will be supported by a secretariat.

Key fact: JACQA will hold its first termly meeting in December 2008

Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP)

This is a UK wide programme, funded by the Technology Strategy Board, which enables businesses to obtain particular knowledge, technology or skills generally from the HE or FE sector or from research companies to meet a specific business need. Each Partnership works through a number of Knowledge Transfer Associates who help with the transfer and embedding of the 'knowledge.' There are some 1,000 Partnerships running currently.

Key Fact: The Innovation Nation Paper, issued earlier this year, proposed doubling the number of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and extending them into FE

Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

The LSC is the body responsible for the planning, funding and commissioning of virtually all publicly funded post 16 education and training outside that of HE. The Council was set up under the 2000 Learning and Skills Act as a core part of the Labour Government's new architecture for '*a world - class education and skills system.*' It originally operated through 47 separate local councils but recently has moved towards a regional structure. LSC receives an annual grant from Government which for 2008/9 amounts to £11.4bn broken down into £6.3bn for young people's learning, £3.2bn for adult learning, £1bn for learner support and £694m for capital grants. Over the years, the LSC has handled some major projects for Government including Train to Gain, Apprenticeships, foundation learning, EMAs and the National Improvement Framework. It is currently carrying forward plans for a demand - led funding system in line with the Leitch Report recommendations.

Key fact: Under proposals in the March 2008 '*Raising Expectations*' White Paper, the LSC will be replaced by two new agencies: the YPLA for pre - 19 provision and the SFA for post - 19 provision. This is due to happen by 2010

Learning and Skills Network (LSN)

The LSN was one of two bodies that emerged when the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) split into two in 2006. The LSN provides extensive support to the learning and skills system by offering consultancy, training and support services. LSN operates as an independent, not for profit organisation.

Key fact: LSN delivers over 500 events a year and its most popular publications can be viewed in its 'Top Ten' publications listed on its website

Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)

Launched in April 2008, LSIS is the new sector owned organisation "*dedicated to supporting excellence and leadership development in the further education and skills sector.*" It has been formed by joining up the expertise of the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) and the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA)

Key fact: The merger between CEL and QIA was completed on the 1 October 2008, a corporate plan will follow

Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs)

LLNs are local networks that help vocational learners progress on to higher education. The first networks were set up in 2005 following a speech on the matter by the then Chief Executive of HEFCE, Sir Howard Newby. At present there are 30 LLNs funded by HEFCE. There is no set model for a LLN but most bring together HE institutions and FE colleges to offer advice and guidance, progression agreements and often bridging arrangements to those who might not normally have considered higher education. HEFCE has so far invested £100m into LLNs and recently commissioned 5 LLNs to lead on links with 14 - 19 provision.

Key fact: An interim evaluation of LLNs was published in April 2008 and provides a good overview of how they operate

Local Authorities (LAs)

Local Councils are responsible for some 800+ local services with Local Authorities taking a key role within this for a wide range of learning and skills services including early years, 14 - 19 and adult learning. Much of Local Authorities' work in this area is drawn together into the DCSF's 10 Year Children's Plan which sets out a vision for improving the lives and welfare of children, families and young people by 2020. From 2010, the aim is for Local Authorities to assume responsibility for funding and securing a place in learning for all 16 - 19 year olds resident in their area whatever their circumstances for which they are currently developing commissioning arrangements. In addition, LAs will have a legal duty from 2013 to secure access to Diplomas for 16 - 19 year olds and, working with the National Apprenticeship Service, apprenticeship places for eligible young people. Most LAs already have a 14 - 19 Plan as part of their Children and Young People's Plan.

Key fact: Local Authorities are currently setting out plans to work in sub - regional groupings with RDAs and GOs to ensure that "*local proposals help meet the future economic and skill needs of the region and enable full participation of young people in appropriate learning*"

Local Employment Partnerships (LEPs)

These were first announced by Gordon Brown in his 2007 Budget statement and have grown steadily ever since. The Partnerships involve a 'Jobs Pledge' whereby Jobcentre Plus agrees to prepare and support people for work, and employers, both private and public, agree to offer work placements, shadowing and guaranteed interviews. The scheme, which is UK wide, initially centred on the retail sector but has now spread to other sectors including hospitality and security. 2,000 employers are involved in some part in the scheme and 1,000 people so far have gained work through it

Key Fact: The aim is that by 2010, more than 250,000 people will be helped into work through such Partnerships

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)

LSPs provide a forum for bringing together a range of partners- private, public and voluntary - to work with Local Authorities on identifying priorities for Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements (LAAs.) LSPs are non - statutory bodies and work closely with Local Authorities who are responsible for their accountability.

There is no fixed model for an LSP but the Government through the Dept for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has laid out a list of expectations.

Key fact: Further details can be found in the Paper on '*Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*' published by DCLG in July 2008

Multi Area Agreements (MAAs)

Multi Area Agreements were first identified in the 2006 Local Government White Paper and endorsed in the 2007 Treasury Sub - National Review. They are arrangements whereby Local Authorities and other partners agree to work together often across borders to tackle big issues such as skills, transport or economic development. In return, Government gives them greater freedoms to direct resources and activities accordingly. There is no fixed model, it's what works locally that counts, but there must be clear accountability

Key fact: The first 7 MAAs were formally signed off by Government in July 2008

National Apprenticeship Service (NAS)

This new dedicated Agency was announced by the Prime Minister in January 2008 as part of the new '*Strategy for Apprenticeships in England*.' It will provide end - to - end responsibility, support and advocacy for Apprenticeship programmes and it follows criticisms in the past that no single body has had such responsibility. Under current proposals, it will operate at a national and sub - regional level, will be housed in the Skills Funding Agency but as a discrete service and its Director will report directly to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for DIUS. Operationally it will work through a field force linked to employer skills brokers; linkages to Train to Gain, National Employer Service and Local Authorities are under development.

Key fact: The aim is to have the NAS fully functioning by April 2009; legislative proposals are included in the proposed draft Apprenticeship Bill

National Council for Educational Excellence

This was one of the bodies set up shortly after Gordon Brown became Prime Minister in June 2007 to provide advice, guidance and support to Government on its education policies and priorities for children and young people. It is comprised of leading figures from the world of business, education and training and it meets quarterly. Topics covered so far include: variations in school performance, 14 - 19 reform and features of world class education.

Key fact: In October 2008, the Council published recommendations about school links with business and HE which the Government has said it will adopt

National Employer Service (NES)

This is a specialist service that operates from within the LSC and offers skills advice and support to large, national employers. The employers concerned are defined by having more than 5000 employees and by being supported through LSC funding. The aim is to give such employers a single point of contact.

Key fact: From 2010, the NES is intended to be housed as a distinct entity within the proposed new Skills Funding Agency

National Skills Academies (NSAs)

First announced in 2005, NSAs are sector based employer - led centres of excellence for skill training and development. Currently 10 are running and two more are in the business planning stage, meaning the Government is well on course for its initial target of 12 to be in place by the end of 2008. The Government, at present through the LSC, provides development and start up costs with partnership funding providing the rest. Once fully operational, Academies are expected to be self sufficient. There is no fixed model for a National Skills Academy but most work with leading providers and agencies through collaborative networks and virtual partnerships to provide skills 'solutions' for sector employers.

Key fact: A further 4 Skills Academies have recently been approved to proceed to the business planning stage; these cover Enterprise, Power, IT and Social Care

National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA)

This is a body which has leading responsibility for developing innovative capacity across the UK. Using secured endowments, it provides '*early stage capital*' for innovators, undertakes research and analysis and works with partners and policy makers to transform the culture of innovation in the UK.

Key fact: NESTA is playing a key role in supporting the Government's '*Innovation Nation*' White Paper proposals

New Deal

New Deal is a welfare to work programme that was introduced in 1998 to help initially young people back into work through a programme of training, support and work experience. It was a core part of new Labour's policy platform in 1997 with the promise that it would be paid for out of a one - off £5bn windfall tax on utility companies. There has been much controversy ever since about how much New Deal has actually cost and how effective in the long term it has been. New Deal has since morphed into a number of different programmes covering; New Deal for Young People, for 25 plus, for 50 plus, for Lone parents, for Disabled People, for Partners, and for Musicians. New Deal is run through Jobcentre Plus and has pioneered new practices in pre - employment advice and the use of Personal Advisers.

Key fact: New Deal is now part of a much bigger 'welfare to work' programme, details of which can be seen in the 2008 DWP/DIUS Paper '*Work Skills*'

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

NIACE is a voluntary organisation, a charity and company limited by guarantee that promotes, supports and celebrates adult learning. It began its life as the British Institute for Adult Education way back in 1921 and has grown to become the recognised voice of adult learning in England and Wales. A number of leading organisations are members of NIACE and in 2007, the Basic Skills Agency merged to join NIACE. NIACE works across all sectors of post - compulsory education and training and has strong links internationally.

Key fact: NIACE is currently hosting a two year Independent Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning. This is due to present its final report, setting out a strategic framework for the future of lifelong learning, in June 2009

Ofqual

This is the body, announced by the Secretary of State in September 2007, as the 'new, independent' regulator for qualifications, exams and tests in England. As such it takes over the regulatory functions of QCA. Ofqual began operating in interim form in April 2008 pending statutory legislation. It will be accountable to Parliament rather than to Government.

Key fact: Ofqual will be responsible for accrediting the new credit - based adult skills qualification framework, known as the QCF. This is currently moving from a stage of testing and trialling to implementation and is due to be fully in place from 2010. In August 2008, Ofqual and the other UK qualification regulators issued the regulatory arrangements for this Framework

Ofsted

Ofsted is the established official inspection agency for standards in education. Created in 1992 as a non - ministerial Government Dept, it has since April 2007 assumed responsibility for standards in education, children's services and skills. Under skills, this covers provision for 14 - 19 year olds and adults over 19, work - based learning including apprenticeships, adult and community learning, prison learning and Jobcentre Plus training. Inspections are based on judgements made against five principal questions set out in a Common Inspection Framework and led by lead inspectors and nominees. Ofsted's current budget is £236m but it is on target to reduce this to £186m.

Key fact: Ofsted is currently consulting on revised, more proportionate arrangements for the inspection of skills provision from Sept 2009

Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS)

OLASS was set up in July 2006 following the Government's 2005 Green Paper '*Reducing Re - Offending Through Skills and Employment.*' Its main role is to equip offenders with the skills they need for employment in the future. OLASS is managed through the LSC who plan and commission the provision but working with an enormous number of other agencies including principally the National Offender Management Service (NOMS,) the National Probation Service and Jobcentre Plus. The LSC's current Prospectus for offender learning which was published in autumn 2007 aims to personalise and prioritise the services as far as possible around the concept of a '*Learning Journey,*' one for adults and one for those aged under 18. The focus of the '*Journey*' is basic skills and vocational training

Key fact: Under the proposed recent Machinery of Government changes, from 2010 OLASS will come jointly under the new Skills Funding Agency and work closely with the new Regional Directors of Offender Management

Pathways to Work

This is a scheme designed to help people claiming incapacity benefits back into work. It does this by providing a range of services and support through a '*single gateway.*' This includes such features as a Personal Capability Assessment, a back to work support package and a 'return to work' credit. Claimants face a work - focused interview 8 weeks after making a claim for incapacity benefit.

Key fact: From April 2008, 40% of the country has been covered by Pathways led by Jobcentre Plus and 60% by external contractors

Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA)

This is the agency that will carry out the non - regulatory functions of QCA as part of the split which sees the regulatory functions going to a new independent regulator - Ofqual. As such, QCDA will be responsible for monitoring and advising Ministers on curriculum and qualification development, assessment development, performance measures and skills provision. It will also work closely with Ofqual in developing criteria against which qualifications will be accredited.

Key fact: Under its '*Next Steps in Regulation*' Report in July 2008, the Government confirmed that it would "*make an informed decision about the future role of QCDA*" once the new learning and skills system was in place in 2010

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)

The 8 RDAs which cover each of the English regions were set up under the 1998 Regional Development Agencies Act. A 9th Agency was established for London in 2000 following the setting up of the Greater London Authority. The remit of the Agencies is to support and drive forward economic development in their particular region, specifically coordinating regional economic development and regeneration, improving regional economic competitiveness and helping to reduce the imbalance between regions. RDAs work closely with a number of different national and local bodies, many of which have changed over the years; for example they have recently been given the task of working with various 14 - 19 bodies. Under last year's Sub - National Review, RDAs were given the brief of working with Local Authorities outside London in developing single regional strategies.

Key fact: RDAs come under the sponsorship of BERR but their funding comes in the form of a '*Single Pot*' from 6 different Depts and is worth currently £2.3bn

Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs)

These were first outlined in the 2003 Skills White Paper as models for aligning skills planning with regional economic planning particularly in areas like housing, transport, business support and economic development. Core members of such Partnerships include RDAs, Local Authorities, Jobcentre Plus and the LSC. Although adults skills funding remains separate, the Government remains keen to align skills priorities as closely as possible with regional economic priorities

Key fact: The Government has made £22bn available for regional economic development and is currently consulting on its deployment as part of the Regional Funding Advice (RFA) Paper released in July

Research Councils

The Research Councils were established under Royal Charter in 1965. At present there are 7 of them: Arts and Humanities; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences; Engineering and Physical Sciences; Economic and Social Research; Medical Research; Natural Environment; Science and Technology. Each Council works closely with Research Councils UK (RCUK,) the body set up in 2002 to help the Councils work more

effectively together. The Councils are non - departmental public bodies and under the 2007 Machinery of Government changes were placed under DIUS. They have a collective budget of just under £3bn.

Key fact: The Government's vision for UK research and innovation can be found in the 10 year '*Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004 - 2014*' along with the more recent '*Innovation Nation*' Paper and '*Race to the Top*,' the Government's response to the Sainsbury Review of Government policies in this area

Sector Compacts

Identified last year as one way of developing and better targeting Train to Gain, Sector Compacts allow particular sectors greater flexibility in how they use Train to Gain resources in return for specific commitments on skill levels. The Compact itself takes the form of a non - contractual agreement between the 3 key partners of the Sector Skill Council, DIUS and LSC, runs for 3 years and is reviewed every 6 months. The aim is to give employers greater flexibility in meeting their skill needs although Compacts are expected to '*take advantage*' of initiatives such as Train to Gain, the Skills Pledge and Apprenticeships and to align with Sector Qualification Strategies. Any additional funding has to come from within the overall Train to Gain budget.

Key fact: Four (Construction, Hospitality, Engineering and Manufacturing, Processing and Manufacturing) sector compacts have already been announced. Housing and Fashion were announced in October with all sectors covered by April 2010

Sector Skill Councils (SSCs)

SSCs are independent, employer - led, UK wide bodies that represent the interests and skill needs of employers. They grew out of the dismantling of the system of 90+ NTOs in 2002 and over the last five years have developed to cover over 90% of the economy. At present there are 25 SSCs, funded by Government at just over £50m for each of the next 3 years. The Conservatives have committed to providing "*£35m additional annual funding*" for SSCs so that they could accredit courses in the FE sector. The UK Commission and Alliance of SSCs is currently working on a revised funding model linked to performance.

Key fact: SSCs are currently subject to an assessment and re - licensing process being led by the UK Commission. This started in August 2008 and completes in December 2009. SSCs are being assessed against 4 criteria; how well run; ability to deliver core products and services; ability to deliver sector specific solutions to employer demand; ability to build partnerships

Single Voice

This is the name of the collective body that is working to develop the self - regulation of the FE sector. In recent years, the sector has become highly if not over regulated and in response to concerns, the Secretary of State two years ago challenged it to develop its own mechanisms for collective responsibility and self - regulation. The Single Voice, a company limited by guarantee, brings together a number of partners and activities in pursuit of this.

Key fact: The Single Voice formally came into being as a company in December 2007 and aims to have some shadow arrangements in place for self - regulation by 2009

Skills Accounts

Announced in Leitch, Skills Accounts began trialling in two regions, the S.E. and the East Midlands from September 2008 following the trialling of Adult Learner Accounts in the same regions. Registered learners who open a Skills Account will receive a pack of information, a virtual voucher which can be cashed in with an accredited provider and a unique learner number which will open up access to their own learner record. In due course other services will be added to the Account such as the Skills Health Check and an online cv function.

Key fact: Skills Accounts will be gradually phased in across England during 2009/10 with full roll out- from 2010

Skills Brokers

Skills Brokers have been developed under Train to Gain to provide tailored services and support to business. The service is free and covers business support, brokered training and advice on access to funding. Skills Brokers operate under a common standard, the Skills Broker Standard which was updated in June 2008.

Key fact: From April 2009, the Skills Brokerage will be integrated with Business Link. Further transition plans will see more Government Depts and other agencies offer their employment and skills services through an Integrated Brokerage Service

Skills Funding Agency (SFA)

This is the name given to the new Agency intended to take over the funding and commissioning of education and training for adults from the LSC. It was originally proposed in the March 2008 White Paper '*Raising Expectations*' where it was described as "*a smaller, lighter touch body, focused on funding not planning.*" Apart from directing funds to accredited providers on the basis of identified demand, the SFA will have responsibility for managing the development of the FE service and will house some important other bodies including the NAS, NES and AACCS. Further details are due out shortly.

Key fact: The SFA's status will be that of a Next Steps Agency. This would make it much more accountable to Government with an operational remit decided in this case by DIUS

Skills Pledge

Launched by the Prime Minister in June 2007 as part of the response to the Leitch Review, the Skills Pledge is a voluntary public commitment made by an employer to support their workforce initially gain essential Level 2 skills. The Pledge is not restricted to any type of employer, nor is it legally binding but it is seen as an important public statement, opening up support and access from a skills broker and generating an action plan for training and support.

Key fact: At the first anniversary of the Pledge in June 2008, the number of employers signed up was 3000. The figure for autumn 2008 is nearly 6,000

The Talent Challenge

The Talent Challenge is the name of a Project being co-ordinated by Business in the Community in which major businesses are committing to seeking out talent, be it in communities or individuals, as a way of responding to current economic and skills shortages. The 'challenge' was laid down in a speech by the Prime Minister at the Leadership Summit in December 2007 and has been taken up by 'a coalition of interests' including the Talent and Enterprise Taskforce, DIUS, DCSF, DWP and BERR. A series of talent debates were run throughout the summer and a list of 13 different actions created and summarised in a report back to the Prime Minister.

Key fact: A number of partners, including the UKCES, CBI, Business in the Community, the National Council for Educational Excellence and some Government Depts, are working on a Talent Map website for the UK to be rolled out in 2009

The Technology Strategy Board (TSB)

The TSB was originally established in 2004 in the former DTI but as part of the 2007 Government changes it moved to DIUS as a non-departmental public body. Its role is "to promote, support and invest in technology research, development and commercialisation." Greater responsibilities around knowledge transfer and research leadership were proposed under the 2007 Sainsbury Review. The Board works through four main programmes: Knowledge Transfer Networks; Innovation Platforms; Research and Development; and Emerging Technologies. It has an overall budget of £1m over 3 years and is a non-departmental public body.

Key Fact: Full details of the Board's future work can be seen in its 3 year Strategic Plan, 'Connect and Catalyse,' released in May 2008

The Training Quality Standard (TQS)

This is a voluntary quality kitemark available to any provider operating in the learning and skills system. It has been developed in the light of the Leitch Report to help meet employer needs and encourage greater employer engagement. Accreditation is based on a comprehensive assessment process which includes employer verification and focuses on two key measures: provider excellence in a vocational area and provider responsiveness to employer needs. The Standard is not attached to public funding but aligns with the provider annual quality assessment through the Framework for Excellence (FfE) to indicate provider excellence in the market place

Key fact: The TQS, which originated in the 2006 FE White Paper, builds on Centres of Vocational Excellence and other quality initiatives and was formally launched in May 2008 following a year's trialling

Train to Gain

Train to Gain is a national skills service designed to support employers of all sizes and sectors to improve the skills of their employees and help raise business performance. It was rolled out nationally in August 2006 following three years piloting as Employer Training Pilots (ETPs) and was initially targeted at employed individuals without a full level 2 qualification. It has since been extended to cover most forms of training from basic skills to management along with advice and support provided through a skills brokerage service. The Government has committed to increase investment in Train to

Gain year - on - year to reach £1bn by 2010/11 with a target of supporting 950, 000 employers by that date - double the current figure. Train to Gain is managed by the LSC which last year issued a 4 year '*Plan for Growth*' built around "*four key accelerators for growth:*" enhanced brokerage; better links with SSCs; better communication; better business to business provision.

Key fact: In June 2008, the LSC announced further flexibilities to Train to Gain including greater support for Skills for Life, level 2 and 3 provision

Time to Train

This is a proposal, on which the Government has recently been consulting, for creating an entitlement for employees to request time off to train. Based on the model for flexible working introduced in April 2003, time to train would entitle any employee who had worked for an employer for a continuous 26 weeks to request time off to undertake '*relevant training.*' The training could be towards an accredited qualification but would not have to be, the only requirement being that it would help improve business performance in some way. An employer would not have to accede to a request but would have to consider it "*seriously*" and give any reasons for refusal. Consultation on the proposal closed on 10 September 2008 and legislation is expected to be completed by 2009. The Government is anticipating that in due course 300,000 people a year would benefit from the right.

Key fact: If the proposal is accepted, the Government will put back its proposed review of a legal right to workforce training from 2010 to 2014/5

UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills was one of the proposals in the Leitch Report of 2006 and was formally launched in April 2008. The Commission is an advisory body, working across the four UK nations to support the employment and skills agenda but with some specific responsibilities that include funding and managing the performance of SSCs, assessing progress towards skills targets and providing advice on good practice for the skills and employment systems. Current projects under the Commission's initial Business Plan include a consultation on National Occupational Standards, a review of employment and skills systems, development of an LMI prototype and talent map along with activities on skills utilisation, employability and proposals for simplifying the skills system in England. The Commission has an expenditure budget for 2008/9 of £78,239.

Key fact: The Commission is due to produce its first '*state of the nation*' Report on progress in employment and skills in March 2009

University Challenge

The 'new' University Challenge was announced in March 2008 and is currently under consultation through HEFCE. The aim is to encourage local communities to develop, an HE centre that can help boost the local economy, open up access to higher level learning and raise skill levels generally. Funding contributions will be expected from RDAs, Local Authorities and business and community groups to support the £150m being put up over the next 3 years by Government to develop these centres. A further policy Paper on the new centres is due in January 2009.

Key fact: The aim is to have 20 new centres in place by 2014

University for Industry (Ufi)

The concept of a University for Industry was sketched out in the mid 1990s and put in place under the new Labour government of 1997/8. It rapidly developed the learndirect brand which has become the flagship e- learning network across the UK. Ufi embraces three streams of learndirect activity: learndirect courses, where there are 500 different types of courses ranging from basic skills to management and taken in over 750 different learndirect accredited centres; learndirect business which provides training services; and learndirect advice, which offers guidance and advice. Ufi is also responsible for the 6,000+ online centres.

Key fact: learndirect careers advice is currently being transferred to the new Adult Careers and Advancement Service

Working Neighbourhood Fund

This Fund, which was announced in 2007, replaces the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Its aim is to help local areas provide more flexible, community based ways of tackling '*worklessness and low levels of skills and enterprise.*' At present £1.5bn has been made available over 3 years for 66 Local Authorities where there are high levels of deprivation. The money is paid as part of the new DCLG Area Based Grant and is not ring fenced to allow for maximum flexibility.

Key fact: £50m has been set aside to 'reward' areas making the best progress

Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA)

First announced in the '*Raising Expectations*' White Paper where it was described as a '*slim - line*' agency with budgetary powers to support Local Authorities in planning and commissioning 14 - 19 provision, the YPLA is a non - departmental public body whose precise responsibilities are currently being worked on. Effectively it will pick up some of the LSC'S strategic responsibilities for 16 - 19 and increasingly 14 - 19 provision particularly around budgeting and co - ordination. It will be an enabling body focused on 14 - 19 provision but with reserve powers to commission FE provision. It will also sit with QCDA as joint chair of the Joint Advisory Committee for Qualification Approval (JACQA.)

Key fact: The YPLA will be based in Coventry and work closely with the adult SFA