

Ivan Lewis MP

Putting Skills in Wider Context

This Government has uniquely made the case for the inter-relationships between social justice and economic success.

Building a new coalition which above all else believes there is such a thing as society- we are not simply a collection of individuals.

Skills can uniquely unlock key to both a fairer society and a more successful economy.

Social justice, by ensuring every individual throughout their life is supported to fulfil their potential or as I define it "know the dignity of self improvement."

And economic success because, whilst our economy is fundamentally strong, productivity and competitiveness remain stubbornly weak and skills are a key driver of productivity.

Skills are also vital to success of our public service reform agenda – nurses, teachers etc.

Skills also represent a key ideological dividing line in the future of public policy.

Whether it be dealing with globalisation which has ended the job for life in the private sector or embarking on necessary public sector reform, our opponents remain wedded to state non intervention/leave it to the market.

However, we accept the government's responsibility to be active in helping people through the inevitable insecurity created by the change.

We seek to replace the concept of job for life with the new 21st century imperative of employability for life.

We are also passionate about demolishing the educational apartheid which has offered opportunities to the few whilst denying them to the many.

We will only do this if we are able to create a culture of lifelong learning and high aspirations in communities and families where education has been historically for somebody else.

Let us be clear whilst we are proud of the Government's educational achievements it is unacceptable that approx 50% of children still fail to get 5 good GCSEs at the age of 16.

If we can attract parents and grandparents back into learning it is not only life transforming for them it gives them the skill and confidence to support children and grandchildren in their learning and has a direct impact on raising school

standards.

Improving our Skills

There are two elements to raising our national skills performance – the young people coming out of the educational system into the labour market and the adults either in or on the edge of the labour market.

Let me deal firstly with young people. We want them leaving education with good qualifications but also the communication, interpersonal, teamwork and leadership skills so essential in the modern world of work. And for those who say we are not radical enough I say:

- Surestart
- Universal Nursery provision.
- Primary literacy and numeracy strategy
- Focus on early years of secondary
- Specialist status for Secondary Schools
- Connexions
- EMAS
- 14-19 Pathfinders
- reduced core curriculum
- flexible 14-16 work related learning
- reform and investment programme for FE
- our 50% HE target

Essential in the future will be a new 14 – 19 phase of education. Currently being considered by the Tomlinson group. Must tackle poor post-16 participation rate. We want a curriculum which is far more tailored to meet the needs/strengths of each individual child.

Where you can progress and achieve through a variety of routes into skilled employment either directly or via Higher education.

Where you are not labelled a failure if the academic /conventional route is not for you.

Where we end this country's unique snobbery towards vocational education and training. Where we reject the "sheep and goats" model favoured by some,

where the middle classes do academic and the disadvantaged /disengaged do vocational.

To those of you who are pessimistic let me reveal one of the best kept secrets of the educational system. By next year we are optimistic that approximately 28% of young people will be undertaking a modern apprenticeship. There are issues – completion rates etc. However good signs of improvement.

Collaboration between institutions and good LEA/LSC relationships essential to this agenda. So is LEA role in school improvement through support and challenge. And out of school activities.

I want to turn now to adults.

In July we launched our national skills strategy – 21st Century Skills – Realising our potential. This strategy is designed to build on some notable successes.

- The Adult Basic Skills Programme.

- The Trade Union Learning Fund now strengthened by learning representatives with statutory rights – excellent example of modern trade unionism transforming individuals' lives and entire culture in many workplaces.

- CoVEs.

- UFI/ Learndirect.

- LSC replacing discredited TECs. Welcome Mark Haysom. Need to balance non negotiable need for accountability with mutual respect and confidence.

Skills Strategy

I want to turn now to specifics of our new national skills strategy.

Despite this progress we have a collection of initiatives rather than an effective strategy and a training system failing to respond to the needs of employers and individuals.

The national strategy therefore aims to:

- Move from a supply driven to demand led system
- Align national, regional and sectoral priorities
- Define more clearly the respective responsibilities of government, employers and individuals

- Create a joined up government approach including Government leading by example with regard to its own employees.
- Link with Success for All and HE White Paper

Key elements of our reform agenda are:

- A new entitlement to free learning for all adults in the labour market seeking a 1st level 2 qualification (equivalent to 5 good GCSEs). In cases of proven skills gaps in regions or sectors this will be extended to level 3 qualifications. Technicians/Higher craft level.
- A weekly maintenance grant for adults studying full time in entitlement categories.
- ICT as 3rd Basic Skill.
- Information, advice and guidance
- The bringing together of RDA, Local LSC and Business Link budgets and policies on skills in every region through Regional Skills Partnerships
- No wrong door for employers.
- The creation of the new Sector Skills Council network covering 90% of the workforce by 2004 - Trade Unions on board and involved in development.
- Government support for new sector agreements
- A commitment to learn lessons from newly expanded employer training programme in order to create a national scheme.
- We have also announced our intention to lift the age cap of 25 on MAs so sectors can develop adult MAs
- Shake up of vocational qualifications, bitesize courses and credit transfer
- Government leading by example – as an employer and by using its procurement power
- Creation of Learning Community Concept in trial areas. Link with Adult and Community Learning
- Most importantly the future skills agenda will be driven forward by the new Skills Alliance – a National Social Partnership for skills
- The alliance, to be jointly chaired by Charles Clarke and Patricia Hewitt, will bring together the social partners – key government departments,

TUC, CBI and the Small Business Council.

- It will meet regularly to monitor progress and make key policy decisions.
- Separate Delivery Partner Group
- AoC works with LSC RDAs, IIP, Ufi, ILP, SSDA, QCA and HEFCE