

Introduction

We want the UK to be one of the best places to live. As the country recovers from recession, we need more people in work and more people in productive work. We need more businesses, and more successful businesses, offering more and better jobs. And we need more and better skilled people to get us there and keep us there. There is little that is more important than equipping ourselves with the skills we need, for the jobs we need, for the successful businesses of tomorrow. As we recover from recession it also provides an unparalleled opportunity to focus more than ever on our ambitions for skills, jobs and the reform of our employment and skills systems.

As a primarily strategic advisory organisation, our unique role is to advise the UK government on jobs and skills by:

- assessing and charting progress towards world class employment and skills;
- identifying and recommending policy changes to increase progress;
- influencing partners and acting as a catalyst for change; and
- taking a UK-wide view of employment and skills activities.

To this end, the UK Commission’s work is organised across three strategic priorities. These are based on evidence from research and policy analysis and conducted by working with and through the UK government, devolved administrations and other partners and stakeholders, to address both UK-wide and nation specific employment and skills challenges. To deliver our commitments efficiently and effectively we strive at all times to use best practice in our operations, in particular with regard to enabling our employees to deliver high performance through appropriate capabilities, structures, systems, processes and attitude.

Our business plan aligns areas of work against our strategic priorities. In reality the impact of our work is less easily defined with many areas contributing to more than one priority as well as contributing to other current and future work. Figure 1 highlights some of these key relationships.

Over the first two years of our existence, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills has sought to make a real contribution to policy and practice in the UK. We believe we have established credibility and recognition as an independent hub for skills policy formation and as an effective transmitter of strategic advice, compelling analysis and potential solutions to the four governments of the UK.

In framing our work programme we recognise the considerable pressure on public expenditure and the need to provide more responsive, value-for-money frontline services – by strengthening, not diminishing their quality; and by finding innovative ways to achieve more with less. We recognise also the challenges we face as the UK emerges from recession – not least in terms of the action that needs to be taken to tackle youth unemployment.

In carrying out our work we will seek to understand the needs of all employers, large, medium and small, private, public and voluntary, and our recommendations to government will differentiate on size or type of employer wherever such differentiation is appropriate.

For further information on any of the work outlined below please see the full Business Plan which is available on our website www.ukces.org.uk

Strategic Priority 1: Building a more strategic, agile and demand-led employment and skills system

In 2010-11 our work under this priority will focus on:

- Raising the UK’s employment and skills ‘game’ by improving the strategic nature of, and investment in, employment and skills.
- Increasing responsiveness to demand through advice on integration of employment and skills services and informed and empowered customers.
- Ensuring that qualifications delivered by the system become more agile and demand-led, including assessing their suitability for young people.

Priority areas of employment and skills spend: Investigating the priority areas of employment and skills, where public spending can add greatest value towards the 2020 goals, and the opportunities for encouraging additional private investment. Outputs from August 2010 as agreed in each nation.

Strategic Skills Audit: Launch and disseminate the results from the National Strategic Skills Audit for 2010 to provide greater insight and foresight into current and future skills needs (initially in England) that are critical to recovery and longer-term economic growth. We will conduct research and labour market analysis to update the National Audit for 2011. The first Audit report was published in March 2010. The next Audit report will be published in June 2011. The Audit will also feed into work with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to ensure that identified high level skill needs and strategic priority areas are addressed.

2010 Review of employment and skills services: Identifying and advising on ways of driving further simplification, integration and improved effectiveness of the employment and skills system, looking at the whole of the publicly funded employment and skills systems in England, Scotland and Wales (subject to agreement), and assessing progress towards integration and what more needs to be done in each nation. In Wales, the 2010 Review will be conducted with the support of the Wales Employment and Skills Board (WESB). Final reports from March 2011.

Taking forward the systems perspectives of “Towards Ambition 2020: Skills, Jobs, Growth” and “Towards Ambition 2020: Skills, Jobs Growth for Scotland”: Advising on the implementation of proposals made in 2009 as agreed in each nation, particularly around empowering customers through funding (including Personal Learning Accounts) and through better information, advice and guidance via course labelling, community scorecards and e-enabled services. This will include work with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) on the supply and demand of higher skills, graduate destinations/outcomes and customer information systems in Higher Education. Reports will be issued as appropriate.

Qualification development timelines: Proposing a new quality assurance process which challenges Sector Skills Councils, awarding organisations and providers to reduce the development time for new qualifications and apprenticeship frameworks that meet changing employer and learner needs more effectively. The new process will be trialed in the summer of 2010.

Vocational Qualifications Reform: Continuing work to improve vocational qualifications to meet the needs of learners, employers and Higher Education. Quarterly progress reports for government sponsors and an evaluation of the Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme will be produced.

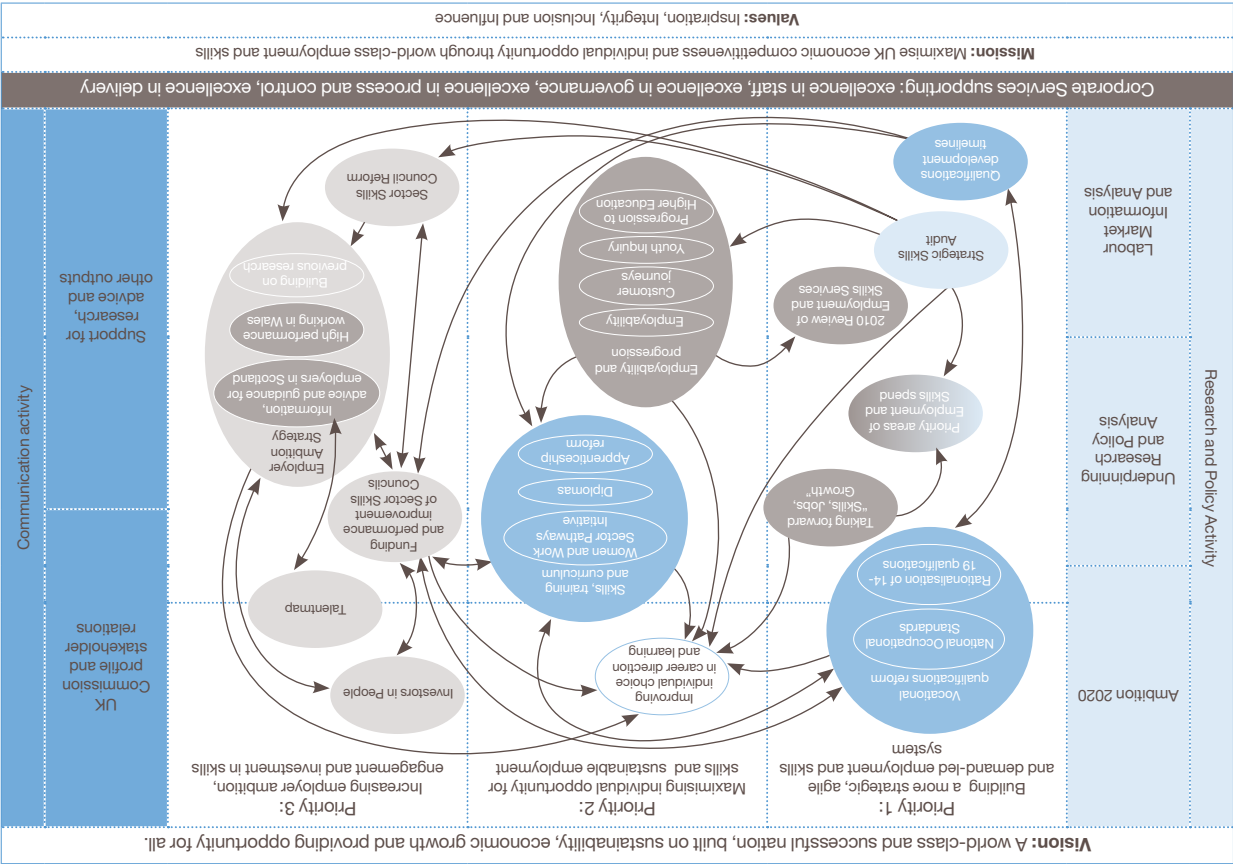


Figure 1: High level strategic map for 2010-11

Key to Lead Directorates

- Research and Policy
- Employer Engagement
- Communications
- Strategy and Performance
- Qualifications
- Corporate Services
- To be assigned

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Strategic Priority 2: Maximising individual opportunity for skills and sustainable employment

In 2010-11, our work under this priority will focus on:

- Reducing the systemic, cultural and informational barriers to employment and progression.
- Improving the content and implementation of qualifications, skills and training opportunities provided by the system to ensure better outcomes and greater satisfaction for individuals.

Employability and Progression: Keeping up our campaign to ensure employability is at the heart of the publicly funded learning system and, through a Youth Inquiry, investigating what works in increasing youth employment. Additional work will follow up lines of enquiry from the 2009-10 work on Customer Journeys and progression into Higher Education. Reports and recommendations will be published in June and December 2010 and in March 2011.

Improving individual choice in career direction and learning: Development of an information, advice and guidance strategy to make proposals for the coordination of the many sources available to individuals and employers. The aim is to empower them to make informed choices about their careers and employment and about the investment of time and money in skills development, skills use and future direction. This will, in England, support the new adult advancement and careers service and, for young people, the ‘Quality, Choice and Aspiration’ strategy. Initial proposals for improving access and quality will be published by March 2011.

Skills, training and curriculum: To improve the quality of, and access to, work-relevant training our work tackles three specific areas: increasing access to training and progression for women through the Women and Work Sector Pathways Initiative; ensuring the new 14-19 Diploma qualifications and curriculum for Science, Languages and International Communication, and Humanities and Social Sciences meet the needs of employers (by June 2010); and, working with key partners, ensuring that apprenticeships frameworks meet the new quality standard for England and Wales (by March 2011), and improving the availability of apprenticeships.

Strategic Priority 3: Increasing employer ambition, engagement and investment in skills

In 2010-11, our work under this priority will focus on:

- Enhancing the capacity of more UK firms to be high growth, high skill, high value added businesses.
- Developing and deploying high quality labour market information, enhanced by foresight on emerging strategic skills requirements, to inform industrial investment priorities; anticipate and better match the supply of skills to emerging demand; and improve skills utilisation.

Employer Ambition Strategy: Development of an Employer Ambition Strategy that will make proposals on how employers can be supported to raise their own ambition and investment in skills and to have a greater influence over the employment and skills system. This strategy will be informed by work from across the UK Commission. The strategy will encompass how the UK Commission’s work related to Investors in People and Sector Skills Councils can make a strong contribution. The work will also meet specific demands from sponsor organisations.

Funding and performance improvement of Sector Skills Councils: The UK Commission’s relationship with the Sector Skills Councils is one of funding, making recommendations to government on performance assessment, and helping them to benchmark and improve their performance, effectiveness and impact on an individual and collective basis.

Sector Skills Council Reform: Working with Sector Skills Councils to help build a more agile and collaborative network, able to respond to the most pressing sectoral skills needs facing the UK economy. In partnership with Sector Skills Councils we have identified areas for collaborative work during 2010-11. The UK government, in its White Paper, “Skills for Growth”, asked the UK Commission to work with the Sector Skills Councils to bring forward proposals for a substantial reduction in their number by 2012. Initial proposals will be presented in October 2010.

Talentmap: Talentmap is a simple but effective framework and web tool to help employers engage with the skills system and navigate through it to find the support they need in relation to skills and talent development. Work will continue in 2010 to further develop both the framework and online service.

Investors in People

Investors in People is the premier business improvement tool for supporting people and talent development across the UK. The UK Commission inherited responsibility for the strategic ownership and development of the Investors in People framework and standard on 1st April 2010 and will work with Investors in People delivery centres to ensure the smoothest possible transition from an employer perspective.

The standard has recently been transformed into a more flexible organisational development framework. During 2010/11 we will consider how the new ‘Choices’ model is aligned to the wider skills agenda, in particular management and leadership, high performance working and skills utilisation. We will also wish to consider how to build sectoral pathways through Choices in partnership with the Sector Skills Councils.

Evidence-based policy

The evidence that underpins our work is fundamental to our ability to challenge, develop, embed and improve employment and skills in the UK. Each project is responsible for ensuring that it is based on firm evidence. In addition, there are underpinning pieces of work that report on and contribute to our understanding of policy and practice across the UK. In conducting this work we will draw on major international research programmes, and collaborate with research organisations and specialists in employment, skills, economic development and growth. We will also continue to seek improvements to strategic, national economic and labour market intelligence across the UK.

Ambition 2020 Report: The UK Commission’s annual report to government on progress towards the employment and skills ambitions across the UK draws on our underpinning programme of labour market information, research and policy analysis and international best practice to provide advice on where improvements might be made in policy and practice to increase progress (2009-10 report due June 2010, 2010-11 report due March 2011).

Skills Research Strategy for England: Development of a skills research strategy including the establishment of a virtual institute to enhance networking with the external research community (strategy published August 2010).

Specific research and policy projects: Projects will be developed to support the strategic priorities and to build on our evidence base and existing findings, taking forward priorities identified by partners including international perspectives on key issues; management and leadership; and individual participation in learning. Reports will be published between June 2010 and March 2011 as each study is completed. Our strategic research advisory group will continue to steer our skills research programme.

Communication of research and intelligence: via monthly editions of Intelligence briefings; series of Praxis policy think pieces; briefing events for policymakers, influencers and decision-makers and International development series, drawing on best practice from abroad.

UK Almanac: Update our web-based and hard-copy resource of spatial and sectoral Labour Market Information by March 2011.

Working Futures: Update our 10 year series of projections of employment and skills by March 2011.

National Employer Skills Survey (NESS): Publish and disseminate the 2009 findings by June 2010, prepare for 2011 NESS (initially England only, extension to other nations under discussion).

UK employer perspectives survey: Employers’ perspective survey report to be published March 2011.

Working with partners and stakeholders

The UK Commission achieves its goals through its effectiveness in informing, inspiring and influencing the goals, ambitions and actions of others. Activities include:

Integrated communications campaigns using a range of activities and techniques including: corporate publications; website development and monitoring; internal communications; stakeholder engagement; media and public relations; public affairs; and events.

Membership of key policy and stakeholder groups.

Communications of outputs and findings from research, analysis, advice and other workstreams through: e-communications; events; internal communications; publications; public relations and media engagement; stakeholder engagement.

Excellent organisation performance

We aim to maintain compliance while driving excellent performance and empowering colleagues across the organisation as much as possible by providing:

- clear policies and guidance, appropriate training and expert customer service enabling consistent approaches;
- efficient and effective back-office systems and processes, supported by high quality tools and systems to reduce time spent on low-value activities; and
- a proactive, forward looking approach to challenges and change facing the organisation.

Support to the Commission and committees: and maximising the contribution of Commissioners through recruitment, induction, knowledge building and facilitating their engagement in revised governance structures. Ensuring Freedom of Information and Data Protection enquiries are dealt with appropriately.

High performance through people and talent management: Leadership and Management programme to develop our managers; Corporate training plan; increased employee engagement with a reformed representatives group and union recognition; and actions to target issues identified from the annual staff survey. We are seeking Investors in People accreditation during the year.

Information and communications technologies: Implement an integrated package of information and communications technologies that enable efficient and collaborative working across the UK Commission and with stakeholders.

Facilities: With cross-organisation ‘Workspace’ group, review working environment to increase high performance and collaborative working.

Finance and procurement: Review and simplify business processes and empower colleagues through use of workflow technology, including the implementation of a new finance/enterprise resource planning system.

Finances for 2010-11

The resources agreed with Sponsors to deliver the UK Commission’s 2010-11 activities are set out below. The figures shown exclude resources for those areas of activity that are still subject to agreement with our Sponsors.

The UK Commission has a total budget of £77,350k. This includes funding for Capital Expenditure of £305k and Non Grant in Aid income of £483k and a depreciation budget of £450k. Of the £77,350k, £55,255k (76%) is used to fund Sector Skills Councils. The rest (£22,095k) is used to fund UK Commission activity of which £7,475k relates to new Investors in People, Research Institute and strategic skills funded activity. Probity and effective management are ensured through a governance framework setting out key organisational policies and controls.