

Vocational Education and Skills Taskforce

Labour's vocational education and skills policy

Our intention is to raise the status of vocational education in schools, colleges and workplaces and in families and communities. We will give young people something to aim for at 18, a 'Technical Baccalaureate', and a clear and quality route through education to get there. We want employers and the wider public to recognise the *Tech Bacc* as signifying a high standard of vocational skills, knowledge and experience.

We will also develop a new system to drive up the number of apprenticeships, so that young people achieving a *Tech Bacc*, and not planning to go straight to university, have a clear next step. We propose a new approach to apprenticeships and skills that puts business in the driving seat. We will give business more control over training funding and setting standards in return for committing to increase high quality training and apprenticeships in their industry.

Labour is committed to addressing these issues as a whole, ending false divides between vocational and academic, skills and knowledge, apprenticeships, training and universities. Labour is committed to increasing access to quality education, skills and training in order to strengthen economic and industrial strategy, and to expand social justice and opportunities for all.

Principal objectives for the Taskforce:

This Taskforce is an independent group providing policy advice and recommendations.

- 1) To engage with stakeholders and the wider public to gather views on our vision for vocational education and skills.
- 2) To develop ideas and suggestions for how we take forward and implement our vision.

Theme 1: Curriculum and assessment routes

Labour wants to develop a transformational 14-18 education system featuring a quality Technical Baccalaureate at 18 for those achieving a rigorous vocational qualification, a work experience placement and achievement in English and Mathematics. The *TechBacc* would sit alongside those A-level programmes of study. We want more and better vocational education up to 18, with all young people undertaking some vocational learning from 14, and compulsory work experience for all 16-18 year olds in quality placements linked to a young person's studies and interests.

To help achieve this, we want to encourage greater employer engagement in schools through work experience, employability skills and, with colleges, the accreditation of vocational qualifications to ensure only the best count towards a Technical Baccalaureate at 18. We are also clear that English and Mathematics should be compulsory for all students up to 18, regardless of a young person's prior attainment.

The Review will explore the following key questions:

1. What should young people learn between fourteen and eighteen?

This question raises curriculum issues: Together, vocational and academic learning should comprise a well-rounded and rigorous education. How can we ensure the choices young people and adults make as they proceed through life offer them more future opportunities not less?

- How can we ensure young people are advised to study the best courses for them, based on their interests?
- Why do some vocational qualifications fail to offer young people the depth of knowledge and skills they need to progress onto further study or an apprenticeship?
- We want all young people to study some English and maths to 18. Should this further study involve working towards a qualification? And what extra training and/or resources would schools and colleges need to deliver this new requirement?

2. How can we ensure high standards for everyone, so that more students have the skills they need for employment?

The question raises issues of assessment and progression: Our exam system is too often geared towards young people following an academic route through GCSEs, A-Levels and on to university, and designed for a time when the school leaving age was 16. Does this system need reform to cater for a participation age of 18 from 2015 and a high quality vocational education 'offer'?

- What is the implication of raising the participation age to 18 for 16-18 apprenticeships, and what would the relationship be of the *Tech Bacc* to the 16-18 Apprenticeship Programme?
- How can learning best be assessed to maintain standards, sustain motivation and recognise real achievement?
- How can we ensure that the system opens up rather than closes down choices?

3. How can we ensure that employers, colleges and schools all play their part?

This question raises issues of structure and organisation: For more young people to experience both quality academic and vocational learning, we want to encourage schools and colleges to work more closely together. This happens in some parts of the country and in many other European countries. How can we spread best practice and can Government help facilitate this cooperation?

- Employers are also crucial here. How can the Government harness the expertise of employers and put them, along with schools and colleges, at the heart of vocational qualifications accreditation?
- How can we increase employer engagement in schools and colleges and increase the number and quality of work placements available for teenagers?
- How can we build a framework which delivers quality and secure progression to high skills employment?

Theme 2: Training and apprenticeships

We want to give employers more effective control over training in return for committing to increase training and apprenticeships. To do this we need to build powerful, employer-led partnerships both sectorally and locally, based on strong partnerships with input from FE Colleges and high quality training providers. We want employers to have more control over the design of training programmes and over closing skills gaps.

We will give new powers to employers in a sector or community to enable them - where they choose - to work together to drive up standards. And we will build an industrial strategy, both sectoral and regional, in which national and local government procurement contracts to large firms depend on providing apprenticeships.

We would like the Review to explore the following key questions:

4. How do we get more high quality apprenticeships?

This question is about the availability of apprenticeships: We need more apprenticeship places. What are the main obstacles employers face when looking to take on an apprentice under 21 years of age and how can we encourage more employers to do so?

- What can we learn from other countries about the way employers are more engaged in, and committed to, training and 'up-skilling' the next generation?
- How can we best engage NEETs and other hard to reach groups in our apprenticeship offer?

5. How do we make sure young people know the choices open to them?

This question is about the routes to training opportunities: We also need higher quality and higher level apprenticeships to prepare young people for the skilled jobs of the future. How can we raise standards in our apprenticeships and ensure there are more level three, four and higher apprenticeships open to young people?

- What can we learn from the best providers of school-leaver apprenticeships? What makes their apprenticeships so successful and in demand?

- How can the public sector best engage with a stronger framework for skills and training and maximise the apprenticeship and training opportunities it offers?

6. How can we ensure that there are opportunities for everyone?

This question is about the training infrastructure: We want employers to take the lead and set up or build on partnerships that suit their industry and region. But how can government best work with employers to facilitate powerful, industry-led partnerships, locally or sector-wide, to deliver training in conjunction with unions, FE colleges and high quality training providers?

- What arrangements would best stimulate business and union membership of, and engagement with, these partnerships?
- What is the most effective way of routing funding for training more directly to employers?
- How can this work with the changing landscapes in skills policy, not least at regional and city level - such as City Deals, or collaborations between LEPs and Local Authorities?

Engagement and consultation

To help us address these issues we are seeking views on the six core questions discussed above, these are:

- 1. What should young people learn between fourteen and eighteen?**
- 2. How can we ensure high standards for everyone, so that more students have the skills they need for employment?**
- 3. How can we ensure that employers, colleges and schools all play their part?**
- 4. How do we get more high quality apprenticeships?**
- 5. How do we make sure young people know the choices open to them?**
- 6. How can we ensure that there are opportunities for everyone?**

Please contact us at skillstaskforce@labour.org.uk with your views and submissions to the Taskforce.