

CII Skills Manifesto 2015



April 2015

The skills pentangle

The Chartered Insurance Institute is the world's leading professional body for insurance and financial services, with over 115,000 members in 150 countries. Our Royal Charter remit is to secure and justify the confidence of the public. Part of this work includes attracting and developing the next generation of talent. We provide support and guidance for our members and employers on apprenticeships and internships, as well as promoting careers in insurance and financial services to students in schools, colleges and universities. In doing so we work closely with employers and so have a clear understanding of what they are looking for from new recruits.

Ahead of May's General Election we have identified five policy issues that an incoming government will need to tackle if the UK is to develop and maintain the skills base required to compete on the global stage. Underpinning this is the need to significantly improve the transition from education into work. Providing a good skills grounding to build upon (vocational and academic are equally valuable) and empowering the next generation to make informed career choices are key components. The CII sees the five following points, what might be described as a pentangle for skills, as vital to achieving this aim.

Call to action

- Stable policy framework – resist the temptation to continually tinker with skills policy
- Apprenticeships – work to further promote the benefits to employers and potential apprentices
- Professional body recognition – make better use of our expertise and experience
- Stronger basic skills – improve literacy and numeracy of those leaving our education system
- Improved careers guidance – provide support to develop the careers guidance process for young people

1. A stable policy framework

We recognise that all governments need to implement manifesto promises, and we are not calling for the status quo. However, the incoming government must resist the temptation to continually tinker with skills policy. It is an area that has witnessed more than its fair share of change over recent years. A stable policy framework is long overdue. Stability provides certainty, which is what employers, providers and learners are crying out for.

Where ministers believe change is necessary, they must realise that in most instances a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate. Each sector of our economy has different requirements and so policy needs to reflect that.

Collaboration is essential to successful policy and this extends to government departments. We would like to see improved collaboration between responsible departments. This represents a realistic objective as there is a welcome consensus across the parties on much of what constitutes the building blocks of a common skills policy.

2. Apprenticeships

The CII welcomes all parties' commitment to apprenticeships. There is no doubting that this has moved up the political agenda and there is much consensus around policy. Apprenticeships are a key part of preparing the nation's future workforce. Promotion to young people and employers is vital to ensure they become embedded in hearts and minds as a route to a successful career. There is still some way to go if we are to bridge the gap between attitudes towards university and vocational pathways. A recent CII survey found only a fifth of sixth form students were considering applying for an apprenticeship. www.cii.co.uk/studentsurvey All parties (government, employers, professional bodies) need to continue to promote the benefits of apprenticeships to potential apprentices and their influencers.

3. Recognising the expertise of professional bodies & professional education

Professional bodies have unrivalled experience of developing standards, expertise in creating relevant and respected qualifications, and enjoy long-standing employer relationships. We have a proven record of providing employers with the standards and exams they want and trust. Policy makers should look to utilise this expertise and look upon professional bodies as willing partners. Significantly we exist at no cost to the exchequer.

Professional education blends academic rigour with practical application. It is continually shaped by the professions and is recognised as a major advantage in competitive global markets. We welcome the recognition of professional bodies in the reshaping of the apprenticeships system, though more can still be done to utilise our expertise.

4. Stronger basic skills

The education system needs to provide students with a strong grounding in the basics that employers require and which provide the basis for a successful future (literacy, numeracy and IT). Our annual skills survey of insurance employers continually highlights this as an issue. Employers are keen to concentrate on developing individual's technical skills, however too many report having to offer remedial literacy and numeracy training.

5. Improving careers guidance and work experience

Despite the creation of the National Careers Service during the last Parliament, careers advice in this country remains unfit for purpose. This is not helped by the current system for the provision of careers advice in schools. Our student survey found that only a third of students feel information about career choices is inspiring, and just over half find careers advice in school helpful.

The provision of information and advice on careers forms an important part of a young person's education. However, it is often provided off the side of a non-specialist's desk – yet it requires specialist skills and knowledge. Therefore, more support is needed to nurture the growth of the careers advice profession. Careers advice remains a Cinderella service and is widely acknowledged to be under resourced and underperforming – to the detriment of a whole generation. Careers advice at its best should provide a dynamic connection between the classroom and workplace.

Our student survey also identified work experience as the preferred way of understanding career options. Employers need to be encouraged to provide meaningful opportunities, as a central part of a functioning careers guidance system. Getting this right is not just the responsibility of government – employers, education establishments and bodies like the CII all have an important role to play in making sure the next generation have the means to make informed career choices.

Daniel Pedley
CII Group Policy & Public Affairs
April 2015

daniel.pedley@cii.co.uk