

The Learning Age - The Response

Introduction

1. *The Learning Age* (Cm 3790) (The Stationery Office, 1998) has been widely welcomed - by individuals, employers, trade unions and all those involved in providing people with opportunities to learn. The Government is grateful to everyone who took the time and trouble to comment on the Green Paper and has found the responses very helpful in the development of its lifelong learning policies.
2. The Green Paper set out the Government's vision for a learning society and a comprehensive set of proposals for lifelong learning for all. The Green Paper covered:
 - the establishment of the University for Industry (Ufi) and individual learning accounts;
 - a major expansion of further and higher education;
 - measures to widen participation in learning across society;
 - proposals to raise standards across teaching and learning;
 - learning in the workplace; and
 - shared responsibilities and the importance of working in partnership.
3. There were about 3,000 thoughtful and constructive responses to the Green Paper from a wide range of interests, including some 2,000 from members of the public. The overwhelming majority of these responses was very positive. This shows the importance so many people - rightly - place on learning in society today.
4. Since *The Learning Age* was published, much has been achieved by the Government and its partners. These include schools, colleges, universities, local authorities, Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), National Training Organisations (NTOs), careers service companies, community and voluntary organisations, companies and national organisations which share the vision of a 'learning society'.
5. The Government has committed substantial resources to the successful implementation of this programme of change. The firm foundations for building an inclusive learning society in the new Millennium are now in place. The responses to *The Learning Age* will help to build on these.

Overview

6. Some of the key messages from the consultation responses are set out below:

- There was overwhelming support for the Government's emphasis on lifelong learning and its overall vision of the learning society, as set out in the Foreword to the Green Paper.
- The proposed expansion of further and higher education to provide for an extra 500,000 people by 2002 was warmly endorsed.
- The concept of the University for Industry was widely welcomed.
- Proposals for developing individual learning accounts received favourable comment from the great majority of respondents.
- In general, respondents supported the Government's plans to invest in young people so that more would continue to study beyond the age of 16.
- The majority of respondents acknowledged the Government's emphasis on adult basic skills and supported its proposals to double provision for adults by 2002; and to set up a working group led by Sir Claus Moser to advise on effective basic skills provision for adults.
- There was a clear consensus that the Government's aim of widening and increasing participation in education and training - via further, higher, adult and community education - was a necessary and desirable step. Many respondents expressed their willingness to be involved in this undertaking.
- There was general agreement with proposals to raise standards across post-16 teaching and learning.
- Many respondents welcomed the idea of setting clear National Targets.
- There was a general recognition of the importance of learning in the workplace.
- The Government's proposals for developing a respected and responsive qualifications system were broadly applauded.

7. Some other issues raised by respondents included:

- the importance of building on existing successful structures and measures and of the Government working in partnership with interested and experienced institutions and organisations at all levels to achieve common goals;
- wariness of too much reliance on information and communication technologies (ICTs), although their considerable potential to facilitate lifelong learning was generally acknowledged;
- the need to ensure that appropriate linkages were made between and across initiatives and measures - and the Government Departments promoting them;
- considerable interest in the publication of further information about the development of initiatives such as the UFI;
- the potential consequences of working towards the Government's vision for its partners; and
- the need for the Government to back up its proposals with resources.

8. The Green Paper was generally welcomed by key national organisations, including the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Funding Councils, the Local Government Association (LGA), the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets (NACETT), NIACE (the National Organisation for Adult Learning), the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the Basic Skills Agency (BSA), the TEC National Council (TNC) and the NTO National

Council. The following quotations are selected from among these responses:

'The CBI has been calling for over a decade for the UK's competitive edge to be sharpened through individuals learning to the optimum. The CBI therefore strongly supports both the vision of a learning society set out in The Learning Age and its mutually reinforcing objectives of enhancing business competitiveness and individual employability.'

'[NIACE] warmly welcomes the breadth and generosity of vision in The Learning Age and, in particular, David Blunkett's foreword in which he recognises that "as well as securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship."

'[The TUC] warmly welcome the Government's commitment to make lifelong learning a key priority for action. The Learning Age has a refreshing breadth of vision in its objectives for learning. We welcome the aspiration of developing a framework for supporting learning for employment, personal development and social cohesion. The TUC recognises the value of learning as a means for people, individually and collectively, to reshape communities and society, improve job security and career progression, and to achieve fulfilment.'

'The [Further Education Funding] Council warmly welcomes 'The Learning Age' and supports its vision of an inclusive learning society. It agrees that a culture of lifelong learning must be firmly established in order to bring about the fundamental shift in the nation's attitudes to education and training that the Learning Age requires.'

'The [Local Government] Association warmly welcomes the Green Paper...as a positive and practical approach to post compulsory learning. We strongly support the emphasis on widening participation, on personal development, learning and achievement.'

'NTOs strongly support the importance of developing a learning culture as critical to the country's competitiveness.'

'The Government is to be congratulated for producing a paper that attempts to treat the entire area of post-16 learning as a whole and for designing a consultation process that allows time for debate in breadth and depth. The very fact of the paper's publication can be regarded as one important step towards building a learning culture.' (professional body)

Background

9. *The Learning Age* and its companion documents, *Further Education for the New Millennium* (DfEE, 1998) and *Higher Education for the 21st Century* (DfEE, 1998) covered all education and training after the age of 16. It invited comment on more than 60 issues, ranging from the potential of broadcasting to the development of credit accumulation and transfer schemes. The Green Paper complemented the Government's earlier White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (Cm 3681) (The Stationery Office, 1997), which dealt with learning between the ages of 3 and 16. Similar consultations on lifelong learning were undertaken in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

10. employers, careers services, trade unions and others. In addition, over 1.5 million copies of a free

summary leaflet have been circulated. During the consultation period, Ministers and senior DfEE officials hosted or supported 12 major conferences around the country. Well over 1,000 people attended these conferences. In addition, many organisations up and down the country ran discussion events for their members and partner organisations.

11. The Government received almost 3,000 responses.

- Two thirds came from members of the public. This was particularly gratifying. In general, these responses reflected great interest in, and commitment to, the concept of the learning society. Many respondents made constructive comments on the various proposals in the Green Paper, often informed by their personal experiences.
- One third of the responses came from interested institutions and organisations. Local education authorities, TECs, NTOs, colleges and universities were strongly represented among these. Further details are given in the table below.

12. Specific responses to the Green Paper are available on request, unless respondents have indicated that they wish their views to remain confidential. Contact 0114 259 4689 or fax 0114 259 4148 or email val.hewson@dfee.gov.uk.

13. Further copies of this summary (Ref: LARespSum) are available from:

DfEE Publications,
PO Box 5050,
Sudbury,
Suffolk,
CO10 6ZQ
Tel: 0345 602 2260
Fax: 0345 603 3360
Email: dfee@prologcs.demon.co.uk

The summary may also be downloaded from the Internet at: www.lifelonglearning.co.uk.

Responses from organisations - breakdown by category	
Awarding/examining body	7
Careers Service Companies & guidance providers	51
Consultants	15
Employers/Employer organisations	48
Further education	125
Government-sponsored bodies/agencies	33
National Training Organisations	38
Libraries	14
Local Authorities/LEAs	173
Museums	9
Private Sector Training Providers	21
Religious bodies	5
Schools	13
TECs	64
Trade Unions/Staff Associations	26
Trusts & Charities	12
Higher Education	91
Voluntary sector	72
Youth Service	9
Other	135
Total	961

Summary of Responses

The Individual Learning Revolution

To achieve the Learning Age, we must put people first - that is, we must remove the various obstacles which prevent participation in learning. We must develop flexible provision and exploit the full potential of information and communication technologies, so that a full range of learning opportunities are available where and when people want them.

14. The Green Paper asked for views on:

- obstacles to learning;
- the roles of the University for Industry and Learning Direct; and
- the potential of broadcasting and information technologies.

15. Typical comments from respondents included:

'If you've never had a job and you don't know anybody who's got a job, it's hard to understand what people mean when they go on about self help. If you're at the bottom of the heap, you have to develop a sense of self worth before you can practise self help.' (individual comment)

'...a relatively modest injection of funds would ensure that a system of quality assured, regional guidance networks were put in place, building on the existing infrastructure.' (careers service)

'...a national childcare strategy is long-awaited and welcome...' (further education college)

'The UfI is an exciting initiative which can act as broker and catalyst to link people with their learning needs - connecting those who want to learn with ways of doing so - whenever and wherever these needs exist.'

'...UfI should not focus exclusively on using new technology to deliver learning...a range of learning methodologies should be available.' (adult guidance organisation)

'Don't let it become just another learning opportunity for the middle class - UfI needs to address the needs of those who have not even got as far as thinking "university's not for me".' (individual comment)

'A reliable and impartial source of information and advice is key - Learning Direct meets that need.' (individual comment)

'The strength of broadcasting is that it has such a high-level penetration into the home, but it is currently a largely passive learning vehicle.' (employer)

'...we must seek coherence and progression for students throughout their lives if we are ever to have a genuine lifelong learning culture.' (adult guidance organisation)

16. It was widely recognised that for some members of society there are very real obstacles to participation in learning.

- Groups identified as needing priority assistance included: part-time students; people on low incomes; the socially disadvantaged; ethnic minorities; people returning to the labour market; students with special needs; older people; and lone parents.
- Barriers quoted by respondents included: the lack of affordable childcare; other care responsibilities; lack of information and guidance services; costs of tuition, examination, equipment etc; the availability of transport, racism and other types of discrimination; benefits regulations.
- Respondents made the point that in some cases special, tailored provision would be necessary to overcome particular barriers.
- Learning in the community was widely viewed as the best way of rekindling the interest of those who had become disaffected by their previous educational experiences.
- There was support for making learning available in places where adults do not traditionally learn, e.g. a comprehensive network of learning centres based in schools, youth centres, churches, chemists, doctors' surgeries, post offices, pubs etc, as well as in libraries, museums. Mobile learning centres, information technology (IT) at home and community schools were also mentioned.

17. The creation of the University for Industry generated strong support and interest.

- Some respondents looked forward to more information about the role, aims and operation of the UfI.
- It was felt to be important that the University for Industry should not get 'blinded by science'. Nor should it underestimate the personal approach and the role of face to face contact in motivating people to learn.
- Some respondents questioned whether the name 'University for Industry' created the right image.
- The need for a strong UfI marketing and advertising campaign - particularly at local level - was emphasised.
- Some felt that help should be targeted at the most disadvantaged groups, such as returners to the labour market, non-learners and low achievers and disabled people. This tied in with a view that there was a need for a comprehensive network of learning centres, not just based around educational providers, but in a variety of easily accessible locations, which would attract customers with a range of backgrounds and needs.
- There was broad support for small firms as a major priority group for the UfI.
- Respondents wanted to see links between UfI and other initiatives, notably individual learning accounts. For example, it was suggested that learning accounts be used to part fund UfI, or that UfI should offer information about learning accounts.

18. Learning Direct was widely welcomed. Respondents were keen that the service should remain an impartial source of advice, once it becomes part of the UfI.

19. There was widespread support for greater use of information and communication technologies and for the role of the broadcasting media, although some respondents suggested that technology could itself become a barrier to learning for some people.

Investing in Learning

The Learning Age will require new ways of supporting learners. Investing in learning benefits everyone so it should be a shared responsibility. We will encourage employers and individuals to take greater responsibility and will target public funds for student support on learners in greatest need.

20. The Green Paper asked for views on:

- investing in lifelong learning;
- individual learning accounts; and
- student support.

21. Typical comments from respondents included:

‘The aims of public funding, and its priorities, are laudable.’ (NTO)

*‘Achieving coherence [of funding etc] is fundamental to the success of “The Learning Age”’.
(further education body)*

‘Employers and individuals will not invest more in learning unless they are convinced that the returns are worth it for them under prevailing conditions.’ (adult guidance organisation)

‘We support the principle of the UfI and of ILAs as important means to increasing access to learning in a flexible manner.’ (NTO)

‘To gain employer commitment to support ILAs it will be vital to minimise administrative complexity.’ (professional body)

‘The introduction of the Right to Study legislation for young people will now be a significant lever in providing access to continued learning for young people...’ (TEC)

‘We believe that support loans should be available to undergraduate students in their early fifties. Life expectancy is increasing... We need to ensure that people can continue to contribute to society and indeed to give of their accumulated experience...’ (adult guidance organisation)

22. There were calls for greater coherence in Government funding of post-16 education and training. Respondents identified a need for parity across the various post-16 options, particularly between the full-time education and work-based routes.

- Suggestions included: a national funding body for post-16 education and training; a unified funding mechanism for education and training for 16-19 year olds; and a single mechanism for funding adult further education and training.
- However, some respondents recognised advantages in using different funding strategies to address different groups with different needs, also stressing the need for local factors and priorities to be catered for.
- There was some support for equal treatment for full-time and part-time study.

23. It was widely acknowledged that Government funds are limited, although there were some calls for additional investment.

- Many respondents favoured the idea of a partnership between Government, individuals and employers for funding learning (including in relation to student support).
- Areas identified as a priority for Government support included: basic skills; special needs; low income families; skill shortages; and updating skills that are out of date or irrelevant within the local labour force.
- Some supported universal Government-supported training up to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 for young people. Others felt that level 3 training should also be supported.
- Basic information, advice and guidance was widely seen as a service that should be universally available and free for adults, with additional guidance needs paid for by the individual.

24. Proposals for individual learning accounts received favourable comment from the great majority of respondents. Particular comments follow:

- The role of individual learning accounts in helping to overcome skill shortages was endorsed.
- Accounts should be simple to operate and easy to understand and that there should be low cost administrative procedures to support them.
- Most welcomed the idea of a 'smartcard' approach, although some feared that it might put off some people who would most benefit from learning.
- Many respondents made suggestions about eligibility for the first million accounts. Some suggested a universal offer; others, help for particular groups. The most widely supported option was to target help on disadvantaged groups, such as the low paid, low skilled or poorly qualified.
- Many respondents proposed incentives for employers to invest in employee learning accounts, although some raised the issue of potential dead-weight costs.
- The need for a cultural change to persuade individuals to understand the importance of investment in their own learning was widely recognised. Some commented on the question of whether people in disadvantaged groups might need help to be able or willing to use accounts.
- Some were keen that the potential of learning accounts for aspirational, non-work-related training should not be diluted.

25. Issues relating to student support also generated debate.

- Respondents were firmly in favour of proposals to make student support loans available to undergraduates in their early 50s.
- There was much support for increasing the size of Access Funds and allowing part-time and younger students to benefit from this provision.
- A number of respondents saw the Learning Age consultation as an opportunity to support recommendations in *New Arrangements for Effective Student Support in Further Education* (the report produced by the Further Education Student Support Advisory Group, chaired by Graham Lane, and published by DfEE in 1998) for a completely new system of student support in further education.

- A few respondents commented adversely on higher education student support arrangements but almost all those who did were themselves students or recent graduates.

Learning At Work

In the Learning Age individuals and their employers will share a responsibility for increasing the quality and quantity of learning at work. We will support employers, employees, and self-employed people in meeting this challenge.

26. The Green Paper asked for views on:

- developing a national framework for learning at work;
- increasing and improving employer investment in learning, especially among small firms; and
- the roles of the National Skills Task Force, TECs, NTOs, Targets and local partnerships in supporting workplace learning.

27. Typical comments from respondents included:

'Until we have a learning culture in the UK, we will continue to lag behind our international competitors.' (individual comment)

'The development of the national framework for the future must have at the centre of its consideration a clear and unambiguous consumer focus and should orchestrate the necessary shift from the current pre-occupation with supply side parameters.' (TEC)

'We share the Government's view that accountability for learning lies with both the individual and employer, supported by the Government.' (employer)

'The new Targets will need...to accommodate learning and achievement which cannot always be readily measured through the formal national qualifications structure but which is none the less valuable and a pre-requisite within the "learning society" model.' (TEC)

'There is widespread enthusiasm for Investors in People amongst training experts and companies which have already achieved the standard. This enthusiasm could be further tapped to encourage new companies to achieve recognition.' (employer)

'Sharing good practice and the creation of a support network for SMEs through a network of small business clubs would be a useful innovation.' (employer organisation)

'The IIP Standard must be accessible in a manner which is relevant to the needs of SMEs to secure their active commitment. Coupled with this, sufficient resources should be available to target SMEs effectively...' (TEC)

'Investors in People is a very useful catalyst to encourage a company to become competitive and look after its staff. However, it is seen as too bureaucratic. The paperwork needs to be reduced and more help supplied.' (employer organisation)

'We welcome the [National Skills] Task Force...' (NTO)

'Local workforce development plans will encourage working together.' (further education college)

'All partners need to work on a changing culture - this cannot come from one body alone.' (NTO)

'A critical condition to enable effective local partnerships will be greater coherence within and between government departments who are jointly steering the work of local partners. "Joined-up" strategic policy development and resource allocation at national level will be critical to enabling "joined-up" delivery, i.e., coherence and genuine partnership at local level.' (TEC)

28. There was widespread support for the creation of a national framework for learning at work.

- Respondents were in favour of national targets 'set and owned' by Government.
- Most respondents expressed strong support for the voluntary approach to workplace learning, although there were a few who suggested that this approach had not worked.
- Many favoured a statutory entitlement to learning for 16 and 17 year-olds in work and some felt that this should be extended to include 18 year-olds. A small minority proposed statutory entitlements to learning for all.

29. The importance of increasing and improving employer investment in learning was almost universally acknowledged.

- Almost all respondents were very supportive of Investors in People and wished to see it more widely implemented.
- Many called for the dissemination of empirical evidence of the contribution learning can make to business success, particularly among smaller firms.
- A number of respondents remarked on the particular difficulties faced by small firms. Investors in People was considered by some to be more difficult for this group. Suggestions included: customised approaches; greater flexibility in evidence; and simpler audit and verification requirements.
- Some respondents suggested fiscal incentives as a way of increasing Investors take-up.
- The idea of employers publishing details of their investment in training was widely seen as a good way of stimulating activity and good practice.

30. In general, respondents wished to see the interested organisations at all levels having clear priorities, but also working in partnership to achieve common goals.

- Respondents expressed support for the work of the National Skills Task Force and endorsed its priorities.
- Links between the Task Force and Regional Development Agencies were generally seen as vital in ensuring that the National Skills Agenda addresses skill shortages at regional level.
- Some respondents recognised the potential of National Training Organisations and wished them to have a higher profile within their sectors.
- The role of TECs was considered to be essentially a strategic one - identifying gaps, driving up quality and guiding employers etc. TECs were seen to be particularly well-placed to co-

ordinate the development and production of Workforce Development Plans.

Realising the Learning Age

Realising the Learning Age will require every part of the education and training system to make its contribution. The challenge is formidable, but the rewards will be great if we succeed.

31. The Green Paper asked for views on:

- investing in young people; and
- widening adult participation in all types of learning; and
- working in partnership.

32. Typical comments from respondents included:

'The Government's Investing in Young People Strategy is extremely welcome.' (trade union)

'The concentration of Careers Service work on those young people most at risk is, in general, welcomed...we have long recognised the need to work in a different way with these young people and have had significant and recognised success.' (careers service)

'It is increasingly recognised that formal institutions such as schools cannot by themselves provide all of the support services and learning experiences which young people need' (youth service body)

'Family learning, training community members to help each other, better access to the Internet, links with broadcasting stations, mentoring and utilisation of Ufi resources are some of the methods available to widen learning opportunities in the community.' (further education college)

'The Learning Age initiatives should seek to encourage learning in the broadest sense: learning as a recreational activity, and learning from recreational activities, can help overcome barriers for those who may otherwise find learning intimidating.' (local government)

'The recommendations of the Tomlinson report, Inclusive Learning, provide a sound basis on which to structure education so that it is genuinely inclusive.' (individual comment)

'Life is no longer just about paid employment. Increasing numbers of older people contribute to society in a wide variety of ways. As the work patterns and social structures change, the role of older people with a wealth of knowledge and experience will become even more vital. Such a role will be further enhanced if these people [can] learn new skills.' (charity)

'More [college] links with local agencies, community groups and tenants associations would be useful.' (charitable organisation)

'There is an urgent need to revitalise this important sector [adult education], and we hope to see new supportive relationships developing between the local authorities, education and

training providers, funding agencies and the Regional Development Agencies to provide a new level of strategic planning for lifelong learning.’ (trade union)

‘We need a real forum in which all providers can be brought together with employers - and employee representatives - to share information and analysis and strategic planning.’ (union)

33. The importance of young people being fully prepared to enter the workforce and to acquire the skills they needed was recognised on all sides.

- Careers education, particularly within schools and colleges, was identified as influential in creating a receptive environment for the promotion of lifelong learning.
- There was a welcome for focussing the Careers Service on young people who are disaffected, at risk or undecided. Many respondents also suggested that this targeting should be extended to support for adults who are disaffected, low skilled or poorly qualified.
- The Investing in Young People initiative was widely welcomed.
- Broad support emerged for partnership in provision. A number suggested establishing local networks for information, advice and guidance and to ensure local coherence and support for national initiatives.

34. The contribution of the Youth Service was acknowledged.

- The main contribution of the Youth Service was seen to lie in: reaching out to disaffected young people; providing information, advice and counselling services; working with reluctant learners; providing accreditation and recognition of informal learning; offering opportunities for social education and life skills; and aiding progression from school to further education and training.
- Many respondents favoured putting the Youth Service put on a stronger footing.

35. Respondents recognised the important and established contribution of the further and higher education sectors to continuing education throughout life.

- There was near universal support for the Green Paper’s emphasis on widening participation.
- Some suggested that partnerships between institutions and communities were an effective way of changing culture and of bringing people into learning.
- There were calls for providers to share good practice in continuing education.

36. There was broad agreement with the Green Paper’s assertion that, in addition to schools, further and higher education and the workplace, people were also able to learn effectively in everyday surroundings - for example, the home, the family and the community. The Government’s moves to support and extend the range of such learning opportunities was widely applauded.

- The creation of the Adult and Community Learning Fund was warmly welcomed.
- Libraries and museums were acknowledged as important ‘gateways’ into learning. The impetus which leisure and volunteer activities can give to learning was also mentioned.
- The value of family learning for children, parents and grandparents was recognised. Some respondents felt that resources for parent education and for parental involvement in schools should be more prominent.

- It was generally agreed that careful attention should be paid to the design and delivery of provision for certain groups of learners - for example, those with mental health difficulties, emotional or behavioural problems or serious physical disabilities. Opening up access to further education for these groups was particularly mentioned.
- The different learning needs and interests of older people were mentioned by some respondents.

37. There was a clear consensus that LEA adult education services should play a significant role in increasing and widening participation among adults.

- There were calls for action to improve the overall standards of service across the country.
- It was suggested that LEAs should publish strategic plans for adult education and lifelong learning.
- Some respondents felt that the links between LEAs and colleges of further education had weakened in recent times and should be strengthened.

38. The importance of working in partnership to achieve the Government's vision was widely acknowledged.

- The value of a co-ordinated approach to lifelong learning at all levels was emphasised. Many respondents approved the Green Paper's moves to encourage sensible and coherent local planning, involving all key players.
- Local partnerships were seen as a key way to ensure recognition of the contribution of lifelong learning to economic development.
- While accepting the value of partnership, some respondents advised that aims, roles and responsibilities should be clearly identified so as to avoid confusion and duplication.
- The UK's effective contribution to international debates on lifelong learning was acknowledged. It was felt by some that the UK itself could benefit from active sharing of best international practice.

Ensuring Standards, Quality and Accountability

The UK must aim for world-class standards in the Learning Age.

39. The Green Paper asked for views on:

- quality and accountability in further education;
- TEC accountability and effectiveness;
- quality in adult education; and
- improving standards and quality in higher education.

40. Typical comments from respondents included:

'The availability of independent assessments on all local education and training providers will be key to raising standards and to informing choice and decision making for both individuals and employers.' (TEC)

'Many of the best, most committed adult tutors undertake such qualifications in their own time and it is reflected in their practice.' (local authority)

'It is essential that TECs remain employer-led but that standards and consistency are improved.' (employer)

'The Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education is an important initiative...we believe that its lessons should be made available to the whole of the post-school teaching profession.' (trade union)

41. Respondents endorsed the Green Paper's emphasis on raising standards and quality assurance.

- There was broad recognition of the importance of inspection in raising standards and achieving consistency of approach between the different sectors and inspectorates involved with post-16 education and training (excluding higher education). Although challenging, it was widely supported.
- Some favoured an over-arching body or single agency which would not only provide consistency but also lead to significant economies of scale. Others cautioned that a national framework of inspection should not lead to an undesirable degree of standardisation, but would need to recognise diversity.

42. Proposals to raise standards and to develop accountability and governance in further education were broadly welcomed.

- There was widespread agreement - particularly among colleges - that both full and part-time teachers in further education should have a recognised initial teacher training qualification within two years of appointment. However, it was considered important that there should be a recognised in-service training route and that a further education teaching qualification should enable free movement between schools and colleges.
- There was general support for the principle that key stakeholders had a role to play in further education accountability.

43. High standards for TECs and their providers were recognised as vital.

- The role of the new Training Standards Inspectorate was widely endorsed.
- A number of respondents commented that high standards required high levels of investment.
- There was broad support for changing eligibility criteria for TEC directors so that they might better reflect their communities and help make TECs more responsive and accountable.

44. There was support for raising quality in adult education.

- A joint approach to standard setting developed by OFSTED, FEFC, the BSA and other relevant bodies found general favour. Some advocated the development and publication of national performance indicators to facilitate benchmarking and target-setting.

- It was recommended that the training needs of adult education tutors should not be forgotten or neglected.

45. There was near universal support for the Green Paper's proposals to improve quality in higher education.

- There was a warm welcome for the new Institute of Learning and Teaching and for the link between funding and teaching quality.
- A small minority of respondents took the view that there was too little understanding of what constitutes quality in higher education.

Recognising Achievement

Qualifications in the Learning Age should meet the needs of people and uphold standards. They must value both academic and vocational achievement, and be easily understood, flexible, and widely recognised.

46. The Green Paper asked for views on:

- qualifications for adults;
- records of achievement;
- key skills for adults; and
- credit accumulation systems.

47. Typical comments from respondents included:

'NTOs strongly support the stated aims for qualifications and the priorities for early action.'
(NTO)

'To ensure that the qualifications system is genuinely able to meet the needs of learners at all ages, and allows individuals to transfer or progress from one type of learning to another without difficulty, [it] must be coherent at all levels.' (employer organisation)

'A framework designed around unitisation and credit accumulation principles will provide the flexibility of learning required by lifelong learning.' (professional body)

'Credit accumulation is a sensible goal but there needs to be standardised quality.' (local authority)

'Basic skills include literacy, numeracy, speaking and listening skills. There must be a clear progression pathway from basic skills into key skills.' (Government agency)

'There is a general consensus that IT should be recognised as a skill that is central to both future learning capability and to future employability. However in the context of the workplace of the future the current distinction between key skills and basic skills is seen to be increasingly arbitrary and inappropriate.' (TEC)

'There are numerous surveys suggesting that "soft" or people skills, including interpersonal communications, are the most required, but also the most deficient of all skills in recruits entering the workplace.' (employer)

48. The Government's aim of developing an easily understood, valued and relevant qualifications system was welcomed on all sides.

- Many respondents recognised the potential of NVQs and supported moves to improve their accessibility and maintain standards.
- The development of the Progress File was well received. It should clearly meet the needs of students and employers and be readily accessible.

49. Credit accumulation and transfer systems generated much interest.

- All those who commented strongly endorsed the proposal to develop such a system in higher education. Indeed there was considerable support for this kind of system in lifelong learning more generally. Many noted that CATS would be powerful tools for widening access and developing parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications.
- All argued that such a system must be based on a clearly understood and universally accepted qualifications framework.
- Many respondents pointed out the difficulties of creating such a system/framework. Key issues identified included: defining what and how to accredit; the 'equivalency' of different learning/qualifications, the 'shelf life' of a unit of credit (particularly in the rapidly changing world of technology); and the implications for existing qualifications. However, most argued that the advantages outweighed the problems.
- There was support for the idea of sub-degrees being offered by higher education institutions.

50. The underpinning importance of key skills and basic skills was recognised by all.

- There was some support for the idea of IT as a basic skill, though it was pointed out that it should not detract from the importance of literacy and numeracy.
- There was support for drawing a distinction between basic skills below level 2 and key skills at level 2 and beyond, although the need to avoid artificial distinctions and barriers between the various levels was understood.