

## **REPLY TO RDAS ON REGIONAL SKILLS PRIORITY STATEMENTS AUGUST 2010**

Thank you for submitting the draft of your Regional Skills Priority Statement 2011/12. We agreed to let you have our comments prior to you finalising the statement for publication in September.

We acknowledge that statements have been developed during a period of transition to a new coalition Government and a new vision for skills. As you know, the Government is committed to simplifying the skills landscape and to freeing colleges and training organisations from external control so that they are able to respond quickly and efficiently to emerging needs of local businesses, learners and communities.

We expect colleges and training organisations to use the Statements to guide their delivery in the short to medium term. They will be of particular value during the transition period when local enterprise partnerships are being established and until they agree their own arrangements for communicating local economic priorities with colleges, training organisations and other partners. It will be important that colleges and training organisations work closely with their local enterprise partnerships and other local partners so that they can co-ordinate their efforts around delivering local priorities. It is also very helpful that the Statements draw out priorities for the skills that are needed to support growth.

BIS will publish information about the public investment in Skills in the autumn that will cover the Spending Review period 2011-15. This information is likely to reinforce the new vision for the skills and FE sector, on which we are currently consulting, where the relationship between further education and its direct customers - learners and employers- takes primacy and is the key to securing high quality and relevant training.

As you may know, we have agreed through the RDA/Skills Funding Agency Implementation Board that it is appropriate for BIS to comment on the statements in a high level advisory capacity in order to contribute to the breadth and depth of consultation and be satisfied that they are supported by a clear evidence base, and that any messages are consistent with the policy of the Coalition Government, to ensure that messages are directed to best effect. We do not however consider it appropriate to challenge what regional and local partners have agreed is important.

We are conscious that in developing your statement you are required to provide evidence of how you have arrived at your conclusions and will want to include supportive data. BIS recognise the issues that have been faced by the regions in including robust, consistent data in their statements. We have worked with the regions and the Skills Funding Agency to resolve any data issues that have arisen following the submission of draft statements to the department at the end of July. We have since received revised statements from each of the regions, and have now provided final comments on the use and presentation of data. We have received assurance from you that your statement references data that

is in the public domain, and adheres to the data sharing protocols agreed with each RDA. It will be for you to ensure that the final iteration of your statement complies with the arrangements we have agreed.

We acknowledge that priorities statements have been developed during a period of new and emerging Government skills policy and that this has brought challenges to the RDAs. I would like to thank you for the work you have done in working up the statement, particularly given those challenges. It provides a rich source of data for colleges and training organisations and for local partnerships, including local enterprise partnerships as they emerge. We place considerable importance on these messages being disseminated effectively during the forthcoming period and welcome the partnership approach taken by the RDAs and the Skills Funding Agency to that end.

I look forward to receiving your final statement in September.

### **Specific comments for each RDA**

#### **East of England**

Overall the East of England statement is of the analytical tone we would expect and suggests a collaborative approach locally to address the issues raised, with the emphasis placed on what the region needs to do to respond to priorities.

The document provides a helpful overview of the consultation approach and communication tools that have been utilised in the development of the statement, including hosting sub regional events. It is interesting to see that a web consultation was conducted to allow a wider audience to contribute to the consultation process and it would be helpful if further details were given on what additional value this form of consultation brought to the overall process. It is noted that the consultation with universities and the FE sector was routed through representative bodies and it would be helpful to see more clearly what level of engagement with individual colleges, training organisations and Universities took place as a result of adopting this approach.