



News Release

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New Report Warns of Further Education Crisis

Problems with staff training, new course development and student enrolment are seriously damaging the Further Education sector's ability to rise to the challenges and opportunities presented by scientific innovation. This in turn harms industry as a whole.

These are among the findings of a major report that urges the new Skills Funding Agency to take the lead in preventing a crisis in FE provision. In the wake of the Learning & Skills Council funding crisis earlier this year, it argues a major overhaul of the FE system is needed to avoid further problems.

The report, entitled: "Emerging Technologies, Emerging Markets: are you ready for the opportunities?" has been produced by the New Engineering Foundation (NEF), a vocational education think tank. It concentrates on the role the FE sector plays in the development and application of new technology, an area crucial to the country's economic future. Over the last fifteen years the contribution of high-technology manufacturing and knowledge-intensive services to UK gross value added has increased steadily to over 40%¹.

Key findings of the report include:

On staffing:

There is a major problem attracting and retaining the best staff. Funding problems prevent colleges from offering competitive salaries and advanced professional development, often with negative consequences for teaching standards.

On qualifications:

There are severe delays in the development and approval of courses to meet the demands of rapidly emerging technologies. With time lags as long as two years between identifying a need and offering a course, the current system actively discourages innovation in provision.

On innovation:

New Engineering Foundation
Suite 2, 10 Bective Place, London SW15 2PZ
Web: www.neweng.org.uk Tel: 0208 786 3677 Fax: 0208 871 3620

Registered Charity Number 1112354



The application of new technologies is hampered by a lack of trained technicians. For example, quantum-dot technology could revolutionise the energy debate by providing cheap and efficient solar power. The application of these and other technologies may be severely compromised without an appropriately trained workforce.

New Engineering Foundation Chief Executive, Sa'ad Medhat, said:

"This report demonstrates an urgent need for changes to the funding and structure of the FE sector. There are many talented and hard-working people whose efforts are being undermined by a system that is currently not equal to the task. We urge the Skills Funding Agency to take these recommendations on board."

David Willetts MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Universities and Skills said:

"I welcome the New Engineering Foundation report, which shares my commitment to improving and extending vocational programmes through effective investment and strong links to industry. The report confirms a real need for training young people with the skills to compete in emerging and innovative new industries, both in Britain and around the world. I hope to take forward many of the ideas represented in the report in my plans for a streamlined funding system for further education, through a new Further Education Funding Council, ensuring responsiveness to business and industry".

ENDS

Notes for editors:

1. The New Engineering Foundation (NEF) was established in 2004 as a grant awarding charity and a think-tank that supports the development of Vocational Education in science, engineering and technology through providing policy advice and advocacy, undertaking and commissioning research studies and impact analyses, and developing and delivering educational programmes and resources.
2. The key messages that emerged from the study are:
 - **Advocacy and leadership is needed at a national level** to change deep-rooted perceptions of STEM related sectors and disciplines.
 - **Funding and funding methodologies need to be revised**, particularly in respect to encouraging colleges to be more flexible, respond quicker and have the capability to horizon.
 - **Strengthening the links between industry, Higher Education Institutes and the FE sector is vital** if better alignment is going to be achieved.



- **Response times to emerging market/technology needs must be improved** – the ‘time lag’ is too great – this will require different and more flexible models of course development and delivery, as well as quality assurance.
 - **FE colleges need to be able to access effective market intelligence**, particularly at a regional level, more readily accessible to FE colleges is a prerequisite if strategic and curriculum planning decisions are to be evidence based and the risks of investment reduced.
3. The recommendations identified for further action are:
- **The planning, commissioning and funding of provision in the FE sector is an area of concern. The current model inhibits long-term strategy and planning in colleges and does not readily enable colleges to be responsive to new and emergent skills needs.**
 - **Colleges are not well placed to drive strategic investment – individually and collectively Government departments, strategic funding agencies, leading industry representatives need to examine how colleges and the sector can be better engaged in early strategic discussion and how viable commercial learning solutions can be enabled.**
 - **Improving the responsiveness of the FE system to the needs of learners and employers (which are related to new and emerging technologies) will require a streamlining of the processes involved in course approval and/or a rationalisation of the number of awarding bodies and other bodies (e.g. SSCs) that influence the curriculum alongside building the capacity and capability of the sector.**
4. The New Engineering Foundation Industrial Fellowship Scheme has been running since 2005, in that time over 300 lecturers have taken part, from over 150 Further Education Colleges nationwide, benefiting over 140,000 learners. Participating companies are estimated to have contributed over £2.3 million in kind.
5. The New Engineering Foundation Knowledge and Technology Exchange Node projects were launched in September 2008. The aim of the projects is to enable FE Colleges to play a more comprehensive role in the provision of knowledge and technology transfer/exchange solutions with business and industry, strengthening economic development at local, regional and sector levels. 22 proposals were received in October 2008 from 20 FE Colleges. 11 proposals have been successful, ensuring coverage in 8 of the 9 Regional Development areas.
6. The full report “Emerging Technologies: Emerging Markets - *are you ready for the opportunity*” can be found from: www.neweng.org.uk/TomHampson09/EmTechnologiesWeb.pdf

^{1 1} Work Foundation (2006) Defining the knowledge economy
http://www.theworkfoundation.com/assets/docs/publications/65_defining%20knowledge%20economy.pdf