

LSIS Brief Guide

Unleashing Aspiration: The Government Response to the Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions
(February 2010)



Introduction

1. This brief guide summarises the government response to *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*.¹ The government's paper responds systematically to each of the 88 recommendations – in the main, accepting them if not totally, then partially, or in principle.
2. It is expected that these recommendations will apply to the whole of the learning and skills sector, however this brief guide mirrors the original terminology in the document which refers to 'colleges'.

Background

3. The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions published *Unleashing Aspiration* in July 2009. The panel, a cross-party assembly chaired by former health secretary Alan Milburn, was established in the White Paper *New Opportunities: Fair Chances for the Future*² (January 2009) in response to increasing concerns that persons from low-income backgrounds were being denied access to professional careers. *Unleashing Aspirations* contained the panel's 88 recommendations for addressing unequal access to the professions. In its investigation of the social make-up of the major professions³, the panel found that an increasing proportion of the membership of most professions comes from families with an above-average income.
4. The paper suggested several reasons for the increasing lack of social mobility in the professions. These included an increasing emphasis on obtaining professional qualifications, especially in law, journalism, accountancy and nursing; the deliberate tightening of the qualifications requirements in several professions to restrict access; the concentration of professional jobs in London and South East England, and; the inability of people in vocational education to progress into professional work.

¹ <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf>, LSIS prepared a brief guide on the document, available [here](#).

² <http://www.lsis.org.uk/Libraries/Documents/BGNewOpportunities.sflb%20http://www.lsis.org.uk/Libraries/Documents/BGNewOpportunities.sflb>

³ The professions include: actors, musicians and writers; lecturers and professors; nurses; teachers; stockbrokers and traders; scientists and other medical professions; engineers; bankers; accountants; journalists and broadcasters; doctors, and; lawyers, according to the graph on page 19 of the Panel's final response. The graph measures the social exclusivity of the professions. The police and the armed forces are mentioned in other parts of the paper.

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5. The government response states that *'Promoting greater social mobility must be a fundamental ambition for our society.'* (p.4) This means *'creating fairer chances for all and removing the barriers some people face getting on in life. It means promoting a more equal society, which is based on merit regardless of background'* (p.4). This statement early on in the government response conveys the spirit of the rest of the document.
6. The panel had identified that there is not a single definition of the professions, however, the government response states that in spite of the lack of definition, there are a number of common aspects for these occupations. These include occupations with recognisable entry points based on education and/or experience, a code of conduct or guidance, systems to maintain standards and quality within the profession and a commitment to continuing professional development.
7. The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions stated that social mobility was essential to the UK's economic and social prosperity. Having referenced the current economic slowdown, the document states that the government *'cannot afford to let anyone's background hold them back from fulfilling their potential... raising aspirations , especially for children and young people through high quality advice and the encouragement of the exposure to role models will increase motivation and a sense of ambition. Anyone with the ability and motivation must be able to get the best education and training they need'* (pp. 4- 5).
8. The proposals in the document are also supported by measures set out in **Higher Ambitions** - to ensure wider and fairer access to Higher Education; in **Skills for Growth**⁴ - the plan to *'empower'* people by developing skills accounts; and in the DCSF publication, **Quality, Choice and Aspiration**, which sets out a strategy to improve the information, advice and guidance young people receive to encourage aspiration.

Report

9. This brief guide highlights primarily the government's response to the recommendations with particular relevance to the learning and skills sector.
10. **Recommendation 1:**
Social mobility should explicitly be the top overarching social policy priority for this and future governments. The Government should develop new ways of embedding this priority across all government departments. It should develop new partnerships with civic institutions, professional bodies, community organisations and individual citizens to help deliver this priority.

⁴ See the LSIS Brief Guide to [Skills for Growth](#)

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The government has accepted this recommendation stating that *'Improving social mobility is a key element of the Government's social... We will continue to focus our energies on providing everyone in society with greater and fairer opportunities'* (p.10).

11. Recommendation 2

Building on the New Opportunities White Paper, the Government should establish an expert social mobility commission. The Commission should have at its core three key roles: research, technical advice, and transparency and accountability. It should be comprised of a small number of independently appointed experts, meeting as an advisory board and supported by a handful of staff.

The government has accepted this recommendation and will set up a social mobility commission. This will be implemented with a *'Transition Team'* which will be set up *'immediately'*, with the creation of the full Commission following shortly after (p.11).

12. Recommendation 4:

The professions and Government should together introduce a national scheme for career mentoring by young professionals and university students of school pupils in Years 9 to 13. The national mentoring scheme should involve partnerships with employers, voluntary organisations, universities and schools.

The government accepted recommendation responding that BIS, via the Higher Education funding Council for England, has now implemented an Aimhigher Associates scheme, whereby undergraduates mentor pupils from similar backgrounds to in schools where there is low progression to HE.

13. Recommendation 22:

Schools and colleges should have direct responsibility for providing information, advice and guidance, with a professional careers service located in every school and college – starting from primary age.

This recommendation was accepted in part. As local authorities (LAs) have relatively recently been given leadership roles for IAG, it was felt that they should be given 18 months to two years to see if they deliver *'better outcomes and more coherent services for young people'* (p.21). The response agrees that schools and colleges should play an *'important'* role in commissioning careers services and in ensuring that they meet their needs. The expectation is that LAs will work closely with schools and colleges in the commissioning and design of IAG services.

14. Recommendation 23:

The Government should remove careers responsibility from the Connexions service. It should reallocate an estimated £200 million to schools and colleges in order to give them the freedom to tender for careers services from a range of providers.

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The government has rejected this recommendation. The response acknowledges that IAG delivered through Connexions varies considerably across the country, however, the recently published IAG Strategy announced that the quality and effectiveness of local authorities' delivery will be reviewed in 2011. The IAG strategy sets out the action that government is taking to *'support system leaders and the workforce to deliver the best possible IAG to young people'*.

15. [Recommendation 25:](#)

Schools, colleges and professions should work in partnership to produce career prospectuses and online information sources aimed at parents. Information could include routes into different professions and the remuneration and costs involved.

This recommendation has been accepted. The response states that the Gateways to the Professions Collaborative forum will provide advice on how this should be implemented. Schools and colleges are expected to have a role in disseminating the information and guidance.

16. [Recommendation 29:](#)

Universities and the Government should actively promote a range of entry points through an all-year academic calendar in order to allow learners to enrol on, and undertake, courses at more flexible times throughout the year.

The government accepted this on the basis that flexibility of time and place is *'key to creating wider and fairer access'*. The government has asked HEFCE to develop further flexibilities. The response states that *'we recognise that it is up to each university or college to take decisions on what it can provide, reflecting local circumstances and the profile of the student population'*.

17. [Recommendation 33:](#)

The Government should ensure that it delivers on its commitment to incorporate apprenticeship frameworks into the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) points system by 2010.

The government response accepts this stating that the BIS Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) includes a requirement that all frameworks should show clear progression routes and that *'qualifications within level 3 and level 4 frameworks will be accredited with UCAS tariff points'* (p.26). The requirement is that all apprenticeship frameworks should be fully compliant with the SASE by April 2011.

18. [Recommendation 34:](#)

The Government should fully fund an initial 3,000 Apprenticeship Scholarships to higher education, rising over time to 10,000 every year, to give the most talented apprentices the chance of a university education. Funding should come from existing Train to Gain budgets.

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The government response accepted this *in principle*. It refers to the skills strategy which announced a scholarship fund of £1 million from autumn 2010 so that *'some 1000 of the best apprentices receive £1000 each to incentivise further progress with their learning and skills development including in higher education'*. This scheme is part of a range of measures to widen the range of higher apprenticeships and to improve the information on pathways to HE following an apprenticeship.

19. Recommendation 35:

Universities and colleges, working with the Government, should make the concept of 'Higher Education within Further Education' one that is universal across the country so that many more mature students, in particular, are able to study for a degree.

The government partially accepted this recommendation. Whilst recognising that HE delivered in FE colleges *'is a valuable part of the higher education landscape'* (P27), the government view is that this should, rather, take place through *'innovative partnerships between universities and further education colleges, and by support for new local higher education centres under the New University Challenge initiative'* (p.27).

20. Recommendation 40:

The Higher Education Statistics Agency should publish information on student admissions at university, college and course level, with more detail on pupils' backgrounds. This should be published annually, with year-on-year progress tracked. It should be provided in a format that enables a transparent assessment of the effectiveness of widening participation expenditure at the individual university level.

The government response accepts this in principle, however, the response to this recommendation is solely in relation to universities only.

21. Recommendation 42:

In order to overcome financial fears, universities should help schools to inform children before they reach the age of 16 – together with their parents – about the grants and financial

The government accepts this recommendation referencing the current activities and stating that Student Finances England (SFE) will be asked to provide *'centralised, accessible, and streamlined information application service'* (p.32).

22. Recommendation 68:

Each profession should work with the National Apprenticeship Service and the relevant Sector Skills Councils to establish clear progression routes from vocational training into the professions, and ensure that learners are aware of these routes.

The government response accepts this, stating that BIS will work with the Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum to develop guidance on a framework setting out

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these progression routes. This is set to be implemented as part of the new Specification of Apprenticeship Standards in April 2011.

23. Recommendation 69:

The Government and the professions should provide a repository of best practice setting out practical ways in which vocational routes can be expanded into the professions.

The government accepts this recommendation. BIS and the Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum are set to implement this by June 2010. BIS will build on 'the progression opportunities available through vocational qualifications and identified in all Diplomas and the Diploma Development Partnerships' (p.42).

24. Recommendation 70:

The Government should extend apprenticeships in professional areas of employment in government departments. Where applicable, these should be explicitly linked to existing management development programmes such as the Civil Service Fast Stream.

The government accepts this recommendation and 'has pledged to create an additional 35,000 apprenticeship places across the economy as a whole of which 1,600 will be in government departments this year' (p.43) BIS and Cabinet Office will be responsible for these actions. The government department apprenticeships are to be set in place by April 2010.

25. Recommendation 71:

The professions should consider how to introduce apprenticeship schemes as part of their reviews of fair access processes in recommendation 66.

The government accepts this recommendation *in principle* stating that the Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum will develop proposals by June 2010 on how this recommendation should best be implemented.

26. Recommendation 77:

The Government should reconfigure the existing Skills Account programme to establish a truly demand-driven system of Lifelong Skill Accounts. They could comprise a voucher up to the value of £5,000 that could be topped up through contributions from individuals and employers with a wide range of entitlements, including to apprenticeships, professional qualifications and to part-time further and higher education programmes, for example.

Accepting this recommendation, the government response states that the Skills Strategy sets out how the government will do this putting 'power and choice firmly into the hands of the learner. Accounts will give individuals greater choice and purchasing power, and let them drive quality improvements across the skills system' (p.45). Skills accounts will be rolled out nationally from autumn 2010.

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27. **Recommendation 78:**

As part of a shift to a more demand-led model of training the Government should review how to redirect support for employers through tax or other direct incentive schemes.

The government accepts this in principle stating, however, that tax measures might not be the most effective way to deliver this assistance, and raising the existing subsidy system as more advantageous.

28. **Recommendation 79:**

As part of a shift to more demand-led training, the Government should review how it can free up the oversight and control of further education.

This recommendation is accepted, stating that the Skills Strategy sets out ‘*how the system of oversight and control of further education is to be simplified*. This includes ‘*greater freedom for all colleges and training institutions to manage their resources more flexibly, combined with enhanced freedoms for outstanding colleges and providers across their total budget*’ (p.46). BIS is reviewing the roles and responsibilities of intermediary bodies alongside efficiency and Public Value Programme considerations. ‘*The design and structure of the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People’s Learning Agency are in line with this recommendation. The Learning and Skills Improvement Service, set up as a sector owned body, places increasing oversight and budgetary control over improvement and development activity in the hands of the sector*’. (p.46)

29. **Recommendation 80:**

The Government should ensure that future increases in spending are better aligned between further and higher education, recognising the important contribution of further education colleges for social mobility, particularly as providers of diverse training routes into the professions.

The government accepts this in principle, stating that it will consider the balance between FE and HE in the forthcoming spending reviews, and will reflect on the outcome of the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance by the end of 2010. This is to be implemented by the end of 2010.

Key messages and implications for the sector

30. The government has accepted the vast majority of the recommendations made by the panel, setting implementation dates, and in some cases has made a start or fully implemented proposals. The current pre-election period does, however, mean that there is some uncertainty as to whether all of the agreed recommendations will hold should there be a change of government.

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31. The agreed recommendations, for now, however represent some important opportunities for learning and skills providers to establish themselves as genuine partners in the move to increase access to the professions, and in the wider ambition of improving social mobility. The government's assertion that a significant inhibitor of social mobility is the lack of progression from vocational education into the professions, provides a compelling argument for rapid development of such pathways, including from apprenticeships.
32. The response proposes that BIS and the Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum provide a repository of best practice which sets out practical ways in which vocational routes can be expanded into the professions. This will ideally draw on examples of real practice so these will need to be developed rapidly to meet the deadline of June 2010. These pathways might most usefully be developed on a regional or sectoral basis and the LSIS Flexibility and Innovation Fund could provide a useful source of support for providers wishing to develop collaborative models.
33. The acceptance in principle of the recommendation that the government should ensure that future increases in spending are better aligned between further and higher education, in recognition of the important contribution of learning and skills providers to social mobility, is particularly welcome. The agreement in principle is welcome even though action will depend on the outcome of spending reviews (see paragraph 29 above), and the current cuts in public spending create an unwelcoming climate for additional funding demands.

Key messages for LSIS development and support services

34. The report of the National Equality Panel '*An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK*'⁵ was published shortly after this response. It set out how inequality accumulates over a lifetime and across generations, and crucially highlights that public intervention is most necessary and effective during the pre-school years, at the transition from education to the workplace and when re-entering the labour market after having children.
35. The profile given by these two reports to issues of equality and social mobility provides an opportunity for the learning and skills sector to promote its unique capacity to help address these priorities within their communities. The imperatives to address inequality and increase social mobility are likely to command high levels of political attention, irrespective of the outcomes of the imminent election. Discussion regarding the implications of these reports and formulation of a sector response will form a dimension of LSIS's planned regional conversations on community development and will help to inform strategy.

⁵ See LSIS Policy Update No 31

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