

## Higher Level Skills in Tees Valley – Extract from full report<sup>1</sup>

### Background to the High Level Skills Study

In their 2009-2012 business plan, Tees valley Unlimited (TVU) prioritised the development of a higher level skills strategy. The purpose therefore of this report (undertaken by Teesside University, on behalf of TVU) was not to duplicate effort but to look at higher level skills in Tees Valley, specifically set these within the national context and develop some ideas around taking forward the notion of a higher level skills strategy/framework in the sub-region.

Key to this was how to move the higher level skills agenda forward so that sub-regional priorities are strategically aligned with the Government's national priorities and regional priorities, whilst at the same time ensuring that a Tees Valley identity is maintained and promoted.

The scope of the study focussed on some of the key economic sectors in Tees Valley, namely :

- **process industries/energy/advanced engineering;**
- **logistics; and**
- **digital multi media**

The study had three main objectives:

1. To assess the demand for higher level skills in key economic sectors of Tees Valley.
2. To measure demand against existing provision, identifying how provision meets demand and where gaps exist.
3. To develop a key reference document for the Tees Valley as part of the case to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) for the devolution of funding to the Tees Valley Employment and Skills Board.

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<sup>1</sup> High Level Skills in Tees Valley - Dr Ruth Helyer and Dionne Lee, Teesside University on behalf of Tees Valley Unlimited, May 2010

## Key messages from the study:

### Communication/Relationships

- What are higher level skills? – this message needs to be clearly articulated as there is currently much confusion and misperception
- Lines of communication between all partners need to be plain, visible and nurtured
- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must translate their language – to ensure mutual understanding
- Progression routes need to be straightforward, effective and promoted
- An ongoing dialogue is crucial to future developments – research responses were rich (and real) – important to foster more of this
- This dialogue needs to be sustainable – not with a project, short-term, funded mindset
- Training Suppliers must be responsive – but demand-led initiatives need to be strategically thought through – not knee-jerk and/or profit-motivated
- Businesses are driven by their business plans and budgets - HEIs must build relationships which enable ongoing involvement

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce

- Society is changing rapidly (and with it lives and jobs)
- It is crucial to equip the workforce with the skills needed for the future
- Employers, employees and HE institutions need to be changeable, adaptable and pre-emptive
- Tees Valley must be equipped to maximise on new opportunities, tying them were possible to existing strengths, and not be allowed to decline but rather strive for excellence in growing industries
- A high percentage of business respondents commented on the need to diversify to survive – they need *new* skills, as well as improving the ones they have
- The ageing workforce is an important factor – but there is some evidence of best practice around mentoring

- Employees need up-skilling to progress up the work ladder, this also creates room in the middle and lower levels for new employees
- Focussed up-skilling impacts on competitiveness, innovation, creativity and productivity - thus creating more job opportunities
- Discussion around improving participation of future employees is crucial to the debate – development of non traditional and alternative routes into higher education is essential
- Information Advice & Guidance needs to be of high quality (and easily accessible) from the youngest age to ensure that an ethos of lifelong learning and career development is fostered in young people
- There are distinctive (and well documented) character traits and attitudes which differ between generations and it is well worth considering these
- In addition to subject-specific skills, graduates need transferable/ generic/employability skills – these were the most requested by interviewees – for example Leadership & Management
- Higher level skills develop the whole person and facilitate the achievement of personal and professional aims – they support the fulfilling of potential and facilitate social justice

### **Bigger (and Balanced) Picture**

- Any Tees Valley skills strategy needs to be aligned with the national skills strategy and local, regional, national and international plans and priorities
- Huge amount of publications have focused on skills issues in the last 12 months – the key documents are précised in this report
- Any Tees Valley skills strategy must be part of the bigger picture in order to ensure that the area can monopolise on opportunities (including funding) and therefore survive and prosper
- The other key sectors in the Tees Valley should also be considered
- Any Tees Valley skills strategy needs to pay due attention to industries/sectors/jobs that are emerging or that do not exist yet
  - Regular gathering of labour market intelligence is needed to ensure that any skills strategy for the Tees Valley evolves and stays relevant

***The full High Level Skills Report is available at [www.teesvalleyunlimited.gov.uk](http://www.teesvalleyunlimited.gov.uk) )***