



The coalition government will bring opportunities for the sector

Political change

WE HAVE NOW HAD TIME TO MUSE

on the enormity of political upheaval. Britain has a coalition government, almost unprecedented in peacetime, and an education and training policy that results from two very different manifestos and political horse-trading.

The previous government's array of skills initiatives now lies on a congealing plate of cold, and unaffordable, spaghetti. Once again, it's 'all change,' and business stands to be confused.

The new government will base its decisions on the overriding need to address the budget deficit, the challenge of getting Britain back to work and the need to satisfy the manifesto commitments of each party.

Leading political figures themselves will also influence decisions, and the employment, skills and tourism arena is largely comprised of experienced Conservative politicians. Many, like David Willetts, minister for science and universities and John Hayes, minister for skills and further education, have been part of the skills community for several years and can be relied upon to bring a belief in business-led priorities and more freedom for educators at a local level.

Willetts and Hayes, along with the secretary of state for education, Michael Gove, were significant contributors to the Conservative manifesto, and we can expect to see them follow through on their promises unless there are complete ideological differences with the Liberal Democrats.

The coalition programme promises a cull of further education quangos, which could apply to a number of agencies – including regional development agencies – which have skills functionality.

Although many businesses will welcome greater clarity and fewer points of contact, it is likely that the interface will still be more complicated than employers are used to and there will still be a need for agencies which can help.

The Labour government's flagship 'Train to Gain' programme also looks doomed – but, in this world of austerity, I see great opportunities for skills development and employment in hospitality, leisure and tourism.

Apprenticeships provide one of the main opportunities for employers to access funding for work-based learning. The sector is already one of the biggest trainers of apprentices – however, this is usually amongst larger employers.

The Conservative manifesto included a £2,000 incentive for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) to take on an apprentice. We will see whether this remains an affordable option but, as case studies show, apprenticeship programmes do have dramatic and positive returns on investment.

Colleges will have more freedom to respond to local needs, provided that they continue to offer quality-assured programmes, like the Professional Chefs' Diploma, in increased volumes.

The coalition has already committed

to engage business directly in getting the million unemployed young people back to work. Before the election, People 1st brokered an agreement between the Conservatives and 20 leading hospitality and tourism businesses to train 50,000 young people over two years. This initiative is a first, and puts the sector in a cutting-edge position.

Employers will receive direct funding for providing training and work placements to individuals. These individuals will have employability skills for SMEs in our sector.

My belief is that the new political dawn provides a real opportunity for our industry to polish up its reputation and be taken seriously by government and industry entrants. Not only are we an engine room for jobs, a 'decade of sport' will provide a worldwide showcase for the sector in the UK, and a rare opportunity to change international and internal perceptions.

We are now recognised as investing more in training per worker than any other business sector, and we know that the new political environment will be one where responsibility for investment will fall more to business as state resources are refocused.

I see our situation in this new, austere, world as being one of great opportunity, and a chance to establish ourselves as a powerhouse of British industry – not only in fact, but in the minds of those we rely on as our customers and workforce. We are, after all, a business for people first. ●

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