

SOUTH LONDON PARTNERSHIP RESPONSE TO DRAFT SKILLS FOR LONDONERS STRATEGY CONSULTATION

December 2017

Background

The South London Partnership (SLP) is a sub-regional collaboration of five London boroughs: Croydon, Kingston upon Thames, Merton, Richmond upon Thames and Sutton. Through collaboration – between ourselves and with local public, private and voluntary and community sector partners – the South London Partnership is committed to accelerating and increasing the potential for economic growth in this area, beyond what we can achieve individually. South London has a critical role to play in the capital’s economic future. It currently houses a £28 billion economy with great opportunities for growth which can support and alleviate pressure on central London.

SLP boroughs’ educational influence spreads far beyond its boundaries. As well as being a major supplier of talent to central boroughs, the sub-region has key specialist schools drawing students from across London and beyond, as well as supporting a significant East to South-West travel to learn route for further and adult education. The sub-region is also significantly placed between the country’s two major airports and is strategically placed to secure London’s influence on the scientific corridor to the south of the capital and the technology in the Thames Valley.

Our [Growth Proposition](#)¹ sets out five priority areas in which we are collaborating to support and strengthen economic growth across our sub-region. One of these is skills. Our aims are better to address current skills gaps for South London employers, to provide the skills to support them to increase their productivity and grow, and to support our residents to access sustainable employment and progress within it. To do this we want to develop a more responsive sub-regional skills system, with boroughs, providers, employers and other stakeholders collaborating more effectively and ensure a strong role for the sub-region within the wider London skills system, including devolved commissioning.

To this end, we are developing – and will publish in early 2018 - a South London Skills Strategy. This will identify the distinctive skills issues and opportunities in our sub-region, drawing on analysis and engagement with providers and employers. It will identify clear priorities around which action will be taken with a range of partners to deliver targeted improvements and help to strengthen our sub-regional collaborative system. We will also want to work with City Hall to ensure that the needs of South London are clearly understood and reflected in all London level activity on skills.

¹ www.southlondonpartnership.co.uk/economy/growth-proposition

Overview of the Draft Skills for Londoners Strategy

The SLP welcomes the draft strategy and believes it provides a good starting point for developing a more responsive, effective and efficient technical and vocational skills system, to support and strengthen the capital’s economy and enable all its residents to have better chances to access the benefits of the work and wellbeing opportunities that this brings. We welcome the steps proposed in the strategy for the Mayor to use a range of existing functions, powers and funding streams to support this agenda.

We believe the Mayor has an important role to play convening, facilitating and encouraging a wide range of partners to play active roles to work towards the highest possible aspirations for training and development of technical and vocational skills for young people and for existing workers to progress successfully in the light of changes affecting the nature and focus of work – as befits our status as a World City. We would hope to see these aspirations grow and stretch in the face of significant changes and challenges to the world of work and the need for more responsive skills and upskilling for Londoners. So, while this is identified as a strategy with a 10 year horizon, we would urge that it be seen more flexibly and reviewed earlier than that.

As part of this, we would urge:

- a. the development of **some priority outcomes measures** against which the skills system in London can be tracked – ideally enabling international comparisons and supporting ambitions for London’s vocational and technical training and education to be truly world class;
- b. a greater focus on how raising skills can contribute to **improving productivity** and economic performance. Low productivity has been identified in the Governments Industrial Strategy and Autumn Budget as a major weakness in the UK and economy. We believe that a key aim for the skills strategy should be to improve productivity – including through supporting the strengthening of management skills, raising basic digital skills and resilience, etc. Making the link between better skills and higher productivity can be an important factor in encouraging businesses to invest in skills and workforce development; and
- c. **more explicit and ongoing consideration of the London skills system’s responsiveness to the impacts of major changes in the labour market** – including automation, the acceleration of digital change, longer but more varied working lives, etc. The aspirations for London need to include that our residents and businesses have the skills to be able to adapt swiftly and seize the opportunities of the major changes that face us all, bearing in mind that these skills needs are adapting and developing ever more rapidly.

The role of boroughs and sub regional partnerships

We welcome the Mayor’s appreciation in the Strategy that the changes which are required to the skills system in London “can only be accomplished through strong local leadership and collaboration between employers, skills and employability providers....”.

We believe that London’s boroughs and sub regional partnerships have a key role to play in bringing about the changes to our skills system as they are uniquely positioned to be able to provide the local leadership, a richness of intelligence and local knowledge to identify issues and opportunities, facilitate closer collaboration between providers, employers and other partners, and drive integration with other services and communities.

We will continue to work closely with City Hall, other sub-regions and wider partners to help shape the mechanisms to do this – and would urge more explicit consideration in the final Strategy of how the different players at different spatial levels, as well as across different thematic issues, can contribute to strengthening the skills system across London.

This should take into account the impact of public transport on the coordination and delivery of a sub-regional skills programme. South London has poor public transport infrastructure compared to other parts of London with it taking well over an hour to get between some of our major centres by public transport. We are already working with TfL and the GLA on a sub-regional strategy that will look to tackle the connectivity issues that are inhibiting economic growth and this will be critical to a sub-regional approach to skills development.

AEB Commissioning

We welcome the references to the need to develop a commissioning framework and that this should be focused on outcomes, which we strongly support. There is an opportunity through devolution to develop a more flexibly responsive skills system, to address local skills needs and opportunities better. It is therefore critical that that boroughs, working through sub regional partnerships, are able to materially influence the commissioning of skills provision in their area. This will provide stronger local accountability to determine if the desired change is actually taking place. The strategy should therefore set out more clearly how the different parts of London government can work together to generate a more successful skills system overall that drives better outcomes.

Other Key Reactions to the Draft Strategy

Our other key reactions to the draft Strategy are:

- We support the aim to **radically improve evidence and intelligence** across the skills system to support commissioning and oversight, and employer and learner choice. We believe the GLA Intelligence function has a critical role to play in this – both at a London level and in

working with sub-regions to shape an approach that draws information from and meets the needs of different levels of the system. We would welcome early discussions about how to collaborate on this. We are also happy to work with the GLA to make the case to government for timely access to information and analysis from the national data systems;

- We believe the Strategy should **address high volume as well as high growth sector skills needs** – given that job churn in volume sectors generates the greatest volume of recruitment and that this can be particularly for mid-range jobs, even in sectors where they are reducing overall. In this context, it could also usefully make clearer links to relevant sectoral initiatives eg workforce work on health and care that forms part of the London Health & Care Devolution settlement;
- We urge the **need to recognise more explicitly the important contribution of adult learning** to wider goals, including wellbeing and community cohesion, which will need to be reflected in the future commissioning approach. Boroughs should have a key role, given the need for local tailoring and integration based on local intelligence about needs and opportunities;
- We believe that greater consideration needs to be given as to how to **stimulate learner demand and support learner choice** of training and education that will help them on pathways into work or to progress in work, beyond the welcome focus on careers advice and guidance eg through more flexible training and upskilling offers for learners;
- While there is a range of excellent technical and vocational teaching in London – including South London, we believe that an important focus of any London skills system should be on **continuously improving the quality of teaching** – including in the face of changing technologies and learner or employer expectations. We would welcome proposals about how London’s quality of learning offer could be strengthened;
- Employers’ investment in the development and reskilling of their existing workforces is increasingly important, particularly as public sector funding for technical and vocational learning has reduced. Yet the complexities of the current entitlements to support in the new apprenticeship funding system (both for Levy and non-Levy payers), and no doubt further changes to come, create a real barrier for employers. We would support **collective work at a London level to help all London’s employers to keep abreast of what they and their staff are entitled or able to access**. And we would want to see a **greater focus developing on flexible learning**, to provide more cost-effective training offers for employers and learners;
- Many small providers in the private or voluntary sector provide high quality specialist training. It is important that the new skills system retains the best skills provision from a

diversity of providers. But it also needs to be underpinned with more transparent information about training offers and their quality, to support learners and employers to navigate the system more effectively;

- Faced with strategic fragmentation given multiple public funding streams identified in the Strategy, we suggest consideration of how to provide a **more coherent oversight of the many different public sector pots of funding** for skills, including a review of whether the existing level of resource is sufficient and how the totality can be used most effectively. This should take account of employment support, much of which links to hard or soft skills; and
- It would be helpful to give **consideration to other issues that impact directly on individual’s ability to access and undertake learning** eg availability of affordable childcare for learners, and travel to learn patterns and costs.

For any queries or follow-up, please contact: Sarah Sturrock (Director, South London Partnership) on director@southlondonpartnership.co.uk.