

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

WRITTEN EVIDENCE: CURRICULUM & ASSESSEMENT REVIEW

Response from: BusinessLDN, One Oliver's Yard, 55-71 City Road, London EC1Y 1HQ

Submitted by: Mark Hilton, Policy Delivery Director, BusinessLDN

Submitted on: 22.11.2024

Introduction

1. BusinessLDN is a business membership organisation with the mission to make London the best city in the world to do business, working with and for the whole UK. We convene and mobilise business leaders to tackle the key challenges facing our capital. We are made up of 170 leading employers across a wide range of sectors.

2. We welcome the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Department for Education to inform its Curriculum & Assessment Review. It is also encouraging that the terms of reference include a focus on developing a 'cutting edge, fit for purpose' curriculum and assessment system that ensures 'young people leave compulsory education ready for work'.

3. The Government has made breaking down the barriers to opportunity for people from all backgrounds a core part of its reform programme. This review is an essential step to achieving that aim by ensuring we have a future workforce equipped with the skills employers need. This is vital to deliver the Industrial Strategy in full.

4. BusinessLDN has a long-standing focus on education and skills policy going back two decades. We incubated Teach First and run the UK's largest annual jobs and careers fair, Skills London. More recently, in 2017-18 we ran the first business-led Employment and Skills Commission for London, producing an Action Plan for the Capital.¹ Since August 2022, BusinessLDN has led the development of the London Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), with the backing of the Mayor of London and London government. Over the last two years, we have spoken to over 1000 employers, training providers and others, to understand more about skills needs and gaps, how the current system is working, and build a roadmap for reforming the skills system in the capital.²

[See the full pan-London LSIP report on our website.](#)

5. The evidence and insight in this submission is drawn from our data, findings and experiences, including from our engagement with employers, educators and other key stakeholders during the LSIP process.

¹ BusinessLDN (formerly London First) (2018) An Employment & Skills Action Plan for the Capital. See: https://www.businessldn.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2018-06/SkillsandEmploymentActionPlan_0.pdf

² BusinessLDN (2023) London Local Skills Improvement Plan. See: <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/what-we-do/people/the-london-local-skills-improvement-plan>

Transferable skills

6. The Government should strive for a curriculum and assessment system that recognises the skill sets employers are looking for beyond just academic attainment. These so-called ‘transferable’ skills refer to an ability or expertise which may be used in a variety of roles or occupations, such as communication; critical thinking; problem solving; and analytical skills.

7. The evidence suggests that employers see these skills as of growing importance but that they are in short supply. Employer demand for transferable skills has been high for decades, yet there have been no policy actions taken that address this need adequately. Demand has grown in recent years, as has their importance for learners and workers. Our Employment and Skills Action Plan found that the rise of automation and AI combined with longer careers means that these skills are at even more of a premium.³ More recently, the London Business Leader Survey conducted by Survation on behalf of BusinessLDN in February 2024 found that 43% of respondents said that cross-cutting transferable skills were the skills their business was most lacking.⁴

8. BusinessLDN has long championed the importance of transferable skills. Our Employment & Skills Action Plan called for transferable skills to be embedded in the national curriculum alongside enterprise and digital skills.⁵ We have also used our stewardship of the London LSIP to call for the Greater London Authority (GLA) to embed transferable skills in Adult Skills Fund and associated programmes, and supported the scaling-up of the Skills Builder Universal Framework among educators and businesses in the capital.⁶

9. However, transferable skills are still not currently integrated into the national curriculum, and they should be. Educational institutions report having to improvise in their approach often without an allocated sustainable funding line available.

10. More opportunities need to be opened to younger people, to use and develop transferable skills. As such, the Government should:

- Ensure that the curriculum, models of assessment and qualifications adopt the Skills Builder Universal Framework.⁷ The Framework provides a practical and structured way to build and measure essential skills and is already used by hundreds of schools and colleges across the country.
- Adopt the features of effective curriculum and assessment design that schools and colleges already using the Universal Framework are employing successfully, including:
 - Make clear in the curriculum what the age-related expectations are of a student on developing transferable skills and what they should be able to demonstrate at specific points of their education.

³ BusinessLDN (formerly London First) (2018) An Employment & Skills Action Plan for the Capital. See: https://www.businessldn.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2018-06/SkillsandEmploymentActionPlan_0.pdf

⁴ The London Business Leader Survey was conducted by Survation on behalf of BusinessLDN. It involved online interviews of business leaders and HR managers in London, between the 6th and 17th of February 2024, with a sample size of 1,209 respondents

⁵ BusinessLDN (formerly London First) (2018) An Employment & Skills Action Plan for the Capital. See: https://www.businessldn.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2018-06/SkillsandEmploymentActionPlan_0.pdf

⁶ BusinessLDN (2023) London Local Skills Improvement Plan. See: <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/what-we-do/people/the-london-local-skills-improvement-plan>

⁷ Skills Builder Partnership (2024) Universal Framework. See: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/universal-framework>

- Build transferable skills across the core curriculum rather than keeping them to the margins in extra-curricular activity. Teachers should be encouraged to identify the skill steps to focus on for a particular year group or cohort and then look across the curriculum to identify opportunities where different skill steps can be taught. Teachers should also be supported to deliver transferable skills through teacher training in PGCEs and CPD.
- Offer opportunities to develop transferable skills through applied learning, such as group projects and community engagement.
- Introduce regular and ongoing assessment methods to assessing learners' transferable skills, including class observation and scenario assessment. This should include formal assessment across different subjects, including Maths and English, with assessment reflected in mid-term and end of year report cards.
- At Post-16 level, transferable skills should be embedded into apprenticeship and T-level standards.

Digital Skills

11. Better integrating digital skills at all levels into curriculum and assessment is vital to meet employers' growing demand for these skills and provide more opportunities for people of all backgrounds in the industries of the future.

12. London has digital skills gaps at all levels, but the broad focus of and demand for digital skills can obscure significant differences across skills levels.

Essential Digital Skills

13. Essential Digital Skills are entry-level skills, which are required for most desk-based jobs. Many young learners and workers lacking essential digital skills in the context of high levels of digital poverty in London.⁸ This is also found at national level; in 2023, approximately half of all 18-24 years couldn't complete the full suite of digital tasks found in the Essential Digital Skills Framework.⁹

14. This skills gap hinders individuals, employers and the wider economy, at a time when a workforce capable of driving economic growth, adapting to technological advancements, and offering opportunities to all is crucial.

15. BusinessLDN is supporting ongoing work through the London LSIP and working with partners such as FutureDotNow and the Good Things Foundation to drive improvements in London's provision of essential digital skills, particularly as a key element of boosting labour market inclusion and social mobility.¹⁰ However, action is also needed at national level. As such, the Government should:

- Integrate the existing Digital Skills Framework into the curriculum for schools, colleges and apprenticeship providers will ensure young people are workforce-ready, with at least the digital essentials needed for today and to progress in the future. This framework offers a ready-made

⁸ BusinessLDN (2023) London Local Skills Improvement Plan. See: <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/what-we-do/people/the-london-local-skills-improvement-plan>

⁹ Lloyds Bank (2023) UK Consumer Digital Index. New data will be released by Lloyds in November 2024. Early indications suggest there has been no significant movement in this figure.

¹⁰ BusinessLDN (2023) London Local Skills Improvement Plan. See: <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/what-we-do/people/the-london-local-skills-improvement-plan>

outline of the skills all people need for work, defined and validated by industry itself, alongside government.

Advanced Digital Skills

16. Advanced Digital Skills (ADS) are mostly cross-sector, such as AI, robotics, data analytics, advanced cloud, advanced coding. However, they also include sector specific skills such as AutoCAD and BIM in construction. One of the key findings London LSIP was that there is significant unmet employer demand for people with Advanced Digital Skills. Two surveys of London business leaders and HR Managers conducted for the LSIP both found that ADS are set to be the most sought-after skillset by London employers across the next two to five years.¹¹

17. The fast-moving pace of technological change – exemplified by the rapid growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in recent years – means that employers are constantly adapting their business needs to make better use of new technologies. This rate of change presents a challenge for the education system to effectively respond to ensure that employers have access to a workforce with the necessary and relevant ADS.

18. As part of its leadership of the LSIP, BusinessLDN has led the charge trying to galvanise action on ADS in the capital. In October 2024, we published *Pioneering Advanced Digital Skills for All: Making London the Best Tech City in the World*, which outlines a vision for greater collaboration between the Mayor, the private sector, and London's leading educators, with actions for the different actors across the system.¹² Among the measures the report is calling for are for the Mayor to make ADS provision central to his new Growth Plan for London and for the Government to deliver further devolution of skills funding to the Mayor so action can be targeted where it is needed.

19. When it comes to the national picture, the Government should use this review to consider how best to best embed the foundations for ADS in curriculum and assessment. To do this, the Government should:

- Work with regional government, including the GLA, to make ADS a focus area for Skills England and for Local Growth Plans.
- Embed relevant ADS including AI literacy and complementary soft skills in curricula, across primary and secondary education.
- Build a curriculum that fosters greater collaboration at national level between the tech sector and education system, including supporting initiatives to upskill teachers to teach and co-design new courses.
- Explore the principles of generative AI in education, including assessment and academic integrity.

¹¹ BusinessLDN (2023) High vacancy rates and skills shortages continue to hold back capital's firms. See: <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/news-publications/news/high-vacancy-rates-and-skills-shortages-continue-to-hold-back-capital-firms> & BusinessLDN (2024) Half of London firms still struggling to recruit, new BusinessLDN survey finds See: <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/news-publications/news/half-of-london-firms-still-struggling-to-recruit-new-businessldn-survey-0>

¹² BusinessLDN (2024) *Pioneering Advanced Digital Skills for All: Making London the Best Tech City in the World*. See: https://www.businessldn.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2024-10/BLDN_Report_Advanced%20Digital%20Skills_DIGITAL.pdf

Green skills

20. Green skills are ‘the skills which are needed to support the transition to Carbon net zero and a sustainable society’. In our survey in February 2024 of more than 1,000 London business leaders and HR managers, carried out by Survation, we found that 25% of respondents indicated their business is currently lacking green skills; and 24% indicated they will require more green skills over the next two to five years.¹³

21. Job growth is expected to be particularly strong in green finance, homes and buildings, power, and low-carbon transport. Many existing job roles will also have to change because of the transition to a greener economy. Meanwhile, across industry companies are increasingly looking to recruit Carbon and Sustainability managers who bring core carbon literacy and project management skills. To meet these changes in requirements there is a growing need to increase education provision in subjects and courses that are relevant for green jobs, as well as the proportion of learners progressing to employment within green priority sectors.

22 The national curriculum in its current form does not equip young people with green skills or teach them about carbon literacy, partly due to the way in which the national curriculum system in the UK is set up, focusing on the theoretical and academic aspects that are taught, without helping young people to put these into practice.

23. BusinessLDN has used the London LSIP to call on the GLA to introduce a form of ‘carbon literacy’ or green skills training into courses funded by the Adult Skills Fund. At national level, the Government should:

- Consider how to introduce ‘carbon literacy’ into the national curriculum in a way which can bring benefit to young people in applying these skills and knowledge in their later lives when they leave education.

Careers support

24. Ensuring that all young people from all backgrounds have access to high-quality, joined-up careers provision is vital so that they are aware of the opportunities and future pathways open to them.

25. While positive progress has been made in recent years, such as the widespread adoption of the Gatsby benchmarks in many schools and other educational institutions, huge challenges remain. The lack of a dedicated, funded careers lead in schools and the lack of time businesses have to engage or indeed to work out how best to engage mean that there are still barriers to getting more employers into education settings.

26. In the capital, a degree of progress has been achieved through the London LSIP process. For example, the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) has been driving more sustainable engagement between business and schools/colleges, including ensure schools are promoting the LSIP’s priority sectors in each of the capital’s sub-regions.¹⁴

¹³ BusinessLDN (2024) Half of London firms still struggling to recruit, new BusinessLDN survey finds See: <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/news-publications/news/half-of-london-firms-still-struggling-to-recruit-new-businessldn-survey-0>

¹⁴ BusinessLDN (2024) The London Local Skills Improvement Plan – June 2024 Progress Report. See: <https://www.businessldn.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2024-09/London%20LSIP%20Progress%20Report%20June24.pdf>

27. BusinessLDN has a longstanding ask calling for the creation of a London Careers Service, which would bring together the co-location of employment support (Job Centre Plus), careers advice (via devolved funding from the National Careers Service) and skills support. This would enable a greater ability to shape the service for local need and Londoners. The Government should also:

- Commit to introducing a dedicated, funded careers lead in all schools. This would allow for greater co-ordination with the CEC and employers and help ensure more young people receive access to high-quality careers provision.

Resourcing

29. There are some issues which are outside the scope of this review, but its recommendations must be informed by the education sector's real capacity to provide a rich educational experience. It is vital that the Government also addresses some of the system's long-standing issues alongside a reformed curriculum.

30. One of these issues is deep-rooted inequality, particularly for those facing barriers at the post-16 stage. In London, for example, analysis by GLA Intelligence found an 11.5% gap in the 2020 employment rate between white Londoners and Londoners from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.¹⁵ This evidence base also found that disabled Londoners have below-average employment rates, at 56% compared to the average of 75%.¹⁶ Remedying this will require better support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, in addition to those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or mental health challenges.

31. FE plays a vital role in fulfilling the nation's skills needs, and the Government must recognise and reflect its essential contributions to both education and the economy. Addressing pay disparities between FE teachers and their school counterparts must be a priority. FE teachers tend to earn 23 per cent less than those who work elsewhere in the education sector.¹⁷ This creates further difficulty in trying to recruit into the sector, making it difficult to entice those from industry who hold more up-to-date knowledge on new and emerging technologies into education.

32. It is also worth noting that this review does not cover adult education, an area that must not be forgotten. Adult education has been hit even harder financially than 16-19 education, and economic reality simply demands that more be done to ensure those beyond 19 can return to education and training.¹⁸

¹⁵ GLA Intelligence (2021) Economic Fairness – Employment Gaps. See: <https://data.london.gov.uk/economic-fairness/labour-market/employment-gaps/>

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ National Foundation for Educational Research (2024) Building a Stronger FE College Workforce. See: https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/ms5olfqv/building_a_stronger_fe_college_workforce.pdf

¹⁸ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2022) Adult Education: the past, present and future. See: https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/output_url_files/BN344-Adult-education-past-present-and-future.pdf