



PRESS RELEASE

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Conservatives' skills proposals – could try harder

The City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development (CSD) today welcomed the Conservative Party's Green Paper on skills, but warned the party that ploughing funds into apprenticeships at the expense of other skills areas was an ill-thought out approach and needed to be reconsidered as a matter of urgency.

The Tory paper outlined a number of policy initiatives with which CSD agreed; in particular, extra funding for apprenticeships, reduction in bureaucracy and greater freedom for colleges were clearly positive moves towards a more flexible approach to the UK's skills base. Highlighting the importance of maintaining a broadly skilled workforce, CSD was pleased that the Conservatives seemed to have agreed with its recent proposals to make skills delivery more locally-focused.

There were, however, some proposals in the paper with which CSD took issue. Speaking on behalf of CSD, an independent organisation which develops evidence-based solutions to skills challenges internationally, Matilda Gosling – CSD's senior manager of research and policy – said: "While we agree with the Tories that apprenticeships must be supported more effectively, we are concerned that the Green Paper's focus is too narrow. Picking on the apprenticeship as a headline issue simply does not give credit to the variety of training methods and qualifications that exist in the UK; the funding boost for apprenticeships is great, but £60m for 'other business needs' is not sufficient. Although we think that the Tories need to do some more thinking about the skills sector, however, we are pleased that the party is working hard to fuel the debate."

Ms Gosling pointed out that the Green Paper contained a proposal to abolish the Train to Gain scheme, which CSD had criticised for placing too much emphasis on Level 2 qualifications; however, re-allocating the funds to apprenticeships was likely to lead to a similar overspend on Level 3, reducing spending on other, equally-important skills levels.



Ms Gosling was concerned that the proposed spending allocations had the potential to generate income inequality, and urged the Conservatives to consider a broader approach to skills. One method to do so, she said, was to work with employers to develop mechanisms for recognising local skills needs, and to respond to those needs swiftly.

The Conservatives' Green Paper was prepared following extensive consultation with the skills sector, including with CSD and its parent organisation, City & Guilds. Ms Gosling praised the party for its breadth of research: "We were pleased to work with the party on developing the paper, and interested to deal with some new thinking about the UK's skills sector. Skills are a critical issue for all parties, and at CSD we are committed to working with policy makers from across the political spectrum to ensure that the UK has the skills base it needs to face future challenges. We look forward to continuing to work with the Conservatives and other parties to help to develop appropriate, evidence-based policies for the UK's skills sector."

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Notes to editors:

The [City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development](http://www.skillsdevelopment.org) is an independent research and development body which aims to improve the policy and practice of work related education and training internationally. It works with organisations around the world – principally with policy makers, employers, training providers and learners – to help to lead the debate on policy and practice, aiming to achieve its vision of a world in which all people have access to the skills they need for economic and individual prosperity.

CSD recently published five policy initiatives concentrating on developing a local focus for skills needs. [A copy of Matilda Gosling's speech](#), outlining the initiatives, can be found on CSD's website.