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Group/Organisation Response

3. Aim of the MA Programme

Proposal

The aim of the MA programme will be :-

*“MAs are key training programmes, **designed by employers to meet the needs of industry, and aimed at growing Scotland’s economy and tackling skills shortages. They involve work-based training combined with study for an appropriate Vocational Qualification or equivalent and relevant core skills in order to prove competence in a particular job/role**”*

Specific Questions

1. What is your view on the proposed aim of the MA programme outlined above?

It should mention specifically the requirement of ‘employers’ possibly as modified above.

(Emphasis on the employer requirements/involvements, and industry, will help to encourage ‘employer’ support since they will feel more connected to the MA, and potential MAs will see a greater connection with ‘employment’ as well as becoming qualified to do-a-job)

2. Do you think the proposed aim achieves the necessary balance between economic development and social inclusion? YES/NO

Social inclusion should not be part of MAs.

Employers are more likely to support MAs on the grounds of economic and business development, rather than making them feel responsible for ‘social inclusion’ issues.

3. If no, please provide suggestions for improvement.

However the MA should be one of the recognised progression routes in any agenda that seeks to address social inclusion issues, i.e. NEET group, and should be within the scope of organisations such as careers and training advisors, not employers.

4. Extension of MAs to Level 2 (SCQF level 5)

Proposal

The MA programme will be extended to enable the use of S/NVQs at levels 2, 3, 4 or 5. The Enterprise Networks will phase out the existing Skillseekers programme to reflect this change.

Specific Questions

4. Should MAs be extended to level 2? **YES/NO**

BUT, see below

5. Please explain the reason for your answer, if necessary.

The extension to Level 2 should ONLY be at the request of employers/industry sectors if it suits their occupational roles. In addition this would allow participants to benefit from the advantages of all the good qualities of the current MA, in terms of full time permanent employment, earn-while-you-learn and core skills, thereby giving improved status to their training.

In addition employers would then be required to employ the young person and make a commitment to training. Arguments advanced that if the employer were required to employ an MA, rather than take a Skillseeker, they would take no one, are not well founded. If an employer requires employees, they will employ! If fact employed status trainees may prevent any current trainee 'exploitation'.

However the Scottish Enterprise research into MAs did propose the introduction of a probationary period, of 8 weeks, albeit for a different reason. This may encourage more employers to participate, and assist your people to 'test the water' before committing to employment.

6. What impact do you think the extension of MAs to level 2 would have on the MA programme or other associated programmes?

The introduction of the Level 2 should not/need not impact on other MA programmes, and in fact could be used as a progression point, if it suited the needs of a particular industry/sector.

NOTE: This consultation document asks for comment on the Level 2, but the Proposal statement mentions Levels 4 and 5. It seems there is another issue, which requires to be fully discussed, regarding the inclusion of Levels 4 and 5 in MAs. Employers will understand the difference between Level 2 and Level 3, but at Level 4, and certainly at Level 5, I believe employers, and candidates, will want a ‘title’ more befitting than MA!!

5. Qualifications

Proposal

A relevant S/NVQ will remain central to the MA programme, although there will be the potential for the SSC to utilise an alternative competency based qualification provided that robust evidence to support this is presented to and approved by the approvals group (MAIG). That evidence must specifically demonstrate why the current or amended S/NVQ is no longer appropriate to the needs of that sector.

Specific Questions

**7. Do you feel that the VQ is the right qualification for proving competence in a job?
YES/NO**

Providing the VQ is properly based on National Occupational Standards, and that the qualification is deliverable by both the employer and the training provider.

The Awarding Body of the qualification must ensure that there is a clearly defined measurement of both competence and knowledge. (Not just a tick-in-the-box) This clarity of definition will allow employers to easily recognise achievement, and therefore give them confidence in the VQ.

8. Should we allow the possibility of using equivalent competency based qualifications to VQs in MA frameworks? YES/NO

Does this question imply that there is no VQ available? If so then the SSC should not be submitting the framework for approval.

However if the employer requires a ‘variation’ on the VQ then perhaps an equivalent could be considered. Once this is done the employee will possibly lose an element of transferability, if they have not obtained at least the basic core competencies of that job role. If the variation can be an additional credit to the qualification, then it would add value, rather than complicate the qualification framework, in the mind of the employer.

9. Please explain further the reason for your answer, if necessary.

Before providing 101 variations, it should be remembered that employers want *simplicity and clarity*, they are in business to be in business, not to understand and interpret educational jargon.

6. Use of Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

Proposal

The SCQF will be used as the mechanism to credit rate and level all future MAs.

Specific Questions

10. What are your views on using the SCQF to credit and level MA frameworks?

The SCQF is an educational tool, and will have significant use in allowing qualifications to be ‘mapped’ This will aid schools, colleges and the HE sector in providing progression routes and careers advice for individuals.

However if there is an expectation that employers will become familiar with, let alone use, the reality will be somewhat different. Perhaps large employers with HR and training departments will use the SCQF, but 95% of businesses in Scotland will not.

7. Core Skills

Proposal

All 5 core skills will be required to be included within all MA frameworks, although there will be the ability for the SSC to seek an exemption to this via the MA approvals group. They must support this with a robust evidence base.

Specific Questions

11. What are your views on the use of core skills in MA frameworks?

Core Skills should form part of the MA framework. BUT the Proposal statement above states: *all 5 core skills will be required to be include...*

This rather contradicts the principle of MAs being designed by employers, for use by employers, to meet their requirements. It would be difficult to justify a position where the Scottish Executive appeared to know better than the employers. In addition achievement in a particular MA framework may be prevented by the inclusion of an unnecessary Core Skill, or a Core Skill at an inappropriate level.

Surely this would deter employers from participation, if the content of the MA framework were difficult, or impossible to achieve! Not only would the candidate be disillusioned, but Scottish Enterprise, who may be funding the MA, would blame the employer, the candidate or the training provider for failing to deliver.

12. Are there any cases where you feel a particular core skill should not be included or included at a lower level, within an MA framework, than currently mandated?

See above response to question 11.

13. What are your views on embedding delivery and assessment of core skills within VQs?

It is absolutely imperative that the relevant core skills are fully embedded within the VQ. The application of core skills is where the debate should be, and how these core skills are used in the job role, or occupational areas of that sector.

Separate certification of core skills may be required by some sectors, although what useful purpose this serves the employer of candidate is unclear. The most important aspect is the delivery, assessment and application of core skills in the workplace.

14. Do you think core skills mapping should be audited or checked? YES/NO

Why would an audit be required? Is there a suspicion that the mapping is not being carried out satisfactorily?

The Awarding Body should 'ensure' that the relevant core skills are correctly embedded in the delivery and assessment of the qualification.

15. If you answered yes to the above question please give suggestions on which organisation might undertake this activity.

Awarding Body. If it has the approval to award a qualification, it has the credibility to ensure the core skills are mapped and embedded correctly.

8. Employed Status

Proposal

All MAs will be employed for the duration of their training.

Specific Questions

16. Should all MAs have employed status? YES/NO

But take cognisance of the Scottish Enterprise research by the Cambridge group. There is a proposal that there should be an 8-week 'probationary period'

17. Please explain further the reasons for your answer, if necessary.

This may encourage more employers to participate, and assist your people to 'test the water' before committing to employment.

9. Setting a Minimum Wage for MAs

Proposal

We will encourage employers to pay MAs a minimum of £80 per week.

Specific Questions

18. Do you think that MAs should be paid a minimum of £80 per week? YES/NO

Employers should determine the minimum wage, rather than the Scottish Executive. Interestingly the Minimum wage legislation is excluded from 'government funded' programmes, but here is a proposal to impose a minimum wage!

19. Please explain the reasons for your answer to this question, if necessary

20. Please provide any suggestions about how a minimum wage for apprentices could be policed?

10. Quality

Proposal

We will work with the Enterprise Network to review the current position regarding SQMS and quality of Government training programmes.

Specific Questions

21. What are your views on the current arrangements for quality management of the MA programme?

The current SQMS is not fit for purpose as applied to MAs.

There are aspects of SQMS that could be amended and applied to MAs. Highlands and Islands Enterprise are reviewing the use and application of the SQMS standards, and appear to be moving to a more realistic application of these standards.

22. Please provide any suggestions for how quality management of MAs might be improved?

Firstly there requires to be some clarity in the definition of ‘quality management of MAs’ If there is a will to really examine quality aspects of MAs it may be possible to seek improvements. It is possible that the SSC or Awarding Body should be more involved in the assessment of MA quality.

11. Age

Proposal

We believe that the MA programme should remain an all-age programme to reflect the changing needs of demography and the changing landscape of skills that a workforce needs to deliver economic prosperity.

Specific Questions

23. Do you think MAs should remain an all age programme? YES/NO

24. Please explain the reasons for your answer, if necessary.

If MAs have, or are to become ‘industry recognised’ qualifications, they must be applicable to all employees who attain that occupational competence level. Employers will not accept that only a 16 to 20 year old will be, or has qualified as an MA. What about the employee who is significantly older and who now demonstrates that same level of competence?

The proposal statement above reflects the correct position.

12. Ancillary Matters

Fit with Other Policies

Specific Questions

25. How could we better ensure adequate progression routes between school, vocational training, and further and higher education?

Further development of the Skills for work programmes will provide an introduction to various occupational/vocational employment. These programmes must be developed in conjunction with employers and MUST include the soft skills, particularly the employability skills that employers most want.

Many employers accept that new entrants to their industries will require to be taught the work skills, but the lack of attitudinal and employability skills are an issue.

Under-represented Groups

Specific Questions

26. How can we increase participation in MAs by under-represented groups?

The various sectors/industries require to continue to promote themselves to potential candidates. It is unreasonable to imply that employers require to do more to entice under represented groups, if these groups do not make application to employers. Changes in attitude must come from parents and careers service, possibly though the use of role model etc.

Proposal

We will develop a policy Blueprint document which clearly sets out the policy rationale for MAs and as well as setting out the various elements which make up an MA framework.

Specific Questions

27. Do you think a Blueprint document on MAs should be developed? YES/NO

A blueprint document may achieve the promotion of MAs, but it will require to be clearly designed for the target audience. It is unlikely that a document suitable for employers will also be suitable for prospective candidates.

28. What do you think would be the benefits and disadvantages of having a Blueprint document for MAs?

It could provide clarity about the objectives, and opportunities that MAs can bring to employers and candidates.

Employer Involvement

Specific Questions

29. How can we achieve greater employer commitment to the MA programme?

By giving employers a greater prominence in MAs. Many employers do not see that they are directly benefiting from MAs, or that there are business growth opportunities associated with involvement in the programme.

A significant number of employers are using MAs because there is no alternative! There is no 'sell' on the economical benefits.

The use of two separate Blueprint documents would provide them with their own perspective on the benefits of MAs.

Additional Views

Specific Questions

30. Please provide any additional comments on the review of MAs.

There is, and has been a significant amount of research undertaken in relation to MAs both by the Scottish Executive and by Scottish Enterprise. (Interestingly not much, if any, by Highlands and Islands Enterprise) There would, without doubt, be a significant advantage in one party overseeing, or joining up, all this work.

In addition there always seems to be a disconnect, either by accident or design, between the Scottish Executive position/policy and Scottish Enterprise position/policy.

There are sound reasons for the Scottish Enterprise training budget to leave the Enterprise network, and follow the Careers service. The direct connection between careers and employment would be strengthened thereby joining up into a single route, progression for young people. This in turn would free up Scottish Enterprise to focus on Smart Successful Scotland through business starts and improved economic performance.

Finally, the joining-up should extend to all aspects of ‘education’ and include both school and higher educational policies. Currently Skills for work is funded through Local Authorities, Colleges and High Education are funded through the Funding Council and MAs are funded through Scottish Enterprise.

Each of these partnerships has its own agenda and policy! Each trying to meet its own objectives, IN SPITE OF ALL OTHERS.

Let us not forget the employers and candidates.