



Federation of Small Businesses

The UK's Leading Business Organisation

EDUCATION AND SKILLS BILL

Summary

The Bill is split into 18 different sections and the key areas for the FSB are:

- Right to Request Time to Train
- Machinery of Government
- Apprenticeships

1. Right to Request Time to Train

The FSB is concerned that:

“Employees should be able to ask that they are accompanied to any meeting with their employer about the request for time to train”

The entitlement to be accompanied at a meeting creates an extra layer of bureaucracy for the employer to follow. The right to request a meeting to discuss time off to train suddenly becomes a formal exercise, crossing over employment law, with the mention of Union Learning Representatives being present. The FSB feels that this extra entitlement will lead to a panic amongst small businesses that a refusal to request time off to train could be interpreted as constructive dismissal.

The ‘right to request time off to train’ policy was intended to be light-touch. Small businesses will fear the heavy hand of regulation if they are forced to undertake formal meetings. The FSB urges DIUS to create an exemption for businesses with fewer than 20 employees – to be able to hold “one to one” informal meetings without the need for union representation.

summary

The FSB has lobbied officials at DIUS – and we are hopeful that there will be something in the Bill to help micro businesses avoid an added layer of bureaucracy. We support the principle of a “right to request” – however it must be as light touch as possible.



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2. Apprenticeships

The FSB gave oral and written evidence to the Innovation, Universities and Skills Select Committee in October 2008 and responded to the Draft Apprenticeships Bill:

We welcome the Draft Bill's intention to raise the profile of apprenticeships but feel that the Government needs to take major steps to stimulate employer demand and should ensure that the wage compensation schemes are easy to understand and operate. An allowance should be paid to micro-businesses for whom taking on an apprentice can be time consuming and costly

We are concerned that the Draft Bill makes little specific reference to potential apprentices aged over 19.

We support the development of Group Training Associations as they are a potential method by which the bureaucratic burden on employers could be reduced. They offer an innovative way in which employers can host an apprentice without employing them directly and could reduce the administrative and bureaucratic burden on small employers.

3. Machinery of Government Changes

Summary

The LSC will be abolished from 2010 and replaced with a Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) for 0-19 year olds, and a Skills Funding Agency (SFA) for 19+.

The division of delivery and funding is good but the proliferation to so many agencies is a concern. Unfortunately one suggestion is that the SFA takes on some of the delivery arms, which we are not in favour of.

Whoever offers the training services must provide what is effective for the businesses and not what suits their own needs. Whilst we may see wide variations across the country the SFA will control the funding and should be able to withdraw funding or make conditions for funding.

The FSB wants a system where funding is provided for short-bite sized informal learning – so we hope that the new institutions will represent the skills interests of the micro-businesses.