

Response to the Proposals for the London Skills and Employment Board's Strategy;

Skills and Employment in London

BTEG
January 2008

BTEG welcome the opportunity to respond to the London Skills and Employment Board's draft strategy which aims to address the substantial skills and employment issues that face London. This response is based on a particular focus on employment and skills in relation to London's Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) community.

About BTEG

BTEG is a national organisation providing a voice to government for BAME skills and employment service providers. BTEG has a successful track record of advising government departments and non departmental public bodies.

BTEG also provides a range of support services for voluntary and community organisations. We are a networking organisation supporting over 1000 third sector organisations across the country. BTEG's services are grouped into three main centres:

- Centre for Educational Success
BTEG provide a national voice for, and support BAME organisations and groups which are working to improve educational outcomes for BAME children and young people.
- Centre for Sustainable Regeneration
BTEG undertake research and policy development activities to stimulate new inclusive approaches to regenerate deprived neighbourhoods
- Centre for Technical Assistance
BTEG work to strengthen the BAME third sector through a range of bespoke technical assistance services.

Methodology

BTEG's response is informed by 6 BAME providers from the field of employment and training in London. All organisations have considerable experience in delivering a range of frontline employment and training services to BAME communities. A consultation meeting was held on the 14th January and this response represents the views of all who attended. (see the appendix for the list of participants). The response is also informed by evidence from research reports. In addition, BTEG has also participated in the Equalities Impact Assessment Consultation on the 12th December 2007 and the London Skills and Employment Board Stakeholder Consultation on the 10th January 2008.

1 The Five Challenges

- 1.1 BTEG and the respondents to the consultation agree that these are the right challenges for action by the Board. However, we would urge the Board to consider an additional challenge with its own set of priorities and actions that will specifically address the significant challenges faced in achieving race equality within the employment and skills agenda. (See section 6.2 and section 7).

2 The Board's Ambition

- 2.1 BTEG and the respondents support the Board's ambition as laid out in the draft proposal. We agree that this ambition will seek to address the long-term issues particular to London.
- 2.2 We also agree with the supporting targets but would like to see a stronger focus on employability alongside employment targets. We ask that the Board recognise the importance of improving employability which supports the individual in 'soft' skills development such as attitudinal change and improving self-esteem.
- We also propose that the Board consider setting specific BAME targets for achieving NVQ level 1 and 2 and that these targets are broken down by ethnicity based on statistical evidence on BAME level 1 and level 2 achievement.

3. Supporting London's People

- 3.1 BTEG and the respondents agree with all the priorities and actions outlined in addressing the support that Londoners will need to achieve their potential but believe that in achieving these priorities the actions must consider particular approaches and methods that will strengthen outcomes for which it is striving to achieve.
- 3.2 **Action 1.1** will be more effective if an engagement campaign is operated at grassroots level. We feel a bottom-up approach will be necessary as those who work within the delivery service are able to understand the issues which affect the individual. We believe this knowledge and understanding at the grassroots level will provide a genuine approach in inspiring motivation and confidence in diverse communities.
- 3.3 **Action 2.1** will be achievable if careers advice services are locally driven. We have concerns at how effective the current Connexions service has been in meeting the needs of young BAME individuals. A BTEG report '*Making Connexions with Race Equality*' 2004; surveyed seven Connexions Partnerships across England and found that there were low engagement levels with young people from BAME communities. The research found that engagement could be improved through employing frontline staff that reflect the diversity of the area and that all staff receive appropriate race and diversity training. It also found that close links with BAME providers also strengthened engagement. Finally, we believe that it is critical for local authorities to implement effective race equality

policies which will ensure effective local career services. We ask that the Board consider this when developing action 2.1.

- 3.4** We also recommend that there is a targeted investment into BAME organisations which currently provide IAG services but lack the accreditation that will strengthen their position to deliver these services under contractual arrangements. Currently there are not enough BAME led third sector organisations which are fully resourced to provide quality IAG services.
- 3.5** Whilst we welcome that **priority 3** focuses on improving pre-employment training and support and its priority to communities which are typically excluded we would suggest an additional priority which promotes entrepreneurship amongst young people and adults as an alternative route to employment. Evidence shows that self employment can be an effective route out of unemployment and does in fact increase the employment rate. Whilst this has been recognised within the draft strategy as an important area for development we believe it should be a priority with its own set of actions. One such action we recommend is that BAME organisations be resourced to provide business start up advice and support. Currently this service provision is dominated by mainstream companies with very little service provision from the BAME sector.
- 3.6** In meeting **priority 3** we are pleased that the Board recognise the importance of tailoring support and training to an individual's needs as outlined in **action 3.1**. This action could be improved through allowing greater flexibility from service providers to implement schemes that meet appropriate need. This is due to huge challenges which can face providers in preparing individuals for 'work readiness'. The respondents to the consultation emphasized the importance of recognising differences in 'the hard to reach' and the 'hard to help'. Both groups require strategies which will vary in intensity and length of time to achieve outcomes including attitudinal change through to improving interview skills.
- 3.7** **Action 3.2** should recognise the difficulties that people with severe barriers to employment experience and whilst the action targets those with severe barriers, there needs to be a commitment from employers to support these particular groups or the action will be meaningless. Our partners stated examples of some of the excellent work carried out by voluntary and community organisations in supporting groups with severe barriers such as offenders and ex-offenders yet they can no longer provide these services due to the withdrawal of funding. They express concern that the commissioning of prison and probation services will find small organisations 'squeezed' out by larger providers.
- 3.8** Whilst we support **action 4.1** in meeting **priority 4**, we strongly recommend that **action 4.1** recognise the importance of BAME involvement in the development of good quality programmes. The BAME sector have a key role to play in collaborating with employers but require resources that will capacity build them to do so.
- 3.9** We agree with **Action 4.2** particularly in the promotion of apprenticeships which our partners stress that to date this has been very difficult to do due to lack of available information on apprenticeships. We believe apprenticeships are an

excellent way of engaging young people in employment and skills development and recommend that an apprenticeships brokerage service be set up that can provide adequate information and advice on apprenticeships. This should also have particular emphasis on targeting BAME young people who are less likely to engage in apprenticeships. Current figures to date reveal that only 6% of BME young people are in an apprenticeship and that figure drops to 4% within the engineering and construction industry. We believe there should be a pan-London strategy for increasing BAME participation in apprenticeships and to raise awareness amongst young people and parents of the opportunities which exist.

4. The Role of Employers

- 4.1** BTEG and the respondents generally agree with all the priorities and actions outlined in addressing the role of employers but express some concern for **action 1.1**.
- 4.2** Whilst on the surface a 'top notch' brokerage service seems an attractive way of engaging employers as a single port of call and a credible way of ensuring that employers engage with the right clients. We believe locally based brokerage services would be far more effective in bringing local providers and employers together to address local employment need. An example of this is Fair Cities designed by the National Employment Panel which supports local employers to provide information on employment needs and access to jobs. This approach also informed the Building Futures programme, a partnership between BTEG and a private recruitment company which also linked locally based employers to BAME employment and skills providers. Whilst these types of programmes create positive avenues to employment, BTEG believe that more BAME employment and skills providers should be capacity built and resourced to source for their own employers therefore strengthening the sector and employment opportunities for local BAME communities.
- 4.3** We also recommend an additional action that will commit employers to support groups with severe barriers to employment as we believe without its own set of actions these groups will continue to face discrimination. Employers could provide volunteering opportunities for such groups as a way of providing an initial path to employment. Mainstream services such as the prison and probation service could also lead the way in employing or providing volunteering opportunities for offenders and ex-offenders, providing a gateway to self improvement and opportunities to be role models and mentors for those still within the criminal justice system.
- 4.4** We also strongly recommend that the Board consider how improving employer practice in relation to race and diversity can be enhanced through ensuring employers are made aware and work in closer partnership with the Mayor's initiative – *'Diversity Works For London'* which seeks to promote equality and diversity with London businesses.
- 4.4** Whilst we welcome the importance of strengthening the capacity of Sector Skills Councils in **priority 2**, we recommend that more action should be taken to

ensure better mechanisms are in place to increase the representation of BAME employers and providers on local employment boards. This will provide a more inclusive decision making process.

5 An education and skills system for the future

- 5.1** BTEG and the respondents agree with **priority 1** and all the actions but would like to see an additional action which will focus on a targeted approach aimed at widening participation for BAME communities and to resource BAME organisations to engage with communities that 'shy away' from educational institutions. We recommend that funding be directed towards the formation and strengthening of partnerships between the BAME sector and FE/HE institutions in order to deliver courses outside of an education establishment and also to encourage the take up of courses which tend to have low BME participation such as the Arts and Science.

6. Integrating employment and skills delivery

- 6.1** BTEG and the respondents agree with priority 1 and all the actions proposed. However we would like to stress that the integration of employment and skills through local area agreements as laid out in **action 1.2** should consider the issue of low participation of the BAME sector on local strategic partnerships and local area agreements. BTEG conducted research in 2007 '*Participation and Local Strategic Partnerships*' which found that there were generally low levels of BAME participation. We emphasise the need to increase BAME participation if the sector is to stand any chance of influencing policy at a local level on the employment and skills agenda.

7. Making the Public Sector System Work for London

- 7.1** BTEG and the respondents agree with the **priority 1** and **action 1.1** as we are keen to see public funding used to improve overall employment and skills outcomes for Londoners. We would also propose that Job Centre Plus and the London Development Agency use the ethnic employment target data and ethnic skills data to help influence local targets through the local area agreement.
- 7.2** In addition to the Board's 5 proposed challenges, we propose an additional challenge (challenge 6) which will support the overall strategic approach to equality targets and measures. We propose this additional challenge due to the employment and skills inequality which continues to be entrenched (particularly within some BAME communities) despite years of strategic planning and delivery to address the issues. These issues have also been recognized within the Discrimination Law Review (2007). Whilst the draft strategy purports to address BAME disadvantage through specific actions and targets we argue that the complex needs of each individual community within the context of BAME requires its own distinct priorities. We also draw attention to the London Plan in which the

Mayor outlines his vision for London and Objective 4 '*To promote social inclusion and tackle deprivation and discrimination*'. We propose that this additional challenge should be linked to Objective 4 providing a targeted and strategic approach in tackling BAME deprivation and discrimination.

8 Proposed Challenge

8.1 Address BAME disadvantage in employment and skills in London

Priority 1

More sophisticated targets which ensure that within the categorisation of BAME there is a distinctive process for understanding the issues of individual ethnicities. Education and employment needs vary between ethnic communities with some ethnic groups suffering greater disadvantage than others.

Action 1.1

A commitment from the Board to address employment and skills gaps between different ethnic groups.

Priority 2

A stronger BAME third sector capacity built to deliver services.

Action 2.1

Funding is directed towards the BAME sector to specifically address capacity building needs.

Action 2.2

Support the development of a level playing field for BAME organisations to tender and deliver public sector contracts.

Priority 3

The BAME sector has a voice at all levels throughout employment and skills strategic planning from a local to a national level.

Action 3.1

The Board will actively seek to increase BAME representation on strategic boards and partnerships in London.

Appendix

Partners Involved in the Response

- Access to Employment and Training
- ACT Training Services
- BTEG
- ELATT
- Leap
- PLG Hope
- Rich Visions

Boroughs Represented

- (Islington)
- (Hackney)
- (Pan-London)
- (Hackney)
- (Brent)
- (Islington)
- (Waltham Forest)

BTEG and the respondents would be happy to discuss our response further with the LESB.

Please contact Jeremy Crook, Director, BTEG at jeremy@bteg.co.uk or on 0207 843 6110 to discuss the response in detail.

Our postal address is BTEG, 2nd Floor Lancaster House, 31-33 Islington High Street, London, N1 9LH.