

Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

19 June 2003

Dear Mr Lambert,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond on behalf of the British Chambers of Commerce to your Review of Business-University Collaboration.

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) is an employer's representative body, with a quality assured network of 60 accredited Chambers of Commerce. The network represent between them over 135,000 businesses of all sizes and sectors of the economy. As such, we are the main representative body for small to medium-sized employers in the United Kingdom.

We are also the largest group of government-funded learning providers in the United Kingdom. The network currently delivers learning to over 13,000 young people and adults on a variety of government funded programmes and during the last year over 50,000 people participated in business training courses delivered by the Chambers of Commerce.

The relationship between Chambers and universities has traditionally been informal. Contact is generally through working groups, work placement schemes, and the delivery of professional management courses to university staff. However, the network is also well placed to foster relations between universities and business, and this should be encouraged.

The best forms of collaboration work when an organisation, such as the RDA, is able to act as an anchor and funding body, but the actual collaboration should be formed and delivered at a local level through bodies such as the local Chamber. There should be minimal red tape, in order to allow relations to work flexibly and to ease delivery.

We would also be happy to assist in additional work in this area. For instance, localised pilots investigating possible collaborations or business focus groups to look at best practice.

To conclude, I enclose our response to the Higher Education White Paper, which answers some of the questions proposed in your consultation. Our main recommendations are as follows:

- The Chambers of Commerce network is well placed to develop links between HE and industry

- We call on Government to continue funding the Graduate Apprenticeship programme, with some additional funding to be offered to small businesses, which will benefit from having such an apprentice in their business.
- We advise Government to consider incorporating some National Vocational Level 4 qualifications into foundation degrees to create a ‘high level’, specialised apprenticeship programme.
- Public sector employers should not have an advantage over private sector employers when recruiting graduates, particularly when many parts of the private sector cannot afford to assist graduates with costs developed at university.
- Investment in higher education should be based on researching and forecasting short, as well as long-term future, trends and needs, rather than seeking to meet an arbitrary target such as 50% entry into higher education.
- To successfully deliver HE through FE, a consulting process should be created between HEFCE and the relevant employer organisation, RDA or SSC to ensure the appropriate work-based training is delivered, and employer interest is kept.
- There should be opportunity for all, who are capable and choose to do so, to enter higher education.
- The policy criteria and framework under which the Access Regulator will operate should be available for consultation and public access.
- BCC would recommend the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education consult widely with all key employer stakeholders when modernising the criteria for Access Courses for over 25’s
- Quality of delivery should not be curtailed by detailed regulation, limitations, and discrimination. There is much to be said for a free market approach to higher education learning.
- Extra provision should be made for SMEs who willingly release their employees for part-time learning in HE.

We look forward to reading your final recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

David Frost
Director General