



Briefing 09/07

February 2009

Skills to grow

This briefing provides details of APSE's response to the skills to grow consultation.

Key issues

1. APSE are a key member of the Delivery Board for 'Skills to Grow', a strategy for improving skills in the green space sector.
2. This briefing paper provides an update on APSE's response to the formal 'Skills to Grow' consultation.

1. Introduction

On 11 November 2008, APSE attended a CLG/CABE green space skills strategy workshop, which was designed to look at the CABE consultation paper on skills in the parks and open spaces sector, 'Skills to Grow'. The strategy has 7 strategic priorities,

1. Increase awareness of the sector and opportunities it offers
2. Improve entry routes and career paths in sector occupations
3. Improve the availability and quality of training, including continuing professional development
4. Improve management and leadership skills
5. Increase the sector's overall investment in skills
6. Build capacity for joined-up thinking and working
7. Develop and maintain a strong evidence base

APSE responded to the formal consultation to 'Skills to grow' on behalf of its membership in November 2008 and the full response is contained below. A copy of the

original consultation document from CABE is available by clicking on the following link:
<http://www.cabe.org.uk/AssetLibrary/12219.pdf>

In addition, APSE was invited to sit on the Delivery Board for the national skills strategy for green spaces. The first meeting was on 21 January 2009 and there was a generally positive and detailed response from a wide range of people to the skills to grow consultation. CABE Space is translating the response into an updated strategy for publication by the end of March 09 with input from the delivery board partners.

2. APSE's response to the Skills to grow consultation

Response from the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) to Cabe space

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) represents officers and members involved in the management and provision of quality public services. APSE's mission statement positions the organisation as 'networking organisation which consults, develops, promotes and advises on best practice in the delivery of public services'. APSE is currently working with almost 300 authorities within the United Kingdom.

Many local authorities will be interested in the proposals to improve the skills of the workforce in the sector. APSE has been working with Cabe space in relation to developing and maintaining a strong evidence base around skills shortages in local authorities. It has been agreed that this will form part of APSE's performance networks for parks services, an annual data collection exercise with over 200 local authority's UK-wide in membership. An initial survey is currently being developed and piloted with a view to including a suite of skills and training related indicators in 2009.

APSE agrees with the need for a focus on green space skills development and the need to support local authorities in improving skills and training needs. APSE believes councils throughout the UK have a critical role, more especially at a time of economic uncertainty, in valuing and investing in the local workforce, which in turn supports the local economy. In addition, APSE argue that the emphasis on skills development should be on front line skills, which is where they will have most impact as the interface with members of the public.

The draft Apprenticeship Bill 2008 demonstrates that Government is now recognising the value of apprenticeship schemes. APSE would like to see more emphasis in the strategy on high quality apprenticeship schemes, as well as identifying and promoting areas of good practice that already exist within local authorities. APSE could assist Cabe Space in identifying good practice case studies of local authorities throughout the UK, including effective apprenticeship schemes, through APSE's apprenticeship awards programme. In addition, APSE's lifelong learning and development training service delivers courses and master classes on a range of subjects for local authorities and would like to work further with partners to identify other management and leadership requirements.

One of the themes in the consultation was resourcing skills development, which APSE believes will be a key issue for local authorities and will affect their capacity to deliver the skills agenda. At a time of budget constraints, with 50% of local authorities expecting cuts in their park budgets next year (APSE state of the market survey 2008), APSE would like to see further clarity on the role that Communities and Local Government and other agencies are going to play in funding skills development. APSE believes that supporting local authorities through additional resources will have more success than increased requirements from the Audit Commission.

APSE are concerned, though, that gains made under best value in improving the quality of our parks and investing in the service may end up being clawed back due to the current economic climate. In addition, APSE think that any further fragmentation of the sector through the commissioning agenda, which splits the functions of strategy and planning from service delivery would impact negatively on the quality of parks and open spaces. All of the evidence from the previous Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) regime tells us that this was detrimental to parks in terms of splitting management from maintenance and this led to de-skilling the parks industry. APSE and GMB researched the impact of this in a piece of research called 'More Grounds for Concern', which APSE are willing to share with Cabe space.

APSE agrees with the consultation statement that 'Local authorities and their contractors are the main employer of green space workers; therefore finding ways of building capacity at local government level will be key to turning around the deficit' page 5. APSE believes that investing in skills brings real benefit to local communities.

Our recent research report on the economic footprint of local councils based on a study of Swindon's streetscene services highlighted the strategic argument for local authorities to be employers and it revealed the impact on the local economy; for example, 98% of streetscene's employees lived within the locality and 64p of every pound invested/spent stayed within that community.

APSE has a range of tools to assist in the action plan for skills to grow, including its advisory group network, best practice case studies, performance networks and lifelong learning and development. APSE would like to work further with partners in helping to deliver this strategy, representing the views of front line service providers. APSE should also be listed in the national partners section of the consultation and would like to be involved in future working parties and steering groups.

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