



May's plans to boost skills met with scepticism

Annie Makoff 24 Jan 2017  3 comments

Some experts say plans don't go far enough to improve UK productivity, while others warn PM's chance of success is 'questionable'

The government has unveiled plans to boost technical skills and education across the UK as part of its newly launched industrial strategy for post-Brexit Britain.

Prime minister Theresa May set out the strategy at her first regional meeting with 30 ministers in Cheshire yesterday (23 January), where she announced [a £170m cash injection for technical training within the STEM sector](#) and a £556m boost for the 'Northern powerhouse'.

Outlined in a green paper with a 10-point plan, the proposals include pledges to invest in science, research and innovation, develop skills, upgrade infrastructure and cultivate world-leading sectors.

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Speaking last week on The Andrew Marr Show, May said the new strategy would help to forge and shape post-Brexit Britain while putting an emphasis on technical education. She told ministers during Monday's meeting of the [importance of "driving growth" across the whole of the UK](#), with “prosperity and opportunity” being spread across the whole country, which would be helped by addressing issues like infrastructure and skills.

Under the plans, the £170m investment would go towards new technical colleges for 16 to 24-year-olds, as well as a research institution that would develop new technologies and boost energy supplies.

“Our action will help ensure young people develop the skills they need to do the high-paid, high-skilled jobs of the future. That means boosting technical education and ensuring we extend the same opportunity and respect we give university graduates to those people who pursue technical routes,” said May.

The plans have been met with mixed reactions from industry experts. Clare McNeil, IPPR associate director for work and families, said improving skill levels alone “would not be enough” to improve productivity. Rob Lamb, cloud business director UK&I at Dell EMC, warned that industry can “no longer afford” to ignore the skills gap prevalent in the industrial sector. Technical education, big data and knowledge sharing would be “vital” to the success of the strategy, he added.

A Dell EMC report last year revealed that 46 per cent of IT workers in engineering and construction received training once a year or less, and a quarter of engineering and construction IT workers said their organisation had a focus on innovation.

Dr Tony Strike, director of strategy, planning and change at the University of Sheffield, told *People Management*: “The focus on basic skills for those who do not go to university is disappointing. For this strategy to be successful, it is key for a society to communicate advanced vocational training as something valuable. Advanced vocational learning can only deliver the skills industry needs if placed alongside and made inseparable from cutting-edge research in each sector so the future capabilities come together.”

Dr Franz Buscha, a reader in the department of economics and quantitative methods, and a member of the Centre for Employment Research at Westminster Business School, said: “The creation of a

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new system of technical education is not a new idea and is something that has eluded UK governments for decades. The primary culprit for this has been consistency and continued support for such a policy over a time span that has crossed multiple parliaments. Whether this is feasible in the current political environment remains questionable.”

Peter Cheese, chief executive of the CIPD, said the new strategy “failed to recognise” that too many existing STEM graduates don’t go into the occupations or industries that demand such qualifications. He added: “If this is to be a truly modern industrial strategy the government must focus more attention on how people can develop transferrable or new skills that will help them to adapt and flourish and secure the UK’s status as a true talent hub.”

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lan

16 days ago

We seem to have been talking for ever - well, at least since the National Skills Task Force led to the creation of Investors in People in 1991 - about the urgent need to create a more skilled workforce. So what has happened, or not happened, in the last 25 years, to lead the current government to the startling conclusion that we need to boost technical skills and education?



Andy

17 days ago

Do pay attention Teresa! It will take an immense effort to create large numbers of high skilled jobs. Why? Because 'knowledge economy' jobs can be done anywhere in the world, and are migrating overseas. The same goes for technical and engineering jobs. The primary culprit for this is our own governments, who have failed to stop this migration. It pains me to say so, but in this respect at least, Trump was right. Creating skilled workforces and opening new colleges is just displacement activity based on easy promises, if they don't have jobs to go to. So let's see some real job creation.



Caroline De Silva

17 days ago

As a CPID member of 30 years I can definitely say that my daughter who has just graduated in a Masters degree in Biological Sciences and has struggled to even get a temporary job, is the reality of a country that squanders its precious young talent. Being a young woman with a Science Masters in the UK is rare these days and yet despite the rarity of a young person of her ilk the UK cannot use the precious resource they have in qualified young people who are there and waiting to take us into the future. Woe betide us all.

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