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Maritime Skills Alliance response to the Industrial Strategy Green Paper, April 2017

The Maritime Skills Alliance creates and promotes apprenticeships and qualifications for the wider maritime sector. We are funded by our 18 members, a uniquely broad mix:

- Border Force
- British Marine Federation
- British Tugowners Association
- Company of Watermen and Lightermen
- International Jack Up Barge Operators' Association
- International Association of Maritime Institutions
- Maritime and Coastguard Agency
- Marine Society and Sea Cadets
- Merchant Navy Training Board
- MYBA The Worldwide Yachting Association
- National Workboat Association
- Port Skills and Safety
- Royal National Lifeboat Institution
- Royal Navy
- Royal Yachting Association
- Seafarers UK
- Sea Fish Industry Authority
- Thames Skills Academy

The MSA also chairs the People and Skills Steering Group within Maritime UK, which brings together the UK's shipping, ports, marine and business services industries, in a coordinated drive for growth.

We are responding to the request for comments on the Government's Industrial Strategy Green Paper. We are particularly interested in pillars 2 (Developing Skills) and 8 (Cultivating world-leading sectors).

We respond briefly below to some of the prompts in the Green Paper, but want to make four overarching points.

First, the maritime sector offers excellent prospects for growth. We are actively supporting the work which Maritime UK is leading to put together a 'Sector Deal' for the maritime sector. We see it as a valuable opportunity to take on to the next stage the strong partnership between the industry and Government which we have been building through the Maritime Growth Study process.

Second, as one of the most international sectors in the economy, we will flourish best within a regulatory regime which recognises that reality, and which helps us to build on its strengths. In particular, and with an eye on the new international opportunities which the Referendum result opens up, we want to see the removal of visa constraints which have hindered our world-renowned specialist colleges and universities from winning more export business.

We see a risk that a policy towards incoming students and highly-valued employees summarised by the phrase “brightest and best” may accidentally overlook those studying for higher level *technical* qualifications (Tier 4), or those who already possess them (Tier 2). In a modern economy “brightest and best” means much more than the academic elite.

Third, with apprenticeship policy (in England) settling down at last we are anxious to avoid a further protracted period of disruption as technical education is reformed. We are pleased to see the Government focusing on technical education but many of your criticisms do not apply to us, and we do not want to see arrangements which work for us disrupted because of problems elsewhere in the economy. We want to be consulted before any changes affecting us are proposed.

Fourth, much of the paper promotes the value of ‘local’ arrangements. We see a good deal of sense in that and very much value the maritime ‘clusters’ round our shores, but we also want to make sure that where national arrangements make more sense, policy should allow for them. Many of our arrangements work UK-wide, and while we of course respect the policy thrust towards devolution, within the UK and within England, we also want to avoid making things more difficult for companies which operate in more than one locality.

Pillar 2: Developing Skills (Questions 10-14)

Technical Education

1. We welcome the Government’s commitment to Technical Education. The maritime sector does not suffer from most of the problems itemised in the Green Paper, however; there is no “bewildering choice” of qualifications, for example. We can do more to clarify the options available, but for the most part both employers and individuals have readily-understood routes to professional qualification, most of which lead to certification which is recognised world-wide.
2. We worry that the Government’s strategy may, paradoxically, end up *undermining* technical education because it follows Lord Sainsbury’s too-stark distinction between ‘academic’ and ‘technical’ skills. All of us in a modern economy - and certainly all of us in the maritime sector - need both academic and technical skills, and the more sophisticated the skills required, the more that is true.
3. In particular we would commend as a model the path taken by trainee officers in the Merchant Navy, whose training is usually a three-year multi-part sandwich course including 12 months training spent at sea (a far higher ratio of on-the-job training than that recommended by Lord Sainsbury), culminating in an HNC, HND, a Foundation Degree, or a Scottish Professional Diploma. The goal for these trainee officers is ‘Officer Of the Watch’ status, which is recognised worldwide because it meets the criteria set by the International Maritime Organization. (These programmes are not statutory apprenticeships).
4. Illustrating the sector’s readiness to embrace intelligent change, we fully support the enhancements recently proposed to the training model for junior officers, promoted as “SMarT Plus”. ‘SMarT’ is the Support for Maritime Training provided by the Department for Transport. The SMarT Plus proposal, backed by the UK Chamber of Shipping, the Merchant Navy Training

Board and both maritime trade unions, and will result in an increased number of officer cadets for modest additional cost to the Department.

Apprenticeships

1. We are keen to see some stability in policy, so that the emphasis can switch from structural reform to the bigger task of encouraging more employers to use apprenticeships effectively as part of their workforce development programmes. The Government should make sure that in its communications to employers it tells them about *all* the apprenticeships available; the current web pages for the Institute of Apprenticeships feature only new-style Standards, and give no indication that existing framework-style apprenticeships even exist. That's unhelpful to employers.
2. We want apprenticeships at Level 2 to continue. We cannot comment on other sectors, but for us a Level 2 apprenticeship most certainly provides good progression for apprentices who have already achieved Level 2 academic qualifications. Apprentices gain an excellent foundation of skills which enable them to be genuinely useful, and set them off on a path which offers good prospects for progression to higher levels based on their proven ability.
3. We support the proposal to simplify access to apprenticeships by adapting the UCAS model and applying it to them. This has long been talked about; we should get on with it. A simple transfer of the UCAS model may not be right, however, because apprenticeships are jobs. Employers must remain free, as they are now, to recruit direct without being forced to use a national vacancy system; any other approach is likely to put some employers off. The system should also be UK-wide, showing opportunities right across the country. It is common in the maritime sector for people to travel long distances for the right job, and any vacancy system created should support that.

Upskilling

1. We are pleased to see the emphasis you give to upskilling. Technological change in the maritime sector brings improvements both in safety and in competitiveness, which we very much welcome, and though most employers support their people as they invest in new developments, we also want to make sure that no one is left behind by technological change.
2. A simple step the Government could take is to provide people with a good range of information about what they can do themselves to improve their skills, and the financial help available to them. Government is inclined to adopt a "tied house" approach to these things, promoting only its own products and services. We recommend you instead to run a "free house", promoting good quality products and services regardless of their origin. That will be more useful to people.

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