National Skills Academy for Environmental Technologies

Response to the APPG for Excellence in the Built Environment inquiry - Sustainable Construction and the Green Deal

1. Background

The National Skills Academy for Environmental Technologies (www.nsaet.org.uk) is funded by BIS, through the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), and key employer partners across the building services engineering sector. It was launched in 2011 and comprises a network of 23 hubs consisting mainly of further education colleges, with over 120 cluster members including some specialist centres supported by leading manufacturers of environmental technology products.

Initially established by SummitSkills, the sector skills council for building services engineering, the National Skills Academy is now at the heart of the sector's drive to promote a low carbon workforce. All training delivered through the Academy is aligned to National Occupational Standards and meets the minimum technical competence specified in the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 2030:2012, upon which Green Deal competence is based.

To provide consumers and others with assurances that installers meet the industry standard, we have also established the National Skills Academy Register of trained installers which displays those who have trained with the Academy and meet the requirements of PAS 2030:2012.

2. Is sustainability suffering in the recession?

In the recession, contractors understandably have been less willing to train and develop their businesses to meet the low carbon agenda. This means that - even though we have an infrastructure to train over several thousand people a year - we have not experienced a huge demand for renewables training as installers have not had the confidence in the market to be able to invest. From a supply side, this is compounded by the fact that as yet, there has been a very low demand from consumers for environmental technologies, and therefore installers see no need to train, develop or be proactive in this area. Unless there is a clear incentive to train, aligned with clarity on the correct training routes, this will continue to be the case.

3. Barriers to sustainable construction - what is holding the industry back and how could this be improved?

We believe a lack of consumer information and confidence, teamed with the recession, has until now prevented the market from growing as renewable and low carbon contractors have not seen the opportunity to branch out in this area. If more is done to generate consumer demand for energy efficiency, more businesses will spot the opening in the market and will seek more training to grow their business.

4. The Green Deal – is the policy the right one? What can be done to ensure take up?

Consumer confidence is vital if the initiative is to succeed. A key way to increase confidence is to assure consumers of the quality of the Green Deal installer workforce, ensuring that only properly competent installers are allowed to work on their property. Any installations of poor standard and those that do not deliver the intended results will be damaging not just to carbon reduction targets, but also the reputation of the Green Deal.

The lack of central communication thus far about the Green Deal compounds the risk of consumers not questioning the competence of installers taking part in the scheme. We hope that the planned communication campaign for 2013 will go some way to address this.

Having a workforce that meets nationally recognised competence levels is essential. The National Skills Academy has welcomed the publication of the PAS 2030, which has set competence standards for Green Deal installation based on National Occupational Standards. However, our specific concerns are as follows:

- PAS2030:2012 includes annexes that list competence requirements for all Green Deal measures. All were based on National Occupational Standards (NOS), which we strongly endorse.
- Until recently these annexes covered minimum standards for microgeneration technologies such as solar photovoltaics, heat pumps and biomass.
- In December 2012 it was announced that these microgeneration technologies were being removed from PAS2030:2012, and would instead be covered by the Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS). The stated intention from DECC is that if installers are certified with MCS, they would have the microgeneration competence required for Green Deal installation, to avoid duplication across the two certification schemes.
- In theory this is a good idea, however MCS does not currently have NOS-based competences included within its scheme.
- This creates a disparity across the Green Deal competence base and means that it's possible for installers with skills lower than the NOS-baseline to work on homes and properties. This has a potentially damaging effect on the quality of microgeneration installations under the Green Deal scheme.

In light of these issues, we believe:

- To ensure consistency of standards in the sector, it is imperative that competence requirements are the same across all Government-led schemes.
- Therefore, the Academy supports DECC's position in requiring NOS based competences to underpin MCS, but would urge that a date for the introduction and implementation of this is announced as soon as possible, to avoid further confusion.

The Green Deal has the potential to be the largest and most successful energy efficiency programme undertaken in the UK, providing consumers embrace the scheme. If Government and Green Deal operators can communicate the message that all Green Deal installers have been comprehensively – and consistently - assessed in the relevant technologies, this will build assurance considerably.