

The Sector Skills Council for Science,  
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies

semta



Bioscience  
Sector Skills Agreement

# Highlights

Winter 2007 Issue 2



# Foreword

Semta, the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies, is working with employers, professional associations and educationalists towards a Sector Skills Agreement for the bioscience sector (Bioscience SSA). The bioscience sector is defined as biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and medical devices.

The Bioscience SSA is a pact between those who plan, fund and deliver education and training to ensure bioscience employers have the skills they need – now and in the future. An employer-led

bioscience Sector Strategy Group (SSG) is driving its development.

This publication outlines the process, progress to date and the benefits the Bioscience SSA will bring. As a bioscience employer, you have the opportunity to shape the Agreement that will help improve the productivity and competitiveness of the industry. Your input is important.

Lynn Tomkins, UK Policy Director, Semta

## SSA process

The Bioscience SSA is being created through a 5-stage process.



Stages 1 – 3 have been completed and work is progressing to agree an action plan. Findings have been presented to all three devolved administrations and the nine English regions which are partners in the development of the UK-wide SSA.

## Themes for action

Informed by stage three of the process, employers in the sector identified the factors critical to its success. These have been translated into four themes for action, each with priority aims:

### Improve sector image and attractiveness:

- Enthuse young people to aspire to a career in science
- Improve information, advice and guidance about the sector
- Encourage adults in other sectors to consider bioscience an attractive, rewarding sector for redeployment
- Improve science literacy across society
- Make career paths clearer and more transparent

### Achieve a top-quality workforce:

- Close the skills gap by increasing the supply of quality people
- Change metrics for undergraduate achievement to reflect employer needs
- Promote and develop a responsive system for generating short courses for industrial scientists at universities
- Develop 'fit for purpose' National Occupational Standards and improve take up
- Make better use of Further Education and apprenticeships
- Press for practical skills to be an integral component of the education system

### Enhance leadership and entrepreneurship:

- Develop a pool of strategic leaders to drive and support SMEs and larger organisations
- Link regional and national scientific leaders to existing 'clusters and networks' to establish regional focus and strength

### Improve employer engagement:

- Develop a national framework of clusters and networks as a focal point for engaging employers in the skills agenda and sharing best practice
- Promote the framework as a critical enabler to implement the skills strategy UK-wide

## BIA support



"I believe the goals of the Bioscience SSA – developing and supporting leaders, improving the image and attractiveness of the sector, and building a top-quality workforce – are absolutely right. The top priority is to improve the image and attractiveness of the bioscience sector. We need to attract the best talent in the country to do STEM subjects at school, STEM degrees at university, then inspire them to want a career in bioscience. To do that we've got to promote the diversity of careers and the industry as ethical and responsible. Companies can help by sending ambassadors into schools and universities so that students understand the opportunities.

"Leadership and entrepreneurship is vital: to commercialise science you need leaders who understand the science and an entrepreneurial environment for it to flourish. We should be developing a pool of inter-disciplinary leaders – bioscientists who understand the work of engineers and clinicians, for example, so they can work together with them in industry.

"Government should be working to make the UK the hub of bioscience education globally, where we

welcome and benefit from people from the international community coming here to train and work. Working with Semta on the SSA will help ensure our needs are presented to Government. In the face of fierce global competition, we need to act quickly and strategically for the benefit of the UK bioscience sector."

**Dr Tony Bradshaw, Director, Operations & bioProcessUK, BioIndustry Association**



Dr Tony Bradshaw

"With the combined actions of individual employers, SSG members, Semta and representative bodies, we can improve the UK science base for the benefit of all stakeholders."

**Jackie Wilbraham, R & D Science Policy Director, AstraZeneca**

## Standards to meet skills needs

Semta is working with laboratory and biotechnology production managers to tackle identified laboratory skills gaps and shortages. The first step is to identify the full range of job roles and competencies required by organisations. This information is then used to write occupational standards that describe the key workplace competencies for the laboratory roles identified. A number of managers have told Semta about their laboratory roles and are now giving us their critique on the new standards we are writing. Comprehensive data will enable us to develop a range of fit-for-purpose, nationally-recognised standards for organisations to use flexibly in meeting their skill needs.

We need as many organisations as possible to participate to ensure the fullest coverage of needs. You can help by: telling us about the job roles and required competencies in your organisation; contributing to standards development; giving feedback on draft standards. To get involved, please email **John Ryalls** at [jryalls@semta.org.uk](mailto:jryalls@semta.org.uk) or call him on **01275 462212**.

## ABPI support



"We're pleased that the SSA is being developed and believe that tackling the issues identified will help to meet our skills needs. But we see this as only the first stage. What we're really looking for are the actions on delivery that will come about as a result of having a Sector Skills Agreement. Higher-level skills are particularly important to us and we hope for increased dialogue between industry and higher education. We cannot afford for the SSA to rest as a 'tick box' exercise: stakeholders must engage in implementing the agreed actions."



Sarah Jones

**Sarah Jones, Head of Education, Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry**

# Collaboration is key



**A leading biotechnology company, Novartis Vaccines and Diagnostics produces vaccines at its high-volume manufacturing facility at Liverpool and has a large requirement for technician skills. Director, Performance Management & OD, Steve Jones, believes the Bioscience SSA will help Novartis maintain the leading-edge status of its processes and bring many benefits to the wider bioscience community.**

"To continue to develop the technical mastery we want, we need to inject external support. We already work with local universities and other providers but there's no established network of providers who are recognised as specialists in particular topics. Hopefully the SSA will provide that network and bring together the demand and supply side."

Novartis already leads the way in some of the industry's requirements and is keen to share its knowledge through the improved clusters approach advocated by the SSA. Partnership For Learning, a local training organisation and preferred training provider for Novartis, has created a 'bioportfolio' of training programmes tailored to the bioscience industry and delivers an aseptic skills programme

developed by Novartis and Liverpool John Moores University. "It's available for others to use with funding available from the LSC for those eligible," Steve explains. "That's an example of how we can sponsor and develop new programmes for use by SMEs in the region and further afield."

Steve urges employers large and small to work together and engage with the SSA. "Collaboration is what it's all about. It includes developing new training programmes, tapping into knowledge, experience and funding support, and encouraging others to take advantage of good provision that's already out there."

"We welcome the opportunity to inform the Government of gaps in provision compared to industry-specific requirements and are keen to work in partnership with Government and agencies to drive the skills agenda. We want to develop the UK's bioscience presence and enhance our ability to attract further products, franchises and investment. Developing skills excellence is a key enabler for us and other UK organisations to meet the challenges of competitors across the world."



## Stop Press *bionow*

Steve Jones was presented with the 'Biomedical Personality of the Year' trophy at the North West Development Agency 'bionow' annual awards for his services to the regional skills and training agenda.

# Benefits summary

The Bioscience Sector Skills Agreement sets out to improve the productivity and competitiveness of the UK bioscience sector by boosting the supply, skills and capabilities of its people.

By taking priority actions we will achieve for the sector:

- Degree content 'fit for purpose' with increased practical activity
- University short courses to meet professional development needs
- The right person for the right role with the right skills and qualifications
- Clear career progression pathways
- Practical skills based on relevant National Occupational Standards
- Improved STEM capability at all levels of education
- Improved information, advice and guidance
- Strong sector leadership at regional and national levels
- A well-coordinated network of clusters for employer engagement



# Find out more

Further information and the following documents are available on Semta's website:  
Stage 1 – Skills Needs Analysis;  
Stage 2 – Assessment of Current Provision;  
Stage 3 – Gap Analysis.  
Visit [www.semta.org.uk](http://www.semta.org.uk)

To get involved, please email Darren Race, Bioscience SSA Implementation Manager, at [drace@semta.org.uk](mailto:drace@semta.org.uk) or call him on 01740 627000.