New research published by the Learning and Skills Council today, has revealed positive findings about perceptions of the FE System, with clear advocacy and support for the System and its activities.

The Status & Reputation of the Further Education System research study conducted by Ipsos MORI, has revealed that stakeholders* recognise the System to be a key driver in meeting the government’s wider goals on economic competitiveness, social inclusion and community cohesion, with three in five (57%) regarding the FE system to be well respected and 64% believing that the activities of the FE System have a major impact on the national economy and productivity.

The majority of stakeholders also feel that the System has made good progress in recent years in quality of provision (63%), general estate and buildings (61%) with the quality of leadership and choice of provision also being cited as improved by half of all stakeholders.

Stakeholder advocacy is encouraging, with 47% of all stakeholders professing to speak highly about the FE System including 28% saying they would provide spontaneous advocacy.

The research also identified a clear constructive route map for improvement:

- Stakeholders tend to be more positive about FE provision locally than nationally – 69% are satisfied with local provision compared with 54% for national
• When stakeholders talk about the FE System, they are essentially thinking about FE/sixth form colleges only – training providers in particular do see themselves as being part of the FE system

• Whilst FE and Sixth Form Colleges are key advocates, there is a need for other stakeholders such as training providers and employers to be better engaged with the System as 36% of employers currently say they have little or no understanding of the FE System

A new steering group has been established by the LSC and DIUS to advance the reputation of the FE System which aims to improve the reputation of FE, increase positive perceptions amongst key stakeholders and raise awareness and understanding of how the FE System is being reformed and updated.

The group represents a diverse range of organisations from across the sector including FE Colleges, Sixth-form colleges, the 157 Group, the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Association of Learning Providers (ALP), independent and work-based learning providers and the LSC and DIUS.

Mark Haysom, Chief Executive, Learning and Skills Council said: “All of us in the sector must work together to develop the reputation and understanding of FE amongst our key stakeholders. The work of the steering group is essential in highlighting the reforms taking place that will further meet the needs of learners and employers. This research helps us identify areas of concern, allows us to agree, with our partners, the direction of travel, and gives us the evidence we need to establish plans for the future.”

John Brennan, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges (members of the FE Reputation Steering Group) said: “Advancing the reputation of the FE sector is critical if we are to demonstrate to both external and internal audiences the value of FE and the contribution it makes to the economic and social success of this country. The strong base revealed by the survey is encouraging but much remains to be done.”
Alison Birkinshaw, Principal of Nelson and Colne College, Lancashire, (a member of the FE Reputation Steering Group) said: “It is very encouraging that this important research recognises the key role of the FE sector in meeting the skills needs of employers. We know that the vast majority of Colleges provide high quality training for employers. Moving forward, we must continue to enhance the reputation of the sector as a whole, to make sure that everyone is aware of the real impact education and training makes to individuals, employers and communities.”

-ENDS-

Notes to editors

The Ipsos MORI research study The Status & Reputation of the Further Education System was conducted in two phases between January and April 2007.

* Stakeholders includes: MPs, journalists, think-tanks, local authorities, Regional Development Agencies, Government Offices, Sector Skills Councils, business representative organisations, trade unions, student representatives, LSC National and Regional Members, training providers, FE/Sixth Form Colleges.

Learning and Skills Council:
The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England’s young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.

Further Education Reputation Steering Group:
Set up in January 2007, the FE Reputation Steering Group aims to enhance the reputation of the FE system amongst key stakeholders. The aim of this work is to raise awareness and understanding of how the FE system is delivering the type of world class provision set out in the FE White Paper and the Leitch Review.

The group consists of a diverse range of leaders from across the sector including FE Colleges, Sixth-form colleges, the 157 Group, the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Association of Learning Providers (ALP), independent and work-based learning providers and the LSC and DIUS.
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