

**DISCUSSION PAPER ON DEVELOPING A NEW
STRUCTURE TO PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE DELIVERY
MECHANISM FOR EDUCATION BUSINESS LINKS**

A SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

JUNE 2000

Background

1. A discussion paper issued in February 2000, *A New Structure to provide an effective mechanism for Education Business Links*, outlined the DfEEs proposals for a new strategic approach for education business partnerships; and sought support and comments on them. This note sets out the main responses.
2. This built on an earlier consultation document, *Schools and Business - Sustaining Partnerships*, issued in Autumn 1998, which sought views on developing stronger links between schools and businesses, and a subsequent working group that reported to Ministers on how to take this forward. A key recommendation was that if business engagement with schools was to be fully effective we needed to adopt a more strategic approach at local level to target resources towards local priorities.
3. At the same time, the *Learning to Succeed* White Paper set out the Government's plans to reform local management of post-16 and adult education through the establishment of the new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and its 47 local "arms" - the local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). Although primarily responsible for post-16 learning, the LSC will have the power - through the Learning and Skills Bill - to support the provision of education business links for all young people, including those of compulsory school age.
4. The main proposal in *A New Structure to provide an effective mechanism for Education Business Links* was the formation of one education business link consortium in each of the 47 local Learning and Skills Council areas. This would mean that the local Learning and Skills Council would contract with one lead body within its area, while schools and businesses would be presented with a "single face" for all education business link activities. These proposals attracted wide support from respondents.

Some facts and figures

5. The consultation took place between the 25 February and 14 April 2000. Seven hundred papers were sent out to a wide range of organisations, businesses and institutions with an interest in education business link activity. These included Education Business Partnerships; other education business link organisations (including those involved in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)); Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs); Local Education Authorities (LEAs); businesses and their representative organisations; Government Offices; Regional Development Agencies; and Careers Services).
6. As a result of this, 297 contributions were received - a response rate of 42 %. Sources of responses were:

Type of organisation	Number of responses	Percentage of total
EBP	91	31
Other EBL Organisations	11	4
Businesses	29	10
TECs	31	10
STEM	27	9
LEAs	37	12
Schools and Colleges	17	6
GOs/RDAs	2	1
Careers Service	13	4
Chambers of Commerce	11	4
Others	28	9
Total	297	100

7. In addition to this, we engaged a consultant to conduct a number of interviews with key players in the education business link field and national businesses, and to report on findings. A series of round - the - table discussions with national businesses was also held. The summary below takes account of all these sources of information.

Key Issues

8. The key issues emerging from the responses were:

- Substantial support for the need to secure a new strategic approach for the EBL agenda, and general consensus in support of the proposals set out in the paper, though some concern was raised about how the needs of those operating at a national level would be met. There was also strong support for the need for closer working with others involved across the whole EBL agenda. It was felt that this should not only include organisations delivering EBL activities, but also businesses - large and small, and their representative organisations; the Learning Partnerships; Connexions Service; LEAs. - and other key players.
- Respondents were keen to seize the opportunity to build quality into the system and the need to be able to link clearly the benefits to pupils in terms of standards and achievements; and the need for these measurements to be reflected in future funding formulae.
- A clear commitment to the importance of EBL activity, and an acknowledgment of the benefits it brings to those taking part. Many assumed - and strongly supported - the concept of an entitlement to EBL activity for all schools age pupils. There was some concern about consistency of quality and provision, with a clear message that quality standards, and evaluation in terms of impact, were needed within the new structure.

- The need to promote and expand business involvement in EBL activities through demonstrating a clear business case for their involvement. Businesses were increasingly moving away from a philanthropic approach towards a more “hard edged” one - and many still remained to be convinced of the benefits to their companies.
- The provision of development funding was welcomed, but there was considerable uncertainty over future funding levels (including core funding), and a belief that failure to allocate adequate resources will place the new agenda at risk.
- There was strong support from most groups about the local approach to the new structure. Nevertheless, there was also concern that without a national or regional structure or forum feeding into the LSC at a strategic level, the needs of large businesses will not be met and national delivery organisations would lose some of their effectiveness.
- There was strong support for national funding criteria, and a clear link between activity and funding set against a national standard. Alongside this, however, there was some concern that the national criteria in the paper did not quite capture all the elements required, for example, insufficient emphasis on employability skills. There was also some concern that some current activities that did not quite fit the current national criteria would be lost.
- There was some concern about lack of clarity regarding the relationships between the Learning and Skills Council, the local Learning and Skills Councils and Learning Partnerships. Many were unclear about the roles and relationships of each, and were concerned that, despite the new arrangements, the local priorities would not be fully identified at a national level, or that geographical barriers would make it difficult for one LLSC to capture the disparate needs of its population.

Next Steps

9. The next step in this process will be for Education Business Link Organisations (EBLOs) to form a consortium within each LSC area. Government Offices (GOs) will have responsibility for coordinating this work. Guidance for GOs on their role in supporting the formation of EBL consortia; assessing initial proposals; allocating development funding and approving Initial Development Plans will be made available at the beginning of June.

10. GOs stand ready to help organisations devise workable arrangements where this would be helpful - and in some areas this work is already underway. Consideration of proposals will take place during the summer, and funding will be allocated by September. At this stage, plans are not expected to determine planned levels of activity. Detailed Initial Development Plans will need to be finalised with GOs before the end of the year at

the latest, to enable the LLSC to determine priorities and put the necessary arrangements in place by April 2001.

Department for Education and Employment

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