

Leading learning and skills

Learning and Skills – the *agenda for change* The Prospectus

August 2005

This document is of interest to everyone in the learning and skills sector

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Learning and Skills – the *agenda for change*

Foreword by Bill Rammell, Minister of State for Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, Department for Education and Skills

Further Education is the engine room for skills and social justice in this country. It equips businesses with the skills they need to compete and opens up opportunities for people of all ages and from all groups in the community to build the platform of skills and qualifications to get and keep jobs, to develop in their jobs to skilled, well-paid employment and to progress to higher education. Thus far an unsung hero, FE is well placed to keep Britain working.

FE's moment has come. It has a leading role in the Government's strategies for both Skills and 14–19 and supports wider policy drives in health and social mobility. Over coming months, we will have the benefit of advice from Sir Andrew Foster's Review of Further Education Colleges, which will have further implications for the sector, and Lord Sandy Leitch's Review of Skills, which will set the long-term perspective of the skills we need for competitiveness. And our continuing *Success for All* strategy has already had a major impact on FE, on which we now want to build.

The context for these developments is first of all international. The UK still lags behind its economic peers on productivity, on the agility to develop and exploit new markets, and on innovation. The pace of change in world markets means that we need fast, efficient dynamic responsiveness in further education so that we can close and indeed leap over our skills gaps.

That urgency exists at national level too. Last year 300,000 young people left school with fewer than five GCSEs and there are still millions of adults who can not read, write or deal with numbers to a basic standard. These are statistics not just about academic attainment but about social exclusion and dauntingly high barriers to meaningful employment. They are

statistics that illustrate the challenge for a dynamic further education sector to tackle.

I warmly welcome the lead that Mark Haysom and the LSC have taken together with the FE sector to develop the *agenda for change* in response to the challenge of developing an effective, efficient and dynamic sector. This is the first step on a journey that will radically change the whole post-16 landscape. The reviews by Sir Andrew Foster on Further Education Colleges, and Lord Sandy Leitch on Skills will provide further advice which will enable the Government to develop and deliver the transformation we must have for a successful future underpinned by economic progress and social mobility.

The *agenda for change* is therefore central to decisions that will follow in the autumn and into next year but it also sets out important areas where early progress can begin now. I look forward to hearing from Mark Haysom how the agenda is received and how it can be taken forward. I therefore wish the Learning and Skills Council and all its partners well in taking forward the *agenda for change*.



Bill Rammell
Minister of State for Higher
Education and Lifelong Learning

Foreword by Mark Haysom

Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Council

Since I arrived at the Learning and Skills Council, I have been asking "What must the FE sector do to step up to the enormous and exciting challenges we face?" From my viewpoint, what we need is a network of colleges that put customers first, that operate as the nerve centre of the skills agenda and take the 14–19 reforms out of policy and into practice, and where the disincentives to collaborate fade away. Colleges as famous for the quality of what they provide as for how they run themselves as businesses. A network famous for its world class buildings and technologies. A simplified system where waste is minimised so funding can be deployed to front line education and training. A sector that plays a broad role in enhancing local communities. And a system where learners and employers can find their way around and are equipped to make good choices.

But this view is in no way the exclusive property of the Learning and Skills Council. In a series of regional meetings in 2004 and again in 2005 we discussed and developed it at length with college principals, and I continue to be struck by the breadth of support it enjoys across the sector.

Nor is the LSC itself exempt from the challenge. We have heard the feedback. As the leading government agency in the FE sector we know we cannot simply say the words and expect providers to provide, employers to engage and learners to learn. We know we have to play an active role, and more importantly we know that role has to be rebalanced. We know we have to move away from micro-management to support; from complex to simple funding; from focus on inputs and data to focus on quality outcomes; from transactional deals at local level to working partnerships; from adding overhead to the system to adding value.

And how will we add that value? We know that if the learning and skills market is to work effectively you have to have something between big government and local communities. If it's all top down you end up with a local system that is merely a unit of national policy with no autonomy or sensitivity to local needs – it means college principals with no room for manoeuvre, employers whose entrepreneurial energies are limited by prescribed national skills that may not be relevant, it means learners constrained in their choices and opportunities for personal development.

Yet if it's all bottom up you get duplication of courses or enormous gaps in provision, unused buildings, disenfranchised groups, unsatisfactory transport arrangements and a haphazard range of provision that may or may not further the national and regional agenda for productivity and social advancement. Our role, therefore, is to get that balance right, to work creatively with local colleges, to tune the system so it really sings.

That is why we have developed an *agenda for change*. It is not just a response to present circumstances but an attempt at shaping the future. We have organised it around six themes:

- 1 We will work together to create colleges valued by **employers** as the partner of choice for developing the **skills** they need.
- 2 We will work together to improve the **quality** of provision, funding excellence and promoting the very best to serve as beacons to others.
- 3 We will radically simplify our **funding** methodology and allocation process, making it more transparent and more responsive to changing needs.
- 4 We will sweep away the complexity that causes colleges to divert resources to collecting **data** of variable benefit.
- 5 We will develop our capital investment strategy to free back-office resources and support improved management systems and processes to thus improve our **business excellence**.
- 6 We will work with colleges to identify ways in which they can secure their **reputation** as pivotal to delivering the education and training needs of the UK.

The six themes add up to a programme that will begin to revolutionise the sector, and since autumn 2004, more than 100 key people from within it have been working with us and others to identify ways of making it happen. We are now moving ahead with urgency. This Prospectus sets out important steps in the way forward – and provides you with an opportunity to have your say on our ideas. While I am clear that this is very much the right direction of travel, I fully recognise

the importance of the outcomes of the Foster and Leitch reviews for our work and that the Government will need to take account of the *agenda for change* together with recommendations from the Foster and Leitch reviews in setting an overall strategy for the sector.

And while we've developed the vision so far largely with college principals, I am now very clear that we need to explore the same messages with college governors, and also right across the post-16 sector. And at every stage we must ensure that it works for the customer – learners and employers – helping them get the education, training and skills that will really equip them to achieve their ambitions.

And how will we know we have made a difference? We will be looking to have shifted the dial on a number of key areas:

- the majority of provision will be ranked as good or higher
- employers and learners rate highly the training that is available and which they receive
- colleges collaborate with schools and a whole range of other providers to deliver the very best education and training opportunities
- college facilities and processes are among the very best pushing money to the front line and improving outcomes for learners and employers; and
- the sector is typified as one of strong, confident colleges, highly regarded by all of their stakeholders both locally and nationally.

This Prospectus sets out what is really just the beginning of a transformation agenda for the sector. I welcome your further views and your collaboration as we take that agenda forward. In future years, we will work with you to build on *agenda for change* and to turn our aspirations into reality.



Mark Haysom
Chief Executive, Learning and Skills Council

Executive Summary

This Prospectus sets out proposals for a dynamic programme of change. A detailed technical annex on **data** comes at the end, and further technical papers on **funding, capital** and other areas will follow.

In our work so far we have focused largely on working with FE college principals. But we do believe that the issues and approaches have wider application across the **whole post-16 sector**, and in some cases have begun to explore this. A common strategy across the whole post-16 sector must make sense in terms of ensuring we are working most effectively with all our partners, to the benefit of young people, adults, employers and communities, and the economy at large.

Therefore, while this Prospectus is addressed specifically to the FE sector, we are arranging dialogue with representatives of the other sectors with whom we work to take this agenda forward more widely. This will include discussions with, for example, independent providers, voluntary and community providers, University for Industry, Local Authorities and schools, and the relevant Trade Unions.

As we take the *agenda for change* forward, we will of course take into account the emerging findings of the Foster Review of Further Education Colleges and the Leitch Review of Skills. And the Government will need to take account of the *agenda for change* together with recommendations from the Foster and Leitch reviews in setting an overall strategy for the sector.

Skills for Employers

We need to bridge the productivity gap with our international competitors. To do that, colleges – and other training providers – will have to go further in offering employers the opportunity to prepare the skilled employees they require. At present, too few employers see these sources as the answer to developing the workforce, and they look elsewhere, or worse, they stop looking at all.

We need to change that perception and position the post-16 sector as the partner of choice for employers looking to develop their workforce.

To achieve this, working with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), we propose to:

- create a **nationwide network** of colleges – and other providers – focused on the needs of employers
- develop with employers a **Quality Mark** for those colleges – and other providers – so that employers know they meet exacting standards and that the services they provide will be of high quality and responsive to the real needs of their businesses
- increasingly make **employers** aware of the benefits of working with these quality-marked colleges – and other providers – so funding flows accordingly in line with employer choice; and
- as set out in the Skills White Paper of March 2005, develop the **National Employer Training Programme** (NETP) as a powerful, demand-led mechanism for changing the way in which training for adults is delivered.

Quality

We have a number of outstanding colleges delivering high-quality provision to learners, employers and communities. But we also see that some are still **under-performing** and that improvement is unevenly spread across the sector and across subject areas. Our ambition is that colleges are famous for the consistent delivery of outstanding quality.

Working with the new Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and our partners, we plan to support improvements in quality among all providers and across subject areas, building on what has already been achieved through the *Success for All* reforms, and the future development of that reform programme.

To achieve this we propose collectively with our many partners to:

- develop a culture of **self-improvement** and peer-referencing where colleges learn from each other and work together to improve quality

- place quality improvement at the heart of the colleges' and the LSC's **review process**, linking funding and planning more explicitly to quality improvement
- create ever more effective **measures of success** that place the learner and employer at the heart of performance measures; and
- develop skills and motivation among the **workforces** of both colleges and the LSC itself.

Funding

The present funding process is complex, bureaucratic and causes difficulties for colleges, other providers and the LSC itself.

For college funding, we look to find a new approach with streamlined processes, a focus on the plan, greater equity of funding methodology across different providers and a new level of certainty that will enable them to plan more effectively.

To achieve this we propose to:

- link funding explicitly to **college plans** and move the LSC away from the micro-management of funding
- explore the scope for extending proposals for simplifying FE funding to other sectors so enabling the LSC to fund whoever is most suited to deliver the provision required, thus ensuring 'contestability'
- radically simplify the funding formula by introducing the concepts of a **standard learner number** and a **provider factor** which, together, will be sufficient to drive funding decisions; and
- introduce **core** and **commissioned** funding where the core guarantees funding based on the previous year's allocations and the commissioned element provides for a degree of flexibility to meet changing needs, summing together to a plan driven by demand.

At the same time, as set out in the Skills White Paper of March 2005, we will introduce the National Employer Training Programme, based on the core principles that: the employer should be able to act in effect as purchaser of the training they need, so that they can secure the design and delivery of training

to meet their priorities; the broker acts on behalf of the employer, able to direct resource to whichever provider can best meet the employer's needs; and that the broker can make those decisions in real time, securing rapid, flexible response in meeting the employer's training needs.

The combination of our changes to funding arrangements and the development of the NETP will make the funding system truly flexible, responsive and demand led.

Data

Good quality data is essential to the effective management of colleges. However, the current data requirements imposed on the sector are bureaucratic and too often ask for information of little real use.

We plan to identify what data is truly conducive to effective management and then declutter the way in which it gets collected.

To achieve this we propose to:

- create a **consistent set** of data definitions and management information (MI) reports to be used by all organisations across the education and skills sector, including the introduction of a Unique Learner Identifier
- work with partners, including DfES and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to create a **record of learning** for each individual which can be accessed by learners, and by colleges and other providers acting on behalf of the learner
- collect **only that data** which colleges need to manage their own business
- have all data collected from colleges by one **'data partner'** to avoid multiple requests for information from various bodies; and
- make a simplified and more **coherent link** between the collection of data and the simplified funding methodology.

Business Excellence

Colleges are businesses as well as education and training providers, and to respond to both learners and employers they need lean and agile underpinning business mechanisms.

We plan to help colleges become better businesses, reduce their administrative overheads and thus release resource for front line delivery.

We propose to:

- introduce new **benchmarking** and value for money measures to stimulate improvements in business performance
- continue **capital expenditure** to improve the estate, and so drive up learner recruitment, retention and achievement; and
- encourage collective **procurement** to deliver better value for money.

Reputation

An improved reputation for colleges is the 'golden thread' that ties all the elements of *agenda for change* together. Research suggests that while colleges enjoy the esteem of their local communities, that esteem fails to aggregate nationally. And as already noted, employers are not yet in the habit of seeing colleges as the answer to their workforce needs.

We plan to help colleges secure the reputation that most deserve, and at all levels – local, regional and national.

We propose to:

- promote the examples of **best practice** that exist in many colleges
- amplify the excellent **reputation** colleges have locally on to a national stage
- develop a **marketing and communications** strategy to promote the sector to all of its audiences and especially to those, such as employers, where we will have something significantly different to promote
- build on the reputation held by colleges – and other providers – along with the LSC in promoting **equality of access** and diversity of provision; and
- undertake regular **research** to track changing perceptions of the sector.

Learning and Skills – the *agenda for change*

Theme One - Skills for Employers

Introduction

We will work together to create colleges valued by **employers** as the partner of choice for developing the **skills** they need.

1 Colleges have a strong reputation for responding to the needs of learners and communities. But their reputation with **employers** tends to be patchy. Yet meeting the skills needs of the nation must be a core part of the further education (FE) mission if we are as a nation to meet the competitive challenges of the 21st century, and make the most of the talents of all our people.

2 There are many examples of colleges who do already have an excellent reputation for working with employers. We need to extend this engagement if the sector is to be regarded universally as a serious player in **upskilling** the country's workforce and bridging the productivity gap with our international competitors. The Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) 2004 National Employer Skills Survey says that only 15 per cent of employers make use of FE when seeking solutions to their training and skills needs. This needs to change.

3 The creation of the network of over 300 **Centres of Vocational Excellence** (CoVEs) in colleges and other providers has gone some way to raising the profile and reputation of colleges as deliverers of high quality specialist training to employers.

4 The development of the new sector based **Skills Academies** will build on this. These will address present gaps in meeting skill needs nationally and provide high-quality skills solutions. Skills Academies will provide leadership to the CoVE network and to sectoral provision in colleges and other providers. Employers

and their Sector Skills Councils will work closely with the LSC and FE to ensure that the needs of each employment sector are not only met now but engender a growing confidence that the FE sector is truly responsive to business needs.

5 We will work closely with the best of the FE sector, the Sector Skills Councils, employers' organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Association of British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) the Small Business Council (SBC) and the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), as well as other partners such as Investors in People UK (IIP) to get the **message** across to employers that improving skills in the workforce is the key to their future success – and so worth greater investment. As emphasised in the Skills Strategy, we recognise that employers will only be willing to invest if they are confident that the design, delivery and quality of training offered by colleges and other providers will meet their needs.

6 At the same time, we want to ensure that all the training offered by colleges and other providers is **flexible**, in tune with what employers want and need and is delivered either on employers' premises or – if delivered in the college – is in world-class buildings. We will learn from our Employer Training Pilots (ETPs) in building the National Employer Training Programme (NETP) as a powerful, demand-led mechanism for changing the way in which training for adults is delivered.

7 Only by working closely with employers will colleges gain the confidence of companies and be recognised as a **natural partner** in raising workforce skills, making the most of a current and potential diverse workforce and underpinning business success.

8 Although we have developed these ideas with colleges, as we take them forward we recognise that we need also to explore the **full range** of providers across the post-16 network if we are to provide the excellence and choice employers are seeking.

Our Proposals

9 We propose to create a **nationwide network** of colleges and other providers, which are focused on the needs of employers and their workforce.

10 Colleges and other providers in this network will be **business-focused** and have a majority of staff with recent experience of the businesses they support. They will work with employers to design training tailored to their particular needs.

11 Those in the network will be **quality-marked** by business so that employers can recognise the specialist support and range of training services they provide. Over time, as employers increasingly recognise and have confidence in the Quality Mark, we expect that they will want to choose to use quality-marked colleges and providers as the suppliers of workforce development services through the NETP.

12 The network will be recognised for being flexible in delivering training at a time, place and pace that **suits employers** and their staff. They will build strong relationships with skills brokers, business advisers and other business organisations to ensure they offer the companies they serve effective support and signposting to an appropriate mix of training and business solutions.

13 The new network will conform to a new **national standard** for working with business. This standard will be tough, jointly developed and owned by employers and colleges.

14 By doing this and building on the links already developed with schools, higher education institutions and other providers, colleges will build on their current role and become central to supporting **local economic development** across the country. They will work in tandem with the network of skills brokers that the LSC has been charged to develop across the country.

How Will It Work?

The standard

15 Building on existing good practice, we propose to work with partners to develop a new **national standard** that is a symbol of excellence in the design and delivery of workforce development services to employers, including responding to and building on the diversity of the current and future workforce. We have already had preliminary discussions with

business organisations that are keen to work closely with the LSC and other partners to achieve this aim.

16 We are keen not to add to the administrative burden of colleges and providers. So, in developing this new standard, we will work closely with the Adult Learning Inspectorate and others to ensure **consistency and coherence** with developing inspection processes. Wherever possible, we would want to incorporate elements of other relevant standards into what will become a new Quality Mark.

17 We will ensure that we build on what we already have, so we are not starting from the beginning. For example, it is anticipated that the existing network of **Centres of Vocational Excellence** and other similar specialist provision will be well placed to be early adopters and achievers of this new Quality Mark.

External validation

18 The experiences of colleges and other providers in similar regional approaches, such as Action for Business and Customer First, is that **external validation/assessment** has been a worthwhile experience. Even those providers who believed they were already delivering excellent services to employers had development areas identified through external assessment.

19 For this new Quality Mark we would want to see a robust but streamlined external assessment process as the penultimate stage to achieving the standard. We also want the final decision to award the Quality Mark to rest with an independent panel, chaired by an employer. **Employers** would play a key part in the external assessment process, including the use of 'mystery shoppers'. We would seek their views on whether the college or other provider had achieved the high standards set for this new Quality Mark.

20 **Self-assessment** and peer group review – discussed further in the Quality chapter of this Prospectus – will play an important role in helping colleges achieve the standard required initially and in delivering continuous improvement. We would want to develop strong expertise in the delivery of workforce development services across the sector as part of this approach. The Quality Mark will become the way we assess quality in the delivery of workforce development services to employers. We will work closely with the new Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and other partners, to ensure that the Quality Mark complements the work led by them on establishing standards for teaching and learning in the workplace. The outcomes of the Quality Mark process and the associated performance indicators will

be incorporated into the new 'employer guide to good training' as it develops.

21 It is not proposed to set a **target** for the number of colleges and other providers that might attain the standard but we recognise that not all will do so, and that some, such as sixth form colleges, will wish to focus their mission elsewhere. Sir Andrew Foster's Review of Further Education Colleges should help explore further the varied missions of the sector.

Funding

22 We recognise that funding is a strong lever and motivator for colleges and providers. The Quality Mark will assist employers, and skills brokers, to identify and choose providers who are best placed to meet their needs and who have demonstrated excellence in the delivery of workforce development services to employers.

23 The real test of the Quality Mark, however, will be employers' willingness to invest more including in **full cost** provision, as a result of their growing confidence in the quality and suitability of the provision offered to employers by colleges and other providers.

Sufficiency of provision to meet the needs of local employers and their workforce

24 Local LSCs, working closely with their partners regionally and locally, will **plan provision** to ensure that it is able to meet the workforce development needs of employers.

25 Where this planning reveals **gaps** in provision, or a lack of the high quality provision employers need to meet their workforce development needs, the local LSC will work with colleges and providers to build that capacity or alternatively bring new provision into the area. We recognise that careful planning will be required in rural and/or sparsely populated areas, and to address the varying issues of equality and diversity among employers, their employees and their potential workforce.

26 We will also be developing the NETP, based on the core principles in the Skills White Paper: that the employer should be able to act in effect as the purchaser of the training they need, so that they can secure the design and delivery of training to meet their priorities; that the broker acts on behalf of the employer, able to direct resource to whichever provider can best meet the employer's needs; and that the broker can make those decisions in real time, securing rapid, flexible response in meeting the employer's training needs. As indicated above, we would expect colleges and other providers that meet the standard and achieve the Quality Mark to be well placed to compete for NETP business.

Transition Period

27 A small number of colleges will already be at, or close to, the proposed standard. However, the majority of others who want to be part of the business-focused network will need some **support** to secure the Quality Mark.

28 The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has allocated significant funds to support **capacity building** in the sector to enable the effective roll-out of the NETP from 2006/07. This work will include a focus on the challenges of making the most of the talents of an increasingly diverse workforce. Our main priorities for the investment fund for this year are:

- ensuring that we have the infrastructure and capacity in place to support effective introduction of the **National Employer Training Programme** from next year
- developing the new **Quality Mark** in close partnership with employers and employer organisations
- working with the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) and other partners, to improve the **leadership and management** skills of people in the sector to ensure that they are designing and delivering workforce development services for employers
- working with Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the Sector Skills Council for employers who deliver and/or support the delivery of lifelong learning, to develop the skills of the teaching and learning staff and assessors in colleges and other providers who deliver **workforce development**. Particular emphasis will be placed on ensuring that delivery staff have up to date industrial/commercial experience. We will also want to develop new delivery models that make more use of the skills and expertise of those working in the sector
- working with the DfES and other partners to develop a standard for teaching and learning in the workplace including rolling out new **teaching and learning materials**. We are working with them to develop materials that support our aspiration that the majority of teaching in support of employers is delivered in the workplace. We will also want to support the development of better initial assessment, as this has been an area for development highlighted in the ETPs

- identify the **best practice** that already exists in the colleges and providers and develop models of good practice and case study material; and
- work with colleges and other providers to ensure that the best in the sector are **showcased** to employers, including work with the business and sectoral press and other media.

29 A relatively small number of colleges and providers have **already achieved** similar standards that have been developed regionally. We will work intensively with these colleges to ensure their speedy and smooth transition to achieving the new Quality Mark.

Next Steps

30 Our next step will be to establish a high level **Steering Group** to oversee this work with representatives from businesses, colleges, providers and other key partners to develop these proposals further. In September, we will commission work to:

- complete the analysis of similar existing **regional approaches** that already exist such as Action for Business, Customer First and EMSkills
- work with colleges, providers and other key partners to develop the content of the **standard** that will underpin the Quality Mark
- work with the CBI, the SBC, the BCC, the FSB and other **employer** organisations to develop the external validation and Quality Mark
- raise **employer awareness** of colleges and how they are working to meet their workforce development needs; and
- agree a **capacity building**/development plan for colleges and other providers and for the LSC itself.

Theme Two - Quality

Introduction

We will work together to improve the **quality** of provision, funding excellence and promoting the very best to serve as beacons to others.

31 If we achieve the transformation described in the previous section as regards services for employers, that is but one part of the agenda. The sector will only really be delivering if a continuing drive on **quality** across the piece forms the second strand. While we have worked so far largely with FE colleges, many of the proposals in this section on quality would have wider application across the post-16 sector.

32 We have a number of outstanding colleges delivering high quality provision to learners, employers and communities. Our pursuit of **quality** has yielded much over the past few years. Overall there has been a remarkable improvement in success rates and many colleges have worked tirelessly to improve their provision and benchmark themselves against the best in the sector.

33 But we also see that some are still **under-performing** and there is too much provision that remains only satisfactory after years of investment. It is not that any particular part of the sector is failing to improve, but rather that improvement is unevenly spread across the sector, and across subject areas. And the sad reality is that the reputation of the sector overall is determined by the weakest performance.

34 We believe that the responsibility for managing change and **improving quality** lies first and foremost with the colleges themselves. The LSC is responsible for assuring the quality of the provision it funds. The QIA will have a responsibility to work with the LSC to support colleges in improving quality. The QIA will lead the development of a three-year Quality Improvement Strategy for the sector from 2006, working closely with the LSC and other key partners. *Agenda for change* will pave the way for the successful implementation of the Strategy.

35 Collectively we want to develop a **strategic approach to investment** in good and excellent provision. We want to see significant further improvements over the next three to five years in attainment, inspection outcomes and measures of success. We want to see more provision improving from satisfactory to good or excellent, while we withdraw from funding provision that is poor.

What We Need To Do

36 We have signed up to a **five-point plan** that we believe will accelerate the development of a culture of self-improvement, that ensures more effective measures of performance, and strategically links quality assurance to development planning.

- i We need to encourage colleges to excel in their individual and collective responsibility for quality improvement. A reputation for rigorous **self-assessment** and respected '**peer-referencing**' approaches will help colleges to learn from each other, and from the very best in the sector, to drive up quality.
- ii We need to make sure that quality is integral to the **annual planning review** process with quality improvement and teaching, training and learning at the heart of the dialogue. The LSC must be in a position consistently to fund only priority-led high quality provision whilst promoting our duty to equality of opportunity.
- iii We need meaningful **measures of success** as a basis for quality improvement. These measures should be fair, valid, transparent and fit for purpose, measures that should provide for commonality across the piece so judgments can be made on the relative performance of all post-16 providers. The information should be accessible and readily understood by learners, parents and employers, reflecting the needs and views of all customers.
- iv We need colleges to become demanding clients of the agencies tasked with supporting quality improvement – the LSC, the Inspectorates and the QIA. We want the sector to push us, to challenge the evidence, to play their part in defining the answers, ensuring clarity on all our respective **roles and responsibilities**.
- v We need collectively to promote diverse first class **leadership, management and workforce development** across the sector, and across the LSC. We believe that any quality improvement strategy for the sector will only be successful if a well-led, highly motivated and skilled workforce implements it.

Self-assessment

37 **Colleges** are first and foremost responsible themselves for improving the quality of their provision. We want to support that by working with the QIA to promote self-assessment, championing 'peer-

referencing' approaches to assist colleges in learning from each other and to ratchet up the quality of their provision.

38 We believe rigorous, comprehensive **self-assessment** is at the heart of organisational development and an essential tool for managing change. Effective self-assessment identifies what needs to be improved, as well as what is unsatisfactory, and results in a challenging quality improvement plan.

39 The LSC will champion the engagement of the sector in self-assessment techniques, peer-assessment and review of performance. We will commission a **benchmarking** exercise to identify what 'quality' looks and feels like so that colleges across the sector can more easily compare how they are doing against their peers. There are already examples of effective models of mutual support and benchmarking. The LSC, working with the QIA and the sector, will consider what role it can play in extending these approaches to the sector as a whole.

40 In conjunction with the QIA, LLUK, and the Association of Colleges (AoC) the sector can pave the way for **self-regulation**. This may be through external validation, peer scrutiny, through linking expert practitioners, through networks that bring together colleges and agencies to help raise the quality bar.

Annual planning review

41 The LSC is responsible for assuring the quality of the provision it purchases. Our **annual planning review** process has a critical role to play in raising standards. Quality improvement measures will be built in to the assessment of development plans, drawing on the services of the QIA to help put those identified improvements into practice. We will adopt a risk-proportionate and differentiated approach, challenging the pace of self-improvement as well as poor and unsatisfactory provision.

42 The LSC will continue to challenge consistently poor performance whether generally or in specific subject areas. Failure to improve satisfactorily will be highlighted in the LSC's risk assessment of the development plan. This assessment will be a factor in agreeing the plan so determining the funding that the provider receives.

43 It is already the case that the LSC can impose conditions on funding where the provision is regarded as **unsatisfactory**. We will clarify what reasonable conditions might be applied and the procedures to be adopted to withdraw from persistently poor

provision, whether in a particular subject or at a particular level within a college and across a college as a whole.

Measures of success

44 A great deal is already being done to develop measures that will provide for comparability across the sector and place the **learners' and employers'** experiences at the heart of assessments of college performance. The Success for All¹ website offers further information on the development of new measures of success.

45 We propose to build on that work and continue to **develop measures** that, among others, will demonstrate our commitment to equality and diversity across the sector, examine the value for money that colleges provide, their responsiveness to local employers, and which fully reflect the views of learners and customers. These measures will contribute to the new standard for excellence in the delivery of workforce development services to employers discussed in the Skills chapter of this Prospectus.

46 We are committed to finding a way of defining the **economic and social benefits** of colleges, so demonstrating the quality impact of the sector as a whole – to the Government, and to the taxpayer. We will explore the employment, earnings and regional development perspective, and the rewards to the individual, the business network and the local community.

47 We collectively need to adopt a **forensic approach** to understanding the needs of the learner, and the employer. We need to use the information we gather nationally and locally to drive up quality, for the benefit of those learners and employers. This will also help us prepare a compelling and influential case for greater investment from the state, and from those employers and individuals who benefit.

48 Most importantly we are agreed that the **measures of success** for each college should align with the mission(s) of that college, be that provision for young people, services to business, community and lifelong learning, or access to and delivery of higher education.

Roles and responsibilities

49 There are a **number of agencies** involved in improving quality in colleges. The LSC, Inspectorates and the QIA all have a part to play in helping colleges improve the quality of their provision within the policy framework for post-16 quality improvement developed by the DfES.

50 We believe that each body has a clear and distinct role in the quality arena:

- **colleges** individually and collectively are responsible for *improving* their own quality;
- **inspectors** are responsible for *assessing* the quality of provision.
- the **Learning and Skills Council** is responsible for *assuring* the quality of provision and the effectiveness of providers in meeting skills needs and priorities; and,
- the **Quality Improvement Agency** is responsible for *supporting* and *enabling* self-improvement through leading the development of a national quality improvement strategy for 2006-09.

51 We will continue to work with all the relevant partners to ensure clarity for all concerned and a jointly owned vision for the way ahead.

Leadership, management and workforce development

52 Success in bringing about improved quality depends on the effectiveness of **leadership and management**, the diversity of that leadership and how it reflects the make-up of colleges' local communities. And it depends on strategic leaders and subject managers addressing issues of under-performance. Evidence points to the recognition of the primacy of learner success as the overarching measure of quality. But colleges increasingly point to staff shortages and problems in recruiting staff, and this is particularly problematical in specific subject areas.

53 We believe there is a need for a nationally coordinated **capacity building** programme within the next phase of the *Success for All* strategy. This should include a focus on governance, leadership, diversity, and management, the continued development of teaching and learning resources, and a focus on workforce development. And it should include recruiting, seconding and developing staff with the right skills; skills for working collaboratively to deliver the 14–19 agenda, and for the employer agenda, including delivery and assessment in the workplace. We believe there is a clear need for specific interventions to respond to the skills, 14–19 and higher education strategies and to the apprenticeship programme across the sector and the LSC as a whole.

54 We are clear that this should be taken forward, in partnership, by a '**leadership compact**', aligning the influence, resources and energies of all the key players; DfES, LSC, QIA, CEL, and LLUK.

55 As a contribution to developing the leadership of the sector, the LSC will play its part in active joint engagement of college **governors** and local LSC Council members, alongside the local Executive working with college senior management teams.

Next Steps

56 We will continue to work with the *agenda for change* quality task group, involving college principals, QIA, AoC and DfES. We will:

- facilitate pathfinders to support the development of **peer review** arrangements
- further develop self-assessment, and **annual planning review** to ensure quality is integral to the planning process
- develop detailed proposals to clarify how the LSC will deal with **unsatisfactory provision**
- implement the right **measures for success** across the post-16 learning and skills sector
- commission further work on **measuring quality** by illuminating learner experiences, describing the economic impact of colleges and analysing their role in developing sustainable and harmonious communities
- publish an annual **review of performance** at college, local, regional and national level
- develop with the QIA more effective support for **self-improvement**, and support moves towards **self-regulation** across the sector; and
- play our part in developing and implementing a '**compact**' with DfES, CEL, LLUK and QIA for capacity building in the sector.

Theme Three - Funding

Introduction

We will radically simplify our **funding** methodology and allocation process, making it more transparent, more demand-led, and more responsive to changing needs.

57 The move towards a demand-led system for employers, and the drive on quality described above must be underpinned by a radical shift in the way we approach funding. We acknowledge that **funding** is a powerful driver and it is clear that there is a need for a fundamental overhaul of the complex funding systems of the LSC. By changing the funding system, we will re-define the strategic relationship between the LSC and the post-16 sector. Our proposals aim to make a reality of the following principles – enabling a focus on the needs of learners and employers, simplification, transparency, putting the employer in the position of in effect being purchaser for workplace delivered training and removing barriers to collaboration between providers.

58 The proposals are based on the work of the *agenda for change* funding theme **task group** and developed further in light of feedback following the roadshows and discussions with DfES. As explained later in this chapter, a more detailed technical document will follow.

59 The proposals have been largely developed working with the FE sector, but we are clear they have potential for **application** in other parts of the post-16 sector. We will want to explore this approach with a whole range of partners as we go forward, before making recommendations for decision to the DfES in the autumn. This is set out in more detail below.

Key Features Of Our Proposals

Funding that 'follows the plan'

60 The central principle driving the proposals is that funding should be used to develop and support the capacity of the learning and skills sector to meet national, regional and local priorities. Effective planning and quality improvement strategies will enable us to address our key objectives such that the funding

method becomes less prominent in influencing delivery. We need to improve the **development planning** framework to make it better able to provide the necessary basis for a more informed planning dialogue that takes account of the individual strengths within the provider network, and has a sharper focus on quality improvement and the promotion of equality. We will begin introducing some of these changes for the 2006/07 planning round that begins in autumn 2005.

61 The role of funding should be to underpin colleges' agreed plans to meet employers' and individuals' needs, to improve quality and to promote equality, while giving colleges and other providers sufficient stability to use their resources to develop and maintain the required capacity to deliver. This requires a long-term relationship between the LSC and FE and a high degree of trust. Under our proposals, the LSC will **'fund the plan'**, support the provider to deliver it, monitor performance, and agree changes to both the plan and funding in the following year. In essence, this will enable the LSC to look towards the future with its partners, rather than making retrospective changes based on past performance.

62 There is radical **simplification** to be gained from 'funding the plan' – moving away from micro-management of providers to a more strategic overview of delivery and performance. The detail of the mix of programmes and the balance of provision to be offered by colleges will sit firmly within planning discussions with the LSC, leaving the funding discussions to focus on learner volumes, as detailed below.

63 The roll out of the **National Employer Training Programme** will provide a powerful, demand-led mechanism for changing the way in which training for adults is delivered. Our reforms, which were informed by the detailed work of the task group, the feedback from the roadshows and our ongoing discussions with the DfES, will incorporate the core principles for funding under the NETP as set out in the Skills White Paper of March 2005 and outlined in paragraph 26 above. Once employers' skills needs have been identified, skills brokers will identify the most appropriate providers. Where a suitable provider is not identifiable locally, the skills broker will work with the LSC to identify a provider from outside the area if necessary. Those providers with excellent inspection grades and, over time, those providers who hold the proposed Quality Mark will be well placed to benefit when skills brokers are looking to expand the local market with other suitable providers.

64 Within overall LSC budgets, the NETP budget will be identified annually; and over time, as set out

in the March 2005 White Paper, allocations of funding will operate on a principle of contestability based on the success of colleges and other providers in meeting employers' needs. We will need to assess with DfES, how far and how fast this principle can apply in the initial implementation phase. Plans for 2006-07 and 2007-08 in particular will depend on decisions by ministers in the autumn on the speed of build up of NETP.

A common funding method

65 The proposals set out in this Prospectus are based so far on discussions and debate with representatives of the further education sector and the DfES. In principle, we can see advantages in extending these principles across the wider post-16 sector, including to school sixth forms. A common funding method would be **simpler** for both providers and the LSC to manage as there will be only one set of funding 'rules', data collection and systems requirements. We will therefore explore with partners across the learning and skills sector, the potential for the development of a **common funding method** which provides a basis for the LSC to allocate funds to whichever provider is best suited to deliver the priorities. At the same time, we will of course keep discussing with employers and their representative organisations how these proposals can best be implemented in order to make a reality of the demand-led principle in relation to provision delivering skills for employers. Based on further comments from partners, we will make proposals in the autumn to the Government.

A simple funding formula

66 Our proposals introduce the concept of **standard learner numbers** as the basis of a common measure of the volume of activity planned to be delivered by each provider. The 'standard learner numbers' measure takes account of the size of learners' programmes, but does not require each element of the programme to be funded separately. For example, two groups of programmes should be sufficient to cover full-time learners: one including those typically followed by many adult learners or young people studying a smaller number of A/AS levels; and one including more substantial programmes followed by most young people in schools and colleges and undertaking Apprenticeships and Entry to Employment. This will simplify the funding calculation while retaining a reasonable link with the resources required by the provider. As the 'Framework for Achievement' develops, we will need to work through the impact – it may be possible to measure 'standard learner numbers' in terms of the volume of 'credits' assigned to units, which will form the building blocks of learners' programmes.

67 A **provider factor** will be calculated to take account of costs associated with its mix of programme types, disadvantage and the need for additional learning support/special educational needs, and area costs. We propose that the provider factor will also incorporate learners' success rates.

68 The factor will be derived from data that a college needs to collect for their own management purposes, as well as the planning and quality improvement dialogue with the LSC. It would be agreed before the start of the funding year, and would represent a **simplification** as funding will be de-linked from the actual delivery of individual learning aims throughout the year. The factor could be reviewed periodically; we envisage that this will normally be aligned to the three-year development planning cycle, though it may need to be more frequent for smaller providers where changes in the pattern of provision have a larger overall effect.

69 The funding rates assigned to the 'standard learner numbers' will be differentiated according to whether the provision is **'fully-funded' or 'co-funded'**. Fully funded provision could include 16-19s, skills for life and first full Level 2, and would provide the LSC with the flexibility in the future to set new priorities and fund them at the fully funded rate. Co-funded activity would be discounted to reflect the assumption that a fee is being paid (for 2005/06 this is 27.5 per cent of the course funding).

'Core' and 'commissioned' elements of funding allocations

70 We intend to introduce an allocations system which guarantees providers a substantial **'core'** of funding of between say 90 per cent and 95 per cent based on their previous year's allocations, for an equivalent volume of activity, although the planned mix may well change year on year in response to changing demands and emerging priorities. This will provide reasonable financial certainty from one year to the next. The remaining funding above the 'core', plus any growth funding, will represent a **'commissioned'** element which will give the LSC the flexibility to direct funding to meet its priorities, to reflect changing policy priorities, or to move provision to higher quality providers, including those who achieve the Quality Mark for the delivery of workforce development services to employers.

71 We envisage that those delivering good quality priority provision will receive **'commissioned'** funding to enable them to at least deliver the same volume of activity as the previous year. But the 'commissioned' element will give the LSC leverage to ensure that the whole of a provider's plan addresses agreed

priorities including those identified by brokers on behalf of employers. It will also enable the LSC to redirect funding to commission new provision and/or new providers in areas of need and unanticipated demand within priority areas. And it will provide the LSC with the flexibility to respond to the costs of priority demand-led provision rising faster than envisaged, an important flexibility given the recent funding difficulties faced by the LSC and providers.

72 The 'commissioned' element could in part support the funding for the NETP, since one priority within that element will be delivery of training on NETP principles. It will reinforce the wider aims of NETP that provision should be demand-led and employer responsive, thereby enabling more employers to work with the best providers for all of their investment in skills. That is part of our strategy for increasing the overall total investment in skills.

Year-end reconciliation of the plan, not the funding

73 The process of agreeing providers' allocations will focus on discussions about **learner volumes delivered against the plan**, removing the need to monitor funding 'earned' as in the present system. Providers and the LSC will share data on the progress of plans and the quality of provision as the year progresses. For those receiving funds through grant-in-aid or grant (such as FE colleges and local authorities) there will be no retrospective adjustment to allocations, provided they meet basic standards of data accuracy. But because of their different contractual position, for independent providers we envisage that it will be necessary to reconcile contracted and actual volumes and adjust funds accordingly.

74 Other than in exceptional circumstances, we do not envisage **in-year adjustments** of allocations taking place. Data on which in-year adjustments could be made are estimates at best and would require further reconciliation later, cutting across the principle of funding the provider's plan. The monitoring of performance against plans in-year should continue to improve the accuracy of the allocations process. The process of agreeing baseline budget positions with the DfES will provide a stronger basis for planning LSC budgets and further reduce the need for in-year remedial action. With the full roll out of NETP, when it is in steady state, it will be a basic principle that colleges and other providers have to earn their business by being selected by employers as the preferred supplier, rather than being guaranteed funding in advance. But it should in practice become a reasonably predictable element of the budget of most colleges and other providers, assuming that quality and responsiveness is always high. This will maximise the ability of colleges and other providers to plan ahead with confidence.

75 The removal of the need to reconcile funding 'earned' in year should enable providers to share up-to-date **management information** with the local LSC focusing on the volume of learner starts and the mix of provision. As set out in the chapter on data, it will then be possible to develop systems that enable better and more timely data sharing between providers and the LSC, thus providing an early-warning system in 'real-time'. This is preferable to a system in which under-performance is often only recognised after the year-end and where retrospective clawback has to be carried out, often leading to de-stabilisation of the provider.

Benefits of Our Proposals

76 If they were to be applied across the sector, our proposals would enable the LSC and providers to:

- **support effectively the skills, 14–19 and quality policies** by placing an emphasis on what is being delivered rather than how funding is earned. This would drive a change in the relationship between the LSC and providers by focusing discussions on planning, performance and quality strategies, with funding as an issue taking a backseat. A common funding method would dissolve the artificial barrier between learning sectors; support rational decisions on what to fund; support effective contestability between providers; and enable purchasing decisions to be made on the basis of capacity and quality
- **support new delivery requirements** – collaboration within 14–19 clusters would be easier under a common funding method. The method will deliver the NETP set out in the Skills White Paper, by in effect putting the employer in the position of the purchaser of training. Quality and responsiveness will be the major driver of commissioning delivery, supported by employer choice and demand within NETP as a determinant of that quality
- **simplify and reduce bureaucracy for providers** through funding the 'capacity to deliver' and ending the need to justify funding 'earned'. The LSC would not expect providers to present management information on individual learning aims in-year for funding purposes; instead, the focus would be on overall learner numbers. This would lead to reduced

data requirements for funding purposes and remove the need for a funding reconciliation at the year-end

- **ensure the equitable distribution of funds.** A common funding method presents the opportunity of establishing common national rates for learners. The real and significant cost differences between providers would be reflected through the provider factor, which will then be reviewed on a regular basis and benchmarked across all providers, using common data sets
- **enable a balance to be struck between reasonable stability for providers and flexibility for the LSC.** Reasonable stability would be established as there will rarely be in-year adjustments or year-end reconciliation of funding (for grant in aid/grant providers) and there would be a guaranteed 'core' of funding year-on-year. Flexibility for the LSC to meet priorities will be possible through the 'commissioned' element of funding, and year-on-year discussions over the mix of provision with the 'core'. The proposed funding method will also provide the opportunity to differentiate national rates to reflect Government priorities, for example to reflect the need to collect fees from individuals for some types of learning or to encourage employer contributions for other types of learning; and
- **support collaboration and employer choice.** Collaboration between providers would be far easier as the funding method will be commonly applied and measured. We would work with other commissioning agencies such as Jobcentre Plus to see how far we could integrate planning and funding approaches, so simplifying bureaucratic processes. We would be improving employer choice through increasing the number of high quality colleges and other providers able to offer skills solutions; and ensuring that skills brokers are able to encourage employers to develop relationships that will meet their ongoing skills needs.

Next Steps

77 We have been working closely with our FE funding theme task group to develop details of the funding formula and allocation and review process. A technical consultation document will follow.

78 We will continue to work with representatives from across the post-16 sector to take forward the detail of our proposals, giving particular consideration to how the approach might operate for each part of the sector. We recognise that for both NETP and safeguarded adult learning provision, there are existing commitments to introduce new funding arrangements from 2006/07. Therefore, we will be engaging in detailed discussions with sector representatives to ensure that these align with the proposed new common funding approach.

79 For schools, we will continue to work with schools, local authorities and the DfES in implementing the 14–19 agenda and rolling-out the *New Relationship with Schools* initiative. We will also be analysing detailed aspects of school sixth form funding arrangements following announcement of the Secretary of State's plans for the funding of schools from 2006/07. We will also work over the next few months with schools and local authorities to explore how the *agenda for change* funding proposals might support these wider developments over the longer term.

80 From these further discussions, we envisage making firm proposals to the DfES in the autumn for the roll out of changes to funding for the various elements of the post-16 sector. Once ministers have taken decisions, we will develop an implementation plan to make explicit the detailed arrangements of how a new funding approach might be rolled out.

Theme Four - Data

Introduction

We will sweep away the complexity that causes colleges to divert resources to collecting **data** of variable benefit.

81 The proposed simplification of the funding methodology is interlocked inextricably with the next theme, that of **data simplification**, since funding drives so much of what the LSC collects and the way we collect it. The objective of the data strand of *agenda for change* is to achieve a radical reduction in the bureaucracy and complexity associated with the data collection and management information (MI) processes across the sector. The focus has so far been very much on FE colleges – but we believe the principles have much wider application across the post-16 sector.

82 The potential prize is significant. For example, a previous detailed study at Chichester College indicated that funding for an additional 10,000 to 14,000 learners across England could be generated by **savings** from simple changes in business processes and data collection requirements. A revision of the funding methodology and standard electronic data exchange with all awarding bodies could generate even more significant additional, but as yet unquantified, savings. However, by far the biggest savings could accrue from automated data collections and shared data access across the sector.

83 Simplifying the collection and access to data by all agencies could, therefore, reduce costs but perhaps more importantly, will increase **transparency**, allowing for more effective strategic planning and performance management of the sector.

What Our Analysis Has Told Us

84 This work has been supplemented by the **evidence** gathered from a number of other studies undertaken by the LSC and DfES in 2004/05 including:

- *Success for All* Test Bed Bureaucracy Reduction Study in Chichester College

- Tribal Education Consulting – Management Information and Data Collection Mapping Project; and
- Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) Feasibility User Requirements Analysis. Further information on MIAP is contained within the annex to this Prospectus.

85 All of these studies have agreed on the extent of the **data problems** in the sector and have reached the same conclusions on their root causes; these include:

- the conflicting and **overlapping** data needs of the many agencies involved drives additional complexity and cost
- **ambiguity** in data definitions and regular changes create unnecessary 'noise', generating many requests for additional data
- inefficient **data transfers** to and from some awarding bodies cause delays and contribute to complexity
- **late** data returns by some providers and slow data processing by the LSC create time lags and phasing problems with MI
- the detailed nature of the **funding methodology** for FE Colleges drives much of the complexity associated with data collection and MI
- the **complexity** of the Learning Aim Database adds significantly to the data problems faced by providers; and
- the format and content of the **Individualised Learner Record** drive high complexity and cost but changes need to be radical if they are to lead to a net reduction in bureaucracy.

Towards a Solution

86 All the studies also proposed a **consistent** set of principles and solutions. In particular, that a solution is only possible if all of the relevant agencies involved in the collection of data work together to harmonise requests and reduce bureaucracy. At the very least, this needs to involve the LSC, DfES, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Inspectorates, Local Authorities (LAs), Connexions, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Federation of Awarding Bodies.

87 In addition, a clear principle has emerged that the same **shared information** base should be used by all of these agencies to monitor a college's performance, quality and equality and diversity measures. This information base should be the same as that used by the college to manage its own business and its own achievement of agreed targets. Colleges should not be expected to collect data beyond this.

88 There is also a need for a consistent set of **data definitions** and standards to be defined for the whole of the sector and for a library of 'standard' MI analyses and reports to be used by all agencies when reporting on college performance and quality. These processes then need to be enforced by a gatekeeper who will ensure that the standards are adhered to and manage any changes required to them.

89 A fundamental part of the need for consistent data definitions is to have a single learner number (to be known as the **Unique Learner Identifier**) which is to be used by all stakeholders in the sector to enable information about learners to be more easily shared and to create a record of learning for each individual. This will be of huge benefit to the individual, as it will significantly reduce the complexity of the paperwork as they move between courses, colleges or other providers of learning.

90 Finally, each college should ideally deal with a single **data collection partner** who will run automated processes to 'pull' the agreed data set on a scheduled basis directly from the provider's own MI systems. That data partner should also run the standard analyses and generate the standard datasets required by agencies across the sector.

91 In all these strands of work it will be important to ensure that data is able effectively to inform colleges and the LSC on performance in relation to equality and diversity issues, while keeping any bureaucratic burdens to the minimum and striking the right balance between regular data collection, and research/survey work.

Proposed Action

92 We believe that **big improvements** can now be made over a short time frame given the renewed appetite for change and recent improvements in technology.

93 Our work has already identified many examples of **technological innovation** in colleges, which are having a significant local impact in reducing bureaucracy. Many of these innovations have been

financed within the private sector and have made more progress than has so far been possible in the public arena. These can form a springboard for further action.

94 As a first step, a **partnership** needs to be formed by the DfES, LSC, QCA and the Inspectorates, building on the MIAP programme, to spearhead the radical infrastructure and standards changes needed. Given the prize, there is an appetite across the private sector for contributing to such a consortium.

95 With a clear mandate for action, an extensive **pilot** with a range of colleges could be up and running within a year and a deployment could be achieved in time for the academic year 2007/2008.

96 Our more detailed proposals are set out in **the annex** to this Prospectus.

Next Steps

97 The LSC intends to provide resources to deliver these changes across the sector and within the LSC. Given the level of support for these proposals at each of the recent regional roadshows, we intend to establish a **Working Group** to ensure that the changes meet the needs of the sector as a whole. The Group will need to take account of the outcomes of the review of the LSC's Equality and Diversity Impact Measures. The LSC will engage with the Working Group to develop a change programme that will actively involve key stakeholders throughout.

98 We would therefore welcome **nominations** from FE college principals and directors of management information to join this group. We envisage a first meeting in September with bi-monthly meetings up to Summer 2006. Those interested should put their names forward to Richard Field at the LSC (richard.field@lsc.gov.uk).

99 Building on MIAP, we will create a **new structure** including a gatekeeper to develop standard definitions and manage changes to data collection and data handling in a coherent way.

100 Progress will be reported to the Working Group regularly. The concept of managing data collection and reporting through a '**data partner**' has far-reaching implications for the FE sector and will be taken forward by setting up a number of prototypes to test the feasibility of the approach for colleges and other providers, and to test the market for suppliers who might be interested in becoming data partners. The outcome of the prototypes will determine the practical details and timescales for wider implementation.

Theme Five - Business Excellence

Introduction

We will develop our capital investment strategy to free back-office resources and support improved management systems and processes to thus improve our **business excellence**.

101 Responding to employers, driving up quality, and simplifying both funding and data systems are all part of what makes for an excellent college. A college that is run as an excellent business is a college that delivers. Improving the business performance of colleges is an essential step in delivering efficiency savings that will release more money to front-line education and training. Collaboration between colleges and a willingness to engage with the private sector, where relevant, are the keys that can unlock savings and business improvements. Again, much of what we explore below in relation to colleges can have resonance across the whole of the post-16 sector.

102 Work is continuing to assess the full **financial impact** of our recommendations. However, it is estimated that the proposals in this report would achieve efficiencies, to be recycled to front-line activities, in excess of £100 million by 2007-08.

Our Underlying Aims and Principles

103 The FE sector is clear and passionate about its educational mission but is less consistent about the **business practices** needed to make it most effective.

104 The range of business performance across the sector is too wide. While there are many exemplary colleges, the overall standard of **management** needs to be raised.

105 We will support colleges to develop best practice in effectiveness and efficiency through the use of **benchmarking measures** across a range of activities. We will be able to use these measures to provide value for money assessments at local, regional and national levels.

106 **Capital expenditure** has a big impact on the efficiency of colleges. It can help to increase participation and improve recruitment, retention

and achievement. At our current rate of spending it will take another 12 years for the whole college estate to be renewed or modernised. We want to speed this up.

107 We already have planned increases in **capital expenditure** in 2005/06 to 2007/08. The proposed increases in capital funding in 2008-09 and 2009-10 announced by the Chancellor in the 2005 Budget will increase the funding available to colleges and accelerate the capital investment and we are developing proposals for agreement with the DfES about how best to invest this additional funding.

108 The LSC will investigate innovative procurement and funding mechanisms with the aim of identifying new funding streams to further accelerate modernisation and renewal. We will support the sector by coordinating collaborative initiatives with public sector **procurement** teams to identify and effectively communicate the best available deals for commodities and services. We will also develop and circulate a simple good practice guide.

Benchmarking

109 Achieving **excellence in business** is not just about saving money. It is also about providing high quality provision and organisational effectiveness, which, in turn, will enhance the reputation of colleges among the communities they serve.

110 The FE sector already has examples of excellent colleges, able effectively to use resources to provide high quality education and training for learners, using this approach to reinforce individualised learning, which reflects the diversity of the people they serve, and promotes equality of opportunity. These examples provide a source of **best practice** to share with other colleges, which should enable the whole sector to raise standards.

111 **Benchmarking** against comparable organisations is already carried out by many colleges in the pursuit of best practice and to provide an indication of their performance against others. In addition, the eMandate estates data benchmarking project is also widely used by those organisations with capital projects in the assessment of value for money and estates use in general and is being extended for a further three years.

112 The measurement of **value for money** achieved by providers and the LSC has been identified by the *Success for All* strategy as being essential to understanding how resources are employed and in identifying how improvements can be made.

Capital Expenditure

113 Previous evaluation has confirmed the impact of **capital expenditure** in contributing to college efficiency, in particular through helping to achieve increased participation and improving recruitment, retention, achievement and reduced running costs, while improving access for people with disabilities.

114 Despite a major investment programme by the LSC working with colleges, too many learners and employers are still expecting to be trained or educated in poor quality accommodation. And at the current rate of investment, approximately £250 million in grants per year promoting around £700 million of development, it would take until 2016-17 for the whole estate to have been **renewed or modernised** since incorporation in 1993.

115 The LSC is therefore developing proposals that, if agreed by Government, would materially accelerate the capital-driven modernisation process so that the **whole estate** could be substantially renewed or modernised by 2013. The LSC has also developed a capital strategy, to be underpinned by regional capital strategies now being developed, to prioritise and provide a planning context for capital investment. This will be placed on the LSC website for information. We will use the results of Strategic Area Reviews to identify development priorities and projects at local and regional level, and seek to work closely with other investment plans, for example Regional Development Agencies (RDA) and Building Schools for the Future, to ensure an integrated approach. We will also be looking to the sector to increasingly take sustainability into account in designing new buildings as part of the capital strategy.

Procurement

116 Recent reviews of public sector efficiency have highlighted **procurement** as a key area for reducing costs and improving services.

117 The LSC would want to see colleges following best procurement practices and ensuring **value for money** is obtained for every pound spent. Savings made can be used to support front line services. In doing this we need to have regard to the impact of procurement practices on the voluntary and community sector in particular, and on providers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, to ensure that we have delivery arrangements that best meet priority needs – ‘value for money’ should not be equated with ‘cheap and cheerful’.

118 There are a number of **procurement consortia** offering services to the FE sector but we believe that more colleges should take advantage of consortia arrangements to reap the benefits they can bring. For general and overhead expenditure, it is proposed the LSC will conduct a baselining exercise, gathering data and analysis of information provided by the FE sector to prioritise areas with the greatest savings potential.

119 We will coordinate existing **collaborative initiatives** with public sector procurement teams to identify and communicate the best available deals for key commodities and develop specific sector wide collaborative deals.

120 A simple '**Purchasing Good Practice Guide**' containing details of sources of procurement information and guidance on the latest procurement techniques will be developed and we will actively promote good procurement practice through the use of a range of communications, including working groups and road shows.

Next Steps

121 Many of the proposals in this section are common sense and likely to be of value across the whole of the post-16 sector. We are keen to implement the ideas as soon as is possible.

122 To achieve this quick implementation we intend:

- to establish a group of principals and representatives from the data and quality themes so we ensure consistency in approach across all three themes. The group will focus on taking forward urgently the following aspects of business excellence:
 - identify the data and benchmarks that highly effective leadership of a college uses to **measure** both quality and efficiency (in staff, non pay and estates) as part of excellent management processes
 - agree how we might establish common understandings and definitions for **value for money** working with those already involved through *Success for All*; and
 - identify what can be done in the short term, while the data theme proposals are being implemented, drawing on existing **best practice** to establishing an immediate start to consistent and useful benchmarking.

- to provide ongoing support for the implementation of the national **capital strategy**
- drawing on regional capital strategies and local LSC capital project plans and supplemented by college data, draw up a **clear map** of the current and planned FE estate; and
- to establish a cross-sector team to advise and assist in implementation of our **procurement** proposals with a project plan in place by August 2005.

Theme Six - Reputation

Introduction

We will work with colleges to identify ways in which they can secure their **reputation** as pivotal to delivering the education and training needs of the UK.

123 Delivering on all the above five *agenda for change* themes lies at the heart of the sixth theme – enhancing the **reputation** of the sector. For too long, colleges have been the invisible sector, arguably overshadowed by the twin educational priorities of schools and universities. The reputation the sector has had as a whole has frequently been negative, skewed by a focus on those that do not perform well.

124 Yet, in common with the perception of many public services, locally many colleges do have an excellent reputation. Combined with mixed messages about the sector's purpose and mission, there is a need for a **radical plan** of action to support the sector in developing a reputation and image that reflects its crucial role in the economic, social development and well-being of the country, and its diverse population.

125 Our approach has been developed alongside Sir Andrew Foster's **Review of Further Education Colleges**, which also has identified reputation as a key theme. The Review's outcomes will clearly strongly influence the way we take our ideas forward. And while we began with a focus on Further Education, we are clear that in taking the issue of reputation further, we must consider the context of the wider post-16 sector overall.

Our Approach

126 We set out our **vision** and objectives earlier in this Prospectus. It is a vision that will place the sector at the heart of the country's skills challenge; a vision of excellence and quality that meets the needs of employers and local communities whilst giving learners real choices and real opportunities to succeed. We have a vision of colleges that are world class deliverers of learning and that are excellent businesses and leaders in their communities. They meet the needs of employers and learners by offering real choice and opportunities to succeed. They will be so flexible and well-regarded, locally and nationally, that the first thought of those who pay for learning, whether

government, employer or learner, will be "FE colleges can deliver this," and, "the FE college will help me succeed" and "the FE college will treat me as an individual, whatever my background".

127 Many of the **building blocks** needed to meet this vision are already in place, and much of the answer on reputation lies in telling the current story better and more consistently, locally, regionally and nationally. We have record levels of young people participating in learning. We have record numbers of apprenticeships. We have made excellent progress in meeting our skills for life targets. We have seen substantial improvements in success rates. We have more than 300 Centres of Vocational Excellence demonstrating excellence in partnership working between colleges and industry. Over 130,000 employees and 18,000 employers have now taken part in the Employer Training Pilots.

128 The reputation theme has sought to identify how we can **amplify** the story of these achievements further. We have concluded that we should:

- develop a **marketing and communications strategy** that will enhance the reputation of the sector with key stakeholders, particularly employers, young people, parents, schools, ministers and the media
- develop a communication approach which improves the **transparency** of the sector so that people can see clearly how the sector and the LSC is performing locally, regionally and nationally
- promote the outstanding examples of **best practice**, teaching innovation, and employer and learner focus that already exist but which often stay hidden from view
- translate the often excellent reputation that colleges enjoy at a **local level** on to a national stage
- empower **college leaders** to communicate a clear mission and purpose for further education as a whole, as well as for their own college; and
- undertake **research** into perceptions of colleges among stakeholders, those who use colleges – and those who do not – so we can track changing attitudes and refine our communications accordingly.

129 These actions aim to address three central questions that affect the reputation, image and perception of colleges:

- What is the sector?

- Who are the audiences of the sector?
- How do we work together to celebrate the success of sector and influence our audiences?

Developing a Strategy

130 The LSC will establish a working group to develop a **marketing and communications strategy** that will serve to build the reputation of the sector. The core objectives of this strategy will be to:

- show how the various elements of the post-16 education and training environment fit together
- detail more positive overall generic messages about the role and purpose of further education
- within this, emphasise the importance of promoting equality and diversity if we are to reach our goals of economic success, social inclusion and social mobility
- illustrate how these messages can be communicated to the key audiences
- present more effective means for communicating success, ensuring that good practice is recognised locally, regionally and nationally; and
- ensure that the sector's diversity, flexibility, creativity, development, and collaboration are recognised and projected as valuable strengths.

Transparency

131 We need to develop a culture of **transparency** across the LSC and the sector, which we ensure that individuals and employers, all or stakeholders, and colleagues across the sector can readily look at our performance. We want to work with the sector to develop a suite of measures to be published regularly – covering financial, volume and quality indicators.

132 And these should apply not just to colleges – and other providers – but show how the **LSC** is doing too – locally, regionally and nationally. We believe that this would be in best interests of us all, in helping customer choice, in determining investment decisions, and in enhancing the reputation of the sector as one

which has 'nothing to hide'. Indeed, it would help bust some of the many myths about the sector that can often undermine our position, especially with key stakeholders.

Promoting Best Practice

133 We know that many colleges deliver learning of outstanding quality; and we know that, at a local level, employers and learners often hold colleges in the highest regard.

134 We intend to take these examples of **best practice** and local innovation and promote them on a national stage in partnership with bodies like the AoC where the debate is often typified by a focus on what is working less well. We need to segment our target audiences and identify the appropriate best practice to promote – value added, value for money, flexibility, economic impact, social impact will all play well with different audiences.

Empowering College Leadership

135 Throughout the work we have done in *agenda for change*, we have heard the same cry time and again from **college leaders** – “give us a vision we can follow”. In this Prospectus, we have set out a clear vision that, we believe, can significantly enhance the reputation of the sector.

136 We will now work with college leaders to refine that vision further, and empower colleges to speak with one voice about the role and importance of their sector. We will build on the success of the **Black Leadership Initiative**, to improve the diversity of the FE workforce at the highest levels, and also within the LSC itself. With improved quality, refined business processes and a learner and employer focus, colleges will be able to speak with confidence about the sector, what it aims to do and what it can deliver.

Regular Research

137 The LSC, in partnership with the whole further education sector and all its stakeholders, will ensure **regular research** is conducted into the public perceptions of the role and contribution of further education. This will include an assessment of the impact of the sector on the economy and the wider social

agenda, including equality and diversity issues, to support informed policy development and support provider responsiveness to the needs of individuals, employers, their communities and the economy.

138 The LSC's **Learner Satisfaction Survey** and **National Employer Skills Survey** along with the research on the perception of further education among the general public jointly commissioned by the LSC and the FE Review, provide a basis for this work. This will be built on to regularly monitor shifts in perceptions and whether these result in the anticipated greater take up of skills training and the development of closer working relationships and collaboration between businesses and colleges.

Next Steps

139 We will set in place an **action plan** to progress with these actions now, while we recognise the further positive impact that the Foster Review is expected to have on this theme in particular. Working with a group of college principals supported by experts from the LSC, we will start by:

- highlighting the unique nature of the sector and the good practice that already exists
- developing more transparent published performance of providers and the LSC locally, regionally and nationally; and
- promoting the views of satisfied customers to tell their own stories and encourage others to take advantage of what is already on offer.

Conclusion

140 We are keen to press ahead. While we want your views on the ideas in this Prospectus, we also believe that the joint work to date and the feedback from the roadshows and discussions with DfES indicate we are moving in the right direction. With that in mind, a number of the theme group members that contributed to helping shape these ideas will continue to work with us to develop suitable implementation plans. We will ensure these plans are integrated across all the themes, set out clear interdependencies, and avoid potential overlaps.

141 We will, additionally, extend our dialogue with those outside of FE to see how these ideas might be implemented across the wider post-16 sector. We aim to publish a timeline with an over-arching implementation plan for the whole of the sector in the autumn, in the light of feedback on this Prospectus, and the technical Annexes on Funding and Data.

142 We want this to continue to be an initiative based on dialogue and discussion. With that in mind, we have created an area on the LSC website where you can offer suggestions about the proposals and how we take them forward or simply record your support. That area can be found on the *agenda for change* section which is hyperlinked from the home page of our website www.lsc.gov.uk. If you wish to comment in writing, please email agendaforchange@lsc.gov.uk.

143 You can download copies of this Prospectus from the *agenda for change* section of our website. When the further technical papers on **funding, capital** and other areas are published, they will also be available for download from this site.

Annex

Data

1 This annex sets out our more detailed thinking on how to implement the data strand objectives set out in the main body of the report. It also provides more information about the remit and plans for the Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) programme.

Detailed Plan of Action

Data and information definitions

- i A consistent set of data definitions to be used by all public and private sector partners across the whole of the education and skills sector should be agreed, building on the work on common data definitions done by MIAP.
- ii A coherent set of minimal but mandatory MI reports should be defined for each activity, and all partners with a stake in that activity should use this. In formulating the mandatory MI reports, there should be a 'public burden' test exploring the total lifecycle cost/benefit of collecting that data and deriving the MI.
- iii All performance targets should have clear definitions and be capable of being derived from data or MI within the defined set in a defined and documented way using the standard reports. These definitions, formulae, basic report templates and the associated electronic application standards should be owned and controlled by a single authority or gatekeeper for the sector. The gatekeeping body could be sponsored by the DfES-led MIAP programme, which involves all partners who have a stake in this.
- iv The associated controls should give the necessary authority to mandate the use of these standards across the sector, but the processes must be both flexible and speedy to ensure that they don't become bureaucratic in themselves.

- v Given the complex inter-relationship between many data elements and reports, they should all be managed and released together as a complete 'package' of standard definitions and a 'library' of standard reports – each clearly named and version controlled.
- vi A scheduled release cycle should be defined and carefully managed to ensure that version control is rigorously maintained.
- vii Changes to definitions and reports can be proposed by any partner in the sector, but the proposals will be subject to a wide formal consultation process before testing in a pilot area prior to general release.
- viii An archive of all standard packages and report libraries will be maintained so that historical datasets can be analysed in context with confidence.
- ix A standard electronic interchange format for examinations entries and results would significantly reduce the administrative burden of managing achievement, particularly when combined with a Unique Learner Identifier (ULI) proposed by MIAP and the Personalised Learner Record proposed in the recent DfES e-learning strategy.

Learner registration service

- i We will develop a learner registration service, with the ULI acting as the 'key' to accessing an individual's learner record. This service will be developed with partners across the sector including other agencies, providers and awarding bodies, under the auspices of the MIAP programme.
- ii We plan to introduce the ULI into learner data as an early part of moving towards improved data sharing. Web-based services will be introduced to support the generation of the ULI, and its verification against known learner identity data. Agencies, providers, awarding bodies as well as the learners themselves would use these services.

- iii Initially prototypes will be developed to test assumptions and find best ways of working with the users of the ULI and associated ULI registration services. The results of the prototypes will inform the specification of the full ULI registration service, which will be part of the overall MIAP/LSC *agenda for change* data theme.
- iv The prototypes will be built on the experience of existing working registration services such as:
 - Ufi/learndirect
 - Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)
 - Established web-based systems for e-learning or advice and guidance, such as S-Cool.
- v The prototype registration services will be tested by as wide a range of providers and awarding bodies as possible across all sectors. Participants will be asked to build the ULI into their existing processes such as learner enrolment, or registration for and issuing of awards.
- vi A major requirement of one or more prototypes is to support the initial QCA Framework for Achievement pilots when these commence early in 2006.
- vii The aim is to have a prototype service specification and rollout plans agreed with participating service providers by autumn 2005, with a view to delivering a prototype service in early 2006.
- iv Performance, inspection and audit dialogues with partners will be based around the outputs from the standard reports run against time-stamped datasets – avoiding any ambiguity or disagreement.
- v Shared, controlled access to college data and MI by all agencies will ensure greater visibility and transparency.
- vi The results of any other aggregation or analysis of a college's data by partner organisations should be available to that provider on-demand. Colleges will then know how their data is being used and a more mature performance, inspection and audit dialogue can occur.
- vii We will actively support greater sharing of information. For example, through the MIAP programme, there are plans to create a single UK Register of Learning Providers, which enables learners, employers, learning providers and others to access the detailed information available on schools, colleges and other providers.

Each college contracts with a data partner

- i Each college would establish a contractual relationship and a secure electronic connection with a 'data partner', who would assist the provider in reducing the burden associated with data collection and reporting.
 - ii On an agreed schedule, the data partner would 'pull' the standard dataset directly from the provider's MI system into a collection and processing area dedicated to that college.
 - iii The data partner would run a standard set of validation, quality and performance reports from the library on the data and would load the results back into the provider's area – where the college can validate the outputs if they wish.
 - iv Accredited agencies from around the sector would be allowed to subscribe to secure, defined parts of each college's data and reports library held by the data partner. All additional MI that is derived by these accredited agencies should be deposited back to the college's area to allow discussion and promote transparency.
 - v This library would be the *only* validated source of MI available on that college and no agency would have the authority to request additional MI or data directly from them.
- Formalised data and information responsibilities**
- i Colleges will not be asked to collect data beyond that which an excellently managed college would need to manage their business and to meet standard performance and quality targets.
 - ii Each college would be expected to implement high quality, auditable information processes, which deliver timely, accurate and complete returns on an automatic basis.
 - iii Colleges will not be asked to make separate data returns for each of their stakeholders. One integrated return will be sufficient to meet the needs of all partners, following the principle of 'collect once – use many times, used by all'. Duplicate requests for data will be eradicated.

- vi The data partner will provide access to the data and MI library via a web browser to dramatically reduce the software maintenance and deployment costs.
- vii The data partner could also supply other services for colleges, for example:
 - **electronic registration service for learners** – supplying the unique learner numbers and providing access to prior achievement data where available
 - **employer registration service** – providing a local employer directory to support the skills agenda
 - **quality and measures service** – deriving the standard quality measures from the validated returned data and providing comparisons with benchmark data, providing a clearing house for self-assessment reports and inspection reports; and
 - **local demographic and demand data** – providing a common set of statistics for all providers.

5 These recommendations were accepted by the MIAP Stakeholder Group providing the basis for a longer-term programme of work to investigate the feasibility of introducing:

- a data sharing framework
- common data definitions
- a data warehouse
- a unique learner identifier
- improvements to the flow of achievement data; and
- a national register of providers.

6 By mid 2004, the outcome of this work was consolidated into a MIAP Proposal for improving services to learners through improved data management. The proposals, supported by DfES ministers, were to:

- implement change incrementally building on what is already planned
- introduce a Unique Learner Identifier; and
- develop arrangements for improving data sharing, across schools, FE and HE. MIAP rejected the immediate development of a fully integrated provider system because it was considered too risky and costly, although it remains the long term goal.

Managing Information Across Partners

2 MIAP aims to improve services to learners, employers and their communities through streamlined data management arrangements. It is a direct and collaborative response to the lack of coherence affecting data and MI across the diverse learning, skills and wider education sector.

3 DfES provides the strategic lead for this work with strong support from the LSC, QCA and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) as core partners. Other key partners include DWP and the devolved administrations, with a wider range of over 40 partners supporting the MIAP aims through the MIAP Stakeholder Group.

4 Initial mapping of the nature and scale of the challenges and issues faced by partners involved in data sharing identified a number of immediate 'quick wins', alongside recommendations for action to support fundamental change.

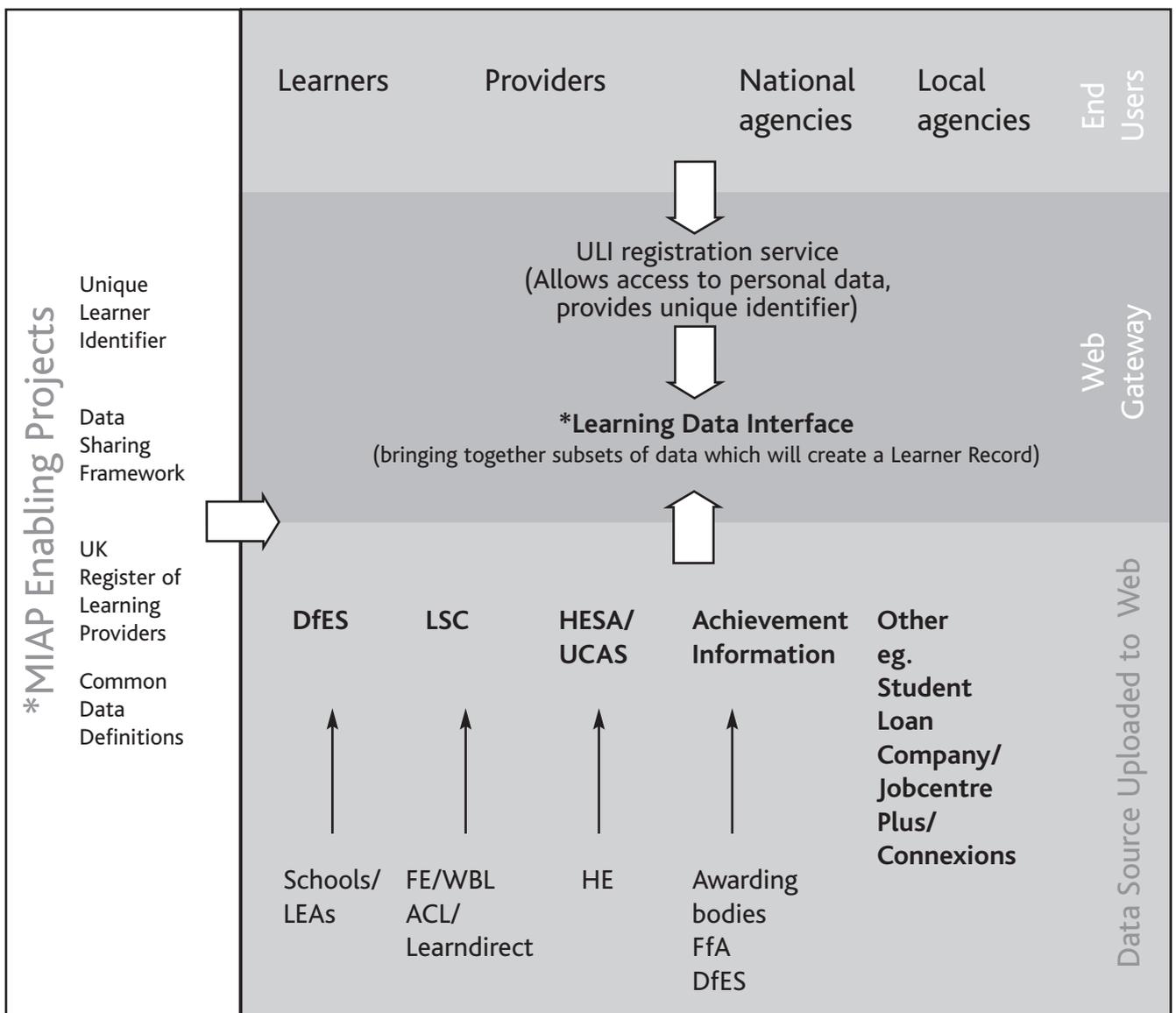
7 Further work was undertaken to confirm and prioritise users' requirements and to understand the business processes associated with learner participation, retention, achievement and destinations. In addition, work was taken forward to confirm a 'core' set of common data definitions and to investigate the most appropriate options for introducing a unique learner number. This provided the basis for a further report to ministers in July 2005 proposing to:

- manage risk and costs by introducing change incrementally across the sector, taking account of the different starting points of partners and building on what is already planned
- introduce a set of core common data definitions to support coherence
- introduce a Learner Registration Service and Unique Learner Identifier as an authentication facility to support data access and sharing as soon as possible

- develop a Data Interface to provide learner access to agreed sub-sets of data held within existing data systems across schools, FE and HE
- introduce a UK register of learning providers during 2005/06; and
- pass responsibility for the development and delivery of the MIAP proposals to the LSC on behalf of the MIAP stakeholder group.

The MIAP Proposal is outlined in the diagram below.

MIAP proposal – Learning data interface



*indicates MIAP programmes

Managing Information Across Partners: Members

Adult Learning Inspectorate
Association of Colleges
Association of Learning Providers
British Education Communication and Technology
Bureaucracy Reduction Group
Cabinet Office – e-Government Unit
Connexions Card
Connexions Service National Unit
Department for Education and Skills
Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland
Department for Work and Pensions
Department of Health
Education and Learning in Wales
England’s Regional Development Agencies
Federation of Awarding Bodies
Higher Education Funding Council For England
Higher Education Statistics Agency
Holex
Jobcentre Plus
Joint Information Systems Committee
Learning and Skills Council
Learning and Skills Development Agency
Learning Partnerships National Network
Local Government Association
National Health Service University
National Institute for Adult Continuing Education
Office for Standards in Education
Office of the e-Envoy
Office of the Information Commissioner
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
Quality Assurance Agency
Scottish Executive

Scottish Qualifications Authority

Secondary Heads Association

Sector Skills Development Agency

Small Business Service

Social Enterprise Unit (DTI)

Standing Committee of Principals

Student Loans Company

Teacher Training Agency

Universities - United Kingdom

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

University for Industry

Welsh Assembly

Notes

Please note a technical funding document accompanies this Prospectus.
It is available from the LSC Website www.lsc.gov.uk

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