

BLACK COUNTRY LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL

DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN

Learning and Skills Council Mission

Raise levels of participation and attainment through high-quality education and training, which puts learners first

Learning and Skills Council Vision

By 2010 young people and adults will have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the rest of the world.

Key Objectives

- Extend participation in education, learning and training
- Increase engagement of employers in workforce development
- Raise achievement of young people
- Raise achievement of adults
- Raise quality of education and training and user satisfaction

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Chairman's Foreword

When I agreed to become the Chairman of the Black Country Learning and Skills Council, I did so because I had seen the power of learning to improve people's lives. Over one million people live or work in the Black Country. If we could get learning right, then this would have a far-reaching impact on local people and businesses.

The message from successive Secretaries of State has been that they want to create a learning society in which everyone has the opportunity to go as far as their talents and efforts will take them. The standards of learning that we need to achieve are constantly rising, and we need to aim to match the best if local people and businesses are to succeed in an increasingly competitive international economy.

Over the next three years, the Learning and Skills Council will be investing over £500 million in the Black Country. During our first year, we have laid important foundations for spending this money. We have invested heavily in research and in piloting new ideas. We have worked with and spoken to our local partners. This has enabled us to pull together a clear picture of what needs to be done to make the Black Country an excellent place for people to learn and for employers to find the skills they need.

Our strategic aims are as follows:

- Creating a culture of learning – making lifelong learning the norm, something that everyone does, sometimes without realising it. We want to change the culture in which too many people leave learning at 16, or go to work with no expectation that they will receive training. We want to make it easier for individuals to get the learning they need and promote the best in learning so that people hear more about the many successes that we have.
- Right skills at the right time – equipping people with the skills that they need in order to find lasting employment; and helping employers find and develop the skills they need to take their business in directions that have a bright future.
- Excellence in learning – making all learning an experience that people will find exciting, enjoyable and rewarding; so that they will want more in the future. For employers, it means having learning available that brings bottom-line reward for the investment they make.

Achieving success will need the widest participation and genuine involvement of all partners and communities in the Black Country. We propose to promote ways of better harnessing everybody's efforts behind a common learning and skills plan for the Black Country. We also aim to ensure that everyone involved in Black Country learning has the knowledge and skills that they need to help us deliver the scale of change that we must achieve.

This Strategic Plan sets out our strategic aims and priorities for the next three years. Please work with us and we can achieve so much together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luke Borwick', with a large, stylized initial 'L'.

Luke Borwick
Chairman

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Introduction

Last July, the Black Country Learning and Skills Council (LSC) published two documents, which set out local baselines in education and learning, and our early strategic thinking. Both documents were well received and this first Strategic Plan for 2002-05 builds on them. It reflects our more recent research, discussion with partners and operational experience of 2001-02, and responds to the national priorities given to us by Estelle Morris.

Why this plan is important

As a relatively new body, the LSC needs to set out what it will be doing and what it will look to from others. Its strategic planning responsibilities mean that it must provide a vision for what needs to be achieved in learning and skills within the Black Country; an under-pinning rationale for that vision and strategy; and a plan to achieve its goals.

One feature of learning and skills in the Black Country is the tremendous degree of creativity and energy that is being generated by people who are seeking to lift standards and tackle problems. This plan should not only add to the momentum of this progress, but also help to provide a helpful framework within which the activity can be co-ordinated.

The plan explains that we need to overcome some deep-rooted problems if we are to achieve our goals. These include a culture within which many people do not see learning as for them; widespread difficulties with literacy and numeracy; and a workforce too dependent on sectors expected to decline over the next decade.

Through the plan, we set out our priorities for making best use of more than £500 million of public money, which we will direct over the three year period. It is vital that we are clear about how this can be best used in the Black Country, and how it can complement other sources of funds and investments. This plan shows how we intend to help learners, local communities and businesses. It also gives other partners the opportunity to engage with us, and to share our goals and high aspirations.

Role of Black Country LSC

Reporting the Issues

We will want future LSC plans and reports to concentrate more on promoting and explaining successes. But, in our first year, it has been important for us to understand the barriers to higher levels of achievement. The LSC has published a series of surveys and research reports, most notably looking at employers' skills needs, increasing participation in learning, and the adequacy of post-16 learning opportunities. We see this as a valuable role for us locally, and we plan to publish further reports to inform our own and others' future strategy and operations. These will be highlighted in an annual Black Country Learning Conference each spring.

Piloting New Ideas and Approaches

Having published our early strategic priorities, we have received many ideas of how to use our local discretionary funding. Our Strategic Plan will take forward the best of these, while retaining each year significant capacity to try out fresh ideas which directly affect our priorities. Some of our early pilot work has, for example, focused on helping employers to identify and tackle basic skills problems in the workplace; and working with community and voluntary groups to build confidence in people to take up learning opportunities. In future, we will also wish to pilot responses to the sector labour force reports and emerging policy areas such as 14 – 19 vocational pathways and opening up progression to Higher Education.

Strategic Planning and Leadership

Although this is the local LSC's Strategic Plan, it is important that it is also seen increasingly as the main blueprint for learning and skills across the Black Country. It should not be a document to note – more a plan for everyone to get behind and help deliver. In order to achieve this position, the ideas contained in the plan need to draw heavily on a range of sources, including local learning plans, the Black Country Regeneration Framework, Advantage West Midlands (AWM) Agenda for Action and the strategic plans of individual institutions. The aim is to create a single vision owned by learners, employers and partners in planning and delivery, and an integrated process which will drive forward a learning and skills programme of change across all parts of the Black Country.

Implementing Government Policies

The White Paper, 'Schools Achieving Success' signalled a significant change in the delivery of education for young people. The subsequent consultation document in relation to the inspection and organisation of sixth form provision also indicated reforms in the delivery of post-16 provision in schools, including enabling the LSC to put forward proposals for the reorganisation of such provision in certain circumstances. The Green Paper on Key Stage 4 and post-16 qualifications brings about further changes in the way in which young people receive their education from the age of 14 through to 19, with a shift in the culture of 'leaving' education at 16 being exchanged for a continuum in learning to the age of 19 and beyond. In meeting these new challenges it will be vital that all those involved in managing, directing and delivering learning are in concert with one another to ensure that young people receive a differentiated, quality and inspirational learning experience that motivates them to continue in learning.

Linking local and regional planning

Through the new Memorandum of Understanding between Advantage West Midlands and the Learning and Skills Councils, the LSCs will take on a contractual role to fulfil their responsibilities within AWM's Regional Agenda for Action. In particular we will take the lead on promoting a learning and skilful region, as well as support the other three pillars.

Supporting and Investing in Excellence

Such a vision will inevitably include many of those activities which the LSC will fund with around £500 million over the period of the plan - but it must also include other areas where the LSC is a partner, for example the Black Country School Improvement Partnership and the Leadership Centre; the Wolverhampton/Telford Technology Corridor and the Regeneration Zones. In addition, there will be new Centres of Vocational Excellence; the Learning Network for Employers, which will be the biggest single European Social Fund grant in the West Midlands and will be dedicated to local workforce development; and activity to offer a greater choice of vocational routes for students, embracing the national initiative to offer 40,000 vocational places for 14 – 16 year olds.

Co-ordination and Coherence

While the range and scale of activity is truly impressive, for many the picture can be confusing. One initial aspect of the LSC's creation was to bring greater cohesion to learning and skills activities. This will be an important, challenging, but essential role for us in our future planning, partnership working and communications strategy. We have begun to explain our role and our added value. But, for now, the greater prize is to plan with others and to paint the bigger picture more clearly of how learning and skills need to change in the Black Country.

Increasing the Demand for Learning; promoting equal opportunities

[To be completed]

Monitoring

Making the Black Country an excellent place for people to learn and for employers to find the skills they need, means benchmarking ourselves against national and international standards.

Sharing Best Practice and Showcasing Excellence

As a pan-Black Country body, the LSC is excellently placed to identify what is working well and to encourage the sharing of good practice. It will also actively promote and publicise excellence in learning within the Black Country and bring to local partners national and international ideas that will stimulate policy development and delivery.

Holding Partners to Account

Alongside its strategic planning and monitoring responsibilities, the LSC will make regular reports to Black Country partners about the progress that is being made by all of us across the learning and skills agenda. This will enable the sponsors of Black Country learning to assess changes in direction and to plan accordingly. We need to know that we are on course at regular intervals; and to intervene strategically wherever necessary.

Strategic Overview and Vision

There are a number of important considerations in preparing this strategy for learning and skills that have a major influence on learners and employers.

These are as follows:

- At a time when the skills required in work and in life more generally are continually rising, not enough of our young people continue in learning beyond 16. We have some of the lowest participation rates for 16 – 19 year olds in the country. We lose 1000 young people each year at 16 into jobs that offer no prospect of training.
- If attainment, retention and progression rates are indicators of the quality of the learning experience young people enjoy, then we have some way to go. Too few young people complete their learning. Too many of our most able young people seek continuing learning outside of the Black Country. We need to offer them equally stimulating and rewarding learning.
- We need to take advantage of Government education policy reforms that will see more flexibility and greater choice for young learners, with more emphasis on vocational studies. The proposed reforms of Modern Apprenticeships to make them an attractive routeway for more young people will also need to be embraced.
- Closer collaboration between education institutions is an inevitable and positive consequence of these policy reforms. The 14 – 16 flexibility pilots and the New Technology Institute model are just two indications of the direction that we need to take. Especially challenging in the Black Country will be planning the future of sixth form provision. We have far more small sixth forms than evaluation material suggests is good for learners. At least three additional City Academies are planned. New integrated working across institutions is being tried out.
- Too many adults have poor numeracy, literacy and language skills, which can be expected to have an adverse effect on their quality of life at home and at work. Almost half are in the present workforce, so this is not an issue solely affecting the elderly, or the unemployed. Basic skills have to be an essential part of our strategy to lift the skills base of the Black Country.

- All of the economic and skills forecasts show that future opportunities will be in a high-skill economy with much greater use of knowledge as a key resource. This is a huge challenge for us in an area of the country with the highest dependency on traditional manufacture. There are a number of consequences for our strategy as a result. We need to develop clearer progression routes to higher level skills; to establish a closer relationship between employers and learning institutions so that the education sector can be guided more clearly on emerging skills needs and become more responsive; and focus on developing the management skills that we will need to achieve the degree of business re-positioning that will be required if the local economy is to flourish.
- The need to prepare people to exploit the potential of the knowledge economy through providing a foundation in IT skills and access to lifelong learning and skills development through e-learning.
- The changes in the composition of the workforce that we can expect over the next few years will mean a growing proportion of people from ethnic minorities and people working longer. As a result, if we are to maximise the potential skills of the Black Country's workforce, we will need to ensure that an inclusive equal opportunities approach is taken to employment and skills training. It also means that employers need to focus more on skilling their present workforce, rather than relying on the recruitment of school leavers.
- Many potential learners do not see learning as something for them, or a way to improve their quality of life. Over the period of this plan, we intend to change this thinking and build bridges from learning to local communities. We need to build confidence in local arrangements and put in place new opportunities for learning in which people will feel confident and secure.
- The growing number of people who are working in the field of learning directly, or as influencers of others. This group has vast potential as part of a knowledgeable, skilled, creative and focused team of professionals. We will develop plans with partners to make "Black Country Learning" a strong and capable force for change.

Against such a broad and exciting strategic backdrop, it is important to prioritise, even though we need to make progress in so many different areas. In this plan, we try to identify those key themes that we believe will bring maximum reward. We focus on many of the deep-rooted problems, because, unless we overcome them, we cannot create the lasting changes that we need.

Our strategic aims, therefore, are:

- To create a positive learning culture, which opens up learning to far more people and businesses.
- To make all learning an excellent and rewarding experience so that people and businesses want more.

- To give people the right skills that they need to improve their lives, support local communities and safeguard local businesses.

We will seek to achieve these aims through a range of means, including:

- A coherent and creative 14 – 19 strategy, working with colleges, schools, LEAs, private training providers and the universities.
- Clearer routes for progression to higher skills.
- Sectoral work that will build closer and more responsive relationships with colleges and other providers.
- Making access to literacy and numeracy skills training easier and more comfortable for pupils having to face their problems at home and at work.
- Promoting the Black Country e-learning strategy.
- Partnership working, especially with the local Colleges, training providers and school sixth forms, Black Country Consortium, Local Strategic Partnerships, the Regeneration Zones and AWM.
- Community Learning Ambassadors, who will build bridges between non-learners and learning.
- Professional development of those who are a part of 'Black Country learning'.
- Investment in excellence and in specialist learning routes.
- Active and positive promotion of all that is good about 'Black Country Learning'

The vision is simply to make the Black Country an excellent place for people and businesses to find the learning and skills they need.

Creating a culture of learning

National Objective: Extend participation in education, learning and training

14–19 Participation

Levels of participation among 16-18 year olds in the Black Country are considerably below regional and national averages. In addition, there is substantial evidence to suggest that members of some, but not all, ethnic minority groups and white males are much less likely to participate in post-16 learning.

Recent research shows those with no, or low-level, qualifications hold the most negative views towards learning and are therefore the least likely to engage in learning. Many express very negative views about their time in education and will actively avoid any situation that reminds them of their school.

There is substantial evidence to suggest that the Black Country underperforms across a range of learning indicators when compared with the West Midlands and England. For example the number of 16 and 17 year olds in learning in the Black Country is 74%, compared with 78% for England.

Routes to Progression

If youngsters are to progress into further learning, then the widest possible range of quality routes to progression, which are relevant and appropriate to their needs, must be available. The LSC will work with partners, including universities, to ensure that progression pathways are clear for young people and to their parents. This will include recognition of prior attainment and developing 'non-traditional' routes, for example Modern Apprenticeships, as a clear route into Further and Higher Education. The Excellence Challenge Initiative will be one of the tools enabling us to target youngsters who traditionally do not access FE or HE to consider these routes. Similarly, the Student Apprenticeship will enable young people to try out their career choices as part of a structured work-related learning experience.

Impartial Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

The Connexions Service will be entering its second year in 2002 and will be key in ensuring that young people are given the best quality advice from the age of 13 onwards. The LSC will be working closely with Connexions and other providers of IAG including mentors and tutors. to ensure that young people are supported in their choices through the delivery of impartial information and advice. This will cover details of all options and pathways open to them, including the quality and performance of organisations through which they may wish to continue their learning.

The Connexions service will also provide critical planning information to the LSC indicating young people's choices, ensuring that the provision made available to them meets their needs.

Work Related Learning

We are seeing the introduction of GCSEs in vocational subjects, increased flexibility and the growing importance of the work-related curriculum and work placements for young people. The LSC will work closely with schools, LEAs, The Education Business Link Consortium and Black Country Business Link to ensure that flexible pathways in education are available to all youngsters, high and low-achievers alike. We will aim to ensure that they receive a breadth of experiences that enables them to make informed career and study choices and that prepares them for the world of work.

The extension of vocational specialisms and Centres of Vocational Excellence into the 14 – 19 agenda will be important, enabling young people to experience learning delivery in sectoral specialisms to a consistently high standard in environments that are not part of their traditional learning experience.

Flexible Pathways

The achievement of flexible pathways for young people cannot be achieved without explicit collaboration across all agencies. The LSC will, where necessary, facilitate partnership working that brings together schools, colleges and private training providers to deliver these.

The connectivity of institutions and initiatives must also be capitalised upon. Linking together Specialist Schools, for example, with Centres of Vocational Excellence will enable pre and post-16 delivery to come together and share best practice, complementary provision and identify potential progression routes. Similarly, the role of City Academies will bring about a transformation in the delivery of 14–19 learning by bringing together joint working across delivery organisations to ensure optimum choice for young people.

Sixth Forms

The planning and funding of sixth forms transfers to the LSC from 2002 and, with the emerging roles and responsibilities in relation to inspection and organisation, the LSC will be working with schools and LEAs to review and evaluate existing provision to ensure that the breadth of curriculum, including Curriculum 2000, offered to young people meets their needs and that proper and reasonable provision is in place that demonstrates value for money. In addition, the role of sixth forms in the context of shared timetabling, not only across schools but across other providers of post-16 learning, will be developed further to ensure the 'learning offer' to all young people is as comprehensive as it can be and of the best possible quality.

Education Business Links

In co-ordinating work-experience placements and teacher placements into Business, Education Business Links support the six DfES outcomes of:

- Raising standards of achievement;
- Improving pupil motivation and attendance;
- Supporting management and leadership in schools;
- Preparing young people for the world of work including employability;
- Enhancing the delivery of the National Curriculum;

- Delivery of key skills, including wider skills such as creativity and enterprise.

These will be important in helping us to deliver any 14-19 strategy. The engagement of employers in developing work-related learning is vital if the learning experience of young people is to be relevant and reflect future needs. The EBL Consortium will play a pivotal role in ensuring that links between businesses and schools are capitalised upon in relation to not only providing youngsters with meaningful work-related learning opportunities but also ensuring businesses are aware of other opportunities they may have by investing in the young people of the Black Country.

Priorities for Action

The Black Country LSC will work with schools, colleges, and training providers to ensure that young people (14-19) have access to, and are fully engaged in, a range of learning opportunities. In order to achieve this we will:

- Ensure that 16-19 provision is sufficiently diverse and flexible to address all learners needs and where possible the present and future needs of the labour market.
- Develop collaborative arrangements between schools, colleges and training providers to ensure that all young people are aware of and have access to a diverse range of learning provision, particularly vocational learning.
- Work with schools and Connexions, to ensure that all Year 11 leavers enter positive destinations that reflect their needs and aspirations.
- Develop the provision of part-time vocational placements for 14-16 year olds in full-time education.
- Embed a vocational curriculum that reflects and responds to the labour market needs of the Black Country.
- Encourage the take-up of Curriculum 2000 qualifications through funding individual programmes of study with clear paths of progression to Higher Education and/or employment.
- Work with the Black Country Education Business Link Organisations as a key mechanism for engaging employers in work-related learning and curriculum development and delivery to increase teacher and pupil awareness of labour market needs.
- Work via Education Business Links to ensure that 'entrepreneurship' is part of all secondary school curricula in the Black Country, to support the diversification of the Black Country economy.
- Ensure that learners with special educational needs (statemented and without statements) have a variety of appropriate options for learning including residential and fully supported, particularly during their transition from pre- to post-16 learning provision.
- Maintain a focus on the particular needs of learners from minority ethnic communities, and those who are disaffected and/or excluded from learning by ensuring the provision of targeted interventions and opportunities to re-engage in learning.

Targets

	Black Country Baseline Information		Black Country Target Position in 2004			National Target for 2004
	Number	%	Increase	Target Number	%	
NATIONAL TARGET						
Increase the proportion of 16-18 year olds in structured learning	31,023	72	+4,210	35,250	80	80%

	Black Country Baseline Information	Black Country Target position for 2004
LOCAL TARGET	%	%
Increase proportion of Year 11 leavers entering 'positive' destinations	81	90

Enthusiating learners and engaging non-learners

Throughout the Black Country, one in six adults have not engaged in any form of learning since leaving school. This non-engagement is especially prevalent among white adults, with only 15% of white people currently studying for a qualification compared to 31% of people from ethnic minorities.

People with disabilities and older people are also much less likely to be engaged in learning than either people without disabilities or younger people.

Significantly, concentrations of non-learners are not always co-terminus with geographic areas of high deprivation. This is linked to the finding that workers in relatively well paid semi and unskilled occupations are the least likely to be engaged in learning.

There are a number of barriers to learning, affecting a significant proportion of the population, that need to be removed if levels of participation and achievement are to be increased. 16% of economically active adults (excluding students) state that there had been some learning that they had wanted to undertake in the last 12 months but were unable to do so. The main barrier cited was that learning takes too much time (37%). Closely associated with this was the need to look after children/dependents (15%) and the lack and cost of childcare (8% and 7% respectively). Of the physical barriers preventing learning, cost was by far the most significant (17%), with learning not being provided at suitable times being cited by 8%.

There are a number of issues that affect the ability of different members of the community to access and participate in learning. For example, women, those with disabilities, and people from black and minority ethnic groups may have very different experiences of learning which will affect their levels of participation and success.

Thus, research shows that, compared to their white counterparts, members of black and ethnic minority groups have higher levels of interest in, and motivation for, learning. However, they are also more likely to have identified learning that they would have liked to have undertaken, but were unable to do so.

The Black Country has significant problems engaging people in learning and remaining in learning. The two major barriers are time and money. Consequently, we will need to provide more learning that directly relates to employer needs and therefore individuals' employment prospects and earning potential. We need to capitalise on this, along with other drivers of change, to entice people into learning; then captivate them enough to make them want to stay. This will involve innovative and flexible learning, in order to minimise the barriers of time and where appropriate incentivisation or subsidy to minimise the financial barriers.

As part of our response we will look further at barriers such as childcare and transport and at introducing new and innovative provision into learning delivery, capitalising where we can on ICT facilities.

Priorities for Action

The Black Country LSC will encourage more adults to participate and remain in learning, especially those unused to learning, including the development of flexible and innovative provision. In order to achieve this we will:

- Ensure that robust, comprehensive and quality assured Information, Advice and Guidance is available to all, particularly those in the workplace.
- Develop flexible, innovative and affordable learning provision that reflects the needs and lifestyles of learners.
- Work with learning providers to ensure that the services they provide are accessible to all learners.
- Develop a strategic and coherent approach to Adult and Community Learning which refocuses provision to attract more non-learners into learning.
- Work with providers, particularly those in Adult and Community Learning, to enable them to identify and address the basic skill needs of potential learners, as a means of encouraging their greater participation in learning.
- Work with the Black Country Regeneration Zones, New Deal for Communities and Local Strategic Partnerships to direct the targeted provision of community-based learning, funded by the LSC and other partners, as a means of addressing social exclusion.

- Develop innovative 'first rung' learning provision to draw disengaged adults back into learning and encourage the widening of participation, particularly in those wards which have a high concentrations of non-learners.
- Through focused and appropriate learning provision, address the barriers to employment and entrepreneurship faced by local communities that contribute to problems of social exclusion and multiple deprivation.
- Through employers, actively promote the benefits of learning to employees as a means of securing their participation in learning opportunities and developing skills for the future.
- Develop proposals with partners to address childcare and transport issues which prevent learning.

Targets

	Black Country Baseline Information	Black Country Target position for 2004
LOCAL TARGET	%	%
Increase the proportion of the population participating in learning	46	50

Enabling progression and continuation of learning

Data from the 104,741 students in 99/00 shows that 69.2% of students were continuing their programme of study, 11.3% were starting a new programme of study (the vast majority of them at the same institution) and 4.9% were entering HE. A further 4.7% entered/continued employment *with* a formal training programme and 4.0% entered/continued employment *without* a formal training programme. 5.9% had "other" destinations.

In 99/00, full-time retention rates among Black Country general FE colleges ranged from 79%-90% compared to a national median of 84% (This showed a decline from 98/99). In the same year part-time retention rates ranged from 81%-91% against a national median of 84%.

[To add – more data on progression]

We will work with providers of learning to ensure that there are flexible high quality progression routes made available at all levels to all those undertaking learning through a breadth of options which result in meaningful and positive outcomes. This will include potential progression into Higher Level study through routes not traditionally associated with degree-level learning, eg Modern Apprenticeships or other mixed learning routes. We will work with all local universities to ascertain current baselines and identify local targets to track high level progression routes for Black Country learners.

[To add – Foundation Degrees; closer college – HE collaboration opportunities (including HE delivery and FE institutions) and HE role in widening participation]

Priorities for Action

The Black Country LSC will work with all providers of learning and information and advice to ascertain current progression routes to identify trends, then build upon this to ensure that learners are receiving accurate and impartial information and advice that results in positive outcomes and further progression. In order to achieve this we will:

- Provide all learners and potential learners with suitable access to appropriate IAG services to facilitate positive progression into further learning and/or employment opportunities.
- Maximise the potential of Adult and Community Learning by developing new ways of accrediting learning and actively promoting and supporting progression into further learning.
- Work with the Black Country Regeneration Zones, New Deal for Communities and Local Strategic Partnerships to direct the targeted provision of community based learning, linked to employment opportunities, that will provide a sustainable means of addressing social exclusion.
- Work closely with partners to promote non-traditional progression routes to higher education.
- [To add – more on links to HE]

Targets

There is a government target with regard to progression to Higher Education. The LSC is committed to measuring against this target and the National Office are developing a target to enable this.

Selling the benefits of learning to communities

Analysis of data from the 2000 Black Country Household Survey indicates a close link between the level of qualifications held by an individual and the average level of earnings. For example, persons qualified to NVQ level 5 and above earn an average of £27,363 compared to those with no qualifications who earn an average of £12,085.

The culture of non-learning in the Black Country is endemic. This results in a spiral of low achievement, low aspiration and, very often, resulting in poor quality of life. Local partners are committed to overcoming this downward spiral and reversing these trends. In order to do this it is important to reach out to local communities to assist us in this. Local Community and Learning Plans already reflect this.

We will champion the benefits of linking learning with employment to people who are both economically active and inactive. We will work with other

partners on a Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA). A Black Country Employment Strategy will give an overall framework and greater coherence to New Deal, job linking, intermediate labour markets and similar activity.

In addition, we must engage with existing provision, particularly Adult and Community Learning Organisations, and charge them with tackling the issues on non-learning by offering learning that meets the needs of communities but that, more importantly, inspires them to progress further and reach and achieve goals they would not ordinarily aspire to.

In doing this it will be vital not to purely sell the product of learning to communities but to sell the benefits of progression, achievement and reward. The role of community organisations will be pivotal to this.

Priorities for Action

Work with key partners and providers to promote the benefits of learning

- Work with statutory, voluntary, partner and provider organisations to develop an extensive network of trained Learning Ambassadors, as a means of encouraging more non-learners to access and participate in appropriate learning opportunities.
- Actively promote the diverse range of learning opportunities in the Black Country and market the benefits of learning through a more effective use of destination information.
- Work with Local Strategic Partnerships to ensure the aspirations of Neighbourhood renewal can be met and place learning at the heart of regeneration by capitalising on the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the Neighbourhood Management philosophy.
- Develop the capacity of communities to champion the learning needs of their areas and to take up employment in partner organisations.
- Utilise role models as positive influencers of the benefits of learning.
- Ensure that IAG is community centred and offers clear and supportive routes through learning opportunities.
- Support the Young Leaders Scheme piloted by Connexions.

Targets

This priority would contribute towards the local target detailed below. The National Office are also developing a National Target with relation to Adult Participation.

	Black Country Baseline Information	Black Country Target position for 2004
LOCAL TARGET	%	%
Increase the proportion of the population participating in learning	46	50

Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

The vast majority of Black Country people, especially those with no qualifications, are unlikely to seek out information, advice and guidance.

For example, only one in five economically active adults (excluding students) have accessed IAG on learning in the last 2 years.

This figure rises only slightly, to 27%, for the 16-24 age group. Just 11% of those with no qualifications have done so compared to 35% of those that already have a level 5 or equivalent qualification. There seems to be little difference in the proportion of those in work and those unemployed who have sought IAG.

Of those who had sought guidance, 27% had done so from their employer and 20% from an FE college. However, only 3% had sought such guidance from an Adult Guidance Centre and just 1% from Learndirect. Clearly, there are differences by employment status here – one third of those in work sought advice from their employer, while a similar proportion of the unemployed looked to government agencies for such advice.

If we are to achieve the ambitions contained in this plan, then the quality of IAG delivered is critical. We will work with existing providers of IAG, including learning providers, to ensure a comprehensive and impartial service of information, advice and guidance is available and accessible for all and identifies clear routes for achievement and progression. We will be working to ensure that intervention of IAG takes place not only at the start and end of any learning experience but during it. We will also be developing ways in which IAG can be delivered in the workplace to encourage employers and employees to develop existing and new skills .

Priorities for Action

The Black Country LSC will work with information, advice and guidance (IAG) providers to ensure a seamless and integrated approach to IAG in the Black Country. In order to achieve this we will:

- Ensure that all IAG provision is objective and impartial and focuses on the needs of the learner. This will include tracking IAG referrals to monitor their success and suitability for the learner.
- Develop a seamless transition between the IAG provided by Connexions and that of the Black Country IAG networks.
- Establish full collaboration between Connexions, the IAG networks and learning providers so that all potential learners have full access to the comprehensive range of options available to them.
- Ensure that IAG provision is accessible to the Black Country population and is fully representative of the diverse needs of Black Country employers, communities and learners.
- Develop effective IAG services delivered within the workforce to encourage participation in learning among those in work.
- Work with Learn Direct (UFI) in the context of its local hubs to ensure information and advice is accessible appropriate to the needs of local learners.

The right skills at the right time

National Objective: Increase engagement of employers in workforce development.

Workforce Development is at the heart of the LSC remit and employers must take a leading role in the influencing of arrangements at national, local and industry levels. Given this remit the LSC will develop and articulate a clear agenda for action on workforce development. This must be achieved through the development of effective working partnerships with employers and those organisations that aim to provide a responsive system to meet the skill needs within the economy i.e. national training organisations, further and higher education institutions, private training providers, business links and Learn Direct (UFI).

Within the Black Country Learning and Skills Council, the Workforce Development Directorate has been established to take lead responsibility for the development of skills strategies which take account of national, regional and local priorities; and to co-ordinate links with employers.

The strategies for engaging employers will be designed to achieve the following outcomes.

- Increase employer investment in the development of their workforce.
- Increase awareness of recruitment and skills issues affecting their own sector.
- Collaborative approaches to tackle emerging issues.
- An understanding of the supportive role of the LSC.

Sectoral-Based Approach

We plan to adopt a sectoral approach to the development of skills strategies and workforce development plans based on labour market intelligence and employer contact.

Over the previous year the LSC has been researching a number of employment key sectors. Following this exercise, we have refined those sectors in which resources will be mainly focused.

- Engineering
- Construction
- Creative Industries
- Retail and Distribution
- Health Care
- Hospitality
- Community and Voluntary

Within each of these primary focus employment sectors it is proposed that a skills taskforce be established. This taskforce will include predominately local, influential employers. It will include employers with a range of experiences of training and development. We want to hear views representative of the

employment sector as a whole. A local employer will chair each skills taskforce.

Membership for each skills taskforce would typically include:-

- Employers
- National Training Organisation(s)
- Employer Federation(s)
- Business Link
- Chamber
- AWM (where appropriate)
- Representative from FE
- Representative from Black Country Training Group
- LSC

Engaging Employers through a sectoral approach

There exists in the Black Country a significant number of companies that do not train staff in new techniques. This greatly affects the ability of the business to compete effectively in industries that are already in long term decline in the sub-region.

One in five organisations expect the level of skills required of their workforce to increase within the next five years. In addition, one in ten employers report the existence of skills gaps with their current workforce. Public bodies and the food and drink sectors are the most likely to highlight skills gaps within their organisation, while the business and financial services sector is the least likely.

From the employers' perspective, 8% of firms state that difficulties have been experienced in training staff. Of these, the lack of willingness of staff to participate in training is the main reason why firms do not arrange training (39%). In addition, finding a training course of sufficient quality affects around one in five firms.

The 2001 Black Country Employer Survey highlights the Retail and Distribution sector as providing the highest percentage of *on-the-job* training (30.4%). However, the Health Care industry is the most likely to provide *off-the-job* training, perhaps indicative of the specialist nature of the training received. Traditional industries and leisure and tourism are highly unlikely to provide any type of training whatsoever. If we interrogate the data further, we find small firms (those employing under 10 staff) as those that are unlikely to support training for their staff. This is worrying considering the majority of firms within the sub-region are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

The most common area for training in the Black Country is Health & Safety (53.8%), closely followed by new staff induction (41.8%). These are generally for new staff entering the industry.

By focusing on priority sectors of significance to the Black Country, we can ensure that our resources have most impact. Our skills strategies and policies will reflect the specific needs of each sector and will, in particular, focus on the

basic and management skills of these sectors. A key priority will be to ensure that employers are able to clearly articulate their skills needs to the providers of training and development.

Following extensive consultation, sector plans will be published for each of our priority sectors, providing detail of our priorities in each area.

Priorities for Action

The Black Country LSC will increase employer engagement in learning, especially through workplace learning, company learning centres and networks, and employee development schemes. In order to achieve this we will:

- Work with Black Country Chamber and Business Link and Black Country Investment to ensure a collaborative approach to the engagement of Black Country employers.
- Facilitate the greater collaboration of employers and providers in workforce development by embedding and extending the Black Country Learning Network and the development of Centres of Vocational Excellence in priority skill areas.
- Ensure that employer views and needs are clearly articulated and communicated to providers in order to inform and develop appropriate learning provision.
- Actively promote the business benefits of learning to employers as a means of engaging their greater support for workforce development activities and encouraging their involvement in wider education/business links.
- Secure the commitment of all companies and organisations to develop their workforce through Investors in People and other quality standards.
- Ensure that female and minority ethnic led networks and businesses are included in the promotion of learning and workforce development, and are consulted about their particular needs and views.

Targets

	Black Country Baseline Information	Black Country Target position for 2004
LOCAL TARGETS		
Increase the proportion of the workforce receiving job-related training	12%	20%
Increase the proportion of employers undertaking training in the past 12 months	41%	50%
Increase the number of employers (50+ employees) recognised as Investors in People	340	To be confirmed
Increase the number of employers (<50 employees) recognised as Investors in People	194	To be confirmed

Basic Skills

At least one in four Black Country residents have low or very low basic skills in both literacy and numeracy. In addition, two-fifths of people do not have a recognised qualification in English. This proportion increases with age in that while 29% of those aged 16-34 do not have a recognised qualification in English this increases to 74% of those aged 55-64. Numeracy problems are even greater in the Black Country, with almost half of all residents lacking a formal qualification in mathematics.

Nationally, it is estimated that 47% of the people with low levels of basic skills are in the workforce. This is likely to be particularly true in the Black Country where, historically, the economy has been characterised by a high number of jobs requiring low skills. It has proved difficult in the past to persuade employers and employees of the benefits of improving basic skills.

The Black Country has higher than the national average of people with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills, therefore we face a real challenge in raising these levels in order to meet the targets for improvement for 2004 and beyond. We intend to work closely with our partners to ensure that the resource available in the Black Country to tackle basic skills is focused appropriately. In particular, we will concentrate resource on working with employers and employees to tackle basic skills as an integral part of the approach to vocational skills needs.

Priorities for Action

Raise the levels of basic skills across the Black Country as a means of enhancing the competitiveness of the potential and existing workforce.

- Disseminate and implement with partners the Black Country Basic Skills Delivery Plan.
- Extend the Workforce Development Brokerage Scheme to ensure that we are able to meet the basic skills needs of the workforce.
- Ensure that employers collaborate with learning providers to adopt a proactive approach to identifying and supporting individuals with basic skill needs.
- Further extend and embed the concept of Learning, Community and Union Ambassadors who are able to support the identification of basic skills needs within local communities and employers.
- Integrate basic skills within existing LSC provision with particular emphasis on developing basic skills solutions within the vocational curriculum.
- Develop a coherent package of support to identify and address the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and basic skill needs of asylum seekers.
- Focus our activities on those wards identified as having particularly low levels of basic skills.

- Develop the capacity of local community and voluntary organisations to identify and address basic skills needs in order to penetrate hard to reach communities.
- Work with providers who provide learning to 16-19 year olds in order to enhance basic skills provision and tackle basic and communication skills prior to entry into the workplace.
- Work with all providers of basic skills learning to ensure that the Black Country has sufficient high quality basic skills tutors available to tackle our priorities in this area.

Target

	Black Country Baseline information		Black Country Target Position in 2004			National Target for 2004
	Number	%	Decrease	Target Number	%	
NATIONAL TARGET						
Reduce the number of people with basic skills needs	At least 262,379	41	18,631	245,011	38	750,000

Vocational Skills

Levels of qualification vary according to occupations, with those employed in professional jobs being the most highly qualified: 79% qualified to Level 4 and 14% to Level 5. In contrast, people in lower skilled occupations are much more likely to have no or few qualifications. For example, 53% of plant and machine operatives do not have any qualifications.

With international competition increasingly strong it is vital for businesses to help improve quality and value for money. Skills hold the key to this and we must achieve a responsive education and learning system that is able to reflect the changing needs of employers.

We will focus on skills needs in our priority employment areas. Our focus here will not be about direct delivery, but will be about developing and piloting activity to build the capacity of learning providers to meet the specific needs of employers in our priority sectors. In particular we will seek to develop provision at NVQ 3 as well as developing routes of progression at all levels. We need to better support employers in being able to effectively articulate their skills needs to learning providers.

Priorities for Action

The Black Country LSC will raise the vocational skills of the workforce, particularly in our priority sectors, to meet the needs of business and support a prosperous economy. In order to achieve this we will:

- Maximise the potential of the Black Country sector skills taskforces and other employer fora to identify and address skills needs and gaps.

- Support the modernisation and diversification of the Black Country economy through increasing employee participation in vocational skills development.
- Ensure that key regeneration initiatives are informed by current and future skills needs as a means of supporting sustainable skills development among disadvantaged communities.
- Work with FE Colleges and Work-based learning providers to develop and deliver innovative solutions to meeting the learning needs of SMEs.
- Work with the Employment Service and key local partners to develop and deliver a route from benefits to skilled employment.
- Ensure that disadvantaged sections of the community locked in receding industries and occupations and those at risk of redundancy, are targeted and supported in gaining new skills for emerging sectors of employment.

Target

	Black Country Baseline Information		Black Country Target Position in 2004			National Target for 2004
	Number	%	Increase	Target Number	%	
NATIONAL TARGET						
Increase the proportion of adults at Level 3	177,000	34 ¹	+42,246	219,250	41	52%

Management Skills

The lack of management training offered by firms within the Black Country is a cause for concern. The lack of skills among SME's greatly affects the competitiveness of businesses and this issue should be addressed, particularly within the manufacturing sector.

Although the Black Country workforce has many strengths, particularly in traditional manufacturing skills, the sub-region lacks many of the higher level skills which place other regions at a relative competitive advantage.

At present, only 21% of Black Country residents are qualified to NVQ Level 4 or above. This proportion varies greatly within the sub-region with levels varying from a low of 19% in Sandwell and Walsall to 25% in Wolverhampton.

Almost one-quarter of organisations provide training for managers and supervisors, which signifies an increase from the 14% observed in the 2000 Employer Survey. This proportion does not vary to any great degree across the four Black Country areas. However, the proportion that provide management training increases with company size, from 16% of those with 1 – 10 employees, to 77% of those with 250 or more employees.

Management training is most likely to be provided in the following business

¹ Based on the Estimated population combined with migration factors (2000 Population)
Draft at 18/07/2006

sectors: public bodies / education (75%); community and voluntary (50%); and health care (42%). Companies based within construction (11%), traditional industries (12%), and food and drink (12%) are least likely to provide management training.

Three-quarters of those organisations which provide training to managers and supervisors, undertake this training in people management skills. A further two-thirds provide training in organisational and/or business planning and strategic management skills, while three in five target leadership skills.

By tackling the skills needs of managers we are able to have an impact on the potential overall effectiveness of the business as well as directly demonstrate to SMEs the business benefits from training and development.

Priorities for Action

Raise the management skills levels across the Black Country as a means of enhancing the competitiveness of the potential and existing workforce.

- Support the modernisation and diversification of the Black Country economy through increasing employee participation in management development.
- Work with FE Colleges and other Providers to develop and deliver innovative solutions to meeting the learning needs of owner managers in SMEs.
- Ensure that the potential of e-learning in management skills is exploited.
- Target the needs of managers in our priority sectors.

Target

	Black Country Baseline Information	Black Country Target position for 2004
LOCAL TARGET	%	%
Increase the proportion of adults at Level 4	16	20

Excellence in Learning

Raising quality and standards is critical. The LSC has committed itself to putting the learner at the heart of the new system for post-16 provision. Raising standards will mean that learners are better served than in the past and are able to succeed in their learning.

At its best, the system of post 16 education and training in the Black Country is excellent, and the best compares well with the best in the country. The difficulty is that quality is inconsistent. Inspection evidence reveals poorly performing providers, mediocre providers and pockets of poor quality within a large otherwise satisfactory range of providers.

National Objectives: **Raise achievement of young people**
 Raise achievement of adults

Raising Levels of Retention and Achievement

Levels of qualifications within the Black Country lag behind both regional and national averages. Currently, the Black Country has: 63%² of 19 year olds qualified to NVQ Level 2, compared to 73% nationally and 68% regionally. Similarly, the proportion of 19 year olds qualified to NVQ Level 3 is considerably less in the Black Country (33%) than in the West Midlands (39%) or the country as a whole (43%).

This pattern is also reflected with older age groups in that the proportion of adults qualified to NVQ Level 3 is 35% - a figure which, again, is lower than both regional and national averages.

These figures suggest that, without considerable effort and investment, the Black Country will struggle to attain the National Learning Targets for Levels 2 and 3 by 2004.

Providers will be expected to investigate the reasons for learners leaving programmes early and to use this information to take action to improve retention. Tracking learners progress to more advanced learning and/or employment must be improved and we need to explore ways of gauging how learners apply their learning in other contexts, such as, in their local communities to help record broader achievements and impacts of learning.

Priorities for Action

Black Country LSC will introduce measures to raise levels of educational attainment in the Black Country. In order to achieve this we will

- Expect providers to maintain systems to monitor and support the progression of all learners.

² Data collected from LSC Administration Sources
Draft at 18/07/2006

- Develop a better understanding of retention rates achieved by individual providers and courses as a means of increasing sustained participation and attainment in learning.
- Engage with key regeneration partnerships and promote a holistic, multi-agency approach to learning that recognises the social and cultural barriers that may impede attainment.
- Recognise the differing values attached to the attainment of qualifications and disseminate best practice in non-traditional methods of accrediting learning.
- Introduce measures to reward and celebrate success through high profile, celebrity award ceremonies.
- Facilitate the introduction of Student Apprenticeships as a means of enhancing post-16 learning to support the attainment of additional qualifications.
- Ensure that the Black Country Education Business Link organisation provides curriculum support, enhances provision and re-engages young people.
- Require all providers to set themselves challenging targets to achieve improvements in recruitment, retention and achievement.

Targets

	Black Country Baseline Information		Black Country Target Position in 2004			National Target for 2004
	Number	%	Increase	Target Number	%	
NATIONAL TARGETS						
Increase the proportion of 19 year olds at Level 2	8,935	63	+1,064	10,000	70	85%
Increase the proportion of 19 year olds at Level 3	4,671	33	+825	5,500	38	55%
Increase the proportion of adults at Level 3	177,000	34 ³	+42,246	219,250	41	52%

	Black Country Baseline Information	Black Country Target position for 2004
LOCAL TARGET	%	%
Increase the proportion of adults at Level 4	16	20

³ Based on the Estimated population combined with migration factors (2000 Population)
Draft at 18/07/2006

National Objective: Raise quality of education and training and user satisfaction

Improving the quality of learning provision

Black Country provision is broadly satisfactory, with less poor and less excellent provision compared with the rest of the country.

Of the occupational areas of provision that have been inspected by the Training Standards Council, 12% has been classified as being less than satisfactory, compared to 18% in England as a whole. However, only 22% of provision in the Black Country is classified as 'outstanding' or 'good' compared to 38% nationally. Much of the provision is deemed to be 'satisfactory' (66% in the Black Country, 44% nationally). The trend is similar when examining the generic areas of provision where an average of 25% has been classified as being less than satisfactory, compared to 26% across England. But an average of 26% of the provision in the Black Country is classified as good or 'outstanding' compared to 32% nationally.

The "curriculum area" inspection grades achieved by FE colleges are slightly behind the national average; with 44% of colleges being awarded either a grade 1 or 2 (50% nationally) and 14% either a grade 4 or 5 (7% nationally). The picture improves slightly for "cross-college" grades, with the Black Country matching the national achievement of 54% for provision being classified as 'good' or 'outstanding'.

Wherever and whenever people and businesses choose to learn, they should be entitled to high quality learning that:

- Delivers what it promises
- Gets them to their goals
- Takes them as high up the ladder of achievement as they are able and wish to go

This will mean a major drive to raise standards. Effective internal quality assurance systems, combined with regular independent inspections against a common framework of standards, are critical to raising quality and achievement and reducing dropout rates. We propose to publish appropriate performance achievements for individual providers.

Priorities for Action

Black Country LSC will promote, embed and support a culture of continuous and effective quality assurance through relationships with work based learning, FE, adult and community learning and other learning providers. In order to achieve this we will:

- Develop a flexible and coherent strategy to drive the improvement of new and existing providers in all areas of LSC funded learning.
- Promote and support periodic and effective self assessment and development planning by all providers.

- Encourage work towards the aspiration that all provision, as identified by the provider review process, will be classified as good or excellent.
- Providing support for poor performing providers.
- Introduce a strategic and performance review of learning providers.

Availability of Learning Provision

If the education and training needs of learners, employers and communities are to be met the LSC Black Country must ensure that the provision on offer is delivered at the right times and the right locations.

Better planning, co-ordination and responsiveness to the learning needs of local people will be a high priority. There is an opportunity to design in a much greater degree of responsiveness to the needs of the learner and the need to build local capacity to generate more activity in which local people feel they genuinely have a stake.

Priorities for Action

Black Country LSC will ensure that there is sufficient high quality provision available in the Black Country to meet the needs of all learners, employers and communities. In order to achieve this we will:

- Develop our purchasing strategy to balance the needs of learners, employers and the community.
- Work with schools, colleges, training providers and other partners to establish excellence and collaborative working in vocational delivery.
- Increase the responsiveness and relevance of the learning infrastructure to better serve the changing needs of employers.
- Improve the range, quality and coherence of IAG provision in the Black Country.
- Ensure the greater accessibility of all learning opportunities within the Black Country with a particular focus on developing information learning technologies, and establishing a more coherent e-learning infrastructure.
- Secure a smooth transfer to new funding arrangements for school sixth forms.
- Ensure that information on the quality of provision is available to inform learner choice.
- Work with partner organisations to ensure no gaps in provision or support arrangements.
- Recognise and reward high performing providers.

Planning learning provision to meet learner needs

Much of the learning provision in the Black Country is fragmented and there is a need to improve the strategic coherence and collaboration of learning. We need to map current provision against labour market and learner needs as a means of determining the appropriateness of the level and

distribution of occupational training. This will enable us to identify duplication and poor quality learning as well as gaps in provision and good practice. We will also look at provision on a sectoral basis with the sector taskforces to get their inputs on the appropriateness and quality of what is delivered.

We will set out indicative expectations of the broad mix of skills required for the Black Country, and set overall priorities of provision - growth and contraction. Targets will reflect expected labour market changes, showing for example how planned provision for the sub-region over time will reflect the growth and decline of particular sectors and occupations. We will then negotiate and agree individual institutional plans so that they are broadly in line with targeted provisions, and monitor implementation through coherent management information aggregated from individual provider returns.

Priorities for Action

Black Country LSC will ensure that the planning and funding of learning is driven by the needs of the learners and the labour market. In order to achieve this we will:

- Create effective systems for identifying need and market gaps, including improved intelligence from Learning Partnerships.
- Work with key partners and providers to further develop systems for capturing structured learner and employer feedback as a means of informing policy and improving provision.
- Work with key partners to develop the Black Country Research Unit and engage in collaborative research to further understand and disseminate the current and future learning and skills needs of the Black Country.
- Provide effective area-wide strategic planning support involving all partner organisations and engaging all sectors.
- Work with key partners on innovative curriculum development, progression and new ways of learning.
- Analyse and interpret retention data from individual providers and courses to assess whether delivery is appropriate, proper and reasonable for learners.
- Ensure that only good provision is grown.

Target

	Black Country Baseline Information	Black Country Target position for 2004
LOCAL TARGET		
Reduce the proportion of companies who have experienced difficulties in finding appropriate training provision	63%	50%

Developing the provider base

The LSC is determined to secure high quality learning which:

- Meets learners, employers and communities needs.
- Delivers high retention and achievement rates.
- Is delivered by competent and qualified staff.
- Offers equality of opportunity and success.
- Takes place in a safe and supportive environment.
- Is well-managed and well-led.
- Delivers value for money.

Priorities for Action

Black Country LSC will drive up quality and improve consistency of standards. In order to achieve this we will:

- Introduce a programme of capacity building measures to develop new providers to LSC standards.
- Establish and work with new partnerships and learning providers who have specialist working knowledge and experience of disadvantaged communities and individuals.
- Work with providers to ensure a safe, supportive and inspirational environment for all teaching and learning.
- Invest additional financial resource, where appropriate, to improve the supplier infrastructure and capability.
- Develop innovative provision to address the needs of learners through both mainstream and additional external funds.
- Support community based organisations to become more actively involved in the learning and development process e.g. as providers, recruiters or referral organisations.

Improving teaching and trainer skills

In recent years there has been considerable change in the way teaching and learning are organised and the way training of teaching is arranged and delivered.

Greater flexibility in the organisation of learning programmes has led to students spending more time studying on their own, using learning centres, open-access computer facilities or assessment centres. Support staff have an important role to play in these new style-learning environments.

The teacher/trainer as the facilitator of learning is using very different skills from those of a traditional lecturer. Students range from those with severe learning difficulties to those following graduate courses, all of which expect some recognition of their personal learning needs.

Priorities for Action

Black Country LSC will ensure effective learning will be delivered by competent and qualified teachers and trainers. In order to achieve this we will:

- Ensure that provider development strategies reflect the diversity of the Black Country community in terms of staff recruitment and development.
- Encourage providers to raise the qualification, competence and skill levels of their staff through continuous professional development.
- Ensure high quality leadership and management of learning, by supporting providers to develop and implement effective programmes.
- Develop and maintain an adequate supply of trained tutors in basic skills and other key vocational areas.
- Provide funding for the vocational updating of trainers skills.
- Provide funding to develop trainer skills in workplace supervision.

Showcasing learning

This work will include:

- Arranging studies of the quality and value for money of LSC-funded education and training activities, including the identification of good practice.
- Publishing the results.
- Supporting collaborative work to build models for standard setting with flexibility.
- Building on the work of others.
- Using networks, workshops, conferences and the Internet to publicise findings.

Priorities for Action

- Increase awareness of good practice through the active showcasing of excellence.
- Encourage sharing of good practice by providers across different sectors, schools, colleges and training providers.

[To be completed]

Innovation in Learning

Through piloting we are able to pick up possible good ideas and develop them to a stage where we could roll out these ideas across the Black Country. This enables us to constantly search for new best practice and to provide a conduit for creativity that we need to change learning. We would plan to earmark a significant proportion of our discretionary budgets each year for new innovative activity.

Priorities for Action

- Mainstream successful activities that have been piloted under the NVQ Level 2 action plan.
- Support innovative provision to make learning more exciting and rewarding.

[To be completed]

E-learning and ICT

As in the twentieth century, with a movement for mass literacy to support the industrial base and the growing service sectors (such as finance and administration), it is necessary in the twenty-first century, to prepare for the expanding knowledge economy.

There are key issues within the Black Country, which have to be managed and linked with this topic, such as basic skills levels, decline in manufacturing, growth in high technology and investment in infrastructure. Additionally it must be recognised that as important as the growth in electronic working is, not all processes are suitable for delivery electronically. E-learning is only one of a range of solutions and will not be a panacea for all ills even though E-literacy has started to engage previously excluded learners, thus widening participation, through differentiated learning.

However, in order to be able to perform a task through electronic means an individual will increasingly need to have **appropriate skills** and be e-literate to both use the technology for social as well as employment needs. They will need access to **appropriate content**, which is designed to be fit for purpose and need. To use the content to acquire knowledge and skills, they will require **support** to learn in a **conducive environment** with sufficiently engaging **materials** to satisfy their needs. They will need **working hardware**, which is linked to a suitable **connection** to access the knowledge held electronically. This requires people with sufficient skills to connect and maintain the hardware. These operators in turn need to be continually revising their knowledge and skills to keep up to date with technological changes. They will need to work beyond the parameters of their immediate building or region to form partnerships and agreed standards to ensure compatibility for access. Those responsible for delivering learning will need to be able to **monitor and evaluate** participation and attainment.

The LSC will work concurrently on all of these topics to ensure that all pieces fit together without compromising quality, currency and value for money for investment.

On **Information Communication Technology (ICT)** developments the LSC has a role to facilitate a shared understanding of the issues as well as supporting the strategic needs for the Black Country and beyond.

- **Infrastructure** considers the specification for the speed of connectivity and endorses the regional strategy to become a Broadband region, which is the highest specification currently available. This will allow for information to be processed speedily and timely.
- **Access** – There has been massive investment in learning institutions, local communities, businesses and other locations where learners will become involved in e-learning. The LSC endeavours to ensure that each opportunity is maximised and are not perceived as separate environments by working towards compatible platforms and removing barriers to access.

- **Interoperability** for a learner is important as they move between learning opportunities. For instance in the past school leavers have discovered that the computers they used at school used different software to colleges or work. The LSC will be supporting providers in deciding which Learning Environment to operate to avoid the video 'betamax' syndrome.
- Different brandings such as 'UK online' and 'learndirect' causes unnecessary confusion. LSC will also work to avoid duplication and confusion to the benefit of the learner.
- **Developments in new options** e.g. WAP phones, digital TVs, means that the LSC will have to be flexible and aware of opportunities or trends in their usage to anticipate the future needs of learners.

The developments, which can be described as **e-life** through government policy on **e-governance** and the expanding leisure field of digital media, gives opportunities:

- To be the magnet or hook into learning from the content of commerce, entertainment, leisure. Among others the BBC has invested greatly in developing materials for educational purposes. The LSC will recommend the use of such materials for providers of learning.
- Skills through life changing events which need to be fostered as introductions to formal e-learning

If all of the above is achieved then coming to **e-learning** will provide for an individual and the LSC the following opportunities:

- **E-literacy** through formal qualification routes which in cases of new and returning learners will need to be prefaced with sessions of support to lead into e-learning opportunities. The LSC will need to establish how these sessions can be recorded and funded.
- A breadth and depth of **content and context** for learners, appropriate for need. The LSC is working with local communities to build up this from grass roots through Grids for Learning.
- The LSC through its **learning ambassadors** strategy will strengthen **support** for learners and tutors.

Links and partners:

Through engagement at strategic level with partners drawn from Local Authorities, Universities, Chamber and Business Link across the four local areas in Black Country convened groups the LSC will play a particular supporting part in broad ICT developments such as

- Development of Broadband connection.
- Forming a Learning Net for co-ordination across the Black Country.
- The introduction of a Smartcard for incentivising learning.
- Purchase of distinct products to support strategies such as making learning more interesting.
- Researching potential for such developments as local rather than national learning TV channels.
- Funding of developments, capital and revenue, which need to be captured and coordinated to maximise the investment.

- The LSC will play a role in networking these opportunities. And forming a judgement on sustainability through funding and people resources.

LSC will work with its partners including suppliers and providers as well as strategists to build an overarching strategy for e-learning to embrace all developments. This strategy will involve consultation with UK online centres, learndirect centres, local ICT co-ordinators and most particularly learners.

Equal Opportunities

The Black Country Learning and Skills Council is committed to mainstreaming and integrating equality into all aspects of its work. Our priorities are to develop and deliver equal opportunities for young people and adult learners through all of our programmes and providers and to promote equality and diversity in our employment policy and practices.

The Black Country Learning and Skills Council is fully committed to the implementation of all legal requirements beyond minimum compliance. The Learning and Skills Act 2000 requires the Learning and Skills Council to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between people from different racial groups, between men and women, and between people with a disability and those without. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 requires the LSC, as a public body, to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups when performing our functions.

The Black Country Learning and Skills Council will ensure the following:

- A written race equality policy.
- Consultation with ethnic minority communities on policy development and outcomes.
- Ethnic monitoring of employment.
- Regular reporting on the above.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 places duties on the LSC to ensure accessibility to employment and services. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) also places duties on all providers of post 16-education. The Black Country Learning and Skills Council will ensure that: such duties are implemented across all funded provision as required by the act.

In terms of gender equality key issues concerning stereotyping and segregation at work are key issues and reflected on Modern Apprenticeships. The Black Country Learning and Skills Council will aim to overcome gender stereotypes by influencing and offering wider occupational and learning choices for young people 14-19.

Opportunities to access learning need to be fully inclusive to all individuals, groups and communities. Certain groups are under represented in learning and disadvantaged by circumstance more than others.

The Black Country Learning and Skills Council's plans will be underpinned by the objectives of the national Learning and Skills Council to:

1. Develop the Council as an equal opportunities employer/organisation.
2. Develop the Council as a champion of equality.
3. Embed Equal Opportunities into all policies, programmes and actions.
4. Report on progress towards equality.

Research and Evaluation

Research

A Research Strategy has been developed that seeks to draw together the various research activities into a single over-arching plan. It also aims to highlight areas in which research is necessary in order to meet the needs and requirements of the Learning and Skills Council Black Country and its partners.

The Research Strategy encompasses a range of activities including the commissioning of statistical information about skills, participation and learning; the mapping of current trends; the identification of future priorities; the assessment of need; and the identification of best practice.

Through the gathering, generating, co-ordinating and swift dissemination of high quality data and intelligence relevant to the needs of the Learning and Skills Council and its partners the research will contribute to our collective understanding of the respective needs and issues of both learners and non-learners in the Black Country thus ensuring that the planning and funding of post-16 learning in the Black Country is driven by the needs of learners and employers.

The research will not only audit current skills in the labour force, but also forecast the skills needs of the future. This will come about through investigations of current and past trends and by taking into account technological changes within sectors and organisations, thus gaining an understanding of the changing levels and types of skills that our provision must supply if demand is to be met. Thus, research is a strategic tool to enable the objectives of the LSC to be met.

Such activities will also assist with the measurement of progress towards local targets, as those identified in this Development Plan and also of progress towards national objectives and targets (e.g. National Learning Targets).

Evaluation

An Evaluation Strategy has been developed that sets out the rationale behind the evaluation activities that we will undertake in order to promote and facilitate continuous improvement in the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of our services.

All evaluation activities will seek to not only assess levels of customer satisfaction and impact, but will also identify the reasons why programmes perform like they do by looking at such factors as delivery mechanisms, tutors, etc.

Building on the national Learner Satisfaction Survey being co-ordinated by National Office, a local survey using a similar methodology will be carried out annually. Both surveys are due to report in March 2002. The purpose of the

surveys is to provide a measure of learning that is offered in the Black Country.

In order to draw together the full range of data that can be used to provide an assessment of the strategic value of the Learning and Skills Council Black Country two reports will be produced each year – a mid-year report in October and a year-end report in April.

The results collected through the evaluation of our programmes will also be used to demonstrate to stakeholders (Black Country learners, residents and employers and partners) that the organisation is successful in addressing its local priorities.

Monitoring

Through yearly monitoring against the targets stated in this plan, we will demonstrate our progress towards achieving our priorities. However, as a number of these targets will be measured by National Office, we will be dependent upon them to provide us with regular updates.

In addition, all management information generated by the Learning and Skills Council will be collated and used to inform the future development of post-16 provision. This will also enable the regular monitoring of our activities and performance. As a result, management information will directly feed into both the research and evaluation strategies.

Health and Safety

LSC Black Country has statutory and common-law responsibilities with regard to health and safety and welfare for its employees, and certain trainees.

The responsibility as an employer reflects the requirements of the statutory legislations. The Health and Safety policy will be reviewed and amended to reflect changes in legislation and the requirements of LSC nationally. As part of our induction process a copy of the Draft Health and Safety Policy is supplied to new employees. As part of our management of Health and Safety we will measure our performance against the policy on a regular basis.

Learning and Skills Council Black Country feels that commitment to Health and Safety means that it should be integrated into processes throughout the organisation. Therefore Health and Safety is assessed when entering into a contract and for all new providers is part of the new provider assessment process. Health and Safety is reviewed and considered as part of a number of our strategic priorities. (Cross Ref: Developing the Provider Base).

The Learning and Skills Council has statutory responsibility to ensure the health and welfare of all learners with their programmes, although the duty of care still rests with the providers. Work-based learning providers are reviewed to evaluate the risks involved, and all providers are measured against the requirements of legislation. Providers will then be banded high, medium or low as the benchmark for priority of visits. In our monitoring and review of providers we will conduct Health and Safety monitoring in accordance with guidelines issued and will expect providers to strive to continuously improve. We will conduct an analysis of the accidents reported to us to identify high risk areas.

Annex 1 - Targets

Nationally, the Learning and Skills Council has set targets for 2004. The national targets detailed below reflect the Black Country's contribution to those targets. There is an intention for the Learning and Skills Council to develop a number of further targets, specifically in the areas of employer engagement, adult participation and the quality of learning provision. There have also been Government Targets issued in relation to progression into Higher Education; colleges having a Centre of Vocational Excellence; and the number of young people accessing Modern Apprenticeships by the age of 22. The Council is therefore committing itself to develop, over the coming months, robust measures in these areas based on regular Government and other surveys.

We are aware that our plan runs to 2005. We aim, following a national lead, to update our targets in line with the revision of the Learning and Skills Council Corporate Plan.

	Black Country Baseline Information		Black Country Target Position in 2004			National Target for 2004
	Number	%	Increase	Target Number	%	
NATIONAL TARGETS						
Increase the proportion of 16-18 year olds in structured learning	31,023	72	+4,210	35,250	80	80%
Increase the proportion of 19 year olds at Level 2	8,935	63	+1,064	10,000	70	85%
Increase the proportion of 19 year olds at Level 3	4,671	33	+825	5,500	38	55%
Increase the proportion of adults at Level 3	177,000	34 ⁴	+42,246	219,250	41	52%
Reduce the number of people with basic skills needs	At least 262,379	41	-18,631	245,011	38	750,000

In addition to our contribution towards the National Targets we have set local targets that are detailed below. We have aimed to capture key areas of performance that can be measured regularly and that reflect our local priorities for the coming years.

	Black Country Baseline Information	Black Country Target position for 2004
LOCAL TARGETS		
	%	%
Increase proportion of Year 11 leavers entering 'positive' destinations	81	90
Increase the proportion of the population participating in learning	46	50
Increase the proportion of adults at Level 4	16	20

⁴ Based on the Estimated population combined with migration factors (2000 Population)
Draft at 18/07/2006

Increase the proportion of the workforce receiving job-related training	12	20
Increase the proportion of employers undertaking training in the past 12 months	41	50
Increase the number of employers (50+ employees) recognised as Investors in People	340 (number)	To be confirmed
Increase the number of employers (<50 employees) recognised as Investors in People	194 (number)	To be confirmed
Reduce the proportion of companies who have experience difficulties in finding appropriate training provision	63	50

Annex 2 – Local Council Members and Advisory Groups

Local Council Members

The Council Members are:

Mr Luke Borwick	(Chairman) Director, Blair Trust Company
Mr Derrick Anderson	Chief Executive, Wolverhampton City Council *
Ms Sue Davis CBE	Deputy Chair, Advantage West Midlands
Mr John Gardner	Joint Executive Council Co-Chair, AMICUS
Mr Bruce Gilbert	Chief Superintendent, West Midlands Police **
Ms Najma Hafeez	Chief Executive, Russell Associates
Mr Keith Hirst OBE	Non-Executive Director, Metsec
Mr Howard Marshall	Director, Hill and Smith plc and Chair, Regional CBI
Ms Bryony Pawinska	Chief Executive, Institute of Career Guidance
Ms Sandra Spence	Chief Executive, Black Country Housing and Community Services Group
Cllr Tim Sunter	Leader, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Mr David Way	Executive Director, Learning and Skills Council
Dr Viv Wylie	Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Wolverhampton*

*Governor of City of Wolverhampton College

**Governor of Sandwell College

Strategic Advisory Group Members

Participation Strategic Advisory Group

Mr Anthony Allen	Employment Service
Mr Dave Feakes	Employment Service
Mr Ian Hart	Wolverhampton City Council
Ms Susan Henderson	Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit
Ms Teresa Kelly	Sandwell College
Ms Rosanna Summers	Regional TUC
Cllr Tim Sunter	Dudley MBC, LSC Council Member
Ms Christine Townley	Basic Skills Agency
Ms Jane Williams	City of Wolverhampton College
Mr John Roberts	Black Country Connexions
Mr Roy Hollyoak	Black Country Training Group
Ms Jackie Westland	Employment Service
Mr Sukhvinder Singh	Business in the Community
Mr Robert Mottram	Disability West Midlands
Mr Jeremy Bruce	Groundwork Black Country
Ms Sue Davis CBE	Council Member
Mr Keith Webb	Lynwood Engineering
Mr Ian Thompson	Sandwell Lifelong Learning Partnership
Mr Keith Heyes	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Ms Patricia Wright	SEMUF
Ms Rosemary Gray OBE	Walsall College of Arts and Technology
Ms Geraldine Child	Walsall Council for Voluntary Services

Draft at 18/07/2006

Mr Colin Robinson	Walsall Lifelong Learning Alliance
Mr Derrick Anderson	Wolverhampton City Council, LSC Council Member
Bishop Michael Wulfrun	The Bishop of Wolverhampton

Regeneration Strategic Advisory Group

Mr Luke Borwick	LSC Chair of Council
Mr Kevin Griffiths	GOWM
Ms Sandra Spence	Black Country Housing and Community Services Group, LSC Council Member
Ms Sandra Croasdale	Black Country Afro Caribbean Business Group
Ms Sarah Middleton	Black Country Consortium
Mr Raj Ojelay	Bilston Engineering
Ms Caroline Simpson	Advantage West Midlands
Mr John Gardner	MSF Union, LSC Council Member
Ms Najma Hafeez	Russell Associates, LSC Council Member
Mr Dave Darlaston	Business in the Community
Mr Douglas Keith	Sandwell College
Mr Derrick Anderson	Wolverhampton City Council, LSC Council Member

Engaging Employers Strategic Advisory Group

Members of this group will Chair the Skills Taskforces

Mr Lee Avery	Black Country Chamber & Business Link
Mr Ian Ellis	Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council
Ms Jane Evans	Walsall Health Authority
Mr John Gardner	AMICUS, LSC Council Member
Dr Gordon Hopkins	Dudley College
Mr Max Jones	Turner Powertrain Systems Ltd
Mr Nick Madeley	Black Country Chamber & Business Link
Mr Howard Marshall	Hill and Smith plc, LSC Council Member
Mr Bill Nicholls	Engineering Employers Federation
Mr Ben Reid	West Midlands Co-operative Society Ltd

Raising Standards Strategic Advisory Group

Mr Keith Bate	Halesowen College
Mr Keith Hirst CBE	Metsec plc, LSC Council Member
Mr Mark Grundy	Shireland Hall Language College
Mr Paul Cave	Wolverhampton Adult Education Service
Mr Richard Holt	Carver Training
Dr Viv Wylie	University of Wolverhampton, LSC Council Member
Ms Barbara Hughes	Adult Learning Inspectorate
Mr Bruce Gilbert	West Midlands Police, LSC Council Member

Annex 3 - Research Material

SKILLS				
No	Research Activity	Partners	Start Date	Publication Date
1	Black Country Employer Survey	Business Link Black Country, Learning & Skills Council Black Country, Learning Partnerships	August	February
2	Research into Basic Skills in the Black Country	Strategic Advisory Group for Basic Skills	August	December
3	Sector Based Research	Internal	December	March
4	Engineering Skills Register	West Midlands Learning & Skills Council	Ongoing	Ongoing
5	Learning Skill Needs Assessment in the Black Country 2001/2002	Internal	January	February
PARTICIPATION				
No	Research Activity	Partners	Start Date	Publication Date
1	Desk Based Research (Participation)	Internal Groups	September	November
2	West Midlands Household Survey	Advantage West Midlands, Government Office for the West Midlands, West Midlands Learning and Skills Council	November	June-August
LEARNING				
No	Research Activity	Partners	Start Date	Publication Date
1	Mapping of 16-19 Provision	Colleges, 6 th Forms, Work Based Learning Providers, Local Education Authorities	August	January
2	Impact Assessment of MA's	Work Based Learning Providers	August	December
3	Mapping of Provision aimed at Disadvantaged Groups	Strategic Advisory Group for Access Equality	September	December
4	Entrepreneurial Activity in Schools	Primary, Secondary and Special Schools, Local Education Authorities and Education Business Links	September	January
5	Mapping of Basic Skills Provision	Internal	January	March

Annex 4 – Memorandum of Understanding with Advantage West Midlands

To be completed.