

Priorities to transform learning and skills

The Learning and Skills Council has set out its Annual Statement of Priorities and key actions that are necessary to transform learning and skills in England.

The priorities are published this month in *The Skills We Need*, which identifies six high level strategic objectives for the next few years against which the LSC's funding and planning in learning and skills will be shaped. It also details the specific actions for the coming year, 2005/06.

In an introduction, Chris Banks and Mark Haysom, respectively our Chairman and Chief Executive, explain why the transformation of the sector is needed. "First, the productivity of our workforce lags behind that of our major competitors. The need to improve skills in order to boost productivity is the biggest challenge facing businesses.

"Second, too many individuals do not have the basic skills they need for work or to achieve the quality of life they want. We have a duty to support social inclusion as well as economic competitiveness.

"The LSC has an important leadership role, providing drive and direction to the delivery of world-class learning and skills. We work with our partners locally, regionally, nationally and across sectors."

In preparing the priorities, the LSC has listened to employers, learners and providers of learning, who understand that to do the job properly will take more than a year. *The Skills We Need: Our Annual Statement of Priorities* sets out what needs to be done to improve skills and boost productivity and is one of the biggest challenges facing the economy today. With a budget of £9.3 billion the LSC will focus on encouraging those who provide training to deliver what employers need now and in the future.

This will involve some tough choices. "Demand can be limitless, but resources are finite. So we have to choose where we invest public money to deliver the skills that employers and individuals need, and realise the nation's ambition to compete with the best in the world. Our job is to make sure we derive maximum benefit from every pound that is spent."

Key actions for 2005/06 include building on the success of Employer Training Pilots, which provide basic skills and Level 2 skills to low-skilled employees in the workforce. The LSC will also produce a capital investment strategy

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Our high level strategic priorities are to:

- 1 Make learning truly demand-led so that it better meets the needs of employers, young people and adults.
- 2 Ensure that all 14-19 year olds have access to high quality, relevant learning opportunities.
- 3 Transform further education so that it attracts and stimulates more business investment in training and skills development.
- 4 Strengthen the role of the LSC in economic development so that we provide the skills needed to help all individuals into jobs.
- 5 Strengthen the LSC's capacity to work effectively at a regional level – particularly with Regional Development Agencies and Regional Skills Partnerships.
- 6 Improve the skills of the workers who are delivering public services.

The Learning and Skills Council wishes you a happy and peaceful holiday, and the very best for 2005.

This year the LSC has decided not to issue Christmas cards but instead, will support the Helena Kennedy Foundation, a charity that gives bursaries to students from under-represented groups for whom additional financial support is critical. The donation will provide up to 20 bursaries in 2005 for students from further education colleges who intend to progress to higher education.



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that builds on Centres of Vocational Excellence and supports priority sectors regionally and nationally.

Key messages from Sector Skills Agreements will be used to reform the learning in which the LSC invests. These will spell out the skills needed by employers in each sector and outline the way in which learning should be delivered to suit business needs.

In 2005/06, the LSC will be learning the lessons from two pilots in the North East and South East to progressively extend the new Level 2 Entitlement with a view to introducing it nationally from 2006/07.

Above all, *The Skills We Need* will proceed hand-in-hand with the recently announced LSC agenda for change.

The information, advice and guidance service will be improved, and continue to give impartial advice to ensure young people and adults can make informed choices about learning and work.

Recommendations from the LSC's Strategic Area Reviews of the supply and demand for learning in each local area will be implemented to increase the choice of high quality learning for young people.

The LSC will also implement the recommendations of national or sectoral reviews, including the strategic review of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

We will also respond to the needs of people with mental health difficulties and the outcome of the Equal Opportunities Commission's investigation into gender stereotyping.

Above all, *The Skills We Need: Our Annual Statement of Priorities* will proceed hand-in-hand with the recently announced LSC agenda for change programme (see Update Issue 4) to create a sector which can meet these priorities.

The Skills We Need: Our Annual Statement of Priorities is available on www.lsc.gov.uk under Documents.

Report says Black Leadership Initiative has tangible benefits

An evaluation of the Black Leadership Initiative (BLI) says the programme to support the progression of black staff to senior management level in the post-16 sector has demonstrated a tangible impact on the black participants and mentors who took part.

The positive action programme was funded by the LSC between July 2002 and August 2004.

The initiative provided secondments, mentoring and work-shadowing opportunities for black staff in learning and skills locations, including colleges and the LSC.

It also involved a very successful inspection-shadowing programme with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

The evaluation was carried out by Zahno Rao Associates to assess the impact of the initiative and to support its transition to the Centre for Excellence in Leadership from September 2004.

The firm's report, *Evaluation of the Black Leadership Initiative*, says the programme exceeded its original targets of developing 30 mentoring partnerships and managing 10 secondments.

It adds: "More importantly, our evaluation has demonstrated a tangible impact on the black participants and the mentors. There have been specific examples of benefits to the seconding and releasing colleges, although this is an area which could be improved. There was high praise for the design of the programme by black participants.

"A number described the programme as 'excellent' or 'brilliant' and expressed the hope that funding would allow the BLI to continue so that others could benefit from it."

The report says the initiative needs to move from being a good, well-executed programme to being seen as raising a serious professional issue for the whole sector and achieving organisational change in the sector.

Kit Roberts, LSC Director of Equality and Diversity, says: "This evaluation by shows that the initiative has been more successful than we could have hoped.

It offers a great opportunity to make a real difference. For the future, we want to see the Black Leadership Initiative fulfil its potential to promote organisational change, as well as continuing to support individuals.

"It offers a great opportunity to make a real difference. For the future, we want to see the Black Leadership Initiative fulfil its potential to promote organisational change, as well as continuing to support individuals.

"The move of the initiative to the Centre for Excellence in Leadership provides the ideal platform for that, but we must all play a part in making it happen."

Evaluation of the Black Leadership Initiative is available from the LSC website under Documents/Subject Listing/Improving Quality/Guidance and Good Practice.

LSC Update

LSC Update can be downloaded in PDF format from the national homepage of the LSC website under Documents/Series/LSCUpdate.

If you require additional hard copies, contact the email address info@lsc.gov.uk stating the issue and number of copies that you require and an address for distribution. Additional copies can also be obtained by phoning the LSC Help Desk on 0870 900 6800.

Review of further education

The DfES and the LSC are sponsoring an independent review into the role of colleges in the further education sector.

Sir Andrew Foster, current head of the Bureaucracy Review Group, has been appointed to conduct the review, which will look at the shape and focus of the sector.

In a letter to key stakeholders, Charles Clarke, the Secretary of State and Chris Banks, our Chairman, said that with the publication of the DfES' Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners, the time was right for the review.

They also recognised the strategy for reforming the 14-19 phase of education, the Skills Strategy and *Success for All* are placing new and challenging demands on colleges. "We want to develop a vision of what a college in a 21st century, demand-led system will look like. But the vision is only the start – we also need to identify what needs to be done to get there. This is essential to ensure that colleges are in the best position to respond to the needs of local learners, employers and wider communities."

Sir Andrew will look at the strategic positioning of the FE college sector in

delivering the learning and skills the nation needs. He will aim to identify the contribution of colleges to learning and skills, their distinctive long-term contribution to economic development and social inclusion and what more needs to happen to transform the sector.

Sir Andrew is expected to report by next autumn. His review forms part of a wide range of activity to transform the sector, including the LSC agenda for change, the reform programme we have launched that focuses on five key themes – skills and engaging employers, quality, efficiency, funding and data.

2005: a year of transition

This year's Association of Colleges' (AoC) Annual Conference maintained its reputation as one of the big events in the learning and skills calendar.

The need for the learning and skills sector to transform to meet the skills needs of learners and employers and the sector's contributions to society were the themes topping the bill at the three-day conference in Birmingham from November 16-18.

Charles Clarke, the Secretary of State, Dr John Brennan, the AoC's Chief Executive, Mark Haysom, LSC Chief Executive and Digby Jones, Director General of the CBI, were among the keynote speakers. Chris Banks, LSC Chairman, made his first major public address to a learning and skills audience since taking up his appointment.

College leaders from around the country were also treated to fascinating contribution from Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister's former communications' chief, which included hints about the way the sector could raise its profile and win esteem for its contribution to the country's

economic and social health. And throughout the three days, there was a

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wealth of learning and skills subjects under discussion at seminars.

In his address, Education Secretary Charles Clarke urged colleges to 'strongly engage' with employers in their local communities. He said: "We need to bring the worlds of education and employment closer together to ensure that the needs of employers are understood and met and learners are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes."

The Secretary of State said the Government's Skills Strategy set out a vision for transforming the national investment in skills and moving to a demand-led system. Colleges had to engage and be more responsive to both employers and employees. He urged colleges to think hard about their offer to employers to drive the necessary changes forward.

Dr Brennan continued the theme. He told the conference that engaging with employers is the biggest challenge facing further education.

Dr Brennan said that given that the supply of skills and talents is so crucial to our national and regional well-being, and with a national employer training programme in prospect, the sector must invite a new dialogue and, where possible, build fresh partnership with employers, both locally and nationally.

He wanted to make sure that employers knew exactly what was achieved in further education – the sheer range and sophistication of college collaboration with local employers. There was need for a more organised dialogue with employers, a dialogue that erased any ignorance about the 'colossal national resource' that FE represented. "After all, we collectively represent the biggest single training resource available to industry. We provide three times the volume of training offered by businesses on their own – and ten times the number of qualifications."

Chris Banks encouraged the sector to build on its success to become truly

LSC launches the 'Reading Room'

Visitors will be able to find information quickly... 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

To meet our obligations under the Freedom of Information Act, the LSC is launching a 'Reading Room', an innovative new online information centre to improve access to our extensive range of published documents.

The Reading Room will be available in the New Year through the documents channel of our website (www.lsc.gov.uk) as a dedicated new service for our wide range of partners, stakeholders and the public.

The Reading Room is a direct response to the Freedom of Information Act which, from January 1 2005, gives people the right to make a written request for information held by a public authority,

although this right is subject to a number of exemptions.

The Reading Room expands on what is currently available through our website and documents channel. It will provide details of the way the LSC is meeting its commitment to the Act and contains a database allowing users to search and retrieve documents. Visitors will be able to find information quickly and independently 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

It will enable users to examine information we publish as a matter of course, plus other information disclosed in response to requests under the Act. Users can make written requests for information

that has so far not been published under these arrangements.

Documents will be added to the Reading Room on a daily basis and information that is popularly requested will be included in a monthly feature.

Regular users of the website can be assured that all their 'favourites' will still be present and easily accessible.

Avril Ward, Director of Knowledge and Information Services, said: "The Reading Room aims to surpass our obligations under the Freedom of Information Act. Taking the lead in this way to make our documents accessible to people and organisations that want them is an important part of the LSC's pledge to be open and transparent with our partners in the learning and skills sector."

for learning and skills

demand-led, transform outcomes for learners and realise the vision to create a skilled and competitive workforce.

On the LSC's leadership role, he said: "It is the responsibility of the LSC to provide leadership to the various delivery systems for learning and training that exist in England. This means that we have to have a clear overall view of what's needed." This included effective planning and investment of all resources; being clear about how to make funding stretch as far as possible; and, driving up quality within the sector.

In a barnstorming performance, Digby Jones paid tribute to the sector. But he said skill shortages and the number of people in the workforce who were functionally illiterate were the compelling reasons why Britain needed a strong partnership between employers and providers.

The big challenge was dealing with these skills issues – the three and a half million people in the workforce who could not read or write properly, the total of seven million people who were functionally illiterate. He told college leaders: "We have got to get small businesses in Britain engaged with you much more than they

are; and you should reach out more than you do."

If employers and further education succeeded in giving Britain the skills it needed, the next generation would be grateful. He added: "If we fail, our kids will never forgive us."

The final keynote address on day three was by the LSC's Mark Hayson.

He reported on the good progress in the last year in preparing to meet the urgent challenges facing learning and skills and told his audience that the sector was now moving into a crucial transition year in its transformation. It would urgently need to focus its efforts on gaps in existing provision, in quality, in meeting employers' skills needs and on gaps in funding.

He described the LSC's recent initiatives – a major consultation on fees, a new strategy for the voluntary sector, the launch of our Equality and Diversity Strategy and a review of provision for learners with learning difficulties.

Links between colleges and schools in meeting the needs of 14-16 year olds were a great success, he said, and the LSC now looked forward to a key role in Mike

Tomlinson's 14-19 reforms.

Real gaps that existed would be tackled in partnership through the LSC agenda for change, focusing on the issues of employers and skills, quality, efficiency, data and funding. "Out of this agenda for change, I think we can all see a new vision emerging for the future of FE," Mark said.

The Government wanted funding focused on 16-18 participation, Apprenticeships, *Skills for Life* and Level 2. To meet these priorities, the LSC would put substantially more of the available resources into participation in 2005-06. In the Grant Letter, funding in 2005-06 would increase by £630 million above spending in 2004-2005. Mark said that to this the LSC would be adding more than £250 million – funds committed to the front line from budgets that did not directly deliver for learners. He acknowledged that some hard decisions would have to be made.

He said 2005 would be a real year of transition. "We want to make it a year of preparation for the major changes I have described – delivering more choice at 14-19, more skills and employer-led training and the very transformation of the sector."

New system means fewer and clearer communications from the LSC

The LSC is introducing a new system for producing and categorising its publications as part of a project that will also see a new, distinctive logo for the organisation.

The aim is to ensure that our literature is consistent, cost-effective and describes exactly whom it's for, what it's about and what action is required by the people who read it in the learning and skills sector.

The project means a clearly structured system for all our publications is being introduced across the LSC. Publications will now fall into one of four categories – information, consultation, action and promotion. They will clearly indicate whom the publication is from, its target audience, its purpose and clear instructions for action.

Jan Davison, Director of Corporate Communications, says: "We produce hundreds of publications every year. College principals and staff are already

very busy – we wanted to find out whether all these documents are needed and are giving the readers the information they need.

It is vital that we present ourselves as one organisation with our own strong identity. This helps to fulfil our leadership role in the learning and skills sector.

"In part, this has been driven by feedback we obtained from last summer's regional roadshows. We've spoken to providers and employers, and they all feel that the LSC needs to produce fewer, clearer communications. To make sure we were producing the right kind of solution, we held a workshop with college

principals as part of the process. So we're listening and responding to what our customers are telling us.

"We also wanted to identify cost savings in publications and print. We anticipate saving about £2 million a year, against a cost for the whole exercise of around £160,000."

There'll be a new look too, with the use of a limited set of colours and high impact black and white photography. We want all our communications – whether reports, leaflets, or information on the web – to look as if it comes from one organisation. Continuing improvement of the LSC website will also grow from this exercise and be a priority for 2005.

We're also planning to use a single, distinctive logo for the LSC. Jan Davison says: "It is vital that we present ourselves as one organisation with our own strong identity. This helps to fulfil our leadership role in the learning and skills sector."

Increase of £630m in LSC budget

This year's annual Grant Letter from the Secretary of State, Charles Clarke, sets out the LSC's key priorities for 2005-06 and increases the Government funding we receive to £9.3 billion in the coming year.

Chris Banks, LSC Chairman, received the Grant Letter from the Secretary of State at November's Association of Colleges' Annual Conference.

Charles Clarke says in the letter: "I expect the Council, working with key partners, to continue to deliver our long term reform strategy, including driving forward *Success for All*, the Skills Strategy, including Skills for Life, and the 14-19 Strategy.

"The Council must continue to drive up participation and attainment among young people and adults, including tackling basic skills and increasing the number of adults achieving a first

full Level 2 qualification, while also supporting progression to higher level skills and qualifications.

"The Council should also lead the transformation of the learning and skills sector, using 2005-06 to plan and build capacity in preparation for the challenges and changes that will step up a gear from 2006-07 onwards as the Five Year Strategy rolls out."

Total Government funding for 2005-06 at £9.3 billion is £630 million above planned expenditure for 2004-05.

By 2007-08, the total increase above 2004-05 will be £1.37 billion. The three-year allocations also provide for an increase of £196 million (2007-08 on 2005-06) in capital investment.

The Secretary of State welcomes organisational changes already made by the LSC, including the introduction of our Regional Directors. He states his department's commitment to achieving

a 15 per cent real terms reduction in its own and in its Non-Departmental Public Bodies' administrative costs by 2007-08 and outlines an administrative budget for the LSC of £235 million by 2007-08.

The Grant Letter is available through the home page of the LSC website (www.lsc.gov.uk).

The LSC's key priorities for 2005-06 are:

- choice and higher attainment for young people
- skills and engaging employers
- future funding reform
- further education colleges
- quality and preparing the sector for change
- equality and diversity.

Achieving greater equality and diversity in the sector

The LSC has launched its Equality and Diversity Strategy for the years 2004/07.

It aims to reach out to groups of people who are not currently involved in learning and improve learners' experience of the education and training they receive, helping them progress in a way that is appropriate to their abilities and aspirations.

Kit Roberts, LSC Director of Equality and Diversity, said: "For the past three years the LSC has worked hard to make a positive difference to individuals' learning experiences.

"We've introduced Equality and Diversity Impact Measures to identify local gaps and barriers to learning provision.

"We've made headway in addressing gender stereotyping in the take-up of Apprenticeships.

"We've been awarded the 'Two Ticks Positive About Disability' symbol by Jobcentre Plus, which shows that our own human resources policies meet exacting standards, and we are carrying on the legacy of the Commission for Black Staff in Further Education.

"This strategy will take us even further. We know that there is more to achieve in this area, and our concerted efforts will be focused on where we can have the most impact.

"Working in partnership with providers – the people who really make it work – we will deliver on this agenda".

Shirley Cramer, Chief Executive of the Dyslexia Institute, and Chair of the LSC's new Equality and Diversity Committee said: "It's a clear articulation of how the LSC will inform the sector on key equality

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and diversity issues. The Committee wholly endorses the strategy and we look forward to seeing it rolled out and realising results".

The Equality and Diversity Committee, announced in September, comprises college principals, employers, and leaders in the equality and diversity community and helps ensure that the LSC places equality and diversity high on the agenda.

Mark Haysom, the Chief Executive of the LSC, said: "The most important reason for delivering equality is because it is about people... it is about people with dreams and with needs, regardless of where they come from, regardless of what their backgrounds are, regardless of what advantages or disadvantages they have had in life.

"I believe passionately that they should have the opportunity to go as far as their talents and their efforts can take them".

The strategy is available on the LSC website.

The LSC Equality and Diversity Strategy comprises six priority areas:

Leadership: the LSC will provide vision and strong leadership in the sector, and make more positive use of planning and funding to achieve greater equality and diversity.

Reaching out to learners who are disengaged: the LSC will improve its approach to communicating with, and reaching out to, marginalized groups.

Supporting compliance: the LSC will work in partnership and keep partners up-to-date with relevant legal developments.

Inclusive/personalised learning: the LSC will work to ensure that provision responds effectively to individual learners.

Working with employers: the LSC will work with employers to promote the business case for diversity and inclusion in the workforce.

Measuring outcomes: the LSC will measure the impact and output of programmes and ensure that good practice is identified and shared.

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