

Learning and Skills Council

&

Learning Partnerships

National Policy Framework

FINAL DRAFT

13 November 2002

INTRODUCTION

1 Learning Partnerships (LPs) continue to play a key role in developing and co-ordinating local learning provision that reflects the needs of the local community and local businesses. The LSC recognises this key role and wishes to work closely with LPs to bring about further improvements to local learning provision.

2 This framework outlines the strategic role of LPs and offers guidance on the relationships between the LSC and LPs. It is intended to provide a focus and a steer for both the local LSCs and LPs on both the context and future delivery.

3 The network of LPs is as varied and diverse as the areas they cover, and in some areas they can be complex partnerships working with multiple agencies across organisations and structural boundaries. To reflect this, each local LSC is encouraged to develop a local protocol with their LPs setting out arrangements for joint-working. A template is provided at annex A to assist with this task.

ROLES

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4 The LSC became fully operational on 1 April 2001 and was given a leading role to play in delivering the Government's vision of the learning society. A society in which 'everyone has the opportunity to go as far as their talents and efforts will take them'¹. The strategic priorities of the LSC are to:

- raise participation and achievement by young people
- increase demand for learning by adults and equalise opportunities through better access to learning
- raise skill levels for national competitiveness
- raise the quality of education and training delivery
- improve effectiveness and efficiency².

5 The LSC comprises a national Council and 47 local Councils. The Council is seeking to establish a culture 'in which there is maximum local freedom and flexibility, with a national determined set of standards for quality and outcomes'³.

¹ The Learning and Skills Council Remit letter, DfEE, November 2000

² Strategic Framework to 2004, Corporate Plan, Learning and Skills Council, August 2001

³ Strategic Framework to 2003, Corporate Plan, Learning and Skills Council, August 2001

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6 Learning Partnerships were established in 1999, to bring coherence and better co-ordination by local providers in the development and delivery of local lifelong learning strategies.

7 Following a ministerial review, Margaret Hodge wrote to LPs in April 2002 setting out the core roles of LPs as:

- promoting provider collaboration in support of lifelong learning; and
- maximising the contribution of learning to local regeneration.

8 The review also confirmed that from April 2003 funding for LPs would be routed by the LSC.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

9 Local LSCs and LPs, by working together, will help plan and deliver integrated learning strategies. This closer alignment between the LSC and the LPs should:

- lead to sustainable growth in participation in successful learning
- better equip people for the demands placed on them by the workplace and for participation in the life of their communities; and
- help embed a culture of lifelong learning.

10 The LSC and LPs will develop a relationship characterised by a shared understanding of the learning and skills needs at national, regional and local levels and will work together to agree how best to meet those needs.

11 Each local LSC will be encouraged to agree a local protocol with the LPs in their area, setting out shared intentions and detailing how the local LSC and LPs will work together for the benefit of individuals and businesses.

12 It is helpful to understand the nature of the working relationship between local LSCs and LPs in the context of the different levels of operation of the former and the different roles of the latter.

Learning Partnerships as:

- strategic partners with the local LSC in developing policy and delivery practices
- suppliers, primarily through the grant regime which will come into place from April 2003, of particular services to the local LSC
- providing advice and counsel for the local LSC on learning issues

- voluntary and independent agencies with a separate but complementary role.

Local LSCs as:

- operating nationally as the strategic funding and planning body and contracting service
- acting locally through 47 separate Councils, each led by a local committee and Executive Director.

13 Local LSCs should build on the work of the LPs in their areas and in 2003/04 and beyond should consider their extended remit which may include:

- reviewing and responding to emerging policies, at a national, regional and local level
- producing persuasive and influential recommendations to their local LSCs and other strategic organisations, on how learning provision should develop within their areas
- articulating and promoting the role of learning in regeneration, influencing learning providers and stakeholders that operate in the LP area, and actively encouraging coherence and collaboration at a local level
- facilitating, in agreement with the local LSC, collaborative activities amongst learning providers that bring tangible benefits to all learners
- providing advice to the local LSC on the application of resources to maximise impact.

14 LPs that deliver this significant remit, will need to demonstrate a full understanding of the needs of local learners, the local economy, local communities and the quality and relevance of existing learning provision. They will need to have good relationships with other organisations such as Regional Development Agencies, Government Offices, Local Authorities and such local bodies that are relevant to deliver their remit (e.g. Connexions, Education Business Link Organisations, New Deal Partnerships, New Start Partnerships, Early Years Partnerships). They will also need to understand how the plans and activities of these organisations interrelate so that they can help bring about greater coherence of learning provision.

15 Each LP will be required to produce a local strategic and operational plan setting out the strategic objectives, priority areas and outputs agreed with the local LSC. Guidance on the production of the strategic and operation plan is contained in separate planning and contracting guidance produced by the LSC National Office [Date to be confirmed].

16 LPs focus will continue to be to improve local co-ordination and collaboration of lifelong learning. This focus may extend to areas of activity outside the remit of the LSC where LPs are likely to secure funding from sources other than the local LSC.

Membership and Operation of Learning Partnerships

17 The membership of LPs should be open and inclusive and include a balanced representation of stakeholders involved in lifelong learning, which will broadly reflect the areas it covers. All partners will be of equal status within the partnership.

18 No changes to the current LP boundaries will be made in the year 2003/04 unless all parties are in agreement to such changes.

19 The organisational structure and management of the LPs is primarily a matter for the Partnership itself. However, the local LSC will wish to be assured that the LP can demonstrate appropriate accountability for funds derived from the LSC.

20 Where the LP is not a legal entity, one of the members of the Partnership will need to agree to be the host body for contracting purposes. This should be agreed with the local LSC.

Transitional Arrangements

21 2003/04 will be a transition year during which the existing network of LPs will be retained and funding for individual LPs will be maintained at 2002/03 levels. The LSC will consult with LPs on any changes to national and local policy or any other initiatives, which may arise in relation to the future of LPs.

Guidance and Production of Local Protocol – Learning Partnerships

Introduction

1 The national policy framework recommends local LSCs and LPs agree a local protocol setting out how they will work in partnership for the benefit of individuals and businesses in the local LSC area.

2 This guidance outlines the underpinning principles and core elements for the local protocol. The guidance is not prescriptive but provides a template, which should help local LSCs and LPs to develop and agree appropriate protocols.

Underpinning Principles

3 The protocol between local LSCs and LPs will be underpinned by the following principles:

- **Openness** – both parties agree to conduct joint discussions, negotiations or related dealings in an open inclusive manner
- **Resources** – both parties will endeavour to ensure that the appropriate level of resources are made available to carry out any tasks that need to be carried out
- **Confidentiality** – both parties agree to respect the need for confidentiality from either party in relation to work done. Both parties agree not to release the nature of any discussions to a wider audience unless both parties agree (this will not be unreasonably withheld by either party)
- **Information transfer** – both parties agree to keep each other apprised of any policy and practice developments. This will involve briefings at regular communication meetings as well as ad hoc bilateral meetings as appropriate
- **Communication arrangements** - a range of communication arrangements will be put in place to ensure an effective and meaningful dialogue between local LSCs and LPs.

Core Contents of the Local Protocol

4 It is recommended that the following headings should be included in local protocols between local LSCs and LPs and consideration should be given to the issues raised in the paragraphs that follow:

- **How the organisations will work together**
- **How the LPs might support the aims of the LSC**
- **How the local LSC might support the aims of the LPs**
- **Agreed priority areas**
- **Agreed areas of joint working**

How the Organisations will work together

5 The local LSCs and the LPs have a mutual interest in working together to develop coherent lifelong learning strategies, that benefit individuals and businesses. Within the local protocol, both parties will want to outline how the local LSCs and their LPs will work to meet this mutual interest.

6 Where there is more than one LP in a local LSC area, local protocols should seek to bring about coherence and where appropriate consistency between separate LPs.

7 The local protocols should reflect the full contribution that each party can make. Below are some examples of ways in which the local LPs might support the aims of the local LSCs and how the local LSC might support the aims of their LPs.

How the LP might support the aims of the local LSC

- Use their expertise and collaborative working to optimise learning opportunities for people and businesses in their areas
- Raise issues with the local LSC in the role of 'honest brokering' regarding arrangements for provision and the extent to which these are impacting locally
- Promote the LSC LIF and ESF funding opportunities available to stakeholders through hosting events and workshops. Offer advice to the local LSC on the allocation of discretionary funding
- Facilitate bringing together key partners to ensure coherence of provision
- Invite local LSC representative to attend LP Board meetings
- Provide a communication link for the local LSC to contact local stakeholders and hold events which promote and disseminate good practice and achievements in a variety of learning contexts
- Provide the local LSC with feedback from existing and potential learners, employers and others on learning and training provision

How the local LSCs might support the aims of the LPs

- Consult LPs as they develop their strategic and operational plans
- Consult LPs on priorities and proposals for the use of discretionary funding
- Use the LPs as a key channel for the facilitation and brokerage of prospective projects
- Seek the advice of LPs on maximising local provision
- Use the LP as a conduit to engage local partners to obtain feedback
- Work with LPs to target specific cohorts of learners or discreet learning communities
- Agree and support the LPs in their role to promote the role of learning in regeneration
- Support the work of LPs with other key agencies

- Provide the LPs with research information detailing local activity and trends analysis

Agreed Learning Partnership local priority areas

8 The local protocol should set out agreed local priority areas. The nature of those priorities will be determined between the local LSC and the LPs, however the following suggestions might be helpful in acting as an aide memoir to local LSC and LPs identifying local priority areas.

9 Possible options for inclusion as priorities are:

- Areas reviews/inspections and action planning
- Basic skills provision
- 14-19 provision
- FE & HE provision
- Identifying and disseminating good practice
- Developing skills and knowledge plans
- Supporting the local learning infrastructure
- Facilitating quality improvements
- E-learning/ICT
- Early years
- Widening participation and progression
- Regeneration activities
- Workforce development

This list is not exhaustive, but it is supplied for illustration purposes.

Agreed areas of joint working

10 The local protocol should set out any particular areas of joint working between the local LSC and LPs. These will be determined between local LSCs and LPs to reflect local circumstances.