

LSC Position Paper on Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-accredited Learning

Introduction

1 The purpose of this paper is to outline recent development work for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) undertaken by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) with the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) on a national system for recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning. The outcomes of this work are summarised and an indication is given of the next stages. Further advice and guidance on this area of work will be issued periodically.

Definition of non-accredited learning

2 In this paper, the term 'non-accredited learning' is used to describe formal and non-formal provision which does not lead directly to any form of external accreditation, award or qualification. It is recognised that some non-accredited learning opportunities are offered in the FE sector, funded as 'other provision': by community and voluntary sector providers or partners of providers; through work-force development; Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes; through Ufl/learndirect; and in school sixth forms. In future a wider range of providers may seek Council funding for non-accredited provision. The development work undertaken to date has relevance in these contexts. It is also relevant in relation to the development of new forms of provision arising from activity to address the government's social inclusion agenda, for example, in the context of Neighbourhood Renewal.

Background

3 The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for the planning, funding, monitoring and quality improvement of all post-16 education and training excluding higher education.

4 *Planning provision of learning opportunities for adults:* the Council works through local LSCs with a range of providers to plan the range of provision designed to meet the needs of young people and adults and to stimulate demand for learning. As well as funding provision for adults to gain qualifications and 'first rung' programmes enabling progression, the Council funds opportunities for learning for personal development and for 'study for its own sake'. The range of provision is planned to meet individual, social and economic needs and to contribute to regeneration, community self-confidence and capacity, citizenship and social inclusion.

5 *Funding:* it is intended that as much as possible of the provision funded by the Council will be within a formula funding approach in due course. It is recognised that some informal, innovative adult learning may not lend itself to inclusion within the formula. Proposals were made in Circular 02/16 as to ways in which achievements in non-accredited learning may be funded.

6 *Monitoring*: the Council must secure high quality provision, high standards and value for money from all its providers with the minimum of bureaucracy.¹ The Council must assure itself of the quality of any organisation or body in receipt of LSC funding through quality and audit systems that enable accurate judgements to be made about the performance of providers. The Council will need to have in place arrangements to assure itself of the robustness of the systems providers have in place to recognise and record progress and achievement in non-accredited learning.

7 *Quality Improvement*: The primary responsibility for quality lies with the provider. The starting point for quality improvement is accurate self-assessment, based on evidence. The Council needs to be confident that providers have systems in place that enable them to recognise and record learners' progress and achievement in non-accredited learning which inform their judgements of the effectiveness of their provision in meeting learners' needs and aspirations.

8 While the primary responsibility for quality lies with the provider, the Council will work closely with providers through local LSCs, giving support where necessary to make improvements in quality assurance systems. This will include arrangements for recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning.

9 *Pilot Inspections of ACL*: During the pilot inspections of ACL it was found that:

- there was insufficient recording and checking of learners' progress
- initial assessment was not adequate, particularly in programmes which were accessible to all learners
- there was too much emphasis on end of programme assessment and the outcomes of learning when compared with formative assessment of progress during the programme
- insufficient attention was given to individual learners' needs
- insufficient information was available on progress and achievement
- there was insufficient analysis of learners' evaluations.

10 In addition, the report found that:

'Little of the adult learning in this sector is accredited. Not all learners wish to pursue accreditation and many providers are still developing systems to monitor the progress, outcomes and destinations of learners. Pilot centres provided numerous examples of the impact of courses on peoples lives, of the opportunities for personal growth, and many other outcomes that are difficult to quantify. Many learners and tutors considered these outcomes to be examples of the achievement of learning goals. Given the varied social, economic and educational backgrounds and aspirations of adult learners, these qualitative outcomes can provide only a partial picture of the extent to which

¹ Secretary of State's remit letter to the LSC, 9 November 2000, paragraph 35

*learners achieve their learning goals. The absence of data and other measurements of achievement in all the pilot inspections made it difficult for inspectors to judge learners' achievements. Evidence of achievements is collected and used in different ways by different providers. It was sometimes difficult to compare achievements by different learners at the same centre and often more difficult to compare providers with one another.*²

11 In its *Quality Improvement Strategy 2003/06* the Council is proposing to develop measures and targets for the sector as a whole. The proposed measures include improvements in learner success rates in FE provision delivered by local adult education institutions.

12 To assist providers in target setting for improvement the Council will gather and make available baseline data on learner success rates. Measures have not yet been established from which targets for improvements in success rates in the context of non-accredited learning may be set. This will not be possible before 2003-4.³

13 The Council recognises that there are inadequacies in the different ways in which success is currently measured, and is working with the DfES and the inspectorates to develop better measures, including those relating to non-accredited learning.

14 *The centrality of the learner:* the Council's guiding principle in its approach to performance improvement is that its over-riding responsibility is to the learner.⁴ A key principle in the Council's quality improvement strategy is to 'put the experience, aspirations and success of learners at the heart of what we do'.³

Project Work by the LSDA with the NIACE

15 During 2001/02 LSDA was asked by the LSC to devise a method for recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning which could be applied nationally and in a range of learning contexts. The method was intended to provide a reliable means of recognising and recording achievement in the absence of formal assessment linked to awards or qualifications, in order to promote parity of esteem. The extent to which such a national method might enable the aggregation and analysis of information about learners' achievements in order to provide useful and reliable baseline data was to be a consideration.

² ALI (2002) *Summary Report: Adult and Community Learning Pilot Inspections, October 2001- March 2002*

³ LSC (2002) *Quality Improvement Strategy 2003-06 Consultation Document*

⁴ LSC Circular 02/06 *Quality Improvement: Intervention to Improve the Performance of Providers, paragraph 4.*

16 The development work drew on earlier work undertaken by the LSDA and by NIACE for the Further Education Funding Council and the DfEE/DfES in which the theoretical and practical aspects of different systems and strategies for identifying and evaluating the outcomes for learners on non-accredited learning were explored. This included research into the views and perceptions of learners of such approaches. Account was taken of developments in the field as providers responded to the requirements of the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) in the context of self-assessment processes and the LSDA's own and other agencies' relevant current research and development work. NIACE has contributed to the development work and the Council has provided support throughout.

The proposed method

17 The method which has been developed by LSDA, NIACE and the Council's Quality and Standards directorate acknowledges the paramount importance of the diverse needs, purposes and interests of learners. It seeks to address the requirements and interests of other stakeholders, particularly providers and the Council and local LSCs. In addition, it takes account of the wider needs of communities, employers in relation to workforce development and the imperative to attract potential learners ie, those not currently participating in learning.

A national approach to recognising achievement in non-accredited learning

18 It is proposed that the national approach to be developed (hereafter 'the Approach') will comprise two elements:

- the implementation of a defined Staged Process by providers for recognising and recording progress and achievement
- the development and implementation of a national system for validating the systems providers have in place to implement and support the Staged Process, to ensure that these are robust.

The Staged Process

19 It is proposed that a Staged Process of essential or 'core' elements, with associated evidence requirements, be adopted by all providers in receipt of Council funding for non-accredited learning.

20 The adoption of such a Staged Process, consistent with the CIF, will enable providers to make sound judgements as to the effectiveness of their arrangements for and practice in recognising and recording learners' progress and achievements through rigorous self-assessment. It will support providers in identifying areas for improvement and contribute to the raising of standards and an enhanced experience for learners.

21 The elements of the Staged Process are set out below. Providers' internal systems should also make specific provision for learners' evaluation

of their learning experience, and feedback from learners which contributes to and informs providers' judgements during self-assessment and their strategies for continuous improvement, including programme design.

22 The Staged Process has been designed to:

- focus on and promote the needs and interests of learners
- take account of learners' diverse and sometimes multiple purposes in learning
- allow for negotiation of the content and outcomes of learning programmes
- encourage learners to reflect on and recognise their own progress and achievement, thus increasing their confidence
- promote and support informed learner self-assessment, peer assessment and dialogue about learning and achievement between learners and tutors/trainers
- enable both the achievement of planned learning objectives and learning outcomes not specified at the outset to be recognised and valued
- promote good practice in teaching, learning and assessment
- enhance providers' quality assurance and improvement practices.

23 Providers will also be expected to ensure that learners' views are taken into account in the planning of future provision.

24 The Staged Process will also:

- be open to flexibility in interpretation and application, to take account of local needs and circumstances and the particular features of the learning programme
- require the minimum level of formal documentation in line with the Council's commitments to avoid increasing bureaucracy
- operate alongside and support the implementation of the CIF
- be compatible with the Council's funding arrangements
- provide a nationally consistent and responsive approach to recognising and recording progress and achievement in ACL.

The elements of the Staged Process

<i>Element</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
<p>1. Aim(s) appropriate to an individual learner or groups of learners (CIF Q1 and Q5)</p>	<p>Clearly stated aim(s) for all programmes</p> <p><i>[Could include aims which do not specifically mention a learning aspiration, for example, in some informal and community based non-accredited learning]</i></p>
<p>2. Initial assessment to establish the learner's starting point (CIF Q4, 1 and 2)</p>	<p>Record of outcomes of process of establishing learners' starting points</p> <p><i>[Process and level of detail will vary according to the nature and duration of the learning programme. Records may include learners' self-assessment of prior learning and/or learning and support needs]</i></p>
<p>3. Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives: initial, renegotiated and revised (CIF Q2, Q4 and Q5)</p>	<p>Clearly stated suitably challenging objectives for all programmes and, wherever feasible, for each learner</p> <p><i>[The level of challenge which is appropriate will vary according to initial assessment of learners' needs, aspirations and starting points. Learning objectives may be amended during the learning programme, for example, as a result of formative assessment]</i></p>

<i>Element</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
<p>4. Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during programme (formative assessment): tutor feedback to learners, learner reflection, progress reviews (CIF Q1 and Q4)</p>	<p>Records of learner self-assessment, group and peer assessment; tutor records of assessment activities and individual/group progress and achievement. Learners' files, journals, diaries, portfolios, artwork; videos, audiotapes, performances, exhibitions and displays; individual or group learner testimony; artefacts, photographs and other forms of evidence</p> <p><i>[Research indicates that learners prefer the term 'feedback' and that learners' capacity for reflection and informed self-assessment would be enhanced by more dialogue with tutors and the sharing of criteria and norms used to evaluate progress and achievement]</i></p>
<p>5. End of programme learner self-assessment; tutor summative assessment; review of overall progress and achievement. This will be in relation to appropriately challenging learning objectives identified at the beginning/during the programme. It may include recognition of learning outcomes not specified during the programme (CIF Q1 and Q4)</p>	<p>Records of learner self-assessment, group and peer assessment; tutor records of assessment activities and individual/group progress and achievement. Learners' files, journals, diaries, portfolios, artwork; videos, audiotapes, performances, exhibitions and displays; individual or group learner testimony; artefacts, photographs and other forms of evidence</p> <p><i>[Evidence is likely to comprise qualitative and quantitative information and to demonstrate planned learning outcomes and learning gains identified subsequently]</i></p>

Table 1: Core elements of the Staged Process and possible sources of evidence

25 *Course/programme evaluation (CIF Q5):* In practice the last element of the Staged Process may take place at the same time as evaluation of the course/learning programme by learners. Providers may invite feedback from

learners, based on reflection and supported as necessary, about the effectiveness of the learning programme and support provided. This will inform tutors' and providers' self-assessment and may result in modifications to provision for example to the range and/or design of programmes, delivery and assessment methods and support arrangements.

26 The process of course programme evaluation contributes to wider quality assurance and improvement processes but does not directly provide evidence of learner progress and achievement.

Consultation on the proposed Staged Process

27 In May 2001 the outline methodology and proposed Staged Process described here were considered at a seminar convened by the Quality and Standards directorate of the LSC. The objectives of the seminar were to evaluate outcomes of the development work undertaken and to contribute to the development of a strategy to implement a national approach to the recognition of achievement in non-accredited learning for the sector.

28 Delegates attending the seminar included representatives of the LSC, the DfES, the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, LSDA, NIACE, the University for Industry (Ufi), the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) and the National Open College Network (NOCN), in addition to representatives of particular interest groups including the Association of Colleges (AoC), HOLEX, the Association of National Specialist Colleges (NATSPEC) and the National Bureau for Students With Disabilities (SKILL).

29 During the seminar the relationship between the proposed Staged Process, the CIF and current provider practices was discussed. A consensus emerged that supported the adoption of the Staged Process. The Process was seen as compatible with the interests of learners in that it facilitated the recognition and valuing of learners' achievements, both intrinsic and in the context of progression.

30 The Staged Process offers a 'tool' for encouraging the development of good practice and quality improvement. The definition of 'core' elements would support the interface between the CIF and providers' practice and development. Definitions of essential evidence would link to the work of the ALI in making available to providers guidance on interpreting the evidence requirements relating to the CIF.

31 The Staged Process interpreted flexibly and with due regard to local factors was regarded as compatible with all types of formal and informal learning including non-accredited programmes. It had the potential to be adapted to support the process of identifying learning gained, for example, through participation in community regeneration activities, thus offering a 'bridge' into more formal learning activity which might be LSC funded.

Relationship between work on the national Approach and funding proposals

32 The relationship between the Approach, a major focus of which is quality improvement, and the LSC's proposals for funding the achievement element of non-accredited learning programmes was considered at the May consultation seminar. The proposals relating to options for the funding of achievement in ACL were set out in the Council's consultation circular on arrangements for funding ACL from 2003/04.⁵

33 The Circular set out three options for the funding of achievement in ACL, all of which would be compatible with implementation of the Staged Process

34 Responses to Circular 02/16 indicated that the preferred option for funding achievement is *Option Two*, details of which are included below.

A national validation system to support implementation of the Staged Process⁶

35 *Option Two* proposed that in relation to the funding of achievement, providers demonstrate that they have a robust system in place for the implementation of the core elements of the Staged Process in their wider quality assurance arrangements. It was proposed that this system, rather than individual learners' achievements, would be subject to audit arrangements. Achievement would be evaluated at provider level on the basis of auditable evidence of robust quality assurance processes as well as summary information about learners' achievement. Funding for achievement would be allocated as a block sum rather than on the basis of individual learner achievement. Providers' systems may be similar to but simpler than those required for qualification provision.

36 In order to move forward in relation to funding the achievement element of non-accredited provision using *Option Two*, the Council will need to put in place a national process for assuring itself of the robustness of providers' systems for implementing the Staged Process. This could include a process of validation and ensuing endorsement ('kitemarking'). Further research will be undertaken into the feasibility of such a national validation system.

Relationship between the Approach and other LSC processes

37 *Performance Review*: The Council has undertaken a review of performance review. Further pilot ACL performance reviews have recently taken place. The relationship between implementation of the Approach

⁵ LSC Circular 02/16: Consultation on Arrangements for Funding Adult and Community Learning from 2003/04

⁶ The term 'national validation system' is used here to denote the development and implementation of a system which ensures that the systems providers use to support the Staged Process are robust.

including the Staged Process and any national system for the validation and endorsement of providers' systems and Performance Review will require clarification.

38 *New Providers*: The Council has in place processes for evaluating potential new providers. The relationship between the Approach including the Staged Process and any validation/endorsement arrangements will require clarification.

39 *Recognition of Excellence*: The Council is working with the DfES on reviewing learning and skills beacon status across the full range of learning and skills providers. Links to the Approach would need to be clarified.

Summary of present position

40 The Council's concerns are:

- to ensure that good practice is identified, disseminated and extended in order to drive up standards and improve the learning experience and outcomes for learners.
- to adopt a proactive approach to encouraging and supporting providers' quality improvement
- to raise standards and improve providers' processes and practices whilst minimising the burden of bureaucracy
- to ensure that formula funding does not distort the relationship between learners' needs and the learning programmes they access and that the transition to formula funding does not destabilise institutions
- to ensure that the national methodology adopted for recognising and recording achievement in non-accredited learning has, in its practical application, sufficient flexibility to have relevance in informal learning taking place in a range of contexts including learning arising from community based and voluntary activity.

41 The Council considers that the proposed Staged Process offers a sound basis on which to move forward. It is based on consensus as to best practice and is compatible with the requirements of the CIF, which is predicated on the centrality of learners' needs.

42 The implementation of the Staged Process will reflect learners' interests. Non-accredited provision will be well planned and focused on the achievement of agreed objectives relevant to learners, and will provide learners with feedback on their progress as well as recognition of their achievements. The Staged Process encourages the recognition and recording of relevant unplanned outcomes and thus allows for the demonstration of 'added value,' for example, in relation to gains in confidence.

Initial assessment which has clearly identified learners' starting points has the potential to enable learners and others to see 'distance travelled'.

43 The Staged Process will meet the needs of providers in promoting good practice and supporting evidence-based self-assessment and planned quality improvement.

44 The development of appropriate arrangements for monitoring the implementation of the core elements of the Staged Process will require embedding within providers' delivery and quality assurance processes. The Approach will ensure that the Council has confidence in the robustness of providers' arrangements for recognising achievement in non-accredited learning.

45 The adoption and effective implementation of the Staged Process and the Approach across the sector in a wide range of contexts will provide a consistent and coherent model for the recognition and recording of learners' progress and achievement in non-accredited learning.

Next steps

46 *Aim:* the aim of the next stage of development will be to move increasing numbers of providers in the medium term to a point at which it will be possible, through effective implementation of the Staged Process, to make clear and succinct judgements relating to the achievements of individual learners and to provide summary information to the Council about the achievements of cohorts of learners.

47 *Steering Group:* In order to achieve this the Council has invited representation from local LSCs on a steering group to oversee the next stages of the development work.⁷

48 *Consultation on Arrangements for Funding Adult and Community Learning from 2003/04:* In planning the detail of further work on recognising achievement, the Council will take account of responses to the proposed options for the funding of the achievement element of non-accredited learning programmes.

49 *Future development work* on the Approach is likely to include:

- a review of current provider practice
- an exploration of the feasibility of a national validation process as part of the Approach
- a programme of demonstration projects to test out the Staged Process and validation processes in a number of different contexts and types of learning

⁷ LSC ACL newsletter 8, July 2002

- evaluation of the demonstration projects and a wide consultation which will inform the final design of the Approach
- guidance on systems and processes associated with implementation of the Approach
- the creation of useable materials to support implementation of key processes
- identification of training and development needs
- the development of the necessary infrastructure for implementing the Approach in a variety of contexts across the sector.

Learning and Skills Council Quality and Standards Directorate, January 2003

If you would like to comment on any matters arising from this position paper or you are interested in becoming involved, please contact Alison Rowland at Alison.Rowland@lsc.gov.uk or 024 7682 3270

Reports and publications relevant to the recognition of achievement in ACL

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- Greenwood, M., Merton, A. and Taylor, S., *An evaluation of non-schedule 2 pilot projects*. LSDA/NIACE, 2000
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