

# **Learning Partnerships**

**Operational Guidance for local  
Learning and Skills Councils,  
covering the period April 2004 to  
March 2005**

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# Operational Guidance

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## Introduction

1 This operational guidance sets out the policy, planning and budgeting arrangements for 2004-05 for Learning Partnerships (LPs). It is also available on the LSC intranet. Local LSCs are asked to pass a copy of this document to their LPs as soon as possible. There will be no separate National Policy Framework for 2004-05; the key areas have been merged with this guidance.

2 The guidance reflects the recent consultation carried out by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), using research from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and the responses of individuals and organisations. The background and outcomes of the Review are set out at Annex 1 to this Guidance. In addition we have tried to ensure operational continuity between the 2003-04 and 2004-05 years.

3 Local LSCs should adhere to the principles set out here, using flexibilities where these are provided, but supporting our efforts to ensure national consistency in the treatment of LPs. In particular, and taking into account available resources and capacity and in the context of the roles of respective stakeholders, that established LPs are the first choice for meeting our obligation to “sustain local partnerships in every area” to:

- promote provider collaboration; and
- maximise the input of learning to local regeneration.

4 In considering how best to ensure national consistency in this respect, we may from time to time gather information about the role of LPs through independent research. Each Annual Operational or Business Plan should make appropriate reference to collaboration and regeneration, as set out in paragraph 3 of Annex 2, where we also set out the structure of the Annual Operational or Business Plan.

5 In the exceptional circumstances of a local LSC failing to reach agreement with an established LP to deliver this core role it will need to demonstrate in its annual plan for 2004/05 how it will sustain the activities set out at paragraph 3 above. When an LP is not performing to the required standard, local LSCs are strongly advised that they are seen to treat LPs similarly to other local service providers by setting performance improvement targets within a reasonable time frame before discontinuing funding.

6 The LSC will support LP networking at regional and national levels through ‘in kind’ support, such as joining steering groups and providing comments on key documents. The DfES has indicated that it is unable to provide funding for the National Learning Partnerships Network. Funding for the Professional Development Programme for Learning Partnership managers will continue to the end of 2005.

## Budget and allocation

7 For 2003-04 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) agreed that the £9.8million budget for Learning Partnerships (LPs) would be ring-fenced within the LSC's Local Intervention and Development (LID) budget for one year only. The then chief executive of the LSC gave Ministers a commitment to continuity of Partnership funding during the period to 31 March 2004. The £9.8million was ring fenced within LID, for LPs in the 2003-04 financial year.

8 The LID budget in 2004-05 is less than it was in 2003-04 and no longer ring-fences money specifically for Learning Partnerships. We have considered the impact of these changes during our review of LPs and will work with them now to ensure that what we buy continues to be relevant to our corporate objectives. Any funding identified by a local LSC for the continued support of an LP is therefore not ring-fenced to LPs or their activities. It is for local LSCs to prioritise their budget for LID and to allocate funding to support LPs accordingly from within those priorities.

9 We are expecting local LSCs to seek to sustain viable partnerships to deliver their core role but we will not be recommending minimum or maximum levels of funding for LP funding agreements.

## Planning & funding principles

10 LPs are required to agree with the local LSC a 3-year development plan and annual Business or Operational Plan. These documents should provide an appropriate fit with the local LSC's own plans. An outline structure for the annual Business Plan is provided at Annex 2.

11 Principles for the development plan are set out at Annex 3. This can be adapted to suit local purposes. The principles are proposed in the light of the report *Learning Partnerships: Maximising the Contribution of Learning to Local Regeneration* (NIACE for the DfES, August 2003). The LSC acknowledges the opportunity to draw on the recommendations in that report.

12 We intend to move towards a position where we are able to give LPs greater assurance as to their future, including through the use of 3-year funding, where that is appropriate. The facility to do so already exists within the arrangements for funding from the LID budget. Where this is agreed appropriate performance measures will be suitable for the LSC-funded element of the LP's work. Where a local LSC is not satisfied with the performance of a particular LP, it is expected that a performance improvement strategy would precede any consideration of withdrawal of support and funding for that LP.

13 Local LSCs should consider the issue of LP boundaries in the context of their Strategic Area Review. We do acknowledge that affordability may be an issue where there are multiple LPs in any one local LSC area. Where this

is the case, local LSCs should seek to broker a rationalisation of LP delivery costs within and between its LPs in order to sustain local partnership activity. Local LSCs, LPs and possibly Local Strategic Partnerships should collaborate to achieve this.

14 Each local LSC should already have in place a local protocol with their LPs setting out arrangements for joint working. For guidance on the fit of the local protocol and planning please see Annex 4. The protocol suggested in last year's guidance has become embedded in local planning. The Review Group recommended that the protocol should be subsumed within the 3 year development plan.

15 Local LSCs should agree a payment schedule with each LP, which reflects the activity taking place during the year. We do not want to prescribe prices for every activity being carried out, but we do want to be sure that the overall impact of the LP is valuable in the context of the local environment and secures value for money for the LSC.

16 Funds can be released quarterly or monthly to the LP, ahead of activity delivery where agreed locally, or less frequently where that suits both parties locally, but the agreed schedule should be adhered to. The schedule should enable delivery, commencing once agreement between LSC and LP has been reached on the content of the annual Operational Plan. For payments to be made ahead of actual delivery, there will of course need to be a system in place that enables recovery of payments made for activity that, for whatever reason, doesn't actually take place.

17 Local LSCs and Partnerships have flexibility to adapt Plans, by agreement, during the year, so that they continue to reflect local circumstances. The recommended timing of reviews is that as a minimum, these should be conducted quarterly.

18 Performance information relating to the chosen success, or impact, measures should flow in to the local LSC in advance of the quarterly review, for discussion at it. The appropriate claim for the next period's funding should also be submitted for consideration at this Review and passed for payment when the LSC is satisfied with the progress made against the Plan and the schedule of activity proposed for the next funding period.

## **Contracting process**

19 The LSCs new generic Funding Agreement documents (contracts), prepared by Council Solicitors must be used when contracting with LPs. The Funding Agreements can be downloaded by local LSCs from the intranet by following this link:

<http://intranet/Portal/Portal/Functional%20Groups/Core%20Functions/Operations/SLSF/LID/>

LID contracting guidance is contained therein. We recommend that local LSCs give their LPs early sight of the example grant funding agreement attached as an annex to the LID guidance. That is the document upon which the local LSC/LP contract must be based.

## **Management information**

20 The nature of the activity to be undertaken by each LP, together with the individual nature of each local LSC & LP interface, means that local agreement will be required on what constitutes valuable management information (MI), to be set in the context of each LP Business or Operational Plan. Such MI should allow the local LSC to, as a minimum:

- determine progress made towards delivery of Operational Plan objectives; and
- ensure LP Boards reflect the communities they serve, work well in practice and deliver value for money.

21 The Management Information collected quarterly in 2003-04 through a returns template is no longer required for national compilation for 2004-05. Local offices will wish to agree and retain locally the success measures for each LP and its activities during planning discussions.

22 Local LSCs are recommended to refer to the menu of Suggested Impact Measures at annex 5 when choosing measures of success. These have been grouped under the themes of the five dimensions of the Three Year Development Plan (as set out in Annex 3). Local LSCs may wish to use one from each grouping to provide coverage of 'hard' and 'soft' impact measures.

## **Managing budgets**

23 There will be no specific requirement to report on Learning Partnership budgets in 2004-05. Local LSCs will be expected to provide Finance Directorate with general LID expenditure profiles at the beginning of the year and to maintain those, spending as close to profile as possible.

## **Where to go for advice**

24 Local LSCs should handle all enquiries in the first instance from Learning Partnerships, referring on to National Office for advice only where necessary.

25 National Office Policy and Development Directorate, (policy matters including annex 1, 3, 4 and 5 of this Guidance) [sue.yeomans@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:sue.yeomans@lsc.gov.uk)

26 Questions about operational matters included in the main body of this Guidance should be directed to Alex Sutherland in the National Office Operations Directorate, [alex.sutherland@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:alex.sutherland@lsc.gov.uk)

27 Queries about contracting should be directed in the first instance to Bill Williams in the National Office Operations Directorate, [William.Williams@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:William.Williams@lsc.gov.uk)

# Annex 1: Learning Partnerships Review 2003

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## Background

1 The LSC is a non departmental public body with 47 local arms. It aims to present a reliably consistent strategic approach to the planning, funding and quality improvement of post 16 learning opportunities across England. Within their remit, local LSCs are obliged to sustain local partnerships to promote collaboration and maximise the contribution of learning to local regeneration – the core role of the already established network of LPs as set out by ministers following the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) review 2002.

2 In May 2003, the LSC commissioned the NIACE review into its relationship with LPs in order to inform Operational Guidance for 2004-05 because previously independent funding of LPs passes into the discretionary element of local LSC budgets from that date, but ministerial expectations of their role remain the same.

3 At its first meeting in June 2003, the steering group set the terms of reference for the review, agreeing that it would:

- look at how LPs can best support the LSC corporate objectives and targets and identify how the LP wider role can add value to the LSC corporate objectives and targets;
- identify and agree appropriate impact measures so that we can measure the value added that LPs bring in helping the LSC meet its Corporate objectives and targets;
- consider what scope there is to enhance the role of Learning Partnerships eg in relation to workforce development;
- recommend the best structural fit for LPs from 2004: there are currently 101<sup>1</sup> LPs. The review will consider the number of LPs and the appropriateness of this structure.<sup>2</sup>

4 The steering group received and discussed the draft report of the independent review at its second meeting on 8 September 2003. The draft was also shared with the Chair of the Learning Partnerships Network at a separate meeting. Comments from these two meetings have informed the final report. The steering group has drawn up a series of key questions based on the report's findings in relation to the original remit. These questions are

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<sup>1</sup> The recent changes to boundaries in Greater Manchester has now increased this number to 104.

<sup>2</sup> It was agreed following discussion that this was an unrealistic aim.



the subject of this consultation but comments are also invited on the broader NIACE recommendations. The consultative responses will inform LSC operating guidance due to be issued to local LSCs by the end of the calendar year.

## Summary of Consultation Responses

5 Ninety consultation responses were received, the distribution of responses by provider type are shown in the table below:

Organisation	Percentage of Responses
Learning Partnerships	70%
Local Education Authorities	4%
Local Learning and Skills Councils	17%
Further Education Colleges	4%
Government Offices	1%
Sixth Form Colleges	1%
Other organisations	3%

6 A good overall response was achieved. Over half of all LPs responded although whilst only a third of local LSCs sent in a response, some Executive Directors opted to comment informally through their networks.

7 The table below details the responses to each of the 13 consultation questions:

Question	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
1	84%	9%	7%
2	97%	0%	3%
3	42%	47%	11%
4	70%	28%	2%
5	N/a	N/a	N/a
6	56%	40%	4%
7	94%	2%	4%
8	58%	34%	8%
9	27%	64%	9%
10	86%	9%	5%
11	86%	7%	8%
12	88%	5%	7%
13	41%	41%	18%

## **Annex 2: Annual Operational or Business Plan Structure 2004-05**

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Partnership contact details (name, address, telephone number & e-mail)

LSC contact details (name, address, telephone number & e-mail)

### Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Summary of 3-year strategic vision
- 3 Collaboration & Regeneration
- 4 Communication/Community Accountability
- 5 Evaluation

## Introduction

- 1 Include current position statement with:
  - Partnership member details;
  - the wider role of the Partnership;
  - details of other funding sources supporting activities funded in part by the LSC; and
  - a review of the 12 months work from April 2003 to March 2004.

## Summary of 3-year strategic vision

- 2 Highlighting the key points from the Partnership's 3-year strategic vision.

## Collaboration & Regeneration

- 3 *Partnership/Local LSC to insert table.* Specify, with cost and timescale, what the LSC is buying in the way of activity to deliver the Department for Education & Skills agenda for Learning Partnerships, promoting provider collaboration in support of lifelong learning and maximising the contribution of learning to local regeneration.

**Table to show objective, milestones (where agreed), whether the objective targets collaboration, regeneration or both, how it will be met, approximate cost of meeting the objective (note, costs for each activity are not required), timescale for delivery and success measures.**

## Communication/Community accountability

- 4 Detail how the Partnership will communicate its plans and results to the community it serves (examples might include through 'feature' coverage via local media and by way of publication of an Annual Report) and how it will consult widely with stakeholders in developing future arrangements, in respect of collaboration and regeneration activities, where the Partnership is expected to make a contribution. Describe briefly any changes or planned changes to boundaries of the LP or any mergers or planned mergers with other partnerships or agencies.

## Evaluation

- 5 Set out agreed local plans for evaluation of Learning Partnership activity, including partners to be consulted on performance.

## Annex 3: Principles for the Three Year Development Plan: Learning Partnerships

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This annex draws on the advice to the DfES prepared by Niace, *Learning Partnerships: Maximising the Contribution of Learning to Local Regeneration*.

1 The LP should draw up a three year development plan from which it will draw its annual Business or Operating Plan. The Development Plan need not be a lengthy document and should focus on how the LP will work with the local LSC as well as making reference to their wider planning context<sup>3</sup>. The LSC recognises that the LPs priorities are agreed by its Board within the context of the local strategic agenda and wishes to understand how those priorities relate to those of the LSC.

2 The three year development plan should open with a statement about its activity and objectives that will constitute a minimum level of performance in return for the funding agreed with the local LSC.

3 The LP statement of activity and objectives including the priorities and planned actions of the LP should range across five dimensions:

- LP internal partnership arrangements and conduct
- How the LP raises aspirations and demand
- How the LP encourages, facilitates and supports others to deliver effective learning, including learning for regeneration
- and how the LP works to achieve this, through regeneration agencies and partnerships to ensure that learning is central to regeneration policy and planning
- How the LP encourages and promotes provider collaboration.

4 In defining the LP's role there needs to be reference to the minimum expectations, activities and services which the LP can be expected to deliver. This will draw on the role of the LP with respect to the LSC's local and national needs, linked to appropriate targets and outcomes. The basis for those targets and agreed outcomes should be reflected clearly in each Operational or Business Plan. The Development Plan should show these targets for the coming year and projected forward for the subsequent two years.

### Internal partnership arrangements

5 How the partnership conducts its business and promotes positive partnership working; provides better connections between interested partners

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<sup>3</sup> This should include where relevant regional Centres of Excellence, developing Regional Skills Partnerships and other relevant organisations.

and other organisations or agencies; leading or supporting better strategic action.

6 The Plan should include the membership of the LP, indicating how its stakeholders are involved with lifelong learning.

7 Whilst it is acknowledged that the organisational structure and management of the LP is primarily a matter for itself, the local LSC will wish to be assured that the LP can demonstrate appropriate accountability for funds from the LSC – the LP should therefore include a statement of its legal entity and name any host body for contracting purposes - any changes to this should be cross-referenced to the Business Plan.

8 The LP boundaries, or a description of the area and activities covered, should be included within the Plan. Where there are plans for change, these should be set out in the Business Plan, with timescales and rationale for change.

## **Developing demand for learning**

9 How the partnership will lead or support the promotion of demand for learning eg around campaigns to promote demand for learning; encouraging collaborative activity where there are gaps; commissioning or supporting needs analyses identifying local learning needs particularly with regard to regeneration or joint projects to stimulate demand through marketing initiatives eg Adult Learners week projects; how the LP provides consultative facilities in support of LSC objectives, policies or initiatives.

## **Facilitating and supporting the delivery of learning, including learning for regeneration**

10 How the partnership will facilitate or support the delivery of learning eg supporting capacity building for key local partners including the voluntary and community sector; encouraging collaborative activity where there are gaps; mapping the provision of learning or regeneration activity across a locality; managing regeneration funding on behalf of a partnership eg Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund management and coordination.

## **Influencing policy**

11 How the partnership engages with agencies and partnerships eg regeneration organisations, to ensure that learning is structurally and centrally embedded in regeneration and partnership working; how the LP works with the local LSC to contribute to its corporate objectives with particular reference to regeneration and partnership working; how the LP works with other LPs/LSPs in the local area; regional and or national links through the NLP Network; working with any new Regional Centres of Excellence.

## **Timing**

12 The LP should aim to agree with the LSC its three year development plan and Business Plan before the commencement of the 2004-05 financial year – timing will depend on local circumstances. In future years, it would be expected that updated plans would be agreed no less than three months before the start of the following financial year.

# Annex 4: Local Protocol and Planning

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## Introduction

1 LPs and local LSCs already have in place a protocol setting out how they will work in partnership for the benefit of individuals and businesses in the local LSC area.

## Underpinning Principles

2 The protocol suggested in last year's guidance has become embedded in local planning. The Review Group recommended that the protocol should be subsumed within the 3 year development plan.

3 As a reminder, the protocol between local LSCs and LPs is underpinned by the following principles:

- **Openness** – both parties agree to conduct joint discussions, negotiations or related dealings in an open and inclusive manner. There may however be occasions when both parties agree not to release the nature of any discussions to third parties for personal and commercial reasons
- **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
- **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.
- **Equality and Diversity** – both parties will ensure that Equality and Diversity is embedded in all planning and delivery of provision.

## Core Contents of the Three Year Development Plan

4 It is expected that the following headings are included in the 3 year development plan 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 plan, both parties will want to outline how the local LSCs and their LPs will work to meet this mutual interest, including how they will involve the Local Strategic Partnership(s) in taking forward this agenda.

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

7 The local plans 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.



## **Annex 5: Suggested Impact Measures**

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The following impact measures were suggested by respondents to the consultation questions and recommended by the Review Group, we have tried to group them under the five dimensions that LPs should be working across in their 3 year development plans.

### **LP internal partnership arrangements and conduct**

- range of partners involved in LP
- seniority of Board members
- numeric data
- successful delivery of specific projects agreed with local LSC
- leverage of funding
- contribution to headline targets
- quality measures
- satisfaction surveys
- information/briefings/policy seminars for Board and partners

### **How the LP raises aspirations and demand**

- activity which promotes and celebrates lifelong learning
- award schemes, newsletters, websites
- conferences and workshops
- raising the profile of learning as a key to sustaining regeneration
- awareness raising
- innovative practice
- number of additional learners accessing learning
- participation levels
- the 'value added' by LPs
- accessing funding for promotions and campaigns
- developing or coordinating Learning Champions/mentoring schemes

### **How the LP encourages, facilitates and supports others to deliver effective learning, including learning for regeneration**

- providing a vehicle for the local dissemination of information on learning, training, education, employment and the economy
- local monitoring
- research undertaken
- mapping provision
- support/leadership for development of neighbourhood learning centres
- contribution to Strategic Area Reviews
- funding, managing or supporting local network or advice staff

- accessing or distributing project or programme funding for partners

## **How the LP works to achieve this, through regeneration agencies and partnerships to ensure that learning is central to regeneration policy and planning**

- plans to address skills shortages
- plans to address particular issues with basic skills
- plans to address under provision particularly in areas of deprivation
- contribution to family learning, IAG and basic skills initiatives
- the 14-19 agenda
- workforce development strategic impact
- links with LSPs
- influence on LSP Action on Learning Plans, Community Plans
- integration into LSP Performance Management arrangements
- recognition as the 'learning arm of the LSP'

## **How the LP encourages and promotes provider collaboration**

- acting as the local linkage across a plethora of organisations and initiatives
- number of collaborative meetings held
- number of collaborative funding bids developed
- role of LPs on project steering groups
- building partnerships
- joint planning.