

Working Together in Practice

A Toolkit to support Learning and Skills Council work with the voluntary and community sector.

For LSC staff working with the voluntary sector

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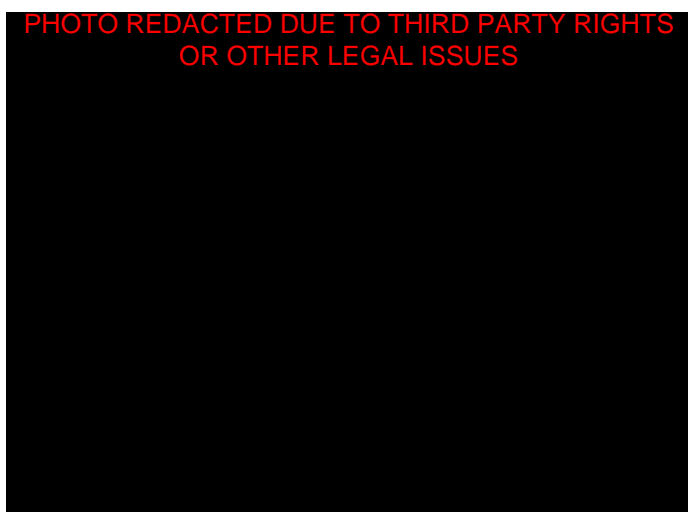
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Volume 2

Working Smarter

Introduction

01

Background to Working Together in Practice: Volume Two

Working Together (2004), the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) strategy for work with the voluntary and community sector (VCS), confirms the VCS as a key partner in the delivery of LSC objectives and targets.

The strategy takes a broad interpretation of the VCS for these purposes, recognising that the sector embraces *"a diverse and complex range of organisations, from the traditional model of the charitable trust, through national businesses run by professional staff, to informal community-level organisations concerned with single issues. Faith-based groups are achieving greater recognition, and social enterprises... are becoming increasingly prominent."* (Paragraph 14).

This diversity, and the opportunities it creates for beneficial collaboration between the VCS and the LSC, is condensed by Working Together into three key roles for sector organisations:

- as providers of education and training services
- as a major group of employers
- as a source of expertise and a channel for communication.

Implementation of the strategy aims to take forward joint work across the three areas by building on existing effective practice. This process has been supported by a £2 million Capacity Building Fund (for 2004-05) and various staff development opportunities and materials. Working Together in Practice: a Toolkit to support Learning and Skills Council work with the voluntary and community sector (2005) was published by the LSC to enhance collaboration with VCS organisations and to enable LSC staff and their VCS partners to deliver 'key actions' in Working Together.

The Toolkit was disseminated in January 2005 through three LSC seminars. These drew together most local LSC staff undertaking the new VCS contact role, along with members of VCS regional networks and forums. Participants identified 'working smarter' as the preferred theme for the second volume of the Toolkit and this has been confirmed in subsequent discussions within the LSC and the VCS.

In this context, 'working smarter' is seen as a reaffirmation of the importance to the LSC of VCS partners, and of the intention to consolidate joint working by implementing Working Together, while recognising that the climate for collaboration is changing continuously.

Profound structural, strategic and operational shifts for both the VCS and the LSC are shaping what can be achieved, creating constraints and opportunities, and requiring those who facilitate VCS/LSC engagement to review what they do – and to make the best of what is available. This volume of the Toolkit is intended to support them in that critical process.

What does it offer?

Volume Two of the Toolkit offers a mixture of information, guidance about suitable approaches, practical advice and 'next steps', and case study examples.

Section One presents a range of suggestions for 'working smarter' and making the most of existing resources, along with 12 case studies illustrating these and other useful ideas in action.

Section Two, on understanding the LSC, mirrors Section One of Toolkit Volume One (which gave an overview of the VCS) with the aim of improving knowledge of the LSC within the VCS and of promoting better understanding and communication.

Working with infrastructure organisations emerges as a common feature of many of the 'Working Smarter' ideas and case studies and this is picked up in the remaining sections. These also respond to specific commitments in the Working Together strategy.

Section Three outlines the major reforms to VCS infrastructure and capacity building being introduced through the ChangeUp programme, and offers suggestions for how LSC staff might engage with developments in their area.

Section Four offers an overview of VCS infrastructure and the reciprocal benefits of LSC/VCS infrastructure engagement, and suggests ways in which this might be enhanced.

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Section Five provides an overview of VCS learning and training consortia, including their structures and functions, and offers some suggested ways forward for LSC engagement with these arrangements.

The Toolkit is designed to be a flexible resource that can support a wide range of activities, from informal discussions through to action planning and staff training and development. The sections are largely self-contained so they can be used separately or in any combination depending on the context. As a consequence, some important information or advice occurs more than once. Please feel free to copy and share the materials.

Section 1

Volume 2

Working Smarter – ideas and examples of
effective practice

Section One

03

Working Smarter – ideas and examples of effective practice

This section offers LSC staff and their voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners:

- ideas for working together, acting locally or regionally, to maximise the effectiveness and impact of existing resources
- case studies illustrating a range of useful ideas in action.

Introduction

The 'Working Smarter' approach is based on the premise that effective collaboration between the LSC and the VCS is mutually beneficial and therefore to be encouraged, but that expectations and action must be grounded in a realistic appreciation of the current operating climate. In practice this can mean:

- thinking more strategically about funding sources
- using existing finite funding more creatively
- initiating alliances
- acting as broker and information-source
- using leverage and influence.

'Working Smarter' can apply to any of the forms of LSC/VCS engagement identified in Working Together:

- the VCS as a provider of learning opportunities
- the VCS as an employer
- the VCS as a source of expertise and channel for communication
- LSC/VCS communication and working relationships.

In practice it often involves a combination of these.

Mutual advantage and common ground

Volume One of the Toolkit outlined in some detail the main areas of mutual interest and benefit for joint LSC/VCS work. However, and particularly in view of current pressures on capacity and resources, it is worth reiterating the key points.

Experience demonstrates that when VCS providers and LSC staff work together, there is a significant degree of congruence between what the LSC needs to fund to meet its Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets (see Section Two) and what VCS organisations seek to deliver to meet the needs and aspirations of their members, clients and local communities. Areas of work that are consistent with LSC strategic priorities and VCS ethos and capacity include:

- a commitment to 'user-centred' or 'learner-centred' practice
- re-engaging young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)
- tackling worklessness

- engaging excluded and disadvantaged groups in learning
- raising the quality of services, including learning, and ensuring these fit the needs of individuals and groups of learners
- delivering embedded and explicit language, literacy and numeracy provision and Skills for Life qualifications
- supporting learners from 'first steps' through to Level 2 and Level 3 provision
- increasing, and meeting the demand for, VCS workforce development and tackling barriers to participation
- creating coherent and well-articulated progression routes within the VCS and with other providers external to the sector – including the provision of appropriate information, advice and guidance (IAG) and learner support arrangements
- building the VCS skills base using good intelligence, including vocational and generic skills, and Skills for Life
- a commitment to embed equality and diversity issues and practice throughout activity and policy
- a commitment to principled, accountable and practical ways of working based on mutual respect and trust.

Ten ideas for working smarter

1 Local LSCs can influence partnerships and franchising arrangements to ensure a fair deal for VCS sub-contractors. This is cost neutral to the LSC, apart from staff time, and would signal an awareness of, and a willingness to address, a persistent cause of concern for VCS providers – in addition to the obvious practical benefits.

See case studies 10 and 11.

2 Local LSCs can initiate funding packages drawing in potential co-funders (Jobcentre Plus, Government Offices, local authorities, charitable trusts, and so on). This is particularly significant in the context of current and projected funding constraints and the difficulties of extending access to mainstream funding to VCS organisations. It has the additional advantage of building useful alliances to support learner progression, and of consolidating strategic links, for example with ChangeUp arrangements and planning processes.

See case study 10.

3 Local and regional LSCs could explore the leeway to harmonise contracting, reporting and monitoring arrangements and 'passporting' information with other funding agencies in cases where providers do business with more than one, thus simplifying "the paperwork". This could reduce the drain on capacity for all concerned.

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4 Local and regional LSCs can encourage their partners (such as Regional Development Agencies and Business Link) to see VCS organisations as business partners, and urge them to take account of sector needs and potential in their planning. They can support partners in making their services more VCS-friendly and accessible, and guide them towards adopting Working Together principles in their relationships with the sector. The LSC's experience, materials and examples of effective practice might prove useful and transferable to other agencies.

See case studies 4, 6 and 9.

5 VCS leads in local and regional LSCs can use the Toolkit to promote awareness of the sector among colleagues with a view to helping them identify the scope for engagement with the VCS in their responsibilities, and to levering in funding from internal LSC budgets. In particular, they can emphasise the importance of building the VCS into LSC action on skills development, stress the significance of sector workforce development to achieving the PSA targets, both directly and through improving capacity to deliver learning opportunities – doubling the returns from investment.

See case studies 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 12.

6 The LSC and VCS could explore together, at local and regional levels, the implications of ChangeUp for their joint work and, notably, how to influence planning and funding decisions (see Section Three: Volume 2). This would be an appropriate area to draw on VCS expertise and information. In view of the rapid, and in some ways, confusing changes being introduced by the ChangeUp process, regular communication with VCS intermediaries will be important to making the most of any emerging opportunities.

See case studies 4 and 12.

7 Local and regional LSCs can promote the development of VCS learning and training consortia and other forums that support more effective and cost-effective approaches (see Section Five: Volume 2). This can be achieved through direct investment by the LSC and also more indirectly, by ensuring that the needs and contribution of these bodies are recognised by the ChangeUp planning processes at sub-regional and regional levels. In particular, local and regional LSC staff could undertake to discuss consortia and their diverse roles within VCS infrastructure with Government Office colleagues to ensure that their service delivery potential is understood, along with their capacity development needs.

See case studies 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 11.

8 The LSC, at local or regional level, can contribute funding for a VCS liaison or coordination post to drive forward actions to implement Working Together. This provides a valuable extra pair of hands while helping to overcome constraints in LSC administration budgets. Other partners, including the VCS, may be willing to share the costs or contribute in other ways. Filling the post from within the sector, and locating it within a VCS 'host' organisation for at least part of the time, signals that the sector's knowledge is valued and trusted. It also means that the initiative is likely to have more credibility and should make administrative arrangements simpler. It is a very practical contribution to VCS capacity-building. The relative rarity of this kind of opportunity can generate high levels of motivation and commitment, and the increased level of mutual understanding provides a lasting legacy.

See case studies 1, 4 and 7.

9 Investing time in transparent, collaborative planning for implementing Working Together can pay dividends in a number of ways. The process itself is valuable in building working relationships. A mutually agreed agenda, with clarity about objectives and roles, helps everyone concerned with forward planning and means work can be shared equitably. With the overall framework agreed, partners can get on with their allotted activities. This builds trust and saves time on supervision and management. 'Arms length management' of funding has similar benefits, showing confidence in the VCS to deal with things in its preferred way and saving LSC staff time.

See case studies 1, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 12.

10 A small investment in information-sharing, signposting and advice, is sometimes all that is needed to make better use of existing resources and opportunities and to prevent having to create new ones. This is economical in terms of funding and effort and means more people and organisations can get the opportunities they need.

See case study 5.

Case Studies

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Case study 1

Greater Merseyside VCS Partnership Coordinator

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 8 and 9.

Why was the activity initiated?

With key partners, Greater Merseyside drew up a Working Together implementation plan for the sub-region, and established a working group, chaired by the LSC Executive Director (ED), to oversee its delivery. The plan and the working group have guided the use of capacity-building and widening participation funding in the sub-region. In September 2004 the working group also agreed on the need for a Partnership Coordinator recruited from within the VCS to drive forward implementation.

What action was taken?

The proposal for a coordinator post, originated by the LSC ED, was worked up into a full job description by a sub-group (comprising representatives from LSC, Sefton Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) and Merseyside Network for Europe). This was then presented with a paper to the LSC's senior management team for approval in principle, in January 2005.

The Partnership Coordinator will divide their time between the local LSC office and VCS organisations. The post is fixed-term, for two years.

What resources were involved?

Funding for the post has been allocated from the LSC's Local Intervention and Development Fund (LID). In principle, £100,000 has been allocated over two years to fund the post (plus on-costs) together with associated activity generated as the role develops.

Who was involved?

The proposal for the Partnership Coordinator post originated with the LSC ED, as chair of the Working Together implementation group. Funding was approved in principle by LSC senior managers and detailed work carried out jointly by LSC staff and VCS partners.

Success factors

With a Working Together implementation plan and working group already established, the LSC and its partners were well prepared to make best use of sudden short-term funding opportunities as they arose.

Designating sub-groups to work up detailed proposals for agreement by the working group and formal presentation to LSC senior managers shared out workloads and ownership.

Recruited from the VCS, and based there for part of the time, the coordinator will have the confidence of VCS organisations.

In setting up the post the LSC has taken account of lessons learned from similar arrangements in other areas.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

There will be a dedicated resource to lead on delivery of the Working Together implementation plan, to the benefit of the LSC and the VCS.

Working between the LSC and the VCS, the coordinator will help to foster mutual understanding of opportunities and constraints, and provide a two-way channel of communication between the LSC and the sector.

Based around this post, the Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership, and Sefton Council for Voluntary Services, who are leading on ChangeUp in the sub-region, are developing a tri-partite working arrangement with the LSC through a parallel coordinator post based in Connexions.

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Case study 2

Coventry and Warwickshire Learning Consortium

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 5 and 7.

Why was the activity initiated?

Local research into the workforce development and capacity-building needs of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Coventry and Warwickshire revealed the sector's potential to contribute to the adult learning agenda. The report recommended a dedicated resource to support the sector's role in the learning and skills arena.

What action was taken?

The LSC Executive Director and funding managers held several meetings with the Directors of the six local Council for Voluntary Services to discuss taking forward the report's recommendations, including development of a Learning Consortium.

What resources were involved?

Local Intervention and Development (LID) funding was awarded in 2004 to help the local Councils for Voluntary Services develop an initial business plan, with assistance from the LSC, with a further allocation to support recruitment of a Director and Administrator for the consortium. In January 2005, funding was secured through the Capacity Building Fund for the VCS to widen the membership of the Learning Consortium and develop internal quality and health and safety procedures. This would help strengthen the consortium position to access other funding through the LSC.

Who was involved?

LSC senior and operational staff worked with the heads of the local VCSs, who in turn consulted their own networks and contacts.

Success factors

Commitment from both LSC and the voluntary sector from the start was underlined by an initial cash injection to develop the consortium. The consortium has also developed a Workforce Development Strategy for the sector in the local sub- region.

The LSC Executive Director was involved throughout.

The consortium business plan was developed in partnership, with the LSC contributing to the content.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

The consortium:

- offers the LSC a single point of contact with the voluntary sector
- is much better placed to know the sector's workforce development needs, and can use the skills and expertise within to address these
- gives the sector one single voice and a clearly-identified way of communicating with the LSC
- builds can take a strategic view of the sector's needs and plan capacity-building accordingly
- gives the sector greater impact – it has just secured co-financing funds to help meet workforce development needs for the sector in the local sub region.

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Case study 3

London North Community Learning Forum

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 5 and 7.

Why was the activity initiated?

In 2001, an awareness that many voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations were under increasing pressure to meet the varied needs of disadvantaged people in the borough led Enfield Voluntary Action (EVA) to survey the support needs of organisations interested in providing learning opportunities for their service users. EVA already had a strong relationship with the sector in providing development and training and had worked with Enfield College to develop the profile of lifelong learning. The research showed the sector's potential and highlighted the need to develop its infrastructure, and in 2002 EVA submitted a proposal to LSC North London.

The LSC agreed, under its Equal Opportunities Strategic Plan (Priority 4), to “work closely with existing and new VCS organisations to build their capacity to deliver learning opportunities to priority groups to include English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), basic skills, guidance and mentoring.” The first ‘seedcorn’ funding for the Community Learning Forum came from the LEA’s adult and community learning budget, then towards the end of its first year the LSC identified a small sum of direct funding to keep the Forum going.

What action was taken?

In the forum’s first year the membership grew from 12 to 64 members. Most are from small to medium-sized VCS organisations, with growing support from the local colleges, the LEA and the LSC. The forum also has a formal link with the Local Strategic Partnership and its elected Community Empowerment representatives.

The Community Learning Forum (CLF) now provides:

- opportunities for members to partner on community learning initiatives
- links to quality assurance in training, and good practice guidance
- opportunities for identifying capacity-building training and exchange of experience and skills
- support for partnership bidding;
- formal communication links with cross-sector strategic and operational partnerships
- support in identifying community learning needs and resources to meet them
- support in identifying non-traditional forms of learning to engage new and isolated learners
- a conduit for VCS contributions to strategic thinking, and VCS understanding of new strategies.

The LSC and the North London Council of Voluntary Service Partnership are now working together to replicate the Enfield Community Learning Forum’s success in the other North London boroughs. This will dovetail with the new ESF capacity-building project for 2005–2007, under which dedicated coordinators will work with each CLF on capacity-building requirements for 200 organisations.

What resources were involved?

The LSC initially provided £2,500 from the Local Initiative Fund (as was), to support and maintain the CLF. The LSC also provided accommodation for CLF members’ meetings at its own office, as well as other in-kind support. Expansion of Community Learning Forums into the other North London boroughs is supported from ESF through the North London CVS Partnership, in partnership with Barnet College. This funding will last until 2007.

Who was involved?

The LSC’s Social Inclusion Manager and the Development and EVA’s Training Manager at EVA led the work.

Success factors

The LSC had already established a sound foundation to its relations with the VCS through its consultation exercise in 2001 and inclusion of the sector in its operating plan.

The drive and commitment of the Enfield CLF Chair mobilised the network and its activities, due to her knowledge of the sector and the skills agenda.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

Both the LSC and the VCS have benefited from the fact that the CLF:

- has provided the infrastructure and foundation to draw up the ESF specification for capacity building for 2005–2007 currently being managed by Barnet College
- provides a network of member organisations for the LSC to carry out Strategic Area Review (StAR) consultations and disseminate information on funding and strategies
- providing cross-functional working between members for partnership bidding and operational partnerships
- will inform strategy through formal links with the Enfield Local Strategic Partnership, and feed into the North London Learning Partnership
- ensures a continuous process of capacity building in the sub-region for new and existing groups.

In addition, the VCS also benefits in specific ways such as:

- Enfield Community Learning Forum (ECLF) provided information to members on LSC- and non-LSC funding streams, and some have begun collaborative working on projects
- partners have been mobilised for partnership working on LEA adult and lifelong learning initiatives in Enfield
- organisational capacity-building includes the Advanced Training Programme for Managers and Action Learning Sets.

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Case study 4

South East Voluntary and Community Sector Network Learning and Skills Leader

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9.

Why was the activity initiated?

The South East LSCs and Regional Action in the South East (RAISE), the regional voluntary and community sector network, had agreed a Compact, an action plan, prior to the publication of Working Together. When the strategy was published they wanted to find a way of implementing it to best effect in the region.

What action was taken?

The LSCs in the region each contributed funding for a post, based with RAISE, to focus on learning and skills issues in the VCS.

What resources were involved?

The LSCs in the region used the pooled LSC/Regional Development Agency (RDA) funding from the Adult Skills pilots to support the post for its first year. Further development by the LSCs and RAISE will be to link with the sectors skills arrangements in ChangeUp (see Section Three: Volume 2). The LSC has funded the current arrangements from the regional skills budget and invested £81,000 in the post to support the development of a learning and skills network.

Who was involved?

The established Compact working relationships provided a mechanism for agreeing the arrangements for the post. A Compact Advisory Group Chaired by RAISE and comprising of the LSC, VCS and representation from the RDA (SEEDA) and FE oversees the implementation of the Compact delivery plan.

Success factors

The existing Compact, and the LSC/VCS relationships that had developed around it, provided a sound foundation for agreement on the new post.

The post is based within the VCS and consequently has the confidence of the sector. The post-holder previously worked for a 'first-tier' VCS organisation so is well-acquainted with their point of view.

The post is working on a clear and mutually-agreed agenda for implementation of Working Together, and the Compact action plan.

The funding – from an unusual source for this type of work – represents a relatively modest contribution from each local LSC but adds up to a valuable resource across the region.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

Both the LSCs and the VCS benefit from a dedicated resource to support implementation of Working Together.

A regional remit means effective practice can be more easily shared.

The post builds capacity for the longer-term among first-tier organisations and the regional network.

The LSC is not tied into a long-term funding commitment when an alternative source (ChangeUp) is in prospect.

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Case study 5

Berkshire Voluntary Sector Brokerage Programme

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 5, 7, 9 and 10.

Why was the activity initiated?

The 2002 'Teecap' project in Berkshire provided the foundation for a county-wide brokerage project. The remit of the original project, piloted by Slough Council for Voluntary Services and Windsor and Maidenhead Voluntary Action, was to:

- carry out a skills needs analysis of 50 groups each in the areas covered
- match their training needs to existing or forthcoming provision at East Berkshire College or elsewhere.

Of the 150 organisations covered in the voluntary sector between the two pilot areas 505 responses were received, resulting in:

- firm bookings on training and development events by a number of organisations with future interest from others
- better organisation of training needs by topic area
- prioritisation of most widespread needs (funding applications, ICT, health and safety, management skills, marketing and legislation) of which all but the first topic could be met through mainstream provision.

What action was taken?

The 'Teecap' project gave rise to the pan-Berkshire Brokerage Programme, under which local VCS infrastructure organisations each employ a part-time training coordinator to identify local sector training requirements and match this to current provision already available. Where this proves inadequate to meet local needs, the coordinators are responsible for sourcing appropriate, high-quality provision from mainstream and specialist providers.

Recent external evaluation of the project has reported outcomes including:

- 56 courses delivered
- 13 with mainstream providers
- four active learning groups
- 895 learners
- one training and information fair (74 participants)
- one diversity day (126 participants)
- over 370 referrals.

As a result the consortia has been successful in securing European Social Fund (ESF) funding for further workforce development in the sector to end in June 2007.

What resources were involved?

The programme is funded by LSC Berkshire's Local Intervention and Development (LID) budget until October 2005. The value of the project is £263,209.

Who was involved

The project is hosted by a county-wide consortium of six voluntary sector infrastructure organisations led by Slough Council for Voluntary Services (SCVS). The other participants are:

- Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action
- Community Action West Berkshire
- Reading Voluntary Action
- Windsor and Maidenhead Voluntary Action
- Wokingham District Voluntary Action.

Success factors

The success of the project is attributed to:

- its ability to accommodate the complex nature of CVS constitutions
- oversight by Community Network, the established LSC/VCS forum for joint working
- clear, structured management by a designated Management Group
- collaborative working between CVSs, FE Colleges, Learning Partnerships
- excellent working relationship between training coordinators
- recognition of diversity despite consortia structure.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

- Both the sector itself and the LSC benefit from stronger, well-trained VCS providers equipped to provide high-quality services and run their business more effectively.
- Initial seedcorn funding from the LSC has geared up the VCS to apply successfully for further funding.
- The external evaluation itself has provided many useful detailed pointers for future LSC/VCS joint working.

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Case study 6

VC Train (Voluntary and Community Sector Training Consortium – South Yorkshire)

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 4, 5 and 7.

Why was activity initiated?

The consortium originally arose from a recognised need to engage with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in a sub-regional setting as ESF Objective 1 funding was due to come on-line.

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What action was taken?

Recognising the need to organise and engage with partners on a sub-regional level, the VCS commissioned an independent consultant to recommend a suitable model for them to adopt. The proposal, recommending a VCS training consortium, was further refined by the LSC to meet the sub-regional context and need.

In 2001 VC Train received initial funding from the LSC for a contract to start off the project, with 30 per cent advanced (as allowed under ESF rules) to allow some start-up and working capital.

VC Train is now a consortium of approximately 80 voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations across South Yorkshire, which provide or promote learning/training opportunities. Full members are learning/training providers; associate members tend to be organisations that either do not focus primarily on training or may already have access to mainstream funds. Members are required to pass a quality assurance test. Each part of the sub-region is guaranteed a number of places on the Board to ensure full coverage of the county.

VC Train's strategic aims include:

- integration of VCS providers into a South Yorkshire-wide structure
- integration of communities of interest – for example, black and minority ethnic organisations are fully integrated into the consortium
- strong partnership working with the LSC
- providing a voice for the sector in strategic planning – for example, working alongside Learning Partnerships to develop the adult and community learning (ACL) curriculum.

VC Train provides a direct bidding and fund management mechanism for VCS learning providers, focusing on access to, and maintenance of, mainstream funding from key government bodies, especially the Learning and Skills Council (with co-financing through European Social Fund or its equivalent in the future). The consortium also works to develop the quality of the network.

The website (www.vctrain.org) provides further information.

What resources were involved

VC Train has only received discretionary funding to date. It has not had an Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspection but is now well into its second cycle of self-assessment.

Its funding, in the period 2004-2007, illustrates the breadth of its activity:

- **ACL** project (funded since April 2002, ESF Measure 11 and 13) to develop and deliver a range of community-based learning opportunities to local non-traditional

learners who do not, cannot, or will not engage in existing community-based or mainstream funded learning provision.

- **'Tackling Disadvantage'** projects (ESF measure 3:17):
 - IMBY South Yorkshire Project (**people with disabilities**), 1,250 beneficiaries
 - Parent Plus (**lone parents**), 1,250 beneficiaries
 - BME Coalfields **Training and Capacity Building** Project, 750 beneficiaries
 - Sheffield – **BME Training** Cluster, 952 beneficiaries
- **Widening Adult Participation** Action Fund project to build VCS capacity to respond to the Skills for Life agenda and thus extend basic skills opportunities in South Yorkshire.
- **Lead provider/managing agent** for single pot-funded projects (from August 2004). VC Train manages the RDA-funded Skills for Life capacity-building activities. Holding the LSC contract, it takes responsibility for the sub-contracted delivery and contract compliance including delivery of outputs, financial monitoring, internal audit, data returns/claims and quality assurance.

Who was involved?

The LSC South Yorkshire Equality and Diversity Manager has been involved since the set-up of the consortium. VC Train's Executive Director, Finance Director and Quality Manager have been the key VCS people.

Success factors

- Good communication has built working relationships over time.
- Flexible funding, provided for several years, has enabled VC Train to innovate and consolidate.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

The key benefit to both LSC and VCS is the mechanism for engagement on a sub-regional basis that is, they cover the same patch.

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Case study 7

LSC London East 'Third Way' Strategy: Umbrella Training Networks

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 5, 7, 8 and 9.

Why was the activity initiated?

The LSC London East's (LSCLE) well-established 'Third Way' strategy outlines its commitment to working with the voluntary and community sector (VCS). A key strand of its implementation is the establishment of local umbrella networks of VCS learning providers, which recognise and enhance the sector in the roles identified in Working Together as provider, source of expertise and channel of communication.

What action was taken?

The LSC has supported the VCS in developing an umbrella body in each of its boroughs for 'first tier' VCS learning providers wishing to provide training to a wide and diverse range of people disengaged from learning. Each network is a funded resource, owned and recruited by its members.

The networks are intended to:

- develop strong links between beneficiaries and street-level learning providers to maximise funding potential from the LSC
- promote partnership working and joint bidding
- establish a database of training provision in each borough
- create and support progression routes into learning from grassroots to mainstream funding
- provide advice and guidance to potential training providers.

The networks are supplemented by two Technical Advisors based at the London Voluntary Sector Training Consortium who will work across the nine LSCLE boroughs and the City to advise the network members on:

- the LSC remit and budgets
- other funding bodies and funding streams
- applications, learning provision and good practice.

A 'network of networks' covering the whole LSCLE sub-region provides an opportunity for discussion and sharing concerns direct with LSC staff, and will keep the sector fully conversant with key LSC issues.

The LSC is also supporting a cross-borough Providers' Forum drawn from nominated members of the networks who are all 'first tier' providers. The forum is intended as a local resource and strategic voice for the sector on skills and learner issues. Borough representatives act as a local resource for the sector on information, signposting, brokerage and good practice dissemination relevant to community provision.

What resources were involved?

The LSC has used ESF and Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) funding to support the networks for a three-year period.

Success factors

- A mapping exercise determined the current level of LSC engagement with the sector and provided a baseline for judging progress made.
- Borough-wide consultation workshops gathering information on designing local implementation plans ensured that the sector was consulted and could feed into plans from the beginning of the process. This secured partnership buy-in.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

Through the networks the LSC and the VCS are evaluating the sector's potential for strengthening links between non-accredited learning and mainstream learning programmes, and for contributing to corporate LSC targets.

The networks provide a way for the LSC to communicate effectively and efficiently with the VCS.

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Case study 8

Asian Trade Links and LSC West Yorkshire

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 5 and 9.

Why the activity was initiated

Within the West Yorkshire area there are numerous black and minority ethnic organisations. These play an important role in engaging with smaller communities but often have limited capacity, which affects their ability to work effectively. LSC West Yorkshire identified the need for increased support and capacity building for these organisations.

What action was taken?

LSC West Yorkshire is currently contracting with Asian Trades Link (ATL), a local provider based in Bradford, to deliver a capacity-building project to black and minority ethnic organisations. ATL undertook training needs analysis of 80 black and minority ethnic organisations, of which 20 have now been selected to take part in more in-depth work. This includes providing intermediate vocational courses to staff, and the production of a toolkit to inform Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs), specifically small black and minority ethnic organisations, of the steps, processes and standards needed to become a learning provider.

What resources were involved?

ESF Co-financing Round 4.

Who was involved?

Ebrahim Dockrat (Development Manager) and Sara Dache (Development Coordinator) of LSC West Yorkshire Asian Trades Link.

Eighty black and minority ethnic organisations (of which 20 are receiving in-depth support).

Success factors

Since the project runs until March 2006, gauging success overall is difficult as yet, but factors that have contributed to its success so far have been:

- a strong partnership approach, inclusivity and consultation about how the project should proceed through the steering group has been well received across the organisations involved in the project
- this has also helped to bring diverse communities together across the district and which would perhaps never have come together otherwise – the opportunity to network with other community organisations has really benefited communication channels in the black

and minority ethnic VCS in West Yorkshire, which is increasingly responsible for a large chunk of training delivery

- providing bespoke on-going training and support for smaller organisations, training needs analyses have meant that each organisation has an action plan that addresses exactly what they need rather than a generic plan for smaller organisations
- the mix of training, which includes courses in counselling, accountancy, internal moderators awards, work shadowing and line management skills (rather than just basic skills, IT skills and so on) has provided greater scope for continued development and collaboration
- there are plans to include some 'mentoring' activity to link smaller providers with larger organisations.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

The project will complete in March 2006. Benefits to date include:

- formation of a steering group of providers working towards similar aims
- a toolkit (launched May 2005) which was developed by the VCS for use in the sector and provides general information on the processes required to be up to the standard needed to become a mainstream learning provider.

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Case study 9

The Yorkshire and the Humber Attachment Scheme 'A Day in the Life Of...'

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 4 and 5.

Why the activity was initiated

At the 2003 regional voluntary and community sector (VCS) learning and skills conference, Making Waves, the Executive Director of LSC South Yorkshire was asked how well he knew the sector – the answer was "not well enough". This reflects a concern about shared knowledge

and mutual understanding that has been experienced more widely within the LSC and VCS.

In 2004, the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional VCS Forum developed its Attachment Scheme as a means of supporting agencies such as the LSC, Government Office, the Regional Development Agency and the Regional Assembly in their work with the sector.

The objectives of the scheme were:

- to develop relationships and mutual understanding
- to build the capacity of public sector managers in relation to the VCS
- to facilitate a greater understanding for participants of the ethos, complexity and objectives of the VCS
- to explore the dynamics of the sector in relation to its infrastructure and differing levels of operation: national, regional, sub regional and local
- to gain insight into the links between national policy, regional policy and implementation at the local level through VCS activity
- for participants to consider a VCS mentor to support them in their partnership work with the sector.

What action was taken?

The Regional Forum designed the scheme and advertised for VCS organisations to act as hosts and to submit a brief proposal outlining what they could offer. The response was extremely good.

LSC West Yorkshire was instrumental in organising staff from the four local LSCs in the region to take part in a pilot programme. The pilot involved nine LSC staff who spent a day initially with the Regional Forum to learn about the history of the sector, its values and activities, and to discuss current issues around policy and funding. This was followed by a day with a host VCS organisation, enabling all concerned to learn more about each other. A debriefing session was held at the Regional Forum two months later.

What resources were involved?

The Regional Forum was paid for some of the staff time in developing, organising and running this scheme. Host VCS organisations were paid a fee of £100 per day.

Who was involved?

The scheme was organised by the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum. The first pilot involved nine LSC staff from across the region, and eleven host VCS organisations. The intention is for the scheme to be rolled out to include staff from other key regional agencies.

Success Factors

A range of factors have been identified that contributed to the success of the initiative:

- the timing was good for the LSC and aligned with the launch of the Working Together strategy
- support from LSC West Yorkshire, which recruited participants from the four local LSCs
- there was a good response from VCOs to act as host organisations who were also paid a fee for taking part
- the format/programme which offered a mixture of input, interactive exercises, quizzes and case studies
- the enthusiasm of all the participants from the LSC and VCS
- support from the LSC Regional Director in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

A wide range of intermediate and longer-term benefits have been identified:

- increased knowledge and understanding of the sector
- clearer picture of how LSC actions impacted on sector
- clearer understanding of how to communicate this impact to colleagues within the LSC
- shared knowledge within LSC
- LSC will work to identify opportunities to benefit VCS organisations, staff and volunteers
- colleagues working with the VCS have been encouraged to work more collaboratively
- the LSC will take account of the insights and knowledge gained in order to feed into their developing district plans for implementing Working Together.

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Case study 10

Brokering a new role for Trinity Partnership: LSC Lancashire with LA and FE

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 1 and 2.

Why the activity was initiated

Lack of success in bidding in ESF Round 1 contributed to difficulties in sustaining activity for a number of VCOs in Lancashire, including Trinity Partnership, an organisation that has been operating in the area for over 30 years. The LSC decided to take steps to keep the organisation operating as they saw its value in delivering a substantial commitment to socially inclusive learning in East Lancashire and contributing to LSC targets.

What action was taken?

LSC Lancashire provided intensive support to Trinity over a nine-month period to enable it to become a franchisee with Accrington and Rossendale College, seen as its best chance for long-term sustainability. Support included:

- establishing a collaborative group to review the situation for Trinity Partnership
- maintenance of existing learning activity
- external consultancy and mentoring
- assistance in developing new programmes of learning, for example, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), and to develop the skills and knowledge of staff as assessors and basic skills tutors
- additional funding to enable Trinity to meet audit requirements for operating within further education (FE) or local authority (LA) core funded provision.

What resources were involved?

A range of funding streams was utilised: Adult and Community Learning; Further Education; Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities; Local Intervention and Development; Disability Discrimination Act Revenue funding.

In-kind support from Lancashire LEA and the college included a contribution of ACL funding and staffing.

Who was involved?

Ray Begley, Adult Strategy Manager, LSC Lancashire Trinity Partnership.

Lynda Mason, Director of Widening Participation, Accrington and Rossendale College Consultant.

Success factors

A key factor that contributed to the success of the activity was the use of a well-respected consultant with FE and LA experience.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

A short-term and long-term benefit included:

- short-term intervention by the LSC led to long-term sustainability of Trinity Partnership
- increased capacity of Trinity Partnership to deliver learning and contribute to LSC targets.

Contact for further information

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Case study 11

Influencing partnerships and franchising arrangements in Sussex

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 1 and 7.

Why the activity was initiated

The project was initiated to research the existing franchise relationships and partnerships between voluntary and community organisations and the FE colleges in Sussex. The parties involved in the project wished to explore ways to continue and strengthen the new and existing partnerships and ensure that Sussex learners are provided with services that are needed

What action was taken

Sussex Voluntary and Community Sector Learning Consortium (SVCSLC) has been working in collaboration with FE Sussex (a consortium of Sussex FE colleges) on a research project to examine practical franchising and partnership working. Key objectives included:

- research into existing work in relation to the practical franchising and partnership working
- research in partnership with the VCS into barriers to

partnership and expectations and needs

- raise awareness of strengths within a partnership
- to organise two focus groups at which the key elements of protocols and Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are identified
- to ensure a link is maintained with the Provider collaboration group (consisting of FE Sussex, Sussex Council of Training Providers and SVCSLC) and the Sussex provider/college protocols and SLAs
- to provide a set of recommendations for future actions
- to ensure links are maintained with other projects so maximum benefit can be obtained from them, for example, the LSC Sussex ESF project on the Skills for Life agenda.

A research report, including recommendations for the various stakeholders involved, has been submitted to LSC Sussex.

What resources were involved

The research has formed part of the Working Together Capacity Building Fund project in Sussex. SVCSLC sub-contracted £12,000 to FE Sussex who carried out the research.

Who was involved

SVCSLC.
FE Sussex (a consortium of Sussex FE colleges).
Claire Witz, Development Adviser, LSC Sussex.

Success factors

There were a number of factors that contributed to success including:

- a consultant with knowledge of both the VCS and FE sectors but no current attachment to either
- effective collaborative working between the FE and VCS organisation involved.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

The research will enable SVCSLC, FE Sussex and LSC Sussex to plan for improvements in cross-sector partnerships across the county.

The sector and the LSC – indirectly – will benefit from the closer working relationships developed between FE and the VCS.

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Case study 12

VCS Workforce Development, LSC Sussex

This case study illustrates 'Working Smarter' ideas 5, 6 and 9.

Why the activity was initiated

The ChangeUp plans for East Sussex and West Sussex include an element of workforce development planning. As the Sussex Voluntary and Community Sector Learning Consortium (SVCSLC) is already working on this issue, as part of their two-year development plan with LSC Sussex, joining the two planning activities and the funds available makes for a collaborative approach that includes all and avoids duplication.

What action was taken

SVCSLC are included in the ChangeUp plans for East Sussex and West Sussex to develop their overall workforce development strategy. A working group has been formed and a briefing paper is being put together which will then be considered by the ChangeUp Executive Groups, SVCSLC members and LSC Sussex.

What resources were involved

SVCSLC Coordinator time.
Funding from Sussex ChangeUp Consortia budgets.
Funding from LSC Sussex Local Intervention and Development Fund.

Who was involved

Staff from SVCSLC, the Sussex ChangeUp Consortia working group, which includes the voluntary and community sector contact from LSC Sussex.

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Success factors

Joined up thinking between the LSC and VCS. Other success factors will be measured once ChangeUp has moved forward.

Benefits to the LSC and the VCS

Amongst the various benefits to the LSC and the VCS are:

- more joined up thinking
- enhanced collaboration; and
- increased value for money by joining funding streams to maximum effect.

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Section 2

Volume 2

The Learning and Skills Council:
a quick overview

Section Two

The Learning and Skills Council: a quick overview

This section offers LSC staff and their voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners:

- an overview of the structure, duties, priorities and functions of the LSC
- details of key LSC staff.

What is the Learning and Skills Council?

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is responsible for planning and funding post-16 education and training (other than Higher Education) in England. It was introduced by the Learning and Skills Act (2000), which set out its three main duties:

- to secure sufficient quality education and training provision for 16–19 year olds
- to secure a reasonable level of quality education and training for people over 19
- to encourage individuals and employers to engage in post-16 learning.

The LSC started work in April 2001, taking over the functions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and the network of 72 Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) in England. However, the LSC is significantly different from its predecessors in that it has an unprecedented statutory responsibility to plan provision as well as fund it, and to promote and raise demand for learning. It is also required to have regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to report annually on its progress and future plans.

What is the LSC's vision?

Our vision is that, by 2010, young people and adults in England will have knowledge and productive skills matching the best in the world.

Our mission is to raise participation and attainment through high-quality education and training which puts learners first.

LSC Strategic Framework to 2004: Corporate Plan, 2001

However, as the Government's national learning and skills policy has become more focused on the agenda for skills and productivity, this has been reflected in a change of emphasis in the LSC's mission. The LSC's priorities for 2005/06 are to:

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

The skills we need: Our Annual Statement of Priorities, (LSC), 2004

In addition, complete the successful transfer of responsibilities from the DFES to the LSC, including for Learner Support, Basic Skills and Offender Learning

In this context, the Government has also reaffirmed social justice as one of the twin goals – along with economic prosperity – for its learning and skills policies. The LSC has published a set of documents (see p. 19 in this volume) setting out its plans to meet the needs of disadvantaged and excluded individuals and groups. Progress against these is overseen by the Equality and Diversity Committee of the LSC's National Council.

How is the LSC structured?

The LSC is still evolving. Recent restructuring has introduced three tiers of management: local, regional and national.

Local

There are 47 local LSC offices, all of which have named contacts for the VCS. A list of the VCS contacts is available from the LSC website (<http://www.lsc.gov.uk>, www.niace.org.uk) and the NIACE website (www.niace.org.uk). Local LSCs are led by an Executive Director and a local council. The latter operates as a committee of the National Council. A number of councils also have members with VCS experience. Details of the council members for each local LSC are available on the LSC website (www.lsc.gov.uk).

Regional

In early 2004, the LSC established a regional tier of leadership and management. Each LSC region has identified senior lead regional responsibilities for Finance, Operations and Skills. More recently, other regional lead

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roles have emerged, including for work with the VCS (see details on p. 23 in this volume).

Each of the nine LSC regions is led by a Regional Director (London has both a Regional Director and a Regional Director Operations). Regional Directors have taken different approaches to the development of regional teams. Some have recruited staff to work in a dedicated way on regional issues; others have negotiated with local LSC staff to include a regional lead responsibility within their existing local roles; some have used a combination of approaches. Regional Directors are supported by a group comprising the Chairs of the local LSC councils and the Executive Directors in each region.

National

The LSC works through five groups at national level: Learning; Skills; Resources, Human Resources; and Strategy and Communications. The **Director of Strategy and Communications** acts as the executive champion for the Working Together strategy. The **Learning Group** focuses on the LSC's work to support young people, including work with learners with learning difficulties, and maintains an overview of the LSC's community-based adult learning and widening participation agendas, as well as leading on the LSC's arrangements for quality improvement. The **Skills Group** leads the LSC's work on the government's Skills Strategies (see opposite). This includes a focus on:

- Skills for Life
- the Level 2 Entitlement
- Employer Training Programme
- Sector Skills Councils
- other workforce development.

National Council

The work of the LSC is overseen by the National Council, appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and made up of a Chair and fifteen members. It is supported by three advisory committees:

- the **Young People's Learning** Committee which advises on strategies for increasing participation and achievement among young people and ways in which young people can develop the skills employers need
- the **Adult Learning** Committee which advises on strategies for reaching learning targets for adults and employers including 'basic skills' training
- the **Equality and Diversity** Committee which is the main forum for stakeholders in the VCS and private sectors to influence the LSC's equality and diversity policies.

Budget and staffing

The LSC is one of the largest Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) in England, with a budget in 2004/05 of

£9.3 billion, rising to £9.6 billion in 2005/06. It employs approximately 4,000 people, having reduced its staff by 800 in 2003/04. The LSC's staffing budget remains under pressure and there is a continuing challenge within the organisation to ensure efficiency, value for money, and to direct the highest possible proportion of funding to front line activity.

What are the LSC's priorities?

The LSC is responsible for the planning, funding, quality assurance and performance management of all post-16 and adult learning outside the higher education sector. This is often referred to as 'the learning and skills sector'. While the LSC's main duties remain unchanged, its mission and strategic objectives have been re-defined since its inception to reflect:

- changes in national policy related to learning and skills
- key strategic priorities
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) priorities for the LSC, articulated through the annual Grant Letter
- reviews of and consultation with providers, including through Strategic Area Review (StARs)
- providers' performance.

Key national policies

The Skills for Life Strategy (2001) – addresses the needs of adults needing to improve their reading, writing, maths and English language skills in order to succeed and progress both at work and in every day life. Action is focused on five priority groups:

- unemployed people and benefit claimants
- prisoners and offenders supervised in the community
- public sector employees
- low-skilled people in employment
- other groups at risk of exclusion.

Success for All: Reforming Further Education (2002) – outlines reforms for adult learning providers that are funded by the LSC, including from the VCS, in order to ensure that provision meets the needs of learners, employers and communities, and is of high quality. There are four goals:

- meeting needs, improving choice
- putting teaching, training and learning at the heart of what we do
- developing the leaders, teachers, lecturers, trainers and support staff of the future
- developing a framework for quality and success.

14–19 Education and Skills White Paper (2005) – aims to raise the aspirations of all 14–19 year olds and to meet their education and skills needs with high quality academic and vocational provision. There are four main aims:

- ensure that every young person masters functional English and maths before they leave education
- improve vocational education
- stretch all young people and help universities to differentiate between the best candidates
- re-motivate disengaged learners.

21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential (2003); and **Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work (2005)** – these two White Papers set out the priorities for adult learning and skills in the context of the government's twin goals: economic success and social justice. At the heart of *21st Century Skills* is a commitment to increase the number of adults in the workforce with full Level 2 qualifications. 'Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work' reinforces this commitment but also places a priority on developing Level 3 skills in technician, advanced craft, skilled trade and associate professional areas. Two key initiatives are helping to support adult skills development: Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and the Employer Training Programme. Importantly for many VCS organisations with an interest in adult learning, both White papers commit the DfES and the LSC to agreeing a budget to 'safeguard' learning for personal and community development.

Key LSC Strategies

The LSC has published a number of strategies, four of which are particularly important for the VCS.

Working Together: a strategy for the voluntary and community sector and the Learning and Skills Council (2004) – acknowledges the VCS as a key partner for the LSC. It recognises that the VCS is particularly good at working with 'hard to reach' learners and can play a role in supporting the LSC's widening participation and equality and diversity objectives. It also understands that VCS organisations are both employers, with a role to play in workforce development, and a potential source of vital information and expertise about communities and a channel for communication.

Successful participation for all: widening adult participation strategy (2003) – aims to coordinate the range of LSC policies, programmes and initiatives that support learning opportunities for people from under represented groups. It acknowledges that widening participation will help to:

- meet the Skills for Life targets
- meet the Level 2 targets
- address the nation's skills agenda
- contribute to the social cohesion and social exclusion agendas
- promote demand for, and appreciation of, the value and pleasure of learning.

Equality and Diversity Strategy 2004 - 2007 (2004) – interprets and provides a framework for implementing

national equality and diversity legislation within LSC-funded provision. The six linked strands of activity are:

- **leadership** – providing vision and strong leadership in the learning and skills sector, and making more positive use of planning and funding to achieve greater equality and diversity
- **reaching out to learners who are disengaged** – improving the LSC's approach to communicating with/reaching out to marginalised groups
- **supporting compliance** – using the strength of the LSC's remit and work in partnership, promoting equality of opportunity among partners, and keeping them up-to-date with relevant legal developments
- **inclusive/personalised learning** – working to ensure that provision responds effectively to individual learners
- **working with employers** – working with employers to promote the business case for diversity and inclusion in the workforce
- **measuring outcomes** – measuring impacts and outcomes in a way that identifies good practice in equality and diversity.

The VCS is acknowledged within the strategy as having a particularly important role to play in helping the LSC to engage with marginalised groups.

Coherent Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Services for Adults (2004) – aims to deliver a coherent and integrated IAG service for adults and has led to a single information service and a network of local IAG services. The strategy acknowledges the need to work effectively with partners in the VCS as IAG and learning providers, and as a source of specialist expertise.

Remit and Grant Letters

The Secretary of State's remit letter (November 2000) to the LSC set out four broad objectives for the organisation:

- encourage young people to stay on in learning
- increase demand for learning by adults
- maximise the contribution of education and training to economic performance
- raised standards.

The priorities are reviewed and adjusted annually through the Grant Letter (issued in November/December), which also confirms the LSC's budget for the forthcoming year. The six priorities for 2005/06 are:

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

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Targets

The main success measures against which the LSC's performance is reviewed are the Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets related to post-16 learning. These are the basis of the LSC's public accountability and determine its spending priorities. The targets are as follows.

Young People

All young people to reach age 19 ready for skilled employment or higher education:

- increase the proportion of 19 year olds who achieve at least Level 2 by 3 percentage points between 2004 and 2006, and a further 2 percentage points between 2006 and 2008, and increasing the proportion of young people who achieve Level 3
- reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training or by 2 percentage points by 2010.

Higher Education (HE)

- To support the higher education (HE) sector to achieve the HE PSA participation target by encouraging many more young people from all backgrounds to gain the qualifications and aspiration for higher education.

Adults

To increase the number of adults with the skills required for employability and progression to higher levels of training by:

- improving the basic skills levels of 2.25 million adults between the launch of Skills for Life in 2001 and 2010, with a milestone of 1.5 million in 2007
- reducing by at least 40 per cent the number of adults in the workforce who lack NVQ Level 2 or equivalent qualifications by 2010. Working towards this, one million adults in the workforce to achieve Level 2 between 2003 and 2006.

What are the LSC's main functions?

The LSC has four main functions: planning; funding and contracting; quality assurance; and performance management.

Planning

The LSC has a responsibility to plan its investment in learning and skills to ensure there is an appropriate range of high quality learning provision to meet individual, employer and community needs, and that learners have a choice of learning opportunities.

Strategic Area Reviews

Having established initial three-year national and local corporate plans in 2001/02, the LSC introduced a local planning process in 2003 called Strategic Area Review (StAR). The aim was for each of the 47 local LSCs, with

partners, to develop a shared understanding of the learning and skills needs of individuals, employers and communities within their areas, to review the current patterns of provision for 16–19 year olds and adults, and through discussion and collaboration, to develop ways to improve the 'fit' between demand and supply of learning and skills. This process has been conducted differently by each local LSC but all were required to produce a plan to improve the 'fit' by March 2005.

The outcomes of StARs have been incorporated in the next phase of the LSC's approach to corporate planning – the Business Cycle – which was introduced nationally in 2004.

The Business Cycle

The new Business Cycle aims to integrate the LSC's responsibilities for planning, funding and raising standards into a simpler, more streamlined process that is more transparent for LSC staff, providers and partners. It seeks to connect the LSC's own planning process with those of providers, to reduce bureaucracy, and support more forward-looking planning between local LSCs, providers and partners. The approach to StAR is now incorporated in the on-going planning processes of the LSC.

The Business Cycle will work as follows:

- **autumn** – the cycle starts with reviews of current and future learning and skills priorities to determine what individuals, employers and communities are looking for. The LSC works with partners such as Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) on these reviews.
- **December** – the outcomes of the reviews are set out in Annual Statements of Priorities which are published nationally, regionally and locally (the first national Statement of Priorities was published in December 2004).
- **January/February** – local LSCs discuss with providers how they can meet the needs identified in the Statements of Priorities in their three-year development plans.
- **March/April** – local and regional LSC plans and budgets are produced in March and drawn together into national plans, targets and budgets in April.
- **April/May** – the LSC reviews and confirms regional and local LSC plans.
- **May/June** – local LSCs finalise discussions with providers and confirm their three-year development plans and agree funding.

Local LSCs are required to consult with key partners on their annual plans, specifically RDAs and Local Education Authorities. All local LSC plans should be approved by their local councils.

How can the VCS engage with LSC planning?

VCS organisations with direct LSC contracts, or indeed, sub-contracts from other LSC providers, will have some

experience of the Business Cycle. Those wishing to work with the LSC might find it useful to speak with their local LSC's VCS contact person about how they can contribute to the reviews of current and future priorities.

This aligns with the VCS role identified in Working Together as a source of expertise and channel for communication, and as a local employer with a contribution to make to workforce development. Starting these discussions in early autumn would be necessary in order to secure access to discretionary or mainstream funding by the following August.

Funding

The LSC has different duties in relation to funding learning for young people and for adults. It is legally required to fund 'sufficient' free provision for 16–19 year olds to enable as many as wish to, to participate in education and training. Fulfilling this entitlement has first call on the LSC's budget. By comparison, the LSC must secure a 'reasonable' level of quality education and training for people over 19. The interpretation of what is 'reasonable' is contested territory when budgets are tight. Pressure stems from the learning and skills sector's success in persuading more young people to enter and stay in post-16 education and training, national policy objectives for adult skills, and other government spending priorities.

Where does the money go?

The LSC has six main programme funding streams and a number of significant project, development and capital funding streams, and a discretionary budget. Figures in brackets are from the LSC's Annual Report and Accounts for 2003-2004.

Young People

- **Programme Budgets:** Further Education (£2,217 million); Work based Learning, including Entry to Employment and Apprenticeships (£565 million); and School Sixth Forms (£1,525 million).
- **Project Budgets:** Increased Flexibility projects for 14–16 year olds, to test new joint working arrangements between schools, colleges, employers, training providers and higher education institutions (£44 million); and Education Business Links Organisations – to support partnership working between education and business (£35 million).

Adults

- **Programme Budgets:** Further Education (£2,088 million); Work based Learning (for learners up to the age of 25 – £294 million); and Adult and Community Learning (£172 million).
- **Project Budgets:** Family Learning (£11 million); Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (£23 million); Information Advice and Guidance (£35 million); Workforce Development (£52 million); Employer Training Pilots – to subsidise and help to plan training in the workplace for employers (£33 million); Union Learning

Fund (£10 million); Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund (£20 million, or £30 millions including capital); Widening Adult Participation Action Fund (£2.5 million in 2004-05).

Development Funding (Supporting Young People and Adults Learning)

- Local Initiative and Development Fund (LID) – local LSCs' discretionary funds, which are a valuable source of funding to the VCS (and used increasingly to support mainstream programmes, for example to contribute to providers' quality improvement) (£189 million).

Capital Funding (Supporting Young People and Adults Learning)

- The LSC has committed £1.1 billion for capital projects between 2003 and 2006 and has national and regional capital funding strategies to focus future investment.

European Social Fund Programmes – £224 million

- The LSC is an ESF co-financing organisation, which means that it can fund ESF projects with matched funding from its own budgets. This is an important additional source of funding and has proved particularly valuable for resourcing VCS-based learning. ESF co-financing arrangements are managed by local LSC offices, in the context of a regional ESF co-financing plan, which is developed jointly by Government Offices, RDAs and Jobcentre Plus. Future ESF funding (after the end of 2006) is uncertain. It is anticipated that at least some ESF funding will migrate towards the new Eastern European Union accession countries.

Within programme budgets there are two areas of work of specific interest to the VCS.

Literacy, Language and Numeracy

LSC funding entitles learners to free tuition at Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3 and Levels 1 and 2. The DfES and LSC priority is to increase the numbers of adults who can demonstrate an improvement in their 'basic skills' (Skills for Life) by the achievement of a National Test at Level 1 or Level 2, but the LSC continues to support some Skills for Life provision that does not lead to the National Tests and also provision for learners at Entry Levels 1, 2 or 3, and pre-entry. VCS organisations are key providers of language, literacy and numeracy provision at all levels and including embedded learning.

First Steps Learning, Learning for Personal and Community Development

This is another key area of VCS engagement with adult learning. LSC consulted in autumn 2004 on proposals for reforming the planning and funding of first-steps and personal and community development learning. This is potentially an important area to the VCS as the funding changes do not imply that the LSC must continue with existing providers but may be in a position to welcome new ones. The responses will inform the LSC's wider review of its funding as part of the LSC agenda for change (see p. 24 in this volume) and in particular, its approach to 'first steps' learning.

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The recent Skills White Paper recognised that a focus on skills priorities risked removing 'shorter, lower level programmes' to the point where essential early progression steps towards a full Level 2 qualification (and beyond) are no longer available. (Para 252 – Skills White Paper)

How does LSC funding reach the VCS?

16–19 Education and Training

Of the £4.75 billion spent on young people in 2003/04, around 80 per cent went to FE colleges and school sixth forms. Just over 15 per cent of the total spent on young people in 2003/04 supported work based learning, the majority being delivered by private or VCS providers. The VCS is well placed to work with young people who are disengaged and in need of additional support with education and training. The Entry to Employment programme provides a key funding stream.

19+ Education and training

The prioritisation of LSC funds on adult learning and skills will vary between regions and local LSC areas. It will depend on the scale of need, performance to date (particularly in relation to the Skills for Life PSA targets) and the local LSC's analysis with partners, through StARs, of the appropriate balance of provision for their areas.

Of the £2.87 billion spent on adult learning in 2003/04, 73 per cent was spent by FE colleges, 10 per cent went on work based Modern Apprenticeships (now known as Apprenticeships), and just over 9 per cent on adult and community and family learning. VCS organisations have accessed funding via these routes in several ways:

- a small number of VCS organisations have been designated as 'external institutions' and are therefore able to draw down further education funding direct from the LSC
- some VCS organisations have partnership agreements with FE colleges to deliver adult learning through franchising
- some VCS organisations have contracts with the LSC to deliver work based learning
- some VCS organisations have contracted with their local authorities where these have contracted out all or some of their adult and community learning, (about 40 per cent contract out at least some of their provision).

Further Education Widening Participation Funding

In relation to widening participation (a key area of VCS activity and concern) the LSC funding formula includes an uplift factor of 12 per cent for the following groups of widening participation learners:

- basic skills learners
- those living in deprived areas
- those living in hostels and residential centres
- those with mental health problems
- travelers
- those whose statutory education has been interrupted
- those in care or who have recently left it

- asylum seekers
- refugees
- ex-offenders
- full-time carers
- those recovering from alcohol or drug dependency
- learners funded by the single regeneration budget (SRB).

Contracting

The LSC must comply with requirements laid down by the Treasury to use three basic types of funding agreement with providers. These are:

- the **contract**, the most widely known type of funding agreement
- **Grant-in-aid** funding under a financial memorandum
- **Grant** agreements.

Table below sets out the main LSC provider categories to which these three funding agreements apply:

Funding Agreement	Provider
Contract for Services (Education and Training Provision)	Private Training Providers; Business Links; Voluntary and Community Organisations
Grant-in-aid (Financial Memorandum)	FE Colleges
Conditions of Funding Agreement	Local Authorities; Government Departments; NHS Trusts
Grant	All

VCS organisations are primarily funded through contracts for service. Under this arrangement, the LSC's primary concern is with the achievement of specified outputs. The LSC can only contract with organisations that are legal entities and local LSC staff are advised to ensure that contracts are with organisations, including those from the VCS, that have legal status. It is worth noting that although contract negotiations are undertaken mostly by local LSC offices, the LSC as a whole is the legal entity for contractual purposes – local LSCs do not have separate legal status.

Small proportions of VCS activity can be funded under grant-in-aid arrangements through partnership funding, either through direct partnership provision or franchising. In direct partnership provision, teaching staff are employed by the college; in franchised provision the third party (or VCS franchisee) employs the staff. Colleges are required to consult with their local LSC prior to developing any new partnership or franchise arrangements. For franchised provision, the LSC expects that due consideration should be given to high quality provision that contributes to its

targets. Limits on the volume of franchising are likely to be applied where provision does not meet these conditions.

Quality

Success for All, Reforming Further Education and Training – Our vision for the future sets out a programme of reform for adult learning that applies to all providers including those from the VCS. The programme has four themes.

- 1 Meeting needs, improving choice** by improving the responsiveness and quality of services in each area to meet learners', employers' and communities' needs.
- 2 Putting teaching, training and learning at the heart of what we do** by identifying and sharing best practice which will guide learning and training programmes.
- 3 Developing the leaders, teachers, lecturers, trainers and support staff of the future**, including setting new targets for full-time and part-time college teachers to be qualified, and developing strong leadership and management through the Centre for Excellence in Leadership.
- 4 Developing a framework for quality and success** by putting into practice a planning, funding and accountability system, based on greater partnership and trust, including three-year funding agreements.

The DfES leads on themes two and three, the LSC on one and four. The latter have been translated into five aims within the LSC's Quality Improvement Strategy (2004).

- 1** Develop local patterns of education and training to meet the needs of learners, employers and communities.
- 2** Recognise and reward excellent providers, and encourage them to share good practice.
- 3** Improve the quality of education and training across the learning and skills sector so it becomes consistently strong.
- 4** Help the weakest providers achieve at least minimum levels of performance.
- 5** Improve the LSC's ability to deliver *Success for All* and the Quality Improvement Strategy.

The first of these aims relates to the LSC's planning responsibilities, in particular StARs and the Business Cycle. Aims two, three and four relate to the quality and success of education and training providers. The fifth supports the others and is focused on building the LSC's own capacity.

Funding Quality

The LSC's approach to funding providers is based on the 'something for something' principle. FE colleges and other providers that receive further education funding (including some LEAs and VCS organisations) can increase their funding year on year if they demonstrate excellence.

Providers are judged against three criteria to determine whether they will receive a real terms increase in their budget:

- progress against their three-year development plan (see Planning section)
- performance evidenced through inspection (see Quality Improvement)
- performance evidenced through success rates of learners (see Performance Management).

There are four categories for funding:

- premium rate funding for excellence
- standard additional funding
- poor performers who agree development plans
- those who decline to agree development plans (inflation only).

Quality improvement

The LSC's approach to quality improvement is based on the principle that providers are responsible for the quality of their own services. Ultimately, quality is measured against the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) through external inspection by either the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) or the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). Ofsted is responsible for inspecting schools and provision for young people in FE colleges. ALI inspects a wide range of work based and adult learning including apprenticeships, further education for adults, **learnirect** provision, adult and community learning, Jobcentre Plus provision, and learning in prisons. A number of VCS providers have experience of ALI inspection.

The emphasis in quality improvement is on provider self-assessment and development planning. The LSC requires all providers to assess the quality of their provision annually and to put in place a development plan to improve quality.

Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement

From 2006/07, the LSC will encourage providers of non-accredited learning that it funds to demonstrate that they have implemented a five-stage process for recognising and recording achievement. A number of VCS providers have been involved in piloting the process known as RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement). The process has been mapped to the Common Inspection Framework. LSC staff and VCS organisations interested in finding out more about RARPA should contact their local LSC VCS contact person (for details, see LSC website), or the RARPA website (<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/RARPA>) – there is also a forthcoming guide on effective practice.

Quality Improvement Support Programme

The LSC funds a quality improvement programme in England called Support for Success, which continues until March 2006. This is run by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) and has three strands: FE; work based learning; and adult and community learning (ACL). The latter is supported by NIACE. VCS organisations that are funded by the LSC to deliver learning, either directly or through another organisation with which they

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have a contract or service level agreement, are eligible for support under this programme. For example, this could include consultancy support if this is accessed on their behalf as a subcontractor by the organisation with which the LSC contracts; or by joining the Quality Improvements Networks. There are currently three of these (for FE, work based learning and ACL) offering meetings in all regions. There is a small membership fee.

Performance Management

The LSC's Business Cycle and quality improvement strategy provide the context for the LSC's performance monitoring process. This is a single system for reviewing the performance of providers, local LSCs and the regional LSC, based on a scorecard which reports on the performance of each local LSC area. The key indicators that make up the scorecard have been developed from three sources:

- the PSA targets for learning and skills
- the LSC's priorities for the year as set out in the grant letter
- other targets set as part of the *Success for All* programme.

Local LSC performance review with providers has two phases:

- **autumn** – local LSCs monitor initial enrolment and participation trends with providers
- **spring** – a full performance review is undertaken with each provider, to consider the achievements of the previous academic year, in particular progress against four headline targets relating to: learner numbers; employer engagement; success rates; professional qualifications for teachers, lecturers and trainers.

The evidence considered by local LSCs for performance review is important not least because it informs decisions about whether providers receive premium funding, standard funding, or inflation-only increases in funding (see Funding Quality). Targeted support is available for providers, particularly those with 'serious concerns'.

Reporting

The LSC publishes an Annual Report and Accounts and its website provides access to national statistics on post-16 learning generated from returns from LSC-funded providers. Some local LSCs also publish a progress report for their local areas and a number have provided reports on their Strategic Area Reviews (for example, LSC Kent and Medway, LSC Milton Keynes Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, LSC Cambridgeshire, and LSC Birmingham and Solihull).

Measuring

Measuring the performance of the LSC and the provision it funds is a complex task given the range of government targets and internal performance indicators, the different types of provision and delays in the reporting cycle. The LSC is working to develop a clearer set of indicators, through the Measuring Success initiative.

What does the future hold?

Agenda for Change

Agenda for change is based on six themes identified through a process of prior consultation.

- **Skills/employers** – how to help colleges best meet the needs of employers and the economy.
- **Quality** – how best to build an adult learning sector that is fully committed to quality and delivery to the highest standards throughout.
- **Funding** – a radical overhaul of the LSC's methodology, to ensure that the available funds are used most effectively to support the policy priorities with the minimum of complexity and bureaucracy.
- **Business Excellence** – driving up the efficiency of the learning and skills sector, individually and collectively, including investing in improvements.
- **Data** – radically revised and simplified systems, which deliver the data and management information that providers need.
- **Reputation** – highlighting the major contribution the LSC makes to the delivery of education, training and skills fit for the 21st century.

Although the original focus of the LSC's agenda for change was on FE colleges, the outcomes of the review will have implications for all LSC funded providers, including those from the VCS. There is to be further consultation including around a proposed approach to allocating funds for 'first steps' and 'personal and community development learning'. This will be of considerable significance to VCS organisations.

Who's who at the LSC?**National**

Chair:	Chris Banks
Chief Executive:	Mark Haysom
Chair of Young People's Committee:	Ian Ferguson
Chair of Adult Learning Committee:	Frances O'Grady
Chair of Equality and Diversity Committee:	Shirley Cramer
Director of Learning Group:	Caroline Neville
Director of Skills Group:	David Way
Director of Strategy and Communications:	Rob Wye

Regional

Regional Director (South West):	Malcolm Gillespie
Regional Director (South East):	Henry Ball
Regional Director (London):	Jacqui Henderson
Regional Director, Operations (London):	Verity Bullough
Regional Director (West Midlands):	David Cragg
Regional Director (East Midlands):	David Hughes
Regional Director (Eastern):	Mary Conneely
Regional Director (North West):	John Korzeniewski
Regional Director (North East):	Chris Roberts
Regional Director (Yorkshire and the Humber):	Margaret Coleman

The current membership of the National Council is available from the LSC's website: www.lsc.gov.uk

Regional LSC Voluntary and Community Sector Leads

South West:	Jill Stanley
South East:	Jon Thompson Fiona Willmot
London:	Mary Francis
West Midlands:	Stephen Lilley
East Midlands:	Di Pudney Paul Williamson
Eastern:	Jo Baty
North West:	Ray Begley
North East:	Simon Wigington Helen Deakin
Yorkshire and the Humber:	David Windle Mick Reynolds

Local LSCs' VCS contact details are available from the LSC's website:
http://www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents/SubjectListing/ConsultationsandResponses/Completedconsultationsandresponses/Working_Together_Strategy.htm

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Definitions

Qualifications Equivalents

Adult Literacy and Numeracy Standards	Vocational and academic equivalents	National Curriculum
Entry 1 Entry 2 Entry 3	No equivalent	Key Stage 1
Level 1	NVQ Level 1 GCSE grades D-G	Key Stage 2
Level 2	NVQ Level 2 GCSE grades A* - C	Key Stage 3/4

A Full Level 2 qualification is equivalent to a NVQ Level 2 qualification, 5 GCSEs grades A* - C and a number of other equivalent vocational qualifications. For full details, contact your local LSC.

Useful reading and websites

The LSC's Annual Statement of Priorities is available at www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents/Keyinitiatives/OurAnnualStatementOfPriorities/skillsweneed.

Regional and local statements of priorities should be available on local LSC websites or from local LSC offices – ask your VCS contact person.

The original LSC Remit Letter and subsequent Grant Letters are available at www.lsc.gov.uk/national/corporate/aboutthelsc/purposeandstructure/keystrategicdocuments

The LSC FE Funding Guidance 2004/05 and Annual Report and Accounts 2003/04 are available at: www.lsc.gov.uk

More information about Sector Skills Councils is available from the Sector Skills Development Agency website: <http://www.ssda.org.uk/>

More information about funding quality is available on the LSC website: www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents/Series/Circulars/SuccessfulforAllArrangementsforpremiumratefunding.htm

More information about the inspection process is available from the Adult Learning Inspectorate website: www.ali.gov.uk

More information about the LSC's Quality Improvement Strategy can be found on the LSC website at www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents/SubjectListing/ImprovingQuality/Qualityimprovementstrategy

More information and contact details about the Support4Success Programme can be found at www.s4s.org.uk

The Government's Skills Strategy White Papers are available on DfES website: www.dfes.gov.uk

Section 3

Volume 2

ChangeUp – capacity building and
infrastructure framework for the voluntary
and community sector

Section Three

ChangeUp – capacity building and infrastructure framework for the voluntary and community sector

This section offers LSC staff and their voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners:

- an outline of the main elements of the ChangeUp programme
- signposts to further information
- some suggestions for LSC staff about how to engage with and influence ChangeUp developments in their areas.

Why is ChangeUp important to the LSC?

ChangeUp is a capacity-building framework for VCS infrastructure (see also Section Four: Volume 2). It is a significant, on-going programme of government investment and intervention in the VCS that is intended to bolster the sector's capacity to deliver publicly-funded services. All strategic bodies working with the VCS will need to engage with it.

If the vision is right, and the architecture appropriate, then ChangeUp will make it possible to deliver a real and lasting improvement in support services for frontline organisations and justify sustained investment in infrastructure not just by central government, but also by other public and private sector funders – including the LSC.

By committing itself to implementing Working Together, the LSC has shown how important the VCS is to its work. The Government's ChangeUp investment and activity is designed to result in a more robust sector that is better able to play its full role in partnership with the LSC at local, regional and national levels. It is important that LSC staff take the opportunity to influence this investment to ensure that the sector is strengthened in ways that will be mutually beneficial to the VCS and to the LSC.

Through the Home Office Active Community Unit, which leads on implementation, central government is making an initial £80 million investment to support the framework with over 65 per cent of the funding earmarked for delivery at a regional or local level. An additional £70 million will be available in 2006/07 and 2007/08. Government offices are coordinating investment in each region.

The ChangeUp framework

Following the 2002 cross-government review of the VCS's role in service delivery, the sector and central and local government developed a shared strategy to enable VCS organisations, with a focus on frontline organisations, especially small and medium-sized organisations, to access the support they need.

The resulting ChangeUp framework has the aim that by 2014 the needs of frontline VCS organisations will be met by support that is:

- available nationwide
- structured for maximum efficiency
- excellent and accessible to all, reflecting and promoting diversity
- sustainably funded.

The framework provides a ten-year structure for developing support and highlights key strategic actions needed to build it. It is intended as a planning tool for government, funders and VCS partners at all levels, enabling them to develop action plans and providing a point of reference for future thinking. The actions require activity at local, regional and national levels, partnership working across a range of public sector agencies, VCS and other stakeholders, and a complex web of joined-up and coordinated activity. This presents major challenges to the VCS and to those external agencies, like the LSC, that seek to work with the sector, and particularly with its infrastructure bodies.

The framework's main proposals are to:

- improve the support available in key areas of need across VCS organisations
- modernise sector support services and representation at national, regional and local levels
- ensure the application of Compact principles by government in its approach to building sector capacity.

The framework structure

ChangeUp is based on the principle of provision being available as close to the point of need as is economically viable. This will generate demands for advice and assistance which may come from other VCS organisations, the private sector, the public sector and funders. The framework places greater emphasis on collaboration, consortia and economical face-to-face support.

The ChangeUp framework focuses on building and strengthening VCS infrastructure with the intention that by 2014, there will be:

- a stable baseline of good quality infrastructure in every local area, in the regions and nationally
- leaner, stronger and more cohesive infrastructure configured to achieve maximum efficiency and impact
- effective joint working across and within the different levels and strengthened peer learning between both frontline and infrastructure organisations
- a variety of consortia arrangements in place offering opportunities to involve smaller organisations in service delivery whilst achieving economies of scale for purchasers
- consortia to share good practice and knowledge and to help build the capacity of smaller organisations.

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In order to achieve this it proposes:

- an Infrastructure National Partnership
- a review of regional, sub-regional and local infrastructures
- a review of specialist infrastructure.

Infrastructure National Partnership

The Infrastructure National Partnership will:

- provide the oversight and leadership required to deliver a step change in the delivery of infrastructure support to the sector
- play a leading role in helping national hubs of expertise (see Key themes for support) to join up to coordinate activity and ensure that they have reach and representation at regional and sub-regional levels
- establish a protocol on the creation of new infrastructure bodies to avoid unnecessary duplication
- develop tools and standards for performance improvement in VCS infrastructure
- establish and oversee a national web-based information portal.

In addition, the framework proposes that the Infrastructure National Partnership should:

- be structured inclusively and involve specialist infrastructure
- encourage on-going dialogue about the roles and relationships of specialist and generalist infrastructure
- report on progress on increasing the reach and impact of generalist infrastructure services in meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities and promoting good practice.

Regional, sub-regional and local infrastructure

The framework proposals are already having an impact on the ground. Cross-sectoral review and planning exercises are taking place to agree the shape and structure of provision that will best meet the needs of frontline organisations, and how this should be funded. Eventually these are intended to happen at regional, sub-regional and local levels.

Infrastructure Investment Plans (IIPs) are being produced which are intended to include:

- actions to meet the needs of frontline organisations
- plans for addressing gaps, overcoming weaknesses and improving reach
- protocols for joint working.

The planning process requires the contribution of a range of providers and includes greater emphasis on collaboration, developing consortia, and linking larger organisations with smaller organisations. National Association of Councils for the Voluntary Service (NACVS) is currently mapping the IIPs to review their contents against the National Hubs' business plans.

It is envisaged that at regional, sub-regional and local levels, infrastructure will gradually coalesce into geographic hubs of activity with services sharing premises and back office facilities, or merging, depending on need. The vision is that there should be local hubs of infrastructure activity delivering generalist and appropriately configured specialist infrastructure functions and services in every local area and region by 2008.

Specialist infrastructure

The framework recognises that it is difficult but essential to ensure that the new arrangements improve access to support for small VCS organisations operating at neighbourhood level, and for organisations working with marginalised and disadvantaged communities, including those in rural areas.

Accordingly, it proposes that IIPs should:

- detail how the needs of diverse organisations and communities should be met
- recognise the need for independent and accountable structures to represent and account for communities of interest
- include an integral role for specialist infrastructure organisations in the development of local hubs of infrastructure activity.

The framework also gives the Infrastructure National Partnerships responsibility to encourage links between specialist and generalist infrastructures, and to review the impact of the latter on more excluded communities.

Key themes for support

The ChangeUp framework identifies VCS support needs in relation to six key themes:

- performance improvement
- workforce development and leadership
- ICT
- governance
- recruiting and developing volunteers
- financing voluntary and community sector activity.

Long-term objectives to 2014 have been agreed for each of these and six national 'Hubs of Expertise' are being established (during 2005) with the aim of improving collaboration, reducing confusion, and providing gateways to advice and services for frontline organisations.

Performance improvement

The ChangeUp objectives are that frontline organisations will be better able to improve the performance of their organisations; make choices about the right tools, and access support and advice more easily.

The framework identifies the need for an increase in the provision of affordable face-to-face support at local level including:

- low-cost consultancy
- peer support
- action learning
- 'cascade' training
- secondments and mentoring
- 'clearing houses' linking experienced managers with organisations in need of support.

Sub-regional partnerships have a role in bringing together agencies concerned with performance improvement to identify needs and develop plans for meeting them.

The National Hub of Expertise in Performance Improvement will:

- offer support, training, signposting and opportunities to share good practice
- influence funders and regulators to ensure that performance improvement is recognised and supported
- oversee the implementation of a Performance Improvement Strategy for the sector.

Workforce development

Workforce development is likely to be the area of ChangeUp of most significance to the LSC. The ChangeUp objectives are that there will be a greater range of accessible development opportunities with increased take-up by VCS workers; and that employers will have improved access to support and advice on human resource issues (see Working Together in Practice, Volume One, Section Six).

The framework identifies the need for:

- VCS employers to be engaged more effectively in the development and planning of skills training
- greater investment in workforce development from both the supply and demand sides
- infrastructure providers to play a role in delivering, signposting and brokering training provision, as well as offering a clearing house function to develop twinning relationships between organisations
- a dedicated source of specialist expertise at sub-regional level to share across a number of localities
- the strengthening and proper resourcing of the skills development role of regional networks through dedicated posts (by 2005) (for contact details of current post holders see Section Four: Volume 2), and regional strategies for workforce development (by April 2006).

The National Hub of Expertise in Workforce Development (which has evolved from the Voluntary Sector National Training Organisation) will:

- lead on the promotion of skills development and good employment practice

- advise Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and oversee the implementation of the VCS Skills Strategy
- provide skills support, advice and signposting for frontline organisations.

LSC staff worked with the Active Communities Unit (ACU) and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) to obtain start-up funding for the national hub. LSC are working closely with the national hub in order to identify skills priorities for the sector. For more information contact elayne.henderson@lsc.gov.uk

The work of the hub will develop in the context of relevant National Occupational Standards, including those for social enterprise managers and advisers (developed by the Social Enterprise Partnership and the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative); and for Community Development Work (developed through consultation led by the Community Work Forum).

ICT

The ChangeUp objectives are that frontline organisations and funders will share a common awareness of the costs and benefits of ICT, enabling them to make informed choices about its use; and that there will be affordable and reliable support models in place, with user friendly advice, including volunteering and *pro bono* support.

The framework proposes that:

- reference information, including basic support and signposting on ICT issues, best practice information, 'how to' guides, and strategic analysis of new developments in ICT, should be accessible via the web and other formats by 2005
- infrastructure bodies should play a lead role in organising training, networking events, and email news services
- a telephone helpline should be available for those organisations without significant ICT capability by 2005.

The National Hub of Expertise in ICT consists of a partnership of national VCS organisations that:

- provide strategic oversight of ICT issues in the sector
- support and coordinate the above activity at national, regional and sub-regional levels
- link the sector to government initiatives to widen access to ICT.

Governance

The ChangeUp objectives are that board members will be aware of their responsibilities; and that they will have access to accurate and helpful information and developments. The intention is that being a trustee should be more attractive and that boards will become more diverse, reflecting the communities they serve.

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The National Hub of Expertise in Governance will:

- secure the sector's ownership of, and commitment to, a strategic approach to governance development
- 'join up' the many organisations, networks and individuals involved in developing governance
- promote the benefits of board membership and champion the value of diverse involvement in governance
- offer support, training, signposting and opportunities to share good practice
- lead the development of competencies and standards in governance practice.

Recruiting and developing volunteers

The ChangeUp objectives are that there will be a leaner, effectively marketed and high quality volunteering infrastructure reaching, recruiting and placing a greater number and diversity of individuals; and that there will be improved volunteer management. The core functions of volunteer centres, which have demonstrated their effectiveness, have been established by the national body, Volunteering England. ChangeUp seeks to rationalise the infrastructure and clarify the roles of these bodies.

The framework identifies the need for:

- provision for local volunteer engagement and organisational support and development through volunteer centres in all areas of the country by 2009
- a commonly branded local volunteering infrastructure linked to the achievement of quality standards available from the end of 2005.

As the National Hub, Volunteering England will:

- develop local volunteer networks to promote volunteering locally within the framework of regional and national campaigns and initiatives
- develop and deliver regional and sub-regional training and support programmes to enhance the skills of paid and voluntary managers of volunteers.

Financing voluntary and community sector activity

The ChangeUp objectives are that frontline organisations will be able to take advantage of opportunities to diversify their income sources; demonstrate increased skill in contract negotiation; and achieve more effective fundraising.

The National Hub (incorporating fundraising, procurement and enterprise) will:

- provide a focus and lead on growing sustainability within the VCS by building capacity to win contracts and diversify income
- build collaboration between frontline organisations to take advantage of commissioning opportunities
- promote good practice in fundraising

- work with funders and purchasers on funding and procurement practice
- engage strategically with advisers and stakeholders from other sectors including public sector funders and support agencies.

Government and VCS capacity building

Government departments are expected to apply the principles of the national Compact on relations between Government and the VCS in England. The LSC has already signed up to those principles and the Working Together strategy encourages all local LSCs to agree regional or local compacts with the VCS (see Working Together p. 42).

The ChangeUp framework proposes that Government departments should:

- adopt a strategic approach to funding VCS infrastructure
- build in consideration of the capacity building needs of the sector at the planning stage of major programmes to which VCS organisations will contribute
- recognise and contribute towards the costs of building organisational capacity when funding frontline organisations as part of meeting the full cost of delivery.

In view of the increasing recognition that VCS organisations are critical to the longer-term achievement of the Skills for Life and Level 2 PSA targets, and the sector's particular contribution to the LSC's widening participation, workforce development and equality and diversity agendas, it is appropriate for the LSC to develop a response (whether at national, regional or local levels) to the ChangeUp proposal for more strategic investment in VCS infrastructure.

Achievements to date

The landscape of VCS infrastructure is changing rapidly, and not always clearly or coherently, as a result of implementation. However, there are some easily identifiable achievements. In *Developing Capacity: Next Steps for ChangeUp* (March 2005), the Home Office reported on:

- the formation of partnerships and the development of business plans for the national hubs of expertise
- the drafting and piloting of a performance improvement framework
- the establishment and rapid development of cross-sector consortia at regional and local level
- the review of existing support and the drafting of infrastructure investment plans to cover every area of England
- increasing evidence of success on the part of public sector funders in adopting a more strategic approach to funding VCS infrastructure.

Challenges

Early analysis and feedback suggests a number of key challenges in implementation that have implications for LSC engagement with these developments:

- there is no focus for sector ownership of implementation
- the programme lacks clear mechanisms to join up and coordinate activity
- the multiple strands of investment are complex and can be confusing
- it is unclear how a general commitment to diversity will be turned into tangible results for the benefit of marginalised communities
- learning and best practice is hampered by the lack of a strong evidence base.

Next Steps – Capacity Builders

Developing Capacity: Next Steps for ChangeUp sets out a plan to build sector ownership, ensure coherence and facilitate learning across the programme. This involves the establishment of Capacity Builders, a sector-led capacity building agency.

Capacity Builders will consolidate successful work at regional and local level, and aim to ensure coherence across these arrangements. It will be responsible for:

- overall programme design, dissemination of good practice, and management and marketing of ChangeUp
- ensuring consistency, and better connection between local, regional and national activity
- performance management of contracts and grants offered under ChangeUp.

Next steps for LSC staff

LSC staff will wish to ensure they are briefed well about ChangeUp developments in their locality, particularly in relation to those aspects of the framework that are of greatest relevance to the LSC – workforce development, funding, ICT and performance improvement. There will be some instances where it would be useful to the LSC to influence local developments. Here are a number of “next steps” which should help with this.

Step One

Identify which elements of the ChangeUp framework are of particular relevance to the LSC and where there are linkages with LSC activity and priorities at regional and sub-regional levels. Areas of particular interest are likely to be:

- workforce development (see Toolkit Volume One, Section Six)
- infrastructure development and sustainability.

Step Two

Contact Government Office staff with responsibility for coordinating the regional implementation of the ChangeUp framework. Ask them for a briefing on current developments.

Step Three

Identify the key VCS infrastructure organisations and consortia in the region and sub-region (see Toolkit Volume One, Section Two). Identify the key contacts in relation to ChangeUp developments and ask them for a briefing.

Step Four

Find out whether the regional and sub-regional infrastructure organisations and consortia have a post with specific responsibility for learning and skills. If so, make contact with the post-holder (see Toolkit Volume One, Section Two) and ask them for a briefing about progress with regional and sub-regional strategies for workforce development. Note – there is some variation in job titles and role description.

Step Five

Find out from the Government Office whether infrastructure investment plans (IIPs) are in preparation, or completed at regional and sub-regional level. If they are, it could be helpful to see the plan or any drafts.

Step Six

Consider the following questions when addressing workforce development strategies and infrastructure development plans.

- What implications do the plans and strategies have for the LSC?
- How do the plans and strategies link to existing LSC work both with the VCS and with other sectors?
- Has the LSC any input to make to the plans and strategies?
- Is the LSC being given the opportunity to make such input?
- How can the LSC help implement the plans and strategies?

Step Seven

Contact the Government Office for a copy of the regional ChangeUp investment plan. Identify whether there are ways in which LSC funding could be “joined up” with Government investment in ChangeUp in order to enhance the achievement of joint priorities.

Step Eight

Share information with other relevant regional and local LSC colleagues to gain a clearer picture of the implementation of the ChangeUp framework across your region and agree how you will work with it in the future.

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Useful reading and websites

Cross Cutting Review of the Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery, HM Treasury, 2002

ChangeUp. Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector, Home Office, 2004

Developing Capacity: Next Steps for ChangeUp. Delivering Excellence in the Voluntary and Community Sector, Active Communities Unit, Home Office, 2005.

www.volunteeringengland.org

www.vcslearninglinks.org.uk (live in August 2005)

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

www.nacvs.org.uk

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/active/index.asp>

www.vsnto.org.uk

Social enterprise National Occupational Standards
www.sepgb.co.uk

Community development work National Occupational Standards
www.fcld.org.uk

Section 4

Volume 2

Voluntary and community sector
infrastructure: an overview and guide to
effective collaboration

Section Four

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Voluntary and community sector infrastructure: an overview and guide to effective collaboration

This section offers LSC staff and their voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners:

- an outline of the reciprocal benefits of LSC work with VCS infrastructure
- a brief overview of VCS infrastructure
- suggested ways in which local and regional LSCs can work with and support these arrangements.

Mutual advantage and common ground

It is not possible for LSC staff to work with the many and various VCS organisations involved in learning and skills in their areas (either through direct delivery or in other ways such as outreach, referral and information, advice and guidance). VCS infrastructure organisations offer a way forward, and indeed, building good working relations with them is a key element of finding 'smarter' ways of joint working (see Section One: Volume 2).

In broad terms, sector infrastructure bodies support the work of the LSC and VCS organisations interested in learning by:

- **bridging** between the LSC, and VCS organisations interested in learning, and the many VCS organisations that contribute to learning in their locality, including those working with the most excluded and 'hard to reach' communities
- **encompassing** both learning and a broad range of other areas of VCS activity such as neighbourhood renewal, creative arts and health, enabling wider considerations to be addressed in planning
- **disseminating** information via networks and forums (and significantly, through routes that are wider than LSC-funded providers), and acting as a two-way channel for consultation and communication on key issues and developments
- **researching** and gathering data and other intelligence on VCS learning and skills needs, identifying target groups, and advising on how best to approach and work with them
- **supporting** the implementation of Working Together in various ways, including contributing to benchmarking activities and compact development at sub-regional and regional levels – with sufficient resourcing, infrastructure bodies could potentially take a lead role in such exercises
- **enhancing** mutual understanding and trust and encouraging realistic expectations of what is feasible as well as desirable in joint work
- **combining** their strategic and operational experience, knowledge and connections to act as credible and authoritative sources of expertise
- **supporting** the LSC in hearing the "voice of the learner" and understanding learner-centred practice, and ensuring

these perspectives are incorporated into policy development and local planning

- **helping** to develop the capacity of local VCS organisations with an interest in learning and skills to deliver high quality learning in local settings
- **encouraging** a wider range of VCS bodies to see themselves as part of a learning and skills sector, and to understand how this might align with their other primary (and complementary) purposes
- **briefing** and supporting VCS members on local LSC boards to ensure they are well informed and able to participate fully and effectively in LSC discussions and decision making
- **offering** positive learning and capacity building opportunities for LSC staff through attachment or placement schemes and two-way placements (see Case Study 9: Volume 2).

These are all entirely supportive of the key roles for the VCS identified in the Working Together strategy: as providers of learning opportunities; as employers; and as a source of expertise and channel of communication.

In recognition of the significance of infrastructure bodies to LSC/VCS engagement, and of the associated capacity and cost issues involved in the development of their various complementary roles, the Working Together strategy's "key actions" include a commitment to "agree and promote [a] common framework for expectations of and support for, VCS infrastructure organisations." The LSC understands that VCS infrastructure bodies are autonomous and will set their own principles and standards. Therefore the strategy suggests that the framework might be developed best through collaboration between local and/or regional LSCs and VCS infrastructure organisations.

Action to support LSC investment in VCS infrastructure must also align strategically with activity around the ChangeUp programme. As Section Three explains, VCS infrastructure is experiencing a process of profound change as a result of this long-term programme of reform. New structures are emerging and traditional configurations and relationships are shifting and adjusting, or at least being challenged to do so. It is important for LSC staff to recognise that if ChangeUp delivers its objectives, VCS infrastructure arrangements will look significantly different in the future.

Keeping in touch with these changes is now a prerequisite for effective LSC/VCS work. In view of this, readers might find it helpful to read both this Section and Section Three in this volume and to use the contact information they both provide.

An overview of VCS infrastructure

In view of the changes referred to above, the following outline identifies the more enduring structural and

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functional aspects of VCS infrastructure and signals various relevant new developments.

VCS infrastructure bodies are also known as 'umbrella' or 'second tier' organisations. They support 'first tier' VCS organisations in delivering services direct to communities or individuals, or in campaigning and advocacy. They function at national, regional, sub-regional and local levels and may be either generic (meeting a wide range of needs in a geographic area), or 'sub-sectoral' (offering support for a particular area of work such as drug abuse or homelessness). Infrastructure support is also provided by organisations external to the VCS such as local authorities, the Community Development Foundation, the Charity Commission, and Business Links.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) recently identified a number of key roles and functions for infrastructure bodies. These are:

- **voice** – providing a voice for their membership/constituency (or giving them a greater voice than they would have individually) to government, funders, business and others
- **development** – providing capacity building support to meet existing needs and by identifying unmet support needs
- **best practice and advice** – promoting and supporting best practice and providing advice in key issues of concern
- **interface** – providing access to their membership/constituency for other agencies or individuals including government, partnerships and researchers (and visa versa)
- **coordination and networking** – both horizontally and vertically between member/constituent organisations and with other organisations performing complementary roles
- **brokering** – pro-actively identifying opportunities for organisations to work together, either across the VCS or voluntary organisations working with government [and its agencies such as the LSC].

The key functions identified by NCVO are: support and capacity building; networking and events; advice, information and signposting; policy; research; services; training; and campaigning and advocacy ('Voluntary Sector Infrastructure: a discussion paper', NCVO, February 2003).

Local and sub-regional infrastructure

Local generic infrastructure support is offered by a range of organisations including 350 Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS), 38 Rural Community Councils (RCC), Volunteer Bureaux (VB), Community Foundations, and Development Trusts. These are often referred to as Local Development Agencies (LDAs) and increasingly, as Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs). There are also more specialist sub-regional bodies such as the growing number of learning and training consortia (see Section Five: Volume 2). In particular, CVS provide a crucial bridging role at local level. They develop, support, promote and represent VCS interests

by helping groups of local people work together on issues that concern them (such as childcare, health, housing); by providing advice and services; promoting the contribution of the VCS to the local authority, the NHS and government agencies; and by enabling local people and organisations to use their skills to the benefit of their community. The work of CVS involves brokering and delivering accredited and non-accredited training in a range of skills needed for effective voluntary activity.

In addition to their core functions, local infrastructure bodies provide a strategic voice for the VCS, for example, with local government, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Learning Partnerships (LPs), they manage government funding, identify training and other support needs, act as managing agents for smaller VCS bodies accessing funding (for example, from the LSC), support quality improvement and project management, and encourage other local VCS networks and intermediary bodies.

It is also worth noting that *Firm Foundations* (2005), the government's framework for community capacity building, emphasizes the importance of participatory and inclusive local forums or networks that draw people and groups together for mutual support and collaborations. 'Community anchor organisations' are seen as key agents in promoting local community development and neighbourhood engagement, and are one of the four priority areas for action.

In response to ChangeUp, there are also a growing number of sub-regional cross-sector partnerships or consortia that have a responsibility to identify the infrastructure needs of their areas, and to incorporate these, and responses to them, into an Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) that reflects the thematic priorities of the ChangeUp framework (see Section Three: Volume 2).

The developing relationships between these generic groupings and local learning and training consortia are variable at present. In some areas the learning and training consortium has a key role in establishing the ChangeUp arrangements and will contribute significantly to the subsequent delivery of services. For example, Humberside Learning Consortium has been working with Local Development Agencies (including CVS and RCC) to produce the investment plan for the area; and the Learning Curve is a member of the ChangeUp consortium for Wiltshire and Swindon and will be the local hub for workforce development. On the other hand, in other areas, learning and training consortia are struggling to be recognised as part of VCS infrastructure.

LSC staff could play an important role in this context by helping to ensure that the needs and, importantly, potential contribution of learning and training consortia are reflected in ChangeUp planning processes at sub-regional and regional levels.

Regional infrastructure

Regional organisations are the most recent level of VCS infrastructure to develop and are growing in both identity and significance in response to the government's emerging regionalisation agenda. There are **generic Regional Voluntary Sector Networks (RVSNs)** in all nine English regions that help to secure links between the VCS and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs), Government Offices for the Region (GORs) and regional assemblies.

Most regions also have a **network for black and minority ethnic (BME) VCS bodies**. These are intended to support the engagement of black and minority ethnic organisations and communities with regional issues, strategies and developments. This is particularly significant in view of recent research that suggests these groups face a disproportionately large funding shortfall that is partly attributable to low levels of involvement with umbrella bodies that could offer advice and support (see *Finding the Funds* Second report of the BME Sustainability Project 2003).

Recognition of this issue underpinned the strong focus of the LSC's Capacity Building Fund (supporting the roll out of Working Together) on supporting these organisations to engage with learning. Further work under ChangeUp will develop a race equality framework against which VCS infrastructure will be appraised.

Current initiatives are exploring other ways of addressing the issue. In Yorkshire and the Humber, for example, the Government Office has commissioned a regional 'BME Panel' to promote engagement with regional agencies. The pilot panel has produced a position paper to inform the LSC and other key partners about strategic approaches to capacity development with black and minority ethnic organisations in relation to learning. The paper will soon be available on the Regional Forum website (www.regionalforum.org.uk).

As this demonstrates, regional networks offer the LSC a conduit to consult with black and minority ethnic communities, particularly around how best to meet their learning and skills needs.

Although RVSNS involvement with the broader learning and training needs of the sector varies between regions, there are a growing number of examples of innovative and effective practice.

Some RVSNS now have dedicated **Workforce and Skills posts**, as recommended by both the Voluntary Sector Skills Strategy and ChangeUp (see p. 38 for contact details). These posts focus on promoting access to high quality learning and skills opportunities for all VCS staff and volunteers. They have a remit to develop partnerships between key regional skills agencies and structures, such as the regional LSC, regional skills alliances, RDAs and GORs. In

other areas, a focus on skills has been assimilated into wider staff portfolios and is therefore more vulnerable to changing priorities and imperatives. An aim of the business plan for the National Hub on Workforce Development is to achieve dedicated posts in all regions.

These roles are supported by the national Workforce Development Hub through a **Cross Regional Skills Group** that consists of all regional staff with skills as part or all of their work. This meets quarterly to share experience and ideas around key VCS interventions in learning and skills, including building relations with the LSC at regional level, and engaging with each regional Sector Skills Development Agency Partnership Manager. The group now shares information on ChangeUp developments.

As part of a trend towards more regional working within the VCS, **regional skills groups** are emerging in some areas. For example, Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) has initiated a Learning Strategy Group that is developing an active role in consultation, policy development and strategies to support best practice. They have recently published a 'Manifesto' for learning based on extensive consultation with the sector and key external agencies, including the LSC. The Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum facilitates a network of sub-regional learning and skills consortia that has been meeting for four years to share practice. More recently they have also identified VCS priorities for the developing regional Working Together implementation plan. The network will continue to develop a focus on policy, research and strategy in the region.

These developments, including the emergence of **regional VCS skills strategies** (a recommendation of ChangeUp, led by the RVSNS), are contributing to more coherent approaches to identifying and meeting VCS learning and skills needs. This has significant potential benefits to both the VCS and the planning process of the LSC. Coordinating RVSNS activities in this area with the LSC Business Cycle would help to ensure that resulting information is used to best effect for VCS learners, service users and providers.

National

Generic national infrastructure bodies include NCVO, the National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS) and the Federation of Community Development Learning (FCDL), which support community groups and organisations. There are national bodies that offer different types of support such as the Charities Aid Foundation, and those that work with particular areas of voluntary activity such as the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) and Consortia+ – a national network (served by NIACE) for the growing number of VCS infrastructure organisations with a focus on learning and training.

Social enterprise has also been developing specialist support bodies, including the Social Enterprise Training and Support Consortium (setas), which facilitates collaboration between social enterprise training providers and agencies across the

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country. Its website (www.setas.co.uk) is a resource for those seeking appropriate training, support and materials. The Social Enterprise Coalition (SEC) is the national body for social enterprise. It provides a platform for showcasing social enterprise and offers information on effective practice, finance, support and training opportunities. SEC also has links to regional bodies.

VCS infrastructure and Working Together

In some regions, for example the North East, West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber, joint LSC and VCS Working Together steering groups are emerging to develop shared strategic approaches to implementation. Local consortia and RVSNS are involved in these groups. Responsibility for facilitation varies but a model of joint 'ownership' is most likely to build trust and effective collaboration. These new forums offer opportunities to exchange information and expertise and are a means of helping to embed the strategy in the wider reaches of the VCS and the LSC. This is consolidated by initiatives like the Yorkshire and the Humber Attachment Scheme (see Case Study 9 in this volume), which offers LSC staff an orientation day, visits to VCS organisations, and a debriefing session. It provides valuable insights into VCS purposes, ways of working, and contribution to learning and skills.

VCS infrastructure bodies in a number of regions are now hosting or co-hosting conferences around the learning and skills agenda and Working Together in particular. For example, Making Waves arranged by the Yorkshire and the Humber Forum was an opportunity to explore adult learning policy in broad terms and to consult with delegates around the strategy. Similarly, 'Joining the Dots' organised by Voluntary Sector North West (RVSNS) was an opportunity for strategic thinking between the LSC (and in this case, Sector Skills Councils) and the local VCS. A strong regional and local LSC presence at such events has sent positive messages about the organisational commitment to work with the sector.

Of course, successful collaboration between the LSC and VCS infrastructure organisations preceded the strategy, and Working Together is explicit in its acknowledgement of that work and the intention to build upon it. For example, in the South East region, the six local LSCs worked with RAISE (RVSNS) to develop and agree a regional compact for LSC/VCS engagement in order to "achieve more for learners and potential learners and communities" (see Toolkit Volume One, Section Five, Case Study 7). As a result of the Compact, RAISE has recruited a Regional Learning and Skills Leader to implement the delivery plan (funded by the six local LSCs and RDA resources), who is supported by a Compact Advisory Group that includes the LSC, RDA and VCS (see Case Study 4 in this volume).

LSC support for VCS infrastructure – 12 steps towards effective engagement

The following '12 steps' are designed to help LSC staff engage with VCS infrastructure bodies and enhance their capacity to offer support for learning. They draw on examples of existing effective practice across the country.

Step One

Discuss with GOR and RDA colleagues the scope for investment in a dedicated Regional Skills post located within the RVSNS, if one does not exist already. Consult with LSC colleagues and VCS post holders in those regions that have one already to identify appropriate, transferable practice.

Step Two

Ensure that GOR staff responsible for ChangeUp planning and implementation are aware of the infrastructure roles of VCS learning and training consortia and their potential contribution to capacity building in the area.

Step Three

Consider establishing a joint LSC/VCS regional or sub-regional Working Together steering group and ensure that arrangements include provision to cover 'backfill costs' for VCS staff time (in accordance with best practice highlighted in the Working Together strategy).

Step Four

Consult with key VCS organisations and external bodies (such as Learning Partnerships and the RDA) about the feasibility and usefulness of sub-regional learning and skills consortia if these do not exist already in the area. Ensure these discussions address how core costs will be covered and the long-term sustainability of the initiative.

Step Five

Commission a VCS intermediary organisation to lead on compact development for the sub-region or region if such arrangements are not in place already.

Step Six

Identify what research has been undertaken already that will contribute to a detailed picture of VCS workforce development needs for the region. Invest in consolidating and updating this data, if necessary. Ensure this information is reflected in the workforce development plans for the area.

Step Seven

As part of ongoing staff development, particularly for those with the role of designated contact for the VCS, consider pairing, mentoring and shadowing arrangements with VCS staff in key infrastructure organisations. Discuss the transferability of existing initiatives like the 'Attachment Scheme'.

Step Eight

Support regional or sub-regional VCS learning and skills conferences and seminars, perhaps through joint planning and 'badging', or through presentations, facilitation, materials and displays.

Step Nine

Invest in the development and delivery of a VCS communications framework (email groups; newsletters; websites) to reach the widest possible range of VCS frontline and infrastructure bodies, located within a sub-regional consortium.

Step Ten

Support the delivery of VCS advocacy or representation training schemes as a way of ensuring maximum effectiveness, consistency and accountability across the work of VCS representatives involved in a range of learning and skills partnerships.

Step Eleven

Discuss with GOR colleagues and appropriate VCS groups, the scope for joint investment in the delivery of key infrastructure functions within black and minority ethnic VCS bodies perhaps taking the Yorkshire and the Humber 'BME Regional Skills panel' as a model for adaptation to local circumstances.

Step Twelve

Consider the transferability of existing good practice and models (for example VC Train in South Yorkshire – see Case Study 6 in this volume) for developing a graduated quality improvement pathway, managed by a suitably placed infrastructure body, for VCS organisations engaged in learning and skills.

Useful contacts and websites**National**

Consortia + – cheryl.turner@niace.org.uk

National VCS Workforce Development Hub – www.vsnato.org.uk

Social Enterprise Coalition – www.socialenterprise.org.uk

Social Enterprise Training and Support Consortium (setas) – website to offer information about social enterprise training and support providers and specialist publications about social enterprise www.setas.co.uk

VCS 'Learning Links' – an Electronic Directory of VCS infrastructure with a focus on learning and training www.vcslearninglinks.org.uk (live in August 2005)

Regional Voluntary Sector Networks (RVSNS)

Community and Voluntary Forum Eastern Region (COVER) – www.cover-east.org

Engage East Midlands – www.engage-em.org.uk

Regional Action and Involvement South East (RAISE) – www.raise-networks.org.uk

Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) – www.rawm.org.uk

South West Forum (SWF) – www.southwestforum.org.uk

Voluntary Organisations Network North East (VONNE) – www.vonne.co.uk

Voluntary Sector North West – Tel: 0161 276 9303 (website under construction)

Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum – www.regionalforum.org.uk

Black and minority ethnic regional VCS networks

East – MENTER – www.mentor.org.uk

East Midlands – VOICE: website under construction

North East – BECON: relaunching website

North West – One North West: www.nwnetwork.org.uk

South West – Black South West Network: www.bswm.org.uk

West Midlands – EMBRACE: www.embrace.org.uk

Yorkshire and the Humber: www.regionalforum.org.uk/index.php

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Sub-regional consortia and forums

NIACE services a national network of sub-regional learning and training consortia and forums called Consortia +. Contact NIACE (cheryl.turner@niace.org.uk) or the RVSN for further details of local consortia.

Councils for Voluntary Service

Information is available from the National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS). Contact www.nacvs.org.uk

Rural Community councils

Information is available from Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE). Contact www.acre.org.uk

VCS District Learning Forums

Contact your local Learning Partnership (www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/llp/index.htm) or sub-regional consortium (see above).

Section 5

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Section Five

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Voluntary and community sector learning and training consortia: an overview and guide to effective working

This Section offers LSC staff and their voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners:

- an overview of VCS learning and training consortia including their values, structures, functions and links to policy
- an outline of future challenges
- some suggested ways forward for LSC engagement with these arrangements.

Background to VCS consortia/forums

VCS learning consortia and forums first appeared in the late 1990s in response to an increasing interest in accredited learning for VCS staff and volunteers. Prior to this, most local VCS training was provided by Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) and often consisted of non-accredited short course programmes. More sophisticated provision, particularly leading to qualifications, required collaboration amongst CVS and with other partners. Early consortia, like the Learning Curve (Wiltshire) and Voluntary and Community Alliance Across Norfolk (VOLCAAN), were established to meet this need. Since their inception therefore, consortia have been a striking example of the type of collaboration between VCS infrastructure organisations that ChangeUp is intended to drive forward (see Section Three: Volume 2).

The value of consortia to VCS work with the LSC was highlighted in a series of early reports exploring LSC/VCS relations. It was clear that consortia offered a part solution to the challenge for LSC staff of working with impossibly large numbers of smaller VCS organisations. For the VCS, they offered the opportunity to engage collectively with the LSC and other partners in a strategic and more equal relationship, and the possibility of securing additional resources.

Local practice developed rapidly once the LSC was established. Much of this has been propelled by the LSC's widening participation agenda and drive to meet Skills for Life targets (see Section Two: Volume 2) but there has also been significant, innovative work around workforce development, for example in Derby and Cumbria. Other funders and agencies have supported these developments, for example Learning Partnerships (LPs), Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), the Lottery Community Fund, and charitable trusts such as Lloyds TSB and the Nationwide Foundation.

In Working Together the LSC acknowledges the importance of consortia as key strategic partners. The strategy recognises that they take different forms, use various names ('consortia' is the term used here to simplify

matters), deliver diverse functions, and are at various stages of development. It also notes that, despite their usefulness, consortia do not cover all aspects of potential LSC/VCS work and that significant areas of provision, and other important services that support adult learning, are delivered by VCS organisations that either cannot or choose not to join these arrangements.

Mutual benefit

As consortia have become more established, it has become possible to identify a range of functions (recognised in Working Together) that are beneficial to both the LSC and the VCS:

- providing a single point for contracting and reporting
- offering a swift and sensitive means of communication with a range of VCS organisations
- providing a vehicle for supporting capacity-building (for both the LSC and VCS)
- through lead bodies in consortia, simplifying funding routes and facilitating the sharing of information, ideas and skills
- helping with quality assurance and staff training, undertaking analysis of the 'gifts' and assets of both learners and consortia members
- providing a strategic voice in developments affecting the sector locally, regionally and nationally.

Consortia principle and values

Although consortia are diverse in the ways they organise and deliver, it is possible to identify some common values. It is important that consortia:

- are owned by the sector
- are democratic in their methods
- develop inclusive practices, both within their own organisations and the work they support
- reflect the diversity of their local communities, including the most marginalised and excluded groups such as travellers, offenders, and black and minority ethnic communities
- are independent of 'political' pressures and vested interests and able to respond properly to the needs of their members and other constituents
- are transparent and accountable to their members, the local community, and their funders and partners.

These are entirely congruent with LSC expectations and interest in these arrangements. In Working Together, the LSC was clear that it "understands that consortia are independent bodies. Their effectiveness depends on their transparency and inclusiveness, on adding value to existing infrastructure and on providing value for money to members and funders." These values, and the range of core functions (see p. 40 and 41 in this volume) could be a starting point for exploring "common standards" and "fit-for-purpose support" which the strategy identifies as a key action for the LSC with its VCS partners.

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Consortia structures

Despite the diverse and evolving nature of consortia arrangements it is possible to identify three broad structures. These can be described as:

- hub and spoke
- lead provider
- communication networks.

Some fit neatly into one category, whilst others are hybrids of two or all three.

Hub and Spoke – VC Train (South Yorkshire) and Humberside Learning Consortium (HLC) both provide a central legal structure and core staff team. They do not deliver training and learning directly but contract provision out to member organisations and other providers. HLC also has a well-developed communication infrastructure (supported through core funding by the local LSC) that acts as a two-way channel for information on all aspects of learning. The effectiveness of these arrangements has been fundamental to the success of the consortium and the development of a productive relationship with the local LSC (see Case Study 6 in this volume). Most consortia have a communications strand in their activities.

Lead Provider – the Learning Curve (Wiltshire) has built on a direct delivery capability within its core staff team and has also developed a pattern of contracting out to affiliated providers. Learning Plus in Devon and Cornwall also functions as a lead provider for the local LSC while West Yorkshire Learning Consortium is a lead provider that is moving towards a 'hub and spoke' approach of contracting out.

Communication Network – Cumbria Learning Links grew out of Cumbria Voluntary Sector Training Network which brought together 80 VCS organisations to share information and ideas. It has supported the development of local organisations through coordinated activities and strategic partnerships and by applying for funding and managing delivery contracts for member bodies. A regular programme of meetings and conferences has covered topics such as funding, standards and quality, links with training providers and with regional and national bodies. It is moving to become a lead provider. (See the Learning from Experience project website for more information about VCS learning and training consortia and their role in relation to VCS language, literacy and numeracy provision – www.niace.org.uk/projects/learningfromexperience)

Consortia functions

The key aim of consortia is to enable VCS organisations to play a full and equal part in the development and delivery of learning to the benefit of their constituencies – including clients, members, volunteers, staff, and their local and target

communities. There is no template for how they achieve this.

Consortia functions vary according to local needs and preferences, the chosen focus of the learning consortium and its stage of development, the shape and nature of local learning infrastructure, and engagement with the local LSC. Potentially, consortia could provide all or some of the following functions.

Information and communication

This includes providing:

- information to VCS clients, volunteers and staff on learning opportunities
- information to the wider community on learning provided by the VCS
- communication between the LSC (locally and regionally) and the local VCS, enabling the LSC to consult effectively and efficiently with the sector
- a focus for information for the VCS on funding opportunities
- information about relevant policy developments, and encouraging VCS responses.

Advice and support

This includes providing:

- help with designing and delivering learning, and with funding bids
- training needs analyses for staff and volunteers
- guidance on how learning and training can be embedded in other VCS activities
- signposting to other learning opportunities.

Training

This includes providing training (sometimes accredited) on such subjects as:

- quality and inspection requirements
- funding applications and meeting funders' requirements
- equality and diversity issues
- widening access to learning and improving retention
- teaching and training skills
- specialist skills such as language, literacy and numeracy teaching.

Sharing good practice and skills

This includes providing:

- opportunities for consortia members to learn from each other through group activities, newsletters, websites, publications, conferences, peer support and mentoring
- opportunities for peer learning and support by 'clustering' members engaged in similar areas of delivery, for example, ESOL or literacy
- opportunities for members to learn from effective practice in other sectors such as colleges and adult and community learning.

Capacity building

This includes providing:

- opportunities for training and sharing practice
- support for core business processes such as planning, fundraising, health and safety (often done in partnership with CVS)
- support for the skills and knowledge needed to develop, deliver and evaluate high quality, responsive community-based adult learning.

Quality

Consortia continuously improve the quality of their own work and that of their members through capacity building and direct support. Where consortia contract with funders (such as the LSC) on behalf of members they often assume responsibility for monitoring and assuring the quality of the learning. This includes providing:

- quality improvement policies, procedures and processes and promoting a high quality culture
- quality support materials including manuals and training around curriculum development, particularly using more consultative methods in community settings
- quality improvement activities such as support and training around self assessment reports, the Common Inspection Framework, observation of teaching and learning, and conducting a skills audit
- support in meeting quality standards such as Customer First.

Funding and contracting

This includes providing:

- greater access for smaller VCS bodies to funding that would be otherwise unattainable by contracting with the LSC and other funders on their behalf
- support with management information systems (MIS) and financial systems
- support with performance and project management
- advice about tendering and contract control.

Representation and advocacy

Representation and advocacy are key and distinctive aspects of consortia activity. They extend the significance of these arrangements beyond service delivery and managing agent activities and include:

- supporting VCS representatives to make an effective contribution to local consultations and discussions around learning
- providing a VCS perspective for key strategic bodies at local, regional and national levels, including the LSC, RSPs, LPs, GORs, the ACU and DfES
- participating in Consortia+ – a national network of consortia/forums (facilitated by NIACE) which offers a coordinated 'voice' in national policy development (alongside opportunities for training, sharing practice and materials).

It is worth noting that although representation is an important aspect of consortia activity, it becomes particularly vulnerable when resources are focused heavily on direct delivery and there is insufficient core funding.

Consortia links to policy

Consortia make a major contribution to a number of key government policy areas, including learning and skills priorities.

Skills Strategies and workforce development

Both Skills White papers (see Section One: Volume 2) make clear the Government's overriding concern to raise the employment skills levels of the population. They also recognise that workforce development must include those employed (or volunteering) within the VCS. Staff and volunteer development is a key objective for most consortia. For example, the West Yorkshire Learning Consortium has worked to upskill its workforce and build capacity through its project "Training for Tomorrow". Some consortia have engaged in the national employer training pilots and a number are also contributing to work based learning for young people through Apprenticeships and Entry to Employment.

Widening participation

The VCS is recognised by the LSC as a key partner in reaching the most excluded learners. Consortia are effective at supporting smaller VCS bodies that have a particularly close relationship with disadvantaged communities. VCS activity is an important route back into learning for many people who would not consider more formal programmes in educational institutions but who become inspired to learn in order to be effective as volunteers or community activists.

Skills for Life

The Government's strategy for improving levels of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) identifies a key role for VCS organisations in its delivery, particularly through engaging more marginalised and reluctant learners. Despite this, there are significant problems about raising awareness within the VCS of the strategy, and there are insufficient appropriately skilled practitioners to identify and meet the language, literacy and numeracy needs within the sector.

Consortia are playing a key role in raising awareness of LLN needs in the sector and building the skills of VCS organisations to meet them. They are highlighting the issues amongst their members, offering training and making other capacity-building interventions. For example, Humberside Learning Consortium has taken a staged approach to raising awareness amongst the local VCS, and to train staff to support and deliver appropriate learning programmes from 'first rung' activities through to accredited provision. The South Yorkshire Consortium is a national pathfinder for whole organisation approaches to

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Skills for Life. The ACU funded 'Learning from Experience' project demonstrated the key role of consortia in this context (see www.niace.org.uk/projects/learningfromexperience).

Information, advice and guidance

The VCS is a partner in both the Connexions service and in providing information, advice and guidance (IAG) services for adults. Consortia have been involved in delivering training and capacity-building services, facilitating communications between agencies and the VCS, and providing information and advice on learning to staff and volunteers. Support has included offering accredited training in IAG for frontline staff, training to enable staff and volunteers to identify language, literacy or numeracy needs, expenses (including 'backfill costs') to help groups participate, and support to attain the Matrix quality standard.

Community cohesion and neighbourhood and civic renewal

Consortia are well placed to realise the vision underpinning the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, the Egan Report on Sustainable Communities; and the Cattle report on community cohesion, of more thriving, empowered and cohesive communities. They can support activists in developing the skills and knowledge they need and can mobilise the skills and resources of the VCS to provide focused, relevant learning around community development, citizenship and activism. They can also champion the need for socially purposeful learning that has a focus on social justice and more participative and democratic ways of developing and delivering adult learning.

Critical success factors in LSC/consortia engagement

There is no substitute for good working relations overtime built over time and based on mutual understanding, a reasonable base of common knowledge, some shared objectives, and achievement of agreed outcomes. The nature of engagement will also be highly particular to the local context, shaped by historical as well as current forces and by individual as well as organisational dispositions. However, there are a few practical steps that both consortia and the LSC can take that will help build effective partnerships:

- long term approaches to consortia development
- realistic and explicit expectations
- a lead contract manager within the LSC to liaise with other contract managers for a consistent approach
- support for VCS staff in understanding LSC documentation
- prompt payment on contracts
- good communication and strong VCS networks at grassroots level
- sound knowledge of the sector within the LSC, and of the LSC within VCS consortia
- good consortia leadership

- skills within consortia in managing and delivering contracts
- knowledge within the VCS of current policy developments.

Future challenges

Resources for development – consortia have benefited in the past from a range of development resources such as LSC Local Initiative Development funds, Widening Adult Participation Action Fund (WAPAF), SRB, Lottery, and RDA and European funding. Securing resources for the research, consultation and development phases that should underpin consortia will become harder with the ending of SRB, the probable reduction of ESF, and the decrease in the amount of lottery funding available to the VCS.

Resources for sustained growth – the external funding environment also presents significant risks to the viability of consortia. The increasing focus on 16–19, Level 2 and Skills for Life targets (see Section Two: Volume 2) in the context of reduced funding for adult and community learning and the anticipated reduction in FE external franchising, all combine to create a turbulent and problematic setting for future planning. This will make sustaining responsive community-led programmes and core functions such as advocacy and information sharing (that are not part of direct delivery) increasingly challenging.

However, it is arguable that straitened circumstances strengthen the case for consortium approach to LSC/VCS engagement and that there could be an "invest to save" rationale to future LSC support for these arrangements. And although there are no simple solutions to current funding difficulties, there are different approaches that will help consortia, in partnership with the LSC, to navigate a way through. These are outlined under 'Ten ideas for working smarter' in Section One: Volume 2. In addition it is important that:

- negotiations between the LSC, VCS and other external partners to establish new consortia, should address at the earliest stages strategies for sustainability, including how to diversify funding sources and broker appropriate partnerships that will support the longer term interests of the consortium
- local and regional LSC staff are familiar with the Treasury and *Guidance to Funders* (HM Treasury, 2003) for funding VCS organisations and ensure that contracting and payment arrangements comply with best practice – including prompt reimbursement, reasonable core costs in contractual arrangements, and exploring the possibility of payment in advance for certain costs
- local and regional LSC staff work proactively to promote the inclusion of learning and training consortia in ChangeUp planning processes to ensure their development needs and capacity-building services and resources are embedded in the emerging arrangements.

Useful reading and websites

Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team
http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/community_cohesion.pdf

Egan, J (Chair) (2004) *The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Social Exclusion Unit (1998) *Bringing Britain Together – a national strategy for neighborhood renewal*.

Ward, T (2004) *Local voluntary sector learning consortia: a NIACE briefing paper*. NIACE

www.niace.org.uk/projects/learningfromexperience

www.exetercvs.org.uk

www.humbersidelearningconsortium.org.uk

www.learningcurve.org.uk

www.cumbrialearninglinks.org.uk

www.cvsderby.co.uk

www.enable.uk.net

www.ladder4learning.org.uk

www.learningplus.org.uk

NIACE is working in partnership with the LSC to support the delivery of the working together strategy.

NIACE (The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education – England and Wales) is a non-governmental organisation working for more and different adult learners.

NIACE's formal aim is: "to promote the study and general advancement of adult continuing education".

Less formally, we interpret this to mean advancing the interests of adult learners and potential learners. Our strategic plan commits NIACE to: "support an increase in the total numbers of adults engaged in formal and informal learning in England and Wales; and at the same time to take positive action to improve opportunities and widen access to learning opportunities for those communities under-represented in current provision."


promoting adult learning

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