

## Record number of entries for Apprenticeship Awards 2006

Now in their third year, the LSC's national Apprenticeship Awards continue to go from strength to strength, with over 1,100 entries received for the 2006 Awards.

The winners will be announced at an Oscar-style ceremony at the London Hilton on Park Lane, on Thursday 15 June, where celebrity hosts Richard Hammond, from BBC 2's Top Gear, and newsreader Natasha Kaplinsky will hand out the gongs to nine winning employers and apprentices.

This year an additional category has been introduced to recognise the achievements of those on the Young Apprenticeship programme, the newest addition to the Apprenticeship family, launched in September 2004.

Other categories include Employer of the Year and Advanced Apprentice of the Year.

The quality of this year's entries, from both employers and apprentices, has been astounding, with household names such as British Gas and Land Rover in the running for large Employer of the Year.

We also welcome back some previous employer finalists, including Leicestershire-based engineering firm Slack and Parr Ltd, a finalist in 2004 and Surrey-based Beere Electrical Services, a finalist in 2005.

## Stop Press

Make sure you read the June issue of Update to meet the winners of the Apprenticeship Awards 2006.



May 2006

The Newsletter for Partners and Stakeholders of the Learning and Skills Council

# FE sector's crucial role in driving sustainability

With sustainable development high on the public agenda and awareness of environmental, energy and waste efficiency issues growing daily, the LSC is hosting a one-day event to highlight the crucial contribution that the learning and skills sector can make to sustainable development.

The free event, being held in London on 26 June and organised by the Learning and Skills Network, is designed for managers with responsibility for, or an interest in, sustainable development within their organisation. It will disseminate the findings of an LSC-funded national survey carried out last autumn by the Learning and Skills Development Agency into sustainable development activity throughout the learning and skills sector.

More than 150 institutions responded to the survey, including FE and sixth form colleges and organisations in adult and community learning and work-based learning. Early findings indicate that over half have sustainable development policies and nearly 70 per cent have undertaken audits of the consumption and management of energy, water and waste. Half said their buildings, through their design and operation, demonstrated good sustainable development practice.

The event will also showcase the range of work, commitment and innovation of providers and practitioners and highlight existing successful approaches to sustainable development. Delegates will be able to participate in a series of interactive workshops run by a range of providers.

To register online for the event, go to the Learning and Skills Network website (<http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/events>).

In addition, the LSC has published a comprehensive strategy on sustainable development *From Here to Sustainability*, which sets out what the sector and the LSC itself can do to integrate sustainable development skills into their work and manage resources in ways that encourage sustainability.

*From Here to Sustainability* is available on the LSC website ([www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)).

The results of the LSC-sponsored survey on sustainable development will be available from the end of June on the LSC and LSN websites.

## Mark Haysom to speak at inaugural QIA summer conference

LSC Chief Executive Mark Haysom is set to speak alongside the likes of David Adjaye, inspirational architect and Dame Kelly Holmes, Olympic double gold medalist at the inaugural QIA summer conference.

'Excellence in Learning and Skills' will take place from 7-8 June at the ICC in Birmingham.

At the conference, thinkers and leaders from the learning and skills sector and beyond will offer their insights into driving improvement, national challenges, encouraging innovation and maintaining a focus on educational opportunity and purpose in a competitive sector.

For updated information on the programme and speakers, visit [www.qia.org.uk](http://www.qia.org.uk) and click on the conference programme button to download a registration form. Tickets can be booked online, by telephone (**0845 363 1478**) or via email ([qia@rslive.co.uk](mailto:qia@rslive.co.uk)).

# FE success rates are 'great news'

## More learners than ever are achieving success in the Further Education sector.

Figures released by the LSC show major progress recorded in priority areas outlined in the recent FE White Paper, *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances*.

The figures give information on LSC-funded learner outcomes in post-16 education and training in England in 2004/05 and illustrate record success levels across both FE and Work Based Learning (WBL). They show a rise in success rates for FE sector colleges to 75 per cent, exceeding the target of 72 per cent established in the *Success for All* reform programme.

Among the highlights in the statistics are:

- a six percentage point increase in success rates for 16–18 year olds taking full Level 2 and a five percentage point increase in success rates for adults following the same programmes – a significant step forward towards the Government's Level 2 Public Service Agreement targets;
- learning aims at Level 2 demonstrating the greatest increase in success rates (five percentage points), while Levels 1 and 3 showed an improvement in success rates of two and three percentage points respectively; and
- an increase in success rates for complete frameworks in Advanced Apprenticeships and Apprenticeships (at Level 2) of five and ten percentage points in 2004/05.

Welcoming the figures, LSC Chief Executive Mark Haysom said: "This is great news for the FE sector, and I congratulate the learners, lecturers and training providers who have worked tirelessly to drive up achievement. The LSC is fully committed to working with the sector to drive up success rates as we move forward with the LSC *agenda for change*, and enter a new phase heralded by the FE White Paper.

"One of the FE sector's key aims is to deliver the skills and qualifications that individuals, employers and the economy need. The accelerated improvements we are seeing at Level 2 and 3 indicate that we are making strong progress and I am optimistic that this upward trend will continue apace.

"Our continued commitment to giving financial support to encourage young people to stay in learning post-16, offering employers access to free Level 2 provision for their workforce, and the new entitlement to free tuition for 19-25 year olds working towards their first full Level 3 qualification will play a vital role moving forward."

The figures are available on the LSC website at [www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Partners/Data/Statistics/LearnerStatistics/StatisticalFirstReleases/StatisticalFirstRelease200405.htm](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Partners/Data/Statistics/LearnerStatistics/StatisticalFirstReleases/StatisticalFirstRelease200405.htm)

## Wider access to Provider Gateway

The second phase of the LSC's Provider Gateway is now live, extending its reach to around 2,000 schools with sixth forms and 1,300 work-based learning providers, in addition to the 500 colleges which had access in the first phase.

The Gateway is a web portal onto which providers' self-assessment reports, the inspectorates' college performance reports and associated documents have been uploaded. One of the important milestones in the New Measures of Success programme, it was launched at the beginning of August 2005 when the LSC, the inspectorates and colleges (including independent specialist colleges) joined the Gateway. The second phase will also enable 150 local authorities to access the Gateway, as well as work-based learning providers with LSC National Employer Service contracts. It is planned that the Gateway will be extended to most LSC-funded providers by summer 2006.

Key improvements and refinements include simplifying the access process and introducing a system of user-approvers and administrative screens. The expansion of the Gateway is important to reduce bureaucracy. It is based on the principle that users submit information once and that information may be used at a variety of times by various partners.

For training and support in the use of the Gateway (<https://gateway.lsc.gov.uk/>), refer to the *Staff Development Resources* section in the New Measures of Success area of the LSC website.

## Sign up for Learning Visits

A programme of structured 'Learning Visits' to Increased Flexibility Partnerships (IFP) and Pathfinder areas has been established by the LSC and DfES to support the implementation of the 14–19 reforms.

The visits are designed for senior strategic planners from LSCs, Local Authorities, providers and practitioners and will be taking place in areas that have developed innovative approaches to delivering 14–19 education and training in a range of settings.

They offer an opportunity to learn first hand about what has and has not worked in these areas. They also aim to enable the visitors to replicate successful policies and practices and implement them in their own areas.

The visits offer three levels of service:

- an Introductory Learning Visit;
- a follow up service; and
- an introduction to the specific policy/practice delivered by the Pathfinder/IFP in and for another area, together with action planning with that area.

Sharing best practice through such programmes is crucial to successful implementation of 14–19 reforms. The IFP was introduced in 2002 to create enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities for 14–16 year olds who would benefit the most. Partnerships were formed between a lead partner, usually a further education college, partner schools and other providers, including training providers and employers.

To choose from the Learning Visits on offer, get details of local contacts and to book a place, visit the 14–19 Gateway area of the DfES website ([www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/)).

For questions about Learning Visits, contact Gareth Griffiths at [gareth.griffiths@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:gareth.griffiths@lsc.gov.uk) or on **024 7682 5896**.

## New qualifications framework planning forges ahead

Information has been published to support LSC-led tests and trials with providers taking place in 2006–08 of key features of the Framework for Achievement (FfA), the proposed unit-based qualifications framework underpinned by a system of credit accumulation and transfer.

The information is in a pack published recently by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), which, with the LSC, is one of the key partners in the project. It sets out the details of the LSC requirements for the publicly-funded FfA trials, its priorities for trial provision, what it wants from the scope and range of the trial programme and some steps to ensure, as far as possible, that the learners' experience is a high-quality one.

The FfA is part of the UK-wide Vocational Qualification Reform Programme established last November by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills to 'revolutionise the nature of the qualifications structure in the UK'. It is designed to recognise a wider range of learner achievements than the National Qualifications Framework.

Partners in the FfA project have invited providers to submit proposals for participation in the trials, which will start in September.

The LSC will look at a range of issues over the two years of trialling, including: how the trials can contribute to testing the LSC *agenda for change* funding methodology; how Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets might be re-articulated; and how the FfA will impact on measuring success.

The LSC will also evaluate whether the perceived benefits of the FfA are realised and what the impact is on providers.

The trials are a complex and challenging programme, but the LSC is strongly committed to the FfA for its potential to deliver a more flexible, responsive and inclusive framework, which better meets the needs of learners and employers and helps achieve our targets and priorities.

The information pack can be downloaded from the tests and trials section of the QCA website ([www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)).

## Changes to FE college audits

The LSC no longer requires most FE colleges to undergo an annual funding audit.

Details of this important change, which comes into effect for 2004/05 and beyond, are now available in a new publication, the *Regularity Audit Framework*.

The framework explains that the LSC funds FE colleges through a Financial Memorandum, which requires colleges to make audit arrangements in accordance with the LSC's *Audit Code of Practice* (LSC Circular 04/07).

This code has now been revised for 2004/05 onwards. While removing the requirement for most colleges to be subject to an annual funding audit, the LSC requires all colleges to appoint financial statements auditors to give an opinion to the LSC and to colleges' governing bodies on the 'regularity' of colleges' expenditure.

Under the revision, colleges are required to obtain, from their financial statements auditors, an audit report on regularity to be published as part of their financial statements.

This report will go to both the college governing body and the LSC. Colleges that do not meet the criteria of the framework are additionally required to commission an interim regularity audit report in respect of the period 1 August to 31 March and to submit this to the LSC by 31 May.

The requirement for regularity audit reports applies to all colleges, whether or not they are in plan-led funding.

The key change in the framework for 2005/06 onwards is that in 2004/05 an interim regularity audit was required for all colleges. This is no longer the case. The LSC determined, on the advice of the National Audit Office, that following the experience of 2004/05, the interim regularity audit would not be necessary for any college where the LSC was satisfied that the college would be able to identify and report any material irregularity or impropriety arising.

The LSC consulted on this proposal last year and respondents were overwhelmingly in favour. The framework will be updated annually to take account of changing requirements. The LSC will review the quality of the work of regularity auditors against this framework in giving their opinion. The LSC will also keep under review the continuing need for the framework.

The *Regularity Audit Framework* is available on the Documents channel of the LSC website ([www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)) under Subject Listing/Funding Learning.

## Survey shows skills gaps are closing

The next issue of LSC Update will include coverage of the findings of the 2005 National Employer Skills Survey (NESS), which provides vital information on the extent, causes and implications of skills gaps and recruiting problems in the labour market.

The survey, which was also conducted in 2003 and 2004, has huge implications for the work of the FE sector in meeting workplace and national skills needs.

The full NESS 2005 findings are scheduled to be published in the summer, but early findings, publicised recently, show that England's skills gap appears to be closing with the number of individuals reported by their employer as having gaps in their skills virtually halving.

The survey was commissioned by the LSC, the Department for Education and Skills and the Sector Skills Development Agency.



# LSC to consult on Framework for Excellence

The LSC is to consult FE colleges and other providers over proposals it has developed as an initial response to the FE White Paper, *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances*.

The consultation will be based on a new document setting out the LSC's proposals for the development of a 'framework for excellence' to be used as the common basis for performance assessment by colleges, schools and other training providers and the LSC.

It will propose initial piloting with colleges and other training providers during the 2006/07 academic year.

The framework is the LSC's response to the request to develop a balanced scorecard approach to using the seven key performance indicators across the three dimensions of responsiveness, quality and finance as indicated in the FE White Paper.

The new consultation document, Framework for Excellence, is scheduled for publication towards the end of May/early June and will be available on the LSC website ([www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)).

## Coming up in June

Don't miss the June issue of Update to find out:

- Current levels of satisfaction among learners, which will be revealed by the forthcoming National Learner Satisfaction Survey;
- Who stole the show at the LSC national Apprenticeship Awards; and
- The latest insights from employers into skills issues affecting their organisations.

LSC Update is published monthly and is available in hard copy and online versions. It can be downloaded from our website ([www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)) through the Documents section of our national home page by selecting Series on the menu bar.

We value your views, so please let us have your comments on the content and style, or any ideas on how you think we could improve LSC Update at [lscupdate@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:lscupdate@lsc.gov.uk).

© LSC May 2006  
Published by the Learning and Skills Council.

Extracts from this publication may be reproduced for non-commercial educational or training purposes on condition that the source is acknowledged and the findings are not misrepresented.

This publication is available in electronic form on the Learning and Skills Council website: [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)

Publication reference: LSC-P-NAT-060100

If you require this publication in an alternative format or language please contact the LSC Help Desk: 0870 900 6800