

Record numbers of 16–18 year olds in training

Over 1.5 million young people are remaining in learning after leaving school according to the latest figures from the Department of Education and Skills.

The rise of 2.7 per cent for 16 year olds is attributed to the introduction of the Education Maintenance Allowance in 2004 and the effective local engagement strategies between local LSCs, schools, colleges, training providers and other partners.

Melanie Hunt, National Director of Learning, at the LSC commented:

“To see record numbers of young people in education and training is immensely rewarding to all those involved in post-compulsory education. I’m delighted to see the positive impact the Education Maintenance Allowance has had, providing more young people with the chance to participation in Further Education and training.”

Despite across the board increases, the proportion of 16–18 year olds not in education employment or training (NEET) increased by one percent to 11 per cent by the end of 2005. This was in line with labour market trends.

The 14–19 Implementation Plan sets the ambition that 90 per cent of 17 year olds will be participating in education or training by 2015.

Today’s figures show that participation rates in education and training for 17 year olds stood at 76 per cent at the end of 2005, an increase of two percentage points over the year.

The statistical first release is available to view at www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/



June 2006

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

'Minimal effect' of fees

New fee policies have had a minimal effect on enrolment for Further Education (FE) courses, according to a new report.

The research was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) and the LSC. Of 40 learning providers surveyed (mainly FE colleges), three quarters believed fee changes have had no impact on enrolment for courses. Other findings revealed:

- 92 per cent of colleges do not think fee increases have been 'damaging'.
- More than three quarters of those surveyed favour the move for an increased level of fee earnings.
- Overall, providers have had 'very few complaints' from users about fee increases.

Geoff Daniels, LSC Director of Funding and Strategy, said: "We realised the new fee policies would present a challenge to FE colleges and learning providers, so the fact that the vast majority have said the new fee structures are not affecting enrolment or causing disruption is a positive sign and suggests that many users recognise the value of training and are prepared to contribute towards the cost of their learning."

He said many colleges had found innovative ways of addressing the challenge. However, it was only the first year and the LSC was committed to working with colleges to manage the roll-out of the new arrangements. Enrolments in Adult and Community Learning (ACL) had been more sensitive to fee changes, according to the report, and some colleges feel communication with employers on the issue of fees would benefit from greater clarity. There was also concern about the effects of fees on full-time adult courses. Although fee increases have not reduced enrolments, some numbers have reduced as funding for adult learning is diverted to the areas of highest priority that will have the most impact on learning and skills.

The new fee policies were introduced in 2005-06 as part of a package of measures to focus funding for FE on the areas of highest priority. It meant that learners are expected to pay increased contributions for some courses, particularly social learning.

Copies of the research report, *The impact of new fee policies in FE*, will be available on the LSC website in July. An executive summary is available in the research area of the LSC website.

The LSDA has been succeeded by the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) details can be found at www.qia.org.uk and www.lsneducation.org.uk

LSC seeks talent from FE/WBL sector

Professionals from the learning and skills sector, and those with relevant specialist skills, are sought to fill senior management and leadership roles.

The roles have been created as part of the LSC's *agenda for change* reform programme. Sally Stewart, LSC Director of HR, said: "This is an exciting time to join the LSC. We are offering people the opportunity to make a real difference to people's lives and help take the learning and skills agenda to the next level."

The LSC has placed advertisements in the national and education press seeking talented people with a background in the sector, as well as those with specialist skills in areas such as finance. Sally added: "We are particularly interested in attracting applications from Black and Minority Ethnic candidates and those with disabilities."

To increase the diversity of the LSC, partnerships have been formed with the Network of Black Managers (NbM) and Black Leadership Initiative (BLI) and a series of roadshows are being held around the country before the end of June. LSC staff will be at the roadshows to share their experiences of working at the LSC. Interested delegates will be offered the opportunity to speak to senior managers about the role.

If you are interested in working for the LSC, browse the vacancies and apply online through its website (www.lsc.gov.uk).

To attend the show contact jennym@nbm.co.uk

Skills training

The annual National Employers Skills Survey (NESS) for 2005 reveals UK firms have arranged or funded 162 million days of training over the last 12 months at a cost of £33.3 billion.

This is equivalent to 7.5 days training for every worker in the country. The survey highlights the critical role of the learning and skills sector in meeting workforce skills needs.

NESS involves over 74,000 interviews with employers of different sizes across different sectors and localities. It is produced by the LSC in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills and the Sector Skills Development Agency.

NESS, the most comprehensive survey of its kind, has been running in its current form since 2003 but builds on previous surveys as far back as 1999.

It is increasingly evident that the skill gap has closed steadily since 2001 (the percentage of establishments with staff not fully proficient has fallen from 23 in 2001 to 16 in 2005) and employer attitudes to training have become increasingly positive.

The survey finds that training is provided by more employers than ever before (65 per cent in 2005 compared with 59 per cent in 2003) and more training plans are in place.

However, it concludes that there is still much work to do to continue reducing the skill gap in an ever-changing economy and employment structure, with the growth in more highly skilled jobs and a decline in unskilled work.

LSC Chairman Chris Banks said: "With the continued increase in competitiveness in the global market, it is more important than ever to understand the skills issues facing employers.

"The National Employers Skills Survey collects and analyses data on the issues employers face in terms of recruitment, skill gaps and training, giving us a greater understanding of what needs to be done to make England more competitive and continue the progress the LSC is making."

Headline findings from the 2005 survey are available in a new document, *National Employers Skills Survey 2005: Key Findings*, available on the LSC website.

The data that lies behind it can be accessed and analysed at (<http://researchtools.lsc.gov.uk>).

Fresh guidance for Learner Support

New information and guidance for all providers receiving allocations of the Learner Support Fund for colleges has been published by the LSC.

The guidance sets out the requirements associated with this resource and detailing changes affecting the fund for 2006/07.

The fund helps learners aged 16 and above with the costs associated with learning, in particular where there are hardship and/or childcare needs.

It also helps to cover learners' living arrangements, transport and other costs in the event that learners have to stay away from home because of the location of a particular course.

Key amendments have been made to the student support regulations affecting eligibility. Colleges should also note the extension of Care to Learn to include 19 year olds, and the further roll-out of the Adult Learning Grant.

Further Education (FE) college senior management and local authority partners can find the guidance in *Learner Support Fund: Funding Guidance for 2006/07*, available on the LSC website.

It is of interest to principals, chief executives and finance directors of FE colleges, Executive Directors and Regional Directors of local LSCs, Local Authorities and providers.

New HE Strategy

The LSC has developed a strategy for Higher Education (HE).

It calls upon the sector to invest in building the ladder of progression and higher level skills to deliver the necessary platform of skills and employability at Levels 2 and 3 to prepare learners for the progression to HE.

The strategy outlines how this investment will make the nation more competitive and ensure the national workforce is more responsive to the changing demands of technology and the economy.

The strategy recognises that the Public Service Agreement (PSA) adult targets for Skills for Life and Level 2 are a key objective for the LSC in its drive to decrease the proportion of young people not in education, training or employment.

It states the importance of ensuring that appropriate progression opportunities to HE exist and that regional planning frameworks and regional skills partnerships address the importance of higher-level skills and learning, particularly concerning to employer involvement.

In recognition of this the strategy is designed to support the Higher Education Funding Council for England in achieving the PSA target to raise the HE participation rate of 18–30 year olds towards 50 per cent by 2010.

The strategy focuses on the four key themes of partnership, provision, participation and progression, which will form the basis for regional and national action plans.

It is intended that the strategy will establish the LSC as an active and influential strategic partner across HE, focusing on its unique position in terms of supporting both the preparation of individuals to progress to HE and the delivery of HE in Further Education and on those areas in which it can make most impact.

The strategy will continue to be developed in the context of the Government's reform programme for learning and skills.

Partnership, Provision, Participation and Progression: the Learning and Skills Council's Strategy for Higher Education, is available on the LSC website (www.lsc.gov.uk)

On the road with *agenda for change*

The momentum of the *agenda for change* transformation programme will be maintained with a series of regional roadshows.

The roadshows are an opportunity for LSC Chief Executive Mark Haysom and Ray Dowd, the LSC *agenda for change* Champion, to report progress on the key themes of the transformation programme, how it links with the recent Further Education (FE) White Paper, together with other developments in the sector, and to highlight the challenges and next steps ahead.

Crucially, the series is also an opportunity for principals of FE colleges and other post-16 institutions to give their views on the implications of the change programme on their organisations. The roadshows which kicked off on June 5 in the South East, run through to 14 July in the East of England. Each will be hosted by the LSC's Regional Director for the region concerned.

Ray Dowd, former Principal and Chief Executive of Wirral Metropolitan College, was appointed the LSC *agenda for change* Champion last January.

He said: "The summer roadshows enable us to maintain our partnership approach to *agenda for change* with leaders on the frontline of post-16 provision and to ensure that together we continue to drive forward the progress of this vitally important programme. The Further Education White Paper has been published since the last roadshows were held in 2005 and as this has huge implications right across the sector, it lends special significance to our discussions with leaders from the sector this summer and how we plan the next steps for *agenda for change*."

A progress report which takes account of issues raised at the roadshows will be produced and circulated at the end of the programme.

The key themes of *agenda for change* are skills, quality, funding, data, business excellence and the reputation of the sector. In addition, as part of *agenda for change*, the LSC is currently carrying out its own transformation programme to become a smaller and more dynamic organisation.

AoC Beacon Awards

The 2005-2006 AoC Beacon Awards were recently presented at a national ceremony in Westminster attended by the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, Bill Rammell.

The Beacon Awards are presented by the Association of Colleges (AoC) Charitable Trust and seek to highlight and reward Further Education (FE) colleges displaying high levels of teaching and support to their learners.

Open to all FE providers in the UK, the Awards encompass general Further Education colleges, specialist colleges and sixth form colleges.

West Nottinghamshire College shone out as an establishment of excellence this year, scooping the President's Award and the RM Award for Leadership in Learning.

Two more outstanding colleges were recognised with Awards sponsored by the LSC; Bridgwater College won the Award for College Engagement with Employers and Blackpool and the Fylde College picked up the Award for Equality and Diversity.

Almost 300 entries were received for the 2005-2006 Awards, covering 25 categories.

The quantity and quality of entries is testament to the good work and achievements of FE providers throughout the UK.

To ensure the FE sector continues to reward and recognise good practice, the LSC would like to encourage even more nominations for the 2006-2007 Awards.

The LSC is increasing its level of support for the AoC Beacon Awards, sponsoring the College Engagement with Employers, Equality and Diversity and 14-19 Collaboration categories.

If you would like to enter your college, applications are currently being accepted for the 2006-2007 Beacon Awards. Details are available at www.aoc.co.uk/aoc/beacon.

Hard copies of the Beacon Awards 2006-07 prospectus can be obtained by contacting the AoC Charitable Trust.

For further information on the awards, contact the Manager of the AoC Charitable Trust, Alice Thiagaraj on **020 7827 4600** or by emailing alice_thiagaraj@aoc.co.uk

Getting NEETs into learning

A research project carried out in three local LSC areas has uncovered effective practice in bringing young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) into learning by setting up local partnerships.

The new study, which was conducted in Greater Merseyside, Central London and Nottinghamshire, is titled *Working to Tackle Levels of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training: Guiding Principles for Policy and Practice*, and is available on the LSC website.

It is of interest to Further Education and Work-Based Learning providers, Connexions personal advisers, local LSCs, those working in the juvenile secure estate and in young offender institutions, members of the voluntary and community sector and, at a national level, policy-makers and strategists.

The study is available on the LSC website at www.lsc.gov.uk

STAR Awards

Nominations for the STAR Awards 2006 have now been received.

The STAR Awards is pleased that this year over 3,128 individuals have been recognised via a nomination, with 1,339 individual nomination forms submitted across all seventeen prize categories. Nominations have come from learners, managers, colleagues and members of the public and have reflected the diversity of the learning and skills sector.

The first stage of the judging process has already begun. The short list judging panel has convened and is currently assessing all nominations. The final judging panel will meet later this month to agree the short list, winners and Highly Commended nominees.

This year we are delighted to welcome several new judges to the panels who bring with them a variety of skills and experience from across the sector. This includes the LSC, sixth form and general Further Education colleges, Adult and Community Learning, Work-Based Learning, voluntary providers and the prison sector. Rob Wye, Director of Strategy and Communications is representing the LSC on the final judging panel.

Rob was previously Executive Director of LSC Northamptonshire and spent the first five years after graduating from Cambridge University working at the Department of Employment in a range of areas including the Minister's Private Office.

Rob also worked in the Department's Finance Directorate before moving to the Manpower Services Commission, where he specialised in training and vocational education issues. Rob was seconded to the LSC national office in 2002, where he was Interim Director of Policy and Development.

The panel's 2006 short list will be made public in July and all these nominees will be invited to the starstudded STAR Awards Ceremony in October, where the prize category winners will be announced.

For more information on the STAR Awards and short list, please visit: www.dfes.gov.uk/starawards

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